

ผลกระทบของการรับรู้ผู้นำทางจริยธรรม
ของผู้จัดการ บริษัทเกี่ยวกับความคิดสร้างสรรค์
ของพนักงานในมณฑลยูนนานประเทศจีน:
บทบาทการสื่อสารเพื่อความปลอดภัยทางจิตวิทยา

The impact of perceived ethical leadership of
corporate managers on employee creativity in
Yunnan Province, China: The mediating role of
psychological safety

Received: October 14, 2025

Revised: January 14, 2026

Accepted: January 21, 2026

วู แยกเวน*

Wu Yanwen*

ศิริเดช คำสุพรหม**

Siridech Kumsuprom**

*วิทยาลัยนานาชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยธุรกิจบัณฑิต ประเทศไทย; วิทยาลัยศิลปะและวิทยาศาสตร์ คุณหมิง ประเทศจีน

*International College, Dhurakij Pundit University, Thailand; College of Arts and Sciences, Kunming, China

*Email: 358799992@qq.com

**วิทยาลัยนานาชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยธุรกิจบัณฑิต ประเทศไทย

**International College, Dhurakij Pundit University, Thailand

**Email: siridech.kum@dpu.ac.th

บทคัดย่อ

ในบริบทสังคมและวัฒนธรรมของจีน อุตสาหกรรมสื่อกำลังเผชิญกับความท้าทายหลากหลายประการ ไม่ว่าจะเป็นความก้าวหน้าทางเทคโนโลยีสารสนเทศ การเปลี่ยนผ่านสู่ดิจิทัล และความต้องการของผู้บริโภคที่เปลี่ยนแปลงอยู่ตลอดเวลา งานวิจัยฉบับนี้ยึดตามทฤษฎีการแลกเปลี่ยนทางสังคม และใช้วิธีการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบสะดวก โดยเลือกพนักงานจำนวน 689 คน จากองค์กรสื่อของรัฐสามแห่งในมณฑลยูนนานของจีน เพื่อนำมาสร้างแบบจำลองเพื่อตรวจสอบผลของภาวะผู้นำเชิงจริยธรรมที่มีต่อความคิดสร้างสรรค์ของพนักงาน และบทบาทตัวกลางของความปลอดภัยทางจิตใจในโมเดลดังกล่าว ผลการวิจัยเชิงประจักษ์ชี้ให้เห็นว่า 1. การรับรู้ต่อภาวะผู้นำเชิงจริยธรรมช่วยเสริมสร้างความคิดสร้างสรรค์ของพนักงาน ($B = 0.433, p < .001$) 2. ความปลอดภัยทางจิตใจมีบทบาทเป็นตัวกลางระหว่างความสัมพันธ์ของการรับรู้ภาวะผู้นำเชิงจริยธรรม และความคิดสร้างสรรค์ของพนักงาน ($B = 0.480, p < .001$) ผลการศึกษาดังกล่าวช่วยเสริมความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างภาวะผู้นำเชิงจริยธรรม และความคิดสร้างสรรค์ของพนักงานภายใต้บริบทวัฒนธรรมจีน พร้อมทั้งชี้ให้ผู้มีอำนาจในจีนให้ความสำคัญกับความปลอดภัยทางจิตใจของพนักงาน เพื่อยกระดับความคิดสร้างสรรค์และเพิ่มขีดความสามารถในการแข่งขันขององค์กร

คำสำคัญ: ภาวะผู้นำเชิงจริยธรรม ความคิดสร้างสรรค์ของพนักงาน ความปลอดภัยทางจิตใจ องค์กรสื่อของจีน

Abstract

As far as China is concerned, in today's social media ecosystem, the media companies have numerous challenges because the information technology keeps improving at a rapid pace, there is always more digital changing and what people who get news want is always changing, too. According to the social exchange theory, we select three SOEs in Yunnan province of China, use convenience sample method to do this study with 689 workers. Develops a model to explore how ethical leadership impacts employee creativity and the mediating effect of psychological safety. Based on the empirical results of study, we can see that: 1. Perceived ethical leadership positively predicted employee creativity ($B=0.542, p<.001$); 2. Psychological safety intensified the relationship between ethical leadership and employee creativity ($B=0.245, p<.001$). And they made contributions to the ethical leadership and creativity study with Chinese context, it shows that the Chinese media leader has to strengthen the psychological safety so as to activate the employee's creativity and boost the enterprise's competitive advantage.

Keywords: Ethical Leadership, Employee Creativity, Psychological Safety, Chinese Media Enterprises

Introduction

Media companies have difficulties such as rapidly developing technology, large digital transition scale, and changes in the preference of its audiences. Such an environment makes creativity the fundamental capacity supporting business' innovation and sustainable competitiveness (Gong et al., 2009). Employees' creative output improves content and helps engage audiences (Shalley et al., 2004), as well as enable a company to respond to competition in the marketplace. Media companies need to keep being competitive by constantly using creative thoughts to make new things, change how they talk to people, and try out new digital technologies that help meet the needs of people who watch TV and listen to music (Am et al., 2020).

Creativity is defined as the ability to produce new, original, and valuable results that are flexible and can be adapted to different uses (Amabile, 1996), and it is becoming an increasingly important ability in this increasingly competitive working world (Hirst et al., 2009; Oldham & Cummings, 1996). Research has shown that employee creativity comes from many things other than just training, such as how someone thinks and feels, who is in charge, and the kind of work environment people are in (Shalley et al., 2004; Tierney et al., 1999).

As for leaders, quite a number of studies have shown that ethical leadership is positively related to employees creativity, Chen and Hou (2016), Gu et al. (2015), Javed et al. (2016) and Li et al. (2023). However, some studies show that the relationship can be context or individual specific (Javed et al., 2018).

State-owned media enterprises in Yunnan Province, traditional cultural values and modern management practices are integrated, ethical leadership may play a particularly significant role (Chenli et al., 2019). And so, in this special environment ethical leadership would appear to be a desirable avenue to pursue for cultivating creativity and merits further study. While some studies have explored how ethical leadership affects employee behavior in general, it is not well understood how ethical leadership impacts creativity in Yunnan's state-owned media firm cultural and organizational context.

Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by exploring the effect of ethical leadership on the creativity of employees in Yunnan's state-owned traditional media companies and the mediating role of psychological safety. In an attempt to add to theory already in existence in the world to try and provide some empirical basis that others in this situation could be aware of when trying to lead a company of people.

Research Objectives

1. To research the effect of employees' perception of ethical leadership by their enterprise managers on employees' creativity in media companies in the Yunnan province of China.

2. How the effect is on the media enterprises' psychological sense of security of Yunnan in China when staff consider firm leaders' ethical leadership on a psychological sense of security.

3. To examine the impact of psychological safety on employee creativity in media enterprises in Yunnan Province, China.

4. Examine the mediating effect of psychological safety among employees of media companies in Yunnan Province, China on the relationship between employees' perception of enterprise leaders' ethical leadership and their creativity

Literature Review

Social exchange theory is one of the main theories of organizational behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Reciprocity, which indicates that people feel obliged to reciprocate benefits they have received from others (Blau, 1964). The theory sees social interactions as a form of exchanges, in which people give up some resources to gain more rewarding benefits (Chenli et al., 2019). And used over the years with reference to leader-employee relationship by Gok et al. (2017). Employees will be motivated to give back to the organization when they think their leaders give them support and create a good learning atmosphere. They are willing to put in more effort, solve problems and come up with creative ideas (Lin & Liu, 2012). Therefore, social exchange theory provides a good theoretical background for the impact of ethical leadership on employee behavior and attitude. Cognition.

Employees' perception of ethical leadership and creativity. Brown et al. (2005)'s definition of ethical leadership, which involves leaders exhibiting appropriate moral behavior consistently in their actions and relationships and also actively fostering followers' moral development through open communication, encouragement, and ethical decision-making. such a leader would be seen as one with such qualities as being honest, having integrity, taking care of others, being open, fair etc., and thus is seen as balanced and principled judgement (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Such features help ethical leaders to make the sorts of decisions that employees will see as fair and trustworthy.

In contrast, Employee creativity involves the capacity to create new ideas or solutions that are both novel and useful for the organization in terms of its products, services, processes, or management practices (Amabile, 1996; Woodman et al., 1993). Oldham and Cummings (1996) found that supportive leaders promote higher creative output. As Brown et al. (2005) also stated that with regards to the attitudes and behavior changes of employees due to ethical leaders we need to know the relationship of leader to creativity rather than us. Chinese companies tend to have an important link between ethically leading their companies and the creativity of their workers. Improves intrinsic motivation, Improves psychological safety, Increases work engagement. Ethical leader becomes a role model, make people

feel important and build the trust atmosphere, they are encouraged to take initiatives in working creatively (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Furthermore, an ethical leader creates a fair and supportive atmosphere that decreases the dangers and uneasiness related to creative work (Edmondson, 1999). Also studies suggest that ethical leadership enhances both the individual creativity and team collaboration to improve the whole organizations capacity for innovation (Al-Haraisa, 2024).

Based on this, we put forward a hypothesis.

H₁: Enterprise managers' perceived ethical leadership in Yunnan province of China significantly positively influences employee creativity in enterprises in Yunnan province of China.

Relationship between employees perception towards ethical leadership and psychological safety. Employee perception of ethical leadership is important to their feeling psychologically safe. And if all of the time the leaders are good, honest, and transparent, it can make for a very trusting worker for their leader and the whole company (Brown & Treviño, 2006). It creates a safer work environment in which the workers are more valued and cherished. Ethical leaders such as to do good things and make fair decisions, wanting to let employees know their opinions are important and they can speak freely without fear.

This behavior pattern can also reduce the anxiety and stress in work (Edmondson, 1999). Difficult or high-pressure situations are met by ethical leaders giving support and positive comments so that the staff will be allowed to put forward their new and original ideas without fear of criticism or worse action being taken. This sort of open atmosphere fosters an environment for taking part and being answerable, which makes workers more ready to give their thoughts and take part in favorable cooperation (Avey et al., 2012). Therefore, one may say that the ethical leadership does not only help to create a safe feeling for psychological safety, but it also contributes to creating an atmosphere of support, which makes team work, and increase the efficiency of work as well.

In Chinese companies, people are starting to understand how important ethical leaders are for making their workers feel safe. Adhering to principles of fairness and transparency, ethical leadership can help employees to develop a greater level of organizational trust and thus increase their psychological safety (Leroy et al., 2012). Ethical leader will often use an unbiased form of decision making, providing necessary help and guarantees to the staff so that they are not afraid of negative assessments, if they are ready to put forward their own unconventional opinion, or make mistakes in difficult conditions. This helps lessen worker stress and increases a feeling of being involved and safe (Ng & Feldman, 2010). Also, ethically leadership respect employees opinion and encourage open discussion, so that employees have more participation and discussion in the workplace and create better works and creativity. Ethical leadership can also trigger more creative workplace actions (Liu et al., 2023).

Therefore, ethical leaders can not only promote the development of psychological safety but also improve teamwork, improve the quality of operations, and form an innovation culture. Thus, this paper puts forward the following hypotheses based on this:

H₂: Enterprise managers' perceived ethical leadership is significantly positively related to psychological safety in Yunnan Province, China.

Relationship between Employees' Psychological Safety and Creativity. According to Edmondson (1999) Psychological Safety is a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking. It is to be able to express your thoughts, ask questions, and put forward new suggestions and so on, with not being afraid of being dumb, afraid of being punished as a result of some sort. Such atmosphere of trust will directly promote the employee's readiness for a new behavior. Psychological safety is closely linked to creative performance according to prior research (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009). when the employees have psychological security, then they are ready to take well-thought risks, look at the unusual points of view and try out the alternative solutions. This willingness to participate in mental and experimental explorations is an important step forward for the improvement of the creative performance.

There is a distinct positive relationship between psychological safety and the creativity of employee in the specific situation of Chinese organization. The fundamental definition from Edmondson (1999) stresses that the guarantee of a non-punitive environment for self-expression allows workers to be free from fear of humiliation or other punishments. This freedom, then, becomes a potent stimulus for generating ideas and enhancing one's problem-solving abilities. Contemporary empirical studies provide strong support for the relationship. For example, Carmeli and Gittell (2009) noticed that psychological safety provides a low-risk platform that promotes more active and voluntary engagement in the creativity process. Moreover, complementing this research is also found in Chinese contexts from Liu and Ge (2020), where they highlight that the stronger one's sense of psychological safety, the more such asly they are to be inclined towards engaging in risky behavior associated with proposing new ideas or spearheading innovations. it turns out into such as a pretty good major boost of the creative output of that. So, groups that grow an encouraging, mistake-tolerant work atmosphere put themselves in a much better situation to make the most out of all parts of their workers' inventive capacities. And turns out to be an inducement to improving the organization's overall creativity output. In short, psychological safety turns out to be a considerable positive predictor of employee creativity in the sense that an increased level of felt safety is tied to a larger potential for creative output. Based on this consolidation of reasoning a hypothesis is made that

H₃: Psychological safety has significant positive effects on employees' creativity for the enterprises in Yunnan of China.

Psychological Safety as a Mediator between Ethical Leadership and Creativity. Ethical leadership can develop employee's creativity by a lot of ways to inside person. Ethical leaders can boost the intrinsic motivation of the followers and enhance the sense of self-efficacy of the followers. By being pro-active in dealing with the employees needs, thoughts and providing them with voices in the decision making processes, and opportunities for growth. Both of these psychological resources have long been recognized as key drivers of creative thought and behavior (Amabile et al., 2004; Elqassaby, 2018). But we have to acknowledge the road that goes from leading to generating creative ideas is never simple. not really, its such as a complex matter in which these are generally moderated by different sorts of states of mind in general in different kinds of contexts that may be found in an organization (de Jong & Den Hartog, 2007; Jung et al., 2003).

First, being an exemplar as a salient moral exemplar. The leaders can keep on displaying ethical behavior to develop a workspace where worker's sense of meaningful work is supported and their belief in themselves is developed, therefore developing the state of high psychological safety (Jin et al., 2022). The idea of safety becoming more embedded in the workforce, employees feel much more comfortable and confident in sharing new and potentially risky ideas and to take initiative on challenging and tough issues (Edmondson et al, 2014). This increased confidence and reduced inhibition is foundational for the following manifestation and use of creativity. Hence, it was perceived that psychological safety is a crucial mediating process through which positive effects of ethically leadership can be turned into real gain for innovative output and the performance.

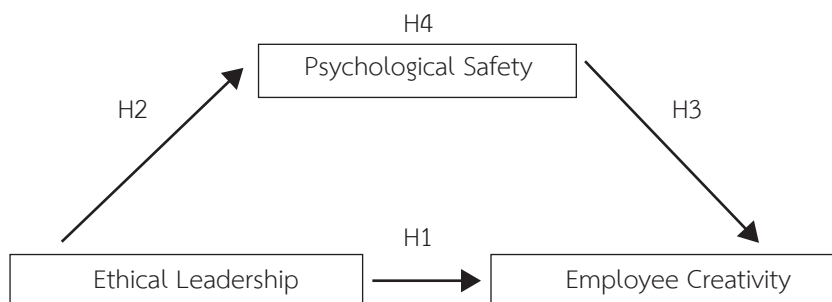
This mediation route is particular with regard to Chinese organizations. Ethical leaders create lots of organizational trust because they show that they are fair and honest. Meanwhile, by granting them more autonomy and having the employees participate in the decision-making process, they are directly empowering their underlings. It also makes the employee psychologically secure (Ilies, 2005). In such an atmosphere of security, people are able to feel the freedom to express their creative ideas and different views without fearing that they will be judged negatively by others or sanctioned by the organization. This feeling of safety immediately causes innovative thinking and flexible thought (Jin et al., 2022). Empirical studies prove that ethical leadership creates an inclusive atmosphere where employees feel comfortable enough to come up with creative ideas, and this directly improves creativity (Zhang et al., 2025). And further, this increased psychological safety allows workers to apply more cognitive resources to solving problems, and to be more fully engaged with their work tasks, both important processes for ongoing innovation (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Based upon the synthesis of this evidence, it is proposed that the managerial ethical leadership enhances employees' psychological safety and such

enhanced psychological state serves as an important generative mechanism through which the leadership enhances employee creativity. Therefore, it is assumed that:

H₄: Psychological safety is a mediator between employees' perception of ethical leadership and creativity of enterprise in Yunnan province, China.

Figure 1

Research Conceptual Framework



Research Methods

Participants

This study conducted a questionnaire investigation on employees of Yunnan Provincial state-owned media enterprises, including Yunnan Newspaper Group, Yunnan Publishing Group, and Yunnan Radio and Television Media Group. The minimum sample size as suggested by Ghiselli et al. (1981) should be at least ten times the number of questionnaire items, and according to Sudman's (1976) guidelines for regional research, the sample size should consist of 500-1000 participants. According to the above standards, the study adopted a convenient sampling method and collected 844 answers. All the procedures comply with the 2015 Ethical Guidelines for Human Research in Thailand to ensure the right, safety, and welfare of participants and the validity and integrity of research. Of the 844 questionnaires distributed, 689 are valid, with an effective response rate of 81.64%.

The demographic features of the final participant pool ($n = 689$) are shown below:
Gender distribution: 220 males, 31.9% of the total; 469 females, 68.1% of the total.

Age distribution: Most participants (93.9%, $n=647$) were between 21 and 35 years old. Participants between 36-50 made up 4.8% ($n=33$). While the age group 51-55 and 56+ comprised 0.6% ($n=4$) and 0.7% ($n=5$) of the sample.

Educational Attainment: Most (92.2%, $n = 635$) of the participants had obtained a bachelor's degree or lower. The remaining participants (7.8%, $n=54$) had obtained a graduate degree (Master's or above).

Measurement Instruments

Ethical Leadership Scale. To assess perceptions of ethical leadership among managers, this study employed the widely acknowledged 10-item unidimensional scale developed by Brown et al. (2005). Participants rated their agreement on a five-point such as rt scale ranging from 1 (“Never”) to 5 (“Always”). A higher mean score on this scale signifies a stronger perception of ethical leadership behaviors. The instrument demonstrated exceptional reliability in this study, with a Cronbach’s α coefficient of .912.

Psychological Safety Scale. Psychological safety was assessed using the validated 7-item measure developed by Edmondson (1999). Respondents indicated their level of agreement on a five-point such as rt scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 5 = “Strongly Agree”). Higher composite scores indicate a greater perceived sense of psychological safety in the workplace. This scale also showed strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s α of .842 in the current sample.

Creativity Scale. Employee creativity was assessed using the 13-item scale developed by Zhou and George (2001). Responses were captured on a five-point such as rt agreement scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 5 = “Strongly Agree”). The total score serves as an indicator of self-assessed creative capability, where higher scores signify elevated levels of creativity. The scale demonstrated excellent reliability in this research context, with a Cronbach’s α coefficient of .924.

Results and Discussion

Common Method Bias (CMV) Test

Given that the data were collected through self-reported measures, procedural and statistical controls were instituted to reduce potential common method variance (CMV), in accordance with best practices. From a procedural standpoint, respondent anonymity was prioritized to minimize social desirability bias.

Statistically, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to contrast a single-factor model (where all items load onto one general factor) with the hypothesized four-factor measurement model, following the recommendations of Podsakoff and Organ (1986). The results revealed a significantly better fit for the multi-factor model ($\chi^2 = 1752.600$, $df = 402$) compared to the single-factor model ($\chi^2 = 4356.015$, $df = 405$). The chi-square difference test yielded statistical significance ($\Delta\chi^2 = 2603.415$, $\Delta df = 3$, $p < .001$), offering robust evidence that common method bias does not pose a significant threat to the validity of the study’s findings.

Table 1

Common Method Variance

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf
Single-Factor	4356.015	405	10.756	2603.415***	3
Multi-Factor	1752.600	402	4.360		

Correlation Analysis

Preliminary bivariate correlation analyses were used to examine the relationships among the key variables—perceived ethical leadership, psychological safety, and creativity. As shown in Table 2, the mean scores for all variables were above the scale midpoint, indicating generally positive levels.

All variables exhibited significant and positive correlations at the $p < .001$ level. A robust correlation was identified between perceived ethical leadership and psychological safety ($r = .590$). Perceived ethical leadership demonstrated a positive correlation with creativity ($r = .628$), and psychological safety similarly exhibited a positive association with creativity ($r = .645$). These correlations offer preliminary support for the hypothesized model.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analyses of Each Observed Variable

Variable	M	SD	Ethical Leadership	Ethical Safety	Psychological	Creativity
Ethical Leadership	3.821	0.582	1			
Psychological Safety	3.882	0.535	.590***	1		
Creativity	3.800	0.511	.628***	.645***	1	

Note. *** $p < .001$. The table presents the correlation matrix among perceived managerial ethical leadership, psychological safety, and creativity. Data compiled in this study.

Structural Equation Model Construction

This study employs structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships among ethical leadership (EL) of corporate managers, employee creativity (CR), and psychological safety (PS). To improve the precision of model estimation, the Maximum such as likelihood Estimation (MLE) method and bootstrap techniques were applied to estimate the data and to verify the validity of the research hypotheses.

According to the SEM coefficients, the goodness-of-fit indices are presented in Table 4.27. In terms of absolute fit, the RMR is .067, the SRMR is .054, and the RMSEA is .050, all below the standard threshold of .080. The GFI is .885 and the AGFI is .870, both slightly below the recommended value of .900. Regarding incremental fit, the NFI (.915), RFI (.909), IFI (.944), TLI (.940), and CFI (.944) all exceed the standard criterion of .900. In addition, the parsimonious fit indices PNFI (.855) and PGFI (.783) meet the recommended threshold of above .500. These results indicate that the proposed model is well constructed and exhibits good fit, meeting the conventional standards for structural equation modeling (Watkins, 2018).

Mediation Effect Test

Based on the analysis of path coefficients in the SEM, and following the recommendations of Preacher and Hayes (2008), this study further employed the bootstrap method to examine the mediating effect of psychological safety on the relationship between employees' perceptions of ethical leadership and employee creativity. The results are presented in Table 3.

The path coefficient from employees' perceived managerial Ethical Leadership to employee Creativity is .297, with $p < .001$

The path coefficient from employees' perceived managerial Ethical Leadership to Psychological Safety is .652, with $p < .001$

The path coefficient from employees' Psychological Safety to Creativity is .376, with $p < .001$

The bootstrap analysis (Table 4) confirmed a significant indirect effect of ethical leadership on creativity via psychological safety (Effect = 0.245, SE = 0.038, 95% CI [0.213, 0.360]). As the confidence interval did not include zero, the mediating role of psychological safety is supported.

Table 3

Summary of SEM Path Coefficients

Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.
H ₁ (EL → CR)	.297	.059	6.810
H ₂ (EL → PS)	.652	.062	14.291
H ₃ (PS → CR)	.376	.040	9.401

Table 4

Summary Table of Bootstrap Mediation Effect Analysis

Path	Effect values	SE	95% LLCI	95% ULCI
Total Effect Path	.542	.029	.377	.382
Direct Effect Path	.297	.059	.205	.382
Indirect Effect Path	.245	.038	.213	.360

Note: The bootstrap method was used with 5,000 random resamples. Effect values represent unstandardized regression coefficients; SE = standard error; LLCI = lower limit of the 95% confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit of the 95% confidence interval. Indirect path = Perceived Ethical Leadership of Business Managers → Psychological Safety → Employee Creativity. This table presents the results of the bootstrap test for the mediating effect, as compiled in the present study.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study furnishes strong evidence that ethical leadership indeed has an effect on employee creativity, which supports the main parts of Social Exchange Theory. Leaders who are honest and fair and who give support create trust-related connections that make workers feel such as taking part in creative work more (Brown et al., 2005; Gu et al., 2015). It comes to state-owned media enterprises in Yunnan, China moral guidance promotes creative work immediately and indirectly by means of the workers' mental experiences. Building a sense of psychological safety, ethical leaders are there with the emotional support so that people are feeling powerful enough to bring forth new ideas and suggestions no matter what is thrown at them.

Moreover, the findings stress the need of psychological safety as a way that ethical leadership is connected to creative behavior. It is consistent with Edmondson's (1999) argument that a trustful environment lowers the fear of evaluation, thus, employees are willing to take the risk and express their unconventional thoughts. Ethical leaders create such a context via fair, inclusive behavior (Jin et al., 2022). And we see that it makes a big difference when we feel psychologically safe; our creative performance really goes up.

And the cultural and organisation factors would only add to it. In Chinese work places with high power distance, and a mix of old and new management methods, what leaders do has extra meaning. As Gong et al. (2019) put it, workers in such surroundings are more apt to think of ethical leadership as genuine and supportive, which could boost its favorable influence on creativity.

Overall, the results match closely with Social Exchange Theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Employees will such asly give back to the leader in kind if they feel that they are being treated ethically and fairly, by giving more discretionary effort, including creative behavior. Our results support the ping-pong approach and indicate that if leaders are good and do the right thing all of the time, it will help workers to have a lot more creative ideas.

Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study give actual instructions to business managers. managers must be a model of justice and integrity as well as a model of not pursuing their own benefits, so that managers can gain virtue rights, and employees will trust managers. organizations should also try to create a supportive environment by developing mechanisms that are able to tolerate faults, and by supporting the open expression of ideas and the experimentation with new ideas. This kind of effort can improve the sense of security and promote innovation. And also, the result can provide some theoretical basis for state-owned enterprise reform. To increase the psychological safety and creativity of their workers and to make state-owned companies in Yunnan border areas more adaptable and competitive.

Future research could increase the sample size and have different industries. Studies can also compare different types of state-owned enterprises and private companies, such as in manufacturing, service, or technology industries, to examine the applicability of the model. There is also the need to create localized measures of various variables, such as scales of ethical leadership and psychological safety, which fit Chinese culture better, so as to improve the accuracy of measurement. Moreover, other mediating or outcome variables can be included in the future studies, such as organizational identification, self-efficacy, learning orientation, employee innovation performance, or organizational innovation capability, to form a more complete model of organizational behavior.

References

- Al-Haraisa, Y. E. (2024). Ethical leadership and employees' creativity: The mediating role of organizational pride. *Foundations of Management*, 16(1), 25-40.
<https://doi.org/10.2478/FMAN-2024-0002>
- Am, J. B., Furstenthal, L., Jorge, F., & Roth, E. (2020). *Innovation in a crisis: Why it is more critical than ever*. McKinsey & Company.
- Amabile, T. M., Conti, R., Coon, H., Lazenby, J., & Herron, M. (1996). Assessing the work environment for creativity. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39(5), 1154–1184.
- Amabile, T. M., Schatzel, E. A., Moneta, G. B., & Kramer, S. J. (2004). Leader behaviors and the work environment for creativity: Perceived leader support. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 15(1), 5–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.12.003>
- Avey, J. B., Wernsing, T. S., & Palanski, M. E. (2012). Exploring the process of ethical leadership: The mediating role of employee voice and psychological ownership. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 107(1), 21–34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-012-1298-2>
- Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. Wiley.
- Brown, M. E., & Treviño, L. K. (2006). Ethical leadership: A review and future directions. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17(6), 595–616. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2006.10.004>
- Brown, M. E., Treviño, L. K., & Harrison, D. A. (2005). Ethical leadership: A social learning perspective for construct development and testing. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 97(2), 117–134. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2005.03.002>
- Carmeli, A., & Gittell, J. H. (2009). High-quality relationships, psychological safety, and learning from failures in work organizations. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 30(6), 709–729. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.565>
- Chen, A. S. Y., & Hou, Y. H. (2016). The effects of ethical leadership, voice behavior and climates for creativity on creativity: A moderated mediation examination. *Leadership Quarterly*, 27(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.10.007>
- Chenli, M., Yuhui, G., Xihuai, L., & Abrokwhah, E. (2019). Mediating effect of team trust on the influence of top management team (tmt) processes against hr decision quality and satisfaction performance. *Personnel Review*, 49(4), 1053-1068.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-09-2018-0336>
- Cropanzano, R., & Mitchell, M. S. (2005). Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review. *Journal of Management*, 31(6), 874–900. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206305279602>

- de Jong, J. P., & Den Hartog, D. N. (2007). How leaders influence employees' innovative behaviour. *European Journal of Creativity Management*, 10(1), 41–64. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14601060710720546>
- Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999>
- Edmondson, A. C., & Lei, Z. (2014). Psychological safety: The history, renaissance, and future of an interpersonal construct. *Social Science Electronic Publishing*, 1(1), 23-43. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091305>
- Elqassaby, H. K. (2018). The effect of ethical leadership on employee creativity. *International Journal of Economics and Management Sciences*, 7(5), Article 552. <https://doi.org/10.4172/2162-6359.1000552>
- Ghiselli, E. E., Campbell, J. P., & Zedeck, S. (1981). *Measurement theory for the behavioral sciences*. W. H. Freeman.
- Gok, K., Sumanth, J. J., Bommer, W. H., & Yigit, A. (2017). You may not reap what you sow: How employees' moral awareness minimizes ethical leadership's positive impact on workplace deviance. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 146, 257-277. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3655-7>
- Gong, Y., Huang, J. C., & Farh, J. L. (2009). Employee learning orientation, transformational leadership, and employee creativity: The mediating role of employee creative self-efficacy. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(4), 765–778. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2009.43670890>
- Gong, Z., Swol, L. V., Xu, Z., Yin, K., Zhang, N., Gilal, F. G., & Li, X. (2019). High-power distance is not always bad: Ethical leadership results in feedback seeking. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, Article 2137. <http://doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02137>
- Gu, Q. X., Tang, T. L. P., & Jiang, W. (2015). Does moral leadership enhance employee creativity? Employee identification with leader and leader-member exchange (LMX) in the Chinese context. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 126(3), 513-529. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-013-1967-9>
- Hirst, G., Van Knippenberg, D., & Zhou, J. (2009). A cross-level perspective on employee creativity: Goal orientation, team learning behavior, and individual creativity. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(2), 280–293. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2009.37308035>
- Ilies, R., Morgeson, F. P., & Nahrgang, J. D. (2005). Authentic leadership and eudaemonic well-being: Understanding leader–follower outcomes. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(3), 373-394. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.002>
- Javed, B., Khan, A. A., Bashir, S., & Arjoon, S. (2016). Impact of ethical leadership on creativity: The role of psychological empowerment. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 20(8), 839–851. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2016.1188894>

- Javed, B., Rawwas, M. Y., Khandai, S., Shahid, K., & Tayyeb, H. H. (2018). Ethical leadership, trust in leader and creativity: The mediated mechanism and an interacting effect. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 24(3), 388-405. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2017.56>
- Jin, X., Qing, C., & Jin, S. (2022). Ethical leadership and innovative behavior: Mediating role of voice behavior and moderated mediation role of psychological safety. *Sustainability*, 14(9), Article 5125. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14095125>
- Jung, D. I., Chow, C., & Wu, A. (2003). The role of transformational leadership in enhancing organizational creativity: Hypotheses and some preliminary findings. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14(4-5), 525-544. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843\(03\)00050-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(03)00050-X)
- Leroy, H., Palanski, M. E., & Simons, T. (2012). Authentic leadership and behavioral integrity as drivers of follower commitment and performance. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 107(3), 255-264. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-1036-1>
- Li, G. P., Li, L. Y., Xie, L., & Lopez, O. S. (2023). The effects of ethical leadership on creativity: A conservation of resources perspective. *Current Psychology*, 43, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04703-0>
- Lin, C. Y.-Y., & Liu, F.-C. (2012). A cross-level analysis of organizational creativity climate and perceived innovation: The mediating effect of work motivation. *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 15(1), 55-76. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14601061211192834>
- Liu, K., & Ge, Y. (2020). How psychological safety influences employee creativity in China: Work engagement as a mediator. *Social Behavior and Personality: An international Journal*, 48(7), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.9211>
- Liu, X., Huang, Y., Kim, J., & Na, S. (2023). How ethical leadership cultivates innovative work behaviors in employees? Psychological safety, work engagement, and openness to experience. *Sustainability*, 15(4), Article 3452. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15043452>
- Nembhard, I. M., & Edmondson, A. C. (2006). Making it safe: The effects of leader inclusiveness and professional status on psychological safety and improvement efforts in health care teams. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 27(7), 941-966. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.413>
- Ng, T. W. H., & Feldman, D. C. (2010). The relationships of age with job attitudes: A meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, 63(3), 677-718. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2010.01184.x>
- Oldham, G. R., & Cummings, A. (1996). Employee creativity: Personal and contextual factors at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39(3), 607-634. <https://doi.org/10.2307/256657>

- Podsakoff, P. M., & Organ, D. W. (1986). Self-reports in organizational research: Problems and prospects. *Journal of Management*, 12(4), 531–544. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920638601200408>
- Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2008). Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models. *Behavior Research Methods*, 40(3), 879–891. <https://doi.org/10.3758/BRM.40.3.879>
- Shalley, C. E., Zhou, J., & Oldham, G. R. (2004). The effects of personal and contextual characteristics on creativity: Where should we go from here? *Journal of Management*, 30(6), 933–958. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jm.2004.06.007>
- Sudman, S. (1976). *Applied sampling*. Academic Press.
- Tierney, P., Farmer, S. M., & Graen, G. B. (1999). An examination of leadership and employee creativity: The relevance of traits and relationships. *Personnel Psychology*, 52(3), 591–620. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.1999.tb00173.x>
- Watkins, M. W. (2018). Exploratory factor analysis: A guide to best practice. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 44(3), 219–246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798418771807>
- Woodman, R. W., Sawyer, J. E., & Griffin, R. W. (1993). Toward a theory of organizational creativity. *Academy of Management Review*, 18(2), 293–321. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258761>
- Younas, A., Wang, D. P., Javed, B., Rawwas, M. Y. A., Abdullah, I., & Zaffar, M. A. (2020). Positive psychological states and employee creativity: The role of ethical leadership. *Journal of Creative Behavior*, 54(3), 567–581. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jocb.391>
- Zhang, J., Choi, M., Wang, K., & Kim, H. E. (2025). How can ethical leadership increase employees' bootlegging creativity behavior in China? A serial mediation model of psychological wellbeing and psychological entitlement. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16, Article 1506906. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1506906>
- Zhou, J., & George, J. M. (2001). When job dissatisfaction leads to creativity: Encouraging the expression of voice. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(4), 682–696. <https://doi.org/10.5465/3069410>