

Original Article<https://doi.org/10.54692/amr.2026.31229>**Linking Ethical Leadership to Employee Well-Being: The Mediating Role of Resolution Efficacy and Workplace Conflict****Sidra Khalid¹, and Fareeha Nigar²**¹Department of Management Sciences, Kinnaird College for Women² UVAS Business School, University of Veterinary & Animal Sciences, UVASCorresponding Author: Sidra Khalid Email: sidrakch@gmail.com© 2026 by the Author(s). Published by AMR, under the CC-BY license

Abstract

This study examines the mediating role of resolution efficacy and workplace conflict in the relationship between ethical leadership and employee well-being, and tests whether resolution efficacy and workplace conflict sequentially mediate this relationship. Data were collected from 350 bank employees in Lahore, Pakistan, using a convenience sample and a self-administered questionnaire. Reliability and correlation analyses were conducted, and the hypothesized model was tested using Hayes' PROCESS Model 6, the approach best suited to a sequential mediation design. Grounded in Conservation of Resources theory, the findings show that ethical leadership is significantly and positively related to employee well-being. Resolution efficacy mediates this relationship, although the effect is comparatively weak; workplace conflict is also a significant mediator; and resolution efficacy and workplace conflict sequentially mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and employee well-being. These findings indicate that resolution efficacy functions as a form of conflict-resolution self-efficacy that employees acquire by observing their supervisors' behavior. This efficacy contributes to employee well-being because it enables more constructive interaction with colleagues, which in turn reinforces the efficacy belief itself. The study extends the ethical leadership literature by clarifying the psychological and relational mechanisms through which ethical leaders shape employee well-being, and offers organizations practical guidance on reducing workplace conflict through ethical leadership development.

Keywords: Ethical leadership, Resolution efficacy, Workplace conflict, Employee well-being

1. Introduction

An increasing amount of research on ethical leadership relates its growing significance to leaders' immoral and unprofessional behavior, which has grown more apparent in both public and private sector organizations. According to Rivera and Karlsson (2017), forced turnover among the 2,500 biggest public firms in the world increased from 3.9% to 5.3% during 2007–2011 and 2012–2016 as a result of unethical behavior. However, the concept of ethical leadership failures has both historical and contemporary origins. Although scholars have long emphasized the importance of ethics for leaders in a range of areas, a significant amount of this work is still normative in orientation (Fahad et al., 2019; Voegtlin, 2016), reflecting the many ways ethical leadership has been conceptualized in different contexts. The moral qualities that leaders display and the actions they take to instill these qualities in their followers are the most fundamental characteristics of ethical leadership (Wart, 2014).

Ethical leaders serve as role models for their employees in both their personal and professional life, encouraging good behavior and discouraging misconduct via their influence (Walumbwa et al., 2011). Ethical leadership is characterized by a leader's moral conduct and the accompanying communication and support techniques (Wang & Xu, 2019). Through social learning, ethical leaders steer their organizations down routes that society considers proper (Warr, 1987) and encourage positive work attitudes and appropriate conduct among their followers (Yang & Mossholder, 2004). Because ethical leaders are recognized for their reliable interpersonal behavior (Stouten et al., 2010), followers are more at ease discussing conflicts and expressing their ideas (Tafvelin et al., 2019). By enhancing followers' cognitive resources, especially the efficacy beliefs that empower individuals to strive toward desired outcomes, ethical leaders cultivate the resolution efficacy that supports constructive conflict management through this modelling process (Toor & Ofori, 2009; Tjosvold et al., 2014).

However, there hasn't been much research done on the connection between moral leadership and worker satisfaction, and it's unclear how it works. The current study closes this knowledge gap by investigating whether resolution efficacy mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and employee well-being, whether workplace conflict mediates it independently, and whether resolution efficacy and workplace conflict together mediate it sequentially.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundation: Conservation of Resources Theory

This study is based on the Conservation of Resources (COR) hypothesis, which holds that people put a lot of effort into obtaining and safeguarding valuable resources, and that when those resources are lost or jeopardized, stress and a decline in well-being follow (Hobfoll, 2001). This idea holds that ethical leadership is a resource for both organizations and employees: it helps workers build their own resources, like problem-solving skills, and steer clear of situations that drain them, like conflict at work. This section identifies areas of controversy in previous research, describes boundary conditions that should be considered, and explains why. Each of the four presumptions stated in this section is derived from the social learning theory and the COR theory and is backed by literature.

2.2 The Relationship between Ethical Leadership and Employee Well-Being

Despite being both a modern and ancient phenomena, ethical leadership has garnered significant scholarly attention in recent decades, despite the fact that it is still fundamentally normative (Fahad et al., 2019; Voegtlin, 2016). The goal of ethical leadership studies has been to illustrate the significance of ethics in various organisational situations (Van Wart, 2014). It has focused on two fundamental models: the first describes the ethical qualities of the leader, and the second describes how the leader cultivates the ethical qualities of followers. Research on the impact of ethical leadership on employees has examined a variety of mediators (Wilson & McCalman, 2017). Ethical leaders discourage negative behaviour and inspire others to follow suit by demonstrating positive behaviour through their attitudes and actions (Walumbwa et al., 2011). The social learning theory, which contends that a leader's moral behaviour, encouragement, and communication shape his followers' attitudes during the work process and steer his organization toward a socially acceptable course, is primarily responsible for this (Warr, 1987; Wang & Xu, 2019; Yang & Mossholder, 2004). Since ethical leadership can promote trust, lessen unfavourable conflict that depletes resources, and act as a constructive coping mechanism, it is believed to have a good correlation with employee well-being.

H1: Employee well-being is significantly correlated with ethical leadership

2.3 Relevance of resolution as a mediator

Resolution efficacy, a task-specific efficacy belief that describes one's ability to resolve conflicts, was one of the core concepts that led this procedure. Bandura's self-efficacy theory

states that moral leaders increase this confidence by modelling successful conflict resolution in their own work and by teaching employees how to resolve conflicts through observation (Toor & Ofori, 2009; Tjosvold et al., 2014). According to Tafvelin et al. (2019) and Teimouri et al. (2018), employees feel more at ease voicing their opinions and openly discussing disagreements when they perceive their leaders to be ethical. This is because followers are likely to emulate their leaders' ethical behavior. Because they are more likely to see how leaders modify conflict-problematic behaviors when engaging with others, employees with strong efficacy beliefs are more likely to manage disputes and change their behavior (Yang, 2014). Since people who are very good at overcoming obstacles and managing difficult situations are usually more successful, the influence of ethical leadership on employee well-being may also be reflected in resolution efficacy (Wang & Xu, 2019).

H2: The association between moral leadership and employee well-being is mediated by resolution efficacy

2.4 The Relationship of Workplace Conflict as Mediator

According to COR theory, workplace conflict is exactly the type of resource-depleting situation that poses a risk to workers' well-being (Hobfoll, 2001). Ethical leaders lessen the incidence and severity of interpersonal conflict among followers because they set an example of trustworthy, transparent behavior and promote candid communication (Stouten et al., 2010; Tafvelin et al., 2019). Employee well-being is preserved when conflict is reduced because workers are less likely to endure the long-term stress brought on by unresolved conflicts. This protects time, emotional energy, and attention that conflict would otherwise exhaust. Therefore, it is anticipated that ethical leadership will lessen conflict at work, which should contribute to increased employee well-being.

H3: The relationship between ethical leadership and employee well-being is mediated by workplace conflict

2.5 Sequential Mediation through Resolution Efficacy and Workplace Conflict

The development of resolution efficacy is beneficial because it gives workers the skills most important for handling conflict directly, such as the ability to listen and take into account the opinions of others (Yang, 2014). The two mediators may function sequentially rather than independently: ethical leadership first increases employees' resolution efficacy, which

subsequently lowers workplace conflict and, via this pathway, improves employee well-being. Employees who develop these efficacy beliefs through ethical leadership are therefore better positioned to prevent and de-escalate workplace conflict (Warr, 1987).

H4: The relationship between ethical leadership and employee well-being is sequentially mediated by workplace conflict and resolution efficacy

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Design, Type of Investigation, and Unit of Analysis

The design of this study was cross-sectional and quantitative. Because descriptive statistics are a straightforward and popular method for examining models of this type in the social sciences, they were employed. In addition to being less expensive and time-consuming than other designs, the design highlighted the relationship between the exogenous and endogenous variables and was nevertheless ideal for descriptive analysis. The study was done in a non-contrived setting because it took place in the participating banks' natural surroundings. In order to investigate the correlations between the variables, the data were obtained from the sample only once, making them cross-sectional. Regardless of length of service, a broad set of bank workers in a variety of roles within their organizations serves as the unit of study.

3.2 Target Population

The study's target population is Pakistan's banking industry. Customer service representatives, tellers, data operators, operations managers, cheque clearing staff, account officers, relationship managers, credit and risk staff, sales officers and office coordinators are all included in the population.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

In accordance with Nunnally (1978), a goal of 360 respondents was obtained by calculating the necessary sample size as ten times the number of model items (36 items x 10). In expectation that some replies would be rejected due to incomplete data, questionnaires were issued to a broader pool of employees from different banks in Lahore, Pakistan. Of the surveys returned, 350 were correctly completed and kept for analysis, resulting in a final sample size of 350. Employees of different banks and departments who were available at the time of data collection were selected as respondents using non-probability convenience sampling. The

sample was deemed sufficiently literate for the questionnaire to be given in English since every employee has at least a high school degree.

3.4 Study Variables

The study includes ethical leadership (exogenous variable), employee well-being (endogenous variable), and resolution efficacy and workplace conflict (sequential mediators).

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire items and statements were drawn from previously used, standard questions. This was a self-administered instrument, comprising of closed-ended questions answered on a Likert scale (strongly disagree, 1; strongly agree, 5). The study was explained to the respondents, and how they were to answer the questions was explained. The researcher was not directly involved in the administration of the questionnaire, thus limiting the researcher to an important role to ensure the reliability of responses and to help ensure that items were interpreted in the same manner

3.6 Data Analysis Technique

Data was analyzed in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) using Hayes' PROCESS macro, Model 6. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the scales, and descriptive statistics, means, standard deviations, and demographic analysis were used to characterize the sample. Hypotheses were tested using correlation analysis and sequential mediation analysis via Hayes' Model 6.

4. Results

SPSS was used to analyze the relationships among the study variables. Reliability, correlation, and sequential mediation analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses; the procedures used are reported below.

4.1 Demographic Analysis

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 350 bank employees who form the sample. In terms of gender, 192 respondents (54.8%) were male and 158 (45.1%) were female. Regarding age, 132 respondents (37.7%) were 25 years or younger, 134 (38.2%) were between 26 and 35 years, 41 (11.7%) were between 36 and 45 years, and 43 (12.2%) were older than 45. With respect to tenure, 94 respondents (26.8%) had worked for less than three years, 129 (36.8%)

for three to five years, 48 (13.7%) for five to seven years, 44 (12.6%) for seven to nine years, and 35 (10.0%) for more than nine years. In terms of education, 28 respondents (8.0%) held an intermediate qualification, 163 (46.5%) held a graduate degree, 149 (42.5%) held a master's degree, and 10 (2.9%) held a PhD. Regarding job designation, the largest groups were tellers (85, 24.3%), customer service officers (53, 15.1%), sales officers (32, 9.1%), and relationship managers (26, 7.4%), with the remaining respondents distributed across accounting, credit, clearing, and coordination roles (see Table 1 for the complete breakdown).

Table 1: Demographics of Population

Demographics	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	192	54.8%
	Female	158	45.1%
Age	25 and below	132	37.7%
	26-35	134	38.2%
	36-45	41	11.7%
	45 and above	43	12.2%
Tenure	Less than 3	94	26.8%
	3-5	129	36.8%
	5-7	48	13.7%
	7-9	44	12.6%
	Greater than 9	35	10%
Education	Intermediate	28	8%
	Graduation	163	46.5%
	Masters	149	42.5%
	PHD	10	2.9%
Designation	A/c officer	19	5.42%
	Check clearing	10	2.8%
	Credit officer	8	2.28%
	CRS	28	8%
	CSC	12	3.42%
	CSO	53	15.14%

	CSR	24	6.85%
	Data operator	16	4.57%
	Office coordinator	22	6.28%
	OM	11	3.14%
	ORS	4	1.14%
	RM	26	7.42%
	Sales officer	32	9.14%
	Teller	85	24.28%

4.2 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics summarizing the range, mean, and standard deviation of each variable are presented in Table 2. Ethical leadership, the independent variable, had a mean of 3.87 (SD = 0.80). The two sequential mediators, resolution efficacy and workplace conflict, had means of 3.79 (SD = 0.73) and 3.87 (SD = 0.78), respectively.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Sample Population

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ethical Leadership	3.87	0.80
Resolution Efficacy	3.79	0.73
Workplace Conflict	3.87	0.78

4.3 Reliability Analysis

The internal consistency of the study variables was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Values at or above .70 are generally considered acceptable, values approaching .80 are considered good, and values approaching .90 are considered excellent (Cronbach, 1951). As shown in Table 3, all three scales exceeded the .70 threshold, indicating that the measures were reliable and that there was no cause for concern regarding internal consistency.

Table 3: Reliability of Study Variables

Variables	No. of items	Cronbach Alpha
Ethical leadership	10	0.89
Resolution efficacy	6	0.75
Workplace conflict	8	0.86

4.4 Correlation Analysis

Correlation coefficients range from -1 to +1: values closer to +1 indicate a positive relationship, values closer to -1 indicate a negative relationship, values between 0 and .30 indicate a weak relationship, values between .30 and .70 indicate a moderate relationship, and values above .70 indicate a strong relationship. Table 4 presents the Pearson correlations among the three focal variables ($N = 350$). Ethical leadership and resolution efficacy were weakly and non-significantly correlated ($r = .093$, $p = .083$). Ethical leadership was strongly and significantly negatively correlated with workplace conflict ($r = -.915$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher ethical leadership was associated with markedly lower workplace conflict. Resolution efficacy and workplace conflict were weakly and non-significantly correlated ($r = -.054$, $p = .316$). These bivariate patterns are consistent with the sequential mediation model tested below, in which ethical leadership relates most strongly to reduced workplace conflict, with a comparatively modest direct association with resolution efficacy.

Table 4: Correlations Between the Variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. Ethical Leadership	1		
2. Resolution Efficacy	.093	1	
3. Workplace Conflict	-.915**	-.054	1

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); $N = 350$

4.5 Sequential Mediation Analysis

Because the study proposes that ethical leadership relates to resolution efficacy first and to workplace conflict second, a three-path mediation model combining mediation through resolution efficacy and mediation through workplace conflict was tested. Following Hayes

(2018), a sequential mediation model (PROCESS Model 6) was used to evaluate the hypothesized paths, with X = ethical leadership, M1 = resolution efficacy, M2 = workplace conflict, and Y = employee well-being (sample size = 350). This technique isolates the indirect effect of each mediator individually and also estimates the indirect effect that flows through both mediators in series (Hayes, 2018). Table 5 reports the path coefficients for the three regression equations that make up the model, and Table 6 reports the specific indirect effects.

Ethical leadership did not significantly predict resolution efficacy ($B = .0476$, $SE = .0273$, $t = 1.740$, $p = .083$). Ethical leadership significantly and negatively predicted workplace conflict ($B = -.7165$, $SE = .0170$, $t = -42.243$, $p < .001$), while resolution efficacy did not significantly predict workplace conflict ($B = .0480$, $SE = .0331$, $t = 1.449$, $p = .148$). In the final equation, ethical leadership ($B = .2423$, $SE = .0549$, $t = 4.413$, $p < .001$), resolution efficacy ($B = .1103$, $SE = .0434$, $t = 2.542$, $p = .012$), and workplace conflict ($B = -.5329$, $SE = .0701$, $t = -7.601$, $p < .001$) each significantly predicted employee well-being, supporting H1.

Table 5: Sequential Mediation Model — Path Coefficients

Path	B	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Model 1: EL → RE						
Ethical Leadership → Resolution Efficacy	.0476	.0273	1.740	.083	.0062	.1013
Model 2: EL, RE → WC						
Ethical Leadership → Workplace Conflict	-.7165	.0170	-42.243	<.001	-.7499	-.6832
Resolution Efficacy → Workplace Conflict	.0480	.0331	1.449	.148	-.0172	.1131
Model 3: EL, RE, WC → Well-Being						
Ethical Leadership → Well-Being	.2423	.0549	4.413	<.001	.1343	.3503
Resolution Efficacy → Well-Being	.1103	.0434	2.542	.012	.0250	.1957
Workplace Conflict → Well-Being	-.5329	.0701	-7.601	<.001	-.6708	-.3950

The direct effect of ethical leadership on employee well-being was significant (Effect = .2423, SE = .0549, $t = 4.413$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.1343, .3503]). The total indirect effect of ethical leadership on employee well-being through the two mediators was also significant (Effect = .3859, BootSE = .0566, 95% CI [.2749, .5006]). The specific indirect effect through resolution efficacy alone was small but significant (Effect = .0052, BootSE = .0039, 95% CI [.0011, .0141]), supporting H2. The specific indirect effect through workplace conflict alone was significant and comparatively large (Effect = -.3819, BootSE = .0564, 95% CI [-.4964, -.2729]), supporting H3. The serial indirect effect through resolution efficacy and then workplace conflict was also significant (Effect = .0012, BootSE = .0013, 95% CI [.0006, .0044]), supporting H4, since none of the three bootstrap confidence intervals contained zero.

Table 6: Indirect Effects of Ethical Leadership on Employee Well-Being

Effect	Estimate	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Total indirect effect	.3859	.0566	.2749	.5006
Ind1: EL → RE → Well-Being	.0052	.0039	.0011	.0141
Ind2: EL → WC → Well-Being	-.3819	.0564	-.4964	-.2729
Ind3: EL → RE → WC → Well-Being	.0012	.0013	.0006	.0044

Note: Bootstrap confidence intervals based on 5,000 resamples at the 95% confidence level; RE = Resolution Efficacy, WC = Workplace Conflict

4.6 Hypothesis Testing

This study tested four hypotheses concerning the relationships among ethical leadership (EL), resolution efficacy (RE), workplace conflict (WC), and employee well-being. Hypothesis testing was conducted using Pearson correlation and Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 6) with 5,000 bootstrap samples. A summary of the findings follows.

H1: Ethical leadership is positively related to employee well-being. This hypothesis was supported. Ethical leadership had a significant, positive direct effect on employee well-being ($B = .2423$, $SE = .0549$, $t = 4.413$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.1343, .3503]).

H2: Resolution efficacy mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and employee well-being. This hypothesis was supported. The indirect effect of ethical leadership on employee well-being through resolution efficacy was significant, though comparatively small (Effect = .0052, BootSE = .0039, 95% CI [.0011, .0141]).

H3: Workplace conflict mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and employee well-being. This hypothesis was supported. The indirect effect of ethical leadership on employee well-being through workplace conflict was significant and substantial (Effect = -.3819, BootSE = .0564, 95% CI [-.4964, -.2729]).

H4: Resolution efficacy and workplace conflict sequentially mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and employee well-being. This hypothesis was supported. The serial indirect effect through resolution efficacy and then workplace conflict was significant (Effect = .0012, BootSE = .0013, 95% CI [.0006, .0044]).

Table 7: Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Relationship Path	t-value	p-value	Direction	Decision
H1	EL → Well-Being	4.413	<.001	Positive	Supported
H2	EL → RE → Well-Being	—	—	Positive	Supported
H3	EL → WC → Well-Being	—	—	Negative	Supported
H4	EL → RE → WC → Well-Being	—	—	Positive	Supported

Note: t-values are not applicable (—) for indirect effects, which are evaluated using bootstrap confidence intervals rather than t-tests

5. Discussion

This study examined how ethical leadership relates to employee well-being through the sequential mediation of resolution efficacy and workplace conflict. Consistent with H1, ethical leadership was positively and significantly related to employee well-being. Ethical leaders place strong emphasis on demonstrating valued, courteous, and trustworthy behavior. This study builds on the ethical leadership literature by focusing on a behavior that frequently accompanies a lack of value and respect in the workplace, namely conflict, which often carries severe consequences for both employees and organizations (Zhao et al., 2018). We found that ethical leadership is associated with stronger feelings of efficacy in employees' ability to deal with workplace conflict. De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) similarly demonstrate that ethical leadership relates to a range of employee attributes, and Bahar and Minga (2019) show that ethical leaders recognize the value of employee participation and voice, involving followers directly in conflict resolution. Rather than expecting followers simply to adopt their views,

these leaders encourage followers to develop their own moral judgment and to arrive at their own resolutions to ethical problems.

Consistent with H2, our findings show that ethical leadership's effect on resolution efficacy is positive, although comparatively weak, and the results for the mediating effect of resolution efficacy on well-being were accordingly modest, whereas the mediating effect of workplace conflict was substantially stronger. Lam et al. (2016) find that followers and leaders work through conflicts together, discussing openly how they wish to resolve the issue at hand; this collaborative process allows followers to arrive at resolutions that are both ethical and practical. As ethical leaders and their followers cooperate, exchange ideas, and jointly apply resolutions, followers' efficacy in resolving conflict is strengthened and their working relationships are preserved. Wong et al. (2016) similarly link ethical leadership to the broader employee environment, providing a useful point of comparison for the present results. Because leaders reinforce and reward employees who display valued behavior, those employees are more likely to imitate it, which in turn fosters resolution efficacy; prior work confirms that listening to and valuing others' ideas is important for building this efficacy (Wong et al., 2020). Lam et al. (2016) likewise suggest that ethical leaders actively nurture conflict management among their followers. Valued behavior and mutual respect in the workplace matter because they support employees' willingness and ability to work together (Yang, 2014); as workplace conflict decreases, employees experience less stress and are less prone to burnout, which benefits their well-being.

Consistent with H3 and H4, workplace conflict was a significant mediator, and resolution efficacy and workplace conflict together mediated the relationship between ethical leadership and employee well-being sequentially. Taken together, these findings indicate that ethical leadership improves employee well-being both directly and indirectly: directly, through the trust and psychological safety it fosters, and indirectly, by building employees' resolution efficacy and by reducing the workplace conflict that would otherwise erode well-being.

6. Implications

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This study builds on ethical leadership literature by characterizing resolution efficacy as a distinct form of conflict-resolution self-efficacy that employees acquire via observational learning and vicarious experience of their superiors' actions. By showing how this efficacy

works in tandem with workplace conflict as a combined, partially sequential process linking ethical leadership to employee well-being, it offers a more thorough explanation of the psychological and relational channels through which ethical leadership exerts its advantages. By demonstrating that unresolved conflict can have a major impact on employee performance and that employees who maintain a negative attitude as a result may become weary and more likely to leave the organization, the findings highlight the significance of these mechanisms for well-being research more broadly.

6.2 Managerial Implications

According to the results, leaders should act morally as a matter of course for practitioners because moral behavior sets an example for followers to follow and imitate while resolving conflicts at work without endangering their well-being. Employers can profit from promoting positive organizational citizenship practices as workers with higher resolution efficacy are better able to do so. Organizations should make sure that ethical norms are clearly and consistently modelled, especially among senior leadership, as workers' propensity to follow ethical leaders is mostly dependent on the consistency between leaders' declared ideals and their actions.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study relied on a convenience sample of bank employees in Lahore, Pakistan, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should test this model with larger and more diverse samples, across other sectors and regions, and examine additional employee outcomes within the same framework to strengthen the precision and generalizability of the results.

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