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Emotional Intelligence and Ethical Leadership to Foster Employees' Mental Health for Promoting Sustainable Development in Organizations: The Moderating Role of Organisational Culture

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Abstract

This research examines how emotional intelligence (EI) and ethical leadership (EL) influence employees' mental health (EMH) and how EMH contributes to sustainable development (SD) in organisational settings. It also investigates the moderating role of organisational culture (OC) in strengthening the relationship between mental health and sustainability. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed, targeting branch-level employees (Customer Service Officers, Bank Tellers, Loan Officers, Credit Officers, and Relationship Officers) in Iraqi private banks. A total of 298 responses were collected using validated measurement scales. Data were analysed using SPSS (Version 28) with multiple and hierarchical regression techniques to test the hypothesised relationships. The results indicate that EI significantly enhances EMH, emphasising the role of self-awareness, self-regulation, and social awareness in fostering psychological and emotional well-being and effective stress management. Conversely, EL did not show a significant direct effect on mental health, suggesting that fairness, integrity, and ethical guidance alone may not directly influence employee well-being in high-pressure work environments. EMH significantly contributed to SD, and OC positively moderated this relationship, highlighting the role of involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission in strengthening sustainability outcomes. This study contributes to organisational behaviour and sustainability literature by validating the mental health–sustainability link in a developing country financial sector. The findings indicate that the widely held assumption that EL consistently enhances mental health may not always hold true, and extend existing frameworks by highlighting the moderating role of OC.

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1. Introduction

In today's dynamic business environment, the pursuit of sustainable development (SD) has moved beyond environmental considerations to encompass the economic and social well-being of organisational stakeholders [1]. Among these stakeholders, employees play a critical role, as their mental health directly influences an organisation's ability to sustain long-term growth and resilience. However, mental health challenges in the workplace are on the rise globally, driven by increasing work pressures, complex leadership dynamics, and organisational change [2]. This concern is particularly relevant in service sectors such as banking, where employees face emotional labour, high accountability, and continuous technological transformation. Therefore, mental health in this context refers to employees' overall psychological state, encompassing key dimensions such as Self-

awareness, Self-regulation, and Social Awareness. These dimensions influence employees' ability to cope with work stressors and maintain their performance and engagement in the organisation. Leadership practices, especially those rooted in ethical principles and emotional intelligence (EI), have gained attention for their potential to support employee well-being and foster organisational sustainability. EI enables leaders and employees to navigate interpersonal dynamics with empathy, self-awareness, and emotional regulation, fostering a psychologically safe, positive work environment. Ethical leadership (EL), emphasising fairness, integrity, and ethical guidance, shapes ethical climates that promote trust, reduce workplace stressors, and encourage sustainable practices.

Although prior studies have examined leadership and mental health separately, few have examined how these factors, together, foster employees' mental well-being in ways that advance SD across economic, social, and environmental dimensions [3]. Furthermore, organisational culture (OC), whether adaptive, consistent, mission-driven, or participative, plays a pivotal moderating role, either reinforcing or diluting these leadership influences. A supportive culture may amplify the positive effects of employee well-being on the organisation's capacity for sustainable outcomes. Despite the growing recognition of these factors, integrated empirical studies in emerging markets remain scarce, particularly in the Middle Eastern banking sector. Iraqi private banks, facing economic volatility and post-conflict recovery, represent a critical context where SD and employee well-being are vital for organisational resilience and social stability [4][5]. Therefore, this study investigates frontline Banks that deliver financial services and sustain organisational performance. By addressing these gaps, the present research aims to contribute to the literature on sustainable organisational behaviour by exploring how EI and EL influence employees' mental health and, in turn, how this mental health fosters SD outcomes. Moreover, it examines the moderating role of OC, offering nuanced insights for leaders seeking to build resilient, sustainable financial institutions in emerging economies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Employees' mental health

Employees' mental health (EMH) has received increasing scholarly attention as an essential element of organisational well-being and sustainable performance. Mental health in the workplace is broadly understood as a state of psychological and emotional balance that enables individuals to cope with work demands, manage interpersonal relationships, and perform effectively in their roles [6]. It goes beyond the mere absence of mental illness, emphasising the presence of positive functioning and the ability to contribute productively to organisational life. Contemporary literature conceptualises EMH as a multidimensional construct. Three critical dimensions are frequently highlighted: psychological well-being, emotional well-being, and stress management or coping abilities. Psychological well-being reflects an employee's overall life satisfaction, sense of purpose at work, and ability to maintain cognitive clarity and optimism despite workplace challenges. Emotional well-being refers to the capacity to experience and sustain positive emotional states, regulate negative emotions, and foster healthy emotional interactions with colleagues and work tasks. Stress management, or coping skills, encompasses the strategies and skills employees use to mitigate the adverse effects of occupational stressors, recover from setbacks, and maintain performance under pressure [7].

Studies in organisational psychology reiterate that an employee who is in good mental health is more likely to be adaptable, creative, and resilient when faced with workplace difficulties. Such employees usually feel even greater job satisfaction, become even more engaged, and have better interpersonal relations, which means flourishing of both individual and organisational sense. Moreover, employees with sound mental health are better positioned to deal with organisational change, complex work requirements, and a positive attitude toward work. There is yet another issue that has surfaced in scholarly debates: the increasing prominence of mental health within the broader framework of sustainable development (SD). Companies that emphasise the EMH are better positioned to nurture long-term sustainability by building a resilient, innovative, and values-aligned

workforce [1][8]. The state of mental well-being is increasingly recognised as not only helpful in maintaining employee welfare but also in supporting future business, including sustainable economic performance, social responsibility, and environmental responsibility. Researchers have identified numerous workplace factors that affect EMH. The role of leadership practices in mental well-being at work, as well as the impact of organisational climate, interpersonal relations, and personal emotional capabilities, has been demonstrated [7]. Consequently, the promotion of mental health also involves both organisational and individual improvements in feminine competency. Overall, EMH can be viewed as an essential focal point of organisational studies, as the phenomenon involves complex interactions among resilience, emotional stability, and stress management capabilities. It not only determines the performance and employee satisfaction but also forms a basis for organisational sustainability in the changing world of business.

2.2. Sustainable Development

SD has become a focal idea in global policies and organisational practices, necessitated by the need to balance environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic success. Based on findings of the seminal Brundtland Report [9], SD might be described widely as the capacity to fulfil the requirements of the present without denying future generations the ability to meet their own requirements. Within an organisational context, this notion has ceased to be relegated to a peripheral issue; instead, it has become a strategic objective, shaping long-term processes, workforce involvement, and corporate responsibility. As modern scholarship points out, SD in organisations is a multidimensional concept, and in most situations, they are divided into three closely interconnected pillars: economic, social, and environmental sustainability [10]. The monetary aspect emphasises the long-term value creation, work effectiveness, and profitability. To be economically sustainable, organisations do not only focus on profitability but also on high-level ethical governance, innovation, and responsible investment. The social aspect revolves around fairness, inclusivity, worker welfare and societal participation. It entails practices that also enhance fair labour standards, human rights, diversity and organisational justice. Regarding the environmental element, the organisation is concerned with its impact on natural resources, carbon emissions, waste, and ecological equilibrium, and promotes environmentally conscious operations and green innovation [11].

These dimensions do not exist independently, but they complement each other. Companies who handle environmental issues properly are likely to increase their reputation and the trust of the stakeholders, which consequently benefits financial performance and social legitimacy. On the same note, organisations that invest in employee well-being and community development tend to improve organisational resilience, innovation capabilities, and competitiveness. New studies by M. Kim & Kim (2021) have widened the debate on SD by combining it with internal organisational variables such as leadership style, organisational culture (OC), employee behaviour, and psychological elements. This shift indicates a more profound realisation that sustainability is not to be spurred on by external compulsions or legal conformity, but also by internal catalysts such as values, ethics, and employee involvement. Human capital has been of particular importance lately due to the recognition of it as part of employees; through their values, attitudes, and well-being, employees have been regarded as agents of sustainability that impact whether the organisation will be able to pursue sustainable practices [8]. Sustainability has also become relevant to corporate strategy and workforce planning, even in the post-pandemic era. Crises have enhanced the understanding of the interconnection between the well-being of individuals in the organisation and its performance, as well as the SD. Companies have begun developing and embracing holistic frameworks that connect the concept of corporate sustainability with internal programs that support mental health, diversity, and ethical leadership [12]. Overall, SD in the organisational domain represents a dynamic, integrated view of attempts to achieve long-term performance that goes beyond environmental and social responsibilities. On a deeper level, organisations that incorporate sustainability into their strategic and cultural context can develop value that goes beyond the economic to include benefits to society and environmental friendliness.

2.3. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a popular topic in organisational behaviour studies, as it is an essential determinant of employees' well-being, interpersonal effectiveness, and leadership success. Initially defined by Al-Samarraie et al. (2023), EI is the capacity of an individual to perceive, understand, regulate and manage emotions in oneself as well as other people. It is a way of illustrating a social and emotional skill, an element of personal adaptation and workplace competency. In organisational contexts, EI helps people navigate intricate social interactions, manage job-related stressors, and maintain psychological well-being. EI has been traditionally divided into three to five dimensions by scholars, depending on the theory used. EI, as conceptualised in this study, comprises three dimensions: self-awareness, self-regulation, and social awareness. Self-awareness is the ability to identify and perceive emotions, thoughts, and other inner processes, enabling people to evaluate the impact of these factors on their behaviour, performance, and decisions at the workplace. The high level of self-awareness can also be seen in the fact that such employees are more precise in recognising the triggers that provoke their emotions, and are also more ready to respond to them positively. Besides, the ability to govern or divert chaotic emotions and to adjust to any new situation is referred to as self-regulation. This is associated with anger management in the work environment, resisting immediate responses, and staying emotionally calm under a lot of pressure. Social awareness entails feeling and knowing how others feel, being empathetic, and ensuring good relations amongst people. It is a crucial dimension for operating as a team, resolving conflicts, and becoming a leader [13].

Substantive studies have proved the organisational value of EI. Employees with higher emotional intelligence have lower rates of occupational stress and burnout, and higher levels of job satisfaction and psychological well-being [14]. In addition, EI has been found to increase effective communication, teamwork, and organisational citizenship behaviours, which help improve organisational performance. EI is also regarded as an essential personal resource for managing workplace demands within the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory [13]. High EI individuals have inner resources that help them maintain psychological energy, stabilise emotional pressure, and sustain well-being in stressful organisational contexts. Conclusively, it can be noted that EI is a critical psychological skill that enables an employee not only to control their personal emotional states but also to facilitate engagement, communication, and management with others, as well as to remain rational in complex workplace conditions. Its applicability to staff well-being and organisational sustainability continues to be reinforced by the growing body of empirical studies [14].

2.4. Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership (EL) has received significant attention in corporate research as a form of leadership that prioritises integrity, fairness, and ethical guidance in the workplace. According to Ali et al. (2022), EL can be defined as the act of demonstrating normatively appropriate conduct through personal behaviours and interpersonal relationships, and encouraging such conduct among his followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making. Ethical leaders are morally right persons, and their conduct defines the behavioural norms in organisations, shaping individual and collective action. There are various vital dimensions in which the literature conceptualises EL. In this study, three basic dimensions of EL are addressed: fairness, integrity, and ethical guidance. Fairness describes the desire of leaders to be just and fair, ensuring that decisions are made in an unbiased manner and that all workers are treated with respect and impartiality [15]. Fair-minded leadership creates a work environment that is inclusive of employees, making them feel appreciated and helping them understand their leaders. Integrity can be described as the leader's conformance to moral and ethical principles, including honesty, openness, and congruence between words and actions. With integrity, trust, and psychological safety, employees can raise concerns and share ideas without fear of reprimand. However, ethical guidance entails actively encouraging ethical behaviour, explaining organisational values, and providing employees with information on morally responsible choices. By providing ethical leadership, leaders reinforce ethical behaviour as an expectation rather than an option. Studies have consistently demonstrated that EL would result in a

favourable organisational climate, employee well-being, and ethical practice in the organisation. Ethical leaders can eliminate workplace stress by establishing psychologically safe working conditions that allow workers to express their concerns and resolve conflicts positively [15]. In addition, EL has been linked to higher job satisfaction and organisational commitment, as well as to citizenship behaviour, and hence to its overall effect on employee engagement and organisational functioning. The latter also believes that EL plays a role in promoting SD goals in organisations. Through social responsibility, fairness, and ethical behaviour, ethical leaders can orient organisational practices to align with sustainability values; they put aside short-term profits because they treat stakeholder interests as paramount. Leaders have a part to play in OC through their role-modelling and ethical decision-making, which facilitate environmental responsibility, social equity, and economic integrity. Altogether, EL plays a central role in constructing ethical OC and improving employee well-being, thereby fostering organisational sustainability. The fact that it has a multidimensional concept that includes fairness, integrity, and ethical guidance provides a diverse way of ethical governance within contemporary organisations [12].

2.5. Organisational Culture

OC is well documented as a critical factor in determining organisational effectiveness, as it affects employee perspectives, conduct, and performance. Defined by Xenikou & Furnham (2022) OC is a pattern of basic assumptions adopted by a group to solve problems related to external adaptation and internal integration. The literature highlights OC as a multidimensional construct encompassing shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that guide employee behaviour and organisational processes [16]. The current research follows the model developed by Denison and presents a list of four dimensions of culture: involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission [17]. Involvement refers to the extent to which employees are involved and empowered to participate towards organisational success. It pays attention to participation, team orientation, and capability development, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment. Moreover, consistency is the manifestation of core values, agreement, and coordination throughout the corporation, which achieves stability and predictability in processes and decision-making. Adaptability reflects the organisation's flexibility to respond to external changes, innovate, and use feedback to learn, enabling it to survive in a volatile environment. Whereas, mission refers to transparency and consensus on an organisation's purpose, strategic intent, and objectives, aligning employee efforts to collaborate and achieve common goals [10]. As studies have consistently indicated, high and favourable OC improves employees' well-being and satisfaction, their performance, and, in general, contributes to sustainable outcomes in an organisation. Further, OC shapes how employees perceive and respond to leaders' behaviours and organisational policies, and thus it is an essential regulator of the relationship between employee attitudes and organisational practices [17]. The use of OC in SD promotion has attracted academic interest in recent years. The practice of environmental and social responsibility in organizations has advantages when a culture demands involvement, adaptability, and mission [15][18] Click or tap here to enter text.. Such cultures foster an ethical climate, encourage employees to participate in sustainability simulations, and enhance their resilience to address complex socio-environmental challenges. To sum up, OC is the social fabric that gathers employees and shapes collective behaviour. This multidimensional character provides a panoramic view of the internal organisational dynamics that sponsor EMH and SD.

3. Hypotheses Development

3.1. Emotional Intelligence and Employees' Mental Health

It is a fact that emotional intelligence (EI) has become an essential focus of organisational research, as a significant personal capacity to observe, comprehend, and manage emotional experiences at the individual and interpersonal levels. In the business setting, EI provides employees with the psychological strength and emotional stability to navigate daily pressures and interpersonal challenges. EI fosters self-knowledge of emotional states (self-awareness), the ability to manage emotions in a healthy way (self-regulation), and the ability to take into account the moods of

workmates (social awareness). Researchers note that workers with higher EI levels find it easier to safeguard their psychological well-being under workplace pressure. They will think that workplace stressors are not sources of an overwhelming threat but situations that can be managed using emotional coping mechanisms that protect their well-being [14]. Besides, EI helps people develop healthy social connections, reduces feelings of isolation, and increases helpful emotional support within the workplace. All this leads to lower levels of psychological strain and better emotional stability, both of which are constituents of mental health [2]. Based on this, EI can be regarded as a self-defensive psychological resource that enables employees to remain emotionally and psychologically intact and to form healthy coping strategies when confronting organisational pressures. Based on this perspective, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Emotional intelligence has a significant positive effect on employees' mental health.

3.2. Ethical Leadership and Employees' Mental Health

Ethical leadership (EL) has gained notoriety as a key contributor to workplace harmony and employee well-being. Being defined as a manifestation of fairness, integrity, and moral guidance in leadership behaviours, EL creates boundaries of trust and psychological safety within organisations. Ethical leaders are role models who can influence workers' ethical performance and create an environment where individuals feel respected and valued. By being transparent and acting morally, ethical leaders eliminate ambiguity and encourage consistency in workplace expectations, which is essential when reducing mental strain among employees [15]. When they remain fair and act with integrity, leaders can give their employees a sense of justice and belonging, both of which are key determinants of mental health. Moreover, ethical support that leaders provide helps employees overcome moral dilemmas and the organisation's challenges with certainty and clarity, thereby eliminating mental conflict. As shown in recent studies, EL not only affects job satisfaction and organisational commitment but also should be seen as a key factor contributing to psychological well-being through the development of trust, emotional safety, and positive social relations in the workplace [12]. The perception of fair and morally sound leaders will lead employees to feel less anxious, experience less emotional exhaustion, and have less workplace stress, which translates into improved mental health outcomes. Based on this theoretical and empirical evidence, it is proposed that:

H2: Ethical leadership has a significant positive effect on employees' mental health.

3.3. Employees' Mental Health and Sustainable Development

Over the past few years, employee mental health (EMH) and sustainable development (SD) have come across a close association in organisational research. Mentally healthy employees are more likely to engage in behaviours considered to be in line with SD goals, such as cooperation, ethical judgment, and environmental care [8]. Psychological well-being and emotional stability, along with the coping skills offered by mental health, allow employees to make their work engaging and to find positive ways to contribute to the overall organisational purpose [12]. SD in organisations is associated with the integration of economic performance, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship. Therefore, employees who maintain good mental health not only have better productivity but are also more socially and environmentally aware. They tend to engage in pro-social behaviours, adhere to inclusive workplace practices, and participate in green initiatives, which are also crucial to achieving sustainability goals [15]. Psychologically, positive mental health will promote the development of other resilience and adaptability as essential qualities for responding to the dynamism of the challenges attendant to sustainability initiatives [8]. With employees' psychological safety and emotional stability, staff are in a stronger position to bring in innovative ideas and work together, leading to sustainable solutions. Based on this understanding, it is proposed that:

H3: Employees' mental health has a significant positive effect on sustainable development.

3.4. The Moderating Role of Organisational Culture

OC is central to how staff interpret their mental health into constructive input acceptable to sustainability. Culture, in turn, is a collective representation of the values, beliefs, and norms that

guide decision-making within the organisation [18]. When the culture is focused on involvement, consistency, adaptability, and a clear mission, it lays the foundations for mentally healthy, empowered employees who can deliver sustainable results [17]. A supportive OC amplifies the positive effects of mental health by aligning employees' energy and well-being with the organisation's sustainability objectives. For instance, cultures that foster involvement enable employees to actively participate in sustainability initiatives, while adaptability encourages innovative solutions to environmental and social challenges. Likewise, mission-oriented cultures allow workers to establish a sense of identity and also highlight the organisation's economic, social, and ecological responsibility to which employees belong [15]. On the other hand, in cultures that lack consistency or shared values, employees who are well with their mental health may be unable to direct their efforts toward sustainability objectives. A simplistic or limited culture may be a barrier that restricts the channels through which mental comfort is translated into sustainable behaviour. Thus, OC can be considered one of the contextual variables that intensify or weaken the correlation between EMH and SD. Based on this understanding, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Organisational culture moderates the relationship between employees' mental health and sustainable development.

4. Theories of the Study

There are two major theoretical bases underpinning this research: the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory and the Organisational Culture Theory. The mentioned theories fully explain the correlation among emotional intelligence (EI), ethical leadership (EL), employees' mental health (EMH) and sustainable development (SD) and make it clear that organisational culture (OC) plays a moderate role.

4.1. Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, which was a theory presented by Lu et al. (2022) states that a person has the impetus to build, retain and preserve personal resources of worth, such as emotional and mental well-being. This theory suggests that when employees encounter work-related challenges, they marshal available personal and environmental resources to adapt and develop their mental health. As EI consists of self-awareness, self-regulation, and social awareness, it provides employees with internal emotional resources to manage stress, regulate emotions, and maintain psychological well-being. Similarly, EL needs to be marked by fairness, integrity, and ethical leadership, which will foster a positive work environment that serves as an external resource, lessening work pressure and fostering a sense of psychological safety. COR shows that having stronger personal resources (EI) and supportive external resources (EL) helps employees remain better positioned to continue mentally and emotionally in a healthy way. Mentally healthy employees are more durable and committed; hence, they can provide considerable contributions to the SD objectives of the organisation within the economic, social, and environmental contexts. Therefore, COR Theory would serve as the theoretical basis for the links between EI, EL, and EMH, and for the use of mental health in stimulating sustainable organisational performance.

4.2. Organisational Culture Theory

In describing the moderating effect of OC, this research is based on the Organisational Culture Theory as expressed by Denison (1990) and Xenikou & Furnham (2022). This theory stresses that common beliefs, values, and practices within any organisation shape mindsets, behaviours, and, eventually, organisational outcomes. Cultural dimensions such as involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission are crucial for establishing a context in which employees' well-being can be translated into sustainable performance. OC determines the effectiveness of EMH's contribution to SD. Employees in cultures that embrace participation and resilience will be more likely to engage in sustainability programs and change their working behaviours to align with environmental, social, and economic objectives. On the other hand, these values are not cherished across cultures, and therefore, the contribution of mental health to sustainability may be reduced. In such a manner, OC acts as a contingent follower, reinforcing or undermining the corpus between EMH and SD.

5. Research Model

The theoretical framework of the research integrates the fundamental elements of emotional intelligence (EI), ethical leadership (EL), employees' mental health (EMH), organisational culture (OC), and sustainable development (SD) concept with the roots in Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory and Organisational Culture Theory. The framework shows how the dynamic qualities of leadership, along with employees' mental states, help realise sustainability outcomes within the organisation. As Figure 1 indicates, EI, which encompasses self-awareness, self-regulation, and social awareness, is proposed as a critical individual competency that can lead to positive mental health outcomes in the workplace. Complementary to this, it is suggested that EL, manifested in its fairness, integrity, and moral orientation, should foster the development of an ethical working climate that would also protect and enhance workers' mental health. Taken together, these leadership and emotional skills form a psychologically supportive work environment that fosters employees' psychological (mental) well-being, emotional well-being, and coping skills. EMH, in its turn, is most likely seen as one of the key drivers of SD within the organisation. SD is interpreted holistically as economic, social, and environmental. Mentally fit workers are better placed to participate in responsible activities, creative ideas, and team-building efforts, which, in turn, help achieve long-term sustainability objectives.

Additionally, the framework presents OC as a moderating factor in this association. The critical attributes of the culture are its high level of involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission, which define how EMH is translated into SD outcomes. However, this relationship can be weaker in rigid or fragmented cultures. This model encapsulates the dynamic interplay among leadership styles, employee well-being, and organisational survival. It indicates the necessity of emotionally intelligent, ethically oriented leadership, guided by a favourable cultural background, to ensure sustainable results are pursued, particularly in a complex setting such as the Iraqi private banking industry, where employee well-being is the key to organisational resilience and sustainability.

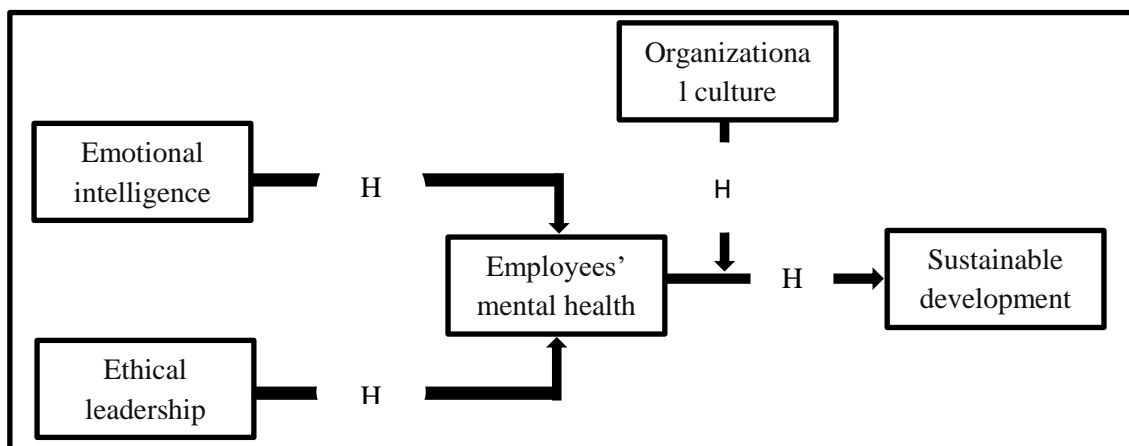


Figure (1): Conceptual Framework

6. Methodology

This research was motivated by practical challenges observed in Iraqi private banks, where increasing work stress, ethical tensions, and limited emotional awareness among managers have negatively affected employees' mental well-being and their ability to contribute to sustainable organisational goals. Therefore, this research was carried out using a quantitative cross-sectional research design as it would permit us to capture the data of a target population at one specific period to understand the connections among emotional intelligence (EI), ethical leadership (EL), employees' mental health (EMH), and sustainable development (SD). Since the cross-sectional research method is free of experimental manipulation, it is widely used in organisational research to determine trends and relationships in real-life settings [19]. The moderating role of organisational culture (OC) is also discussed in the study, which used regression-based methods supported by the PROCESS macro in

SPSS.

6.1. Sampling Region

The research will be conducted in the private banking industry in Iraq, with employees from sampled branches of five central Iraqi private banks: Trade Bank of Iraq (TBI), Bank of Baghdad, International Development Bank, Al-Taif Islamic Bank, and the National Bank of Iraq. These banks were chosen because they were large, approachable, and had a continued commitment to sustainable business activities and organisational development. The employees at the branch level were the specific target of the research, comprising Customer Service Officers, Bank Tellers, Loan Officers, Credit Officers, Relationship Officers, Operations Clerks, ATM Services Assistants, Compliance Support Assistants, and Back-Office Staff. The selection of these employees was based on the fact that they deal directly with customers, supervisors, and internal policies, and hence are able to provide a clear picture of the implications of leadership behaviour and OC on psychological outcomes and sustainable performance.

6.2. Sample Size Determination

To determine an appropriate sample size for hypothesis testing, the guidelines of Hair Jr et al. (2021) were followed, which recommends a minimum of 10 responses per observed variable when using regression-based techniques. Based on this guideline and given the number of variables in the study, a target of 400 questionnaires was distributed in both printed and electronic formats across the selected banks. After data screening and the exclusion of incomplete or inconsistent responses, 298 valid responses were retained for analysis, representing a 74.5% response rate. This rate is considered acceptable in organisational research, especially within service-sector environments where employee engagement with surveys can be influenced by workload and institutional access [20].

6.3. Measurement Tool

The data collection instrument was a structured, self-administered questionnaire developed using established, validated scales adapted to the banking and organisational context. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A pilot test was conducted with 30 employees to ensure clarity, cultural relevance, and face validity. EI was measured using a 12-item scale adapted from Wong & Law (2002), covering three dimensions: self-awareness, self-regulation, and social awareness. EL was assessed with 10 items adapted from Ali et al. (2022), reflecting dimensions such as fairness, integrity, and ethical guidance. EMH was measured using a 15-item instrument drawing from the Mental Health Continuum–Short Form and updated occupational mental health tools [7]. It captured psychological and emotional well-being, as well as stress/coping abilities. SD was measured using a 9-item scale representing the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability in the workplace, adapted from [21]. OC, the moderating variable, was assessed using 12 items adapted from the Denison Organisational Culture Survey [17] that covered involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission. All scales demonstrated high reliability, with Cronbach's alphas exceeding 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency. For analysis, composite mean scores were computed for each construct. These composite scores enabled the use of regression analysis and the PROCESS macro to examine both direct effects and moderation.

7. Results and Discussion

7.1. Respondent Demographics

A total of 298 valid responses were analysed, representing a 74.5% response rate. Table (1) summarises this rate by indicating that the majority were male (54.4%), with 45.6% female participants. Most respondents were aged 30–39 years (43.3%), followed by 20–29 years (28.1%), 40–49 years (19.5%), and those aged 50 and above (9.1%). Customer Service Officers (21.5%) and Bank Tellers (19.8%) were the largest groups, while Compliance Support Assistants (0.0%) were the smallest. However, the respondents' organisational tenure was classified into four categories: (29.2%) had less than 5 years of experience, (32.2%) had 5 to 9 years, (21.8%) reported 10 to 15 years, and (16.8%) had more than 15 years of organisational experience.

Table (1): Respondent Demographics (n = 298)

	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	162	54.4
	Female	136	45.6
Age	20–29	84	28.1
	30–39	129	43.3
	40–49	58	19.5
	≥50	27	9.1
Years of experience	Less than 5 years	87	29.2
	5 to 9 years	96	32.2
	10 to 15 years	65	21.8
	More than 15 years	50	16.8
Position	Customer Service Officer	64	21.5
	Bank Teller	59	19.8
	Loan Officer	54	18.1
	Credit Officer	46	15.4
	Relationship Officer	44	14.8
	Operations Clerk	25	8.4
	Bank Office Staff	5	1.7
	ATM Services Assistant	1	0.3
Compliance Support Assistant	0	0.0	

7.2. Reliability and Validity of the Measurement Model

The measurement model showed satisfactory reliability and convergent validity. All Cronbach’s alpha (α) values exceeded the recommended 0.70 threshold. (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), Composite Reliability (CR) exceeded 0.70, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50, indicating good convergent validity [22].

Table (2): reliability and convergent validity

Construct	Items	Cronbach’s α	CR	AVE
Emotional Intelligence	12	0.87	0.90	0.60
Ethical Leadership	10	0.85	0.89	0.58
Mental Health	15	0.92	0.93	0.64
Sustainable Development	9	0.88	0.91	0.59
Organizational Culture	12	0.89	0.92	0.62

7.3. Descriptive Statistics

Table (3) presents the descriptive statistics and correlations. Mean scores ranged from 3.45 Ethical Leadership (EI) to 3.78 Employees’ Mental Health (EMH). Correlations ranged between 0.32 and 0.60 ($p < .001$), suggesting moderate positive relationships and acceptable discriminant validity [23].

Table (3): Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Construct	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Emotional Intelligence	3.65	0.72	1				
Ethical Leadership	3.45	0.67	0.41**	1			
Mental Health	3.78	0.74	0.55**	0.32**	1		
Sustainable Development	3.69	0.70	0.48**	0.36**	0.60**	1	
Organizational Culture	3.72	0.68	0.44**	0.39**	0.57**	0.53**	1

7.4. Multicollinearity

To assess multicollinearity, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values were examined. VIF values ranged from 1.12 to 2.87, well below the conservative threshold of 5, and tolerance ranged from 0.35 to 0.89, exceeding the recommended 0.20 [24]. Thus, no multicollinearity concerns were detected.

Table (4): Multicollinearity Analysis

Construct	VIF	Tolerance
Emotional Intelligence	1.85	0.54
Ethical Leadership	1.12	0.89
Mental Health	2.87	0.35

Sustainable Development	2.41	0.41
Organizational Culture	1.96	0.51

7.5. Hypotheses testing

The hypotheses were examined using hierarchical multiple regression to assess both direct and sequential relationships among the study constructs. As shown in Table (5), Emotional Intelligence (EI) was a strong predictor of EMH ($\beta = 0.43, t = 7.05, p < 0.001$), supporting H1. This finding aligns with recent evidence emphasising the role of EI in enhancing psychological well-being and coping mechanisms at work [25]. Conversely, EL did not exhibit a significant direct influence on EMH ($\beta = 0.11, t = 1.56, p = 0.12$), leading to the rejection of H2. This result contrasts with earlier studies suggesting a positive leader-driven effect on employees' mental wellness [26], implying that leadership ethics alone may be insufficient to improve mental health without supportive organisational practices. Regarding H3, EMH significantly and positively predicted Sustainable Development (SD) outcomes ($\beta = 0.52, t = 8.75, p < 0.001$), demonstrating that psychologically healthy employees are more likely to contribute to economic, social, and environmental sustainability initiatives [27]. However, Model 2 explains 35.6% of the variance in EMH ($\Delta R^2 = 0.32, F\Delta (2,293) = 68.3, p < 0.001$) and Model 3 accounts for 40.8% of the variance in SD ($\Delta R^2 = 0.21, F\Delta (1,292) = 76.6, p < 0.001$).

Table (5): Regression Results (Direct Effects)

DV	Predictor	B	t	p	R ²	ΔR^2	F Δ
Mental Health	Emotional Intelligence	0.43	7.05	<0.001	0.356	0.320	68.3***
	Ethical Leadership	0.11	1.56	0.12			
Sustainable Development	Mental Health	0.52	8.75	<0.001	0.408	0.210	76.6***

7.6. Moderation Analysis

Table (6) presents the moderation analysis results, which tested the moderating role of Organisational Culture (OC) on the relationship between EMH and SD. The results indicate that EMH significantly predicts SD ($\beta = 0.52, t = 8.75, p < 0.001$), explaining 40.8% of the variance in SD. OC also has a significant direct effect on SD ($\beta = 0.19, t = 3.41, p = 0.001$). Importantly, the interaction term (EMH \times OC) is significant ($\beta = 0.13, t = 2.97, p = 0.003$), with a change in explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.014, F\Delta = 8.82, p = 0.003$), supporting H4 and confirming the moderating role of OC. The interaction plot in Figure (2) shows that the positive relationship between EMH and SD is stronger under high OC ($\beta = 0.58$) than under low OC ($\beta = 0.46$). This finding suggests that when OC is supportive, consistent, and mission-driven, employees with higher mental well-being are more likely to engage in sustainable practices within the organization.

Table (6): Moderation Analysis Results

Predictor	β	t	p	R ²	ΔR^2	F Δ
Mental Health (EMH)	0.52	8.75	<0.001	0.408		
Organizational Culture (OC)	0.19	3.41	0.001			
EMH \times OC (Interaction)	0.13	2.97	0.003	0.422	0.014	8.82**



Figure (2): Moderating Effect of Organisational Culture

7.7. Discussion

This research presents in-depth insights into the pathways involving EI, EL, EMH, and SD, and underscores the potential moderating role of OC. As observed in earlier studies, EI appears to be a powerful predictor of EMH because emotionally intelligent employees are able to manage workplace stress and exhibit greater psychological resilience [25]. Conversely, EL had not been significantly affecting EMH in the given circumstances, suggesting that EL, on its own, could not substantially improve mental well-being but required supportive organisational practices and structural mechanisms. This result contrasts with previous literature and highlights that the effect of leadership on psychological outcomes is complex. EMH proved to be a substantial improvement in SD performance, supporting the idea that, because they are mentally healthy, employees are better and more inclined to participate in actions related to economic, social, and environmental sustainability [27]. The moderation analysis indicated that OC has a statistically significant but modest effect on the relationship between EMH and SD. While the interaction plot showed a slightly stronger link in organisations with high cultural support ($\beta = 0.58$) than in those with weak cultural alignment ($\beta = 0.46$), the effect was limited, and the overall impact of EMH on SD remained essentially unchanged. This suggests that, although a supportive and aligned culture can slightly amplify employees' capacity to translate their psychological well-being into sustainable actions, its influence is moderate. Taken together, these findings underscore the importance of an integrated approach to sustainability, where organisations focus on enhancing employees' EI, creating mental health supportive environments, and fostering an organisational culture that can modestly strengthen the translation of psychological well-being into sustainable practices.

8. Conclusions

This study investigated the influence of emotional intelligence (EI) and ethical leadership (EL) on employees' mental health (EMH) and how mental health contributes to sustainable development (SD) within the Iraqi private banking sector. The moderating role of organisational culture (OC) was also examined to understand how cultural characteristics shape this relationship. The findings provide three key insights. First, EI had a significant positive effect on EMH, highlighting the importance of self-awareness, self-regulation, and social awareness in promoting psychological well-being, emotional stability, and effective stress management among banking employees. Second, EL did not show a significant direct effect on EMH. This outcome suggests that while fairness, integrity, and ethical guidance are essential for organisational trust, they may not directly enhance psychological well-being in environments where job stressors, workload pressures, or cultural constraints are dominant. Third, EMH significantly influenced SD, confirming that employees with higher psychological and emotional well-being are more likely to contribute to organisational sustainability

through improved economic performance, social responsibility, and environmentally conscious practices. Finally, the study revealed that OC significantly but modestly moderated the relationship between EMH and SD. Although the moderating effect was statistically significant, its strength remained relatively weak, suggesting that OC only slightly enhanced EMH's impact on SD. Furthermore, the overall effect of EMH on SD remained almost unchanged even after introducing the moderating variable, suggesting that OC did not substantially strengthen this relationship. Cultures characterised by involvement, consistency, adaptability, and a strong sense of mission were still found to contribute positively, but their influence was limited in scope. Overall, these findings enrich the understanding of the psychological mechanisms linking leadership behaviour to sustainability and emphasise the importance of cultural alignment in achieving sustainable organisational goals.

8.1. Implications

The results carry significant practical implications for human resource development and organisational policy in the banking sector. Managers should prioritise EI development programs through training and coaching interventions, enabling employees to regulate emotions, cope effectively with job-related stress, and maintain psychological resilience. Although EL did not show a direct impact on mental health, it should not be overlooked; instead, EL practices should be integrated with employee wellness initiatives to enhance their psychological relevance. Additionally, cultivating an adaptive and mission-driven OC is crucial, as the findings confirm that supportive cultural attributes amplify the positive effects of mental health on sustainable outcomes. This study also theoretically contributes to the organisational behaviour and sustainability literature by empirically validating the mental health–sustainability link in a developing-country service-sector context, where such relationships remain underexplored. Drawing on Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory [28] [Click or tap here to enter text.](#) The findings reinforce the notion that employees with higher EI possess greater psychological resources, enabling them to conserve and build additional resources (e.g., resilience, coping capacity) that enhance mental well-being and, subsequently, sustainable behaviour. The non-significant role of EL suggests that the assumption that all positive leadership traits equally enhance employee well-being may not always hold. From a COR Theory perspective, the dimensions of EL (fairness, integrity, and ethical guidance), while essential for building trust and moral conduct, may not directly generate the psychological and emotional resources employees require. Without complementary organisational support systems, these ethical behaviours may be perceived as normative rather than as additional resources that enhance employees' psychological well-being, emotional stability, and coping abilities. Moreover, the findings extend Organisational Culture Theory [18] by demonstrating that cultural elements such as involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission clarity act as enabling mechanisms that strengthen the translation of EMH into SD outcomes. A supportive OC provides shared norms and values that encourage the conservation and optimal use of employees' psychological resources, thereby reinforcing sustainable organisational practices.

8.2. Limitations and future research studies

This research has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the use of a cross-sectional design constrains our ability to infer causal relationships among emotional intelligence (EI), ethical leadership (EL), employees' mental health (EMH), and sustainable development (SD). To gain a clearer understanding of how these variables interact over time and to explore the directionality of their relationships, future studies would benefit from employing longitudinal designs.

Second, the decision to focus exclusively on private banking institutions in Iraq limits the generalizability of the findings to other sectors or cultural contexts. Future research should broaden its scope to include public banks, various financial institutions, and organisations from diverse industries and cultural settings, thereby enhancing the external validity of the results.

Third, reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias, despite efforts to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. To bolster the reliability and robustness of findings in subsequent studies, it would be advantageous to incorporate objective measures or multi-source data collection methods. This could include supervisor ratings, organisational records, or behavioural observations,

providing a more comprehensive view of the variables in question.

Fourth, although EL did not demonstrate a significant direct impact on EMH, this outcome calls for qualitative research to explore potential mediating or contextual factors. Variables such as job design, perceived organisational support, and cultural norms may significantly influence employees' psychological responses to leadership behaviours and warrant further investigation.

Lastly, this study underscores an important practical implication for the Iraqi banking sector, which plays a vital role in promoting SD aligned with global banking standards. It is recommended that organisations within this sector initiate targeted initiatives to enhance EI and EL. Such initiatives could include leadership training programs, workshops focused on emotional awareness, and policies that prioritise employees' mental well-being, all aimed at fostering a sustainable, psychologically healthy workforce. By addressing these limitations, we can deepen the theoretical and practical understanding of the intricate interplay between leadership behaviour, employees' mental health, and sustainability outcomes.

9. Supplementary material

(None).

10. Author's Contributions

The author solely designed the research, collected and analyzed the data, interpreted the results, and prepared the manuscript.

11. Funding

(None).

12. Data availability statement

The data supporting the findings of this study were obtained from survey responses collected from employees working in Iraqi private banks. The dataset is available from the author upon reasonable request.

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14. Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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كيف يسهم الذكاء العاطفي والقيادة الأخلاقية في تعزيز الصحة النفسية للموظفين لدعم التنمية المستدامة في المنظمات: الدور الوسيط للثقافة التنظيمية

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المستخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في كيفية تأثير الذكاء العاطفي (EI) والقيادة الأخلاقية (EL) على الصحة النفسية للموظفين (EMH)، وكيف تسهم الصحة النفسية بدورها في تحقيق التنمية المستدامة (SD) في البيئات التنظيمية. كما تتناول الدراسة الدور الوسيط للثقافة التنظيمية (OC) في تعزيز العلاقة بين الصحة النفسية والتنمية المستدامة. وقد تم اعتماد تصميم بحث كمي باستخدام المسح المقطعي، مستهدفاً الموظفين على مستوى الفروع (موظفو خدمة العملاء، الصرافون، موظفو القروض، موظفو الائتمان، وموظفو العلاقات) في المصارف الأهلية العراقية. بلغ عدد الاستجابات الكلية 298 استبانة، جُمعت باستخدام مقاييس مُعتمدة. وتم تحليل البيانات باستخدام برنامج SPSS (الإصدار 28) عبر تقنيات الانحدار المتعدد والانحدار الهرمي لاختبار العلاقات المفترضة. أظهرت النتائج أن الذكاء العاطفي يعزز بشكل ملحوظ الصحة النفسية للموظفين، مما يؤكد دور الوعي الذاتي، والتنظيم الذاتي، والوعي الاجتماعي في تعزيز الرفاهية النفسية والعاطفية وإدارة الضغوط بفعالية. في المقابل، لم تُظهر القيادة الأخلاقية تأثيراً مباشراً ذا دلالة إحصائية على الصحة النفسية، مما يشير إلى أن العدالة والنزاهة والتوجيه الأخلاقي وحدها قد لا تؤثر بشكل مباشر على رفاهية الموظفين في بيئات العمل عالية الضغط. كما تبين أن الصحة النفسية تسهم بشكل كبير في التنمية المستدامة، وأن الثقافة التنظيمية تتوسط إيجابياً هذه العلاقة، حيث أبرزت أهمية التفاعل، والاتساق، والقدرة على التكيف، والرسالة المؤسسية في تعزيز مخرجات الاستدامة. تسهم هذه الدراسة في أدبيات السلوك التنظيمي والاستدامة من خلال التحقق من العلاقة بين الصحة النفسية والتنمية المستدامة في قطاع مالي ضمن دولة نامية. وتشير النتائج إلى أن الافتراض الشائع بأن القيادة الأخلاقية تعزز الصحة النفسية بشكل دائم قد لا يكون صحيحاً في جميع السياقات، كما توسع الأطر النظرية القائمة عبر تسليط الضوء على دور الوسيط للثقافة التنظيمية.

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