



# Relationships between ethical climate, political behavior, ethical leadership, and job satisfaction of operational officers in a wholesale company, Bangkok Metropolitan region



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## ABSTRACT

This research investigated whether the ethical climate, political behavior, ethical leadership, and job satisfaction in one organization have an impact on each other. The research was conducted using a selected group of 177 operational officers in a wholesale business company in the Bangkok Metropolitan region. The operational officers were recruited from four divisions (commercial, finance, marketing, and administration) using a stratified random sampling approach. The majority was female and the participants' average age was 32 years. The instrument used was a designed questionnaire divided into five sections and consisting of checklists, opened-end questions, and rating scales. The data were analyzed statistically using percentages, means, standard deviations, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, and multiple regression analyses. The results showed that the operational officers in the wholesale business company had a high level of overall ethical climate, a low level of overall political behavior, and moderate levels of overall ethical leadership and overall job satisfaction. The ethical climate and ethical leadership were positively correlated with job satisfaction. The multiple regression analyses method also confirmed that the ethical climate, political behavior, and ethical leadership constructively had significant predictive ability regarding job satisfaction.

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## Introduction

The ethical climate is a state where employees possess a sense of what is right and wrong in their company without an expressed order or a written set of rules. The ethical climate is considered a part of organizational culture (Boonbongkarn, 2001) and is the key factor to cultivating a good relationship among employees and organizational cultures which will help to predict work effectiveness (Ulrich et al., 2007). Most ethical climate theories applied in

this study are based on the ideas of Victor and Cullen, as the “fathers of ethical climate” (Victor & Cullen, 1988 as cited in Goldman & Tabak, 2010). The ethical climate means a shared perception by operational officers of acceptable behavior, relationships, use of power, and ethical standards within an organization, without a written announcement. This so-called perception can influence their attitude, decision making, and ethical behavior. There are five types of ethical climate: 1) *instrumental*, an ethical climate that encourages serving the organization's interests; 2) *caring*, a climate that encourages concern for and consideration of others; 3) *independence*, a climate that encourages decisions according to personal moral beliefs; 4) *rules*, a climate that emphasizes decisions guided by internal rules

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and regulations; 5) *law and codes*, a climate that supports decisions based on external codes such as the law or professional codes of conduct.

Previous studies suggested that the ethical climate perceived by professional nurses in non-profit private hospitals in the Bangkok Metropolitan region has a positive correlation with their job satisfaction (Sasomsap, 2004). The team's interest, social responsibility, and laws and professional codes climate had a positive correlation with the job satisfaction of both employees and managers (Elci & Alphan, 2009). Moreover, it was found that ethical climate types can predict 58 per cent of the overall managers' job satisfaction (Okpara & Wynn, 2008).

There are also several associations between ethical climate and deviant political behaviors such as personal aggression and backstabbing between coworkers (Peterson, 2002 as cited in Appelbaum, Deguire, & Lay, 2005). The ethical climate has a significant influence on the behavior of both leaders and subordinates (Smith & Conje, 1982 as cited in Pio, 2000). It can decrease employees' morality and job satisfaction (Saritwanit, 2009). All levels of personnel, especially leaders, should acknowledge the importance of the ethical climate in the workplace and subsequently allay deviant political behavior, as the main role of leaders is to lead the organization to success. Leaders can exercise their authority both directly and indirectly in order to lead groups to fulfill the appointed task (Sittilert, 2007). Ethical leadership is the key factor that decreases employee counterproductive behavior (Brown & Trevino, 2006). The constant dissatisfaction of employees can lead to lower organizational citizenship, causing counterproductive behavior such as voluntary absence, lateness, making errors, conflicts with colleagues, and actual turnover (Riggio, 2009). Many scholars have proposed various definitions and terms for political behavior, that is politics in an organization. Based on the literature review, we can conclude that those different terms all involve the same definition which is "actions" having a meaning similar to "behaviors". Political behavior means any form of actions of operational officers that are considered an unauthorized or illegal use of power according to the company's rules. Political behavior is the means by which people attempt to obtain power over a person, a group, and a company in order to gain personal interest for themselves, or any intended groups, and also to maintain personal (and/or their group's) power. According to Moorhead and Griffin (2010), there are eight techniques of political behavior: 1) controlling information; 2) controlling lines of communication; 3) using outside experts; 4) controlling the agenda; 5) game playing; 6) image building; 7) building coalitions; and 8) controlling decision parameters. This research did not use the techniques of using outside experts, controlling the agenda, and controlling decision parameters because they are irrelevant to the scope of responsibilities. The operational officers under this entity would not have flexibility in the chain of command, as such—the reporting line and requested tasks are mostly driven by the management level.

The study of the correlation between political behavior and job satisfaction by Kulachai (2009) showed that perceptions of organizational politics have a positive influence

on political behavior. The perceptions of organizational politics are able to reduce job satisfaction, organizational commitment, citizenship behavior, and task performance, and lead to increased psychological strain (Chang et al., 2009 as cited in Guclu, Mahmoud, Bryan, & Barry, 2010). Perceptions of self-promotion and ingratiation behavior are related negatively to job satisfaction, especially of supervisors, and are related positively to turnover intentions (Cook, Ferris, & Dulebohn, 1999).

Nowadays, in Thailand, government officers, state enterprise officers, and employees working in the private sector are as well-educated as their counterparts in developed countries in terms of administrative technology; however, it is irrefutable that Thai workers are still lacking in professionalism and work ethics (Pratchayapruet, 2008). Large or renowned organizations are constantly under public and media scrutiny and pressure. In order to protect their good reputation, maintain satisfactory performance quality, and preserve public confidence, they must regulate legal and ethical conduct (Tangkrajangjit, Pangniran, & Sokaew, 2003). It is predicted that within 5 years, Thai exports will expand at about 7–8 per cent. Thailand's export sector will play an essential part in propelling economic growth. Furthermore, urbanization and the formation of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) will increase tourist arrivals and e-commerce growth (Anonymous, 2014). As a result, the participants in this study were chosen from a large, privately owned, consumer wholesale products company providing services to a large portion of the Thai population. The findings from this research can be used to plan strategic guidance to enhance the ethical climate and ethical leaderships for commanders, to allay deviant political behaviors in private sector organizations, and to ultimately promote job satisfaction for personnel within organizations properly and harmoniously within the context and culture of Thai society.

Ethical leadership is often believed to be a dominant trait in three leadership theories consisting of transformational leadership, authentic leadership, and spiritual leadership (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & Hoogh, 2011). Several studies on leadership theories found that ethical leadership is not merely a trait in other theories of leadership, but rather it is another distinct theory of leadership itself (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Ethical leadership relates to a number of personal characteristics of chief operational officers including honesty, trustworthiness, and fairness. The ethical leaders are caring and principled. They also make ethics explicit by role modeling ethical behavior, communicating an ethics message, demonstrating appropriate decision making, setting moral standards, and by applying the reward and discipline system to hold followers accountable for ethical conduct, in order to benefit oneself, other people, and the broader society to the utmost. According to Kalshoven et al. (2011), there are seven forms of ethical leader behavior: 1) fairness; 2) power sharing; 3) role clarification; 4) people orientation; 5) integrity; 6) ethical guidance; and 7) concern for sustainability.

The leadership behavior of school administrators (both relationship-oriented and task-oriented) positively correlates to the high morality and job satisfaction of teachers

(Sawatprapa, 2001). Similarly, executives' ethical leadership is positively related to middle managers' job satisfaction and their organizational commitment (Kim & Brymer, 2011). The congruence between leaders' moral development and their employees' moral development can positively influence job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and is negatively associated with turnover intentions (Schminke, Ambrose, & Neubaum, 2005).

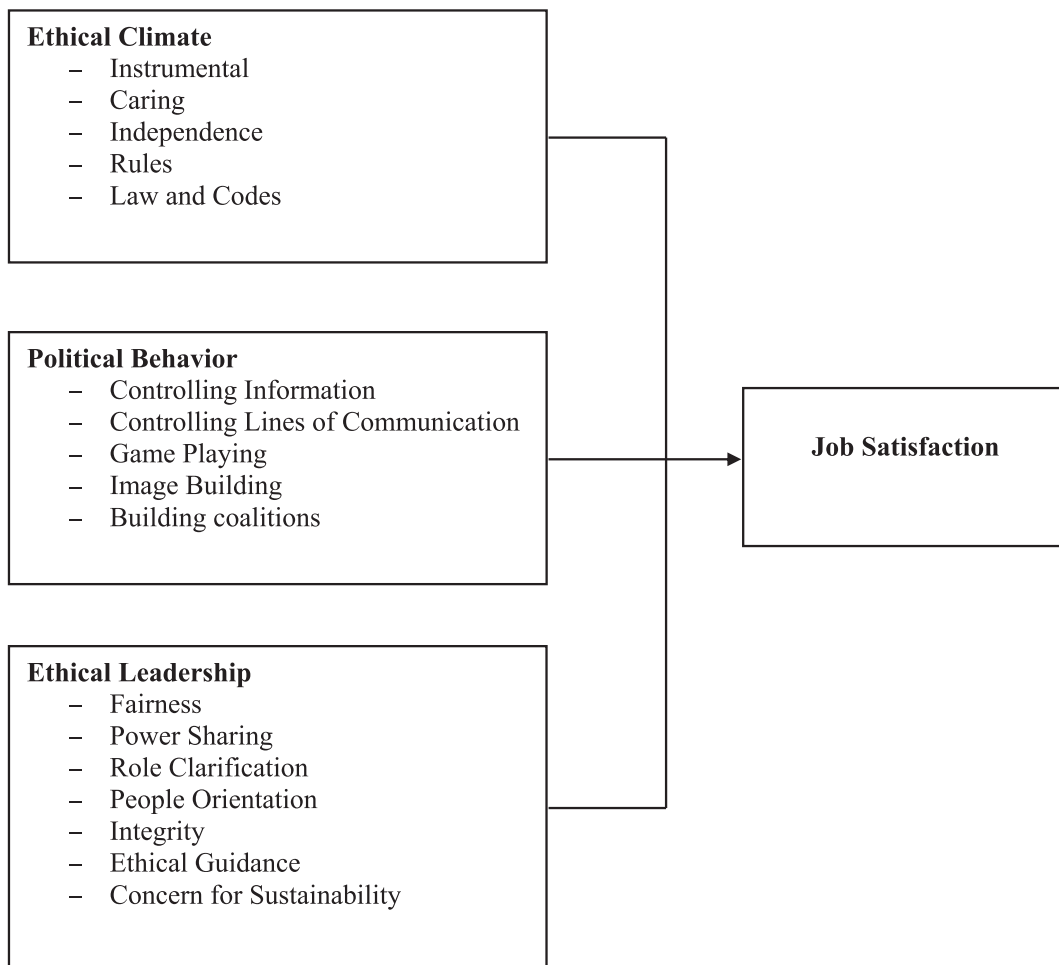
Job satisfaction is the key to the success of any organization. Currently, there are many studies on the influence created by employees' job satisfaction showing that employees with higher job satisfaction perform better than those with lower job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction means the positive or negative feeling resulting from knowing that task, payment, promotion opportunities, supervision, and support from coworkers received or experienced by operational officers, compared to other officers in the same organization, are equitable. According to Smith et al. (1969 as cited in Luthans, 2007), there are five job dimensions representing the most important characteristics of a job about which employees have affective responses: 1) the work itself; 2) pay;

3) promotion opportunities; 4) supervision; and 5) co-workers. This research aimed to explore the correlation between the ethical climate, political behavior, ethical leadership, and job satisfaction, as well as their predictive abilities toward the job satisfaction of operational officer in a wholesale business company located in the Bangkok Metropolitan region (see Figure 1).

## Methods

The sample consisted of 177 operational officers from four different departments of the company (commercial, finance, marketing, and administration) and was recruited using a stratified random sampling approach. The study tool was a verified validity and reliability questionnaire composed of five parts: 1) personal factors, containing seven items of a checklist and open-ended questions; 2) ethical climate, containing 17 items with an overall coefficient of .92; 3) 26 items of political behavior with an overall coefficient of .86; 4) 47 items of ethical leadership with an overall coefficient of .97; and 5) 20 items of job satisfaction with an overall coefficient of .94. The data were



**Figure 1** Conceptual framework

analyzed statistically using percentage, mean, standard deviation, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, and stepwise multiple regression analyses.

## Results and Discussion

The results of the study shows that the hypotheses—to examine ethical climate, political behaviors, ethical leadership, and job satisfaction experienced by operational officers in a wholesale business company in the Bangkok Metropolitan region by focusing on analyzing relations between ethical climate, political behavior, ethical leadership, and job satisfaction and to explore the influences and the predictive abilities towards job satisfaction experienced by operational officers—were both supported and unsupported as follows:

### *Relationship Between Ethical Climate and Job Satisfaction*

Overall and individually, the four types of ethical climate—*instrumental, caring, independence, and law and codes*—showed a significant (at the .01 level), positive correlation toward job satisfaction of the operational officers in the Bangkok-based wholesale business company, supporting the hypothesis. Only the *rules* climate had no significant correlation with job satisfaction.

These results could have been the result of the company's executives encouraging operational officers' mutual perception of desirable workplace behaviors by the following means: forming a common attitude that organizational interests come before personal interests; to urge employees to operate with honesty and transparency; establishing ethical rules and guidelines; applying the reward and discipline system; to hold employees accountable for ethical conduct; appointing a committee to monitor their operations; and informing them of wholesale business ethics. After all, for a worker in a wholesale business company, abiding by the local law and business ethics is considered the utmost responsibility to society. Customers' acceptance of the company's ethical business operation, without taking advantage of other small entrepreneurs, could be the main source of increasing job satisfaction for the operational officers.

Also, the results indicated that only the *rules* ethical climate had no significant correlation with job satisfaction, which did not support the hypothesis. This could have been because all operational officers are appointed to strictly comply with the company's rules and regulations according to the policy introduced by executive management. However, compliance with those rules and regulations is not taken into consideration for any rewards or work benefits, but deemed merely a duty for all operational officers to fulfill in order to prevent misconduct that might discredit the company.

### *Correlation Between Political Behavior and Job Satisfaction*

Overall and individually, the five forms of political behavior—*controlling information, controlling lines of communication, game playing, image building, and building coalitions*—of the operational officers in the Bangkok-based

wholesale business company had no significant correlation with job satisfaction.

This could have resulted from the implementation of the wholesale business company's ethical policies. Thus, the company rules and regulations are strictly enforced by the executive managers, the audit committee, and the auditors in order to prevent unauthorized use of power or any actions to wrongfully obtain power and personal interests. However, compliance with such rules and regulations was not accounted for in the yearly performance appraisals. In reality, the purpose of the implementation of the company rules and regulations is to seriously and equitably penalize non-compliant operational officers.

### *Correlation Between Ethical Leadership and Job Satisfaction*

Overall ethical leadership and the seven ethical leader forms of behavior—*fairness, power sharing, role clarification, people orientation, integrity, ethical guidance, and concern for sustainability*—of the operational officers in the Bangkok-based wholesale business company had a significant (at the .01 level), positive correlation with job satisfaction, supporting the hypothesis.

The ethical leadership of supervisors can be the direct cause of job satisfaction of operational officers because supervisors have absolute authority to, for instance, grant position transfer requests, award salary increments, and facilitate operations in conflict situations with customers. The supervisors' proper, honest, and fair treatment of employees has passed the 360-degree evaluation. They can successfully apply unbiased, analytical, critical thinking to their decision making. Normally, the wholesale company's operational goals are expressed in writing, indicating what it needs, how long it takes, the amount of expenses, and the methods to apply to complete the task, in order to properly plan the operations. The company also acknowledges the importance of two-way communication to offer operational officers opportunities to clarify and defend themselves in cases of complaints. Operational officers are allowed to participate in and express their opinions about any decisions of their supervisors. This helps to keep operational officers in the loop and to be able to satisfy customer needs promptly in this competitive environment (see [Tables 1 and 2](#)).

### *Predictive Abilities Toward Job Satisfaction*

Data analysis investigated the hypothesis that the ethical climate, political behavior, and ethical leadership constructively have predictive ability toward the job satisfaction of the operational officers in the wholesale business company in Bangkok. The results showed that these three factors could predict the job satisfaction of the operational officers and were significant at the .01 level. The predictive abilities had a percentage of 59.00 and the coefficient of multiple correlations was .60.

It is possible that the power sharing behavior, for example, giving subordinates power to control and depend on their own decision making and creating chances for subordinates to practice and learn how to make logical decisions in a higher-pressured working environment than

**Table 1**  
Levels of ethical climate, political behavior, ethical leadership, and job satisfaction

Variable	Type	$\bar{X}$	SD	Level
Ethical climate	Instrumental	4.34	.51	High
	Caring	4.09	.53	High
	Independence	4.08	.55	High
	Rules	4.31	.60	High
	Law and codes	4.02	.66	High
	<b>Overall</b>	<b>4.15</b>	<b>.47</b>	<b>High</b>
Political behavior	Controlling information	2.07	.67	Low
	Controlling lines of communication	2.29	.58	Low
	Game playing	2.18	.65	Low
	Image building	2.09	.66	Low
	Building coalitions	2.28	.78	Low
	<b>Overall</b>	<b>2.17</b>	<b>.47</b>	<b>Low</b>
Ethical leadership	Fairness	3.44	.64	Moderate
	Power sharing	3.47	.65	Moderate
	Role clarification	3.53	.66	Moderate
	People orientation	3.39	.75	Moderate
	Integrity	3.66	.65	Moderate
	Ethical guidance	3.44	.65	Moderate
	Concern for sustainability	3.21	.85	Moderate
	<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.45</b>	<b>.58</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
Job satisfaction		<b>3.39</b>	<b>.55</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

usual, will allow subordinates who take up such opportunities to show their supervisors that they are ready to handle greater responsibility in the future.

Ethical guidance behavior was the second highest because in general, supervisors have more working experience and complete understanding of company's policies, so that their communication and explanation of ethical guidelines and the proper line of conduct to subordinates will help them learn and follow the company's rules, guidelines and policies faster and more efficiently.

The third highest ranking was for fairness behavior and image building behavior equally. Fairness behavior is shown when the superiors of the operational officers reward and discipline operational officers fairly and equitably, basing any action on facts proven by the audit committee. The company's flat organizational structure may lead to competitiveness for promotion among coworkers. Therefore, employees may display image building behavior in order to increase their chances of career advancement.

The independence climate was the lowest of the predictive abilities. This climate may have resulted from operational officers receiving appraisals without any complaints from customers and colleagues, granting them confidence in their moral operations and ethical decisions, without breaching any company rules or regulations (see Table 3).

## Conclusion and Recommendations

### *Correlations Between Ethical Climate and Job Satisfaction*

Overall and individually, the four types of ethical climate—*instrumental*, *caring*, *independence*, and *law and codes*—of the selected operational officers in the wholesale business company in the Bangkok Metropolitan region were significantly (at the .01 level) and positively

correlated with job satisfaction, supporting the hypothesis. The results confirmed that in order to maintain the high level of ethical climate, the company should provide feedbacks with statistics based on job performance appraisal. Furthermore, the comments must be relevant to the policies. This will enhance the growth of the ethical climate in working aspects.

### *Political Behavior had no Correlation with Job Satisfaction*

The results showed that overall and individually, the five forms of political behavior—*controlling information*, *controlling lines of communication*, *game playing*, *image building*, and *building coalitions*—of the operational officers in the wholesale business company in the Bangkok Metropolitan region had no significant correlation with job satisfaction. Thus, the hypothesis was not supported in this regard. According to this, the management level of the company should provide support to create and enhance linkages between political behavior and job satisfaction via knowledge-sharing activities such as training on how to cope with deviant behavior in the organization. The research revealed that employees would be able to handle political ambiguities and gain a higher level of job satisfaction if they were educated about political issues in the company.

### *Ethical Leadership was Positively Correlated with Job Satisfaction*

The study showed that overall and individually, the seven forms of ethical leadership behavior—*fairness*, *power sharing*, *role clarification*, *people orientation*, *integrity*, *ethical guidance*, and *concern for sustainability*—of the operational officers in the wholesale business company in the Bangkok Metropolitan region had a significant (at the .01 level), positive correlation with job satisfaction, which supported the hypothesis. To highlight this finding, the management level of the company should support training for both managers and officers. This would enhance comprehensive awareness regarding ethics via two-ways communication. Furthermore, the company should obtain assistance from external and/or internal audit committees in reviewing all projects to improve the transparency of administration, as well as sharing practices by setting up a session such as “Train the Trainers: Ethical Concerns” in which employees could participate.

### *Ethical Climate, Political Behavior, and Ethical Leadership Constructively had Explanatory Abilities Toward Job Satisfaction*

The results showed that ethical climate, political behavior, and ethical leadership constructively had significant (at the .01 level) explanatory abilities toward the job satisfaction of the operational officers in the wholesale business company in the Bangkok Metropolitan region. The hypothesis, hence, was supported. Power-sharing leadership behavior had the highest predictive ability toward job satisfaction of the company's operating officers. Regarding this finding, because power sharing could lead to job

**Table 2**  
Correlation between ethical climate, political behavior, ethical leadership, and job satisfaction

Variable	EC						PB						EL									
	EC1	EC2	EC3	EC4	EC5	ALL	PB1	PB2	PB3	PB4	PB5	ALL	EL1	EL2	EL3	EL4	EL5	EL6	EL7	ALL		
EC	EC1	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
	EC2	.74**	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
	EC3	.64**	.65**	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	EC4	.69**	.58**	.55**	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	EC5	.53**	.56**	.63**	.47**	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	ALL	.85**	.88**	.88**	.75**	.74**	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
PB	PB1	–.44**	–.32**	–.29**	–.50**	–.33**	–.42**	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
	PB2	–.27**	–.20**	–.27**	–.41**	–.42**	–.35**	.52**	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
	PB3	–.15*	–.14	–.23**	–.13	–.38**	–.24**	.27**	.38**	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
	PB4	–.14	–.04	–.08	–.11	–.02	–.09	.40**	.36**	.51**	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
	PB5	–.21**	–.20**	–.25**	–.15	–.27**	–.26**	.33**	.21**	.30**	.40**	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
	ALL	–.33**	–.23**	–.30**	–.34**	–.37**	–.36**	.70**	.68**	.73**	.81**	.58**	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
EL	EL1	.24**	.26**	.28**	.16*	.20**	.29**	–.21**	–.12	–.44**	–.26**	–.39**	–.40**	1	–	–	–	–	–	–		
	EL2	.32**	.26**	.30**	.12	.31**	.32**	–.20**	–.04	–.20**	–.06	–.28**	–.20**	.68**	1	–	–	–	–	–		
	EL3	.31**	.25**	.38**	.19*	.33**	.36**	–.23**	–.10	–.25**	.01	–.18*	–.20**	.57**	.73**	1	–	–	–	–		
	EL4	.25**	.25**	.24**	.12	.24**	.27**	–.11	.04	–.09	.09	–.14	–.04	.57**	.83**	.81**	1	–	–	–		
	EL5	.16*	.10	.24**	.08	.18*	.19*	–.07	–.09	–.36**	–.15*	–.19*	–.25**	.66**	.65**	.74**	.70**	1	–	–		
	EL6	.23**	.32**	.27**	.16*	.29**	.32**	–.09	.03	–.08	.14	–.29**	–.05	.51**	.60**	.73**	.66**	.59**	1	–		
	EL7	.17*	.26**	.20**	.19*	.18*	.24**	.04	.18*	.17*	.29**	–.08	.20**	.28**	.51**	.61**	.67**	.37**	.75**	1		
	ALL	.29**	.29**	.32**	.17*	.30**	.34**	–.15*	–.01	–.21**	.01	–.26**	–.16*	.74**	.89**	.89**	.93**	.81**	.81**	.72**	1	

Abbreviations: ethical climate = EC, political behavior = PB, ethical leadership = EL

\* $p < .05$

\*\* $p < .01$



**Table 3**

Predictive abilities of ethical climate, political behavior, ethical leadership toward job satisfaction

Predictive variable	Behavior	B	Sb	Beta	t	p
Ethical climate	Independence	.11	.05	.11	2.03	.04
Political behaviors	Image building	.15	.05	.18	3.33	.01
Ethical leadership	Fairness	.15	.06	.18	2.46	.02
	Power sharing	.38	.06	.44	6.08	.00
	Ethical guidance	.17	.06	.21	3.20	.00
(Constant) = .22						
R = .60		R <sup>2</sup> <sub>Adj</sub> = .59		F = 50.52		p = .01

satisfaction, managers should encourage employees to attend meetings and take turns to perform the leader's roles. Communication about ethical concern must be shared and cascaded down accordingly to all levels. Feedback and quality assessments to measure the performance of employees must be standardized to ensure transparency of ethical values.

### Recommendations

In order to utilize the findings in this research to develop and enhance ethical climate, ethical leadership, and job satisfaction in organizations, the following are recommended for further study.

First, sampling from supervising and/or higher level officers is recommended for further investigation, so that the results can be investigated at all levels of personnel in organizations.

Second, three of Moorhead and Griffin's political behavior (using outside experts, controlling the agenda, and controlling decision parameters) were excluded from this research to comply with the context of the sample. These three types of political behavior could be included in a new study to further develop the body of knowledge and new strategies to handle organizational political behavior more effectively.

Third, sampling from retail business companies is recommended for new research in order to compare and analyze these new findings with those from the wholesale business company data, as well as to further investigate the research issue in the operational context of retail business companies. This could help in uplifting the ethical climate and ethical leadership and successfully dealing with political behavior that can influence the job satisfaction of the personnel in an organization.

### Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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