Impact of Ethical Leadership on Team Cohesion: The Mediating Role of Trust in leadership.

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ABSTRACT:- In the construction sector of Pakistan's major cities, this study explores the connection between ethical leadership and team cohesion. It zeroes in on the role that faith in leadership plays as a mediator between the two. Ethical leadership, which includes being truthful, fair, and transparent, is crucial for fostering trust and positive team relationships. This study statistically analyses the correlation between moral leadership and team cohesion, controlling for followers' trust in their leaders. A total of 223 professionals from Pakistan's main cities' building industries participated in the survey. Using SPSS, we were able to find mediation effects and significant correlations in the data. Based on the findings, trust in leadership is an important mediator between ethical leadership and team cohesion. This research shows that ethical leadership practices are necessary to boost productivity and collaboration on construction sites. Policymakers and managers in the sector should take note of the discussion around the need of ethical leadership development programs in boosting organizational performance and team productivity.

Keywords:- Ethical Leadership (EL), Team Cohesion (TC), Trust in Leadership (TL), Construction Sector (CS), Pakistan, SPSS, Quantitative Research.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Business ethics has gained prominence among academics, practitioners, regulators, and governments (Manz et al. 2008) as a result of corporate crises like Enron and National Irish Bank. Unethical leaders have emerged globally, prioritizing their own ambitions over the welfare of their enterprises (Padilla et al. 2007). Trevino and Brown (2004) argued that unethical behavior has existed ever since the existence of human beings. Also, there have been ethical and unethical leaders since the beginning of civilization.

Those in leadership positions who demonstrate a commitment to ethical behavior set an example for their followers, who in turn internalize these principles. Ethical leadership is characterized by traits that are visible in the leader's actions, such as concern, honesty, fairness, and trustworthiness (Lee & Adil 2024). Ethics is somewhat associated with leadership for managers and academic scholars. To establish a sustainable and productive working environment, leadership must possess an ethical framework. Leaders, as role models inside their businesses (Grojean et al. 2004), must exhibit exemplary moral conduct in their acts to establish a moral framework. Numerous research on ethical conduct underscore the significance of ethics for leaders (Ozgener 2009). In alignment with global trends, a substantial body of ethical research has concentrated on ethical leadership as a critical precursor to organizational success.

According to Carroll et al. (1998), team cohesion is a dynamic process that allows a group to stick together and achieve its goals while satisfying member needs. This implies that greater team cohesiveness leads to greater team success. Teams are essential for success in contemporary businesses (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006), whether functioning in an office environment (Simons & Peterson, 2000) or in isolated, constrained, or harsh conditions (Bishop, 2004). People benefit from teams in several ways. The two pillars of innovation and new information creation—convergent and divergent thinking—are made possible when their varied expertise is combined (Hoegl & Parboteeah, 2007). Additionally, they can boost morale and lend a helping hand to team members who are struggling due to overwork or lack of expertise (Salas, Sims, & Burke, 2005). Without a doubt, teams provide several advantages, but these benefits can only be fully experienced by teams that are able to work together harmoniously. Cohesion Teamwork relies on the intrinsic motivation that keeps individuals committed to the group and eager to pitch in (Casey-Campbell & Martens, 2009; Chiocchio & Essiembre, 2009). Team members who don't feel connected to one another (for whatever reason—distrust, dislike, apathy, etc.) are less invested in the team's success and less willing to engage in the "teaming" activities that make teamwork possible.

According to Rousseau et al. (1998), trust in a leader, defined as "the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another. Members of a team are more likely to put aside their own concerns and drive to succeed when they have faith in their leader (Dirks, 2000). They also increase their psychological availability (Li & Tan, 2013) as well as the perception that they have resources (physical, emotional and intellectual) available to perform their tasks (Kahn, 1990). Based on this viewpoint and the claim that there are multiple influential sources that affect the team's cohesiveness and performance (Mathieu et al., 2015), we argue that there is a strong connection between the dynamics of the team at the vertical and horizontal levels.

There is a significant lack of study on the relationship between ethical leadership, team cohesiveness, and trust in leadership within the Pakistani market. While most studies have looked at these dynamics in Western settings, very little has been done to really study how they play out in Pakistani organizations, which face their own unique set of social, economic, and cultural challenges.

A complex knowledge of ethical leadership and its consequences on team dynamics is required in Pakistan's distinctive corporate climate, which is defined by a combination of traditional beliefs and contemporary corporate practices. Additionally, cultural considerations frequently impact trust, and the effect of ethical leadership in promoting trust in Pakistani teams is still unexplored. Because of this knowledge vacuum, studies are needed to determine whether there is a connection between ethical leadership and team cohesiveness and, more particularly, whether trust plays a mediating role in this relationship inside Pakistani organizations.

By filling this knowledge vacuum, the study hopes to make a contribution to Pakistani leadership and organizational behavior literature while also providing useful insights for practitioners who are looking to improve team performance by leading ethically. Organizational success in today's dynamic market may be achieved by a deeper understanding of these linkages within the Pakistani context, which in turn can inform more targeted tactics to foster ethical leadership and teamwork.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethical leadership and Team cohesion

Research in organizational behavior has focused heavily on the relationship between ethical leadership and team cohesiveness. Team dynamics and performance are only two of the many organizational outcomes that may be impacted by leaders who demonstrate ethical behavior. Leadership that is guided by respect for ethical views and values, as well as for the dignity and rights of others, is known as ethical leadership (Brown & Trevino, 2006). According to Brown et al. (2005), this approach requires leaders to provide an example of ethical behavior and cultivate an atmosphere of trust and openness. It is believed that ethical leaders will encourage their teams to act ethically, which will have a good effect on the attitudes and actions of their followers.

The level of attraction and motivation among team members to stay part of the team is called team cohesiveness (Carron et al., 2005). Cohesion in the workplace refers to the degree to which a team's members get along with one another and work together to accomplish a common objective (Beal et al., 2003). Team members report higher levels of work satisfaction, better communication, and improved performance when there is high cohesiveness (Mullen & Copper, 1994).

There is strong evidence from studies linking ethical leadership with cohesive teams. For example, according to research on Chinese executive teams, an ethical CEO can boost team cohesiveness, which in turn boosts team innovation (Aubke et al., 2014). This shows that teams with ethical leaders have closer ties because members feel comfortable sharing their thoughts.

Another study found that ethical leadership improves organizational safety performance by strengthening team cohesion (Zhu et al., 2015). This supports the premise that leaders who put an emphasis on ethics foster a feeling of community among their teams, which is essential for productive collaboration.

How ethical leadership fosters team unity is explained by many processes. To begin with, teams look up to ethical leaders because of the example they set. Their actions inspire the rest of the team to treat each other with the dignity and compassion that they display (Mayer et al., 2012). Second, leaders who uphold ethical standards encourage honest and open dialogue. A cohesive workplace where varied viewpoints are appreciated is fostered when team members are encouraged to openly communicate their thoughts through this transparency (Hoogh & Hartog, 2008). Third, a leader's ethics determine whether or not team goals are in line with company principles. Members of the team are more likely to stick together when they believe their fellow workers are also working toward similar objectives (Shin & Choi, 2010).

According to social identity theory, people's sense of who they are is shaped in part by the communities to which they belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). By encouraging people to develop a strong sense of social identity, ethical leadership may strengthen team cohesiveness. Members of the group are more likely to get along with one another when their leaders stress the importance of the group's common beliefs and objectives. Leaders, according to transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994), should motivate

their followers to put the group's needs before their own. By inspiring their followers to act in accordance with their principles, ethical leaders frequently exhibit transformative traits. Both individual dedication and team cohesiveness are bolstered by this revolutionary approach.

As a strategic project, developing ethical leaders should be a top priority for organizations. Leadership development programs that teach participants to communicate effectively and make ethical decisions can help teams work together more effectively. Overall employee happiness and performance may be enhanced by establishing a company culture that emphasizes ethics. We postulate the following based on the aforementioned literature:

H1: Ethical leadership is significantly and positively associated with team cohesion.
Mediating role of trust in leaders

The degree of trust among teams is greatly affected by ethical leadership, which is defined by actions like honesty, equity, and openness. Achieving great performance and creativity relies on strong team cohesiveness, which is enhanced when there is trust. Ethical leaders build trust by acting ethically themselves and communicating openly, according to the research. As an example, according to Brown and Trevino (2006), ethical leadership is exemplified by leaders who demonstrate normatively appropriate behavior in their own interactions and activities. An essential component of any cohesive team is its members' ability to trust one another, and this action fosters such trust (Mayer et al., 1995). There is more team cohesiveness when workers believe their leaders are trustworthy and act ethically in their dealings with coworkers (Kalshoven et al., 2011). Ethical leadership promotes a culture of respect and cooperation, which in turn improves team cohesiveness, according to research. According to research by Michalisin et al. (2022), effective leadership practices greatly boost team cohesiveness, which in turn improves performance. They found that leaders who act in ways that make their teams more attractive to one another can boost performance in the long run by making everyone feel more connected to the team. This is in line with the results of Gong (2020), who showed that an ethical CEO has a good effect on the creativity of the top management team (TMT) by making the TMT more cohesive.
When people in a team trust one another, they are more likely to speak their minds. Ethical leaders inspire their teams to speak their minds and provide the data that matters most when making decisions (Hoogh & Hartog, 2008). Team members are more invested in the team's success when they are able to express their thoughts and feelings freely. Supporting this idea, Zafar et al. (2020) found that trust mediates the connection between ethical leadership and safety performance, suggesting that cohesive teams have a greater chance of achieving good results.

Additional evidence from social learning theory supports the idea that trust, team cohesiveness, and ethical leadership all interact with one another. Bandura (1986) argues that people pick up new habits and ways of behaving by watching someone they look up to. According to Brown et al. (2005), teams whose leaders set a good example by acting ethically are more likely to have high levels of trust and unity among themselves. As a result, the efficacy of ethical leadership is reinforced, and the process continues in a positive feedback loop wherein increasing trust increases cohesiveness.

Furthermore, research has shown that trust is a key factor in determining team dynamics. Leaders that treat their staff with integrity foster an environment of trust, as pointed out by Burke et al. (2007). Team members are more likely to work together and provide mutual support when they have a feeling of belonging through this relationship. In addition, the importance of trust-based emotional relationships on team dynamics and cohesiveness was highlighted by Byun et al. (2017).

In conclusion, research shows that trust is a critical link in the chain connecting ethical leadership and cohesive teams. Stronger interpersonal ties among team members are a result of an atmosphere of trust that ethical leaders create via their behaviors and communication methods. As a result of increased trust, teams are better able to work together, which boosts productivity and creativity. Organizations that want their teams to work well together should make developing ethical leadership practices that encourage trust and cooperation a top priority. So, we come up with the following hypothesis based on the literature mentioned above.

H2: Trust in leaders is significantly and positively associated with team cohesion.
H3: Trust in leader mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and team cohesion in a way when there in high trust it will create high level of team cohesion.

Research model:

Data collection
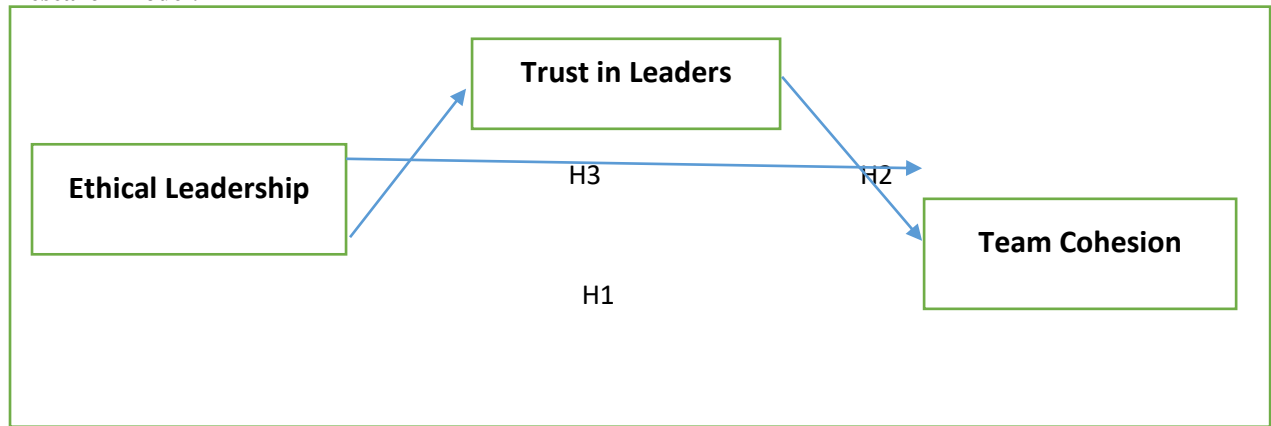
A field research was conducted in important cities of Pakistan to gather data from the project-based building sector in particular. People who are actively working on different projects in the sector were also featured. They were asked to fill out a Google Form while they were really working.

Employees from various sectors of the construction industry in key cities across Pakistan made up the study's population. A feasible sampling strategy employing closed-end surveys was developed to meet time and expense restrictions. Between April 10, 2024, and June 1, 2024, a cross-sectional survey was administered to 223 individuals in order to collect data using an easy sampling strategy. Online data collection was made possible through self-study and personal networks, which were used to facilitate the survey.

Data analysis

Analytical procedures were carried out utilizing Amos and SPSS. Durrheim (2002) said that descriptive statistics offered a thorough synopsis of the evidence. Finding the relationships between the variables under consideration is, as stated by Bailey (1987), the fundamental goal of statistical analysis. The goal was accomplished by use of the SPSS program, which allowed for the evaluation and examination of data. Amos was used for accurate measurement, and the analysis included finding connections between variables, measuring things out, and looking at measurement mistakes.

Measures
Ethical leadership

Brown et al. (2005) developed an instrument to measure leaders' ethical conduct called the Ethical Leadership Scale. The 10-item survey uses a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 representing a strong disapproval and 5 representing a strong agreement. To illustrate a point, take the following: "My supervisor assesses success by considering both the results attained and the approaches employed to attain them."

Team cohesion

This characteristic is evaluated via the team cohesiveness scale that was developed by Carron and Hausenblas (1998). A survey was administered to the participants to gauge their level of team cohesiveness. Using a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), the assessment consists of 5 items. An item on the scale may be "We work well together as a team."

Trust in leadership

One way to measure this variable is with the trust in leader's scale, which was created by Dirks and Ferrin (2002) and uses a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being very disagreeing and 5 being very agreeing. There are five components to the evaluation. One thing that leaders do is be open and honest with us when they communicate.

Table 3. 1Reliability of Measures		
Name of Variables.	Number of Items (s).	. (α)
Ethical Leadership	10	.732
Trust in leaders	5	.710
Task interdependence	5	.708

Results

This study set out to mediate the effect of confidence in leaders on team cohesiveness by examining the relationship between ethical leadership and team cohesiveness.

Descriptive Statistics:

Descriptive statistics tell you what the data is like. Average, minimum, maximum, sample size, and standard deviation are all shown via descriptive statistics. In Table 4.1, you can see the data details.

Table 4. 1Descriptive Statistics					
Variables	**Sample Size**	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
Ethical Leadership	223	1.23	5.00	4.65	0.89
Trust in Leaders	223	2.18	5.00	3.98	0.71
Team Cohesion	223	1.89	5.00	4.15	0.65

Table 4.1 displays the study's variables along with their respective numbers. The input columns are displayed in the first column of the table. The sample size, minimum and maximum, standard deviation, and number of components are two, three, four, five, and six, respectively. The number of participants in the study is 223. These variations are all limited to a 1–5 scale. The independent variable, ethical leadership, has a mean of 4.65 and a standard deviation of 0.89. Finally, team cohesiveness (the dependent variable) reflects a mean of 4.15 with a standard deviation of 0.65, while trust in leaders (the mediator) shows a mean of 3.98 and a standard deviation of 0.71.

Control Variables:

In order to determine if the demographic variables (gender, age, experience, and credentials) significantly affected the dependent variable (DV), we employed the analysis of variance (ANOVA) approach. No significant relationship between DV and demographic variables such as age, gender, experience, or education was found in the estimates of F statistics. As a result, demographic variables may be safely left out of the regression analysis. Tabulated in Table 4.2 are the findings.

Table 4. 2				
Control Variables			F	Sig.
Age			0.98	.56
Gender			1.06	.82
Experience			1.03	.46
Qualification			0.88	.78
Sig. level p< 0.05				

Correlation Analysis

Using Pearson's product, we were able to ascertain the minutes' worth of correlation between the variables under investigation. Findings from the study reveal a connection between diversity (as measured by value) and organizational dominance (as shown by both positive and negative metrics). When two signs are positive, it means they are moving in the same direction; when they are negative, it means they are moving in opposing directions. To determine correlation coefficients, one uses Pearson's regression analysis. The range of possible values is from 1.00 to -1.00. When the value is zero, it means that the variables are not related to each other.

Table 4. 3

	1	2	3
Ethical leadership	1		
Trust in leaders	.499**	1	
Team cohesion	.501**	.289**	1

*N=223** significant level 0.01 level.*

Explanation of the Correlation Results:
Ethical Leadership and Trust in Leaders

Trust in leaders and ethical leadership are correlated with each other with a value of 0.499. There is a moderate positive association between the two variables, suggesting that followers have more faith in their leaders when they exhibit more ethical behavior. The association is very probable to be attributed to more than just chance, as it is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Ethical Leadership and Team Cohesion

The connection between Ethical Leadership and Team Cohesion is 0.501. This is a modest positive association, implying that more ethical leadership is generally linked to enhanced team cohesiveness. This association is statistically significant at the 0.01 threshold.

Trust in Leaders and Team Cohesion

Team cohesiveness and trust in leaders are correlated with a value of 0.289. In other words, there is a little but substantial association between team cohesiveness and trust in leaders, as seen by this weak positive correlation. Team cohesiveness grows in tandem with leader trust, however this bond isn't quite as robust as the others. At the 0.01% level of significance, this link is likewise noteworthy.

Regression analysis

You can see the degree of dependence between the predictor and the result variable in a regression analysis. A standard variable's value will vary in response to changes in one or more independent variables; this is useful information to have. Thus, unlike correlation analysis, which only describes the link between variables, it explains the causative relationship as well. Although there are other tools available for doing regression (e.g., Baron& Kenny, 1986), we have chosen to employ Hayes' (2012) process technique for analysis due to its suitability and ease of use in this particular study.

Tables 4.4 – 4.5 reflect the results of regression analysis using Hayes (2012) processing.
H1: Ethical leadership is significantly and positively associated with team cohesion.

The first hypothesis is accepted by Table 4.4, which demonstrates that there is a positive and significant association between ethical leadership and team cohesiveness (B =.31, t = 4.10, p <.001). There is significant evidence to support the hypothesis, since the P value suggests a high degree of significance.

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001*

Table 4.4: Results of a regression study examining the impact of ethical leadership on team cohesion.

Variables	B	SE	T	P
Ethical Leadership ⟶ Team cohesion	.24	.06	3.95	.000

H2: Trust in leaders is significantly and positively associated with team cohesion.
According to Table 4.5, the third hypothesis is supported by the positive and significant link between project success and clearly defined project goals (B =.29, t = 6.99, p <.001). There is significant evidence to support the hypothesis, since the P value suggests a high degree of significance.

A regression analysis was conducted to determine the influence of confidence in leaders on team cohesiveness (Table 4. 5).

Variables	B	SE	T	P
Trust in leaders ⟶ Team cohesion	.29	.06	6.99	.000

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001*

H3: Trust in leader mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and team cohesion in a way when there in high trust it will create high level of team cohesion.
According to Table4.8, there is a statistically significant indirect effect of ethical leadership on team cohesiveness via the mediator of trust in leaders. With a 95% confidence interval that does not include zero, the bootstrapping values range from.2566 to.0484. These findings provide credence to the idea that followers' faith in their leaders mediates, at least in part, the connection between moral leadership and group cohesiveness. Therefore, we also accept the third hypothesis.

Table 4. 4 Regression Analysis for Mediation

Variables	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Ethical leadership ⟶ Team cohesion	.2566	.0484

III.   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

The major goal of the research was to identify the relationship between ethical leadership and team cohesiveness, with confidence in leaders serving as a mediator. The construction sector industry was the intended audience for the data collected from various cities in Pakistan. 223 people took the time to fill out a Google form with their thoughts and opinions. All hypotheses are confirmed and approved by the empirical results.

Conclusion

Empirical evidence from this study shows a positive and statistically significant relationship between ethical leadership and team cohesiveness. What's more, it shows that trust in leaders mediates this relationship, so a high level of trust between ethical leadership and team cohesiveness strengthens the relationship.

Practical implications

Several businesses can benefit from this study's conclusions, especially those in Pakistan's construction industry, where strong leadership and cohesive teams are essential for successful projects. The findings highlight how ethical leadership is critical for building trust and strengthening team unity, which in turn affects cooperation and productivity.

In their leadership development programs, construction businesses should emphasize the need of ethical leadership. Teams are more likely to be cohesive when their leaders are trustworthy and act in an honest and fair manner. Organizations should prioritize trust-building initiatives that include transparent communication, consistent ethical conduct, and fair decision-making, since trust in leaders mediates the link between ethical leadership and team cohesiveness.

This study stresses the need of training and recruiting approaches that prioritize the development of ethical leaders for human resource managers. Businesses might think about doing ethical and trust-building seminars on a regular basis to help cultivate a good culture.

In addition, by highlighting the importance of ethical leadership and actively cultivating trust between leaders and employees, construction project managers may utilize these insights to improve team performance. Building trust amongst team members may lessen tensions, boost collaboration, and improve project results.

In conclusion, the study's results highlight the importance of trustworthy ethical leadership in building cohesive teams, which is critical for enhancing organizational performance and attaining sustainable success in the construction industry.

Limitation and future direction

Although there are a number of caveats to be aware of, this research does shed light on how ethical leadership influences team cohesiveness in Pakistan's construction industry via the medium of confidence in leaders.

One limitation is that the study only looked at one industry, thus the results might not apply to other fields. Due to factors such as significant employee turnover, short project durations, and unpredictable working conditions, the construction business may display distinct dynamics when contrasted with other industries. Second, while 223 is a sufficient number of respondents, they are all from one part of Pakistan, thus their experiences may not be representative of the country as a whole. The results' generalizability might be compromised by this restriction.

Also, the study only records information at one moment in time because it is cross-sectional. So, we can't draw any conclusions about cause and effect or evaluate how ethical leadership impacts team trust and cohesiveness over the long run. In addition, leaders' ethical leadership and followers' faith in them were evaluated using self-reporting measures, which might contribute to response biases such common method variance or social desirability.

Finally, there may be moderating variables in the association between ethical leadership and team cohesiveness that this study does not take into consideration. These variables may include things like leadership

style diversity or organizational culture. Additional aspects might be investigated in future studies using longitudinal designs to provide a more complete picture of the dynamics involved.

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