

## An analysis of the mediating role of emotional intelligence and motivation on the impact of responsible leadership on employee performance in the insurance sector<sup>1</sup>

### Sigorta sektöründe sorumlu liderliğin çalışan performansına etkisi: Duygusal zekâ ve motivasyonun aracılık rolünün karma yöntemle incelenmesi

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#### Abstract

This study investigates the relationships between employees' perceptions of responsible leadership, emotional intelligence, motivation, job stress and job performance within the Turkish insurance sector. A "sequential explanatory mixed-methods design" was employed, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. In the quantitative phase, data were collected via surveys from 299 participants, exceeding the minimum sample size required by G\*Power. The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with 10 participants to deepen understanding of the quantitative findings. Quantitative results revealed that responsible leadership has significant positive effects on employee performance and emotional intelligence, with emotional intelligence partially mediating these effects. Conversely, the mediating role of motivation was not statistically significant. Qualitative findings supported these results, emphasising that fair and transparent leadership enhances organisational commitment and trust. The study underscores the vital importance of ethical and emotionally aware leadership for fostering sustainable performance in organisational settings.

**Keywords:** Responsible Leadership, Employee Performance, Emotional Intelligence, Motivation, Job Stress, Mixed-Methods, Quantitative Analysis, Qualitative Analysis

**Jel Codes:** M12, M54, J24

#### Öz

Bu araştırma, Türkiye sigorta sektöründe çalışanların sorumlu liderlik algıları ile duygusal zekâ, motivasyon, iş stresi ve performans arasındaki ilişkileri incelemektedir. Çalışmada nicel ve nitel veri toplama tekniklerinin birlikte kullanıldığı "sıralı açıklayıcı karma desen" tercih edilmiştir. Araştırmanın nicel aşamasında, G\*Power analizi ile belirlenen minimum sayının üzerine çıkılarak 299 katılımcıdan anket yoluyla veri toplanmıştır. Nitel aşamada ise nicel bulguları derinlemesine açıklamak amacıyla 10 katılımcı ile yarı yapılandırılmış mülakatlar gerçekleştirilmiştir. Nicel bulgular, sorumlu liderliğin çalışan performansını ve duygusal zekâyı anlamlı ölçüde artırdığını; duygusal zekânın ise bu ilişkide kısmi aracı rol oynadığını ortaya koymuştur. Buna karşılık motivasyonun aracılık etkisi istatistiksel olarak doğrulanmamıştır. Nitel bulgular, çalışanların adil ve şeffaf liderleri daha güvenilir bulduğunu vurgulayarak nicel sonuçları desteklemiştir. Bulgular, sigorta sektöründe etik değerlere dayalı liderlik yaklaşımlarının sürdürülebilir performans ve bağlılık için kritik öneme sahip olduğunu göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sorumlu Liderlik, Çalışan Performansı, Duygusal Zekâ, Motivasyon, İş Stresi, Karma Yöntem, Nicel Analiz, Nitel Analiz

**JEL Kodları:** M12, M54, J24

## **Introduction**

In the contemporary business landscape, organisations operate in a context shaped by globalisation, rapid technological advancements and increasing stakeholder expectations. In this environment, their legitimacy and survival depend not only on economic performance but also on their ability to fulfil ethical, social and environmental responsibilities. In this volatile environment, traditional leadership theories often fall short of addressing complex stakeholder demands (Beckmann et al., 2020). Consequently, Responsible Leadership (RL) has emerged as a normative and stakeholder-focused approach, defined as the art of building trust-based relationships and coordinating responsible actions to achieve a shared business vision (Poetrie et al., 2023).

Unlike conventional leadership models, responsible leadership integrates corporate social responsibility with leadership ethics. It positions the leader as a moral role model who balances the diverse interests of employees, society and the environment to ensure sustainable organisational success (Beckmann et al., 2020; Turker, 2024). It refers to leaders acting in accordance with ethical standards and remaining sensitive to employees' and broader stakeholder groups' needs (Liao et al., 2022). One of the most critical organisational outcomes of this leadership style is employee performance, which underpins organisational success (Beckmann et al., 2020). This performance is a multidimensional construct encompassing both technical proficiency (Task Performance) and voluntary contributions to the organisation's benefit (Contextual Performance) (Constantinescu & Kaptein, 2020). While current literature suggests that responsible leadership behaviours—such as fairness, support, and ethics—empower employee outcomes, the mechanisms that transform these behaviours into actual performance remain an area requiring deeper empirical investigation. Among these mechanisms, Emotional Intelligence—the ability to recognise, understand and manage emotions—is highlighted as a crucial factor enabling employees to execute tasks effectively and build high-performance relationships (Miao et al., 2020; Sanchez-Gomez & Bresó, 2020). Furthermore, although the role of motivation is emphasised, job stress is identified as a critical factor that negatively impacts performance levels in demanding environments (Nguyen et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022; Poetrie et al., 2023; Turker, 2024). The extant literature offers limited integrative evidence on the mechanisms by which responsible leadership translates into improved employee performance, particularly in high-pressure, trust-intensive sectors. Although prior studies have examined direct associations, insufficient attention has been paid to the specific psychological pathways that may mediate or condition this relationship. This conceptual fragmentation restricts a comprehensive understanding of how leadership behaviours influence performance outcomes in complex organisational environments. To address this gap, the present study adopts a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design to examine the interrelationships among responsible leadership, emotional intelligence, motivation, job stress and employee performance in the Turkish insurance sector. By combining quantitative findings with qualitative insights, the study seeks to provide a more nuanced, context-sensitive explanation of the underlying mechanisms. In doing so, it aims to clarify how responsible leadership can be strategically utilised to strengthen human capital effectiveness and support long-term organisational sustainability.

## **Conceptual framework**

Responsible leadership focuses not only on achieving organisational goals but also on adding value to society and the environment (Waldman & Balven, 2021). According to Voegtlin et al. (2012), this form of leadership is grounded in multidisciplinary foundations—such as ethical theories, stakeholder theory and the systems approach—to support stakeholder engagement and fair decision-making processes. Furthermore, from a stakeholder theory perspective, responsible leadership presents a normative approach that integrates corporate social responsibility with leadership ethics. Within this framework, leaders act as moral role models for stakeholders and guide employees toward sustainable, environmentally friendly and socially beneficial practices (Maak et al., 2021).

Employee performance is a multidimensional concept that reflects the extent to which individuals fulfil their assigned duties to achieve organisational goals. In general, performance refers to the degree to which individuals translate their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and motivation into their work (Armstrong, 2014). Moreover, recent studies emphasise that performance is closely intertwined with psychosocial dimensions, highlighting the pivotal role of the ethical quality of leadership in shaping these outcomes (Koopmans et al., 2020; Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2020). Employees who demonstrate high levels of performance not only enhance individual productivity but also contribute significantly to an organisation's competitive advantage and long-term sustainable success (Afsar et al., 2021). The determinants of employee performance can be broadly categorised into individual factors, such as competencies and self-efficacy; organisational factors, including leadership approach and reward systems; and psychosocial factors, such as job stress and motivation (Montani et al., 2020). Consequently,

empirical evidence indicates that leadership grounded in ethical principles strengthens employees' trust and organisational commitment, thereby supporting sustained improvements in overall performance (Bedi et al., 2021; Maak et al., 2016; Waldman & Balven, 2021).

## **Method**

### **Research design**

This study employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, one of the core mixed-method approaches, to investigate the research problem in depth and to enrich quantitative findings with qualitative insights (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This design consists of two distinct phases: In the first phase, quantitative data were collected and analysed to test the hypotheses and examine the relationships between variables. In the subsequent phase, qualitative data were gathered to elaborate on the significant (or unexpected) findings from the quantitative analysis and to interpret participants' experiences (Ivankova et al., 2006). This holistic approach allows for an understanding not only of "what" the results are (quantitative) but also of "why and how" these results emerged (qualitative).

### **Sample and data collection**

The sample size for the research was determined using G\*Power (v3.1.9.7) to ensure adequate statistical power. Based on the power analysis (effect size  $f^2=0.15$ ,  $\alpha=0.05$ , and 95% power), the minimum required sample size was determined to ensure the validity of the results. Accordingly, data were collected from employees in the Turkish insurance sector via convenience sampling, yielding 299 valid surveys for the quantitative analysis. This sample size exceeds the threshold determined by the G\*Power analysis, thereby enhancing the representativeness of the study.

In the qualitative phase, 10 industry professionals—who also participated in the quantitative phase—were selected through purposive sampling for semi-structured interviews. This phase explored workplace reflections on the relationship between responsible leadership and emotional intelligence.

### **Hypotheses**

*H<sub>1</sub>: Responsible leadership has a positive effect on employee performance.*

Responsible leadership refers to a normative approach in which leaders act with sensitivity not only to organisational outcomes and efficiency goals but also to ethical principles, stakeholder expectations and social responsibility. This leadership style fosters a sense of justice, trust and meaningfulness among employees. Consequently, it strengthens psychological attachment, a key antecedent of performance. Employees managed by ethical and responsible leaders tend to internalise organisational goals more effectively and perform their tasks with greater accountability and commitment.

Furthermore, recent empirical studies provide strong evidence that responsible leadership has a direct and positive impact on employee performance. For instance, Maak, Pless and Voegtlin (2021) demonstrate that responsible leadership significantly enhances both task performance and contextual performance. Similarly, Waldman and Balven (2021) emphasise that this leadership style shapes sustainability-oriented performance outcomes through employees' work-related behaviours. Based on these findings, it is hypothesised that responsible leadership positively influences employee performance.

*H<sub>2</sub>: Responsible leadership has a positive effect on emotional intelligence.*

Emotional intelligence is a core psychosocial competency that enables individuals to recognise, regulate, and manage their own emotions while understanding others' emotions. Since responsible leadership emphasises empathy, ethical awareness and social responsibility, it creates a work environment conducive to the development of employees' emotional awareness and regulation skills. In this context, leaders who demonstrate ethical and emotionally sensitive behaviours serve as moral role models, thereby fostering employees' interpersonal sensitivity and emotional competence.

Furthermore, contemporary literature highlights the influential role of leadership behaviours in shaping employees' emotional intelligence. For instance, Miao, Humphrey and Qian (2020) argue that specific leadership behaviours significantly enhance employees' emotional capabilities. Similarly, Bedi, Alpaslan and Green (2021) demonstrate that ethical and responsible leadership strengthens key components of emotional intelligence, such as empathy and emotional awareness. Consequently, based on these theoretical and empirical foundations, responsible leadership is expected to positively affect emotional intelligence.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** *Emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between responsible leadership and employee performance.*

The effect of responsible leadership on employee performance often emerges indirectly through employees' psychological and emotional resources, rather than through direct mechanisms alone. In this context, emotional intelligence functions as a mediating mechanism in the transformation of leadership behaviours into performance outcomes. The empathetic, fair, and ethical behaviours exhibited by responsible leaders enhance employees' emotional intelligence; consequently, this improves their ability to cope with stress, collaborate effectively, and engage in task-focused behaviours.

Furthermore, recent studies provide empirical support for the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the leadership–performance relationship. For instance, Miao et al. (2020) demonstrates that the impact of leadership styles on performance is largely transmitted through employees' emotional intelligence. Similarly, Decuyper and Schaufeli (2020) emphasise that leadership effects on performance are strengthened through employees' emotional and psychological resources. Therefore, based on these integrated perspectives, it is hypothesised that emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between responsible leadership and employee performance.

### **Population and sample**

The sampling strategy for this study was informed by methodological literature and a priori power analysis utilising G\*Power 3.1. Before data collection, we calculated the minimum sample size necessary to identify medium-sized effects (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007). G\*Power analysis indicated a minimum sample of 85, but 299 responses were secured to ensure sufficient statistical power for regression-based mediation analyses. Care was taken to ensure that the participants were diverse in terms of department, job level, gender, age and duration of professional experience when creating the sample. Thus, the research achieved a balanced sample structure representing different perspectives across the institution.

The socio-demographic findings indicate that most participants are in the 25–44 age range. Specifically, 29.4% of respondents are between the ages of 25–34, while 31.4% are in the 35–44 age group, indicating that the sample largely consists of individuals in their active working years. Regarding gender distribution, 58.9% of participants are female, and 41.1% are male. Regarding educational attainment, a substantial proportion of the sample holds higher education degrees: 46.5% have a bachelor's degree, 8.7% have a master's degree, and 1% hold a doctoral degree. Regarding marital status, 53.8% of participants reported being married, 42.5% reported being single, and 3.7% preferred not to disclose their marital status.

An examination of organisational tenure reveals that 36.8% of respondents have been working in their current organisation for 2–5 years, while 24.7% have been there for 0–1 year, suggesting that a considerable portion of the sample has relatively short to moderate tenure. In terms of monthly income, more than half of the participants (53.2%) fall within the 20,001–50,000 TL bracket, followed by those earning 75,001 TL or more (22.1%). Overall, the sample's demographic structure reflects a relatively balanced distribution across age, education level, and organisational tenure.

### **Data collection tool**

The survey method and interview form were used in the data collection process. The survey form is composed of scales that measure the independent and dependent variables of the study:

Responsible Leadership Scale (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Turkish adaptation: Palalar Alkan, 2015): 17 items, three sub-dimensions – Ethics and Justice, Task/Role Clarity, Power Sharing.

Emotional Intelligence Scale (Lee & Kwak, 2011; Turkish adaptation: Kayıhan & Arslan, 2016): 20 items, three subscales – Emotional Recognition, Emotional Facilitation, Emotional Regulation.

Job Stress Scale (Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Turkish adaptation: Demiral et al., 2007): 17 items, three subscales – Job Demands, Job Control, Social Support.

Individual Work Performance Scale (Koopmans et al., 2013; Turkish adaptation: Köroğlu Kaba & Öztürk, 2021): 14 items, three sub-dimensions – Task Performance, Contextual Performance, Counterproductive Work Behaviour.

All scales were administered using a 5-point Likert-type rating system (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree). Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the principles of confidentiality and voluntariness, as outlined in the informed consent form; data were collected via online and paper forms.

## **Data analysis**

### **Quantitative data analysis**

The data were analysed using one of the widely used statistical programs in the social sciences. The analysis process was carried out in three stages:

**Data Preprocessing:** Missing data were checked, outliers were examined, and the assumption of normality was evaluated using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and skewness and kurtosis values. According to George and Mallery (2010) and Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), values within  $\pm 2$  of the mean satisfy the normality assumption.

**Reliability and Validity:** Internal consistency of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. All alpha values exceeded 0.80, indicating high reliability according to the criteria proposed by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). Construct consistency was examined through **exploratory factor analysis (EFA)**. The measurement instruments used in this study were adapted from scales that have been widely employed and previously validated in the literature, including Turkish samples. Since the present research does not aim at scale development or revalidation but rather examines relationships among established constructs, EFA was considered sufficient to evaluate the factor structure's consistency in the current dataset.

**Relationship and Impact Analyses:** Correlation analyses were conducted to examine relationships among variables, and simple and multiple regression analyses were performed to examine causal relationships. Additionally, independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were applied to examine the effects of socio-demographic variables, and post hoc tests were conducted to determine the source of significant differences.

**Hypothesis Tests:** The study's hypotheses were evaluated using statistical findings obtained from regression analyses. Additionally, the mediating effects of emotional intelligence and motivation were tested using regression-based mediation procedures. To further ensure the robustness of the findings, potential common method bias was assessed using Harman's single-factor test. All measurement items were entered into an unrotated EFA to determine whether a single factor would account for the majority of the covariance among the variables. The results indicated that no single factor accounted for most of the total variance, suggesting that common method bias does not pose a serious threat to the validity of the results.

### **Qualitative data analysis**

This study employs a qualitative research approach to gain a deeper understanding of employees' perceptions and experiences regarding leadership behaviours, emotional processes, and work outcomes. Qualitative research focuses on exploring meanings, interpretations and contextual factors rather than quantifying relationships; thus, it is particularly suitable for examining complex organisational phenomena that cannot be fully captured through numerical data alone. Philosophically, the qualitative approach is grounded in interpretivist and constructivist perspectives, which assume that reality is socially constructed through individuals' experiences and interactions. Accordingly, concepts such as responsible leadership, emotional intelligence, job stress and individual performance are viewed not only as measurable variables but also as lived experiences shaped by organisational and interpersonal contexts.

The inclusion of qualitative analysis aims to complement and enrich the quantitative findings by explaining how and why the observed relationships occur. In this regard, interview data collected from 10 participants were analysed using content analysis. A deductive coding framework was developed in alignment with the quantitative scales—specifically covering emotional intelligence, responsible leadership, job stress and individual job performance. Subsequently, the analysis was conducted using MAXQDA. This process revealed key themes such as responsible leadership, employee expectations, communication and workload management, offering deeper insight into the mechanisms underlying the quantitative results.

### **Findings**

The data analysis in this study was conducted systematically in accordance with the research objectives and hypotheses. Initially, data cleaning procedures and preliminary analyses were performed to ensure data integrity and suitability for statistical testing. Subsequently, the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments were rigorously examined.

Following these preliminary steps, descriptive statistical analyses were conducted to present the distributions of the main variables. Moreover, correlation analyses were employed to determine the

direction and strength of the relationships among the variables. To test the research hypotheses, regression and mediation analyses were performed using SPSS. In this manner, the study's findings are presented to allow for evaluation at both a descriptive level and in terms of the underlying relational and explanatory mechanisms.

To evaluate the distribution characteristics of the scales used in the study, skewness and kurtosis values were examined alongside the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (Table 1). According to George and Mallery (2010) and Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), skewness and kurtosis values between -2 and +2 indicate that the data meet the assumption of normality. Upon examining the results, it is observed that the skewness and kurtosis values for all variables fall within this acceptable range. Accordingly, the sub-dimensions of the task performance, contextual performance, counterproductive work behaviour, emotional intelligence, job stress and responsible leadership scales meet the assumption of normality. Therefore, it was determined that parametric tests would be appropriate for the subsequent analyses. Furthermore, the significance level ( $p$ ) was set at 0.05 or lower. Cronbach's alpha coefficients, used to determine the scales' reliability, are presented in Table 1. All values exceed 0.80; thus, according to the criteria established by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), the scales demonstrate high internal consistency. In conclusion, the study confirms that all measurement instruments provided statistically reliable data that meet the assumption of normality.

**Table 1:** Normality and Reliability Test Data for the Scales Used in the Study

| Variables                       |          | Kolmogorov-Smirnov |         |      | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---------------------------------|----------|--------------------|---------|------|------------------|
|                                 |          | Statistics         | Se.     | p    |                  |
| Task Performance                | Average  | 20,2308            | 0,25805 |      |                  |
|                                 | Skewness | -0,803             | 0,141   |      |                  |
|                                 | Kurtosis | -0,013             | 0,281   |      |                  |
| Contextual Performance          | Average  | 23,1505            | 0,31527 |      |                  |
|                                 | Skewness | -0,628             | 0,141   |      |                  |
|                                 | Kurtosis | -0,319             | 0,281   | <.01 | 0,863            |
| Counterproductive Work Behavior | Average  | 12,4415            | 0,19086 |      |                  |
|                                 | Skewness | -1,552             | 0,141   |      |                  |
|                                 | Kurtosis | 1,657              | 0,281   |      |                  |
| Individual Job Performance      | Average  | 55,8227            | 0,53437 |      |                  |
|                                 | Skewness | -0,54              | 0,141   |      |                  |
|                                 | Kurtosis | -0,203             | 0,281   |      |                  |
| Emotional Recognition           | Average  | 24,1706            | 0,25981 |      |                  |
|                                 | Skewness | -1,509             | 0,141   |      |                  |
|                                 | Kurtosis | 3,536              | 0,281   |      |                  |
| Emotional Facilitation          | Average  | 23,3779            | 0,27977 |      |                  |
|                                 | Skewness | -1,206             | 0,141   |      |                  |
|                                 | Kurtosis | 2,02               | 0,281   | <.01 | 0,96             |
| Emotional Regulation            | Average  | 30,9866            | 0,38942 |      |                  |
|                                 | Skewness | -1,004             | 0,141   |      |                  |
|                                 | Kurtosis | 1,372              | 0,281   |      |                  |
| Emotional Intelligence          | Average  | 78,5351            | 0,85861 |      |                  |
|                                 | Skewness | -1,379             | 0,141   |      |                  |
|                                 | Kurtosis | 3,205              | 0,281   |      |                  |
| Workload                        | Average  | 11,9833            | 0,15194 |      |                  |
|                                 | Skewness | 0,355              | 0,141   |      |                  |
|                                 | Kurtosis | -0,531             | 0,281   |      |                  |
| Job Control                     | Average  | 12,8763            | 0,18964 |      |                  |
|                                 | Skewness | 0,725              | 0,141   |      |                  |
|                                 | Kurtosis | 0,094              | 0,281   | <.01 | 0,81             |
| Social Support                  | Average  | 9,8261             | 0,23974 |      |                  |
|                                 | Skewness | 1,323              | 0,141   |      |                  |
|                                 | Kurtosis | 1,346              | 0,281   |      |                  |
| Job Stress                      | Average  | 34,6856            | 0,42174 |      |                  |
|                                 | Skewness | 1,079              | 0,141   |      |                  |
|                                 | Kurtosis | 1,51               | 0,281   |      |                  |
| Ethics and Justice              | Average  | 21,204             | 0,32204 |      |                  |
|                                 | Skewness | -0,646             | 0,141   |      |                  |
|                                 | Kurtosis | -0,193             | 0,281   |      |                  |
| Task/Role Clarity               | Average  | 18,3512            | 0,34142 |      |                  |
|                                 | Skewness | -0,973             | 0,141   |      |                  |
|                                 | Kurtosis | 0,138              | 0,281   | <.01 | 0,96             |
| Power Sharing                   | Average  | 21,0435            | 0,33582 |      |                  |
|                                 | Skewness | -0,615             | 0,141   |      |                  |
|                                 | Kurtosis | -0,267             | 0,281   |      |                  |
| Responsible Leadership          | Average  | 60,5987            | 0,94855 |      |                  |
|                                 | Skewness | -0,795             | 0,141   |      |                  |
|                                 | Kurtosis | -0,024             | 0,281   |      |                  |

**Table 2:** Correlation Relationships Among the Scales Used and Their Sub-Dimensions

| z                               | Task Performance | Contextual Performance | Counterproductive Work Behavior | Individual Job Performance | Emotional Recognition | Emotional Facilitation | Emotional Regulation | Emotional Intelligence | Workload | Job Control | Social Support | Job Stress | Ethics and Justice | Task/Role Clarity | Power Sharing | Responsible Leadership |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------|-------------|----------------|------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------|------------------------|
| Task Performance                | r 1              | ,750**                 | -,119*                          | ,883**                     | ,433**                | ,426**                 | ,431**               | ,465**                 | -0,063   | -0,02       | 0,028          | -0,016     | ,248**             | ,263**            | ,227**        | ,259**                 |
| Contextual Performance          | p 0              | 0,04                   | 0                               | 0                          | 0                     | 0                      | 0                    | 0                      | 0,28     | 0,736       | 0,635          | 0,787      | 0                  | 0                 | 0             | 0                      |
| Counterproductive Work Behavior | r 1              | -,226**                | ,871**                          | ,472**                     | ,484**                | ,420**                 | ,491**               | -,153**                | -,124*   | 0,045       | -0,085         | ,217**     | ,254**             | ,233**            | ,247**        |                        |
| Individual Job Performance      | p 0              | 0                      | 0                               | 0                          | 0                     | 0                      | 0                    | 0,008                  | 0,032    | 0,44        | 0,14           | 0          | 0                  | 0                 | 0             |                        |
| Emotional Recognition           | r 1              | ,166**                 | -0,088                          | -0,112                     | -0,088                | -0,103                 | -0,103               | -0,008                 | -,134*   | -,184**     | -,168**        | 0,109      | 0,035              | 0,064             | 0,072         |                        |
| Emotional Facilitation          | p 0,004          | 0,127                  | 0,054                           | 0,129                      | 0,075                 | 0,89                   | 0,021                | 0,001                  | 0,004    | 0,06        | 0,546          | 0,273      | 0,214              |                   |               |                        |
| Emotional Regulation            | r 1              | ,456**                 | ,452**                          | ,425**                     | ,478**                | -,123*                 | -,131*               | -0,026                 | -,118*   | ,287**      | ,289**         | ,270**     | ,297**             |                   |               |                        |
| Emotional Intelligence          | p 0              | 0                      | 0                               | 0                          | 0                     | 0,033                  | 0,024                | 0,654                  | 0,042    | 0           | 0              | 0          | 0                  |                   |               |                        |
| Workload                        | r 1              | ,785**                 | ,700**                          | ,876**                     | -0,089                | -0,026                 | -0,027               | -0,059                 | ,267**   | ,316**      | ,280**         | ,303**     |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Job Control                     | p 0              | 0                      | 0                               | 0,123                      | 0,656                 | 0,641                  | 0,308                | 0                      | 0        | 0           | 0              | 0          |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Social Support                  | r 1              | ,845**                 | ,947**                          | -,127*                     | -0,067                | -0,093                 | -,129*               | ,263**                 | ,323**   | ,311**      | ,316**         |            |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Job Stress                      | p 0              | 0                      | 0,028                           | 0,248                      | 0,11                  | 0,026                  | 0                    | 0                      | 0        | 0           | 0              |            |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Ethics and Justice              | r 1              | ,941**                 | -0,081                          | -0,01                      | -0,056                | -0,065                 | ,245**               | ,273**                 | ,277**   | ,279**      |                |            |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Task/Role Clarity               | p 0              | 0                      | 0,162                           | 0,858                      | 0,338                 | 0,259                  | 0                    | 0                      | 0        | 0           |                |            |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Power Sharing                   | r 1              | -0,105                 | -0,034                          | -0,064                     | -0,089                | ,277**                 | ,325**               | ,311**                 | ,321**   |             |                |            |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Responsible Leadership          | p 0,069          | 0,553                  | 0,273                           | 0,123                      | 0                     | 0                      | 0                    |                        |          |             |                |            |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Task Performance                | r 1              | ,238**                 | 0,061                           | ,502**                     | ,180**                | ,138*                  | ,169**               | ,171**                 |          |             |                |            |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Contextual Performance          | p 0              | 0,295                  | 0                               | 0,002                      | 0,017                 | 0,003                  | 0,003                |                        |          |             |                |            |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Counterproductive Work Behavior | r 1              | ,475**                 | ,806**                          | -,189**                    | -0,093                | -0,113                 | -,137*               |                        |          |             |                |            |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Individual Job Performance      | p 0              | 0                      | 0,001                           | 0,11                       | 0,052                 | 0,017                  |                      |                        |          |             |                |            |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Emotional Recognition           | r 1              | ,804**                 | -,222**                         | -,150**                    | -,208**               | *                      |                      |                        |          |             |                |            |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Emotional Facilitation          | p 0              | 0                      | 0,009                           | 0                          | 0                     |                        |                      |                        |          |             |                |            |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Emotional Regulation            | r 1              | -,147*                 | -0,077                          | -0,108                     | -,116*                |                        |                      |                        |          |             |                |            |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Emotional Intelligence          | p 0,011          | 0,184                  | 0,062                           | 0,045                      |                       |                        |                      |                        |          |             |                |            |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Workload                        | r 1              | ,837**                 | ,833**                          | ,936**                     |                       |                        |                      |                        |          |             |                |            |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Job Control                     | p 0              | 0                      | 0                               |                            |                       |                        |                      |                        |          |             |                |            |                    |                   |               |                        |
| Social Support                  | r 1              | ,883**                 | ,957**                          |                            |                       |                        |                      |                        |          |             |                |            |                    |                   |               |                        |

|             |   |  |   |        |
|-------------|---|--|---|--------|
| Task/Role   |   |  |   |        |
| Clarity     | p |  | 0 | 0      |
| Power       | r |  | 1 | ,955** |
| Sharing     | p |  |   | 0      |
| Responsible | r |  |   | 1      |
| Leadership  | p |  |   |        |

\*\* = p<.01, \*p<.05

The Pearson correlation analyses presented in Table 2 indicate statistically significant relationships among the main variables and their sub-dimensions, consistent with the theoretical framework. The dimensions of employee performance are strong and positively interrelated. Specifically, high correlations between task performance and contextual performance ( $r = .750, p < .01$ ) and between these sub-dimensions and individual job performance ( $r = .871-.883, p < .01$ ) suggest that employee performance is a multidimensional yet holistic construct. These findings indicate that the sub-dimensions function as complementary components of an integrated structure.

An examination of the relationships between emotional intelligence and performance variables reveals that emotional intelligence is moderate, positive and significantly related to task performance ( $r = .465, p < .01$ ), contextual performance ( $r = .491, p < .01$ ) and individual job performance ( $r = .478, p < .01$ ). Similarly, the sub-dimensions of emotional intelligence, emotional recognition, emotional facilitation and emotional regulation show positive relationships with performance indicators. These results suggest that employees' ability to manage their emotions effectively supports higher performance. In contrast, counterproductive work behaviour is negatively and significantly related to performance dimensions (e.g., contextual performance:  $r = -.226, p < .01$ ), indicating that negative behaviours weaken performance outcomes. Regarding responsible leadership, it is positively and significantly associated with task performance ( $r = .259, p < .01$ ) and individual job performance ( $r = .297, p < .01$ ). Furthermore, the strong positive relationships between responsible leadership and emotional intelligence ( $r = .321, p < .01$ ), as well as ethics and justice, suggest that leadership perceptions are shaped through ethical and supportive dimensions. Conversely, the negative relationship between responsible leadership and job stress ( $r = -.116, p < .05$ ) indicates that responsible leadership practices reduce job stress. The relationships between job stress and performance dimensions are generally weak but negative. Specifically, the negative correlations between job stress and individual performance suggest that increasing stress levels may adversely affect work outcomes. Moreover, the negative relationships between job stress and variables such as social support and job control highlight the stress-buffering role of organisational resources. When evaluating the correlation matrix for multicollinearity, high correlation coefficients are observed among the sub-dimensions of the same conceptual constructs. Therefore, in regression analyses, total scale scores and their respective sub-dimensions should not be included simultaneously in the same model. Nevertheless, since correlations among variables belonging to different constructs are generally within acceptable limits ( $r < .80$ ), there is no fundamental obstacle to conducting regression analyses. The final assessment of multicollinearity will be based on the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values calculated during the regression analyses.

**Table 3:** Data on the Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence in the Relationship between Responsible Leadership and Employee Performance

| Model |                        | Unstandardised Coefficients |            | Standardised Coefficients |        |      |
|-------|------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
|       |                        | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      | t      | p    |
| 1     | (Constant)             | 29,518                      | 2,686      |                           | 10,988 | ,000 |
|       | Responsible Leadership | ,090                        | ,030       | ,160                      | 3,011  | ,003 |
|       | Emotional Intelligence | ,265                        | ,033       | ,426                      | 8,030  | ,000 |

$r^2 = 0.660$ ;  $F(2, 296) = 49.669$ ;  $p < .05$ ; Employee Performance =  $29.518 + (0.090 \times \text{Responsible Leadership}) + (0.265 \times \text{Emotional Intelligence})$

According to Table 3, the multiple regression model explaining the effect of emotional intelligence and responsible leadership on employee performance was found to be statistically significant ( $r^2 = 0.660$ ;  $F(2,296) = 49.669$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Specifically, the model explains 66% of the variance in employee performance, indicating a relatively strong explanatory capacity within the scope of the variables included in the model. Based on the findings, responsible leadership positively affects employee performance ( $\beta = 0.160$ ,  $t = 3.011$ ,  $p = .003$ ). In contrast, emotional intelligence is a stronger predictor and demonstrates a more pronounced significant effect ( $\beta = 0.426$ ,  $t = 8.030$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Furthermore, although the responsible leadership variable remained significant when emotional intelligence was added to the model, the decrease in the  $\beta$  coefficient suggests a partial mediating role for emotional intelligence. In other words, while responsible leadership directly increases employee performance, a portion of this effect occurs indirectly through employees' levels of emotional intelligence. Consequently, these results reveal that emotional intelligence partially mediates the relationship between responsible leadership and performance.

**Table 4:** Data on the Relationship between Responsible Leadership and Job Stress and its Sub-dimensions

| Correlation            | Responsible Leadership | Workload | Job Control | Social Support | Job Stress |
|------------------------|------------------------|----------|-------------|----------------|------------|
| r                      | 1                      | ,171**   | -,137*      | -,203**        | -,116*     |
| Responsible Leadership | P                      | 0,003    | 0,017       | 0              | 0,045      |
|                        | n                      | 299      | 299         | 299            | 299        |

According to Table 4, there is a negative, significant relationship between responsible leadership and job stress ( $r = -0.116$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This indicates that employees' stress levels decrease as their perception of leadership responsibility increases. Additionally, it was determined that responsible leadership established significant positive relationships with workload ( $r = 0.171$ ,  $p < .01$ ), while maintaining negative relationships with job control ( $r = -0.137$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and social support ( $r = -0.203$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

These findings suggest that responsible leaders contribute to reducing job stress by ensuring a more equitable distribution of tasks, fostering open communication, and cultivating a supportive organisational climate. Through these practices, responsible leadership indirectly enhances employee motivation and performance while reinforcing psychological well-being. Furthermore, the results are consistent with prior empirical evidence indicating that lower stress levels are associated with stronger employee engagement and higher motivational resources.

**Table 5:** Data on the Relationship Between Job Stress and Individual Job Performance and Its Sub-dimensions

| Correlation | Job Stress | Task Performance | Contextual Performance | Counterproductive Work Behavior | Individual Job Performance |
|-------------|------------|------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| r           | 1          | -0,016           | -0,085                 | -0,168**                        | -0,118*                    |
| Job Stress  | p          | 0,787            | 0,14                   | 0,004                           | 0,042                      |
|             | n          | 299              | 299                    | 299                             | 299                        |

Upon examining Table 5, it is evident that there are significant and negative relationships between job stress and certain sub-dimensions of employee performance. Specifically, a statistically significant negative relationship was found between job stress and counterproductive work behaviour ( $r = -0.168$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Similarly, a significant negative relationship was observed between job stress and individual job performance ( $r = -0.118$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

In contrast, no significant relationship was found between job stress and task performance ( $r = -0.016$ ,  $p > .05$ ) or contextual performance ( $r = -0.085$ ,  $p > .05$ ). These findings indicate that as employees' stress levels increase, their performance is negatively affected, particularly in terms of individual efficiency and productivity. Therefore, reducing or effectively managing stress is essential to boosting employees' motivation and performance. Consequently, this result indirectly supports the premise that motivation and psychological well-being positively affect employee performance.



**Table 7:** Code Frequency Analysis

| Codes                              | n  | %     |
|------------------------------------|----|-------|
| Social Support and Solidarity      | 48 | 14,41 |
| Contextual Performance             | 48 | 14,41 |
| Task Performance                   | 45 | 13,51 |
| Moral Human                        | 45 | 13,51 |
| Emotional Awareness                | 40 | 12,01 |
| Workload and Time Pressure         | 35 | 10,51 |
| Moral Manager                      | 33 | 9,91  |
| Emotional Harmony in Relationships | 15 | 4,5   |
| Emotional Management               | 13 | 3,9   |
| Control and Autonomy               | 11 | 3,3   |

The code frequency analysis conducted in MAXQDA revealed that the themes identified within the scope of the study were present in the interview transcripts, with varying intensities (See Figure 7). According to the analysis findings, the themes with the highest frequency were social support and solidarity (n=48, 14.41%) and contextual performance (n=48, 14.41%). This situation indicates that participants strongly emphasise social elements such as mutual assistance, team spirit, supportive relationships and volunteerism within their work environment. These two dominant themes were followed by task performance (n=45, 13.51%) and the moral human theme (n=45, 13.51%), respectively. Furthermore, both themes reveal a shared sense of responsibility, ownership of their work, and adherence to ethical values among employees.

The theme of emotional awareness (n=40, 12.01%) indicates that the ability of individuals to recognise and manage their own emotions is a significant aspect of organisational behaviour. On the other hand, the themes of workload and time pressure (n=35, 10.51%) and ethical manager (n=33, 9.91%) suggest that employees are highly aware of both managerial attitudes and stressors stemming from work intensity. Notably, the sub-themes of emotional intelligence—specifically emotional adjustment in relationships (n=15, 4.5%), emotion management (n=13, 3.9%), and control and autonomy (n=11, 3.3%)—were represented at lower frequencies. Consequently, this finding suggests that participants focused more on social relationships, ethical values, and performance indicators than on individual emotional processes.

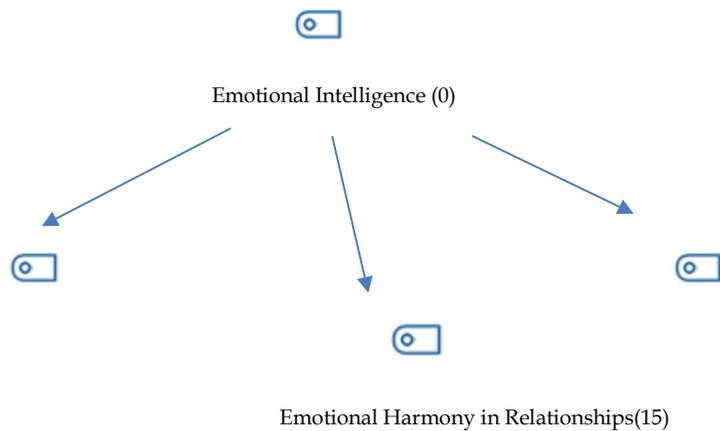
**Table 8:** Theme - Subtheme List

|                            |                                    |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
|                            | Emotional Awareness                |
| Emotional Intelligence     | Emotion Management                 |
|                            | Emotional Harmony in Relationships |
|                            | Moral Human                        |
| Responsible leader         | Moral Manager                      |
|                            | Workload and Time Pressure         |
| Job Stress                 | Control and Autonomy               |
|                            | Social Support and Solidarity      |
|                            | Task Performance                   |
| Individual Job Performance | Contextual Performance             |

According to Table 8, four main themes and 11 sub-themes were identified through the coding process. The theme of emotional intelligence comprises the sub-themes of emotional awareness, emotion management, and emotional alignment in relationships. These sub-themes represent individuals' abilities to recognise, regulate and effectively utilise their emotions in social interactions. Furthermore, the theme of responsible leadership is represented by the sub-themes of moral person and moral manager, which reflect ethical decision-making and ethical behaviour.

In addition, the theme of job stress includes the sub-themes of workload and time pressure, control and autonomy and social support and solidarity, which explain employees' experiences regarding workload, control levels and social support. Finally, the theme of individual job performance comprises the sub-themes of task performance and contextual performance, describing employees' behaviour both within

and outside their formal job descriptions. This structure is consistent with the research's theoretical model and provides a holistic thematic framework based on the codes derived from the MAXQDA analysis.



**Figure 2:** Hierarchical Distribution of the Emotional Intelligence Theme

Qualitative analysis findings indicate that participants have a significant awareness of how to recognise, manage, and maintain emotional balance in their relationships with others. As illustrated in Figure 2, the theme of emotional intelligence comprises the sub-themes of emotional awareness, emotion management, and emotional harmony in relationships. Specifically, the sub-theme of emotional awareness refers to individuals' ability to recognise their own emotions and control their emotional responses. Meanwhile, emotion management encompasses individuals' tendencies to cope with negative emotions and maintain emotional balance. Furthermore, emotional harmony in relationships focuses on the ability to understand others' feelings, empathise and maintain positive communication. These findings demonstrate that employees can utilise their emotional intelligence skills to establish balance at both individual and interpersonal levels, especially in stressful or uncertain situations encountered in their professional lives. In this respect, emotional intelligence can be considered a fundamental personal competency that enhances the quality of internal organisational relationships, reduces communication conflicts and ultimately supports overall performance.

### Emotional awareness

This sub-theme encompasses individuals' ability to control their emotions in stressful or conflictual situations, to prevent negative emotions from affecting their behaviour, and to maintain emotional balance. In the participants' statements, it is evident that emotions such as anger, stress and anxiety are recognised and consciously managed. Emotional management helps employees strengthen their communication and maintain their work performance. This skill serves as a constructive balancing factor, reducing the impact of negative emotions in intra-organisational relationships.

*"This is especially inherent in corporate business life, but of course, successes that reflect in business results make us happy, but beyond that, working with colleagues who can express and understand their concerns harmoniously with a compatible team." (P6),*

*"Smiling faces affect motivation in the workplace, and the most smiling faces are on my own team." (P2),*

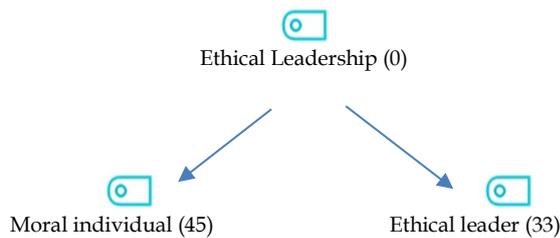
### Emotional harmony in relationships

This sub-theme encompasses employees' abilities to empathise in the workplace, understand others, develop open communication and maintain emotional balance within the team. Participant statements indicate that expressions of involvement enhance both individual motivation and team efficiency by fostering healthy communication, trust, and mutual understanding. Participants stated that cohesive teams experienced higher job satisfaction and less conflict. In relationships, emotional harmony is not merely an extension of individual awareness; it also stands out as a social equilibrium mechanism that ensures a positive organisational climate. In this context, participants emphasised that building understanding, supporting emotional sharing, and generating solutions together directly impact business success.

*"Healthy communication, communication skills and most importantly, here, regardless of the difference between subordinates and superiors, even, as I always say, we can't get atom-sized pieces."*

*"Our most important job is relationship and people management, so that's a very critical team management, of course..." (P7),*

"Leadership is also. It means not only being in the lead and showing the way but also being a good teammate. Instead of saying "Let's do this, guys, let's do it this way" while working on a project, I would engage the team by asking, "What are your ideas on this topic?" (P2),



**Figure 3:** Sub-Theme Scheme for the Responsible Leadership Theme

The theme of responsible leadership refers to the behaviour of managers guided by principles of justice, honesty, credibility, and responsibility. In the participants' statements, responsible leadership was defined not only as adhering to rules but also as demonstrating a fair, respectful and exemplary approach toward employees. During the discussions, it was frequently emphasised that managers should bear ethical responsibility in decision-making, protect employees' rights, and maintain open communication. As seen in Figure 3, the theme of Responsible leadership consists of two sub-themes: "moral individual" and "responsible leader". Participants stated that managers should possess not only professional knowledge but also ethical values. This theme has been considered particularly decisive, particularly in strengthening employees' trust and increasing their perception of organisational justice.

#### **Moral individual**

This sub-theme represents the leader's commitment to ethical values, primarily as a human being, and their conscientious and just behaviour. In the participants' statements, the concept of "moral individual" is associated with honesty, justice, respect, trustworthiness and a sense of responsibility. It has been emphasised that a responsible leader should exhibit a fair and exemplary attitude not only in managerial decisions but also in daily behaviour. Participants stated that "being human" and "acting conscientiously" are fundamental moral elements at the core of leadership.

*"This is very important, and secondly, what's important is the trust of the people on your own team. They should be able to come to their aid selflessly when they are in trouble, and they should inspire confidence in them. So, we need to create a team spirit." (P1),*

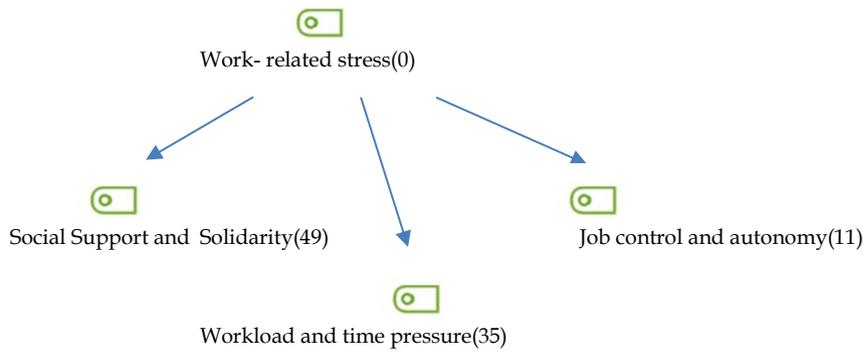
*"When I think of ideal leadership, the first thing that comes to mind is an environment where you are integrated with the team you are leading, and there is agreement on the goals to be achieved together. Trust is one of the most important issues that comes to mind, and that includes the team's trust in each other and, of course, in their leader." (P5),*

#### **Responsible leader**

This sub-theme represents the manager's responsibility to make decisions based on ethical values, to exhibit exemplary behaviour toward their employees, and to create an environment of justice, transparency, and trust within the organisation. "Responsible leader" is the practical dimension of responsible leadership; it refers to how the leader's personal virtues are reflected in their management philosophy and organisational decisions. In the participants' statements, it was emphasised that managers need to demonstrate consistency not only in discourse but also in actions.

*"Although the definition of responsible leadership might seem a bit inward-looking, as if it's done with internal stakeholders, I feel that if this is developed a bit further and extended to external stakeholders, still always focusing on ethics, it will reach a good place at the end. I can use this as a definition of responsible leadership." (P9),*

*"And most importantly, taking responsibility. They need to believe and feel that they will be appreciated when they fulfil this responsibility, or that their work will be seen and make a difference." (P6),*



**Figure 4:** Schema for the Theme of Job Stress

This theme explains the psychological strain employees experience due to the pressure, intensity, and time constraints they face in the work environment, and the impact these factors have on performance. Participant statements indicate that work-related factors, particularly workload, level of control and social support, are key elements shaping job stress. Data from the interviews indicate that some employees struggle with time pressure, heavy workloads and uncertainty, but autonomy and support mechanisms mitigate this stress. Participants stated that management support and team cohesion played a protective role in coping with stress.

### **Workload and time pressure**

This sub-theme encompasses the feelings of pressure and burnout experienced by employees due to their intense work pace, time constraints and excessive workload. In the participants' statements, the increasing workload and endless deadlines were described as pushing employees' physical and mental limits. The intensity of work is associated not only with the number of tasks but also with conditions that require constant attention, energy and emotional resilience.

*"We already have a workload, and if we direct our workload to areas that we think are more meaningful or make a difference, I think it will increase motivation." (P6),*

*"When you can't establish dynamics within the team, it reflects in the business results. The backlog of work and the pressure to meet deadlines are seriously demotivating." (P7),*

### **Job control and autonomy**

This sub-theme reflects the extent to which employees can make decisions within their own work processes, take responsibility, and act independently in their jobs. In the participants' statements, autonomy was seen as a motivating factor for employees who were trusted, whose ideas were valued and who were allowed to work using their own methods. In contrast, excessive control, micromanagement, and exclusion from decision-making processes were among the factors that increased employee stress levels. The findings indicate that job satisfaction and performance increase when employees are supported in terms of "delegation of authority" and "initiative use."

*"My manager tells me not to be afraid of making mistakes. The important thing is to recognise and correct the mistake. This feeling of trust is very valuable." (P10),*

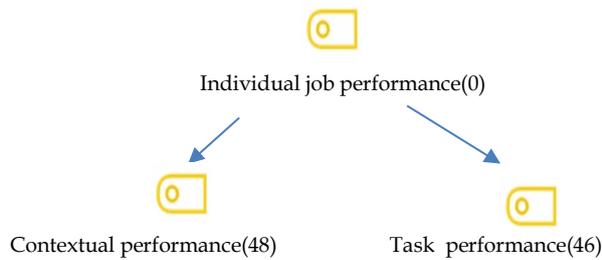
*"An employee who can decide how to do their own work is both happy and productive. Controlling her every step is just creating stress." (P3),*

### **Social support and solidarity**

This sub-theme encompasses the moral, trust, and mutual support that employees receive from their managers, colleagues, and the organisation in the work environment. In the participants' statements, a sense of team solidarity and mutual support was identified as a fundamental protective factor in coping with job stress. Employees stated that not feeling alone during challenging times reduced their stress levels and that a supportive manager or an understanding team environment increased their work motivation. These findings indicate that social support not only provides emotional relief but also is a significant factor in strengthening organisational commitment and performance.

*"I think the ideal leader should, above all, be a guide. In terms of direction, it's not just about suggesting or predicting that his teammates will move in this direction, but also about him behaving in this way, providing them with leadership, guidance, ideas, a network of stakeholders and knowledge sharing." (P2),*

"It's important to motivate employees or ensure the motivation of our colleagues, especially those we work with." (P6),



**Figure 5:** Individual Job Performance Theme Data

This theme encompasses employees' levels of effective task performance, sense of responsibility and efforts to contribute to organisational goals. In participant statements, individual performance was associated not only with technical skills but also with self-discipline, motivation and work ethic. The findings indicate that performance is evaluated in two dimensions: task performance reflects an employee's ability to fulfil their responsibilities on time and with quality. In contrast, contextual performance refers to voluntary support and behaviours that contribute to team solidarity beyond the job description. Participants stated that increased cooperation within the institution and collective consciousness also strengthened individual performance.

### Task performance

This sub-theme refers to the extent to which individuals perform their tasks in a planned, effective and timely manner, in accordance with their job descriptions. In participants' statements, job performance was not only associated with the technical completion of the work, but also with indicators of quality, responsibility and self-discipline. Employee commitment to their work, goal awareness, and a sense of responsibility toward their duties have been seen as fundamental determinants of individual performance. The findings indicate that employees who meet managers' expectations, manage their time effectively, and take initiative are perceived as performing better.

"I'm not someone who has trouble with motivation anyway, but it has this benefit: when you see the person you're looking up to and want to follow, and you see them taking on this task with you, you want to be a part of it even more..." (P2),

"How can I say it? The English version comes to mind. He needs to be more self-determined, well-versed in that area, able to convey his passion for it, disciplined and passionate in his work and leadership..." (P3),

### Contextual performance

This sub-theme refers to employees going beyond their job descriptions to make voluntary contributions within the organisation, supporting their teammates and helping create a positive work environment. In the participants' statements, contextual performance was shaped around the concepts of "cooperation," "collaboration," "team cohesion," and "shared responsibility." Participants stated that employees who not only do their own work but also facilitate the work of others, contribute voluntarily to the institution and radiate positive energy make a significant contribution to organisational success.

"Management isn't just about giving orders; it's about being there for your team when they need you. I'll go out on the field with my team; I won't leave anyone alone." (P7),

"When a friend can't keep up, I support their work. No one sees this as an obligation; there's a natural culture of mutual assistance." (P5).

## Discussion and conclusion

This research highlights the complex interplay between responsible leadership, emotional intelligence, motivation, job stress and employee performance within the Turkish insurance sector through both quantitative and qualitative lenses. Compared with existing theoretical frameworks, the findings offer significant insights that both support and depart from current theories in light of sectoral dynamics.

The quantitative findings confirmed that responsible leadership has a direct and significant positive effect on employee performance (H1). This result aligns fully with the meta-analyses of Bedi et al. (2016) and the studies of Maak, Pless, and Voegtlin (2021), who argue that responsible leadership enhances both task and contextual performance by fostering a sense of accountability. In the qualitative phase, participants'

emphasis on "Fairness and Transparency" supports the concept of "discursive responsible leadership" proposed by Voegtlin (2011); the ethical dialogue established by the leader with stakeholders fosters a sense of trust-based accountability among employees, thereby driving performance.

A key contribution of this study is the identification of Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a partial mediator in the relationship between responsible leadership and performance (H3). This finding parallels the work of Miao, Humphrey and Qian (2020) and Liao et al. (2022), which posits that leadership styles influence performance largely by enhancing employees' emotional resources. From a critical perspective, in a field like insurance that requires intense customer relations and stress management, the ethical climate provided by a responsible leader appears to activate the employee's self-regulation skills. When combined with the findings of Sanchez-Gomez and Bresó (2020), it is concluded that responsible leadership is not merely a "management style" but also a "process of developing emotional capacity."

Contrary to some literature (Nguyen et al., 2020; Turker, 2024), the mediating role of motivation was not statistically significant in this study. This discrepancy may be associated with the highly competitive and goal-oriented structure of the insurance sector. Our findings suggest that, unless supported by an ethical climate and emotional intelligence, financial incentives or general motivational tools (such as bonuses) remain insufficient to ensure sustainable performance. This finding extends Kuvaas's (2006) argument – emphasising the relative importance of intrinsic motivation over extrinsic tools – by suggesting that, in this sectoral context, emotional intelligence may serve as a more proximal psychological mechanism linking responsible leadership to performance outcomes.

The research identified a negative relationship between responsible leadership and job stress. This aligns with the Karasek and Theorell (1990) model, which predicts that organisational resources (such as leader support) mitigate psychological strain. While Zhang et al. (2022) emphasise that job stress directly hinders performance, our qualitative theme of "Social Solidarity" proves that the environment of trust created by a responsible leader transforms stress from an "obstacle" into a manageable process.

Based on the study's findings, the following concrete recommendations are provided for insurance sector managers and HR professionals:

**Leadership Development Programs:** "Responsible Leadership" training – focusing on stakeholder sensitivity and ethical decision-making skills, as emphasised by Beckmann et al. (2020) – should be mandatory rather than solely on sales targets.

**Emotional Intelligence-Oriented Recruitment:** Since EI is a powerful predictor of performance, these skills should be measured during recruitment processes (e.g., using tools such as the Kayıhan & Arslan, 2016 scale), and candidates with higher EI levels should be prioritised.

**Ethical Climate and Transparency:** To manage ethical dilemmas in insurance sales, managers should adopt an "open-door" policy and establish a transparent communication model that views errors as learning opportunities rather than grounds for punishment (Voegtlin et al., 2012).

**Psychosocial Support Systems:** To reduce the destructive impact of job stress on performance, organisations should move beyond bonus-oriented motivation and organise leader-supported group work and emotional resilience workshops

## **Suggestions**

Based on the research findings, it is highly recommended that organisations in the insurance sector prioritise the development of responsible leadership training programs. Since the study demonstrates that responsible leadership significantly enhances both emotional intelligence and employee performance, managers should be trained to focus on ethical decision-making, transparency and fairness. By acting as moral role models, leaders can foster an environment of trust and organisational justice, which are proven to strengthen employees' commitment and task-related outcomes.

Furthermore, organisations should invest in initiatives to improve employees' emotional intelligence. The results indicate that emotional intelligence serves as a critical partial mediator between leadership and performance. Specifically, providing workshops on emotional recognition and regulation can equip employees with the necessary psychological resources to handle complex social interactions and improve both task and contextual performance. Strengthening these competencies is essential for maintaining workplace harmony and individual productivity.

To mitigate job stress, management should focus on increasing social support and job autonomy. While workload and time pressure are inherent in the sector, the study suggests that a supportive team environment and the delegation of authority act as buffers against stress. Accordingly, leaders are

encouraged to promote open communication and to foster "initiative use," which reduces psychological strain and prevents counterproductive work behaviours. Fostering a culture of solidarity ensures that employees remain motivated even under high-pressure conditions.

Ultimately, it is essential to recognise that employee performance is a multifaceted construct influenced by a range of psychosocial factors. Organisations should adopt a holistic approach that integrates responsible leadership values with emotional awareness to ensure sustainable performance. In conclusion, by aligning stakeholders' expectations with supportive leadership practices, companies can create a resilient workforce capable of achieving long-term organisational success.

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#### **Author Contributions:**

Idea/Concept/Design: **B.B.** Data Collection and/or Processing: **B.B.** Analysis and/or Interpretation: **B.B.** Literature Review: **B.B.**, Writing the Article: **B.B.** Critical Review: **B.B.**, **M.S.A.**, **E.B.** Approval: **B.B.**, **M.S.A.**, **E.B.**

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