



# Ethical Leadership in Action: Empirical Insights from Saudi Arabia's Journey Toward Vision 2030

**Prof. Abdelmohsen A. Nassani**

Full Professor, College of Business Administration  
Nassani@ksu.edu.sa

**Mansoor Naif Al-Hareri**

Human Capital Executive Consultant  
cv.alhareri@gmail.com

Department of Management, College of Business Administration

King Saud University

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

## Abstract

*This study investigates the antecedents and consequences of Ethical Leadership (EL) using a study of the interaction between Transformational Leadership (TL), Leader Conscientiousness (LC), Employee Well-Being (EWB), and Ethical Leadership (EL) in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) labor market and organizations. Data were collected from a sample of 203 employees utilizing validated online surveys, sampling broad professionals across numerous industries to secure robust representation. The data were analyzed with SPSS for descriptive statistics, reliability, and correlation, and AMOS for confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis. Results indicate that Leader Conscientiousness (LC) is positively associated with transformational and Ethical Leadership (EL), which in turn fosters principled and inspiring leadership behavior. Both types of leadership significantly enhance Employee Well-being (EWB), with Transformational Leadership (TL) exerting a stronger influence. Ethical Leadership (EL) was found to mediate between Transformational Leadership (TL) and Employee Well-being (EWB), and between Leader Conscientiousness (LC) and Employee Well-being (EWB). The findings of these results highlight the overriding significance of conscientious, ethically driven leaders in promoting Employee Well-being (EWB) as well as in fostering a good organizational climate in an effort to attain Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 goals of cultivating integrity, transparency, and sustainable work environments.*

**Keywords:** Ethical Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Leader Conscientiousness, Employee Well-being, Saudi Arabia Vision 2030.

## A Synopsis of the Research

Methodology:	This research adopts a quantitative and cross-sectional method to examine 203 employees across sectors using a simple random sampling approach. Data were collected using validated online questionnaires measuring Ethical Leadership (EL), Transformational Leadership (TL), Leader Conscientiousness (LC), and employee wellbeing using a five-point Likert scale. The data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS, which examined descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, correlations, confirmatory factor analysis, and path analysis to test hypotheses and model fit.
Contribution:	This research significantly adds to the body of knowledge of Ethical Leadership (EL) emanating from the Vision 2030 for Saudi Arabia. This research quantitatively tested and confirmed affirmative relationships between Leader Conscientiousness (LC), Transformational Leadership (TL), Ethical Leadership (EL), and Employee Well-being (EWB), assessing the mediating effect of Ethical Leadership (EL). The findings add actionable knowledge to help Saudi organizations better understand how to develop and contextualize ethical, conscientious leadership to improve their employees' well-being and achieve the aims of transparency, integrity, and sustainable workplaces of Vision 2030.

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Findings:	The research verifies that Leader Conscientiousness (LC) has positive effects on Transformational Leadership (TL) and Ethical Leadership (EL), with significant statistical effects. Transformational Leadership (TL) significantly promotes Employee Well-being (EWB), while Ethical Leadership's (EL) has a more modest yet still significant positive effect. Ethical Leadership (EL) also mediates the effects of Leader Conscientiousness (LC) on Employee Well-being (EWB) and Transformational Leadership (TL) on Employee Well-being (EWB), confirming all the proposed hypotheses. All reported effects are statistically significant.
Recommendations for Practitioners:	The findings reveal that conscientious leaders boost well-being through ethical and Transformational Leadership (TL). Organizations should prioritize conscientious traits in hiring, train leaders to inspire ethically, and monitor well-being outcomes. These practices align with Vision 2030 by building sustainable, high-performing workplaces.
Future Research:	Future research should incorporate a mixed-methods design and generalize to developing and developed-country public organizations for enhanced generalizability. Psychological safety, organizational justice, as well as other mediators and type of industry as moderators, should be studied to offer additional insight. Longitudinal designs could assess long-term consequences of ethical and Transformational Leadership (TL) on organizational effectiveness as well as worker well-being towards supporting Vision 2030 goals and objectives.

## Introduction

Business organizations are a critical part of satisfying the needs of individuals and society, and Ethical Leadership (EL) is an important pillar to organizational success in the contemporary era. As highlighted by Hayat Bhatti et al. (2020), leadership effectiveness involves the capacity to guide and influence people towards a common objective while making sure that this leadership is based on high ethical standards (Altahat & Atan, 2018). Within this paradigm, Ethical Leadership (EL) is a comprehensive approach that goes beyond theoretical concepts and pragmatic prescriptions, essentially "doing the right thing" in each situation and decision.

The concept of Ethical Leadership (EL) assumes unparalleled importance in the backdrop of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which is leading the national economy towards attaining remarkable global outcomes by encouraging values of transparency and integrity—key components of Ethical Leadership (EL). Leadership in modern organizations has extended beyond just leading; it is now an ethical accountability with the objective of establishing work cultures founded on bilateral trust and respect.

Studies indicate that Transformational Leadership (TL) is key to achieving these objectives by motivating employees and unleashing their potential, which further affects their productivity and psychological well-being in a positive way. Bubbles (2012) further highlights that transformational leaders build organizational commitment by empowering employees and boosting their self-confidence as well as their trust in themselves and their leaders.

Brown et al. (2005) have defined Ethical Leadership (EL) as "showing virtuous behavior in actions and interactions, and promoting followers' adherence to these standards through effective communication and moral decision-making." This definition fully aligns with the dream of Vision 2030, which aspires to establish a knowledge-based economy on the basis of values and moral principles.

The value of Ethical Leadership (EL) is clearly demonstrated through its potential to improve organizational performance and workers' well-being. Leaders who use this approach do not just focus on short-term goal attainment; rather, they attempt to create a lasting organizational culture founded upon several determinants: solidifying trust and credibility between employees and leadership, creating an inclusive and motivational working environment, harmonizing organizational objectives with human needs, and facilitating innovation and creativity within an ethical supportive climate.

Conversely, leadership characterized by unethical behavior may result in dire effects like low morale and organizational disloyalty, as well as financial crises and loss of reputation. This elicits the supreme necessity of implementing Ethical Leadership (EL) structures that complement the national transformation agenda led by Vision 2030.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the antecedents and consequences of Ethical Leadership (EL) as illustrated in (Figure 1).

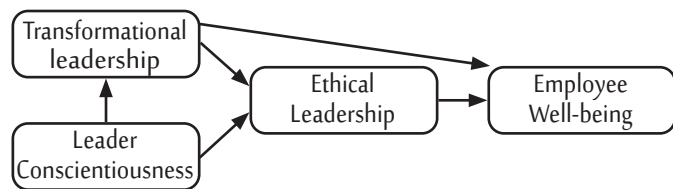


Figure 1: The Research Model

## Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

### *The Relationship between Leader Conscientiousness (LC) and Ethical Leadership (EL)*

Leader Conscientiousness (LC), being one of the core facets of the Big Five personality traits, incorporates characteristics such as dependability, self-control, responsibility, and goal orientation (Mihelic et al., 2010). Ethical Leadership (EL), defined as the exhibition of behavior in aligned with normative expectations through behavioral actions and social interactions (Brown et al., 2005), is heavily reliant on the degree of conscientiousness of a leader.

Conscientious leaders exhibit a strong moral foundation and a strong sense of responsibility, which aligns with the principles of Ethical Leadership (EL). They give high priority to integrity, fairness, and accountability, thus fostering trust and openness within the organization (Bello, 2012). Research indicates that conscientious leaders tend to engage in ethical decision-making since their strict and principled tendencies compel them to act in ways that support organizational values (Brown et al., 2005).

Moreover, conscientious leaders serve as role models for ethical behavior, hence fostering a workplace characterized by honesty and responsibility. Their reliability and orderly leadership style guarantee the successful application of ethical principles, lowering incidences of misconduct within the workplace and enhancing workers' trust (Mihelic et al., 2010). Research has indicated that such leaders are bound to promote ethical policies and urge employees to engage in ethical dialogue, further enhancing the ethical climate in the workplace (Bello, 2012).

The implications above suggest that conscientiousness in leaders is an important determinant of Ethical Leadership (EL) behaviors. Leaders who score high in conscientiousness are more likely to exhibit Ethical Leadership (EL) traits, thereby fostering a morally sound work environment.

Based on previous studies, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H1: It is expected that leader conscientiousness has a positive relationship with Ethical Leadership (EL).*

### *The Relationship between Leader Conscientiousness (LC) and Transformational Leadership (TL)*

Transformational Leadership (TL), defined as leadership that transforms and inspires followers to achieve exceptional outcomes through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994), is significantly impacted by how conscientious a leader is.

Conscientious leaders exhibit a strong commitment to excellence and achievement, which aligns with the core principles of Transformational Leadership (TL). They prioritize vision creation, high performance expectations, and persistent goal pursuit, creating conditions so employees feel inspired to create high proactive behaviors to exceed expectations (Bono & Judge, 2004). Research indicates that conscientious leaders should have more differences on proactive behaviors inspire and intellectually stimulate their teams, as their disciplined and structured approach enables them to effectively communicate organizational goals and drive innovation (Judge et al., 2002).

Additionally, conscientious leaders serve as role models for dedication and reliability, reinforcing a culture of accountability and high performance. Their dependability and work ethic ensure that Transformational Leadership (TL) behaviors-such as providing mentorship, encouraging creativity, and fostering trust-are consistently applied, enhancing employee engagement and organizational success (Rubin et al., 2005). Studies have also found that conscientious leaders are more likely to articulate a compelling vision and align team efforts with long-term strategic objectives, further strengthening the Transformational Leadership (TL) process (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Given these findings, it seems clear that Leader Conscientiousness (LC) plays a pivotal role in shaping Transformational Leadership (TL) behaviors. Leaders who score high conscientiousness, would have more differences in Transformational Leadership (TL) traits, thereby fostering an inspiring and high-performing work environment.

Based on previous studies, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H2: It is expected that Leader Conscientiousness (LC) has a positive relationship with Transformational Leadership (TL).*

### ***The Relationship between Ethical Leadership (EL) and Employee Well-being (EWB)***

Ethical Leadership (EL), which is defined as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships” (Brown et al., 2005, p. 120). EL is an important factor in an employee's overall well-being and increasing the likelihood that they view the organization positively. Employee Well-being (EWB) encompasses employees' holistic experience at work, including physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions (Sharma et al., 2016). Ethical leaders foster well-being by creating fair, respectful work environments where employees feel like they are valued employees and supported by the organization (Kalshoven et al., 2011).

Ethical leaders promote well-being through several mechanisms. First, they provide psychological safety by encouraging open communication and protecting employees from unfair treatment (Chughtai et al., 2014). This aligns with Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which suggests that Ethical Leadership (EL) serves as a valuable resource that helps employees gain additional resources, creating a positive cycle that enhances well-being (Hobfoll, 2001). Second, ethical leaders fulfill employees' underlying psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2012) by involving them in decision-making, clarifying roles, and offering support (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008).

Studies show Ethical Leadership (EL) boosts job satisfaction (Boo & Koh, 2001) and reduces stress by establishing fair procedures and interpersonal justice (Judge & Colquitt, 2004). Employees under ethical leaders experience greater engagement and commitment (Brown et al., 2005), as these leaders model integrity and care, which employees reciprocate through improved performance and well-being (Mitchell & Brown, 2010). However, some studies note that ethical incongruence-when employees' values misalign with their leader's ethical standards-can negatively impact well-being (Yang, 2014).

Based on previous studies, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H3: It is expected that Ethical Leadership (EL) has a positive relationship with Employee Well-being (EWB).*

### ***The Relationship between Transformational Leadership (TL) and Employee Well-being (EWB)***

Transformational Leadership (TL), characterized by behaviors that inspire and motivate employees to achieve beyond expectations (Bass & Avolio, 1994), plays a pivotal role in enhancing Employee Well-being (EWB). Employee Well-being (EWB) is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that has job satisfaction (hedonic), job engagement (eudaimonic), job stress (negative), and sleep quality (physical)

(Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009), is significantly influenced by Transformational Leadership (TL) behaviors. Transformational leaders enhance well-being by fulfilling basic psychological needs of employees psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Through intellectual stimulation, they foster autonomy by encouraging employees to develop innovative to their job (Barling et al., 2010). By demonstrating individualized consideration, they build strong, supportive relationships that satisfy employees' need for relatedness (Arnold et al., 2015). Furthermore, through inspirational motivation, these leaders enhance employees' sense of competence by setting challenging goals and providing the confidence to achieve them (Gilbert & Kelloway, 2014).

Empirical research demonstrates that Transformational Leadership (TL) positively impacts all dimensions of Employee Well-being (EWB). Transformational leaders increase job satisfaction and engagement while decreasing job strain through idealized influence and mentoring behaviors (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000; Turner et al., 2002). They create work environments where employees experience lower stress symptoms and improved sleep quality, contributing to overall physical well-being (Kelloway et al., 2012). The hierarchical approach to Employee Well-being (EWB) provides support for the notion that Transformational Leadership (TL) has the strongest association with this multidimensional construct, particularly in fostering high engagement and satisfaction while minimizing stress (Busseri, 2015).

Based on previous studies, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H4: It is expected that Transformational Leadership (TL) has a positive relationship with Employee Well-being (EWB).*

### ***The Relationship between Transformational Leadership (TL) and Employee Well-being (EWB) Through Ethical Leadership (EL) as Mediator***

Research has established a significant connection between Transformational Leadership (TL) and Employee Well-being (EWB), with Ethical Leadership (EL) serving as a critical mechanism in this relationship. Transformational Leadership (TL) involves idealized influence as well as intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006), naturally cultivate ethical standards within their teams. By modeling integrity (idealized influence), encouraging moral reasoning (intellectual stimulation), and demonstrating genuine concern for employees' development (individualized consideration), they establish a foundation for Ethical Leadership (EL) (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Empirical evidence confirms that Transformational Leadership (TL) strongly predicts Ethical Leadership (EL) ( $\beta = 0.64$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), as these leaders embed moral principles into organizational culture.

Expanding to include Ethical Leadership (EL), enhances Employee Well-being (EWB) by fostering psychologically safe environments (Kahn, 1990), ensuring fair treatment (Colquitt et al., 2001), and promoting work-life balance (Kalshoven et al., 2011). Meta-analytic findings reveal a robust correlation between Ethical Leadership (EL) and well-being ( $\rho = 0.52$ ), particularly for psychological health (Hoch et al., 2018). This mediation occurs because transformational leaders, through their ethical practices, reduce workplace stressors, build trust, and satisfy basic psychological needs, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

Supporting this mechanism, longitudinal research indicates that Ethical Leadership (EL) mediates 68% of Transformational Leadership's (TL) impact on well-being (Ng & Feldman, 2015), while other studies show it accounts for 42% of variance in well-being outcomes (Banks et al., 2020). Employees under transformational leaders experience greater well-being not merely due to inspirational motivation but because these leaders institutionalize fairness, transparency, and care-core tenets of ethical leadership. The mediation occurs because transformational leaders establish ethical norms that reduce workplace stressors, create climates of trust that buffer against anxiety, and promote fairness that satisfies basic psychological needs.

Based on previous studies, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H5: Ethical Leadership (EL) is expected to positively mediate the relationship between Transformational Leadership (TL) and Employee Well-being (EWB).*

***The Relationship between Leader Conscientiousness (LC) and Employee Well-being (EWB) Through Ethical Leadership (EL) as Mediator***

Research has established a significant relationship between Leader Conscientiousness (LC) and Employee Well-being (EWB), with Ethical Leadership (EL) serving as a crucial mediating mechanism in this connection. Conscientious leaders typically exhibit traits of dependability, self-discipline, and strong achievement orientation (Judge et al., 2002), and frequently demonstrate Ethical Leadership (EL) behaviors, which are characterized by normatively appropriate behavior and development of followers' ethical standards (Brown et al., 2005). These ethical behaviors emerge from conscientious leaders' inherent sense of responsibility and moral obligation (Mayer et al., 2012), and often manifest as fair decision-making, transparent communication, and consistent modeling of organizational values (Kalshoven et al., 2011).

Moreover, Ethical Leadership (EL) plays a very crucial role in fostering Employee Well-being (EWB), for instance, psychological, emotional, and physical well-being at work (Danna & Griffin, 1999). Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) proposed that when workers who work under ethical leaders acquire essential psychological resources that serve as a buffer against stress and facilitate positive work experience. Such resources include greater trust in leaders, perceived organizational justice, and greater psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999) that altogether offer greater job satisfaction and reduced work-related stress (Banks et al., 2020).

Social learning theory, as described by Bandura (1977), explains the mediation process, where employees observe and learn the ethical behavior modeled by hardworking leaders, thus leading to improved well-being outcomes. Empirical evidence supports that Ethical Leadership (EL) acts as a mediator in the relationship between Leader Conscientiousness (LC) and Employee Well-being (EWB), with studies showing that this mediation accounts for significant amounts of variance in well-being measures (Ng & Feldman, 2015). Organizations that are interested in improving employees well-being should therefore aim at building conscientious leadership characteristics alongside promoting Ethical Leadership (EL) behaviors, thus fostering a working environment that is conducive to moral behavior and also Employee Well-being (EWB).

Ethical Leadership (EL) involves demonstrating normatively appropriate conduct, such as fairness, transparency, and moral integrity, while promoting such behaviors in followers (Brown et al., 2005). Conscientious leaders are naturally inclined to adhere to ethical principles due to their sense of duty and responsibility. This ethical behavior acts as a bridge (mediator) linking their conscientiousness to Employee Well-being (EWB). For example, when a conscientious leader consistently makes fair decisions and models integrity, employees feel respected and secure, which boosts their well-being (e.g., Eisenbeiss, 2012). Empirical evidence supports this mediation effect: a study by Mayer et al. (2009) showed that Ethical Leadership (EL) mediates the relationship between leader traits (like conscientiousness) and follower outcomes, including well-being. The mediation occurs because conscientiousness drives leaders to act ethically (e.g., avoiding favoritism, ensuring accountability), and these ethical actions create a trusting and supportive work environment. Employees under such leadership experience lower levels of anxiety and higher levels of engagement, directly enhancing their well-being. For instance, Ng and Feldman (2015) found that Ethical Leadership (EL) reduces workplace stressors, a key component of Employee Well-being (EWB), by fostering a sense of justice and care.

Based on previous studies, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H6: Ethical Leadership (EL) is expected to positively mediate the relationship between Leader Conscientiousness (LC) and Employee Well-being (EWB).*

***The Relationship between Leader Conscientiousness (LC) and Employee Well-being (EWB) through Transformational Leadership (TL) as Mediator***



A robust connection exists between Leader Conscientiousness (LC) and Employee Well-being (EWB), with Transformational Leadership (TL) serving as a pivotal mediating mechanism. Conscientious leaders can be identified by their diligence, dependability, and sense of duty responsibility (Costa & McCrae, 1992). These traits predispose them to engage in Transformational Leadership (TL) behaviors, which include inspiring followers, providing individualized consideration, fostering intellectual stimulation, and articulating a compelling vision (Bass, 1990). Transformational Leadership (TL) emerges from conscientious leaders' tendency to set high standards, plan effectively, and prioritize the growth and welfare of their teams (Judge & Bono, 2000). For instance, their meticulous nature drives them to mentor employees and align organizational goals with individual aspirations, key aspects of Transformational Leadership (TL).

Transformational Leadership (TL), in turn, enhances Employee Well-being (EWB), encompassing job satisfaction, psychological health, and reduced stress (Arnold, 2017). According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), employees thrive when leaders meet their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness-needs that transformational leaders fulfill through empowerment and support. For example, by encouraging creativity and recognizing individual contributions, transformational leaders cultivate a sense of purpose and belonging, which bolsters well-being (Nielsen et al., 2008). Empirical studies affirm this mediation effect: Transformational Leadership (TL) has been shown to channel leader traits like conscientiousness into positive employee outcomes, including well-being, by fostering a motivating and supportive work environment (Bono & Judge, 2004). Conscientious leaders' disciplined and goal-oriented nature fuels transformational behaviors, which then inspire employees and enhance their sense of value and security. This dynamic reduces workplace stress and increases engagement, directly impacting well-being (Skakon et al., 2010). Thus, Transformational Leadership (TL) acts as a conduit through which conscientiousness positively influences Employee Well-being (EWB).

Based on previous studies, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H7: Transformational Leadership (TL) is expected to positively mediate the relationship between Leader Conscientiousness (LC) and employee well-being.*

### ***The Relationship between Leader Conscientiousness (LC) and Ethical Leadership (EL) Through Transformational Leadership (TL) as Mediator***

A robust connection exists between Leader Conscientiousness (LC) and Ethical Leadership (EL), with Transformational Leadership (TL) serving as a pivotal mediating mechanism. Conscientious leaders will exhibit dependability, self-control, and achievement orientation (Judge et al., 2002). These traits predispose them to engage in Transformational Leadership (TL) behaviors, which include inspiring followers, providing individualized consideration, fostering intellectual stimulation, and articulating a compelling vision (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Transformational Leadership (TL) emerges from conscientious leaders' tendency to maintain high standards, act with duty, and prioritize the ethical growth of their teams (Bono & Judge, 2004). For instance, their structured and responsible nature drives them to motivate employees and align team efforts with moral standards, key aspects of Transformational Leadership (TL).

Transformational Leadership (TL), in turn, enhances Ethical Leadership (EL) is defined as demonstrating normatively appropriate conduct and encouraging ethical practices (Brown et al., 2005). According to theoretical insights, transformational leaders fulfill followers' needs for moral clarity and higher-order values, fostering an environment of integrity (Brown & Treviño, 2006). For example, by encouraging intellectual stimulation and addressing ethical concerns openly, transformational leaders cultivate a sense of ethical responsibility and trust (Mihelic et al., 2010). Empirical studies affirm this mediation effect: Transformational Leadership (TL) has been shown to channel leader traits like conscientiousness into Ethical Leadership (EL) outcomes, with a moderate correlation ( $r = 0.28$ ) between conscientiousness and Transformational Leadership (TL) (Bono & Judge, 2004), fostering a principled work environment (Turner et al., 2002). The conscientious leader's strong sense of duty and responsibility fuels transformational behaviors, which then reinforce ethical standards and ensure consistency between words and actions. This dynamic strengthens

Ethical Leadership (EL) practices (Brown et al., 2005). Thus, Transformational Leadership (TL) acts as a conduit through which conscientiousness positively influences Ethical Leadership (EL).

Based on previous studies, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H8: Transformational Leadership (TL) is expected to positively mediate the relationship between Leader Conscientiousness (LC) and Ethical Leadership (EL).*

## Methodology

The methodology selected for this study utilizes a robust array of techniques, including an in-depth research design, specification of the target population, development of the questionnaire, application of statistical analysis, evaluation of content validity, and execution of an initial pilot study.

### Population and Sample

This study targeted working professionals employed in labor market and organizations across Saudi Arabia. The research sought to capture diverse perspectives from employees representing various industries, organizational structures, and job roles to ensure the generalizability of the findings.

The accessible population includes employees currently working full-time across a broad range of governmental ministries, public agencies, multinational corporations, and local private firms. The sample was selected using a simple random sampling technique to minimize selection bias and ensure a representative cross-section of the workforce.

Data was collected through a structured online survey distributed via professional networks, organizational email lists, and digital platforms. Out of the distributed questionnaires, a total of 203 fully completed responses were received and deemed valid for analysis, reflecting a 100% response rate from the distributed sample.

The sample composition was characterized by diversity across demographic dimensions, this broad distribution across demographic categories enhances the study's validity and allows the findings to be generalized to a wide range of professional contexts within Saudi Arabia.

The final sample size ( $n = 203$ ) exceeds the minimum thresholds commonly recommended for path analysis, thereby strengthening the robustness of the statistical findings.

### Data Collection

To gather the essential data for this study, we utilize secondary sources such as books, journals, statistical reports, and websites. Additionally, for information not available through these secondary sources, we collect primary data by administering questionnaires to the target population to capture their perspectives on the antecedents and consequences of Ethical Leadership (EL). The research methodology involves analyzing the collected data using descriptive and analytical approaches, supported by polling techniques and the primary software tool, SPSS V26.

### Measures

All variables were carefully assessed using a five-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questionnaire consisted of 40 items, all of which were directly taken from existing, validated questionnaires used in previous research.

- 1- **Ethical Leadership (EL):** Ethical leadership was measured using the Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) adopted from Brown et al, (2005). This questionnaire assesses Ethical Leadership (EL) behaviors using a 7-item scale.
- 2- **Transformational Leadership (TL):** Transformational leadership was measured in accordance with the guidelines provided by Schwab (1980) and Churchill (1979). This questionnaire assesses various transformational leadership behaviors using a 6-item scale.



- 3- **Leader Conscientiousness (LC):** Leaders conscientiousness which is under the (Big Five personality traits) was measured through a 5-item scale based on the NEO PI-R questionnaire that proposed by Pham (2007).
- 4- **Well-being:** was measured by 6 questions designed by Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006). The items used were as follows: "At work, I feel I am bursting with energy", "In my job, I feel strong and vigorous", "I am enthusiastic about my job", "My job inspires me", and "When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work".

### Statistical Methods

This study employs descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and graphical representations to extract key insights. Correlation coefficients were used to assess validity and internal consistency, while Cronbach's alpha was applied to verify the reliability of the study outcomes. Additionally, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 26) and AMOS (Version 26) were utilized to analyze the data and test the research hypotheses and model.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis is conducted using AMOS and SPSS, starting with a detailed review of the descriptive statistics for each variable. Subsequently, Cronbach's alpha is calculated to evaluate the reliability of Ethical Leadership (EL), Transformational Leadership (TL), Leader Conscientiousness (LC), and Employee Well-being (EWB).

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

#### Demographic Information

Table (1) shows the Demographic Information as follows:

- 1- **Gender:** 81.8% from the sample are "male" and 18.2% are female.
- 2- **Age:** 0.5% from the sample are "Less than 20 years old," 17.2% are "20 to less than 30 years old," 32% are "30 to less than 40 years old," 36.5% are "40 to less than 50 years old," 10.8% are "50 to less than 60 years old," and 3% are "More than 60 years old."
- 3- **Years of Experience:** 12.8% from the sample have "Less than 5 years," 18.2% have "5 years to less than 10 years," 18.2% have "10 years to less than 15 years," 20.2% have "15 years to less than 20 years," 24.1% have "20 years to less than 30 years," and 6.4% have "More than 30 years."

**Table (1): Demographic Information (n=203)**

Variable	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	166	81.8
	Female	37	18.2
	Total	203	100.0
Age	Less than 20 years old	1	0.5
	From 20 to less than 30 years old	35	17.2
	From 30 to less than 40 years old	65	32
	From 40 to less than 50 years old	74	36.5
	From 50 to less than 60 years old	22	10.8
	More than 60 years	6	3
	Total	203	100.0
Years of Experience	Less than 5 years	26	12.8
	From 5 years to less than 10 years	37	18.2
	From 10 years to less than 15 years	37	18.2
	From 15 years to less than 20 years	41	20.2
	From 20 years to less than 30 years	49	24.1
	More than 30 years	13	6.4
	Total	203	100.0
Education Level	High School or equivalent or less	17	8.4
	Diploma or equivalent	24	11.8
	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	107	52.7
	Master's degree or equivalent	37	18.2
	Postgraduate studies	18	8.9
	Total	203	100.0

- 4- **Education Level:** 8.4% from the sample have "High School or equivalent or less," 11.8% have "Diploma or equivalent," 52.7% have "bachelor's degree or equivalent," 18.2% have "Master's degree or equivalent," and 8.9% have "Postgraduate studies."

### *Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation Analysis of Variables*

In Table 2, the analysis revealed that Transformational Leadership (TL) had a mean score of 3.79, Ethical Leadership (EL) was rated at 3.71, Leader Conscientiousness (LC) emerged as the highest-rated variable with a mean of 3.95, while Employee Well-being (EWB) had a mean of 3.59.

Correlation analysis showed positive relationships among these variables, with moderate to strong correlations observed between Transformational Leadership (TL), Ethical Leadership (EL), Leader Conscientiousness (LC), and Em-

ployee Well-being (EWB), indicating that increases in one are associated with increases in the others. Specifically, Transformational Leadership (TL) showed the strongest correlation with Leader Conscientiousness (LC) ( $r = 0.75$ ) and Employee Well-being (EWB) ( $r = 0.65$ ), while Ethical Leadership (EL) also demonstrated significant relationships with Leader Conscientiousness (LC) ( $r = 0.60$ ) and Employee Well-being (EWB) ( $r = 0.48$ ).

These findings suggest that leaders who exhibit transformational and ethical behaviors, particularly those high in conscientiousness, contribute positively to Employee Well-being (EWB).

### *Reliability Analysis*

Table 3 illustrates the Cronbach's Alpha values attributed to each construct of the questionnaire and their respective items. The Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.836 to 0.902, indicating high reliability and consistency of the data collected.

The Cronbach's Alpha for Transformational Leadership (TL) is 0.836 (6 items), for Ethical Leadership (EL) is 0.902 (7 items), for Employee Well-being (EWB) is 0.844 (6 items), and for Leader Conscientiousness (LC) is 0.865 (5 items).

These are in the high range, indicating strong reliability for all constructs covered in the questionnaire. This validates the fact that the measures applied are consistent and reliable in measuring the respective variables.

### *Testing Research Model Fit:*

Table 4 presents the fit indices derived from data analysis. The indices show that the model fits the observed data perfectly. The ratio of CMIN/DF is 0.995, which is less than the conventional cutoff value of 3, therefore reflecting an excellent fit. Both the CFI and IFI scored 1.000, reflecting a perfect alignment between the model and the data. The TLI achieved 1.000, confirming an excellent model fit, while the RMSEA recorded 0.000, indicating a perfect fit. The NFI and GFI scored 0.997 and 0.998, respectively, demonstrating high accuracy in representing the data. Additionally, the AGFI recorded 0.975, and

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics**

No	Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3	4
1	Transformational Leadership (TL)	3.79	0.74				
2	Ethical Leadership (EL)	3.71	0.61	.576**			
3	Employee Well-being (EWB)	3.59	0.86	.652**	.480**		
4	Leader Conscientiousness (LC)	3.95	0.74	.750**	.596**	.547**	

**Table .3 Reliability Analysis Cronbach's alpha**

Variables	Items	Cronbach's alpha
Transformational Leadership (TL)	6	0.836
Ethical Leadership (EL)	7	0.902
Employee Well-being (EWB)	6	0.844
Leader Conscientiousness (LC)	5	0.865

**Table 4. Model Fit Result**

Statistics	Result
P	.318
CMIN/DF	.995
CFI	1.000
IFI	1.000
TLI	1.000
RMSEA	.000
NFI	.997
GFI	.998
AGFI	.975
RMR	.007

the RMR scored 0.007, reflecting minimal residual variance. Overall, these results suggest that the model has an excellent fit and a high ability to explain the data.

Table 5 presents the results of the path analysis between the key variables. The effect of Leader Conscientiousness (LC) on Transformational Leadership (TL) is strong and positive, with an estimate of 0.754 and high statistical significance (C.R. = 16.104,  $p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that Leader Conscientiousness (LC) significantly influences Transformational Leadership (TL).

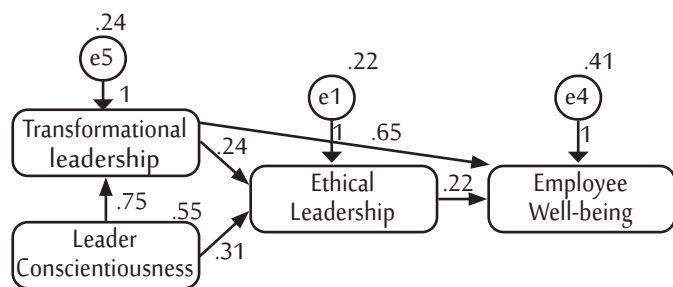
Similarly, Transformational Leadership (TL) positively contributes to Ethical Leadership (EL), with an estimate of 0.241 and high statistical significance (C.R. = 3.561,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Leader Conscientiousness (LC) also enhances Ethical Leadership (EL) practices, with an estimate of 0.309 and high statistical significance (C.R. = 4.535,  $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 5. Path Analysis**

Path coefficient			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Transformational Leadership (TL)	←	Leader Conscientiousness (LC)	.754	.047	16.104	***
Ethical Leadership (EL)	←	Transformational Leadership (TL)	.241	.068	3.561	***
Ethical Leadership (EL)	←	Leader Conscientiousness (LC)	.309	.068	4.535	***
Employee Well-being (EWB)	←	Transformational Leadership (TL)	.647	.074	8.728	***
Employee Well-being (EWB)	←	Ethical Leadership (EL)	.220	.091	2.423	***

Furthermore, Transformational Leadership (TL) has a strong and positive impact on Employee Well-being (EWB), with an estimate of 0.647 and high statistical significance (C.R. = 8.728,  $p < 0.001$ ). Ethical Leadership (EL) also contributes to improving Employee Well-being (EWB), with an estimate of 0.220 and high statistical significance (C.R. = 2.423,  $p < 0.001$ ), although its impact is relatively smaller compared to Transformational Leadership (TL).



**Figure 2. Standard Estimation conducted by AMOS**

## Discussion

The findings make a strong case for the significant relationships among Leader Conscientiousness (LC), Transformational Leadership (TL), Ethical Leadership (EL), and Employee Well-being (EWB), aligning with the proposed research model and hypotheses. The findings highlight the important role of Leader Conscientiousness (LC) as an antecedent to both transformational and Ethical Leadership (EL), which in turn mediate its effects on Employee Well-being (EWB). This discussion interprets these findings in light of the hypotheses, theoretical frameworks, and practical implications.

The strong positive relationship between Leader Conscientiousness (LC) and Transformational Leadership (TL) (H2: estimate = 0.754,  $p < 0.001$ ) supports prior research suggesting that conscientious leaders, with their diligence and goal-orientation, are predisposed to inspire and motivate followers (Bono & Judge, 2004). Similarly, the significant link between Leader Conscientiousness (LC) and Ethical Leadership (EL) (H1: estimate = 0.309,  $p < 0.001$ ) aligns with studies indicating that conscientiousness fosters ethical conduct through a sense of duty and moral responsibility (Brown et al., 2005). These findings confirm that conscientiousness serves as a foundational trait, enabling leaders to exhibit behaviors that enhance organizational dynamics. The robust effect of Transformational Leadership (TL) on Employee Well-being (EWB) (H4: estimate = 0.647,  $p < 0.001$ ) reinforces the notion that leaders who inspire, stimulate, and support their teams create

environments conducive to job satisfaction, engagement, and reduced stress (Arnold, 2017). This aligns with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), as transformational leaders meet employees' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, fostering a sense of purpose and security. The high correlation ( $r = 0.65$ ) between Transformational Leadership (TL) and Employee Well-being (EWB) further substantiates its critical role in enhancing multidimensional well-being outcomes.

Ethical Leadership (EL) also positively impacts Employee Well-being (EWB) (H3: estimate = 0.220,  $p < 0.001$ ), though its effect is less pronounced than that of Transformational Leadership (TL). This finding supports the Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which posits that ethical leaders provide psychological resources like trust and justice, reducing stress and enhancing well-being (Ng & Feldman, 2015). The moderate correlation ( $r = 0.48$ ) suggests that while Ethical Leadership (EL) is beneficial, its influence may be more context-specific or supplementary to other leadership styles. The study confirms that Transformational Leadership (TL) mediates the relationship between Leader Conscientiousness (LC) and Employee Well-being (EWB) (H7), as evidenced by the significant paths from conscientiousness to Transformational Leadership (TL) (estimate = 0.754,  $p < 0.001$ ) and from Transformational Leadership (TL) to well-being (estimate = 0.647,  $p < 0.001$ ). This mediation mechanism highlights how conscientious leaders' disciplined and visionary approach translates into inspirational behaviors that uplift Employee Well-being (EWB) (Skakon et al., 2010). The strong model fit indices (e.g., CFI = 1.000, RMSEA = 0.000) further validate this pathway, suggesting that Transformational Leadership (TL) is a key conduit for conscientiousness's positive effects. Similarly, Ethical Leadership (EL) mediates the relationship between Leader Conscientiousness (LC) and Employee Well-being (EWB) (H6), with significant paths from conscientiousness to Ethical Leadership (EL) (estimate = 0.309,  $p < 0.001$ ) and from Ethical Leadership (EL) to well-being (estimate = 0.220,  $p < 0.001$ ). This aligns with social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), as employees emulate the ethical behaviors of conscientious leaders, fostering a trusting and supportive climate that enhances well-being (Mayer et al., 2009). However, the relatively smaller effect size of Ethical Leadership (EL) compared to Transformational Leadership (TL) suggests that its mediating role, while significant, may be less dominant in this context.

The positive relationship between Transformational Leadership (TL) and Ethical Leadership (EL) (estimate = 0.241,  $p < 0.001$ ) indicates a synergistic effect, where transformational leaders reinforce ethical standards, further amplifying their impact on well-being (H5). This interplay underscores the complementary nature of these leadership styles, with Transformational Leadership (TL) providing the motivational framework and Ethical Leadership (EL) ensuring moral grounding (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

## Conclusion

This study offers a nuanced and empirically supported exploration of the antecedents and consequences of Ethical Leadership (EL), with a particular emphasis on the mediating roles of transformational and Ethical Leadership (EL) in linking Leader Conscientiousness (LC) to Employee Well-being (EWB). The findings confirm that conscientiousness, as a foundational trait, drives leaders to adopt transformational (H7) and ethical (H6) behaviors, both of which significantly enhance Employee Well-being (EWB). The robust statistical evidence-highlighted by high path coefficients (e.g., 0.754 for conscientiousness to Transformational Leadership (TL),  $p < 0.001$ ; 0.647 for Transformational Leadership (TL) to well-being,  $p < 0.001$ ) and an excellent model fit (e.g., CFI = 1.000, RMSEA = 0.000)-validates the proposed relationships and underscores their relevance in the Saudi Arabian context.

Transformational Leadership (TL) emerges as the more dominant mediator, reflecting its powerful capacity to inspire, engage, and empower employees, as evidenced by its stronger effect size (estimate = 0.647 vs. 0.220 for ethical leadership). This aligns with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which highlights the fulfillment of psychological needs as a driver of well-being. Ethical Leadership (EL), while less

potent in magnitude, complements this by fostering trust and fairness, consistent with Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). Together, these leadership styles create a synergistic effect, amplifying the positive influence of conscientiousness on workplace outcomes.

The high reliability of the measures, as indicated by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.836 to 0.902, and the broad base of sample demographics (81.8% male, 52.7% bachelor's degrees, and levels of experience), enhance the generalizability of these findings within Saudi Arabia's workforce. The research connects theoretical constructs to practical application, providing an organizational blueprint to develop leadership that not only realizes goals but also values Employee Well-being (EWB)-a critical facet in the modern focus on sustainability and corporate responsibility.

For practitioners, the effect is two-fold: from enhancing recruitment and training to embedding well-being into organizational DNA, the potential for transformation is huge. Leaders high in conscientiousness, enhanced by transformational and Ethical Leadership (EL) practices, can be champions of successful, ethically oriented organizations. This is particularly applicable in Saudi Arabia, with economic diversification and labor force development as Vision 2030 national priorities.

Future studies can build on this model by examining other potential mediators, like employee empowerment and organizational justice, or by examining its generalizability in various cultural or industrial contexts. Longitudinal tests would also serve to explain the causal processes and long-term consequences of these relationships. Nevertheless, this study is an affirmation of the considerable influence of conscientious leadership, mediated by transformational and ethical practices, on Employee Well-being (EWB). This calls for an active dedication to building leaders who lead by ethical actions, thereby guaranteeing workplaces that are not just effective but also humane, equitable, and sustainable.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This research was carried out on a sample of employees based in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where most of the respondents were males, and this might constrain the generalizability of the results to a more extended and gender-diverse population. Future research must include heterogeneous samples in order to test cross-cultural variations in determinants of Ethical Leadership (EL) in individualistic and collectivistic societies. Furthermore, the research used a cross-sectional design that could limit the potential for identifying causal links between the antecedents, Ethical Leadership (EL), and its effect over time. Longitudinal research would provide greater insight into the temporal dynamics and directionality of these relationships. Also, the research concentrated on the Saudi labor market, and the cultural issues peculiar to this setting could influence the results in a different manner in other cultural environments. Further, while the research investigated several key variables linked to Ethical Leadership (EL), there are additional variables that were not covered in this research which could also influence Ethical Leadership (EL) behavior and its consequences. Thus, we call for more systematic research on the antecedents and consequences of Ethical Leadership (EL). These would include investigations in new areas such as the gig economy and tech startups, comparisons of the impacts across labor market organizations, and tests of sector-specific moderators, such as those relevant to safety-critical or creative industries.

### **Practical Implications**

The results of this research highlight the central connection between Leader Conscientiousness (LC), Transformational Leadership (TL), Ethical Leadership (EL), and employees' well-being, offering a wealth set of practical implications for organizations, especially in Saudi Arabia's economics field. These implications are designed to guide organizational leaders, HR professionals, and policymakers in leveraging leadership traits and behaviors to enhance workplace outcomes.

- 1- **Targeted Leadership Recruitment and Assessment:** The strong influence of Leader Conscientiousness (LC) on both transformational (estimate = 0.754,  $p < 0.001$ ) and Ethical Leadership (EL) (estimate = 0.309,  $p < 0.001$ ) suggests that organizations should prioritize this trait during recruitment and promotion processes. Tools such as the NEO PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992) can be integrated into hiring protocols to identify candidates with high conscientiousness. Additionally, behavioral interviews focusing on past demonstrations of responsibility, goal-orientation, and ethical decision-making can ensure alignment with transformational and Ethical Leadership (EL) potential, ultimately benefiting Employee Well-being (EWB).
- 2- **Tailored Leadership Development Programs:** Organizations should invest in customized training programs that amplify conscientious leaders' natural tendencies toward transformational and ethical behaviors. For Transformational Leadership (TL), workshops on inspirational communication, vision crafting, and individualized mentoring can enhance their ability to motivate employees (Bass, 1990). For Ethical Leadership (EL), training in ethical dilemma resolution, transparency practices, and fairness in resource allocation can reinforce their moral grounding (Brown et al., 2005). Such programs should include real-world simulations and feedback mechanisms to refine these skills, ensuring a direct positive impact on Employee Well-being (EWB) (e.g., estimate = 0.647 for Transformational Leadership (TL),  $p < 0.001$ ).
- 3- **Fostering a Dual Leadership Culture:** The synergy between transformational and Ethical Leadership (EL) (estimate = 0.241,  $p < 0.001$ ) highlights the need for a workplace culture that supports both inspirational and principled leadership. Organizations can establish formal codes of conduct that emphasize ethical standards while encouraging innovation and employee empowerment—hallmarks of Transformational Leadership (TL). Leadership retreats or cross-departmental forums can facilitate the exchange of best practices, allowing conscientious leaders to model and reinforce these dual behaviors, creating a ripple effect that elevates trust, engagement, and well-being across teams.
- 4- **Employee Well-being (EWB) Initiatives:** Given the direct effects of transformational (estimate = 0.647,  $p < 0.001$ ) and Ethical Leadership (EL) (estimate = 0.220,  $p < 0.001$ ) on Employee Well-being (EWB), organizations should empower conscientious leaders to spearhead well-being programs. These could include flexible work arrangements, mental health resources, and recognition systems that align with transformational leaders' focus on individualized consideration and ethical leaders' emphasis on fairness. For instance, implementing regular well-being surveys (e.g., based on Schaufeli et al., 2006) can help leaders track employee energy, enthusiasm, and stress levels, tailoring interventions to specific needs.
- 5- **Performance Monitoring and Feedback Loops:** Organizations must implement ongoing monitoring systems in order to sustain the benefits of this model of leadership. Regular 360-degree feedback from employees can ascertain the degree to which conscientious leaders exhibit transformational and Ethical Leadership (EL) and their role in well-being. Using Human Resources analytics such as: Employee retention levels, absenteeism, and satisfaction ratings, and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can provide a quantitative matrices. This evidence-based approach allows organizations to rationalize leadership strategies so that they are responsive to the Saudi Arabia workforce dynamics in the evolving economic climate.
- 6- **Policy and Structural Support:** Organizations policies need to underpin the mediating roles played by both transformational and Ethical Leadership (EL). Reward systems, for instance, may reinforce leaders exhibiting vision-based motivation (transformational) and integrity-based decision-making (ethical), therefore associating such behavior with tangible outcomes like promotions or financial compensation. Structural support structures, such as ethics committees or innovation centers, can



also supply conscientious leaders with tools needed to exercise their leadership styles, thereby magnifying their influence on Employee Well-being (EWB).

- 7- **Cross-Sector Relevance in Saudi Arabia:** Since the study sample was drawn from labor market and organization sectors ( $n = 203$ ), these findings are particularly relevant to Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 goals of workplace productivity and employee satisfaction. For the Public sector organizations can apply these findings to enhance delivery of service by inspired and ethics-based leadership, while private sector firms can use them to enhance the competitive advantage and talent retention in an increasingly diversifying labor economy. Adapting these implications to address sector-specific problems-such as government bureaucracy or business profit pressures-can help achieve optimum effect.

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