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## Development of a Broader Conceptualization and Measurement Scale of Ethical Leadership (BELS)

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### Cover Page Footnote

The authors report no conflict of interest in writing this article.

# Development of a Broader Conceptualization and Measurement Scale of Ethical Leadership (BELS)



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## **Abstract**

*This study presents a broader construct of ethical leadership as an alternative to existing understanding of the term. The study divides the existing literature into classical and contemporary thoughts. The study brings forth limitations of the existing classical conceptualization based on several shortcomings. Synthesis and development of existing studies lead to a broader narrative that essentially addresses the limitations posed in this study. This broader viewpoint is based on the categorization of ethical theories by Van Wart (2014). A new definition of ethical leadership is presented and a survey scale of ethical leadership based on this conceptualization is developed. This study calls for empirical studies to test the new scale and use it to re-validate existing studies.*

## **Introduction**

The increasing body of literature on ethical leadership (Eisenbeiss, 2012; Den Hartog, 2015, Brown et al., 2006) reports on the various positive effects of ethical leadership such as reduction in absenteeism (Hassan et al., 2014), lower turnover intention (Demirtas and Akdogan, 2015; Elci et al., 2012), and higher motivation for whistle blowing (Bhal and Dadhich, 2011). However, a closer look at the literature reveals that studies pertaining to ethical leadership uphold different conceptualizations of ethical leadership. This is problematic because the presence of multiple conceptualizations hampers the accumulation of knowledge and results in unnecessary proliferation of constructs (Blalock, 1968; Tesser and Kraus, 1976 as cited in Singh, 1991). In general, these different conceptualizations can be classified into a classical and a contemporary school of thought.

The classical school of thought includes studies that uphold the view that ethical leadership comprises of personal ethical virtues of a leader and lists activities undertaken by them to inculcate these values into followers. These studies portray a two-dimensional view of ethical leadership as developed by Brown et al. (2005); Trevino et al. (2003); and Trevino et al. (2000). These two dimensions are called the moral person which refers to the virtues of the leader, and moral manager which refers to the efforts

undertaken by leaders through various means to promote such virtues (Brown et al., 2005). This conceptualization remains popular in the literature till today, and has paved the way for a large number of empirical studies.

The contemporary conceptualization of ethical leadership includes studies that promote a broader scope of ethical leadership (e.g., Kalshoven et al., 2011; Eisenbeiss, 2012; Van Wart, 2014; Voegtlin, 2016). The common underlying denominator in these modern contemporary thoughts of ethical leadership includes two broad views which put them in contrast to classical views. First, in contrast to the classical school of thoughts, contemporary theories of ethical leadership put more emphasis on the external environment and, second, the role of leader is shifted from being a manager that manages employees with rewards and punishments to a mentor that inspires followers by putting the followers' needs before their own (Van Wart, 2014).

A comparison of the classical and contemporary conceptualizations of ethical leaderships shows that, on the one hand, the classical ethical leadership conceptualization lacks many values including efforts on the part of leaders to prioritize the needs of employees or take responsibility for society and environment (Eisenbeiss, 2012; Voegtlin, 2016). On the other hand, contemporary conceptualizations do not include an outline of activities needed to address these growing responsibilities. Therefore, in this study, we aim to develop an overarching conceptualization of ethical leadership that combines both elements.

Next to the absence of an overarching conceptualization, ethical leadership scholarship also lacks an overarching measurement tool. Questionnaires that are currently in use either judge leaders on classical assumptions or measure modern values ignoring the basics of classical theories. This study addresses the call to compare different ethical leadership scales (Yukl et al., 2013), and creates a new scale which will help to address a broader conceptualization.

This article is structured as follows. First, we develop the broader conceptualization of ethical leadership using two building blocks. The first building block reviews elements that were found lacking in the classical model as suggested in the extant literature on ethical leadership. The second building block discusses elements from the contemporary conceptualizations. In the discussion that follows, we explicate how repetitive and similar attributes are removed as part of the development of a broader conceptualization. Based on these building blocks, we next put forward a new broader ethical leadership definition. Following this definition, we then construct the broader ethical leadership scale (BELS) using an amalgam of existing scales and self developed items from the literature. The article ends with a discussion of the utility of the broader conceptualization and the BELS, and presents a future research agenda on ethical leadership.

## **Building Block 1**

### ***Criticizing the Classical Ethical Leadership Conceptualization***

The classical conceptualization of ethical leadership was first presented by Trevino et al. (2000; Trevino et al., 2003). This has been further developed and defined by Brown and colleagues (2005). In their study, they define ethical leadership as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal action and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (Brown et al., 2005, p.120). This conceptualization attributes ethical leadership as the sum of two dimensions; the moral person and moral manager.

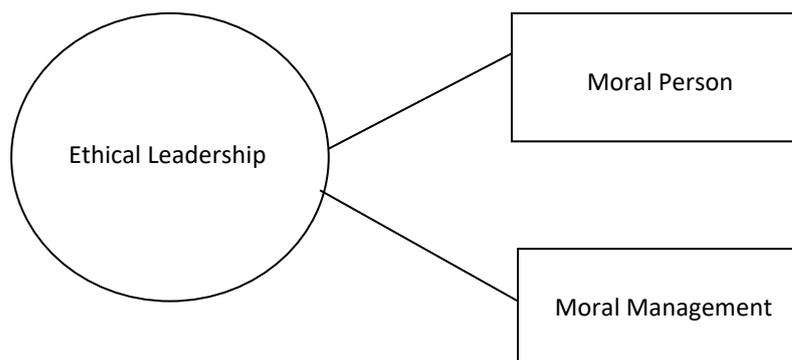
The moral person dimension refers to the personal attributes of the leader her/himself, for example, honesty, fairness, integrity and the leader’s decision-making which includes consideration for ethical consequences of decisions, and making principled and fair choices that can be observed and emulated by others (Bass & Avolio, 2000; Burns, 1978; Howell & Avolio, 1992 as cited in Brown et al., 2005). The moral manager refers to the activities that the manager undertakes to inculcate these values in followers. These activities include role modeling, communication about ethics, and reinforcements (Brown et al., 2005).

Role modeling refers to making the behaviour and decision-making of the leader visible and salient for observation by followers against an observational background which is neutral at best (Brown and Trevino, 2006, p. 597 as cited in Heres and Lasthuizen, 2012). Communication herein implies that leaders “not only draw attention to ethics and make it salient in the social environment by explicitly talking to followers about it, but they also provide followers with voice, a procedurally or interpersonally just process” (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Howell & Avolio, 1992 as cited in Brown et al., 2005). The reinforcement component refers to leaders setting, “ethical standards, reward ethical conduct and discipline those who don’t follow the standards” (Gini, 1998; Trevino et al., 2003 as cited in Brown et al., 2005).

This conceptualization has been at the base of many empirical studies., however, the classical model lacks a number of contemporary values. We highlight seven points of discussion, being focus on negative reinforcement, stakeholders not defined, lack of consideration for empowerment, ambiguity in normative appropriateness, lack of role clarification, lack of consideration for environmental sustainability and need for leader learning. Figure 1 shows the classical model of ethical leadership lacking the above-mentioned contemporary values.

**Figure 1: The Classical Model of Ethical Leadership**

**Stage 1: Development of Classical Model**



**Limitations:**  
**Role Clarification**  
**Empowerment**  
**Responsibility for Society, etc.**

**Focus on Negative Reinforcement.** Within the classical ethical leadership conceptualization, the moral management dimension includes role modeling, communication about ethics and reinforcement to guide followers towards ethical actions. Reinforcement

refers to leaders' disciplining the behaviour of followers towards the desired ethical conduct by the means of rewards and punishment (Heres and Lasthuizen, 2012). This experience lies with the observers as well as individuals being rewarded or punished (Trevino et al., 1992; Brown et al., 2005; Mayer et al., 2009 as cited in Heres and Lasthuizen, 2012). The focus on punishment is problematic, due to the implications on an employee's well-being as it can have a negative effect on employees' self-esteem. A lower self-esteem is negatively related to performance (Covin et al., 1992; Pierce and Gardner, 2004). This has also been cited in the classic conceptualization (Kanungo and Mendonca, 1996 as cited in Brown et al., 2005).

**Stakeholders Not Defined.** Stakeholders are defined as: "any identifiable group or individual who can affect the achievement of an organization's objectives or who is affected by the achievement of an organization's objectives. Stakeholders include, for example, public interest groups, protest groups, government agencies, trade associations, competitors, unions, as well as employees, customer segments, and shareowners" (Freeman & Reed, 1983, p. 91).

Several scholars argue that the classical conceptualization of ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005) does not focus on external stakeholders like customers and society (Den Hartog, 2015, p.112; Frisch and Huppenbauer, 2014 in Voegtlin, 2016). This argument stems from the lack of reference to external stakeholders in the definition. However, it is important to consider stakeholders as they are important components of an organization. The initial model of ethical leadership put forward by Trevino et al. (2000) did include the sub dimension of concern for society as part of moral person dimension of the construct. However subsequent studies did not identify the scope of ethical leader in its definition or measurement tool (Brown et al., 2005).

**Lack of Consideration for Empowerment.** Scholars describe empowerment as "allowing followers a say in decision making and listening to their ideas and concerns" (De Hoogh and den Hartog, 2008, p.298). The classical conceptualization of ethical leadership lacks direct and explicit attention for empowerment although empowerment has been a topic of discussion in related terms of 'giving employees voice' in the classical theory (Brown et al., 2005). Recent studies on ethical leadership emphasize its importance and have found empowerment to be a vital component of the moral manager dimension (Resick et al., 2006; Den Hartog and De Hoog, 2009 as cited in Heres and Lasthuizen, 2012). According to these scholars, ethical leaders give chances to their employees to voice their concerns, become a part of the decision-making process and help them set their goals. The study by De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) suggest that empowerment has importance in studies relating to high performance work systems (Becker & Huselid, 1998 as cited in De Hoogh and Den Hartog, 2008).

**Lack of Normative Appropriateness.** Classical conceptualizations use the term 'normatively appropriate' for desired ethical behaviour. Although individual ethics are normative in general and vary with cultural boundaries, in terms of organizational studies ethical leadership needs to address the nature of normativeness. In light of the debate regarding unethical pro-organization behaviour (Kalshoven et al., 2016), the extent of normativeness merits a definition of its organizational boundaries. Other studies (Frisch and Huppenbauer, 2014; Den Hartog, 2015) also raise concerns about the term 'normatively appropriate' used in the definition of ethical leadership by Brown and colleagues (2005). These scholars argue that norms may vary across organizations and industries and there is no identification regarding who sets these norms. Furthermore,

such norms may even be harmful for others. The classical conceptualization (Brown et al., 2005) lacks clarification about the normative nature of conduct.

**Lack of Role Clarification.** Role clarification refers to transparency by leaders in clarifying performance goals and expectations for followers (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Kalshoven, 2011). Classical conceptualizations do not address this important function of moral management (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Kalshoven et al., 2011). Role clarification was used along with power sharing and morality and fairness by De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) in their study to assess ethical leadership and adapted by Kalshoven et al. (2011) as part of their construct. In their studies, De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) and Kalshoven et al. (2011) identified role clarification among ethical leader behaviors. Ethical leaders are expected to help employees identify their roles within the organizations. This is important to take into consideration as lack of role clarity can create false expectations in terms of individual responsibility and can hamper good performance. Employees can judge when their performance is at par, and it also helps to avoid employees worrying unnecessarily about their performance (Kalshoven et al., 2011). The definition by Brown et al. (2005) lacks the acknowledgement of role clarification as part of ethical leader's responsible behavior.

**Lack of Environmental Sustainability.** Corporate sustainability can be defined as meeting the needs of a firm's direct and indirect stakeholders (such as shareholders, employees, clients, pressure groups, communities, etc.), without compromising its ability to meet the needs of future stakeholders as well. Towards this goal, organizations have to maintain and grow their economic, social and environmental capital base while actively contributing to sustainability in the political domain (Dyllicks & Hockerts, 2002, p.132). Although this definition focuses on the political domain, we think it holds true beyond this frame as sustainability as mandate transcends political motives. Contemporary ethical leadership scholars (Van Wart, 2014; Eisenbeiss, 2012; Voegtlin, 2016) promote environmental sustainability as a factor of ethical leadership whereas the classical conceptualization (Brown et al., 2005) does not share this concern. We argue that implicit in the theory of ethical leadership is the understanding that ethical leaders are responsible individuals (Eisenbeiss, 2012). This implies a responsibility to both internal and external stakeholders including the society and environment. Having established this, ethical leaders are compelled to be conscious about their surroundings including the environment and its sustainability. Concern for sustainability has also been identified by De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) and subsequently by Kalshoven et al. (2011). By not clearly identifying stakeholders, as discussed above, the implicit thoughts about environmental sustainability are left undecided in the classical conceptualizations (Brown et al., 2005).

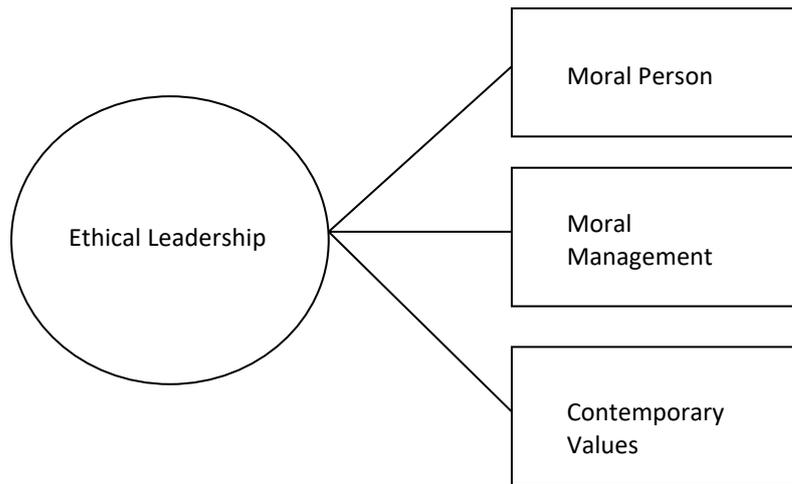
**Need for Leader Learning.** Leadership learning refers to the knowledge that the leader needs to possess in order to lead effectively and adapt constantly to the changing environment. According to Voegtlin (2016), it is an important aspect of leader responsibility. It also implies knowledge in terms of ethical behaviours. Both classical and contemporary conceptualizations lack focus addressing this important aspect of leadership. In a study that explored the link between learning and leadership (Brown and Posner, 2001), leadership development was termed a learning process. Application of adult learning and fostering transformational learning were considered essential in the design and delivery of leadership development efforts. With regard to this important aspect of leadership, the definition of an ethical leader by Brown and colleagues (Brown et al., 2005) overlooks the importance for self-improvement through learning for either

the ethical leaders themselves or the followers. This is in line with the qualities of reconsideration associated with leaders (Hester, 2012). We believe learning can imply going through a process of reconsideration which can be result of training, experiences, or formal education.

*Figure 2* represents the two dimensions of classical model as depicted in figure 1 with the addition of contemporary values as outlined above.

**Figure 2: Classical Model of Ethical Leadership Including Contemporary Values**

**Stage 2: Development of Classical Model**



**Limitation:**  
**No link to ethical components of related styles**

**Building Block 2**

***Ethical Components of Other Leadership Styles***

The broader ethical leadership conceptualization that is developed in this study not only considers critical points raised by contemporary ethical leadership scholars but also uses insights from five related leadership styles. These styles are positive, spiritual, transformational and professionally grounded leadership. Although classical theory negates the possibility to link transformational style to ethical leadership but acknowledges the link (Brown et al., 2005), it does not discuss the association with the other four styles mentioned in this section. Van Wart (2014) in his study considers these leadership styles as contemporary ethical leadership theories. Their crucial role in ethical leadership include a focus on individual ethics, fostering resilience, advocating for diversity and equal rights, stress on ethical principles instead of total reliance on rules (grounded leadership) and change in terms of adaptation of needed ethical perspective (Shakeel et al., 2019).

***Virtuous Leadership.*** Virtuous leadership as characterized by Van Wart (2014) is similar to the moral person in the classical conceptualization of ethical leadership. In both classifications, it refers to a person who has particular ethical attributes. In terms of the classical conceptualization, it refers to a person who is considered fair, trustworthy, honest and caring (Brown et al., 2005). Care is also at the epi-center of values deemed important for leaders within the leadership literature (Hester, 2012). However, the moral

person does not actively pursue to instill these attributes in followers; this is a job for moral manager (the second dimension of ethical leadership according to the classical conceptualization). A virtuous leader has attributes such as honesty, trustworthiness, fairness conscientiousness and prudence (Van Wart, 2014, p.29). Prudence or wisdom according to Van Wart (2014) can be used for understanding why things are the way they are. It refers to blending experience, knowledge and reason to make optimum or prudential decisions (Kodish, 2006 in Van Wart, 2014).

***Attention for Resilience (Link to Positive Leadership).*** Resilience is termed as the “ability to bounce back from adversity” (Hartley,2018, p. 211) and has been deemed useful for public sector leadership. However, this study proposes it to be central to the concept of ethical leadership in general. According to the literature, resilience is of two types; preventive and restorative (Hartley, 2018). Preventive resilience deals with building the capacity to deal with adverse situation whereas restorative resilience deals with bringing a person back to normalcy after a stressful period (Hartley, 2018). Preventive resilience is directly related to ‘ethical competence’ of the leader, which involves training the leader to follow inspiration and professional principles to cope with unexpected situations and ethical dilemmas when rules do not guide appropriately or are unavailable (discussed in upcoming section). Whereas, restorative resilience is instrumental in avoiding ethical lapses in high stress situation. This calls for special attention as abusive behaviour has been linked with stressful situations within ethical leadership literature (Lin et al., 2016).

***Addressing Diversity Management (Link to Socially Responsible Leadership).*** Diversity management is defined as “the commitment on the part of organizations to recruit, retain, reward, and promote a heterogeneous mix of productive, motivated, and committed workers including people of color, whites, females, and the physically challenged (Ivancevich and Gilbert, 2000, p.77). Ethical leaders being responsible individuals, and governed by the principles of fairness and justice are expected to give equal representation and opportunities to all stakeholders in all matters of organization. Although the classic conceptualization of ethical leadership does not focus explicitly on diversity, diversity constitutes a vital component of spiritual leadership (Van Wart, 2014).

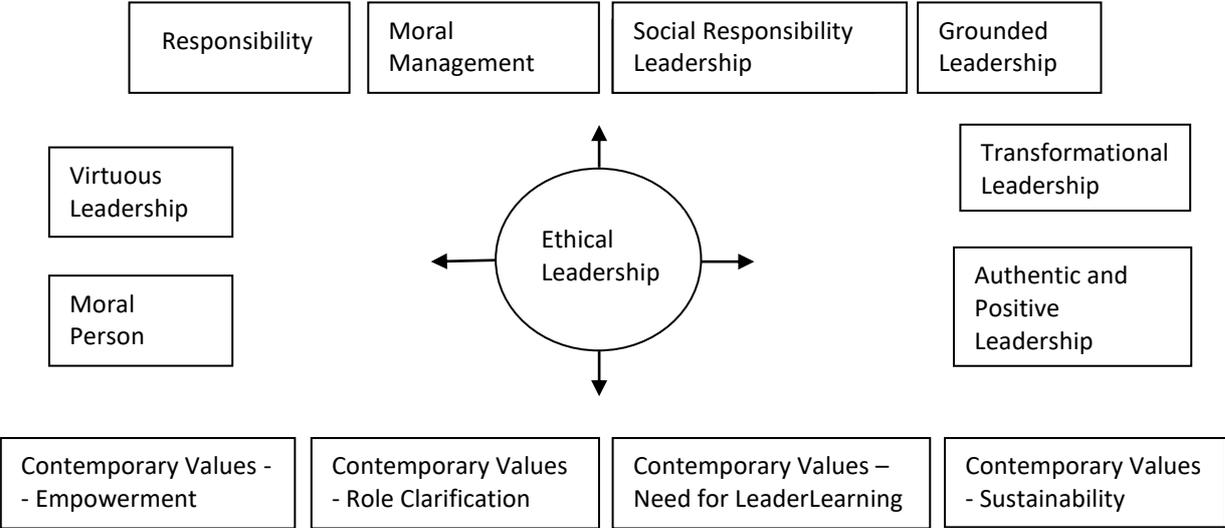
***Professionally Grounded Leadership.*** Among the contemporary theories of ethical leadership is professionally grounded leadership (Van Wart, 2014) which is also in line with Voegtlin’s (2016) work on ethical leadership. The grounded approach focuses on ethical *principles* whereas the moral manager focuses more on *rules* and regulations (Van Wart, 2014). If an ethical leader decides based on rules, (s)he would be following the classical conceptualization of ethical leadership; whereas if an ethical leader is forced to decide which has no precedence or associating rule for guidance, theoretically (s)he will be a professionally grounded ethical leader. In our study, we call the ability of following principles “ethical competence.” This is similar to addressing the issue highlighted by a leadership study, “that socialization and training in ethical decision-making ought to become a consistent practice” (Hester, 2012, p.8).

***Ethical Component of Transformational Leadership.*** On a similar note, responsibility on the part of ethical leaders also maintains that ethical leaders in their conscious mind, save budget restraints, will not withhold transformational changes in the organization which could increase productivity or benefit their organization in the long run. Brown et al. (2005) reviewed the overlap between transformational and ethical leadership and stated that this overlap at best is partial. However, there are two known types within transformational leadership; authentic transformational leaders who can be termed as

leaders true to their agenda of undergoing change and pseudo- transformational leaders who use change to pursue selfish needs (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

In contrast to the classical school of thought, we are of the view that the association of ethical leadership and authentic transformational leadership is not a mere overlap but that ethical leaders are known to use various styles depending on the context (Heres and Lasthuizen, 2012). We argue that ethical leadership as proposed by Van Wart’s categorization (2014) entails social responsibility styles including Corporate social responsibility (CSR) leading to environmental sustainability and transformational leadership styles. Having incorporated the categorization by Van Wart (2014) into our development, currently our model is illustrated in *Figure 3*.

**Figure 3. A Broader Conceptualization of Ethical Leadership**



*Figure 3* shows the components of ethical leadership that have been covered so far. The dimensions of moral person and moral manager have been added from classical school of thought; Responsibility is included in our broader model to compensate for the lack of clarity on the definition of “normative appropriateness” in the model presented by Brown et al. (2005). Responsibility also stands as a dimension of ethical leadership from the study of Voegtlin (2016). We add contemporary ideas of empowerment, need for leader learning and sustainability from our discussion and the remaining 6 dimensions from Van Wart’s (2014) categorization including virtuous leadership, authentic and positive leadership, moral management, professionally grounded leadership, socially responsible leadership and transformational leadership. However, these 12 dimensions include some overlap that we discuss in the upcoming section, before presenting our broader definition of ethical leadership.

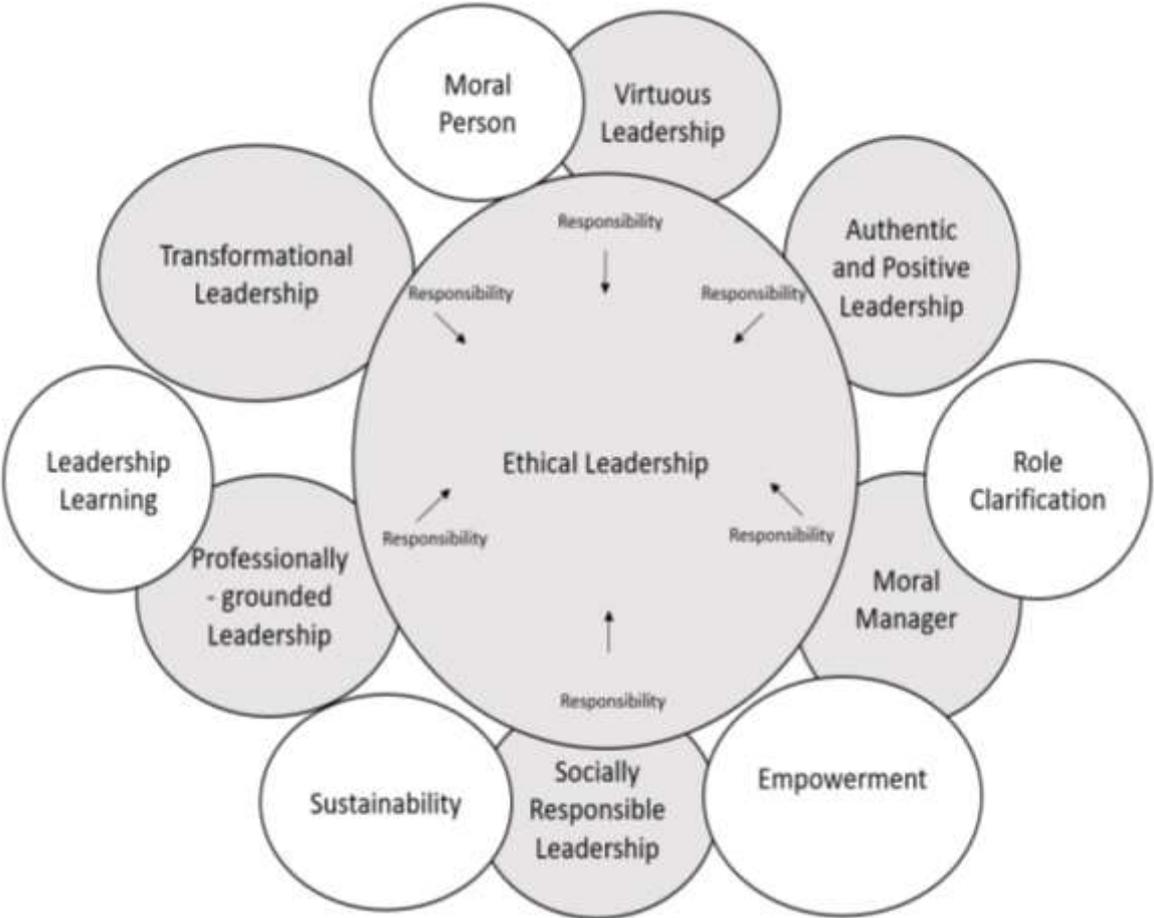
**Broader Ethical Leadership Definition**

Although contemporary studies pose critique on the multiple shortcomings of the classical assumptions of ethical leadership, these studies are limited to the proposition of new dimensions of ethical leadership with no emphasis on the specific list of activities it comprises (as are part of moral management of the classical assumption). Enlisting activities of these dimensions can help distinguish them from each other as well as avoid

repetition. For example, responsibility is implicit in the classical conceptualization and is also a separate explicit dimension identified by Voegtlin (2016). The sub-dimension of responsibility includes links to multiple other contemporary concepts. For instance, it has links to the grounded leadership characterization of Van Wart (2014), with empowerment, with need for learning and with social responsibility leadership of Van Wart, 2014.

Figure 4 demonstrates overlaps between dimensions. For example, the moral person dimension of classical ethical leadership is similar to virtuous leadership, and sustainability is part of CSR which is a socially responsible leadership style in Van Wart’s categorization. Other examples concern empowerment and role clarification, which are added to moral management, whereas concerns relating to the need for learning and sustainability are addressed through the dimensions of professionally grounded and socially responsible leadership respectively. Responsibility, which is an important dimension of ethical leadership by Voegtlin (2016), is seen as a vital factor of all dimensions of ethical leadership. We have used it above to compensate for the lack of clarity of ‘normative appropriateness’ and we think it also addresses the shortcoming regarding identification of relevant stakeholders. This is possible as the dimension of socially responsible leadership identifies society as well as environment among external stakeholders.

**Figure 4. Ethical Leadership Dimensions**



So, all shortcomings of the classical perspective mentioned are covered in the model presented in *Figure 4* and we can now present a new, broader definition of ethical leadership: *“Ethical leadership is the implicit and explicit pursuit of desired ethical behavior for self and followers through efforts governed by rules and principles that advocate learning motivation, healthy optimism and clarity of purpose to uphold the values of empowerment, service to others, concern for human rights, change for betterment and fulfilling duty towards society, future generations, environment and its sustainability.”*

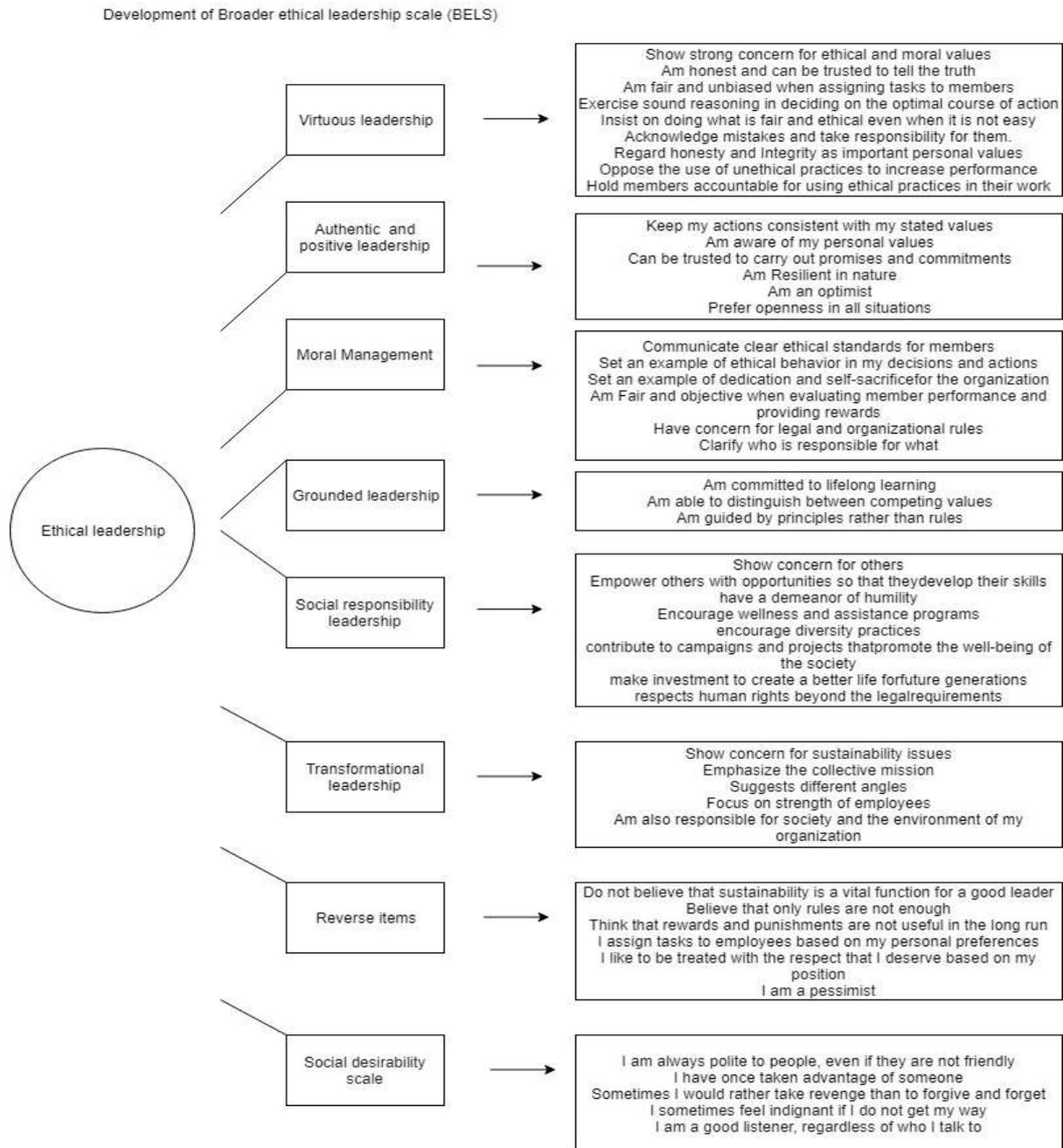
Embedded within this definition are the approaches of six constituent ethical leadership styles including virtuous leadership, authentic and positive leadership, moral manager, professionally grounded leadership, social responsibility leadership (including CSR, spiritual servant leadership) and transformational leadership (Van Wart, 2014). These approaches will form the basis for the development of the Broad Ethical Leadership Scale (BELS).

### **Scale Construction**

The BELS has been developed as an amalgam of existing scales of the constituent styles of ethical leadership. The Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) and the Ethical Leadership Questionnaire are based on classical conceptualization of ethical leadership, whereas, the Ethical Leadership at Work (ELW) is based on contemporary conceptualization. An exhaustive list of scales that were used to import items is shown in *Table 1*. For authentic and positive leadership, professionally grounded leadership, and spiritual leadership no items could be found in the literature. We developed items ourselves using the study of Van Wart (2014). For the items that were imported from existing scales, only those with factor loadings above 0.4 were considered for incorporation. Overlapping items were also removed to avoid repetitions. We chose to formulate the items in such a way that leaders rate themselves on a Likert scale, therefore, we decided to add items to assess social desirability and formulate a few items negatively (as most items were formulated positively).

In the appendix we provide the tool including items from the social desirability scale as well as negatively coded items for some of the existing items from BELS of our scale. The negatively coded items include “Do not believe that sustainability is a vital function for a good leader” (reverse of transformational leadership) “Believe that only rules are not enough” (reverse of moral manager), “I assign tasks to employees based on my personal preferences” (reverse of virtuous leadership), “I like to be treated with the respect that I deserve based on my position” (reverse of servant leadership) and “I am pessimist” (reverse of positive leadership). The social desirability scale (Hays et al., 1989) consists of items, “I am always polite to people, even if they are not friendly,” “I have once taken advantage of someone,” “Sometime I would rather take revenge than to forgive and forget,” “I sometime feel indignant if I do not get my way” and “I am a good listener, regardless of who I talk to.” These items were added to allow control analyses and counter potential response errors.

**Figure 5. Item-wise Detail of BELS**



Next, we will discuss the development of the items for the different elements of ethical leadership.

**Developing Virtuous Ethical Leadership by Addressing Capacity for Ethical Competence**

For the BELS we use eight items to measure virtuous leadership. These items originate from the ELQ that fit best with Van Wart’s description of virtuous leadership including attributes like wisdom. In doing so, we selected the items relating to the moral person. These self-assessed items are “show strong concern for ethical and moral values,” “am honest and can be trusted to tell the truth”, “am fair and unbiased when assigning tasks to members,” “insist on doing what is fair and ethical even when it is not easy,”

“acknowledge mistakes and take responsibility for them,” “regard honesty and Integrity as important personal values,” “oppose the use of unethical practices to increase performance,” and “hold members accountable for using ethical practices in their work” . The coefficients for these items vary from .68 to .72 in their validation study (Yukl et al., 2013).

In addition to these items we also include an item “exercise sound reasoning in deciding on the optimal course of action” relating to wisdom. This item is taken from the survey scale of Wang and Hackett (2016). Wisdom of a leader is a focal characteristic of a virtuous leader as portrayed by Van Wart (2014) but has not been used by Yukl and colleagues in the ELQ (Yukl et al. 2013) which we believe is a potential shortcoming. The coefficient of this item in the two studies conducted by Wang and Hackett (2016) had factor loadings of .78 and .87 respectively.

### **Developing Authentic and Positive Ethical Leadership by Addressing Self Awareness**

To assess authentic leadership, we developed items using the description of Van Wart (2014). He classifies an authentic leader as a person who has a focus on her/his self-awareness and improvement. Most essentially as the label suggests, an authentic person displays her/his values through action and stays true to her/his words, hence the feature of “walking the talk” is among the key characteristic of such a leader besides the ability of controlling ego-drives. Therefore, we developed one item relating to the essential characteristic of authentic leaders “am aware of my personal values” and imported two items from the ELQ scale “Keep my actions consistent with my stated values” and “Can be trusted to carry out promises and commitments.” These items had coefficient values of .75 and .72 respectively (Yukl et al., 2013).

Positive leaders are characterized by Van Wart (2014) as emphasizing openness, transparency, optimism, and resilience. We developed three items accordingly: “am resilient in nature,” “am an optimist,” and “prefer openness in all situations.”

### **Developing Moral Management by Addressing Role Clarification**

Moral management is a dimension of the classical conceptualization of ethical leadership. It includes activities that are carried out by leaders to inculcate ethical values in their followers. These activities include two-way communication reinforcement and decision making (Brown et al., 2005). Although as explained earlier, empowerment is also highlighted among the activities of moral manager, on the basis of Van Wart’s (2014) characterization we place empowerment within servant leadership below. Furthermore, based on the shortcomings discussed earlier, role clarification is added as a component of moral management. To assess the moral manager variety of ethical leadership, we use items from the ELQ scale: “communicate clear ethical standards for members,” “set an example of ethical behavior in my decisions and actions,” “set an example of dedication and self-sacrifice for the organization” and “am fair and objective when evaluating member performance and providing rewards.” These items had coefficients varying from .65 to .83 in the original validation study (Yukl et al., 2013).

Besides ELS and ELQ, the ELW also served as a popular scale for assessing ethical leadership. It is based on a construct that includes seven ethical leader behaviors, some of which, for instance role clarification and sustainability are lacking in both the ELS as well as ELQ (Kalshoven et al., 2011). Yukl et al. (2013) criticize the ELW based on arguments that some items use (1) multiple components (2) vague wording and (3) and mixing of positive and negative worded items. Although some of the leader behaviour that the ELW assesses, for instance sustainability, is related to other ethical leadership

varieties, in the assessment of moral manager dimension, we include only one item relating to role clarification. This item “clarify who is responsible for what” had a coefficient of .75. Finally, we develop one item ourselves relating to rules: “have concern for legal and organizational rules.”

### **Developing Professionally Grounded Ethical Leadership by Addressing Ethical Competence (Learning) and Capacity for Self-Improvement**

Professionally-grounded leadership considers broader ethical principles which are not part of the classical conceptualization as the moral management component of the classical conceptualization is more focused on rules and regulations. A focus on principles rather than rules through professionally grounded leadership gives the BELS a broader focus. To assess professionally grounded leadership, we make use of items that touch upon the fundamental differences between this variety and the values of moral manager. Due to lack of availability of a scale that measures professionally grounded leadership, we refer to the description by Van Wart (2014, p.29). He describes a grounded leader as someone who has the capacity to make reasonable exceptions to policies, the competence to deal with competing values and the ability to recognize inappropriate behaviour. These values, which can be developed by a leader through professional training, can be attributed to the learning component of leadership. By adding learning as a factor that differentiates professionally grounded leadership, we also address the shortcomings of the moral manager framework as propagated by Brown and colleagues (Brown et al., 2005), and the subsequent work based on this model. The item relating to learning was taken from Thun and Kelloway (2011). Besides the item “am committed to life-long learning” with a coefficient of .61, we incorporate a self-developed item relating “ability to distinguish between competing values” and “guided by principles rather than rules” based on the description by Van Wart (2014).

### **Developing Socially Responsible Ethical Leadership by Identifying Stakeholders, and Addressing Sustainability and Empowerment**

Socially responsible leadership entails three sub styles: servant, spiritual leadership, and CSR. Servant leaders are described as persons who emphasize improvement in well-being, who believe in empowerment of employees and who have a characteristic of concomitant humility (Van Wart, 2014). To measure these characteristics, three items from the scale of Dennis and Bocarnea (2005) are used. These items “show concern for other,” “empower others with opportunities so that they develop their skills,” and “have a demeanor of humility” have coefficient values of .83, .80 and .82 respectively (Dennis & Bocarnea, 2005).

Spiritual leadership is characterized by the assumption of work as a calling and focus on wellness/assistance programs, diversity practices and bereavement programs (Van Wart, 2014). Spiritual leadership can be defined as “comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one’s self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership” (Fry, 2003, p.11). Literature also explains “Spiritual leadership can be viewed as a field of inquiry within the broader context of workplace spirituality. Both are areas of research in the early stage of development and therefore lack a strong body of theory and research findings” (Fry, 2003, p.108). In keeping consistency to our work, we uphold the attributes highlight by Van Wart (2014): care for others and diversity. We developed two items “encourage wellness and assistance programs” and “encourage diversity practices” to assess these tendencies (Van Wart, 2014).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is characterized by a focus on law abidance, legal and ethical responsibilities, sustainability, human rights and charity (Van Wart, 2014). To assess CSR, we use two items “contribute to campaigns and projects that promote the well-being of the society” and “make investment to create a better life for future generations” with coefficients of 0.67 and 0.81 from the scale of Turker (2009). We also develop an item relating to human rights, “respects human rights beyond the legal requirements” to fully cover the characterization of Van Wart (2014).

**Developing Transformational Ethical Leadership by Addressing “Withholding Necessary Transformation”**

To assess the transformational component of ethical leadership, we make use of a scale developed by Avolio et al. (1999). This instrument uses six factors to assess transformational leadership namely charisma/inspirational, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, contingent reward, management by exception-active and passive avoidant. Based on our understanding of negative tendencies of transactional tactics as explained earlier, we avoid using items relating this last factor. Instead we focus on Van Wart’s (2014) description of a transformational leader which is closely associated with sustainability of the environment. Since the scale by Avolio et al. (1999) does not assess this capacity, we incorporate an item relating to sustainability, “show concern for sustainability issues” from the ethical leadership scale by Kalshoven et al., (2011) with a coefficient of .85. Beside sustainability, we incorporate three items from the scale by Avolio et al. (1999). These items are “emphasize the collective mission,” “suggests different angles,” and “focus on strength of employees.” They relate to the factors of charisma, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration and have coefficients of .71(.77), .81(.79) and .82(.72) respectively for initial and replication set of samples. (Avolio et al., 1999).

Table 1 shows the full survey tool, including sources of origin for each item. Figure 5 shows all items incorporated in the BELS.

**Table 1: List of Items of BELS and Their Sources<sup>1</sup>**

<i>S No</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Source of items</i>	<i>Ethical Leadership Style</i>
	I, as leader		
1	Show strong concern for ethical and moral values	(ELQ) Yukl et al. 2013	Virtuous Leader
2	Am honest and can be trusted to tell the truth	-	
3	Am fair and unbiased when assigning tasks to members	-	
4	Exercise sound reasoning in deciding on the optimal course of action	Wang and Hackett, 2016	
5	Insist on doing what is fair and ethical even when it is not easy	(ELQ) Yukl et al. 2013	
6	Acknowledge mistakes and take responsibility for them.	-	
7	Regard honesty and integrity as important personal values	-	
8	Oppose the use of unethical practices to increase performance	-	
9	Hold members accountable for using ethical practices in their work	-	

<sup>1</sup> Source of items denoting ‘-’ implies same as preceding.

10	Keep my actions consistent with my stated values	Van Wart, 2014	Authentic Leader
11	Am aware of my personal values	-	
12	Can be trusted to carry out promises and commitments	-	Positive Leader
13	Am resilient in nature	-	
14	Am an optimist	-	
15	Prefer openness in all situations	-	Moral Manager
16	Communicate clear ethical standards for members	(ELQ) Yukl et al. 2013	
17	Set an example of ethical behavior in my decisions and actions	-	
18	Set an example of dedication and self-sacrifice for the organization	-	
19	Am Fair and objective when evaluating member performance and providing rewards	-	
20	Have concern for legal and organizational rules	Van Wart, 2014	Professionally grounded leader
21	Clarify who is responsible for what	(ELW) Kalshoven et al. 2011	
22	Am committed to lifelong learning	Thun and Kelloway, 2011	
23	Am able to distinguish between competing values	Van Wart, 2014	
24	Am guided by principles rather than rules	-	
25	Show concern for others	Dennis and Bocarnea, 2005	Servant Leader
26	Empower others with opportunities so that they develop their skills	-	
27	Have a demeanor of humility	-	
28	Encourage wellness and assistance programs	Van Wart, 2014	Spiritual Leader
29	Encourage diversity practices	-	
30	Contribute to campaigns and projects that promote the well-being of the society	Turker, 2009	CSR
31	Make investment to create a better life for future generations	-	
32	Respects human rights beyond the legal requirements	Van Wart, 2014	Transformational Leader
33	Show concern for sustainability issues	(ELW)Kalshoven et al. 2011	
34	Emphasize the collective mission	(MLQ)Avolio et al. 1999	
35	Suggests different angles	-	
36	Focus on strength of employees	-	
37	Am also responsible for society and the environment of my organization	Added	Reverse coded
38	Do not believe that sustainability is a vital function for a good leader	Added, reverse of transformational L	
39	Believe that only rules are not enough	Added, reverse of moral manager	
40	Think that rewards and punishments are not useful in the long run	Added, reverse of moral manager	
41	I assign tasks to employees based on my personal preferences	Reverse of 3	

42	I like to be treated with the respect that I deserve based on my position	Reverse of 27	
43	I am a pessimist	Reverse of 14	
44	I am always polite to people, even if they are not friendly	Hays et al., 1989	Social desirability scale
45	I have once taken advantage of someone	-	
46	Sometimes I would rather take revenge than to forgive and forget	-	
47	I sometimes feel indignant if I do not get my way	-	
48	I am a good listener, regardless of who I talk to	-	

## Conclusion

The goal of this article was to review and develop the literature of ethical leadership conceptualizations. The existing literature addressed multiple conceptualizations and made use of various measurement tools. To synthesize the literature, this study divided it into two broad schools of thoughts; classical and contemporary. By addressing the shortcomings of the classical conceptualization, we added the distinguishing elements of the contemporary conceptualization into this model to develop a broader conceptualization. In doing so, we offer a new definition that addresses these contemporary elements and a new ethical leadership survey scale which overcomes all existing limitations. We put forward our understanding of ethical leadership as: *“Ethical leadership is the implicit and explicit pursuit of desired ethical behavior for self and followers through efforts governed by rules and principles that advocate learning motivation, healthy optimism and clarity of purpose to uphold the values of empowerment, service to others, concern for human rights, change for betterment and fulfilling duty towards society, future generations, environment and its sustainability.”*

The Broader Ethical Leadership Scale (BELS) we proposed in this study is a comprehensive scale of ethical leadership that incorporates all elements of ethical leadership that have previously been only partially present within classical ethical leadership scales or in contemporary scales but not altogether. The BELS is an amalgam of items from existing scales and self-developed items where no existing scales were present. Existing scales were not used in full to avoid repetition. Most existing items were originally intended to be rated by subordinates, but we have changed these into first form by adding, ‘I, as a leader’ before each item. To reduce the risk of social desirability or bias, we have incorporated a social desirability scale and added a number of negatively coded items. Researchers who want to use the BELS can of course reformulate the items again to make them suitable for respondents’ rating their leaders.

Future research is needed to empirically validate the BELS and test whether the broader concept of ethical leadership holds. Some ethical attributes may be universal, for instance fairness and justice while others are more contemporary in nature. Some of the most distinguishable elements of the broader concept that pertain to modern day ethical debate are sustainability, openness to diversity, empowerment and care for society. The advocacy of these elements may also be subject to culture, geographical locations and organizational sector. With regard to empowerment of women, even in the most developed countries like the USA, women rights in numerous forms are yet to be fully implemented (Hester, 2012). Given that ethical leadership is normative in nature, we predict differences across cultures within some elements, but generic environmental concerns and human rights do not vary. We invite further research to determine which

ethical leadership attributes stand universal and otherwise. Likewise, the feminine attribute of caring has been widely acknowledged (Noddings, 1984) and this aspect is put in contrast with relative psychological theories. Since the broader construct of ethical leadership entails such elements, it will be interesting to link care-associated attributes across gender in empirical studies, which could then indicate if female leaders outperform their male colleagues within this domain and if some attributes associate more closely to a specific gender as highlighted by Hester (2012). It is also important to further investigate the exploitation of women as “carers” (Kittay, 2003) and the misuse of “ethical leader’s care” in general by followers. Replication of existing studies using the BELS will also be interesting to test the broader concept of ethical leadership across different sectors i.e. public, private and nonprofit. It will be interesting to explore if ethical leadership has the same construct across these sectors or have multiple interpretations for these sectors as predicted (Heres & Lasthuizen, 2012).

Finally, the downside of proposed definition relates to its implicit focus on a number of important factors. However, our measurement scale, BELS, is longer than the existing scales and includes multiple items per dimension, which have been left as such because (a) a validation study can determine which items work best and (b) to obtain sufficient variation in responses. This is also in line with the study of Ziegler et al. (2014) which suggests that before making a short measurement tool, a long measurement tool is needed. Alternatively, interviews could also prove to be an effective tool for ethical leadership (Heres and Lasthuizen, 2012). The BELS scale can provide a useful framework for such interviews.

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