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Research Article

Psychometric characteristics of the Serbian version of the Ethical Leadership at Work Questionnaire (ELW-RS)

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to adapt the Ethical Leadership at Work Scale (ELW) into Serbian as a self-report measure for subordinates to evaluate their managers, to examine the construct validity of this new version, and to test the level of invariance across gender and organizational sector within the Serbian version (ELW-SR). The sample consisted of 306 participants (72.5% females) with at least six months of work experience, aged between 20 and 63 years, mostly highly educated, and primarily employed on a permanent basis in the private sector (74.80%). The results showed that ELW-SR adequately reflects all dimensions of the original scale: people orientation, fairness, power sharing, concern for sustainability, ethical guidance, role clarification, and integrity. Confirmatory factor analysis showed that a seven-dimensional solution with correlated residuals has a good fit (χ^2 = 1491.09, df = 640; CFI = .916, TLI = .907, RMSEA = .07, and SRMR = .100), thereby affirming the validity of the Serbian version of the scale. However, the study points to the need for caution in generalizing results, particularly concerning variables such as gender and type of organization, where the assumptions of invariance were not unequivocally confirmed. Additionally, the scale's criterion validity was tested to examine how well the test results predict relevant outcomes related to ethical leadership, such as job satisfaction, psychological safety, and self-efficacy. These findings imply that ELW-SR can be an effective tool for assessing ethical leadership in the Serbian business context.

Keywords: ethical leadership, ELW, CFA, invariance, seven-dimensional model

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Introduction

The importance of studying ethical leadership within business environments is increasingly evident in modern society, which is striving more and more for transparency, accountability, and adherence to ethical norms in all aspects of business (Banks et al., 2019). Although research on ethical leadership has primarily been conducted in Western countries, particularly the USA, where business ethics measures are well established by legislation, there is a distinct need to expand the research focus to various cultural and regional contexts (Saha et al., 2020). This is particularly significant in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, where leadership studies are not as advanced as in the West, making such research crucial for understanding the nuances and challenges faced by this region (Boţa-Avram et al., 2021).

Given the significant interest in ethical leadership in recent scholarship, the current conceptualization of ethical leadership reveals substantial limitations that impede both theoretical and practical advancements (Banks et al., 2021; Fischer et al., 2020; Saha et al., 2020). The prevalent models conflate leader behaviors with followers' subjective evaluations, incorporating an array of traits, values, and cognitions that may not accurately represent ethical leadership behaviors (ELB). Moreover, the causal relationships between ethical leadership and its outcomes remain obscured due to methodological shortcomings in existing studies (Banks et al., 2021). This conceptual confusion necessitates a refined measurement approach to capture the multifaceted nature of ethical leadership more accurately.

The cultural context in which leadership is studied also can significantly affect the portrayal and perception of ethical behaviors within the leadership context. Despite the existence of initial intercultural comparisons (Eisenbeiß, 2012; Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2013), it has been essential to expand research to develop a comprehensive view of ethical leadership, including aspects that are universally accepted and aspects specific to certain cultures. Applying this approach to the Serbian context and validating the Serbian version of the Ethical Leadership at Work questionnaire are important steps towards better understanding both global and local dynamics of ethical leadership. Ethical Leadership at Work questionnaire not only contributes to the academic community with new, culturally relevant insights but also enables organizations within the CEE region to better assess and develop ethical leadership practices, which is crucial for building sustainable and ethically responsible business practices.

With this goal, the Ethical Leadership at Work questionnaire (ELW) by Kalshoven and colleagues (Kalshoven et al., 2011) became a focus of interest for researchers. By adapting the multidimensional Ethical Leadership at Work questionnaire into Serbian, our aim was to provide a comprehensive and valid multidimensional scale in the Serbian language, which can help us address various issues of importance in this area.

Understanding Ethical Leadership

As per Brown et al. (2005), ethical leadership can be described as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the advancement of such conduct to the followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making" (p. 120). This approach identifies two key components: the leader as a moral person and the leader as a moral agent, emphasizing the necessity for the leader to be authentic in their moral principles before implementing these principles in leading others (Treviño et al., 2000). The dimension of a of a leader as a moral person is reflected in traits such as integrity, fairness, and authenticity, which are evident both in their professional and private lives. These characteristics are not unique to ethical leadership but also overlap with other leadership styles, such as authentic, servant, transformational, and spiritual leadership (Toor & Ofori, 2009). The component of a leader as a moral agent particularly pertains to the leader's efforts to promote ethical values among followers, encouraging them to behave ethically and make ethical decisions. This role involves developing a culture that values transparency, accountability, and mutual respect, directly impacting the perception of the leader as an ethical guide (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Treviño et al., 2003).

Previous empirical studies have shown a significant association between ethical leadership and the ethical behavior of employees. Specifically, "ethical behavior of employees" refers to actions such as adherence to company policies, reporting misconduct, treating colleagues with respect, maintaining honesty in communications, and demonstrating fairness and integrity in decision-making processes (Brown et al., 2005; Resick et al., 2006; Ofori & Toor, 2021). Moreover, ethical leadership is associated with enhanced interactions between leaders and followers, contributing to improved exchange quality and leadership efficiency (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Hassan et al., 2013).

Research has demonstrated the crucial role ethical leaders play in shaping and enhancing an organization's ethical climate (Schminke et al., 2005; Mayer et al., 2009; Kang et al., 2011). Such leaders establish the ethical norms of an organization through the implementation of processes and policies that influence employees' perceptions of their work environment's ethicality (Demirtas et al., 2015; Mayer et al., 2009). In environments like Serbia, business practices exhibit unique characteristics, especially in leadership approaches and ethical standards. Serbian business culture has historically included hierarchical structures, with authoritative and directive leadership styles often observed, especially in the context of transitional economic and political challenges (Mojić, 2003). While Serbian business culture has a legacy of self-governing socialism—traditionally emphasizing community and employee well-being-leadership practices have shifted notably in recent decades (Hollinshead & Maclean, 2007). Ethically motivated leadership and people-oriented practices in Serbia face unique challenges rooted in the complex post-socialist landscape. As shown in a study analyzing the fragmented narratives in a Serbian enterprise recently acquired by a multinational company, the volatile institutional and politically charged context complicates the applicability of linear, Western models of organizational change (Hollinshead & Maclean, 2007). This context amplifies the need for an in-depth exploration of ethical leadership within Serbian organizations, as it highlights the potential for both ethical and unethical practices influenced by socio-political dynamics and transitional realities. Schminke et al. (2005) found that the interplay between a leader's moral organizational factors-including caring orientation, standards and regulatory orientation, and autonomous decision-making-correlates strongly with the organization's ethical climate. Consequently, further studies underscore the critical impact of ethical leadership on fostering an ethical organizational environment (Lu & Lin, 2014; Mayer et al., 2009).

Ethical leaders demonstrate respect for their followers, supporting and caring for them, consistent with findings by Treviño et al. (2003). They are distinguished by a high people orientation, as indicated by Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2013). By including followers' ideas and concerns in their decisions, allowing participation in setting performance goals, and giving followers a voice, ethical leaders engage in power sharing, which contributes to the development of followers and strengthens their self-confidence (Brown et al., 2005; Kalshoven et al., 2011). Research also indicates that ethical leadership practices can impact employees' levels of self-efficacy, leading to heightened engagement and dedication to organizational objectives (Tongsoongnern & Lee, 2022). Moreover, the presence of ethical leaders in the workplace can cultivate a sense of optimism among employees, encouraging their commitment to the organization's success (Hoogh & Hartog, 2008).

Fairness is also a key characteristic of ethical leaders, as suggested by the moral dimension of personality, reflected through transparent, objective, and balanced decisions and interactions (Treviño et al., 2000). Integrity is manifested through alignment of behavior with stated principles, keeping promises, and consistency in actions (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Kalshoven et al., 2011). Ethical leaders exhibit a broad ethical awareness that transcends organizational boundaries, particularly evident in their deep concern for sustainability, including care for the environment and promoting environmentally friendly work processes (Kalshoven et al., 2011). Ethical guidance involves explaining the values and guidelines of ethics to followers, emphasizing the importance of ethical standards, and making ethics an explicit part of the leadership agenda (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Through ethical guidance, leaders reward those who act according to ethical standards and penalize those who violate them, fostering ethical awareness among followers.

While the dimensions of people orientation, fairness, and integrity constitute the moral person within ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005), power sharing, role clarification, ethical guidance, and concern for sustainability form the facet of moral management (Khuntia & Suar, 2004). Such a comprehensive definition has enabled a deeper understanding and

measurement of ethical leadership, providing a foundation for further research and practical application in organizations.

Measuring Ethical Leadership

The first instruments began to develop in the early 21st century. Brown and colleagues (Brown et al., 2005) developed the Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS), which has been widely used in research. However, ELS faces criticism due to the breadth and ambiguity of its items, as well as a lack of precision in defining behaviors related to ethical leadership (Tanner et al., 2010). These weaknesses have highlighted the need for the development of new instruments that better capture the multidimensionality of ethical leadership, including a leader's personal moral traits and managerial practices.

In developing the Ethical Leadership at Work Scale (ELW; Kalshoven et al., 2011), the authors aimedto overcome the limitations of previous instruments (e.g., the ELS), focusing on more precise item formulation and an expanded set of dimensions encompassing ethical leadership. The ELW is based on extensive analysis of existing research, interviews with managers and employees, and original items developed by the researchers, using an empirical-descriptive approach. This approach emphasizes the concrete behaviors of leaders and their interactions with employees, allowing for the assessment of ethical leadership without prior knowledge of ethics. The evaluation is based on the frequency of displaying certain behaviors rather than on assessing the ethicality of leaders' actions, highlighting the interaction between leaders and followers as key to perceiving ethical leadership.

The ELW enhances its predecessor, the Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS), by focusing on moral management aspects such as power sharing, role clarification, and sustainability. It has been adapted into multiple languages, reflecting its global relevance and the broad interest it has generated. The ELW not only expands the definition of fairness to include daily work interactions but also integrates environmental considerations, aligning with corporate social responsibility and business ethics. Additionally, it assesses leaders' integrity but omits trust, offering a comprehensive tool for evaluating ethical leadership (Kalshoven et al., 2011).

The ELW not only represents a theoretical breakthrough but also excels in practical applications, providing a comprehensive framework for analyzing the various dimensions of ethical leadership (Kalshoven et al., 2011; Silva & Duarte, 2022). The ELW scale encompasses several dimensions of ethical leadership, including fairness, integrity, ethical guidance, people orientation, power sharing, role clarification, and concern for sustainability. These dimensions are interrelated and collectively contribute to a comprehensive understanding of ethical leadership. For instance, fairness and integrity are foundational elements that support trust and respect within an organization, while ethical guidance and people orientation foster a supportive and morally sound work environment (Kalshoven et al., 2011).

Empirical studies using the ELW scale have measured various work attitudes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and trust in leadership (Jang & Oh, 2017; Kim & Park, 2015). For instance, ethical leadership significantly enhances job satisfaction by promoting a positive work environment and fair treatment (Kalshoven et al., 2011; Steinmann et al., 2016). Organizational commitment, reflecting employees' emotional attachment and loyalty to their organization, is also positively influenced by ethical leadership, which fosters a sense of belonging and ethical culture (Kim & Park, 2015; Metwally et al., 2019). Additionally, the ELW concept incorporates sustainability as a crucial construct (Kalshoven et al., 2011), particularly predicting green behavior (Ahmad et al., 2021). The scale has also been predictive of other important outcomes, such as employee engagement and reduced counterproductive work behaviors (Huang et al., 2021). Ethical leaders who exhibit behaviors such as fairness, integrity, ethical guidance, and concern for sustainability create an environment where employees feel psychologically safe to voice their opinions and concerns (Ahmad & Umrani, 2019). Ethical leadership has been found to enhance psychological safety by fostering trust, respect, and open communication within the organization (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009).

The ELW scale is positively related to other leadership styles, such as transformational leadership transactional or severant leadership, and negatively related to autocratic and passive leadership (Steinmann et al., 2016; Zhu et al., 2015). Both ethical and transformational leadership

emphasize the moral and inspirational aspects of leadership, though ethical leadership places a stronger emphasis on ethical conduct and moral principles (Den Hartog, 2015). Ethical leadership provides incremental value by specifically addressing ethical issues and promoting a culture of integrity, which may not be as explicitly covered in transformational leadership (Chun et al., 2009; Den Hartog, 2015).

Study Aims

The objective of this study was to adapt the Ethical Leadership at Work Scale (ELW; Kalshoven et al., 2011) into Serbian (ELW-SR), examine the construct validity of this new version, and assess its alignment with the original ELW scale; our aim was to offer a new and more comprehensive selfreport measure of employees' perceptions of ethical leadership of their superiors. This study builds on the constructs used by Kalshoven and colleagues (2011) to validate ELW. While adapting the ELW to Serbian, particular emphasis was placed on tailoring the scale to reflect the cultural and linguistic nuances of the region. This adaptation involved not only linguistic accuracy in translation but also ensuring that the concepts of ethical leadership were relevant and comprehensible within the Serbian workplace environment. Additionally, the study investigated the factor structure of the ELW-SR, verifying whether the original seven-dimensional structure remained stable in the Serbian context. Assessing the factor structure was crucial for confirming the structural validity of the scale and its dimensions across different cultural settings. Gender and organizational type (public vs. private) were tested for measurement invariance. Previous studies indicated that male and female leaders may exhibit different leadership styles shaped by societal expectations and traditional values (Mitrić-Aćimović et al., 2012; Stojanović-Aleksić et al., 2016; Stošić Panić & Simić, 2024). Additionally, public sector organizations face unique ethical challenges (due to their bureaucratic structures and reform pressures), and thus, they may differ from the private sector (Janovac et al., 2023). By examining scale invariance across gender and organizational type, this study aims to ensure that the scale accurately captures employees' perceptions of ethical leadership in diverse contexts, enhancing the validity and applicability of the measure across various demographic and professional groups in Serbia. We examined the criterion validity of ELW-SR by analyzing its correlations with psychological safety, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction, which are considered outcomes of ethical leadership. These constructs were chosen based on their established relevance in leadership research.

Method

Sample

The initial sample consisted of 392 employees. Given that the scale measures the ethical behavior of managers as rated by employees, we excluded individuals with less than six months of work experience, those without a direct supervisor, and those not part of a team of at least three people. This refinement left a sample of 312 individuals. After removing multivariate outliers based on Mahalanobis distance criteria (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), 306 participants remained. We used a convenience sample, comprising individuals with at least six months of work experience (Min = 0.7, Max = 37, M = 7.96, SD = 9.09), of which 72.5% were female. Participants' age ranged form 20 to 63 years (M = 31.85, SD = 8.62). The highest percentage of participants had higher education, with completed bachelor's (32.4%) or master's degrees (36.9%), while 18.6% had finished vocational high school or gymnasium, and the smallest percentages had completed associate degrees (6.9%) or doctoral studies (5.2%). Nearly 90% of participants came from urban areas, 5.6% from towns, and 5.2% from rural areas. In terms of employment, 56.9% were on permanent contracts, 36.3% on temporary contracts, and 6.9% employed on other bases. A majority of 74.8% worked in private organizations, while 25.2% were in the public sector.

Measures

Ethical Leadership at Work Questionnaire (ELW; Kalshoven et al., 2011)

The ELW was designed to explore the prerequisites and outcomes of ethical leadership by asking subordinates to rate their supervisors' ethical leadership behaviors. Participants were instructed to read each item carefully and decide the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with it using a five-point Likert scale (1 - *strongly disagree*, 5 - *strongly agree*). The ELW features 38 items spread across seven dimensions: People Orientation ("Is genuinely concerned about my personal development"), Fairness ("Holds me accountable for problems over which I have no control" *reverse item), Power Sharing ("Allows subordinates to influence critical decisions"), Sustainability Concern ("Shows concern for sustainability issues"), Ethical Guidance ("Explains what is expected from employees in terms of behaving with integrity"), Role Clarification ("Indicates what the performance expectations of each group member are"), and Integrity ("Keeps his/her promises"). The initial version's reliability in original study ranged from .84 to .94. For this study, the scale was translated into Serbian using a backtranslation method. Two bilingual translators translated and re-translated the 38 items, discussing and reconciling differences to agree on a functionally equivalent Serbian version.

Perceived Organizational Support Scale (POSS; Armstrong-Stassen & Ursel, 2009)

Originally developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986), this scale measures perceived organizational support and was adapted by Armstrong-Stassen and Ursel. It consists of 10 items, with a five-point Likert scale as a response format (1 - *strongly disagree*; 5 - *strongly agree*). An example item is: "The organization values my contribution to its well-being.".This unidimensional questionnaire was adapted to Serbian using a back-translation method for this research. Original studies have shown it to have strong metric properties, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency of .95.

Psychological Safety Questionnaire (PSQ; Edmondson, 1999, adaptation Goljović, 2023)

The PSQ is a unidimensional questionnaire consisting of 7 items, with responses also on a five-point Likert scale (1 - *strongly disagree*; 5 - *strongly agree*). Respondents need to answer each question based on their personal experience in the current work environment/team. An example item is: "I feel safe to take a risk in this organization.". It was adapted to Serbian using a back-translation method for this study. The scale has demonstrated good metric characteristics in original research, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency of .80.

Job Satisfaction Measure (JSS; Dolbier et al., 2005)

This single-item questionnaire asks respondents to rate their job satisfaction on a five-point Likert scale (1 - not at all satisfied; 5 - extremely satisfied), answering the question: "Overall, how satisfied are you with your job?" This single-item measure is designed to measure the general affective dimension of job satisfaction. Initial research demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity of this measure, and the justification for its use has been supported in numerous studies (Ock, 2020).

Procedure and Data Analysis

Following permission from one of the authors of the original scale for its use and translation, a forward translation was conducted by two independent translators (Hedrih, 2019), followed by data collection. Data analysis involved confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the maximum likelihood method with IBM SPSS and the AMOS (version 21, extension), which was used to assess the structural validity of the instrument. Specifically, we aimed to assess whether the factor structure of the Serbian adaptation of the scale corresponds to the original factor structure. Both a unidimensional (single-factor) model and a seven-factor model, including a variant with correlated residuals, were tested. Model fit was evaluated using various indices, including x2, x2/df, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). A model was considered to have an acceptable fit if CFI and TLI values were .90 or higher, and if the values of RMSEA and SRMR were .08 or lower (Kline, 2011). Criterion validity was tested to examine how well the test results predict relevant outcomes related to ethical leadership. Invariance was tested against two criteria: gender and the type of organization in which participants work (i.e., employed in the public or private sector).

Results

The results of the CFA (Table 1) indicated that the unidimensional model had a relatively high χ^2 /df ratio, with fit indices (i.e., CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR) suggesting inadequate model fit.

The seven-factor model showed improvement over the unidimensional model. However, although the fit of this model was better (compared to the unidimensional model), the fit indices still fell short of the acceptability thresholds. Significant improvement was achieved with the introduction of correlated residuals into the seven-factor model. This model displayed a χ^2 /df of 2.330, CFI of .916, and TLI of .907, indicating a good model fit. The RMSEA value reduced, also suggesting a good fit. However, the SRMR value remained significantly above acceptable limits.

Table 1

	χ²	df	χ²/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
1-factor model	2076.53	659	3.153	.859	.850	.084	.237
7-factor model	1769.46	644	2.748	.888	.878	.080	.091
7-factor model with correlated residuals	1491.09	640	2.330	.916	.907	.066	.100

Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

An ANOVA test was conducted to compare the fit of different models. The differences between the models were assessed using ANOVA tests of the chi-square values. The results indicated that the difference between the unidimensional model and the 7-factor model was statistically significant ($\Delta \chi^2 = 307.07$, $\Delta df = 15$, p < .001), suggesting that the 7-factor model provides a significantly better fit than the unidimensional model. Additionally, the difference between the 7-factor model and the 7-factor model including correlated dimenions and several residuals was also statistically significant ($\Delta \chi^2 = 278.37$, $\Delta df = 4$, p < .001), indicating that including correlated significant ($\Delta \chi^2 = 278.37$, $\Delta df = 4$, p < .001), indicating that including correlated dimensional model and the 7-factor model with correlated dimensions revealed a significant difference ($\Delta \chi^2 = 585.44$, $\Delta df = 19$, p < .001), providing further support for the best fit of the 7-factor model with correlated dimensions (for the graphical representation of this model, see Figure 1).

Figure 1

A Seven-factor Solution with Correlated Dimensions and Residuals



Note. Correlations between latent dimensions were included in the analysis but not shown in the model for clarity.

The next segment of the analysis focuses on testing the model's invariance with respect to two key demographic criteria: gender and the type of organization (public or private). Invariance is crucial for determining whether the factor structures of the model are consistent across the studied groups. The analysis was conducted at four levels: configural, metric, scalar, and strict invariance, each imposing increasingly stringent conditions of equality among groups. The results are summarized in tables that illustrate how the model performs in terms of different fit indices (χ^2 /df, CFI, TLI, RMSEA) and changes in these indices (Δ CFI, Δ TLI, Δ RMSEA) across the various levels of invariance.

The analysis of invariance by gender (Table 2) indicated that the model meets the basic adaptability requirements across all levels of invariance. Although the CFI (.879) and TLI (.867) values were relatively high, they did not reach the commonly recommended thresholds (.90) for optimal model fit. These values suggested acceptable, but not ideal, fitting, implying that the model adequately represented the data structure in relation to gender. Changes in fit indices (Δ CFI, Δ TLI, Δ RMSEA) between different levels of invariance were minimal, suggesting that the model maintained consistency in measurement across both genders.

Table 2

	χ²/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	∆ CFI	∆ TLI	∆ RMSEA
Configural	2.00	.879	.867	.067	-	-	-
Metric	1.98	.889	.867	.067	.00	.00	.00
Scalar	1.95	.889	.867	.067	.00	.00	.00
Strict	1.95	.890	.868	.066	.01	.00	.00

The Analysis of Invariance across Gender

The analysis of invariance by organizational type (public vs. private) (Table 3) showed that models at different levels of invariance had decent, but not ideal, adaptability indices. The configural model had a CFI of .883 and TLI of .872, indicating a fit below the usual threshold of .90. The CFI and TLI values were similar across models. Such findings suggested that the factor structures remained relatively consistent regardless of the considered levels of invariance. RMSEA values were consistently low (.054-.056); however, the CFI and TLI values were below the recommended thresholds.

Table 3

	χ²/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	∆CFI	Δ TLI	∆ RMSEA
Configural	1.94	.883	.872	.056	-	-	-
Metric	1.92	.883	.872	.056	.00	.00	.00
Scalar	1.92	.881	.871	.056	.00	.00	.00
Strict	1.90	.881	.870	.054	.00	.00	.00

The Analysis of Invariance across Type of Organization (Private or Public)

In the next step, we assessed the interconnectedness between various dimensions of ethical leadership, including orientation to people, fairness, power sharing, sustainability, ethical guidance, role clarification, and integrity (Table 4). All correlations were statistically significant and moderate in magnitude, implying that different aspects of ethical leadership were closely linked. Such findings indicated the conceptual coherence of the ethical leadership construct as a whole, supporting the internal validity of the measured dimensions.

The reliability of each dimension (Table 4), assessed by Cronbach's alpha coefficients, had values ranging from .814 to .958, suggesting an exceptionally high degree of internal consistency for each dimension.

Table 4

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People orientation	(.94)						
Fairness	.41**	(.89)					
Power sharing	.60**	.33**	(.81)				
Concern for sustainability	.41**	.18**	.37**	(.89)			
Ethical guidance	.60**	.32**	.40**	.42**	(.92)		
Roles clarification	.66**	.25**	.46**	.28**	.67**	(.93)	
Integrity	.73**	.49**	.47**	.36**	.62**	.62**	(.96)
М	3.68	4.00	3.56	2.94	3.65	3.83	3.93

Descriptive Statistics, Pearson Correlation Coefficients, and Reliability Measures

SD	1.06	1.09	.87	1.23	1.11	1.03	1.10
Sk	57	-1.02	43	.04	63	80	89
Ки	67	.11	31	95	38	20	07

Note. Sk - skewness; Ku - kurtosis; values in parentheses indicate Cronbach alpha coefficients.

^{*}*p* < .05. ^{**}*p* < .01.

The results also revealed significant positive correlations between job satisfaction and all dimensions of ethical leadership, with correlations ranging from moderate to high (r = .31 - .52). These correlations support the criterion validity of the instrument. The relationships between self-efficacy and ethical leadership were weaker; still, self-efficacy showed significant correlations with all dimensions of ethical leadership except for fairness. Psychological safety showed moderate to high significant correlations with all dimensions of ethical leadership to a greater sense of safety among employees.

Table 5

	People orientation	Fairn ess	Power sharing	Concern for sustainability	Ethical guidance	Roles clarif.	Integ rity
Job satisfaction	.51**	.31**	.45**	.31**	.42**	.43**	.52**
Self- efficacy	.24**	.05	.21**	.14*	.20**	.15*	.21**
Psy. safety	.52**	.38**	.40**	.28**	.31**	.35**	.47**

Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Ethical Leadership and Related Constructs

^{*}*p* < .05. ^{**}*p* < .01.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to translate the Ethical Leadership at Work Scale (ELW) into Serbian, to examine the construct validity of the new version, and to demonstrate the level of invariance between the Serbian version of the ELW (ELW-SR). This study builds on the constructs proposed by Kalshoven et al. (2011), who developed the Ethical Leadership at Work scale as an extension and elaboration of the earlier ethical leadership framework introduced by Brown et al. (2005). We verified whether the original seven-dimensional structure remains stable in translation.

Consistent with the ELW, the Serbian version of this instrument (ELW-SR) comprises the dimensions of people orientation, fairness, power sharing, concern for sustainability, ethical guidance, role clarification, and integrity. Fit indices confirm that the seven-dimensional solution provides the most optimal fit. Comparative model analyses suggest that the seven-dimensional solution is the most suitable model among those tested. Similar to the initial version, values indicating that a one-factor solution would be adequate were not obtained. Even though the initial validation yielded significantly better results, the one-factor solution was not retained as the final one nor was it recommended to use a composite score as a unitary measure of ethical leadership. The structure of ELW-SR effectively reflects the key aspects of ethical leadership, as identified in the original study. Since residual correlations were introduced for items that belong to the same measurement subject and conceptually describe very similar phenomena, this solution was retained as meaningful and adopted as final.

The invariance of the scale was examined in relation to two criteria: gender and type of organization, which enabled the determination of whether the scale measures ethical leadership equally well among different demographic and professional groups in Serbia. The CEE region has distinct historical, social, and economic characteristics that influence organizational behavior and leadership styles (Cartwright, 2020). For instance, the legacy of hierarchical and authoritative leadership styles from the pre-transition period may impact how ethical leadership is perceived and practiced (Csath, 2022). Therefore, it is crucial to validate and adapt the ELW-SR to ensure it accurately reflects the ethical leadership constructs within this specific cultural milieu. By doing so, we can ensure that the instrument is sensitive to

cultural nuances and provides valid and reliable measurements of ethical leadership in the CEE context.

The decision to test for invariance across different genders and types of organizations stems from theoretical and empirical considerations. Gender differences in leadership have been widely documented in the literature, with research suggesting that men and women may exhibit and perceive leadership behaviors differently (Ho et al., 2015; Kacmar et al., 2011). Eagly and Johnson (1990) posited that women tend to adopt a more transformational leadership style, characterized by empathy and ethical considerations, whereas men may lean towards transactional leadership. Given these differences, it is essential to examine whether the ELW-SR is equally valid for both genders to ensure it does not inadvertently favor one over the other. Additionally, the variation in organizational types—such as public vs. private sectors-can also influence the practice and perception of ethical leadership. Public sector organizations often emphasize transparency and accountability, while private sector entities might prioritize efficiency and profitability (Andersen, 2010). These differing organizational cultures can shape the way ethical leadership is enacted and perceived. By testing the invariance of the ELW-SR across different types of organizations, we can ascertain its robustness and applicability in varied organizational settings, ensuring its broader utility and relevance.

However, the results of the present study do not unequivocally indicate invariance. A positive aspect of the obtained results is that there are no differences in versions according to both criteria. The differences in fit indices that were obtained are negligible. Nevertheless, the fit indices achieved in this analysis are not within acceptable limits but are slightly below. Although such results could be accepted according to some less stringent criteria, the conclusion is that this solution is not acceptable and does not positively support the invariance of the measure relative to the examined criteria.

Criterion validity was further explored through a comparative analysis of ELW-SR with existing instruments measuring related outcomes of leadership, ensuring that ELW-SR adequately reflects the role of ethical leadership on important workplace outcomes. Supporting the scale's criterion validity, our results revealed significant positive correlations between job satisfaction and all dimensions of ethical leadership. The association with the dimension of self-efficacy, as well as psychological safety, shows medium to high significant correlations with all dimensions of ethical leadership, suggesting that a higher perception of ethical leadership correlates with a greater sense of personal efficacy and a higher sense of security among employees within the same team. The results support the idea that all seven dimensions should be considered when studying ethical leadership. This provides additional value in predicting outcomes and contributes to a more detailed understanding of how ethical leadership develops or functions, as well as of particularly effective behaviors. The results are consistent with previous research examining how ethical leadership can contribute to job satisfaction (Jang & Oh, 2017; Steinmann et al., 2016), psychological safety (Ahmad & Umrani, 2019), and ultimately, employees' self-efficacy (Hoogh & Hartog, 2008; Tongsoongnern & Lee, 2022).

Within our study, significant limitations were identified that deserve special attention in order to deepen the understanding of the results obtained and guide future research initiatives. One of the key limitations was related to the sample of respondents, which was not sufficiently balanced in terms of variables relevant for measuring invariance, which is the most significant flaw observed in the process of assessing psychometric characteristics. This imbalance may have contributed to the less favorable results; thus, further research is needed to address this aspect in detail and draw reliable conclusions. Furthermore, there is a pronounced need for more thorough research into the nomological network of leadership to provide a clearer understanding of this complex construct. Additionally, given the closeness of the construct of ethical leadership to related concepts such as servant and transformational leadership, it is advisable to conduct an analysis of the instrument's discriminative validity. Such an analysis is crucial for making a reliable decision about the psychometric characteristics of the scale, ensuring its validity and reliability in academic and practical applications.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the literature on ethical leadership by expanding the empirical basis of the ELW scale and testing its applicability in a different cultural context. The findings affirm that the concept of ethical leadership is relevant and applicable

beyond the Anglo-Saxon context, offering insights into the universality and cultural specifics of ethical leadership. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of further examining and validating the multidimensionality of ethical leadership.

The practical implications of this research are substantial, particularly in the context of fostering ethical leadership within Central and Eastern European (CEE) organizations. The ELW-SR instrument provides a robust tool for organizations seeking to elevate ethical standards and encourage ethical behavior in the workplace. This instrument enables leaders and HR professionals to identify specific areas for development and training, thereby facilitating targeted interventions to enhance ethical leadership. Furthermore, employing the ELW-SR can help cultivate a work environment characterized by transparency, integrity, and fairness. By regularly assessing ethical leadership behaviors, organizations can build and sustain a strong ethical culture, which in turn can lead to increased employee satisfaction and loyalty. Ultimately, the utilization of the ELW-SR has the potential to improve overall organizational efficiency by ensuring that ethical considerations are integral to leadership practices.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to translate the Ethical Leadership at Work Scale into Serbian and to examine the factor structure, measurement invariance, and construct validity of the Serbian version. The results demonstrated that the seven-dimensional structure of the scale effectively reflects the key aspects of ethical leadership, despite challenges related to invariance across gender and organizational type. Overall, the instrument shows promising psychometric properties, and the author recommends its further use, emphasizing the scale's importance in the development and research of ethical leadership, particularly in the demographic area where the validation was conducted. This instrument not only provides insights into the specific dimensions of ethical leadership but also encourages organizations to actively engage in promoting ethical values and behaviors, which is crucial for building sustainable and responsible business practices.

Conflict of interest

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Supplementary Materials

Table S1

Descriptive Statistics: Individual Items of the ELW-SR

	Item translated to Serbian language	М	SD	Sk	Ku	Loading				
	Orijentacija na ljude									
ELW- RS_1	Zainteresovan je za to kako se zaista osećam i kako mi ide na poslu.	3.82	1.13	77	12	.86				
ELW- RS_2	Ostavlja dovoljno vremena za uspostavljanje ličnog kontakta.	3.77	1.20	68	58	.80				
ELW- RS_3	Obraća pažnju na moje potrebe.	3.70	1.21	65	57	.86				
ELW- RS_4	Odvaja vreme za razgovor sa mnom o tome kako se osećam na poslu.	3.46	1.34	37	-1.12	.82				
ELW- RS_5	lskreno je zainteresovan za moj lični razvoj.	3.47	1.30	41	93	.81				
ELW- RS_6	Saoseća sa mnom kad imam problema.	3.73	1.23	66	60	.82				
ELW- RS_7	Brine o svojim podređenima.	3.84	1.21	75	46	.85				
	Pra	avičnost								
ELW- RS_8	Smatra me odgovornim/om za probleme nad kojima nemam kontrolu.	3.93	1.18	92	14	.88				
ELW- RS_9	Smatra me odgovornim/om za posao nad kojim nemam kontrolu.	3.95	1.20	98	07	.94				
ELW- RS_10	Smatra me odgovornim/om za stvari koje nisu moja krivica.	4.13	1.14	-1.20	.42	.86				
ELW- RS_11	Gradi sopstveni uspeh na rezultatima koji su postigli drugi.	3.73	1.41	70	90	.53				
ELW- RS_12	Fokusiran je uglavnom na postizanje sopstvenih ciljeva.	3.30	1.46	29	-1.29	.47				
ELW- RS_13	Manipuliše podređenima.	3.96	1.35	-1.03	28	.56				

	Pod	lela moći						
ELW- RS_14	Omogućava podređenima da utiču na donošenje ključnih	3.25	1.19	40	67	.64		
	odluka.							
ELW-	Ne dozvoljava drugima da	3.95	1.19	-1.04	.21	.58		
RS_15	učestvuju u donošenju odluka.							
ELW-	Traži savete od podređenih koji se tiču organizacione	3.53	1.20	67	45	74		
RS_16	strategije.	5.55	1.20	57	45	.74		
ELW-	Preispituje odluke na osnovu							
RS_17	preporuka koje dobije od svojih podređenih.	3.74	1.08	68	09	.70		
ELW-	Dodeljuje podređenima	3.80	1.13	92	.27	.54		
RS_18	zaduženja koja su izazovna.	0.00		.52	.27	.04		
ELW-	Dozvoljava mi da igram							
RS_19	ključnu ulogu prilikom definisanja ciljeva i željenih	3.48	1.23	51	64	.70		
	rezultata rada.							
Briga za održivost								
ELW-	Želi da radimo na ekološki	0.11	1.01					
RS_20	prihvatljiv način.	3.11	1.31	15	89	.81		
ELW-	Pokazuje zabrinutost za							
RS_21	pitanja održivosti životne	2.95	1.38	.03	-1.17	.94		
	sredine.							
ELW-	Stimuliše recikliranje	2.74	1.39	01	1 17	0.2		
RS_22	predmeta i materijala u našem odeljenju.	2.74	1.59	.21	-1.17	.82		
		io vođenj	e					
ELW-	Jasno objašnjava koja su	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	-					
RS_23	pravila ponašanja i kako da svi	3.60	1.25	60	62	.50		
_	"igraju pošteno".							
ELW-	Objašnjava šta se od							
RS_24	zaposlenih očekuje u pogledu	3.80	1.23	81	31	.84		
	etičnog ponašanja.							
ELW-	Pojašnjava dileme koje su u	267	1 00	64	50	00		
RS_25	vezi sa etičnim ponašanjem na radnom mestu.	3.67	1.23	64	56	.89		
ELW-	Brine se o tome da svi							
RS_26	zaposleni prate etičke	3.64	1.26	63	62	.92		
	propise.							

- 61	.89								
.01	.00								
93	.83								
92	.66								
moralnom ponašanju. Razjašnjenje uloga									
43	.73								
68	.75								
12	.94								
.36	.94								
07	.81								
.07	.01								
13	.95								
.09	.97								
.07	.90								
0.4	07								
.04	.87								
	92 43 68 12 .36 .07 13								