

## **The Effectiveness of Training Use of Character Strengths on the Transformational and Ethical Leadership of Middle Managers**

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The aim of the present study was to investigate the effectiveness of the training use of character strengths on transformational and ethical leaderships. The research design was a quasi-experimental design with an experimental group and a control group. The sample consisted of 40 middle managers of an organization who were selected through convenience sampling and randomly assigned to two experimental and control groups. The members of the experimental group received interventions using character strengths, while the control group did not receive any intervention. The research questionnaires included the Transformational Leadership Questionnaire (Carless et al.) and the Ethical Leadership Questionnaire (Brown et al.). The data were analyzed using multivariate and univariate analyses of covariance. The findings indicated that after controlling for pretests, the intervention using character strengths significantly increased the mean scores of

the transformational and ethical leaderships in the experimental group compared to the control group.

**Keywords:** training use of character strengths, transformational leadership, ethical leadership

Given that middle managers have close relationships with employees, among the three skills mentioned for managers at various levels (perceptual, technical, and human skills), human skill is considered essential for the success of middle managers. Today, the human skill is referred to as leadership. Leadership is a two-way transformational process in which individuals are empowered to influence others and guide them towards predefined goals (Siala, 1995). In organizations, leadership style is the method managers use to guide and inspire employees to achieve organizational goals (Fur, 2008). Today, two of the most important leadership styles in leadership literature are transformational leadership and ethical leadership.

Transformational leadership is a specific type of leadership style in which the leader establishes a relationship with followers based on four dimensions: idealized influence, individual consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation. Idealized influence includes inspiring visions and outlooks, shared risks and hardships, and gaining the trust and confidence of subordinates. Idealized influence encompasses the factor of empowerment in transformational leadership, where leaders act as strong ethical and behavioral models for followers. The result of this behavior is the trust and confidence of followers in the leader's behaviors and decisions. In fact, this dimension signifies the pride, enlightenment, respect, and loyalty of followers towards a leader who conveys an idealistic sense (Lee et al., 2020). In other words,

transformational leaders behave in a way that gains the respect and attention of followers, and they position themselves as role models for their followers. They align with them and as a result, are easily influenced by the leader's influence. Individual consideration is a style in which the leader pays special attention to the welfare and comfort of employees and addresses the individual needs of the employees, establishing friendly and individual relationships with each of the followers (O'Keeffe et al., 2019). Inspirational motivation describes leaders who have high expectations of their followers. These leaders paint a positive picture of the future for their followers and inspire them to use their capabilities and potentials to achieve goals. The mental encouragement of the leader motivates employees mentally and encourages them to deal with issues creatively and question seemingly obvious matters. They also encourage them to examine problems from different perspectives and implement innovative problem-solving techniques. In general, mental encouragement requires encouraging followers to find new and creative ideas for problem-solving and encouragement (Mantano, 2017).

Due to the ethical scandals that have occurred in business, government, and organizational affairs, ethical leadership has been seriously considered (Koenig et al., 2019). Ethical leadership is considered a type of leadership style that seeks to develop ethical standards and effectively implement them in employee behaviors. Ethical leaders are able to establish ethical laws and regulations for their employees. These leaders are expected to use management skills to attract employees' attention to ethical principles and guide them towards ethical actions (Ahmad & Gao, 2018). Ethical leaders cultivate

independence and freedom among their subordinates and treat them with dignity and respect, and enhance personal qualities such as self-confidence, competence, and self-esteem. Ethical leaders are advocates of open communication in the work environment. They listen patiently and sincerely to their employees' conversations and encourage them to express their beliefs and concerns. By focusing on qualities such as kindness and honesty, they promote collective learning and assistance and attach great importance to the well-being of their employees (Zhou et al., 2020).

Multiple studies have been conducted on the impact of transformational and ethical leadership on organizational and job outcomes. Regarding the impact of transformational leadership, research has shown that transformational leadership is associated with organizational citizenship behavior, extra effort, job engagement, trust to management, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Sharif et al., 2024), psychological empowerment, and organizational identity (Kah et al., 2019), psychological well-being (Hermas et al., 2017), organizational creativity and innovation (Lee et al., 2020), and lower levels of job burnout, job stress, depression, anxiety, and failure (Mantano, 2017).

Sarwar et al. (2020) demonstrated that ethical leadership is related to job engagement, psychological well-being, and job performance. Al-Halboosi et al. (2020) showed that ethical leadership enhances employees' ethical behavior. They also showed that ethical leadership enhances employees' perception of organizational justice. Saifan et al. (2020) in their research showed that ethical leadership increases psychological empowerment and organizational identity and reduces

employees' intention to quit. O'Keeffe et al. (2019) demonstrated that ethical leadership has a positive relationship with job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Despite the importance and influential impact of transformational and ethical leadership, most studies have used them as predictive variables, but research on interventions to increase these two variables has been largely neglected. Now that multiple studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of these two leadership styles, the design of appropriate interventions to increase these two leadership styles is of utmost importance. Given the positive nature of these leadership styles in the present study, an intervention derived from positive psychology constructs, has been used titled use of character strengths to enhance transformational and ethical leadership. Character strengths is a set of personality traits that constitute part of individuals' identity and, when manifested and expressed, enhance their psychological well-being (Niemic, 2018). In other words, character strengths are defined as positive characteristics reflected in thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Park et al., 2004). They are capacities that enable individuals, organizations, and communities to progress (Seligman et al., 2005).

Peterson and Seligman (2004) classified character strengths into six main categories and 24 unique competencies, including wisdom and knowledge (including creativity, curiosity, intellectual brightness, interest in learning, judgment strength), courage (including courage, perseverance, authenticity, vitality strength), humanity (including intimacy, kindness, and social intelligence strength), justice (including fairness, leadership, citizenship strength), moderation (including forgiveness,

humility, caution, and self-control strength), and excellence (including aesthetic appreciation, gratitude, hope, humor, spirituality strength).

Wisdom character require the acquisition and application of knowledge. The determination to achieve goals despite external or internal obstacles is a major feature of courage. Humanity character high interpersonal competence and is achieved through the forces of kindness and the ability to love and be loved. The force of justice is manifested in positive interactions with a broader community. Moderation character applies to a tendency towards moderation in expressing desires and is achieved through self-restraint and caution. The forces that connect us to a larger world form the force of excellence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Research shows that training interventions use of character strengths have been effective in many organizational behaviors, including job mission, job identity, and job burnout (Lian et al., 2021), employee well-being (Mansani et al., 2021), performance (Gasnell et al., 2020), effectiveness in coping with problems and hardships, employee efficiency and productivity (Litman-Navia & Levy, 2015), job satisfaction, well-being, and sense of meaning at work (Forest et al., 2012).

Regarding the impact of training interventions use of character strengths on dependent variables in the present study, i.e., transformational and ethical leadership, research has shown that training use of character strengths and knowledge competencies plays a significant role in increasing the effectiveness of transformational leadership behavior (Bass, 2008). Jag and Offerman's research (2000) showed a positive relationship between curiosity and inspirational motivation and

rational excitement. Sousik et al. (2004) demonstrated a positive relationship between learning orientation and transformational leadership. Research has shown that honesty explains 35% of the variance in transformational leadership (Pry & Perkett-Thompson, 2002). Olivier et al. (1999) demonstrated that spiritual humor enhances transformational leadership.

In a study conducted by Orr (2020), it was demonstrated that training use of the character strengths of courage and humanity increased ethical enthusiasm. Sousik et al. (2019) examined the relationship between character strengths and ethical leadership. They showed that character strengths such as self-regulation, honesty, social intelligence, and courage are related to ethical leadership. Planski et al. (2015) demonstrated that character strengths such as courage are related to ethical decision-making. In another similar study on the relationship between character strengths and ethical leadership, it was shown that subordinates who reported higher levels of character strengths for their supervisors also evaluated them as ethical leaders. In another study, Eisen Schmidt et al. (2019) showed that all character strengths, especially wisdom, courage, humanity, interest in learning, and social intelligence, had the strongest correlation with ethical leadership.

Character strengths do not have an inherent impact on their own, but rather they need to be used. Used of character strengths means that individuals learn the techniques and skills of using character strengths and apply them in real life. Therefore, the issue of intervention for training in the use of character strengths is raised here. One of the research gaps and practical applications in this area is the subject of training methods, techniques, and skills for using these competencies, which has

not yet been extensively researched and studied. From the past to the present, it has been assumed that competencies naturally develop and reach an optimal state without the need for specific training and development. However, this view is mistaken, and studies show that human competencies are developable and can reach a better level through training (Baker & Van Vark, 2018; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Therefore, character strengths do not automatically have the ability to impact various outcomes; rather, they need to be identified and taught through experimental interventions to transform them from potential to actual and to be able to impact organizational variables. Detailed investigations by the researchers of this article in relevant specialized texts in Iran indicate that no intervention research has been conducted on the effect of training in use of character strengths. Therefore, considering this theoretical and research gap, the need for a comprehensive experimental intervention using a training protocol for teaching knowledge, techniques, and skills for use of character strengths is keenly felt. Based on this, the important question of the present study is how much training use of character strengths can increase transformational leadership and ethical leadership?

### **Research Hypotheses**

- 1- Training use of character strengths increases transformational leadership.
- 2- Training use of character strengths increases ethical leadership.



## **Instruments**

### **Transformational Leadership Scale**

The variable of transformational leadership is assessed using the 7-scale General Transformational Leadership (GTL) scale developed by Carls et al. (2000). This scale examines dimensions such as, providing a vision, providing support, empowering employees, innovativeness, and having idealized influence (charisma). Since the items only contain an assessment of the basic factor (Carls et al., 2000), the GTL is used as a general scale of transformational leadership. The seven items are scored on a 6-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree); a higher score indicates a manager who generally exhibits transformational leadership behaviors.

Carls et al. (2000) reported the Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire as .93. They found good internal support for the convergent and discriminant validity of GTL. For example, they showed that the correlation between the subscales of the MLQ5 multifactor leadership questionnaire, the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), and the overall transformational leadership scale ranged from .71 to .81. This questionnaire was translated and prepared for use in Iran for the first time by Brijai (2012). He obtained the reliability of this questionnaire as .96 and .88 using Cronbach's alpha and split-half reliability, respectively. Additionally, the validity of the questionnaire was calculated through correlating the total score of the questionnaire with a researcher-made question. The obtained correlation coefficient between the scale score and the overall question was .85, which was significant at the  $<.01$  level.

In the present study, before conducting the main research, the reliability and validity of the research questionnaires were

examined in a sample of 70 individuals. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using the Cronbach's alpha method, resulting in .89. Additionally, the confirmatory factor analysis index indicated the desirable validity of the questionnaire, with RMSEA=.09, IFI=.98, and CFI=.97.

### **Ethical Leadership Questionnaire**

The Ethical Leadership Questionnaire was designed by Brown et al. in 2005. This questionnaire consists of 10 items. The questionnaire is scored on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The reliability of the questionnaire was reported by the developers as .87 using internal consistency. Asheghi et al. (2021) reported the internal consistency of the questionnaire as .76. Keybari et al. also calculated the reliability of the questionnaire as .95 using the Cronbach's alpha method. Dostar et al. (2015) reported the reliability of the questionnaire as .97 using the Cronbach's alpha method.

In the present study, before conducting the main research, the reliability and validity of the research questionnaires were examined in a sample of 70 individuals. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using the Cronbach's alpha method, resulting in .89. Also, the index of confirmatory validity analysis indicated the desirability of the validity of the questionnaire.

(RMSEA0)=.09, IFI 0.98, CF=.97./ 97)

educational intervention of using character strengths

The educational intervention of use of character strengths, titled "Training in using character strengths with a new method," was designed by Mangrin and Ensilmu-Matos in 2012. In this

intervention, participants in the experimental group were initially familiarized with various character strengths and their application methods in the workplace through two 3 training and workshop sessions, they were given a set of tasks to become familiar with the methods of use of various character strengths in a limited manner during these workshops. Subsequently, the participants were encouraged to use character strengths in their work environment. Each participant in the experimental group was asked to use one of the character strengths at least three times a day for a minimum of three days in their workplace, with coordination with the researcher, and to report it to the researcher. The SMART technique was used to set daily goals. Participants were asked to define clear, tangible, measurable, and achievable goals for using each of the character strengths and implement them in their daily work life. Participants were asked to take notes of all their actions to strengthen each of their character strengths and report them to the researcher.

Throughout the entire duration of the training period, the researcher encouraged and motivated the participants to use character strengths through telephone calls and provided guidance to address any questions or ambiguities that might arise in practice. This intervention was carried out over a period of 75 working days. The first session was completed one week before the start of the intervention, and the questionnaires of the dependent variables were completed by both the experimental and control groups. As mentioned, two 3-hour sessions were then allocated for familiarization and training in the methods of utilizing character strengths. The researcher and colleagues contacted the participants in the experimental group at least three times a day and monitored the process.

### **Method**

The research design in this research is quasi-experimental and pre-test-post-test with the control group. In the current study, teaching using character strengths were selected as independent variables, transformational and ethical leaderships as dependent variables.

The statistical population of this research was the middle managers of an organization in Tehran. A number of 40 middle managers voluntarily participated in the research in the form of available sampling, with the condition that they have at least 2 years of managerial experience and have at least 5 people in their group. These participants were divided into two groups of 20 people by simple random sampling, and they were also assigned to experimental and control groups by simple random sampling and completed the pre-test and post-test questionnaires. The participants of the intervention experimental group received training of using character strengths, but the control group did not receive any intervention. Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used to analyze the data. The assumptions, including data normality and variance homogeneity were investigated by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and Levin test, respectively. Also, the homogeneity of regression slope, equality of variance and covariance were confirmed.

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of dependent variables.

**Table 1**  
**The Mean and Standard Deviation of Dependent Variables, Separating the Test Group and Control Group**

Statistical indices of variables	Group	Post-test		Pre-test	
		Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean
Transformational leadership	Experimental	3.98	24.90	2.27	16.35
	Control	3.58	17.15	4.78	18.90
Ethical Leadership	Experimental	5.07	36.85	4.44	23.15
	Control	4.11	23.20	4.71	22.25

As can be seen in Table 2, the average scores of transformational and ethical leaderships in the post-test in the experimental group are higher than the average scores of transformational and ethical leaderships in the post-test in the control group.

To investigate the impact of training use of character strengths on the dependent variables, a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used to determine the effectiveness of the independent variable on the dependent variables, the relevant findings of which are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Results of Multivariate Correlation Analysis (MANCOVA)**

Effect	Name of test	Test power	Eta squared	Significance level	The degree of freedom of the hypothesis	F test statistic	Level
Group	Pillay effect test	1.000	.928	.000	2.000	46.010	.928
	Landay -Wilk test	1.000	.928	.000	2.000	46.010	
	Hotelli ng effect test	1.000	.928	.000	2.000	46.010	12.883
	The largest root test	1.000	.928	.000	2.000	46.010	12.883

As observed in Table 2, the results of the multivariate analysis of covariance in the experimental and control groups indicate that these groups differ significantly in at least one of the dependent variables. To test the hypotheses, a univariate analysis of covariance was used, the results of which are reported in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
**The Results of the Group Effect Test on the Variables**

Effect	Variables	Test power	Eta squared	Significance level	F test statistic	Average of squares	Degrees of freedom	Level
Group	Transformational leadership	1.000	.565	.001	40.228	564.128	1	564.128
	Ethical Leadership	1.000	.744	.001	90.295	1307.720	1	1307.720

Hypothesis 1 suggests that training use of character strengths increases transformational leadership. Based on the results in Table 3, the ratio of 40.228 univariate analysis of covariance in transformational leadership .001 is significant. Referring to the means in Table 1, it can be observed that the mean scores in the post-test for the experimental group in the transformational leadership variable are higher than the mean scores for the control group. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is confirmed. Hypothesis 2 indicates that training use of character strengths increases ethical leadership. By looking at Table 3, it can be stated that the ratio of 90.295 univariate analysis of covariance in the ethical leadership variable .001 is significant. Referring to the means in Table 1, it can be observed that the mean scores in the post-test for the experimental group in ethical leadership are higher than the mean scores for the control group. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is confirmed.

### **Discussion**

The present study was conducted to investigate the effect of training use of character strengths on the transformational and ethical leadership of middle managers.

The first hypothesis had proposed the effectiveness of training use of character strengths in increasing transformational leadership. The research results confirm this hypothesis. These findings are consistent with those of Bass (2008), Jag and Sousik (2006), Sousik et al. (2004), Perry and Perkettt-Thompson (2002), and Oliu et al. (1999).

Training use of character strength of knowledge enables a leader to creatively gather and use knowledge to solve practical and unpredictable problems. Training use of character strength of creativity leads to an increase in the leader's creativity, which is more likely to encourage followers to strive for new approaches and solutions when faced with challenges. Training use of character strength of creativity and innovation in groups and organizations prompts leaders to stimulate their employees to engage in seeking information, evidence, and experiential openness. Leaders who are more curious are driven by a need for information search, evidence, and experiential openness. Curiosity leads to a dynamic open-mindedness termed "dynamic open architecture" by Baker & Van Ver Kam (2018), which involves assessing situations and formulating a vision for the purpose of changing the current state. Creativity can encourage leaders to challenge the status quo and create new opportunities.

Training use of character strength of love of learning leads to an increase in transformational leadership. This character strength enjoying learning and mastering new skills, often resulting from internal motivation derived from jobs and tasks



that reflect a direction for mastery. Strengthening the direction of mastery learning and internal motivation encourages leaders to serve as continuous learning models throughout their lives for their followers (Sousik et al., 2004).

Training use of character strength of broad-mindedness leads to an increase in transformational leadership, it should be said that due to this capability, the levels of superior knowledge, judgment and ability to solve the problems of the leaders increase. Sousik (2006) suggested that a leader's wisdom demonstrates to followers what types of goals they should focus on (inspirational motivation) and use their emotions and experiences to solve problems (rational excitement). He also suggested that by employing the capacity for insight, leaders can identify and appreciate their followers' knowledge, skills, and abilities, indicating an increase in individual attention by transformational leaders.

Training use of character strength of courage leads to an increase in transformational leadership, it should be said that this character ability includes courage and heroism in the face of dangers and problems. Courage is related to self-efficacy, self-confidence, and internal positioning. And each of these factors is related to demonstrating transformational leadership behavior (Gibson, 1986). Courage in thought and action can increase risk-taking accompanied by inspirational influence and rational excitement. Additionally, courage can lead to idealistic motivation, as followers see that their leader's behavior is based on good beliefs for the organization when facing risks that may harm them.

The role of use of character strength of resilience in increasing transformational leadership should be noted as

follows: This competency encompasses perseverance in facing challenges and being diligent in striving to achieve goals. Assuming that transformational leaders are internally motivated, individuals with resilience demonstrate perseverance. Persistent, yet realistic, commitment to ideals, values, and strategies may allow leaders to gain the trust and loyalty of their followers. Resilience reflects resilience and commitment to goals, and when observed by followers, leaders are seen as having idealized influence and inspirational motivation (Oliu et al., 1999).

Regarding the role of training use of character strength of honesty in increasing transformational leadership, it should be noted that common concepts of character are often summarized as integrity or truthfulness. For Bass (2008), honesty is considered the core of all competencies. Palanski and Yammarino (2007) examined the literature on integrity and concluded that honesty encompasses many things (e.g., alignment of words and actions, being true to oneself, and being truthful). According to Sousik (2006), honesty includes telling the truth, being guided by codes that emphasize adhering to accepted social values and fulfilling commitments. Being truthful to oneself, being truthful to others, and being open and honest in expressing one's feelings are also included. These practices can promote trust and ethical behaviors in organizations and lead to the demonstration of idealized influence by leaders (Perry and Perkett-Thompson, 2002).

In terms of the role of training use of character strength of zest for life in increasing transformational leadership, it should be noted that zest for life means being enthusiastic, eager, and having the vigor necessary for leaders to cope with high levels

of stress, uncertainty, and daily challenges. Research has shown that transformational leaders are proportionate and have high energy levels. A leader's zest for life can influence followers and lead to extraordinary efforts to increase job performance. Therefore, the level of idealized influence and inspirational motivation of leaders increases (Gibson, 1986).

Regarding the role of training use of character strength of love in increasing transformational leadership, it should be noted that love encompasses friendship and service orientation to others, so that the inclination to care for others makes the leader attentive and compassionate towards their followers. In this case, the psychological attachment of followers to the leader leads to compassionate leadership and idealized influence by the leader. Caring for others as a competency that includes sincere attention to the problems of others and seeking the best for followers leads to increased individual attention by transformational leaders. Intimacy as one of the dimensions of love as an agreement on important beliefs and values leads to the establishment of close relationships and, consequently, idealized influence (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017).

The role of training use of character strength of kindness in increasing transformational leadership should be noted as follows; kindness means being generous, nurturing and caring for others, and showing compassion and empathy towards others. Kindness influences idealized influence and individual consideration as components of transformational leadership. When a leader prioritizes the interests of others over their own, they have a positive influence as a role model. When they learn to care for their followers through coaching and creating

opportunities, it can be said that they have learned individual consideration.

Regarding the role of use of character strength of social intelligence in increasing transformational leadership, it should be noted that transformational leaders require social intelligence to guide and control daily political and interpersonal challenges (Sousik & Magreen, 1999). Social intelligence means the ability to perceive, evaluate, and express emotions accurately. Since transformational leadership is considered a form of social influence, having social intelligence is essential for increasing inspirational motivation and especially idealized influence (Sousik & Magreen, 1999).

In terms of the role of training use of character strength of citizenship behavior in increasing transformational leadership, it should be noted that leaders who value citizenship and commitment to the common good through the alignment of their words and actions create trust among their followers and increase emotional attachment and commitment to the leader. In this case, the idealized influence of leaders easily increases through role modeling. Organizational citizenship behavior of leaders is somewhat indicative of honesty, consistency between words and actions, and trust in managers. All of these factors can increase idealized influence and inspirational motivation (Palanski & Yammarino, 2007).

Regarding the role of training use of character strength of equality and fairness in increasing transformational leadership, it should be noted that justice means treating everyone equally based on a set of rules and regulations. In this case, the individual does not allow their emotions and feelings to interfere with decision-making. Justice and equality are related to the

development of a very strong ethical identity and also ethical leadership. High levels of ethical reasoning are related to transformational leadership. High levels of ethical reasoning can increase idealized influence. Also, high levels of ethical reasoning lead to the leader displaying a model of self-sacrifice, which in turn motivates followers to adopt this model, thus increasing the inspirational motivation of leaders and leading followers to prioritize collective interests over individual benefits.

The role of training use of character strength of forgiveness can be said to be associated with increased well-being and feelings of empowerment, hope, and self-esteem, all of which play a significant role in increasing transformational leadership (Atwater & Yammarino, 1993). The idealized influence of a transformational leader increases when they help a wrongdoer to learn something new from their experience, to restore the relationship, and to erase any remaining negative aspects from their mind (Sousik, 2006).

Regarding the role of training use of character strength of caution, it should be noted that caution means careful consideration in decision-making, avoiding unnecessary risks, and being duty-bound. Caution is a necessary condition for rational excitement. Transformational leadership seeks employee input on alternative solutions to increase accuracy in decision making. As a result, it encourages employees to think about ways to solve problems (Jag and Bono, 2000).

In terms of the role of training use of character strength of appreciation of beauty and excellence, it should be noted that appreciation of beauty and excellence is a state in which an individual experience feeling of joy, wonder, and spiritual

elevation when they witness positive and extraordinary states in others. Leaders who appreciate beauty and excellence typically gather examples and information to establish high standards of excellence (e.g., continuous improvement) for others in the organization to emulate. When these leaders reward others for such displays, they indicate what the organization values and considers excellent performance. This sets high standards for emulation, which can inspire employees and provide them with the necessary skills and desire to achieve these high standards, thus realizing idealized influence and inspirational motivation (Perry & Perrett-Thompson, 2002).

Appreciation focuses the individual's attention from themselves to others and maintains mutual commitments in relationships. These implicit psychological contracts, when rewards that have intrinsic motivational aspects are given by the leader, create transformation in employees (Goodwin et al., 2001). Appreciation provides leaders with an opportunity to express gratitude to their followers for their successes and provide evidence that high-performance standards supported through idealized influence and inspirational motivation are achievable. Appreciation may also give leaders the opportunity to model self-sacrifice to the organization and its members and demonstrate individual consideration by appreciating the unique talents and skills of their followers that contribute to the organization's success. Followers have a strong need for validation, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Appreciation helps leaders meet these needs through idealized influence and individual consideration.

Regarding the role of training use of character strength of optimism, it should be noted that having positive expectations of

others, being optimistic, and focusing on a positive and transparent future provide the necessary motivation for leaders and their followers. Hope helps leaders strengthen inspirational motivation, idealized influence, and rational excitement by being able to outline a positive vision of the future and design new and creative ways to achieve this positive vision for their followers (Lian et al., 2021).

Oliu et al. (1999) demonstrated that humor increases transformational leadership by enhancing the leader's divergent thinking, ethics, coherence, and employee productivity. Humor can impact transformational leadership by increasing rational excitement. From a cognitive theory perspective, humor involves juxtaposing seemingly incompatible ideas in new ways that offer a solution to a problem. This juxtaposition creates many cognitive processes that lead to a solution. From an emotional and affective theory perspective, humor can indicate mocking a challenging situation and redirecting followers' attention from problems and challenges to mocking the challenging situation, reflecting an inspiring and desirable perspective.

Spirituality gives personal meaning to life and redirects individuals from self-focus to focus on others, from self-aggrandizement to care, attention, and preservation of the rights of others, and dedication to society. This factor is akin to collective action performed by transformational leaders. With the help of spirituality, transformational leaders can provide a meaningful and inspiring vision by giving meaning to the challenges and problems that employees face, thus inspiring and providing new meaning to their followers (Sousik, 2000).

The second hypothesis had proposed the effectiveness of training use of character strengths in increasing ethical leadership. The research results confirm this hypothesis. These findings are consistent with those of Oor (2020), Sousik et al. (2019), Palanski et al. (2015), and Eisen Schmidt et al. (2019).

Training use of character strength such as humility, honesty, and compassionate behavior towards subordinates, ethical courage, and self-control in the face of challenges and temptations influences ethical leadership and increases it (Wang & Haque, 2016). Honesty is considered an attractive factor for ethical leadership in that it enhances the leader's credibility and likability. These factors can increase ethical leadership. Honesty makes the leader's subordinates recognize them as an important reference point that they can emulate and follow. This factor strengthens ethical reasoning as a component of ethical leadership (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Humility is also considered a fundamental factor for ethical leadership, as it increases selfless and sincere interactions with others, such as listening to subordinates' opinions and having the best wishes for them, as a component of ethical leadership (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Honesty and humility are sources of self-respect and positive emotions. They also reduce stress, facilitate supportive relationships and rewards, and create a basis for respecting others, all of which are considered characteristics of ethical leadership. Increasing compassion character can enhance ethical leadership because it creates an ethical criterion that reflects concern for the welfare and comfort of others as a characteristic of ethical leadership (Goodwin et al., 2003).

Self-assessment in terms of similarity to social and ethical standards and positive emotions, along with compassion,



provides self-feedback that encourages ethical behaviors in ethical leaders and commits leaders to strengthen the ethical behaviors of committed subordinates (Wright and Quick, 2011). Therefore, empathy shows itself in the form of ethical leadership behaviors such as listening to subordinates' opinions and defending them (Brown and Mitchell, 2010). Leadership in this way increases moral leadership because it makes them pay more attention to the interests, needs and problems of subordinates (Kelt et al., 2002).

Courage, especially ethical courage, establishes a set of ethical norms that enhances ethical leadership behavior. When ethical courage in leaders increases, they tend towards value-based achievements (achieving goals by any means), ethical ideals, and ethical codes (Sekreka et al., 2009). These tendencies align with the ethical person and ethical manager dimensions of ethical leadership, such as ethical living, defining success in terms of goals and the means to achieve them, discussing ethical values with subordinates, and disciplining them for deviating from ethical norms.

Self-control training is another competency that enhances ethical leadership. According to the resource conservation theory (Hagger, 2015), individuals strive to gather personal resources such as mental capabilities to cope with stress and maintain mental well-being. These resources enable individuals to maintain their mental balance, always conform to ethical norms, and behave ethically.

The effectiveness of honesty and humility on ethical leadership behavior involves attention to ethical standards and their preservation and support (Brown et al., 2005). It also involves resistance and resilience against temptations to deviate

from the truth and to engage in self-centered behaviors that do not align with ethical norms. By focusing on ethical standards, honesty and humility, self-controlled leaders may have greater self-confidence in manifesting honesty/humility in ethical leadership behavior. Furthermore, meta-analytical results by Reader et al. (2012) showed that individuals with high self-control demonstrate more ethical behaviors and fewer undesirable behaviors. Additionally, any tendency towards anger and aggressive behavior towards subordinates is neutralized through self-control, leading to a positive perception of the leader by subordinates (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Managers with high self-control are very effective in promoting ethical leadership behavior because they have the necessary volitional resources to express support for subordinates during times of anger or lack of self-confidence. Individuals with high self-control regulate their emotions more effectively, display better interpersonal skills, and show greater concern for others (Tangney et al., 2004). The manifestation of ethical courage in the development of ethical leadership behavior involves controlling fear and making individual choices and having the will to act ethically despite personal risks. It also requires internal resilience in avoiding unnecessary, distressing, or psychologically painful risks (Sekreka et al., 2009). Focusing on controlling fear and exercising willpower for ethical action is necessary, and therefore leaders with high self-control can be more effective in the development of ethical courage in ethical leadership behavior (Harbor & Kacevali, 2014).

The internal validity of the experiment was ensured by the random assignment of participants to experimental and control

groups. Random assignment equates the groups and allows them to be compared, and largely controls threats to internal validity

One of the limitations of this study is that it was conducted only on middle managers, so caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings to other job positions. Additionally, due to organizational constraints, the opportunity to follow up on the results was not possible for a while. Therefore, it is recommended that this issue be addressed in future research. It is also suggested that all managers benefit from training methods to use character strength by holding appropriate classes and workshops to increase their transformational and ethical leadership style.

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