

Ethical leadership and organizational commitment in the Colombian electricity sector: the importance of work self-efficacy

Liderazgo ético y compromiso organizacional en el sector eléctrico colombiano: la importancia de la autoeficacia laboral

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Abstract: This study analyzes the effect of ethical leadership on organizational commitment, considering work self-efficacy as a mediating variable. Structural equation modeling is used to analyze the proposed relationships. The sample consists of 448 professionals in the Colombian electricity sector. Ethical leaders increase organizational commitment, specifically the affective, normative, and perceived investment dimensions (Continuance 2), but not the perspective of lack of job opportunities (Continuance 1). Work self-efficacy explains how ethical leadership influences the analyzed dimensions of organizational commitment, with the exception of the lack of job opportunities (Continuance 1). Ethical leadership seeks to meet the socio-emotional needs of followers. When employees feel listened to and valued by the leader, they voluntarily choose to increase their commitment. However, when employees feel trapped in an organization and experience a constant sense of obligation, their discouragement intensifies, and they withdraw emotionally until they are disconnected from the positive effects of ethical leadership and work self-efficacy.

Keywords: Ethical leadership, work self-efficacy, organizational commitment, affective commitment, normative commitment, continuance commitment.

Resumen: Este estudio analiza el efecto del liderazgo ético sobre el compromiso organizacional teniendo en cuenta a la autoeficacia laboral como variable mediadora. Para examinar las relaciones propuestas se utiliza un modelo de ecuaciones estructurales. La muestra está compuesta por 448 profesionales pertenecientes al sector eléctrico colombiano. Los líderes éticos incrementan el compromiso organizacional, específicamente, las dimensiones afectiva, normativa y de inversiones percibidas (Continuidad 2), pero no la perspectiva de falta de oportunidades laborales (Continuidad 1). La autoeficacia laboral explica cómo el liderazgo ético influye en las dimensiones analizadas del compromiso organizacional, con excepción de la falta de oportunidades laborales (Continuidad 1). El liderazgo ético busca satisfacer las necesidades socioemocionales de los seguidores. Cuando los empleados se sienten escuchados y valorados por el líder, optan voluntariamente por aumentar su compromiso. Sin embargo, cuando los empleados se sienten atrapados en una organización y experimentan una sensación constante de obligación, su desánimo se intensifica y se retraen emocionalmente hasta desconectarse de los efectos positivos del liderazgo ético y de la autoeficacia laboral.

Palabras clave: liderazgo ético, autoeficacia laboral, compromiso organizacional, compromiso afectivo, compromiso normativo, compromiso de continuidad.

1. Introduction

Sustainable development is perhaps the main concern of organizations, even in emerging countries (Maldonado-Guzman et al., 2023; Sánchez-Báez et al., 2023). However, corporate sustainability requires a real and balanced integration of its dimensions. Thus, the economic side has become a priority interest over other perspectives, such as the human one (Ilyas et al., 2020). The social purpose of companies is underpinned by initiatives aimed at increasing the well-being and commitment of employees (DiPietro et al., 2020). Commitment is a multidimensional construct that stimulates employees through emotional guarantees, security, and purpose related to the ongoing work activities (Trigueiro-Fernandes et al., 2019). The leadership approach is key in addressing this organizational need. For example, researchers have found a strong relationship between ethical leadership and work commitment (Qing et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2019). However, there is not much empirical evidence available on the implicit mechanisms that enable this relationship (Engelbrecht et al., 2017; Ilyas et al., 2020).

In this sense, the ethical leader's transparency and communication skills make it easier for employees to place a set of expectations on him/her, which are usually accompanied by a solid and lasting commitment (Qing et al., 2020). The ethical leader is defined as the model for appropriate behavior through compliance with norms. This behavior includes a series of personal actions and relationships with followers to provide them with the necessary tools to face ethical dilemmas and to make any decision (Brown et al., 2005). In fact, a growing body of research supports the positive effect of the ethical leader on the follower's behavior (Arshad et al., 2021; Ashfaq et al., 2021). Considering the social cognitive theory developed by Bandura et al. (2001), self-efficacy is associated with high self-realization, persistence, and personal satisfaction. Therefore, self-efficacy can positively modify the employee's confidence and resilience in situations of uncertainty. This is generally linked to greater individual interest in the organization. In fact, the ability to integrate successes and failures into the overall experience of the individual becomes a source of personal confidence (De Anda et al., 2023). Thus, employees with high self-efficacy can face all kinds of challenges with confidence and strong commitment to their work life (Aftab et al., 2022). Hence, self-efficacy may be an underlying element that relates ethical leadership and organizational commitment.

Nevertheless, and surprisingly, Ilyas et al. (2020) suggest that the effect of ethical leadership on organizational commitment is stronger among employees whose self-efficacy is low rather than high. In other words, in light of these findings self-efficacy negatively moderates the relationship between ethical leadership and commitment. In fact, Saks and Ashforth (2000) suggest that individuals with low self-efficacy are more susceptible to external factors because they have less confidence in their abilities. Consequently, these employees are more likely to accept the ethical leader's instructions and normative behavior to guide them toward achieving organizational goals. On the other hand, employees with high work self-efficacy and strong self-confidence are less dependent on the leader and his or her influence. That is, their level of commitment is not strongly related to the ethical leader's influence.

In any case, in limitations and suggestions for future research, Ilyas et al. (2020) suggest using mediating variables as indirect conditional effects that better explain the relationship between ethical leadership and commitment. This study aims to answer the questions of these authors through the following objective: to analyze why ethical leadership can help employees commit at work through the perception of self-efficacy. The underlying role of work self-efficacy is examined as a mediating element for this purpose. In other words, its circumstantial effect (moderator) is avoided and its role as a process (mediator) is examined. An extensive literature review conducted for this research did not reveal similar studies.

This study aims to contribute to the existing literature on ethical leadership in several ways. First, by examining the indirect effect of ethical leadership on organizational commitment through the mediating role of work self-efficacy. This analysis defines a theoretical model that has not been used in Latin America. In fact, the theoretical contribution goes further by proposing a scheme divided into four mediating effects. This means that the effect of ethical leadership is revised, with the help of work self-efficacy, in each of the subscales that form organizational commitment.

In conclusion, the empirical findings of this research are expected to convey important practical implications. First, positive and ethical leadership styles can serve as organizational resources that encourage employees to invest more energy in improving their commitment. Second, organizations that focus on ethical culture can build a line of work where employee development is the leader's primary concern. This could help organizations have a committed and productive workforce with lower turnover rates, still a critical indicator in today's competitive environment. Second, it uses the theory of resource conservation, updated by [Hobfoll et al. \(2018\)](#), along with the theory of resource and demands (J-DR) proposed by ([Bakker & Demerouti, 2017](#)) to address the importance of self-efficacy as a mediating mechanism. These theoretical assumptions propose that a positive leadership style can be an organizational resource that increases employee intensity and efficacy ([Aftab et al., 2022](#)). In reality, organizational or personal resources are the main antecedents and central causes that promote work commitment ([Eldor & Harpaz, 2016](#)). Therefore, the persuasive behavior of the ethical leader is expected to be transformed into a role model that influences the follower's confidence in his or her abilities. This belief, if significant, influences the choice and coherence of employees' efforts to achieve a goal. Determination and commitment are likely to depend on changes in individual initiative, and the ethical leader is key to this positive process.

The document begins with an introduction, followed by a theoretical framework or literature review. This serves to establish relationships between variables and their respective hypotheses. The section concludes with the research model. The methodology is then described, after which the results are presented. A discussion and an analysis of the implications follow. Finally, the limitations of the study and a conclusion are included.

2. Theoretical Framework

The influence of self-efficacy on employees' organizational commitment has not been sufficiently analyzed ([Chesnut & Burley, 2015](#); [Soomro et al., 2023](#)). For example, [Hameli and Ordun \(2022\)](#) or [Liu \(2019\)](#) support the assumption that self-efficacy is a key factor that predicts commitment. However, both of these studies use organizational commitment as a single construct. In this sense, commitment may have different interactions with self-efficacy due to its multidimensionality. This diversity may provide a different perspective on the relationships. Thus, this study presents four models that establish a relationship between self-efficacy and commitment from a broader and more detailed perspective.

Similarly, the relationship between ethical leadership and commitment has not been sufficiently analyzed. For example, [Bahadori et al. \(2021\)](#) believe that ethical leadership is positively related to affective, normative, and continuance commitment. However, these researchers do not make a judgment regarding continuance commitment. Recognizing the plural nature of continuance commitment is key for a more accurate understanding of whether or not ethical leaders can be deactivated, for example, by a lack of job alternatives for employees. Finally, the use of self-efficacy as an indirect or mediating variable adds depth to the relationship between ethical leadership and the four possible variants of organizational commitment. In fact, self-efficacy is a personal resource associated with motivation that can explain certain individual behaviors. For example, [Park, et al. \(2023\)](#) believe that the ethical leader has a positive relationship with unethical pro-organizational behavior through continuance commitment. Therefore, it is likely that self-efficacy can provide more information about the link between ethical leadership and different models of commitment.

Simultaneously, ethical leadership creates a contrast with other management styles such as the transformational, service, visionary, or authentic styles from different perspectives. Ethical leadership aims at change and organizational performance, but through deep moral employee development. Therefore, the ethical leader ensures that the employee focuses his or her efforts in a collective sense, and that self-interest is no longer an alternative to achieving certain goals ([Sarwar et al., 2020](#)). In addition, the ethical leader intentionally seeks an honest and fair relationship with the employee through reward and punishment mechanisms. That is, communication revolves around ethical awareness and related behaviors as a key and

non-negotiable organizational outcome. In fact, the leader uses ethics to build bonds with employees and also to address organizational strategies and goals (Wang et al., 2021).

2.1. Model 1: (Ethical Leadership - Work Self-Efficacy - Organizational Commitment)

Ethical leadership is a management style that is characterized for promoting normatively appropriate behavior through personal guidelines that are usually transferred to followers through ongoing communication (Brown et al., 2005). In this sense, previous research shows that the leader's ethical behavior plays a key role in task performance (Walumbwa et al., 2011). However, the effectiveness of the ethical leader remains a topic of debate that has become increasingly important in recent years. Therefore, it is important to determine which contextual factors make ethical leaders more effective.

Ethical leadership may combine moods with personal actions to make its management convincing. Trust is a starting point that fosters certain ethical initiatives, through sincere communication, as resources useful to face any obstacle (Ashfaq et al., 2021). Thus, an eminently ethical management represents positive support for the behavior of followers (Arshad et al., 2021). According to the social cognitive theory updated by Bandura et al. (2001), self-efficacy is a critical motivational trait for achieving personal goals by enhancing employee well-being (Sartori & Garrido, 2023). The theory states that individual beliefs have a greater impact on behavior than what is objectively true (Rumjaun & Narod, 2020).

In this sense, the progressive interest in ethical management styles is subject to its capacity to guide positive employee behavior toward daily work activities. The leader's involvement creates a set of expectations that are usually translated into continuous effort by employees to develop new resources. Therefore, ethical leadership shapes an emotionally constructive climate that leads to increased work self-efficacy (Aftab et al., 2022).

The impact of ethical leaders extends beyond the executive sphere. A compelling influence designed through an ethical model is certain to transfer autonomy and opportunity to employees. This circumstance creates a context of gratitude that commits employees and fosters an energetic work disposition through high work self-efficacy (Ilyas et al., 2020). The perception of fairness conveyed by the ethical leader certainly creates optimism and commitment among employees, making them more efficient. In fact, people with a strong sense of work self-efficacy are more likely to accept corporate values and goals. Thus, there is a strong compatibility between the development of employees' abilities to increase their self-efficacy and their commitment to the organization (Syabarrudin et al., 2020).

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed: *H1*. Work self-efficacy significantly mediates the positive relationship between ethical leadership and organizational commitment.

2.2. Model 2: (Ethical Leadership - Work Self-Efficacy - Affective Commitment)

Affective commitment is an expressed statement by the employee about his or her sense of belonging and emotional attachment to the organization (Santiago Torner, 2023b). From this perspective, when the employee is included and treated with respect by the ethical leader, the employee increases his/her resources (social support and positive feedback on performance) and the quality of the relationship with the supervisor increases his/her capabilities (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

On the other hand, work self-efficacy is a construct that depends on the environment and, more specifically, on the interpretation of the signals it sends. In this sense, the ethical leader is an integrating factor that exerts a strong contextual influence (Ilyas et al., 2020). Certainly, the nature of moral managers, characterized by open communication and clear direction, expands employees' belief in their ability to perform effectively and achieve positive results (Aftab et al., 2022). The explicit intention to respond through extra-role behaviors and a systematic demonstration of skills appears in employees

from the moment they feel treated with reciprocal norms. In other words, a strong affective bond is formed (Qing et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2019).

Self-efficacy and trust are closely related. In this sense, the ethical leader creates an environment that helps to keep employees emotionally committed through a strong belief in their own abilities, and in an interaction where trust is a critical value (Ochoa Pacheco et al., 2023). Therefore, self-efficacy is a personality trait that enhances affective commitment when combined with other related resources (Erum et al., 2020).

Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed: *H2*. Work self-efficacy significantly mediates the positive relationship between ethical leadership and affective commitment.

2.3. Model 3: (Ethical Leadership - Work Self-Efficacy - Normative Commitment)

Normative commitment originates from a moral obligation bond between member and organization. In other words, it is driven by a high degree of emotional responsibility and a mentality to support change initiatives (Lazar et al., 2022). Its theoretical basis is different from that of affective commitment, but they share antecedents and consequences. Therefore, they have a strong interdependence (Meyer & Parfyonova, 2010).

Thus, Bakker and Demerouti (2017) propose motivational pathways that come from work or from certain personal resources, such as self-efficacy, to explain the characteristics of commitment, especially normative commitment. Work self-efficacy assumes the function of a cognitive link between personal or work resources and professional commitment (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). In this direction, those with a high normative commitment are willing to make individual sacrifices for the good of the organization because they consider it morally correct. From this perspective, work self-efficacy and this commitment type share commonalities and interact to achieve organizational goals (Syabarrudin et al., 2020).

Much of the academic work has focused on analyzing ethical behavior from a normative perspective. In other words, examining the behavioral principles, guidelines, and codes for acting ethically. In this sense, the ethical leader is responsible for transferring individual standards of action from theory to organizational culture, through credible and sustainable actions over time. Thus, the ethical leader becomes a reliable conductor of ethical behavior in the organization (Sarwar et al., 2020). From this perspective, employees with high normative commitment are more likely to connect with the indicators transmitted by ethical leaders, and to increase their productivity through effective attitudes that also contribute to job satisfaction (Abuzaid, 2018).

Finally, ethical leaders increase the sense of personal responsibility. Therefore, moral managers and employees are committed through clearly defined values and a clear orientation to the norm (Bahadori et al., 2021).

Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed: *H3*. Work self-efficacy significantly mediates the positive relationship between ethical leadership and normative commitment.

2.4. Model 4: (Ethical Leadership - Work Self-Efficacy - Continuance Commitment due to Perceived Investment or Work Sacrifice (CC2))

CC2 has a different and almost opposite approach to *CC1*, which is the first dimension of continuance commitment and refers to commitment to remain in an organization due to lack of employment alternatives, (Taing et al., 2011). In fact, the organizational purpose of *CC2* is based on the theory of simultaneous or parallel bets. That is, it values all the investments that an employee would lose by voluntarily leaving the job, including seniority, social position, or friendships. In this case, the decision is not necessarily accompanied by feelings of disappointment, suffering or emotional exhaustion. In fact, *CC2* has an affinity with affective or normative commitment (Taing et al., 2011).

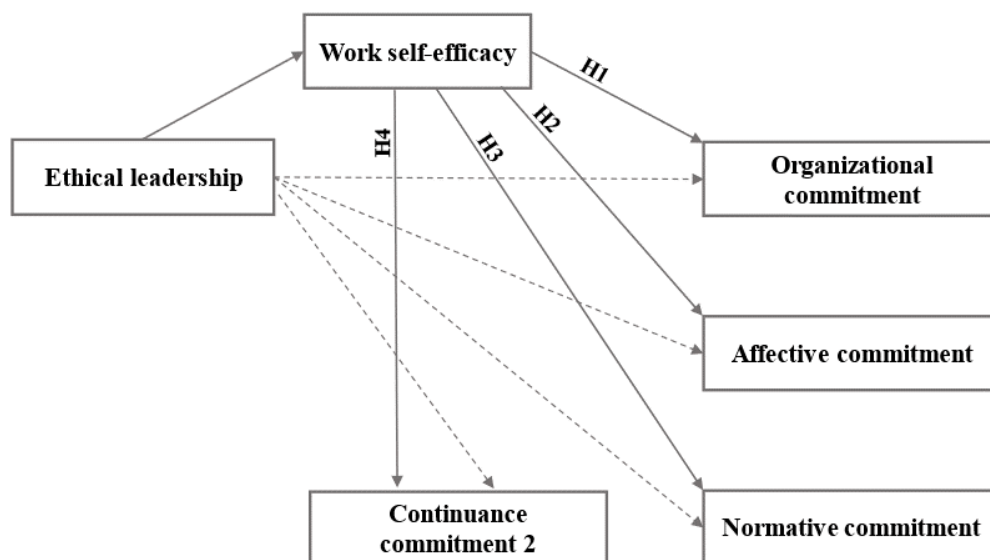
In addition, *CC2* is not related to a feeling of subjective discomfort or to avoidance strategies to escape responsibility (Gillet et al., 2023). People in the *CC2* group may have a high degree of development of their abilities, but their motivation may be subject to more extrinsic aspects. Therefore, there is no separation between individual work self-efficacy and this type of commitment (Potipiroon & Ford, 2017).

People who want to stay in their workplace are likely to perform better and work hard to receive positive feedback from their leaders (De Clercq et al., 2021). Consequently, the characteristics of the ethical leader and its dimensions of correctness, justice, and integrity may be similar to *CC2* (Bahadori et al., 2021).

Ethical leaders do not exert excessive pressure on employees. Therefore, employees with a strong perception of *CC2* will intentionally seek a stable relationship with their leader. Employees will take on additional tasks with the desire to increase their self-confidence in order to reduce turnover. That is, they will allocate more resources and energy through effective voluntary behaviors that guarantee their job security (De Clercq et al., 2021).

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed: *H4*. Work self-efficacy significantly mediates the positive relationship between ethical leadership and *CC2*. See Figure 1 for a theoretical structural model.

Figure 1: Theoretical Mediation Model. Model 4 (Hayes, 2018).



3. Methodology

3.1 Procedure and Samples

A single study was conducted to evaluate the different hypotheses. In the first phase, the researcher contacted 32 organizations in the Colombian electricity sector. After several filters, especially location and relevance, the number of participating companies was reduced to 6. The main objective was to collect information from the most representative cities in the country. The research went through a preliminary phase during the second semester of 2021 to verify its clear ethical

orientation. During the last four months of 2021, the following information was sent to the selected companies: objectives, confidentiality agreements, data protection and voluntary withdrawal. Data collection was completed in the first quarter of 2022. The surveys were completed online and on separate days to reduce the potential influence of the common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Microsoft Forms and a six-point Likert scale (strongly agree - strongly disagree) were also used. All the companies allocated part of the working day for this activity. The average time to complete the entire process was 35 minutes and the response rate was 100%.

The sample consisted of 448 employees. 39% were women and 61% were men. Seniority varied widely: 14.3% of employees had less than 1 year of experience, 23.2% had between 1 and 3 years, 17.2% had between 4 and 6 years, and finally 45.3% had more than 6 years of experience. The mean age was 41.3 years (SD = 9.93). 100% of the participants had a university education and more than 65% had a graduate degree. The sample was calculated using STATA statistical program, and sampling was by conglomerates (main cities in Colombia).

3.2 Ethical Considerations

This research project was evaluated on July 21, 2021 by the Ethics Committee of the University of Vic - Central University of Catalonia (Internal code: 170/2021). Its conclusions certify the following: (1) The study meets the necessary adequacy requirements in terms of objectives and methodological design. (2) The ethical requirements for obtaining informed consent and aspects related to confidentiality are met. (3) The researcher's competence and available resources are adequate to conduct the study without any apparent risk, as it is non-experimental. Informed consent has been handled considering the rules of good scientific practice proposed by the Superior Council of Scientific Investigations (CSIC) Spain (2010).

3.3 Instruments

- *Control Variables*: Seniority and gender were used as control variables. Respondents were asked to indicate how long they had been working, using a scale to measure seniority with a minimum of one year. Gender was coded as 0 for men and 1 for women.
- *Ethical Leadership*: A 10-item, unidimensional scale proposed by Brown et al. (2005). Used in its original version with a 7-point Likert scale and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84. It analyzes the leadership's ability to focus the organization's attention on ethics and actions consistent with the values. Used by Santiago Torner (2023c, 2023e) with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 (Review appendix 1).
- *Work Self-Efficacy*: A 6-item, unidimensional scale proposed by Schaufeli et al. (1996). Used in its original version with a 4-point Likert scale and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90. It analyzes the individual's ability to successfully achieve organizational goals. Used by Salanova and Schaufeli (2000) with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80 (Review appendix 1).
- *Organizational Commitment*: Scale consisting of 18 questions and three dimensions: affective, normative, and continuance. Each dimension has 6 items. Developed by Meyer et al. (1993) with a 7-point Likert scale and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82. It analyzes the emotional ties between employee and employer, along with the costs associated with voluntary departure from the organization, in addition to the feelings of obligation internalized by employees who stay in their jobs because they believe it is the right thing to do. Used by Lee et al. (2001) with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 (Review appendix 1).

- *Affective Commitment*: A 6-item unidimensional scale proposed by Meyer et al. (1993). Used in its original version with a 7-point Likert scale and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82. It analyzes the emotional ties that bind the employee to the organization. Used by Santiago Torner et al. (2024) with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 (Review appendix 1).
- *Normative Commitment*: A 6-item unidimensional scale proposed by Meyer et al. (1993). Used in its original version with a 7-point Likert scale and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.73. It analyzes the commitment to stay in an organization for moral reasons related to reciprocity, including loyalty and sense of duty. Used by Kim et al. (2020) with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.74 (Review appendix 1).
- *Continuance Commitment 1*: First subscale of the dimension proposed by Meyer et al. (1993) with 3 items. Used in its original version with a 7-point Likert scale and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.55. It analyzes the individual's perception of the lack of employment alternatives. Used by Gillette et al. (2023) with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.78 (Review appendix 1).
- *Continuance Commitment 2*: Second subscale of the dimension proposed by Meyer et al. (1993) with 3 items. Used in its original version with a 7-point Likert scale and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.55. It analyzes perceived sacrifices versus potential benefits when considering leaving a job. Used by Gillette et al. (2023) with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.73 (Review appendix 1).

3.4 Data Analysis

The potential disadvantage of the Common Method Variation (CMV) is approached from several perspectives. Considering the guidelines of Podsakoff et al. (2012), Harman's single-factor test is used post-hoc through SPSS v.25 computer program. The extraction of factors indicates 30.142% of total variance, a percentage that excludes the CMV problem because it is less than the 50% limit. Furthermore, the use of six different sources of information, the distribution of surveys on different days, and the use of a separate questionnaire for each organization reinforces the idea that CMV bias is not a significant problem for the data.

Analyzed initially are the descriptive statistics and various Pearson correlations between the variables studied (Table 1). Then, the model validity is analyzed through two control procedures: (1). Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) (Table 2). (2). Convergent and Discriminant Validity (CaDV) (Tables 1 and 3). Subsequently, PROCESS macro for SPSS v 3.5 (Hayes, 2018) is used to examine the mediating role of the work self-efficacy variable in the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational commitment (Table 4). In order to achieve this objective, Model 4 (simple mediation) is selected, with one caveat because four different mediation models are used within the same matrix (Table 4). The confidence interval is 95% and 10,000 bootstrapping samples are used. Mean centering of the predictor variables is used to address potential problems of multicollinearity. This technique makes it possible to reduce statistical drawbacks associated with a correlation between predictor variables that is too high (Aguinis et al., 2017). Finally, Figure 2 shows the mediation model with unstandardized coefficients (macro-AMOS v.26 - SPSS).

4. Results

4.1 Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the seven scales used in this study (Tables 1 and 2) is adequate. The Cronbach's alphas are above .70, which, according to Bonett and Wright (2015), indicates acceptable internal consistency. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, ranges, and correlations of all scales included in this study. Analyses revealed statistically significant

relationships between the variables studied: (1) The first control variable (Sex) only had nonsignificant relationships. (2) The second control variable (seniority) was related to ETL ($r = 0.16$, $p < 0.001$) and CC2 ($r = 0.12$, $p < 0.001$). These relationships are particularly important because they indicate that perceptions of ETL and CC2 increase positively over time. In fact, it is reasonable for the sense of perceived sacrifice (CC2) to increase in the long term (Taing et al., 2011), and on the other hand, it is not common for a management style to consolidate (Özgenel & Aksu, 2020). (3) Ethical leadership is associated with all scales except lack of job alternatives (CC1) ($r = 0.06$, $p > 0.05$), which validates this management style and the security it provides. (4) Work self-efficacy has the same behavior and is not associated with (CC1) ($r = -0.04$, $p > 0.05$). (5) In fact, affective commitment is not associated either ($r = 0.07$, $p > 0.05$). (CC1) moves away from positive emotional attachments as it tends toward dissatisfaction (Gillet et al., 2023). Finally, note the significant relationship between normative commitment and (CC1) ($r = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$). This is likely due to the obligatory nature of both commitments (Syahrani et al., 2022).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Constructs	N	M	SD	S	A	ETL	AUT	OC	AC	NC	CC1	CC2
Sex (S)	1	0.40	0.49	x								
Seniority (A)	1	3.60	1.80	0.037	x							
Ethical leadership (ETL)	10	46.40	8.20	-0.049	0.165*	0.830						
Job self-efficacy (AUT)	6	29.81	3.90	0.001	0.087	0.314*	0.810					
Organizational commitment (OC)	18	77.20	12.10	0.018	0.096*	0.258*	0.304*	0.820				
Affective commitment (AC)	6	29.80	4.80	0.082	0.073	0.291*	0.430*	0.733*	0.830			
Normative commitment (NC)	6	25.20	5.50	-0.022	0.051	0.228*	0.212*	0.818*	0.519*	0.740		
Continuance commitment 1 (CC1)	3	12.20	2.80	-0.012	0.048	0.056	-0.037	0.360*	0.069	0.175*	0.710	
Continuance commitment 2 (CC1)	3	14.10	2.50	-0.008	0.123*	0.180*	0.158*	0.808*	0.400*	0.668*	0.324*	0.730

Notes: The table shows the calculation of descriptive information and Pearson correlations. Discriminant Validity (diagonal) is also included. (N) Number of Items. (M) Mean. (SD) Standard Deviation. Significant correlations *($p < 0.05$). CI (95%) ($n=448$). Source: Prepared by authors.

4.1.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is done using these absolute goodness of fit indices: (Macro AMOS V.26). CMIN(χ^2), Likelihood Ratio; (χ^2/df), Chi-square on Degrees of Freedom; (RMSEA), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; (SRMSR), Standardized Root Mean Square Residuals; and (GFI), Goodness of Fit Index. These values indicate the degree to which the model can predict the matrix of observed covariances. Other incremental fit factors are used concurrently. (IFI), Incremental Fit Index; (CFI), Comparative Fit Index; (NFI), Normed Fit Index. These values verify the proposed model in relation to another model, which usually does not specify the link between constructs. CFA confirms the validity of the proposed theoretical model.

Table 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Goodness-of-fit measure	Acceptable fit levels	Results
CMIN (χ^2)	χ^2 (small)	465.24
χ^2/df	< 3	2.660
RMSEA	< 0.06	0.050
SRMSR	< 0.08	0.066
GFI	> 0.90	0.922
IFI	> 0.90	0.924
CFI	> 0.90	0.920
NFI	> 0.90	0.912

Notes: The correct fit of the model is usually influenced by different causes (1). Number of factors. (2). Number of response points. (3). Sample size. The adequate fit shown in the table is probably due to the internal consistency of the factors analyzed, to the high number of response points (6), and to the sample size (n=448). In fact, samples close to 450 people have a 77% probability of fitting (Morata-Ramírez et al., 2015). Source: Prepared by authors.

4.1.2. Convergent and Discriminant Validity

Table 3 presents a second validation of the model through the validations suggested by Chin (1998). The following analyses are performed to verify the robustness of all variables: (1). Composite Reliability (CFC) (2). Average Variance Extracted (AVE). (3). Discriminant Validity. (DV). Likewise, the Critical Coefficients (CR) follow the recommendations of Hair et al. (2006) - (>1.96; p-value less than 0.05). The CFC and Cronbach's Alpha values are above 0.70, which guarantees the reliability of the constructs used. The AVE factors are between 51% and 69%, which is significant. The square root of the AVE must be greater than the Pearson correlations between variables to have discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 3: Convergent and Discriminant Validity

	ALPHA ¹	CR ²	CFC ³	AVE ⁴	DV ⁵
ETL	0.92	> 1.96	0.830	0.690	0.830
AUT	0.89	> 1.96	0.860	0.650	0.810
OC	0.81	> 1.96	0.810	0.680	0.820
AC	0.86	> 1.96	0.830	0.690	0.830
NC	0.74	> 1.96	0.720	0.550	0.740
CC1	0.76	> 1.96	0.750	0.510	0.710
CC2	0.73	> 1.96	0.740	0.540	0.730

Notes: The table shows the degree of correlation of the measures of the items that include the same concept (convergent validity), and the theoretical difference between the different constructs (discriminant validity). 1. Cronbach's alpha. 2. Critical Coefficients. 3. Composite Reliability. 4. Average Variance Extracted. 5. Discriminant Validity. Source: Prepared by authors.

4.2. Validity Analysis

4.2.1. Hypothesis Tests

This study proposes a relationship between ethical leadership and organizational commitment, mediated by work self-efficacy. Model 4 proposed by Hayes (2018), simple mediation, was used to test the different hypotheses. The simple mediation procedure, also known as evaluation of direct and indirect effects, is designed to examine the impact of a mediating variable on the relationship between an independent or explanatory variable and another dependent or explained variable.

This statistical technique is based on traditional linear regression models. Its objective focuses on knowing the percentage of explained variance (variability) of a dependent variable, or criterion, based on a set of independent or explanatory variables. In mediation analysis, a relationship is established between an explanatory or independent variable X, a criterion or dependent variable Y, and variable M, known as mediating variable, added through them (Hayes, 2013).

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), four assumptions must be met before applying a simple mediation analysis: confirm that the independent or predictor variable is significantly related to the criterion or dependent variable; confirm that the independent or predictor variable is significantly related to the mediating variable; confirm that the mediating variable has a significant relationship with the criterion or dependent variable, holding constant the effect of the independent or predictor variable; and confirm that the relationship between the independent or predictor variable and the dependent or criterion variable is significantly lower when the mediating variable is included in the model. In this sense, PROCESS macro for SPSS statistical package simplifies and improves the process with clear and easy to interpret data, avoiding the use of a more mechanical procedure as proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986). Figures 1 and 2 and Table 5 show simple mediation analyses with unstandardized regression coefficients. Table 4 shows the support for the four hypotheses presented, along with the indirect effects of the self-efficacy mediating variable, using unstandardized coefficients. Confidence intervals (CI) are 95%, 10,000 bootstrapping samples, and upper and lower limit confidence intervals (LLCI and ULCI) serve as boundaries. The regression analysis is irrelevant if 0 appears in the space delimited by the ranges. Coefficient of determination R² helps to understand the relevance of the model used. In this case: (1). Model 1 explains 26% of the dependent variable Organizational Commitment (OC). (2). Model 2 explains 21% of the dependent variable Affective Commitment (AC). (3). Model 3 explains 16% of the dependent variable Normative Commitment (NC). (4). Model 4 explains 12% of the dependent variable Continuance Commitment 2 (CC2). Hypothesis 1 proposes that AUT mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational commitment. The linear effects a_i ; b_i (Model 1) confirm the relationship ($\beta = 0.12$, SE = 0.02, $p < 0.05$) ($\beta = 0.93$, SE = 0.18, $p < 0.05$). Hypothesis 2 proposes that AUT mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and affective commitment. The linear effects a_i ; b_i (Model 2) confirm the relationship ($\beta = 0.12$, SE = 0.02, $p < 0.05$) ($\beta = 0.57$, SE = 0.07, $p < 0.05$). Hypothesis 3 proposes that AUT mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and normative commitment. The linear effects a_i ; b_i (Model 3) confirm the relationship ($\beta = 0.12$, SE = 0.02, $p < 0.05$) ($\beta = 0.27$, SE = 0.08, $p < 0.05$). Hypothesis 4 proposes that AUT mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and CC2. The linear effects a_i ; b_i (Model 4) confirm the relationship ($\beta = 0.12$, SE = 0.02, $p < 0.05$) ($\beta = 0.11$, SE = 0.05, $p < 0.05$).

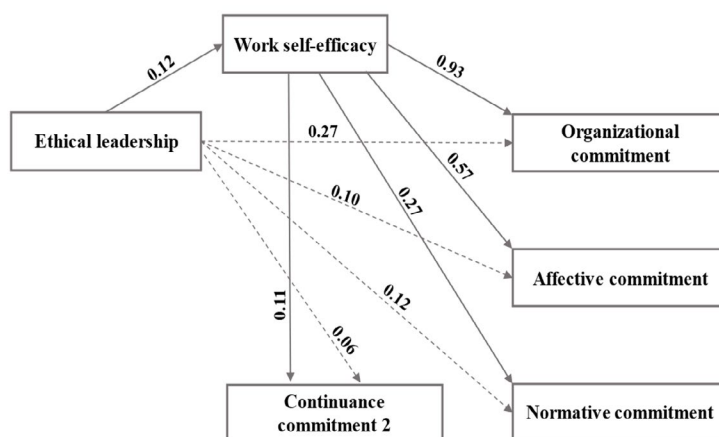
Table 4: Hypotheses Test Results

Hypothesized Relationship	Proposed model				t-value	Test results
	Unstandardized coefficients					
H1 Ethical Leadership - Self-Efficacy (M). Self -Efficacy - Organizational Commitment	0.12				6.98*	
Indirect effect X on Y (M)	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	5.22*	Supported
	0.112	0.033	0.054	0.185		
H2 Ethical Leadership - Self-Efficacy (M). Self -Efficacy - Affective Commitment	0.12				6.98*	
Indirect effect X on Y (M)	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	8.39*	Supported
	0.069	0.016	0.041	0.102		
H3 Ethical Leadership - Self-Efficacy (M). Self -Efficacy - Normative Commitment	0.12				6.98*	
Indirect effect X on Y (M)	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	3.14*	Supported
	0.066	0.014	0.031	0.960		
H4 Ethical leadership - Self-efficacy (M). Self -efficacy - CC2	0.12				6.98*	
Indirect effect X on Y (M)	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	2.24*	Supported
	0.044	0.010	0.021	0.074		

Notes: * $p < 0.05$ **Table 5:** Mediation Analysis Results

Model	Route	B	p	t	ES	LLCI	ULCI	
MODEL 1 (ETL ¹ -AUT ² -OC ³)	ETL - AUT	ai	0.122	0.001	6.988	0.017	0.088	0.156
	AUT- OC	bi	0.930	0.001	5.218	0.176	0.574	1.267
	ETL - OC	c'	0.266	0.001	3.873	0.068	0.130	0.399
MODEL 2 (ETL -AUT -AC ⁴)	ETL - AUT	ai	0.122	0.001	6.988	0.017	0.088	0.156
	AUT - AC	bi	0.566	0.001	8.393	0.067	0.431	0.695
	ETL - AC	c'	0.102	0.001	3.920	0.026	0.051	0.153
MODEL 3 (ETL -AUT -NC ⁵)	ETL - AUT	ai	0.122	0.001	6.988	0.017	0.088	0.156
	AUT - NC	bi	0.267	0.002	3.141	0.084	0.098	0.427
	ETL - NC	c'	0.122	0.001	3.756	0.032	0.058	0.186
MODEL 4 (ETL -AUT -CC2 ⁶)	ETL - AUT	ai	0.122	0.001	6.988	0.017	0.088	0.156
	AUT - CC2	bi	0.110	0.026	2.238	0.049	0.013	0.207
	ETL - CC2	c'	0.057	0.003	2.988	0.019	0.020	0.095

General Note (1). Ethical Leadership. (2). Work Self-Efficacy. (3). Organizational Commitment. (4). Affective Commitment. (5). Normative Commitment. (6). Continuance Commitment 2 (CC2). Source: Prepared by authors

Figure 2: Regression Analysis Results (unstandardized coefficients)

Notes: The figure shows the proposed simple moderation statistical diagram (4 models). ETL has strong relationships with all constructs. AUT explains these relationships through OC, AC, NC, and CC2. Source: Prepared by authors

5. Discussion

This research examines the mediating role of work self-efficacy on the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational commitment. In fact, the analysis is deeper because it uses four different models to better understand the effects of ethical management on commitment and each of its dimensions. The results show that:

Work self-efficacy significantly mediates the positive relationship between ethical leadership and organizational commitment (Hypothesis 1), which is consistent with [Ashfaq et al. \(2021\)](#). These authors believe that the positive behavior of ethical leaders makes them credible agents that influence employees and increase their ability to face new challenges with self-efficacy and higher levels of commitment. Additionally, the results suggest that a trustworthy leader becomes a role model and a useful resource for employees to face all their activities with an ethical perspective. This knowledge expands employees' personal safety and their interpretation of processes. In other words, it improves their work self-efficacy ([Ilyas et al., 2020](#)).

According to [Hobfoll et al. \(2018\)](#), the resources that come from work are destined to build new capabilities and alternatives. Therefore, ethical leaders provide social and affective resources that reinforce employees' positive expectations about the behavior of the person in whom they place part of their emotional safety. This positive environment of personal growth increases organizational commitment as a whole ([Syabarrudin et al., 2020](#)). Ethical leaders, due to their versatility and adaptability, are likely to be key and become a situational factor that activates employees' work self-efficacy and commitment.

The first finding of this research is that work self-efficacy mediates the relationship between ethical leaders and affective commitment (Hypothesis 2). No similar results were found in the literature, at least with this specificity.

The personality of ethical leaders awakens enthusiasm and a dynamic character in employees, which is likely to influence work self-efficacy and affective commitment. Personal identity is in fact a motivational factor that leads to attitudinal results ([Albrecht & Marty, 2020](#)). Consequently, the ethical leader seeks to connect employee values with organizational values by establishing ethical standards that serve as role models. This social exchange, connected to mutual affection and two-way trust relationships, increases self-efficacy and affective commitment ([Negiş Işık, 2020](#)).

Ethical leaders also create strong emotional bonds among employees, which increase their sense of belonging, and connect work self-efficacy with the employee-organization affective identity. Work resources, such as flexibility and decision-making ability, certainly suggest a general predisposition toward trust, ethics, and emotional connectedness, which in turn helps employees feel work self-efficacy in their jobs (Santiago Torner, 2023a; Zaim et al., 2021). Supervisor support clearly provides resources that lead to strong self-efficacy. Thus, personal results and effectiveness are direct and indirect factors determinant of the development and of the intentional relationship between employees and the organization (Ilyas et al., 2020).

At the same time, work self-efficacy mediates the positive relationship between ethical leadership and normative commitment (Hypothesis 3). This is the second important finding of this paper without any apparent contrasting research.

Ethical leaders initiate a process with employees to understand the importance of norms and their correct application in decision making. The construction of moral responsibility and ethical thinking may promote normative behavior in organizations (Syahrani et al., 2022). For example, the quality of exchange between leaders and followers, through strong interaction and the use of a fair reward system, develops resources and ethical standards as a basis for normative commitment (Danish et al., 2020).

In this direction, work self-efficacy is not only based on individual security, but also on positive attitude and adaptability. Therefore, when employees are aware of the norms that guide the organization, they reconsider their moral approach through a high sense of coherence and personal adaptation. This means that the criteria of justice and integrity prevail, which consolidates the normative sense of their commitment. Ultimately, this balance determines the interaction between ethical leadership, work self-efficacy, and normative commitment (Lazar et al., 2022). Furthermore, normative commitment establishes a relationship between ethical leaders and followers, based on certain moral obligations, that can influence the psychological contract through bidirectional loyalty and promote self-efficacy (Pulungan et al., 2020).

On the other hand, work self-efficacy justifies the articulation between ethical leadership and the second dimension of continuance commitment: perceived sacrifices (*CC2*) (Hypothesis 4). This result is important because it helps to understand continuance commitment from two opposite aspects, and the negative or positive contribution of each to the organization.

People in *CC2* do not necessarily lack the resources to cope with demanding work situations. Thus, they do not use avoidance strategies to avoid responsibility. In fact, *CC2* makes employees aware that their work provides them with valuable resources that they would lose by leaving (Taing et al., 2011; Vandenberghe et al., 2011).

In this sense, this type of commitment does not break the relational or transactional contract that employees have with the organization. The desire to remain in a specific job position is likely to activate motivational mechanisms oriented towards work self-efficacy (Potipiroon & Ford, 2017). Engaging in extra-role behaviors or accepting a higher workload may represent an employee strategy to mitigate the stressful prospect of having to change organizations.

In conclusion, a high *CC2* perception forces employees to make a determined demonstration of their competencies through voluntary behaviors that require resources, but also build additional ones (De Clercq et al., 2021). This attitude can be particularly useful for a management style that prioritizes loyalty and performance (Bahadori et al., 2021).

It is worth noting that, without addressing a particular hypothesis, there is no significant correlation between ethical leadership and work self-efficacy, with commitment due to a lack of alternative work options (*CC1*). Consequently, this subscale of continuance commitment was not incorporated in the mediation model. This result is particularly important because it addresses continuance commitment through its multidimensional aspects (Taing et al., 2011).

CC1 originates from perceived incapacity itself. In other words, an employee keeps his or her job because of a calculation of probabilities and a strong feeling that his or her only job expectation is reduced to the activity being performed at that moment. This situation distances employees from the available resources of the organization and causes deep feelings of confusion and discomfort (Vandenberghe et al., 2011). Employees with *CC1* undoubtedly view organizational permanence

as an obligation. Their main perspective is based on facing the stress caused by their position, which implies uninterrupted emotional exhaustion, instead of looking for something different (Gillet et al., 2023).

CC1 is identified with low self-confidence and weak orientation towards effort and persistence in achieving goals. This range of behavior is not related to the values conveyed by ethical leaders or to the nature of work self-efficacy. In fact, CC1 places a burden on the potential resources available to employees, emphasizing the impossibility of quitting while underestimating the responsibility of the job (Liu et al., 2007). This perception is incompatible with aspects of the psychological contract, or with an affective state that seeks social exchange with a constructive vocation (Taing et al., 2011). In fact, CC1 can lead to negative affectivity. This means, a tendency to experience moods of rejection and emotional restlessness, with a clear tendency to avoid risk or to see it as an inconvenience (Vandenberghe et al., 2011).

On the other hand, Bandura et al. (2001) specify that work self-efficacy requires a high perception of competence to successfully modify or cope with stressful work-related situations. In contrast, CC1 is characterized by a strong feeling of lack of resources to face a stressful environment (Woltés & Fernández-Mesa, 2023). Therefore, work self-efficacy and CC1 cannot be related (Liu et al., 2007). It is hard for a commitment that identifies with discouragement and is positively correlated with job dissatisfaction, low persistence, or emotional exhaustion, to benefit from the positive effect of self-efficacy, or to accept the behavioral development proposed by ethical leaders (Gillet et al., 2023).

In fact, the ethical leader is characterized by fair and equitable behavior. This honest treatment usually triggers positive responses from employees. However, if the employee does not have a hopeful perspective of his or her future, he or she will avoid any contextual influence. According to the COR theory, employees who generally have negative reactions to their work deplete their resources and are unable to replenish them because their organizational relationship is coercive. This negative scenario prevents ethical leaders from influencing employees who have difficulty performing the minimum tasks proposed by the job. Therefore, employees have a clear tendency to not relate to self-efficacy and the leader's influence (De Clercq et al., 2021).

6. Practical Implications and Limitations

Colombia is a country with significant corruption problems. The misuse of public funds over several decades has undoubtedly led to a lack of citizen interest in social issues in general, and organizations in particular have overextended their scope and focused on profit. These economic criteria weaken moral values and ethical codes (Santiago-Torner, 2023d). In addition, social gaps are widening, and individual needs are eclipsing the reality of the country.

Leadership with a clear ethical vocation is certainly essential to change the course of organizations. However, when leaders have a cascading impact, they must be aware of being congruent with what they say and do. Employees' perception of leadership style stimulates or inhibits ethical behavior, outside and inside the organization (Bahadori et al., 2021).

Fair treatment, respect for ethical and social norms, and clear regard for personal integrity are characteristics of leaders who claim to be ethical (Santiago-Torner & Muriel-Morales, 2023). Organizations urgently need to pause and organize a system of indicators to visualize ethical progress. Clearly, the concept is not enough without commitment to follow through. Organizations and their leaders often lose their identity in continuous daily struggles that weaken the scope of morality in favor of the immediacy of results (Santiago Torner, 2023a).

In terms of work self-efficacy and its complexity, leaders must ensure that the most relevant tasks are also the most intrinsically motivating tasks for employees. Excessive intrinsic focus on some tasks can certainly interfere with the performance of less interesting tasks. However, because of the lower transcendence, this situation is unlikely to significantly change individual performance.

Undoubtedly, maintaining a motivated, self-effective, and engaged workforce is a key retention strategy for organizations. A conscious focus on satisfying employees' needs, through a high perception of autonomy and competence, will evoke feelings of affective belonging and prevent continuance commitment *CC1*.

This research has limitations. However, every effort has been made to reduce them as much as possible. First, the concern of Common Method Variance (CMV) is addressed through a series of procedures: (1). Surveys were completed on separate days. (2). Anonymity is guaranteed. (3). The formats have a different distribution of questions.

Second, the social desirability bias is limited through several meetings with the participating organizations. The importance of answering the questions impartially because the success of the research depends on it, was emphasized in these meetings. Additionally, the fact that all participants are university graduates helps to understand the importance of the project.

Data collection in a single country, in this case Colombia, could not be avoided and limits generalization of the results. Furthermore, the transversality of the research prevents the establishment of a clear cause-effect line. Therefore, it is proposed to extend this research through a longitudinal approach that includes other mediators, or moderators, to explain how, why or when the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational commitment is established and strengthened. For example, it is possible to use different ethical climates, or the main dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization) to understand the contexts and circumstances that hinder or promote the advancement of ethical leaders.

7. Conclusion

This study provides several theoretical contributions by finding that an ethical leadership style influences organizational commitment and each of its dimensions through work self-efficacy. The findings suggest that ethical leaders foster a participatory work environment that inspires trust. This interaction-rich climate contributes not only to the transfer of resources, but also to the creation of new resources, which leads to increased self-efficacy. Indeed, an individual's belief that he or she has sufficient abilities to perform a task, positively influences organizational commitment, specifically in its affective, normative, and perceived job sacrifice aspects (*CC2*). However, the feeling of lack of job alternatives (*CC1*) is related to behaviors of lack of interest in adequately fulfilling role requirements. Similarly, employees feel trapped in their job functions and use all their resources to buffer the stress generated by this situation. Therefore, their responses are passive and far from the constructive attitude that relates links ethical leadership to work self-efficacy, and to desired organizational behavior.

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Appendix 1: Variables, items, and AVE calculation

Constructs and items	Factor Loadings	AVE
<i>ETHICAL LEADERSHIP (Brown et al., 2005)</i>		
Listens to what employees have to say	0.810	0.656
Disciplines employees who violate ethical standards	0.533	0.284
Conducts personal life in an ethical manner	0.781	0.610
Has employees' best interests in mind	0.850	0.723
Makes fair and balanced decisions	0.895	0.801
Can be trusted	0.899	0.809
Discusses business ethics or values with employees	0.884	0.781
Sets an example of how to do things right in terms of ethics	0.887	0.787
Defines success not just by results but also how results are obtained	0.864	0.746
When making decisions, asks "what is the right thing to do?"	0.817	0.667
		0.690
<i>AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT (Meyer et al., 1993)</i>		
I do not feel emotionally committed to my organization	0.883	0.779
I do not feel fully integrated in my organization	0.871	0.758
I really feel the organization's problems as my own	0.850	0.723
This organization means a lot to me personally	0.778	0.606
I would be happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization.	0.858	0.736
I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.	0.734	0.539
		0.690
<i>NORMATIVE COMMITMENT (Meyer et al., 1993)</i>		
I would feel guilty if I left my organization now	0.683	0.466
I would not leave my organization now because I have a sense of obligation to my colleagues	0.671	0.450
I owe a lot to my organization	0.830	0.689
This organization deserves my loyalty	0.751	0.564
Even if it were in my best interest, I feel it would not be right to leave my organization	0.800	0.640
I feel no obligation to remain in this organization	0.714	0.510
		0.550
<i>CONTINUANCE COMMITMENT 1 (Meyer et al., 1993)</i>		
I feel as if I have very few job options	0.663	0.440
One of the few negative consequences of leaving this organization is the scarcity of available alternatives	0.681	0.464
Today, staying in my organization is as much a matter of necessity as it is of desire	0.700	0.624
		0.510
<i>CONTINUANCE COMMITMENT 2 (Meyer et al., 1993)</i>		
If I had not put so much of myself into this organization, I might consider working somewhere else	0.763	0.582
It would be very hard for me to leave the organization, even if I wanted to	0.651	0.423
Much of my life would be affected if I changed organizations	0.780	0.610
		0.540

Constructs and items	Factor Loadings	AVE
<i>WORK SELF-EFFICACY (Schaufeli et al., 1996)</i>		
I can effectively solve problems that arise in my work	0.812	0.659
I contribute effectively to the work of my organization	0.801	0.641
In think I am good at my job	0.810	0.656
I am motivated to achieve objectives in my job	0.758	0.575
I have achieved many valuable things in my job	0.849	0.721
I am confident that I can get things done effectively in my job	0.790	0.624
		0.650