The Mediating Role of Affective Commitment in the Relationship Between Ethical Leadership and Ethical Climate in Non-Profit Sports Organizations in Ardabil Province

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Abstract

The research was conducted to examine the effect of ethical leadership on ethical climate with the mediation of emotional commitment in non-profit sports organizations of Ardabil province. The study has been conducted on members from non-profit sport organizations of Ardabil province. This cross-sectional study was conducted using three questionnaires of ethical leadership behavior Brown et al. (2005), ethical climate Victor and Cullen (1988) and De Waal (2018) affective organizational commitment on the Likert scale to collect data. Data has been collected from 157 employees through a pretested questionnaire. Data from the cross-sectional study was analyzed using SPSS 24. For testing the hypothesis, Hayes Process mediation model has been applied. Findings have revealed that affective organizational commitment in both forms of strategies are significantly and positively related to ethical climate. Further, affective organizational commitment has been identified as a significant mediator between ethical leadership behavior and ethical climate with full mediation effect. It can be concluded that if organizations have a very ethical atmosphere, it can improve emotional commitment. It is a fact that ethical leadership behavior influences ethical climate directly and indirectly through affective commitment.

Keywords

Ethical leadership behavior, Ethical Climate, affective commitment, non-profit sport organizations

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Introduction

Over the years, there have been numerous attempts in the ethics literature to explain and understand ethical decision-making and ethical behavior (Arslan & Berkman, 2009; Özgener & Temelleri, 2009). In accordance with this global trend, a large amount of research has examined the relationship between organizational ethics and its results. Today, corporate social responsibility is more necessary and the image of the company becomes vital due to the transparent vision of the management. Therefore, managers' values are very important in influencing the work environment. The role of managers and their ethical behavior plays a fundamental role in creating an ethical framework for organization members and in building the organization's collective personality (Wright & Goodstein, 2007).Therefore, ethical leaders are essential factors in shaping the ethical framework for an organization. Ethical leadership refers to the display of behaviors that conform to appropriate norms, which can be seen through the leader's actions and relationships (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005). Researchers have discussed ethical leadership mostly with theoretical and conceptual terms. Some research focusing on ethical leadership has shown its positive effects on pro-social behaviors (Mayer, Kuenzi, & Greenbaum, 2010; Piccolo, Greenbaum, Hartog, & Folger, 2010). However, most studies on ethical leadership have not been conducted in non-profit sports organizations. Ethical leadership is the demonstration of appropriate normative behavior through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and emphasizes promoting such behavior to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making (Neubert, Carlson, Kacmar, Roberts, & Chonko, 2009). Furthermore, ethical leadership is rewarded and punished through role modeling. Leaders are important sources for such modeling because of their role. Previous research has also shown that role models in organizations influence prosocial behaviors (Piccolo et al., 2010). In the following sections, ethical leadership behavior and its effects on the perception of ethical climate and affective organizational commitment are defined.

Ethical Leadership

Leader's behaviors are very important in order to have efficient work conditions and organizational culture. According to Brown and et al.(Brown & Treviño, 2006), ethical scandals in work environment point out the importance of ethical issues and leadership behaviors that have ethical content (Waddock, 2004). Researchers believe that ethics must indeed begin at the top. Leaders cannot shrink from their obligations to set a moral example for their followers; formal ethical codes and ethic training have little chance of success unless the ethical actions and behavior of top management are consistent with what they teach. Leaders are the key to determine the outcome of organizational goals and to set the tone for employee behavior which may include promotion, appraisal and strategies (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Organizational leaders should encourage employees by leading by examples; they have the responsibility to define organizational norms and values, live up to expectations and encourage their followers to adopt same (Bello, 2012). According to Fisher & Lovell Negative examples of immoral behavior by corporate executives are like a „cancer" on ethical behavior within organizations (Bello, 2012; Lovell, 2006). Employees want to be associated with managers that are honest, credible, respectful, and fair (Bello, 2012; Posner & Kouzes, 2007). Organizations can achieve better employee attraction and retention when employees have the opportunity to work for truly responsible and ethical employers (Bower, 2003; Upadhyay & Singh, 2010). Failing to be a good leader can lead to increase employee turnover and decrease the likelihood of attracting new employees. This can also increase the costs associated with turnover, increase employee supervision, decreases job satisfaction and decrease the level of employee productivity. Employees are the most important assets in

organizations, which without, the goals and objectives may not be attained. Several studies have been conducted on the roles that ethical leaders can play in achieving increase employee job performance. A study by Toor & Ofori revealed that ethical leadership may play a mediating role in the relationship between organizational culture and employee outcomes. study's shows that ethical leadership is more likely to bring about leader's effectiveness, willingness of employees to put in extra efforts, employees" job satisfaction, and an atmosphere for ethical leadership to flourish; which will ultimately leads to increased employees" job performance (Bello, 2012). On the other hand, Brown and Trevino believe that social learning theory and social exchange theory Homans(Homans, 1958), can explain the personal characteristics of ethical leadership and its positive impact on employees in an organizational context. They found that ethical leadership has managerial authority, can motivate employees to pay attention, can provide a trusted and pertinent role model associated with the traits of caring and treating others fairly, and finally, provide values, attitudes, and behaviors that employees can learn and imitate (Fu, Long, He, & Liu, 2020).

Ethical climate

The ethical climate within an organization may affect how individuals choose to deal with these ethical issues. This was first stated in Ethical climate theory by Victor and Cullen (Simha & Cullen, 2012). Victor and Cullen defined ethical climate as a pervasive organizational characteristic that affects how organizational decisions are made (Cullen, Victor, & Stephens, 1989). Thus, within an organization, ethical climate is based on members' perceptions of typical organizational practices and procedures involving ethics. When an organizational member is faced with an ethical issue and con siders what the organization would want him/her to do, that consideration is based on the organization's ethical climate. Thus, ethical climate includes individuals' perceptions of organizational norms regarding ethical behavior (Bartels, Harrick, Martell, & Strickland, 1998). Also ethical climate can be described as "the perception of what constitutes right behavior, and thus becomes a psychological mechanism through which ethical issues are managed" (Martin & Cullen, 2006). As such, the construct of ethical climate approaches the notion of moral norms, that is, behavioral guidelines that drive the interpretation of what is right and wrong within groups and organizations (Ellemers, Pagliaro, Barreto, & Leach, 2008; Pagliaro, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2011; Pagliaro, Lo Presti, Barattucci, Giannella, & Barreto, 2018). This refers to the fact that different organizations develop different subcultures that govern how individuals relate to each other and regulate each other's behavior. Starting from the original ethical climate theory (Victor & Cullen, 1987), a growing body of research has focused on the consequences of ethical climate on employees' perceptions and behaviors. In this vein, researchers ascertained that ethical climates predict employees' ethical behaviors (Treviňo, Butterfield, & McCabe, 1998; Verbeke, Ouwerkerk, & Peelen, 1996), job attitudes, commitment to the organization, organizational behavior (Pagliaro et al., 2018). And the other hand Sims and Keon investigated the effects of ethical climates on the person organization fit, and concluded that persons whose ideal preferences of ethical climate matched with the actual ethical climate in their organizations were more likely to be committed to their organizations (Sims & Keon, 1997). This particular finding in terms of person– organization fit and ethical climate was verified by later studies (Ambrose, Arnaud, & Schminke, 2008).

Mediator: Affective Commitment

There exists no single human factor that has impacted organizational outcomes more than organizational commitment (Alsiewi & Agil, 2014). Commitment in the workplace has the potential to influence organizational effectiveness and employee well-being (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). As a result, organizational commitment is one of the most important constructs for organizational researchers and managers of organizations (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). It is particularly relevant in an era when resource scarcity and cutback management have become the norm, and when managers of public institutions across countries are addressing challenges of attraction and retention of high-quality employees as well as their morale, motivation and performance (Chordiya, Sabharwal, & Goodman, 2017). Porter et al. defined organizational commitment as a belief and acceptance of organizational goals and values, the willingness to exert effort toward organizational goals, accomplishments, and a strong desire to maintain organizational membership. Basically, it is individual's affective binding with his/her organization as a consequence of accepting organizational values, and the willingness to keep working within the organization (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015). Meyer and Allen listed types of commitment, including commitment from necessity (continuous commitment), commitment from obligation (normative commitment), and the affective organizational commitment (Gautam, Van Dick, & Wagner, 2004). So that all of the definitions affective organizational commitment emphasize the employee's bond with the organization, captured by the characteristics such as acceptance of organizational goals, values, and a strong desire to associate with the organization (Perry, 2004). Meyer and Allen reported that the predictors of affective organizational commitment generally occurred in three categories: (a) organizational characteristics, (b) personal characteristics, and (c)work experiences (Kumari & Afroz, 2013; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Several practical and theoretical implications of affective commitment have been highlighted in the research literature (Chordiya et al., 2017; Lam & Liu, 2014; Schoemmel & Jønsson, 2014; Wang, Indridason, & Saunders, 2010). In addition to positive associations with employee physical and psychological well-being, and with job satisfaction (Lovakov, 2016), affective commitment works to strengthen employees" identification with the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Nkhukhu-Orlando et al., 2019). It also enhances emotional, mental and physical investment in the organization, attachment to the goals of the organization and its vision (Moon, Hur, Ko, Kim, & Yoon, 2014). But recent research acknowledges that non work aspects, such as life satisfaction, should be important consideration for organization operating system. Affective commitment tends to correlate more strongly with any given outcome variable including the focal behavior. Mayhew & M. dan Gardner, stated that organizational-based psychological ownership is concerned with individual members' feeling of possession and psychological connection to an organization as a whole including organizational culture and climate, attitudes of senior management, corporate goals and vision, reputation of the organization, and corporate policies and procedures (Kumari & Afroz, 2013).

The aim of the present study was to investigate the effect of ethical leadership on ethical climate with the mediation of emotional commitment in non-profit sports organizations of Ardabil province. previously studies have determined the relationship between ethical leadership behavior with ethical climate but studies explaining the role of affective commitment as a mediator in non-profit sports organizations are in dearth. Considering this, present study has been designed to attain two aims. First, it investigates the relationship between ethical leadership behavior and ethical climate. Secondly, study has examined affective commitment as a mediator between ethical leadership behavior and ethical climate. Accordingly, hypothesis framed for the study is:

H 01. ethical leadership behavior is significantly affected to affective commitment.

H 02. affective commitment mediates the relationship between ethical leadership behavior and ethical climate.
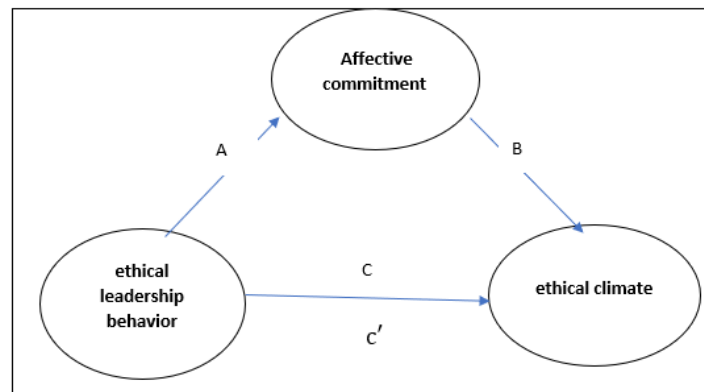

Figure 1. Statistical Model of Mediation effect

Materials and methods

In this study, several precautions are taken to minimize common method biases (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). For example, in our study to minimize the common method variance our independent and dependent variables were collected in a specified time (in May 2022) Detailed information was provided to ensure the confidentiality of our respondents and to decrease social desirability. Finally, in order to decrease the evaluation apprehension, the respondents were told that there is no correct or incorrect answer for the items given in the survey. Scoring in this study was based on a five-point Likert scale in which it showed 1 = ''strongly disagree'' and 5 = ''strongly agree'' Thus items are averaged within the scales to create composite measures for each variable.

Sample

The participants who are working as middle-level managers, athletes, and sports volunteers' members are chosen from three non-profit sports centers in Ardabil province.157 members were chosen randomly from these facilities in which about 300 (N) member are still working. This sample size is sufficient according to the Gpower. The final sample consists of 74 % male and 26 % female participants. The average of their age is 27.12 years. All participants have a direct contact with their job and they work in a volunteer's job in non-profit sport industry. Also, the sample is distributed according to their department. 37 % of the sample is in the volunteering; 10.23 % is in the team management; 13 % is in the coaching; and 40 % in the Athletes department.

Measures

Brown et al. (2005) developed and validated the 10-item ethical leadership behavior scale, which is used in this study. An example item is ''My supervisor listens to what employees have to say.'' The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.803. The ethical climate scale which was developed by Victor and Cullen (1988) is used in this survey. The scale consists of 10 items. An example item is ''The most efficient way is always the right way in this company.'' The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.827. For the last variable, Affective organizational commitment scale which was developed by De Waal (2018) is used. The scale consists of 5 items. An example item is ''I think I can easily join another organization as a member of this organization''. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.743.

Statistical Approach for Mediation Analysis

Hayes PROCESS Macro has been used to measure the mediation effect of variables, namely, affective organizational commitment between ethical leadership behavior and ethical climate. Hence, model number 4 of Process has been applied for the analysis for which Hayes guidelines of mediation effect has been followed (Hayes, 2017). Figure 1 has presented the statistical model of mediation effect. Firstly, direct effect of mediator (Affective commitment) has been analyzed on outcome variable (ethical climate) shown as path B (refer Figure 1). Secondly, direct effect of predictor (ethical leadership) has been analyzed on mediator variable shown as path A. Thirdly, total effect of predictor has been computed on outcome variable without considering the mediator variable shown in path c. Fourthly, direct effect of predictor variable has been examined on outcome variable through the mediator shown in path c'. Finally, Variance Accounted For (VAF) measures the effect size of the indirect effect on the total effect, that is, how much direct effects can be explained by the mediating variables. It is generally believed that VAF values greater than 80% are full mediators, those greater than 20% and less than 80% are local mediators, but less than 20% indicate that there is no mediating effect (Yang et al., 2019).

$$VAF = \frac{(a*b)}{(a*b)+c'}$$

Results
Initial Analysis
To evaluate the distribution of the sample, skewness and kurtosis values are observed in Table 1. Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) stated that the values of the skewness and kurtosis must be between -2 and +2 for a normal distribution. As seen from the table, the sample in this survey has a normal distribution. From the given values, members perceive the organizational climate and act ethically, and they are committed to their organizations.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Estimates

Variable	Mean	SD	Alpha	Skewness	Kurtosis
ethical leadership behavior	3.79	0.049	0.803	0.206	0.012
ethical climate	1.49	0.048	0.827	1.012	-0.385
affective commitment	1.28	0.050	0.743	-0.080	-0.548

Hypotheses Testing
The correlations between and descriptive statistics for the variables in the study is shown in Table 2. As expected, ethical leadership behavior is significantly correlated with the ethical climate and affective commitment.

Table 2. Mean, standard deviations, and correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. ethical leadership behavior	3.05	0.038	-		-
2. ethical climate	2.73	0.043	0.015*	-	-
3. affective commitment	2.80	0.045	0.227*	0.140*	-

Hypothesis 1

To test the hypotheses, we first entered the mediator (affective commitment) variable on the independent variable (ethical leadership behavior). As shown in Table 3, the beta weight for ethical leadership behavior was significant and, in the direction, predicted. Thus, with Hypothesis 1, the positive effected between ethical leadership behavior and affective Commitment was supported, and the first requirement for mediation was satisfied.
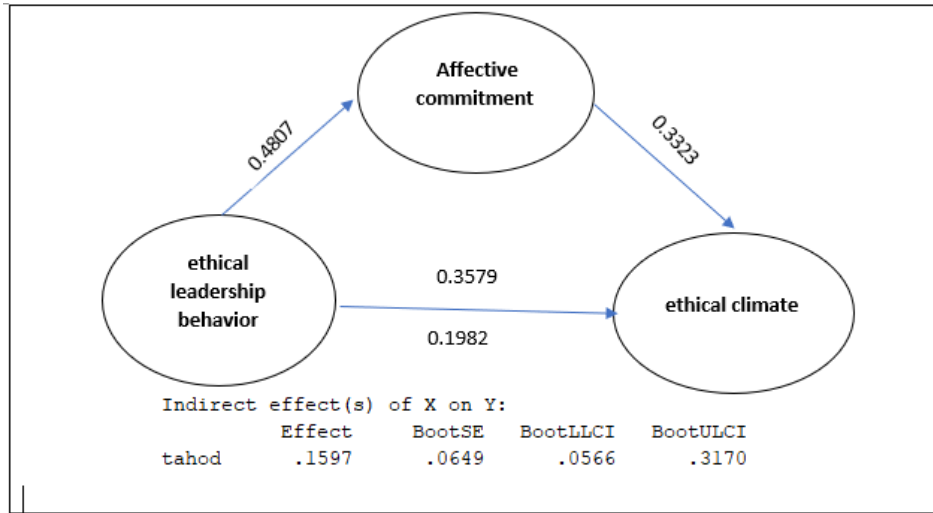

Figure 2. Output Model of affective commitment Mediation Effect

Hypothesis 2

VAF's (2017) procedure for assessing the mediating role of the affective commitment is used. First, the independent variable should be significantly related to the mediator variable. Second, the independent variable should be related to the dependent variable. Third, the mediating variable should be related to the dependent variable and the independent variable included in the equation. If the first three conditions hold, then at least partial mediation is present. If the independent variable has a non-significant beta weight in the third step, then complete mediation is present (MacKinnon et al. 2002). indeed, Hypothesis 3 asserts the mediating effect of affective commitment on the ethical leadership behavior and ethical climate relationship. First, ethical leadership behavior and affective commitment were entered in step 1. The results from this step demonstrated the significance of dependent variable. In step 2, the ethical leadership behavior and ethical climate relationship was searched. The beta weight was also significant in this step. Thus, second requirement of the mediation was satisfied in order to test the third step of mediation, we regressed the dependent variables on the mediating variable with the independent variable included in the equation. The results, shown in Table 3, indicate that the affective commitment partially mediated the relationship of between ethical leadership behavior and ethical climate, as the beta for ethical leadership decreased after adding ethical climate but it remained significant. Also, considering that both paths A and B are significant with the presence of the mediator in the model and since the effect of C is also significant in the model after the presence of the mediator. It can be concluded that the variable of organizational commitment is not a complete mediator and is probably a partial mediator. VAF was used for further investigation.

Table 2. Results from PROCESS Macro testing Authenticity at Workplace Mediation Model and Variance Accounted For (VAF)

VAF	a×b indirect	b	a	C′ direct	c
0.391	0.1597	0.3323	0.4807	0.1982	**0.3579**

Discussion

Managers are important sources for organizational success and unethical behavior. This study examined a mediating model about the effect of managers' ethical leadership behavior on ethical climate and affective commitment members. In this study, it is argued that as role models in their organizations, and by modeling ethical leadership behavior and engendering relational attachments, managers achieve moral authority that has a virtuous influence on organizational members. Furthermore, it is argued that the influence of ethical leadership behavior spreads through the work context and the process of social contagion in order to shape the ethical climate, which, in turn, contributes to organizational members' commitments to their organizations as a whole. In other words, if managers act in an honest and trustworthy way, these behaviors then create a virtuous cycle in which ethical leadership behavior perpetuates affective commitment that allows flourishing.

The results are similar with those which assert that managers displaying ethical leadership behavior play a critical role in shaping perceptions of ethical climate (Brown & Treviño, 2006). It is concluded that the ethical leadership behavior is related to the perceptions of affective commitment, and the affective commitment mediates the influence of the manager who performs ethical leadership on individual's outcomes. The results also affirm that the prominence of ethical leadership behavior among many factors may influence the attitudes and attachments of organizational members, and contribute to individual flourishing (Wright & Goodstein, 2007).

This study emphasizes that organizations would benefit from their employees who perceive high commitment and ethical working environment. Such perceptions can be enhanced via diverse management techniques, practices such as maintaining open channels of communications and interactions. Results of this study also point to the need for additional research that examines the role of potential mediators of relations between ethical leadership and employee outcomes. As a predictor, ethical leadership is gaining more importance in the organizational behavior field. So, it may help the organizations to arrange and establish an ethical framework in their environment working. In addition, managers should include communication and interaction in their managerial values in order to lessen negative perceptions that can arise from individual predispositions and commitment.

Manager's ethical values and their fair and honest behaviors are important factors to shape the organizational climate and organizational commitment (Schein 1985; Treviño et al. 1998). Therefore, organizations should pay attention to select and promote their managers in order to establish an ethical climate. This perception is highly important for sports organizational since human factor is the most important issue in all processes for the sport. The sports organizational needs highly committed members for sustainable strategic superiority. This study is important to contribute to the business ethics literature. Another contribution of the present study is that, it is the first study which searched the direct and indirect effects of ethical leadership on individual behavior outcomes in the non-profit sports organizational in Iran.

The data in this study are gathered from the non-profit sports organizational in Iran. Thus, the results cannot be generalized compared to the other industries or cultures. So, future researchers should consider the weaknesses outlined above, and they could extend the given results by including additional outcome variables such as political, counterproductive, or deviant behaviors. Future research could also use a multi-level approach to theorize and analyze the effects of ethical leadership. In this study, we were interested in the individual level effects of ethical leadership on perceptions of climate and affective commitments. Future research could gather data from work groups so that the data could be aggregated to assess the impact of ethical leadership on group level climate and behavioral variables.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that if organizations have a very ethical atmosphere, it can improve emotional commitment. It is a fact that ethical leadership behavior influences ethical climate directly and indirectly through affective commitment.

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