The Impact of Innovation and Ethical Leadership on Social Relationships in the Workplace through Ethical Marketing: An Analytical Study

تأثير الابتكار والقيادة الأخلاقية على العلاقات الاجتماعية في بيئة العمل من خلال التسويق الأخلاقي: دراسة تحليلية

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Abstract

The research highlights the need to foster a work environment that promotes innovative behavior and reduces job fatigue, We collected data from 312 full-time employees and professors from government universities using an electronic questionnaire. The data was analyzed using SPSS software, and the results indicate that ethical leadership positively influences innovative behavior.

In this study, we employed the concept of personal initiative to examine individuals who exceed their assigned tasks and strive to achieve their goals. The findings show that job perfectionism correlates positively with innovative behavior, suggesting that managers seek to enhance human resource utilization through ethical leadership.

Keywords: job burnout, personal initiative, human resources, health perfection.

Jel Classification Codes: M52.

الملخص:

يسلط البحث الضوء على الحاجة إلى إنشاء بيئة عمل تعزز السلوك الإبداعي وتقليل الإرهاق الوظيفي، وقد تم جمع البيانات من 312 موظفا وأستاذا بدوام كامل من الجامعات الحكومية عبر استخدام استبيان إلكتروني والاستعانة برنامج *SPSS* لتحليل البيانات.

أظهرت النتائج أن القيادة الأخلاقية لها تأثير إيجابي على السلوك الإبداعي. في هذا البحث، استخدمنا مفهوم الاستقلال الشخصي لدراسة أولئك الذين يتجاوزون مهامهم المحددة ويسعون لتحقيق أهدافهم. أظهرت النتائج أن الكمال الوظيفي يرتبط بشكل إيجابي بالسلوك الإبداعي، مما يشير إلى أن المدراء يسعون لتحسين استخدام الموارد البشرية من خلال القيادة الأخلاقية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإرهاق الوظيفي، المبادرة الشخصية، الموارد البشرية، الكمال الصحي.

تصنيف **JEL:** M52.

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1.Introduction:

Organizational sustainability has become a major focus for business organizations and provides development opportunities, financial viability, competitive advantages, and long-term growth. Facing leading organizational management problems around the world, organizations operate in environments that threaten their sustainability and continuity. Consequently, most organizations seek innovation to retain a competitive advantage and maintain organizational sustainability, thereby improving professionalism, service quality, and care. Innovation leads to new business models, products, and changes in social and economic systems, fostering sustainable entrepreneurship and organizational change, and enhancing competitiveness.

Innovation is a key factor related to the sustainable competitiveness of organizations in both tangible (processes, services, and products) and intangible (organizational culture and leadership) areas, Organizations must recognize the necessity of innovation to survive in challenging business environments and secure sustainable competitive advantages. These points underscore the importance of innovation in organizational performance and the need for innovative behavior among organizational members.

Ethical leadership plays a crucial role in guiding this innovative behavior, ensuring that innovation efforts are aligned with ethical standards and corporate social responsibility. Ethical marketing practices, driven by such leadership, not only enhance the reputation of the organization but also strengthen social relationships within the workplace. Engaged employees, inspired by ethical leadership and supported by innovative practices, serve customers in the best way possible, leading to stronger interpersonal relationships and a more cohesive work environment.

Scholars focus their attention on how the workplace is organized; Not their tasks, functions and hierarchies, but the patterns of relationships and available capacities capable of shaping them. By individuals engaged in a variety of relationships at work, including relationships between subordinates. These relationships often converge in the workplace, developing into relational bonds known as friendships. Friendships are unique to the workplace in two fundamental ways:

(1) Friendships are voluntary-although individuals do not typically choose who they work with, they choose which of these individuals to become friends with.

(2) friendships have an interpersonal focus as individuals get to know and treat each other as whole people, rather than merely occupants in the workplace. Consequently, employees choose to spend time with their friends, both in the workplace and away from it, beyond that imposed by their organizational roles. Because of these characteristics, friends in the workplace serve as important sources of social and emotional support. Workplace friendships are also distinguished from other types of friendships in that peer friends share unique knowledge regarding workplace experiences and activities, enabling them to communicate about work-related issues with a depth and competence not found in other friendships. Hence our research into identifying workplace friendships. Work, ethical leadership and perfectionism among employees.

2. Methodology:
2.1 Research problem:
We conducted a questionnaire to prove the research model, The research model examines the impact of innovative behavior and ethical leadership on workplace friendship and perfectionism among employees. It tests the moderated mediation effect of workplace friendship. The main purpose of this research is to provide a method to increase ethical behavior among subordinates, Ethical leadership is one of the most effective types of leadership, as it has positive effects on employee behavior patterns. Ethical leadership may contain several areas or standards, such as moral personal qualities, ethical administrative qualities, team work qualities, and human relations qualities, which have a significant impact. Great for productivity and career achievement. These standards determine to what level the administrative leader uses the ethical leadership style in the organization. So university employees were selected. After reviewing the current literature on ethical climate, ethical leadership and decision-making, individual and group behavior dynamics, stress factors, organizational and employee performance, and the mutual relationship between these components, the following major research problems are highlighted:

A. The relationship between ethics and leadership has been studied by researchers in previous studies, yet the world still faces major social and economic challenges due to ethical issues. Therefore, the ethical dimension of leadership should receive more research attention amidst these increasing challenges especially in the areas of organizational ethics.

B. Theoretical models have yet to determine whether mediating effects between components of organizational ethics within the macro- and micro-meso conceptual framework remain consistent across different contexts, organizations, and groups of individuals.

C. There is a need to determine the relationship between innovative behavior and workplace friendship in a context that is largely characterized by multiculturalism.

D. There is a need to evaluate the extent to which ethical actions are critically relevant and which mediating components influence organizational behavior, ethical employee behavior, and perceived employee performance the most.

E. The necessity of developing a new or improved framework or model that will enable the promotion of ethical business practices and performance in a dynamic context that is largely influenced by internal and external pressures that are detrimental to ethical standards.

F. There is a need to provide appropriate recommendations to the business community in order to better equip them to face ever-increasing ethical challenges and to address such dilemmas in a largely multicultural context.

On the basis of the literature review, identified gaps and research objectives, the following research questions are posed and enhanced here so that the research design and methodologies are appropriately formulated to test and answer these questions:

A. How are moral context variables understood and explained by theoretical models in the literature?

B. How are the mediating variables (ethical leadership and internal and external pressures of workplace friendship) conceptualized and explained?

C. What is the nature of the theoretical and observed interrelationships between ethical context and influences on employee ethical behavior and perceived employee performance?

D. Is it possible to build or customize a scientific theoretical model on the relationship between the independent variables of the ethical context and the mediating variables with the aim of enabling organizations and

practitioners to develop appropriate strategies and processes to enhance positive employee behavior and performance in general?

2.2 The importance of research:

This study highlights the significance and role of ethical leadership in fostering innovative behavior. Furthermore, the criteria for sample selection are as follows: the ethical integrity of leaders is paramount for organizational members. Additionally, the importance of ethical leadership within organizations to cultivate social relationships and camaraderie in the workplace is consistently emphasized.

Ethical leadership is crucial in guiding innovative behavior, ensuring that all innovation efforts align with ethical standards and principles of corporate social responsibility. Such leadership not only enhances the organization's reputation but also strengthens internal social bonds. Through ethical marketing practices, driven by ethical leaders, organizations can create an environment that promotes trust and mutual respect among employees. This, in turn, leads to improved collaboration, enhanced employee engagement, and stronger social connections within the workplace.

2.3 Research objective:

The following empirical research objectives are put forward keeping in mind the scope of the research and the multicultural setting

A. How to explain friendship in the workplace and ethical leadership in Iraq with a global perspective?
B. What are the main types of ethical climates that exist, their characteristics and peculiarities, and how do they relate to the variables under investigation?
C. What are the most common internal and external workplace pressures that organizations face that can jeopardize ethical behavior and standards?
D. What are the most influential stressors in the workplace?
E. What is the statistical relationship between the mediating variables of ethical leadership and behavior, and internal and external pressures in the workplace?

2.4 Research scheme:

As shown in Figure 1, the hypothetical diagram of the research
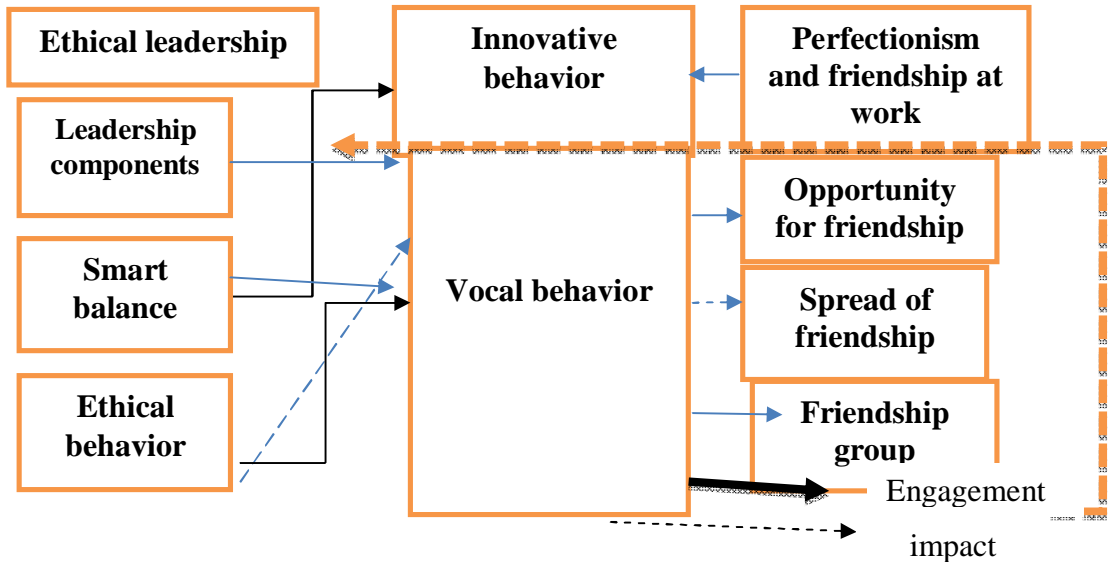
2.5 Research sample:

We targeted university employees and professors for our survey. The sample was distributed and collected via an online questionnaire, with participants informed that the survey aimed to explore methods to enhance innovative behavior, and their responses would remain confidential. The survey garnered responses from 314 full-time university staff and faculty members. Most respondents were subordinates. The data revealed 149 males (43.6%) and 163 females (56.4%) Age-wise, the largest group was participants in their 30s, totaling 17(%51.8) .

Ethical leadership was defined as exhibiting normatively appropriate conduct through key aspects of individual behavior and interpersonal relationships, and promoting ethical standards among subordinates through effective communication, reinforcement, and decision-making. The measurement tool included 10 items, such as "My leader disciplines employees who violate ethical standards" and "My leader sets an example of ethical behavior." Responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Innovative behavior was characterized by actions encouraging constructive challenges and innovative suggestions for change. This was assessed using six items, also rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

Psychological safety, defined as the belief that colleagues, including leaders and peers, would not misunderstand or penalize individuals for taking risks or voicing concerns, was measured using the Psychological Safety Scale adapted from previous studies. This scale comprised five items, with responses again on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Workplace friendships were evaluated through six items, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

2.6 Research hypotheses:

A. Perfectionism and friendliness at work are positively related to ethical leadership;
B. Innovative behavior is positively related to perfectionism and friendliness at work;
C. The positive impact of perfectionism and friendship at work on ethical leadership;
D. Innovative behavior has a positive effect on perfectionism and friendship at work.

3. Measuring friendship in the workplace:

By adopting a 6-item scale used by Nielsen (2000), Jex Adams). The original scale measures friendship opportunity and friendship diffusion, with six (06) items each, while we used six (06) friendship diffusion items to measure relationship strength and quality. This was decided by taking into account the necessary condition for enhancing empathy at work.

The Modified Perfectionist Scale (Slaney, 2001) is the original source consisting of 19 items to measure perfectionism. It includes three subscales: high standards, variance, and order. Scott and Bruce's (1994).

While friendships can take many forms, there are four basic characteristics of friendship that distinguish these bonds from other types of roles and relationships. First, friendships are voluntary. Unlike relationships with family members, neighbors, or co-workers, friendships are chosen, not imposed. Second, friendships are informal relationships in

the sense that there is a relative lack of normative rituals or labels to guide role expectations (Teresa, 2023, P13), in contrast to roles dictated by formal organizational hierarchies, such as supervisor relationships, and cultural institutions. Third, friendships are characterized by societal norms, or the expectation that one will provide support based on need rather than receive support. Fourth, friendships are driven by social and emotional goals, Their primary goal is to promote emotional and relational well-being, These qualities make workplace friendships distinct from other positive relationships at work, such as high-quality relationships, formal mentoring, positive work relationships between leaders and subordinates (Roxy etal, 2021, P4), and other close and positive relationships outside of work.

The complexity of both personal relationships and modern organizational life allows for inherently different types of professional friendships. However, our definition of workplace friendships here is limited to platonic (non-romantic) relationships between individuals who currently work in the same organization. Thus, based on the basic features of friendship and boundary conditions mentioned above, we define workplace friendship as a non-romantic, voluntary, and informal relationship between existing coworkers that is characterized by societal norms and socio-emotional goals. While these core features of friendship have been shown to remain consistent across contexts, we argue that when they exist within organizations, tensions, complexity, and potential for downsides cease (Amy, 2021, P54).

Workplace friendships refer to informal, voluntary, and interpersonal interactions between employees in an organizational setting, The importance of workplace friendship has received significant attention in the literature due to its positive association with many favorable organizational and employee attitudes, such as organizational performance, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and perceived job importance. Although many studies have investigated workplace friendship in organizations, many questions Important remains unanswered (Al Jabouri, 2022, P23), One of these questions is how to study the factors that influence workplace friendship. Scholars have explored the

antecedents of workplace friendship from two aspects, including individual and contextual characteristics. Compared with personal factors, contextual factors play a pivotal role In forming friendships in the workplace. One inevitable contextual factor in the workplace environment is employees' perceptions of fairness. This is because workers often pay attention to whether they are treated fairly in the organization. (Wen etal, 2020, P21) showed that when employees perceive treatment unfair, they seek the help and support of other coworkers, leading to the development of workplace friendships. Based on these findings, the perception of fairness may be negatively related to workplace friendships. However, many types of research show the positive effects of fairness on Personal relationships in the workplace, which means that fairness may be linked to friendship in the workplace. Personal friendship relationships are the basic building blocks for building informal relationships in organizations (Kanten & Deniz, 2020, P 231).

Perfectionism is a common personality trait that describes people who strive for perfection and set excessively high standards for performance, sometimes leading to poor self-evaluations or responses to external evaluations. Perfectionism has been positively associated with creativity, which may lead to innovative behavior. However, some suggest that perfectionism reduces innovation and detracts from an employee's ability to innovate. Perfectionism is associated with higher levels of fatigue, and this is the case for athletes, Exploring whether perfectionism has distinct effects on innovative behavior and burnout. Relevant literature on the two dimensions of perfectionism suggests that normal, adaptive, or positive perfectionism is viewed as healthy perfectionism, whereas neurotic, maladaptive, or negative perfectionism is viewed as unhealthy perfectionism. In our research, health-related perfectionism is associated with people who strive for excellence. Unhealthy perfectionism related to fears of perfection is associated with people who seek approval from others (Al Jabouri, 2022, P 103), or fear potential failure due to mistakes or not meeting their own standards. In the context of high friendships in the collective workplace (Al Jabouri, 2023, P48), relying on aspects of personal initiative Healthy perfectionists seek resources and feedback

more actively, and also share new ideas freely, while unhealthy perfectionists are less likely to perceive approval and encouragement from coworkers within a supportive environment. Therefore, we believe that collective friendship in the workplace strengthens the positive relationship between healthy perfectionism and innovation (Khairy, 2023, P22).

3.1 Ethical Leadership and Innovative Behavior

Ethical leadership has a positive relationship with and directly influences the innovative behavior of employees. According to social exchange theory, employees recognize and appreciate their leaders' motivations and support, responding positively based on the principle of reciprocity. The theory further suggests that employees perform more effectively when they have strong relationships with their leaders. When ethical leaders give meaning to employees' roles, make their work more meaningful, encourage creativity, and motivate adaptability to changes, employees perceive positive treatment, establish emotional connections, and feel committed to their leaders. This process leads to high motivation and innovative behavior. Additionally, the recognition of social exchange relationships among organizational members is enhanced by the balanced decisions and fairness of ethical leaders, resulting in employees reciprocating with innovative work behavior (Al Jabouri, 2022, P87).

Ethical leaders engage in open, two-way communication, sincerely listening to their employees and encouraging them to voice their concerns and opinions. This approach motivates employees to suggest new ideas to improve current business strategies, operations, and procedures. Thus, ethical leadership is a key factor that facilitates innovative behavior (Eny et al., 2021, P90).

Ethical leadership is defined as demonstrating normatively appropriate behavior through individual actions and interpersonal relationships. It promotes employee engagement through decision-making, reinforcement, and two-way communication, emphasizing structured behavior aimed at enhancing the ethical conduct of organizational members. Ethical leaders highlight the importance of ethics, facilitate the expression of ideas, and cultivate a climate of mutual respect where employees feel safe to express diverse opinions (Sajjad and Amina, 2020, P98).

The roles of ethical leaders include creating a sense of security and encouraging employees to share their ideas freely. Such leadership is expected to enhance employee behavior, encouraging the expression of

constructive challenges and innovative proposals for change. Innovative behavior is evident when employees voice their concerns and suggest improvements (Jana, 2019, P76).

Employees exhibit innovative behavior when they recognize unethical or inappropriate actions and courageously speak up, supported by ethical leaders' encouragement. Social learning theory suggests that individuals learn specific behaviors by observing people they deem legitimate. Employees observe their leaders and use their actions as a reference point. Ethical leaders provide opportunities for employees to speak out, publicly affirming appropriate behavior and opposing inappropriate conduct. They model these behaviors, encouraging similar actions in their employees, who learn through observation (Al Jabouri, 2020, P86; Chien, 2013, P61), When leaders actively create fair work environments, they become role models for their followers.

Furthermore, leaders provide followers with strict ethical standards and encourage them to express their opinions and ideas regarding methods and ethics, which helps improve the work environment and procedures. This explains why ethical leadership enhances the vocal behaviors of organizational members (Kibum, 2021, P75).

4. Analysis and testing of the model:

The proposed research model was analyzed using the SPSS software. The reliability of internal consistency was assessed through composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha. Table 1 indicates that the results are satisfactory, showing no issues with reliability or discriminant validity, as the CR values exceeded 0.90. Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability and validity results

Variables	Average Variance Extracted	Reliability	Cronbach's alpha	variance	Elements symbol
Ethical leadership	**0.588**	**0.901**	**0.710**	**0.677**	**EL1**
				0.654	**EL2**
				0.623	**EL3**
				0.618	**EL4**
				0.688	**EL5**

Innovative behavior	0.590	0.855	0.821	0.712	IBD1
				0.699	IBD2
				0.790	IBD3
				0.656	IBD4
				0.870	IBD5
				0.788	IBD6
Perfectionism and friendship at work	0.566	0.824	0.799	0.777	WFR1
				0.798	WFR2
				0.754	WFR3
				0.723	WFR4
				0.710	WFR5

Source: Prepared by the researcher according to the outputs of the SPSS program

The factor of each indicator item and its cross-validation processes were extracted into its corresponding latent structure and tested for convergent validity. In the model, each element is placed successively larger. In addition, Table 2 shows that scale validity is achieved because the items on the diagonals of the matrix are always larger than the items outside the diagonal (these values indicate the correlation between the respective constructs) in the corresponding row and column.

Table 2. Variable correlations

EL	IBD	WFR	Elements
0.853			EL
0.545	0.855		IBD
0.666	0.499	**0.777**	WFR

Source: Prepared by the researcher according to the outputs of the SPSS program

Multicollinearity and common method bias were examined using cluster average VIF (AVIF) and average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF) scores. The results showed that the AVIF and AVIF values were 4,223 and 3,661, respectively.

4.1 Evaluate the structural model:

The results demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between Innovative Behavior (IB) and Ethical Leadership (EL) ($\beta = 0.405$, $p < 0.05$), Workplace Friendships (WFR) and EL ($\beta = 0.518$, $p < 0.05$),

and EL and IB (β = 0.505, p < 0.05). However, there was no significant relationship between WFR and IB (p > 0.05). To assess the effect size of the independent and dependent variables, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was examined. The minimum acceptable R^2 value is 0.10. The findings indicated that WFR and EL account for 45.7% of the variance in IB, suggesting a moderate effect size. Additionally, IB and WFR significantly impact EL, explaining approximately 64% of the variance (R^2 = 0.723).

The effect size (f^2) of the variables was also analyzed. Table 3 showed that WFR has a small effect on EL (f^2 = 0.211) and IB (f^2 = 0.062). EL has a medium effect on IB (f^2 = 0.137), and WFR has a large effect on organizational efficiency (f^2 = 0.313), as detailed in Table 3.

Table 3. Effect of dimensions according to hypotheses.

F2	The result	Dimensions
0.137	Medium effect	**IBD -> EL**
0.211	Small effect	**IBD -> WFR**
0.313	The effect is great	**WFR -> EL**

The first hypothesis: There is a significant correlation between perfectionism, friendship at work, and ethical leadership. Table (4) shows the results of the test of the relationship between perfectionism, friendship at work, and ethical leadership.

Table (4) Results of the test of the relationship between perfectionism and friendship at work and ethical leadership

Subordinate		Perfectionism and friendship at work					
Independent variable	**Const ant** Const ant	**Beta**	**R**	R^2	**T** calcula ted	**F** calcula ted	**Sig.**
Ethical leadership	1.80 3	.723	0.7 4	.52 3	4.025	30.7 32	.00 0 [b]

Source: Prepared by the researcher according to the outputs of the SPSS program

It is clear from Table (4) that the regression equation indicates the constant (a = 1.803), which means that there is a value of ethical leadership of (a = 1.803)) when the value of perfectionism and friendship at work is equal to zero.

As for the marginal slope value of perfectionism and friendship at work, it reached (β = 0.723), which indicates that a change of (1) in moral leadership will lead to a negative change of (0.723) in the calculated value of perfectionism and friendship at work, and that the correlation rate between perfectionism Friendship at work and ethical leadership is estimated at (0.74). This indicates that there is a correlation between the two variables, a positive positive relationship that is good at a moral significance (0.000). The value of the coefficient of determination (R^2) also indicated a coefficient of (0.523), which means that ethical leadership is explained Its value is (0.523) from the variance occurring in the calculated value, and it is morally significant within the level of significance (0.05). In light of these results, this hypothesis is not rejected.

The second hypothesis: There is a significant correlation between innovative behavior, perfectionism, and friendship at work. Table (5) shows the results of testing the relationship between innovative behavior, perfectionism, and friendship at work.

Table (5) Results of testing the relationship between innovative behavior, perfectionism, and friendship at work.

Perfectionism and friendship at work							Subordinate
Sig.	F calculated	T calculated	R^2	R	Beta	Constant _	Independent variable
.000b	30.732	4.025	.623	0.53	0.512	1.601	Innovative behavior

Source: Prepared by the researcher according to the outputs of the SPSS program

It is clear from Table (5) that the regression equation indicates the constant (a = 1.601), and this means that there is a value of innovative behavior of (a = 1.601) when the value of perfectionism and friendship at work is equal to zero, while the value of the marginal slope of innovative

behavior has reached (β=0.512) It indicates that a change of (1) in perfectionism and friendship at work will lead to a negative change of (0.512) in the calculated value of innovative behavior, and that the correlation rate between innovative behavior, perfectionism and friendship at work is estimated at (0.53), and this indicates There is a good positive correlation between the two variables at a significant level (0.000). The value of the coefficient of determination ($R2$) also indicated a coefficient of (0.623), which means that innovative behavior explains its value (0.623) of the variation occurring in the calculated value, and it is morally significant within the level of significance (0.05). In light of these results, it is not rejected This hypothesis.

The third hypothesis: There is a significant influence relationship between perfectionism, friendship at work, and ethical leadership. Table (6) shows the results of testing the relationship between perfectionism, friendship at work, and ethical leadership.

Table (6) Results of testing the relationship between perfectionism, friendship at work, and ethical leadership.

Perfectionism and friendship at work							Subordinate
Sig.	F calculated	T calculated	R^2	R	Beta	_Constant	Independent variable
.000b	30.742	4.225	.801	0.62	0.551	1.432	Ethical leadership

Source: Prepared by the researcher according to the outputs of the SPSS program

It is clear from Table (6) that the regression equation indicates the constant (a=1.432), and this means that there is a value of ethical leadership of (a=1.432)) when the value of perfectionism and friendship at work is equal to zero, while the value of the marginal slope of ethical leadership reached (β=0.551) It indicates that a change of (1) in perfectionism and friendship at work will lead to a negative change of (0.551) in the calculated value of ethical leadership, and the correlation rate between perfectionism and friendship at work and ethical leadership is estimated at (0.62), and this indicates There is a relationship of influence between the two variables, a good positive direct relationship at a significant level (0.000). The value of the coefficient of determination ($R2$)

also indicated a coefficient of (0.801), which means that ethical leadership explains its value (0.801) of the variance occurring in the calculated value, which is morally significant within the level of significance (0.05). In light of these results, it is not rejected this hypothesis.

Fourth hypothesis: There is a significant influence relationship between innovative behavior, perfectionism, and friendship at work Results of testing the influence relationship between innovative behavior, perfectionism, and friendship at work.

The regression equation indicates the constant (a = 1.873), which means that there is a value of innovative behavior of (a = 1.873) when the value of perfectionism and friendship at work is equal to zero, while the value of the marginal slope of innovative behavior has reached (β = 0.781). It indicates that a change of (1) in perfectionism and friendship at work will lead to a negative change of (0.781) in the calculated value of innovative behavior. The value of the coefficient of determination (R^2) also indicated a coefficient of (0.801), which means that innovative behavior Its value (0.801) is explained by the variance occurring in the calculated value and it has a moral significance within the level of significance (0.05). In light of these results, this hypothesis is accepted.

4.2 Results:

Employees are crucial to the success of any organization, which is why this research focused on examining three key factors: Ethical Leadership (EL), Innovative Behavior (IB), and Workplace Friendships (WFR). To explore these relationships empirically, a conceptual model was developed and tested. The findings indicate that perfectionism, workplace camaraderie, and ethical leadership are all positively associated with innovative behavior, a result consistent among university staff.

The aim of this research is to enhance employees' skills and abilities, address undesirable behaviors that disrupt organizational functioning, and boost performance and efficiency within the university. By fostering collaboration and information sharing, the research promotes greater employee engagement. The results also revealed a significant positive link

between WFR and EL, aligning with previous studies. Employees who value workplace friendships are generally happier, which enhances their work engagement. Friends at work are more likely to offer social support, a critical factor for improving workplace effectiveness. Moreover, WFR contributes to increased work efficiency by strengthening employees' sense of belonging, leading to deeper engagement and commitment.

Despite these benefits, some argue that workplace friendships can be detrimental. Friends at work may cause distractions, leading to less productivity if employees engage in non-task-related conversations. Additionally, maintaining close friendships can demand significant emotional effort, potentially reducing work engagement if employees feel obligated to balance their work and personal relationships.

The research also confirmed the expected relationship between EL and IB. This finding supports previous studies that emphasize the strong connection between these variables. A positive work environment, coupled with effective interactions between colleagues and managers, fosters employee comfort and consistency. WFR enhances team cohesion, creates a stimulating work atmosphere, and encourages employees to remain with the organization. Friendships at work help build emotional bonds with the organization, improving employees' sense of belonging and commitment to their work.

Furthermore, cross-functional communication among university employees can be facilitated by workplace friendships, allowing them to share experiences and express opinions about their work environment. This commitment often drives employees to go above and beyond, offering extra support to colleagues and participating in discretionary activities.

Finally, the research found that EL mediates the relationship between WFR and IB. This result mirrors previous findings that demonstrate how different components of workplace dynamics, when combined effectively, enhance employees' efficiency and engagement. Providing employees with the necessary resources leads to high engagement levels and positive organizational advocacy.

5. Conclusions:

Recent research explores how employee engagement, workplace friendships, and ethical leadership impact employee innovation. The study tested four hypotheses using data collected from employees at the University of Kufa. The findings revealed that employee engagement, ethical leadership, workplace friendships, and innovative behavior all influence work outcomes.

The research highlighted the mediating role of employee engagement between positive perfectionism and workplace friendships. Additionally, workplace friendships were found to moderate the relationship between innovative behavior and ethical leadership. By examining the interaction effects of employee engagement and workplace friendships in the proposed model at the University of Kufa, this study enhances our understanding of how these factors influence innovative behavior.

The insights from this research can assist organizations in appreciating the role of workplace friendships in differentiating their services and guide industry leaders in developing strategies to gain a competitive edge.

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