

T.C.
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SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
İŞLETME ANABİLİM DALI
ÖRGÜTSEL DAVRANIŞ (İNGİLİZCE) TEZLİ YÜKSEK LİSANS PROGRAMI

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND MORAL COURAGE:
THE MEDIATING ROLE OF ETHICAL CLIMATE AND THE MODERATING ROLE
OF MORAL DISENGAGEMENT**

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

ELİF BETÜL ŞENER

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between moral courage, ethical leadership, ethical climate and moral disengagement. Despite its importance, empirical studies on moral courage remain relatively scarce. In this context, data were collected from 237 white-collar participants working in various fields of the private and public sectors in Türkiye. Participants answered the questions in the demographic information form, moral courage scale, ethical leadership scale, ethical climate scale and moral disengagement scale. The data obtained were analyzed with the SPSS 22 program. As a result of the analysis, it was found that ethical leadership contributes positively to both moral courage and the formation of ethical climate. In addition, ethical climate contributes to the level of moral courage of employees. Finally, ethical climate plays a mediating role in the relationship between ethical leadership and moral courage. These results reveal the importance of those variables for promoting moral courage in organizations.

Keywords: moral courage, ethical climate, ethical leadership, moral disengagement

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı ahlaki cesaret, etik liderlik, etik iklim ve ahlaki çözülme arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektedir. Öneme rağmen, ahlaki cesaret üzerine yapılan ampirik çalışmalar görece sınırlı kalmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, Türkiye’de özel ve kamu sektörlerinin çeşitli alanlarında çalışan 237 beyaz yakalı katılımcıdan veri toplanmıştır. Katılımcılar demografik bilgi formu, ahlaki cesaret ölçeği, etik liderlik ölçeği, etik iklim ölçeği ve ahlaki çözülme ölçeğinde yer alan sorulara yanıt vermiştir. Elde edilen veriler SPSS 22 programıyla analiz edilmiştir. Analizler sonucunda etik liderliğin hem ahlaki cesarete hem de etik iklimin oluşumuna olumlu katkıda bulunduğu bulunmuştur. Ayrıca etik iklim çalışanların ahlaki cesaret düzeyine katkıda bulunmaktadır. Son olarak etik iklim etik liderlik ve ahlaki cesaret arasındaki ilişkide aracı rolü oynamaktadır. Bu sonuçlar, organizasyonlarda ahlaki cesareti teşvik etmek açısından söz konusu değişkenlerin önemini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: ahlaki cesaret, etik iklim, etik liderlik, ahlaki çözülme

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INTRODUCTION

Today's organizations operate in increasingly complicated and dynamic environments. In the business world, where competition is intense and processes are fast, protecting ethical values is of great importance. Employees frequently face ethical challenges in their work processes. A concept that enables taking courageous steps to protect and defend ethical values, rather than remaining silent or ignoring these challenges, has attracted attention in the business world in recent years.

Organizations are expected to be responsible not only for profit but also to take care of people and the planet (Elkington, 1997). In this context, the attitudes of organizations and employees in the face of ethical dilemmas are of great importance. It is stated that courage functions as a protective shield for other values (Miller, 2005). What is expected from employees when they encounter unethical situations is to stand up for the truth by displaying moral courage.

Moral courage refers to saying and defending what is right in situations that are unethical and have risky consequences. However, this concept, which is a subtype of prosocial behavior, involves high risk because it entails social costs for the individual and usually results in negative experiences rather than being rewarded (Coşkun & Cingöz-Ulu, 2022). Fear of exclusion or leaving the job can make it difficult for employees to show moral courage in the workplace. In addition to all this, when we look at the issue from a different perspective, employees' inability to perceive ethically questionable situations or not knowing what to do even if they perceive them can cause them to remain silent in the face of ethical situations. Therefore, instead of wishing that an unethical situation does not occur, it is important to provide the necessary training directly and indirectly so that employees can take the right steps in such situations and to make employees feel supported after such situations (Sekerka et al., 2009). Providing this support depends on the ethical climate of the organizations and the ability of leaders to be role models.

Brown et al. (2005) define ethical leadership as exhibiting correct behaviors that are accepted as normative through personal actions and relationships and encouraging followers with factors such as open communication and reward mechanisms in response to such behaviors. Accordingly, the ethical leader has a series of behaviors such as constantly sending ethical messages and holding followers accountable for ethical behaviors, and the fact that these are done with a purpose and justice contributes to the followers' perceptions of ethical leadership (Trevino et al., 2000). In addition, as mentioned above, incentive

mechanisms transform this into a kind of learning process, that is, leaders influence their followers' understanding of impact through modeling their ethical behavior (Brown et al., 2005). After discussing the importance of ethical leadership, it is also essential to address the concept of ethical climate. Ethical climate is defined as the attitude and common perception of what the correct behavior is and how to behave in situations that need to be examined ethically in an organizational sense (Victor and Cullen, 1988). The concept is also linked to the norms, rules and practices that affect the ethical behaviors of employees. Ethical climate also provides solutions to employees on how to evaluate the problems they encounter (Martin and Cullen, 2006). While the ethical climate determines the ethical standards of the organization, ethical leaders act as a guide for employees and facilitate them to engage in correct behavior.

In addition to organizational factors, individual factors also play a determining role in moral courage. It is known that personality has tendencies that affect moral courage positively and negatively (Baumert et al., 2024). According to Bandura (1999), moral disengagement is a tendency that causes individuals to rationalize and normalize situations instead of being disturbed by unethical situations that contradict ethical principles. Accordingly, the person can find explanations for himself through various mechanisms by throwing off responsibility. This can detach employees from the context. That is, even if the ethical context is strong, a tendency toward moral disengagement may inhibit individuals from demonstrating moral courage. Considering all this, the responsibility of professionals and academics is to understand moral courage and examine the antecedents that facilitate this behavior.

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between ethical leadership and moral courage, examining the mediating role of ethical climate in this relationship and the moderating role of moral disengagement between ethical climate and moral courage. The main subject of our research is moral courage, along with the other variables: ethical leadership, ethical climate, and moral disengagement, which will be particularly emphasized. Examining these variables will contribute to increasing the number of resilient and determined employees in the face of unethical situations and perhaps offer insights into the variables that should be considered in the recruitment process and the creation of ethical work environments that protect and sustain ethical values. In this way, the study aims to offer a roadmap to keeping ethical values alive in the workplace.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Moral Courage

Today, when courage is mentioned, fictional heroes and people who overcome physical dangers and reach their goals in extraordinary circumstances usually come to mind. So is courage limited to physical actions only? When seeking an answer to this question, it may be useful to make a distinction between two basic types of courage. These are physical courage and moral courage. Miller (2005) defines moral courage as the courage of one's own beliefs, that is, the courage to do the right thing in situations where others turn a blind eye, ignore, or choose not to act. Although ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle discussed moral courage in the context of war, they prioritized it over the physical. Nowadays, it is accepted that courage can be shown in different areas of life, outside of the battlefield. As mentioned above, whether courage is physical or moral depends on the type of fear an individual faces. These fears include fear of physical harm or death, and fear of losing moral integrity, authenticity, or social disapproval. Moral courage is also related to physical courage (Putman, 1997; cited in Miller, 2005). Moral courage requires an individual to protect their ethical values. However, it is not limited to this, it also includes taking risks for others. The individual defends what is right by supporting someone who is being treated unfairly, by intervening instead of remaining silent in the face of an unethical situation, and by going beyond compliance. It aims to protect universal values and realize an ideal. Moral courage involves not only maintaining an ethical stance but also creating a benefit for others. Therefore, it is meaningful to consider it within the framework of prosocial behavior.

Behaviors that people aim to create benefit, that they carry out voluntarily and thinking of others rather than expecting something in return are called prosocial behavior (Esmer and Özdaşlı, 2018). Prosocial behaviors cover a wide range of actions that aim to benefit one or more people, such as helping, showing moral courage, sharing, and donating (Batson, 1998, p. 282; cited in Osswald et al., 2011). Prosocial behavior is of great importance as it is necessary to maintain positive social relationships and promote social harmony (Ding et al., 2018). The fact that prosocial behavior, in addition to its contribution to individual and social development, has a preventive effect on negative behaviors. Thus, it increases the importance of this issue and makes it worth studying (Coşkun & Cingöz-Ulu, 2022).

Prosocial behavior is divided into two groups according to purpose and content: helping and moral courage. Helping behavior is also divided into two groups: altruism and egoistic helping behavior.

Altruism is done voluntarily without expecting anything in return, while egoistic helping is done with the expectation of a reward or return. The other branch, moral courage, requires the individual not only to help others, but also to take social costs and risks. This aspect makes it different from other prosocial behaviors (Coşkun & Cingöz-Ulu, 2022).

Moral courage is the behavior of standing behind the truth with courage in the face of unethical and risky situations. This behavior, which is an indicator of commitment to ethical values, is also a protective shield for other values. Moral courage means that individuals take risks and face up to the values they believe to be right. Universal values such as honesty, responsibility, respect, justice, and compassion form the basis of moral courage, and when increasing ethical violations among the next generations are considered, the importance of transferring these values to the future becomes clear (Kidder, 2005).

Moral courage is defined as the intervention of individuals against situations where moral principles are violated, without aiming for personal benefit, even at the risk of negative consequences for oneself (Baumert et al., 2013). Moral courage focuses on protecting moral norms (Miller, 2005; Kidder, 2005). Moral courage targets the perpetrator(s), which distinguishes it from helping behavior and other forms of compliance with moral norms (Baumert, 2024).

Miller (2005) explains the five major components of moral courage: these are presence and recognition of a moral situation, moral choice, behavior, individuality, and fear. The first step of moral courage is to recognize a morally critical situation. In such a situation, the individual evaluates her moral values and principles together with her intuition. For example, it is a moral situation for someone to be treated unfairly, and witnessing this situation is a test for the observer. This moment makes a call to the observer and demands that he take action. This is the beginning of moral courage. The second component, moral choice, includes the individual's need to choose the morally correct option when faced with an unethical situation. When making this choice, the individual should take into account her moral values, principles and intuitions, as we mentioned above. A choice, even if legally correct, may conflict with the morally correct option. This shows that moral courage should be displayed not only within the framework of the law, but also in accordance with the individual's moral values. The third component is behavior, and this includes an Aristotelian perspective. Accordingly, moral courage is achieved not only by making/knowing the right decision internally, but also by putting it into action. In other words, knowing what to do is not enough, it is necessary to put it into action. Behavior is a critical element in distinguishing moral courage from moral judgment. Knowing that it is right to help someone is different

from actually helping that person. Behavior is a concretization that reflects one's moral decision and brings it to life. The fourth component is individuality. Moral courage means that an individual adheres to his or her own values and takes responsibility alone in situations where the majority remains passive. Because if everyone else is doing/can do the same thing, it is questionable whether this is moral courage. Moral courage is usually something that a minority of individuals show by taking risks. Individuals who act in line with ethical values, regardless of the inaction of the majority, during times when they remain silent, can be given as an example. Moral courage is generally an individual action, because when the majority is in harmony, the individual acts alone, adhering to ethical values. It is also possible to carry it out as a group. However, the individual assumes responsibility for his/her own decisions and actions alone. The fifth and final component is fear. Moral courage requires acting despite fear. Acting in difficult situations brings fear with it. This fear is an inseparable part of moral courage because the individual knows the consequences of his/her action, that is, the risks it carries, and eventually faces these consequences. Fear makes moral courage more meaningful because, as mentioned, the individual dares to do the right thing despite his/her fear and does it. At this point, the important thing to focus on is not fearlessness, but rather acting despite fear. As a result, according to this component, moral courage consists of recognizing a moral situation, making the right choice, taking action, acting individually and continuing despite fear. When one of these components is missing, moral courage is not fully realized. It should be emphasized that moral courage is a critical virtue in protecting the individual's ethical values and ensuring social justice (Miller, 2005).

2.1.1 The Importance of Moral Courage

It is important to address the issue of moral courage because today's world is changing rapidly and becoming more complex with the development of technology, so the impact of ethical decisions is increasing on a global scale. In order to cope with ethical dilemmas and ensure public safety, individuals need to show the courage to do the right thing in the ever-growing chaos. In this way, it will be possible to protect ethical values at the social level. Moral courage is an indispensable element for creating a more just and honest world (Kidder, 2005).

Kidder (2005) explains the importance of moral courage with the metaphor of light and darkness. According to him, moral courage is like lighting a small candle in a dark room. Darkness, that is, evil, is actually the absence of light, and this results from the lack of light, that is, goodness. However, lighting a small candle is enough to illuminate the darkness. Because darkness is not an active force, it is only the absence of goodness. Behaviors that represent goodness can eliminate evil, just like lighting a candle.

Baumert (2024) states that moral courage is usually associated with people who risk their lives in extraordinary situations. However, he emphasizes that it is also possible to show moral courage in the face of injustice and harassment encountered in daily life. However, he also states that the intervention of observers is quite rare. Because, as mentioned above, it is a prosocial behavior with social costs (Coşkun & Cingöz-Ulu, 2022).

2.1.2 Dimensions of Moral Courage

Moral courage, as mentioned above, is the ability of individuals to intervene against violations of moral norms, taking into account possible negative consequences, provided that it is based on ethical/moral principles (Sekerka et al. 2009). Sekerka et al. (2009) consider moral courage as a professional competence and explain it in five dimensions within the framework of an ideal in which organizations internalize and implement ethical values. The dimensions consist of moral agency, multiple values, endurance of threats, going beyond compliance, and moral goals.

The first dimension, moral agency, refers to the individual's predisposition to act morally and their will to continue to do so. Individuals who display moral courage are ready to take action in the face of an ethical challenge. This does not mean taking action immediately, but it does mean feeling responsible and quickly assuming it. This means that individuals can take action without hesitation, as moral actors, in the face of an ethical situation, instead of thinking about what to do. The second dimension, multiple values, refers to individuals' ability to observe and use professional and organizational values together with their personal values. Accordingly, individuals can combine and harmonize different values and use them. In other words, individuals make decisions by considering both the values of the organization and their personal values. The third dimension, endurance of threats, corresponds to the ability of an individual to take action despite risky situations. Rather than physical courage, this dimension involves the individual risking their status, identity or character to do the right thing. Individuals who exhibit moral courage take action and overcome situations by managing emotions such as fear, anxiety or doubt. The fourth dimension, going beyond compliance, refers to not only complying with the rules but also working towards realizing them based on ethical ideals. In other words, individuals who demonstrate moral courage do not only meet legal requirements, but also try to understand the real purpose behind these rules and act ethically in the final step. The fifth and final dimension is moral goals. This dimension corresponds to the individual's efforts to not only fulfill their duty but also to aim for a virtuous outcome. Individuals who display moral courage adopt the goal of a greater good by prioritizing virtues such as honesty and justice. This also brings about the individual's consideration of others and society beyond

their own interests. As a result, these dimensions explain moral courage, which is considered as a competence, how individuals behave in ethically critical situations and their determination to do the right thing, and within this framework, individuals do not only comply with the rules, but also aim for a greater understanding of good.

2.1.3 Barriers to and Development of Moral Courage

Miller (2005) discusses various social and personal costs of moral courage. These include social exclusion, loss of career, physical or psychological harm, and facing social reaction. In addition, personal interests and personal comfort may be negatively affected, and individuals may find themselves in uncertain situations, not knowing what consequences they will face after demonstrating moral courage. Individuals who display moral courage may face the fear of being ostracized, alone, and rejected by society when they do not conform to the majority opinion. At the same time, standing up to an injustice in environments of violence and oppression can increase the risk of being subjected to threats or attacks. Being constantly criticized, ridiculed, and pressured may negatively affect an individual's mental health. The reaction of society is also an important factor. Those who take a different stance may be labeled as nonconformists or troublemakers. This damages their social status. In traditional societies, opposing the norms may cause the individual to be condemned even by their family and close circle. Getting out of the comfort zone may require time, resources, and energy. Furthermore, since individuals cannot fully predict the consequences, the uncertainty factor comes into play. This may prevent them from taking risks. Besides these, there is actually another step that prevents the person from taking action, and that is not knowing what to do. Some people cannot recognize situations or remain passive because they cannot figure out how to act. Similarly, in the process of making a moral choice, an individual may not know how to decide in the face of a moral dilemma they notice. This uncertainty can make it difficult for an individual to act courageously against unethical situations.

When listing the obstacles to showing moral courage, Baumert (2024) mentions that an individual has to face not only the perpetrator but also the reaction of other witnesses. The individual may face situations such as being ridiculed by other witnesses, being ostracized, or even being disapproved of by the victim. In addition, evaluating a situation, questioning the need to intervene, and thinking about what can be done requires time and energy. These costs, which are difficult to notice but can be effective deterrents, are why individuals may choose the easy option of ignoring instead of intervening (Baumert, 2024).

There are a number of suggestions for developing and encouraging moral courage. These can be listed as education, habit formation, use of stories and heroes, social support and strategies for coping with fear. Education is important for establishing the basis of moral courage. However, this education is not limited to transferring information only and includes practice in order to make correct behaviors a habit. Stories provide concrete examples of right and wrong, and heroes provide role models. In addition, social and organizational support also encourages moral courage. Highlighting individuals who exhibit moral courage in society and workplaces will encourage others to exhibit ethical behaviors. One way to encourage moral courage is by rewarding. In addition, creating safe environments will ensure that individuals are not afraid to tell the truth. Creating open communication channels and mechanisms to protect employees will ensure that moral courage is supported at the organizational level. Strategies should be developed for individuals to recognize their fears and cope with them in situations that require accepting fear and doing the right thing. Individuals should be encouraged by teaching techniques for reshaping emotions and controlling impulses in order to overcome fear. In addition to all this, when guidance and training are provided to individuals to reduce uncertainty, it will be easier for them to have a clear idea of how they should act (Miller, 2005).

Individual-based studies; Baumert et al. (2024) investigated which personal processes are effective in displaying moral courage, and found that the most important factor that increases intervention is the individual's perception of self-efficacy as an internal (dispositional) determinants. Additionally, moral disengagement reduces the individual's sense of responsibility and reduces the likelihood of intervention. In addition, according to Abdollahi, Iranpour, and Ajri-Khameslou (2021), there is a positive and significant relationship between resilience and professional moral courage among nurses.

2.1.4 Moral Courage in Organizations

Remaining silent against unethical behavior within the organization may cause problems to become more unsolvable, therefore it is important for employees to adopt ethical values and behave accordingly in the organization's operating processes (Yollu et al., 2024). From this we arrive at the idea that moral courage should be fostered in organizations. It provides resistance against phenomena such as group pressure, routinized unethical practices and culture of silence in organizations. It helps to create careful organizational environments where abuse, injustice and corruption are controlled. In addition, the fact that moral courage is not innate but a behavior that can be learned and reinforced is a very valuable reason for us to consider it in an organizational context (Serrat, 2017).

Yollu et al. (2024) found that there is a positive relationship between authentic leadership and subordinates' moral courage, and that psychological capital mediates this relationship. Khoshmehr et al. (2020) found a positive relationship between employees' psychological empowerment and moral courage. Taraz et al. (2019) found that there is a positive relationship between ethical climate and moral courage. Awad and Hassan (2022) revealed that crisis leadership and ethical leadership are positively related to the moral courage of nurses and ethical climate plays a mediating role in this relationship. Pakizekho and Barkhordari-Sharifabad (2022) found that there is a positive relationship between ethical leadership and moral courage. Lotfi-Bejestani et al. (2023) found that perceived organizational justice is positively related to moral sensitivity and moral courage and negatively related to moral distress. They also found that moral sensitivity and moral courage are positively related to moral distress. Mostafa (2019) found a negative relationship between abusive supervision and moral courage and a positive relationship between moral efficacy and moral courage. In addition, moral courage can appear in different faces. First, whistleblowing occurs through reporting of wrongdoing within the organization and plays a role in organizations with ethical weaknesses. Elhihi et al. (2025) found that moral courage acts as a mediator between ethical leadership and error reporting behavior. Similarly, Li et al. (2025) claimed that employees' respect for their work contributes positively to their moral courage. Conscientious dissent appears as resistance to unethical practices within the organization, demonstrated by individuals who strive to create powerful change. In addition, social entrepreneurship is the production of innovative solutions by taking ethical risks while considering the well-being of others (Comer & Vega, 2011). Challenging the misbehavior of superiors, intervening in the misbehavior of colleagues, resisting unethical orders, confessing mistakes, and initiating positive change are also different faces of moral courage (Witt & Tanner, 2025). Principled organizational dissent and employee voice can also be considered as related concepts for the improvement of existing policies.

In order to promote moral courage, it is important to address relevant organizational and individual factors, such as ethical leadership, ethical climate, and moral disengagement.

2.2 Ethical Leadership

The concept of ethical leadership has become increasingly important in today's business world. This leadership style aims to protect universal values such as justice, honesty, and transparency, as well as achieving organizational goals. Thus, an ethical perspective is taken for both stakeholders and society.

Leaders, who prioritize moral principles in their decision-making processes, shape the organization by reflecting these principles through their actions.

Brown et al. (2005) define ethical leadership as the demonstration of normatively appropriate behavior through personal actions and interpersonal relationships and the promotion of such behavior to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making. The first component of this definition, which is considered as a constitutive definition, is the display of normatively appropriate behaviors through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, indicating that ethical leaders become reliable role models for their followers by exhibiting behaviors such as honesty, reliability, and justice. Normatively, appropriateness is contextual and left open-ended. The second part of the definition highlights that such behaviors are fostered among followers through two-way communication, as ethical leaders emphasize ethical issues and openly discuss them with their followers. They create a fair process by giving their followers the opportunity to express their opinions. In the reinforcement part, they reward ethical behavior by setting ethical standards and discipline those who do not comply with the rules. Finally, the decision-making part means that ethical leaders make their decisions fairly and principledly, taking into account the consequences.

Ethical leadership requires the leader to both have moral values individually and take an active role in ensuring that these values are spread and implemented throughout the organization. In other words, leaders should not only have moral values, but also spread these values to all levels of the organization and direct employee behavior in line with these values (Trevino et al., 2000).

Ethical leadership has common values with authentic, spiritual and transformational leadership types such as altruism, ethical decision-making, integrity and role modeling. However, in ethical leadership, moral management and consideration of others are at the forefront. However, the priorities are different in other leadership styles. Authentic leadership focuses on self-awareness and authenticity. Spiritual leadership focuses on vision, hope, faith, and seeing work as a calling. Transformational leadership, on the other hand, emphasizes vision, values and intellectual stimulation (Brown and Trevino, 2006).

2.2.1 Importance of Ethical Leadership

The importance of ethical leadership can vary depending on the business context and the desired outcome. If employees are doing a job where they frequently encounter ethical dilemmas, the likelihood of

ethical leaders influencing their attitudes and behaviors increases. Ethical guidance becomes more critical, especially in situations of uncertainty (Brown et al., 2005). An ethical leader should be considered an attractive, trustworthy, and legitimate role model who demonstrates normatively appropriate behaviors and emphasizes the ethical message in order to influence employee outcomes. The perceptions of followers regarding the altruistic motivation and efforts to create a fair work environment in the leader strengthen his role model. Open communication and reinforcement will increase the impact of the leader's ethical message (Brown et al., 2005). Trevino et al. (2000) support their theoretical perspective with interviews with managers. They argue that ethical leadership supports long-term business success, avoids legal problems, increases employee loyalty and satisfaction, protects the reputation of the organization, and creates trust between employees and stakeholders. When employees take their leaders as an example, they tend to adopt ethical behaviors. Ethical leadership is difficult because sometimes it may be easier to choose to act unethically, and sometimes these unethical behaviors can bring great rewards. Going beyond these and maintaining ethical leadership is a difficult process that requires personal and mental discipline. But some managers have been able to reach their positions thanks to their determination to do the right thing. Nevertheless, maintaining leadership roles and maintaining ethical values can be difficult at the same time. For this reason, while improving their ethical aspects, it will be valuable for them to learn how to adapt this to business life through training and mentoring practices. It is also important for managers to learn through feedback whether they are seen as ethical leaders by their employees. Because it will help us understand to what extent this sensitivity is reflected. Since it is not only an individual but also an organizational phenomenon, it is necessary to "be a role model", "reinforce processes by supporting them with communication" and "structure reward and punishment mechanisms accordingly". Checking and supporting on an organizational basis whether ethical values are maintained provides good preparation before crisis moments. Ethical crises are successfully managed by adhering to values, such as the Tylenol crisis in 1982. In this crisis, Johnson & Johnson quickly recalled the contaminated products and communicated transparently with the public, prioritizing consumer safety over profits. Continuity of ethical leadership is ensured by taking clear and rapid action in the face of ethical violations (Trevino et al. 2000).

2.2.2 Dimensions of Ethical Leadership

Trevino et al. (2000) explain ethical leadership in two main dimensions: moral person and moral manager. Moral person includes the leader's individual moral characteristics, behaviors and decision-making processes. In terms of individual characteristics, the leader must be true, honest and reliable.

Accordingly, the leader's words and behaviors are consistent, the leader does not lie and expresses the facts as they are. Employees trust their words because they are consistent and credible. The leader reflects his ethical attitude in his behaviors by always doing the right thing, treating employees fairly and respectfully and being open to communication. It is also important for him to adhere to ethical values in his personal life. Finally, he does not compromise on values when making decisions. He is impartial and fair and stays away from personal interests. He considers the interests of the society as well as the interests of the organization in his decisions and complies with ethical rules. The moral manager dimension includes the leader's responsibility to spread ethical values throughout the organization and guide employees in this direction. There are things that a leader needs to do to be perceived as an ethical manager. First of all, one should be a role model with visible actions, that is, set an example with ethical behavior. This gives employees a strong message about what is acceptable. In addition, ethical behaviors are noticed and imitated by employees. That is, if leaders do not set an example, it becomes difficult for employees to internalize ethical norms (Dickson et al., 2001). Secondly, communication about ethics and values is necessary. Leaders should constantly emphasize ethical values in a clear and sincere way and explain why these values are important. This way ensures that employees adopt these values. It is also important to guide them when they encounter ethical dilemmas and show them what the right behavior is. Finally, it is necessary to emphasize the reward and discipline system. The leader should reward ethical behaviors and punish unethical behaviors. Disciplinary practices should also be fair and consistent. No tolerance for ethical violations and the functioning of the system ensures that employees comply with ethical standards and is a powerful tool that shows how much the leader cares about values. These two dimensions are complementary elements for the leader to be perceived as an ethical leader. In summary, the leader must both have moral values individually and play an active role in spreading these values throughout the organization (Trevino et al., 2000).

In the same study, Trevino et al. (2000) put forward a matrix that includes four different leadership types to understand ethical leadership, according to how strong or weak leaders are in the moral person and moral manager dimensions. These are ethical leader, unethical leader, hypocritical leader, and ethically neutral leader. Ethical leaders both have strong moral values individually and take an active role in spreading and implementing these values throughout the organization, therefore they are perceived as an ethical leader by employees. Unethical leaders both lack moral values and make no effort to spread and develop ethical standards within the organization. They are seen as immoral by employees. Although hypocritical leaders verbally emphasize ethical values, their behaviors are not compatible with these values. Therefore, they are viewed by employees as inconsistent and unreliable. Ethically neutral leaders,

on the other hand, do not explicitly take an ethical stance, making it difficult for employees to understand how much the leader cares about ethical values. This may leave ethical standards unclear within the organization. As a result, ethical leadership requires both having individual moral values and spreading these values throughout the organization. Leaders should strongly embrace both dimensions to encourage ethical behaviors of employees and to sustain the success of the organization in the long term (Trevino et al. 2000).

Kirk, (2024) lists six core principles of ethical leadership. These are respect, accountability, service, honesty, justice and community. According to the principle of respect, leaders value the skills and contributions of their employees. While leaders in traditional orders expect respect, in modern ethical leadership this situation is reciprocal. Thus, healthy relationships are established in the workplace. According to the principle of accountability, leaders are responsible for their actions. They make decisions honestly, stand behind their work and produce solutions with open communication instead of blaming others in unsuccessful situations. According to the principle of service, leaders prioritize doing the right thing for employees, customers and society. They act with the understanding of service to society and engage in charity work and volunteer activities, and encourage their teams to do this kind of work. According to the principle of honesty, transparency is the basis for building trust. Leaders help employees make the right decisions by communicating openly and honestly on every issue, and this approach strengthens the reputation of the brand. According to the principle of justice, it is necessary not only to comply with the laws, but also to treat everyone fairly. At this point, leaders treat all employees and customers fairly and equally. They expect the same attitude from their teams. According to the Community principle, leaders see the organization as a community and consider the benefit of everyone. This helps them create inclusive and collaborative work environments. Ethical leaders who adopt these principles both strengthen relationships within the organization and contribute to the long-term success of the organization.

2.2.3 Ethical Leadership in Organizations

The findings regarding unethical behaviors in organizations are alarming. Unethical behaviors within the organization include unethical behaviors such as lying to internal and external stakeholders, abusive behavior, discrimination, theft, and sexual harassment. One in every two employees has witnessed these misconduct behaviors at least once (ERC, 2007). However, these behaviors go unreported for reasons such as fear of reprisals or a desire to protect the perpetrators. It is an undoubted fact that this will increase unethical behavior (Mayer et al., 2010). Ethical leaders hold organizational values and social

values together and integrate them into the organization. They conduct processes transparently and make fair decisions. The leader is a role model for ethically acceptable behaviors. Leaders can trigger or suppress employees' tendencies to behave ethically or unethically (Dickson et al., 2001). Ethical leaders consistently implement organizational ethical principles through the exemplary behaviors they set. This creates a work environment where ethical behavior becomes a natural reflex for employees. This environment plays an important role in preventing ethical violations (Mayer et al., 2010). There is a positive relationship between ethical leadership and organizational citizenship behavior, and ethical climate plays a mediating role in this relationship (Shin, 2012). Mayer et al. (2009) found that ethical leadership was negatively related to group-level deviant behaviors and positively related to organizational citizenship behaviors. Walumbwa and Schaubroeck (2009) found that ethical leadership has a positive relationship with employees' voice behavior and that psychological safety partially mediates this relationship. Chughtai et al. (2015) found that there is a positive relationship between ethical leadership and employees' commitment to work, and a negative relationship between ethical leadership and emotional burnout, and that trust in the manager plays a mediating role in these relationships. Shin (2012) found a positive relationship between ethical leadership and employees' perception of ethical climate. Yang and Wei (2018) found a positive relationship between ethical leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. In addition, organizational commitment played a mediating role in this relationship, and workplace ostracism weakened both the direct and indirect effects. According to the study by Ahmad and Gao (2018), there is a positive relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement. Psychological empowerment partially mediates this relationship. Power distance orientation weakens both the direct relationship and the indirect effect between ethical leadership and psychological empowerment. Mostafa and Abed El-Motalib (2018) found a positive relationship between ethical leadership and work commitment. Work meaningfulness is a partial mediator in this relationship. However, the relationship between ethical leadership and work commitment was observed to be weaker in employees with high work meaningfulness. According to the study of Özden et al. (2019), there is a positive relationship between ethical leadership, ethical climate, and job satisfaction. In addition, the relationship between ethical leadership and ethical climate was found to be moderate, the relationship between ethical leadership and job satisfaction was low, and the relationship between ethical climate and job satisfaction was found to be moderately positive and significant. Yang (2020) found that there is a positive relationship between ethical leadership and employee voice. In addition, organizational identification plays a partial mediating role in this relationship.

Ethical leaders can encourage employees to show moral courage. There is a positive relationship between ethical leadership and employee ethical behavior, and ethical climate plays a mediating role in this relationship (Lu & Lin, 2014). For example, a manager's defense of ethical decisions can set an example for employees to take risks and exhibit the right behavior (Shin, 2012).

According to Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986), individuals learn behaviors not only through direct experience but also by observing others, especially role models such as leaders. Through processes of attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation, individuals internalize and reproduce observed behaviors based on the consequences they see. In this way, ethical leaders, as role models, can shape employees' moral actions by modeling ethical behavior. Employees who have an ethical leader who gives messages through clear communication and is an instructive role model are expected to act decisively and show moral courage in risky situations in order to protect ethical values. Therefore, we hypothesized:

H1: Ethical leadership makes a positive contribution to moral courage.

It is also important to examine the ethical climate created by ethical leaders and how this interacts with moral courage.

2.3 Ethical Climate

Work climate is related to how an organization perceives its practices and rules. When we consider this perception on the basis of ethical practices, we examine the ethical climate. For this reason, when making any decision affecting others, members of the organization take into account the ideas that the organization accepts as correct. This shared understanding helps individuals determine which behaviors are considered ethical and guides their actions accordingly (Schneider, 1975); (Victor & Cullen, 1988). Ethical climate is defined as the attitude and common perception shown about what is the correct behavior and how to behave in situations that need to be examined in an organizational sense (Victor & Cullen, 1988). It is formed as a result of procedures, policies and practices within the organization and is the sum of the norms and standards that guide employees on how to evaluate when they encounter an ethical problem (Cullen et al., 2003); (Martin & Cullen, 2006). It is not just rules and guidelines that create an ethical climate. It is considered from another perspective and covers the decisions made by the individual as to whether an action is correct or not within the organization. This is not a situation that comes about as a result of individual differences of opinion; it is based on organizational foundations (Victor & Cullen,

1988). Thus, ethical climate represents perceptions of what is right behavior. This perception functions as a psychological mechanism that mediates the management of ethical issues (Martin & Cullen, 2006).

2.3.1 Importance of Ethical Climate

In the modern business world, organizations are required to conduct business by observing ethical values, framed by frameworks such as laws. However, the ethical image portrayed externally may not accurately reflect the internal ethical dynamics of the organization. Therefore, focusing on the perception of ethical climate can be an important guide to understanding what is happening inside (Martin & Cullen, 2006). Ethical climate generally refers to the common perceptions of employees about how they deal with ethical dilemmas and how they apply ethically correct behaviors. The contextual situation of the ethical climate affects the perceptions and interpretations of employees, which in turn guides them in a behavioral sense (Taştan, 2019). In other words, its importance comes from the fact that it affects decision-making processes as well as subsequent behavior given to ethical dilemmas (Martin & Cullen, 2006). Reward and punishment practices encourage ethical behavior; in other words, the created climate can shape the decisions of individuals who take into account the consequences of their behaviors (Schwepker, 2001). In other words, ethical climate provides employees with information about the appropriateness of the behaviors they observe in the work environment. In this way, employees learn indirectly what behaviors others approve of. The ethical climate, which helps the employee understand what is valuable and acceptable in his unit, guides the individual on appropriate behavioral norms (Mayer et al., 2010).

2.3.2 Dimensions of Ethical Climate

Victor and Cullen (1987, 1988) suggest that ethical climate is shaped on two dimensions. The first dimension, ethical criteria, represents the form of reasoning in the decision-making process. The decision-making process is divided into three main classes under the titles of egoism, benevolence and principle. These correspond to Kohlberg's (1984) three levels of moral development, namely preconventional, conventional, and postconventional. The second dimension indicates the focus of ethical reasoning, that is, the level of analysis. This dimension determines the level at which ethical issues are evaluated and is divided into three main classes: individual, local and cosmopolitan. These levels represent personal interest, group or organization interest and social responsibilities, respectively. The intersection of these dimensions creates nine different theoretical climate types. Each climate type explains what kind of decision-making criteria individuals use in the face of ethical dilemmas and how the organization encourages these criteria. The same authors later clarified five climate types through empirical studies.

They convey that these are the most common types and provide a good framework. These ethical types of climate are called instrumental, caring, independence, law and code, and rules (Victor & Cullen, 1987, 1988; Martin & Cullen, 2006). Instrumental climate is a type of ethical climate in which individuals make decisions on an egoistic basis, focused on individual or organizational interests. In this environment, ethical behavior is evaluated in the context of personal gain and the achievement of organizational goals. The idea that the end justifies the means is dominant, and unethical behavior can be rationalized when thought of as outcome-oriented. Caring climate refers to an ethical climate in which the welfare and well-being of others are prioritized in decision making. Employees consider not only their own interests but also all stakeholders, and the well-being of everyone is taken into consideration. This provides a context in which cooperation, empathy and social responsibility are valued. The climate of independence is an environment where individuals take ethical decisions independently of external rules and are guided by personal moral beliefs. Accordingly, individuals act according to their conscientious values. The idea that everyone decides for themselves what is right is dominant. Individual judgments are taken as basis. A legal and code climate is a climate in which employees base their decisions on external standards such as laws, professional ethics, or religious principles. It reflects a deontological understanding of ethics. Accordingly, when decisions are made in the organization, the question of whether it violates the law or not is taken as a reference. The rules climate is a climate in which ethical behaviors are determined within the framework of procedures and official rules determined by the organization. This climate is frequently encountered in bureaucratic structures and the key to success is considered to be compliance with the rules.

2.3.3 Ethical Climate in Organizations

Under the conditions of growth and rapid change experienced with globalization, it is important to evaluate ethical climate perceptions in order to focus on ethics in the business world and to develop more effective ethical strategies both theoretically and practically (Martin & Cullen, 2006). Leaders shape climate perception through the policies they draw attention to and the way they present them to employees (Mayer et al., 2010). Ethical climate, in which managers play a role in creating, is an important force that directs ethical behavior as well as work-related results (Schwepker, 2001). Schwepker (2001) revealed that ethical climate is positively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Ulrich et al. (2007) found a positive relationship between ethical climate and job satisfaction, and a negative relationship between ethical climate and intention to leave. Neubert et al. (2009) found that there is a positive relationship between ethical climate and job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment.

Wimbush and Shepard (1994) found that employees' ethical behavior is affected by the perceived ethical climate in the organization and that the ethical climate is shaped by managers' attitudes towards policies and practices. Based on this, we hypothesized that:

H2: Ethical leadership makes a positive contribution to the formation of ethical climate.

Leaders play a critical role in the formation of ethical climate because the ethical values of leaders are reflected in the policies, practices and climate within the organization. The leader is a role model for employees, and rewarding ethical behavior while punishing unethical behavior creates a strong ethical climate within the organization. The power of the climate comes from how well employees comply with ethical expectations (Dickson et al., 2001). Ethical leaders convey to employees that doing the right thing is expected, encouraged, and valued.

Employees develop their skills in recognizing and resolving ethical issues. It reduces the pressure to compromise ethical behavior for the sake of business goals. It creates a climate where doing the right thing is valued. Ethical leaders consistently implement organizational ethical principles through the exemplary behaviors they exhibit. This creates a work environment where ethical behavior becomes a natural reflex for employees. This environment plays an important role in preventing ethical violations (Mayer et al., 2010). The contribution of ethical climate to moral courage will emerge through some psychological mechanisms. The norm clarity provided by the ethical climate clearly conveys the message of which behaviors are considered ethical in the organization. This clarity reduces uncertainty and paves the way for more decisive action in ethical situations. In addition, when colleagues have the same attitude, they can influence each other positively. Additionally, the supportive structure of the ethical climate provides a sense of psychological safety for employees (Sayan, 2025). Thus, employees are expected not to hesitate to express their opinions against unethical practices. Taraz et al. (2019) found a significant and strong positive relationship between the ethical climate perceived by nurses and their levels of moral courage. Accordingly, we hypothesized that:

H3: Ethical climate makes a positive contribution to moral courage.

Furthermore, ethical leaders contribute to the creation of an ethical climate in the organization by influencing employees' perceptions with their attitudes and behaviors. Ethical leaders build a shared sense of ethics at the organizational level by clearly communicating to employees what is right and important. In an organizational environment with shared ethical norms, employees may be more willing to display moral courage in risky situations, making the consequences they may face more predictable.

Mayer et al. (2010) stated that ethical leadership creates a climate based on ethical norms among employees and this climate makes it easier for employees to stand up against unethical behavior. Detert and Trevino (2010) also emphasized that ethical climate supports employees to be more courageous in pursuing ethical behavior even if there are potential costs. In this way, ethical climate not only contributes to moral courage, but also can play a mediating role in the relationship between ethical leadership and moral courage. Awad and Hassan (2022) found that ethical climate has a mediating role in the relationship between ethical leadership and moral courage. Therefore, Thus, we hypothesized that:

H4: Ethical climate plays a mediating role in the relationship between ethical leadership and moral courage.

Additionally, when considering the relationship between ethical climate and moral courage, it is important to examine employee tendencies such as moral disengagement.

2.4 Moral Disengagement

According to Social Cognitive Theory, individuals control their thoughts and behaviors through self-regulation processes. Individuals who maintain their own internal moral standards through moral agency can thus choose good behaviors and avoid bad behaviors. In this way, individuals who review and evaluate their own behavior can maintain their moral standards. However, the self-regulation system is not always active, and in some cases it may be interrupted, that is, it may become disabled (Detert et al. 2008; Bandura, 1986). At this point, it is essential to discuss the concept of moral disengagement.

Moral disengagement is when individuals activate various mechanisms to end their internal accounting and avoid feeling remorse in situations where they go beyond their internal moral standards. Thanks to these mechanisms, unethical situations are trivialized and the individual relaxes by moving away from the feeling of responsibility. According to Bandura (1999), moral disengagement refers to the process through which individuals normalize unethical behaviors by rationalizing them, instead of experiencing discomfort due to their inconsistency with moral standards. Accordingly, the person leaves out the internal control system in this process, where he uses various mechanisms. Thus, he relieves himself of the responsibility and relaxes. In other words, it refers to the individual's tendency towards psychological strategies that he can use to keep negative emotions away from himself while exhibiting behaviors that contradict his own moral principles (Baumert, 2024).

2.4.1 Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement

Bandura (1986;1999) defined eight mechanisms related to moral disengagement.

Moral Justification: According to this, people generally try to morally justify their behavior before committing harmful actions. In this process, the idea that harmful behaviors serve a socially valuable or moral purpose comes to mind. Thus, with harmful behavior becoming acceptable, individuals can view themselves as virtuous people who fulfill a moral obligation. In other words, moral justification prevents the individual from feeling guilty by normalizing harmful behavior (e.g. violence) for a higher purpose. "I lied to protect someone" is an example.

Euphemistic Labeling: Language is effective in the formation of thought patterns that shape actions. The way a behavior is named can completely change the perception of it. This is used to honor harmful acts and reduce responsibility. In other words, euphemistic labeling trivializes violence, makes responsibility unclear, and desensitizes society. "Let's not say I copied, let's say I was inspired" is an example.

Advantageous Comparison: Another way of legitimization is comparison. Perception of a behavior may vary depending on what it is compared to. In this way, reprehensible actions can be shown to be virtuous. Because the more striking the thing compared, the destructiveness of one's own behavior appears better. Historical comparisons are also examples of this. Thus, it creates a psychological infrastructure for society that ensures the continuity of structural violence. "At least I didn't steal like him" is an example.

Displacement of Responsibility: people do not take responsibility for harmful actions. When this mechanism works, individuals decide to absolve themselves by holding the authority responsible for the consequences of their actions. Thus, they can do things that they would not do individually, by normalizing them under the leadership of authority. This process causes them to ignore the moral consequences of their actions, thinking that they are just doing their duty. As a result, even people with moral values can remain silent and actively take part in large-scale harmful behavior. "My manager told me to do this" is an example.

Diffusion of Responsibility: In this mechanism, when responsibility for harmful behaviors is distributed, personal agency is hidden. The feeling of responsibility can be reduced by distributing it through division of labor. When an individual is responsible for a small, isolated aspect of a job rather than all aspects of it, their attention is shifted to the efficiency of the job rather than the morality of the

whole. In addition, group decision-making can lead normally thoughtful people to make brutal decisions. Because when everyone is responsible, no one feels truly responsible. Thus, they act more brutally than in situations where they feel responsible. "We all decided together, I'm not the only one responsible" is an example.

Disregard or Distortion of Consequences: Another mechanism is for the individual to ignore or distort their actions. People avoid confronting or minimize the harm they cause due to self-interest or social pressure. Moreover, they can discredit evidence of harm. Situations where the consequences of harmful behavior are underestimated, ignored and distorted prevent the self-criticism mechanism from taking action. "It was wrong of me to do that, but no one was hurt" is an example.

Dehumanization: The individual identifies with people with whom they experience sadness or joy and develops the ability to empathize with them (Bandura, 1986). Thus, they feel empathy and a sense of responsibility towards the people they identify with. Because this creates a greater conscience effect compared to strangers. However, when this bond is broken, things change dramatically. The victim's image affects the offender. Calling the victim different, degrading or demonizing names, as well as making animal comparisons, serve this purpose. Thus, the potential for all ordinary people to act monstrously against the other arises. And they do this without questioning themselves. "He deserves it, it doesn't matter if he's upset or not" is an example.

Attribution of Blame: Another mechanism is to put the blame on the enemy or the circumstances. In this process, individuals who think they are forced to do something legitimize harmful actions as a compulsory defense. The person denies responsibility due to the idea that harmful actions are mutual, the victims deserve what happened to them, and the feeling of being obliged to do so. An evil that has its causes prevents the offenders from feeling remorse, as the victims are also considered partially responsible. When the crime is cleared, the conscience of the offenders is relieved and this doubles the pain of the victims (Bandura, 1986). "If he did his job on time, I wouldn't have to yell at him" is an example.

As a result, people have certain moral standards, and when these standards are violated, the person feels uncomfortable and self-reprimands. However, if they do not hold themselves responsible for negative consequences, they can stay away from these negative emotions. Moral Disengagement Theory also offers an explanation of how individuals relieve themselves by rationalizing the situation when engaging in unethical behavior. Through these mechanisms, unethical and unfair behaviors are renamed, their harmful effects are removed and distorted, identification with the victims is reduced, and thus a

victim's experiences are made acceptable. This rationalization makes unethical actions acceptable and helps individuals avoid feeling guilty (Bonner et al., 2016).

2.4.2 Moral Disengagement in Organizations

Widespread corruption in organizations has necessitated the examination of underlying psychological processes. Moral disengagement, one of these psychological processes, allows employees to perform unethical actions without feeling guilty by breaking the link between their internalized moral values and their behaviors (Bandura, 1991). Moral disengagement also explains employees' engagement in deceptive and fraudulent activities and severe unethical behavior (Barsky, 2011). According to Moore et al. (2012), hierarchy, group work and organizational culture can lead to the use of mechanisms. Use of these mechanisms may additionally bring large financial losses to companies in the long run. Over time, it leads employees to legitimize behaviors such as lying, that is, it triggers unethical behaviors. Machiavellianism and low empathy levels are also positively associated with moral disengagement (Moore et al., 2012). In addition, Aykanat and Yıldız (2022) found that psychopathy and narcissistic behavior are positively associated with moral disengagement. Barsky (2011) found that there is a positive relationship between moral disengagement and unethical behavior. Ebrahimi and Yurtkoru (2017) found that moral disengagement plays a mediating role in the relationship between affective commitment and unethical pro-organizational behaviors performed for the benefit of the organization. Detert et al. (2008) found that moral disengagement is positively related to unethical decision-making behavior. Bonner et al. (2016) found a negative relationship between supervisor moral disengagement and employees' perception of ethical leadership. Baumert et al. (2024) found a negative relationship between moral disengagement and moral courage. Moore (2008) found a positive relationship between moral disengagement and organizational corruption processes. Üçok (2020) emphasized that it is the duty of managers to consider compliance with ethical values in recruitment processes, implement ethical codes established by management, act objectively in dismissal decisions, and apply consistent sanctions for ethical violations in order to prevent organizational moral disengagement.

An employee with a tendency towards moral disengagement may rationalize unethical behaviors within themselves. This may lead to the normalization of these behaviors over time. As a result, the employee may not be inclined to uphold ethical values, that is, to display moral courage. Because the internal moral standards of employees with high levels of moral disengagement are disconnected from their actions. Therefore, these employees are less likely to demonstrate moral courage (Baumert et al., 2024). On the other hand, the ethical climate prevailing in the organization provides employees with

information about what is right and wrong. In this way, it both guides them to protect ethical values and provides a safe environment. An ethical climate can encourage employees to display moral courage in pressured situations. In other words, the ethical climate increases the likelihood of employees taking risks and doing the right thing in the face of ethical dilemmas. However, employees with a high level of moral disengagement tend to justify unethical behaviors and avoid responsibility, despite the values and norms provided by the ethical climate in the organization. This may disrupt the relationship between ethical climate and moral courage. In this context, no matter how strong the ethical climate in the organization is, employees with high levels of moral disengagement are expected to display less moral courage behavior. That is, moral disengagement may play a moderating role in the positive relationship between ethical climate and moral courage. Thus, we hypothesized that:

H5: Moral disengagement plays a moderating role in the relationship between ethical climate and moral courage.

2.5 Relevant Theories and the Conceptual Framework of the Research Model

The theories we used while establishing the research model in this study are as follows:

Moral Development Theory states that individuals' moral decisions develop in parallel with the progress in their cognitive structure. That is, over time, the individual reaches higher levels of moral reasoning. Kohlberg explains moral development in three main levels and six stages. These three main levels are preconventional, conventional and postconventional. At the preconventional level (first and second stages), the individual adapts to rules according to external rewards and punishments. While behaviors are shaped by the motivation to avoid punishment in the first stage, in the second stage, the individual makes decisions according to the criterion of benefiting by considering his own interests. At the conventional level (third and fourth stages), the individual observes the expectations of society and the maintenance of social order. In the third stage, the desire for approval dominates. In the fourth stage, importance is given to the maintenance of order. At the postconventional level (fifth and sixth stages), the individual adopts universal ethical principles and takes into account his or her inner values. The fifth stage represents the social contract and individual rights, while the sixth stage is based on moral principles. Accordingly, what influences an individual's moral behavior are moral principles that develop over time, rather than external authorities (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977).

Self-Determination Theory is a theory developed by Deci and Ryan (2008) to explain the motivation of individuals. Accordingly, individuals need to have their three basic psychological needs met

in order to demonstrate healthy functioning and develop their intrinsic motivation. These are autonomy, competence and relatedness. The theory treats motivation as a continuum. According to the theory, individuals become more intrinsically motivated through the support of these needs. While social environments that meet needs increase intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being, environments that deprive needs trigger extrinsic motivation and cause passivity and loss of motivation in the individual.

Social Learning Theory corresponds to the idea that individuals learn behavior not only through their own direct experiences but also by observing others. During the observation process, individuals observe the behaviors of role models such as teachers, leaders, and parents and the consequences of these behaviors. By reinforcing and punishing the model, the observer is more likely to learn and exhibit the behavior. The theory is explained through four processes. These are attention, retention, motor reproduction and motivation. In these processes, the behavior of the role model is observed and meaningful movements attract attention. Observed behavior is mentally represented. The behavior is physically reproduced and, depending on the observed outcome, a desire to repeat the behavior occurs. This process is not a one-to-one imitation, but rather a learning of the rules of behavior. In this way, the individual can derive appropriate behaviors in different contexts (Bandura, 1986).

Social Exchange Theory, Blau (1964), addresses the balance of giving and taking. Accordingly, individuals look for the harmony between what they give and what they receive. If these two do not match, they try to eliminate the incompatibility between them. Individuals who receive kindness will tend to give kindness. In other words, a behavior is met with a response in the same direction. But the obligations in this relationship are unclear. In other words, it is not known when and how a positive behavior will be reciprocated. This emphasizes that there is a trust-based transfer in the balance of give and take.

Ethical Climate Theory offers an approach to understanding ethical behavior in an organizational context. According to the theory, ethical climate is the set of ethical norms and standards that employees consider to be widely adopted in the organization. The theory addresses ethical climate in two dimensions: ethical decision criteria and level of analysis. Ethical decision criteria represent those adopted by individuals in the decision-making process. The level of analysis determines the reference point on which ethical decisions are focused. The perception of ethical climate affects the way employees make decisions on ethical issues, which in turn determines whether they exhibit ethical or unethical behavior. (Victor & Cullen, 1988).

Moral Disengagement Theory explains how individuals deceive themselves and morally justify behaviors that violate their internal moral standards. It corresponds to the individual's process of coping with self-contradiction. It is part of Social Cognitive Theory. Accordingly, when an individual acts contrary to his or her internal values, he or she is confronted with self-control mechanisms such as shame and guilt. At this point, the mechanisms are temporarily disabled by some cognitive mechanisms (Bandura, 1986). Unethical and unfair behaviors are renamed, their harmful effects are removed and distorted, identification with victims is reduced, and thus the mechanisms that make what a victim experiences acceptable, and the feeling of discomfort in the face of unethical behaviors/situations, are eliminated (Bonner et al., 2016).

According to Social Learning Theory, ethical leaders serve as role models for employees. Employees who observe the behavior of an ethical leader learn to act ethically both directly and indirectly. In addition, the leader's attitude towards ethical issues can encourage employees to show moral courage. According to Ethical Climate Theory, leaders shape the ethical climate with their policies and practices within the organization. They can strengthen the common perception of ethics with reward and punishment systems. Ethical climate can make it easier for employees to adopt ethical behavior. According to social learning theory, employees can gain knowledge about norms. According to Social Exchange Theory, employees may feel responsible to their leaders and the organization, and this may motivate them to take action. According to Self-Determination Theory, one can strengthen one's belief in oneself through internal motivations. Also, according to Moral Development Theory, individuals who reach the postconventional level can act more courageously in defending ethical values. A strong ethical climate can provide employees with the foreknowledge that correct behavior will be met with positive results. This may make it easier for them to take risks. According to moral disengagement theory, employees can rationalize unethical behavior, which may reduce their tendency to intervene in unethical issues.

In summary, ethical leadership and ethical climate contribute directly and indirectly to moral courage, while moral disengagement can weaken these relationships. The hypotheses and research model created in this direction are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Ethical leadership makes a positive contribution to moral courage.

Hypothesis 2: Ethical leadership makes a positive contribution to the formation of ethical climate.

Hypothesis 3: Ethical climate makes a positive contribution to moral courage.

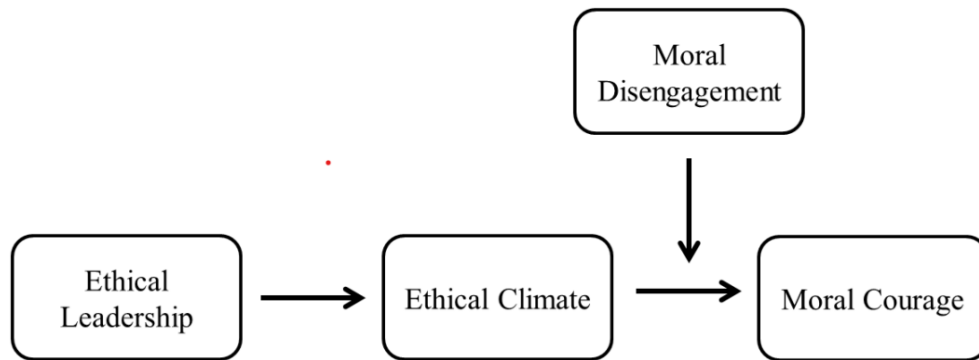
Hypothesis 4: Ethical climate plays a mediating role in the relationship between ethical leadership and moral courage.

Hypothesis 5: Moral disengagement plays a moderating role in the relationship between ethical climate and moral courage.

Research Model

The research model tested in this study is given below.

Figure 1



3. METHOD

In this section, information on the data collection tools and procedure, the sample of the research, and the process followed in the analysis of the data are included. In accordance with the purpose of the research, quantitative research method was adopted; the obtained data were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques.

3.1 Research Instruments

In this study, four scales were used to measure the relationship between moral courage, ethical leadership, ethical climate, and moral disengagement. In addition, an information form including demographic characteristics of the participants such as age, gender, and total tenure was added.

Moral Courage: The “Professional Moral Courage Scale” developed by Sekerka et al. (2009) was used to measure moral courage. The scale consists of five dimensions and fifteen items. Its adaptation to Turkish was made by Yollu et al. (2024) and the Cronbach alpha value was measured as 0.94. The answers were rated with six points from 1 - strongly disagree to 6 - strongly agree. Sample items from the scale “When I encounter an ethical challenge, I take it on with moral action, regardless of how it may pose a negative impact on how others see me” and “I hold my ground on moral matters, even if there are opposing social pressures” (see Appendix A, Section 4 for the scale).

Ethical Leadership: The “Ethical Leadership Scale” developed by Brown et al. (2005) was used to measure ethical leadership. The scale consists of a single dimension and ten items. The Turkish version was taken from the study of Çetin Kılıç and Eser (2022), and the Cronbach alpha value was found to be 0.96. In the original study by Brown et al. (2005), the Cronbach alpha was reported as 0.90. The answers were rated with six points from 1 - strongly disagree to 6 - strongly agree. Example items from the scale: “My manager disciplines employees who violate ethical standards”, and “My manager sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics” (see Appendix A, Section 3 for the scale).

Ethical Climate: The “Ethical Climate Scale” developed by Qualls and Puto (1989) and revised by Schwepker et al. (1997) was used to measure ethical climate. In Schwepker et al.’s (1997) study, the scale demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.892. The scale consists of a seven-item. Its adaptation to Turkish were made by Çiçek and Deniz (2017) and the Cronbach alpha value was measured as 0.88. The answers were graded with six points from 1 - strongly disagree to 6 - strongly

agree. Sample items from the scale: “My company has policies with regards to ethical behavior” and “Unethical behavior is not tolerated in the organization I work for” (see Appendix A, Section 2 for the scale).

Moral Disengagement: To measure moral disengagement, the “Moral Disengagement Scale” developed by Moore et al. (2012) was used. Moore et al. previously developed a scale consisting of eight dimensions and twenty-four items. They later tested the eight and sixteen-item shortened versions of this scale and decided that it was usable. The scale we used in this study is a short version of eight items and consists of a single dimension. The Turkish adaptation was made by Ekmekçioğlu and Aydoğan (2019) and the Cronbach alpha value was found to be 0.91. In the original study by Moore et al. (2012), the Cronbach alpha was reported as 0.80. The answers were rated with six points from 1 - strongly disagree to 6 - strongly agree. Sample items from the scale: “It is okay to spread rumors to defend those you care about” and “People who get mistreated have usually done something to bring it on themselves” (see Appendix A, Section 5 for the scale).

3.2 Procedure

This research aimed to reach white-collar participants working in the public and private sectors in Turkey. During the data collection process, online survey tools were preferred to ensure that participants had easy access to the survey. In this regard, the questionnaire was made available online using Google Forms. Snowball sampling method was used to determine the participants. The researcher first shared the survey link with his/her social and professional circle, and then the participants were asked to forward the survey to their own circles. Thanks to this chain sharing method, individuals from different sectors and institutions were reached. As a result of this process, data were collected from a total of 250 white-collar employees working in various fields in the public and private sectors across Türkiye. However, after applying inclusion criteria and data screening procedures, the final sample consisted of 237 participants. Additionally, the data collection process was carried out between January and March 2025.

3.3 Sample

During the data collection process, data were obtained from 250 white-collar employees working in public and private organizations operating in various sectors. The inclusion criterion was that the participants had been working in the same organization and under the same supervisor for at least four months. This minimum period was determined by the researcher to allow sufficient time for social learning to take place within the organization. Of the collected data, 10 did not meet these inclusion criteria and 3 were outliers and were therefore not included in the analyses. As a result, the analyses were conducted on data from 237 participants.

Table 1: Some Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

Sociodemographic characteristics	N	%	Sociodemographic characteristics	N	%
	237	100		237	100
Gender			Work Group Size		
Female	155	65.4%	5 and below	73	30.8%
Male	82	34.6%	6-15	102	43.0%
Marital status			16-30	26	11.0%
Married	118	49.8%	31-100	29	12.2%
Single	119	50.2%	101 and above	7	3.0%
Age			Tenure with Current Supervisor		
25 and lower	35	14.8%	0-5 years	198	83.5%
26-35	109	46.0%	6-10 years	19	8.0%
36-45	50	21.1%	11-15 years	10	4.2%
46 and higher	43	18.1%	16 years and above	10	4.2%
Education			Sector		
High school	13	5.5%	Public	75	31.6%
Associate degree	17	7.2%	Private	162	68.4%
Bachelor's degree	139	58.6%	Industry of the Organization		
Master's degree	60	25.3%	Banking/Finance	12	5.1%
Doctorate (PhD.)	8	3.4%	Textile	9	3.8%
Total Tenure			Information Technology	15	6.3%
0-5 years	93	39.2%	Food Industry	14	5.9%
6-10 years	38	16.0%	Automotive	11	4.6%
11-15 years	34	14.3%	Energy	14	5.9%
16 years and above	72	30.4%	Construction	18	7.6%
Tenure at Current Organization			Logistics	14	5.9%
0-5 years	165	69.6%	Tourism	6	2.5%
6-10 years	28	11.8%	Investment	6	2.5%
11-15 years	23	9.7%	Legal Services	3	1.3%
16 years and above	21	8.9%	Education	76	32.1%
			Healthcare	31	13.1%
			Communication	8	3.4%

The sample group consisted of 237 employees, 155 female (65.4%) and 82 male (34.6%). Of these, 118 were married (49.8%) and 119 were single (50.2%). The mean age of the participants was 35.08 (SD=10.421) and the majority were between 26 and 35 years old (46.0%). Additionally, the majority (58.6%) have a bachelor's degree. 75 (31.6%) of the participants work in the public sector and 162

(68.4%) work in the private sector. The organizations they work with operate in different fields such as education, healthcare, constructions, information technology, food industry, energy and logistics. The total tenure of the participants is mostly between 0-5 years (39.2%). The majority have been working in the current organization for 0-5 years (69.6%). The majority have been working with their current managers for 0-5 years (83.5%). Finally, in terms of team size, the majority work in groups of 6 to 15 people (43.0%). The results can be seen in Table 1.

3.4 Data Analysis

IBM SPSS 22 were used to test the research model. To assess the factor structures of the scales, Factor analysis was conducted. In order to test the hypotheses, correlation analysis and regression analysis were performed. Additionally, an independent sample t-test and Kruskal-Wallis test were conducted to examine the effect of demographic variables. Hypothesized relationships were tested using linear regression analysis. Finally, mediator and moderator tests were performed through hierarchical regression analysis.

4. RESULTS

4.1 FACTOR AND RELIABILITY ANALYSES

Factor analysis and reliability analysis were performed for the scales used in the study, respectively.

4.1.1. Factor and Reliability Analyses for Moral Courage

Table 2: Factor and Reliability Analyses for Moral Courage Scale

Variables	Factor Loading
Moral Agency & Multiple Values (Variance Explained: 43,051 % Cronbach Alpha Value: .846)	
3. My work associates would describe me as someone who is always working to achieve ethical performance, making every effort to be honorable in all my actions. (Moral Agency)	.74
5. No matter what, I consider how both my organization's values and my personal values apply to the situation before making decisions. (Multiple Values)	.72
4. I am the type of person who uses a guiding set of principles from the organization as when I make ethical decisions on the job. (Multiple Values)	.72
1. I am the type of person who is unfailing when it comes to doing the right thing at work. (Moral Agency)	.70
2. When I do my job, I regularly take additional measures to ensure my actions reduce harms to others. (Moral Agency)	.68
6. When making decisions I often consider how my role in the organization, my command, and my upbringing must be applied to any final action. (Multiple Values)	.50
Going Beyond Compliance & Moral Goals (Variance Explained: 8,214 % Cronbach Alpha Value: .796)	
14. I think about my motives when achieving the mission, to ensure they are based upon moral ends. (Moral Goals)	.78
13. It is important for me to use prudential judgment in making decisions at work. (Moral Goals)	.71
12. It is important that we go beyond the legal requirements but seek to accomplish our tasks with ethical action as well. (Going Beyond Compliance)	.68
15. I act morally because it is the right thing to do. (Moral Goals)	.65
11. When I go about my daily tasks, I make sure to comply with the rules, but also look to understand their intent, to ensure that this is being accomplished as well. (Going Beyond Compliance)	.50
Endurance of Threats (Variance Explained: 8,064 % Cronbach Alpha Value: .726)	
8. I hold my ground on moral matters, even if there are opposing social pressures.	.83
7. When I encounter an ethical challenge, I take it on with moral action, regardless of how it may pose a negative impact on how others see me.	.75
9. I act morally even if it puts me in an uncomfortable position with my superiors.	.61
Total Variance Explained: 59,330 % Cronbach Alpha Value: .894	
KMO and Bartlett's Test	
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	0,891
	Approx. Chi-Square 1368,927
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df 91
	Sig. 0

As a result of the factor and reliability analyzes performed for the Moral Courage Scale, it was seen that the scale consisted of three factors, whereas it was originally five factors. In addition, the scale explained 59.330% of the total variance. Factor loadings ranged between .508 and .743 for the first factor, .509 and .783 for the second factor, and .610 and .839 for the third factor. The first factor is called "Moral agency & multiple values" ($\alpha = 0.846$), the second factor is called "Going beyond compliance & moral goals" ($\alpha = 0.796$) and the third factor is called "Endurance of threats" ($\alpha = 0.726$). The overall reliability coefficient of the scale (Cronbach's Alpha) was calculated as 0.894. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was found as .891. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was found to be significant ($\chi^2 = 1368.927$; $df = 91$; $p < .001$). Additionally, according to the factor analysis results, the first factor explains 43.051% of the total variance, the second factor explains 8.214%, and the third factor explains 8.064%. Finally, three factors explaining 59.330% of the total variance were obtained. MC10 item was excluded from the analysis because it showed values close to other factors. While the original scale had five factors, three factors were obtained in this study. This suggests that in the Turkish sample, some dimensions may have merged due to cultural or semantic proximity and may be perceived as more conceptually intertwined. The results can be seen in Table 2.

4.1.2 Factor and Reliability Analyses for Ethical Leadership

Table 3: Factor and Reliability Analyses for Ethical Leadership Scale

Variables	Factor Loading						
8. My manager sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics.	.92						
5. My manager makes fair and balanced decisions.	.90						
7. My manager discusses business ethics or values with employees.	.89						
1. My manager listens to what employees have to say.	.88						
6. My manager can be trusted.	.88						
4. My manager has the best interests of employees in mind.	.86						
9. My manager defines success not just by results but also the way that they are obtained.	.85						
3. My manager conducts his/her personal life in an ethical manner.	.81						
10. When making decisions, my manager asks "what is the right thing to do?"	.81						
2. My manager disciplines employees who violate ethical standards.	.49						
Total Variance Explained: 71,049 % Cronbach Alpha Value: .952							
KMO and Bartlett's Test							
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	0,94						
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	<table style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">Approx. Chi-Square</td> <td style="text-align: left;">2318,524</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">df</td> <td style="text-align: left;">45</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">Sig.</td> <td style="text-align: left;">0</td> </tr> </table>	Approx. Chi-Square	2318,524	df	45	Sig.	0
Approx. Chi-Square	2318,524						
df	45						
Sig.	0						

As a result of the factor and reliability analyses conducted on the Ethical Leadership Scale, it was seen that the scale had a single-factor structure and explained 71.049% of the total variance. The factor loadings of the items ranged between .494 and .928. Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated as .952. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was found as .940. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was found to be significant ($\chi^2 = 2318.524$; $df = 45$; $p < .001$). The results can be seen in Table 3.

4.1.3 Factor and Reliability Analyses for Ethical Climate

Table 4: Factor and Reliability Analyses for Ethical Climate Scale

Variables	Factor Loading
2. My organization strictly enforces a code of ethics.	.83
4. My organization strictly enforces policies regarding ethical behavior.	.82
3. My organization has policies with regards to ethical behavior.	.80
1. My organization has a formal, written code of ethics.	.73
6. If an employee in my organization is discovered to have engaged in unethical behavior that results primarily in personal gain, she or he will be promptly reprimanded.	.71
5. Unethical behavior is not tolerated in the organization I work for.	.70
7. If an employee in my organization is discovered to have engaged in unethical behavior that results in primarily organizational gain, she or he will be promptly reprimanded.	.66
Total Variance Explained: 57.53% Cronbach Alpha Value: .876	
KMO and Bartlett's Test	
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	0,806
	Approx. Chi-Square 927,946
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df 21
	Sig. .000

As a result of the factor and reliability analyses conducted for the Ethical Climate Scale, it was seen that the scale had a single-factor structure and explained 57.532% of the total variance. The factor loadings of the items ranged between .666 and .839. Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated as .876. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measurement value was .806. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was found to be significant ($\chi^2 = 927.946$; $df = 21$; $p < .001$). The results can be seen in Table 4.

4.1.4 Factor and Reliability Analyses for Moral Disengagement

Table 5: Factor and Reliability Analyses for Moral Disengagement Scale

Variables	Factor Loading
2. Taking something without the owner's permission is okay as long as you're just borrowing it.	.76
7. Some people have to be treated roughly because they lack feelings that can be hurt.	.68
6. Taking personal credit for ideas that were not your own is no big deal.	.68
3. Considering the ways people grossly misrepresent themselves, it's hardly a sin to inflate your own accomplishments a bit.	.67
8. People who get mistreated have usually done something to bring it on themselves.	.64
1. It is okay to spread rumors to defend those you care about.	.63
5. People can't be blamed for doing things that are technically wrong when all their friends are doing it too.	.63
4. People shouldn't be held accountable for doing questionable things when they were just doing what an authority figure told them to do.	.61
Total Variance Explained: 44,520 % Cronbach Alpha Value: .815	
KMO and Bartlett's Test	
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	0,829
	Approx. Chi-Square 544,556
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df 28
	Sig. 0

As a result of the factor and reliability analyzes performed for the Moral Disengagement Scale, it was seen that the scale had a single-factor structure and explained 44.520% of the total variance. The factor loadings of the items in the scale ranged between .614 and .765. Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated as .815. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was found as .829. In addition, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was found to be significant ($\chi^2 = 544.556$; $df = 28$; $p < .001$). The results can be seen in Table 5.

4.2 CORRELATION ANALYSES

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted on all variables and sub-dimensions in the study.

Table 6: Correlation Analyses

Correlation coefficients among variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age	2.42	.95	1											
2. Total Tenure	2.35	1.27	.836**	1										
3. Tenure at Current Organization	1.57	.98	.571**	.629**	1									
4. Tenure with Current Supervisor	1.29	.73	.347**	.419**	.634**	1								
5. Work Group Size	2.13	1.07	.192**	.202**	.102	.057	1							
6. Ethical Climate	4.34	1.01	.115	.107	-.029	.010	.063	1						
7. Ethical Leadership	4.27	1.11	-.039	-.024	-.068	.057	-.052	.460**	1					
8. Moral Disengagement	2.26	.83	-.202**	-.195**	-.067	-.091	.013	-.179**	.009	1				
9. Moral Courage (Total)	5.16	.49	.159*	.132*	-.015	-.098	.033	.312**	.130*	-.331**	1			
10. Moral Agency & Multiple Values	5.24	.54	.103	.089	-.018	-.104	-.045	.292**	.194**	-.267**	.895**	1		
11. Going Beyond Compliance & Moral Goals	5.1	.57	.136*	.111	-.054	-.092	.086	.246**	.080	-.280**	.870**	.644**	1	
12. Endurance of Threats	5.12	.64	.193**	.156*	.057	-.04	.066	.254**	.016	-.314**	.759**	.543**	.530**	1

* P<.05; **P<.01.

The analysis was conducted on all variables and sub-dimensions in the study, including demographic characteristics, to examine the relationships between the concepts in the research model. These demographic variables were included in the correlation analysis to investigate whether they were related to individuals' levels of ethical climate, moral courage, moral disengagement, and ethical leadership. The correlation coefficient can be interpreted as follows: very weak between 0 and 0.3, weak between 0.3 and 0.5, moderate between 0.5 and 0.7, strong between 0.7 and 0.9, and very strong between 0.9 and 1 (Sürücü et al., 2023). Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients for all variables are shown in Table 6.

The results show that the dimensions of moral courage are moderately and significantly related to each other. The results of correlation analysis revealed that most of the relationships between variables were statistically significant. However, no relationship was found between tenure at current organization, tenure with current organization, tenure with current supervisor and work group size and the research variables. Additionally, no significant relationship was found between ethical leadership and moral disengagement, between going beyond compliance & moral goals and ethical leadership, and between endurance of threats and ethical leadership. Except for these three cases, all other relationships between variables were found to be statistically significant.

Significant relationships between demographic characteristics and all variables are as follows: There is a negative relationship between age and moral disengagement ($r = -.202, p < .01$), a positive relationship between age and going beyond compliance & moral goals ($r = .136, p < .05$), endurance of threats ($r = .193, p < .01$) and moral courage (total) ($r = .159, p < .05$). There were negative relationships between total tenure and moral disengagement ($r = -.195, p < .01$), and positive relationships between total tenure and endurance of threats ($r = .156, p < .05$) and moral courage (total) ($r = .132, p < .05$).

The significant relationships between all variables are as follows; A positive relationship between ethical climate and ethical leadership ($r = .460, p < .01$), moral agency & multiple values ($r = .292, p < .01$), going beyond compliance & moral goals ($r = .246, p < .01$), endurance of threats ($r = .254, p < .01$) and moral courage (total) ($r = .312, p < .01$), There is a negative relationship between ethical climate and moral disengagement ($r = -.179, p < .01$). There are positive relationships between ethical leadership and moral agency & multiple values ($r = .194, p < .01$) and moral courage (total) ($r = .130, p < .05$). There are negative relationships between moral disengagement and moral agency & multiple values ($r = -.267, p < .01$), going beyond compliance & moral goals ($r = -.280, p < .01$), endurance of threats ($r = -.314, p <$

.01), moral courage (total) ($r = -.331, p < .01$). The results are generally consistent with expectations for direction and significance between variables.

4.3 HYPOTHESES TESTING

In this study, Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were tested using standard regression analyses. Finally, mediator and moderator analyses were performed through hierarchical regression analysis for hypotheses 4 and 5.

4.3.1 Regression Analyses

4.3.1.1 Regression Test for Ethical Leadership and Moral Courage

Regression analysis was conducted on ethical leadership and moral courage.

Table 7: Regression Analysis Findings Showing the Effect of Ethical Leadership on Moral Courage

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients (β)	t-value	p	F	Adjusted R^2
	B	Std. Error					
Constant	4.924	.126		39.084	.000		
Perception of Ethical Leadership	.057	.029	.130	2.004	.046	4.017*	.017

Dependent Variable: Moral Courage

$N = 237, *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.$

The regression analysis results presented in Table 7 demonstrate a statistically significant relationship between ethical leadership and moral courage. The model was found to be significant ($F = 4.017, p < .05$), with ethical leadership explaining 1.7% of the variance in moral courage (Adjusted $R^2 = .017$). The standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = .130$) indicates a positive and significant effect ($t = 2.004, p = .046$). These findings support Hypothesis 1: Ethical leadership makes a positive contribution to moral courage.

4.3.1.2 Regression Test for Ethical Leadership and Ethical Climate

Regression analysis was conducted on ethical leadership and ethical climate.

Table 8: Regression Analysis Findings Showing the Effect of Ethical Leadership on Ethical Climate

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients (β)	t-value	p	F	Adjusted R^2
	B	Std. Error					
Constant	2.561	.233		11.014	.000		
Perception of Ethical Leadership	.418	.053	.460	7.944	.000	63.111*	.212

Dependent Variable: Ethical Climate

$N = 237$, * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

As shown in Table 8, ethical leadership has a statistically significant and strong positive effect on ethical climate. The model is highly significant ($F = 63.111$, $p < .001$), with ethical leadership accounting for 21.2% of the variance in ethical climate (Adjusted $R^2 = .212$). The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .460$) reveals a substantial effect ($t = 7.944$, $p < .001$). These findings support Hypothesis 2: Ethical leadership makes a positive contribution to the formation of ethical climate.

4.3.1.3 Regression Test for Ethical Climate and Moral Courage

Regression analysis was conducted on ethical climate and moral courage.

Table 9: Regression Analysis Findings Showing the Effect of Ethical Climate on Moral Courage

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients (β)	t-value	p	F	Adjusted R^2
	B	Std. Error					
Constant	4.510	.134		33.596	.000		
Perception of Ethical Climate	.152	.030	.312	5.040	.000	25.405*	.098

Dependent Variable: Moral Courage

$N = 237$, * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 9 presents the results testing the impact of ethical climate on moral courage. The model is statistically significant ($F = 25.405$, $p < .001$), with ethical climate explaining 9.8% of the variance in moral courage (Adjusted $R^2 = .098$). The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .312$) shows a positive and

significant effect ($t = 5.040, p < .001$). These findings support Hypothesis 3: Ethical climate makes a positive contribution to moral courage.

4.3.2 Mediation Analyses

Baron and Kenny's (1986) three-step regression technique was applied to test the mediating role of ethical climate in the relationship between ethical leadership and moral courage.

Table 10: Mediation Analysis Findings Showing the Mediating Role of Ethical Climate in the Relationship Between Ethical Leadership and Moral Courage

		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients (β)	t-value	p	F	Adjusted R ²
		B	Std. Error					
STEP 1	Constant	4.924	.126		39.084	.000		
	Perception of Ethical Leadership	.057	.029	.130	2.004	.046	4.017*	.017
Dependent Variable: Moral Courage								
STEP 2	Constant	2.561	.233		11.014	.000		
	Perception of Ethical Leadership	.418	.053	.460	7.944	.000	63.111*	.212
Dependent Variable: Ethical Climate								
STEP 3	Constant	4.526	.149		30.390	.000		
	Perception of Ethical Leadership	-.008	.031	-.018	-.255	.799	12.685	.090
	Perception of Ethical Climate	.156	0.034	.321	4.584	.000		
Dependent Variable: Moral Courage								

$N = 237, *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001$.

Table 10 presents the results of the mediation analysis demonstrating the mediating role of ethical climate in the relationship between ethical leadership and moral courage. In Step 1, ethical leadership significantly predicts moral courage ($\beta = .130, t = 2.004, p = .046$), with an explained variance of 1.7% (Adjusted R² = .017). In Step 2, ethical leadership shows a significant effect on ethical climate ($\beta = .460, t = 7.944, p < .001$), accounting for 21.2% of the variance (Adjusted R² = .212). In Step 3, when both ethical leadership and ethical climate are entered into the regression model, ethical climate significantly predicts moral courage ($\beta = .321, t = 4.584, p < .001$), while the direct effect of ethical leadership becomes non-significant ($\beta = -.018, t = -.255, p = .799$). The final model explains 9.0% of the variance in moral courage (Adjusted R² = .090). These results indicate that ethical climate fully mediates the relationship

between ethical leadership and moral courage. These findings support Hypothesis 4: Ethical climate plays a mediating role in the relationship between ethical leadership and moral courage.

4.3.3 Moderation Analyses

To test the moderating role of moral disengagement in the relationship between ethical climate and moral courage, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted based on Baron and Kenny’s (1986) approach.

Table 11: Moderation Analysis Findings Showing the Moderating Role of Moral Disengagement in the Relationship Between Ethical Climate and Moral Courage

		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients (β)	t-value	p	F	Adjusted R ²
		B	Std. Error					
STEP 1	Constant	4.510	.134		33.596	.000		
	Perception of Ethical Climate	.152	.030	.312	5.040	.000	25.405*	.098
Dependent Variable: Moral Courage								
STEP 2	Constant	5.610	.087		64.196	.000		
	Moral Disengagement	-.195	.036	-.331	-5.385	.000	28.995***	.106
Dependent Variable: Moral Courage								
STEP 3	Constant	5.172	.030		175.321	.000		
	Perception of Ethical Climate	.127	.030	.258	4.256	.000	16.766	.167
	Moral Disengagement	-.139	.030	-.282	-4.670	.000		
	Perception of Ethical Climate X Moral Disengagement	.018	.027	.041	.681	.497		
Dependent Variable: Moral Courage								

N = 237, **p* < .05; ***p* < .01; ****p* < .001.

As shown in Table 11, the moderator analysis was conducted to examine whether moral disengagement moderates the relationship between ethical climate and moral courage. In Step 1, ethical climate had a statistically significant positive effect on moral courage ($\beta = .312$, $t = 5.040$, $p < .001$), explaining 9.8% of the variance (Adjusted R² = .098). The model was highly significant ($F = 25.405$, $p < .001$). In Step 2, moral disengagement was introduced as a predictor, revealing a significant negative effect on moral courage ($\beta = -.331$, $t = -5.385$, $p < .001$). The model remained significant ($F = 28.995$, $p < .001$), with an explained variance of 10.6% (Adjusted R² = .106). In Step 3, the interaction term (Ethical Climate \times Moral Disengagement) was included to test the moderation effect. While both ethical climate ($\beta = .258$, t

= 4.256, $p < .001$) and moral disengagement ($\beta = -.282, t = -4.670, p < .001$) continued to have significant direct effects on moral courage, the interaction term was not statistically significant ($\beta = .041, t = 0.681, p = .497$). Therefore, these findings do not support Hypothesis 5: Moral disengagement plays a moderating role in the relationship between ethical climate and moral courage.

4.4 ANALYSES OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Analyses were conducted based on demographic variables.

4.4.1 Independent Sample T-test for Gender

Independent samples t-test was conducted to understand whether there is a difference between gender and variables.

Table 12: Independent Sample T-tests for Gender

Variables	Groups	N	M	SD	T-test	
					T	p
Perception of Ethical Leadership	Female	155	4.10	1.14	-3.451	.001
	Male	82	4.60	.98		

* $p < .05$.

According to the results, no difference was observed according to gender except for ethical leadership. For ethical leadership, the mean score for women ($M = 4.10$) was lower than that of men ($M = 4.60$). This result may indicate that men's perception of ethical leadership is higher than women's. Results can be seen in Table 12.

4.4.2 Independent Sample T-test for Marital Status

Independent samples t-test was conducted to understand whether there is a difference between variables and marital status.

Table 13: Independent Sample T-tests for Marital Status

Variables	Groups	N	M	SD	T-test	
					T	p
Perception of Ethical Climate	Married	118	4.51	.94	2.413	.01
	Single	119	4.19	1.05		
Moral Disengagement	Married	118	2.13	.77	-2.403	.01
	Single	119	2.39	.87		
Moral Courage	Married	118	5.26	.48	2.981	.00
	Single	119	5.08	.48		

* $p < .05$.

The results showed that there was no significant difference in perceptions of ethical leadership based on marital status. However, there were differences in terms of marital status for ethical climate, moral disengagement and moral courage. For ethical climate, the mean score for single ($M = 4.19$) was lower than that of married ($M = 4.51$). The mean score for moral disengagement for married ($M = 2.13$) was lower than that of single ($M = 2.39$). The mean score for moral courage for single ($M = 5.08$) was lower than that of married ($M = 5.26$). These findings may indicate that married employees have higher perceptions of ethical climate and also have higher levels of moral courage, while single employees have higher levels of moral disengagement. Results can be seen in Table 13.

4.4.3 Independent Sample T-test for Sector

Independent samples t-test was conducted to understand whether there is a difference between the variables and the sector.

Table 14: Independent Sample T-tests for Sector

Variables	Groups	N	M	SD	T-test	
					T	p
Perception of Ethical Climate	Public	75	4.14	0.96	-2.272	.02
	Private	162	4.45	1.02		
Perception of Ethical Leadership	Public	75	3.88	1.20	-3.785	.00
	Private	162	4.45	1.02		

* $p < .05$.

There is no difference between public and private sectors for moral disengagement and moral courage. Therefore, these are not shown in the table. There is a difference between public and private sectors in ethical climate and ethical leadership. The mean score for ethical climate for public ($M = 4.14$) was lower than that of private ($M = 4.45$). For ethical leadership, the mean score for public ($M = 3.88$) was lower than that of private ($M = 4.45$). These results may indicate that ethical leadership and ethical climate in the private sector are higher compared to the public. Results can be seen in Table 14.

4.4.4 The Kruskal-Wallis Test for Other Demographic Variables

The Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric test was conducted for demographic variables that were not homogeneously distributed. Thus, differences between groups were examined for all variables.

Table 15: The Kruskal-Wallis Tests Results

Variable		N	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H	df	Sig.
Moral Disengagement	Age group			8.669	3	.034
	25 and below	35	46,79			
	46 and higher	43	33,57			.010
	26-35	109	82,49			
	46 and higher	43	61,33			.008
	Total Tenure			10,695	3	.013
	5 and below years	93	68.76			.016
	11-15 years	34	50.97			
	5 and below years	93	92.15			.005
	16 years and above	72	71.19			

*p < .05

The Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric test was conducted for demographic variables that were not homogeneously distributed. Thus, differences between groups were examined for all variables. No differences were found in the results for education level, tenure at the current organization, and total tenure with current supervisor and work group size. However, differences were found for age groups and total tenure. According to the test results, moral disengagement shows a difference based on age groups, with a mean rank score of 46.79 for aged 25 and below, 33.57 for aged 46 and higher. This shows that participants aged 25 and below had higher levels of moral disengagement compared to those aged 46 and above. Similarly, the mean rank score of 82.49 for the 26-35 group and 61.33 for the 46 and above age group. Additionally, the difference was found between the total tenure and moral disengagement. There is a difference between the 0-5 total tenure with a mean rank score of 68.76 and the 11-15 total tenure with a mean rank score of 50.97. This shows that participants with a total tenure of 0-5 have higher levels of moral disengagement than those with a total tenure of 11-15. Similarly, there is a difference between 0-5,

with a mean rank score of 92.15, and 16 and above, with a mean rank score of 71.19. Results can be seen in Table 15.

5. DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between moral courage and certain organizational and individual variables, namely ethical leadership, ethical climate, and moral disengagement, based on data collected from white-collar employees across various sectors. In this section, the findings are interpreted in light of relevant theoretical frameworks and prior literature.

Hypothesis 1, which proposed that “Ethical leadership makes a positive contribution to moral courage”, was supported ($\beta = .130$, $p = .046$). Considering our research model, we first looked at the relationship between ethical leadership and moral courage. We found that employees' perceptions of ethical leadership positively contribute to their display of moral courage. These results indicate that ethical leadership not only reflects positively on employees but also has the power to motivate them. Moral courage is defined as the willingness to speak out and take action in defense of one's ethical principles (Sekerka et al., 2009). We may remain silent against unethical behavior due to fear and the desire to maintain relationships (Ganu, 2018). Overcoming these fears is possible with ethical leadership. Ethical leaders who inspire satisfaction and trust also inspire courage. According to Social Learning Theory, individuals shape their behavior based on the role models they observe. Ethical leaders set concrete examples for employees by exhibiting values such as honesty, justice, and transparency. Thus, employees can learn what the right behavior is by observing how their leaders behave in ethical dilemmas. A leader's opposition to unethical behavior can send a message to employees that taking risks is acceptable. The moral manager dimension of ethical leadership is seen to be related to emphasizing ethical values and living them. Creating safe environments promotes moral courage. Mentoring by ethical leaders prepare employees for ethical dilemmas and reduce uncertainty about what to do. Thus additionally, ethical leaders can gain organizational trust through consistency in their decisions. Employees may take more risks to stand up to injustice if they believe their leaders will protect them. That is, ethical leaders contribute to employees' moral courage. This is achieved by leaders' consistency with ethical values and their attitudes towards spreading values (Trevino et al., 2000). The findings are in line with the existing literature: Ganu (2018), Awad and Hassan (2022), and Pakizekho and Barkhordari-Sharifabad (2022) found that ethical leadership makes a positive contribution to moral courage. These findings align with Social Learning Theory, as ethical leaders model behaviors that empower employees to take ethical risks (Trevino et al., 2000; Sekerka et al., 2009). However, although the relationship is statistically significant, the effect size ($\beta = 0.130$) is relatively small. This may be because moral courage is a highly individual trait and is more

influenced by personality traits and dispositions such as justice sensitivity and self-efficacy (Poteat & Vecho, 2016; Baumert et al., 2024). Furthermore, employees' perceptions of ethical leadership may not always be strong or consistent enough to trigger courageous behavior. Even when employees value ethical behavior, fear of retaliation or social ostracism may prevent them from acting courageously. Furthermore, our findings suggest that perceptions of ethical leadership tend to be lower in the public sector, which may have contributed to the lower overall effect size observed.

Hypothesis 2, which proposed that “Ethical leadership makes a positive contribution to the formation of ethical climate”, was supported ($\beta = .460, p < .001$). We examined the relationship between ethical leadership and ethical climate. We found that employees' perceptions of ethical leadership contributed positively to their perceptions of ethical climate. Leaders' ethical behaviors can shape employees' shared perceptions of what is right. At the same time, they spread ethical messages through communication. Prior research has demonstrated that talking to leaders about ethical dilemmas helps employees internalize ethical standards. This can reduce uncertainty and clarify for employees what is acceptable, which can strengthen the ethical climate. The use of reinforcement mechanisms by ethical leaders helps them demonstrate desired and undesirable behaviors and thus establish organizational norms. Leaders who base their decisions on universal values are expected to create a perception of an ethical climate that takes social responsibility into account. Additionally, ethical leaders create a safe environment where employees can make ethical decisions without fear of taking risks. In other words, the perception of ethical leadership shapes the perception of ethical climate. Ethical leaders ensure the sustainability of these values by creating ethical climates. This can help employees develop a common understanding and internalize ethical behavior. The findings are parallel to previous studies in the literature: Shin (2012), Lu & Lin (2013) and Özden et al. (2019) found that ethical leadership makes a positive contribution to the formation of ethical climate.

Hypothesis 3, which proposed that “Ethical climate makes a positive contribution to moral courage”, was supported ($\beta = .312, p < .001$). We examined the relationship between ethical climate and moral courage. We found that employees' perceptions of ethical climate positively contribute to their display of moral courage behavior. Ethical climate is known as the shared perception of what is right. This perception serves as a guide for employees to determine how to behave in ethical dilemmas. Employees in an ethical climate are expected to have increased courage to intervene because they know that they are supported by the organization against unethical behavior. In an environment where rules and procedures are clear, employees will not hesitate to take action against ethical violations. In addition, the existence of

policies will provide assurance that they can tell the truth without fear of consequences. According to the postconventional level of Moral Development Theory, individuals prioritize universal values above all else and the ethical climate creates a common consciousness. This is expected to encourage employees to adopt ethical goals and promote moral courage, in addition to compliance with the rules. A climate that uses reward mechanisms on ethics will also promote moral courage. It is also known that the perception of ethical climate will provide a clear framework for what should be done and reduce uncertainty. In a strong ethical climate, an employee knows that others will act as he or she does in similar situations. In other words, the mechanisms operated by the ethical climate can support employees to display moral courage. The findings are consistent with previous studies in the literature: Taraz et al. (2019) and Awad and Hassan (2022) found that ethical climate makes a positive contribution to moral courage. A strong ethical climate may serve not only as a behavioral guide but also as a source of psychological safety that legitimizes ethically courageous actions.

However, it should be noted that the ethical climate scale used in this study focuses mainly on rule and sanction-based dimensions. This raises the possibility that ethical behaviors may stem more from external enforcement than internalized values, which challenges the assumption that strong ethical climates necessarily foster moral courage.

Hypothesis 4, which proposed that “Ethical climate plays a mediating role in the relationship between ethical leadership and moral courage”, was supported. When ethical climate was included in the model, the effect of ethical leadership on moral courage became non-significant ($\beta = -.018$, $p = .799$), while the effect of ethical climate remained significant ($\beta = .321$, $p < .001$). We examined the mediating role of ethical climate in the relationship between ethical leadership and moral courage. The findings revealed that ethical climate fully mediates this relationship. An ethical climate reduces uncertainty and makes it easier for employees to demonstrate moral courage in risky situations. It can also help employees feel that the ethical leader and the organization are behind them, thus helping them avoid fears such as job loss and exclusion (Sekerka et al., 2009). In other words, when looking at the relationship, ethical leaders create a perception of ethical climate in employees through their policies and behaviors. This perception can make it easier for employees to feel moral responsibility and take risks. As a result, the effect of ethical leadership on moral courage is mediated through ethical climate. Ethical climate can prepare the ground for employees to show moral courage by transferring the norms and environment of trust created by the ethical leader to them. The findings are parallel to previous studies in the literature. Awad and Hassan (2022) also found that ethical climate plays a mediating role in the relationship between ethical

leadership and moral courage. Additionally, this full mediation situation may indicate that ethical climate for employees becomes a more dominant explanatory factor than individual leader perception. So when we talk about a common ethical context, it can override the impact of the leader's individual behavior. Employees may now attribute moral norms not directly to the leader but to the general structure of the organization. Therefore, normative power shifts from the individual leader to a much broader organizational structure, highlighting ethical climate as the strongest determinant of moral courage.

Hypothesis 5, which proposed that “Moral disengagement plays a moderating role in the relationship between ethical climate and moral courage”, was not supported. The interaction term (Ethical Climate \times Moral Disengagement) was not significant ($\beta = .041$, $p = .497$). The negative effect of moral disengagement on moral courage has been frequently emphasized in the literature. The fact that individuals with high levels of moral disengagement are less likely to show moral courage has been supported by studies conducted in different cultures (Baumert et al., 2024; Coskun et al., 2024). However, previous studies have examined the direct effect. In this study, the moderating role in the relationship between ethical climate and moral courage was examined and it was found that it had no statistical effect. This suggests that the positive effect of ethical climate on moral courage may continue independently of individuals' levels of moral disengagement. This means that when the ethical climate is strong, moral disengagement does not influence the level of moral courage. According to Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), moral disengagement allows individuals to temporarily override their internal moral standards in order to relax rather than judge themselves when they engage in unethical behavior. Because this process is internally driven, it can operate independently of external contextual factors such as ethical climate. Therefore, the absence of a moderation effect in this study may reflect a theoretical limit. Another theoretical interpretation of the absence of a moderation effect could be that ethical climate exerts a stronger normative influence on behavior than individual tendencies. In strong ethical climates, the existence of shared norms, clarity of expectations, and institutional support can directly shape employee behavior and make individual tendencies such as moral disengagement less influential. It is also possible that moral disengagement becomes a more relevant predictor only in weak or ambiguous ethical climates, where institutional guidance is lacking or unclear. Additionally, this result may be associated with some methodological and sampling limitations. In particular, the fact that data was collected using a self-report technique brings with it the risk of social desirability bias. It is possible that participants tend to reflect themselves as more ethical and responsible individuals. In fact, this situation is supported by the low levels of moral disengagement (Mean = 2.26) and the relatively high levels of moral courage (Mean = 5.16). These findings suggest that participants may have reflected themselves in an idealized manner

rather than their actual behavior. In addition, the sample does not include those with high and low levels of moral disengagement, but rather those with generally low levels. In other words, the lack of sufficient variation in the level of moral disengagement may have made it difficult to test the moderating effect of this variable.

When we examine the mean scores for all the basic variables in the study, these provide important clues about the ethical attitudes and perceptions of the participants in the sample. As we mentioned, the mean of the moral courage variable is 5.16. This shows that the participants have a high tendency to adhere to ethical principles and do the right thing in the face of difficulties. This is a positive indicator that employees are willing to resist unethical behavior.

The variables of ethical climate (Mean = 4.34) and ethical leadership (Mean = 4.27) also have relatively high means. This indicates that participants' perceptions of ethical climate and ethical leadership are high. In fact, it is seen that ethical principles are adopted in the organizations they work in and leaders encourage ethical behavior. However, when the findings are evaluated carefully, it is seen that the perceptions of ethical climate (Mean = 4.14) and ethical leadership (Mean = 3.88) of employees working in the public sector are lower than the perceptions of employees working in the private sector (ethical climate Mean = 4.45; ethical leadership Mean = 4.45). This may indicate that ethical standards have not been sufficiently internalized in the public sector, as compared to the private sector. On the other hand, it may indicate that ethical leadership practices are less noticeable to employees. In addition, the high level of these perceptions in the private sector may result from organizations emphasizing ethical principles and managers exhibiting their behaviors accordingly. This may indicate that ethical climate and ethical leadership need to be improved in the public sector. The main reasons for the lower perceptions of ethical leadership and ethical climate in the public sector may be factors such as organizational structure, hierarchical culture and perception of merit. These differences in structure and culture make it difficult to internalize and implement ethical standards, thus negatively affecting employees' perceptions on this issue.

The moral disengagement variable appears to have a low score (Mean = 2.26). Accordingly, participants are not inclined to rationalize unethical behaviors. Other possibilities are discussed under the fifth hypothesis.

Analysis was conducted on demographic variables. It was observed that there was no difference between most groups. It was observed that there was a positive relationship between the age variable and moral courage, and a negative relationship between the age variable and moral disengagement. In other

words, it can be said that the sense of moral responsibility increases with age, and at the same time, the determination to act ethically may increase. This finding is similar to that in the literature, Yollu (2023) also found that moral courage tends to increase with age. Similarly, a positive relationship was observed between total tenure and moral courage, and a negative relationship between moral disengagement. It was observed that women's perception of ethical leadership was lower compared to men. This may suggest that female employees are either less exposed to ethical leadership behaviors or perceive them differently. The fact that women have lower perceptions of ethical leadership than men can be explained by Gilligan's (1982) ethics of care perspective. According to this perspective, women are more sensitive in interpersonal relationships and ethical evaluations. This may lead women employees to observe ethical leadership behaviors in the workplace more critically and to show higher sensitivity to these behaviors.

Considering marital status, it was observed that married individuals had higher perceptions of ethical leadership and ethical climate, lower levels of moral disengagement, and higher levels of moral courage. These results may indicate that married individuals may show higher commitment to ethical values and tend to behave ethically. This may be attributed to the stronger sense of social responsibility and commitment to normative values among married individuals. The long-term thinking tendencies and adaptability motivations of individuals with family responsibilities may increase their commitment to ethical principles. In addition, according to social role theory (Eagly, 1987), marriage is a life experience that reinforces the individual's behavior of taking responsibility and complying with social expectations.

When sectoral differences are examined, it is seen that the perception of ethical leadership and ethical climate of employees working in the private sector is higher than those working in the public sector. This difference may indicate that ethical values are more prominent in the private sector. This difference may be related to the private sector placing greater emphasis on ethical practices due to pressure from competition, customer satisfaction and corporate reputation. The fact that ethical leadership is more visible in the private sector can be explained by the fact that performance focus and accountability are more prominent. In the public sector, bureaucratic structure and administrative restrictions can make it difficult to perceive ethical leadership behaviors.

When age group and total tenure were examined, it was observed that the level of moral disengagement decreased as the years of working experience and age increased. This may indicate that both age and organizational experience reduce an individual's tendency to rationalize unethical behavior. This finding can be explained by the fact that individuals reach more advanced moral development stages with age. According to Kohlberg's moral development theory (1984), individuals begin to give more

importance to universal ethical values over time. In addition, life experience gained with age can increase the ability to address ethical dilemmas more sensibly and consistently. The decrease in moral disengagement with increasing organizational seniority can be associated with the fact that individuals' long-term employment within the organization strengthens their sense of belonging and responsibility. In addition, as work experience increases, individuals' awareness of ethical standards increases and they are likely to encounter more ethical role models. Greater adaptation of senior employees to the organizational culture may facilitate the internalization of norms that encourage ethical behavior.

It is known that moral courage is a behavior that brings risks. There may be negative feedback for the person who shows moral courage. Acting separately from the group, raising voice is a kind of rebellion. However, this rebellion is done for moral values. For this reason, it is a noble behavior. Employees who dare to speak up in the face of unethical situations can be viewed from several perspectives. One of these is the ability to make moral judgments and distinguish right from wrong. Another is that they take risks because they will face negative consequences such as being ostracized and having to leave their job. An organization should be able to convey the necessary information about ethical values to its employees. It should also be able to convey the message that it will support and protect its employees who behave correctly. Additionally, employees should be informed that if they demonstrate moral courage, this will result in positive change. Our study presents how the way to achieve this is through ethical leadership and ethical climate.

5.1 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This study contributes to the literature by addressing the concept of moral courage, which has been little studied locally and has come to the fore in international academia in recent years. In the context of Turkey, comprehensive empirical studies on the concept of moral courage at the organizational level are rare. Therefore, the study may be considered an original and significant contribution to the national literature. In addition, this study offers a multi-level analysis by considering individual, organizational and leadership-based variables together. Also, the moderating role of moral disengagement between ethical climate and moral courage has rarely been examined in the literature, and in this respect, it can be stated that the study set out with limited theoretical grounding and its findings make an important contribution. It is seen that this concept is generally discussed in the context of the health field, both locally and internationally. In this study, a survey was conducted with participants from different fields. The similarity of the data obtained with the literature may indicate that these findings are generalizable. Addressing this

concept on an organizational basis makes an important contribution to the literature in order to fill the gaps in the literature.

To explain the relationships in the study, theoretical frameworks such as Social Learning Theory and Ethical Climate Theory help to understand the theoretical foundations of the concepts in detail. Additionally, theoretical foundations that explain individual moral decision-making processes, such as Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory, can be included. This contributes to the understanding of how moral courage is shaped not only at the organizational level but also at the individual level. Examining moral courage behavior, which is usually examined through individual factors, together with the concepts of ethical leadership and ethical climate provides a comprehensive explanation in an organizational sense. In this regard, the “ethical leadership – ethical climate – moral courage” triangle may be viewed as a holistic model rarely discussed in the existing literature.

In addition to these theoretical contributions, it is also important to discuss the applicability of the theoretical frameworks used in a collectivist (Aydın, 2019) cultural context such as Turkey. For example, Social Exchange Theory, which emphasizes the expectation of reciprocity and benefit-based relationships, may have operated in a more implicit and relationship-focused manner in cultures where relational values are prominent, such as Türkiye. In this context, ethical behavior may often be shaped by loyalty, emotional commitment, and the drive to protect the relationship rather than by calculated reciprocity. Similarly, when evaluated in terms of Moral Disengagement Theory, direct mechanisms such as dehumanization or attribution of blame may be used less in cultures where interpersonal relationships are valued; on the other hand, group-centered mechanisms such as diffusion of responsibility or justification through obedience to authority may operate more dominantly. This situation is particularly striking in collectivist structures where group harmony and social integrity are highly emphasized. From the perspective of Moral Development Theory, it should be considered that social norms and family expectations may be more effective than individual values in individuals' moral justifications. This situation may culturally differentiate the individual from reaching the postconventional level based on universal ethical principles. In line with these points, in future studies, including cultural dimensions such as individualism-collectivism in the model or comparatively analyzing different cultural contexts may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms of moral courage. These considerations further emphasize the importance of contextualizing moral courage more deeply within the culture and organizational environment in which it is practiced.

Although the original Moral Courage Scale was designed as a five-factor structure, analyses indicated a three-factor structure in the Turkish context. This result may reflect a tendency for some values to be interpreted in a more culturally holistic manner, which may lead to the empirical unification of theoretically distinct dimensions. In collectivist cultures such as Turkey, individual ethical judgments and responsibilities are often evaluated within the framework of group harmony and relational dynamics. Therefore, dimensions such as “moral agency” and “multiple values” may not be perceived as clearly distinct from each other, which may explain the combination of factors observed in the analysis. These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that measurement instruments developed in different cultural settings may differ in construct due to differences in understandings of value and moral reasoning across cultures. Thus, the study also contributes methodologically by providing insight into how moral courage can be conceptualized and measured across different cultural contexts.

From a practical contribution perspective, moral courage has a direct impact on protecting ethical values and preventing unethical behavior. To avoid long-term harm, it is important for employers to develop strategies to discourage unethical behavior and encourage moral courage. Managers can shape employees' perceptions of ethical climate. This can make it easier for them to demonstrate moral courage. All of these are important when moral courage is considered as improvable.

The guidance of managers and providing information on what to do before an unethical behavior occurs are important. Because in times of crisis, when faced with ethical dilemmas, knowing what to do will make it easier for employees to take action. At the same time, the attitude of key members after an act of moral courage is important. Because the employee here has acted by taking into account the fear of being excluded or losing the job. Therefore, a careful attitude should be taken towards the employee who has taken the risk. It should be demonstrated that moral courage is supported by the organization, especially through the use of reward and punishment mechanisms. That is, organizations must create a guiding environment that both guides and inspires confidence.

In order to support ethical leadership and moral courage, practices such as ethical awareness seminars, role-playing studies and case study sessions can be implemented in organizations. Selecting individuals who are highly sensitive to ethical values in recruitment processes and including ethical behavior criteria in performance evaluation systems can reinforce such behaviors and increase moral courage. As discussed, the difference between public and private sectors should also be taken into account in terms of implementing contributions. For example, specific programs to increase the visibility of ethical leadership in the public sector could be proposed. Additionally, the applicability of the findings in the

public and private sectors may differ. Factors such as hierarchical structure in the public sector and competitive pressure in the private sector may affect ethical behavior in different ways. Especially in times of crisis (for example, during epidemics or economic crises), the importance of moral courage behaviors increases even more. Such emphasis can strengthen organizational preparedness and leadership sensitivity in the face of ethical dilemmas, especially in crisis periods.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted with a limited number of participants, which represents a limitation to the generalizability of the findings. Although the sample size was limited, future research with larger and more diverse samples could enhance the generalizability of the findings. In addition, studies can be conducted with different scales.

For example, in this study, the strength of ethical climate perception was tested. The scale used (Schwepker, 1997) primarily captures rule-based and sanction-oriented dimensions, which may not fully encompass the multifaceted nature of ethical climate. This may limit the interpretation of the relationship between ethical climate and moral courage because ethical behaviors observed in such a climate may result from external control mechanisms rather than internalized ethical values. Therefore, it may be beneficial to use more comprehensive and multidimensional frameworks in future research, such as the typology developed by Victor and Cullen (1988), which includes diverse ethical climate types like caring, independence, and instrumental climates. Using a multidimensional ethical climate scale in future studies may better explain the conditions under which moral disengagement moderates the effect of ethical climate on moral courage.

In addition, the development of ethical climate and ethical leadership in the public sector may also be the subject of new studies in the future. It should also be noted that individual factors, as well as organizational factors, have an impact on moral courage. Although it is an important finding that moral disengagement did not play a moderating role, this variable can be re-examined in different contexts or with alternative data collection methods. Thus, it can be more clearly demonstrated under what conditions moral disengagement can significantly affect the ethical climate-moral courage relationship. Also, It might be meaningful to see factors which might moderate ethical climate-moral courage relationship. In future studies, it would be useful to test different individual factors with the same model.

As mentioned earlier in the discussion section, it would be appropriate to take into account methodological limitations such as “social desirability bias” and “self-report” within the scope of this study, as these may particularly affect the measurement of moral courage and moral disengagement.

In addition, demographic differences should also be addressed. Considering that the sample was predominantly female and that gender may have an impact on variables such as moral disengagement or moral courage, this may have caused deviations in the analyses. The education level of the participants is higher than expected. Moreover, the majority of participants had short-term managerial experience, which may indicate limited exposure to observing ethical leadership and its effects sufficiently. Although the 4-

month criterion determined for social learning closes this gap to some extent, it may not be sufficient for long-term evaluation of the manager.

In future studies, longitudinal research designs can be employed to better examine changes over time in key organizational and individual variables such as ethical leadership, ethical climate, moral disengagement, and moral courage. Additionally, qualitative methods may provide deeper insights into employees' perceptions and experiences regarding these variables, thereby enriching the understanding of how they interact and develop within organizational contexts.

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APPENDIX A. SCALES OF THE STUDY

Değerli Katılımcı,

Bu anket, Prof. Dr. Nurdan Özarallı'nın danışmanlığında, Marmara Üniversitesi Örgütsel Davranış Yüksek Lisans Programı için yaptığım tez çalışmasına veri toplamak amacıyla düzenlenmiştir. Kurum kültürü, yönetici-çalışan ilişkileri ve çalışan davranışlarını daha iyi anlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Kişisel veya kurumsal kimlik bilgileri içermeyen, beş bölümden oluşan ve yaklaşık altı dakikada tamamlanabilecek bu anketteki tüm yanıtlarınız tamamen gizlilik ilkesine uygun şekilde anonim olarak işlenecek ve yalnızca bu araştırma amacıyla kullanılacaktır. Anketteki sorulara içten ve gerçekçi yanıtlar vermeniz, çalışmamızın doğruluğu ve başarısı için oldukça değerlidir.

Bu çalışma hakkında herhangi bir sorunuz olursa, aşağıdaki e-posta adresim üzerinden bana ulaşabilirsiniz. Zamanınızı ayırıp katkıda bulunduğunuz için şimdiden çok teşekkür ederim.

Elif Betül Şener

BÖLÜM 1

Bu bölümde yaş, cinsiyet, eğitim durumu gibi bazı demografik bilgileri içeren sorular yer almaktadır.

Yaş: _____

Cinsiyet: Kadın / Erkek

Eğitim haliniz: Lise / Ön Lisans / Lisans / Yüksek Lisans / Doktora

Medeni durum: Bekar / Evli

Hangi sektörde çalışıyorsunuz? Kamu / Özel

Çalıştığınız kurum hangi alanda faaliyet göstermektedir? Bankacılık - Finans / Tekstil / Bilişim-Teknoloji / Gıda/ Enerji / Otomotiv / İnşaat / Lojistik / Turizm / Diğer: _____

Çalışma şekliniz nedir? Ofisten / Uzaktan / Hibrit

Ne kadar süredir iş hayatındasınız? _____

Ne kadar süredir aynı kurumda çalışıyorsunuz? _____

Mevcut yöneticiniz/ amirinizle ne kadar süredir birlikte çalışıyorsunuz? _____

Çalışma grubunuz (sizinle doğrudan çalışan ekip) kaç kişiden oluşmaktadır? _____

BÖLÜM 2		(1) Kesinlikle katılmıyorum.	(2) Katılmıyorum.	(3) Pek katılmıyorum.	(4) Biraz katılıyorum.	(5) Katılıyorum.	(6) Tamamen katılıyorum.
1	Çalıştığım kurumda, etik kurallar yazılı ve resmidir.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Çalıştığım kurum, etik kuralların uygulanması konusunda çalışanları zorlar.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	Çalıştığım kurum, etik davranışlara ilişkin politikalara sahiptir.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	Çalıştığım kurum, etiğe uygun davranışlara ilişkin politikaların uygulanması konusunda çalışanları zorlar.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	Çalıştığım kurumda, etik dışı davranışlara tahammül edilmez.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	Kurumumda çalışanlardan biri, kendisine çıkar sağlayan etik dışı bir davranışta bulunursa kınanır.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	Kurumumda çalışanlardan biri, şirkete çıkar sağlayan etik dışı bir davranışta bulunursa kınanır.	1	2	3	4	5	6
BÖLÜM 3		(1) Kesinlikle katılmıyorum.	(2) Katılmıyorum.	(3) Pek katılmıyorum.	(4) Biraz katılıyorum.	(5) Katılıyorum.	(6) Tamamen katılıyorum.
Bu bölümde doğrudan bağlı olduğunuz yöneticiniz/ amirinizle ilgili birtakım ifadeler yer almaktadır. Lütfen bu ifadelere ne derece katılıp katılmadığınızı “(1) Kesinlikle katılmıyorum” dan “(6) Tamamen katılıyorum” a kadar uzanan ölçek üzerinde değerlendiriniz.							
1	Yöneticim, çalışanların düşüncelerini dikkate alır.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Yöneticim, etik standartları ihlal eden çalışanlara yaptırım uygular.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	Yöneticim, kişisel yaşamında etik değerlere uygun davranır.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	Yöneticim, çalışanların çıkarlarını en iyi şekilde gözetir.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	Yöneticim, adil ve dengeli kararlar verir.	1	2	3	4	5	6

6	Yöneticim, güvenilir bir kişidir.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	Yöneticim, çalışanlarla iş etiği veya değerleri hakkında fikir alışverişi yapar.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	Yöneticim, işlerin etik açıdan nasıl doğru yapılacağına dair örnek olur.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	Yöneticim, başarıyı sadece sonuca göre değil aynı zamanda bu sonucun nasıl elde edildiğine göre değerlendirir.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	Yöneticim, karar verirken “yapılacak doğru şey nedir?” diye sorar.	1	2	3	4	5	6

	BÖLÜM 4 Bu bölümde çalıştığınız kurumdaki davranışlarınızla ilgili birtakım ifadeler yer almaktadır. Lütfen bu ifadelere ne derece katılıp katılmadığınızı “(1) Kesinlikle katılmıyorum” dan “(6) Tamamen katılıyorum”a kadar uzanan ölçek üzerinde değerlendiriniz.	(1) Kesinlikle katılmıyorum.	(2) Katılmıyorum.	(3) Pek katılmıyorum.	(4) Biraz katılıyorum.	(5) Katılıyorum.	(6) Tamamen katılıyorum.
1	İşyerinde ne yapılması gerekiyorsa bunu başarılı şekilde yapan bir kişiyimdir.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	İşimi yaparken başkalarına zarar vermemek için düzenli olarak ek tedbirler alırım.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	İş arkadaşlarım beni her zaman etik ilkeleri uygulayan, tüm eylemlerimde onurlu olmaya çabalayan biri olarak tanır.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	İşimle ilgili etik bir karar alırken kurumun ilkelerini gözetirim.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	Durum ne olursa olsun, karar vermeden önce hem kurumun değerlerini hem de kişisel değerlerimi göz önünde bulundururum.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	Karar alma sürecinde, sıklıkla kurumdaki rolümün, yetkimin ve yetiştirilme tarzımın nihai eylemi nasıl etkilemesi gerektiğini düşünürüm.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	Etik açıdan zor bir durumla karşı karşıya kaldığımda, kararım diğer	1	2	3	4	5	6

	insanların bana olumsuz bir bakış açısı geliştirmelerine neden olsa bile ahlaki açıdan doğru eylemlerde bulunurum.						
8	Bana karşı toplumsal baskılarla karşılaşsam bile ahlaki tutumumu sürdürürüm.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	Kurum yönetimi ile ters düşeceğimi bildiğim durumlarda bile ahlaki davranırım.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	İş arkadaşlarım, beni işimi yaparken yönergeleri uygulamaktan fazlasını yapan biri olarak tanırlar; eylemlerimin ahlaken doğru olması için her şeyi yaparım.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	Günlük işlerimi yaparken kurallara uymaya özen gösteririm, ancak bunun da başarılı olduğundan emin olmak için kuralların arkasındaki niyeti anlamaya çalışırım.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12	Çalışırken yasal gerekliliklerden fazlasını yaparım ancak bu eylemlerimin etik olduğundan emin olmalıyım.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	Karar verirken sağduyulu muhakeme yapmak benim için önemlidir.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14	Görevimi yerine getirirken ahlaki amaçlara uygun olmasını sağlamak için güdülerim üzerinde düşünürüm.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15	Ahlaki davranıyorum çünkü yapılacak doğru şeyin bu olduğunu düşünürüm.	1	2	3	4	5	6

BÖLÜM 5		(1) Kesinlikle katılmıyorum.	(2) Katılmıyorum.	(3) Pek katılmıyorum.	(4) Biraz katılıyorum.	(5) Katılıyorum.	(6) Tamamen katılıyorum.
1	Bu bölümde birtakım ifadeler yer almaktadır. Lütfen bu ifadelere ne derece katılıp katılmadığınızı “(1) Kesinlikle katılmıyorum” dan “(6) Tamamen katılıyorum”a kadar uzanan ölçek üzerinde değerlendiriniz.						
1	Sevdiklerinizi koruyacaksa dedikodu çıkarmanın bir sakıncası yoktur.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Ödünç aldığımız sürece, bir şeyi sahibinin izni olmadan almanın bir sakıncası yoktur.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	Kişilerin kendilerini olduğundan farklı sundukları göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, kendinizi az da olsa olduğunuzdan daha iyi göstermeniz hiç de suçlanacak bir şey değildir.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	İnsanlar, kendi üzerinde otoritesi olan kişilerin onlara yapmasını söylediği ahlaki açıdan şüphe uyandıran şeyleri sırf yaptı diye sorumlu tutulmamalıdır.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	İnsanlar, tüm arkadaşları da aynısını yaparken, teknik olarak yanlış olan şeyleri yaptıkları için suçlanamaz.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	Kendine ait olmayan fikirleri kullanıp tüm övgüleri kişisel olarak üzerine almak çok da büyütülecek bir şey değildir.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	Bazı kişilere sert davranılmak zorunda kalınır çünkü onların incinebilecek herhangi bir duygusu yoktur.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	Kötü muameleye maruz kalan insanlar, genelde buna neden olan şeyler yapmıştır.	1	2	3	4	5	6