

ETHICAL CLIMATE AND BEHAVIORAL INTEGRITY: A STUDY OF THE DETERMINANTS OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP UNDER POLITICAL MENTORING

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: Unethical behavior has been a source of incremental cost in corporations worldwide, and its consequences are detrimental to organizational health. In today's turbulent environment, the role of leadership becomes even more vital under uncertainties. This study investigates the impact of ethical climate and behavioral integrity on ethical leadership through political mentoring.

Methodology: The data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire distributed to the employees of various service sectors of health, education, banks, insurance companies, telecommunication, hotels, and transportation. The overall useable response rate was 85% (450 in total). The data were analyzed through SPSS version 22 and ADANCO version 2.2.

Main Findings: The findings of the study are evidence of a strong association among behavioral integrity, ethical climate, political mentoring, and ethical leadership. We also found the mediating role of political mentoring between behavioral integrity and ethical leadership and between ethical climate and leadership.

Applications of the study: This study is significant for the managers of the service sector in developing the ethical climate. It gives an insight to the leaders that they should guide their subordinates about the environment appropriately.

It means that the leader's role matters in building the organizational employees' character and success.

Novelty/Originality of the study: In this study, the role of political mentoring in ethical climate has been recognized, which contributes to business ethics. Furthermore, it bridges the literature gap related to the mediating role of political mentoring in an organizational climate.

Keywords: *Political Mentoring, Ethical Climate, Ethical Leadership, Behavioral Integrity, Social Learning Theory.*

INTRODUCTION

In this turbulent and contemporary business environment, a leader's behavior is considered ethical based on transparency, integrity, and authenticity (Saha *et al.*, 2020). The concept of ethical leadership can be traced from previous researchers such as Loftus *et al.* (1978); Avolio and Gardner (2005). Ethical leadership can be explained as an independent concept with two dimensions: a moral manager and a moral person (Danish *et al.*, 2021). The moral person shows the leader's attributes, whereas the moral manager represents the efforts made by the leader to promote ethical behavior (Wang *et al.*, 2017). Ethical leadership is considered the influential element for any business organization (Zaim *et al.*, 2020). A moral person perceives ethical leadership as the right behavior, moral trait, and good decision-making. In contrast, a moral manager allocates these ethical characteristics to subordinates by using discipline and reward, role modeling, and communication (Trevino *et al.*, 2000).

The theoretical concept of social learning theory helps to explain ethical leadership within the organization (Danish *et al.*, 2021). It can be interpreted as the way the ethical leaders guide the behavior of their employees at job place (Mo & Shi, 2017). Bandura (1986); Charles (2016) defined social learning theory as the individuals learn from the punishments, rewards and also learn from others through imitation, modeling, and observation. It further explains that individuals pay attention to follow the behavior of attractive and credible role models. Leaders are considered legitimate normative role models. Employees in organizations are directly influenced by their leaders because they have the power to implement rewards and punishment. In this context, the social learning theory allows the individuals to learn from their surroundings because most of the pressures are built up through their interactions with other individuals (Bandura, 1986).

Simha and Cullen (2012) explained that an organizational ethical climate stimulates the individual viewpoint towards work involvement and behavior that escalates the organizational performance. Furthermore, Victor and Cullen (1988) mentioned that ethical climate depends on employees' perceptions of procedures and policies in the organization that enhance ethical conduct and improve employees' attitudes and behavior (Elci & Alpkam, 2009). Ethical climate indicates the positive effect

on the employee's ethical leadership behavior, job performance, and organizational commitment. Ethical climate impacts the ethical issues and decision-making processes with the moral criteria the individuals apply to resolve and grasp this issue. Therefore, employees consider that an ethical climate is necessary to maintain ethical leadership and develop harmony in the organizational procedures then the organization progresses.

[Palanski and Yammarino \(2007\)](#) first described integrity, who used this concept in various research articles in different ways. For instance, they explained that behavioral integrity is virtuous behavior and a parsimonious construct. [Simons et al. \(2007\)](#) defined the word integrity as the consistency between actions and words. [Victor and Cullen \(1988\)](#) defined the ethical climate as employees' shared perception of ethical procedures and practices of firms. Previous research showed the association of ethical climate with job satisfaction, turnover intentions, extra-role, and in-role behavior, commitment, and ethical behavior. Thus, the ethical climate provides meaningful insight into how it affects the employees and their attitude and behavior in the organization.

[Burlew \(1991\)](#) defined mentoring as it is a procedure where an expert person (mentor) provides guidelines, opportunities, and knowledge to the least experienced protégé ([Haring, 1999](#), [Danish et al., 2021](#)). Incorporations and companies use mentoring for the sake of influential corporate culture, values, and expectations ([Wilson & Elman, 1990](#)). There are three mentoring models: networking mentoring, grooming mentoring and blending mentoring. Networking mentoring involves more than two persons, and it is non-hierarchical. The second one is the grooming mentoring that involves the relationship of a more skilled mentor and less skilled protégé, and it is traditional ([Kochan et al., 2015](#)). Blending mentoring is the combination of networking and grooming mentoring ([Haring, 1999](#)). [Silvester and Menges \(2011\)](#) discussed formal and informal mentoring. In an organization, political informal mentoring is used because it is necessary for the smooth running of business operations.

The rationale of the study

This study aims to demonstrate whether political mentoring mediates the association between an organizational ethical climate and ethical leadership. Furthermore, it seeks to add up in the literature about the concept of political mentoring. It is a newly emerging term because a few mentoring studies were found in the literature but not in the context of the organizational environment. This study also determines whether behavioral integrity and political climate are directly related to ethical leadership. Finally, this study will be an effort to cover the overall service sector in the organizational environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The theoretical framework and hypotheses of the study based on different theories are mentioned below:

Relationship between Political Mentoring and Ethical Leadership

The concept of leadership and mentoring is studied by [Blass and Ferris \(2007\)](#). They pointed out as "military provides a unique opportunity..., because the military develops 100% of its leadership from within..., the military develops its leaders throughout for a career." There are some beneficial military characteristics such as (1) global vision, (2) outside information of the world to enhance performance, (3) use networks to gain useful contacts. (4) have an optimistic approach to the organizational objectives and goals, (5) courage, competency, integrity, and commitment ([Van-Gils et al., 2015](#)). The functional approach of an effective leader and the mentors have many things in common. For example, a mentor must have a clear visualization of the latest things globally, such as the leader having a clear vision, and he enlists others about his vision. Both are visionaries and can take the individual and organization to a better place in the future.

[Kouzes and Posner \(2017\)](#) defined four basic behaviors that motivate the leader to get successful results. These are: (1) inspiring the shared vision, (2) enabling others to act, (3) modeling the way, and (4) encouraging the heart. Both have collected these behaviors through questionnaires, case analyses, and surveys. Leaders are willing to create a challenging environment for the employees to contribute to their success ([Kouzes & Posner, 2017](#)). Leaders can force people to do the work. They put their vision ahead and try to convenience the people to gain support. Moreover, it is necessary first to model the way to become a successful leader. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is generated:

H1: *Political mentoring is positively related to ethical leadership.*

Relationship between Behavioral Integrity and Ethical Leadership

Behavioral integrity can be defined as the perceived criterion between the leader's deed and words ([Protas, 2013](#); [Jones, 2019](#)). [Simons \(2002\)](#) and [Leroy et al. \(2011\)](#) explained several viewpoints that demonstrate behavioral integrity. The most important viewpoint is that the leader should be a man of action and words. He should always preach what he does in his daily matters. A leader should be aware of the actual values of the people. He should be mindful of himself. If he lacks self-awareness, then he cannot perform his tasks properly.

Ethical leadership can be validated and identified in four different ways ([Miao et al., 2018](#)). First, balanced processing is defined as the leader's behavior in which he analyzes the factual information before making a decision and is not afraid of followers' negative views ([Van-Gils et al., 2015](#)). Second, self-awareness represents behavior that shows leaders are conscious of preferences, aware of personal needs, motivation, and wants. Third, the inner moral view is defined as self-regulation, which discusses the internal moral values and standards. The last one is relational transparency, which shows the association between leader and follower. All these elements are explained by [Kernis and Goldman \(2006\)](#) as "the unobstructed operation of one's true, or core self in one's daily enterprise" ([Lakey et al., 2008](#)). [Avolio and Gardner \(2005\)](#) further added that a leader must cooperate with everyone in the organization ([Leroy et al., 2015](#)). The following hypothesis is postulated based on these logical arguments:

H2: *Behavioral integrity is positively associated with ethical leadership.*

Relationship between Ethical Climate and Ethical Leadership

[Schminke et al. \(2005\)](#) claimed that organizational leaders influence the organizational ethical work environment ([Qin et al., 2018](#)). They studied the association of ethical climate and leader's moral development. Their results verify this relationship. [Engelbrecht et al. \(2017\)](#) discussed the positive association between ethical climate and transformational leadership. Finally, [Neubert \(2019\)](#) found a positive association between ethical climate and ethical leadership.

Ethical leadership has two main parts: (1) moral manager (ethical standards, punishing, communicating, rewarding, and role modeling ethical behavior, (2) moral person (justice, integrity, trustworthiness, and concerns for others) ([Beadle-Brown et al., 2015](#)). Ethical leaders represent many favorable personal characteristics and create a role model for their employees to follow. [Dickson et al. \(2020\)](#) explained how much leaders are interested in developing the ethical climate for the organizational better performance. Leaders are responsible for setting the organizational ethical tone by implementing procedures, policies, and practices to implement ethical behavior and control misconduct. [Kozlowski and Doherty \(1989\)](#) narrated that leaders perform as interpretive filters of group members' policies and processes. In light of these practices and policies, leaders give their views about the perception of climate. In the light of the above arguments, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: *Ethical leadership is positively related to ethical climate.*

The Mediating Role of Political Mentoring between Behavioral Integrity and Ethical Leadership

[Simons \(2002\)](#) discussed behavioral integrity as an individual's promises that he commits to some other person to fulfil. In another way, it can also be expressed as the extent to which a leader's commitment to what he says and what he means. According to the communicated intentions and values, which are considered high in behavioral integrity, the leader behaves according to the communicated intentions and values ([Simons, 2002](#)). To consider a leader as high in behavioral integrity does not ensure that leader's shared values are either morally shared or better for the subordinates. When the leader delivers a high level of behavioral integrity, subordinates react according to that shared values. [Palanski and Yammarino \(2007\)](#) discussed the certainty of subordinates with respect to leader's behavior ([Engelbrecht et al., 2017](#)).

[Blass and Ferris \(2007\)](#) defined mentoring as an effective way of developing skills and transmitting knowledge and information. Mentoring enhances the mental capability of a person ([Chong et al., 2020](#)). However, another perspective of mentoring is considered a vehicle that develops and builds political skills and knowledge ([Thatcher & Perrewé, 2002](#)). The desire of the protégé to choose such a type of mentor helps him to become successful in his goals and missions in life ([Young & Perrewé, 2000](#)). As [Feldman and Weitz \(1991\)](#) wrote: "in choosing mentors, an ambitious protégé would be more interested in finding mentors who could open doors for them, sponsor them for promotions, or bring them along as their assistants when they got promoted." ([Salami, 2010](#)). In light of the above discussion, it is necessary to understand that behavioral integrity is necessary for effective mentoring.

It is evident that the leaders become more responsible for their actions and employees' actions in behavioral integrity. If the employees are going to be mentored appropriately, then the organization will progress. Social learning theory explains that employees learn from their leaders and mentors, and in this way, the organization will achieve success. In previous studies, the mediating role of political mentoring is not much known between the association of ethical leadership and behavioral integrity. So the following hypothesis is postulated based on this logical statement:

H4: *Political mentoring mediates the association between ethical leadership and behavioral integrity.*

The Mediating Role of Political Mentoring between Ethical Climate and Ethical Leadership

Mentoring in the organization means that a senior person must perform the guidance and advisory services to grow his protégés' careers ([Siegel et al., 2011](#)). [Viator and Pasewark \(2005\)](#) exhibited that mentoring is well defined as a developing cycle, including separation, redefinition refinement, and initiation to support more junior staff ([Lim et al., 2015](#)). [Eby et al.](#)

(2006), using social learning theory and social information-processing theory, claimed that the managers perform as the information filters and powerful referents due to their hold in the punishments and reinforcement (Bandura, 1977; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). This will help to create an excellent ethical climate in the organization. Schneider and Rentsch (1988) defined the ethical climate as the entities operationalize routine actions and behaviors that are supported, rewarded, and expected. Victor and Cullen (1988) further defined the ethical climate as predicting an explanation of ethical behavior. Pagliaro *et al.* (2018) also explained it as different from the other climates as "the prevailing perception of typical organizational practices and procedures that have ethical content" (Victor & Cullen, 1988).

A recent study described that ethical leadership has a significant effect on ethical climate and subsequently on subordinates' ethical behavior (Lu & Lin, 2013). Specifically, this study revealed that subordinates show enhanced ethical behavior since ethical leaders support ethical guidance. They lead and manage ethical conduct in the workplace. Furthermore, ethical leaders develop an ethical climate, which, in turn, positively affects the ethical behavior of subordinates. The findings of their study are consistent with previous studies expressing that business leaders use various techniques to convey ethical guidelines to their followers on different levels, which have an impact on followers' behavior (Mayer *et al.*, 2009). It has an important influence on an organizational ethical climate in turn (Lu & Lin, 2013). The organizational ethical climate is created and sustained through the leader's actions and initiatives (Wimbush *et al.*, 1997). However, this research was done in a particular Asian cultural background where power distance might significantly impact the consequences of the leader's influence on subordinates' perceptions related to ethical climate and consequently subordinates' behaviors. Henceforth, it can be summarized that such results may differ in an organization that functions in Western cultural background, like Australia.

Nonetheless, the extent of research conducted on ethical climate depicts that limited research has been conducted on the association between ethical climate and ethical leadership (Shin, 2012). Based on the above discourse and following a call for future research, it is probable that ethical leadership influences the subordinates' perception of ethical climate in a respectful way. These findings indicate strong authentication that ethical leadership helps in establishing an ethical climate within an organization. Although the study conducted by Neubert *et al.* (2009) exhibits prominent strengths like a time gap and a large sample, and the researchers showed that the sample size was limited demographically.

From the above discussion, it is evident that the employees learn from their mentors and leaders in the organization as per social learning theory. If the employees are going to be appropriately mentored, then the organization will succeed. In the previous studies, the mediating role of political mentoring is still an under-investigated area between the relationship of ethical leadership and ethical climate. So based on these logical arguments, it is hypothesized that:

H5: *Political mentoring mediates the association between ethical climate and ethical leadership.*

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Participants and Procedure

This study is considered quantitative research, which is applied to analyze the impact of behavioral integrity and ethical climate on the ethical leadership in an organization through the mediating role of political mentoring in Pakistan's service sector. In this study, the positivist paradigm approach was used to find the relationship among the variables of the study, and a well-designed questionnaire was utilized for the data gathering and analysis process. The basic aim of this approach is to organize problems, build hypotheses, check and summarize data to give a law-like and generalizable conclusion. The quantitative approach was used in this study because it develops the precision of results through statistical analysis and subjectivity components connected to the qualitative approach. Furthermore, in quantitative research, the researcher is independent, value-free and unbiased, structured and accurate, and reliable through reliability and validity testing. (Park & Park, 2016). Furthermore, Barnham (2010) expressed that quantitative research is usually simpler to examine than qualitative research analysis since it reveals the correlations and regressions between two variables, and it gives concrete and factual data.

To reduce the common method bias, the questionnaire consists of two parts: the first one includes questions about the independent variables (behavioral integrity and ethical climate), and the second one includes the mediator (political mentoring) and dependent variable (ethical leadership). In this study, the non-probability sampling technique was used. It is a technique that does not follow the probability theory while selecting the appropriate sample. The sample was collected from the different service sectors such as health care centers, banks, insurance companies, education sectors, telecommunications, transportations, and hotel industries. In Social Science and Business fields, the structural equation modeling (SEM) technique is mostly used. This technique is useful to test the different theories and make them useable for the research question. SEM is classified into two types, covariance and variance-based SEM (Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). In variance-based SEM, the researchers make proxies as linear combinations of observed variables and then use these proxies to estimate model parameters. In covariance-based SEM, empirical variance is used to estimate the parameters. The data

collected through a survey questionnaire was analyzed using ADANCO 2.2 software for variance-based structural equation modeling. This software uses several information estimators such as Ordinary Least Square (OLS) Regression Analysis based on the sum of scores for analyzing and hypothesizing models and partial least squares path modeling (Henseler, 2017). In ADANCO software, correlation and confidence in the hypotheses are also analyzed, but it does not impose on the normality of data.

Measures

Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership is determined by using a 10-item scale of Brown *et al.* (2005), which is the most commonly used scale to measure ethical leadership in management to operationalize the definition. Sample items include “My leader discusses business ethics or values with employees” and “My leader makes fair and balanced decisions.” A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the items that range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cronbach’s Alpha of the scale was 0.89.

Ethical Climate

The ethical climate is determined by using the scale of Victor and Cullen (1988), which is the most commonly used scale to measure this item. Sample items are “What is best for everyone is a major consideration here” and “In this company, the first consideration is whether a decision violates any law.” A 5-point Likert scale was applied, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to measure the items. Cronbach’s Alpha of the scale was 0.86.

Behavioral Integrity

The behavioral integrity is measured by the scale of Simons *et al.* (2007), which is the most widely used scale to measure this item. Sample items are “There is a match between my manager’s words and actions” and “My manager conducts himself/herself by the same values he/she talks about.” Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from “1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).” Cronbach’s Alpha of the scale was 0.95.

Perceived Political Climate

The perceived political climate is measured by the scale given by Neubert *et al.* (2009), which is the most widely used scale to measure this item. Sample items are “My mentor has demonstrated well-listening skills in our conversations” and “My mentor has shared personal experiences as an alternative perspective to my problems.” A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used to measure the items. Cronbach’s Alpha of this scale was 0.95.

Political Mentoring

The items related to political mentoring were developed based on psychosocial and career functions identified by descriptive studies of mentoring associations and previously conducted qualitative analyses (e.g., Roche, 1979; Burke, 1984; Zey, 1984; Kram & Isabella, 1985). These are the most widely used scales to measure this item. Sample items are “I sympathized with my manager/leader about the added problems that my request caused” and “I acted in a friendly manner with him/her before asking for what I wanted.” A 5-point Likert scale was applied to measure items ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cronbach’s Alpha of the scale was 0.92.

Conceptual Framework

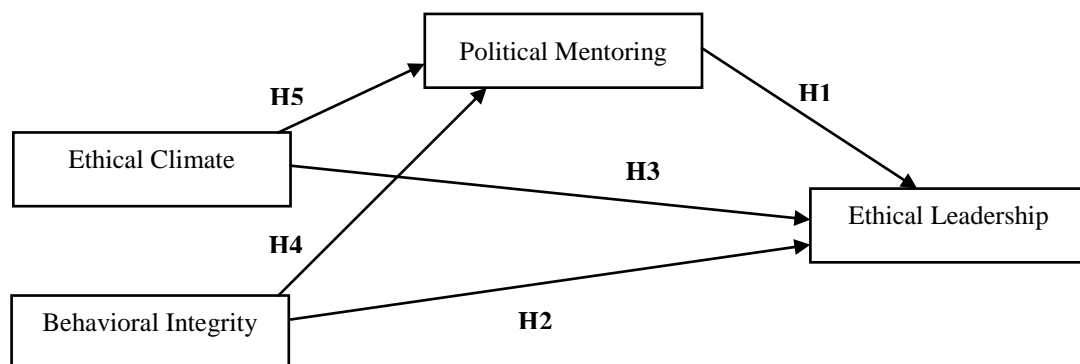


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Author Analysis

Data Analysis

The data gathered through a survey questionnaire was analyzed using ADANCO 2.2 software for variance-based structural equation modeling. This software uses several information estimators such as OLS regression analysis based on the sum of scores for analyzing and hypothesizing models and partial least squares path modeling (Henseler, 2017). In ADANCO software, correlation and confidence in the hypothesis are also analyzed, but it does not impose on the data normality. In this software, the first step is modeling the structural model and then calculating its validity and reliability.

The information about the demographic analysis is gathered through a questionnaire and is shown in Table 1. In this study, data were gathered from the different service sectors of Pakistan, and the frequencies of demographical aspects like gender, designation, experience, and type of organization were calculated through SPSS. In this study, data were gathered from 450 respondents. The majority of the respondents were male (54.2%), the majority of the participants were having experience of 6-10 years (58.9%), most of the respondents were associated with the education sector (20.7%), and the designation of the majority of the respondents was high-level (41.3%).

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Characteristics	Classification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	244	54.2
	Female	206	45.8
	Total	450	100
Experience	1-5 years	74	16.4
	6-10 years	265	58.9
	More than 10 years	111	24.7
	Total	450	100
Organization	Health-care (Hospitals)	76	16.9
	All Banks	36	8
	Education sector	93	20.7
	Insurance companies	48	10.7
	Hotel industry	82	18.2
	Telecommunication	42	9.3
	Transportation services	73	16.2
	Total	450	100
	Low level	86	19.1
	Middle level	178	39.6
	High level	186	41.3
	Total	450	100

Structural Model

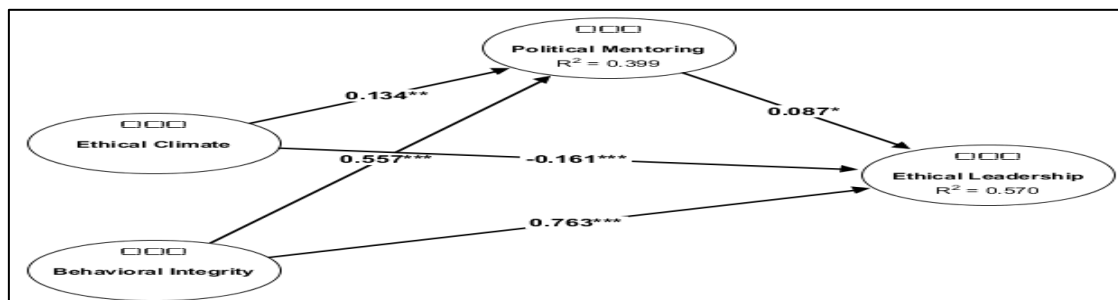


Figure 2: Structural Model

Source: Author Analysis

Reliability of the Constructs and Convergent Validity

Table 2: Reliability of the Constructs and Convergent Validity

Constructs	R^2	Jöreskog's Rho (ρ_c)	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	AVE
Political Mentoring	0.3985	0.9059	0.7939	0.8280
Behavioral Integrity		0.9521	0.9247	0.8689
Ethical Climate		0.8683	0.6996	0.7675
Ethical Leadership		0.9215	0.8309	0.8545

The reliability of the model is determined through Cronbach's Alpha (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). The alpha value threshold is 0.70, and the above is considered a satisfactory level of reliability. To observe the model uniformity and consistency, Joreskog's Rho value is used (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). The threshold for the Joreskog's Rho is 0.70 or above. In Table 2, all Joreskog's Rho values are above 0.80, which ensures high reliability. Convergent validity (CV) is defined as the point at which two theoretically related constructs should be related (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). The minimum threshold for the average variance extracted (AVE) is 0.50. All the values of AVE are greater than 0.50, which confirms the convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity: Fornell-Larcker's Criteria

Table 3: Discriminant Validity: Fornell-Larcker's Criteria

Constructs	Political Mentoring	Behavioral Integrity	Ethical Climate	Ethical Leadership
Political Mentoring	0.8280			
Behavioral Integrity	0.3847	0.8689		
Ethical Climate	0.1582	0.2251	0.7656	
Ethical Leadership	0.2461	0.5484	0.0555	0.8545

Discriminant validity means whether the concepts that should not be related are unrelated or not. For this purpose, the researcher used Fornell-Larcker's criteria (Cable *et al.*, 2014). As per this criteria, the square root of AVE should be greater than the correlation values of other constructs. It is clear from Table 3 that all the AVE values are greater than the correlational values of constructs. So, discriminant validity is satisfactory in this model.

Results of Hypotheses Testing

ADANCO 2.2 is variance-based software. It can also be used to test the hypotheses. To model the unknown population of the data, the option of bootstrapping was used (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2011). T-statistics are used to measure the level of significance.

Table 4: Results of Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses		Standard Bootstrap Result						Status
		Coefficient	Mean	Standard Error	t-value	p-value (2-sided)	p-value (1-sided)	
H1	PM->EL	0.0868	0.0862	0.0441	1.9698	0.0491	0.0246	Accepted
H2	BI -> EL	0.5569	0.5586	0.0491	11.3450	0.0000	0.0000	Accepted
H3	EC -> EL	0.1493	0.1481	0.0329	4.5727	0.0000	0.0000	Accepted
H4	BI -> PM-> EL	0.0484	0.0482	0.0253	1.9146	0.0055	0.0279	Accepted
H5	EC-> PM->EL	0.0116	0.0114	0.0074	1.5668	0.1175	0.0500	Rejected

Note: PM = Political mentoring, EL = Ethical leadership, BI = Behavioral integrity, EC = Ethical climate

DISCUSSION

H1 shows the positive influence of political mentoring on ethical leadership. The t-value is 1.9698, and the p-value is 0.0491, which is significant at a 5% significance level. Thus H1 is accepted. Previous research described that a direct relationship exists between political mentoring and ethical leadership (Dashper, 2020). In this study, positive t-value verifies that good political mentoring determines the leader's role to build strong ethics under his leadership.

H2 shows the positive impact of behavioral integrity on ethical leadership. The t-value is 11.3450, and the p-value is 0.0000, which is significant at a 1% significance level. Thus H2 is accepted. Prior studies estimated the positive relationship between behavioral integrity and ethical leadership (Chan, 2020). In this study, the positively related t-values clearly show that if the

employees have integrity in their actions, they take the mentoring sessions seriously to make the organization and their personality traits better.

H3 shows the impact of the ethical climate on ethical leadership. The t-value is 4.5727, and the p-value is 0.0000, which is significant at a 1% significance level. Thus H3 is accepted. Previous research found the association between ethical leadership and ethical climate (Kim *et al.*, 2015). In this study, the positive t-value verifies that the leaders create an ethical environment for the employees and this ethical climate leads towards organizational success.

H4 shows the mediating role of political mentoring between the relationship of behavioral integrity and ethical leadership. The t-value is 1.9146, and the p-value is 0.0055, significant at a 1% significance level. Thus H4 is supported. Previous studies like Berson *et al.* (2015) also investigated the mediating role of political mentoring between behavioral integrity and ethical leadership. In this study, mediation is present between the variables, which testifies that behavioral integrity impacts ethical leadership in the presence of mentoring.

H5 shows the mediating role of political mentoring between the ethical climate and ethical leadership. The t-value is 1.5668, and the p-value is 0.1175 > 0.05, which shows no mediation in this relationship. Thus H5 is not accepted. Earlier studies like Carroll *et al.* (2020) found the association between ethical leadership and ethical climate. The reason is that it is not necessarily true that if the climate is progressive, then the leaders perform well. It all depends on how they perceive the organizational climate and how they deliver to them. The leaders' political mentoring is not necessary for the good ethical climate of the organization.

CONCLUSION

Leaders are the essential pillars for the success of the organization and for the development of ethical behavior (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). This study examined the mediating role of political mentoring in an organizational ethical climate, behavioral integrity, and ethical leadership. The mentor's role is to give an employee guidance about an organizational environment and working conditions. Politically, the mentor's role is to make sure that guidance given to the employee about the environment is appropriate and consistent with the organizational norms and policies. The fundamental objective of this study is to check the role of ethical leadership in the organization with proper mentoring. So, the environment of the organization becomes constructive and supportive for the employees. If the manager plays his part in the organization rightly, the organizational environment becomes more comfortable. In this way, the progress of the organization will increase. This study clearly shows the strong mediating effect of political mentoring among the ethical leader, behavioral integrity, and ethical climate.

The results indicate that the mediating role of political mentoring between the relationship of ethical climate and ethical leadership is not supportive, as discussed earlier (Lu & Lin, 2013). But the mediation of political mentoring between the association of behavioral integrity and ethical leadership is vital (Jones, 2019). These results clearly show that the leader should be a man of principle and ethically vital for organizational success. It means that the leader's role matters in building the organizational employees' character and success. The climate never makes a leader (Simha & Cullen, 2012). It is the leader who makes the climate of the organization through his integrity and actions.

This study has several strengths. First, the population is taken from the service industry, and face-to-face interaction was made to reduce the mistakes in the data collection. In addition, this study contributes to business ethics as the role of political mentoring in the ethical climate is unknown (Lim *et al.*, 2015). This study helps to conceptualize the mediating part of political mentoring in an organizational climate. In conclusion, this research examines how mentors play their part in building the employees' character so they can perform well in the organization. It also manifests the leader's role in building a supportive and collaborative environment for employees to work diligently and adequately.

LIMITATIONS AND STUDY FORWARD

Besides all this, there are some limitations to this study. The sample is mainly collected from Pakistan's service sector, so the data is not demographically diverse. The researchers can conduct research by gathering data from the service sectors of other countries. Moreover, the data is collected from one province of Pakistan; therefore, it cannot be generalized to Pakistan's overall service sector. The researchers can increase the generalizability of the results in the future by collecting data from other provinces. Other than the variables used in this study, future research can be conducted by adding the different variables and analyzing the moderating role of political mentoring. In addition, the data in this study were collected at one point in time. Therefore, future researchers can gather the data at multiple points in time to observe the causal associations. Finally, this study was quantitative, and future researchers can adopt a qualitative approach in the future.

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CO-AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

All the authors in this article have declared no conflict of interest. All the authors have contributed to complete this article. Waqas Baig has carried out the data analysis and conceptualization. Rizwan Qaiser Danish has contributed to data collection and validation. Muqqadas Rehman has written the original draft and has worked on project administration. Muhammad Hasnain has contributed to methodology, final review, and editing. Hafiz Fawad Ali has a contribution related to the interpretation of concepts.

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