Ethical Leadership and Employee Creativity: The Mediating Role of Teamwork

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Abstract

The research aimed to emphasize the significance of ethical leadership's impact on teamwork and employee creativity. Quantitative research was applied, and data was gathered from 176 employees at Nishat Group Faisalabad, Textile Industry. A purposive sampling technique was used, and data was gathered through a survey questionnaire. The correlation test examined that ethical leadership, teamwork, and employee creativity have positive associations between them. Similarly, ethical leadership improves teamwork and employee creativity. The study concluded that ethical leadership principles have positively boosted employee creativity and teamwork, which is a good sign for achieving broader organizational goals.

Introduction

The recent spate of corporate scandals involving prominent corporations globally, coupled with government bailouts of extensive malfeasance in the United States, has significantly heightened awareness of the significance of ethics in the corporate sector. Organizations now acknowledge the significance of ethical standards as a competitive advantage and a method to safeguard their reputation (Manroop, 2014). The increasing significance of ethics and corporate social responsibility necessitates that contemporary organizational leaders act more ethically than their predecessors (Tu & Lu, 2012; Kalshoven, Den Hartog & Hoogh, 2011). A leader is an individual inside an organization who may significantly mitigate unethical actions and establish the ethical tone of the company (Kim & Braymer, 2011). Ethical leadership is considered critically significant as ethical leaders serve as custodians and communicators of ethical standards, influencing the behavior of others within the organization and ultimately affecting organizational performance (Stouten et al., 2013; Aronson, 2001; Kanungo, 2001; Treviño, Brown, & Hartman, 2003).

Comprehensive study has validated ethical leadership as a successful leadership style and underscores its significance in management literature. Researchers have theoretically and empirically investigated the influence of ethical leadership on follower attitudes and behaviors, discovering that ethical leadership serves as a significant predictor of job satisfaction and emotional dedication (Brown et al., 2005; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008), enhances extra-role behaviors (Avey, Polanski, & Walumbwa, 2011), promotes employee voice behavior (Chin, 2013), improves task performance (Piccolo et al., 2010), and contributes to firm performance (Zehir, Ertosun, Zehir & Müceldili, 2011). Most previous research has addressed ethical leadership, concentrating on its moral dimensions and linking it to followers' ethical and moral behaviors, such as ethical identity, organizational citizenship behavior, and ethical decision-making, as well as to unethical behaviors, including deviant and counterproductive actions.

Ponuu and Tenakoon (2009) discovered a favorable correlation between ethical leadership and employee organizational commitment, as well as follower confidence in their leader. Mayer et al. (2009) contended that ethical leadership is inversely correlated with deviant conduct and favorably correlated with organizational citizenship behavior. Other researchers have posited that ethical leadership constitutes an effective leadership style that fosters employee voice behavior (Chin, 2013;

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Walumbwa et al., 2011) and enhances extra-role behaviors (Avey, Polanski, & Walumbwa, 2011) while exhibiting a negative correlation with unethical organizational conduct (Mayer, Kuenzi & Greenbaum, 2012). Insufficient emphasis has been devoted to the task-related achievement of ethical leadership, which mainly investigates the impact of ethical leadership on employee creativity. Nevertheless, many empirical studies have been undertaken by Chung, Ribbens, and Zhou (2013) and Yidong and Xinxin (2012) that investigate the impact of ethical leadership on employee creativity and creative work behavior.

Creativity is often seen as a means of survival and a competitive edge in an environment marked by dynamic changes and competition (McMahon & Ford, 2013). Ambles' (1988) componental theory of creativity posits that leadership is a crucial facet of the perceived work environment, or our intricate social system, that may influence both the magnitude and occurrence of employee innovation. Shelley and Gilson (2004) posited that good leadership significantly influences employee innovation by establishing an optimal work environment and setting that might enhance creativity. Ethical leadership emphasizes justice, autonomy, morality, and a people-centric approach, and it may serve as an optimal leadership style to foster employee innovation (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Ethical leadership serves as a key indicator of individual creativity and creative work behavior at both the individual and group levels (Yidong & Xinxin, 2013; Chung, Ribbens & Zhou, 2013). The method by which ethical leadership affects employee creativity remains ambiguous and warrants additional investigation, as shown by Chung, Ribbens, and Zhou (2013) and Mayer et al. (2012).

A significant number of early researchers have investigated the impact of ethical leadership on outcomes via the lenses of social learning and social exchange (e.g., Brown and Treviño, 2006; Brown et al., 2005; Chung, Ribbens & Zhou, 2013). Nevertheless, few studies have adopted a distinct viewpoint on internal drive by examining the influence of ethical leadership on employee performance and creativity at work, highlighting the motivational dimension of ethical leadership and its impact on intrinsic motivation (e.g., Picolo et al., 2010; Yidong & Xinxin, 2012). In accordance with this research, we endeavored to examine the impact of ethical leadership on employee creativity via the application of teamwork.

Research Objectives
I.   To know the correlation of ethical leadership between teamwork and employee creativity.
II. To explain the predictive association between ethical leadership and teamwork.
III. To measure the predictive association between ethical leadership and employee creativity.

Literature Review
The definition of ethical leadership provided by Brown, Treviño, and Harrison (2005) is as follows: the presentation of normatively suitable behavior via personal acts and interpersonal interactions; the encouragement of such behavior to followers through two-way interaction, reinforcement, and decision-making (pp.120). According to Brown et al. (2005), an ethical leader is defined by two primary components. The first is the moral person component, which encompasses a variety of characteristics such as dedication to others, equity, confidence, and honesty. The subsequent component is the moral supervisor component, which includes elements such as satisfying, reprimanding, collaborating, focusing on ethical standards, and demonstrating ethical behavior.

Therefore, it is equally important to point out that a multitude of excellent personal qualities characterize ethical leaders and also can exert influence on their colleagues by actively enforcing ethical behavior (Mayer, Kuenzi, & Greenbaum, 2011). In addition, ethical leaders are defined by attributes such as honesty, compassion, generosity, transparency, truthfulness, collective motivation, fairness, and trustworthiness. These qualities are classified as principled persons who make balanced choices (Brown et al., 2005; Brown & Treviño, 2006). Additionally, distributing authority is the last but certainly not the least dimension of ethical leadership, which is defined as having the right to speak by supporters (De Hoogh, & Den Hartog, 2008).

The vast majority of research also reveals that ethical executives have good consequences not just for workers but also for the firm as a whole. In addition to this, the utility of ethical leadership is the concept of investigation and implementation.   An example of this would be the fact that ethical leadership is significantly connected with interconnected fairness, leader integrity, leader concern, and perceived influence (for example, Avey et al., 2011; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Detert et al., 2007; Mayer et al., 2009; Neubert et al., 2009; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009).

However, there is also a correlation between ethical leadership and workers' willingness to disclose their concerns (Brown et al., 2005). For example, unethical conduct among work units of lower levels and deviance among higher levels of citizenship and lower work unit deviance (Mayer et al., 2010; Mayer et al., 2009) are both connected with unethical behavior from lower-level work units. According to Walumbwa and Schaubroeck (2009), there was a positive correlation between greater levels of ethical leadership and psychological safety and voice behavior. Additionally, there was a favorable association between higher levels of ethical leadership and trust, commitment, and organizational optimism (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008), as well as intrinsic motivation (Piccolo et al., 2010).

Employee Creativity

According to Amabile (1996), Amabile (1997), Mumford and Gustafson (1988), Oldham and Cummings (1996), and Zhou (2003), creativity is defined as the development of innovative and valuable ideas or problem solutions on a topic (i.e., goods, processes, or services) that are suitable for the phenomena or issue that is being presented. The definition of creativity is that it is the process of coming up with fresh ideas that are not only original but also practical. According to Shaley et al. (2004), ideas are considered innovative when they are distinct in comparison to other concepts that are already accessible inside the organization. Furthermore, ideas are considered valuable when they have the potential to provide either direct or indirect contributions to the business, either in the short term or in the long term.

In their study, Plucker et al. (2004) provided the following definition of creativity: Creativity is a relationship among abilities, manipulation, and circumstance by which a people or collective develops an apparent outcome that is both innovative and beneficial when viewed within a social context." According to Woodman, Sawyer, and Griffin (1993: 293), creativity is often defined as the act of accomplishing everything for the very first time anyplace or the creation of new information. According to Zhou and Oldham (2001), it entails breaking down and rearranging the information that is known about the topic in order to get the most distinctive and important thoughts.

Teamwork

When it comes to whether or not new work structures have arisen in growing capitalist countries, the issue of teamwork has been a source of attention. Teamwork has been identified as a significant aspect that is in contradiction with traditional forms of work organizations. These conventional forms of work organizations prioritize the management goals of greater production as well as the self-confidence and achievement of employees (Wood, 2024). All parties involved agree that corporations should pave the way for more participatory patterns of responsibility that provide workers with more levels of creativity and authority over their professions. This would allow employees to better use their creative potential and valuable contributions to the company (Friel, 2024).

Collaboration may give workers a feeling of permission since it allows them to exercise their power over the work situation (Goodman et al., 1988; Harley, 1999). This is the primary reason that supports the notion that collaboration is associated with better levels of productivity. As a result, employers who have a greater degree of influence over their employees' occupations are more likely to feel a sense of commitment to institutions. As a consequence, they are more likely to be eager to improve the company's performance (Cohen et al., 1996; Dunphy & Bryant, 1996; Pil & MacDuffie, 1996).

According to Ramsay et al. (2000), this remark also strengthens the theories of "high commitment" and "high performance" management systems. In these management systems, collaboration is one of the organizational elements believed to promote the company's efficacy by increasing the workers' motivation. In addition, cooperation improves organizational performance because it gives individuals the opportunity to use their knowledge, talents, and skills. It is also beneficial in terms of the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and information (Vaskova, 2007; Wagner et al., 1997; Wall et al., 2002).

Leana (1987) has found that teamwork is a potential to facilitate the creation of specific tasks and human resources among workers in an environment where employee competency and high-quality knowledge are becoming more vital to corporations' success. This is accomplished via the anticipation of mutual and collaborative learning processes. When it comes to the division of work, there are many different team arrangements. Offline teams and online self-managed teams are the two most well-known forms of team structures that have been explored in academic literature., who distinguishes between delegating and involvement. Similarly, Levine and Tyson (1990) differentiated between review involvement, which was considered offline effectiveness, and functional participation, which was considered online output. According to Lawler et al. (1995), there is a distinction between work planning power-sharing agreements and parallel frameworks. Parallel frameworks are described as being parallel to or outside of the legal system of leadership and the organization of work. From the above scientific literature review, there were several hypotheses developed and hypothetical framework was developed with proposition of social exchange theory (see Figure 1).

Hypotheses

1. **H1:** Ethical leadership and teamwork have association with employee creativity.
2. **H2:** Ethical leadership has predictive relationship with teamwork.
3. **H3:** Ethical leadership has positive predictive association with employee creativity.
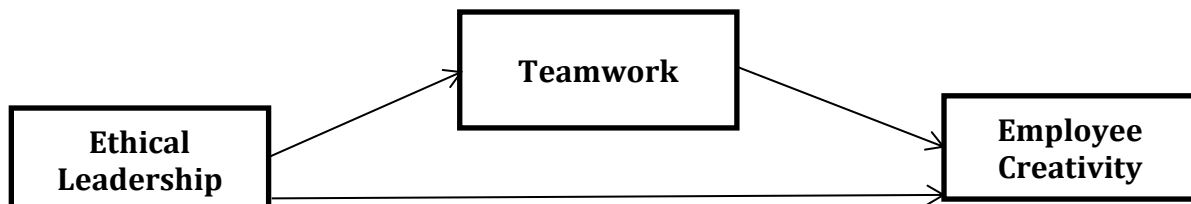

Figure 1: Hypothesized Model

Methodology

Nishat Group Faisalabad was the population where this research was carried out. It was decided to contact workers of Nishat Group who were working there at the time when the data was being collected. Through purposive sampling, information was gathered from 176 employees who are currently employed in textile industry. Quantitative research method was used, and a survey questionnaire was composed, and these items were adopted and adapted from three distinct scales to make effective and easy instruments. G*Power software was used to calculate the sample sized based on multiple linear regression model (see Figure 2 and 3 for details). The Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) has reliability value was .87, so it may be used to measure ethical leadership. After that, the creativity scale was established from the study of Scott, Susanne, Reginald, and Bruce (1994) and it was modified to estimate the level of creativity shown by employees. The reliability value was .79. Following that, teamwork scale was adopted from the study of Farooqi., et al (2020) and the reliability value was .71. The researcher used these scale and collected data from the respondents. Data was analyzed through Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21 and the statistical test was correlation to know the linear relationship between the variables.
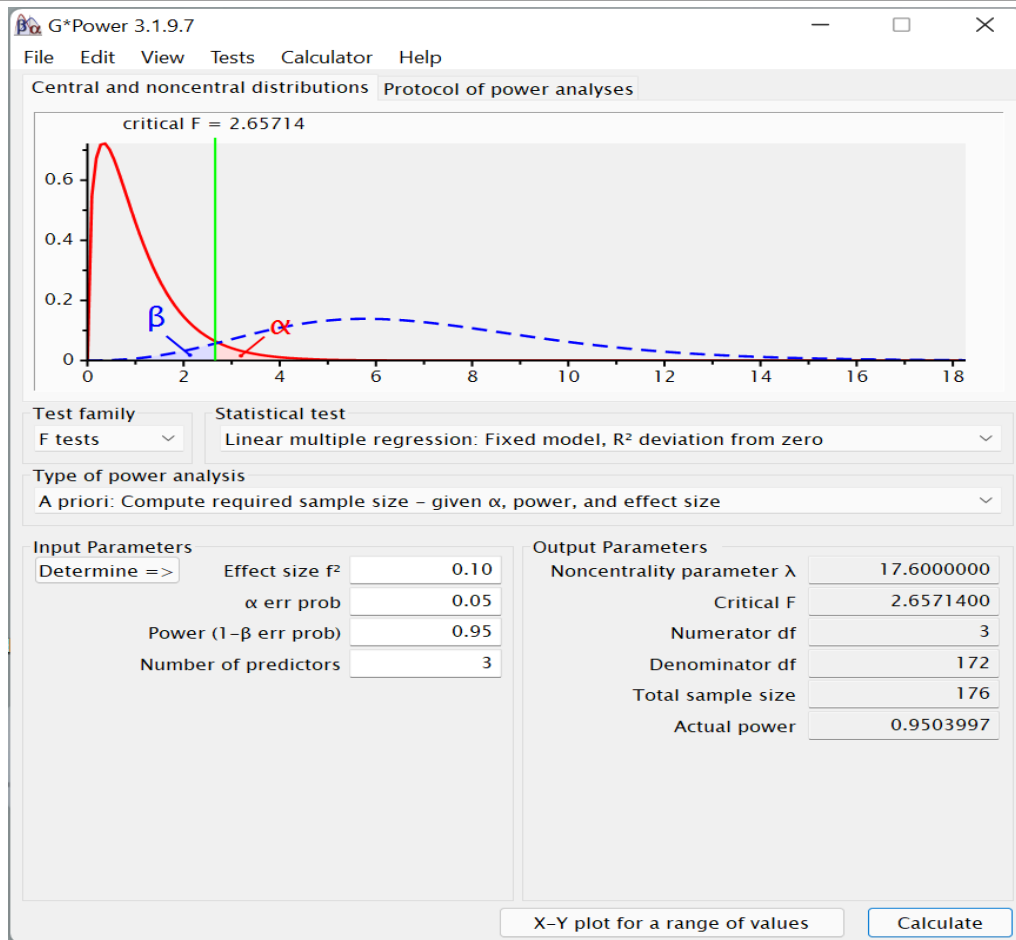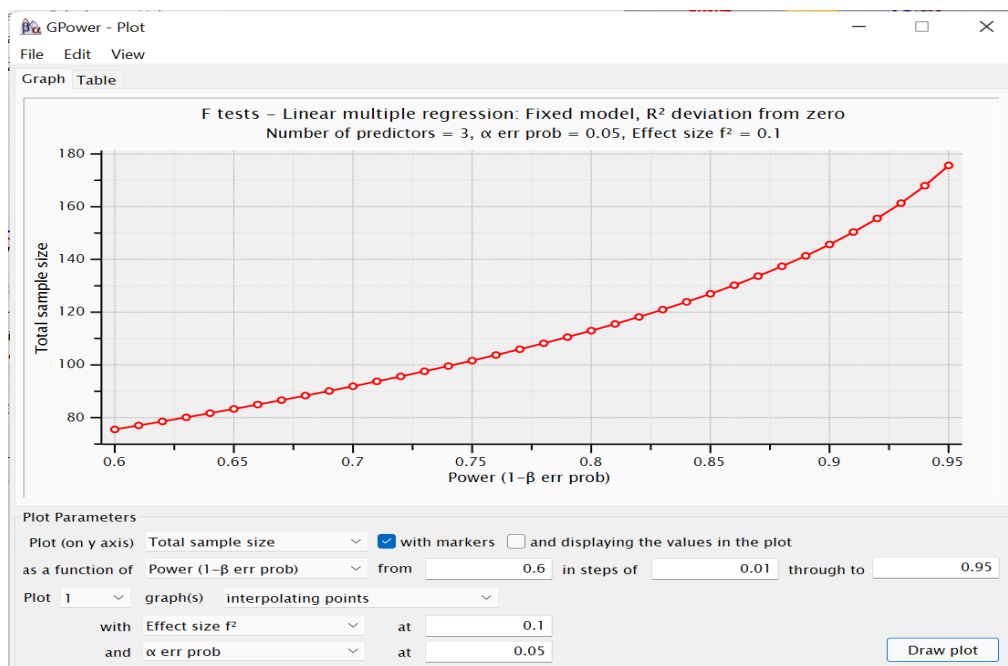
Figure 2: Sample Size for Generalized based Model

Figure 3: Sample Size Plot Parameters

Data Analysis and Results

The paper analyzed analyzed the results with correlation and simultaneous and multiple hierarchical regression tests. All the findings discussed below with proper interpretation. The result revealed that there was total 166 respondents and 80 were female and 86 were male employees.

Table 1
Correlation between Teamwork, Ethical Leadership and Employee Creativity (n=176)

	Teamwork	Ethical Leadership	Employee Creativity
Teamwork	1		
	.000		
Ethical Leadership	.714**	1	
	.000	.000	
Employee Creativity	.501**	.811**	1
	.000	.000	.000
	176	176	176

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient test was used, and data was analyzed. Table shows that teamwork has a strong positive correlation [r=.714] with ethical leadership. Similarly, teamwork has a strong positive correlation [r=.501] with employee creativity. Then, there is also a strong positive correlation [r=.811] between ethical leadership and employee creativity (see Table 1).

Table 2
Simultaneous Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Employee Creativity (n=176)

	Employee Creativity		
Predictors	B	S.E	β
Ethical Leadership	.159	3.37	.161***
Teamwork	.189	5.65	.199***
Total R^2	.200***		
F	10.55**		

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

The results revealed that ethical leadership has a positive significant relationship with employee creativity with beta value ($\beta = .161***$). Similarly, teamwork has also positive significant association with employee creative with beta value ($\beta = .199***$). The coefficient determination values suggested that both ethical leadership and teamwork bring 20 percent change in employee creativity at industrial setup (see Table 2).

Table 3
Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Employee Creativity (n=176)

	Employee Creativity		
Predictors	$\triangle R^2$	β	$\triangle F$
Step 1			
Control Variables (Gender)	.090		10.345
Step 2			
Ethical Leadership	.340	.161***	22.24
Step 3			

Teamwork	.250	.199***	22.43
Total R^2	.260**		

Note: Adapted Model and Gender was Control Variable

The results showed that after controlling gender variables, i.e., age in step one, the overall results were more robust and significant. Similarly, ethical leadership was entered into step two, and it is predicting a good for employee creativity. Lastly, teamwork was entered into step three, and it was found a significant relationship for employee creativity. The overall model accounted for how much variance 26 of variance with [$F_{(3,166,13)}$ = 22.43, p< .001 for employee creativity. Whereas teamwork mediates between ethical leadership and employee creativity (see Table 3).

Discussion

According to Mumford et al. (2002), they argued that creative labor is concentrated on the first person. The production of ideas and solutions is dependent on people's knowledge and expertise. In the second place, creative activity necessitates the participation of several people. Lastly, according to Mumford et al. (2002), creative activity is both time-consuming and inherently difficult. The challenges that arise in creative activity are often challenging, ill-defined, and novel-reasoning challenges that need a significant amount of time to resolve. For creative activity, it is necessary to have long-term drive and continued concentration. In the fourth place, creative work is expensive (Mumford et al., 2002), which means that it requires a wide range of resources to be linked together. The creative process requires a variety of resources, including human, economic, time, and energy resources. Finally, creative activity is fraught with danger and uncertainty (Mumford et al., 2002).

The effect of various leadership styles on creativity has been investigated by a number of researchers, both theoretically and empirically. These leadership styles include transformational leadership (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009), authentic leadership (Muceldili, Turan, & Erdil, 2013), empowering leadership (Zhang & Bartol, 2010), and abusive supervision (Liu, Liao & Loi, 2012). A small amount of research has been conducted on this aspect of leadership, which focuses on the investigation of the impact that ethical leadership has on the creative output of employees. Due to the fact that ethical leadership places an emphasis on justice, independence, and caring for others (Brown & Travino, 2006), this style of leadership has the potential to influence employee creativity dramatically (Cheng, Ribbens & Zhou, 2013). Therefore, ethical leadership may be the right way to solve this gap. The componential theory of creativity proposed by Ambles (1988) suggests that in complex social systems, leadership is an essential feature of the recognized workplace setting. Leadership has the potential to influence both the amount of employee creativity and the consistency with which it occurs. The current approach to studying creativity also assumes that the social environment may influence both the amount and frequency of creative behavior and that any human being who has normal capabilities is capable of producing at least a reasonable amount of creative work in some areas, at some point in time (Amabile, 1996).

In addition, a significant number of early researchers have investigated the impact of ethical leadership on consequential outcomes via the lens of social knowledge and social exchange. For instance, Brown and Trevin (2006), Brown et al. (2005), and Chung, Ribbens, and Zhou (2013) have all conducted studies on this topic. There have been a few studies that utilized an alternate view of the intrinsic drive in order to investigate the implications of ethical leadership on employee performance and imaginative work behavior. These studies have also shed light on the motivational component of ethical leadership and its influence on intrinsic motivation (for example, Picolo et al., 2010; Tu & Lu, 2012). For example, Mehmood., et al (2021) described that social exchange theory is best model for business development. In accordance with this research, we endeavored to discover the impact that ethical leadership has on the creative output of employees by means of the mediation of emotional empowerment. To be more specific, we base our research on social exchange theory in order to describe the fundamental structure of teamwork that exists between ethical leadership and employee innovation. No study has been conducted up to this point that has investigated the

mechanisms that could mediate the link between two fundamental factors, namely ethical leadership and employee creativity.

Conclusion

This study explained that teamwork mediates between ethical leadership and employee creativity. In order to determine the relationship between ethical leadership and employee creativity, the study concluded that it could improve employee creativity. The role of teamwork is an important factor that has boosted employee creativity in every step of the textile industry. In this way, it is concluded that ethical leadership and teamwork have a positive significant effect on employee creativity. Considering the above discussion, teamwork has paramount importance for the productivity of the textile industry. It is recommended that an ethical leadership workshop be conducted to develop employee creativity. Teamwork is a good suggestion for the textile industry, and it can improve and achieve organizational goals for better production.

Author Contribution
Paper Idea, Conceptualization, Design and Formatting was done by Uzma Noor.
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