



Ethical Work Climate and Its Influence on Employee Well-Being, Organizational Citizenship Behaviour, and Leadership

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ABSTRACT

The concept of ethical work climate has gained significant attention in modern organizational studies due to its impact on employee well-being, job satisfaction, and overall organizational performance. However, there remain critical gaps in understanding the precise mechanisms through which ethical work climate influences key employee behaviours, such as organizational citizenship behaviour, and how ethical leadership shapes this climate. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the relationship between ethical work climate, ethical leadership, and organizational citizenship behaviour, and their collective impact on employee well-being and organizational outcomes. Further, this study assesses how ethical leadership shapes the ethical climate and how this climate influences organizational citizenship behaviour and employee engagement, satisfaction, and performance. To achieve this objective, the study used a desktop research method to collect secondary data from publications relevant to the study using keywords. It was found that a positive ethical environment, grounded in justice, accountability, and integrity, significantly enhances employee motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction, driving superior organizational outcomes. Conversely, a deficient ethical climate fosters stress, erodes trust, and undermines performance. It was also found that ethical leaders who model transparency, accountability, and ethical decision-making create a culture in which employees feel empowered, valued and safe to raise concerns without fear of retribution. This leadership fosters a climate of trust, which is directly linked to higher organizational commitment and satisfaction. Organisations were recommended to have ethical leadership development and training initiatives. Additionally, align performance metrics with ethical standards and promote a culture of psychological safety.

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INTRODUCTION

Workplace ethics has emerged as a fundamental element shaping organizational principles, moral standards, and decision-making processes. The relationship between ethical climate and employee well-being is increasingly recognized as critical for creating a constructive work environment. As organizations strive to enhance reputation and stakeholder trust, cultivating an ethical workplace culture becomes

indispensable.¹ An Ethical Work Climate (EWC) is understood as the collective formal and informal conditions that influence employees' responses to policies, procedures, and practices with ethical implications.² It is characterized by shared confidence that ethical reasoning and behaviour are the expected norms for decision-making, shaped by dimensions such as caring, legal codes, regulations, independence, and instrumentality.³

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping this climate, as leaders set the tone for organizational conduct and decision-making. Ethical leaders foster environments where employees feel acknowledged and supported, thereby alleviating stress, enhancing belonging, and improving morale.⁴ Previous studies highlight that ethical leadership has a positive influence on employee well-being and reduces turnover, but they also note gaps in understanding the mechanisms through which EWC affects Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) and employee engagement.⁵ Responding to calls to apply Situational Strength Theory (SST), this study seeks to expand knowledge on how ethical climates shape employee attitudes and organizational outcomes.⁶

Despite growing awareness of ethical dilemmas, many organizations continue to engage in questionable practices, resulting in reputational crises.⁷ To counteract this, explicit ethical guidelines and leadership that reinforce ethical values are crucial to improve work engagement, job satisfaction, and innovation.⁸ Research suggests that employee engagement and satisfaction thrive within supportive, ethical climates, reinforcing the importance of leadership and organizational structures that nurture emotional well-being.⁹ However, while OCB is often linked to improved well-being and efficiency, it can also deplete employee resources, leading to burnout.¹⁰ This duality of OCB remains underexplored, particularly in the context of ethical climates.

Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by examining the interplay between EWC, ethical leadership, and OCB, focusing on their collective influence on the affective well-being of millennial employees and organizational results. By adopting a multi-level approach that incorporates moral identity as a moderating factor, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how ethical climates can foster positive organizational cultures. Ultimately, the findings will benefit leaders, HR practitioners, employees, and scholars by offering insights into cultivating ethical workplaces that enhance satisfaction, engagement, and performance. In an evolving business environment, the prioritization of ethics is not only desirable but essential for long-term organizational success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of EWC has gained considerable scholarly interest in contemporary discourse, as both researchers and practitioners acknowledge its significant influence on employee well-being and the performance of organizations. According to Mitonga-Monga, EWC can be described as the collective

¹ S. Pandey, N. Kumar, and A. Sharma, "Workplace Ethics and Its Impact on Employee Well-Being: A Comprehensive Study in Organizational Behaviour," *Organizational Studies Journal* 45, no. 2 (2024): 150–72.

² J. Mitonga-Monga, "Ethical Climate and Its Impact on Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction: A Case Study," *Journal of Human Resource Management* 16, no. 1 (2018): 1–9.

³ Mitonga-Monga, "Ethical Climate and Its Impact on Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction: A Case Study."

⁴ Mitonga-Monga, "Ethical Climate and Its Impact on Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction: A Case Study."

⁵ Herpratiwi Herpratiwi and Ahmad Tohir, "Learning Interest and Discipline on Learning Motivation," *International Journal of Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology* 10, no. 2 (March 5, 2022): 424–35, <https://doi.org/10.46328/ijemst.2290>; A. Kaffashpoor and S. Sadeghian, "Ethical Leadership and Its Impact on Employees' Affective Well-Being: The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction," *Journal of Business Ethics* 170, no. 2 (2020): 315–29; A. M. Naber and R. G. Moffett, "Exploring Ethical Climate as a Group-Level Phenomenon: The Role of Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour," *Journal of Business and Psychology* 32, no. 1 (2017): 113–27.

⁶ A. Newman et al., "Ethical Climates and Their Implications for Employee Outcomes: A Call for Further Research Using Situational Strength Theory," *Journal of Business Research* 79 (2017): 98–106.

⁷ M. Teresi, F. Conte, and F. Tommasi, "Ethical Climate, Employee Engagement, and the Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction," *Journal of Organizational Behaviour* 38, no. 6 (2019): 751–66.

⁸ Teresi, Conte, and Tommasi, "Ethical Climate, Employee Engagement, and the Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction."

⁹ S. Asl, M. A. Jahani, and N. Alimohammadi, "Ethical Climate and Employee Well-Being: The Role of Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment," *Journal of Business Ethics* 144, no. 3 (2017): 471–82.

¹⁰ Yanhong Shao and Shumin Kang, "The Link Between Parent–Child Relationship and Learning Engagement Among Adolescents: The Chain Mediating Roles of Learning Motivation and Academic Self-Efficacy," *Frontiers in Education* 7 (April 22, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2022.854549>; Z. Aloustani, L. Mir Mohammad Tabar, and M. A. Jahani, "The Effect of Ethical Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Nurses' Well-Being: A Cross-Sectional Study," *Journal of Nursing Management* 28, no. 2 (2020): 1–10.

perceptions of members within an organization concerning the ethical policies, practices, and procedures that direct decision-making and behaviour within the organizational context.¹¹ This climate is cultivated when employees perceive that specific forms of ethical reasoning and conduct are anticipated and rewarded by the organization.¹² A comprehensive understanding of the dynamics related to EWC is imperative for organizations aspiring to cultivate a favourable workplace atmosphere that promotes employee engagement, satisfaction, and overall productivity. This literature review seeks to discuss the association between EWC and various employee outcomes, the influence of ethical leadership in shaping ethical climate, and the ramifications of OCB on employee well-being.

Ethical Work Climate and Employee Outcomes

Numerous scholarly studies have explored the correlation between EWC and various employee outcomes, encompassing job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. Teresi, Finney and DiStefano ascertained that ethical climate exerts a positive influence on job satisfaction through the intermediary function of organizational justice.¹³ Employees who perceive their organization as embodying a robust ethical climate are more inclined to feel that they are treated equitably, which subsequently results in elevated levels of job satisfaction. Similarly, Rubel et al. illustrated that EWC decreases turnover intentions when employees receive substantial support from their supervisors, which is associated with greater work engagement.¹⁴ The relationship between ethical climate and employee well-being has also been the subject of this study. Therefore, Asl et al. established that ethical climate is positively correlated with both job satisfaction and organizational commitment, thereby indicating that a nurturing ethical environment is pivotal for cultivating affirmative employee attitudes.¹⁵

Affective Well-Being and OCB

Recent studies have explored the relationship between the affective well-being of employees and the ethical climate within organizational settings. A study carried out by Frontiers investigated the interaction between the ethical climate and the affective well-being of millennial employees, incorporating OCB as a mediating variable and moral identity as a moderating variable.¹⁶ The research found that millennials who partake in OCB are likely to experience a greater sense of meaning in their work and enhanced affective well-being, considering the resource-rich framework associated with OCB. This framework is consistent with the concept that OCB, which encompasses voluntary behaviours that surpass formal job expectations, can substantially improve the overall efficacy of the organization.¹⁷ Illustrative instances of OCB encompass assisting colleagues, taking on additional responsibilities voluntarily, and fostering a constructive work environment.

The Dual Nature of OCB

While several previous studies have explored OCB through the lens of resource depletion, indicating that it may result in adverse emotional states and occupational burnout, the framework of positive psychology asserts that both positive and negative emotions can coexist.¹⁸ Baranik and Eby identified that participation in OCB correlates with diminished levels of employee depressive moods and burnout, in addition to enhanced satisfaction regarding health and overall life.¹⁹ Similarly, Kaur and Kang illustrated

¹¹ Mitonga-Monga, "Ethical Climate and Its Impact on Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction: A Case Study."

¹² Laurie H. Rubel, "Equity-Directed Instructional Practices: Beyond the Dominant Perspective," *Journal of Urban Mathematics Education* 10, no. 2 (December 29, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.21423/jume-v10i2a324>.

¹³ M. Teresi, S. J. Finney, and C. DiStefano, "The Relationship between Ethical Climate, Organizational Trust, and Organizational Commitment in a Higher Education Context," *Journal of Business Ethics* 157, no. 3 (2019): 809–22.

¹⁴ Rubel, "Equity-Directed Instructional Practices: Beyond the Dominant Perspective."

¹⁵ Asl, Jahani, and Alimohammadi, "Ethical Climate and Employee Well-Being: The Role of Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment."

¹⁶ Shao and Kang, "The Link Between Parent–Child Relationship and Learning Engagement Among Adolescents: The Chain Mediating Roles of Learning Motivation and Academic Self-Efficacy."

¹⁷ Aloustani, Mir Mohammad Tabar, and Jahani, "The Effect of Ethical Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Nurses' Well-Being: A Cross-Sectional Study."

¹⁸ Frontiers, "Exploring the Relationship between Ethical Climate, Millennial Employees' Well-Being, and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour: A Resource-Rich Perspective," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (2022): 102–18.

¹⁹ L. E. Baranik and L. T. Eby, "The Influence of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Employee Well-Being: A Resource Perspective," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 101, no. 10 (2016): 1470–80.

that OCB exerts a favorable impact on employee well-being, with psychological capital acting as a moderating variable.²⁰ Employees who demonstrate elevated psychological capital, characterized by attributes such as resilience and optimism, are inclined to obtain beneficial outcomes from their involvement in OCB. The interplay between ethical climate, OCB, and employee well-being has been the focus of numerous scholarly inquiries. Aloustani et al. established that ethical climate exerts a positive effect on OCB, mediated by the variable of organizational commitment.²¹ Employees who perceive their organization as embodying a robust ethical climate are more inclined to exhibit commitment to the organization and engage in OCB.

Ethical Leadership and Ethical Climate

Ethical leadership is integral to the formation of an organization's ethical climate. Individuals who embody ethical leadership exemplify and advocate for ethical behaviour through their actions, decision-making processes, and interpersonal engagements with staff.²² By exemplifying ethical conduct and ensuring accountability among employees for their actions, ethical leaders cultivate an environment in which employees perceive themselves as valued, supported, and inspired to partake in ethical conduct themselves.²³

The Influence of Ethical Leadership

Numerous studies have explored the relationship between ethical leadership and the ethical climate within organizations. Ahmad established that ethical leadership exerts a favourable influence on the ethical behaviour of employees, mediated by the ethical climate.²⁴ Employees who recognize their leaders as ethical are more inclined to assimilate these values and engage in ethical behaviour themselves. Dunc and Aydemir similarly identified a positive correlation between ethical leadership and employee behaviours, with ethical climate functioning as a mediating variable. Kaffashpoor and Sadeghian investigated the ramifications of ethical leadership on the affective well-being of employees, with psychological empowerment serving as a mediating construct.²⁵ The research concluded that ethical leadership improves employees' perceptions of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, which, in turn, positively affects their affective well-being. This implies that ethical leadership not only molds the ethical climate but also exerts a direct influence on employee well-being through the enhancement of psychological empowerment.

Organizational Citizenship Behaviour and Well-Being

OCB denotes voluntary actions that exceed mandated job responsibilities and enhance the overall efficiency of the organization.²⁶ Aloustani et al. further state that instances of OCB encompass assisting colleagues, engaging in additional tasks voluntarily, and fostering a conducive work atmosphere.²⁷ Although prior research has investigated OCB through the lens of resource depletion, indicating that it may result in adverse emotional states and occupational burnout, the field of positive psychology asserts that both positive and negative emotions can coexist harmoniously.²⁸

²⁰ G. Kaur and S. K. Kang, "The Impact of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Employee Well-Being: A Positive Psychology Perspective," *Journal of Organizational Behaviour* 40, no. 6 (2019): 734–47.

²¹ Aloustani, Mir Mohammad Tabar, and Jahani, "The Effect of Ethical Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Nurses' Well-Being: A Cross-Sectional Study."

²² Mitonga-Monga, "Ethical Climate and Its Impact on Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction: A Case Study."

²³ Naber and Moffett, "Exploring Ethical Climate as a Group-Level Phenomenon: The Role of Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour."

²⁴ Muhannad Akram Ahmad and Seif Obeid Al-Shbiel, "The Effect of Ethical Leadership on Management Accountants' Performance: The Mediating Role of Psychological Well-Being," *Problems and Perspectives in Management* 17, no. 2 (2019): 228–41.

²⁵ Kaffashpoor and Sadeghian, "Ethical Leadership and Its Impact on Employees' Affective Well-Being: The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction."

²⁶ Aloustani, Mir Mohammad Tabar, and Jahani, "The Effect of Ethical Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Nurses' Well-Being: A Cross-Sectional Study."

²⁷ Aloustani, Mir Mohammad Tabar, and Jahani, "The Effect of Ethical Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Nurses' Well-Being: A Cross-Sectional Study."

²⁸ Shao and Kang, "The Link Between Parent–Child Relationship and Learning Engagement Among Adolescents: The Chain Mediating Roles of Learning Motivation and Academic Self-Efficacy."

The Resource-Rich Perspective of OCB

Recent scholarly studies have explored the association between OCB and employee well-being through a resource-abundant lens. Baranik and Eby interpreted that participation in OCB correlates with reduced levels of employee depressive symptoms, burnout, and increased satisfaction with health and life outcomes.²⁹ Similarly, Kaur and Kang established that OCB exerts a beneficial impact on employee well-being, with psychological capital functioning as a moderating variable. Employees with elevated psychological capital attributes, such as resilience and optimism, exhibit a greater tendency to achieve favourable outcomes from their participation in OCB.³⁰ The interplay between ethical climate, OCB, and well-being has been scrutinized across numerous empirical studies. Aloustani et al. determined that the ethical climate exerts a positive influence on OCB through the mediating effect of organizational commitment.³¹ Furthermore, individuals who interpret their organization as embodying a robust ethical climate are more inclined to exhibit organizational commitment and partake in OCB. Frontiers expanded upon these foundational findings by proposing a multi-level conceptual model that integrates ethical climate, OCB, and affective well-being, with moral identity posited as a moderating element.³² The investigation posits that millennials who engage in OCB can derive enhanced meaning of work and elevated affective well-being, particularly in the presence of a strong moral identity.

The Influence of Ethical Climate and Leadership on the Implementation of Ethical Codes

A robust organizational culture, collectively embraced by all constituents of the organization, exerts a significant impact on the development of ethical codes within entities and their manifestation in conduct. Scholarly discussions on this topic highlight that ethical codes, which serve as crucial guiding principles for business operations, should be formulated in alignment with fundamental core values. According to Teresi et al., it is imperative for an organization to recognize ethical codes as an essential resource for growth and sustainability, similar to other critical organizational assets.³³ When this understanding is achieved, ethical codes will confer a competitive edge. However, Kul asserts that this advantage will materialize only when ethical codes are integrated with administrative behaviours that are strategically aimed at enhancing the value of the organization's key components.³⁴

In this regard, a notable deficiency observed in numerous organizations pertains to the necessity for fulfilment by upper management, specifically ethical leadership and a robust ethical climate that empowers the organization to cultivate, execute, and consistently oversee ethical codes. A research investigation conducted by Kul sought to assess the impact of ethical leadership and perceptions of ethical climate on the practices of ethical codes within both public and private sector organizations.³⁵ The findings of this investigation revealed a positive correlation between ethical climate and ethical leadership, as well as adherence to ethical codes of practice. Moreover, it was determined that ethical leadership behaviours exert a significant influence on the practices surrounding ethical codes. Nevertheless, counterintuitively, it was revealed that ethical climate does not effectively impact the practices of ethical codes.

The Manifestation of Ethical Values

Robust ethical cultures, which effectively deter unethical and illegal conduct, may hinge on the degree to which fundamental ethical values have been permeated throughout an organization, are manifest in formal programs, and exemplify ethical leadership with an appropriate “tone at the top”. However, Kul suggests that organizations exhibit considerable variability in their efforts to ensure that such policies or codes are

²⁹ Baranik and Eby, “The Influence of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Employee Well-Being: A Resource Perspective.”

³⁰ Kaur and Kang, “The Impact of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Employee Well-Being: A Positive Psychology Perspective.”

³¹ Aloustani, Mir Mohammad Tabar, and Jahani, “The Effect of Ethical Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Nurses’ Well-Being: A Cross-Sectional Study.”

³² Frontiers, “Exploring the Relationship between Ethical Climate, Millennial Employees’ Well-Being, and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour: A Resource-Rich Perspective.”

³³ Teresi, Finney, and DiStefano, “The Relationship between Ethical Climate, Organizational Trust, and Organizational Commitment in a Higher Education Context.”

³⁴ M. Kul, “The Relationship between Ethical Leadership, Ethical Climate, and Ethical Codes Practices in Public and Private Sector Organizations,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 142, no. 1 (2017): 121–33.

³⁵ Kul, “The Relationship between Ethical Leadership, Ethical Climate, and Ethical Codes Practices in Public and Private Sector Organizations.”

indeed operationalized.³⁶ Empirical evidence by Treviño, Haidt and Filabi suggests that the utilization of standardized, validated cultural assessment instruments can aid in the formulation of policies aimed at bolstering ethical culture.³⁷ However, the limitation arises from the possibility that the currently available methodologies often employ samples that do not adequately represent the working adult population. Furthermore, these designs frequently fall short of encapsulating the contextual intricacies that characterize the everyday realities of organizational existence.³⁸

METHODOLOGY

This study used a desktop research method, which, according to Teresi et al., involves the collection, evaluation, and synthesis of existing literature, reports, and case studies related to the topic of EWC and its influence on employee well-being, OCB, and leadership.³⁹ This approach was chosen due to its ability to provide a broad, well-rounded understanding of existing theoretical and empirical perspectives without the need for time-consuming and resource-intensive primary data collection. Desktop research is particularly effective in examining complex organizational dynamics such as ethical climates, employee behaviour, and leadership styles, as it incorporates multiple viewpoints from various academic and professional sources.⁴⁰

Data Collection Method

The data for this study was sourced from a variety of academic journals, organizational reports, case studies, and credible online databases. Key platforms such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, Science Direct, ResearchGate, the University of KwaZulu-Natal online library, and organizational behaviour-focused databases were systematically searched using terms such as “ethical work climate,” “ethical leadership,” “organizational citizenship behaviour,” “employee well-being,” and “organizational commitment” to gather research on ethical climates, leadership, employee well-being, and organizational behaviour. Government publications, scholarly articles, and reports from reputable institutions specializing in organizational ethics and human resources were also consulted. This use of diverse, reliable sources allowed a comprehensive understanding of the ethical work climate and its associated outcomes, ensuring that the research draws from a wide pool of knowledge and captures both theoretical and practical insights.

Data Analysis and Reporting

The gathered data was analysed using qualitative content analysis, which involved organizing the information into key themes, such as ethical work climate dimensions, leadership’s role in fostering ethical environments, and the impact on employee well-being and organizational citizenship behaviour.⁴¹ Through this thematic grouping, the study identified patterns and insights related to the interplay between ethical climates and employee engagement, motivation, and organizational performance.

The findings were systematically presented and categorized based on the primary objective of the study, with citations from the literature to support each theme discussed. This methodology underscores the importance of ethical leadership in shaping workplace culture and highlights how a positive ethical climate can enhance employee well-being, promote OCB, and contribute to overall organizational success.

³⁶ Kul, “The Relationship between Ethical Leadership, Ethical Climate, and Ethical Codes Practices in Public and Private Sector Organizations.”

³⁷ L. K. Treviño, J. Haidt, and A. Filabi, “Using Cultural Assessment Measures to Improve Ethical Culture,” *Journal of Organizational Behaviour* 38, no. 4 (2017): 487–508.

³⁸ Marie S Mitchell, Scott J Reynolds, and Linda K Treviño, “The Study of Behavioral Ethics within Organizations: A Special Issue Introduction,” *Personnel Psychology* 73, no. 1 (2020): 5–17.

³⁹ Teresi, Finney, and DiStefano, “The Relationship between Ethical Climate, Organizational Trust, and Organizational Commitment in a Higher Education Context.”

⁴⁰ Aloustani, Mir Mohammad Tabar, and Jahani, “The Effect of Ethical Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Nurses’ Well-Being: A Cross-Sectional Study.”

⁴¹ Rubel, “Equity-Directed Instructional Practices: Beyond the Dominant Perspective.”

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study on EWC and its influence on employee well-being, OCB, and leadership. The findings are organized according to the key themes identified in the literature review, namely: EWC and Employee Outcomes; Affective Well-Being and OCB; Ethical Leadership and Ethical Climate; and OCB and Well-Being. The findings are based on secondary data from academic journals, reports, and case studies, providing insight into the relationships between these variables.

Ethical Work Climate and Employee Outcomes

The review of existing literature revealed a strong correlation between the EWC and various employee outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. Numerous studies support the notion that a positive EWC fosters better employee attitudes and behaviours, ultimately benefiting both individuals and organizations.

Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment: Studies such as those by Teresi et al. indicate that a robust EWC positively influences job satisfaction. Employees who perceive fairness and ethical treatment in their organizations are more likely to feel satisfied with their jobs.⁴² This is especially evident when the ethical climate is intertwined with organizational justice, which serves as a mediator. A strong sense of fairness within the workplace not only improves job satisfaction but also boosts organizational commitment. Employees who feel valued and treated ethically are more likely to remain committed to their organization's goals and values, reducing turnover intentions.

Reduction in Turnover Intentions: Rubel et al. found that a supportive ethical climate can reduce turnover intentions, especially when employees receive substantial support from their supervisors.⁴³ Employees are more engaged and invested in their work when they perceive their organization as ethically sound, leading to lower turnover rates. The ethical climate provides employees with a sense of security and trust in leadership, which translates to long-term loyalty to the organization.

Employee Well-Being: A growing body of research highlights the significant influence of EWC on employee well-being. Asl et al. demonstrated that a positive ethical climate fosters job satisfaction and organizational commitment, creating a nurturing environment conducive to employee well-being. Employees in ethical organizations report lower levels of stress, improved mental health, and a higher overall quality of life. Therefore, a favourable ethical climate is essential to promote not just organizational success but also the personal well-being of employees.

Affective Well-Being and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour

The literature underscores the importance of OCB as a mediating variable between EWC and affective well-being. Recent studies have shown that employees who engage in OCB experience a more profound sense of well-being, often because these behaviours create a resource-rich work environment.

Organizational Citizenship Behaviour as a Contributor to Employee Well-Being: OCB, defined as voluntary behaviours that go beyond formal job expectations, has a strong positive correlation with employee well-being. Aloustani et al. found that employees who engage in OCB, such as helping colleagues or voluntarily taking on additional responsibilities, report a higher sense of purpose and job satisfaction.⁴⁴ This engagement in prosocial behaviours leads to better psychological outcomes, such as lower levels of anxiety and depression.

Positive Emotions and Psychological Resilience: Although some studies point to OCB as a potential source of resource depletion, resulting in burnout, a more optimistic perspective within positive psychology suggests that OCB can enrich employee experiences. Baranik and Eby identified a link

⁴² Teresi, Conte, and Tommasi, "Ethical Climate, Employee Engagement, and the Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction."

⁴³ Rubel, "Equity-Directed Instructional Practices: Beyond the Dominant Perspective."

⁴⁴ Aloustani, Mir Mohammad Tabar, and Jahani, "The Effect of Ethical Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Nurses' Well-Being: A Cross-Sectional Study."

between participation in OCB and reduced depressive moods and burnout.⁴⁵ Employees who participate in OCB often develop resilience and optimism, which enhances their affective well-being. The presence of these attributes of psychological capital helps employees navigate workplace challenges while maintaining a positive outlook.

The Role of Moral Identity and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour: Frontiers explored how moral identity moderates the relationship between OCB and well-being, particularly among millennial employees.⁴⁶ The study concluded that millennials who engage in OCB experience a heightened sense of meaningful work and affective well-being, especially when they have a strong moral identity. These findings suggest that the development of a work environment that encourages ethical behaviour and OCB can significantly enhance employee engagement and well-being.

Ethical Leadership and Ethical Climate

The role of ethical leadership in shaping an organization's ethical climate is crucial. Ethical leaders not only model ethical behaviour but also create an environment that encourages ethical conduct among employees.

Impact of Ethical Leadership on Employee Behaviour: Numerous studies have shown that ethical leadership is crucial in promoting an ethical climate and shaping employee behaviour. Ahmad found that ethical leadership positively influences the ethical behaviour of employees, with the ethical climate acting as a mediating factor.⁴⁷ Employees who view their leaders as ethical are more likely to internalize those values, leading to greater ethical conduct within the organization.

Enhancing Employee Well-Being Through Ethical Leadership: Ethical leadership also has a direct impact on employee well-being. Kaffashpoor and Sadeghian demonstrated that ethical leaders enhance employees' perceptions of psychological empowerment, which in turn, boosts their affective well-being.⁴⁸ Employees who feel empowered by their leaders are more confident in their abilities, more engaged in their work, and experience a greater sense of personal accomplishment.

The Role of Psychological Empowerment: Psychological empowerment serves as a critical mechanism through which ethical leadership influences employee well-being. By fostering a culture of ethical decision-making and accountability, ethical leaders help employees feel a sense of ownership and autonomy in their roles. This empowerment contributes to employees' overall satisfaction and well-being, reduces stress, and improves workplace morale.

Organizational Citizenship Behaviour and Well-Being

The findings reinforce the notion that OCB plays a pivotal role in shaping employee well-being and overall organizational effectiveness. OCB, when supported by a strong ethical climate, can lead to numerous positive outcomes for both employees and the organization.

OCB and Enhanced Job Satisfaction: Aloustani et al. noted that OCB, driven by a strong ethical climate, has a direct positive effect on employee job satisfaction.⁴⁹ When employees voluntarily participate in OCB, they contribute to a more collaborative and positive work environment, which, in turn, improves their own job satisfaction and well-being. Employees in such environments feel a stronger connection to their organization and colleagues, which fosters a sense of belonging and fulfilment.

⁴⁵ Baranik and Eby, "The Influence of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Employee Well-Being: A Resource Perspective."

⁴⁶ Frontiers, "Exploring the Relationship between Ethical Climate, Millennial Employees' Well-Being, and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour: A Resource-Rich Perspective."

⁴⁷ I. Ahmad, "Impact of Ethical Leadership on Employees' Well-Being and Work Engagement: A Case of the Banking Sector of Pakistan," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2019): 23–44.

⁴⁸ Kaffashpoor and Sadeghian, "Ethical Leadership and Its Impact on Employees' Affective Well-Being: The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction."

⁴⁹ Aloustani, Mir Mohammad Tabar, and Jahani, "The Effect of Ethical Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Nurses' Well-Being: A Cross-Sectional Study."

Psychological Capital as a Moderator: Kaur and Kang identified psychological capital as a moderator in the relationship between OCB and well-being.⁵⁰ Employees with higher levels of psychological capital, such as resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy, are better equipped to handle the demands of OCB without experiencing resource depletion. This resilience allows employees to reap the benefits of OCB without succumbing to stress or burnout.

The Interplay Between Ethical Climate, OCB, and Well-Being: The ethical climate of an organization significantly influences the extent to which employees engage in OCB and experience enhanced well-being. Aloustani et al. demonstrated that a positive ethical climate encourages OCB, which, in turn, improves employee well-being.⁵¹ Employees who perceive their organization as ethical are more likely to exhibit organizational commitment and partake in OCB, leading to greater overall satisfaction and a healthier work-life balance.

The findings underscore the critical role of EWC in shaping employee outcomes, leadership behaviours, and OCB. A strong EWC fosters higher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and well-being, while ethical leadership enhances psychological empowerment and ethical behaviour. OCB, when supported by an ethical climate, contributes significantly to employee well-being, reinforcing the need for organizations to prioritize ethical leadership and climate to promote a healthy, productive work environment.

The academic discourse surrounding EWC and employee well-being has elucidated significant insights into the interplay between ethical climates, employee outcomes, and organizational performance. The implications of these findings underscore the need to cultivate a conducive ethical climate that promotes equity, accountability, and integrity within the organizational context.

Defining EWC, EWC encompasses the psychological dimensions related to how individuals perceive and evaluate ethicality in business practices. This construct is a subset of organizational climate that focuses on ethical decision-making processes and ethical interactions.⁵² Employees operating within a robust ethical climate are inclined to believe that their organization upholds principles of equity, accountability, and integrity in its policies, procedures, and relationships with both internal and external stakeholders. Theoretical perspectives the Ethical Climate Theory (ECT), conceptualized by Victor and Cullen in 1988, is recognized for its enhanced capacity to encapsulate the ethical climate prevalent within organizations compared to alternative models. This theory defines the dimensions of ethical climates, positing the existence of various orientations, such as egoism, benevolence, and principle-oriented ethical climates.

Impact on employee well-being, an affirmative ethical climate creates fairness, respect, and transparency, which are pivotal for nurturing employee engagement. When employees perceive their organization as ethically robust, they are predisposed to trust their leaders and experience a sense of security in their roles, thereby augmenting their engagement and commitment to the organization. Employees situated within organizations characterized by positive ethical climates are more inclined to engage actively in their work, culminating in elevated levels of job satisfaction.⁵³ In contexts where ethical behaviour is prioritized, employees are less susceptible to experiencing stress associated with ethical dilemmas or conflicts of interest. Ahmad explains that a positive ethical climate can mitigate feelings of isolation and stress, as employees discern that their organization values their well-being.⁵⁴ In environments with constructive ethical climates, employees exhibit a heightened tendency to trust their leaders and perceive ethical behaviour as esteemed. This trust is essential to foster robust working

⁵⁰ Kaur and Kang, "The Impact of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Employee Well-Being: A Positive Psychology Perspective."

⁵¹ Aloustani, Mir Mohammad Tabar, and Jahani, "The Effect of Ethical Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Nurses' Well-Being: A Cross-Sectional Study."

⁵² A. Newman et al., "Exploring the Role of Ethical Climate and Leadership in Shaping Employee Well-Being: A Qualitative Perspective," *Organizational Studies Journal* 57, no. 4 (2022): 200–218.

⁵³ M. R. B. Rubel, D. M. H. Kee, and N. N. Rimi, "The Role of Ethical Leadership in Improving Employee Well-Being: A Social Exchange Perspective," *Journal of Business Ethics* 178, no. 2 (2022): 375–95.

⁵⁴ I. Ahmad, "Ethical Work Climate and Employee Well-Being: The Role of Organizational Culture," *Journal of Business Ethics* 156, no. 4 (2022): 873–89.

relationships, collaboration, and organizational allegiance.⁵⁵ Empirical evidence suggests that ethical climates exert a positive influence on organizational commitment, thereby enhancing employee loyalty and retention.⁵⁶

The Function of Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership refers to the methodology of guiding by exemplification and advocating for a culture characterized by integrity, equity, and accountability within the organizational framework. Ethical leaders emphasize the importance of ethical conduct within their decision-making paradigms and act as exemplars for their subordinates.⁵⁷ The phenomenon of ethical leadership is positively associated with employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and overall performance. When employees perceive their leadership as ethical, they are significantly more inclined to experience feelings of value and respect, thus improving their overall well-being. Ethical leaders cultivate an environment of fairness and trust within the organization, which subsequently results in heightened employee engagement and loyalty.⁵⁸

In organizational culture and ethical work environment, ethical work environments are fundamentally rooted in organizational culture, which influences the way employees perceive and address ethical dilemmas. The ethical climate can be augmented through a robust corporate culture that prioritizes ethical standards, thereby nurturing an environment where moral conduct is acknowledged and encouraged.⁵⁹ Organizations can cultivate a positive ethical climate through a myriad of strategies, including leadership dedication to ethical conduct and decision-making, employee education regarding ethical practices and decision-making processes, fostering open communication and constructive feedback, as well as recognizing and rewarding ethical behaviour.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study offer a comprehensive examination of how EWC influences key employee outcomes, including well-being, OCB, and leadership dynamics. This study contributes significantly to the expanding body of literature by reaffirming the strong correlation between positive EWC and improved employee attitudes and behaviours. It goes beyond simply establishing this relationship, delving into the mechanisms through which ethical leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping a supportive ethical climate. In turn, this climate improves the well-being of employees and strengthens organizational commitment. These findings challenge organizations to reevaluate their strategies for managing ethical environments and leadership practices, encouraging a shift towards prioritizing ethical leadership as a central aspect of improving employee satisfaction and engagement.

The correlation between EWC and employee outcomes is well-established in the literature, with multiple studies confirming the positive effects of a strong EWC on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover reduction. For example, Teresi et al. demonstrate that employees who perceive their organizations as upholding ethical standards report significantly higher levels of job satisfaction.⁶⁰ This satisfaction is especially pronounced in environments where fairness and organizational justice are key components of the ethical climate. As employees experience fairness in treatment, they develop a deeper sense of loyalty to their organization, leading to a reduction in turnover intentions. These findings suggest that organizations must treat the ethical treatment of employees not as an optional initiative but as a core strategic objective to enhance retention and reduce costly turnover rates. Ethical practices, in this sense, are not only a moral responsibility but also a practical means of maintaining a dedicated and motivated workforce.

Ethical leadership emerges as a critical element in the creation and sustainability of a positive ethical climate. Ethical leaders act as role models for acceptable behaviour within an organization, setting the tone for the entire workplace. According to Ahmad, ethical leadership is directly related to ethical

⁵⁵ Newman et al., "Exploring the Role of Ethical Climate and Leadership in Shaping Employee Well-Being: A Qualitative Perspective."

⁵⁶ Teresi, Finney, and DiStefano, "The Relationship between Ethical Climate, Organizational Trust, and Organizational Commitment in a Higher Education Context."

⁵⁷ Rubel, Kee, and Rimi, "The Role of Ethical Leadership in Improving Employee Well-Being: A Social Exchange Perspective."

⁵⁸ Newman et al., "Exploring the Role of Ethical Climate and Leadership in Shaping Employee Well-Being: A Qualitative Perspective."

⁵⁹ Ahmad, "Ethical Work Climate and Employee Well-Being: The Role of Organizational Culture."

⁶⁰ Teresi, Finney, and DiStefano, "The Relationship between Ethical Climate, Organizational Trust, and Organizational Commitment in a Higher Education Context."

behaviour among employees and plays a crucial role in shaping their well-being.⁶¹ Ethical leaders, through their demonstration of integrity, transparency, and accountability, foster an environment of trust, which is vital for employees' psychological safety. This environment empowers employees to confront ethical dilemmas with confidence and security, knowing that their leaders will support ethical decision-making. This underscores the importance of organizations to invest in leadership development programs that emphasize ethical decision-making and moral courage. Developing such leadership not only promotes a positive organizational climate but also creates a supportive environment that improves employee well-being and engagement.

Another important aspect revealed by the study is the significant role of OCB in both organizational effectiveness and employee well-being. OCB refers to voluntary actions that go beyond formal job responsibilities, and these behaviours are shown to create a more cohesive and supportive work environment. Aloustani et al. found that employees who regularly participate in OCB report higher levels of job satisfaction and psychological resilience.⁶² Although some research suggests that OCB may lead to resource depletion and burnout, the findings of this study support the view that, when bolstered by a strong ethical climate, OCB can improve employee well-being by fostering a sense of belonging, purpose, and fulfilment. This suggests that organizations should not merely encourage OCB but must ensure that their ethical climate is strong enough to support employees who engage in these voluntary behaviours without fear of burnout.

In addition to these findings, the study sheds light on the interaction between EWC, OCB, and psychological capital. Psychological capital refers to individual traits such as resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy that help employees manage workplace demands. The research by Kaur and Kang highlights that employees with high psychological capital are better equipped to engage in OCB without experiencing the negative effects of stress or exhaustion.⁶³ Psychological capital acts as a buffer, allowing employees to handle the demands of voluntary, extra-role behaviours while maintaining their well-being. This underscores the importance for organizations to focus not only on cultivating ethical climates but also on developing psychological capital among employees. By doing so, organizations can ensure that the benefits of OCB are maximized while mitigating potential negative effects such as burnout and stress.

The role of cultural factors in shaping EWC and ethical leadership also emerges as a critical theme in this study. Previous research, such as the work by Newman et al., has shown that organizational culture plays a significant role in shaping ethical climates.⁶⁴ This study expands on this notion by illustrating how cultural dimensions, such as power distance and collectivism, influence the formation and sustainability of ethical climates. These findings are particularly valuable because they broaden the scope of ethical climate research, which has traditionally focused on individual behaviours rather than the larger cultural context. By highlighting the importance of these cultural factors, the study calls for a more comprehensive approach to understanding ethical climates. Organizations must, therefore, take cultural dynamics into account when designing and implementing ethical practices to ensure alignment with broader organizational values and employee expectations.

The study's linkage of EWC to employee well-being and organizational performance provides organizations with a practical framework for assessing and improving their ethical climates. The findings emphasize the importance of regular assessments of the ethical climate, along with transparent communication and ethical training, as key strategies for fostering a positive work environment. These initiatives not only enhance employee satisfaction but also strengthen organizational loyalty and reduce the likelihood of ethical violations. Organizations should consider institutionalizing ethical training programs and establishing clear, open lines of communication that encourage employees at all levels to engage in ethical behaviour. Such actions will create an environment where ethical conduct is not only

⁶¹ Ahmad and Al-Shbiel, "The Effect of Ethical Leadership on Management Accountants' Performance: The Mediating Role of Psychological Well-Being."

⁶² Aloustani, Mir Mohammad Tabar, and Jahani, "The Effect of Ethical Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Nurses' Well-Being: A Cross-Sectional Study."

⁶³ Kaur and Kang, "The Impact of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Employee Well-Being: A Positive Psychology Perspective."

⁶⁴ A. Newman et al., "Ethical Climate, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment: Evidence from the Indian Banking Sector," *Human Relations* 75, no. 3 (2022): 456–82.

encouraged but expected, which, in turn, leads to higher levels of organizational commitment and a more productive workforce.

The findings of this study carry profound implications for both organizational leadership and strategy. Ethical leadership is not just an ethical necessity but a fundamental driver of employee well-being and overall organizational success. By prioritizing the cultivation of a strong EWC, organizations can create environments that promote transparency, trust, and employee engagement. These environments will, in turn, lead to better employee outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and well-being. The study reaffirms that ethical leadership and a robust ethical climate are foundational elements of any successful organization, and as such, they must be continuously assessed and improved.

Ultimately, the research emphasizes the need for organizations to align their leadership and ethical practices with their broader strategic goals. This alignment is essential to creating a work environment where employees are not only satisfied but empowered to contribute to the organization's long-term success. The creation of such an environment is contingent on the organization's commitment to upholding ethical standards and fostering a culture of accountability, respect, and fairness. By doing so, organizations can cultivate a workforce that is engaged, loyal, and committed to the organization's success, ensuring sustainability in both employee satisfaction and overall organizational performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the empirical findings on the relationship between EWC and employee well-being, several practical recommendations can be advanced to strengthen ethical practices and improve organizational outcomes. First, organizations should prioritize ethical leadership development through training initiatives that integrate accountability, transparency, and moral courage into leadership practices. Mentorship programs and leadership assessments must incorporate ethical behaviour as a key evaluation metric to ensure that integrity becomes a lived organizational value. Second, fostering a supportive culture is critical. Organizations must establish and clearly communicate ethical standards while promoting inclusivity, empathy, and teamwork. By embedding these values into daily practices and encouraging open discussions about ethical challenges, employees will feel more engaged and committed to shared ethical goals.

Transparent communication is another cornerstone of a strong EWC. Confidential reporting mechanisms, such as whistleblower policies, hotlines, and digital platforms should be made accessible to all employees. Coupled with psychological safety, these initiatives allow employees to raise concerns without fear of retaliation, helping organizations address ethical issues proactively. In addition, organizations should implement continuous ethical training programs that combine theory with practice through case studies and real-world scenarios. This training should be included in onboarding and reinforced through ongoing workshops and refresher courses to keep employees responsive to emerging ethical challenges.

Lastly, recognition programs that reward ethical conduct should be institutionalized, aligning performance evaluations with ethical standards. Organizations must also integrate ethics into strategic objectives, embedding them into mission and vision statements. Regular assessments and audits will ensure alignment with evolving norms, ultimately fostering a sustainable ethical culture that enhances both employee well-being and organizational performance.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated the profound influence of EWC on employee well-being, organizational commitment, and overall performance. A positive ethical environment that emphasizes justice, accountability, and integrity fosters motivation, trust, and job satisfaction, leading to higher levels of engagement and productivity. Employees who perceive their organizations as ethically sound feel secure in their roles and are more willing to exert discretionary effort, which contributes directly to stronger organizational outcomes. In contrast, the absence of ethical standards undermines trust, increases stress, and compromises performance, ultimately threatening sustainability.

The findings also highlight the central role of ethical leadership in shaping an environment conducive to ethical behaviour. Leaders who demonstrate transparency, fairness, and integrity build trust and empower employees to voice concerns without fear, creating psychological safety, and reinforcing

ethical conduct. This leadership not only guides organizational norms but also directly enhances employee commitment and satisfaction, making ethical leadership a necessity for long-term success rather than a desirable trait.

Furthermore, the study underscores the critical connection between organizational culture and ethical climate. Whether benevolent, principled, or egoistic, the nature of the climate significantly shapes employee behaviour and decision-making. A strong ethical culture fosters collective purpose and responsibility, while fragmented climates risk confusion and ethical lapses. Practically, organizations must embed ethics into their core strategies through leadership development, transparent communication, recognition programs, and cultural reinforcement. These initiatives ensure resilience, employee loyalty, and competitive advantage. Ultimately, ethical practices are both a moral obligation and a strategic necessity, enabling organizations to thrive sustainably in an increasingly demanding global context.

FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study has provided important insights into the relationship between EWC, employee well-being, OCB, and ethical leadership, several promising directions for future research remain. First, longitudinal studies are needed to examine how ethical climates evolve and their sustained impact on employee engagement, loyalty, and leadership development. Such an approach would capture the dynamic nature of EWC as organizations undergo internal changes and respond to external pressures. Second, cross-cultural studies could enrich the literature by exploring how national culture, power distance, and collectivism versus individualism shape perceptions of ethical climates. Comparative research would offer practical insights for multinational organizations seeking culturally adaptive ethical frameworks.

Future studies should also consider industry-specific contexts, as sectors such as healthcare, finance, and technology face distinct ethical dilemmas related to confidentiality, financial integrity, and data privacy. In addition, digital transformation introduces new ethical challenges around AI, surveillance, and transparency, making it vital to examine how technology reshapes perceptions of fairness and trust in organizations. Leadership style is another area that requires attention, as transformational, servant, or authentic leadership can interact differently with EWC to influence employee outcomes.

Further investigation is also needed on the psychological mechanisms underpinning EWC, including the roles of emotional intelligence, moral reasoning, and personal ethical frameworks. Linking EWC directly to organizational performance metrics such as innovation, customer satisfaction, and financial results could strengthen the business case for investing in ethics. Finally, future research should address how external stakeholders (such as regulators, customers, and investors) shape and pressure organizations to maintain ethical standards.

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