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The Effect of Ethical Leadership on Perceived Organizational Identification: The Mediating Role of Ethical Climate

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Abstract:
In this study, the mediating variable role of ethical climate and the effect of ethical leadership on organizational identification were examined. It was proposed that managers are role models in the organizations in which they are involved, that they would direct the ethical climate with their ethical leadership behaviour and that as a result they would positively affect the organizational identification perception of the employees. To this end, a quantitative research was carried out through the data acquired from 322 healthcare personnel employed as nurses/midwives, other healthcare personnel and administrative personnel at public hospitals in a certain province of Turkey. In the evaluation of the data, confirmatory factor analysis, correlation analysis and structural equation modelling were utilized. The findings of the research revealed that ethical leadership behaviour impacts the perception of organizational identification directly and indirectly. Moreover, it was discovered that regarding the indirect influence of ethical leadership behaviour, ethical climate plays a mediating role.

Keywords: Ethical leadership, organizational identification, ethical climate, structural equation modelling

1. Introduction

The fact that leaders influence the organizational values is not newly introduced. The ethical scandals encountered in the professional life has caused an increase of questions regarding the role of leadership in shaping ethical behaviour (Brown, Treviño & Harrison, 2005) and the impact of ethical leadership on the individual, group and organizational outcomes was discussed by many scientists from the field of organizational behaviour and management (Zhu, May & Avolio, 2004; Schminke, Ambrose & Neubaum, 2005; Dick et al., 2007; Qi & Ming-Xia, 2014). What is exclusively discussed is the role played by the leaders in affecting the ethics and ethical behaviour both in macro and micro levels. At the macro level, leaders' capability of affecting the ethical climate and the conditions under which these influences might be strongest. And at the micro level, they raise questions about the consequences of fit or misfit between leaders' ethics and those of their employees (Schminke, Ambrose & Neubaum, 2005). The positive impact of ethical leadership behaviours, such as honesty and trustworthiness, on organizational identification is also among the matters that are examined (Qi & Ming-Xia, 2014; De Cremer, Brebels & Sedikides, 2008). Based on the literature, the views that ethical leadership behaviour will affect the ethical climate and that both of these phenomena will similarly affect organizational identification constitute the subject of this study.

2. Literature review

2.1. Ethical Leadership

Leadership behaviour means so much more than the allocation of resources, monitoring and guiding the followers and routine activities carried out in order to establish a spirit of unity for the organization. Leadership, in its true sense, is evaluating the needs and expectations of the followers and drawing inspiration from these needs and expectations in order to materialize the vision of providing the organization and the followers with the best service there is (Mendonca, 2001). Ethical leaders are expected to be more likely to consider each employees' developmental needs and to place them in positions where they can experience work role fit and a sense of meaning in their jobs. When the leader satisfies such expectations, it can also contribute to the self-improvement of the employees and their enhancing of their own job skills (Zhu, May & Avolio, 2004). Ethical leadership, which is of essential importance for businesses, is described as the exhibition of normatively appropriate behaviour through personal acts and interpersonal relations and the demonstration of such behaviour to the followers via bilateral communication, reinforcement and decision making (Brown, Treviño & Harrison, 2005).

Brown, Treviño and Harrison have adopted a two-dimensional approach to explain the nature of ethical leadership. In the first dimension of that study, the traits, the behaviours and the decision making process of the leader were described. And the second dimension was expressed as moral leadership. In this dimension, the leader, as a role model through its acts, displays an approach of reinforcing the employees. Ethical leadership involves processes that center universal moral values and that play an active role in the individual's forming a dynamic self (Brown, Treviño & Harrison, 2005; Avey, Palanski & Walumbwa, 2011). "To act in a normatively appropriate behaviour" is used in the sense to explain how the leader should act in the workplace as consistent with general expectations. Leaders are characterized as individuals who are fair, principled, trustworthy (taking responsibility due to their own actions) and who activate the reward or punishment system for the actions of their subordinates when necessary (Piccolo et al., 2010). In the study that was conducted by Resick et al., six fundamental traits of ethical leadership were identified, i.e. having a solid character and integrity, ethical awareness, community/individual-orientation, motivating, encouraging and empowering, and managing ethical accountability (Resick et. al., 2006). Ethical leaders emphasize ethical values both in their personal lives and their business lives, support fair and appropriate behaviour within the working environment and are a role model for their followers in the organization. In addition, ethical leaders actively motivate their employees to behave in an ethical manner (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

2.2. Ethical Leadership and Ethical Climate

An organization consists of many climates. The ethical climate of the organization is important in that it influences the ethical behaviour of the employees (DeConinck, 2011). Victor and Cullen's (1987, 1988) work has been influential in highlighting the notion that organizations have a type of climate pertaining specifically to ethical issues. They define this type of climate as "the shared perceptions of what is ethically correct behaviour and how ethical issues should be handled". The ethical climate serves for many functions in organizations. When the employees go through a moral dilemma, it helps them to decide how to deal with such ethical issues and what the ethically correct behaviour is (Cullen, Parboteeah & Victor, 2003; Martin & Cullen, 2006).

In their studies, Victor and Cullen handle ethical climate perceptions prevalent within the organization under two dimensions based on the philosophy of ethics and sociology (Tsai & Huang, 2008). While the first dimension demonstrates the ethical criteria for organizational decision-making, the second dimension reveals the locus of analysis used as reference for ethical decisions. When these two dimensions are transformed into a matrix, nine theoretical types of ethical climate (Self-interest, Company Profit, Efficiency, Friendship, Team Interest, Social Responsibility, Personal Morality/Independence, Rules, Standard Operating Procedures, Laws, Professional Codes) arise (Cullen, Victor & Bronson, 1993; Cullen, Parboteeah & Victor, 2003). However, the five climate types found by Victor and Cullen in their subsequent work widely used, and accepted measure of ethical climate to date which are called Caring (corresponding to the degree to which the environment may be characterised by workers who are sincerely interested in the well-being of each other), Independence (referring to the degree to which employees would be expected to be guided by their personal moral beliefs), Law and Code (corresponding to the degree to which employees adhere strictly to the codes and regulations of their profession and government), Rules (corresponding to the degree to which employees strictly adhere to the rules and mandates of their organization or subunit), and Instrumental (corresponding to the degree to which employees look out for their own self-interest) (Martin & Cullen, 2006; Shacklock, Manning & Hort, 2011). The sub-dimensions that are formed during studies that evaluate the ethical climate can differ according to analysis results (Schminke, Ambrose & Neubaum, 2005; Agarwal & Malloy, 1999). In our study, the sub-dimensions of ethical climate that arose as a result of the confirmatory factor analysis are shown in Figure 1 in white.

Ethical Theory		Locus of Analysis		
		Individual	Local	Cosmopolitan
	Egoism	Instrumental (Self-Interest and Company Profit)		
	Benevolence	Caring (Friendship and Team Interest)		Social Responsibility
	Principle	Independence	Rules, Law and Code	

Figure 1: Sub-dimensions of Ethical Climate

Within this structure, the policies and applications set by managers play a key role in shaping the ethical climate and determining whether the existing ethical character of the organization will be weak or strong. The ethical condition of the leader of the organization as a role model and the norms established by him/her have an impact on the formation of employees' moral structure and contribute substantially to the ethical climate of the organization (Dickson, et al., 2001; Schminke, Ambrose & Neubaum, 2005; Mayer, Kuenzi & Greenbaum, 2010; Grojean et. al., 2004).

In the light of these studies, the following hypothesis involving the relationship of the interaction between ethical leadership and ethical climate was developed as the first hypothesis of this study:

- Hypothesis 1:In health institutions, ethical leadership positively impacts the ethical climate.

The relation of ethical leadership and ethical climate with organizational identification is explained below.

2.3. Ethical Leadership, Ethical Climate and Organizational Identification

Organizational Identification, which is based upon the social identity theory and is a specific form of social identity, is described as the individual feeling himself/herself to be a part of the organization (Mael & Ashforth, 2001; Walumbwa et al., 2011); and

experiencing the success and failure of the organization as though they were his/her own. Identification, as a complex perception causing faith, attitude and emotions, draws its emotional and behavioural expression from loyalty (Mael & Ashforth, 2001). Pratt proposed two conditions that are necessary for organizational identification to occur: 1 - the individual perceives that the organizational identity is an important part of his/her self, 2 - the individual starts to define his/her self with the organizational identity. Individuals who identify themselves with their organization form a strong perception of self through the answers they give to the question "What does this organization stand for?" (and, by implication, "What do I stand for?"), stand in solidarity with the organization; and play an effective role in building the perceived organizational identification by developing behaviours such as staying within the organization and gaining acceptance (Dukerich, Golden & Shortell, 2002).

However, a review of the literature could find no study that specifically examined how an ethical work climate is related to organizational identification. Since identity involves a person's self-concept derived from membership in a group logically health personnel who possess high ethical values will identify with organizations they perceive that possess those values. An ethical work environment can lead to positive outcomes for the organization. The presence of an ethical work environment leads to increased identification with the organization. (DeConinck, 2011). Thus, the following hypothesis will be tested.

- Hypothesis 2: The presence of an ethical climate is related positively to organizational identification.

Scientists express that in the presence of trust and when the satisfaction of the individual's need for psychological security is ensured, people will further identify themselves with their social institution (i.e. their organization) (Walumbwa et al., 2011). Empirical studies that were carried out support this idea. For instance, there are studies which reveal that ethical leadership, the traits of ethical leadership (Walumbwa et al., 2011; Caldwell, 2009; Sökmen, Emekçioğlu & Çelik, 2015) and ethical climate (Qi & Ming-Xia, 2014) are positively related to organizational identification.

Based on the literature, the following hypothesis involving the relationship of the interaction between ethical leadership and organizational identification was developed as the third hypothesis of this study:

- Hypothesis 3: Ethical leadership is positively related to organizational identification.

As the fourth hypothesis of this study, the following hypothesis involving the relationship of the interaction between ethical leadership, ethical climate and organizational identification was developed:

- Hypothesis 4: Ethical climate mediates the relation between ethical leadership and organizational identification.

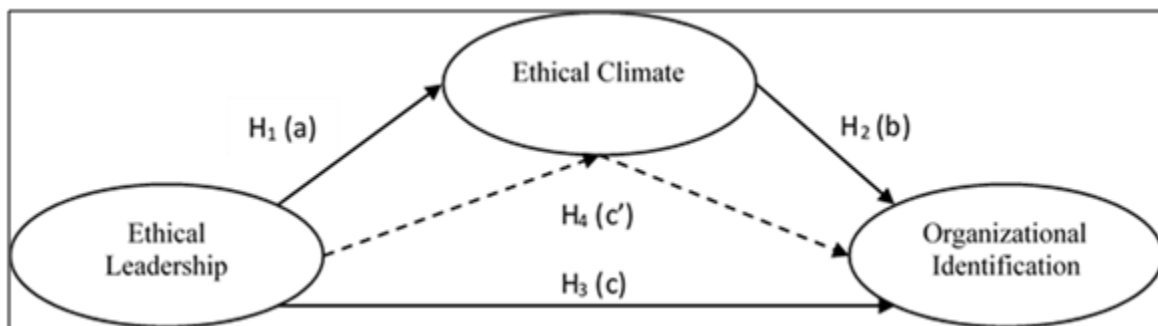The hypotheses included within the study are illustrated together below.

Figure 2: Hypothesized Model.

3. Method

3.1. Sample and Data Collections

The study data was collected from personnel serving at 10 Hospitals and 5 Oral and Dental Healthcare Centres (ODHC) under the Kocaeli Provincial Public Hospital Union (PHU). Within this framework, the measures of the study (Ethical Leadership, Ethical Climate and Organizational Identification) were provided on-line to all personnel employed at these institutions by receiving the required permissions. The necessary reminders were given to the employees three times via the PHU and twice through the hospital managers. The personnel of 5 public hospitals and 1 ODHC agreed to contribute to the study. The number of relevant personnel employed by these institutions during the period of research is 1502. The application went on for a period of six months. The number of responded survey is 362 (25%). Four groups of personnel employed at hospitals were included in the research, namely, doctors, nurses/midwives, other healthcare personnel and administrative personnel. However, since the rate of respondence of the doctor group was low (n<30), this group was excluded from evaluation. Another 15 surveys were also excluded from evaluation due to incomplete data. When the data collected within this framework are examined, a total of 322 surveys were included in the evaluation.

Regarding demographics, the average age of the participants 33.3 years old (std. dev. 7.7) and ages ranged from 20 to 60 years. The average working experience was 11.06 years (std. dev. 7.9); and 73.9% of the respondents were female. The sample was composed of master/doctorate (6.6%), university (81.3%), high school and primary or secondary school (12.1%) graduates. Of the respondents 163 individuals were working as nurse/midwife (60.6%), 103 individuals were other health personnel (32%), and only 56 (17.4%) as administrative personnel. The employee participants had an average health sector tenure of 11.6 years (SD = 7.9), and an average organizational tenure of 5.8 years (SD = 5.6).

3.2. Measures
All items are measured on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3.2.1. Ethical Leadership
Employee respondents completed the 10-item ethical leadership scale developed by Brown et al. (2005). The suitability for use in Turkish, the validity and the reliability of this measure was ensured by Tuna, Bircan and Yeşiltaş (2012). Sample items include "My supervisor disciplines employees who violate ethical standards," and "My supervisor discusses business ethics or values with employees" (α=0.97).

3.2.2. Ethical Climate
Employee respondents completed the thirty-six -item global ethical climate scale developed by Cullen et al. (1993). The linguistic validity of the measure and the reliability of the scale instrument was ensured by Eser (2007). The nine dimensions measured; instrumental (self-interest and company profit) (ten items, α=0.85, "In this organization, people are mostly out for themselves."), efficiency (five items, α=0.85, "The major responsibility for people in this company is to consider efficiency first."), caring (friendship and team interest)(six items, α=0.83, "In this company, people look out for each other's good."), social responsibility (four items, α=0.83, "It is expected that you will always do what is right for the customer and public."), independence (four items, α=0.85, "In this company, people are expected to follow theft own personal and moral beliefs."), rules, laws and codes (eight items, α=0.83, "It is very important to follow strictly the company's rules and procedures here.").

3.2.3. Organizational Identification
Employee respondents completed the 10-item ethical leadership scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992). The Turkish version of the measure is used in the literature and the validity and reliability study thereof was carried out by Tüzün (2006). Sample items include ''When someone criticizes my company, it feels like a personal insult,'' and ''When I talk about the Alpha system I usually say we rather than they.'' (α=0.97).
The fit for the hypothesized model is evaluated by using traditional goodness of fit measures: goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), normed fit index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and root square mean of approximation (RMSEA).

3.2.4. Data Aggregation
Firstly, the data were tailored for analysis. To this end, in order to reveal the dimensions of the ethical climate measure, under which dimensions the statements (items) have factor loads was determined through the factor analysis (CFA) method. As a result of the analysis, four climate types became evident in our study. The dimensions of independency and efficiency did not arise. Moreover, 3 statements were excluded from the analysis due to their insufficient factor loads. The dimensions that arose were instrumentalism (α=0.702), caring (α=0.913), rules laws and codes (α=0.859) and social responsibility (α=0.807) (p=0, df = 528, KMO=0.896).

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics
The means, standard deviations, intercorrelations and scale reliabilities among the key variables are presented in Table 1. The means and standard deviations are within the expected ranges. According to the table, it is seen that there is a positively significant relation between ethical leadership, ethical climate and organizational identification.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
Ethical Leadership	3.2609	0.88298	$(0.948)^{**}$		
Organizational Identification	3.3649	0.92228	0.496^{*}	$(0.909)^{**}$	
Ethical Climate	3.2562	0.52349	0.639^{*}	0.400^{*}	$(0.822)^{**}$

Table 1: Descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlations among variables
* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
**Cronbach's alpha; SD = Standard deviation.
Note. n=322.

4.2. Measurement Model
First of all, we tested our variables. We used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with SPSS Amos 23 to test our variables. We tested a measurement model that had three latent factors (i.e., ethical leadership, ethical climate, organizational identification) and 20 indicators (ten items for ethical leadership, four items for ethical climate, and six items for organizational identification). The fit indices appear in Table 2. We use generally, the measurement model as analyzed using a CFA of the variables indicates a good fit ($\chi2$=427.39, df=163, p=0.00, GFI=0.88, AGFI=0.84, NFI=0.91, CFI=0.94, RMSEA=0.06), (Arbuckle, 2010; Byrne, 2010).

4.3. Structural Model
The next step in analyzing the data is to test the hypothesized model. We used structural equation modelling (path analysis) with Amos 23 to test our hypothesis. Having confirmed that the measurement model had adequate fit, we tested our proposed structural

model. Results of the structural analysis of the proposed model provides an acceptable fit to the data (X^2 = 413.14, *df* = 162, p≤ 0.05; GFI=0.85, AGFI=0.84, NFI=0.91, CFI=0.94, RMSEA=0.06)

Model	df	X^2	X^2/df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
CFA model	163	427.39	2.62	0.88	0.84	0.91	0.94	0.06
Hypothesized model	162	413.14	2.55	0.85	0.84	0.91	0.94	0.06
Final model	162	413.14	2.55	0.85	0.84	0.91	0.94	0.06

Table 2: Goodness of fit indices.

The first hypothesis examines the relationship between ethical leadership and ethical climate. In support of Hypothesis 1, the path coefficient between ethical leadership and ethical climate (β= 0.73, p<0.001) was positive and significant. Ethical leadership influences health institution's ethical climate. Hypothesis 2 analyses the relationship between ethical climate and organizational identification. The results indicate that ethical climate is related positively to health personals' organizational identification (β=0.17, t=5.93, p<0.05). Hypothesis 3 predicted that ethical leadership is positively related to organizational identification. We also found support for this hypothesis (β=0.53, p<0.001). Hypothesis 4 predicted that ethical climate mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational identification. Our hypothesis structural model (fig. 2) build on partially mediated model. To test for mediation, we followed recommendations provided by James et al. (2006). First, a statistically significant relationship must exist between the predictor and the mediator (supported by hypothesis 1).
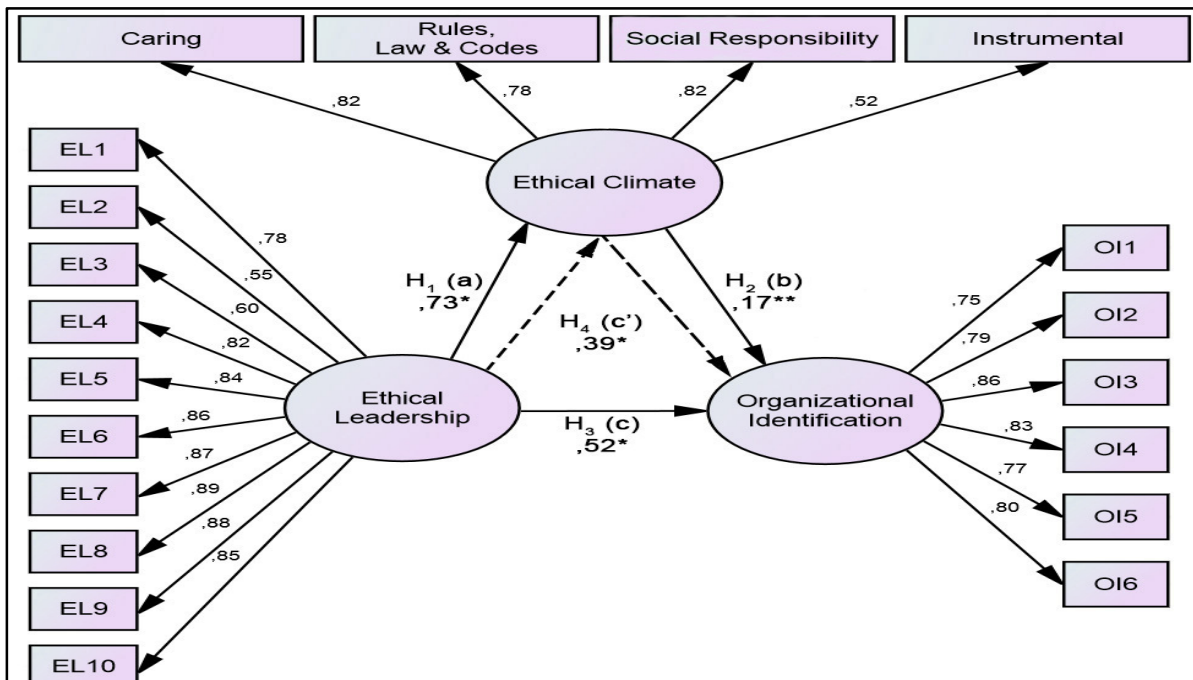

Figure 3: Final Model
*P<0.001, **p<0.05

Second, a statistically significant relationship must exist between the mediator and the outcome (supported by hypothesis 2). If a goodness-of-fit test is conducted to determine whether the only path from the predictor to the outcome is through the mediator, this call fully mediated model. If as a result of the goodness of fit test there is also a direct effect between the predictor and the outcome, this call partial mediation model. There was a significant direct effect of ethical leadership on organizational identification when testing the partially mediated model (β=0.39, p=0.00). Thus, the partially mediated model is the better fitting model for examining these particular data (fig.2). To test the goodness-of fit of ethical climate as the mediator between ethical leadership and organizational identification we calculated the product of coefficients (of the independent variable and mediator) with bootstrap analysis by using Amos 23. A statistically significant indirect effect implies that the relationship between the antecedent and the outcome variable occurs through the mediator. And also statistically significant direct effect implies that the relationship between the antecedent and the outcome. The indirect effect was significant for the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational identification (β = 0.12, p<0.05). In addition, the Sobel test, which was developed by Sobel and named after him, was also utilized and the results again revealed that the mediation relation was statistically significant (z=1.9746, P<0.05).

5. Discussion
The concepts of ethical leadership and ethical climate are considered to be important in the health sector just as it is in other sectors and it is thought that the ethical leadership perception of healthcare workers can have an impact on their organizational identification

perception. From this viewpoint, revealing the mediating role of ethical climate between the ethical leadership and the organizational identification perception of healthcare workers was aimed. This study, which was carried out with the purpose of contributing to the literature on this field, was conducted by way of surveying 322 employees of public hospitals in the province of Kocaeli who work as nurses/midwives, other healthcare personnel and administrative personnel. As a result of the research, the conclusion that ethical leadership has a positive impact on the formation of an ethical climate in health institutions was reached. Moreover, it was concluded that this ethical climate positively affects the identification of healthcare workers with their organizations. Another striking result of the research was that the partial mediation role of ethical climate between ethical leadership and organizational identification was supported.

A similar study was carried out by Yeşiltaş (2012) over hotel businesses which also operate in the service sector. In the study, as a result of the analyses conducted with a view to the mediating impact of ethical climate it was discovered that ethical leadership indirectly and directly impacts on organizational identification. In the study of DeConinck (2011), who researched the impact of ethical climate on the formation of organizational identification, it was concluded that the three dimensions of ethical climate have a positively relation with organizational identification. Mayer, Kuenzi and Greenbaum (2010), who researched the relation of ethical leadership with employee misconduct revealed that ethical climate has a mediating role in the relationship between ethical leadership and employee misconduct and that ethical leadership is positively related with ethical climate. In the research they conducted over students who were also employed, Sims and Kroeck revealed that ethical climate is an important factor in the person-organization fit (Sims & Kroeck, 1997). In another study where the relation between the perceived organizational support, organizational identification and the ethical behaviour of the manager was examined, a positively significant relation was found between organizational identification and the ethical behaviour of the manager (Sökmen, Ekmekçioğlu & Çelik, 2015).

During the literature research conducted to reveal the relation of ethical leadership with other organizational outputs, studies which set forth that organizational identification has a mediating role were also encountered. In their study where the relation between ethical leadership and employee performance was investigated, Walumbwa et al. (2011) reached the conclusion that ethical leadership has a positively relation with employee performance and that organizational identification has a mediating role in this relation. In their research, Qi and Ming-Xia (2014) concluded that organizational identification has a mediating role in the relation between ethical leadership and the behaviour of employee voice and that there is a positively relation between ethical leadership and organizational identification. In the research they carried out, Dukerich, Golden and Shortell (2002) examined the power of organizational identification while investigating the relation between the organizational citizenship behaviour and organizational cooperative behaviours levels of physicians; and as a result, it was observed that organizational identification is positively related to the organizational citizenship behaviour and collaboration.

6. Conclusion

In our study, it was observed that the perception of ethical leadership has a positive effect on the ethical climate and organizational identification. It was also revealed that ethical climate has an important mediating role. It is not possible to materialize the contemporary management mentality in the absence of ethical principles. The leader has a significant role in the institutionalization of ethical values in the management of the organization. It was observed that managers who have a distinct character of ethical leadership also have a positive impact on the ethical climate. In organizations where the ethical climate and the perception of ethical leadership is high, employees display more ethical behaviour. Managers should focus on developing a culture which contains a manner of leadership, encouragement systems, codes and norms that support ethical behaviour and alleviate unethical conduct. The health sector is a dynamic and fluid environment where a person serves another person and where interpersonal communication and competition is intensely experienced. Due to such features of health institutions, it is important that personnel who provide services should display ethical behaviour and adopt the organizational values of the institution. This can only be accomplished through the formation of an ethical climate within the organization and the identification of the employee with his/her organization. In this way, a personal and institutional performance increase can be achieved.

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