

# Ethical leadership, emotional leadership, and quitting intentions in public organizations

Leadership and  
quitting  
intentions

## Does employee motivation play a role?

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Received 11 May 2019  
Revised 11 October 2019  
20 December 2019  
7 January 2020  
Accepted 10 January 2020

### Abstract

**Purpose** – Motivation constitutes a central topic for business management, because of its critical impact on job performance. Therefore, understanding whether and how the style of leadership adopted by leaders in organizations promotes and maintains employee motivation is of great interest to both scholars and practitioners. Drawing on self-determination theory, this study investigates how ethical and emotional styles of leadership influence employee motivation and thus job performance.

**Design/methodology/approach** – An empirical study was conducted in the public sector in Kuwait. About 607 employees participated in this study. Structural equation modeling techniques were used for testing the causal relationships between constructs.

**Findings** – Results of our study indicate that both ethical and emotional leaderships enhance employee motivation. Furthermore, employee motivation has a positive impact on job performance. The results also show that job performance exerts a negative effect on quitting intentions. Finally, interest in the private sector moderates the job performance–quitting intentions relationship.

**Practical implications** – These findings provide theoretical contributions to the extant literature, as well as important practical implications for managers.

**Originality/value** – This study demonstrates the role of both ethical and emotional leaderships in shaping employee behaviors. To the best of our knowledge, this research is among the few that provides initial evidence regarding quitting intentions as an outcome of the impact of ethical and emotional leaderships on employee motivation and individual performance in Kuwait.

**Keywords** Self-determination theory, Employee motivation, Ethical leadership, Emotional leadership, Job performance, Quitting intentions

**Paper type** Research paper

### Introduction

Motivation attracts substantial attention because of its function as a primary predictor of human behavior (Steers *et al.*, 2004). In particular, organizations constantly seek novel ways to promote employee motivation among their employees, defined as a willingness of organizational members to engage fully in their work (Wright, 2004). Prior literature has established the links between employee motivation and various beneficial outcomes, such as employee satisfaction (Judge *et al.*, 2005), employee well-being (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2007), work engagement (Pink, 2011), and better job performance (Deci and Ryan, 2000). In turn, researchers and managers call for more research efforts to clarify the dynamic mechanisms by which organizations can promote and maintain their employees' work motivation (e.g. Leftheriotis and Giannakos, 2014; Levin *et al.*, 2012).

Extant literature identifies two main sources of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Curiosity, satisfaction, interest, involvement, and positive challenges constitute intrinsic



Leadership & Organization  
Development Journal  
Vol. 41 No. 2, 2020  
pp. 257-279  
© Emerald Publishing Limited  
0143-7739  
DOI 10.1108/LODJ-05-2019-0206

incentives for work (Amabile *et al.*, 1996), whereas monetary bonuses, certificates, prizes, awards, and punishment are all considered extrinsic incentives (Davis *et al.*, 1992; Vallerand *et al.*, 1992). Both sources should be considered by organizations (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Weibel, *et al.*, 2010), but scholars assert that intrinsic sources are more critical and deserve greater attention (Chen *et al.*, 2013; Cabrera and Cabrera, 2005). In response, we investigate intrinsic sources of motivation by exploring how leadership styles might promote employee motivation for employees of public organizations in an Eastern cultural context. Public organizations offer an interesting setting for addressing these questions for two main reasons. First, in most countries, they confront serious management challenges, due to their generally low appeal for highly skilled managers and high-performing employees (Caillier, 2011). This lack of attraction stems from the weak financial incentives that public organizations can offer, which also implies that some current employees or managers devote little effort to their jobs (Campbell and Im, 2016). Second, unlike the relatively extensive research into employee motivation in the private sector (Costen and Salazar, 2011; Jung *et al.*, 2015), fewer studies address whether and how leadership influences employee motivation in public organizations.

Leadership refers to “the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (Yukl, 2006, p. 8). It has greater relevance for organizational success (Northouse, 2007), including through its effects on the behavior of employees and followers (Mayer *et al.*, 2012). Motivating employees to perform their work effectively and achieve work goals may even be the most important task of leaders (Baard *et al.*, 2004). Acknowledging this importance, the current research seeks to shed light on the role of two forms of leadership: ethical and emotional. Brown *et al.* (2005, p. 120) defined ethical leadership as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making.” Ethical leadership reportedly evokes a variety of positive outcomes, such as job satisfaction, organizational identification, commitment, and task performance (Ng and Feldman, 2015; Kalshoven *et al.*, 2011). *Emotional leadership* refers to managing the emotions of followers by exhibiting understanding, consideration, and respect for their feelings and needs (Grandey, 2000). As Humphrey (2002) states, “a key leadership function is to manage the emotions of group members” (p. 498), which in turn can influence employees’ behaviors and help establish a trusting, meaningful relationship between leaders and followers (Loerakker and van Winden, 2017). We propose that both ethical and emotional leaderships can effectively guide, influence, and motivate employees in the workplace.

Although past empirical studies consider employee motivation in public organizations (e.g. Frank and Lewis, 2004; Gregg *et al.*, 2008), no studies that the authors are aware of include the role of leadership. Since motivation can impact a variety of workplace outcomes, it is important to assess the effects of leadership style on job performance and employee intention to quit. Accordingly, a key objective of our study is to begin to fill this gap in the organizational behavior literature by examining antecedents and outcomes of employee motivation. Hence, our driving research question is the following: *Does ethical leadership and emotional leadership influence employee job performance and intention to quit?* To address this question, we investigate the direct effects of leadership styles on employee motivation and on job performance along with the indirect effects on quitting intentions in public organizations located in the Middle East, specifically, Kuwait.

We draw on self-determination theory (SDT) as the overarching framework to examine the antecedents and outcomes of employee motivation. Figure 1 summarizes the overall model we elaborate and test empirically.

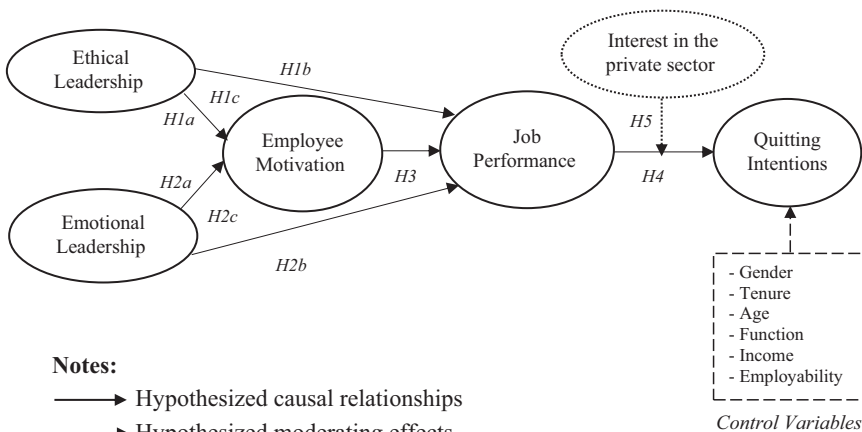
**Theory and hypothesis development**

*Relationship of ethical leadership and employee motivation*

Ethical leadership influences employee attitudes and behaviors, such as organizational citizenship behavior (Sharif and Scandura, 2013), organization commitment (Harvey et al., 2013), job satisfaction (Brown et al., 2005), and job performance (Sharif and Scandura, 2013), though the motivational processes underlying these influences remain unclear. To determine how ethical leadership might shape positive employee outcomes, namely, motivation, we utilize SDT (Deci and Ryan, 2000), a macro theory of human motivation. According to SDT, three innate psychological needs, namely, competence, autonomy, and relatedness, generate the highest quality of intrinsic motivation (Gagne and Deci, 2005).

Ethical leaders are honest, principled individuals who make fair decisions (Brown and Trevino, 2006). They communicate ethical expectations, establish clear ethical standards, and administer rewards and punishments to ensure compliance (Brown and Mitchell, 2010). Competence refers to a person’s desire to be challenged, control, and master her or his environment and thus overcome obstacles by applying her or his abilities. Ethical leaders create an organizational environment where employees challenge themselves and develop capabilities that allow them to achieve their goals while ensuring that employee competence is congruent with moral values (Gagne and Deci, 2005; Kuvaas, 2006). Autonomy reflects the person’s volitional choice to act in harmony with his or her integrated self. Since autonomy is dependent on trust, respect, fairness, listening, and self-awareness, ethical leaders encourage autonomy by being honest, respectful, trustworthy, and fair in interactions with their employees (Brown and Mitchell, 2010). The need for relatedness reflects the extent to which people sense social connections or belongingness with others. Ethical leaders display empathy, service to others while respecting the dignity and rights of others, all of which are required for relatedness. When employees are led by ethical leaders who model and nurture trust and respect with integrity in their relationships with employees, it is more likely that the innate psychological needs of employees will be met. Since ethical leaders are more likely to nurture intrinsic motivation through feelings of caring, security, and relatedness by offering employees opportunities to extend their capabilities, make their own choices, and interact and connect with leaders (Deci et al., 1989), we hypothesize that:

*H1a.* Ethical leadership is positively associated with employee motivation.



**Notes:**  
 ———→ Hypothesized causal relationships  
 .....→ Hypothesized moderating effects  
 - - - -→ Un-hypothesized controlling effects

**Figure 1.**  
Research model

*Relationship of ethical leadership and job performance*

Ethical leaders are viewed as role models for ethical and moral conduct because they exhibit high moral standards that shape the ethical climate within the workplace, which can assist employees to deal with a variety of workplace-related problems. Some studies at the individual and team level have shown that leaders who adopt an ethical leadership style can help employees to achieve better individual task and group performance (Brown *et al.*, 2005; Piccolo *et al.*, 2010; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2011).

Yet, other work drawing on SDT suggests that the ethical behavior of leaders facilitates the natural processes of follower motivation. Motivation is a central SDT variable for predicting workplace outcomes (Deci and Ryan, 2008). Since people are motivated by their psychological needs, honest and respectful treatment by ethical leaders along with feelings of fairness and caring can inspire employees to grow and thrive. Recent studies drawing on SDT reasoning note that higher levels of motivation among employees (both public sector and private sector) positively influence their self-reported work performance (Kuvaas, 2006; Lee and Raschke, 2016). Overall then, employees working for an ethical leader are more likely to enhance their performance (Piccolo *et al.*, 2010) because the leader's ethical behavior increases employee motivation. Motivated employees, in turn, should display higher levels of job performance (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2011). Drawing on our aforementioned logic, we propose:

*H1b.* Ethical leadership is positively associated with job performance.

*H1c.* Employee motivation mediates ethical leadership–job performance relationship.

*Relationship of emotional leadership and employee motivation*

Research into emotional leadership and its impacts (Connelly and Ruark, 2010; Van Kleef *et al.*, 2009) provides accumulated evidence that emotional leadership is influential and associated with effective leadership and favorable follower outcomes (Damen *et al.*, 2008). Extant research provides little insight into the affective mechanism by which leaders motivate their followers (Yukl, 1998). Recent developments in leadership theory stress the importance of leaders' emotions, consistent with Humphrey's (2002) findings that the most effective way for leaders to shape followers' motivation is to arouse their positive emotions.

Emotionally intelligent leaders are able to monitor their own and others' feelings and emotions effectively (Gardner *et al.*, 2009). As a result, they are more likely to display empathy, which creates a nurturing and encouraging work environment for employees. Additionally, emotional leaders have better social skills that allow employees to develop a sense of belonging (Daus and Ashkanasy, 2005). Work environments that promote feelings of caring and security facilitate greater employee autonomy by exerting employee empowerment while allowing them to develop greater competence and a sense of relatedness. Drawing on SDT, when leaders display empathy and effectively manage relationships, employees are more likely to find work intrinsically motivating because their three innate psychological needs, namely, competence, autonomy, and relatedness, are met (Gagne and Deci, 2005). From the leader's perspective, this process should enhance the follower's intrinsic motivation (Van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2004). Thus, we posit:

*H2a.* Emotional leadership is positively associated with employee motivation.

*Relationship of emotional leadership and job performance*

Leaders need to establish supportive environments, by valuing their followers' efforts, delegating authority, and enriching people's responsibilities (Avolio and Bass, 1995).

The relationship between leaders and followers accordingly depends on leaders' responses to their followers' attitudes and behaviors (Vidyarthi *et al.*, 2014), as well as how followers evaluate their leaders' provision of resources and support (Dansereau *et al.*, 1975). According to social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), employees reciprocate positive social relationships with positive behavioral outcomes such as performance (Gerstner and Day, 1997). Leaders' emotional states can facilitate social relationships, which then facilitate the transfer of resources needed to achieve improved performance (Tekleab and Taylor, 2003; Vidyarthi *et al.*, 2014).

Some prior work suggests that perceptions of positive emotions displayed by leaders can enhance job performance (Bono and Ilies, 2006). Other work indicates that negative emotional displays can lead to decreased performance (Johnson, 2009). Researchers contend that the reason for these mixed findings is that employees are more likely to express positive attitudes and exert higher task performance in reaction to positive displays of emotions by leaders (Damen *et al.*, 2008; Wang and Seibert, 2015), whereas others posit that this influence is minimal (Visser *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, Boal and Whitehead (1992) report that leaders who are aware of their own emotions can create a supportive work environment and channel their employees' attention toward achieving performance objectives.

This complex relationship between leaders' emotions and followers' outcomes might be informed by SDT, which suggests that when leaders are in control of their emotions, they are able to build high levels of trust in the work environment (Cameron, 2008). Encouraging trust and showing empathy facilitates greater intrinsic motivation of employees, which, in turn, positively influences employee job performance. Drawing on SDT logic, we anticipate that when leaders express their emotions effectively, they can facilitate greater employee motivation by satisfying the needs of employees' autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which should improve their job performance (Eberly and Fong, 2013). Formally,

*H2b.* Emotional leader support is positively associated with job performance.

*H2c.* Employee motivation mediates emotional leadership–job performance relationship.

#### *Relationship of employee motivation and job performance*

Industrial psychologists and managerial practitioners share a strong interest in understanding what motivates employees to achieve higher performance. Various studies identify motivation as crucial to enhanced organizational performance, which leads to a long-term competitive advantage for the firm (Igalens and Roussel, 1999; Lawler, 1994). SDT suggests that when individuals' psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied, they are intrinsically motivated, which results in enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity (Deci and Ryan, 2008). Drawing on SDT logic, we reason that employees with higher levels of intrinsic motivation will be more likely to put forth greater effort to meeting their performance, we hypothesize:

*H3.* Employee motivation is positively associated with job performance.

#### *Relationship of job performance and quitting intentions*

Employee intentions to quit is a major concern for managers in both the private and public sectors, because of the deleterious impact on the organization in terms of recruitment, training costs, decreased productivity, and morale (Koh and Goh, 1995; Brown *et al.*, 2009). Defined by Allen (2004, p. 36) as “an individual's withdrawal cognitions that involve thoughts of quitting and search for alternative employment opportunities,” an intention to quit is

a function of various factors, such as the work environment (Choi, 2009), job characteristics (Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Kim, 2005), human resource management practices (Shaw *et al.*, 1998), and alternative job opportunities (Griffeth *et al.*, 2000).

Several studies investigate the reasons underlying employee intention to quit their organizations (Allen and Griffeth, 1999; Zimmerman and Darnold, 2009; Jackofsky and Peters, 1983; Schoemmel *et al.*, 2014). Jackofsky (1984) suggests two competing reasons related to the link between job performance and employee intention to quit. First, high-performing employees may be more likely to leave the organization, because they have more alternatives for finding a job elsewhere. Second, organizations may be less willing to retain underperforming employees. Similarly, Dreher (1982) posits that the positive relationship between performance and turnover intentions can be explained by the availability of employment opportunities for higher performers but their lack of availability to those who exhibit poor performance. Hence, better employee job performance can be expected to lower employee intention to quit. Thus, we hypothesize:

*H4.* Job performance is negatively related to quitting intentions.

#### *Moderating role of interest in the private sector*

The negative relationship between job performance and quitting intentions may be especially pronounced when public sector employees prefer to work in the private sector. If they can find meaningful opportunities in the private sector, these employees often report intentions to leave to pursue newer options that are more challenging (Stahl *et al.*, 2009). In addition, some employees might view their public sector job as less interesting compared with a job in the private sector. This may influence the relationship between job performance and their intention to quit the organization. Studies have examined a variety of workplace outcomes and attitudes of employees working in both the public and private sectors (Jurkiewicz and Brown, 1998; Wittmer, 1991). Since employee interest in the private sector might moderate the relationship between job performance and quitting intentions, it is important to examine this relationship. Hence, we propose:

*H5.* Interest in the private sector moderates the relationship between job performance and quitting intentions.

## **Research methods**

### *Data collection*

Kuwait is a collectivistic society, where religion exerts a strong influence on various aspects of life (Hofstede, 1980). Economically, it has a high per capita income, low levels of poverty, and a low unemployment rate. Compared with the private sector, the work conditions in the public sector are relatively less challenging and not particularly stressful, and the vast majority of employees working in the government sector are Kuwaiti (Carvalho *et al.*, 2017).

Since Arabic is the official language of correspondence in the public sector, to ensure the reliability and validity of the scales, the survey was conducted in Arabic, using an instrument translated from the English version (Brislin, 1980) in a way that ensured semantic equivalence. The survey was sent to approximately 1,100 employees working in different public organizations in Kuwait. The cover letter explained the purpose and scope of the study, assured participants of the strict confidentiality of their responses, and specified that the decision to participate was voluntary. The data was collected over a four-week period, during which respondents completed the self-report forms and returned them directly to one of the authors. The 607 responses represent a response rate of 55.2 percent. Overall, 83.5 percent of employees were employed in nonmanagerial positions, and

52.2 percent of the participants were men. In terms of age, 49.1 percent were between 18 and 34 years, and 49.1 percent of participants had less than five years of work experience.

### Measures

*Ethical leadership (ETL).* We measured ethical leadership with five items developed by Lam *et al.* (2016). The original scale developed by the authors was composed of 10 items, and we only included the five items that refer to good leadership, describing a leader who “Disciplines employees who violate ethical standards,” “Has the best interests of employees in mind,” “Makes fair and balanced decisions,” “Can be trusted,” and “Sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics.” Participants were asked to indicate their level of perception of each of the five items on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = very dissatisfied, 5 = very satisfied.

*Emotional leadership (EML).* We used four items on a five-point scale to measure emotional leadership (Van der Voet, 2014). The items indicated that the leader “Acts with considering my feelings,” “Shows respect for my personal feelings,” “Behaves in a manner thoughtful of my personal needs,” and “Treats me with considering my personal feelings.”

*Employee motivation (EM).* Employee motivation was assessed with a scale of five items developed by Sjöberg and Lind (1994) and used in several other studies (e.g. Björklund *et al.*, 2013; Björklund, 2007; Stoerseth, 2006). The original version includes 12 items, but a short version with four items has been tested in some studies (e.g. Björklund *et al.*, 2013; Stoerseth, 2006). We used a similar short version but transformed the questions into statements: “I feel stimulated by my work tasks,” “I am motivated to work,” “I often feel a strong will to work,” and “I would spend more time at work, if possible.”

*Job performance (JP).* The scale used to measure job performance was adapted from a five-item measure developed by Podsakoff and MacKenzie (1989; see also Janssen and Van Yperen, 2004), since we included only four of the items from the original five-item scale. These items were “I always complete the duties regarding my job,” “I meet all the formal performance requirements of the job,” “I fulfill all responsibilities required by my job,” and “I never neglect aspects of the job that I am obligated to perform.”

*Quitting intentions (QI).* We measured quitting intentions using Rosin and Korabik’s (1991) four-item scale. It includes “At this time I would quit my job if it were feasible,” “I am planning to leave my job within the next six months,” “I am actively searching for another job right now,” and “I have thoughts about leaving this organization.”

*Interest in the private sector.* To measure this construct, we developed a four-item scale. In Kuwait, most new university graduates are hired first by public organizations. After some years and gaining some experience, many of them seek jobs with a private business or attempt to set up their own business. The four items we use to measure this interest are “I am interested in working in a private organization,” “If I am offered a job position with a better salary in a private organization, I would accept it,” “I am interested in setting up my own business in the future,” and “I am planning to set up my own business.”

*Controls.* Finally, we included several control variables in our model that they might influence the results. For example, we included gender (coded as male = 0, female = 1), because men change their jobs more frequently than women. The age variable (less than 34 years old = 0, between 34 and 49 years old = 1, and older than 49 years old = 2) acknowledges that as people age, they may be less willing to quit or change jobs. We also controlled for tenure, defined as the number of years working for the same organization (less than five years = 0, between six and 10 years = 1, and 11 years or more = 2). People may grow bored after working for the same organization for many years, which might influence their willingness to leave or change jobs. With regard to job function (nonmanagerial employee = 1, manager/supervisor = 2), we propose that nonmanagerial employees may be

more ready to quit their jobs than managers. Furthermore, we included employability, which should be closely associated with quitting intentions, measured with a four-item scale (Lam *et al.*, 2016): “I can easily find another job elsewhere instead of my present job,” “I am confident that I could quickly gain another job with another employer,” “I could easily switch to another employer, if I wanted to,” and “I have a good chance of getting a job elsewhere, if I looked for one.” Lastly, we controlled our results with the income, which refers to the compensation and benefits that an employee receives from the job. Some researchers support that the income might affect employees’ intentions to quit (e.g. Guan *et al.*, 2015), so we used a two-item scale from Cho *et al.* (2013): “I am satisfied with my overall compensation, including leave benefits, retirement and pay” and “My pay is an adequate reflection of the amount of responsibility I have.”

**Analysis and results**

The data analysis follows a two-stage methodology. In the first stage, since we use multiple-item scales to measure constructs, we validate the measurement model and assess all the scales for reliability and validity. In the second stage, we test the different structural relationships using the structural equation modeling (SEM), with the support of two software packages (SPSS 25.0 and AMOS 24.0).

*Assessment of the measurement model*

We confirm the reliability and validity of all the constructs in our theoretical model. To examine constructs’ reliability, we first identified the Cronbach’s alpha value for every scale. All values were greater than the recommended threshold of 0.70, in support of acceptable reliability (See Table I). Second, we checked the composite reliabilities (CR) for each scale. As the results in Table I revealed, all values of CR exceeded the cutoff value of 0.8. Therefore, we regard the latent constructs as sufficiently reliable.

With regard to the scale validity, the check for convergent validity included several criteria (Hair *et al.*, 2006). First, we used a confirmatory approach to test the validity of the measures. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was run in AMOS 24.0 software. Based on the recommendations of Hair *et al.* (1998), the factor loading should be 0.45 or above for a sample size of 150 units. For our research, we collected about 607 units. We used following statistical indices to assess model fit, namely, ratio of the Chi-square to the degrees of freedom ( $\chi^2/df$ ), the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), and root mean square of approximation (RMSEA) (Hair *et al.*, 1998). The results of the fit to the data of the five-factor theoretical model are: ( $\chi^2/df = 2.594$ ; CFI = 0.968; TLI = 0.963, GFI = 0.931; and RMSEA = 0.051). Thus, the CFA measurement model presents a good fit to the data. As reported in Table II, the CFA results reveal that the factor loadings of all measures are statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) and greater than 0.45 (minimum factor loading = 0.560), which lend support to the convergent validity of all the measures.

Second, we employed other statistical criteria to test the convergent validity of the scales used in this research: the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) and the average variance extracted (AVE), for which values should be higher than 0.5. As presented in Table II, the results of

Constructs	Alpha	CR	AVE	KMO
Emotional leadership (EML)	0.910	0.951	0.830	0.831
Ethical leadership (ETL)	0.930	0.937	0.752	0.883
Employee motivation (EM)	0.840	0.895	0.685	0.783
Job performance (JP)	0.830	0.888	0.665	0.785
Quitting intentions (QI)	0.890	0.925	0.756	0.819

**Table I.**  
Reliability and  
convergent validity of  
research variables



Construct	Item	Standardized factor loading	T-value	Standard error (S.E.)
Emotional leadership (EML)	EML1	0.780	25.451	0.034
	EML2	0.903	25.451	0.046
	EML3	0.927	26.311	0.045
	EML4	0.907	25.590	0.045
Ethical leadership (ETL)	ETL1	0.624	17.197	0.041
	ETL2	0.859	28.153	0.035
	ETL3	0.896	30.454	0.034
	ETL4	0.912	31.532	0.035
	ETL5	0.861	31.532	0.029
Employee motivation (EM)	EM1	0.748	21.796	0.040
	EM2	0.909	21.796	0.052
	EM3	0.838	20.627	0.052
	EM4	0.560	13.436	0.060
Job performance (JP)	JP1	0.618	14.066	0.058
	JP2	0.711	14.066	0.087
	JP3	0.894	18.686	0.061
	JP4	0.769	17.306	0.063
Quitting intentions (QI)	QI1	0.738	20.632	0.044
	QI2	0.846	20.632	0.053
	QI3	0.871	21.204	0.056
	QI4	0.854	20.826	0.056

**Note:** All factor loadings are significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level

**Table II.**  
Results of  
confirmatory factor  
analysis (CFA)

these two statistical indexes also confirm adequate convergent validity of all the constructs in this research.

To determine the degree to which measures of any two variables are empirically distinct, or discriminant validity, we relied on the approach proposed by [Bagozzi et al. \(1991\)](#), which requires the AVE of each latent construct to be greater than the squared correlation of that construct with any other latent construct. As shown in [Table III](#), the AVE value of each construct is greater than its squared correlations with any other constructs, indicating discriminant validity.

#### *Assessment of the structural model*

*Descriptive statistics and correlations.* [Table IV](#) contains the descriptive statistics and correlations for the control, independent, and dependent variables. As expected, both

Constructs	Emotional leadership	Ethical leadership	Employee motivation	Job performance	Quitting intentions
Emotional leadership	<b>0.830</b>				
Ethical leadership	0.537	<b>0.752</b>			
Employee motivation	0.106	0.132	<b>0.685</b>		
Job performance	0.033	0.038	0.076	<b>0.665</b>	
Quitting intentions	0.074	0.171	0.173	0.022	<b>0.756</b>

\* The values in the diagonal (bolded) represent the AVE and the other values are the squares of the interconstruct correlations

**Table III.**  
Discriminant validity  
of the research  
constructs

**Table IV.**  
Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the control, independent, and dependent variables

N	Constructs	Means	Std. Dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Emotional leadership	3.480	1.102	1										
2	Ethical leadership	3.506	1.024	0.733**	1									
3	Employee motivation	3.535	0.970	0.326**	0.363**	1								
4	Job performance	4.137	0.798	0.182**	0.197**	0.276**	1							
5	Quitting intentions	2.377	1.131	-0.273**	-0.414**	-0.416**	-0.149**	1						
6	Gender	1.477	0.499	-0.084*	-0.116**	-0.155**	0.027	0.089*	1					
7	Age	1.604	0.656	0.035	0.048	0.212**	0.112**	-0.137**	-0.182**	1				
8	Tenure	2.917	1.328	0.061	0.044	0.149**	0.189**	-0.108**	0.010	0.567**	1			
9	Function	1.166	0.377	0.086*	0.067	0.237**	0.145**	-0.118**	-0.177**	0.302**	0.330**	1		
10	Employment	1.400	0.491	0.037	0.020	0.165**	0.070	0.144**	-0.179**	0.013	-0.034	0.054	1	
11	Income	3.127	1.181	0.311**	0.429**	0.272**	0.108**	-0.277**	-0.092*	0.162**	0.140**	0.099*	0.052	1

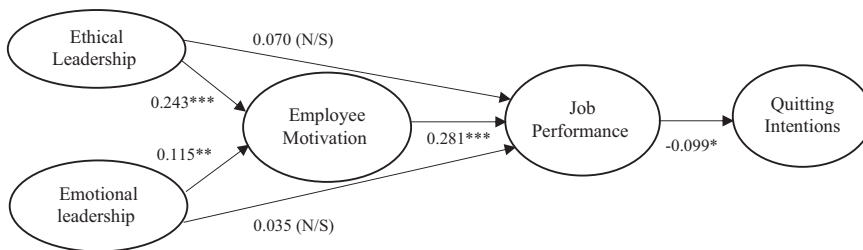
**Notes:** \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed); \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

emotional leadership and ethical leadership relate positively to employee motivation ( $r = 0.326, p < 0.01$ ;  $r = 0.363, p < 0.01$ , respectively). In addition, employee motivation relates positively to job performance ( $r = 0.276, p < 0.01$ ), and as predicted, job performance correlates negatively with quitting intentions ( $r = -0.149, p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, the controls indicate several significant correlations. For example, gender, age, tenure, function, and employment all correlate significantly with quitting intentions ( $r = 0.089, p < 0.05$ ;  $r = -0.146, p < 0.01$ ;  $r = -0.108, p < 0.01$ ;  $r = -0.118, p < 0.01$ , respectively). Income shows a significant correlation with employee motivation ( $r = 0.272, p < 0.01$ ), job performance ( $r = 0.108, p < 0.01$ ), and quitting intentions ( $r = -0.277, p < 0.01$ ). Therefore, introducing these control variables in our research is well justified.

*Test of the hypotheses.* We tested the hypotheses derived from the research model using the SEM technique in AMOS 24.0, according to two different structural equation models. The first structural equation model tests the direct effects, the mediating effects, and the controlling effects, while the second structural equation model examines the moderating effects.

*Structural equation model 1.* Direct effects. With the first structural equation model, we examine the direct relationships of emotional leadership, ethical leadership, and employee motivation, between employee motivation and job performance, and between job performance and quitting intentions. Gender, tenure, age, function, income, and employability were included as control variables. The results of the first structural equation model produced the following index values: CFI = 0.907, TLI = 0.891, GFI = 0.880, and RMSEA = 0.070, indicating adequate fit with the data (McKnight *et al.*, 2002; Gefen *et al.*, 2000; Hair *et al.*, 2006). Figure 2 summarizes the results of the first structural model.

As predicted in H1a, ethical leadership is positively related to employee motivation ( $\beta = 0.243, p = 0.000$ ). In H1b, we predicted a positive relationship between ethical leadership and job performance, but this link is not significant in Figure 2 ( $\beta = 0.070, p = 0.156$ ), so we cannot confirm this hypothesis. In support of H2a, emotional leadership is positively associated with employee motivation ( $\beta = 0.115, p = 0.006$ ), but we find no significant relationship with job performance, leading us to reject H2b ( $\beta = 0.035, p = 0.426$ ). As predicted, employee motivation relates positively and significantly to job performance ( $\beta = 0.281, p = 0.000$ ), in support of H3. Finally, consistent with our expectations, job performance is negatively associated with quitting intentions ( $\beta = -0.099, p = 0.023$ ), so we can confirm H4.



**Notes:**

- \*  $p < 0.05$
- \*\*  $p < 0.01$
- \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

N/S: Not Significant

**Figure 2.**  
Estimation of the  
research model  
(structural equation  
model 1)

Controlling effects. Structural model 1 also includes several control variables, as detailed in Table V. Specifically, we found that age, gender, tenure, and function have no significant controlling effects on quitting intentions. However, employability and income exert significant controlling effects on these intentions.

Mediating effect of employee motivation. To examine the mediating effect of employee motivation in the relationships between ethical leadership and job performance, and between emotional leadership and job performance, we used the bootstrapping technique (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). In Table VI, we provide the results of the direct, indirect, and total effects. As can be seen in Table VI, ethical leadership has a positive effect on job performance via employee motivation (indirect effect  $\beta = 0.138, p < 0.05$ ). Thus, H1c is supported. Furthermore, emotional leadership affects job performance via employee motivation (indirect effect  $\beta = 0.067, p < 0.05$ ), in support of H2c.

We also used Sobel tests in SmartPLS to provide support to our findings regarding hypotheses H1c and H2c. The Sobel test is a method that determines whether the mediation impact is statistically significant. We run two Sobel tests in SmartPLS involving for each test, the three concerned variables. Test 1 for supporting hypothesis H1c, and test 2 for supporting H2c. The Sobel test 1 results indicated that the indirect effect of ethical leadership on job performance through employee motivation was significant (Sobel Z-test = 4.379 > 1.96,  $p < 0.001$ ), giving a further support for Hypothesis H1c. Furthermore, the results of Sobel test 2 revealed that the indirect effect of emotional leadership on job performance through employee motivation was significant (Sobel Z-test = 4.765 > 1.96,  $p < 0.001$ ), a further support for hypothesis H2c.

Structural equation model 2. Moderating effect of interest in the private sector. To test the moderating effect of interest in the private sector on the relationship between job performance and quitting intentions, we conducted a second structural equation model in AMOS. To this end, we adopted a multigroup analysis (e.g. Byrne and Stewart, 2006). The steps taken to test the moderating effect are as follows. First, the sample was split into two groups based on the median value (3.00) of the interest in the private sector variable (e.g. Aiken and West, 1991) resulting into two groups: (1) low interest in the private sector (308 responses) = values below the median, and (2) high interest in the private sector (299 responses) = values above the

**Table V.**  
Results of controlling effects (structural equation model 1)

Control variables	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	p-value
Gender	0.065	0.108 (N/S)
Age	-0.077	0.122 (N/S)
Tenure	0.003	0.956 (N/S)
Function	-0.063	0.140 (N/S)
Employability	0.115	0.004**
Income	-0.255	0.000***

Notes: \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; N/S: Not Significant

**Table VI.**  
Direct, indirect, and total effects

Path	Indirect effect	Direct effect	Total effect
Emotional leadership – Employee motivation	–	0.115**	0.115**
Ethical leadership – Employee motivation	–	0.243***	0.243***
Employee motivation – Job performance	–	0.281***	0.281***
Ethical leadership – Job performance	0.068*	0.070 (N/S)	0.138*
Emotional leadership – Job performance	0.032*	0.035 (N/S)	0.067*

Notes: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; N/S: Not Significant

median. Second, we run this second model in AMOS by including all the variables in Figure 1 along with the interest in the private sector as a moderating variable. Results showed satisfactory fit statistical indexes, suggesting adequate model fit with our data: CFI = 0.897, TLI = 0.880, GFI = 0.845, and RMSEA = 0.052.

Third, to determine whether there is a moderating effect, we compare the effect of job performance on quitting intentions in both groups. As shown in Table VII, this effect varies with the level of interest in the private sector: At high levels of interest in the private sector, the effect is positive and significant ( $\beta = -0.194, p = 0.002$ ), whereas at low levels, the effect is insignificant ( $\beta = -0.104, p = 0.088$ ). Thus, job performance interacts with interest in the private sector to influence employee intention to quit, which provides support for H5. The results of the estimation of this second model are summarized in Table VII.

The plot in Figure 3 provides further support for the moderating effect by showing that job performance increases employee quitting intentions to higher extent when interest in the private sector is at high level.

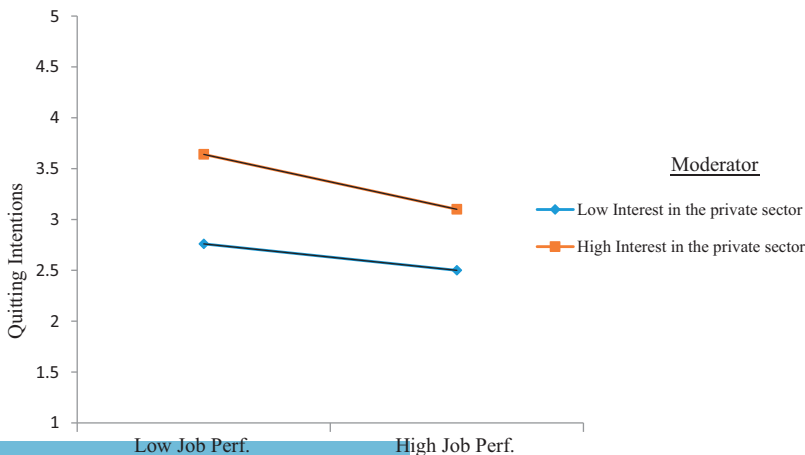
### Discussion and implications

Our proposed conceptualization of the psychological processes by which leadership exerts influences on employees' motivation suggests some deep ties. In particular, with regard to ethical leadership and employee motivation, our theoretical framework suggests that leaders are more likely to enhance employee motivation when they systematically interact with them, respect their aspirations for autonomy, and provide the resources they need to increase their performance. Our results indicate that emotional leadership, such as using emotional arguments that strengthen the relationship, increases employee motivation. Job performance is also influenced by the extent to which leaders convey normatively appropriate conduct and provide emotional support in the form of positive emotions. In addition, we found that

Hypothesis	Path specified	Group	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	p-value
H5	Job performance – Quitting intentions	Group 1: Low IPS	-0.104	0.088 (N/S)
		Group 2: High IPS	-0.194**	0.002

**Notes:** \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; N/S: Not Significant; IPS: Interest in the Private Sector

**Table VII.**  
Results of the moderating effect of interest in the private sector (structural equation model 2)



**Figure 3.**  
The moderating effect of interest in the private sector on the relationship between job performance and quitting intentions

employees' performance level is negatively associated with his or her intention to leave. However, their interest in opportunities in the private sector strengthens the effect of job performance on intentions to quit.

### *Main findings*

Existing work clearly advocates the importance of employee work motivation (Steers *et al.*, 2004), yet the complex phenomenon and its influence on job performance need further research consideration. We draw on SDT to develop an empirical framework to advance insight into the mechanisms that allow ethical and emotional leaders to influence employee motivation and increase their performance. First, grounded in SDT, we explore the motivational process underlying the relationship between ethical leadership and employee motivation. Consistent with previous studies, we find a positive association, which suggests that employees respond positively to the ethical cues provided by their leaders and display greater motivation. This finding is in line with previous studies that emphasize the critical role of ethical leadership with regard to job outcomes (Bedi *et al.*, 2016; Ng and Feldman, 2015; Treviño *et al.*, 2014). For example, according to Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber (2009), ethical leadership can motivate employees to experience positive psychological states and engage in positive behaviors that encourage better performance. Other studies have found that ethical leadership positively influences employee behaviors such as commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship (Kalshoven and Boon, 2012; Sharif and Scandura, 2013; Harvey *et al.*, 2013).

Second, SDT is a relevant framework to understand the affective mechanism by which emotional leaders influence employee motivation. We reason and find that emotional leadership exerts a positive impact on employee motivation. Thus, our study responds to calls for additional research into the role of leader's emotions in motivating their employee (e.g. Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Gooty *et al.*, 2010).

Third, we show that employee motivation is positively related to job performance; it is an outcome of both ethical and emotional dimensions of leadership. This finding aligns well with prior research that has found that employee motivation is valuable because of its significant impact on job performance (Chen *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, we determine that employee motivation fully mediates the relationship between leadership (both ethical and emotional leaderships) and job performance, in accordance with literature that argues that effective leadership practices improve performance by enhancing organizational commitment, employee engagement, and employee motivation (Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Combs *et al.*, 2006). Our findings are in line with other work that finds that relationship quality and trust serve critical functions in the positive relationship between ethical leadership and job performance (Piccolo *et al.*, 2010; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2012; Schaubroeck *et al.*, 2011).

Fourth, our study reveals the negative impact of job performance on employee intention to quit (Jackofsky and Peters, 1983; Jackofsky, 1984), such that high-performing employees are more likely to remain in their jobs compared with poor performers. While some existing research has found that high-performing employees are more willing to change their jobs (Thompson and Terpening, 1983), our results offer some clarity on this debate. Specifically, we find a significant moderating effect of interest in working in the private sector to explain the negative relationship between job performance and the intention to quit. This result suggests that for employees who seek to enter the private sector, their performance has a positive and significant influence on their intention to quit.

### *Contributions to theory*

Our research contributes to the extant literature in several ways. First, we broaden extant theory by providing new insights into how leadership can promote employee motivation.

Several scholars identify leadership as an important tool for organizational success (Northouse, 2007; Li *et al.*, 2017; Tian and Sanchez, 2017) and for driving key outcomes (e.g. employee engagement, attitudes, employee creativity, and individual effectiveness), but very little research has investigated the influence of leadership style on employee motivation. By exploring how leadership contributes to employee motivation, we begin to address this gap in the literature.

Second, our results show that employee motivation mediates the relationships between ethical leadership, emotional leadership, and job performance. Scholars (e.g. Piccolo *et al.*, 2010; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2011, 2012) note the inattention to the intervening mechanisms that link leadership and job performance. We contribute to this line of research by demonstrating the importance of considering employee motivation as an intervening variable. Hence, our study suggests that introducing a mediator such as motivation might help to better explain how leadership (ethical and emotional) influences job performance.

Third, this research illuminates the relationship between job performance and quitting intentions. Given the importance of understanding techniques companies can use to retain their best employees is of great interest, our research provides empirical evidence that high-performing employees might be more willing to stay in their jobs. We demonstrate that job performance is an indicator of employee retention. We also find that this relationship is moderated by one specific factor, that is, interest in the private sector. Our unique study setting in Kuwait provides interesting insights, especially because most new graduates from universities begin their professional careers in public organizations. After having worked there for some time and gaining work experience, some workers seek jobs in the private sector. Accordingly, we contribute to extant literature by demonstrating that the relationship between job performance and the intention to quit is affected by an employee's interest in working in the private sector.

Fourth, many studies examine employee motivation using data from the private sector (Costen and Salazar (2011); Joung *et al.* (2015)). Our study addresses the lack of insights into employee motivation, and the ability of leadership to enhance motivation, in the public sector. Specifically, we extend prior findings pertaining to the public sector by demonstrating that leadership drives employee motivation, and employee motivation drives job performance.

Fifth, by conducting this research in an Eastern culture, we contribute to the literature by assessing whether employee motivation can be enhanced by leadership, as well as how it affects job performance and quitting intentions of public sector employees in an Eastern culture. This is important since prior research (e.g. Calza *et al.*, 2016; Eisend *et al.*, 2015) has found that culture can have a significant influence on organizations and their functioning. Public organizations in Eastern countries (Kuwait in our case) suffer from serious concerns related to employee motivation, so understanding ways to motivate public sector employees in this Eastern country is particularly important. Thus, our research enriches extant literature by adding new insights about employee motivation in a novel cultural and organizational setting.

#### *Contributions to practice*

The findings of this study offer valuable practical insights for organizations. First, perceptions of both ethical and emotional leaderships foster employee motivation in the workplace, so leaders should work to develop a culture where ethical behaviors are the norm, by emphasizing moral values, integrity, and trust; treating employees with respect and dignity; providing them with autonomy; and empowering them to make decisions. Leaders must also create situations that feature positive emotional approaches and adjust their emotions to stimulate motivation and enhance job performance. As Humphrey (2002) asserts, "Leaders need different emotional leadership skills to guide organizational members around obstacles and onto the path that leads to success." Prior studies (e.g. Drouvelis and

Nosenzo, 2013; Hermalin, 1998) suggest that leading by example is one way for leaders to encourage employees to engage in behaviors that benefit their organizations. Other scholars have challenged the view that ethical leadership consists of a single set of best practices and note the importance of considering the context, that is, private or public sector (Heres and Lasthuizen, 2012). Since historically leaders in Eastern cultures (e.g. Kuwait) tend to be autocratic and transactional, it becomes important to encourage their ethical and emotional leaderships. Organizations must consider context-appropriate training programs that allow prospective leaders to develop relevant skills, which, in turn, are likely to increase employee motivation and performance. An important dyadic relationship implication is that leaders should consider matching their emotional displays to employee motivation to increase individual performance.

Second, this study demonstrates the influence of individual performance on quitting intentions. Variation in turnover intentions can be explained by the level of individual performance, implying that the best employees are likely to stay because leaders engage in efforts to retain them by providing them with autonomy, good working conditions, needed resources, and contingent rewards (Dreher, 1982). Low-performing employees instead are more likely to leave, to the extent that leaders do not reward their poor performance (Lance, 1988). Effective leadership thus provides a starting point for understanding the mechanisms that can encourage high-performing employees to stay rather than look for better opportunities outside the organization.

Third, the model used to predict turnover intentions was developed and tested in the public sector in a non-Western context (Kuwait). To the best of the authors' knowledge, our study is among the few that provides initial evidence regarding turnover intentions as an outcome of the impact of ethical and emotional leaderships on employee motivation and individual performance in Kuwait. In this regard, it is important to acknowledge that Kuwait's public sector is consistently overstaffed, due to its nationalization policies. Turnover intentions are low, regardless of job performance, due to the high salaries and social benefits provided by the government. The reputation of the well-paid, comfortable public sector demotivates Kuwaiti employees from seeking work in the private sector (Segal *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, leaders in the private sector also could devote more effort to luring Kuwaiti nationals into private sector employment.

#### *Limitations and research opportunities*

Several limitations of this study could influence interpretations of the findings. First, the data came from organizations operating in the public sector in an Eastern culture (i.e. Kuwait), which may prevent generalization of the findings to other organizational contexts. However, the ethical and emotional leadership concepts reflect a Western perspective. In applying these concepts for the first time to a context in which Islamic values are deeply rooted in society, it was not possible to capture all measures specific to this society. It would be interesting to explore additional similarities and differences in ethical and emotional leaderships across cultures to enhance the external validity of the findings. Second, this study explored employee motivation using a single construct from motivation theory. Previous studies include different types of motivation (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Weibel *et al.*, 2010), and leadership may influence these various types of motivation differently. Thus, it would be interesting for research to explore other types of motivation to provide additional insights. Third, we adopted a cross-sectional research design since the data was collected only once, during the same period, so definitive inferences about causal processes are not possible. Longitudinal research could capture more data points over time, which would help clarify the causal effects and provide more accurate results. Fourth, considering Kuwait's cultural particularities, more studies of ethical and emotional leaderships rooted in the public sector in Kuwait should be conducted to help organizations overcome the various management and



leadership challenges. Fifth, prior research indicates that both ethical and emotional leadership styles affect employee job outcomes, by shaping the organizational culture (Tu and Lu, 2013; Chen and Hou, 2016). Further research might include organizational culture constructs as mediators that help explain how leadership styles influence employee motivation and job performance.

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