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LINKAGES BETWEEN ETHICAL LEADERSHIP, PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT, AND INNOVATIVE WORK BEHAVIORS IN HEIs

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Ethical Leadership, Innovative-Work-Behaviors, Perceived-Organizational Support, Faculty Members & Universities	<p>The twenty first century has brought paradigm shift in the universities. These days universities are supposed to be innovative, self-sustainable and self-reliant. Researchers are investigating factors that can instill innovation and creativity in universities. Since Ethical Leadership boosts Innovative Working Behavior within the organizations, therefore its role in universities should be examined. This empirical study has examined associations between concepts of ethical leadership and perceived-organizational support and innovative work behaviors in selected public sector universities of Pakistan. Adopting a cross-sectional research design, online data were gathered from a sample of faculty members, universities of KP, Pakistan. Collected data were examined and analyzed by descriptive univariate and multivariate inferential statistics. Findings revealed that both direct (β: 0.883) and mediational-indirect links via variable of Perceived Organizational Support, between Ethical Leadership (β: 0.789) and Innovative Working Behavior (β: 0.686). This study has yielded vital empirical and theoretical contribution along with the proposed practical implications.</p> <p> 2022 Journal of Social Research Development</p>
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INTRODUCTION

Twenty first century has brought paradigm shift in the universities around the world (Khan & Anwar, 2021). Nowadays, the universities are supposed to be innovative, self-sustainable and self-reliant. Moreover, the universities are engaged in activities related to teaching and research (Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021). The quest for being the best creates a competitive environment within universities, thus placing the academic staff under extreme pressure of “publish or perish”. However, recently researchers believe that it is discouraging reinforcer

and should be replaced with “publish and flourish” (Lambovska & Todorova, 2021). To do so, modern universities should develop the innovative work behaviors of academic staff by providing them strong ethical leadership, effective in respects, and organizational support so as to attain leading aims overwhelmed at anticipated success (Musenze & Mayende, 2022). Ethical leadership has gained attention in higher education sector as it is believed that ethical leaders improve productivity by valuing employees’ rights and dignity (Jia, Zhu, Zhang, Rasool, Asghar & Chin, 2022).

Ethical leaders’ qualities of being honest, trustworthy, and caring are perceived positively by employees and employees consider it as kind of organization support where employees are viewed as valued organizational assets (Qi, Liu, Wei, & Hu, 2019). Employees once find themselves easy in a conducive working environment are enabled to apply innovative ideas towards their work over the knowledge sharing, knowledge recombination and knowledge amplification that ultimately drive innovative working behavior (Stoffers, Van der Heijden, & Jacobs, 2020). In this connection, the empirical research on linkages between concepts of ethical leadership and innovative work behavior in higher education sector is gaining much attention and research studies have been conducted in diverse countries, in diverse contexts, with diverse results likewise Pakistan (Zahra, Ahmad & Waheed, 2017; Khan, Khan & Jan, 2021); Uganda (Musenze & Mayende, 2022); China (Jia (Jia, Zhu, Zhang, Rasool, Asghar & Chin, 2022); (Purwanto, Purba & Sijabat, 2021); United Kingdom (Ahmed, Abid & Contreras, 2020) and Nigeria (Jibola, 2020).

Since, higher education system of each country has its own dynamics, therefore, findings of studies from other countries cannot be fully generalized over the universities and higher education system, which is currently operating in Pakistan. The higher education system of Pakistan is administered by the Higher Education Commission at and the Higher Education departments (Furqan, Hanif, & Hanif, 2022). In this regard, the higher education system of Pakistan experienced the huge paradigm shift during the year 2002, when mega changes were brought into the old system of University Grant Commission by keeping in view the demands of ever changing the world (Siddiqui, 2007). Currently, Pakistani universities are actively engaged both in teaching and research activities, although innovation, creativity and commercialization features are not too much convincing (Yousafzai, Khan, & Shah, 2021). In this connection, researchers believe that the developments made in the higher education system of Pakistan can be attributed towards the futurist leadership that has governed the existing higher education system of Pakistan (Tanveer, 2020; Sarwar, Zamir, Fazal, Hong, & Yong, 2022).

Some of studies have also documented the impact of ethical leadership in universities of Pakistan (Zahra & Waheed, 2017; Khan, Khan, & Jan, 2021; Sarwar et al., 2022). However, the impact of leadership (particularly ethical leadership) on recent development in higher education system of Pakistan has not been fully explored and there is an overall paucity of

research on linkages between ethical leadership and innovative working behavior in the higher education sector of Pakistan. Keeping this in view, the current study has empirically investigated connections between concepts of ethical leadership, perceived organizational support, and innovative working behavior in selected public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Broadly speaking, the study has tried to find out answers towards following research questions:

1. Are there any connections between concepts of ethical leadership and perceived organizational support among faculty members in the public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan?
2. Does concept of perceived organizational support mediate connections between ethical leadership and perceived organizational support among faculty members in public sector universities of KP, Pakistan?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethical Leadership & Perceived Organizational Support

The ethical leaders are honest, fair, caring, and supportive. They have ethical courage and believes in the rights and dignity of their employees (Shakeel, Kruyen, & Van Thiel, 2019). Ethical leaders always act as a role model by exhibiting ethical principles for inspiring their employees toward positive working behaviors and leverage employees voice (Bai, Lin, & Liu, 2019). Ethical leaders' qualities of being honest, trustworthy, and caring are perceived positively by the employees and employees consider it as a kind of organizational support in which employees are viewed as valued organizational assets (Qi, Liu, Wei & Hu, 2019). The connection between the concepts of ethical leadership and perceived organizational support can be examined through the theoretical foundations, likewise the social exchange theory, which proposes that any social behavior can be developed through the process of exchange with the maximum benefits and minimum costs in the diverse situation (Gergen, 2011; Stafford & Kuiper, 2021).

The social exchange bonds are developed through the norms of reciprocity (Blau, 2017) in such a way that once employees feel that their ethical leader or head has treated them in a supportive way then they treat their ethical leader or organization in the favorable manner (Hansen, Alge, Brown, Jackson & Dunford, 2013). The high level of social exchange bounds predicts different positive behavior, including the innovative working behavior (Musenze & Mayende, 2022). It means that the effect of ethical leadership is further strengthened by the employees' perceived feelings of support from the organization in diverse situations in different circumstances to attain desired leading consequences and outcomes. Consistent with the existing research work, for example, Zagenczyk, Purvis, Cruz, Thoroughgood and Sawyer (2021), Wang and Xu (2019) and Musenze and Mayende (2022) the current study has hypothesized that:

H1: There is direct and positive connections between Ethical Leadership and Perceived Organizational Support.

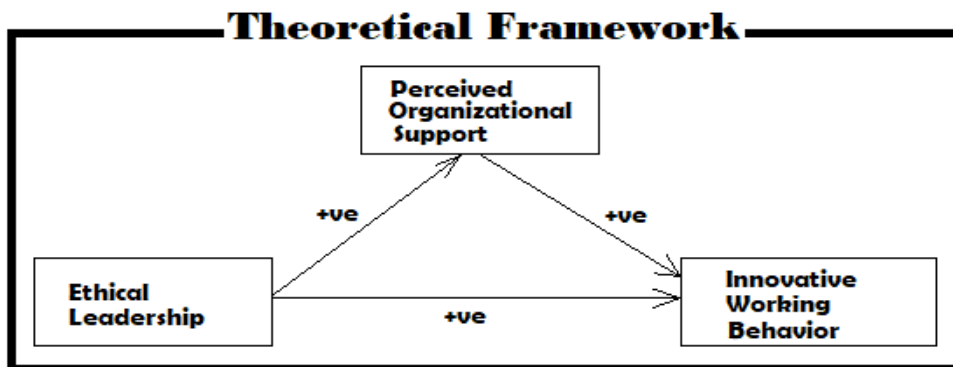
Ethical Leadership & Innovative Working Behavior

As earlier stated that Ethical leaders' qualities of being honest, trustworthy, and caring are perceived positively by employees (Qi et al., 2019), while such positive feelings ultimately predicts different positive behavior, including innovative working behavior (Musenze & Mayende, 2022). The employees once find themselves in conducive working environment, are enabled to apply innovative ideas to their work over a knowledge sharing, knowledge recombination and knowledge amplification, which ultimately drive the innovative working behavior (Stoffers et al., 2020). The connection between concepts of ethical leadership and innovative working behavior can be better understood over cognitive evaluation theory of motivation that offers that external stimulus once perceived as rewarding triggers internal motivation and creativity (Deci & Ryan, 2013).

Since innovative working behavior involves not only idea exploration, and generation but also idea struggle and implementation (Thurlings, Evers, & Vermeulen, 2015; Arain, Bhatti, Hameed, & Fang, 2019) therefore ethical leaders can act as an external stimuli that actually motivate and stimulate employees within the organizations to search, create and implement innovative and new ideas (Ahmad, Gao, Su, & Khan, 2021). Based upon such reciprocity norms introduced by Blau (2017) and Cognitive Evaluation Model of Deci and Ryan (2013) and other similar research, for example, by Baykal (2020) and Wu, Yuan and Yen (2021), current study has further hypothesized that:

H2: There is direct and positive connections Ethical Leadership and Innovative Working Behavior, whereas mediated by perceived organizational support

Figure 1 Direct and Mediational Connections between Concepts of Ethical Leadership, Innovative Working Behavior, and Perceived Organizational Support.



The research framework is given below as Figure 1, which shown both direct and indirect links between concepts of Ethical Leadership and Innovative Working Behavior. These links

have been marked with (+ve) and (-ve) signed for denoting positive or negative relationship between the variables.

RESEARCH METHODS

The current empirical study has implemented a correlational design with cross-section mode. Such research design can allow researchers to collect data at single point time for determining association between variables of study (Lau, 2016).

Population & Sample

The population composed of academic/teaching staff that are employed in the chosen universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Selected population of faculty member was chosen because it was neither practically possible nor economically feasible to contact all academic staff in the whole province. The selected universities consisted of four universities located in the southern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Population Framework

Universities	Lecturer	Assistant professor	Associate Professor	Professor
Kohat University of Science & Technology	88	45	25	12
Khushal Khan Khattak University, Karak	35	18	00	00
University of Science, Technology Bannu	72	55	09	04
Gomal University, D. I. Khan.	110	88	33	25
Total Population	305	206	67	41

Sample was drawn through three stages sampling process. In the first stage, four clusters were made on basis of geographical location of selected universities. In the subsequent second step, stratum was developed according to demographic variables like job position. While in the final third step, simple random sampling technique was employed to get 40% sample from each of the stratum. In this linking, researchers believe that 40% sample can be the representative of the total population (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Following this procedure, thus, a sample of (n:247) faculty members was acquired from the total overall population of (N:619).

Table 2 Sampling Framework

Universities	Lecturer	Assistant professor	Associate Professor	Professor
Kohat University of Science & Technology	35	18	10	5
Khushal Khan Khattak University, Karak	14	7	0	0
University of Science, Technology Bannu	28	22	4	2
Gomal University, D. I. Khan	44	35	13	10
Total Population	121	82	27	17

Data Collection

Due to ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, data were collected over online self-administered questionnaire, which comprised of following sections:

1. The concept of ethical leadership was measured by ten items of scale on the ethical leadership developed by (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005).
2. Concept of perceived organizational support was measured by six items of scale made by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa (1986).
3. Concept of innovative work behavior was measured by ten items of the innovative work behavior scale by Janssen (2003).

Data Analysis Strategy

1. Reliability was checked by Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, while validity was checked by running confirmatory-factor-analysis. Overall model fit was resolute by checking fit indices, including, Chi-square (χ^2), Normed Chi-square (χ^2/df), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Root Mean Square Residual (RMR), and Goodness of Fit Index (GFI).
2. The hypotheses were tested by running Multiple Linear Mediation Regression. In this regard, the process suggested and proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) was followed. According to this procedure the mediation can be checked through following steps:
 - a) In first step direct link (path A-B) between dependent (B) and independent (A) variables should be checked.
 - b) In second step, direct link (path C-B) between dependent (B) and Mediator (C) variables should be checked.
 - c) In the third step, direct-link (i.e., path A-C) between independent (A) and Mediator (C) variables should be checked.
 - d) In final step, independent (A) & Mediator (C) variables be entered into the model. If beta values of direct path (A-B) decrease, mediation has occurred, if beta values are significant then, will be partial mediation.

RESULTS OF STUDY

Table 3 shows that Cronbach Alpha Coefficients for three variables, i.e., Ethical Leadership, Innovative Working Behavior and Perceived Organizational Support are within acceptable range of >0.50 (Gliem & Gliem, 2003), which means that this data is reliable as well as consistent in particular context.

Table 3 Reliability and Consistency Analysis

Variables of Study	Cronbach's Alphas
Ethical Leadership	0.90
Perceived Organizational Support	0.86
Innovative Working Behavior	0.81

In the next step, Confirmatory Factor Analyses were run separately on each construct of the study to determine validity and overall model fit. Table 04 reveals that all of the three constructs of this study had demonstrated acceptable fit as clear from fit indices, which are within the acceptable range. Thus, showing that model of study possesses sufficient construct validity.

Table 4 Model Fit Indices for Construct Validity

Variables	Models	X2	df	X2/d	RMSEA	RMR	CFI	GFI
EL	Ten Factors Model	1.38	34	4.05	0.094	0.028	0.941	0.922
POS	Six Factors Model	7.90	06	1.31	0.018	0.010	0.997	0.991
IWB	Eight Factors Model	127	20	6.36	0.013	0.038	0.844	0.914

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypotheses were tested according to procedure mentioned in the data analysis section. Table 5 and Figure 2 show that there was direct link amid dependent (B) and independent (A), $\beta= 0.833$, significance value of 0.000. Table 05 and Figure 03 further shows that there was a direct link between mediator (C) and independent (A), $\beta=0.789$, p-value= 0.000. In a similar way, there was direct link between mediator (C), dependent (B), $\beta= 0.686$, p-value= 0.000. finally, once mediator (C), independent (A) variables were simultaneously entered into model, then direct link between dependent (B) and independent (A) got weakened, as clear from path c', $\beta= 0.774$, p-value= 0.000. It means that partial mediation had occurred. In this way, hypotheses were accepted as it was established that a direct connection amid the concepts of Ethical Leadership and Innovative Working Behavior exists, moreover, there is an indirect link between these two variables via mediator variable of Perceived Organizational Support.

Table 5 Results of Hypotheses Testing

Paths	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	SBC	T-TV	Sign
c	Ethical Leadership	Innovative Working Behavior	0.883	28.45	0.000
a	Ethical Leadership	P-Organizational Support	0.789	24.21	0.000
b	P-Organizational Support	Innovative Working Behavior	0.686	17.79	0.000
c'	Ethical Leadership + Perceived Organizational Support	Innovative Working Behavior	0.774	16.25	0.000

Figure 2 (A-B Path Model)

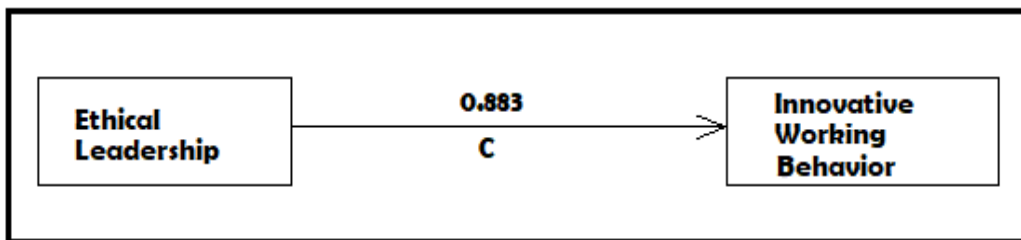
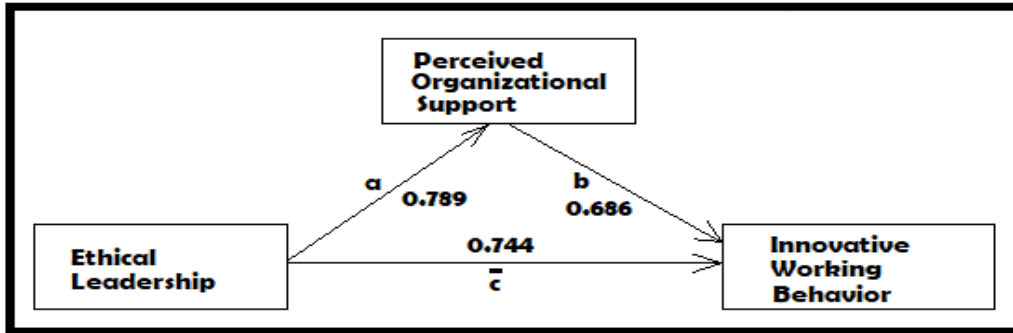


Figure 3 (Mediation Model, A-B-C Paths)



DISCUSSION ON RESULTS

This study aimed at determining direct and indirect linkages between Ethical Leadership and Innovative Working Behavior. Results obtained from this study revealed that there was a direct link between Ethical Leadership and Innovative Working Behavior, as well as there was indirect link between two variables via mediating variable of Perceived Organizational Support. Findings obtained from current study are coherent with Theory of Organizational Support (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and Cognitive Evaluation Theory of Motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2013) that established that Ethical Leadership is associated with Innovative Working Behavior. Ethical leaders' qualities of being honest, trustworthy, and caring are perceived as organizational support and reward by employees (Qi et al., 2019), while perceptions finally predicts different positive behavior, include innovative working behavior (Musenze & Mayende, 2022). This study has therefore extended direct connection between Ethical Leadership and Innovative Working Behavior by positioning the Perceived Organizational Support as a booster of Ethical Leadership.

Findings obtained from current study are in agreement with outcomes of earlier studies, for example, Musenze and Mayende (2022) conducted a study on relationship of Ethical Leadership with Innovative Work Behavior in the public sector universities of Uganda and discovered that the concept of Ethical Leadership was positively and directly associated with the Innovative Work Behavior. Likewise other recent studies by Ahmed et al (2020) and Ahmad et al (2021) have yielded similar findings, hence it is empirically tested that Ethical Leadership can be effective in enhancing the Innovative Work Behavior. The results obtained from the present study and previous studies have extended our understanding about the dynamic linkages between Ethical Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior in the higher education sector. This study has made important empirical as well as theoretical contributions. Empirically, the work on ethical leadership has mostly been conducted in the developed western countries.

This study has tested dynamic linkages between Ethical Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior among university teachers working in remote located public sector universities of

Pakistan. Theoretically, this empirical study has proven that concept of Ethical Leadership is connected with the concept of Innovative Working Behavior, whereas Ethical leaders' qualities of being honest, trustworthy, and caring are perceived as organizational support and reward by the employees. It means that Perceived Organizational Support acts as a booster of Ethical Leadership. In this way Theory of Organizational Support (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and Cognitive Evaluation Theory of Motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2013) have been successfully validated and further extended by the addition of Perceived Organizational Support as a contributory variable.

Findings of this study have significant practical implications. Realizing the important role of Perceived Organizational Support, faculty members should give support to each other and work in a collaborative way. The administration of the universities should develop the conducive working environment by including peer support through ethical leadership principles. The universities should consider Ethical Leadership as an integral part of their organizational strategy since Ethical Leadership acts as a fulcrum for the human resource development. Therefore, all process within universities should integrate ethical principles as essential features. All such efforts will motivate employees and will create a sense of the innovativeness among the employees in the universities of Pakistan. Thus, highly innovate universities in Pakistan will be in a better position to contribute towards the economic and technological development of Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

The twenty first century has brought a big shift in universities and overall higher education sector around the world. Success of the modern universities is leveraged on their quality of being innovative, self-sustainable and self-reliant. Since Ethical Leadership plays a very important role in boosting the Innovative Working Behavior within the organizations, therefore universities in Pakistan should work on developing working environments that are based on principles and standards of effective Ethical Leadership and Organizational Support. In this way the universities in Pakistan will get developed and will be able to contribute towards the economic and technological development of Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistani universities will be in a position to compete in the international markets for their services and products.

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