

## Integrity, ethical leadership, trust and work engagement

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to investigate how leader integrity and ethical leadership can influence trust in the leader and employee work engagement.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data were collected using an electronic web-based questionnaire completed by 204 employees from various business organisations. Data were analysed by means of item analysis and confirmatory factor analysis conducted via structural equation modelling.

**Findings** – High levels of reliability were found for the measurement scales. Good model fit was demonstrated for the measurement and structural models. Empirical support was found for all the postulated relationships in the structural model.

**Originality/value** – This study is the first to analyse the joint relationships between leader integrity and work engagement through the mediating role of ethical leadership (i.e. moral management) and trust in the sense the key role played by ethical leaders in creating an ethical and trusting work climate conducive for employee engagement.

### Introduction

Identifying the situations that foster work engagement of employees is vital for the sustainability and growth of organisations (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008; Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012; Tims *et al.*, 2011). Engaged employees are more productive, enjoy their work, and are more efficient and involved in their work (Tims *et al.*, 2011). One of the conditions that are critical in strengthening work engagement is organisational trust (Buckley, 2011). Because employees are more likely to engage in their work if they are drawn upon themselves to perform their roles, trust on the part of management is essential. Excessive monitoring and enforcement from management can hamper employees' tendency to engage in their work.

Ethical leadership is critical to a leader's credibility and his/her potential to exert meaningful influence (Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012). This credibility of ethical leaders is likely to have a significant influence on trust between a leader and followers (Eisenbeiss and Giessber, 2012).

Integrity, which refers to adherence to moral principles, captures the essence of ethical values and therefore can be seen as an important driver of ethical leadership (Palanski and Yammarino, 2011; Van Aswegen and Engelbrecht, 2009). One can also consider the impact





























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