Role of Ethical Leaders in creating Ethical Climate in Public Sector

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Abstract

This study focuses on conceptualizing the phenomenon of organizations that are having relatively more interest in ethical behavior of leaders than ever before. Since few decades, their importance has grown due to increased level of unethical behavior on leaders' parts and overstated responsibility drawn on their shoulders. Current research takes into account the leadership behavior of Government educational institutions heads in terms of creation of ethical climate in the institutions. For empirical testing of framework, data from 300 participants including principals, vice-principals, headmasters, deputy-headmasters working in (107) government educational institutions were taken through purposive sampling methodology. Various tests like descriptive statistics, regression correlational and factor analysis along with cross tabulation were executed through computer software like AMOS and SPSS. The results depicted that leadership behavior of ethical leaders was directed towards creation of ethical climate in the educational institutions. Results indicated a meaningful and positive effect of ethical leadership on Caring, Rules, Law and Codes, Independence ethical climate types but no significant influence on Instrumental type ethical climate.
Keywords: Ethical leadership, Ethical climate, Law and Codes, Instrumental, Independence

Ethical leadership shows a beneficial role in public institutions because it stresses on the establishment of working environment for better delivery of services to the society as a whole. Promoting and enhancing ethical leadership can be exceptional asset for the institutions that wish to improve employees' performance (Wadei et al., 2020). For example, ethical leadership focuses on the performance of mutually suitable conduct that improves efficiencies and business excellence (Rehman, 2011). Public sector leaders are held responsible to various stakeholders for their actions (Giessner & Quaquebeke, 2010). They are in continuous tension during the process of implementation of ethical leadership system. Majority of leaders fail in public sector due to their ignorance and selfishness. Thus, public sector leaders restrain themselves from practicing ethical leadership in their organizations for the establishment of ethical climate. On the other hand, organizations unethical conducts are not only due to some rotten apples but most likely those cracks in the roots of an organizational ethical climate are the source of misconduct (Kuenzi, Mayer & Greenbaum, 2020). Various influences of ethical climate have been noted by researchers (Stetzer et al., 1997); they are responsible for decreasing negative consequences (i.e. accidents, absence). Organizational norms are more likely to affect workers than structural features (Borry, 2017). These outcomes results in huge financial and social costs for the organizations. Employees' behavior and expectations are largely affected by organizational exclusive set of attitude, features, effectiveness, cultures, outcomes and expectations (Harrison & Mclntosh, 1992).

This study is about ethical aspects, and as due to globalization, economies are shifting from service and manufacturing to knowledge economies (The Futures Project, 2000). Educational institutions are the main source of acquiring knowledge for being competitive (Enemark, 2005). In Pakistan, scholar like Kazmi (2016) pointed out about the deteriorating condition of education sector, specifically, the alarming condition of secondary education. There could be multiple causes of this poor quality but one of the major factors is environment of these institutions. Sarwar et al. (2010) has discussed various factors that influence quality of education and environment as a whole. Leadership behavior is instrumental in creating supportive environment in the institution. Teachers are more prone towards attaining institutional goals if they think that their institution is more supportive to them (Fuller et al., 2006).

Based on the background, and the research objectives to identify the importance, association and role of ethical leadership, and climate in organisations, some specific key research questions (RQs) are:

Research Question 1: What is the role of ethical leadership originations?

Research Question 2: Is there any association exists between ethical leadership and ethical climate?

Research Question 3: What associations exist in between the sub ingredients of ethical climate and ethical leadership?

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Theoretical Evidence

Majority of researchers have investigated ethical leadership around different topics. Empirical studies have been done on the operations, dimensions and outcomes of ethical leadership (Ko et al., 2018). However, It is important to understand and investigate whether the ethical behavior of educational leaders cultivates ethical environment (climate) or not. They should understand what ethical values are espousing in the organization and which behavior(s) they may root (Borry, 2017). More specifically, what type(s) of ethical climates are present in these educational institutions? Researchers like (Kim & Miller, 2008; Kim, Miao & Park 2015; Al-Omari 2012), give recommendation for investigation of relationship between ethical climates and leadership of an organization.

Ethical leadership and Ethical Climate

It is the responsibility of leaders to create suitable working environment in the organization. For that, a climate based on ethical ground is necessary, to examine the ethical aspects of organizations. This concept is based on general organizational climate view. Victor and Cullen (1988) viewed ethical climate as a way to explain and discuss behavior of ethical nature in organizations. They demarcated ethical climate as "*perceptions of established prevailing organizational norms shared by the members to address issues with a moral component"*. After stating the ethical climate, we move to classification of ethical climate which is necessary for the suitable behavior in the organization. Ethical climate model with empirical basis has been vastly utilized and validated by various scholars in social sciences. They indicated and explained five dimensions as rules, caring, instrumental, law and code, and independence.

Ethical leadership has usually been demarcated in terms of normative business ethics. In different subjects like business ethics, normative view states the way the individual should act in the organization (Brown, 2007). When discussing ethical leadership, the most commonly used description was given by Brown et al. (2005) who defined it as "*Ethical leadership is defined as the demonstration of normatively suitable behavior through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the propagation of such behavior to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making*". Ethical leadership usually uses two pillars, moral person and moral manager (Trevino et al., 2000a; Brown et al., 2005).

Trevino and her colleagues proposed that a *moral person* aspect is that in which individual makes right decisions, tries to do things rightly, and cares for others (Zagenczyk, 2020). The *moral person* aspect provides basis for ethical leadership and is vibrant for developing positive repute for ethical behavior. Treviño et al. (2003) suggested that *moral persons* are viewed as trustworthy, fair and honest in the performance of their behavior.

Studies show that there exists association among the ethical climate classes even. Stetzer et al. (1997) suggested that ethical climate has a variety of influences. The manager after the evaluation of existing class or classes in the organization will be able to develop policies and procedures to further ethical behavior among workers (Deshpande, 1996; Wimbush et al., 1997). Forte (2004) pointed out meaningful link between various management levels and organizational ethical climate. Further, Kim and Miller (2008) indicated differences in various classes of ethical climate recognized on the basis organizational or individual features. For instance, Wittmer and Coursey (1996) indicated that managers of public organizations considered ethical working climate as less promising as compare to managers of private organizations. Demirtas and Akdogan (2015) suggested that managers influence the climate of the organization. Similarly, ethical leadership behavior of Sports Board leadership influenced ethical climate of a non-profit soccer club (Constandt & Willem, 2019). Ethical leadership and ethical climate are positively related to each other (Enwereuzor et al., 2020; Al Halbusi et al., 2020). Leaders in public education institutions tend to create suitable working environment through implementing policies given by ministry of education. Therefore, researchers proposed the following argument.

H_1: *Ethical leadership has effect on ethical climate.*

Ethical leadership and Caring climate

It is observed that where there prevails ethical climate, the workers show deep interest and importance in the well-being of each other and the well-being of every other stakeholder in the organization. Every worker in the organization tends to stand for the benefit for the other and along with organization and society at large. Therefore, Caring aspect of ethical climate encourages utilitarian approach. Moreover, workers in such climate are encouraged to work in groups or teams (Victor & Cullen 1988). Researchers have so far found mixed findings in relation to leadership and Caring climate. In Caring aspect of ethical climate, Russian managers' ethical behavior together with their accomplishment in the organizations is highly associated (Deshpande, 1996; 2000). Additionally, Caring climate has negative relationship with the managers'

and employees' misbehavior (Vardi, 2001). Later, Deshpande and Joseph (2009) suggested that Caring climate is ineffective on managers' ethical behavior in Russian organizations. Ethical leadership can enhance caring climate in the originations (Bommer et al. 2018). Therefore, researchers in the current study propose the following argument.

H₂: Ethical leadership has effect on Caring ethical climate.

Ethical leadership and Rules climate

In Rules aspect of ethical climate, workers are engaged in procedures and rules of the organization. Adherence to rules, policies and procedures is required for the deontological foundation of such a climate. In Rules aspect, the policies, rules and procedures provide outline in workers' ethical decision-making (Victor & Cullen 1988). Numerous rules and regulations are being followed in Russian organizations. Managerial staff in Russian organizations considers rules as most perceived ethical climate type (Deshpande, 2000; Deshpande, 2011). However, it was shown that ethical behavior of managers does not affect Rules climate (Deshpande & Joseph, 2009) but misbehavior of managers and employees negatively impact it (Vardi, 2001). Furthermore, ethical leadership may have strong association with climate and thus towards better performance (Bai et al. 2019). Managers and leaders in public educational institutions try to establish such a climate where everyone should follow procedures and rules. Therefore, the researchers proposed the following argument.

H₃: Ethical leadership has effect on Rules ethical climate.

Ethical leadership and Law & code climate

In Law and code aspect of ethical climate, workers are supposed to prioritize government and professional regulations and codes in their decision making. In such a climate, it is necessary for workers to think beyond the organizational procedures and rules to those of professional associations and to seek for proposals for appropriate behavior (Victor & Cullen 1988). In Russian organizations, ethical behavior of managers does not affect Professional climate (Deshpande & Joseph, 2009). In public educational institutions administrators tend to follow laws and codes established by the Federal government (Abdullah, 2019). They take actions for the implementation of these laws and codes in their institutions. Therefore, researchers in the current study propose the following argument.

H₄: Ethical leadership has effect on Law and code ethical climate.

Ethical leadership and Independence climate

Another aspect is independence climate, where workers are considered to engage in their own set of moral standards rather than count on only on standards set by the organization. In such ethical climate workers follow their own moral standards founded on set of well-thought-out values. For ethical decision-making, workers use their own moral values and standards in dealing with moral problems (Victor & Cullen 1988). Peng and Wei (2019) indicated in their study that leadership behavioral integrity influence employees' voice through team independence climate. Leaders not only create independence climate through role modeling but also through clear, trustworthy and

predictable environment (Simons et al., 2015). Therefore, the researchers proposed the following argument.

H_5: *Ethical leadership has effect on Independence ethical climate.*

Ethical leadership and Instrumental climate

In Instrumental aspect of ethical climate, workers are more focused on their self-interest at both individual and organizational level and overlook concern of others in their decision-making (Victor & Cullen 1988). Such a climate increase concern of both workers and organization, boots conduct that characterizes the significance of rising production of profits in business organization (Parboteeah & Kapp, 2007). However, in instrumental climate, association between successes of Russian organizations with managers' ethical behavior was weakly associated (Deshpande, 1996; 2000). It is ineffective on ethical behavior of respondents (Deshpande & Joseph, 2009) but negatively related to workers and managers' misbehavior activities (Vardi, 2001). Therefore, researchers in the current study propose the following argument.

H6: Ethical leadership has effect on Instrumental ethical climate.

Research Methodology

The study is based on the key objective of current research that was to analyze the pattern of administrators' ethical behavior and ethical climate that prevailed in the educational institutions. Target population in current research composed of principals, vice-principals, headmasters, and deputy headmasters employed in various government educational institutions located in Islamabad. So, principals, vice-principals, headmasters, and deputy headmasters are the units of analysis for current research. Purposive sampling data collection methodology was employed for current study. Administrators who were working in the present institution for minimum of one year self-reported their individual leadership behavior and institutional ethical climate as a whole.

Research Model and Measures

The study employed ethical leadership, which was measured using Yukl et al., (2013) ethical leadership Questionnaire having fifteen items. Ethical climate was measured using Cullen, Victor, and Bronson (1993) Ethical Climate Questionnaire having thirty six items. Both ethical leadership and ethical climate were self-reported by administrators of government educational institutions. Likert-type 5-points instrument ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree" was employed for obtaining responses.

Data Collection Procedure

The principals, vice-principals, headmasters, and deputy headmasters who were employed in one hundred and seven government educational institutions (primary, secondary and higher secondary) located in Islamabad voluntarily provided data on variables of research. Administrators who were working in the present institution for minimum of one year self-reported were first briefed about the nature and importance of the study before filling in the questionnaire. Administrative structure of higher secondary and secondary schools consists of a principal and a vice principle with two to four deputy

headmasters. Primary and middle schools have a headmaster and a deputy headmaster.

Total of 300 research questionnaires were distributed to participants of selected schools along with the briefing about the nature of study and confidentiality of responses. Study survey included ethical leadership and ethical climate research items. Current study also included demographic factors like gender, age, experience and education of administrators. Females and males from various age groups together joined our research survey. This was done to increased research reliability results and to minimize participants' bias. Study survey was conducted through various channels including post, in-person and email. However, majority of instruments were distributed personally by researchers. They made several visits to educational institutions for this purpose. Participants were given enough time to fill in the study instruments. Data collection took approximately 4 months.

Out of 300, the researchers got back 237 study instruments with 79% respond rate. The Collected instruments were initially sorted out for validity and completion, 17 instruments were rejected at this stage. Data from 220 (female 130; male 90) remaining instruments were punched into the computer and thereafter screened for missing values. Now, data were ready for further statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics

Standard deviations, averages and Cronbach's α of research items were included in the descriptive statistics. Reliability of research instruments was evaluated using Cronbach's α value whose minimum standard is such that it must be larger than 0.7 (Cronbach, 1951). First variable, ethical leadership as a whole had average 4.257, St. Deviation 0.547 and α value 0.942. It means responses on five point Likert type scale of ethical leadership were collected on 4-5 points and had significant reliability value. Second variable, ethical climate was evaluated on five aspects. Ethical climate overall had average 3.813, St. Deviation 0.491. The analysis of five aspects showed that Instrumental (InEC) had average 3.267, St. Deviation 1.092 and α value 0.886. Caring (CEC) had average 3.870, St. Deviation 0.722 and α value 0.962. Independence (IEC) had average 3.833, St. Deviation 0.795 and α value 0.94. Rules (REC) had average 4.051, St. Deviation 0.745 and α value 0.819. Law & Codes (LCEC) had average 4.045, St. Deviation 0.690 and α value 0.877. The findings discussed above showed no problem of Kurtosis and Skewness that could affect the normality of the data as all set of values when divided by St. error were below 2.96 (Field, 2013).

Now, data were ready for more statistical investigations. Researchers used SEM in AMOS software on study data in two independent but interlocked stages. First procedure was used for drawing measurement model in AMOS. Second procedure was use to draw whole model in SEM to investigate and verify presumed casual relationships in the study.

At this point, all the variables of current model were drawn in AMOS and they were set to freely co-vary with each other. This process is referred as Confirmatory Factor Analysis and its output is depicted in table 1. Model goodness of fit indices first introduced by (Kline, 2011) was used here. Goodness of fit indices of measurement model in the study were GFI = 0.614, CFI = 0.829,

TLI = 0.821, Chi-square = 6336.991, Normed Chi-square= 1.814, DF = 3493, AGFI = 0.587 and RMSEA = 0.061. Entire set of fit indices met the minimum criteria, so furthermore, convergent and discriminant validity of collected data can be tested.

Table 1. *Factor Loadings*

Variables	Items	Factor Loadings
Ethical Leadership (EL)	15	0.775, 0.767, 0.723, 0.744, 0.728, 0.719, 0.621, 0.730, 0.739, 0.701, 0.730, 0.768, 0.729, 0.596, 0.741
Ethical Climate (EC)	**5**	-
Instrumental (InEC)	4	0.921, 0.891, 0.880, 0.873
Caring (CEC)	15	0.899, 0.790, 0.839, 0.879, 0.729, 0.740, 0.757, 0.827, 0.693, 0.810, 0.801, 0.770, 0.761, 0.741, 0.796
Independence (IEC)	4	0.798, 0.833, 0.792, 0.840
Rules (REC)	3	0.820, 0.669, 0.844
Law & Codes (LCEC)	5	0.870, 0.859, 0.744, 0.708, 0.673

The researchers have followed Fornell and Larcker (1981) three tiers methodology for the measurement of validity. In current study, convergent validity was investigated in first two phases, while discriminant validity in third phase. Table 1 depicted summary of ethical leadership and ethical climate along with its five dimensions. Response from participants on ethical leadership was received on 15 items with factor loadings between 0.596 and 0.768. Instrumental aspect of ethical climate was evaluated through 4 items with factor loadings between 0.873and 0.921. Caring aspect was evaluated through 15 items with factor loadings from 0.693 to 0.899. Rules aspect was evaluated through 3 items with factor loadings from 0.669 to 0.844. Law &Codes aspect was evaluated through 5 items with factor loadings from 0.673 to 0.870. The factor loading of all the variables showed values greater than threshold values. Thus, first phase procedure was finalized here.

Table 2. *Psychometric properties*

	CR	AVE	InEC	CEC	EL	LCEC	IEC	REC
InEC	0.939	0.795	**0.891**					
CEC	0.961	0.625	0.080	**0.791**				
EL	0.942	0.522	0.002	0.294	**0.722**			
LCEC	0.881	0.601	0.050	0.366	0.233	**0.775**		
IEC	0.888	0.666	0.198	0.383	0.204	0.353	**0.816**	
REC	0.823	0.611	0.043	0.323	0.238	0.388	0.300	**0.782**

In the next phase, for calculation and investigation of psychometric properties, minimum set standards defined by Fornell and Larcker (1981) was used. Results shown in the table 2 depicted that tested Composite Reliability (CR) values of data in comparison with standard values of larger than 0.5 for each variable. All CR values were significantly higher than 0.5. These research items were displaying variance to only their respective variable, on which these were supposed to be loaded and not with any other variable of the research. Hence, above results showed the convergent validity of all research instruments under consideration.

Subsequently, researchers finally stepped into the last phase to examine the discriminant validity. For determination of discriminant validity, √AVE values were evaluated for analyzing whether these values were larger than correlational values of all variables shown in the diagonal of the table 2. The findings showed that correlational values were lower than all the diagonal values. The findings showed that items of one variable only loaded to related variable over and above were not in conflict with other research variables. Now, for determining final results, both data set and model were ready to be run in AMOS to apply SEM.

Data Analysis and Results

In table 3, the direct associations of overall and the dimensions of EC with EL of the model were examined at this point. Of six direct associations, five proved to be meaningful at different significant levels. Different structural model Goodness of fit indices GFI = 1, TLI = 1.069, AGFI = 1, CFI = 1, Chi-square=.005, Normed Chi-square= .005, DF = 1 and RMSEA = .000 proved significant for the current research.

Table 3. *Study variables' Regression Weights*

	Associations		Unst. Beta coeff.	St. Beta coeff.	S.E.	C.R.	P
EL	→	EC	.234	.260	.059	3.982	***
EL	→	IEC	.261	.180	.097	2.701	**
EL	→	CEC	.374	.283	.086	4.371	***
EL	→	InEC	-.002	-.001	.135	-.013	Ns
EL	→	REC	.269	.198	.090	2.985	**
EL	→	LCEC	.265	.210	.083	3.181	**

Note: ns=not significant, *=p<0.05, **=p<0.01, ***=p<0.001.

EL was positively and significantly related to EC as a whole as (Unst. Beta coeff. = 0.234; St. Coeff. Beta = 0.260; p < 0.05). Hence hypothesis H1 was accepted. The EL was positively linked to four (out of five) aspects of EC. EL was highly significantly linked to aspect IEC as (Unst. Beta coeff. = 0.374; St. Beta coeff. = 0.283; p < 0.001) at 99 % level of significance, EL was highly significantly linked to aspect CEC as (Unst. Beta coeff. = 0.374; St. Beta coeff. = 0.283; p < 0.001), EL was insignificantly linked to aspect InEC as (Unst. Beta coeff. = -0.002; St. Beta coeff. = -0.001; p = ns), EL was significantly linked to aspect REC as (Unst. Beta coeff. = .269; St. Beta coeff. = 0.198; p < 0.01), and EL was significantly linked to aspect LCEC as (Unst. Beta coeff. = 0.265; St. Beta coeff. = 0.210; p < 0.01). These results approved hypotheses H2, H3, H4, H5, however, disapproved hypothesis H6.
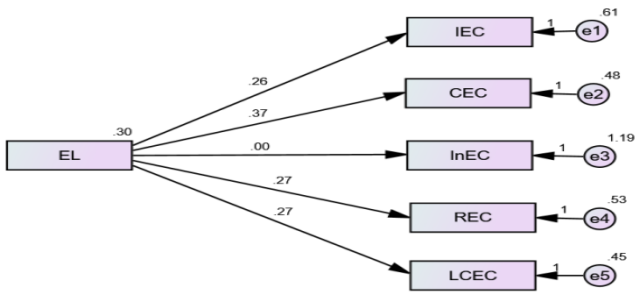
Figure 1. Pictorial Depiction of the Model

The above figure 1 show the depiction of the research model with the error term generated. Almost all the hypotheses were approved except one as mentioned in the hypotheses table.

Discussion and Implications

Ethical leadership behavior of administrators' effects ethical climate. Specially, the results of current study have pointed out that ethical climate is positively and significantly influenced by ethical leadership. Administrators in public sector educational institutions are responsible for establishing ethical climate with their ethical leadership behavior.

Based on the research questions, study outcomes show that hypotheses go approved and similarly the support exist in accordance with hypothesized direction. Current study outcomes endorse past research results by Shin (2012) who pointed out that association between ethical leadership behavior of CEO's and employees' perception of ethical climate was significantly positive. Additionally, the findings imply that organizational climate becomes more ethical with the more ethical behavior of administrators. This statement is endorsed by researchers like (Brandebo et al., 2016) who claimed that organizational climate was more ethical along with trust of employees on immediate supervisor in constructive leadership than destructive leadership. Organizational analysis of a federal agency indicated that ethical work climate is a crucial component of a desirable organization, a place where motivated employees work hard (Jeon et al., 2019).

Based on the research objective to identify the role of ethical leadership, it is observed that ethical behavior of leader establishes greater profound ethical environment in the organizations, which results in superior ethical procedures (Huhtala et al., 2013). Various viewpoints of scholars (accountability, regulations and laws) have been discussed in leadership literature for improving ethical conduct of employees in the organization (Hanbury, 2004). Similarly, to counter check the association and role of ethical leadership and climate, the studies support that if administrators establish ethical climate in educational institutions and make ethical decisions through government rules and regulations, and policies, the climate can be much conducive and productive ultimately. Specially, they stress on explicitly role identification and definition, predictable and caring environment, and formal

procedures. For smooth functioning of educational institutions, administrators sometimes are involved in complicated and hard decision-making. Yet, majority lack analytical skills for decision-making. Most of them avoid critical decision-making for fear of failure and accountability. Hence, various critical organizational issues that need timely thoughtfulness remain unattended.

Furthermore, based on the research objectives, it is found that in organisations, a number of administrators can be honest, caring and altruistic, however well-being of employees and society, ethical decisions are needed at any cost is their top priority. They involve in fair and equal treatment to all employees of different races, religions, positions and ethnicity. They communicate government orders in terms of notifications through frequent staff meetings. Their job is also to implement and enforce government orders. They monitor and appraise employees' performance on daily, weekly and monthly basis. Specially, Shapira-Lishchinsky and Rosenblatt, (2010) suggested that climate in educational institutions may be established on caring and formal structures by introducing and maintaining constant ethical work norms, and working for these values adoption and internalization (Saygili, 2020). Likewise, Kim and Brymer (2011) stressed that hotel executives may infiltrate entire business organization through ethical behavior by influencing its climate resulting in fully satisfied and committed workers.

Therefore, on the basis of the research questions, it can be said that the behavior of workers ethical/unethical or legal/illegal in an organization is responsible for shaping organizational climate. A number of administrators in educational institutions, motivated by their self-interest, use their position to make unethical and illegal decisions for their own advantage, setting aside the advantage of workers and organization. They start such projects in which they think they can receive commission or kickbacks and thus ill use institutional funds. They use institutional resources like playgrounds, telephone and supporting staff to benefit him. Such an environment establishes distrust and dissatisfaction among workers on administrators.

One of the implications is that the managers must be vigilant in enforcing codes of business ethics in the organization. As business code of ethics for different organizations and countries are different. Workers normally resist and retaliate against new codes of ethics. New code of conduct can be incompatible with traditional practices, decision-making, norms and values. Moreover, in order to increase organizational effectiveness, managers/administrators must value ethical climate creation in the organization. Ethical leadership framework structured by Brown et al. (2005) has proven to be reliable and effective in government educational institutions' context. Hence, HR practitioners and managers ought to enforce code of business ethics for establishing ethical climate along with other HR essentials.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Since last two decades, leadership behavior of executives in business organizations is under more consideration than ever before because of crash of housing market in USA and various top rated corporations. Current research investigates relationships between ethical leadership and ethical climate and dimensions of ethical climate in public sector educational institutions. Results showed that ethical climate are positively affected by ethical leadership behavior

of administrators. This depicted that strength of ethical climate in educational institutions depends on administrators' ethical leadership behavior. Additionally, there do not surface single type of ethical climate but a mixture of climate types in institutions. Four aspects of ethical climate as Independence, Rules, Caring, Law and Code are influenced by ethical leadership behavior of administrators but instrumental not. *First*, current research has small size. Major reason of small size is because of its data collection standard, i.e. from administrators to attain objectives of study. Data should be collected from administrator-teachers dyad for future study. *Secondly*, current research involve only Federal government educational administrators, data may be collected from private educational institutions' administrators in future.

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