Nexus of Leadership Behaviour and Morality: Insights from the Indian IT Sector

*[1]Dr. Pooja Jain, **[2]Vaibhavi Mane

[1]Asst.Professor, International Institute of Professional Studies-Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore MP India.pooja.jain@iips.edu.in

[2]Research Scholar, International Institute of Professional Studies-Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya , Indore MP India

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between leadership behaviour and perceived morality among professionals in the Indian Information Technology (IT) sector, addressing a critical gap in leadership studies by integrating Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). Leadership factors such as charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration were analyzed alongside morality dimensions like care, fairness, loyalty, respect, and purity. Findings reveal that while morality and leadership behavior individually contribute significantly to their respective domains, there is negligible cross-impact between the two (2.2% and 1.3%, respectively). Contrary to earlier studies, these results suggest limited managerial implications regarding the interplay of morality and leadership. However, organizations can benefit by incorporating moral reasoning assessments during recruitment and fostering ethical work cultures through codes of conduct and periodic ethics training. Emphasizing moral courage and ethical decision-making through targeted programs is also recommended for developing morally conscious leaders. This study underscores the importance of ethical frameworks in leadership and organizational practices.

Keywords: leadership behaviour, morality, Moral Foundations Theory, Indian IT sector, ethical leadership.

1. Introduction

In the recent times emergence extensive and disheartening ethical leadership failures are observed. Neither the public nor private sectors were immune as many leaders were exposed for immoral or unethical behaviours. Financial greed and corruption, corporate meltdowns, and spiralling unethical practices were revealed as financial scandals surfaced at prominent companies such as Enron, Tyco International, Adelphia, Peregrine Systems, WorldCom, Satyam and others (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). In response, leadership and management theorists began to place a renewed emphasis on the importance of ethics and morality in exemplary leaders (May, Chan, Hodges, & Avolio, 2003; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; George, 2003; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Brown & Treviño, 2006).

Thus, the goal of this research is to understand perceived morality and leadership behaviour of professionals working in Indian Information Technology sector. The moral aspect of leadership is often a neglected element in leadership studies. Morality is a critical factor in leadership; that its absence could turn an otherwise powerful leadership into a disastrous outcome (Sendjaya, 2005)

In this paper an attempt is made to look into the relationship of leadership factors and morality. For this five factors of leadership namely: *charisma* or *idealized influence* (attributed or behavioural), *inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation*, and *individualized consideration* are taken into account and for Morality the factors namely Care (*Harm/care)* Fairness (*Fairness/reciprocity)*: *In-group/loyalty*: Respect (*Authority/respect)* and Purity (*Purity/sanctity)* from Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) (Haidt and Graham 2007 are taken into account.

2. Literature Review

Moral and ethical aspects of leadership are becoming important field of study in today's time due to recent moral scandals taken place in various industries (Bedi et al. 2015; Yukl 2010). Leaders possess hierarchal authority, allocate valuable resources, and set the standard of social norms within organizations (Yukl and Lepsinger 2004). Through processes including social learning and social exchange (Brown and Treviño 2006), employees' attitudes and behaviors would be profoundly influenced by whether their leaders act with morality. Moral leadership is defined as "leader's behaviour that demonstrates superior personal virtues, self-discipline, and unselfishness" (Cheng et al. 2004, p. 91). When leaders' behaviors are consistent with the social norm and considered ethical, moral, and righteous, there can be profound positive influence leading to beneficial outcomes. Indeed, empirical investigation has established that moral leadership is positively related to normative commitment (Erben and Güneşer 2008), trust (Lau et al. 2007), psychological empowerment (Li et al. 2012), creativity (Gu et al. 2015), and performance (Chen et al. 2014; Wu 2012). Recently, it was found that moral leadership can elicit followers' proactive behaviors such as voice (Chan 2014; Zhang et al. 2015) and job crafting (Tuan 2018).

Although extant literature has explored various psychological mechanisms of moral leadership such as perceptions of justice (Li et al. 2012), identification with supervisor (Gu et al. 2015), and trust (Wu 2012), there is limited research that has examined multiple mediators simultaneously, and especially the relationship among mediators (Chen et al. 2014). Furthermore, although leader-member exchange (LMX) is established as an important mediator of moral leadership (Gu et al. 2015; Zhang et al. 2015), the process by which moral leadership leads to LMX is unclear.

Leader morality may ease those concerns and elicit proactive behaviors (Zhang et al. 2015). We contribute to the empirical base of moral leadership by extending the nomological network of moral leadership to employees' positive work behaviors in a cultural context where proactivity is both critical and considered difficult to elicit (Zhang et al. 2015). Practically, our results provide insights on how to cultivate positive work behaviors and proactive behaviors. Second, we simultaneously test the mediating effects of value congruence and LMX. Moreover, we test whether value congruence could lead to LMX, and thus form a sequential mediation link from moral leadership to value congruence, then to LMX, and finally to positive work behaviors. This examination would shed light on the integration of two important explanations of moral leadership's effect, namely the social learning and the social exchange processes (Treviño et al. 2000). Furthermore, the relationship between perceived value congruence and LMX is seldom empirically examined. Our investigation of the relationship between value congruence and LMX provides insights on the initiation of social exchange relationship from a similarity perspective (Steiner 1988). Third, morality is "normatively appropriate conduct" (Brown et al. 2005, p. 120), in that social and institutional context is critical to its meaning and effect (Brown and Treviño 2006). Leader morality has long been emphasized in China as an effective means of influence (Farh et al. 2008). There is a growing body of research on leader morality using China as the res Leader morality has long been recognized as an effective means of influence (Yukl 2010). Moreover, it is normatively appropriate (Treviño et al. 2006) and socially responsible (Zu and Song 2009). As such, leader morality is considered a critical factor within many leadership concepts, including transformational leadership (Burns 1978), servant leadership (Greenleaf 1977), authentic leadership (Avolio and Gardner 2005), and paternalistic leadership (Pellegrini and Scandura 2008). A leader's personal attributes such as honesty, integrity, unselfishness, justness, and caring are considered important for leader morality in these conceptualizations. However, a theoretical definition and systematic investigation specifically paid to moral leadership is only in its early stage of development (Brown and Mitchell 2010). Recent concerns over organizational scandals and corruption have necessitated paying closer attention to leader morality (Fehr et al. 2015). Responding to this situation, we have witnessed an increase in the social scientific approach to moral leadership research in the past decade (Bedi et al. 2015; Brown and Treviño 2006).

Morality is very important in the Chinese way of leading (Farh et al. 2008). Confucianism leans more towards leader morality than legal institutions (Fei et al. 1992; Xin and Pearce 1996). This tradition is reflected in modern communist doctrine where leader morality is considered very important when selecting and promoting political officials (Miao et al. 2014). Accordingly, it is expected that an effective Chinese leader should be acting in a moral manner (Farh and Cheng 2000). This phenomenon is reflected in many leadership theories rooted in the Chinese culture. For example, one of the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership is morality (Pellegrini and Scandura 2008). Additionally, it was found that the performance-maintenance leadership theory should include another factor in China, namely moral character (Ling and Chen 1987). From an indigenous perspective, Li and Shi (2005) developed a Chinese transformational leadership scale and found that one of the four dimensions is moral modeling. This conceptualization of leader morality involves personal attributes such as being honest, fair, and trustworthy, and having integrity; scarifying personal interest for the organization; putting subordinates' interests before their own; working together with subordinates; setting an example by working hard; not taking credit for others' work; sharing weal and woe with subordinates; not deliberately giving subordinates a difficult time, and not retaliating against subordinates through the abuse of power. We adopt this conceptualization of moral leadership in this study for three reasons. First, this indigenous scale captures a broad range of moral characteristics in the Chinese work context and was proved to have good psychometrical properties (Li et al. 2015; Liu et al., 2010a, b). Second, it does not contain a moral management element. Some have cautioned against the moral management element of ethical leadership in China by claiming that "punishment by ethical leadership might lead followers to be dissatisfied" (Liu et al. 2013, p. 579). Third, moral leadership is usually treated as a sub-dimension of paternalistic leadership in studies conducted in China (Chen et al. 2014; Gu et al. 2015). Our conceptualization complements this approach by taking a different perspective.

3. Population, Sample Design, Sampling Technique & Sample

For the purpose of this research the professionals working in IT companies of India are taken into consideration. Snowball Sampling Method is used. The advantage of this sampling technique is that after contacting the initial subject the researcher is able to ask the subject to help to identify people with similar traits or interest (De Gama, McKeena, & Peticca-Harris, 2012). Sample size selected for the present study comprises of 450 employees working with IT companies of India.

Sample size selected for the present study comprises of 450 male and female working with IT companies of India. Sampling unit for research are professionals working in IT companies in India.

In this research, the snowball sampling technique is used to survey the respondent. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method and proceeds from two stages; the first potential respondent is identified from the population then the researcher uses their judgement to choose respondents. The advantage of this sampling technique is that after contacting the initial subject the researcher is able to ask the subject to help to identify people with similar traits or interest (De Gama, McKeena, &Peticca-Harris, 2012).

4. Data Collection Method:

Both primary and secondary type of data was collected to conduct research. The Primary data used for the study, was collected by using snowball sampling technique by floating questionnaire that was employed as survey instrument. 450 Indian IT Professionals completed Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ) (J.Graham, J.Haidt& B.Nosek, 2008) and Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (B.M. Bass & B.J. Avolio, 1995) that was administered in June, 2017 by both online as well as offline mode. For the collection of secondary data books, journals, magazines, articles, were referred in offline as well as online modes.

The reliability of the statements measuring the morality and leadership behaviour was determined by using Cronbach's Coefficient alpha as shown below:

4.1 Case Processing Summary of Morality

		N	%
Cases	Valid	450	100.0
	Excluded	0	.0
	Total	450	100.0

List wise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Table no. 4.1.1

Reliability Coefficients of Morality

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.807	30

Table no. 4.2

Case Processing Summary of Leadership Behaviour

		N	%
Cases	Valid	450	100.0
	Excluded	0	.0
	Total	450	100.0

List wise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Table no. 4.2.1

Reliability Coefficients of Leadership Behaviour

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.839	21

4.2.2 Normality Check

It is recommended that the choice of the method for data analysis should be based on the kind of departures from normality that one wishes to investigate (Cox & Small, 1978). As in this study, the means of data collection was survey method, and the source was only the information technology sector professionals, so the normality of the data could be the issue of concern. The normality of data for this study is checked by the Mardia's test of multivariate normality by the web power multivariate Kurtosis available on the link http://webpower.psychstat.org/models/kurtosis/. The result of the multivariate test for skewness p values 12.70069 z 1058.39076 and Kurtosis 53.87176 25.21845 which showed p value more than the cut off criteria of Mardia's multivariate test of Skewness $+_1$; Kurtosis $+_2$. This indicated the violation of normality criteria in the given research data set. Hence the data set was not normal.

5.Tools for Data Analysis

On the basis of the result of the normality test, analysis of the data with the SMART PLS3 software was decided. To process the data in SMART PLS, it is not necessary for data to be normal.

6. Creation of model and testing

The constructs and the model is tested and analyzed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with the help of the SMART PLS3 software. PLS-SEM is a 2nd generation technique used to analyze and explain the variance of the endogenous latent constructs and useful for prediction and confirmation of the theory (Joe F Hair, Henseler, Dijkstra, & Sarstedt, 2014). This method requires a two-stage assessment- first, measurement model assessment and then structural model assessment to test hypothesized relationship suggested by (Anderson & Gerbing , 1988).

6.1 Structural Model Assessment

The model fit checked by assessing the two measures of model fit, i.e., SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Residuals) and NFI (Normed Fit Index). SRMR indicates an absolute measure of model fit, which asses the average magnitude of the discrepancies between observed and expected correlations. Values less than 0.08 signify the data fit the model (Joe F Hair et. al., 2014).

NFI measures the incremental measure of fit index, the values between 0 and 1 indicates data fit the model, the closer the NFI value to 1, the better the fit (Bentler & Bonett,1980). The SRMR value and NFI calculated in the models is shown in Table no.6.1.2 Thus, results have suggested a good fit for this research model.

Table 6.1.1

	SRMR Value[a]	NFI Value[b]
Research Model 1	0.079	0. 925

6.1.2 Summary of Hypothesis Testing on Research Model

To evaluate the direct impacts of all the hypothesized relationship, the bootstrapping method followed to assess Standard Beta values and corresponding t-values as suggested by (Joseph F Hair, Hult, Ringle, Sarstedt, & Thiele, 2017). Statistical testing of hypothesis represents that if t-value at 0.05 level of significance is greater than 1.96 (for a two-tailed test).

6.1.3 Research Model 1. - *Impact of factors of leadership behaviour on morality*

H_{01}: There is no significant impact of Idealized Influence on Morality as perceived by subordinates in IT sector in India.

H_{02}: There is no significant impact of Inspirational Motivation on Morality as perceived by subordinates in IT sector in India.

H_{03}: There is no significant impact of Intellectual Stimulation on Morality as perceived by subordinates in IT sector in India.

H_{04}: There is no significant impact of Individual Consideration on Morality as perceived by subordinates in IT sector in India.

H_{05}: There is no significant impact of Contingent Reward on Morality as perceived by subordinates in IT sector in India.

H_{06}: There is no significant impact of Management-by-exception on Morality as perceived by subordinates in IT sector in India.

H_{07}: There is no significant impact of Laissez-Faire-Leadership on Morality as perceived by subordinates in IT sector in India.

The model developed to deduce relationship between morality and factors of leadership behaviour as seen in Figure no.5.1, account for only 1.3% variance. Thus 1.3% variance is explained by idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual simulation, individual consideration, contingent reward, management-by-exception and laissez-faire-leadership which reflect that all these variables are not very significant and does not impacts Morality. The results are summarized in Table no. 5.5.1

Idealized influence has no significant impact on morality (H01 beta = -0.039, t=0.497), thus in light this finding null hypothesis namely, "There is no significant impact of Idealized Influence on Morality as perceived by subordinates in IT sector in India" is not rejected. Moving further inspirational motivation also has no significant impact on morality (H02 beta= 0.070, t= 0.703), so in light of this result null hypothesis namely, "There is no significant impact of Inspirational Motivation on Morality as perceived by subordinates in IT sector in India", is not rejected. Intellectual simulation has no significant impact on morality (H03 beta= -0.030, t=0.569), therefore, null hypothesis namely, "There is no significant impact of Intellectual Stimulation on Morality as perceived by subordinates in IT sector in India" is not rejected. No significant impact of morality is found on individual
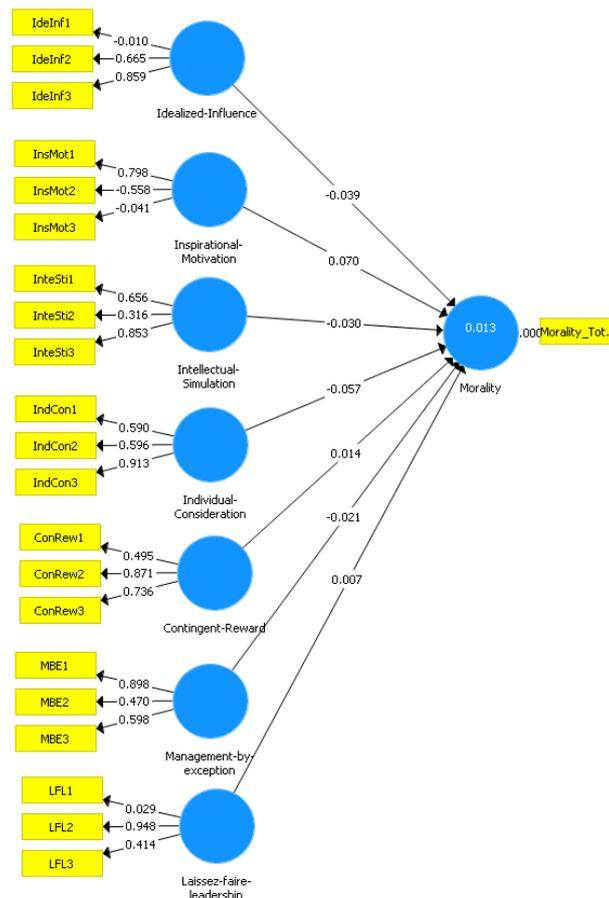
Research Model 1Figure

	Hypothesis Relationship	Std Beta	Std Error	T Value	P Value	Decision
H1	Idealized-Influence -> Morality	-0.039	0.078	0.497	0.822	Not Rejected
H2	Inspirational-Motivation -> Morality	0.070	0.100	0.703	0.620	Not Rejected
H3	Intellectual-Simulation -> Morality	-0.030	0.053	0.569	0.382	Not Rejected
H4	Individual-Consideration -> Morality	-0.057	0.065	0.874	0.483	Not Rejected
H5	Contingent-Reward -> Morality	0.014	0.063	0.226	0.570	Not Rejected
H6	Management-by-exception -> Morality	-0.021	0.055	0.373	0.925	Not Rejected
H7	Laissez-faire-leadership -> Morality	0.007	0.070	0.094	0.709	Not Rejected

Table no.6.1.4

consideration (H04 beta=-0.057, t=0.874), thus null hypothesis, "There is no significant impact of Individual Consideration on Morality as perceived by subordinates in IT sector in India", is not rejected. Contingent reward is having no significant impact on morality (H05 beta=0.014, t=0.226), therefore null hypothesis formulated, "There is no significant impact of Contingent Reward on Morality as perceived by subordinates in IT sector in India" is not rejected. No significant impact of morality is seen on management-by-exception (H06 beta=-0.021, t=0.373) thus null hypothesis namely, "There is no significant impact of Management-by-exception on Morality as perceived by subordinates in IT sector in India" is not rejected.

And at last laissez-faire leadership also has no significant impact on morality (H07 beta=0.007, t=0.094), so null hypothesis namely, "There is no significant impact of Laissez-Faire-Leadership on Morality as perceived by subordinates in IT sector in India" is not rejected.

7. Findings ,Discussion and Conclusion

The findings reveal that there is no significant impact of factors of leadership behaviour on morality as a whole as perceived by subordinates in IT sector in India. All the hypotheses formulated were not rejected. But on contrary few researches have demonstrated that there is significant impact of factors of leadership on morality, especially studies conducted by Bandura (1991,1999) and Dittmar (1992). Further inconsistent with the present findings few researches show that some individuals focus on avoiding doing bad, while others have a more proactive orientation to doing good, in terms of their ethical actions and decisions (Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, &Hepp, 2009).

Sampling unit for research are professionals working in IT companies in India. This study contributes to the academic scholarship. The results show that both factors of morality and leadership behaviour individually contribute greatly to the individual variables (92.6 and 99.3 percent respectively). Therefore the initial validation of the Moral foundations Questionnaire (MFQ) and Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) shows that answers to the concerns of the morality and leadership behaviour can be reliably be used to predict perceived morality and perceived leadership behaviour of subordinates working in Indian IT sector individually but, results also revealed that there is trivial impact of factors of morality on leadership behaviour (2.2 percent) as perceived by subordinates working in Indian IT sector and no impact of factors of leadership behaviour on morality (1.3 percent) as perceived by subordinates working in Indian IT sector, thus no sound managerial implications can be drawn from these findings.

8. Implications of the Study

The results of this study suggest that organizations can benefit from introducing certain morality test to judge candidates moral reasoning and moral decision making at the time of recruitment along with technical test for its prospective candidates to gain moral conscious employees.

Study provides an indication for organization to firstly lay down certain: Workplace ethics – The Code of conduct as they play a major role in present & future employees and leaders business decision making. Most large corporations today have developed codes of conduct internally, which are intended to provide guidance for managers confronting ethical situations and moral conflicts. Such codes of conduct need to be supplemented by internal systems, such as reward and information systems, promotion and hiring practices, recognition systems, and organizational culture and communication systems, that support their implementation And then secondly it is advisable that every organization must emphasize on infusing ethical core values in its employees from very beginning and conduct time to time workplace ethics training. Strong top management commitment to and communication about values and ethical conduct is a core element of moral leadership from the top of the organization. Moral leadership is essential to managers and employees at all levels of the enterprise when they are faced with difficult ethical decisions and moral conflicts. Codes of conduct alone can seldom be sufficient for managers to come to good decisions unless they are supported by these other aspects of the organization. In addition to company or organizational codes of conduct, many of which have been developed internally by companies to articulate their own value systems, a number of codes and principles have emerged globally to help managers think about their moral responsibilities. Some of these are quite spare and lay out fundamental principles, based on globally agreed on documents signed by many nations, such as the United Nations Global Compact with its 10 core principles or the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. Others are more elaborate and have been developed by business groups or multi sector alliances to help guide business decision making. Again, as with internal codes of conduct, these principles are helpful guides but cannot address every unique situation. As a result, codes need to be supported by the organization managerial decision making, its culture, its reward systems, and the communication that exists about ethical practices within the firm. Along with having strong moral foundations within an individual leader and backed-up by sound ethical code of conduct laid by an organization, the individual in a position of a leader must also have moral courage- the equality of character that enables a leader to face up to ethical challenges confidently, despite possible opposition and against popular opinion (Kidder, 2005), thus specific training programs must be conducted by organizations on the basis of MFQ results. Many researches reveal that results of training programs have recently been reported (see Osswald, et al., 2009; Jonas, Boos, & Brandstätter, 2007) that were specifically designed to develop moral courage by teaching participants specific behaviour routines to use when facing threats. As noted earlier, these programs can serve as a means for developing the scripts that can help guide appropriate ethical decision- making and action as required by the situation.

9.Limitation of the Study and Future Scope of Research-

A very crucial limitation of the conducted study is a relatively small research sample i.e. 450. Therefore, results cannot be generalized to all information technology companies in India, thus future researches are recommended to large sample size. Further empirical investigation of the developed models is required in a different country context to increase the generalizability of the models. In future, a similar survey should be conducted on a larger scale and cover all similar and varied fields as well. Also, it would be worth expanding the research in another country context. A last piece of practical advice suggests administering the MLQ to multiple raters (e.g. colleagues, supervisors, subordinates) and comparing the respective results. In Our study we only surveyed the subordinates of the leaders. Both researchers and work and organizational psychologists can explore the viability of (the combination of) alternatives proposed here.

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