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## Article

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# The impact of ethical leadership on organizational citizenship behavior in higher education: the contingent role of organizational justice

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## ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational citizenship, with organizational justice as a moderator. In addition, we investigate how the impact of ethical leadership varies based on the extent to which organizational justice is the prevalent norm within an institution. We examine our proposed model in higher education institutions in northern Jordan and analyze the data using structural equation modeling. The data was gathered from 254 academic staff members employed by private universities. The data set revealed that ethical leadership significantly impacted organizational citizenship behavior in higher education institutions. However, as a moderating variable, organizational justice does not moderate the association between ethical leadership and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) in Jordanian higher education institutions. Through the moderating role of organizational justice, the authors investigate the effect of ethical leadership on organizational citizenship behavior. This study's findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing evidence from a non-western country, such as Jordan. Based on the findings, the study's theoretical and practical implications, as well as its limitations and recommendations for future research, are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, leadership ethics has been a rapidly expanding topic of organizational behavior study. This field has substantially contributed to our understanding of misconduct in the workplace, and the damage that such behaviors pose to the confidence and reputation of leaders and organizations has become apparent (Aljawarneh & Al-Omari, 2018; Egorov et al., 2020). Gallup polls indicate that administrative corruption is the most severe worldwide issue in over a hundred countries (Shareef & Atan, 2019). Ethical leadership positively impacts employee attitudes, behavior, and overall organizational performance (Kalshoven et al., 2011; Taamneh et al., 2024). The notion of OCB is one of the concepts produced by contemporary administrative thought, and it has received considerable attention from writers and scholars due to its contribution to promoting individuals and organizations. OCB is a desirable feature for the higher education sector to promote these institutions and work diligently to enhance their rank in a highly competitive environment. OCB relates to providing different extra-role behaviors (Hart et al., 2016).

OCB allocates greater resources to organizations while reducing their dependence on formal, costly processes (AL-Khatib & Ramayah, 2023; Tavakoli et al., 2011). Therefore, if firms desire productive

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practices, their employees must show OCB through creativity, spontaneity, and extra-role behaviors (Shareef & Atan, 2019). However, OCB is categorized into five primary dimensions: conscientiousness, altruism, civic virtue, civility, and sportsmanship (Hart et al., 2016). Ahmed Al Abdouli (2020) believes that organizational citizenship behavior, or lack thereof, is one of the most influential aspects in shaping employee attitudes and determining his behavior toward his organization. Kalshoven et al. (2011) adds that an effective leader usually uses various behaviors to satisfy employees' demands and tries their best to exceed the minimum requirements of the business. In addition, an effective leader provides guidance and support to his followers and enhances their motivation and confidence, encouraging them to work harder and demonstrate higher organizational citizenship behavior (Egorov et al., 2020).

Several researchers have addressed the concept of ethical leadership; setting up ethical standards and employing contingent reinforcement to control ethical behavior are all part of ethical leadership. It also involves setting an example for others to follow and advocating ethical conduct. In addition, ethical leaders employ group motivation to help convince followers (Brown et al., 2005; Resick et al., 2006; Taamneh et al., 2022a). Our research model separated the organizational justice moderator variable into three components: (a) procedural justice, (b) distributive justice, and (c) interactional justice. When employees view their relationship with their immediate manager and the organization to be adequate or balanced, they are more likely to reciprocate by devoting a greater amount of energy, time, creativity, and work-intensity behavior (equal to OCB) (Pan et al., 2017).

It has been discovered that ethical leadership has a positive impact on a variety of aspects within organizations. Mayer et al. (2009) discovered that ethical leadership increases employees' moral behavior and organizational commitment. Eisenbeiss et al. (2015) established a connection between ethical leadership and organizational citizenship behavior, contributing to enhanced organizational performance. As demonstrated by Walumbwa et al. (2011) research, ethical leadership also improves organizational trust and employee engagement, resulting in an enhanced corporate reputation. Due to its positive impact on organizational effectiveness and employee well-being, OCB is of major importance in the fields of organizational psychology and management. OCB refers to discretionary, voluntary behaviors that go beyond formal employment requirements and contribute to an organization's overall success (AL-Khatib, 2023; Organ, 2018).

Organizations of all types and higher education institutions must demonstrate exemplary organizational citizenship behavior. Organizational citizenship behavior promotes teaching staff, enables flexibility in the workplace, and contributes to increased job efficiency and productivity (Alomari, 2020; Al-Okaily et al., 2022; Al-Khatib et al., 2023; Robins et al., 2017). The university administration's role is to fulfill the institution's objectives efficiently and effectively by employing the faculty's work effectively. It is well known that faculty members are the most prominent people upon whom the university relies to produce knowledge and provide high-quality educational and community services (Bowen, 2018). Practices of organizational citizenship are a major concern for institutions of higher education. Prior research has enhanced our understanding of the factors influencing OCB in higher education institutions, and ethical leadership appears to be the most effective model for promoting organizational citizenship behavior (Yang & Wei, 2018).

Two gaps must be addressed. First, the increasing influence of organizational justice on organizational behavior has made organizational justice a concern for organizations. Some studies investigated the connection between organizational justice and employee citizenship. According to Jati et al. (2023), contract employees with a greater perception of organizational justice engage in greater citizenship behavior. Peng-Cheng and Zhou (2018) revealed that OCB will be more prevalent when organizational managers exert considerable effort to establish distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. Recent research employing an explanatory design and qualitative and quantitative techniques revealed that employees are more likely to engage in OCB when they perceive a high level of organizational justice. Organizational justice is the perception of fairness and equity within an organization's policies, procedures, and practices. It involves how employees perceive the allocation of resources, opportunities and rewards, as well as how decisions are made within the organization (Tesfaye et al., 2022). We know a great deal about the direct effects of organizational justice on citizenship behavior, but only a few studies have examined the moderating effect of organizational justice (Yang & Wei, 2018). Therefore, we should pay more attention to its moderating effect. The primary objective of this study was to investigate the moderating

effect of organizational justice on the association between ethical leadership and employee OCB. The second reason for conducting this study is the paucity of research on ethical leadership and its relationship to organizational citizenship behavior and organizational justice in academic institutions in the Jordan context (Alomari et al., 2019; Alkhudari et al., 2022). The vast majority of existing research limits effective leadership styles to transformational leadership while disregarding emerging leadership models (Elrehail et al., 2018). Organizational justice exists in distributive, procedural, and interactional forms, which can enhance employees' extra-role responsibilities (Ali, 2016).

In this research work, we contribute to the current body of knowledge by filling in the gaps. This study aims to evaluate the impact of ethical leadership on organizational citizenship behavior in Jordan universities. Specifically, the study's objectives were as follows: (a) to determine the level of ethical leadership, organizational citizenship behavior and organizational justice prevalent in Jordan's university sector; (b) to examine the influence of ethical leadership on OCB; (c) to investigate the moderating power of organizational justice on the relationship between EL & OCB.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Research background

As educational institutions, universities play a vital role in the creation of knowledge, perpetuating research accomplishments, and providing services to the community and other entities; as a result, their contribution to human resource training also makes it necessary to promote organizational citizenship behaviors (Tagliaventi & Carli, 2021). Faculty members play a crucial role in numerous aspects of university work. University academic personnel play vital roles in various fields, including research, education, and community service (Al-Okaily, 2023a; Abdullah & Akhtar, 2016; Ozlan, 2019). Only one part of work-related behaviors is governed by formal job descriptions, which are also known as in-role behaviors. Organizational citizenship behaviors, also known as extra-role behavior patterns, are linked to various other work-related performances that affect organizations as social beings composed of groups and individuals. The five OCB aspects of altruism, civility, conscientiousness, civic virtue, and sportsmanship were first articulated by Organ (1988) and other scholars. Altruism, the first element, includes impulsive actions to help others with tasks or handle a business problem. The second, courtesy, deals with avoiding confrontations with people over work-related issues. The third quality is conscientiousness, which is characterized as independent action above and beyond what is necessary for the position. The fourth virtue, civic virtue, indicates the willingness to participate responsibly in the organization's activities (Hasanuddin, 2020).

In the context of higher education, employees who go above and beyond their official job tasks are essential to high performance in universities. Due to ongoing interactions with students, the community, and research duties, university academic staff members deal with difficult and complex tasks. The expanding functions of faculty members cannot be fully regulated in his job descriptions (Al-Okaily, 2023b; Aljawarneh et al., 2022; Donglong et al., 2020; Halid et al., 2020). OCB should be considered a crucial component of academic performance. The degree to which employees are willing to engage in discretionary activities like OCB may significantly impact how well they perform. The willingness of faculty to put forth more effort through altruism (e.g., aiding students in understanding a challenging subject), courtesy (e.g., Providing others the required advice, avoiding causing controversy or escalating a dispute and informing students in advance of class cancellation), civic virtue (e.g., retaining the university's reputation while adhering to the law, rules, and academic standards and attending student events voluntarily), and conscientiousness (e.g., contribute, if desired, to problem-solving at the university and to enhancing and developing work process and utilizing the lecture and session time as effectively (Alhadrawi, 2020).

Jordanian universities generally confront several issues, which may be summed up by the absence of employee involvement in organizational decisions and the employees' dissatisfaction with their jobs, making them unwilling to engage in additional behaviors (Al-Okaily & Al-Okaily, 2022). It is impossible to disregard the role played by the organization's poor social and psychological environment in the failure of faculty members' universities to foster positive attitudes. The governance of universities,

particularly private institutions, faces significant challenges due to the universities' lack of genuine incentives and the fragility of wages, salaries, and justice structures. It has become obvious that ethical orientation, fairness, honesty, and empowerment are examples of ethical leadership behaviors that help develop organizational citizenship (Al-Okaily, 2024). In the following part, we'll talk about the ethical leadership variable.

Business ethical scandals have brought up significant issues regarding the influence of ethical leadership on promoting ethical behavior. As leaders are a vital source of moral guidance in this regard, it is well recognized that employees look to prominent people's workplaces for moral guidance (Brown et al., 2005). Leaders who maintain moral standards are concerned about their people and give respect. They build strong, trustworthy relationships with their followers by being consistently honest, confronting unethical behavior, and being open with them. These leaders have no trouble gaining the respect and trust of their people. According to past research, ethical leadership increases employees' confidence in management. According to several academics, ethical leadership is the capacity to accept accountability for moral conduct and to guide people in a way that honors their intelligence and dignity by virtue of the leader's position of social authority (Al Amosh & Khatib, 2023; Al-Okaily, Al-Kofahi, et al., 2023). From a social behavioral perspective, some researchers tend to enumerate an ethical leader's qualities, including persistence, interest, integrity, and a sense of responsibility for every action he/she takes (Al-Okaily, Alsmadi, et al., 2023; Pertiwi et al., 2019). Brown et al. (2005) states that ethical leaders are typically sincere, compassionate, and fair. They are also willing to share power and make it plain to subordinates what is expected of them in terms of moral conduct. Based on the aforementioned, we may conclude that ethical leadership is persuading others to work towards the organization's goals while demonstrating ethical behavior and inspiring followers to maintain and improve these standards. It must be stressed that ethical leadership promotes an ethical environment marked by shared values and rules of behavior through the exemplary role of the leader to demonstrate the significance of this leadership style in light of social learning theory (Aws et al., 2021). Staff members frequently imitate these role models by observing how the leader behaves and grabs desired habits (Al-Okaily, 2022).

## 2.2. Hypotheses development

We used the social exchange theory to develop our present model. The social exchange theory can provide insight into the underlying mechanisms when analyzing ethical leadership's effect on OCB. Based on the social exchange theory, ethical leadership can increase OCB through various mechanisms, such as trust and reciprocity, positive work relationships, and psychological context. Individuals engage in social exchange, according to the social exchange theory, when they consider the cost and benefit of their interactions with others (Al Amosh, 2022; Al-Okaily, Alkhawaldi, et al., 2023; Alsmadi et al., 2022; Al-Okaily, Alqudah, et al., 2023; Al-Okaily, Al-Fraihat et al., 2022). In conclusion, social exchange theory serves to explain how ethical leadership influences OCB by fostering a positive exchange environment, fostering trust, and fostering reciprocity (Abu-ALSondos, 2023a; Hatamlah et al., 2023).

Previous studies that addressed ethical leadership reveal that they approached the topic from various angles. The study by Brown et al. (2005), which was based on three dimensions: fairness, role clarity, and power sharing, maybe the most well-known of these studies in this subject. Many other studies have been drawn from this study. The research study of Kalshoven et al. (2011) is arguably the most comprehensive investigation, and the following variables will be used: (1) Fairness: treating others equally, not showing favoritism, and making just decisions. (2) Sharing power: Including followers in decision-making and paying attention to their opinions and issues (3) Role Clarification: outlining responsibilities, demands, and performance expectations (4) Role orientation: showing concern, respect, and assistance to subordinates (5) Integrity: being consistent in one's words and deeds and keeping one's word (6) Ethical guidance: describing moral principles, encouraging, and praising moral conduct. (7) Concern for sustainability: taking care of what meets stakeholder expectations, addressing environmental concerns, and making the organization ecologically friendly.

The social exchange idea has historically been the cornerstone of OCB research. This social exchange theory proposes that exchanging profitable and favorable activities from organization representatives will help to build high-quality trade relationships. The application of this theory implies that academic



employees will change their ethical behavior if they are aware of their superiors' ethical standards, which will lead to their adopting voluntary behaviors that are beneficial to the company (Abu-ALSondos, 2023b; Al-Okaily, Teoh, et al., 2023; Al Amosh, 2023; Hassan et al., 2014; Majeed & Taha, 2023). Various studies have examined and proved the relationship between ethical leadership and OCB (Aloustani et al., 2020; Shareef & Atan, 2019). By analyzing the impact of ET on academic staff's OCB in Jordanian private universities, we expand on current efforts in this paper. We hypothesize the following:

*H1. Ethical leadership positively impacts academic employees' OCB in Private universities in Jordan.*

The concept of organizational justice refers to how members of the organization feel about how fairly the organization treats them (Ali, 2016). In addition to having a generic taxonomy, organizational justice can be divided into three categories from the perspective of the social exchange theory (Jilani & Gilani, 2021): (1) distributive justice: refers to the employees' feeling that the organization they are part of is treating them fairly in terms of its allocation of rewards such as wages, incentives, goods, and benefits (2) procedural justice: it is about the perceptions of justice related with the decision-making processes; (3) Interactional justice: related to the quality of interactive behavior during the practice of procedures

Organizational justice should be present in all parts of the workplace, from how tasks are done to how internal and external rewards are given and how coworkers talk to each other. An organization's philosophy greatly affects how employees feel and think about things like OCB and job satisfaction (Al-Okaily, Al-Majali, et al., 2023; Magatef et al., 2023). The organization needs to be fair in its system regarding distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. When employees are treated fairly by the organization in every aspect, they are inclined to show a more positive attitude and behavior like OCB. Organizational justice increases satisfaction and is perceived as encouraging employees to go above and beyond their responsibilities (Ajlouni et al., 2021). Organizational justice directly and indirectly affects what employees do outside of their jobs (Ali et al., 2019; Srouji et al., 2023). Considering the preceding, it makes sense that ethical leaders are more likely to influence academic staff's organizational citizenship behavior when organizational justice is the norm rather than the exception at a university. Considering this, we hypothesize the following:

*H2a: Organizational justice (distribution) will moderate the relationship between ethical leadership and academic employees' OCB in private universities in Jordan.*

*H2b: Organizational justice (procedural) will moderate the relationship between ethical leadership and academic employees' OCB in private universities in Jordan.*

*H2c: Organizational justice (interactional justice) will moderate the relationship between ethical leadership and academic employees' OCB in private universities in Jordan.*

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Population and sample

The research population consisted solely of faculty members from private universities in Jordan. Faculty members are the most crucial and capable of attaining the educational institution's goals, particularly if they have the right conditions for organizational citizenship behavior. Four private universities from the northern region of Jordan have been chosen. The total number of academic staff at the four universities is 552. As suggested by earlier research, if the population size is insufficient, the researchers should attempt to cover the entire population. Therefore, we distributed questionnaires to all the academic staff at the four universities, of which 263 were returned and nine were invalid for analysis, bringing the total number of valid questionnaires to 254. We eliminated all insufficient responses or lacked substantial data (Hair et al., 2019). Two hundred forty-six replies were considered valid.

#### 3.2. Questionnaire instrument

A questionnaire was adapted from previous studies to collect data from academic personnel employed by private universities. The origins of the times of ethical leadership were adapted from Brown et al. (2005), Yukl et al. (2013), Kalshoven et al. (2011), and Den Hartog and De Hoogh (2009). The OCB items

were chosen from the works of Chiang and Hsieh (2012) and Taamneh et al. (2021a). The elements of organizational justice were derived from Elovainio et al. (2010).

## 4. Data analysis

### 4.1. Demographics information of the respondents

The present study is comprised of 79.7% male employees and 20.3% female employees. 17.0% of the participants were 30–39 years old, 32.0% were 40–49 years old, 36.6% were 50–59 and 14.4% were more than 60 years old. As for academic qualification, 7.2% of participants had bachelor's degrees, 7.8% had master's degrees, and 85.0% had PhDs. Concerning job title, 54.9% of the participants were faculty members, 19.0% of the participants were heads of department, 9.8% of the participants were assistant deans, 5.9% of the participants were deputy deans and 10.5% of the participants were deans. As for academic ranking, 5.2% of the participants were tutors, 8.5% were lecturers, 34.6% were assistant professors, 32.7% were associate professors and 19.0% were professors. Finally, 40.5% of years of experience were less than ten years, 24.2% were 11–15 years, 17.6% were 16–20 years, 7.2% were 21–25 years and 10.5% were more than 25 years.

### 4.2. Assessment of the measurement model

We used a causal-predictive structural equation modeling (SEM) method with PLS 4 software to check and estimate the interactive relation between the model variables. Covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) is based on the indeterminacy of item scores (Al-Okaily, Abd Rahman, et al., 2020; Al-Okaily, Al-Okaily, et al., 2020). variance-based SEM operates based on fixed latent scores and strives to optimize predicting the endogenous constructs rather than the model fit (Al-Radaideh et al., 2023; Hair et al., 2019). Conversely, PLS-SEM operates on fixed latent scores and aims to maximize the prediction of endogenous components rather than the model fit (Bany Mohammad et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2019). PLS-SEM can deal with very difficult and complex structural models, as second-order models have small sample sizes and isn't strict on data normality. Figure 1 shows the loadings items of different scales and beta estimates in

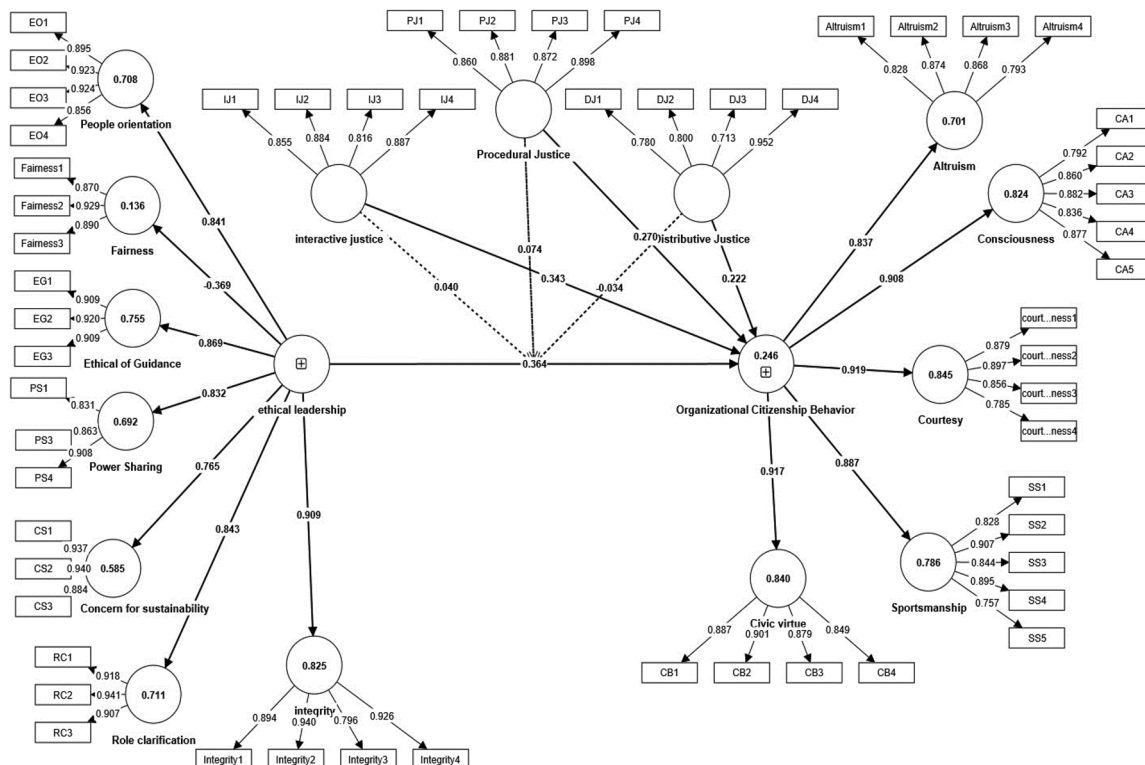


Figure 1. Measurement model and correlations.



**Table 1.** Mean and standard deviation.

| Measures                            | Mean        | (SD)         |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Ethical Leadership                  | 3.46        | 0.674        |
| People orientation                  | 3.55        | 0.996        |
| Fairness                            | 2.96        | 1.175        |
| Power Sharing                       | 3.21        | 0.742        |
| Ethical of Guidance                 | 3.7603      | 1.00834      |
| Concern for Sustainability          | 3.4009      | 0.98998      |
| Role clarification                  | 3.7734      | 0.92453      |
| Integrity                           | 3.5915      | 1.08547      |
| Organizational Citizenship Behavior | <b>4.24</b> | <b>0.646</b> |
| Altruism                            | 4.1078      | 0.70697      |
| Consciousness                       | 4.3098      | 0.71006      |
| Courtesy                            | 4.3056      | 0.71877      |
| Sportsmanship                       | 4.1699      | 0.75106      |
| Civic virtue                        | 4.3121      | 0.73072      |
| Organizational Justice              | <b>3.34</b> | <b>0.876</b> |
| Distribution justice                | 3.0033      | 1.05170      |
| Procedural justice                  | 3.3905      | 0.99250      |
| Interactional justice               | 3.6373      | 0.90273      |

**Table 2.** Reliability and convergent validity.

| Instruments                         | $\alpha$ | CR    | rho   | AVE   | $R^2$ |
|-------------------------------------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Organizational Justice              | 0.942    | 0.947 | 0.944 | 0.589 | 0.246 |
| Altruism                            | 0.862    | 0.864 | 0.906 | 0.708 |       |
| Authority sharing                   | 0.835    | 0.836 | 0.901 | 0.753 |       |
| Civilized behavior                  | 0.902    | 0.903 | 0.932 | 0.773 |       |
| Clarify the role                    | 0.912    | 0.912 | 0.944 | 0.850 |       |
| Distributive Justice                | 0.905    | 0.778 | 0.887 | 0.666 |       |
| people orientation                  | 0.921    | 0.921 | 0.944 | 0.810 |       |
| Ethical of guidance                 | 0.900    | 0.902 | 0.937 | 0.833 |       |
| Organizational Citizenship Behavior | 0.966    | 0.967 | 0.968 | 0.584 |       |
| Procedural Justice                  | 0.910    | 0.990 | 0.931 | 0.771 |       |
| Sportsmanship                       | 0.901    | 0.912 | 0.927 | 0.719 |       |
| Sustainability concern              | 0.910    | 0.914 | 0.943 | 0.847 |       |
| conscience awareness                | 0.904    | 0.907 | 0.929 | 0.723 |       |
| Courteousness                       | 0.877    | 0.879 | 0.916 | 0.732 |       |
| ethical leadership                  | 0.934    | 0.963 | 0.948 | 0.520 |       |
| Integrity                           | 0.912    | 0.922 | 0.939 | 0.793 |       |
| interactive justice                 | 0.884    | 0.900 | 0.920 | 0.741 |       |
| Justice                             | 0.879    | 0.891 | 0.925 | 0.804 |       |

the model and shows the significance  $R^2$  of each variable within the inner model and correlations between variables. Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation.

The outer model loadings presented in Figure 1 were mostly above the 0.7 threshold, and their respective B-values were vital. together with the Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) > 0.70, composite reliability (CR) > 0.70, and average variance extracted (AVE) > 0.50 values presented in Table 2. furthermore, Table 3 shows that Fornell–Larcker criterion was satisfied as the square of each variable's AVE is greater than the inter-correlations.

The preceding sections established models' reliability and validity. The coefficient of estimation for the structural model is reported in Table 4. The observed direct impact of ethical leadership on OCB is positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.397$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), the direct effect of interactive justice on OCB not significant ( $\beta = 0.311$ ,  $p = 0.057$ ), also the direct effect of distributive justice on OCB not significant ( $\beta = -0.137$ ,  $p = 0.409$ ) and the direct effect of Procedural justice on OCB not significant ( $\beta = -0.017$ ,  $p = 0.903$ ). The moderating impact of interactive justice on the association between ethical leadership and OCB was insignificant ( $\beta = 0.010$ ,  $p = 0.926$ ). The moderating impact of distributive justice on the association between ethical leadership and OCB was insignificant ( $\beta = -0.229$ ,  $p = 0.139$ ). The moderating impact of Procedural justice on the association between ethical leadership and OCB was not significant ( $\beta = 0.369$ ,  $p = 0.063$ ). Table 4 can be inferred to interactional effect between the second-order variables. The variance explained by the model  $R^2$  is 0.264, translated as 26.4% for OCB in Table 2. Falk and Miller (1992) set a benchmark for  $R^2$  values and argued that the lowest recommended level should be 0.10. The  $R^2$  in our study showed a large effect.

**Table 3.** divergent validity based on the Fornell–Larcker approach.

| Measures                   | 1            | 2            | 3            | 4            | 5            | 6            | 7            | 8            | 9            | 10           | 11           | 12           | 13           | 14           | 15           | 16           | 17           |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Altruism                   | <b>0.841</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| Civic virtue               | 0.682        | <b>0.879</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| Concern for sustainability | 0.301        | 0.223        | <b>0.921</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| Consciousness              | 0.704        | 0.798        | 0.215        | <b>0.850</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| Courtesy                   | 0.718        | 0.821        | 0.240        | 0.824        | <b>0.855</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| Distributive Justice       | 0.263        | 0.181        | 0.379        | 0.125        | 0.185        | <b>0.816</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| Ethical of Guidance        | 0.338        | 0.344        | 0.633        | 0.307        | 0.314        | 0.267        | <b>0.913</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| Fairness                   | 0.014        | 0.120        | 0.077        | 0.198        | 0.188        | 0.051        | 0.256        | <b>0.897</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| OCB                        | 0.837        | 0.917        | 0.268        | 0.908        | 0.919        | 0.222        | 0.366        | 0.135        | <b>0.764</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| People orientation         | 0.220        | 0.165        | 0.583        | 0.166        | 0.239        | 0.346        | 0.637        | 0.305        | 0.217        | <b>0.900</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| Power Sharing              | 0.309        | 0.267        | 0.635        | 0.201        | 0.284        | 0.415        | 0.677        | 0.158        | 0.290        | 0.682        | <b>0.868</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| Procedural Justice         | 0.269        | 0.248        | 0.368        | 0.192        | 0.244        | 0.692        | 0.411        | 0.068        | 0.270        | 0.414        | 0.380        | <b>0.878</b> |              |              |              |              |              |
| Role clarification         | 0.365        | 0.381        | 0.531        | 0.315        | 0.356        | 0.368        | 0.745        | 0.344        | 0.393        | 0.598        | 0.642        | 0.502        | <b>0.922</b> |              |              |              |              |
| Sportsmanship              | 0.692        | 0.789        | 0.232        | 0.706        | 0.752        | 0.253        | 0.334        | 0.086        | 0.887        | 0.190        | 0.253        | 0.262        | 0.349        | <b>0.848</b> |              |              |              |
| ethical leadership         | 0.344        | 0.321        | 0.765        | 0.302        | 0.352        | 0.412        | 0.869        | 0.369        | 0.364        | 0.841        | 0.832        | 0.513        | 0.843        | 0.314        | <b>0.909</b> |              |              |
| integrity                  | 0.293        | 0.271        | 0.642        | 0.294        | 0.329        | 0.400        | 0.752        | 0.335        | 0.323        | 0.704        | 0.696        | 0.541        | 0.748        | 0.264        | 0.721        | <b>0.891</b> |              |
| interactive justice        | 0.328        | 0.297        | 0.493        | 0.257        | 0.294        | 0.712        | 0.404        | 0.123        | 0.343        | 0.439        | 0.494        | 0.762        | 0.525        | 0.359        | 0.560        | 0.527        | <b>0.861</b> |

**Table 4.** Direct effects results.

| Relationships  | $\beta$ | $T$   | $p$   |
|--|---------|-------|-------|
| Ethical leadership -> Organizational Citizenship                               | 0.397   | 3.852 | 0.000 |
| Distributive Justice -> Organizational Citizenship                             | -0.137  | 0.825 | 0.409 |
| Procedural Justice -> Organizational Citizenship                               | -0.017  | 0.122 | 0.903 |
| interactive justice -> Organizational Citizenship                              | 0.311   | 1.902 | 0.057 |
| Procedural Justice $\times$ ethical leadership -> Organizational Citizenship   | 0.369   | 1.859 | 0.063 |
| interactive justice $\times$ ethical leadership -> Organizational Citizenship  | 0.010   | 0.047 | 0.962 |
| Distributive Justice $\times$ ethical leadership -> Organizational Citizenship | -0.229  | 1.480 | 0.139 |

$\beta$ : beta value;  $p$ : p-value;  $T$ : T-value.

## 5. Discussion

Our research aimed to investigate the impact of ethical leadership on organizational citizenship. The study also sought to evaluate the function of organizational justice in moderating the relationship between ethical leadership and OCB. Our study targeted academic staff in private universities in the north of Jordan. We utilized the causal-predictive structural equation modeling (SEM) method with PLS 4 software. The study showed moderate ethical leadership practices, with a mean score of 3.46 out of 5. Respondents reported a lack of fairness and power-sharing practices, two of the seven components of ethical leadership (with a mean of 2.96 and 3.21, respectively). Concerning the remaining six dimensions of ethical leadership (people orientation, ethical guidance, concern for sustainability, role clarity, and integrity), the study sample showed a moderate degree of these dimensions (Mean = 3.55, 3.76, 3.40, 3.77, 3.59, respectively). This study's results converged with those of Taamneh et al. (2017), where the integrity dimension in the first study obtained a close mean to that of the current study. (mean of 3.29 versus 3.59).

In contrast to the findings of Taamneh et al. (2022b), where participants reported a moderate degree of adherence to integrity standards, the present study revealed an above-average level of adherence. (mean of 3.01 versus 3.59). The survey sample demonstrated a high degree of organizational citizenship behaviors in general and each of its dimensions. In terms of organizational justice practice, respondents generally agreed on a medium degree of organizational justice. However, the dimension of distributive justice has received inadequate practice. It is worth noting that only administrators with a solid ethical commitment can assist universities in maintaining their good reputation and attracting national and international students.

The result of our primary effect model suggests that ethical leadership was found to be positively related to organizational citizenship behavior in private universities in Jordan. The results of this study are consistent with prior studies conducted in the context of proximity to Jordan (Al-Amouri, 2022). This would suggest that ethical leadership behaviors can build a trust climate that fosters employee citizenship behavior in prior research (Aloustani et al., 2020; Yang & Wei, 2018). However, we estimated the interaction model to examine our moderating hypotheses. The effect of organizational justice on organizational citizenship behavior was also examined in this study as a moderated variable. Contrary to expectations, the results obtained from the analysis show that organizational justice has no effect on OCB in the private universities in Jordan. However, organizational justice does not facilitate the relationship between ethical leadership and OCB. While this result is inconsistent with previous literature, including those studies that emphasize the positive link between organizational justice and OCB (Bahri, 2017; Rahman et al., 2022), two reasons, at least, could explain our conflicting result. First, the concept of organizational justice in private universities in Jordan is challenging to apply in a society dominated by nepotism and favoritism, where the investigator can observe a significant disparity in employee salaries and wages. Second, most private universities in Jordan are family businesses, where open competitive exams and other merit principles are not frequently considered (Al Hbabi & Alomari, 2020; Taamneh et al., 2021b; Taamneh et al., 2017).

## 6. Theoretical and practical implications

The study aimed to explore the influence of ethical leadership on academic staff's OCB and the moderating effect of organizational justice on the link between EL and OCB in private institutions in Jordan.

Thus, our work fills essential gaps in the literature. First, identifying various ethical leader behaviors will help us understand when and how such behaviors link to employee and organizational variables respectfully. Second, while previous research restricts effective leadership styles to transformational leadership and ignores new forms of leadership, it can be considered that this study is among the first studies that examine the effect of ethical leadership on extra-role behaviours (i.e., academic personnel's OCB) in higher education in Jordan, within a single theoretical framework, thereby enriching the EL theory with h knowledge acquisition from this perspective and adding a new dimension to the body of literature on higher education. Third, We examine our proposed framework in a non-Western nation, such as Jordan, whose context differs significantly from studies undertaken in the West. This would expand our understanding of ethical leadership, OCB, and organizational justice in environments characterized by a distinct Arab culture and various unique traits. Fourth, previous studies assume that leadership styles enhance OCB in organizations, ignoring the influence of context and prevalent norms. Assessing the moderating effect of organizational justice sheds light on several circumstances crucial to facilitating leadership's role in fostering OCB in organizations.

In terms of practice, the study's findings and those of earlier research demonstrated that ethical leadership had a positive effect on OCB. In order to achieve their objectives and maintain their reputation, higher education institutions must have leaders that act ethically. Given the existence of a clearly defined conceptual framework that identifies the dimensions and components of ethical leadership, we recommend that universities establish training programs in ethical leadership behavior to train leaders and invest in this behavior. Ethical leadership, with its underlying behaviors, is the most suitable leadership style for promoting an environment conducive to enhancing the OCB of academic members. It is recommended that academic leaders consider organizational justice while dealing with followers. Organizations ought to employ proactive measures to avoid or tackle ostracism in the workplace, such as promoting a culture of collaboration, offering training on diversity and inclusion, and creating explicit policies against discrimination. Organizations may improve the beneficial impact of ethical leadership on OCB through encouraging inclusiveness.

To increase OCB, organizations must improve the perception of justice by assuring transparent decision-making, fair distribution of rewards, and equal treatment. Overall, the research recommends that universities have to prioritize ethical leadership, support organizational justice, and acknowledge the significance of OCB. By applying these practical implications, universities may establish an atmosphere at work that promotes fairness, ethical conduct, and engagement among staff members, eventually enhancing universities' performance and satisfaction with academics.

## 7. Limitations and future studies

No study comes without limitations, which should be considered in future research. This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted on several private Jordanian universities, focusing on the kingdom's northern region. This limits the capacity to generalize the study's findings; hence, it is proposed that the remaining regions of the country be represented in future studies due to their distinct cultural contexts (Ruiz et al., 2011). Given the growing interest in studies about ethical leadership, it is recommended that additional research be undertaken on the antecedents and outcomes of applying ethical leadership, as well as comparative research between several other countries (developing and developed). Second, this study focused on the academic staff segment, excluding administrative personnel; hence, conducting similar research with a bigger sample size that includes administrative employees is recommended. Third, this article may overlook potential temporal issues, such as the evolution of leadership or organizational contexts over time. A static data record may miss the dynamic nature of ethical leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. Fourth, the current research design employs a quantitative approach with data from some academic staff in Jordan. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the circumstances should be examined by employing qualitative research methods. Finally. Future studies may include the impact of current information technologies in higher education institutions (Thi Chung & Thi Tram Anh, 2022). Also, as OCB could boost organizations' internal social capital and performance (Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2023) future studies could test if our current model is explicative of organizational performance or internal social capital.

## 8. Conclusion

The study offers significant insights into the relationship between ethical leadership, organizational justice, and OCB in Jordanian higher education institutions. It has been discovered that ethical leadership has a positive effect on academics engagement in OCB. When leaders demonstrate ethical behavior, impartiality, integrity, and empathy for others, faculty academics are more likely to engage in discretionary actions that benefit universities and allow them to accomplish their primary mission and policies. The results show that organizational justice does not significantly moderate the relationship between ethical leadership and OCB. These findings indicate that ethical leadership has a direct, positive effect on OCB, irrespective of the perceived level of organizational justice. In other words, faculty members who perceive their leaders to be ethical are more inclined to engage in organizationally beneficial behaviors, regardless of their perceptions of the organization's fairness. Notably, these conclusions are founded on the specific study conducted, and additional research may be required to investigate the relationship between ethical leadership, OCB, and other potentially moderating variables. This study nevertheless sheds light on the limited influence organizational justice has on the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational justice.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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**Appendix 1. Measurement items, mean and standard deviation**

| Measures  | Mean SD |       |
|---|---------|-------|
| Ethical Leadership (Mean = 3.46; SD = 0.674)  |         |       |
| People orientation (Mean = 3.55; SD = 0.996)  |         |       |
| My Boss:  |         |       |
| 1) Put others demands and needs over his self-interest.   | 3.34    | 1.278 |
| 2) Pay attention to my personal needs.  | 3.51    | 1.033 |
| 3) Is genuinely concerned about my personal development.  | 3.62    | 1.088 |
| 4) Is interested in how I feel and how I am doing.  | 3.75    | 1.042 |
| Fairness (Mean = 2.96; SD = 1.175)  |         |       |
| 1) Holds me responsible for work that I gave no control over.   | 2.90    | 1.247 |
| 2) Holds me accountable for problems over which I have no control.  | 2.92    | 1.300 |
| 3) Pursue his/her own success at the express of others.   | 3.08    | 1.391 |
| Power Sharing (Mean = 3.21; SD = 0.742)   |         |       |
| 1) Dose not allow others to participate in decision making.   | 2.75    | 1.248 |
| 2) Delegates challenging responsibilities to subordinates.  | 3.33    | 1.136 |
| 3) Seeks advice from subordinate concerning university strategy.  | 3.37    | 1.146 |
| 4) Allows Subordinates to influence critical decisions.   | 3.40    | 1.035 |
| Ethical of Guidance (Mean = 3.7603; SD = 1.00834)   |         |       |
| 1) Compliments employees who behave according to integrity guide lines.   | 3.72    | 1.097 |
| 2) Clarifies the likely consequences of possible unethical behavior by myself and colleagues.                   | 3.73    | 1.118 |
| 3) Clearly explain integrity related codes of conduct.  | 3.83    | 1.099 |
| Concern for Sustainability (Mean = 3.4009; SD = 0.98998)  |         |       |
| 1) Stimulates recycling of items and material in our university.  | 3.26    | 1.081 |
| 2) Shows concern for sustainability issues.   | 3.46    | 1.088 |
| 3) Would like to work in an environmentally friendly manner.  | 3.48    | 1.058 |
| Role clarification (Mean = 3.7734; SD = 0.92453)  |         |       |
| 1) Explains what is expected of me and my colleagues.   | 3.73    | 0.987 |
| 2) Clarifies what is responsible for what.  | 3.76    | 1.062 |
| 3) Indicate what the performance expectations of each group member are.   | 3.82    | 0.961 |
| Integrity (Mean = 3.5915; SD = 1.08547)   |         |       |
| 1) Keeps his/her promises.  | 3.55    | 1.208 |
| 2) Objects unethical practices even it is for the sake of university.   | 3.58    | 1.223 |
| 3) Can be trusted to do the things he/ she says.  | 3.61    | 1.231 |
| 4) Is fair and objective in evaluating and rewarding his subordinates.  | 3.63    | 1.219 |
| Organizational Citizenship Behavior (Mean = 4.24; SD = 0.646)   |         |       |
| Altruism (Mean = 4.1078; SD = 0.70697)  |         |       |
| 1) I respect my colleagues' demands.  | 4.08    | 0.774 |
| 2) help colleagues when required.   | 4.10    | 0.901 |
| 3) I give constructive suggestions for improvement.   | 4.10    | 0.882 |
| 4) I help new employees adjust in new working environment.  | 4.15    | 0.801 |
| Consciousness (Mean = 4.3098; SD = 0.71006)   |         |       |
| 1) I avoid internal rumors and negative talk about my university.   | 4.19    | 0.849 |
| 2) I make sure that most of my working hours are spent on my professional duty.                                 | 4.32    | 0.816 |
| 3) I stick to working hours.  | 4.33    | 0.759 |
| 4) I seek to boost my university's image.   | 4.35    | 0.861 |
| 5) I protect the university resources.  | 4.37    | 0.887 |
| Courtesy (Mean = 4.3056; SD = 0.71877)  |         |       |
| 1) I contribute to solving problems and misunderstanding among my colleagues.                                   | 4.20    | 0.866 |
| 2) I respect the privacy of my colleagues.  | 4.32    | 0.848 |
| 3) I avoid hurting the feelings of my colleagues.   | 4.33    | 0.835 |
| 4) I respect and protect the rights of my colleagues.   | 4.37    | 0.818 |
| Sportsmanship (Mean = 4.1699; SD = 0.75106)   |         |       |
| 1) I tolerate any personal offense and avoid blaming others.  | 3.97    | 0.942 |
| 2) I accept criticism from my colleagues with open arms.  | 4.09    | 0.869 |
| 3) I avoid catching my colleagues' mistakes.  | 4.24    | 0.923 |
| 4) I am friendly and understanding with my colleagues.  | 4.25    | 0.837 |
| 5) I apologize if I have wronged others.  | 4.31    | 0.868 |
| Civic virtue (Mean = 4.3121; SD = 0.73072)  |         |       |
| 1) I do additional work to develop work at my university.   | 4.14    | 0.884 |
| 2) I follow technical and administrations developments in my field of work.                                     | 4.33    | 0.826 |
| 3) I make sure to attend meetings for my work.  | 4.37    | 0.794 |
| 4) I abide by rules, law, regulators and instruction in fore at the university.                                 | 4.41    | 0.823 |
| Organizational Justice (Mean = 3.34; SD = 0.876)  |         |       |
| Distribution justice (Mean = 3.0033; SD = 1.05170)  |         |       |
| 1) I think the financial incentives I get are very appropriate.   | 2.80    | 1.21  |
| 2) I feel the match between my salary and my qualifications.  | 3.02    | 1.24  |
| 3) I think that the university administration is striving to achieve a better position for the faculty members. | 3.08    | 1.23  |
| 4) The salary I get is fair compared to what my colleagues in the university get.                               | 3.11    | 1.07  |
| Procedural justice (Mean = 3.3905; SD = 0.99250)  |         |       |
| 1) The university management accepts objections from staff that it issue regarding them.                        | 3.24    | 1.11  |
| 2) There is a mechanism that allows faculty members to object to decisions that concern them.                   | 3.31    | 1.11  |
| 3) Regulations and instructions apply to everyone without exception.  | 3.44    | 1.18  |
| 4) Rules for obtaining leave apply equitably to all staff.  | 3.58    | 1.05  |

| Measures  | Mean SD |      |
|---|---------|------|
| Interactional justice (Mean = 3.6373; SD = 0.90273)   |         |      |
| 1) University management shows concern for the rights of staff members.                     | 3.42    | 1.08 |
| 2) University management appreciates initiatives and suggestion submitted by staff members. | 3.58    | 1.02 |
| 3) Management treats staff with appropriate of respect.                                     | 3.71    | 1.03 |
| 4) University management is keen to motivate staff to carry out scientific research.        | 3.85    | 1.04 |