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Ethical Climate as a Predictor of Counterproductive Work Behaviours and Turnover Intention: The Mediating Role of Level of Education

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Abstract:
The presence of a conducive work environment is desired to ensure the flow of positive behaviours in organizations. Now, the creation of an ethical climate is perceived to be key in ensuring that employee's engage in ethical behaviours. In view of this, we examined the direct predictive relationship between ethical climate, counterproductive work behaviours and turnover intentions. Also, we investigated the extent to which level of education mediates the relationship between ethical climate and counterproductive work behaviours. Predictive correlational research design was used in which data were gathered from 276 respondents from the Ghanaian service sector via reliable questionnaires. The hypotheses were tested using hierarchical multiple regression and standard regression tests. Ethical climate did not significantly predict counterproductive work behaviours, but the relationship between ethical climate and counterproductive work behaviours was partially mediated by level of education. It was observed that ethical climate significantly and negatively predicted turnover intentions. The findings were consistent with the social information processing theory. The findings have significant implications for the creation of positive ethical climate in Ghanaian organizations.

Keywords: *Ethical climate, counterproductive work behaviours, turnover intentions, level of education*

1. Introduction

Ethical climate is an important part of corporate culture and map out the areas of ethical conduct. It is the character or decision process employees use to determine whether their responses to ethical issues are right or wrong (Mayer et al 2011). The growing concern for organizations to take steps and solve counterproductive behaviors in the organization brings ethical climate into sharp focus. The nature of ethical climate in place will therefore influence the response of people in a particular ethical situation.

The control the organization has over its employees' behaviors and how strongly employees are attached to the core values of the organization shows the strength of its ethical climate (Bartels et al. 1998).

Most studies, notably in the field of organizational psychology, management and organizational behaviour have investigated the influence of organizational climate on employee behaviours: counterproductive work behaviours (Kanten & Ulker, 2013); propensity to leave (Dickson et al., 2006; Bellou & Andronikidis, 2009; Ahmad et al., 2012); absenteeism, lateness, putting little effort into work, taking excessive breaks, wasting resources, arguing with workmates, acting rudely in the workplace (Appelbaum et al., 2007; Pena-Suarez et al., 2013; Dawnson et al., 2008). However, emerging literature from the arena of organizational ethics suggests that ethical climate has the capacity to affect behavioural and organizational outcomes (Wittmer & Coursey, 1996). Despite this, there is no known empirical study on the relationship between ethical climate, counterproductive work behaviours and turnover intentions in literature. Against this backdrop, we intend to fill this gap by providing scientifically relevant empirical research which will make case for the development for ethical climates in organizations.

Ethical climate has been developed as an organizational construct. Both the conceptual and empirical research on ethical work climates have been most fully developed by Victor and Cullen (1987, 1988). They conceive of ethical climate as the "shared perceptions of what is ethically correct behaviour and how ethical issues should be handled" (Victor & Cullen, 1987:52). Ethical work climate is an extension of two related concepts—work climates and organizational culture. Organizational culture can be thought of as shared beliefs, values, customs, and traditions of an organization. Linking ethical climate to organizational culture, Victor and Cullen (1988:103) conceive of ethical climate as "the ethical dimensions of organizational culture." Victor and Cullen follow the work of Schneider (1975 and 1983) by conceiving of work climates as aggregate perceptions of the practices and procedures of organizations. So, ethical climate is the shared perceptions of the ethical aspects of an organization's culture.

2. Objectives of the Study

i. To investigate the predictive relationship between ethical climate and counterproductive behaviours
ii. Examine the predictive relationship between ethical climate and turnover intentions
iii. Investigate the extent to which level of education mediate the relationship between ethical climate and counterproductive.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Social Information Processing Theory

This study was driven by the social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). According to this theory, individuals look to their environment for cues to characterize their work environment and to understand appropriate ways to behave. In view of this, ethical climates can serve as one cue to help individuals know what types of (un)ethical behaviors are (un)acceptable in the work unit. The social environment or ethical climate in this case, provides information to individuals as to the appropriateness of behaviour they see in the work environment. The ethical climate also provides cues to individuals as to how others in the work environment deem what is acceptable behavior.

3.2. Ethical Climate

The ethical climate concept is associated with Victor and Cullen (1987, 1988). They defined ethical climate as "the prevailing perceptions of typical organizational practices and procedures that have ethical content" (1988, p.101). Ethical climate has been viewed as a unidimensional component of the overall organizational culture or climate variable (Victor & Cullen, 1987, 1988; Trevin˜o, Butterfield & McCabe, 1998).

3.3. Counterproductive Work Behaviour

The concept of counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) has gained currency in organizational behaviour literature in recent times. CWB has been conceptualize as behaviours that are unproductive, damaging to organizational goals and harmful to the organization by directly affecting its functioning or property, or by hurting employees in a way that will reduce their effectiveness (Mann et al., 2012: 142; Klotz & Buckley, 2013: 115). Similarly, Robinson and Bennett (1995) viewed counterproductive behaviours as voluntary behaviour that violates important organizational norms and threatens the well-being of organizations, its members, or both (Yen & Teng, 2012: 2). Generally, CWB connotes behaviours that are harmful and directly affects organizational functioning or property by impacting on employees in a way that reduces their effectiveness (Roy et al., 2012: 1342). Other researchers have labelled CWB as antisocial organizational behaviour, organizational misbehaviour, organizational deviance, employee withdrawal, dishonesty, dysfunctional behavior, counterproductive behaviour (Everton et al., 2007: 118). Interest in counterproductive behaviours has attracted research attention because of their impact on organizations and employees in terms of financial, social and psychological effects (Fagbohungbe et al., 2012: 208). They have also been classified as behaviours that induce increasing organizational costs, decreasing commitment, organizational citizenship behaviours, productivity, lateness, absenteeism and turnover (Brooks, 2012:238). Despite their negative consequences on organizations and employees, organizations identify factors which are conducive to such behaviours (Biron, 2010:876).

3.4. Turnover Intention

We conceptualize turnover intention as the extent to which an individual willingly and deliberately seeks for alternative employment outside his/her organization. Cotton and Tuttle (1986) defined turnover intention as an individual's estimated probability that they will stay in their employing organization (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986). Similarly, Tett and Meyer (1993) viewed turnover intentions as conscious wilfulness to seek for other alternatives in other organization. Literature shows that turnover intention is a direct predictor of actual turnover. People do not just leave; rather their decision is always necessitated by some reason. For example, the individual has decided in advance to leave the organization. This is consistent with attitude-behavior theory (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) that one's intention to perform a specific behaviour is the close predictor of that behaviour. Justification for the link between turnover intentions and actual turnover has been supported by empirical evidence (Lambert, Hogan, & Barton, 2001). In view of this, Price (2001) suggested that the turnover intentions construct is an indirect measure of actual turnover.

3.5. Relationship between Ethical Climate and Workplace Behaviours

Two popular workplace behaviours identified in organizational psychology literature are counterproductive work behaviours and turnover intentions. Ethical climates have been found to reduce significantly negative workplace behaviours. For example, in a meta-analytic study, it was observed that positive ethical climates were negatively related to dysfunctional organizational behaviour (Martin & Cullen, 2006). Similarly, Wimbush et al (1997) found that caring climates and law and code climates were negatively related to stealing and lying behaviours. Against this backdrop, we posit that a positive ethical climate provides fertile grounds for the demonstration of good behaviours, and hence a reduction in negative workplace behaviours such as counterproductive works behaviours and turnover intentions. Based on the above review, we proposed the following hypotheses:

1. Ethical climate will relate significantly and negatively to counterproductive work behaviours
2. There will be a significantly negative relationship between ethical climate and turnover intentions

3.6. Relationship between Level of Education and Workplace Behaviours

It is the desire of every employer that employee's maintain their membership with the organization. When an employee leaves, it creates an unpalatable situation for the organization. Literature shows that level of education was significantly and positively associated with engagement in ethical behaviours (Appelbaum, Deguire & Lay, 2005). Peterson (2002) posits that organizational deviance is lower in ethically caring climate. Empirical research shows that level of education was positively associated with turnover intention where employees who are more educated are more likely to quit than those with low education (Mitchell et al., 2000). Evidence from the retail sector, nursing sector and hotel sector revealed that level of education was positively associated with turnover intentions (Igharia & Greenhaus, 1992; Yin & Yang, 2002; Khatri *et al.*, 2001). Iqbar (2010) reported that employees who are highly educated will have higher expectation towards their existing employer. These findings contradicted the outcome of Salami (2008) who reported that highly educated employees occupying higher positions in their organizations show more responsibilities toward their organization. We put forward the following hypotheses following review of the literature:

1. Level of education will relate significantly and negatively to counterproductive work behaviours
2. Level of education will significantly mediate the relationship between ethical climate and counterproductive work behaviours

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

We utilized predictive correlational research design to investigate the extent to which level of education mediates the relationship between ethical climate, counterproductive work behaviours and turnover intentions. The study follows the quantitative research approach because inferential statistical tests such as hierarchical regression and correlation were used to test the hypotheses. Data were also collected via standardized research questionnaires.

4.2. Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

We adopted a two-step sampling approach in our study. The first stage involved selection of interested organizations; and the second stage involved selection of respondents. Non-probability sampling method was used to select both the organizations and the respondents. Specifically, convenience sampling method was used to select the organizations and the respondents. Organizations that were interested in the study and were also ready to provide the information required for the study were selected. Similarly, respondents who were available and had time to complete the research instrument were given the questionnaire to complete. The study involved two hundred and seventy-six (n=276) respondents with different demographic composition. Thus, the sample was heterogeneous. The distribution of the sample along the various demographic factors is presented in Table 1.

Variable		**Frequency**	**%**
Sex:	Male	173	62.7
	Female	103	37.3
Job position:	Manager	32	11.6
	Non-manager	244	88.4
Tenure:	2 years and below	81	29.3
	3-5years	132	47.8
	6-8years	45	16.3
	9years and above	18	6.5
Level of education:	Master's degree	95	34.4
	First degree	117	42.4
	HND	64	23.2
Total Number of Respondents (N=276)			

Table 1: Sample Characteristics of Respondents

The sample was diverse comprising respondents with different demographic composition. As shown in **Table 1**, 62.7 percent of the respondents were males while 37.3 percent were females. In terms of job position, it was observed that 88.4 percent of the respondents were within the non-managerial ranks in their organization while 11.6 percent of them were within the managerial ranks. Analysis of tenure of the respondents showed that 47.8 percent of the respondents had worked in their organization between 3 to 5years; 29.3 percent had worked for 2years and below; 16.3 percent had worked between 6 to 8years while 6.5 percent had worked for 9years and above.

4.2.1. Instruments/Measures

Self-report questionnaire was used to collect data on ethical climate, counterproductive work behaviour and turnover intentions.

Ethical climate: ethical climate was measured with Victor and Cullen (1988) scale. The scale contains 30-items anchored on a 6-point response format ranging from completely false (1) to completely true (6). Sample items included: *"everyone is expected to stick by organizational rules and procedures", "Successful people in this organization go by the rules" etc.* Minimum and maximum score on this scale ranged from 30 to 180 respectively.

Counterproductive work behaviour: Bennett and Robinson (2000) scale was used to measure counterproductive work behaviours. The scale contains 16-items anchored on a 5-point Likert rating format ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Sample items on the scale included: *"cursed at someone at work", "taken an additional or longer break than is acceptable at your workplace" etc*. minimum and maximum score on the scale ranged from 16 to 80 respectively.
Turnover Intentions: this scale was measured using Kelloway, Gottlieb and Barham (1999) scale. The scale contains 4-items anchored on a 7-point Likert rating format ranging from extremely likely (7) to extremely unlikely (1). Sample items included: *"how likely is it that you will be working at the same organization this time next year?" "I will be with this organization five years from now?" etc.* Minimum and maximum score on this scale ranged from 4 to 28 respectively.

4.2.2. Data Collection Procedure

We obtained permission was all the organizations that participated in the study. Sample questionnaire was submitted to the HR department of the participating organizations for consideration and approval. After permission was granted, we proceeded to administer the research instrument. Since we were not allowed to administer the research instrument personally to respondents during working hours, we explained the data collection procedure to an assistant in the HR to do the data collection on our behalf. To guarantee confidentiality, we attached envelops to the questionnaires and respondents were instructed to put completed questionnaire in the envelop and seal. This was to allay the fear that the assistant in the HR unit might see their responses. Similarly, respondents were instructed not to write their names or initials on the questionnaire to guarantee their anonymity. Finally, respondents were not given any form of incentives to lure them into accepting to answer the questions. Each respondent was given one survey packet to complete and return it to the HR unit for onward delivery to the researchers. Clear instructions for completing the survey packet were provided on the face on the questionnaire. Data were collected within 2 months.

5. Results

Bivariate correlation was performed to ascertain relationships between demographic factors and the main variables in the study. In addition, reliability coefficients for the main variables were computed. Table 2 shows the correlation matrix and reliability coefficients for the main variables in the study.

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.	Sex	-						
2.	Job position	-.001	-					
3.	Tenure		.186**	-.080	-			
4.	Education	.135*	.217**	-.068	-			
5.	Ethical climate		.085	-.032	-.037	-.106*	(.805)	
6.	CWB		.003	-.057	-.291**	.150**	-.057	(.931)
7.	Turnover intention	-.073	.184**	.167**	.081	-.175**	-.033	(.704)

Table 2: Correlation Matrix and Reliability Coefficients of Main Variables in the Study
***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*
NB: Reliability Coefficients for the study variables are shown in brackets, CWB-Counterproductive Work Behaviour

The result in Table 2 indicates that sex did not relate significantly to the main study variables: ethical climate (r=.085, p>.05), CWB (r=.003, p>.05) and turnover intentions (r=-.073, p>.05). Job position related significantly to turnover intention (r=.184, p<.01) but insignificantly to ethical climate (r=-.032, p>.05) and CWB (r=-.057, p>.05). Tenure related significantly to CWB (r=-.291, p<.01) and turnover intention (r=.167, p<.01) but insignificantly to ethical climate (r=-.037, p>.05). Further, level of education related significantly ethical climate (r=-.106, p<.05) and CWB (r=.150, p<.01) but insignificantly to turnover intention (r=.081, p>.05). Ethical climate related significantly to turnover intention (r=-.175, p<.01) but insignificantly to CWB (r=-.057, p>.05).
Reliability coefficients for the study variables: ethical climate (α=.805), CWB (α=.931) and turnover intentions (α=.704) were above the acceptable threshold for statistical analysis (Nunnally, 1978).

	Model 1	Model 2
Ethical climate	-.057	-.042
Level of education	-	.146*
F	.894	3.404*
R square	.003	.024
ΔR square	.003	.021

Table 3: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Results of the predictive Relationship between Ethical Climate and CWB
**p<.05, NB: Standardized beta values are shown*

The result indicates that ethical climate did not significantly predict counterproductive behaviours (β=-.057, p>.05). However, level of education partially mediated the relationship between ethical climate and counterproductive behaviours (β=-.042, p>.05). Level of

education accounted for 2.1% of the variance in the relationship between ethical climate and CWB. The mediation model was significant [$F_{(2,273)} = 3.404$, $p<.05$]. However, the direct predictive relationship model was not significant [$F_{(1, 274)} = .894$, $p>.05$].

	Model 1
Ethical Climate	-.173**
F	8.444**
R square	.030

Table 4: Standard Regression Results of the Predictive Relationship between Ethical Climate and Turnover Intention
***p<.01; NB: Standardized beta values are shown*

The result indicates that ethical climate significantly and negatively predicted turnover intentions. Ethical climate accounted for 3.0% of the variance in turnover intentions. Ethical climate-turnover intentions model was significant [$F_{(1, 274)} = 8.444$, $p<.01$].

6. Discussion

The maintenance of proper organizational environments has become necessary in recent times. Ethical climates are associated with positive workplace behaviours. Contrary to the expectation of the study, ethical climate was not significantly and negatively associated to counterproductive work behaviour. This outcome contradicted previous literature (Martin & Cullen, 2006; Peterson, 2002; Wimbush et al., 1997). However, level of education partially mediated the relationship between ethical climate and counterproductive work behaviour. This corroborates past studies (Appelbaum, Deguire & Lay, 2005). We also found that ethical climate was significantly and negatively associated with turnover intention. This empirical outcome from the Ghanaian service sector was in agreement with previous literature (Martin & Cullen, 2006; Wimbush et al., 1997; Peterson, 2002).

Together, our findings are consistent with the social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Since individuals actively process information from their work environment, ethically acceptable work-settings provide fertile grounds for the cultivation of organizationally-acceptable behaviours. Thus, mirroring the social environment, ethical climates provide information to individuals as to the appropriateness of behaviour they see in the work environment (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). We intimate that level of education has the capacity to affect the interpretation of organizational happenings, hence, we expect highly educated employee's to understand and appreciate the prevailing climate and hence engage in acceptable behaviours (Appelbaum et al., 2005). Accordingly, ethically caring climate has been found to encourage the demonstration of acceptable behaviours (Peterson, 2002).

7. Limitations of the Study

Despite the theoretical and practical relevance of the study, there are some limitations. First, the data was sourced from a single source. This raises issues concerning common variance bias usually associated with single source data collection approach. Finally, the outcome of the study precludes us from drawing cause-effect relationship.

8. Practical Implications

The study has demonstrated the significance of ethical climates in contemporary work organizations. To reduce or eliminate deviant behaviours in organizations, there was the need to create ethically caring climate to facilitate the continual engagement in acceptable behaviours by the workforce. It is also imperative that the education of the workforce is taken seriously as it enhances effective interpretation and acceptance of organizational policies. Finally, organizations can invest in ethics training for the workforce and reward individuals for engaging in ethical behaviours.

9. Conclusion and Recommendation

Since unethical behaviours are of grave concern to organizations, it is imperative that positive ethical climates are created to ensure that the workforce exhibit acceptable behaviours. Thus, organizations need to step forward and foster strong and positive ethical climate, so that when employees are confronted with ethical dilemma, they know how to go around it. Our findings were consistent with the social information processing theory. Future researchers should consider investigating the extent to which ethical leadership and organizational culture mediate or moderate the relationship between ethical climate and workplace behaviours in Ghanaian organizations.

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