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DOES EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE PLAY A ROLE IN ETHICAL LEADERSHIP?

Researching employees' perceptions.

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ABSTRACT

Does emotional intelligence (EI) has a role in ethical leadership? Studies show that leadership in general is an emotion-laden process. However, emotional abilities in research are usually associated with other leadership styles and thus, there is lack of published data in the literature for the possible role EI has explicitly in ethical leadership. Moreover, there is also limited information regarding the perceptions on ethical leadership from a followers-centered approach, which is the perspective we adopt in this research. Descriptive data was gathered with the use of 15 interviews about followers' perceptions regarding their managers' EI and the role it has on the latter's reputation as ethical leaders. The analysis of the dataset is aided by the use of a suitable software for qualitative analysis, using the coding method. Our findings show that a leader's EI plays a role in the perception's followers build of them. Our findings support existing literature on ethical leadership and suggest new insight on what traits are considered important for followers to see in a leader. Based on our results, we propose social learning theory (SLT) as a mechanism that might explain this relationship. Nonetheless, we recommend for further exploratory research to be done, in order to define the strength of the influence between EI and ethical leadership, moderated by SLT.

Keywords: emotional intelligence (EI), ethical leadership, managers, subordinates, LMX, social identity theory (SIT), social learning theory (SLT), leaders

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Reading guide

The structure of this thesis includes five chapters in total. The first chapter is an introduction to the topic of research, followed by the main question and its sub-questions. Along with that, the (social, practical, and scientific) relevance of this study is identified. Then, the theoretical framework is discussed, where related literature is identified and relevant theories are presented. For the third chapter, the research methods and techniques are presented, including the sample selection process and operationalization of the research, along with the way the data is analyzed, acknowledging the validity and reliability of the product. Next, comes the results part where the findings of the empirical data collection are given and the analysis is shown. For the last part we have the discussion where the results are associated and compared with the literature used in the theoretical framework. Furthermore, the limitations and theoretical and practical implications are discussed, giving room for future exploratory research to take place. A small summary of the thesis with the final remarks is what compose the conclusion, offering a coherent ending. In the appendices additional information and tables can be found to add in the explanation and visualization of the thesis.

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Scandals in the corporate world have been exposed and have brought the need of ethical leadership and ethical judgment to the surface more than ever. In 2018, the biggest corruption scandals in the tech history shocked the world, with the most popular being: proof that one of the biggest social media and technology company victualled a political consulting firm with millions of users' private information for political advertising purposes, without first getting the proper consent. Even though rumors have been going around, it took years for the CEO to plead guilty for his actions. They knew, the consequences would create a public image of a faulty leader that neglected morale and prioritized personal wealth, beneficial relationships, and network expansion. We, voluntarily, give access to our private data by clicking “agree” in all “terms & conditions” checkboxes, believing that company leaders will make ethical decisions by keeping our private data stored carefully and handled with respect, but that is not always the case.

On the antipode of unethical decisions, we find the ethical decisions; decisions that are made by individuals in positions of leadership, mostly. As “leadership” Harms and Creda (2010) define *“a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”* (p.3). Sims (2009) insists on the value of a leader's credibility within the scope of a company and stresses that businesses can send a clear message to the society when they replace a dishonest CEO, when they recruit executives with credibility, integrity, managers with authenticity and accountability of actions and decisions.

Leaders are considered those who inspire their followers by setting the role-model example for them and have the position and ability to influence employees, make decisions for the team. It is usually expected of managers to hold such positions (Heres, 2014), as manger's role is evolving from the traditional responsibilities to a leader role that is responsible on managing employees (Iuscu, Neagu, & Neagu, 2012). In the work of Brown, Treviño and Harrison (2005), we find that for a leader to be perceived as an ethical leader, he/she must be and come across as honest, trustworthy, seen as fair, principled and balanced decision-maker, one who understands his/her social responsibility and maintain an ethical behavior in his/her personal and professional life. Therefore, ethical leadership is defined 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).

Ethical leaderships’ antecedents have been of interest for the scholars (Brown & Treviño; Jordan, Brown, Treviño, & Finkelstein, 2013; Mayer et al., 2012; Chen & Indartono, 2011), but surprisingly research has not expanded on the role of emotions therein, leaving a gap to question and research. According to literature, ethical leadership requires human interaction and communication, making the intellectual and emotional process fundamental components (Doorewaard & Benschop, 2003). Specifically, it has been proved that managers’ ability to recognize emotions can have a positive effect on employee motivation, job satisfaction, and performance, decreases the possibility of employee turnover (Al-Bahrani, 2017). The abovementioned facts show that having awareness and sensitivity to understand the emotions that hinder in interpersonal communications, can work as a big asset for leaders. All these can be better presented in the notion of emotional intelligence (EI), as having *“the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions”* (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p.189).

In our research we approach followers’ perspectives about their manager’s EI and how that might play a role in the perception of them as ethical leaders, looking also into the traits an ethical leader is desirable to hold. Based on literature, we know that leadership is a concept that without followers would not exist (Bryman, 1992); it is a relationship that is a result of social construction. Specifically, it is followers’ perceptions of leaders’ behaviors concerning fair treatment of employees and principled decision-making that helps to create the role of an ethical leader (Treviño, 2000, 2003; Avolio, 1999; Brown, Treviño, 2006). Therefore, we consider follower’s side and perception about their managers’ emotional abilities and leadership style an important factor to research. Likewise, in order to investigate what could possibly explain the role EI may have in ethical leadership, we will use three theories that we think could work as mechanisms to help us understand this relationship.

Social Exchange Theory

Leaders play a vital role in creating and maintaining moral awareness in decision-making and acting processes, as the ethical behavior they demonstrate helps to create a moral organizational culture and to motivate others to behave in similar ways with relevant values and ethics, (Heres, 2014; Lasthuizen, 2008; Treviño, Weaver, Gibson, & Toffler, 1999). Toor and Ofori (2009) examined the construct of ethical leadership and found that it is directly related to employees' willingness to perform intensively and to their levels of satisfaction with their leader.

Through the Social Exchange Theory, we know that social exchange relations operate on the base of mutual exchange: when individuals identify that a person or an organization is treating them positively, they treat the person or organization favorably in return, making prime social exchange relations resulting in positive attitudes and behaviors (Shore et al. 2006; Bauer and Green 1996; Gerstner and Day, 1997). Therefore, we assume that being an individual with emotional awareness and sensitivity in verbal and non-verbal communication that treats his/her followers with concern and fair judgment might increase the perception of a trusty leader; hence, followers will be keen to acting in a similar way, if not in the same, in return. As suggested above, we identify this scientific gap there, as there are no empirical findings that support this statement yet.

In the social exchange relationship between leader and followers we find the Leader-Member Exchange Theory, known as LMX. LMX puts in the spotlight the dyadic relationship between the leader and each member independently, instead of examining the relationship between the leader and his/her group as a whole. The reason for that is that each relationship is likely to differ in quality. The same superior can have strong, trusting, emotional, and respect-based relations with some subordinates, but poor with others, making the distinction between in-group and out-group dyads respectively (Lunenburg, 2010; Bauer & Ergoden, 2015). This distinction "causes" individuals to experience their relation with their leader differently and leads to diverse follower behaviors in the workplace as well (Rockstuhl et al., 2012).

However, individuals, and in this case leaders, differ in the degree of sensitivity and consciousness towards moral information, as transmitted by ethical leadership behavior (Eisenbeiss & van Knippenberg, 2014). Thus, it is important to examine how personal abilities of individuals, in this case leaders' (i.e. managers') EI, are perceived by their followers in order to

see how that plays a role in the perception followers have of their managers as ethical leaders. Moreover, there is also significant difference in perception of what ethical leadership is and how it is rated amongst individuals (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2009; Kalshoven et al., 2013); differences in both the organizational and the individual level have been found by scholars. In the work of Van den Akker, Heres, Lasthuizen, and Six (2009) there is evidence that individuals understand differently the key elements of ethical leadership in terms of values, principles, standards, how their leader exhibits moral values in personal and professional level with priority on the latter (Heres, 2014).

Social Learning Theory (SLT)

Social learning in ethical leadership works on the perspective that leaders influence the ethical conduct of followers through role-modeling (Yukl, 2002). The broad term of “modeling” includes variety of psychological stages, including observational learning, imitation, and identification. Bandura (1986) supports that one can acquire knowledge via direct experience, observing others’ behavior and the consequences following that. In the environment of an organization, ethical conduct can be transmitted to employees by learning what behavior is expected, rewarded, punished, and desirable to have through role modeling. Leaders have the critical role of being the immediate source of such modeling behavior because of their assigned role and the status of success this carries, as well as the ‘power’ they have to influence the behavior of others (Brown, Treviño & Harrison, 2005).

For leaders to be attractive and credible role-models about ethical conduct, they must be seen as having altruistic behavior and motivation. According to Brown, Treviño and Harrison (2005), “*such behaviors include honesty, consideration of others, and fair treatment of employees (including respect and voice).*”. Studies have also revealed that employees consider justice to be notably important when evaluating the organization (Alexander & Ruderman, 1987) and role modeling (Scandura, 1997). More specifically by engaging in transparent, fair, and caring actions, and formulating a fair environment for all, the leader becomes a genuine source of information regarding the ethical conduct and becomes a model for imitation. However, employees in the contemporary working environment receive messages from all directions in the organization,

which makes it difficult to identify those referring to ethical and appropriate behavior unambiguously. Treviño and her colleagues (2003) advocate that in order for ethical leaders to steer employee's attention in such matter, they must make the ethics message easily detectable. Therefore, communicating to employees clearly ethical matters and standards can be vital to ethical leadership as a social learning process.

Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Social identity theory views leadership as a social categorization process that is based on prototype depersonalization and associated with social identity (Hogg, 2001). The process is characterized as “depersonalization” not to add an immoral touch to it, but to accentuate the fact that people are not seen as individuals anymore, but as matches to certain ingroups and outgroups.

The most prototypical member is the one appearing to have influence based on the perception of members occurred by cognitive and behavioral conformation to the prototype, which later is considered to hold the leader's role. “The prototype”, refers to context specific traits that determine attitudes, feelings, and behavior that distinguish one group from another. Social categorization happens gradually and assimilates them to the relevant ingroup or outgroup, and thus gradually highlights the prototypical similarities (Tajfel, 1969). Influences develop into reality when followers agree and engage to leader's suggestions (Hogg, 2001). This process gives power to the leader and creates a status-based hierarchical structure, dividing the group in leader(s) and followers. Followers usually base their perceptions about leadership and endorsement of the leader on judgment of person-fit to specific situations and tasks.

Aim of the research

Momeni's (2009) work showed that majority of employees' perspectives about their working environment are immediately derived from how they perceive their managers' ethicality and the behavior they display. With that being proved, we consider important to be able to observe subordinates' perceptions that are directly created by the assumptions, expectations, and observations of their manager's behavior. This way we should be able to consider how employees'

perceptions of the manager's EI assist in shaping their perceptions of his/her ethical leadership. Leadership is an arbitrary concept that without follower's perception cannot be evaluated in terms of influence (Brown & Treviño, 2005; Lord & Maher 1991; Moorman & Grover, 2009). Therefore, we consider our research to be follower-centered.

So, how does followers' perception of their leaders' EI play a role in the image they have of him/her? What do they consider ethical leadership to be and how their leaders' emotional abilities play a role in that? If we answer these questions, we will be able to see whether emotions have a clear relationship with ethical leadership and their role therein, which is what we aim for. Identifying the research gap, we consider important to be able to identify how leadership works and what is the role emotions play in the relation between leader and followers.

Our study also aims to surpace information on the way ethical leadership can be improved by taking into account what followers recognize and value in a leader and the part that emotions have in this process. This observation can help to identify the traits that are desirable in a manager, in order for him/her to have linear relationships with his/her subordinates and be considered an ethical leader. Through the effort of gathering insights on the relationship between ethical leader and followers, we aim to answer our research question:

“How do employees' perceptions of their manager's EI relate to their perceptions of their manager's ethical leadership?”

In order to answer the main question, we have built theoretical and practical sub-questions that will help us to identify whether EI is related to has a role in ethical leadership, as perceived by followers:

Theoretical:

1. What is emotional intelligence according to academics?

2. What is the role of emotions in leadership according to literature so far?

Practical:

3. How do managers express their emotions in their workplace and how is that perceived by their followers?
4. How should ethical leadership appear according to employees?

Relevance of the study

Societal

Emotional intelligence, or else EQ, is a set of abilities that allow us to not only understand but to also manage our emotions and those of others, determining 80% of our success in life (Goleman, 1996). At the same time, as any other skill, we can train our EI abilities in order to produce desirable responses to those emotions aroused. For some, EI is considered to be non-existent, but for others is the component that aid in people's success, in leader's effectiveness, and in happiness (Goleman, 1996; Cobbe & Mayer, 2000). We believe, it is time to give EQ better acknowledgment and promote societal awareness of its beneficial role.

Society's formation and function is rooted in the education that people receive, developing common values and constructing a broader culture. That being said, we believe that by building awareness early on and to a broader part of the population, will result in better self-management and create a more content population overall. Living proof of that is the results from the program on emotions by YALE Center for Emotional Intelligence. This program's objectives are to achieve recognizing emotions in oneself and others, understanding the causes and consequences of emotions, labeling emotional experiences with an accurate and diverse vocabulary, and regulating emotions in ways that promote growth. The YCEI has found that at the schools that specific program is applied, the number of bullying events, and anxiety and depression levels have dropped significantly. Moreover, student leadership and grades that have gone higher (Rubstein, 2017). Therefore, by understanding the impact that EI has on one's personal development and how much it can contribute as a mechanism to cope with challenging situations, we believe it could essentially

change many things in the way people form their relationships. In order for this to happen in more parts around the globe, the concept of EI needs to be broadly discussed and recognized.

Scientific

From a scientific point of view, EI alone is a concept that has gathered a lot of controversy in the research world, creating doubts about its actual role and validity. It is highly argued by some (Zaccaro & Horn, 2003; John Antonakis, 2004) that EI is not a valid construct, as there is no scientific data proving its influence, leading to “*fads without sufficient consideration given to the validity of these ideas.*” (Zaccaro & Horn, 2003). Presenting findings that can support its potential active role, function, and aid in ethical leadership, will help clarify the nature of this uncertainty. One of the reasons behind this controversy is that EI is usually measured through self-assessment tests, suggesting that results might be biased and offer no insights as to how one’s EI can actually affect the perception others have of him/her. Looking into the way employees understand their managers’ emotional abilities and how that might play a role in the character of his/her leadership through the comparison of those perceived as ethical leaders and those perceived as non, this research aims to demonstrate the added value of EI.

Most importantly, this study complements existing findings on ethical leadership, while still offering new insights on its conceptualization and components. We find very important to identify whether the emotional abilities of a leader impact the perception his/her subordinates have of him/her, as leadership is an emotion-laden process (George, 2000; Albrow, 1992). As a concept, leadership has its basis on the interaction of leaders with their subordinates. Once this interaction begins, emotional awareness and emotional regulation become pivotal factors that affect the quality of this relationship (Wong & Law, 2002). However, there is little published data on the role of emotions in the ethical leadership process, as the majority of the research that has been conducted studies the concepts separately and/or relates EI to either transformational or transactional leadership styles (e.g. Al Bahrani, 2017); from these studies, we can draw assumptions on ethical leadership, but not on the direct relation between emotions and ethics.

Lastly, there is not much past research based on the perceptions of subordinates on ethical leadership and the preferred traits of a leader (Resick et al., 2006; Martin et al., 2009). The majority of the outcomes depict the characteristics of ethical leaders, their elements, and the way ethical

leadership is influenced by the organizational framework it takes places (e.g. Brown & Treviño, 2006; Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum & Kuenzi, 2012; Heres, 2014).

Practical

The practical relevance of this study can be identified in its useful application in the workplace for the improvements and upgrade of each leader's effectiveness. In addition, the findings would contribute to the positive collective change in the corporate environment, focused on human resources, leadership, management, and the overall organizational culture. It has been proved that EI is an asset both inside and outside the work context, as it leads to professional and personal success (Villanueva & Sanchez, 2007; Codier & Odell, 2014; Cherniss, Extein, Goleman, & Weissberg, 2006; Côté, 2014; Scott, 2014). A leader with high EI is able to build strong interpersonal connections, understand others, make employees feel emotionally safe, and use it as an important influential skill in leadership (Brackett et al., 2011; Malik, 2013; Njoroge & Yazdanifard, 2014; Zampetakis & Moustakis, 2011).

So far, the literature findings on this subject have focused on the comparison of several proposed models and on the way to identify and control emotions when they occur (Cherniss, Extein, Goleman & Weissberg, 2006). Hence, here, we detect the following practical significance for the research of this topic: If EI is an ability that truly plays a role in leader's ethical way of leading, then organizations should invest in EI training and development programs in order to (1) broaden their future leader pool with capable candidates by promoting and cultivating this skill in their employees, and (2) contribute to the decision leaders make to lead ethically. That, can further add in building strong and competent teams with the right distribution of human capital that will perform under any circumstances, building an organizational competitive advantage. Therefore, understanding the impact EI has on one's personal development and how much of an advantage it can be, could change dramatically the way people form their relationships and career paths.

Chapter 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the Western societies, emotions were firstly believed to be dis-organizing interruptive mechanisms to the mental activity and productivity that acted as disturbances to the individual (Young, 1943). Later on, emotions were perceived positively; viewed as organized responses because they progressively focus on cognitive activities and their subsequent action (Leeper, 1948; Easterbrook, 1959). In modern theories, emotions have gained more support, proving that cognitive intelligence alone does not result in human-like behavior, leading even artificial intelligence (AI) to the decision of adopting the use of emotions to direct computer's processes (Mayer, 1986). Salovey and Mayer (1990), in their work, used emotions to show their functionalistic perspective and considered them to be a motivating mechanism. Nowadays, emotions are also viewed as an influential skill in leadership as well (Brackett et al., 2011; Malik, 2013; Njoroge & Yazdanifard, 2014; Zampetakis & Moustakis, 2011).

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

A century ago, Thorndike (1920) suggested that social intelligence was an important competence for individuals, that would measure peoples' abilities to identify and regulate their relationships with others. At the time, the whole concept was considered vague and met no further exploration. In Killian's work (2012) we find evidence that Thorndike and Wechsler (Cherry, 2014) came to the conclusion that individual's personal and professional success depend on both cognitive and general intelligence, more specifically in emotional and social traits. Despite all that, the importance of emotions in general, became popular as a concept after Goleman's work in 1995, when he compared the IQ with the not-so-popular back then EQ¹ (Al-Bahrani, 2017).

According to Brackett et al. (2011), there is the need to first define separately EI's components: emotions and intelligence. "Emotions" consist of sets of responses that declare how one addresses the current challenge and understands the opportunities that arise in the face of the current event. These set of responses include mostly physiological changes, face and body expressions, and action tendencies (Lazarus, 1991). Salovey and Mayer (1995) developed a theory

¹ "Emotional Quotient" (EQ): was first used and published in 1987 in an article by Basley.

model based on the belief that EI connects emotions and intelligence, aiming to evaluate EI skills used and their impact on individual's performance in workplace. Recent studies have proved that emotions can impact the formation of ethical judgment and decisions (Hess & Bacigalupo, 2013), performance, and relationships. Horberg et al. (2011) suggest that emotions affect moral judgment through the creation of particular socio-moral concerns. For instance, anger is linked to events that hinder injustice and unfairness. From a broader view, researchers have confirmed the validity of EI, along with the fact that cognitive intelligence alone is not enough to lead to individual's success, such as promotion, advancement and career satisfaction (Emmerling & Goleman, 2003; Seibert, Kraimer & Liden, 2001).

“Intelligence”, as human intelligence, has been specified in many different ways. Thinking in complex ideas, adapting effectively to one's certain environment, gaining emotional knowledge, having critical thinking, learning from experience and putting reasoning behind every thought, are some of the components referring to individual's ability to succeed and achieve their goals (Neisser et al., 1996, p.77). To explain intelligence, there are more than one definitions written by psychologists and learning researchers throughout the years (e.g. Binet, 1916; Humphreys, 1979; Gardner, 1993; Gottfredson, 1998; Sternberg & Salter, 1982), but we choose to use Wechsler's (1958) definition, as it is the one most accepted and used: *“Intelligence is the aggregate or global capacity of the individual to act purposefully, to think rationally and to deal effectively with his [or her] environment.”* (p.7). To that, Schmidt and Hunter (2003) add the ability of problem-solving as an important component of intelligence.

The combination of both items results in the constitution of EI. EI is a set of skills, which in short refer to the ability of how well people can perceive and manage emotions, both their own and others' (Johnson, 2017). Elder (1997), describes EI as a way to measure how well an individual applies concrete judgment and reasoning to circumstances when assessing an emotional response to those situations. In that sense, EI differs from other types of intelligence that focus only on the cognitive process (Côté & Miners 2006; Mayer et al. 2008).

According to Goleman (1995) and Bar-On (2000), EI is more of a combination between competence, ability, and non-cognitive skills, that are brought together to help individuals cope with their environment. Goleman in his research concluded that where EI was present, it resulted

in excellence (Goleman, 1998). According to him, emotional intelligent individuals show strong communicational skills, ability to build powerful relationships, and embody supportive coping strategies that assist in their personal and professional success (Mann, 2009). For Mayer and Salovey things were not that different either. For them, it was first about social intelligence, described as the ability to understand and manage one’s self and others (Mayer & Salovey, 1990).

Mayer and Salovey (1990) introduced a subset of social intelligence defined as “*the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions*” (Ibid., p. 5). Later in their work they divided this set of abilities in three processes: appraising and expressing emotions in the self and others, regulating emotions in the self and others, and using emotions in adaptive ways.

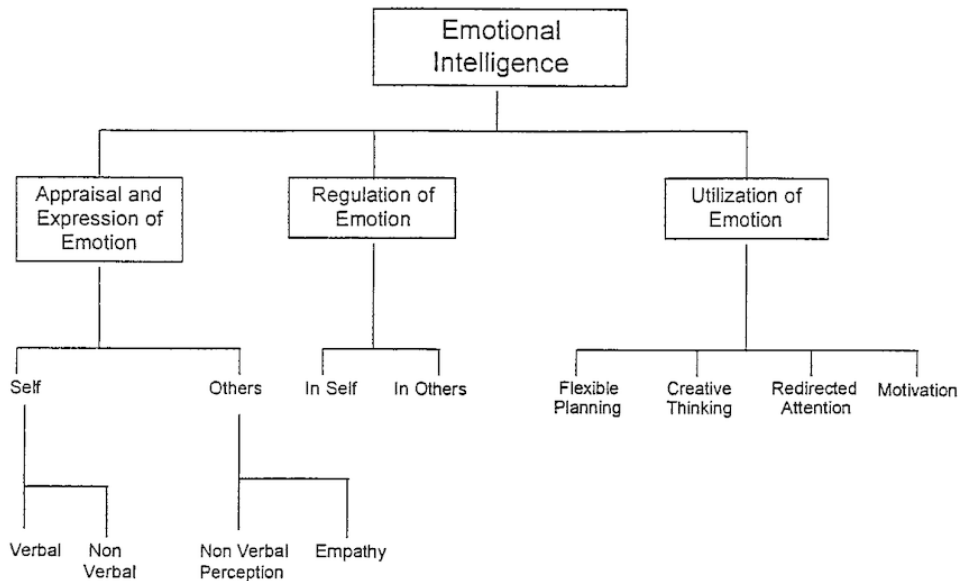


Figure 1: Conceptualization of Emotional Intelligence according to Mayer & Salovey

“Appraising and expressing one’s own emotions” to their surroundings, requires for the individual to first decode his/her own emotions and then express them in accurate way (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), verbally, or non-verbally through facial expressions and other channels, which has also been referred to as “nonverbal sending accuracy” (Buck et al., 1980). As Côté (2014) describes with a given example, “*Emotionally intelligent leaders who are satisfied with work and who wish to express positive emotions to followers may show these emotions clearly, whereas leaders with*

lower EI may express the same emotions less clearly, so that followers perceive other emotions instead.” (Darwin, 1872/1955). Appraising the emotions of others as an ability can make interpersonal relationships smoother. It is also based on non-verbal perception of emotions from different facial expression interpretation, and empathy, body posture, and vocal variations (Buck et al., 1980; Elfenbein & Eisenkraft, 2010). With this ability, individuals can gather information regarding attitudes, intentions, and thoughts that are transmitted through emotional expressions (van Kleef, 2009).

Furthermore, in self-regulation of emotions, Mayer and Salovey talk about the “*regulatory system that monitors, evaluates, and sometimes acts to change mood*” (Mayer & Gaschke, 1988); in some cases, mood-regulation can happen automatically, but in others it does not. For an individual to regulate the emotions of others they must regulate and alter their reactions as well, something that can happen when the individual chooses carefully the way he/she describes himself/herself and their activities to others, and hence, ‘controls’ the impressions formed (Goffman, 1959). Lastly, the differences in the ability of the individuals to utilize their emotions to their benefit and control the affect emotions have on them, can be used in order to solve problems either when they arise or by considering the consequences an action can bring (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Fine et al., 2003; Morgan et al., 2010). A good example of that is being motivated by the thought of failure.

Mayer and Salovey throughout their work recognize that there will be differences both in the abilities and in the way they are displayed by individuals. Differences in these abilities provide proofs that people differ in their capacity to understand and express emotions, and to a broader extent this can mean the existence of underlying skills that through learning can be used to help people manage their mentality and behavior, as their key components are the competences of perceiving emotions, managing emotions, using emotions and understanding emotions. Different individuals have different understanding of the emotions they experience, based on their individual awareness (Barrett et al., 2004).

All of the models of EI proposed by researchers accept that what constitutes this set of emotional abilities is “awareness and managements of one’s own emotions, and awareness and management of others’ emotions” (Goleman, 1995). This set is ‘acquired’ through social

interaction and development of people skills, and includes the created set of responses to the event that aroused them (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). However, one implication that can occur when integrating these two concepts -meaning emotions and intelligence-, is the lack of clear ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answer when it comes to feelings. Proof to that is the fact that researchers have been facing a challenge when trying to commit to a specific way to measure these variables and hesitate to rely on the variation in scores that conclude to those with higher EI or lower EI (Mathews et al., 2004).

Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership is a concept that has gathered a lot of attention, both philosophic and scientific. In the modern world, the competitive nature of the global marketplace and the ethical concerns therein, have increased the need for ethical leadership (Ung Hee, Hye Kyoung & Young Hyung, 2013) and have shaped the way ethical leadership is perceived (Rehman, 2011). As a concept, ethical leadership aims not only to prevent unethical behaviors, but to also raise awareness about ethics and improve the overall decision-making process. Bass and Avolio (2000) support in their research that the designation as ‘ethical’ comes from the component of inspiration, stimulation, and visionary leadership behavior (Brown, Treviño & Harrison, 2005).

For ethical leadership to be modeled and thrive in an environment, it needs a leader that comes across as honest, trustworthy, seen as fair, principled and balanced decision-maker, one who understands their social responsibility and maintain an ethical behavior in their personal and professional life (Brown, Treviño & Harrison 2005; Howell & Avolio, 1992). However, leadership and its principles do not necessarily come with a specific occupation nor position. Even though leadership and management overlap as concepts, one can be a leader without being a manager and a manager without being a leader (Ciulla, 1998). According to theory, any member of an organization showing the matching characteristics can acquire the role of a leader, but it is the managers who are essentially looked when there is a need for one, because of the responsibilities on ethical behavior, means, and authority managerial positions come with (Heres, 2014). The points where the two roles converge are, firstly, the fact that individuals in order to have successful managerial path rely heavily on their abilities to also be a leader (Yukl, 2006), and secondly, the

success of a leader can be supported by the official power one has as a manager, along with the resources allocated and responsibilities distributed to a formal management position (Dineen, Lewicki & Tomlison, 2006).

Additionally, Treviño and her colleagues (2000, 2003) identified the “*moral person and moral manager*” dimensions, which combined construct the reputation of a leader. What is crucial in formulating an ethical leader’s role is to have solid and just ethical principles that will guide his/her decision-making processes. This is also described as the “moral person” dimension of a leader. Being someone with morale implies having strong and solid personal traits, such as integrity, consistency, credibility, to endorse open conversations, and to act with concern towards fairness of situations and towards people by doing the right things. Even though being a “moral person” sets the basis for becoming an ethical leader, follower’s perception of one’s traits and behaviors in the workplace are fundamental factors in this reputation. Therefore, the aspect of a “moral manager” refers to those who make ethics their explicit personal and leadership perspective “*by communicating an ethics and values message*”, endorse and empower their followers, and are a role-model (Heres & Lasthuizen, 2012). This way, leaders intentionally promote ethical behavior that will further influence followers’ ethical or unethical behavior (Ibid.).

Moral values and norms that are dominant on the specific context where ethical leadership is exercised, is what leads in ethical decision-making and behavior (Heres, 2014; Six, Bakker, & Huberts, 2007). In general, this process, according to Rest (1986), goes through four stages, starting from (1)the recognition of the moral nature of the decision, act, or situation in say (ethical sensitivity and awareness), (2)moving to the scaling of possible consequences and alternatives to choose one of the available options (ethical judgment or reasoning), (3)followed by the intention to act in an ethical way, and (4)closing with the commitment on ethical behavior (Heres, 2014; Hunt & Vitell, 1986; Jones, 1991). Sometimes, it is easier to identify the unethical behavior that led to the violation of the normative standards of the contexts wherein the individual acted instead of the ethical one.

The role of the leader, and the concept of leadership in general, would have no meaning without the followers, as leadership is a process that exists only with the participation of followers (Bryman, 1992). It is a relationship that is a result of social construction, and as situational

leadership theory points out, it can be formed differently according to the situations (Northhouse, 2010). It is, hence, the reflection of followers' perceptions of leaders' behaviors concerning fair treatment and principled decision-making that helps to create the role of ethical leaders (Treviño, 2000, 2003; Avolio, 1999; Brown, Treviño, 2006). It is this specific professional behavior that suggest the morality standards to followers and establish the importance of ethics in an organization (Cooper, 2006).

How EI may play a role in perceptions on ethical leadership

The responsibility to create and manage a working environment usually lays in the hands of leaders. In the research for the relationship between EI and leadership, a positive influence in terms of leaderships' development and performance has been found (Batoool, 2013; Nixon et al., 2012), showing that follower's performance and professional development are highly affected and directly connected to leaders' EI and their leadership style (Qazi, Shafique & Ahmad, 2014). Part of being a leader means inspiring and guiding employees but Rehman (2011) noted that not all can do that effectively and they definitely cannot do it in the same way. He found that EI strongly influence the leadership style different leaders use.

Haidt (2001) mentions that social models can cause fast and irresponsible decision-making resulting from intuition and the strong intuitive reaction. That being said, it is very important for people in leadership positions to have internalize the importance of ethics so much that they intuitively act ethically. An intuitive act of someone who values more the social and interpersonal relations can be an interruptive factor when making ethical decisions because of this social relation between the decision-maker and the individual that will carry the consequences (Reynolds, 2006). Usually, in such situations, one can lean towards comfortable decisions that at the same time can be unethical, trying to avoid uncomfortable results, for example when the decision's outcome will contribute negative emotions to be created (Mellers, 2000), and so we find leaders ability to understand and manage their emotions extremely important in the leading process.

It is reported in Sadri's (2012) work that researchers argued for EI and not IQ being the type of intelligence that influences more the success in leadership. Leaders who use their emotion understanding and evaluation skills can create an environment of understanding with their

followers, they can empathize towards their behaviors and actions (Iuscu et al., 2012), which will overall result in building tighter relationships between them (Batool, 2013). Among others, interpersonal skills, such as communication, can make leadership more efficient as it is considered of major importance to be an effective leader who minimizes conflicts (Torenvlied & Akkerman, 2012), while also motivating and guiding employees to achieve their goals (Armstrong, 2009; Lussier & Achua, 2009). Therefore, we consider equally important the perception of the followers about the emotional intelligence of their leaders with leader's EI itself, which we assume can affect the way in which the followers perceive the leadership style, the values and relationships their leaders promote.

On the other hand, what we do not know is how followers perceive their leader's emotional abilities, and if that has a role to play in the perception they have of them of being ethical leaders. In this case, we are confronted with a scientific gap of minimum observations from followers' side (Smollan & Parry, 2011; Wong & Law, 2002), which is what we are approaching in this paper. All relationships have two sides from which they can be studied. Most studies focus on the traits an ethical leader should hold, so it is worthy to investigate how followers experience ethical leadership to be. The relationship between leader and followers is a relationship based on influence (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Loerd & Maher, 1991; Moorman & Govern, 2009; as found in Heres, 2014), hence we consider that one of the following theories might act as a mechanism that explains this relationship.

Leader-Follower exchange relationship (LMX)

From chapter 1, we know that LMX is based on the dyadic relationships between the leader and the members he/she consider to be part of the in-group or out-group of the team. The in-group members, are those that assist the leader in the decision-making process and are given extra responsibility and liberty in their roles, enjoying open communications and extra consideration. In reality, the in-group member is 'promoted' to a trusting partner, creating a dyad with the leader. What follows is that the subordinates take on more responsibility in the commitment of the success of the organization, thus is required of him/her to devote more time and effort (Ibid.). At the same time, they gain more attention and rewards. In contrast comes the relation between the leader and the out-group. Individuals that are included in this category will have a formal employment

relationship with their leader as is mandated by their professional contract. The leader will provide support and guidance but will not move beyond that. From their side, out-group members will not proceed in exceeding their efforts and will do no more than what is asked of them (Yukl, 2010).

The distinction between in-group and out-group subordinates is not desirable, as it can carry the consequence of having dissatisfied team members, i.e. the out-group members once the differentiation in treatment becomes sensible (McClane, 1991; Yukl, 2010). In other words, treating team members in an unequal way and not following organizations’ guidelines in all cases can result in unethical behaviors from the manager’s side. Consequently, subordinates start recognizing inappropriate behaviors that are tolerable by being exposed to the wrong role-modeling behavior and creating false perceptions as to what ethical leadership is. Therefore, it is advised that leaders acquire high-quality relationships with as many followers as possible, and accordingly, it is desirable to keep the out-group as small as it can be (George & Jones, 2008). It has been proved that subordinates that are closer to the leader have higher job productivity, are more motivated, show more satisfaction and engagement in their general citizenship behavior (Lunenburg, 2010). In general, LMX supports that work-related attitudes and behaviors of followers depend on how they are being treated by their leader (Rockstuhl et al., 2012).

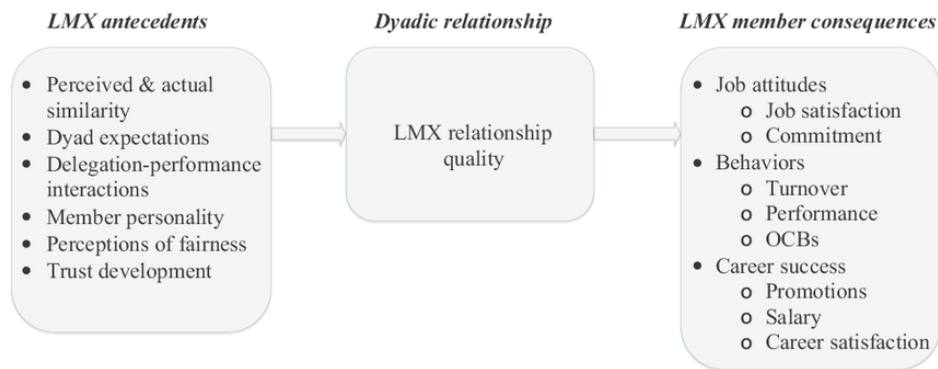


Figure 2: Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Bauer & Ergoden, 2015)

Even though leaders have the dominant role in creating the exchange relationship with a subordinate, followers also play an important part in creating this relationship. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) in their analysis describe the central concepts of LMX being “*the development of LMX relationships is influenced by characteristics and behaviors of leaders and members, and occurs through a role-making process. Higher quality LMX relationships have very positive*

outcomes for leaders, followers, work, units, and the organization in general.”. In their work they also consider of key importance that managers should make the high-quality exchange relationships accessible to all subordinates and not differentiate amongst them (Ibid.).

In the recent work of Peng and Kim (2020) we see that social exchange relationships can be linked with organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). OCB is individual voluntary commitment to an organization and its interests, that encourages organizational effectiveness as well, and has its base on individual non-compulsory behavior that is not necessarily formally acknowledged (Heriyadi, Tjahjono, & Rahayu, 2020). OCB as an individual behavior is influenced by several factors including the leader-member exchange relationship. High LMX suggests a positive contribution to OCB, promoting a mutually beneficial relationship for both leader’s and subordinate’s side (Ibid.).

In the LMX theory we see some drawback. It has yet to be defined how a leader is forming ‘good’ relations with his/her subordinates and what causes them. Also, in the research done so far, the specific leader behaviors that promote ‘high quality relationships’ have not been broadly described. That is also an outcome of the fact that LMX is a descriptive -rather than normative-theory, that aims to explain employees relate and interact with each other in the working environment, and does not offer a ‘recipe’ of how to make high quality exchange relations (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Instead, it focuses on the more general needs; the need of leaders to show trust, respect, openness, leeway, and attention.

Social Learning Theory (SLT)

“SLT has been frequently used to explain the influence of ethical leadership on employee normative behavior” (Peng & Kim, 2020, p.7). We see that researchers use SLT as an explanatory mechanism, noting that followers imitate their leaders’ behaviors because they work as role models to them (Kacmar et al., 2011; Mayer et al., 2009; Schaubroeck et al., 2012). As also done in ethical leadership, leaders deal with unsuitable member behavior, use reward to appraise preferable behavior, and interact with their followers in a “frequent two-way communication” (Peng & Kim,

2020, p.7) where they talk about the ethical standards and organizational values of the specific organization where they are employed.

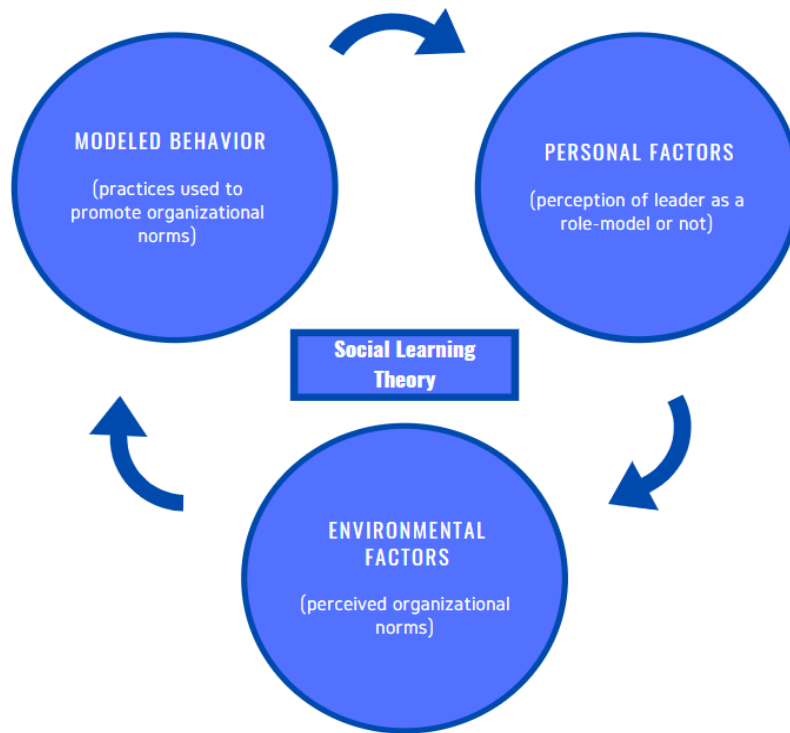


Figure 3: Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986)

When applying SLT to ethical leadership an important assumption is that followers learn and approve the collective norms in two ways: (1) as practiced and seen directly from the experience with their leader, and (2) indirectly through observation of their leaders' interactions with other people in the organization (Brown and Treviño, 2006). The ethical culture in the organization is thus a reflection of the perceived norms of ethically appropriate behavior displayed in the organization, assisted by the practices used to promote these norms along with supporting ethical behaviors and prohibiting the unethical ones (Kaptein, 2011; Treviño, Butterfield, & McCabe, 1998; Treviño & Weaver, 2001).

As ethical culture is about subjective perceptions employees have, leaders and immediate supervisors play an important role in sculpting these perceptions. Employees base those perceptions about the organizational values promoted by the top-level leaders on their immediate working environment (Sluss & Ashforth, 2008). When a leader is seen to not punish or, even worse

to condone unethical behavior, subordinates will perceive the ethical culture to be weak, regardless the code of conduct or the rules against immoral behavior. In general, the way ethical leadership is displayed and promoted by managers and immediate supervisors provide employees with critical information about the ethical values top management justify (Treviño & Weaver, 2001).

Social Identity Theory (SIT)

The basic principle of SIT is that individuals associate themselves with different social groups, where they recognize themselves as a representative member (Hogg, 2001); it is “*the individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership*” (Tajfel, 1972, p.292). This process of self-categorization directs the individuals to acknowledge similarities between themselves and other members of the particular social group they belong to (Stets & Burke, 2000). Leaders are seen as the characteristic member of the organization (Schein, 2010) and most of the time individuals associate themselves with the organization based on the sense of fit they gain through interaction with the leader and observation of his/her behaviors (Schaubroeck, Peng, & Hannah, 2013; Sluss & Ashforth, 2008).



Figure 4: Social Identity Theory process

Ethical leaders represent values, ethics and standards that are traversing societies by being prototypical leaders (Nowak & Sigmund, 2005). A prototypical leader does not need to exercise of show power in order to have influence; they are influential because their suggestions demonstrate groups’ norms (Yukl & Fable, 1991), so individuals who associate with them are likely to recognize fit between their personal values and the organizations’ ones. For example, reflecting emotional value significance in one group means that the prototypical leader

himself/herself will have to first show emotional expression in order for subordinates to also be able and attach the same value in the group. Therefore, ethical leadership make individuals see themselves as a representative of the particular organization and so helps them develop high levels organizational identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Expectations

From what we have seen in the literature so far, the concepts of leadership and followership are two separate yet interdependent ideas; there is no leader without followers and no followers without a leader. The dynamic of this relationship is equally distributed to its parts, so we make the conceptualization of our research question giving emphasis on the follower's side and the way followers perceive their leaders, as we consider their perception valuable and not researched enough. It has been proved by Shamir's (2007) follower-focused research that follower's perception adds to our understanding of the leadership notion as well, which is one of our objectives for this thesis.

That being said, difference is expected to be seen also in follower's opinion about the important traits a manager should have, and what is the ideal version of ethical leadership according to their perceptions. One step further, we consider that since the relationship between leader and followers has a set basis on the role-modeling aspect of leadership, how emotions are expressed, regulated and utilized by the leaders can play a role their reputation/image as ethical figures and potentially alter what followers perceive as 'ethical' and 'unethical' in their working environment. With that being said, we expect to see different points of view in what followers consider ethical behavior and their ideal representation of ethical leadership.

Moreover, the literature on EI shows that different individuals show differentiations both in their emotional abilities and in the way they use them (Mayer & Salovey, 1990). Lastly, diverse answers are also expected in terms of how manager's express their emotions and how they understand and manage employee's emotions as well. The reason we target emotions along with behavior, is because they are a response created by feelings, physical action, perceptions, and are the driving force behind a certain behavior displayed (Smith, 2002).

Chapter 3: RESEARCH METHOD & TECHNIQUES

Method

In the literature, the role of emotions in leadership is somewhat neglected in the research (Albrow, 1992). However, scholars recognize the importance of emotion-recognition and regulation as an influential skill in leadership (Brackett et al., 2011; Malik, 2013; Njoroge & Yazdanifard, 2014; Zampetakis & Moustakis, 2011). Even when emotions are being researched in combination with leadership, that usually results to either transformational or transactional leadership styles (e.g. Al Bahrani, 2017), from where we can make assumption about ethical leadership as well, but with no immediate explicit relation between emotions and ethics.

In the present thesis we aim to explore if EI plays a role in ethical leadership, through the perceptions of employees. Since there is little published data about emotions in leadership and, to our knowledge, no data regarding the explicit relationship between the two concepts, qualitative research will offer an exploratory approach, help us gather descriptive information, resulting in giving preliminary answers. To do that, descriptive and comprehensive understanding of how subordinates' perceptions of managers' emotional abilities an ethical leadership is necessary. The reason we choose managers as leaders, is because based on previous research they are the ones usually selected to embody the role of the leader in an organization (Heres, 2014; Yukl, 2006; Dineen, Lewicki & Tomlison, 2006).

Qualitative research can aid in the understanding of the meaning people attach to behaviors from their subjective view resulting multiple different perspectives (Bresnen, 1995) and offer “*an understanding of behavior, values, beliefs, and so on in terms of the context in which the research is conducted.*” (Bryman, p.408). Hence, since not all leaders have the same emotional abilities and not all subordinates have the same understanding of ethical leadership, qualitative methods are well suited for our research (Ibid.). Since this is a no-probability sampling approach with a specific and limited number of interviewees, we will not proceed to any population generalizations. However, theoretical contributions and generalization can be made (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Yin, 2003). The aim of theoretical generalizations is to offer additions and insights to already existing research material, and to hopefully create the environment for future hypothesis testing. In the case of theoretical generalizability, the number of participants is not a drawback, since what matters

most is the quality and the richness of the sample in representing different perspectives and transmitting different experiences (Bryman, 2012).

Techniques

It is argued by Eisenbeiss and van Knippenberg (2014), that followers vary in terms of awareness and understanding of moral information displayed by their leaders, and these differences can be the determinant factor of the intensity between leader and his/her followers. Aiming to gather as much insight as possible on the subjective views and created perceptions of employees, we will keep a relatively open character of the interviews – semi-structured, with open-ended questions that will help us to reach our objectives. The qualitative research and the data analysis that follows, will offer broader explanation to responses given and will let us explore this relationship and the role EI has on ethical leadership.

The qualitative part of the research will consist of 15 interviews with team members/followers occupied in the private sector. Theoretical sampling, like ours, is used to discover the categories and their characteristics along with the interrelationships that help answer the research question (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We believe that 15 interviews are a satisfying number to begin with, as more can lead us to what is called “theoretical saturation”, causing us to waste valuable time from our analysis. The researcher comes across theoretical saturation when the interviews no longer offer new findings and observations, nor stimulate new theoretical understandings, and there is no need to continue with data collection (Bryman, 2016; Charmaz, 2006).

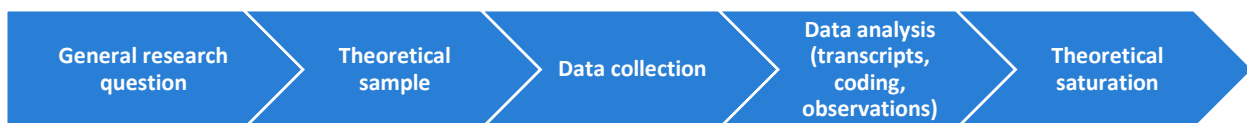


Figure 5: Theoretical sampling process (Bryman, 2016, p. 420)

The reason we choose the private sector specifically is firstly, because we acknowledge the differences in the organizational structure and goal between different sectors, and due to better accessibility in participants. In Anderson (2010, p.138), Pandey and Wright state that “*public*

management scholarship has suggested that public organizations are fundamentally different from private organizations as a consequence of the functions they provide to society". A study by Hudson's European R&D center, aimed to analyze leaders' characteristics amongst 1,185 senior leaders in Europe in the public and the private sector, found that leaders in the latter are more inclined to "believe and trust" (Hudson Publications & Research), a signal of more compassionate approach towards their followers. One more reason that led us to believe that the private sector is more fitting to research interpersonal relationships and individual behaviors, is the higher level of accountability in public organizations (Hooijberg, 2001), leaving less room for interpersonal relations and emotions to be part of the follower-leader connection, as public organizations put emphasis and value on public service motivation (PSM) of employees (see appendix II) (Heres & Lasthuizen, 2012).

Sample selection process

We will use purposive sampling, choosing participants in a strategic way to have relevant characteristics that answer to the question and provide a good variety of sample (Bryman, p.408). As for the sampling group itself it will consist of full-time working adults in the Netherlands, occupied in all kind of size companies (small, medium, large) in the private sector and under the same leader for at least 10 months. We recognize that bigger companies may have more complex leadership structure, but what we are researching is how the followers perceive their immediate leader, i.e. their manager. Large organizations have shared cultural elements (Schaubroeck et al., 2012) that work as "*A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way you perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.*" (Schein, 1985). That being said, we believe company's structure will not be an altering factor for our research plan. Additionally, we do not aim at a specific hierarchical level, from trainees to senior level they can all participate. The reason behind that is because managers, if they want to be considered as ethical leaders, must treat all their subordinates equally and with fairness leadership (Brown, Treviño & Harrison 2005), no matter the experience each of them has. Therefore, we consider all hierarchical levels to have valuable perceptions to offer from their experience so far.

We are aiming for a sample that will have equal representation of all genders, various ages and cultural backgrounds, to have an inclusive sample. Having a diverse and heterogeneous group of participants as sample is very important when studying social and ontological phenomena, as is the concepts we research, because of the cultural representation and the variety in observations this can result to. The Netherlands have many job opportunities that do not require Dutch to be someone's mother language, resulting in the creation of multicultural and international working environments. The exclusion of certain groups can therefore take away those benefits (Allmark, 2004). To achieve the ~15 interviews, we have two options, that either or both will take place:

1. We will use snowballing sampling, contacting a small group of suitable participants and then ask them to establish contact with other suitable participants. The sample will not be random in any sense, but since we do not standardize for demographics and do not conduct quantitative research it will not have any further consequences on the validity and reliability of the results (Bryman, 2012, 4th edition). In our case, the 'snowball' will be created with the use of three people from our professional contacts as starting point. Each of them is currently working in a different enterprise, holding positions in the supervisory and entry level.
2. Try to reach more participants, always fulfilling the criteria, using the social media, and specifically LinkedIn connections.

Lastly, all participants will be employees in the Netherlands. Even though with the use of virtual interviews there is no problem in the geographical whereabouts of both the interviewer and the interviewees, the choice of the country is a preference based on the social network and the option to have English-speaking participants for this English-written research. Using the original material without having to translate it is highly important in social research. Concepts in one language can have different interpretation in another one and that can be problematic for qualitative research since the analysis and the results produced from it are based on words (van Nes, Abma, Jonsson & Deeg, 2010). Words express the meaning we give them, but language also influences how this meaning is constructed, so we acknowledge the importance of using a language that will not

influence the interpretation of words and concepts used by having the risk of losing or altering the original material in translation.

Operationalization

Due to the unprecedented circumstances covid-19 has brought, interviews with physical presence are out of question. The process will continue with videocall interviews through MS Teams, making the data collection as efficient as possible. With the use of synchronized experience of image and sound we will be able to grasp body language elements, replacing effectively the face-to-face process (Bertrand & Bourdeau, 2010), helping us also in terms of validity, allowing us to gain detailed understanding, while creating openness with the interviewee to expand their responses.

Interviews with the use of videocalls have been subject of criticism with the main argument of the potential difficulties that may occur due to technical problems, such as frozen image or disrupted sound (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Saumure & Given, 2010; Hanna, 2012; James & Busher, 2009; Seitz, 2016). However, a comparative study on the topic of potential differences between Skype and in-person interviews conducted by Krouwel, Jolly and Greenfield (2019), found that not only technical difficulties did not become barriers, on the contrary, they became bonding points caused by both parties' vulnerability. The same research results in the following statement: *"From a qualitative perspective the researchers neither experienced nor noted any consistent difference between the nature and character of the interviews by mode."* (p. 6).

Data analysis

After the data is gathered, the data analysis part will take place starting from the detailed transcription of the interviews. When we have everything written down and checked by the interviewees for any mistakes or misconceptions (member check process), we will organize our open code and proceed to analyze the data, using a suitable qualitative analysis software called NVivo (version 12), to go through the coding process. The coding process per se will start with us getting familiar with the whole data set, reading and re-reading what we have collected, trying to

observe the themes and patterns that look alike or are in total contrast, and of course those that explain our topic of research.

Continuing, we will use axial coding, which is a way to find linkages in the data collected and identify the codes, categories and subcategories therein and is considered a trustworthy tool for qualitative analysis (Simmons, 2018). Using inductive reasoning since we have a specific research question to approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), we will look to identify central phenomena and relationships between the material that are data driven. This can be done through axial coding, that will reveal themes, new categories and new subcategories. With the use of axial coding we have the possibility to also identify causal conditions, meaning the conditions *“that create or bring about emergent themes. [...] Causal conditions may offer explanations and specific identifiable accounts for the theme.”* (Simmons, 2018, p.3). Also, since there has been previous research and literature on the main components of our research question separately (EI and ethical leadership), we can generate themes deductively from theory and prior research (Boyatzis, 1998).

The second step in the analysis would be to follow thematic, or else, selective coding. According to Holloway and Todres (2003), thematic coding should be a fundamental step in qualitative analysis due to the various different and complex concepts qualitative research can approach. Thematic analysis as a method is used to identify, analyze, and report patterns/themes that exist in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Essentially, it helps the researcher to identify patterns and themes, and describe the data set with rich details, selecting which are of interest according to the researched topic and report them in the paper (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). In our case, using thematic coding will help us to ‘give voice’ to all the interesting material collected from the interviews conducted, separating the data corpus into themes that include similar and/or contrasting material. We will go at the latent level of the thematic analysis, beginning to identify and bring to the surface the underlying ideas, assumption, evidence, and conceptualizations that exist in the data collected.

Once we create the set of themes the refinement process will take place, again (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This time, we will check to see if all themes form coherent patterns and if the material extracted from the data corpus reflect the meanings of the whole data set (Ibid.). In case we identify issues or inadequacies in the initial coding themes, the necessary changes will happen

in order to distribute the data correctly and in a meaningful way. This will be done either by changing existing codes -themes will be combined or broken down-, creating new, or delete anything with no adding value (King, 2004; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is to be expected, as the coding path is an ongoing and organic process. The concluding themes will then be named. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) it is important to use names that immediately give to the reader a sense of what the theme is about. Finally, the discussion chapter will include all of the relevant results, results that were both expected and unexpected, those that respond to the expectations and those that do not, the ones that explain the phenomenon that we study.

Validity & Reliability

In order to secure the validity and reliability of our research we proceeded in taking some careful steps before, during, and after the interviews. Firstly, when we mentioned that we will choose our purposive sampling, by no means we meant that we have pre-determined participants or that there is previous connection to them (Le Comple & Goetz, 1982). In qualitative research, selection of the sample is based on the ability of participants to provide relevant data according to the research question. To avoid, in the best of our ability, insufficient data collection, we will choose participants who are able to report to events relevant to our research, and that are not observable to us otherwise.

When conducting interviews, it is always hard to determine if what participants say is the truth, or if events and opinions are adjusted based on fear of consequences or because they want to please the interviewer with their answers (Brink, 1993). To avoid being caught in similar situations, we will send all participants, prior to the interview, a signed form of the anonymity protocol, assuring that their data will remain secure and not accessible to anyone other the researcher; evidence (such as name of employer) that can lead to revealing the identity of participants will also be erased from transcripts. This way, we will try to ensure more accurate and honest answers, minimizing the personal doubts and hesitations one might have about their participation and security of their identity.

Another measurement that we will take in order to ensure there is no external influence in participants' answers, is that we will conduct one-on-one interviews and not in group settings.

Even though this might be proved to be more time consuming, we believe it is in the best interest of our research. Keeping the setting of the interview as minimal as possible, with only the interviewer and the interviewee present, we aim to avoid any possible influence in participants' answers and description of events by other opinions on the events. Since we target personal perceptions and opinions, we want to maintain the personal and individual character to all data collected. It is possible that doing group interviews would suggest otherwise.

The anonymity protocol will be followed by a one-pager, where we will describe the topic of research. In this document no details about the questions of the interview will be included, as we do not want to put participants in a position of having already planned their answers; we seek honest, original, and real-time answers. Therefore, the main purpose of this document is to give information to the participants about what is the aim of our research, what the process will be like, and how we plan to use the information gather from the interview. This way, we avoid any confusion regarding the process, our intentions, and the voluntary character of their participation -stating explicitly that they can deny to reply to specific questions and/or withdraw at any moment during the process-, while at the same time we create a first impression of the importance of our project.

Moreover, for a participant to be able to open up about personal views, experiences, and not be afraid to talk with honest, it requires to first feel comfortable. Since we have established that there is no prior connection with the participants, we will try to make participants trust us by being transparent about the steps of the process and be willing to offer any further information needed. Given the covid-19 circumstances, which do not allow us to have physical interaction with the participants, interviews will be conducted virtually. We believe that giving participants the freedom to be in their own space while answering our questions will make them feel more comfortable during the process.

Keeping the validity and reliability standards of our research, of course includes the detailed transcription of the exact words of each participant will ensure that no information gets lost, but at the same time we consider equally important the role of keeping notes during the interview. The participants will have received prior knowledge about our intention of hand-writing things during the interview. These notes will consist of minor details that are observed during the

interview, such as body language signals, emotional condition while describing things, sense of trustworthiness, etc. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the single most important measurement to support the credibility of the study is the use of “members check”. Members check is the process when participants get sent the transcription of the interview they had, in order to check for misconceptions and do quality control. This way, credibility, accuracy and validity for what was transcribed by the interviewer is ensured (Harper & Cole, 2012). Lastly, to add to the validity of the results produced by the questions asked, we will run a pilot round to make sure the questions are easily understood, are not misconceived and the interviews last a reasonable amount of time.

Chapter 4: RESULTS & ANALYSIS

During our interviews we intended to see the perceptions of our participants regarding their manager's emotional intelligence and how that plays a role in the perception they have of them as ethical leaders. In order to research that, we created relevant sub-questions (see chapter 1) and we constructed our interview questions in such way that would approach each concept individually and would reveal what are considered the important characteristics in a manager, so that we can evaluate the importance emotional ability skills have to a follower as well. From the answers we received during the interviews we can see that majority of the participants had a clear understanding of what was asked and in cases where they felt unsure, they asked for clarifications.

After transcribing and importing the files in NVivo, we proceeded in analyzing each interview and creating fitting nodes (i.e. codes) to facilitate all relevant and similar information (see Appendix IV). Conducting this research our main objective was to see in what way employees' perceptions of their manager's emotional intelligence (if it) has a role in their perception of the latter's leadership style as ethical. All themes were created in order to help us understand each variable independently, as we wanted to also identify employees' views on what ethical leadership is, how do their managers express their emotions in the workplace and what is employee's perception about that and the similarities-differences among their answers/perceptions.

Emotional Intelligence.

One of the main subjects in our research is that of emotional intelligence. We identified not only comments that relate to the concept, but we also divided it into codes of dealing with others' emotions, expressing emotions, emotions in leadership, and the perception followers have of their leader's expression. In the general node of "emotional intelligence" we included all comments that had to do with general characteristics and/or behaviors of the managers that reveal emotional abilities. Examples of that are "*she is a good listener; she can make you open up. ... she can find a way to calm the other person down*", "*she asks me more personal questions, about my family, about how I feel.*", and "*he knows how to approach people very well.*", which all indicate managers with emotional awareness and understanding.

Managers were seen to have the ability to empathize with their subordinates (*“I think she's very perceptive. But I think that has to do with each person. She can understand you completely.”*), to be aware of the situations (*“he's very good at knowing what is going on”*), and to act proactively in creating a space where emotional matters are spoken about (*“speaking about these kind of emotional matters”*). Such characteristics were also perceived important to define the leadership style of the manager and were used to characterize him/her (*“There was no chemistry nor connection. The manager giving orders. So, it felt like, you know, he was not the leader, he was the boss, because there's a distinction.”*).

Dealing with others' emotions.

In that code we identified the cases where managers showed interest and were willing to listen to their subordinates. In majority of the cases (10/15), manager's approach was that he/she *“would listen to you, which means she shows interest.”* Interest from managers' side towards employees' worries and well-being was also shown by urging their subordinates to share their thoughts and worries with them in order to understand the situation and take action on that (e.g. *“he has even said that all of the people we should always report to him and we should always consult him”*, *“share thoughts like something that's happened or whatever, and then she is there to deal with that, to find a way to calm the other person, to get more to the point of the situation to find the best way to deep dive into the root cause of the problem”*, *“When you get frustrated about something at work that doesn't go as you want to, he will be more compassionate and try to help you always.”*). Even in extreme situations, such as the occurrence of a burn-out, participant 15 reported that his manager showed complete understanding of the situation and focused in helping him to recover and not drown in all the unpleasant feelings burn-out is associated with (*“I expressed it to him. He tried to help me relax, take my time. Yeah. He actually helped me deal with it. So instead of having me forced to do it all originally planned to do he gave me some time to spend only on one topic and let me understand that I should work less than the time that I should.”*).

Leader's emotional expression & employees' perceptions on that.

Starting the research, we expected to find differences in the way managers express their emotions, as well as in the way employees perceive that, but in majority of the cases (11/15), participants said that they have not seen their manager to express extreme emotions or express in an inappropriate way according to their perception. However, there were a couple of cases (3/15) that the way managers chose to express themselves, or not express -which was perceived as the wrong thing for a manager to do-, was inappropriate, unprofessional and unethical as well.

Majority of the sample reported that they consider their manager to be “*an open book*”, “*honest*”, “*direct*”, “*do not show extreme emotions during work*”, “*respond calmly*”, and “*would deal with the issues professionally*”. In all of the examples, emotional expression was seen as an asset and it was specifically mentioned that the emotions shown were related only with work and the working environment in general. When things would get to a personal level, not oversharing was appreciated as it maintained the line between personal and professional; respondent 10 reported: “*She shares a bit of her experience on emotional level but she never goes too personal, which I like.*”. Accordingly, directness was never perceived negatively. All participants appreciated that their managers share their frustration, talk about emotions, especially because “*it is very nice to explain things and communicate with each other.*” (respondent 5). Expressing emotions was also always seen as a way of communication within the team (“*I would say he is very honest ... If he's having a good or bad day, he communicates it always.*”), and was talked about in the interviews as a positive characteristic that added in the value of the manager as a leader of the team (“*he is quite open and easily approachable. These are all the good things he has. I believe he is a very good manager if you ask me.*”, “*she is really open, which I really like. You can see when she is happy or when she like what you are doing. So, she will really show her emotions.*”).

However, answers on the matter were different for three participants. In the first case, the interviewee was present in an incident where the manager “*vented out*” on one of the employees during a meeting, in order to make him/her aware that the situation was serious shouting “*you shouldn't do this now, we're having a meeting*”. According to the interviewee, this was something that occasionally could happen, if the manager was having a bad day and so it was anticipated and justified by the employees to see such behavior. This happened usually towards more

hierarchically equal colleagues of him/her, as “... *he doesn't do you usually these kinds of things, for instance, the juniors, but mainly the seniors, mainly to people that they hear is quite equal.*”. Intense moments and expressions were also perceived without any behavioral expression, but also through facial and non-verbal expressions, as it was reported by respondent 5, “*he did not shout or something, but you could see that for her it was really intense in the moment.*”.

On the second situation (respondent 8), that we found extremely opposite to the other ones, is that of a manager that was described as “*very logical, he does not have so many feelings*”. In that case the employee was extremely dissatisfied and affected by the manager’s behavior, leading her to thoughts of self-resignation, as she was constantly feeling her efforts were not enough and no matter how good she would perform “*he is not the type that will compliment you or say that you did the good things*”. The usual way this specific manager chooses to express his thoughts and emotions would include “*eye rolling, gossiping with his favorite colleagues, talking behind peoples’ backs, or he would not express at all*”. It was after the completion of the questions that the participant said this type of behavior was affecting her well-being, not only mentally but physically as well, as she experienced hair loss and extreme changes in her sleeping patterns. Following to that came the thoughts of quitting this job along with the fear that even in a new working environment similar behavior may be experienced.

Third and last, is the case where the participant felt that the manager was lacking honesty, or was altering the facts in order for her employee to feel appreciated, whereas in reality the participant herself felt that she was asked to do more than she should. The manager had set a deadline but “forgot” to inform the participant (4) in time. Afterwards, the manager instead of admitting the incident as has happened, he/she tried to ‘sugarcoat’ the events by complimenting participants’ abilities and performance, calling her “*a champion*” and making feel accountable for the deadline to be met by saying: “... *the boss is really expecting you to present it and we are sure that you will do very well*”. But because she felt that the manager was only trying to persuade her to meet the deadline in the new timeframe (“*So this is something that I don't like when people they try to flatter you in order to get something from you. You can be nice, but there is this little line.*”), it was a moment where he/she questioned the trust she had towards her manager.

Ethical Leadership.

The second necessary subject to study for our research was the notion of ethical leadership, both as was perceived by the employees and as shown through managers' behaviors in the workplace. We identified that factors that affect followers' assumptions of their leader's ethical leadership is communication, fairness, understanding, dealing with moral issues, mentorship behavior, and accountability of his/her behaviors.

Communication.

In the big majority, we see that verbal communication is used to “*communicate small issues*”, “*addressing important issues or scolding*”, to “*keep informed what we're doing*”, to express through “*humor in our team*” and is always perceived positively as a leadership behavior component. Participant 1 specifically emphasizes in the importance of good communication in the team, saying that it is “*very, very, very much important*”. Through communication subordinates can pose their questions, express dilemmas that have to do with work, talk about struggles that may face, and managers from their end can listen, empathize, and understand. Communication can be used from managers also as a mean to talk about issues, raise awareness, express their views, guide their followers, and of course show how willing and approachable they are to support their subordinates.

In general, managers who do not hesitate to communicate with their subordinates create a more open and friendly environment, asking from their subordinates to do the same, working as a role model to them. A vivid example of such behavior is the one given by participant 10: “*she asks to communicate more between us. Like if we see something that is wrong, or something or someone that did not do something, well, or maybe that goes a bit outside of what is expected trying to ask, “just approach your colleague”, because we can all kind of with the philosophy or the attitude of we can all make mistakes. ... So, that's it, she's trying to promote that a lot.*”. Participants showed to highlight communication as a way for managers to promote open and direct communication, helping for misunderstandings to be avoided and creating an overall smooth professional environment (“*... bridging different divisions, different accounts. So, he is really trying to glue different people together.*”, participant 1).

A pattern we saw that promotes communication positively, and therefore assists in the perception of the ethical leader, is the acknowledgement of good behavior and achievements by the manager. We identified such examples in 14/15 interview transcriptions, that included *“praise when you do something good”*, in situations where the manager *“needs our help, she shows us that she thanks us a lot.”* and in some situations, acknowledgment of good results and behaviors was shown practically, through monetary rewards or certifications. In all 14 cases, appraisal and recognition was only positively perceived by our participants, clearly mentioned as an asset in the following examples: *“if you did something good and comes up at the public setting, he will give you praise for that thing in front of everyone, so that's a very good characteristic.”*, *“She always gives credit to the people for their work and in front of management and with emails and meetings and everything. Which is also very important.”* and *“if someone is working, we get a promotion. You see this very often. ... they try not thank him exactly but they show that this is something that you can continue to do because it's something that we like.”*. Aside from the positive view of organizational culture this behavior creates, it also works as a motivator for employees to perform their best knowing that they will be recognized for their efforts.

The most immediate way of communicating though is through open discussions, which makes the participants feel and recognize that there is transparency in what they do, and there is no *“sneaky behavior”*, leading in identifying the ethical and honest side of their managers as well. Managers can choose to have open conversations with their subordinates as a way to also discuss future goals (*“So we have this discussion once per year and also we have them objectives, states based on our bonus, which is also once per year in its earlier in the year so that you can set your goals”*), showing a true leadership behavior, an individual that cares to guide their followers and take their worries seriously. Moreover, managers show their intentions to be aware and present in events that take place even nowadays with the covid-19 pandemic changing the working environment as we knew it, with majority of employees working from home (*“we had the one to one because we have one to one per every week so that we can give an update and talk about the problems that we might have or things that we want to discuss with her.”*). At the same time, the lack of such intentions of open communication is strictly and directly related with the perception of an unethical leader, one who does not care or show interest towards his/her people. We have the example of participant 8, expressing about her manager, who *“only focus on the numbers and find all these things **sometimes because in his mind, everyone should follow the rules. You know,*

there is a specific mindset. We follow this. And why do we have to talk about it? You know.” leaving her having the minimum possible communication with the manager, finding the root of the problem in the fact that *“he is very logical person, he is a numbers guy ..., doesn’t have so many feelings.”*, which leads to job dissatisfaction.

Fairness.

The big majority of the (13/15) participants felt that their managers were acting on fair terms, not making exceptions and following the organizational culture for equality amongst employees, adding to the reputation of an ethical manager. Managers, as leaders, *“... they're having an active role to play”*, as it is believed to ‘transfer’ the organizational culture and ethics in their teams, presenting the role-modeling example behavior of an employee. Also, fairness was used to include situations where managers act individually on events with *“integrity and doing the right things, even when circumstances may point to another less favorable direction.”* It was highly appreciated when managers acted with *“neutral and objective picture of the situation”*, without using punishment before explaining the situation, *“if you do something that it's not with the rules or with the policy or in general with the spirit of the team, they will try to explain you why it's not good or accepted.”* Being fair was one of the most used adjectives when participants were asked to describe the most important traits a manager should have.

Moreover, consideration of team’s opinion in the decision-making process or even *“consult the team when making decisions”*, was highly spoken of and created a more bonded atmosphere within the team. In the words of participant 2 we can see the positive effect in the perception of her manager’s image: *“I am quite junior and I don't have an opinion. He usually also asks my opinion”*. Lastly, the feeling of being included and seen as a counting member of the team based on the behavior of the manager, made participants feel *“valued”*, *“never offended or underestimated”* and that noting that *“never treats me differently from the Dutch people”*, helping participants recognize their manager’s ethical side.

“Equality” in our analysis got the meaning of *“treat everyone in the same way, make everyone feel equally acknowledged”*, which can be better explained by the example given from participant 4 *“And I think in general, they try to face all of us in the same way so that we don't forget that some people, for instance the Dutch people, they have more abilities or they will have*

more opportunities in the future than others.”. However, one very interesting reference was made by a female participant which identified an unequal situation but was justified based on gender-oriented and gender-dominated career path, talking about *“We have like equal representation. There are internationals. There's only one woman and myself. So, we're two in a group of like 16 people. But it's very common in the sector not to see many women in general. So, it's not that suspicious or anything.”*. In her case, she still believed it was not management’s fault that there is unequal gender representation in the team, so it did not affect the perception she had of her manager’s ethicality.

Dealing with moral issues.

Interviewees were asked about the way their managers discussed about moral issues at work and how they deal with immoral and rule-breaking behavior. Based on that, 13/15 participants referred specifically on these matters and in 10/13 cases the manager would immediately contact the individual(s) involved and would discuss the matter privately. The immediate action on the matter was well-appreciated and was specifically connected with the characteristic of a good leader: *“When he sees misconduct, he'll always act on it. I think that's where the good leader should do.”*. This way subordinates were more inclined to show trust to their managers who seem to understand when action is needed. There are cases (4/13) where the managers also prefer to have a proactive stance moral issues by creating awareness, so they can avoid having immoral incidents, being open and do not hesitate to talk more about such matters (e.g. of participant 6 *“okay, we need to talk more about this.”*).

One interviewee (participant 2) described a past event, offering a completely different finding from the rest: *“A team member did something that he was not supposed to do. And he was quite serious. He [the manager], like, shouted at him. He told him what you did was wrong. You shouldn't do this. And if you do that, like next time, I have to report you myself. So, yeah, I think he gave, like, kind of advice in the beginning. And then he said, yeah, next time I'm going to take action. So please, like, avoid things like that. So, I think he's very serious when he talks about this kind of stuff.”*. From the way the participant talked about the event described, he/she consider the manager to take a hard stance on immoral matters, without thinking in a negative way of the

manager despite the intense reaction he had, acknowledging the fact that he is being serious when dealing with such incidents.

Decision-making.

The big majority of the participants that touched on their leaders' decision-making (8/13) mentioned that any kind of decision is first discussed with the team or at least team's opinion is asked and taken into consideration: *"But then if it's an important decision to make, we know that she will make it with our opinions. She will take it under consideration. But she's not afraid to make a judgment call and she's not afraid to stand up for her team."* A different view came from participant's 7 words: *"he's trying to do his best or something, and he's really young"*, considering manager's age and lack of experience in the way the manager makes decisions. Participant 7 reported that the specific manager would first decide on his own and then make the announcement to the team.

Role-modeling.

In 10/12 cases that comprehended correctly the aspect of role-modeling, participants said that their managers act as *"a good role model for them to have someone to follow the same steps after a while"*. In one other situation, participant 2 also referred to the expectations a manager has, which should be aligned with what he/she provides his/her subordinates with: *"I believe, like a good leader is also following this ethical behavior himself is a good leader because you can't just expect from the others to follow a certain behavior if you're not following it yourself."*, continuing with specific reference to her manager: *"He has the characteristics to be a manager and a leader because he himself is doing things and then he advises to do the same."*

It was briefly mentioned, that in order for someone to be perceived as a role model your personalities must be alike in order to be able to get inspired by the manager. In this case, we can say that role modeling has a more personal touch including personality traits and soft skills, rather than just professional ones: *"I think this is a more personal question because if someone inspires you, it means it's more similar with your character ... I think I'm not getting inspired. But it's a good example, I think."* That comes in contrast with what participant 3 said: *"When it comes to work, yes, he tries to inspire me that he is my supervisor. So, he tries to inspire me and to teach*

me things about work. So, yes, I think that he indeed certifies as a role model”, where there is a reference in the work aspect of role-modeling. Lastly, we came across participants 8’s view, where she characterized her manager “... not really a role model or motivator or something like that. No, he would just let you do your work as you think”, expressing the perception of a manager that is not interested in being a leader by setting the example for the rest of the team to follow.

Understanding.

Large part of our sample (11/15), included comments and/or references which mostly involve behaviors that shows compassion and justification towards an act, an event, or an emotional expression of an employee by their manager. To be more exact, such cases involve situations where “*they [managers] do not put much pressure on you*”, or as participant 5 mentioned “*she was always saying to me that it doesn't matter if you make some mistakes, we all do these mistakes and not worry*”. The pattern with showing understanding towards a mistake that was made was also included in a case where the overall incident led to strengthening the trust built between leader-follower by “*driving a better connection, a better relation between me and my manager and of course, its strengths, our relationship as well. Because I can trust her and she can trust me more because I'm being honest with her.*”. Lastly, understanding was shown in more personal matters that affected the employee, such as “*huge fight at home with the boyfriend, and the boyfriend left the house. ... I needed a week holiday because I had this happening and my head is not, I can't focus in work right now. And she was okay she approved the week off of holiday. I think this is really, it's really nice.*” complemented positively leader’s emotional understanding ability, something that was particularly important for some candidates, mentioning in general that the manager “*understands a lot when I open and speak about my feelings to her, “she does not make you feel bad about yourself”* when you do something wrong and as a form of caring for the employees.

Mentorship

Further analysis showed that most of interviewees (8/15) felt that their managers also have a role of advisor or give some guidance in moments of frustration or challenging events. This could be either achieved proactively (“*And also what she's trying to do is that she's sort of trying to give me examples of situations and how I could handle them because I'm quite new, more so in this*

team and in this department. ... So, it's good to have an adviser.”) or seen in crucial times (“*So you also have a person to report to, but also a person to always come to for guidance.*”). Sometimes this guidance was also needed when subordinates were seeking for neutral and ‘professional’ advice (participant 1).

In all 8/15 cases that mentorship was identified it was perceived positively. The right guidance seemed to enhance motivation and (skills) development in participants, along with the feeling of having some sort of official or unofficial type of support. It is believed that this leadership characteristic works as an asset according to participants, as “*this more guiding kind of style is more effective.*”. In certain situations, the feeling of protection and guidance the manager created to his/her team was compared to that of “*the father of the team*” or “*the protective mother duck*”, showing how important these participants consider the role of their managers. Describing someone with the qualities of a parent reveals the important role this person has to one’s development and automatically gives the idea that we talk about someone who is caring towards his/her people. One of the goals behind this type of behavior is “*to support the team and help them grow*”.

Accountability.

In this category we refer to comments done by the participants (7/15) that relate to managers intentions and behaviors that show support towards their team and take responsibility of their team’s and/or their own actions; they acknowledge and understand wrongdoings and show honesty. Using participant’s 3 words: “*That's one of his very good characteristics, he [the manager] always takes responsibility and he tries to resolve the issues as soon as they arise.*” accompanied by participant’s 13 comment: “*She [the manager] is willing to learn and admit that she is learning from us*”. In 6/7 cases the behavior ownership was positively perceived by the employees and associated with ethical leadership, but in the case of participant 8: “*I have had this discussion with him the last week because I was a bit fed up, like I felt that I'm not appreciated or all these things. And he also said, 'yeah, I'm not the easiest person and I'm not complimenting enough, yeah.'*”, where the acknowledgment of the wrong behavior by the manager himself was not enough to act as a relief to employee’s questioning her manager’s leadership style.

Chapter 5: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Our findings show that EI relates to the perception subordinates have of their managers as ethical leaders. Even though we were provided only with a couple of ‘unethical’ examples, seeing the patterns helped us understand the characteristics that made managers be perceived as ethical or not. The results showed that subordinates want managers to have emotional competence, apart from the experience they have gained. Many of them felt that ethical leadership should entail having people management skills, such as understanding, be willing to listen to your subordinates, make sure that they feel comfortable in their working environment and with their working role. We saw that despite the time of tenure a participant was under the manager, communication was of utmost importance in both expressing emotions and showing understanding (Goleman 1998), and in making employees have the feeling of transparency in what they do making their manager come across as honest. We can even say that the lower in the hierarchy of employment a participant was, the more he/she valued the aspect of communication and inclusion in the team setting.

The initial objective of this research was to identify how the perception of manager’s EI may play a role in manager’s reputation as ethical leader. In order to answer our main research question, we conducted interviews to collect data and analyze them. In order to see how a manager with emotional abilities differ from a manager who lacks in emotional abilities, we compared the behaviors each displayed, as were transmitted to us by participants. EI was found in the way managers expressed their emotions, understood and managed their subordinates’ emotions, and also in the way they communicated. Managers that really communicated, also showed equal treatment to all, fairness in decisions, displayed mentorship behavior, were accountable for their actions, did not show extreme emotional expressions and were always open to listen and support their subordinates; those were perceived as ethical leaders and leaders that have the trust of their followers when making a decision.

On the other hand, in the cases that managers did not engage in verbal contact with their team regularly, were not perceived as completely honest and transparent at all times and were seen as “numbers’ people” with no sign of emotional abilities, consequently categorized as unethical leaders. Questionable behaviors in the working (participant 4, 8, 10) affected the trust and social

connection interviewees have with their managers, reaching the point of losing motivation and in some cases (participant 4, 8) to even want to proceed to self-resignation. Interviewees that faced managers with no emotional competences experienced unhealthy sleeping habits, anxiety, and the levels of work motivation decreased significantly. The vivid example of participant 8 of how the lack of awareness, emotional intelligence and ethics can influence subordinates of the person that does not have these attributes, but still holds a leadership position.

Starting our research, we expected to see differences in the way managers express their emotions, as well as in the way employees perceive that. However, this was not the case. Majority of the sample reported that they consider their manager to be open, honest, direct, do not show extreme emotions during work and respond calmly in variety of situations. In all of these examples, emotional expression was seen as an asset and it was specifically mentioned that the emotions shown were related only to work or the working environment in general, keeping the distance between personal and professional life (De Wite & Meyer, 2010).

Communication is a vital ingredient for human relationships, hence leader-follower relationship is no exception to that. Communication was found in almost all of the cases and it was considered a behavioral trait that adds positively in the perception employees have of their manager's ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005), whilst the lack of communication creates the opposite perception towards the leader. We identified references and comments that discuss the matching topic which is communicated in one way or another, i.e. verbally and explicitly mentioned or non-verbally through actions and behaviors. It appears to be a common component to both EI and ethical leadership.

Majority of participants said that their managers choose to express their emotions verbally rather by using body language, and that helps in the perception of them as honest and direct leaders. At the same time, the way they show understanding and support to their subordinates is also being perceived through communication in the form of verbal contact, by checking-in on them regularly and by asking questions when employees express their frustration or unpleasant emotions, revealing a caring leader that is also worried about the well-being of the team and understands emotions. Accordingly, directness was never perceived negatively. All participants appreciated that their managers share their frustration, talk about emotions, especially because they find

communication a very nice way of explaining situations and emotions without creating misconceptions; that also added in their reputation as honest managers. Expressing and sharing emotions was also always seen as a way of communication within the team (Mayer & Salovey, 1990), and was evaluated as a positive characteristic that added in the value of the manager.

Also, in the greater part if not in the whole, interviewees associated communication with transparency, open discussions, team building, emotional and professional support, and acknowledgement of good performance and behavior; traits that according to them are necessary for one to be perceived as ethical leader. These observations are in alignment with what the literature presents. Emotionally intelligent individuals show strong communication skills, complemented by the ability to build strong relationships (Goleman, 1998; Mann, 2009), which results in making the leadership process more effective by minimizing conflicts in the working environment (Torenvlied & Akkerman, 2012). Of course, ethical leadership's definition itself provide us with evidence that communication is necessary in ethical leadership as well: "*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).

Majority of participants, mentioned the need for the manager to be mostly a leader, one who "*recognizes the hard work*" instead of giving orders; be someone who is guiding his/her team, coach them, devote time to them. However, even guidance has its boundaries and there should be a line between guiding and ordering people. The results of this study also indicate that ethical leaders should be accountable and responsible for their actions (Sims, 2009) showing that they have acknowledgment and at the same time they are making their team feel protected, and confident, providing them with a good role model, to have someone to follow their steps after a while (Heres & Lasthuizen, 2012). Respect and equality were found to be vital things to exist within a team. When it comes to equality, it was mentioned in different ways, but always lead in the conclusion of treating all people in the same way or putting the same amount of effort for everyone in order to give every employee equal opportunity for development (Bendura, 1986), sometimes mentioned more specifically in terms of demographic characteristics or even in regard to experience.

A very important factor in employees' perceptions of what ethical leadership is and should be, something that actually complements the aim of our study, is the fact that many of the participants, from all experience and age groups, talked about the role of emotions. That is no surprise, as prior studies have noted the importance of emotions in leadership (Heyler et al., 2016; George, 2000). What is important though, is the fact that in some cases, emotions were implemented in the way that managers should manage and express their emotions, and understand others emotions in terms of the different personalities in the team. This can really be linked to the fact that participants referred specifically to the fact that they consider important for manager to not only have work experience, but to also have emotional experience and lead with "empathetic leadership" as well, meaning to be people-oriented. In fast-paced modern working environments, in order for everyone to maintain good performance, keep their motivation and well-being, having a manager with high EI abilities can be of great asset both for the team and for the organization, assisting to job satisfaction, in building stronger teams, minimizing turnover too.

Following the second objective of our study and trying to understand what employees consider ethical leadership to be, we asked each of them during their interview to answer what ethical leadership means to them and how it should ideally look like. Of course, amongst the results we found the expected characterizations of what several reports have already indicated that have to do with following guidelines, codes of conduct, and rules (Brown et al., 2005). However, surprisingly, "*complying also with your personal feelings, because sometimes personal is stricter than the company's rules*" was mentioned by a participant, expressing the importance of having an emotional side in leadership. This finding can also be evaluated in accordance to the "moral person-moral manager" aspect of an ethical leader that has been considered important by followers as well ("*a leader who has specific values that follows as a person.*") (Treviño et al. 2000, 2003). Of course, being honest, open, have dignity and provide feedback to his/her subordinates were also mentioned, complementing what has already been established in the literature of ethical leadership (Brown, Treviño & Harrison 2005; Howell & Avolio, 1992).

Not showing extreme emotions does not mean that managers do not experience them, it just shows their competence in understanding them and handling them the right way (Elder, 1997). In Chapter 2, we took theory one step further by assuming that how a leader chooses to regulate, express, and utilize emotions can influence his/her reputation as an ethical leader. That has been

shown through our data, by looking at the comparison of managers that show emotions in a professional and appropriate way being perceived as ethical leaders, in contrast with managers who do not show signs of emotions at all, or choose to go overboard when expressing them and cannot be associated with ethical leadership by their subordinates.

However, an unanticipated view was also presented in couple of cases. As specifically was described in an interview, “venting out” to one of your colleagues cannot usually be perceived positively and/or professionally, but even that can be justified -apparently. We believe that happens in situations where such behavior is followed by ownership of behavior, acknowledgment of expressing inappropriately and accompanied by an apology. On the situation where the manager was described as “*very logical, he does not have so many feelings*” (participant 8), the employee was extremely dissatisfied and affected by the manager’s behavior, leading to thoughts of self-resignation, as she was constantly feeling her efforts were not enough and no matter how good she would perform the manager would not show acknowledgement of her achievements. In that case, the manager was not only perceived as unethical because of his unprofessional behavior, but also because of the lack of emotional abilities, as he would not express any kind of emotions. He would express himself with eye rolling, gossiping specific colleagues, talking behind peoples’ backs. This is a vivid example of how the lack of awareness, emotional intelligence and ethics can influence subordinates of the person that does not have these attributes, but still holds a leadership position.

When lack of honesty was perceived, employees started questioning the ethical side of their manager. Even in situations where ‘sugarcoating’ things was being understood instead of directness, accountability of action, subordinate’s trust in the face of the manager started shaking. Moreover, objective and equal treatment towards everyone was something all participants insisted on, but at the same time when understanding was absent and managers did not empathize were perceived as emotionless. Therefore, a middle solution would offer balance: it is desired for managers to stick to rules and guidelines, without losing their understanding and reasoning when reacting or making a decision.

In our research, we tried to identify which theory out of the three described and used in chapter 1 and 2 -LMX, SLT, SIT- could work as a mechanism to explain the role EI has in ethical leadership as subordinates perceive them; so we created Table 3 and Table 4 (see Appendix VI)

with the proposing mechanisms to help us identify which one better explains this relationship. Lacking in exploratory research for this specific relationship showing the explicit influence of each mechanism, we can only make theoretical assumptions and suggestions based on our analysis. With that being said, we identified that majority of the references concerning our topic of research can be categorized in the social learning theory (SLT). We base our observation in the way things were perceived by the participants in the working environment. Managers in majority of the cases were perceived to act as role-models for employees to learn what is expected and desired, and what is rewarded and punished through the consequences of behaviors (Bandura, 1986). Leadership involves influence (Yukl, 2002) and according to Bandura (1986), things can be learnt either by first-hand experience and/or by observation of others' behavior and later consequences. Employees use the information obtained through these means to move to conclusions about their manager. It is far more important for attention to be paid in the actions and ongoing behaviors of leaders rather than only the statements they make, for followers to really identify the altruistic motivation in them.

Nonetheless, in our analysis we came strong examples that fit in the LMX relationship as well: in-group dyadic relationships but also behaviors that match the out-group conditions (e.g. lack of communication from manager's side leading to low job satisfaction and loss of trust from employee's side -participant 4) (McClane, 1991; Yukl, 2010). Members that were really satisfied with the relationship between them and their managers show signs of closer relationships with the manager, appeared to be more motivated and satisfied (Lunenburg, 2010). All cases that revealed some kind of understanding, reinforcement, communication, acknowledgment, fairness and equality, and mentorship behavior from manager's side were associated with positive feelings towards employees' responsibilities and engagement to OCB (Peng & Kim, 2020; Rockstuhl et al., 2012).

To sum up, from our analysis we can see that EI of a manager has an impact on his/her behavior, and consequently to the reputation as an ethical leader. Managers that are open, communicative, emotionally expressive, understanding, fair, and direct is what all of the sample thought to be ethical leaders. Balance and generally "*professional or neutral behavior*" were also mentioned as a good way of expressing emotions in the working environment. Indeed, managers choose to show their emotions in different ways but in their majority, they remain transparent and

open to either express and/or communicate about the events and thoughts taking place, which is positively perceived by their subordinates when recognizing them as ethical leaders. In the extreme cases of wrongfully expressed emotions or unethical events, the results and the impact they have in employee's perception of their managers was -the least to say- damaging for the trust or appreciation of their leaders.

Limitations

Our study is not without its limitations. Our sample is a total of 15 selected participants based on our criteria, and as a relatively small sample it cannot be representative of the full-time working adults in the Netherlands. Therefore, no population generalizations can be made, because our research is based on the individual traits of the managers. Nevertheless, small-scale sample studies still offer insights about the topic of research, can be subject to theoretical generalizations (Yin, 2005) and can assist to draw causal relationships between the concepts.

One more limitation we identify, is the lack of equal gender representation in our sample. Due to difficulty in locating suitable candidates given the pandemic covid-19 and the limited time left, we have a sample that consists of four males and 11 females (see Appendix IV). However, it was not in the objectives of our research to study the gender as a factor that could potentially give further depth and explanation to our results. From the results we have, it is different managers' characteristics and subordinate's experiences that result in different answers. Employee's gender does not seem to be a factor that relates to the perception participant X has of his/her manager's EI and leadership style. Additionally, we focus our research on the private sector, excluding the public and the hybrid type of organizations. This limits the external validity of our research, as the generalization about employees' perceptions on their managers' EI and ethical leadership occupied in the other two sectors are not studied in this thesis.

The interviews that took place have the purpose of giving us insights on how employees perceive and understand their managers' EI, and how that plays a role in identifying them as ethical leaders or not, and further help in the identification of the mechanism that explains this relationship. This way, our findings enrich the existing literature on ethical leadership and the role of emotions therein. Additional research is needed in order to evaluate the causal relationship

between the two concepts as perceived by subordinates and how big or small their effect is. Also, exploratory analysis is needed in order to understand which of the three mechanisms ultimately is the mechanism that could help explain this relationship, as the type of our research is not to allow us any causal explanations.

Implications

Theoretical

The findings of this thesis are interesting and can be taken into account for both the academics and the practitioners. For scholars, this is a reminder that leadership is a dual-ended process that requires both the leader and the followers to be on the same page about it. For example, followers that do not feel valued and appreciated can easily be demotivated; but what seems to be equally important for ethical leadership to be effective is the perception followers have of their leader. When ‘building’ this perception, followers utilize both the emotions they see their leaders expressing, and also the way these emotions are expressed. Leaders that choose to not show any signs of emotional expression are the ones considered more distant, less people-oriented, and are associated with unethical behavior, whereas those that seek and try to communicate with their subordinates, in general or about ethics and emotions specifically, are perceived to be good and ethical leaders. Consequently, we see that emotions appear to have an important role in the ethical leadership process and its identification by the followers.

The existing theory about ethical leadership can be complemented using the results that show emotional abilities to indeed seem to have a role in the reputation of an ethical leader. The adjustment we think could serve better the purpose of this theory, is that emotional expression and understanding are two characteristics subordinates use to evaluate the image of their leader. Based on our analysis, we see that managers who display emotional abilities are successfully considered to be ethical, whereas those who lack in those abilities and in communication are associated with the image of a questionable leader. In the field of ethical leadership, further and more extensive research can help to refine what followers seek in an ethical leader in terms of emotional abilities and how strong the causal relationship between the two is. Lastly, a conceptualization of how EI

is measured explicitly in ethical leadership according to followers can help things to be clearer from follower's side.

Practical

The ambition of this thesis is to contribute in showing the important role emotions have in ethical leadership directly through the experiences and perceptions of the followers. Being an ethical leader is not something people are born with; it is the result of a constant learning process. And while managers are being taught how to act with integrity, honesty, equality, fairness in decision-making (Brown, Treviño, Harrison, 2005), why not be taught how to use and develop their EI as well?

Firstly, knowing that EI plays a role in ethical leadership, and more specifically in the way leaders are perceived as ethical, is a way to show the importance of making the right manager choice when looking for one. EI is something that according to Goleman (Cherniss, Extein, Goleman & Weissberg, 2001) can be learnt, exercised, and contributes to peoples' lives in positive ways. Therefore, it would be helpful for organizations to establish EI in (ethical leadership) training programs (Schyns et al., 2011; Schyns et al., 2013) in order to raise awareness of what EI is, how it can be improved, and what its role is in the working life. Furthermore, allocating people with high EI in leadership positions can help create smoother interpersonal relationships and keep employee's motivation at an increased level, by making them feel heard and understood, not pressured and not being treated as expendables. So, it is both for the organization's and its employees benefit for managers to be chosen carefully and with consideration to their emotional abilities beforehand. The results of this analysis can be used by multiple parties in order to improve promotions at work and/or broaden the candidate pool when such circumstances arise.

Conclusion

Overall, our research aimed to enrich the literature on ethical leadership by adding new insights to the way managers' emotional intelligence impact their subordinate's perception of them as ethical leaders, to what employees consider to be ethical leadership and how it should ideally look like according to them. This was set off by providing an overview of each concept individually, then

by combining the theoretical findings in order to view the similarities between them and to formulate expectations and observations.

We believe that our findings provide further inquiries that support the existing literature on ethical leadership and at the same time add some different perspectives which, however, require more research. Through our analysis, EI appears to be an existing concept in ethical leadership that can impact the reputation of a manager in the workplace as to the type of leader he/she is, an ethical one or not. The theoretical mechanism that could possibly explain this relationship appears to be the Social Learning Theory, however, it still requires a more in-depth analysis as to how strong of an influence it is in the relationship between EI and ethical leadership. While we know from previous research that in ethical leadership (proactive) communication about ethics is very important, in our case we concluded that followers appreciate building strong communicational connections with their leaders that are not limited to ethics and fairness issues, but include emotional expression and empathy as well. At the same time, subordinates seek for their manager's understanding from their managers and value those that are devoted to their teams and offer a good example for them to follow.

However, in the second chapter of the thesis we see that research on the role of emotions in (ethical) leadership is very limited, and when it specifically concerns EI is almost non-existent. A question that could not be addressed by this thesis is the strength of the effect of perceived EI to a leader's reputation of a leader as ethical. It is important that in the future a more explicit method is used to research the connection of the concepts and demonstrate the causal relationship and strength of the effect. This requires quantitative research, based on employee perception and in order to explain the role of SLT as a mechanism that aids this relationship. State-of-the-art findings that concern the world as it is forming today would contribute to a more balanced and performative working environment while, at the same time, keep content and motivated employees, allocating EI the attention it merits.

“Why do people have emotions, and what should they do with them? They have them because emotions are crucial to survival, communication, and problem solving.

Emotions are signals, ones worth listening to.”

- Greenberg, Emotion Focused Therapy (p.11)

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APPENDIX I

Interview protocol and interview questions as asked during the interviews:

Starting this interview, I would like to properly introduce myself. My name is Anna and I am a master's student at Utrecht University and originally, I am from Greece. I would like to first of all thank you for taking the time to help me on this research, it is very much appreciated.

The aim of this thesis research is to try and understand how followers perceive certain traits and behaviors of their leaders/managers. More specifically, we aim to understanding how followers understand ethical leadership and the role of emotions therein. There are no right or wrong answers, as we are interested in your view of things, in other words your perception of your leader's behavior. and his/her behavior.

The interview will last up to 45 minutes maximum. At this point I would like to ask for your permission to record our interview in order to maintain the accuracy of your responses and to make sure that none of the important details will be lost. At the same time, you may see me keeping some notes, so I can navigate better the analysis part and for me to be able to reflect on the process afterwards. Since we are doing a digital interview, the Team's recorder will record also your face, so in case you do not feel comfortable with that I can use my personal voice recorder instead. Three months after the final approval of the thesis all recordings will be permanently deleted.

At this point, I want to disclose and emphasize on the fact that this interview will remain anonymous. I will provide you with a form of consent signed by me and for you to sign that guarantees that explicitly. No other party than me will know your personal and/or contact information. After we conclude our meeting, I will proceed in the transcription of our conversation, where I will make sure to erase any information that can lead to your identity, for example your employer organization, your first name, etc. In the written parts of the thesis you will be referred to as Participant X, and the only thing that can or will be used in its initial form is some quotes when necessary to support findings and add to the validity of the research, but again without displaying any sensitive information. All raw data will be stored in UU files, but with all anonymity guaranteed.

After the transcription is done, you will receive a draft version of it, where you can indicate whether there are matters that are factually incorrect, that put you in a vulnerable position or that could lead to possible identification of yourself or your employment status/organization.

Before we begin, I want to inform you that your participation to our research is voluntary, so you can withdraw or deny to answer at any moment during this process.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Do I have your permission to record our interview?

BEGINNING

Can you tell me a few things about your background and your current working role?

CORE QUESTIONS

1. How would you characterize the ethical behavior within your working environment?
2. What role does your manager take in supporting and promoting such ethical behavior?
 - a) If positive: what does that look like? Can you give some examples? What could (s)he do better in this respect?
 - b) If negative: why do you think that is? What could (s)he do to support and promote ethical behavior more?
3. How would you describe your manager's (moral) decision-making?
4. How would you characterize your manager's role modeling behavior?
5. How would you describe the way your manager discusses moral issues at work?
6. How does your manager deal with incidents of immoral, rule-breaking behavior?
7. How does your manager deal with behaviors that stand out positively in terms of integrity and ethicality?
8. How would you describe your manager's interpersonal skills and awareness? (How would you describe your manager's communication?)

9. How does your manager express his/her own emotions in the workplace and how do you perceive that?
10. How does your manager deal with employees' emotions in the workplace?
11. What is your perception of your manager's ability to understand and manage emotions?
12. What does ethical leadership mean to you? [What should such leadership ideally look like?
13. Overall, which traits do you consider important for a manager to have?

ENDING

Is there anything that we did not touch about this topic but you consider important?

We have come to the end of our interview; I would like to thank you again for your participation.

If it is proved to be necessary, I may contact you again for any clarifications. Of course, if you have any questions yourself, feel free to contact me.

APPENDIX II

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

for participation in Public Administration and Organization Science graduation research

“Employees’ perceptions about their managers’ emotional intelligence and ethical leadership”

I have been informed about the research. I have read the written information. I have been able to ask questions about the research. I have had an opportunity to think about my participation in the research and it is completely voluntary. I am entitled to withdraw the consent I am granting at any time and to stop participating in the research without providing reasons.

I hereby consent to participating in the research.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

The undersigned, responsible for the research, hereby declares that the person named above has been informed orally and in writing about the aforementioned research.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

APPENDIX III

Public Service Motivation short definition:

PSM explains the desire individuals have to serve the public sector and link their personal actions to the public interest. Usually, people who are engaged in PSM are being employed either in governmental or in non-governmental (NGO) organizations, as they do not aim at personal and monetary rewards, but at employee commitment to the organization (Gottfradson, 2015).

APPENDIX IV

Table 1: Sample characteristics

Participant ID	Sector of employment	Gender	Age	Years of employment in the company	Tenure under the same leader	Highest educational level obtained
1	Consulting	M	20-29	4	2	MSc
2	Financial services	F	20-29	1	1	MSc
3	Financial services	F	20-29	1	1	MSc
4	Food processing	F	20-29	2,5	2	MSc
5	Food processing	F	20-29	1	1	MSc
6	Manufacturing	M	20-29	11 months	11 months	Double MSc
7	Food supply	F	30-39	2	11 months	BSc
8	Financial services	F	30-39	5	3	MSc
9	Manufacturing	F	20-29	3	10 months	MSc
10	Travel agency	F	40-49	10	2	BSc
11	Financial services	F	30-39	5	4	MSc
12	Research	F	30-39	3	3	PhD
13	Technology	F	40-49	4	2	MSc
14	Food processing	M	20-29	1	1	Double MSc
15	Research	M	30-39	3	3	PhD

APPENDIX V

Nodes created in analysis in NVivo12, graph comparing number of items coded, & Word Cloud about managers' EI and ethical leadership perceptions

Table 2: Nodes created from data analysis

Name of Node	Files	References
Emotional Intelligence	7	12
Dealing with others' emotions	14	43
Showing interest & Understanding	10	20
Emotions in leadership	7	13
Expressing emotions	14	39
<i>Communication</i>	11	15
<i>Openness</i>	6	6
<i>Professionality</i>	7	13
Perception of leader's expression	9	21
Ethical leadership	7	8
Communication	8	18
<i>Acknowledgment</i>	14	28
<i>Discussing</i>	13	29
<i>Support</i>	10	22
<i>Team builder</i>	5	15
Dealing with moral issues	13	29
Decision making	13	26
Emotions in leadership	7	13
Employee well-being	4	8
Employees perception	15	64
Fairness	13	41
<i>Equality</i>	9	21
<i>Inclusiveness</i>	11	32
Mentorship	8	18
Accountability	7	9
Proactive behavior	4	6
Role-modeling	12	28
Understanding	11	29
Interpersonal skills	15	79
Important characteristics	15	92
Leadership behavior	15	160
Improvements	2	3
Unethical behavior	4	7
<i>Extreme behaviors</i>	2	3
<i>Inequality</i>	2	4
<i>Self-development</i>	4	7

APPENDIX VI

Table 3: Categorization of codes and sub-codes to the fitting theory

Mechanism	Components	Results
LMX	<i>Show understanding</i>	<p>Acts and words of understanding and sympathy mostly involve behaviors that shows compassion and justification towards an act, an event, or an emotion expression in general of an employee by their manager.</p> <p>The pattern with showing understanding towards a mistake done was also included by participants' cases and the overall incident led to strengthening the trust built between leader-follower.</p>
	<i>Communication</i>	<p>It is considered vital for all relationships and a behavioral trait that adds positively in the perception employees have of their manager's ethical leadership. Lack of communication led to questioning leader's honesty and intentions. Open discussions were deeply appreciated and considered important, giving the feeling of transparency, identifying the ethical and honest side of managers.</p> <p>Communication was very important in emotional expression through discussion or small talk, and dealing with others emotions as well.</p> <p>Showing support is also part of the communication, verbal or non-verbal, a very important aspect for subordinates to feel safe in their team environment.</p>
	<i>Acknowledgment – Appreciation</i>	<p>Acknowledgment and appreciation of effort, of good results and behaviors was shown practically, through monetary rewards or certifications. In all 14 cases, appraisal and recognition was only positively perceived by our participants.</p>
	<i>Mentorship</i>	<p>Participants in majority of the cases felt that their managers also have a role of advisor or gives some guidance in moments of frustration or challenging events.</p> <p>Guidance can enhance motivation and (skills) development in each individual, promoting the feeling of having official or unofficial type of support. When managers engage in the role of mentor, they show more interest towards the development of the individual, they have a closer relationship which is based on guidance.</p>
SLT	<i>Sets the example</i>	<p>Managers by setting the example for their subordinates they make it easier for them to follow the same or similar behavior.</p> <p>This can be achieved either by promoting certain behaviors, by speaking about them, or simply by displaying them himself/herself in the working environment.</p>
	<i>Role-modeling</i>	<p>A very crucial aspect of leadership in order for subordinates to recognize someone as an ethical leader. Being source of inspiration, example to follow and a person whose characteristics are desirable and create admiration made participants recognize their leader as role-model and motivates them to act in the same way.</p> <p>Role-modeling behavior was also perceived in terms of emotional expression, sharing emotions and thoughts with subordinates motivating to do the same.</p>
	<i>Reward & Punishment</i>	<p>Reward and punishment showed to employees what is the behavior they need to engage to, but also what is their leader willing to tolerate. This way employees learn by observation or experience what behavioral attributes are to be supported and what to be disapproved.</p>

	<i>Fairness</i>	<p>Fairness was one of the most important aspects of leadership and was perceived as the mean through which managers engaged and promoted the organizational culture, by acting on the terms of code of conduct. It was explicitly reported by a participant that managers have an active role to play on that.</p> <p>In combination with fairness, neutrality in situations was a way of showing that personal relationships and opinions would not affect the integrity of managers.</p>
	<i>Equality</i>	<p>As sub-category of fairness, equality was also important for participants to see and feel in their working environment. Objective criteria, everyone being treated equally and in the same way under the same circumstances, and promoting inclusiveness in the team setting were characteristics subordinates appreciated in their managers.</p>
	<i>Inclusiveness</i>	<p>Inclusiveness holds all those perceptions that made participants feel like they belong in their team and are valuable members for the organization. Emotions of wholesomeness, diversity (in hierarchy, gender, etc.) within the team, and events that make participants feel like they are part of a team or a broader ‘family’ can be found under this sub-code.</p>
SIT	<i>Recognition of leader</i>	<p>Managers and leaders in general do not have to exercise their powers to be perceived as such.</p> <p>Many of the participants recognized their managers as leaders based on the behavior they displayed, including being an example for other managers to imitate, being the person who can defend his/her subordinates when necessary, and also being the one who will make the final decision.</p>
	<i>Decision-making</i>	<p>The way decisions were made by the manager helped employees identify themselves as members of this specific team.</p> <p>Managers in majority asked and took into consideration their subordinates’ opinions, giving employees the feeling of belonging in the team, being included and valued.</p>

Table 4: Example quotes supporting each theory based on what was found in the transcripts

Mechanism	Components	Results
LMX	Show understanding	<p>"I have happened to say no to tasks assigned to me because I didn't feel comfortable with it and no one punished for it, no one would behave differently. It was very clear."</p> <p>"I made a mistake. I realized it. Okay. I admit, it's my mistake. I should not have done this in the past. OK. Well, thank you for admitting it and stuff. And it helps driving a better connection, a better relation between me and my manager and of course, its strengths, our relationship as well. Because I can trust her and she can trust me more because I'm being honest with her."</p>
	Communication	<p>"have a little admiration for her because she is able to be in a work environment where she connects and talks about her feelings and ideas."</p> <p>"And she trusts. She's quite open person, is a very open person."</p>
	Acknowledgment – Appreciation	<p>"When you do something good, he always praises it. And if you did something good and comes up at the public setting, he will give you praise for that thing in front of everyone."</p>
	Mentorship	<p>"So, he tries to be sort of the father of the team, in a way, taking care of people."</p>
	SLT	Sets the example
	Role-modeling	<p>"He's a I think he has the characteristics to be a manager and a leader because he himself is doing things and then he advises to do the same."</p> <p>"And that's also the way I at least try to manage the projects I'm managing myself. That's a bit based also on the way he does."</p>
	Reward & Punishment	<p>"A team member did something that he was not supposed to do. And he was quite serious. He, like, shouted at him. He told him what you did was wrong. You shouldn't do this. And if you do that, like next time, I have to report you myself."</p> <p>"We do get bonuses. You can be suggested by a colleague or your supervisor to get a bonus."</p>
	Fairness	<p>"She doesn't take credit for our work ever. She always gives credit to the people for their work and in front of management and with emails and meetings and everything. Which is also very important."</p>
	Equality	<p>"And I think in general, they try to face all of us in the same way so that we don't forget that some people, for instance the Dutch people, they have more abilities or they will have more opportunities in the future than others."</p>
	Inclusiveness	<p>"I know I'm just an intern for a company, but she takes care of me like I'm part of the employee."</p>
SIT	Recognition of leader	<p>"He more or less defended your colleague. And it's special I think, because it was a younger colleague who could not necessarily defend himself in that situation."</p>
	Decision-making	<p>"But then if it's an important decision to make, we know that she will make it with our opinions. She will take it under consideration."</p>