Enhancing Employee Involvement in Sustainability Activities: Evidence from Public Sector Universities

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Enhancing Employee Involvement in Sustainability Activities:

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Abstract: *The concept of employee involvement in sustainability activities (IVL) has gained attention in recent literature. Most of the prior studies on IVL have explored its outcomes; however, this research stream has paid little attention to exploring its antecedents. Moreover, the IVL phenomenon is unexplored in the context of universities. The present study addresses the gap by identifying and empirically testing the antecedents of IVL in university settings. Therefore, the study's main aim is to analyze the direct and indirect effect of ethical climate on IVL through workplace spirituality. Following the cross-sectional design, the data was collected from 294 faculty members of public sector universities in Pakistan. The collected data was analyzed by adopting the PLS-SEM approach using SmartPLS 3. The findings of the study revealed that the ethical climate has a significant direct effect on IVL and workplace spirituality. Similarly, the direct effect of workplace spirituality on IVL is found significant. Finally, the data analyses result also confirmed the indirect effect of ethical climate on IVL through workplace spirituality.*

Keywords: Sustainability-oriented behaviors, ethical climate, workplace spirituality, Universities, Faculty, Higher education.

Introduction

In recent years, the value of organizational sustainability has increased. At present, many companies are attempting to adopt socially conscious policies in the belief that they can have a long-term competitive edge (Nakruang, Donkwa, & Suvittawat, 2020). These programs were developed earlier by large corporations. Small and medium-sized companies recognize the importance of this concern, but they have greater difficulty implementing sustainability initiatives due to their limited resources. In addition, recent research shows that other corporations, such as cooperatives, trusts, and nonprofit organizations, are contemplating a triple-bottom-line strategy. This stream of research highlighted that universities have begun to pursue this direction, and sustainability approach is now ingrained in many universities' operations (Rahman, Castka, & Love, 2019). With the ultimate aim to contribute to their countries' sustainability, universities aim to boost their contributions

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to economic growth, minimize the effects on the environment and guarantee the social development of their societies and regions. In modern societies, higher education institutions play an essential role, acting as an integrative force in determining sustainable economic growth.

Currently, most research on sustainability has concentrated on its assessment at the organizational level factors (Shang, Chen, & Li, 2020). Several sustainability experts have recently called for further research to improve our understanding of its individual level factors (Shah & Rahim, 2019; Tian & Robertson, 2019). In response to these calls, several researchers, including (Carmeli, Brammer, Gomes, & Tarba, 2017) have highlighted the significance of voluntary employees' sustainability-oriented behaviors in achieving the overall organizational sustainability-related outcomes. However, limited research has been done to explore the antecedents of such behaviors. Prior literature has shown that an ethical climate can lead to ethical behavior among organizational actors. Employees' job satisfaction, organizational loyalty, intention to stay and workplace happiness are the few beneficial outcomes of ethical climate. While several organizational benefits of an ethical climate have been identified in these studies however, few studies have looked at a beneficial employee behavioral outcome that could also be a potential advantage of an ethical climate, namely employee involvement in sustainability activities (IVL) (Carmeli et al., 2017). As a result, this empirical study aimed to fill in this gap by investigating whether an ethical climate influences IVL. Employees' self-initiated behaviors for the organizational sustainability are referred to as IVL, and these behaviors are neither demanded nor compensated by the organization. More research is required to gather empirical evidence of the relationship between IVL and its potential predictors, so that various conceptual models can be formulated to discover the possible mechanisms that lead to voluntary employee behavior towards sustainability. This study responds to such a question by looking into the connection between ethical climate and IVL. Furthermore, investigating IVL is crucial for universities since academic staff who demonstrate IVL are more likely to deliver high-quality education to students (Rahman et al., 2019).

The possibility of a mediation process between the two constructs mentioned above was also explored in this study, as such a mechanism would provide a greater understanding of how an ethical climate affects IVL in universities. Workplace spirituality has risen in popularity in recent years to promote a healthy psychological climate for employees. The workforce's changing dynamics are reshaping the workplace and raising issues to university management of hiring, training, and personnel management. Work stress and depression are at an all-time high in organizations, resulting in mental fatigue, workplace oppression and incivility. As a result of these problems, a modern managerial approach known as workplace spirituality has emerged, which aids in the balance of various aspects of employees' life as well as the company. In the education sector, workplace spirituality is a relatively unexplored subject. There are only a few research studies in the educational setting that concentrate on workplace spirituality. The majority of previous workplace spirituality research was conducted in hospital settings and accounting companies, and it centered on the outcomes of workplace spirituality, such as organizational success and job satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational citizenship behavior. Thus, the main aim of the present study was to examine the direct and indirect

effect of ethical climate on IVL through workplace spirituality among academic staff of the universities.

Literature Review

Ethical Climate

Work climate refers to the specific working environment that each organization has based on its culture. Given its normative aspect, the ethical climate is one of the most important sub-constructs of organizational climate. This sub-construct focused on its members' ethical workplace behaviors, including management and employees. Theory of ethical work climate (EWC) was first conceptualized by Victor and Cullen (1988) as "the shared perceptions of what is ethically correct behavior and how ethical issues should be handled." Victor and Cullen (1988) operationalized EWC by two main dimensions 1) ethical criterion (egoism, benevolence, and principle) 2) locus of analysis (individual, local, and cosmopolitan). They hypothesized nine types of ethical climate in an organization using these two dimensions, including self-interest, company profit, efficiency, friendship, team interest, social responsibility, personal morality, company rules, procedures, and laws, as well as laws and professional code.

Ethical Climate and IVL

Moving forward, (Arnaud, 2006) developed a new theory of ethical work climate (EWC) by conceptualizing the construct with all four dimensions of the PPM model, namely, collective moral sensitivity, collective moral judgment, collective moral motivation, and collective moral character, based on Rest's (1984) psychological process model (PPM). Unlike the EWC theory, which only followed one dimension of the PPM model, namely moral judgment, and ignored the others. As a result, the new EWC theory is crucial because it provides a more comprehensive understanding of the construct. Since the evolution of the ethical climate construct by Victor and Cullen (1988), there has been much debate on this construct in various organizational contexts, i.e. forms of organization, organizational characteristics and demographics, prevailed organizational norms and values (Aloustani et al., 2020). However, until the end of the twentieth century, the debate was limited to the relationship between the ethical climate and ethical employee conduct in the workplace. Following that, the debate moved to the various antecedents (for example, leadership and organizational practices) and outcomes (for example, employee job attitudes, behaviors, psychological state, and performance outcomes) of the ethical climate.

   Organizational reform is critical to sustainability, as it involves involvement and learning behaviors of employees that can be improved by creating an ethical climate. Moreover, the ethical climate contributed significantly to the shared organizational citizenship actions of employees (OCB) (Kim & Vandenberghe, 2020). This relationship depends on an organization's ethical climate strength. Employees' OCB increases as a result of the organization's strong ethical climate, and vice versa. In a study done to understand

accountants' ethical behavioral intentions, Ahmed, Alzgool, Imam, and Ahmed (2020) found that ethical climate is strongly linked to employees' belief in social responsibility. Belief in social responsibility improves employee engagement and promotes positive employee behavior, crucial in establishing long-term customer relationships. Furthermore, caring values are needed to cultivate ethical behaviors of employees that reinforce them to partake in pro-social behaviors. Care ethics improves IVL by affective responses to organizational sustainability (Carmeli et al., 2017).

Moreover, the ethical climate plays an important role in translating employee actions into executing an organization's sustainability policy. But workers experience an ethical climate based on many organizational activities. For example, Guerci, Radaelli, Siletti, Cirella, and Shani (2015) noted ability-enhancing and opportunity-enhancing HRM activities could improve the organization's ethical climate. Given the ongoing debate about ethical climate that began three decades ago, much space remains to be covered. Most ethical climate study focuses on employee activities (including OCB) (Kim & Vandenberghe, 2020) whereas, the debate on the ethical climate-IVL relationship is minimal. It is an important way to discuss the need for employee engagement to achieve organizational outcomes. Hence, the present study hypothesized that:

H1: Ethical climate has a direct impact on IVL of faculty members.

Workplace Spirituality

From different viewpoints, the researchers attempted to describe the idea of workplace spirituality. Spirituality, according to Frinlicia and Nilasari (2019), is the manifestation of a person's true meaning and intent in life, as well as a desire to work in a peaceful setting. Likewise, Nair and Sivakumar (2018) described workplace spirituality as the consideration of an organization's work atmosphere as a spiritually peaceful environment for its employees. Spirituality, according to Zimmer et al. (2016), is a structure for proven organizational values, defined as a culture that promotes employees' interactions during job processes and a culture that will give employees a willingness to work. According to Aboobaker, Edward, and Zakkariya (2019), "spirituality" refers to a work atmosphere in which workers feel at ease and have a sense of purpose within the organization. It is claimed that a peaceful work atmosphere aids in the development of employees' personalities, the sense of their emotions, and their positive performance towards themselves and their work. Employees feel a sense of belonging within the company when they find appropriate conditions that enable them to communicate their internal lives.

When looking at some research, it was discovered that there are strong correlations between positive employee attitudes and behaviors and organizational variables. These studies included organizational engagement, quality of life, employee well-being, and work satisfaction. According to Haldorai et al. (2020), workplace spirituality was critical in deciding what triggered employee success in organizations in the twenty-first century. Despite the lack of empirical evidence, research clearly shows the potential value of workplace spirituality among management researchers. Furthermore, workplace spirituality is critical in terms of both employee and organizational performance and should be thor-

oughly researched. Nair and Sivakumar (2018) went on to say that it has a direct effect on employee satisfaction and organizational objectives, and that it should be explored further.

Workplace Spirituality as Mediator

The present research put forward that ethical climate can either directly influence employee sustainability-oriented actions or be mediated by other factors such as workplace spirituality. In prior literature, the relationship between ethical climate was found to be mediated by organizational spirituality. As workers consider the work climate to be positive, they place a high emphasis on the well-being of all employees, fostering a sense of community that can manifest itself in the form of helping others and society as a whole. The following logic serves as another foundation for this notion that the ethical climate in the workplace is positively linked to spirituality (Nair & Sivakumar, 2018), and workplace spirituality is related to employees' sustainability-oriented behaviors. As a result, workplace spirituality acts as a connection between ethical climate and IVL. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:
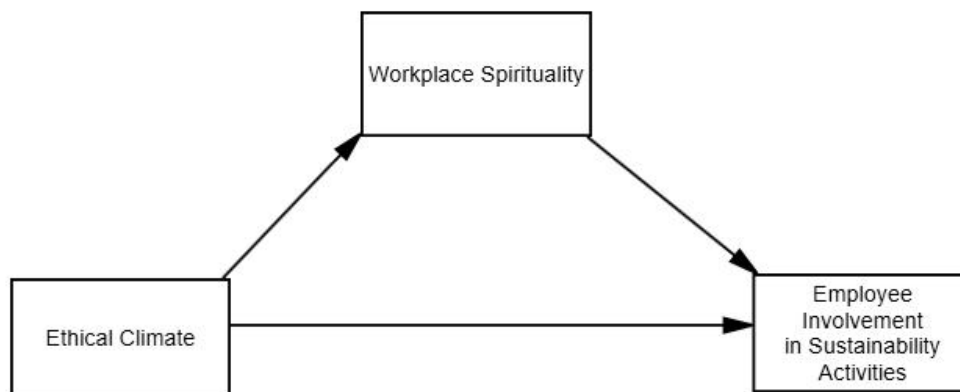
H2: Ethical climate has direct effect on Workplace spirituality of faculty members.

H3: Workplace spirituality has a direct effect on faculty members involvement in sustainability activities (IVL).

H4: Ethical climate has an indirect effect on faculty members involvement in sustainability activities (IVL) through workplace spirituality.

Figure 1
Theoretical Model of the study

Methodology

Data Collection Procedure

In order to test the hypotheses, the data was collected from all 16 public sector universities situated in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) of Pakistan. A total of 700 questionnaires were emailed to faculty members using random sampling technique. Out of total, 294 valid responses were received constituting a response rate of 42%. The data was collected in three phases. First, the list of all faculty members was developed. Second, the sample of the faculty members were developed randomly using MS Excel. Finally, the questionnaire was developed using google docs and the link was emailed to the selected faculty member. The respondents were given a time of one month to submit their responses. Two reminders were sent after 15 days and 25 days respectively. After one month, all the remaining respondents were considered as non-response. The data was collected in the months of August and September 2020.

Measures

Workplace spirituality was measured using Krishnan (2007)'s 6 items scale. All Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree". Sample items are: "An attitude of sameness toward all people is a noble thing to have" and "Living in selfish isolation from others is to be avoided". The construct has a reliability of 0.75 (Pradhan, Pradhan, & Jena, 2016).

The construct of ethical climate was evaluated by using 7 items scale developed by Schwepker Jr (2001). Items included: "In my company there is a formal, written code of ethics" and "In my company, unethical behavior is not tolerated". The internal consistency of the scale was more than 0.70. The statements were analyzed by using a 5-point Likert scale varying from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Employee involvement in sustainability activities (IVL) was measured using Kanungo (1982) 9 items scale. The sample items are "I am highly involved personally in improving sustainability in this organization." and "Most of my interests are centered around my attempts to improve sustainability in this organization". All the items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The scale has a reliability of 0.96 (Carmeli et al., 2017).

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed by both descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive analysis was performed by using SPSS 23. Whereas, inferential statistics were performed by adopting PLS-SEM technique and analysis was done by using SmartPLS 3. All the scales have reflective items therefore, consistent PLS-Algorithm and consistent boot strapping was performed. Both the measurement and structural model were ascertained in the study.

Results

Demographics and Descriptive Statistics

The average age of respondents were 42.7 years. The number of male respondents were 182 or 61.90% out of the total respondents which were higher than the number of female respondents which were 112 or 38.10% out of the total respondents. This shows that the sample comprised of a greater quantity of male faculty members. The total number of 212 respondents that were married representing 72.11%, 62 respondents were unmarried, representing 21.09%, and 20 respondents were divorced/widowed that are 6.80% of the total. Most of the respondents consisted of MS/M.Phil. degree holders who were 172, representing 58.50% of the respondents, while the others 122 have PhD degrees that represent 41.49% of the total respondents. 143 respondents represented 48.63% of the respondents having between 10 to 15 years of teaching experience. The other 70 respondents representing 23.81% of the respondents have 5 to 10 years of experience, 62 respondents representing 21.09% of the respondents have 0 to 5 years of experience, whilst 19 respondents have more than 15 years of experience, represents 6.46% of the total respondents. The mean values of ethical climate, workplace spirituality, and IVL were 2.96, 3.29 and 2.98. Likewise, the standard deviation of ethical climate, workplace spirituality and IVL were 0.540, 0.329 and 0.501 respectively.

Construct Reliability and Validity

In this study, the PLS-SEM was performed by using SmartPLS 3. Before testing the hypotheses of the study, the measurement model was assessed through CFA. The results of CFA of this study were presented in Figure 1 and Table 1. The measurement model has two main components that need to be analyzed. First, the internal consistency is ascertained by Cronbach Alpha's value and the outer loadings that should be greater than 0.70. In this research model, the constructs' Cronbach Alpha values vary between 0.936 and 0.956 that is greater than the threshold value. Likewise, all the values of outer loadings are greater than 0.70 except IVL 9 i.e., 0.614. None of the item was deleted as it does not have effect on the reliability of the constructs (Hair Jr, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Gudergan, 2017).

Second the convergent validity was established by evaluating the values of Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The values of CR and AVE must be greater than 0.60 and 0.50 respectively to establish the model's convergent validity. The present study meets the criteria of convergent validity as the CR values of all constructs were between 0.949 and 0.963 whereas, the minimum value of AVE of the model was 0.744.

Table 1
Measurement Model

Construct	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Ethical Climate	EC1	0.852	0.956	0.963	0.744
	EC2	0.924			
	EC3	0.875			
	EC4	0.870			
	EC5	0.876			
	EC6	0.850			
	EC7	0.888			
Workplace Spirituality	WS1	0.900	0.950	0.959	0.769
	WS2	0.899			
	WS3	0.902			
	WS4	0.900			
	WS5	0.884			
	WS6	0.726			
Employee Involvement in Sustainability Activities	IVL1	0.885	0.936	0.949	0.759
	IVL2	0.916			
	IVL3	0.899			
	IVL4	0.870			
	IVL5	0.907			
	IVL6	0.920			
	IVL7	0.891			
	IVL8	0.816			
	IVL9	0.614			

Similarly, the discriminant validity was established by Fornell and Larcker criteria and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. Fornell and Larcker criteria is a measure of the square root of the average variance derived (AVE) and the associated correlations with other variables (Hair Jr et al., 2017). The AVE's square root for each construct must surpass its correlation with every other construct to support discriminant validity. In addition, HTMT ratio has then been used to evaluate the distinctive meaning of two variables while the maximum appropriate value for HTMT is 0.85 (Kock, 2015). The AVEs' square roots and the associations between the variables and HTMT are presented in in Table 2 and Table 3. The findings presented in Table 2 and table 3 indicate that discriminant validity was fulfilled.

Table 2
Fornell and Larcker Criterion for Discriminant Validity

	Employee Involvement in Sustainability Activities	Ethical Climate	Workplace Spirituality
Employee Involvement in Sustainability Activities	0.862		
Ethical Climate	0.425	0.877	
Workplace Spirituality	0.665	0.345	0.871

Table 3
Heterotrait-Monotrait Criterion for Discriminant Validity

	Employee Involvement in Sustainability Activities	Ethical Climate	Workplace Spirituality
Employee Involvement in Sustainability Activities			
Ethical Climate	0.434		
Workplace Spirituality	0.644	0.357	

Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses of the study were established by running bootstrap procedure. The results of hypotheses testing are presented in Figure2 and Table 4. The findings revealed that ethical climate has a direct impact on workplace spirituality (B= 0.752; p-value= 0.000 < 0.01) and IVL (B= 0.752; p-value= 0.000< 0.01). Similarly, the direct effect of workplace spirituality (B= 0.752; p-value= 0.000 < 0.01) on IVL is also established. Moreover, the findings also confirm the indirect effect of ethical climate on IVL through workplace spirituality (B= 0.752; p-value= 0.000< 0.01).

Table 4
Hypotheses Results

Hypothesis	Beta	S.E	T Value	P Value	CIˆ{BCa} Low	CIˆ{BCa} High	Decision
EC ->IVL	0.219	0.041	5.339	0.000	0.137	0.302	Supported
EC ->WS	0.345	0.055	6.286	0.000	0.227	0.440	Supported
WS ->IVL	0.596	0.032	18.59	0.000	0.529	0.656	Supported
EC ->WS ->IVL	0.206	0.036	5.752	0.000	0.134	0.272	Supported

Discussion

The present study's main aim was to assess the direct and indirect effect of ethical climate on IVL through workplace spirituality. The findings of the study revealed that the ethical climate has a significant direct effect on IVL. The existence of an ethical environment in Pakistani universities can be a powerful force in understanding faculty members behavior (Asad, Naseem, & Faiz, 2017). The results indicate that faculty members' extra-role behavior is directly influenced by the ethical environment. The current results are consistent with previous findings, suggesting that ethical environment and OCB have a significant relationship. The findings suggest that faculty members have a strong understanding of their universities' ethical environment, and as a result, they put more effort into positive work attitudes, as shown by higher IVL levels. Positive attitudinal outcomes among faculty members were cultivated by the ethical climate in universities. The findings inferred that faculty members' sustainability-oriented activities are higher when they experience a higher degree of ethical climate within university. This finding is in line with the fact that there is a connection between ethical environment and extra-role behaviors (Derin, Toker, & Gorener, 2021). The results also show that extra-role behavior is influenced by an employee's perception of congruence between an entity and their own ethical values. According to the theory of social exchange, when faculty members are ethically treated,

they see themselves as part of the university and strive to make up for it by extraordinary behavior.

It has been suggested that the ethical climate of the workplace has a positive relationship with workplace spirituality. The ethical climate encourages people to care for others. The universities' ethical climate inspires faculty members to take a genuine interest in everyone's well-being, cultivating a feeling of togetherness. The ethical climate also makes it easier for people to find job meaningfulness (Mulki & Lassk, 2019). When there is an ethical climate in the university, the faculty members are always willing to help their peers in performing their duties. This gives workers a sense of worth and ties to their jobs.

The result of data analysis also found a significant direct effect of workplace spirituality on IVL. This strong correlation shows that faculty members do not see their job as simply a means to an end. Spirituality at work encourages them to participate in sustainable behavior more often by raising awareness of the needs of other members and inspiring behaviors. Faculty members who derive greater significance and intent from their work are more likely to engage in sustainable practices on a regular basis. Likewise, the significant direct relationships, ethical climate has an indirect effect on IVL through workplace spirituality. These findings are in line with the study of De Carlo, Dal Corso, Carluccio, Colledani, and Falco (2020) who found that the managements positive behaviors have an indirect effect on employees' work engagement through workplace spirituality.

Research Implications

This research has resulted in a variety of theoretical implications that can be extended to management literature. To begin with, workplace spirituality is a relatively unexplored subject in academia. This study shows how faculty members can use workplace spirituality to minimize negative behaviors and foster positive behaviors in universities. Next, the authors empirically evaluated the predictors of workplace spirituality, while most research focused on the outcomes of spirituality in the workplace. Finally, the authors assessed the potentiality indirect effect of ethical climate on IVL through workplace spirituality that fills the gap in prior literature. The present study has several practical implications. The results show that the ethical climate has a significant effect on workplace spirituality and employee involvement in sustainability activities (IVL). It implies that ethical climate is an important contributor in shaping employees' sustainability-oriented behaviors by work place spirtualty. In this regard, the university management should develop the ethical standards that are in congruence with the personal values of faculty members and inform them through a comprehensive training program.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations that provide opportunities for future research. This is a cross-sectional study in which data is collected at one point in time and only provides the current perceptions of the respondents about the phenomena at the time of data collection. However, in order to get causal inferences, data must be collected repeatedly from the respondents at different point of time, that constitute a longitudinal study. Further studies

may extend this research by following experimental, longitudinal, or time-series design to allow for causal implications. Moreover, present research has taken the faculty members' perception about ethical climate, workplace spirituality, and employee involvement in sustainability activities. In order to expand the canvas of conceptual understanding, this study suggests further research to test the research model at group level having faculty members and their supervisors as respondents of the study. This will provide in depth understanding of the current research model at different organizational levels.

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