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CURRENT EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Understanding Responses to Ethical Leadership

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In this issue of *OMJ*, the Current Empirical Research section presents the article “Ethical Leadership: Not Everyone Responds Equally.” Authors W. Randy Evans, Richard S. Allen, and Russell W. Clayton extend the ethical leadership literature by examining ideological resources, such as value-oriented principles, to examine the relationship between leaders and subordinates. As they state, this is important because ethical leadership is in part ideological. They develop and test hypotheses related to the relationship between ethical leadership and followers’ organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational identification. Furthermore, they look at the moderating impact of equity sensitivity on follower’s organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational identification with those who have a benevolent orientation versus an entitled orientation.

The authors conducted two studies to test their hypotheses. Study 1 used a cross-sectional e-mail survey on 223 working adult graduate students. Hierarchical regression was utilized to analyze these data. The authors found a positive relationship between ethical leadership and organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational identification. Furthermore, they found support for the interaction effect of ethical leadership and equity sensitivity on organizational commitment and organizational identification. Additionally, they further analyzed the data through a slope analysis, which showed that the highest level of organizational commitment was from individuals with a higher level of benevolence who perceived their managers as exhibiting high levels of ethical leadership. The same effect was true of degrees of organizational identification.

In Study 2 an experimental design was employed to test the relationships hypothesized. In the second study, 244 working adults were recruited by students to participate and were provided a link in an e-mail invitation. These participants were randomly assigned an ethical scenario to

review and the other variables in the study were measured with the instruments used in the first study. In this study, the researchers again found support for a positive relationship between ethical leadership and organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational identification. Moreover, the findings also supported the interactive effect of ethical leadership and equity sensitivity on organizational commitment and job satisfaction, but not on organizational identification. In this study they also conducted slope analysis. They found that the highest level of organizational commitment and job satisfaction occurred when high ethical leadership and high levels of equity sensitivity were present.

This article presents an interesting and detailed analysis of the relationship of ethical leadership on followers, which is an underexamined area in the literature. With the use of a two-study approach, Evans, Allen, and Clayton provide a significant contribution to the ethical leadership literature. The results of the two studies indicate that not everyone responds to ethical leadership in the same way, and these results have implications for work attitudes. This is an important finding for researchers and practitioners to understand. For researchers, this expands the nomological network of ethical leadership. Moreover, this article has implications for human resource research in such areas as hiring and training, and on organizational behavior research in areas such as organizational citizenship behaviors and motivation. All of these areas could be avenues of future research. For practitioners, the authors note that organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational identification are associated with higher levels of job performance. Thus, managers may want to consider the impact of ethical leadership and an employee’s equity sensitivity when examining or trying to improve employee performance. Thus, the authors provide a very impactful contribution to the management field, a contribution that will likely be built on by other scholars.