The Moderating Role of Ethical Leadership in the Relationship between Emotional Exhaustion and Service Sabotage Behaviour: An Applied study on Employees of Travel Agencies in Egypt

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By

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ABSTRACT:

This research aims to investigate the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour by examining the moderating role of ethical leadership, with a focus on category A travel agents in Egypt. To this end, a moderation model was developed, applied to frontline employees in travel agencies, and validated to examine the moderating effects of prevention- based ethical leadership and promotion-based ethical leadership. The results showed that emotional exhaustion has a positive impact on service sabotage behaviour. The research further found that ethical leadership (promotion- based ethical leadership and prevention-based ethical leadership) is a key tool for reducing service sabotage behaviour. Furthermore, it is shown that promotion-based ethical leadership has a significant moderating impact on reducing the positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour. Emotional exhaustion interacted with promotion-based ethical leadership to reduce service sabotage behaviour, such that service sabotage behaviour is highly reduced when leaders apply high levels of promotion-based ethical leadership when compared to leaders who apply low levels of promotion-based ethical leadership. However, prevention-based ethical leadership has no significant moderation impact.

Keywords: Emotional exhaustion, Service sabotage behaviour, Prevention-based ethical leadership, Promotion-based ethical leadership.

1. Introduction:

The tourism sector in Egypt is the main engine of economic growth, as it affects the availability of job opportunities, whether directly in the tourism sector or indirectly through other complementary industries. Tourism in Egypt affects about 70 feeder services and related industries, accounting for approximately 40% of Egypt's non-commodity exports. In addition to the crucial role of the tourism sector as a main source of foreign currency. Travel agents have a powerful impact on this sector through their role as "sales agents" in promoting and distributing packaged holidays and destinations (Elbaz et al., 2018).

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In this context, tourism organisations consider their frontline employees as a main asset that affects their ability to survive and succeed if they are managed effectively. Also, service organisations depend on their frontline employees to achieve competitive advantage, service differentiation, and service quality (Alola et al., 2019). The crucial role of frontline employees motivates researchers to discover the risk of having frontline employees act in a deviant way. Although it is difficult to calculate the cost of such deviant behaviours, their impact is not limited to performance but also negatively impacts profitability and growth opportunities for the organisation. Generally, deviant behaviours may be directed towards the organisation, customers, or colleagues (Harris and Ogbonna, 2006). However, this study focuses on service sabotage behaviours that concentrate on deviant customer-oriented behaviours. Retaliatory action, demonstrating frustration, and being aggressive with customers are examples of service sabotage behaviour. These behaviours not only affect customers' attitudes towards service providers but also their willingness to spread negative word of mouth, which goes beyond organisational reputation (Lee and Ok, 2014; Hongbo et al., 2019).

The risk of service sabotage behaviour lies in its intentional nature. Although customers may forgive the unintentional mistakes that reduce their service quality, they cannot forget the intentional sabotage. In the case of service sabotage, the organisation loses their customers' loyalty, which in turn threatens its' existence (Harris and Ogbonna, 2009).

Consequently, managers should understand the factors that leads to service sabotage behaviour. Employees' emotional exhaustion is one of the main reasons that increase service sabotage behaviour. This is especially important for frontline employees who work under the pressure of directly interacting with customers all the day. As a result, emotional exhaustion increases employees' propensity to sabotage service as a technique to express their discontent towards the job and the organisation (Edmondson, 2008).

In this context, ethical leadership can help organisations overcome several deviant behaviours (Kuenzi et al., 2020). Employees view their ethical leaders as inspiring sources that can help them reduce emotional dissonance by encouraging open communication and expressing their actual feelings with them (Mo and Shi, 2017). Additionally, ethical leaders care about the welfare of their employees and serve as role models by embedding and discussing ethical values (Ertop, 2019). Followers are attracted to their leader as they

pay attention to their interests. Ethical leaders also set clear ethical standards and use rewards and punishments as means to ensure that these standards are followed (Garba et al., 2018).

This study contributes to the literature of ethical leadership and service sabotage behaviour by using conservation of resources theory to provide a theoretical explanation for why frontline employees engage in service sabotage behaviour, differentiating the effects of ethical leadership dimensions (promotion-based ethical leadership and prevention-based ethical leadership) on service sabotage behaviour, and exploring the moderating role of ethical leadership dimensions in the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour.

2. Conceptual background and hypothesis:

2.1 Conservation of resources theory (COR):

Previous studies have widely used conservation of resources theory to explain how employees deal with workloads in their daily lives (Dai et al., 2014). This theory focuses on how individuals seek, obtain, and protect their valuable resources (Zhou et al., 2018). According to COR theory, every individual has a set of resources that are valued and crucial for his life (Dai et al., 2014). Therefore, people are motivated to **acquire** and **protect** these resources (Lee and Ok, 2014). In this context, COR theory identified four types of resources: **objects** (such as a tangible benefit that an individual receives), **social support** (which makes employees feel better), **personal characteristics** of employees (such as skills), and finally, **energy resources** (such as money and knowledge) (Alola et al., 2019; Parray et al., 2023).

Resources in the workplace can be personal, departmental, or organisational. Resources in the workplace are described as everything that facilitates success and goal achievement. For example, resources may include employees' ability to access information, obtain social support from supervisors or co-workers, have training opportunities to improve their job competency, interact with inspirational managers, participate in decision-making, employee experience, personal or emotional traits, workplace conditions, and performance outcomes (Howard and Cordes, 2010).

This means that conservation of resources is carried out through two mechanisms. **The first mechanism** refers to **"resource accumulation"**, which depends on the individual's ability to invest the available resources,

regulate his behaviour, and impose his control over the environment to acquire new resources and achieve his goals. According to this mechanism, the individual aims to increase his stock of resources and improve his well-being. **The second mechanism** refers to **"resources protection"**, in which the individual aims to maintain the same amount of resources as before loss. So, when the employee realises that the resources he gets from his work are less than those he used to meet work requirements, he intends to leave this job (Wang et al., 2011; Cole et al., 2010).

According to COR theory, individuals face both stress and strain. **Stress** refers to conditions that require continuous cognitive, emotional, or physical effort from employees. **Strain** represent reactions resulting from being stressed for a long time. Work and social relationships are the most common sources of stress in the organisational environment (Díaz et al., 2017). Stress often depletes individuals' resources. In this context, emotional exhaustion is a reaction to stress and appears as a result of excessively consuming valuable resources (Dai et al., 2014). Resources often have a symbolic value that outweighs their tangible value. Thus, the loss of resources affects individuals' feelings of emotional exhaustion even if it does not affect their standard of living or job security (Díaz et al., 2017).

2.2   Emotional exhaustion:

Maslach and Jackson (1981) noticed the state of physical and psychological fatigue experienced by employees at work. They called this state **"job burnout"**. From their point of view, job burnout is divided into three dimensions. The first dimension is known as **"emotional exhaustion"**, which refers to the employee's inability to meet the organisation's excessive emotional demands during daily interactions with people, which in turn leads to the depletion of his emotional resources (Dai et al., 2014; Lussier et al., 2021). While the second dimension is **"depersonalization",** which describes the state in which employees lose their feelings towards customers, ignoring their needs or dealing with them as objects used to achieve their work goals. Finally, the third dimension is **"reduced personal accomplishment"**, which describes employees' lack of motivation towards their jobs and their sense of professional competence and achievement being greatly reduced (Kenworthy et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2019; Klusmann et al., 2021).

This study focuses on emotional exhaustion because of its **negative effects** on employees and the entire organisation (Edmondson, 2008). Chen et al.

(2019) confirmed that emotional exhaustion is **the most influential dimension** in organisational outcomes compared to other dimensions of job burnout. Donahue et al. (2012) also stated that emotional exhaustion is considered **the best predictor of job burnout**. Additionally, Darrat et al. (2016) acknowledged that emotional exhaustion can be viewed as **the first step** in the burnout process. It is also described as "a major **warning sign** before the onset and consequences of full-fledged burnout" (Darrat et al., 2016; p. 237).

Emotional exhaustion is combined with employees' feelings of **depression**, **lethargy**, and **cynicism** towards the work environment (Li et al., 2017). It is a state characterised by an employee's feelings of **underachievement**, **hopelessness**, **decreased self-esteem**, and **increased negative feelings** towards his **job**, the **organisation** he works for, and the **customers** he serves. In this context, emotional exhaustion is defined as "a state of depleted emotional resources that contributes to breakdowns in **self-control**" (Lussier et al., 2021; p.5).

Although many employees can feel emotionally exhausted regardless of their different jobs, responsibilities, and authorities, this study focuses on the **emotional exhaustion of frontline employees**, whose jobs require direct interaction with customers, whether face-to-face or by direct voice chat, and who are responsible for satisfying their needs. Nowadays, managers are more motivated to ensure that frontline employees' attitudes and behaviours are in line with organisational requirements and customers' expectations. They perceive that the success of service organisations depends on frontline employees' skills and competencies (Chen et al., 2019). In addition, frontline employees have a superior ability to influence and shape customers' experiences and attitudes (Hu et al., 2020; Pradhan, 2021).

However, the nature of frontline employees' jobs increases their emotional exhaustion as they directly interact with customers all day, trying to satisfy different customers' needs and developing long-term relationships with them (Chen et al., 2019). Thus, frontline employees are more emotionally exhausted as they lose their energy while making efforts to welcome customers, create a comfortable environment for them, control their emotional expressions, and keep smiling in front of customers while providing service (Alola et al., 2019).

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Despite the importance of frontline employees, they suffer from high workloads, low wages, insufficient training, low levels of job security, and limited opportunities for promotion (Karatepe and Uludag, 2007; Pradhan, 2021). Also, employees who directly communicate with customers, especially in service organisations, suffer from frequent customer complaints and misbehaviour from some work colleagues (Alola et al., 2019).

Emotional exhaustion is a serious issue for organisations because it negatively affects the organisation's success and its employees' health and well-being (Park, 2019). Emotional exhaustion is a response to employees' exposure to job stress for a long time. So, conservation of resources theory has been widely used to explain the effect of emotional exhaustion on psychological and organisational outcomes (Karatepe and Uludag, 2007; Park, 2019; Kim et al., 2012; Lussier et al., 2021). The most important outcomes of excessive emotional exhaustion for employees are explained as follows:

Emotional exhaustion undermines **organisational identity** as employees perceive psychological contract breaches (Kasekende et al., 2020). According to COR theory, emotionally exhausted employees suffer from frustration and an inability to perform their job duties. Therefore, emotional exhaustion drives employees to express their **job dissatisfaction** through negative attitudes (Alola et al., 2019; Parray et al., 2023). Consequently, emotional exhaustion contributes to high rates of **withdrawal behaviours**. For instance, emotional exhaustion may cause an increase in **employee absenteeism rates**, strong **intentions to leave** work, and increased employee desire for **alienation** (Howard and Cordes, 2010).

Moreover, emotional exhaustion contributes to **low levels of job performance**. Excessive workload and role pressures consume employees' personal resources and negatively affect their mood, which causes them emotional exhaustion. In turn, excessive emotional exhaustion **limits employees' ability to meet their job requirements over a long period of time** (Thompson et al., 2020). Emotionally exhausted employees also **put less effort into their work** and may be **unwilling to help their colleagues** (Raman et al., 2016). Additionally, employees' feelings of emotional exhaustion increase his willingness to **hide information** (Zhao and Jiang, 2021).

Emotional exhaustion also negatively affects the employee's willingness to engage in **organisational citizenship behaviours**. Frontline employees

consume a large part of their emotional resources to deal with the stress they face while interacting with customers. Therefore, they do not have sufficient resources to put in extra effort and better meet their work demands (Kasekende et al., 2020).

Moreover, emotionally exhausted employees are more likely to engage in **unethical behaviours** for three reasons. **First**, work stress and fear of failure may motivate employees to achieve their goals even by lying, cheating, manipulating, or engaging in other unethical behaviours. For example, employees may make promises to customers that cannot be met, hide information about offers and discounts, provide incorrect information about products, hide errors that the employee makes in the transaction procedures, or steal office supplies for personal purposes. **Second**, the nature of the job, which contains stress, tension, and conflict, is most likely to induce emotional exhaustion. **Third**, employees lose their resources during the self-control process, which in turn is a strong reason for adopting unethical behaviour (Lussier et al., 2021).

Researchers have indicated that emotional exhaustion plays a crucial role in increasing deviant behaviours. Emotionally exhausted employees who work under pressure have a greater opportunity to make **mistakes** during service delivery (Kim et al., 2012). They express their frustration and dissatisfaction by engaging in **deviant behaviour** (Jiang et al., 2021). In the same pattern, emotional exhaustion contributes to an increase in **organisational deviance** (Darrat et al., 2016). Likewise, emotionally exhausted employees are more likely to engage in **counterproductive behaviours** (Raman et al., 2016).

2.3   Service Sabotage Behaviour:

Although sabotage is a general concept that may target many aspects within the organisation, such as sabotage of production or property, a specific type of sabotage **focuses on harming customers** and is limited to the **behaviours of frontline employees** during **service delivery interactions.** This type of sabotage is known as "service sabotage behaviour" (Kabadayi, 2019; Gip et al., 2023). The concept of service sabotage behaviour had not been clearly defined until Harris and Ogbonna (2002). According to their definition, "service sabotage is service employees' misbehaviour that is intentionally designed to negatively affect service" (Lee and Ok, 2014, p. 176).

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The concept of **service sabotage** differs from simple mistakes that an employee may make in terms of the **intentional intent to harm customers**. Service sabotage behaviours include intentionally mistreating customers, playing pranks, showing frustration or depression to customers, and taking retaliatory actions. It also includes changing the speed of service delivery according to employees' moods or personal needs (Lee and Ok, 2014). Service sabotage behaviours also include intentionally being rude to customers, arguing with them, laughing and embarrassing customers in public, asking customers for unreasonable money, blaming customers when problems occur, ignoring a customer, purposely overcharging or undercharging for services provided to the customer, and wasting time during customer interaction (Edmondson, 2008; Yeh, 2015).

Frontline employees view sabotage behaviour as a form of retaliation, as they have their own motives for sabotaging the service. They realise that the organisation or its managers failed to apply the ethical rules that preserve their rights. Therefore, employees take the initiative to protect their rights themselves. So they intentionally sabotage the service because the offender deserves such behaviour (Skarlicki et al., 2008).

Harris and Ogbonna (2009) classified service saboteurs into four types. First, Thrill seekers are those employees who sabotage the service to reduce boredom and relieve the daily routine. Thrill seekers exploit the nature of their job as customer-contact staff to search for excitement, joy, and pleasure. For example, service sabotage behaviour here is done through jokes and gambling on unfamiliar customers. Second, Apathetic service providers are often indifferent to organisational rules. In contrast to the thrill seekers who achieve their goals, the apathetic are lazy, ignore customers, and disregard the rules. Apathetic employees consider their work a cause of trouble and the customer a source of nuisance. The work of an apathetic service provider is not up to service quality standards. Third, Customer revengers interact with potential abuse from customers. This type of service saboteur seeks revenge from the customer whose behaviour is unacceptable. Fourth, money grabbers who sabotage the service in order to increase their income, regardless of the impact on the organisation or customers.

The seriousness of these behaviours is not limited to customer perception and evaluation of frontline employees but extends to **organisational value** and **profitability** (Lee and Ok, 2014). Service sabotage behaviours also

negatively impact **job performance,** as employees' preoccupation with service sabotage is likely to detract from their ability to do their job duties effectively (Skarlicki et al., 2008). As a result, sabotage increases **waste**, **work destruction**, and **neglect of work** and **reduces organisational performance** (Abubakar and Arasli, 2016). Additionally, service sabotage behaviours affect the **organisation's reputation** and its **financial position** (Hongbo et al., 2019). It also negatively affects the organisation's **efficiency** and **productivity**. Customers express their negative attitudes about poor service quality by **negatively promoting the organisation** or **switching to other competitors** (Yeşiltaş and Tuna, 2018). Furthermore, service sabotage behaviours increase **customers' deviant behaviours**. When customers perceive that they are mistreated, they are motivated to engage in unacceptable behaviours and seek revenge from the service provider. According to the mechanisms of social exchange, this creates a reciprocal relationship in which both parties abuse each other. Service sabotage behaviours also affect the quality of the relationship between the customer and the organisation, so that **organisational trust**, **satisfaction**, and **commitment** drop off (Hu et al., 2020).

This study depends on conservation of resources theory to explain the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour. According to conservation of resources theory, employees' perception that they have insufficient resources motivates them to find ways to perform their work tasks with the fewest possible resources. Excessive thinking about how to protect the limited resources they have in light of the heavy burdens imposed on them leads to emotional exhaustion. Consequently, emotionally exhausted employees become more prone to displaying neuroticism while interacting with customers and sabotaging the service as they are unable to be patient in satisfying the customers' needs (Luo and Bao, 2013).

This is confirmed by Dai et al. (2014), who stated that emotionally exhausted employees face difficulty meeting their work demands according to the expected standards. Those employees are more willing to sabotage the service, either to protect their resources or to compensate for the resources they have lost. For example, emotionally exhausted employees may deliberately work slowly to control their work environment and reorganise their behaviours because they do not have adequate resources to work faster. Moreover, emotionally exhausted employees prefer to take longer breaks than

allowed in order to refresh their mettle and enhance their ability to control their emotional expressions. Deliberately slow interaction with customers and taking longer breaks than authorised are two examples of service sabotage behaviours.

Moreover, Edmondson (2008) pointed out that emotionally exhausted employees are more likely to adopt service sabotage behaviours as they lack a sense of self-esteem. Emotional exhaustion occurs when the individual realises that his effort is greater than the return he got, or when he is exposed to work pressures that exceed his ability to adapt, or when he helps his colleagues without getting their help when needed, or when his colleagues don't appreciate his effort. Here, the individual makes a decision to preserve the remaining resources as a stock that will protect him in the future, rather than wasting it without sufficient return in the current time.

Similarly, Yoo and Frankwick (2013) acknowledged that emotional exhaustion positively affects employees' willingness to adopt deviant behaviours directed towards the organisation as a whole, or personal deviance directed at co-workers, or deviant behaviours targeting customers and stakeholders. From this point of view, the researcher suggests that emotional exhaustion increases frontline employees' service sabotage behaviour, as they need more psychological resources. Emotionally exhausted employees also perceive their work as a cause of resource depletion. Thus, they accumulate negative attitudes towards their work, violate regulations, and work inefficiently. Hence, this study assumes that:

Hypothesis (1): There is a positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour.

2.4 Ethical leadership:

Recently, organisations have been interested in implementing some regulations that focus on ethical rules and developing training programmes that promote and support work ethics (Demirtas and Akdogan, 2015). Ethics are fundamental to all human interactions, especially those between a leader and his followers. The cornerstones of ethical organisations are ethical behaviours, which also increase a leader's competency with his team (Charoensap et al., 2019).

According to social learning theory, Brown et al. (2005) defined **ethical leadership** as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through

personal and interpersonal relationships and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (p. 120). According to Brown et al. (2005), ethical leadership is a two-dimensional concept. The **first dimension** is the **moral person**, which describes the personality traits of leaders such as credibility, honesty, trustworthiness, fairness in decision-making, and caring for others. Whereas the **second dimension** refers to the **moral manager**, which means that leaders exploit their position and managerial authority to communicate ethical standards, promote ethics, and encourage followers to be honest.

Previous studies have widely relied on Brown and colleagues' definition and dimensions of ethical leadership, such as (Mayer et al., 2012; Demirtas and Akdogan, 2015; Ertop, 2019; Demirtas, 2015; Avey et al., 2012; etc.). This may be due to the flexibility in their definition of ethical behaviours that are relevant to different organisations' cultures. Brown et al. (2005) use the word "appropriate behaviour" in their definition as acceptable behaviours vary across organisational or societal cultures. It also consists of only 10 items, allowing researchers to easily collect data with measures of other concepts in their research (Kaptein, 2019). Despite the wide spread of Brown et al. (2005) perspective of ethical leadership, the procedural concept presented by the researchers ignores that ethical leadership is a two-dimensional concept as they indicated in their study. The researchers did not differentiate the effects of these dimensions on organisational outcomes.

Recently, Bush et al. (2021) have noticed that ethical leadership concept goes beyond simply encouraging subordinates to follow ethical behaviours. Specifically, they declared two dimensions of ethical leadership, namely, promotion-based ethical leadership and prevention-based ethical leadership. **Promotion-based ethical leadership** refers to the leaders' role in encouraging, supporting, and rewarding employees for acting ethically. In contrast, **prevention-based ethical leadership** represents the leaders' role in monitoring employees' behaviours, warning them of the consequences of unethical behaviours, and punishing them when necessary. The authors stress that the ethical leader's behaviours vary across time, as he is responsible for evaluating and controlling his subordinates' behaviours depending on promotion and prevention as complementary processes. Bush et al. (2021) also acknowledged that prevention-based ethical leadership is not a new concept. It has a solid foundation in several definitions given in previous

studies. For example, Brown et al. (2005) stressed the need for leaders to take necessary actions when employees violate ethical standards. In addition, Yukl et al. (2013) highlighted the leaders' role in preventing employees' unethical behaviours. However, empirical research has not measured its' impact on employees' behaviours.

Previous studies have presumed that leaders' efforts in preventing unethical behaviours and promoting ethical behaviours will affect employees in the same way (Brown et al., 2005; Yukl et al., 2013). However, Bush et al. (2021) asserted that each dimension has a unique influence on employees' perceptions of trust. According to social exchange theory, promotion-based ethical leadership builds a close bond between the leader and his subordinates, characterised by certainty and mutual trust between the two parties. While prevention-based ethical leadership increases employees' uncertainty and untrustworthiness. Therefore, Bush et al. (2021) explained that although both prevention and promotion are two parts of ethical leadership, their impact on subordinates is different according to social exchange theory. This is something that previous studies did not pay sufficient attention to.

So, this study adopts the perspective of ethical leadership presented by Bush et al. (2021) to explore the impact of the leader's role in promoting ethical behaviours, as well as his role in preventing unethical behaviours, on service sabotage behaviour. Finding out which one is more effective in reducing service sabotage behaviour.

Previous studies have demonstrated that ethical leaders have an effective role in influencing their subordinates, either by increasing desirable behaviours or reducing undesirable outcomes (Yeşiltaş and Tuna, 2018; Kuenzi et al., 2020). Ethical leadership promotes employees' **constructive intentions** and can bring many positive outcomes to the organisation (Niu et al., 2022). Ethical leadership also provides employees with a greater **willingness to take charge**. Ethical leaders' behaviours have a great impact on their followers' desire to undertake constructive voluntary efforts to bring about functional change with regard to how work is carried out in their jobs, work units, or the organisation (Wang et al., 2020). Similarly, ethical leadership enhances **decision authority**, which reflects the degree of freedom employees have in selecting and organising their work duties (Mckenna and Jeske, 2021).

More importantly, ethical leadership contributes to motivating employees' **innovative work behaviours**, especially for those employees whose

proactive personality are low. This is a result of ethical leaders' practises such as advocating two-way communications, promoting participation in decision-making, and encouraging followers' voices by expressing their opinions. Employees are more likely to participate in innovative work behaviour when they have greater autonomy and easy access to new ideas (Ahmed et al., 2023).

Regarding the **service delivery process**, Dimitriou and Schwepker (2019) pointed out the effect of ethical leadership on increasing employees' **commitment to service quality**, which refers to the degree to which service providers are dedicated to delivering high-quality services to customers. Ethical leadership also reduces service sabotage behaviour by increasing **customer orientation**. Subordinates pay more attention to customer needs when they realise that their leader pays attention to others' welfare, which limits the potential for **service sabotage behaviours**.

In addition, Schaubroeck et al. (2016) acknowledged that ethical leadership improves **service provider performance** and enhances **customer service quality.** Ethical leadership reinforces social values and beliefs that clarify desirable service delivery behaviours. Frontline employees search for social cues from their colleagues and supervisors to learn about the expected behaviours when interacting with customers. These cues create a culture of customer service delivery interactions that directs employees towards participating in or refraining from certain behaviours while serving customers. Ethical leadership also encourages employees' sense of internal commitment, which includes feeling compliant with instructions and directives to behave in a certain way. Moreover, Garpa et al. (2018) declared that ethical leadership also benefits customers by increasing employees' willingness to undertake voluntary behaviours when serving customers, which are known as **customer-oriented citizenship behaviours**.

Further, Yeşiltaş and Tuna (2018) stated that ethical leadership reduces **service sabotage behaviour**, as ethical leaders reinforce subordinates' awareness of organisational ethical values and create a **positive service climate**. Organisational ethical values are an effective tool in improving the quality of products and services provided to customers, as well as enhancing employee behaviours within the organisation. The personal and managerial traits of ethical leaders reduce service sabotage behaviour.

In the same context, Altahat and Atan (2018) explained that ethical leadership negatively affects the employee's **intent to sabotage the service**. They stated that the intentional intent to cause harm is incompatible with the principles of ethical leadership that encourage human orientation and concern for others. Therefore, this study assumes:

Hypothesis 2: There is a negative relationship between ethical leadership and service sabotage behaviour.

This hypothesis is divided into the following sub-hypotheses:

H2a: There is a negative relationship between prevention-based ethical leadership and service sabotage behaviour.

H2b: There is a negative relationship between promotion-based ethical leadership and service sabotage behaviour.

2.5 The moderating role of ethical leadership:

Although there are a handful of studies that have explored the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviours, such as Edmondson (2008) and Luo and Bao (2013), they have not examined potential moderators of this relationship. Specifically, research has not shed light on the ways that weaken the impact of emotional exhaustion on employees' adoption of service sabotage behaviours. To that end, this study aims to understand the moderating role of ethical leadership in the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour.

According to the conservation of resources theory, employees' feelings of resource depletion motivate them to sabotage the service, and the degree of depletion is alleviated or aggravated along with different situational factors. Consequently, the degree of service sabotage changes accordingly. Therefore, some situational factors in the organisation may increase or decrease the depletion of resources and accordingly change the degree of service sabotage. In the present study, the researcher proposes that ethical leadership is a crucial factor that exists in employees' work environment, and plays a moderating role in the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour.

Several researchers have pointed out the role of ethical leadership in reducing stress and providing an appropriate work environment (Demirtas and Akdogan, 2015; Li and Bao, 2020). Furthermore, ethical leadership can

induce **positive changes in the workplace**, as subordinates perceive their ethical leader as a credible role model who motivates them to increase **positive workplace behaviours** (Li and Bao, 2020).

In the case of **high ethical leadership**, employees perceive that their leaders care for them, focus on their needs, motivate them to work, enhance their awareness of work value, and provide them with support (Van Gils et al., 2015). High levels of ethical leadership also enhance the employees' perception of the work environment. Ethical leaders are also keen to set a reasonable workload for their subordinates to raise their trust in their ability to do the required tasks. So, ethical leadership reduces employees' perception of stress and uncomfortable working conditions, which is a fertile environment for increased unethical behaviour (Stouten et al., 2010). So, the researcher hypothesised that high ethical leadership will weaken the positive impact of emotional exhaustion and employees' tendency towards sabotaging the service.

However, when **the level of ethical leadership decreases**, employees lack a sense of care and attention, which motivates their negative attitudes towards the organisation and increases their cynicism regarding the organisational environment (Qian and Jian, 2020). Additionally, the absence of ethical leadership increases employees' tendencies to express their discontent by engaging in unethical behaviours (Mayer et al., 2012), organisational deviance (Neves and Story, 2015; Tufan et al., 2023), and service sabotage (Altahat and Atan, 2018). Hence, the researcher hypothesised that **the absence of ethical leadership** will increase the positive impact of emotional exhaustion on service sabotage behaviours. The researcher can formulate the third hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis (3): Ethical leadership moderates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour.

This hypothesis is divided into the following sub-hypotheses:

H3a: Prevention-based ethical leadership moderates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour.

H3b: Promotion-based ethical leadership moderates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour.

Based on the previous hypotheses, the researcher concludes the following theoretical framework in figure (1).

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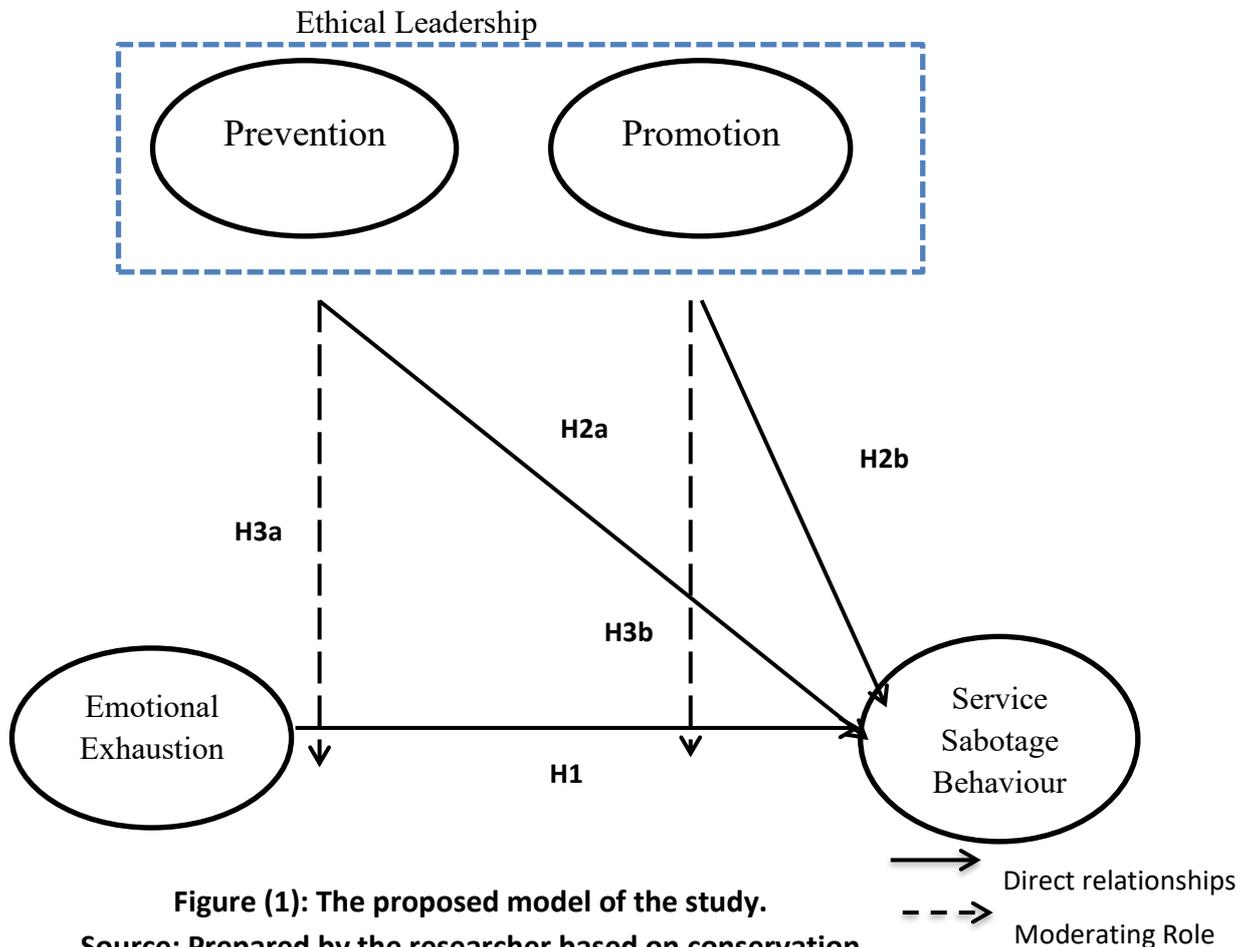
Figure (1): The proposed model of the study.
Source: Prepared by the researcher based on conservation of resources theory and literature review.

3.1 Sample and Procedure:

The current research was applied to travel agents located in Egypt. The population consists of all frontline employees of travel agencies in Egypt. Specifically, frontline employees were chosen in this research because they directly interact with customers on a daily basis and are responsible for service delivery. Daily customer interactions, routine work, low payments, and limited promotion opportunities make them more vulnerable to emotional exhaustion. Therefore, service sabotage behaviour is more common among them.

Travel agents in Egypt are classified into three categories, namely category A, B, and C. **Category (A) travel agents** are companies that handle packages

for individuals or groups either incoming or outgoing abroad away from Egypt. Those agents also arrange all of these packages' other components, such as accommodation. **Category (B) travel agents** are those firms that are responsible for booking travel tickets and baggage or luggage transfers on different means of transportation. This can include water-based transportation, those working as agents for airlines, or other means of transport. **Category (C) travel agents** consist of sea, air, or land transport companies that transfer tourists and their luggage (Hammad, 2016). This research focuses on category (A) travel agents located in Cairo, as they represent nearly 85% of all Egyptian travel agencies. This category is authorised to work in inbound and outbound tourism according to Egyptian law (Abou-shouk et al., 2021). The total number of travel agencies under Category (A) operating in Cairo is 1266 (ETAA, 2022).

According to the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the number of employees engaged in travel agencies in Cairo is approximately 16770. Accordingly, consistent with the electronic sample size calculator [1], if the margin of error is selected to be 5% with a confidence level of 95%, and the population size is 16770, then the required sample size should be **376**. During the period of December 2022 to February 2023, a total of 600 questionnaires were delivered to a simple random sample of frontline employees. A total of 581 questionnaires were returned, of which 23 were discarded because of missing information. Finally, 558 questionnaires with a response rate of 93% were valid for statistical analysis. Participation significantly exceeded the 376 benchmark, allowing for the generalizability of the findings (Saunders et al., 2016).

3.2 Measures:

Measurement items were adopted from different scales from previous studies. The scale items had to be translated into Arabic to fit the Egyptian language and make the questionnaire more understandable.

Emotional exhaustion was measured using 8 items of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) scale. This scale was designed to measure job burnout, of which emotional exhaustion is one of the dimensions. It is worth noting that the Maslach and Jackson (1981) scale is one of the leading measures of emotional exhaustion.

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[1] https://www.calculator.net/sample-size-calculator.html.

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This research relied on the scale presented by Bush et al. (2021) to measure ethical leadership. This scale is characterised by its ability to distinguish between the effect of promoting ethicality and the effect of preventing unethical behaviour on employees' behaviours and organisational outcomes. This measurement consists of 12 items. Six items were used as indicators for each dimension.

Service sabotage behaviour was analysed using Harris and Ogbonna (2006) scale, which consists of 9 items. It is worth noting that Harris and Ogbonna were the first authors developed a measure of service sabotage. This has contributed to an increase in the amount of research into service sabotage behaviours since then.

4. Data analysis and results:

4.1 Characteristics of respondents:

As shown in Table 1, samples consisted of 217 male (38.9%) and 341 female participants (61.1%). **In terms of age,** 44.3% were from 20 to less than 30 years old, 42.1% were from 30 to less than 40 years old, 12.4% were from 40 to less than 50 years old, and 1.3% were 50 years old and above. **In terms of education level**, 76% possessed a bachelor's degree, 14.2% had received a medium education level, and 9.9% were postgraduates. **In terms of work experience,** 38.9% had worked for less than 5 years, 40.3% had worked for 5 to less than 10 years, 16.8% had worked for 10 years to less than 15 years, and 3.9% had worked for 15 years and above.

Table (1): Characteristics of respondents

		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	217	38.9
	Female	341	61.1
Age	From 20 years to less than 30 years	247	44.3
	From 30 years to less than 40 years	235	42.1
	From 40 years to less than 50 years	69	12.4
	50 years or more	7	1.3
Qualification	Vocational school or high school degree	79	14.2
	Bachelor Degree	424	76
	Post graduate	55	9.9

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Experience	Less than 5 years	217	38.9
	From 5 to less than 10 years	225	40.3
	From 10 to less than 15 years	94	16.8
	15 years or more	22	3.9

Prepared by the researcher based on statistical analysis.

In the current research, the researcher used SPSS V.22 for the descriptive statistics. In addition, Warp-PLS software 7.0, a partial least squares-structural equation modelling approach was used to (a) evaluate the outer model, (b) measure the inner model, and (c) test the research hypotheses.

4.2 Measurement Model Assessment:

As the questionnaire is the main tool for collecting data in this research, the researcher conducted questionnaire pilot testing to enhance the quality of the questions and make sure that respondents understood each one very well. The researcher made some modifications in order to fit the nature of the study and the sampling unit.

In order to pre-test the questionnaire, its validity and reliability should be evaluated. The researcher used Warp-PLS V.7 to test the reliability and validity of the measurement model. To measure construct validity, both convergent and discriminant validity should be investigated. Convergent validity was first tested using factor loadings, in which the values of loadings can be considered significant if they are equal to or greater than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017). Further, convergent validity is also measured by (AVE), in which the value can be accepted if it is higher than 0.5. Furthermore, the reliability of the measurement model was measured using both Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). This can be explained as shown in table (2).

Convergent validity measures the correlation that exists between the construct items. Individual item reliability is assessed by using combined loadings and cross loadings. According to Hair et al. (2017), the loadings include Pearson relationships among measurement items and latent variables. According to the results shown in table (2), the measurement items were fulfilled based on the criteria except the items "I feel emotionally drained from my work" and "I feel I am working too hard on my job", which have a factor loading of 0.686 and -0.078, respectively. So, these items were excluded from the measurement of emotional exhaustion. In addition, the item "warned employees about the consequences of unethicality", with a factor loading

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equal to 0.164, was excluded from the measurement of prevention-based ethical leadership. Additionally, the item "supported employees who act in an ethical manner" has a factor loading of 0.421. Therefore, this item was excluded from the measurement of promotion-based ethical leadership. Relating to service sabotage behaviour, the item "At this outlet, customers are deliberately mistreated" has a 0.615 factor loading. Since this value was less than 0.7, this item was excluded.

To assess the reliability of the measurement scale, the researcher depends on Cronbach Alpha and composite reliability values shown in table (2) to measure internal consistency. As all alpha and composite reliability values were higher than 0.7, it is clear that all scales have good internal consistency.

Average variance extracted is also used to predict convergent validity. Average variance extracted should be at least 0.5 to be sure that the construct is clearly presented by its' correlated indicators. Table (2) shows that all AVE values are relevant. So, the convergent validity requirement of all constructs was achieved.

Table (2): Factor loadings, Cronbach's α, Composite reliability, and average variance extracted

Items	Factor loading
Emotional Exhaustion (α=.90, CR=.93, AVE=.67)	
I feel emotionally drained from my work.	~~0.686~~
I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job.	0.926
I feel burned out from my work.	0.936
Working directly with people puts too much stress on me.	0.920
I feel frustrated by my job.	0.936
I feel used up at the end of the workday.	0.869
I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.	0.851
I feel I am working too hard on my job.	~~-0.078~~
Prevention-based ethical leadership (α=.85, CR=.89, AVE=.62)	
Strictly enforced ethical policies.	0.903
Closely monitored employees to prevent ethical lapses	0.890
Paid close attention to the ethicality of employee actions.	0.876
Punished employees for engaging in ethical transgressions.	0.817

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Kept a close eye on whether employees are following ethical rules.	0.830
Warned employees about the consequences of unethicality	~~0.164~~
Promotion-based ethical leadership (α=.89, CR=.92, AVE=.69)	
Encouraged employees to behave ethically.	0.947
Communicated a strong ethical mindset to employees.	0.900
Informed employees of the importance of acting ethically at work.	0.756
Rewarded employees for doing the right thing.	0.936
Valued employees who demonstrate moral courage.	0.905
Supported employees who act in an ethical manner.	~~0.421~~
Service sabotage behaviour (α=.91, CR=.93, AVE=.60)	
People here take revenge on rude customers.	0.752
People here hurry customers when they want to.	0.788
It is common practice in this industry to "get back" at customers.	0.840
People here ignore company service rules to make things easier for themselves.	0.834
Sometimes, people here "get at customers" to make the rest of us laugh.	0.754
People here show off in front of customers.	0.784
Sometimes, when customers aren't looking, people here deliberately mess things up.	0.789
At this outlet, customers are deliberately mistreated.	~~0.615~~
People here slow down service when they want to.	0.793

However, discriminant validity refers to the degree of difference among the construct and other related constructs (Hair et al., 2017). Discriminant validity can be assessed by the square root of AVE, which must be higher than the maximum value of correlation between constructs. Discriminant validity is supported if AVE is greater than the maximum shared variance (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table (3): Correlation Matrix with Square Roots of AVE

	Emotional exhaustion	Service sabotage behaviour	Prevention-based ethical leadership	Promotion-based ethical leadership
Emotional exhaustion	**(0.823)**			

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Service sabotage behaviour	0.570	**(0.775)**		
Prevention-based ethical leadership	-0.634	-0.522	**(0.791)**	
Promotion-based ethical leadership	-0.575	-0.458	0.469	**(0.832)**

Note: Square roots of average variances extracted (AVEs) shown in diagonal.

The square root of AVE is used to estimate discriminant validity, and it is larger than the correlations among the constructs as shown in table (3). So, all correlation criteria are relevant, and all the scales of the study variables met the requirements of internal stability, which means the possibility of relying on the scales used to measure all the study variables.

4.3   Structural Model Assessment:

To assess the structural model, the research explores the model fit and the quality indices. The results indicate that average path coefficient **(APC =0.099, P=0.005)**, Average R-squared **(ARS=0.423, P<0.001)**, Goodness of Fit **(GoF=0.606)**, which indicate the quality of the model.

To investigate the causal relationships between latent variables, some metrics such as beta (β), P-value (P), R^2, and effect sizes (F^2) were used in analysing the structural model. The researcher used effect sizes (f^2) for assessing the independent latent variable's impacting degree on the dependent variable. The following formula was employed for calculating each path coefficient's effect size.

$$f^2 = (R^2 \text{ included} - R^2 \text{ excluded}) / (1 - R^2 \text{ included})$$

According to the guidelines of El-Hilali et al. (2020), f^2 clarifies the effect size of each independent variable in a separate manner on the dependant variable. It shows the value of the change in the coefficient of determination (R^2) when one or more of the independent variables is deleted. Cohen (1988)

stated that the values of effect sizes might be 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, which shows that, respectively, the predictor latent variable's effect on an endogenous variable is small, medium, or large. Furthermore, table (3) summarises path coefficients and significant levels.

Consistent with previous studies (Ma et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2011; Dai et al., 2014; Cheng et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2018), the researcher considered gender, age, qualification, and job experience as control variables because of their potential impact on service sabotage behaviour. This research confirmed that the control variables (gender, age, and qualification, and job experience) are insignificant and have no impact on service sabotage behaviour (β= -0.002, P=0.477), (β= -0.045, P= 0.144), (β=0.036, P= 0.194), (β=0.045, P= 0.145) respectively.

The results showed that emotional exhaustion significantly, positively, and directly impacts service sabotage behaviour ($\beta = 0.25$, P < 0.001), and its effect size was ($f^2 = 0.143$), indicating a relatively moderate effect size between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour, as shown in table (4). ***Therefore, H1 was accepted.*** Regarding prevention-based ethical leadership, the results showed that prevention-based ethical leadership significantly and negatively affects service sabotage behaviour ($\beta = -0.239$, P < 0.001), and its effect size was ($f^2 = 0.128$). Therefore, ***H2a was accepted***. Relating to promotion-based ethical leadership, the results reveal that promotion-based ethical leadership significantly and negatively affects service sabotage behaviour ($\beta = -0.144$, P < 0.001), and its effect size was ($f^2 = 0.069$), as indicated in table (3). So, ***H2b was accepted.*** Overall, it is clear that ethical leadership negatively affects service sabotage behaviour, ***supporting H2***. The results also indicate that ethical leadership' dimensions differ in the degree of their impact on service sabotage behaviour. The largest effect is justified by prevention-based ethical leadership, where the value of the path is -0.239, followed by promotion-based ethical leadership with a path coefficient of -0.144.

The results shown in table (4) reveal that prevention-based ethical leadership had no significant moderation effect on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour ($\beta = -0.044$, P = 0.151). ***Therefore, H3a was rejected***. In addition, the results indicated that promotion-based ethical leadership moderates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour ($\beta = -0.090$, P = 0.016),

and its effect size was ($f2$ = 0.042). ***So, H3b was accepted***, confirming that promotion-based ethical leadership reduces the positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour.

Table (4): Standardized coefficient estimates

Effects	Coefficient	SE	P-value	Effect Size
EX ⟶ SSB	0.247	0.041	<0.001	0.143
Prev ⟶ SSB	-0.239	0.041	<0.001	0.128
Prom ⟶ SSB	-0.144	0.042	<0.001	0.069
Ex*Prev ⟶ SSB	-0.044	0.042	0.151	0.019
Ex*Prom ⟶ SSB	-0.090	0.042	0.016	0.042

Source: prepared by the researcher based on statistical analysis.

This research pursued to measure the moderation role of promotion-based ethical leadership. Based on the path coefficient of the direct relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour (β = 0.25, P < 0.001), the path coefficient of the direct relationship between promotion-based ethical leadership and service sabotage behaviour (β = -0.14, P < 0.001), and the path coefficient of the interactive impact of emotional exhaustion and promotion-based ethical leadership on service sabotage behaviour (β = -0.090, P = 0.016), the researcher draws the simple slopes of the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour at high (+1 SD) and low (-1 SD) values of promotion-based ethical leadership. According to figure (2), emotional exhaustion and promotion-based ethical leadership interacted to predict service sabotage behaviour. As shown in figure (2), emotional exhaustion is positively related to service sabotage behaviour, and was weaker under high promotion-based ethical leadership, but the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour was stronger under a low promotion-based ethical leadership.

Figure (2): Low-High values of promotion-based ethical leadership in the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour.

5. Discussion and implications:

Results showed that there is a significant, direct, and positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour, **supporting H1**. This finding is comparable with the results of research by Luo and Bao (2013) and Edmondson (2008), who similarly found that the more emotional exhaustion employees feel, the greater their service sabotage behaviour.

The results concluded that emotional exhaustion raises service sabotage behaviour. The researcher believes that there are several reasons behind this result. First, frontline travel agent employees suffer from **frequent daily interactions with customers**. They are also **frustrated** and **dissatisfied** with their working environment. This may lead them to service sabotage behaviours such as laughing and embarrassing customers to overcome boredom and the daily routine. Showing frustration and depression to customers and embarrassing them are types of service sabotage behaviour, as stated by Harris and Ogbonna (2009), who highlighted that thrill seekers are a kind of saboteur employee engaging in service sabotage only for joy and excitement.

Second, the work stress travel agent employees face due to the **inquiries of non-serious customers** about the available trips motivates them to achieve their goals even by lying, cheating, or engaging in other unethical behaviours. In this case, employees feel that they are working too hard without a valuable return. So, they may make unrealistic promises to attract more customers, get their sales commission, and justify their effort. Lussier et al. (2021) pointed out that deceiving customers is another unethical behaviour that harms customers.

Furthermore, the researcher can conclude that emotionally exhausted travel agent employees may engage in service sabotage behaviour to solve their problem of reduced self-esteem. This is especially apparent when they are exposed to customer abuse. Harris and Ogbonna (2002) provide evidence on the role of service sabotage behaviour in enhancing employees' self-esteem, which is a state combined with emotional exhaustion. Similarly, Gip et al. (2023) stated that employees depend on illicit exploits, such as service sabotage, to improve their self-esteem, overcome stressful events, and reclaim their psychological well-being.

In addition, conservation of resources theory can be used to provide another explanation for the positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour. Resource safe mode is a main motivator for

service sabotage behaviour (Liu et al., 2020). Travel agent employees who are emotionally exhausted lack the emotional resources required to handle repetitive customer complaints. So, they have to work with the least possible amount of resources. For example, they may ignore company service rules to make things easier for themselves.

Moreover, emotional exhaustion raises employees' negative attitudes towards their job, the organisation they belong to, and the customers they serve (Lussier et al., 2021). Consequently, this reduces the employee's keenness to provide satisfactory service to customers and increases their willingness to engage in service sabotage behaviour.

This research confirmed that ethical leadership significantly, directly, and negatively affects service sabotage behaviour. Specifically, the results showed that prevention-based ethical leadership **has the strongest impact** on reducing service sabotage behaviour, followed by promotion-based ethical leadership, **supporting H2a and H2b,** respectively. This result may have several explanations in previous research.

Promotion-based ethical leadership depends on supporting, encouraging, and rewarding employees for ethical behaviours (Bush et al., 2021). According to the conservation of resources theory, promotion-based ethical leadership is the process by which leaders provide their followers with the work resources they need. Promotion-based ethical leadership provides care and support for followers in their daily work and communicates with them frequently to show compliance with organisational norms. Employees, in turn, trust their leader, experience the meaning of work, and generate more positive outcomes (Lu, 2022). From this point, the researcher can conclude that promotion-based ethical leadership provides travel agent employees with the sufficient resources they need to work faster, respect the rules of customer service, and show concern for customer needs. So, service sabotage behaviours are reduced.

Furthermore, prevention-based ethical leadership focuses on monitoring employees and showing a lack of trust regarding employees' behaviours (Bush et al., 2021). Ethical prevention orientation has a great impact on employees' desire to avoid pain and punishment. In this situation, employees want to be on the safe side and comply with ethical rules to achieve job security. However, ethical promotion orientation depends on achieving moral ideals that are desired without penalising those who do not comply with them.

Ethical promotion depends on increasing employees' altruistic behaviours (Shao et al., 2011). This explains why prevention-based ethical leadership has a stronger direct impact on service sabotage behaviour than promotion-based ethical leadership.

Additionally, this research is in line with Bush et al. (2021) regarding the role of promotion-based ethical leadership in reducing undesirable outcomes. According to their findings promotion-based ethical leadership increases employees voluntary behaviours and reduce their counterproductive behaviour. However, this research differs from theirs regarding prevention-based ethical leadership. Bush et al. (2021) declared that prevention-based ethical leadership leads to undesirable outcomes. They proposed that although both prevention and promotion are two dimensions of ethical leadership, their impact is different according to social exchange theory. These two dimensions have important implications for followers' interpretations of their environment. Specifically, they suggest that the leader who attends to the right by supporting and rewarding employees for ethical behaviours makes followers perceive that they are in a high-quality social exchange relationship. In turn, this increases employees engagement in valued voluntary behaviours and reduces counterproductive behaviours. In contrast, the leader who attends to the wrong by monitoring and punishing unethical behaviour makes employees perceive a low level of social exchange, which reduces their motivation for voluntary behaviours and increases their willingness to engage in counter-productive behaviours.

Overall, ethical leaders have the power, status, and personal characteristics such as honesty, credibility, and trustworthiness to be regarded as ethical role models from whom employees could emulate their ethical conduct. Additionally, ethical leaders control the reward and punishment systems. Employees' perception of the consequences of others' ethical or unethical behaviours in the workplace affects their decision to engage in service sabotage behaviour. Consequently, the current research revealed that ethical leadership significantly, directly, and negatively affects service sabotage behaviour. This result is consistent with the finding introduced by Yeşiltaş and Tuna (2018) that ethical leaders reinforce subordinates' perceptions of organisational ethical values, which in turn enhances service quality and reduces deviant behaviours, including service sabotage. This highlights the

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importance of ethics, which should be emphasised and implemented in the daily life of the organisation.

Relating to the moderating role of ethical leadership, the findings demonstrated that promotion-based ethical leadership significantly moderates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour, **supporting H3b**. However, prevention-based ethical leadership had no significant moderating effect, **rejecting H3a**.

Although the results supported the direct impact of prevention-based ethical leadership on reducing service sabotage behaviour, the interaction effect of emotional exhaustion and prevention-based ethical leadership was not supported. The researcher can determine that the reason behind this result is that the psychological needs of emotionally exhausted travel agent employees can only be handled by promotion-based ethical leadership. Frustrated travel agent employees need their leader to provide them with advice and enthusiasm instead of pain and punishment to be able to reduce service sabotage behaviour.

Specifically, when we are trying to reduce the service sabotage behaviours of emotionally exhausted employees, the matter is different. Bush et al. (2021) stated that although prevention-based ethical leadership behaviours provide clear instructions relating to how leaders should prevent unethical behaviour, leaders' daily emphasis on preventing and punishing employees for their unethical behaviours may create an **aversive internal sense for the followers** relating to the nature of their relationship with the leaders.

Emotionally exhausted employees miss the feeling of appreciation. They are exposed to high work stress for a long time (Dai et al., 2014). This makes prevention-based ethical leadership may be not the perfect solution for reducing service sabotage behaviours of emotionally exhausted employees. **Instead**, emotionally exhausted employees need their managers to appreciate their efforts to recover from their exhaustion, avoid intentionally redirecting their frustration and work stress towards customers, and renew their enthusiasm towards ethical behaviours. Managers should provide employees with support and reward them for their moral courage. So, the researcher can conclude that promotion-based ethical leadership provides employees with the resources they need to replace their frustration with excitement and their low self-esteem with a feeling of achievement.

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This finding is supported by the conservation of resources theory, which recognises promotion-based ethical leadership as the process by which leaders provide their followers with the necessary work resources. The conservation of resources theory explains the role of promotion-based ethical leadership in enhancing employees' sense of vitality and enthusiasm at work. The daily behaviours of promotion-based ethical leadership provide care for employees, which enhances work vitality, enhances employees' learning motivation, and promotes employees' thriving at work (Lu, 2022).

These findings support the call of Bush et al. (2021) relating to the necessity of differentiating the impact of promotion-based ethical leadership and prevention-based ethical leadership on employees' recognition of their environment that affects their behaviours and organisational outcomes.

5.1 Theoretical implications:

Regarding the theoretical implications, in concert with Altahat and Atan (2018), it is clear that service sabotage remains an ambiguous behaviour that needs further research in different cultures, especially Arab Islamic culture. Therefore, the current research significantly contributes to the theoretical understanding of service sabotage behaviour in several aspects. First, it adds to the existing knowledge pertaining to the tourism industry by highlighting the relationships between emotional exhaustion, service sabotage behaviour, and ethical leadership. By developing and empirically examining a comprehensive conceptual model to describe how emotionally exhausted travel agent employees interact with customers, their willingness to engage in service sabotage behaviour, and the role of their managers in addressing this issue in tourism organisations. Few prior studies have highlighted the antecedents of service sabotage behaviour, especially in this context.

Second, this research also contributes to the existing literature by understanding the critical roles of prevention-based ethical leadership and promotion-based ethical leadership in handling service sabotage behaviour in tourism organisations. To the best of the author's knowledge, this is the first academic work evaluating how differently travel agent employees respond to prevention-based ethical leadership and promotion-based ethical leadership. Although limited studies have examined the role of ethical leadership in reducing unethical behaviours, this research explores ethical leadership from a new perspective and in a new context. The current research has provided academics with meaningful inferences into how ethical leaders can play a

variety of roles and how even the same leader can have significantly varied effects on their followers' propensity to service sabotage in the context of tourism agencies.

Third, this research also provides a valuable contribution by understanding the moderating role of ethical leadership in the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour. Although some earlier research has looked into the linkages between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour (Luo and Bao, 2013; Edmondson, 2008), no known work has empirically investigated the moderators of this relationship. The empirical results indicated in this research are considered an addition to tourism and human resources research by introducing emotional exhaustion as a reason behind increasing employees' service sabotage behaviour. Not only that, the results of this research provide aid to their leaders, enabling them to overcome this problem through ethical leadership.

5.2 Practical implications:

In terms of practical implications, the findings of this research offer travel agency managers several recommendations that, if applied, have the potential to improve frontline employees' performance and reduce service sabotage behaviours. This can be explained in some detail as follows:

Emotional exhaustion has a considerable positive impact on service sabotage behaviour, implying that the less emotional exhaustion, the less service sabotage behaviour. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the main reasons resulting in service sabotage in tourism organisations. Leaders should conduct regular meetings with their followers, listening to their problems and trying to handle their emotional exhaustion. By addressing the emotional exhaustion of travel agent employees, travel agency managers should be able to significantly reduce the negative outcomes of service sabotage behaviour. To do so, managers should increase the ability of their employees to accumulate more resources by increasing their wages and their opportunities for promotion. The same can be done by reducing travel agents' consumption of resources by reasonably reducing their workloads and enriching their jobs to overcome the problem of their full-time communication with customers.

Prevention-based ethical leadership has a direct negative impact on service sabotage behaviour. So, managers can reduce service sabotage behaviour by developing effective monitoring systems, such as installing

cameras or recording customer-employee conversations. Managers must then assess each employee's performance and decide how to penalise those who break customer service rules. It is also recommended for travel agencies to have a hotline system available for receiving and recording customers' complaints. To raise employees' awareness of the seriousness of service sabotage behaviours, managers can also talk about how earlier incidents of unethical behaviour negatively impacted the firm. All of these mechanisms help travel agency managers strictly reinforce ethical rules to control service sabotage.

Promotion-based ethical leadership also reduces service sabotage behaviour. This indicates that the more ethical leaders discuss the importance of acting ethically, the fewer employees engage in service sabotage behaviour. Travel agency managers can take advantage of this by trying to gain their followers' trust and exerting effort to develop good relationships with them. Managers should also relate employees' performance appraisals to their ethical behaviour. To do so, travel agency managers should take employees' ethical behaviours into consideration when making decisions related to their performance appraisal, promotion, rewards, and transfer.

Promotion-based ethical leadership can weaken the positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour. Hence, it is recommended to depend on promotion-based ethical leadership to reduce the service sabotage behaviour of emotionally exhausted employees. In high-workload conditions, it is better for travel agency managers to restrict the probability of service sabotage behaviour by continuously communicating with employees to build a strong ethical mindset that guides their behaviour. Also, travel agency managers should support the efforts of their frontline employees by rewarding them for their dedication to work. When travel agent employees find support from their managers, they perceive that their effort is valued and justified. To do so, managers should compensate their employees for their excessive effort by providing them with financial rewards or a special discount on leisure trips with their families as a gift from their travel agency. The leader's role in appreciating employees' efforts can control their level of emotional exhaustion and reduce their service sabotage behaviour.

5.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research:

As with any scientific research, the current study has some limitations that can be addressed by future researchers. One of these limitations is that the study was restricted to Category A travel agents in Cairo and didn't include Categories B and C. Furthermore, there were sampling limitations. Since only Greater Cairo was selected as the geographical sampling frame, the data collected was limited to a large part of Egypt but not the whole.

This study concentrates on emotional exhaustion as a potential predictor of service sabotage behaviour. Future research can examine the impact of work-family conflict, abusive supervision, and psychological contract breaches.

The researcher in this study differentiated the effect of prevention-based ethical leadership and promotion-based ethical leadership on service sabotage behaviour and neglected other unethical behaviours such as employee misconduct, counterproductive behaviour, organisational deviance, and workplace bullying.

The current study also looked into the effect of prevention-based ethical leadership and promotion-based ethical leadership on service sabotage behaviour, while differentiating the impact of these dimensions on discretionary behaviours remains an ambiguous issue. So, future research can investigate the impact of prevention- and promotion-based ethical leadership on organisational citizenship behaviour or customer-oriented citizenship behaviour.

This study has examined the moderating role of ethical leadership in the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour. So, it focuses on the moderating role at the management level and ignores the moderating role at the organisational level, such as organisational justice, organisational pride, and workplace authenticity.

The current research has also investigated the direct impact of promotion- and prevention-based ethical leadership on service sabotage behaviour, ignoring the potential moderators of this relationship such as employees personalities. So, future research may reveal how employee personality moderates this relationship.

The researcher has explained the moderating role of ethical leadership in the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service sabotage behaviour

and disregards the potential mediators in this relationship, such as employees self-esteem.

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Yomna El- Daly; Dr. Mostafa Al Kerdawy and Dr. Maha Misbah Shabana

الدور المعدل للقيادة الأخلاقية في العلاقة بين الإجهاد العاطفي وسلوكيات تخريب الخدمة: دراسة تطبيقية على موظفي شركات السياحة في مصر

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الملخص:

تهدف الدراسة إلى تحديد أثر الدور المُعدل للقيادة الأخلاقية في العلاقة بين الإجهاد العاطفي وسلوكيات تخريب الخدمة. كما أنها تسعى لتحقيق مجموعة من الأهداف الأخرى تتمثل في التعرف على أثر كلاً من الإجهاد العاطفي، القيادة الاخلاقية (القيادة الأخلاقية القائمة على التحفيز والقيادة الأخلاقية القائمة على المنع) على سلوكيات تخريب الخدمة. وأخيراً تقديم مجموعة من التوصيات في ضوء نتائج هذه الدراسة تُساعد المديرون في الشركات موضع التطبيق على مواجهة سلوكيات تخريب الخدمة. ويتمثل مجتمع هذه الدراسة في جميع موظفو الخطوط الأمامية بشركات السياحة من الفئة (أ) الموجودة بمحافظة القاهرة. وتحقيقاً لهذه الغاية، تم استخدام الاستبانة كأداة لجمع البيانات من مفردات العينة. وتم تحليل البيانات واختبار النموذج المقترح باستخدام Warp PLS-SEM. وقد أظهرت النتائج أن الإجهاد العاطفي يؤثر تأثيراً ايجابياً على سلوكيات تخريب الخدمة. كما أوضحت النتائج أن أبعاد القيادة الأخلاقية (القيادة الأخلاقية القائمة على التحفيز والقيادة الأخلاقية القائمة على المنع) تُؤثر تأثيراً سلبياً على سلوكيات تخريب الخدمة. علاوة على ذلك، يتضح أن القيادة الأخلاقية القائمة على التحفيز تُعدل العلاقة بين الإجهاد العاطفي وسلوكيات تخريب الخدمة. في حين أن القيادة الأخلاقية القائمة على المنع ليس لها تأثير مُعدل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإجهاد العاطفي، القيادة الأخلاقية، سلوكيات تخريب الخدمة