

Corporate Social Responsibility, Ethical Leadership, Organizational Climate and Employer-Employee Relations in a Trading Company

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Abstract

Workers are essential for organizational vitality, playing a crucial role in sustainable expansion. This study, anchored in social exchange theory, investigates corporate social responsibility, ethical leadership, organizational climate, and employer-employee relations in a Trading Company. Using quantitative, descriptive, comparative, and correlational design with a sample size of 162 out of 279 employees, the study reveals significant correlations among key factors. Despite the company's excellence, the researcher suggests there's room for enhancement.

Keywords: Business Administration, Corporate Social Responsibility, Ethical Leadership, Organizational Climate and Employer-Employee Relations, Trading Company, Quantitative Study, Philippines

Introduction

Employees are pivotal to organizational success, contributing significantly to sustainable growth (Kaur & Batra, 2018; Koo & Ki, 2020). In this context, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) emerges as a crucial element for fostering sustainable development, with a focus on enhancing employees' quality of life and extending benefits to the wider community (Hui, 2021). The integration of CSR and ethical leadership is vital for achieving long-term productivity, as these practices collectively shape the organizational culture and set the tone for sustained success (Ullah et al., 2022). Notably, there is a positive correlation between CSR initiatives and ethical leadership, underscoring their combined influence on the organizational environment (Cingöz & Akdoğan, 2019).

Ethical leadership, in particular, has a profound impact on employees' attitudes and behaviors, which in turn, significantly affects overall organizational performance (Addai et al., 2019). The influence of leadership extends to shaping the organizational climate—a critical determinant of employee behavior and performance (Mishra & Tikoria, 2021). A positive organizational climate fosters employee commitment and enhances performance levels (Prashar & Gupta, 2019). Additionally, the quality of employee-employer relationships plays a crucial role in productivity, with effective communication being key to cultivating a positive workplace culture (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020).

The trading company under study, with over 30 years of experience in wholesale and retail trading of consumer products, attributes its success to its dedicated workforce. Given this backdrop, this study aims to explore the interplay between CSR, ethical leadership, organizational climate, and employee-employer

relations within the specific context of trading firms in the Philippines. This research addresses a gap in the literature, as there is limited exploration of these interconnected dimensions within this particular industry setting.

Objectives of the Study

To determine the significant relationship between (a) corporate social responsibility and ethical leadership, (b) corporate social responsibility and organizational climate, (c) corporate social responsibility and employer-employee relations, (d) ethical leadership and organizational climate, (e) ethical leadership and employer-employee relations, and (f) organizational climate and employer-employee relations.

Literature Review

The researcher explores corporate social responsibility, ethical leadership, organizational climate, and employer-employee relations using Social Exchange Theory (SET), a key concept in understanding employee reactions and a prominent framework in management studies (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Blau (1964) emphasizes that the fundamental premise of the social exchange theory is human interaction; therefore, the theory emphasizes the social relations and personal ties among the actors that form the exchange of resources and benefits. When employers show concern for employees, social exchange associations multiply, which, thus, yields positive results (Thomas & Gupta, 2021). Employees will respond positively when their employers treat them well (Blau, 1964; Mostafa & Andrews, 2018).

Corporate Social Responsibility

In the social exchange theory, studies found that CSR reputation would affect long-term relationships through trust, information sharing, and risk-reward sharing (Lee & Lee, 2019). Corporate social responsibility is the voluntary activities undertaken by a firm to operate economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable (Riyadh et al., 2019). Organizations use CSR to develop competitive advantage and establish a symbiotic relationship with stakeholders (Tiep et al., 2021). CSR is incorporated daily with greater force in business management (Ortiz-Avram et al., 2018). The study by Jenkins (2006), as cited Maldonado-Eraza et al. (2020), stated that despite the diversity of businesses, you could find social practices in which everyone agrees and must work, such as having a good working environment, promoting an equitable distribution of wealth, and working for the protection of the environment. Applying SET to a specific organizational context will enable employees to form a distinct social exchange relationship with their superiors, colleagues, customers, and suppliers (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2021; Cropanzano et al., 2017).

Intellectual Capital. Intellectual Capital has been recognized as a critical source for companies to expand and achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Zakery & Saremi, 2021). It is a shared knowledge embedded in employees, company routines, and internal networking connections (Jordão & Novas, 2017). The value of a company's employee knowledge, skills, ideas, and business training is not listed in the balance sheets; it is stated that the products manufactured by companies and their intangible assets are the sources of economic value (Chen et al., 2005; Nguyen & Doan, 2020). It has become an organization's key value driver (Huang et al., 2021; Kianto et al., 2010). One of the main factors that promote growth and competitiveness (Olawajaju & Msomi, 2021).

Health and Safety. The health and safety of employees have long been a serious concern in businesses (Zhang et al., 2020). All staff members, workers, administrators, and managers should know about health

and safety (Ramzi & Abdulwahid, 2021). Organizations cannot function without being healthy and safe; when lives are threatened, everything else becomes secondary (De Cieri & Lazarova, 2021).

Intra-organizational Justice. Employees' perceptions of positive or negative justice towards their organizations outline their comprehension of whether they are treated fairly (Yeşilada & Denizgil, 2020). It is a judgment made by an employee about the fairness of outcome distribution, processes in allocating outcomes, and interpersonal relationships at the workplace (Greenberg, 2001; Mengstie, 2020). It is important to note that it is not about how justice should be but rather about how the individuals—particularly employees—perceive to be treated by an authority, either their manager, client, or sponsor (Colquitt, 2001; Unterhitzberger & Bryde, 2019).

Adaptation to Change. Everyone must adapt more or less to the changing environment daily (Martín et al., 2021). Adaptation to change requires an emotional state contrary to suffering and distress and the ability to manage and undertake actions that promote adjustment to new challenges (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2020). In adaptation, tolerance to uncertainty is connected to anxiety and stress in highly demanding situations (Soriano et al., 2019). How people perceive and cope with uncertainty becomes relevant to their ability to adapt (Lucas Casanova et al., 2019)

Ethical Leadership

Social exchange theory indicates that ethical leadership is vital in shaping the workplace's individual-type moral climate and reducing employees' turnover intention (Saleh et al., 2022). Social exchange influences ethical leadership, as social exchange perceptions are essential for employees' sense of organizational belonging and ethical leadership (Mitonga-Monga, 2020). Ethics is often declared at the 'heart' of leadership (Cullen, 2022). Ethical leadership is the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships and the promotion of such behavior to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making (Brown et al., 2005; Ko et al., 2018). It provides a support mechanism and helps improve employees' performance (Lotfi et al., 2018; Mekhum, 2020).

People orientation. People-oriented leaders will be more common and effective (Janićijević, 2019). People-oriented management may manifest by allowing employees to influence organizational decisions directly (Baran & Sypniewska, 2020). People-oriented leadership encourages participation, develops people, and acknowledges personal needs (León & Morales, 2018). Employees perform well and are motivated when employers or the organization have high people orientation (Kuswati, 2020).

Integrity. This is one of the principles related to moral uprightness (Nafi & Kamaluddin, 2019). The term 'integrity' has a wide range of meanings, comprising those referring to the quality of being morally right and honest (Khadka & Bhattarai, 2021). It implies a deliberate motivation to do the right thing for the right reason (Heywood et al., 2017). It entails having pure, dedicated, and sincere (Hoekstra & Kaptein, 2020; Weber & Wasieleski, 2013).

Ethical Guidance. Ethical guidance for employees in the workplace anchors on ethical leadership (Kim, 2021). Good leaders are known for their guidance, inspiration, and motivation and for guiding the followers in the right direction, whether in social or work life (Sharma et al., 2018). A lack of concern for ethics may be considered the biggest barrier to quality service delivery (Wijesekera & Fernando, 2018).

Role Clarification. This is one facet of interprofessional collaboration crucial for effective interprofessional team functioning (Hudson et al., 2017). Despite being a core tenet of interprofessional collaboration, it is consistently documented as a challenging process for interprofessional teams (Ly et al.,

2018). Better role clarification is needed to foster multidisciplinary team coordination (Karam et al., 2017; Ling & Xu, 2009).

Organizational Climate

Social exchange theory and the reciprocity norm of repayment were used to support the relationships, as it is the most common exchange rule between organizational stakeholders (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). Social exchanges influence organizational climate, an essential feature of a gratified workplace (Jung & Ali, 2017; Obeng et al., 2021). In the organizational context, the climate is the natural outcome of social sense-making as people make sense of their workplace by extracting cues from their social surroundings (Beus et al., 2018). Employees' interpretation of events, prediction of possible outcomes, and adequacy of actions are influenced by organizational climate (Battistelli et al., 2021). Organizations must continuously maintain and strengthen employees' knowledge-sharing behavior and learning, which is positively influenced by organizational efforts (Kim & Park, 2020).

Reward. To drive desirable behavior, employees need to feel valued; thus, it is important to identify which rewards motivate and satisfy their needs (Victor & Hoole, 2021). The correct way makes them feel valued and engaged in their work (Victor & Hoole, 2017). To guarantee optimum performance, an organization must offer a range of diverse means of rewarding its employees (Alhmoud & Rjoub, 2019; Ferland, 2012).

Warmth. This refers to perceived characteristics such as cordiality, helpfulness, and kindness (Zheng et al., 2021). It is a variable of organizational climate factors that has a positive and significant effect and is dominant in the performance of employees (Oyihoe, 2020). With a positive climate, the work environment will improve, and warmth and cooperation will be felt by many (Montejo & Patino, 2021).

Support and Commitment. Support has been found to be one of the most significant factors affecting commitment (Khalid, 2020; Satardien et al., 2019). Support promotes the employees' sense of obligation to increase their commitment to the organization and achieve organizational goals (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Zheng & Wu, 2018). Employees who receive more support from supervisors show more commitment to their organization than those who receive less support from supervisors (Ahmad et al., 2020).

Structure. Structures promote management that shows different levels of control, communication, participation, roles, incentives, and duties (Zapata, 2019). It is responsible for appropriate project implementation and business operation (George, 2018). A well-designed organizational structure is a cornerstone of achieving an organization's goals (Rezaee et al., 2019).

Risk and Conflict. Risk is generally perceived for its undesirable consequences (Dias et al., 2020). At the same time, conflict is a natural phenomenon in organizations due to interactions among people (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020). Addressing risk and conflict requires both preventing and managing shocks and in many cases, the cost of prevention proves lower than the cost of managing the event (Hill et al., 2019).

Employer-Employee Relations

Social exchange theory views the individual-perceived employee-employer relations indicated by a negative or positive reciprocity norm positively or negatively affecting employee attitudes (Chen et al., 2023). The exchange approach in management has viewed employee and employer relationships as mutual, which explains the exchanges between employees and employers (Ahmed Haj Ali et al., 2018). Organizations must develop strategies to improve employee-employer relations (Panday & Kaur, 2022). The success of any organization is hinged on the abilities and competence of the employees and on how

well employers create a positive work environment that satisfies the emotional needs of the employees will influence to a great extent, the level of organizational productivity (Arimie & Oronsaye, 2020).

Salary. Salary is perceived as a key factor affecting employment (Zhang & Liu, 2018). Salary is remuneration in the form of money employees receive due to their position as employees who contribute to achieving company goals (Rivai, 2018). It is an integral part of organizational success because it inspires employees to exert more effort in discharging their workplace duties, positively influencing their effectiveness and efficiency, especially among teachers (Adekanmbi & Ukpere, 2021). Employees are required to work professionally to receive wages or salaries (Darmawan, 2021).

Working Environment. In today's challenging and competitive environment, organizations and institutes are making continuous efforts to improve the performances of their employees (Chaudhry et al., 2017). The work environment is a universal belief established by employees regarding the extent to which the organization values them, their contributions, and their well-being (Soliman, 2023). A positive working environment ensures employee productivity and avoids unnecessary stress, thus affecting their work performance (Athirah Saidi et al., 2019; Awan, 2015). A comfortable and inclusive working environment will boost the employees' performance, boosting organizational performance (Waktola, 2019).

Conflict management. Conflicts are an inevitable part of the business, but what is essential is how the business defines the root cause of the conflicts and manages them (Maiti & Choi, 2021). Conflict management is essential, and managing conflicts effectively reduce the adverse impacts of conflict and may improve decision-making and enhance positive outcomes (Iyiola & Rjoub, 2020; Rahim, 2002; Rispens et al., 2021). Conflict management methods are the behavioral styles stakeholders utilize to address conflicts when conflicts arise (Wu et al., 2017).

Communication. The communication transmits information and coordinates human actions to create social meaning, significance, and shared reality (Fischer et al., 2021). This transfer gains special importance in business, particularly in the service sector, since the service providers work with people based on communication (Genç, 2017). It should be seen as constitutive, based on careful planning, vigilant implementation, and continuous assessment (Mahbob et al., 2019).

Supervision. Supervision is a two-way dynamic process for a particular purpose geared toward fulfilling the organization's goal (Nwosu et al., 2021). Supervision is essential for optimizing performance and motivation (Westgate et al., 2021). It matters: since it serves as educational, supportive, and management functions (Rees et al., 2020).

Recognition. Recognizing an employee can be seen as positive feedback that strengthens the employee's behavior, highlighting the achievement of an objective or specific task (Masri & Suliman, 2019; Mone et al., 2011). Recognition is an incentive approach often used in management practice and is essential in organizations (Yang et al., 2022). When recognition is high, the employee is valued and appreciated for every action taken in line with organizational goals (Ewool et al., 2021).

Training and Development. Training and development are applied in many facets of organizational performance (Omar & Nik Mahmood, 2020). It aims to bridge the gap between the current and the desired performance and needs to match the business needs and objectives defined by the organization (Ludwikowska, 2018). Employees' training and development are essential in every organization (Lok et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2013).

The literature review highlights the interrelation between corporate social responsibility (CSR), ethical leadership, organizational climate, and employer-employee relations through the lens of social exchange theory. This theory is relevant to the study, as it connects these dimensions to the organization's efforts to

manage and retain key employees. The reviewed studies suggest that CSR, ethical leadership, organizational climate, and employer-employee relations are crucial human resource practices influencing employees' decisions to remain with the organization.

However, the review also reveals gaps in the current literature, particularly in studies conducted within the Philippines. While existing research identifies various factors, there is limited evaluation of CSR, ethical leadership, organizational climate, and employer-employee relations based on employee perceptions. This gap motivates the researcher to pursue this study.

Methodology

A descriptive-comparative and correlational study was conducted with 169 randomly selected participants from a pool of 279 employees at a Negros Island trading company. An adapted-modified instrument, validated by 16 experts, achieved acceptable Content Validity Index values. Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha showed high coefficients: customer relationship management ($\alpha = 0.958$), ethical leadership ($\alpha = 0.986$), organizational climate ($\alpha = 0.980$), and employee-employer relations ($\alpha = 0.986$). Adherence to ethical guidelines ensured proper conduct. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to assess demographic-based differences, while Spearman's rho measured significant correlations among variables.

Results and Discussion

Correlation among Variables

Correlates	n	df	r	p-value	Sig. @0.05
Corporate Social Responsibility and Ethical Leadership	162	160	0.777	0.001	Significant
Corporate Social Responsibility and Organizational Climate	162	160	0.744	0.001	Significant
Corporate Social Responsibility and Employer-Employee Relations	162	160	0.838	0.001	Significant
Ethical Leadership and Organizational Climate	162	160	0.657	0.001	Significant
Ethical Leadership and Employer-Employee Relations	162	160	0.814	0.001	Significant
	162	160	0.599	0.001	Significant

Organizational Climate and Employer-Employee Relations					
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The research found a significant association between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and ethical leadership, with an $r = 0.777$ and a p-value of 0.001. This strong correlation suggests that CSR and ethical leadership are closely linked, as indicated by employee responses. The data implies that the organization's CSR efforts have a significant impact on its ethical leadership, and any changes in ethical leadership can, in turn, influence CSR initiatives. The findings suggest that the ethical leadership of the trading company shapes how it designs and implements its CSR programs. Companies should be mindful of their broader impact on society—economically, socially, and environmentally. Effective corporate responsibility programs not only contribute to societal well-being but also boost workplace morale, thereby enhancing the organization's ethical leadership and overall direction.

The study by Wu et al. (2021) found that CSR positively relates to ethical leadership. De Roeck & Farooq (2018) highlighted the need for consistency between employees' perceptions of CSR and ethical leadership to foster their inclination to further social good through relationship-building activities with their organization. At the same time, the study of Pasricha et al. (2018) reveals that ethical leadership, directly and indirectly, influences CSR practices.

The study shows a significant association between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and organizational climate, with an $r = 0.744$ and a p-value of 0.001. This strong correlation suggests that CSR initiatives have a considerable impact on the organizational climate, as reflected in employee responses. It implies that the organization's CSR efforts play a crucial role in shaping the overall climate, and any changes in the organizational climate can, in turn, influence CSR practices. The findings suggest that CSR initiatives focused on strengthening and providing additional resources for employee capacity building, such as technical and professional training, positively affect the organizational climate. This, in turn, enhances employees' organizational commitment, deepening the bond they have with the organization. Sobhani et al. (2021) found significant relations between CSR and organizational climate. If organizations follow and emphasize CSR initiatives coupled with organizational climate, it will have a positive impact; they can attain the maximum level of organizational performance (Alkhadra et al., 2022). Employees show a higher appreciation of the firms' organizational climate when they see enough CSR benefits in their organizational activities (Lombardi et al., 2020).

Data shows a significant correlation between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and employer-employee relations, with an $r = 0.838$ and a p-value of 0.001. This strong association suggests that CSR initiatives have a profound impact on employer-employee relations, as reflected in employee ratings. It indicates that the organization's CSR efforts significantly influence how employees perceive and engage in these relations. Conversely, any shifts in employer-employee relations can also affect the organization's CSR activities. The results imply that the trading company's CSR initiatives are focused on strengthening employer-employee relations. Moreover, CSR shapes employees' perceptions of the organization, enhancing its employer brand, which serves as the internal mechanism that drives the company's daily commitment to being the type of employer it aspires to be.

Corporate social responsibility and employer-employee are greatly associated (Kumar, 2021; Zhang et al., 2009). Bastian & Poussing (2023) underline the importance of CSR as a driver of the employer-employee relationships because the CSR-oriented companies seem more open to stakeholder dialogs with employees.

The research also found a significant association between ethical leadership and organizational climate, with an $r = 0.657$ and a p -value of 0.001. This indicates a strong connection between these two factors, as reflected in client responses. The findings suggest that ethical leadership significantly influences the organizational climate, and any changes in the organizational climate can similarly impact perceptions of ethical leadership. The results imply that employees often look to their leaders to shape their conduct and perceptions of organizational policies and practices, which, in turn, define the organizational climate. When employees view their leaders as ethical role models, they are more likely to engage in behaviors that enhance the overall climate of the organization.

Mishra & Tikoria (2021) showed in their study that ethical leadership significantly influences organizational climate. Ethical leadership is critical to improving employee perceptions and experience of an organization's climate (Kia et al., 2019).

Data also indicates a significant association between ethical leadership and employer-employee relations, with an $r = 0.814$ and a p -value of 0.001. This strong correlation suggests that ethical leadership has a substantial impact on employer-employee relations, and vice versa. Ratings further support that the organization's ethical leadership directly influences the quality of employer-employee relations. Similarly, any changes in employer-employee relations are likely to affect perceptions of ethical leadership within the organization.

Ethical leadership shapes the ethical climate, which, in turn, influences employees' perception of employer-employee relations (Jha & Singh, 2019). Ethical leadership emphasizes the socio-emotional dimension in an employer-employee relationship (Franczukowska et al., 2021). While transmitting the ethical values of the institution, ethical leadership cultivates employee commitment to the organization, thereby strengthening the employer-employee relationship (Ashfaq et al., 2021).

Research reveals a significant relationship between organizational climate and employer-employee relations, with a p -value of 0.001 and $r = 0.599$, indicating a strong correlation. This suggests that organizational climate directly impacts employer-employee relations and vice versa. The findings imply that the company must address various social and psychological needs of employees, particularly in areas such as participation in management, training opportunities, and effective grievance-handling procedures. These factors play a crucial role in shaping positive employer-employee relations.

The study by Riego De Dios (2020) found that employer-employee relationships and organizational climate positively correlate. The findings concluded that harmonious and cordial employer-employee relations are pertinent in building a sustainable organizational climate and accomplishing organizational goals (Yadav et al., 2022). Organizational effectiveness through organizational climate undeniably depends on well-designed employer-employee relations practices which embrace vibrant industrial relations (Das & Acharjya, 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study reveals that employees view ethical leaders as influential in promoting actions for the greater good. Positive employer-employee relations are essential, fostering a sense of community. Organizational processes significantly impact employee performance. Moreover, the study highlights the importance employees place on corporate social responsibility towards customers, reflecting the company's compassion and employee treatment.

The researcher further concludes that employees recognize the trading company's effective use of ethical leadership, impacting corporate social responsibility, organizational climate, and employer-employee

relations. The study highlights significant correlations among these factors, suggesting room for enhancement in corporate social responsibility despite the trading company's commendable performance.

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