

THE NEXUS BETWEEN ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND ETHICAL CLIMATE: THE PANACEA FOR COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIOUR IN NIGERIA

***Dr Isimoya, Ogochukwu Augustine¹ and Bakarey, Emmanuel Bamidele²**

¹Dept of Actuarial Science & Insurance, Faculty of Management Sciences, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos-Nigeria. Tel: +2348034926769,

²Dept of Insurance, Faculty of Management Sciences, University of Jos, Jos, Nigeria. Tel: +2348062848858, Email: babadee4good@yahoo.com

*Corresponding author: drmoya1995@gmail.com

Abstract

This survey based research was undertaken with the objective of examining the ethical climate linkage between ethical leadership and employees' counterproductive work behaviours. The study adopted a two-step sampling procedure. First, a systematic random sampling method was used to select five (5) out of thirty (30) quoted insurance companies operating in Nigeria. Second, a non-probability judgemental sampling method was applied to elicit information from one hundred and fifty-four (154) respondents (senior staff) from the five (5) participating organizations. However, one hundred and fifty-one (151) questionnaire were retrieved (a response rate of 98%) and found usable for analysis. Using simple linear regression analysis and Sobel test mediation analysis, it was revealed that ethical leadership not only had negative association with deviant behaviours, but also a robust positive relationship with ethical climate (the mediating variable). Sobel test mediation analysis revealed that ethical climate (mediator) significantly influences the relationship between ethical leadership and employee counterproductive behaviour. Based on these findings, the study concludes that ethical leadership behaviour and ethical climate can stem the tide of employees' counterproductive work behaviours in Nigerian insurance industry.

Keywords: Ethical Leadership, deviant behaviour, ethical climate, Nigerian Insurance industry.

1. Introduction

Since the dawn of the 21st century, counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs) are increasingly becoming issues of great concern to management of organisations (Chang

& Smithikrai, 2010). CWB is defined as employee's volition which violates the norm of an organisation. Examples of CWB include but not limited to bullying, sexual harassing, gossiping with and endangering co-workers, pilfering, fraud, sabotage, leaving duty post early, taking excessive breaks, withholding effort, manipulation of financial statements and stealing from the organisation (Akikibofori, 2013; Aveyi Luthans & Youssef, 2008; Robinson & Benneth, 1995). This inexhaustible list of CWBs does not only constitute clogs in the wheel of progress but also has harmful consequences on the organisation and its stakeholders (Chang & Smithikrai, 2010; Lim, Cortina & Nagley, 2008). It is argued that lack of ethics and ethical leadership contributed to such undesirable events in the organisations (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Eisenberg & Brodbeck, 2014; Xu, Loi & Ngo, 2016). The predominance of CWB unethical practices in modern workplaces have been acknowledged by contemporary researchers (Irukwu, 2009; Chang & Smithikrai, 2010; Uche, George & Abiola, 2017) however the antecedents of such behaviours are generally unknown in Nigerian management literature, yet they bring forth significant implications for the organisations.

It has been established that employees' perception of a strong ethical climate in an organisation provides emotional attachment significantly to business, by increasing management efficiency (Hunt, Wood & Chonk, 1989), organisational productivity (Singhapakdi, Kraft, Vitell & Rallafalli, 1995), job satisfaction (Brown & Peterson, 1993) and organisational commitment (Hunt et al, 1989). It follows that ethical climate may be regarded as institutionalised organisational practices and processes which influence decision making within an organisation and explains what behaviours are acceptable or unacceptable (Victor & Cullen, 1988). Additionally, ethical leadership is seen as the presentation of normatively appropriate behaviour through personal and interpersonal actions and the advancement of such behaviour to followers (Brown, Trevino & Harrison, 2005). It is noteworthy to state that different organisations and institutions such as business, sports, religious etc have acknowledged the significance of ethical leadership behaviour in performance and growth of organisation (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Tseng & Wu, 2017).

Contemporary researchers have in different context, studied personality traits and demographic characteristics as predictors of CWB (Amin, Shamsaddin, Razimi, 2018; Uche, George & Abiola, 2017; Ugumgbor, 2014) in Nigerian organisations. Such studies may have provided insight into the link between supervisor toxicity, personality traits and CWB. However, limited research exist which examined the underlying mechanism to explain the relationship between ethical leadership and CWB or antisocial behaviour (Brown & Trevino, 2006). To substantiate the significance of this study, Gasparski (2005) noted that unethical behaviour in companies is not caused by less ethically oriented people in the organisation, but lack of ethical culture which specifies which action is acceptable or unacceptable. Thus,

one may reasonably assume that the structure and culture of an organisation predict the unethical behaviour in the organisation (Rok, 2009). Therefore, this study proposed that much of the unethical behaviour prevailing in Nigerian insurance industry would be attributed to style of leadership and organisational culture. Although deviant behaviours violate the norm of an organisation, and are regarded as unethical and anti-social behaviours, this research proposed that the practice of ethical leadership which institutes organisational integrity (Paine, 1994) will dilute the predominance of unethical behaviours. Hence, this research seeks to empirically investigate the ethical climate linkage between ethical leadership and employee deviant behaviours in the Nigerian insurance industry. The purpose of this study is to provide answer to the following research questions

- i. To what extent can ethical leadership significantly associate with CWB?
- ii. To what extent can ethical leadership positively relate with ethical climate?
- iii. To what extent can ethical climate significantly predict CWB?

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Following this introduction is the relevant literature review which highlights the hypotheses of this study. The next is the research methodology, followed by discussion of the findings and finally, conclusions and recommendations.

2. Review of Literature Theories and Conceptual Model

Social learning theory is used to explain the relationship between ethical leadership and employee anti-social work behaviour in this study. Ethical leadership affects employee CWB through social learning. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1986) posited that individuals' learning is affected by paying attention to and emulating the attitudes and behaviours of their role models. Thus social learning theory helps to explain how and why ethical leaders influence organisational members' ethical attitudes and behaviours, through leadership appropriate behaviours, which manifests in ethical organisational policies, procedures and practices.

Ethical leadership and employee CWB

It has been argued that the predictors of CWB in workplaces, can be grouped into two broad classes – individual and organisational related factors (Appelbaum, Laconi & Matousek, 2007). For the individual related factors, examples are negative affectivity, agreeableness, moral philosophy, age, gender, education, seniority, marital status, emotional intelligence, conscientiousness (Nyako, Ansah-Nyako & Sempah, 2014) while organisational related factors comprise organizational justice, perceived organisational support, co-workers' pressures to conform, management styles, and organisational ethical climate (Priesemuth, Arnaud & Schmunke, 2013; Alias, Rasdi & Ismail, 2013). To summarise, if leaders in the Nigerian insurance industry would make decisions, based on ethical consideration, (caring, honest, fair and equitable) as moral

persons (Trevino, Hartman & Brown, 2000) and communicate ethics to subordinates, reward and punish them based on ethical principles, and teach them how to maintain high ethical standards, as moral managers, (Trevino et al, 2000) without feeling pressure to forgo ethical conduct for the sake of achieving business objectives (Mayer, Kuenzi & Greenbaum, 2011), these would ameliorate CWBs among employees in the Nigerian insurance industry. Thus, this study hypothesised that

H₁: Ethical leadership will negatively relate with employee counterproductive behaviours, in the Nigerian insurance industry.

Ethical leadership and ethical climate

Ethical leadership connotes a situation where the leaders take decisions based on the principles of honesty, integrity, fairness and concerns for others. The theoretical work of Dickson, Smith, Grojean and Enhrhart (2001) sought to explain how ethical leaders critically influence the ethical climate in their organisations. Moreover, ethical leaders set the ethical tone based on the policies, practices and procedures they emphasise (Ethics Resource Centre, 2016). Consequently, Mayer, et al, (2011) and Dinc and Ayademiri, (2014) claimed that leadership styles impact employees' perception of the climate. Ethical leaders make ethical decisions considering what the right thing to do is in terms of ethics; regularly communicate ethics to subordinates, reward and punish employees accordingly with ethical principles. In the light of the above Mayer, Kuenzi and Greenbaum (2011) argued that ethical leaders through these behavioural traits make it clear to the employees, that upholding ethics is an important organisational consequence. Sequel to the above, we hypothesized that:

H₂: Ethical leadership will be positively associated with ethical climate in Nigerian insurance industry.

Ethical climate and employee CWB

Ethical leadership is the most significant precursor of ethical climate (Dinc & Aydemir, 2014). Ethical climate is the prevailing employees' perception of typical organisational practices and procedures, which have ethical content (Victor & Cullen, 1988). In the same vein, Peterson (2002) stated that, it is the shared perceptions of what ethically correct behaviour is and how ethical issues should be handled in the organisation. Therefore, ethical climate is the cue to help individual employees to know what types of (un)ethical behaviour are (un)acceptable in the work unit. It serves as a filter through which objective phenomena must pass and perceived by organisational members. Above all, Kose and Kose (2016) observed that the presence of ethical climate leads to increased identification with the organisation, consequently, if organisational climate emphasises ethical actions, employees will be less likely to exhibit deviant or CWB. Other researchers, Wimbush, Sheppard and Markham (1997) found out that caring climate, ethical orientation in management, were adversely

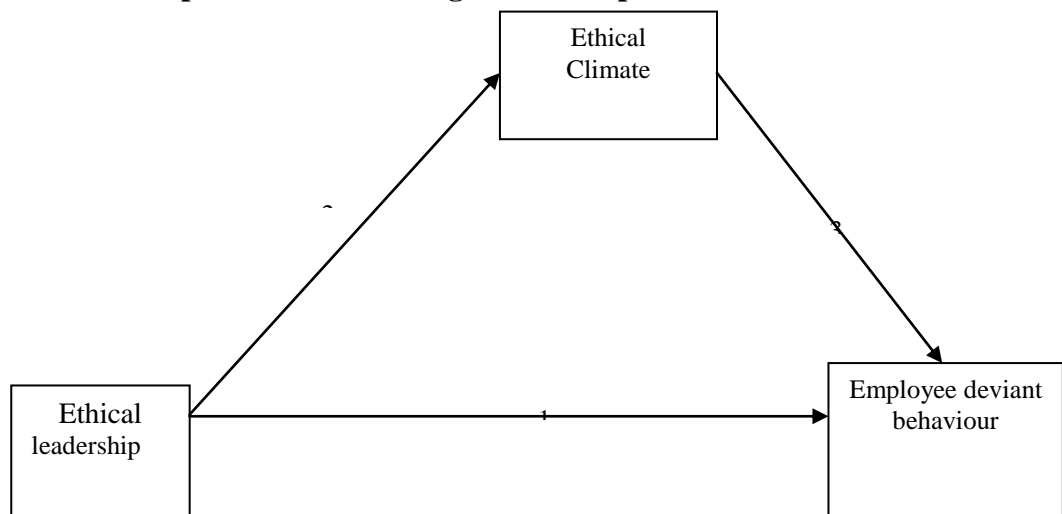
associated with deviant behaviour, therefore, ethical caring climates have the capacity to lower CWB (Peterson, 2002) while Wimbush, et al (1997) found that unethical climate is directly related to accomplice. Thus, drawing from aforementioned researches, this study posits that

H₃: Ethical climate would be negatively associated with employee's counterproductive behaviours, in the Nigerian insurance industry.

Conceptual model:

In figure 1 below, conceptual framework shows that ethical leadership (independent variable) is related to employee deviant behaviour (dependent variable) and ethical climate (mediating variable). The model shows how ethical leadership's causal effect can be apportioned into its indirect effect on employee deviant behaviour through organisational ethical climate (paths 2&3). Ethical leadership also has a direct effect on employees' deviant behaviour (path 1)

FIGURE 1: Conceptual model showing relationship between the variables



Source: Authors' design

Following the literature review, the hypothetical propositions for the study are stated as follows

- i. Ethical leadership does not significantly associate with CWB
- ii. Ethical leadership does not positively relate with ethical climate
- iii. Ethical climate does not significantly predict CWB

3. Methodology

This study adopted cross-sectional survey design, which obtains a representative sample by taking a cross-section of the population (Sedgwick, 2014). This study aims to investigate the prevalence of deviant behaviour among employees in the Nigerian

insurance industry. The population of this study comprised all the senior insurance executives in the 30 quoted insurance companies in Nigeria (Factbook, 2011). The senior executives in the insurance industry were chosen for this study because according to Nnabuife (2010) leaders have the crucial responsibility to ensure that the organisations are ethically guided. Additionally, those who are interested in the issues of deviant workplace behaviours are managers who want to prevent it (Rogojan, 2009), and only leaders who strongly considered the acquisition of wealth at all cost and bothered little about the consequences, are likely to engage in unethical practices (Gberevbie, 2011).

The sample for the study was determined by using a two-step sampling procedure. The first step was the selection of five (5) participating insurance firms through a systematic random sampling, from the sampling frame of 30 quoted insurance firms. Five firms were considered adequate representative of all the 30 quoted firms as all of them were headquartered in Lagos metropolis where the study was conducted. Lagos metropolis houses major insurance companies operating in Nigeria. The second step involved the application of non-probability sampling method to select the respondents, from the five participating firms. One hundred and fifty (154) senior insurance underwriters, marketing executives, claim handlers, administrative officers constituted the sample size. Thirty-one (31) respondents made up of six (6) managers and 25 senior staff employees were selected from each of the five (5) participating firms except one that had 30 respondents.

The sample size of 154 was derived using the Yamane (1967) formula.

$$n = N/1+N(e)^2$$

Where n = Sample Size, N = Population of senior executives in five (5) participating firms, e = Level of Precision. i.e 0.05

$$N = (250/1+250)0.0025 = 250/1.625 = 153.84 = 154$$

Data Collection Procedure

The researchers wrote to the participating organisations for consideration and approval for this research. After the approval was granted, thirty-one (31) copies of the research instruments were submitted to each of the head of human resource (HR) units, of the participating firms, since the researchers were not allowed to distribute the questionnaire individually during working hours. The HR assistant was instructed to judgementally distribute the questionnaire among six (6) managers/supervisors and 25 senior employee officials available at the time of distribution. Only one participating firm received a package of 30 copies of the research instrument. The questionnaire was separately enveloped and respondents were instructed to insert the completed questionnaire in the envelope and seal. This is to guarantee confidentiality. Copies of the completed questionnaire were collected from HR unit, within 2 weeks.

Measures

In this study, the researcher's adapted validated instruments (self-report questionnaire) on ethical leadership scale developed by Brown, Trevino and Harrison (2005), ethical climate scale developed by Victor and Cullen (1988) and employee counterproductive work behaviour scale developed by Bennett and Robinson (2000). In ethical leadership scale, 10 items were adapted, using Likert's 5 point format scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, to = 5, strongly agree.

Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of the instrument was to be evaluated. The authors sought for the assistance of experienced management researchers and some senior staff employees in the insurance industry, to give their feedback.

With regards to the reliability of the scale, Taherdoost (2016) stated that reliability of an instrument is the degree of consistency with which it measures variables. The questionnaire was subjected to Cronbach Alpha statistical test to determine the extent of the internal consistency of the scale items. Where the reliability coefficient (Alpha value) is 0.70 and above, the scale is adjudged to be reliable (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2000). Table 2 below shows the reliability coefficient of the study constructs.

Table 1: Reliability of Study Constructs

Reliability of Measurement Items

Variables	Item	Cronbach Alpha
Ethical Leadership	10	0.95036
Employee Deviance Behaviour	10	0.87529
Ethical Climate	18	0.92412

Source: Authors' Computation

4. Data Analysis

The data analysis was summarized using mean score for descriptive statistics while the hypotheses were tested using the regression analysis and Sobel (1982) test approach for mediation analysis. Out of the 154 copies of questionnaire administered to the respondents, 151 copies of questionnaire were completed and returned which implies a response rate of 98%.

Findings

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Study Constructs

ITEMS	N	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
Ethical Leadership	151	2.90	1.016
Employee deviance	151	2.42	0.776
Ethical Climate	151	3.05	0.785

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse data in the study; the mean and standard deviations of the variables in the study are shown in table 2. The results of the descriptive statistics show that employees' deviant behaviour as a construct has the least level of favourability among respondents. With a standard deviation of less one, it implies low variability of responses from respondents about the construct. However, ethical climate has the highest favourability as compared to others. It has a mean value of 3.05 which is higher than the mean of Likert five point scales. Its standard deviation also falls below one which depicts low variability of responses among respondents. In the same vein, ethical leadership has a high mean value i.e 2.90 however, it has a high standard deviation ie 1.016 which shows a higher variance with respondents' responses to statements about the construct.

In order to ascertain the statistical values of the response to each of the constructs, one-sample t test was conducted as shown in table 3. One sample test statistic and test of significance help to determine whether the population mean equals the hypothesized value (test mean).

Table 3: One sample Statistic and one sample test for the Constructs (Ethical Leadership, Employee Deviant Behaviour and Ethical Climate)

One-sample statistic						
	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Std error mean		
Ethical leadership	151	2.9033	1.01616	.08269		
Employee deviant behaviour	151	2.4285	.77695	.06323		
Ethical climate	151	3.0541	.78593	.06396		
One-sample test						
Test value = 3						
	T	Dt	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence interval of the difference	
					Lower	Upper
Ethical leadership	-1.169	150	.244	-.09669	-.2601	.0667
Employee deviant behaviour	-9.039	150	.000	-.57152	-.6965	-.4466
Ethical climate	.846	150	.399	.05408	-.0723	.1805

Source: Authors

The result showed that the mean and the significance level of the ethical leadership (Mean = 2.90, $p > 0.05$) and ethical climate (Mean = 3.05, $p > 0.05$) were statistically insignificantly different to normal test value of 3.0 while the mean and the significance level of the employee deviant behaviour (Mean = 2.43, $p < 0.05$) was statistically significantly different to normal test value of 3.0. The implication, tentatively is that H_1 and H_3 may not be rejected as $p > 0.05$, while H_2 is thus rejected as $p < 0.05$.

Test of Hypotheses

In mediation analysis, according to Mackinnon (2000), there are three major approaches: (a) causal steps (b) difference in coefficients (c) product of coefficients. All these methods use information from the following three equations:

$$Y = a_0 + a_1X + \epsilon_1$$

$$M = b_0 + b_1X + \epsilon_2$$

$$Y = c_0 + c_1X + c_2M + \epsilon_3$$

Where a_0, b_0, c_0 are intercepts

Y is the dependent variable

X is the independent variable

M is the mediator

a_1, b_1, c_1 and c_2 are coefficients

$\varepsilon_1 \varepsilon_2 \varepsilon_3$ are residuals

In a single-mediator model such as this, there are two ways to calculate the indirect effect i.e by taking the difference in coefficients $c - c'$ or the product of the coefficients 'ab'. To test the significance of indirect effect, we apply the Sobel test.

Sobel test is an approach that calculates the indirect effect by multiplying two regression coefficients obtained from the mediating pathways a & b, in figure 3.

The two coefficients are obtained from two regression models: i.e

$$\text{Model 1: } M = b_0 + b_1X + \varepsilon_2$$

$$\text{Model 2: } Y = c_0 + c_1X + c_2M + \varepsilon_2$$

Where Y = Employee deviant behaviour (EDB)

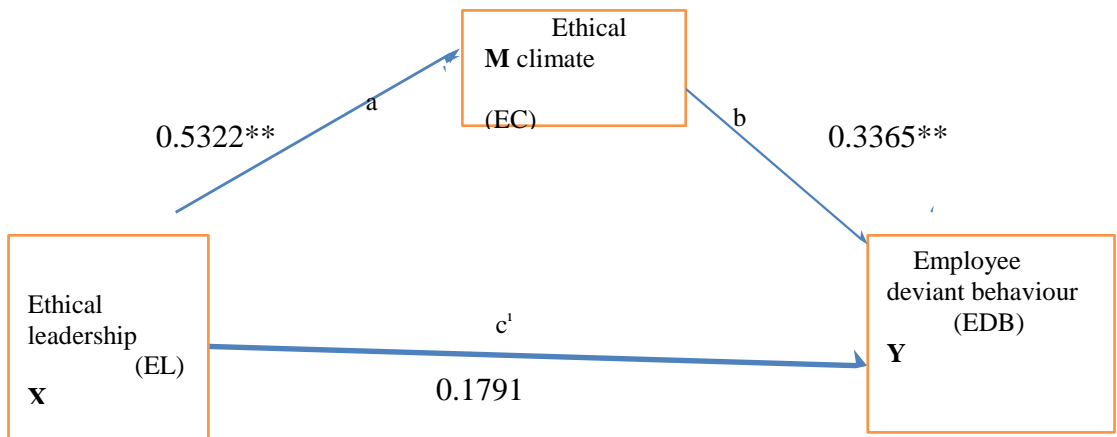
M = Ethical climate (EC)

X = Ethical leadership (EL)

b_0, c_0 = Intercepts

It is important to state that in Sobel test, using the product of coefficient approach, interest is on the product of the coefficients of the partial regression effect for ethical leadership (EL) predicting ethical climate (EC) and the simple regression coefficient of ethical climate (EC) predicting employee deviant behaviour (EDB).

FIGURE 2: Sobel test: Product of coefficient approach



Source: Authors' Computation

The unstandardised regression coefficients between ethical leadership and ethical climate was statistically significant ($\beta=0.5322, p<0.05$), just as the unstandardised regression coefficient between ethical climate and employee deviant behavior ($\beta=0.3365, p<0.05$). The indirect effect was $(0.5322 \times 0.3365) = 0.1791$. Also the significance of this indirect effect was determined using the Sobel test so as to ascertain whether the mediator variable (ethical climate) significantly carries the

influence of the independent variable (ethical leadership) to dependent variable (employee deviant behaviour). The result showed that the indirect effect was statistically significant ($z=2.9870$, $p<0.05$). This implies that ethical climate significantly influences the relationship between ethical leadership and employee deviant behaviour in the Nigerian insurance industry

Discussions

Several research reports have indicated that employee anti-social work behaviour is commonplace in the Nigerian insurance industry (Irukwu 2009). However, the current researchers seek to empirically investigate the influence of ethical leadership and climate on employee deviant behaviours. The study found negative relationships between ethical climate as well as ethical leadership with employee CWBs respectively. These suggest negative association between ethical leadership and climate with employee CWBs, indicating that hypotheses 1 & 3 are not supported. However, a positive relationship was found between ethical leadership and organisational ethical climate. This implies that hypothesis two (H2) is supported, thus ethical leadership is positively associated with ethical climate. The findings of this study are consistent with the results of earlier studies such as Mayer, et al, (2011) and Kanten and ErUlker (2013) carried out in the US and Turkey, respectively. For instance, Mayer et al (2011) found that ethical leadership was negatively related to employee deviance and positively related to ethical climate.

In the present study, we found a robust negative relationship between ethical leadership and employee deviant behaviour, (i.e -0.515 $p<0.01$) implying that ethical leadership can reduce employee CWBs in the Nigerian insurance industry by 52%. However in a similar study, Mayer et al (2011) found a less significant direct effect of ethical leadership on employee misconduct ($b= -0.12$ $t= -1.61ns$). A plausible explanation could be that Nigeria as a less developed economy, has greater challenges of unemployment, therefore employees are bound to obey and align themselves to the values of their leaders, if they are to keep their jobs.

This study has a number of theoretical implications. For instance, although Bello (2012) had found a positive relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance, little research has investigated the relationship between ethical leadership and employee deviance in Nigeria. In this study, the researchers found that when leaders are ethically oriented i.e. moral persons (caring, honest and trustworthy) and moral managers (role models of ethical behaviour, through communicating ethics, rewarding employees who are ethical and punishing the deviants), they would be able to influence employees against CWBs. These theoretical correlations are consistent with social learning theory (SLT) which states that employees learn new behaviours by imitating their role models. Ethical leaders in insurance industry who are supervisors or managers, are superior to their followers by organisational status,

therefore, their subordinates see them as their role models. Moreover, Nyukorong (2014) noted that leaders in higher levels of organisation publicise initial values and lead employees in ways of achieving rewards by sticking to them, however, individuals modify their own behaviours based on consequences, reinforcement and punishment others received (Bandura, 1986). In addition, SLT posited that individuals tend to imitate persons who are similar to themselves, or persons who are higher in social status, or those individuals who are either reinforced for their behaviour or are punished for it.

Furthermore, ethical leadership is found to be an antecedent to organisational ethical climate. Since ethical leaders are moral persons and moral managers (Trevino, Hartman & Brown 2000) they are able to create an ethical environment (Brown et al, 2005) in which doing the right thing is valued and emphasised. Leaders set the tone (Robbins, 1995) by institutionalizing ethical values in the management of the firm. When employees perceive that leaderships do not compromise ethical standards to improve organisations' bottom-line (Mayer et al, 2011), through their human resource practices, policies and procedures, they would learn that ethical climate prevails. In addition, the perception of ethical leadership has a significant positive effect on the ethical climate. Consequently, ethical climate plays an important mediating role in the relationship between ethical leadership and employee deviant behaviours (Kose & Kose, 2016). Moreover, employees would refrain from unethical work practices, where ethical climate prevails (ethical behaviour is rewarded while unethical behaviour is punished). This is consistent with the postulations of affective event theory (AET). According to Fagbohunge et al (2012) AET proposed that organisational events are proximal causes of affective reactions. Similarly, Weiss & Cropanzano (1996) observed that AET is used to illustrate how moods or emotions affect job behaviours. The implication is that if the organisational events are positive such as equitable rewards; organisational justice, organisational support (features of ethical leadership and climate), it would help to refrain employees from CWBs.

Conclusion

The main goal of this study was to determine the relationship between ethical leadership and employee deviant behaviour with ethical climate as a mediating variable in the Nigerian insurance industry. This study established that ethical leadership as a moral person (caring, honest and trustworthy, fair and equitable) and as a moral manager (communicating ethics and values, rewarding ethical standards and punishing unethical behaviour) is needed to stem the tide of employees' CWBs in the Nigerian insurance industry. In addition, the study also established that ethical climate (where leaders do not forgo ethical conduct for the sake of achieving business objectives) is the sine-qua-non for employee pro-social behaviours in Nigeria. Thus, the results of this research suggest that management in the Nigerian insurance industry

cannot effectively deal with employees' deviant behaviours without initiating ethical management principles and ethical climate in the workplace.

Thus, ethical management principles through fair policies and procedures in decision making and personal conduct fosters ethical climate. Consequently, this study extends our knowledge of effectiveness in the application of ethics in management and ethical climate as panacea for employee CWB in the Nigerian insurance industry.

Recommendations

The findings of the study showed that ethical leadership is practically associated with ethical climate, which in turn, is negatively associated with employee deviant work behaviour. Therefore, the researchers recommend that the boards of insurance companies in Nigeria should recruit and select management trainees who are morally inclined for their management trainee positions. The boards could achieve this through pre-interview assessment and integrity tests. Second, for the existing managers, the organisations should invest their resources in ethics training for their leaders/managers. Thus, by investing their resources in training and development of leaders/managers in ethics, they would be able to establish ethical climate in their organisations and thus reduce the tendency for employee anti-social work behaviour.

Limitations of the study

Although the unit of analysis consists of senior employees in the insurance industry, this present study is limited in its analysis because there was no separation between male and female employees in testing the causal relationship between ethical leadership and employees CWB. Another limitation is that the study was based on cross sectional design instead of a longitudinal research design. For true test of causality, the sample would have been taken from across the various sectors of the economy on a longitudinal or experimental research design. This study is also limited by the choice of participants who were selected on non-probability basis, thus making the findings less generalisable to research community (Alvi, 2016). We suggest that future researchers should incorporate these identified shortcomings in order to run a more powerful analysis.

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