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# HOW DO ETHICAL LEADERS PROMOTE EMPLOYEES' FEEDBACK-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS? A SERIAL MEDIATION MODEL

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This study explores how ethical leadership fosters employees' feedback-seeking behaviours. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory, the research identifies intrinsic motivation and affective commitment as key mediators through which ethical leaders encourage proactive feedback-seeking. The findings reveal that ethical leadership positively influences employees' intrinsic motivation and affective commitment to the organisation, which in turn enhances their tendency to feedback – an essential behaviour in dynamic and quality-sensitive work environments such as manufacturing. To empirically test this model, a cross-sectional survey was conducted among 422 employees at a large manufacturing plant in Manisa, Türkiye. The results support a serial mediation model, confirming that ethical leadership indirectly promotes feedback-seeking behaviours through increased intrinsic motivation and affective commitment.

Keywords: ethical leadership, intrinsic motivation, affective commitment, feedback-seeking behaviour



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## INTRODUCTION

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Feedback-Seeking Behaviour (FSB) holds substantial importance for organisational development, particularly in rapidly changing work environments (Zhu et al., 2023). Many employees find themselves in a feedback vacuum, especially in knowledge-based organisations, where they may struggle to assess the work of experts (Lee & Kim, 2021). Employees who actively seek feedback tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction (Ozturk et al., 2021) and improvements in performance. The prevalence of FSB within an organisation not only helps inexperienced employees better understand role expectations but also enhances the performance of more experienced staff (Gong et al., 2017). Consequently, FSB contributes positively to organisational success while helping employees develop their knowledge and skills (Cheng et al., 2023). Furthermore, this behaviour also cultivates active communication with leaders (Lee & Kim, 2021), which enhances overall organisational performance and effectiveness (De Stobbeleir et al., 2011). It initiates a continuous cycle of motivation, learning, and development, ultimately boosting both individual and collective performance within the organisation (Zhou et al., 2024).

Many studies suggest that FSB has a positive impact on employee performance, job satisfaction, career development, and a reduction in employee turnover (Cheng et al., 2023). Nevertheless, despite its recognised benefits, employees often refrain from actively seeking feedback in organisational settings due to perceived costs – such as the time required – and the psychological discomfort stemming from potential criticism or threats to their self-image (Parker & Collins, 2010). Despite these limitations, scholars have emphasised the importance of understanding how to encourage employees to engage in proactive FSB (Sherf & Morrison, 2020).

Recent research provides strong evidence for the central role of leadership in shaping employees' attitudes and behaviours, concluding that leaders significantly influence the development of FSB (Kim et al., 2024). Organisational growth is supported when employees receive active feedback from their leaders. Indeed, prior studies have shown that servant leadership (Huo & Liu, 2023), transformational leadership (Cheng et al., 2023), inclusive leadership (Song et al., 2023), and ethical leadership (Qian et al., 2017) positively affect FSB. These leadership styles motivate employees from diverse cultural backgrounds to seek feedback, thereby contributing to organisational success (Fruhen et al., 2022).

Despite these advancements, how and why Ethical Leadership (EL) influences FSB remains insufficiently understood. Exploring the impact of EL on employees' FSB is both theo-

retically and empirically valuable (Qian et al., 2017). The influence of EL on such behaviours is inherently complex (Qin et al., 2021), as feedback seeking is not a one-time behaviour but a repeated process influenced by varying intrinsic factors (Cheng et al., 2023). Studies have identified several moderating and mediating variables – such as emotional intelligence (Qian et al., 2017), traditionality (Qin et al., 2021), intrinsic motivation (Cheng et al., 2023), and duty orientation (Moss et al., 2020) – that shape this process.

Drawing on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017), individuals are inherently motivated by the fulfilment of their needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. When these psychological needs are met, Intrinsic Motivation (IM) and Affective Commitment (AC) are strengthened (Schrock et al., 2023; Ma et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, despite the emergence of a growing nomological network and supporting empirical evidence, little is still known about the emotional and motivational mechanisms that drive FSB in employees (Valcea et al., 2011). Addressing this gap, the current study investigates the serial mediating role of IM and AC in explaining how EL promotes employees' FSB. This study is the first, to our knowledge, to empirically test the joint mediating effects of these two variables. Accordingly, it contributes to the literature by offering a deeper understanding of the psychological processes that motivate employees to seek feedback.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES**

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FSB is increasingly recognised as a vital component of organisational development, particularly in today's dynamic and rapidly evolving work environments. It contributes significantly to employee job satisfaction, performance, and career advancement (Qian et al., 2022). Given its developmental potential, understanding the antecedents of FSB has become a central concern in organisational behaviour research.

Among these antecedents, leadership has been identified as a critical driver. Leaders who attend to the psychological needs of their followers tend to foster more effective FSB (Alavi, 2024). In this regard, the present study draws upon SDT as a foundational framework to explain the motivational mechanisms underlying FSB. SDT posits that when individuals experience satisfaction of their basic psychological needs – namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness – they are more likely to exhibit self-determined behaviours (Bilal et al., 2021). This theory offers a compelling lens through which to explore how EL can influence motivational and behavioural outcomes (Ouakouak et al., 2020).

Specifically, SDT helps explain how social-contextual factors, such as leadership style, interact with psychological need satisfaction to shape IM and AC (Alamri et al., 2020). Ethical leaders, through their fairness, integrity, and concern for others, are likely to create a supportive environment that fulfils these needs, thereby enhancing employees' motivation to seek feedback. From this perspective, it is proposed that EL positively affects FSB by fostering IM and strengthening AC.

## **Feedback-seeking behaviours and ethical leadership**

Numerous studies characterise FSB as the act of soliciting input or evaluation from others to enhance personal and professional growth, vital for learning and development (Leenknecht & Carless, 2023; De Stobbeleir et al., 2011). Employees adjust their behaviour based on feedback to succeed in organisations. Recent research indicates that FSB facilitates employees' understanding of organisational performance (Anseel et al., 2015), fostering adaptable relationships and self-awareness (Laudel & Narciss, 2023). However, this process demands significant time and resources yet remains crucial for organisational progress.

Ethical leaders promote open communication and receptiveness to input by encouraging active feedback; in doing so, they foster a prosocial culture where feedback is viewed as a developmental tool rather than as criticism, thereby enhancing moral standards and interpersonal trust (Wu, 2021). Prior studies highlight the pivotal role of leaders in fostering employee feedback (Song et al., 2023). EL positively impacts FSB, inspiring trust, and respect among employees, who emulate appropriate behaviour through social learning processes (Laudel & Narciss, 2023). Hence, EL promotes performance-enhancing behaviours like FSB through social learning mechanisms.

H1: Ethical Leadership positively affects Feedback-Seeking Behaviours.

## **Intrinsic motivation, ethical leadership, and feedback-seeking behaviours**

Drawing on the concept of EL, employees are more likely to experience supportive conditions that fulfil their basic psychological needs, thereby fostering the IM necessary for engaging in FSB (Li et al., 2023). Motivation refers to the internal psychological processes that drive individuals to pursue specific goals and fulfil essential needs. In this context, IM denotes the inner drive to engage in activities for their inherent

satisfaction and personal value, rather than due to external rewards or pressures (Lin, 2007). IM includes both affective and cognitive dimensions of commitment (Goldman et al., 2017), which positively influence employees' willingness to seek feedback.

Ethical leaders play a vital role in shaping this motivation by articulating a compelling organisational vision and helping employees understand the importance of the organisation's mission and their own roles within it (Sun et al., 2024). Moreover, by offering consistent support, respecting individual needs, and acknowledging employee competencies, ethical leaders foster an environment conducive to IM (Shafi et al., 2020). Employees with high levels of IM are thus more inclined to seek feedback proactively and demonstrate greater autonomy and engagement in their work (Shin & Grant, 2019).

H2: Intrinsic Motivation plays a mediating role in the effect of Ethical Leadership on Feedback-Seeking Behaviours.

### **Does the relationship between ethical leadership and feedback-seeking behaviours have a mediating role with intrinsic motivation and affective commitment**

The relationship between EL and FSB can be significantly shaped by the mediating roles of IM and AC. EL fosters integrity, open communication, and trust among employees (Islam et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2022; Saha & Sharma, 2020;). Such an environment not only enhances employees' IM – by making them feel valued and appreciated in their roles (Zhang, J. et al., 2023) – but also reinforces their AC, which is understood as an emotional attachment to the organisation (Chernyak-Hai et al., 2024; Mamun & Khan, 2020). Intrinsically motivated employees are more likely to engage in FSB, as they are driven by an internal desire for learning, improvement, and growth (Gan et al., 2023). Similarly, employees with strong AC tend to invest more effort in their tasks and are more committed to achieving organisational goals, which, in turn, encourages proactive feedback-seeking to enhance performance (Haffar et al., 2023).

Building on SDT, we propose that EL first nurtures IM by supporting employees' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This enhanced motivation subsequently strengthens AC, forming a sequential mechanism that ultimately leads to increased engagement in FSB.

H3: Intrinsic Motivation and Affective Commitment serially mediate the relationship between Ethical Leadership and Feedback-Seeking Behaviours.

## METHOD

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### Sample and procedure

The research sample consists of employees working at a plant that produces technological household goods. Research data were collected between April 2024 and May 2024 and there was no pre-registration. First of all, the factory manager was interviewed and informed about the purpose of the research. The research was allowed to be conducted on the condition that the research data would not be shared with third parties and that the name of the company would not be given. With the help of HR managers, participants in all departments were surveyed on-site. The participants, who were selected by the convenience sampling method, were first informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaire was administered on a voluntary basis with the commitment that their confidentiality would be guaranteed.

When the obtained questionnaires were analysed, 11 questionnaires that were considered to be filled in randomly were not included in the study. Upon completion of the data collection process, a total of 433 surveys were obtained. These surveys were thoroughly examined by the researchers. In line with Byrne's (2016) recommendations, the surveys of 7 participants who failed to respond to more than 50% of the items on the latent variables, and the surveys of 5 participants who marked all items on the latent variables as either '1' or '5', were excluded from the study. Thus, a valid sample of 422 employees was retained.

Of the participants, 203 are female and 219 are male. 248 participants are married, while 174 are single. Regarding age distribution, 155 participants are 30 years old or younger, 132 are between the ages of 31 and 40, and 135 are 41 years old or older. In terms of education level, 106 participants have completed high school or lower, 286 have completed associate's or bachelor's degrees, and 30 participants have received graduate education.

### Statistical analysis

SPSS 27.0 and AMOS 22.0 software were used for data analysis. First, we analysed whether Common Method Bias (CMB) – a potential distortion that can occur when data for all variables are collected from the same source at the same time – was a concern for this study. Then, the validity and reliability of the scales used in the research were checked, and descriptive statistical analyses were performed. Correlation analysis was used to determine the relationships between the variables. In our study, we employed the Process Macro (Model 6) developed by Hayes (2018) to test the hypotheses. We employed

bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, a non-parametric technique that repeatedly draws samples (with replacement) from the dataset to estimate the confidence intervals of indirect effects, thereby increasing the robustness and reliability of the mediation analysis.

## Measures

In this study, we used well-established scales from prior literature, all of which have demonstrated strong validity and reliability. All items were retained in the final analysis following reliability and validity checks. All scales are 5-point Likert-type and statements are rated from "1 = strongly disagree" to "5 = strongly agree". Demographic information such as gender, age, and marital status of the participants was categorised.

*Ethical Leadership.* The 10-item EL scale developed by Brown et al. (2005) was used to determine the participants' perceptions of their managers' ethical leadership. Sample statements of the scale are "The team leader conducts his/her personal life in an ethical manner" and "The team leader listens to what employees have to say".

*Intrinsic Motivation.* The IM scale developed by Ruiz-Palomino & Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara (2020) utilising the work of Gagné et al. (2010) was used to determine the IM of the participants. There are three items in the scale. Sample statements of the scale are "I have chosen this job because I enjoy it very much" and "I have chosen this job because I have fun doing it".

*Affective Commitment.* The six-item AC scale developed by Meyer et al. (1993) was used to determine the AC of the participants. Sample statements of the scale are "I feel strong sense of belonging to my organisation" and "I am proud to tell others I work at my organisation".

*Feedback-Seeking Behaviours.* The six-item FSB scale developed by Parker and Collins (2010) and frequently used in recent studies (Zhang, X., et al., 2023) was used. Sample statements of the scale are "I observe which performance behaviours my boss rewards and use this feedback" and "I seek feedback from my supervisor about potential advancement within the system".

## RESULTS

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### Common method bias

Collecting all data from a single source raises concerns regarding CMB (Podsakoff, 2012). To mitigate this risk, several procedural remedies were applied during the data collection process. First, professional guidance was sought during the development of the questionnaire, and the items were random-

ly ordered to reduce response patterns. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and were encouraged to answer sincerely. Furthermore, the survey was conducted in settings where the participants' supervisors were not present, minimising potential social desirability bias.

Despite these precautions, it is still recommended to statistically test for the presence of CMB. Accordingly, Harman's single-factor test was conducted by entering all measurement items into an exploratory factor analysis. The results showed that a single factor did not account for the majority of the variance – the largest variance explained by one factor was 36.2%, which is below the critical threshold of 50%. In addition, correlation analysis was performed. Bagozzi et al. (1991) suggest that if inter-variable correlations exceed 0.90, CMB may be present. However, all correlations in this study were well below that threshold (Table 1).

Lastly, the variance inflation factor (VIF) values among the latent constructs were examined to assess multicollinearity, following the recommendation by Kock (2015), who states that VIF values should be lower than 3.3. The results confirmed that all VIF values met this criterion. Taken together, these findings provide evidence that the dataset is free from significant CMB (Kock, 2015; Bagozzi et al., 1991).

## Reliability and validity analyses

Firstly, the reliability and validity of the variables were checked. For the reliability control Cronbach's alpha, Composite reliability (CR) and Omega coefficients were taken into consideration, while for the validity control, structural and convergent were taken into consideration. The findings obtained as a result of the analysis are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
Reliability and validity

Variables	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	Omega	AVE
Ethical leadership	0.621-0.752	0.903	0.910	0.903	0.504
Intrinsic motivation	0.724-0.826	0.810	0.812	0.810	0.590
Affective commitment	0.562-0.865	0.859	0.860	0.860	0.513
Feedback-seeking behaviours	0.657-0.731	0.870	0.875	0.871	0.502

In order to check the reliability of the scales used in the research, internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha), CR values and Omega coefficients were taken into consideration. The findings presented in Table 1 show that Cronbach's alpha values are between 0.810 and 0.903, CR values are between 0.812 and 0.910 and Omega coefficients are between 0.810 and 0.903. The literature states that reliability can be mentioned when

these values are 0.7 and above (Sürücü et al., 2023; Hair et al., 2017). The findings in Table 1 confirm that the scales are internally consistent and reliable.

After the reliability of the scales was checked, validity tests were conducted. Fornell and Larcker (1981) state that convergent validity can be mentioned if the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value is greater than 0.5 and AVE takes a value smaller than the combined reliability value (Sürücü & Maslakçı, 2020; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, the fact that the  $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$  value is greater than the correlation values between the variables and the correlation value does not exceed 0.85 indicates that the scales have discriminant validity (Table 1). The results in Table 1 confirm that the AVE values vary between 0.502 and 0.590 and that the AVE is smaller than the combined reliability value, thus the scales have convergent validity. In addition, the fact that the  $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$  value is greater than the correlation values between the variables and the correlation value does not exceed 0.85 indicates that the scales have discriminant validity (Table 2).

Lastly, the fit indices of the measurement model were checked and found to have good fit values ( $\chi^2/df = 2.96$ , GFI = 0.974, NFI = 0.971, CFI = 0.963, TLI = 0.957 RMSEA = 0.047) (Byrne, 2016). When all the findings obtained are evaluated together, it can be said that the scales used in the research are reliable and valid scales.

## Descriptive statistics analysis

Descriptive statistics and correlation analyses are presented in Table 2.

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
Ethical leadership	3.59	0.62	(0.710)			
Intrinsic motivation	3.98	0.56	0.423	(0.768)		
Affective commitment	4.01	0.71	0.481	0.536	(0.716)	
Feedback-seeking behaviours	3.41	0.66	0.462	0.444	0.437	(0.709)

TABLE 2  
Descriptive statistics  
and correlations

\*\* $p < 0.05$ , Values shown in parentheses are  $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$

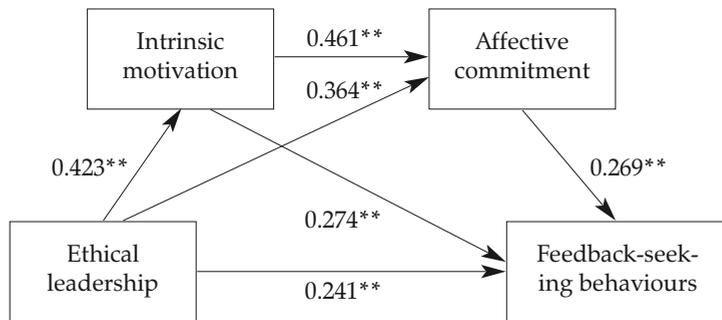
Correlation analysis reveals that EL has a positive relationship with IM ( $r = 0.423, p < 0.05$ ), AC ( $r = 0.481, p < 0.05$ ) and FSB ( $r = 0.462, p < 0.05$ ). In addition, the relationship between IM and AC ( $r = 0.536, p < 0.05$ ) and FSB ( $r = 0.444, p < 0.05$ ) is also positive. Following the establishment of these significant relationships among the variables, hypothesis testing was subsequently performed.

## Hypothesis testing

Process Macro (version 4.0), developed by Hayes (2018) as an add-on to SPSS, was used to test the research hypotheses. Process is a regression-based path analysis tool used for testing complex models involving mediation, moderation, or both. In this study, we used Model 6, which is designed to examine a serial multiple mediation structure. Specifically, it estimates the indirect effect of an independent variable (EL) on a dependent variable (FSB) through two mediators in a defined causal sequence ("IM → AC").

The analyses were conducted with 5,000 bootstrap resamples and a 95% confidence interval. Bootstrapping is a resampling procedure in which multiple subsamples of the same size as the original sample are randomly drawn to empirically examine the variability of parameter estimates and fit indices (Byrne, 2010). Hayes (2018) suggests that 5,000 resamples are sufficient to ensure reliable results. The analysis results are presented in Figure 1 and Table 3.

FIGURE 1  
Serial multiple  
mediation model and  
standardised model  
paths



Estimate	Paths	$\beta$	SE	95% CI	
				LLCI	ULCI
Direct effect	EL → FSB	0.241	0.089	0.107	0.169
Indirect effect	EL → IM → FSB	0.091	0.084	0.082	0.099
	EL → AC → FSB	0.067	0.052	0.052	0.083
	EL → IM → AC → FSB	0.048	0.044	0.025	0.062
Total effect	EL → FSB	0.447	0.193	0.134	0.254

TABLE 3  
Total, direct, and in-  
direct effects of each  
model path

EL: Ethical Leadership; FSB: Feedback-Seeking Behaviour; IM: Intrinsic Motivation; AC: Affective Commitment

Analyses conducted to test the serial mediation effect showed that the direct effect of EL on FSB ( $\beta = 0.241, p < 0.05, [CI = (0.107, 0.169)]$ ) was significant and positive (Figure 1). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

The findings presented in Table 3 show that IM mediates the effect of EL on FSB ( $\beta = 0.091, p < 0.05, 95\% CI [0.082,$

0.099]). Thus, Hypothesis 2 is supported. The findings in Table 3 also confirm that IM and AC are serial mediators in the effect of EL on FSB ( $\beta = 0.048, p < 0.05, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.025; 0.062]$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

These findings provide strong empirical support for the proposed theoretical model grounded in SDT. Specifically, the results confirm that EL not only has a direct positive effect on employees' FSB but also exerts a significant indirect effect through IM and AC. The mediation results – particularly the serial path from "EL  $\rightarrow$  IM  $\rightarrow$  AC  $\rightarrow$  FSB" – highlight the psychological mechanisms through which ethical leadership shapes proactive employee behaviours.

This sequential mediation indicates that ethical leaders cultivate a work environment that satisfies employees' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which in turn fosters a stronger emotional connection to the organisation and encourages employees to seek feedback as part of their developmental trajectory. These results not only validate the hypothesised model but also contribute to the literature by empirically demonstrating the dynamic and multi-layered process through which leadership styles influence employee learning behaviours.

Overall, the findings emphasise the strategic importance of EL in building motivational climates that support continuous improvement, open communication, and employee-driven performance enhancement.

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request.

## DISCUSSION

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This paper focused on examining the serial mediating role of IM and AC in explaining how ethical leaders promote employees' FSB. The study provides empirical evidence to address the research gap concerning the psychological mechanisms through which ethical leadership fosters proactive feedback-seeking – an area that has remained underexplored in leadership research.

The findings indicate statistically significant associations showing that EL is positively related to IM and AC, both of which are, in turn, associated with greater FSB among employees. In support of the first hypothesis, the results demonstrate that EL enhances employees' motivation to seek feedback. This study builds upon prior research that has established links between EL and various employee outcomes, including commitment (González-Cánovas et al., 2024; Dimitriou, 2022), retention (Junaidi, 2023; Mayende & Musenze, 2018), well-being (Halbusi et al., 2024; Sarwar et al., 2020), and job satisfaction (Valentine et al., 2024; Freire & Bettencourt, 2020), thereby offering deeper insight into the broader effects

of EL. Ethical leaders cultivate an environment of open communication and set clear standards that support continuous learning and improvement, encouraging employees to seek feedback without fear of negative consequences (Bakar & Connaughton, 2022).

Our findings align with those of Yulianeu et al. (2024), who found that destructive leadership – via leader psychopathy – erodes ethical norms and psychological resources, leading to expediency through moral disengagement and organisational cynicism. In contrast, our study highlights the positive pathway whereby EL satisfies psychological needs and reinforces motivational and emotional bonds, thereby fostering constructive behaviours such as FSB. Collectively, these studies illustrate the dual impact of leadership on employee behaviour: it can either provoke defensive, deviant responses or nurture proactive engagement.

Additionally, research by Arzenšek et al. (2021) on labour market precarity shows that atypical contracts and intensified workloads reduce employee well-being and suppress voice. Our findings offer a counterpoint by suggesting that EL may act as a buffer against such adverse conditions by cultivating psychologically safe environments in which employees feel both intrinsically motivated and emotionally committed to their organisations. Similarly, Arasli et al. (2020) demonstrated that constructive leadership fosters innovation through psychological safety and employee creativity. Our study extends this line of inquiry by examining how EL facilitates FSB via IM and AC, further underscoring the developmental potential of supportive leadership.

Recent work by Jeong et al. (2025) also complements our findings by showing that EL elicits other-praising moral emotions, which encourage prosocial behaviours such as feedback seeking, organisational citizenship, and voice. These affective mechanisms add to the understanding that EL operates not only through motivational and relational pathways but also through emotionally grounded moral appraisals.

Finally, Kumar and Vilvanathan (2024) show that even negative organisational stimuli – such as supervisor gossip – can prompt employees to engage in feedback seeking to protect or improve their performance and reputation. Their study emphasises the mediating role of FSB and reveals that personal traits like agreeableness moderate this dynamic. Taken together with our focus on EL, these findings suggest that both positive and negative social cues can act as meaningful drivers of developmental workplace behaviours such as feedback seeking.

Next, the study investigated the mediating role of IM, an area that remains relatively underexplored despite its signifi-

cant influence on employee performance (Patwary et al., 2024; Triswanto & Yunita, 2021). The results revealed that IM positively influences FSB; motivated employees are more likely to pursue opportunities for development and growth (Hurtienne & Hurtienne, 2023; Martin, 2018). These findings suggest that EL enhances FSB primarily through its impact on IM, which serves as a crucial psychological mechanism in this relationship. In turn, this process fosters greater employee gratitude and engagement within the organisation.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the ongoing discourse by examining a relatively neglected yet essential area; the dual mediating roles of IM and AC in the relationship between EL and FSB. IM has been identified as a key driver of employee satisfaction and engagement (Ma et al., 2023), whereas AC refers to the emotional attachment employees feel toward their organisation (Mamun & Khan, 2020). This emotional connection encourages employees to invest in continuous improvement, growth, and development. The findings show that the sequential mediation of these two variables enriches the feedback-seeking process. Employees who are both satisfied and emotionally supported demonstrate a greater tendency to seek feedback proactively – unlike those who lack such motivation and commitment.

In sum, this study not only builds upon previous research but also deepens our understanding of how EL influences employee behaviour. It emphasises the central role of IM and AC in cultivating a healthy organisational climate that supports FSB.

Although the findings support the hypothesised mediation pathway, the cross-sectional nature of the data prevents us from making strong causal claims. It is possible that FSB also influences perceptions of leadership or AC. Future longitudinal or experimental studies are needed to more robustly establish the temporal ordering and causal direction among these variables.

## CONCLUSION

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Addressing a notable gap in the literature, this study explored the serial mediating roles of IM and AC to explain how EL fosters employees' FSB. It offers empirical evidence to better understand the mechanisms that motivate employees to actively seek feedback. Overall, the findings provide a valuable perspective on the potential outcomes of FSB within organisations.

This research contributes novel insights by demonstrating how feedback-seeking, when combined with AC and IM – both grounded in SDT – reflects employees' psychological needs for relatedness and competence, ultimately enhancing

performance outcomes. Such an environment reinforces the importance of feedback-seeking as a developmental behaviour that drives both individual improvement and broader organisational success (Cheng et al., 2023). Furthermore, examining how and why EL shapes FSB within a large manufacturing context offers meaningful theoretical contributions and practical implications for leadership development and organisational strategy (Cheng et al., 2023).

## Theoretical and practical implications

This study makes several contributions to the literature by empirically linking ethical leadership to employees' proactive FSB. While a few studies have tested similar models (Ajmal et al., 2024; Gong et al., 2019), these have largely overlooked the manufacturing plant context. Prior research has often utilised motivation-related variables to explain this relationship; however, the current study uniquely positions IM as a central mechanism through which ethical leaders facilitate employees' engagement in FSB. In addition, the study emphasises AC as a second serial mediator – a variable that remains underexplored in the feedback-seeking literature.

Theoretically, this research extends the existing model by incorporating SDT, which posits that individuals are inherently motivated when their needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy are fulfilled (Schrock et al., 2023). Ethical leaders help satisfy these psychological needs, thereby enhancing both IM and AC, which in turn foster FSB. The findings underscore the essential role of leader-provided feedback within a motivational framework, aligning closely with the core tenets of SDT. In doing so, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms by which EL positively shapes FSB through serially mediated pathways.

From a practical standpoint, the findings offer actionable insights for manufacturing organisations. First, the study reinforces the value of encouraging FSB as a means of meeting employees' basic psychological needs and improving their work efficacy. It further highlights the importance of recognising IM and AC as key drivers of this behaviour. Given that employees may hesitate to engage in feedback-seeking due to fear or uncertainty, fostering a work climate that nurtures internal motivation and AC to the organisation is essential.

To this end, HR departments and organisational leaders should implement training and development programmes that clearly communicate the organisational mission, values, and performance expectations. Such initiatives can promote goal alignment and cultivate a sense of purpose. Moreover, organisations should prioritise employee well-being and psychological safety, creating an environment that supports personal

initiative and open communication. These strategies collectively enhance the conditions under which FSB can thrive, thereby contributing to both individual growth and organisational effectiveness.

## **Limitations and future directions**

Despite yielding valuable insights, this study has several limitations. First, the sample – drawn exclusively from a manufacturing plant in Manisa, Türkiye – may lack the diversity necessary to reflect broader organisational contexts, thereby limiting the generalisability of the findings. Future research should aim to include more varied samples across different industries, regions, and cultural settings to enhance external validity and provide a more robust understanding of the observed relationships.

Secondly, while the cross-sectional nature of the study may not fully capture the dynamics and lasting effects of feedback, a longitudinal study could provide a deeper understanding of how these relationships develop over time and allow for causal inferences to be drawn. Such designs would allow for more nuanced insights into causal directionality and the developmental trajectories of these relationships. Moreover, the present model does not account for contextual and organisational factors – such as organisational culture, technological infrastructure, or external environmental conditions – that may significantly influence FSB. Including these variables in future models could help to clarify the broader conditions under which EL operates most effectively.

Another limitation lies in the potential influence of unmeasured variables outside the current model – such as individual personality traits, organisational climate, or self-selection biases – which could simultaneously affect employees' perceptions of EL and their likelihood to seek feedback. Future studies should incorporate relevant control variables or explore alternative model specifications to assess the robustness of the observed relationships.

It is also important to note that the relationships identified in this study are correlational rather than causal. While the proposed model is theoretically grounded in SDT and supported by prior empirical work, the use of cross-sectional data limits the ability to draw firm conclusions about causality. The mediation effects presented here should therefore be interpreted as suggestive pathways rather than definitive causal mechanisms. Future research employing longitudinal or experimental designs is necessary to validate the temporal sequencing and causal influence of the proposed mediators.

Lastly, future studies should broaden the theoretical framework by examining other potential mediators and modera-

tors – such as organisational justice, psychological empowerment, or different types of feedback (e.g., positive vs. negative). Investigating the role of diverse leadership styles across various sectors would also offer a more comprehensive understanding of the antecedents and outcomes of FSB in organisational settings. It should not be overlooked that variables such as self-selection and self-efficacy may also influence these results, aside from the specification of our model. Including these variables in future studies would help to clarify the relationship between ethical leadership and FSB.

## Informed consent

The consent of participants was obtained through consent form via online. The consent form contains the title of study, intent of study, procedure to participate, confidentiality, voluntary participation of respondents, questions/query and consent of the respondents. The respondents were requested to provide their willingness to participate in survey on consent form via email before filling the online-surveyed (questionnaire). Furthermore, participants were also assured that their anonymity would be maintained and that no personal information or identifying element would be disclosed. The consent form is in the supplementary files.

## Ethical approval statement

The data were collated through online survey approach (questionnaire), where anonymity of the respondents was meticulously observed. The respondents were not asked to provide their names, identification, address, or any other identifying elements. The authors minutely observed the ethical guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki during the survey. In addition, we hereby certify that this study was conducted under the ethical approval guidelines of the Office of Research Innovation and Commercialisation, University of the Punjab granted under the office order No. D/ 409/ORIC dated 31-12-2021.

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# Kako etički vođe potiču ponašanje zaposlenika usmjereno na traženje povratnih informacija? Model serijalne medijacije

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Ova studija istražuje kako etičko vodstvo potiče ponašanje zaposlenika usmjereno na traženje povratnih informacija. Oslanjajući se na teoriju samoodređenja, istraživanje identificira intrinzičnu motivaciju i afektivnu predanost kao ključne posrednike kojima etički vođe potiču proaktivno traženje povratnih informacija. Nalazi otkrivaju da etičko vodstvo pozitivno utječe na intrinzičnu motivaciju zaposlenika i afektivnu predanost organizaciji, pojačavajući njihovu sklonost traženju povratnih informacija, što je bitno ponašanje u dinamičnim i na kvalitetu osjetljivim radnim okruženjima, kakva je proizvodnja. Kako bi se empirijski ispitao ovaj model, provedeno je presječno istraživanje među 422 zaposlenika u velikom proizvodnom pogonu u Manisi u Turskoj. Rezultati podržavaju model serijalnoga posredovanja, potvrđujući da etičko vodstvo neizravno potiče ponašanje kojim se traže povratne informacije kroz povećanu intrinzičnu motivaciju i afektivnu predanost.

Ključne riječi: etičko vodstvo, intrinzična motivacija, afektivna predanost, ponašanje kojim se traže povratne informacije



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