

## RESPONSIBLE HRM AND EVERYDAY ETHICS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF MORAL IDENTITY AND MODERATING ROLE OF LEADER INTEGRITY

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### Abstract

*This study examines the influence of Responsible Human Resource Management (Responsible HRM) on employee ethics by investigating the mediating role of moral identity and the moderating role of leader integrity. Grounded in Social Learning Theory, the study proposes that ethical and employee-oriented HR practices shape ethical workplace behavior through employees' internalization of moral values, while leadership integrity strengthens this relationship. A quantitative explanatory research design was employed using cross-sectional survey data collected from employees working in multiple organizational sectors. Data were analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS 4 through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that Responsible HRM significantly enhances employee ethics and positively influences employees' moral identity. Moral identity further demonstrates a significant positive effect on employee ethics and mediates the relationship between Responsible HRM and ethical behavior. Additionally, leader integrity significantly strengthens the positive relationship between Responsible HRM and employee ethics. The findings extend Social Learning Theory by integrating organizational systems, psychological mechanisms, and leadership behavior into a unified ethical management framework. The study contributes theoretically by refining understanding of moral identity as an organizationally influenced construct and practically by emphasizing the importance of responsible HR systems and integrity-based leadership in fostering ethical workplace behavior. The study also provides strategic implications for organizations seeking to strengthen ethical cultures and sustainable organizational practices.*



## Introduction

Pressure on organizations to adopt ethical and socially responsible management practices has increased in recent years because of a number of factors, including increased stakeholder expectations, employee misconduct in the workplace, and concerns about employee well-being. The growing importance of organizations establishing an ethical workplace culture that promotes integrity and ethical behavior among workers is driven by a series of ethical scandals, corporate irresponsibility, and a loss of trust in leadership. In this context, Responsible Human Resource Management (Responsible HRM) has become a significant managerial approach that incorporates fairness, employee welfare, sustainability, and ethical considerations into HRM practices. Nowadays, organizations should not only enhance their performance but also inculcate their employees with ethical values and socially responsible behaviour (Zhao & Zhou, 2021). Ethical conduct in the workplace is vital as it fosters trust in the organization, positive working relationships among employees, minimizes employee misconduct, and contributes to the sustainability of the organization (Islam et al., 2021). Accordingly, academics and practitioners are growing in their interest in the mechanisms by which responsible organizational practices impact employees' ethical attitudes, and

what psychological or leadership factors enhance these links (Wang et al., 2017; Zheng et al., 2022).

While ethical management is a universal issue, it is especially relevant in developing economies where organizations are likely to experience poor ethical climate, inconsistent ethical leadership and minimal sustainable HR practices. In many organizations there is a lack of leadership and support for moral values, which leads to ethical ambiguity. By fostering fairness, transparency, employee engagement, and ethical practices, responsible HRM can significantly contribute to resolving these issues. But the success of these practices might be contingent on employees' inner moral attributes and leadership qualities. Thus, comprehending the mechanisms by which Responsible HRM impacts employee ethics via moral identity and leader integrity offers valuable insights for organizations aiming to foster a robust ethical culture and responsible conduct among their employees.

Responsible HRM is the practice of human resource management that focuses on ethical treatment, employee welfare, sustainability, and social responsibility in the organization (Khan et al., 2024). Previous research indicates that HR practices based on ethics and employees' interests have a positive impact on employees' attitudes and ethical behaviors (Hu & Jiang, 2018).

Employee ethics is a reflection of the moral behavior, integrity and observance of the ethical standards of the organization by the employees in their activities. Moral identity – the extent to which morality is part of a person's self-concept – has been found to be an important psychological mechanism that shapes ethical behaviours (Wang et al., 2017). Likewise, leader integrity is the consistency between what the leaders say and what they do, and their commitment to moral values (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2020). Previous research shows that ethical leadership, moral identity and responsible HR practices all foster ethical behavior, voice behavior, and organizational citizenship behavior among employees (Han et al., 2024; Shahzad et al., 2025).

While there has been an increasing interest in the academic world in the field of ethics and the role of ethical leaders in organizations, there are several important gaps in the literature. First, most of the previous studies have mainly concentrated on the ethical leadership and CSR as a predictor of ethical employee outcomes and limited studies have been conducted on Responsible HRM as a direct organizational mechanism that affects employee ethics (Islam et al., 2021; Wang & Li, 2019). Second, previous studies have often focused on employee ethical behavior from a leadership-centered perspective, without

considering how HR systems can be used to influence the moral behavior of employees. Third, while moral identity has been discussed in the literature as a moderator in the context of ethical leadership and ethical voice behavior (Han et al., 2024), there is limited empirical evidence on the mediating role of moral identity between Responsible HRM and employee ethics. This restricts the understanding of how HR practices can impact on ethical outcomes, in terms of the inner psychological mechanism.

Moreover, the role of leader integrity as a boundary condition in the link between Responsible HRM and employee ethics is relatively under-researched. Previous studies have largely focused on how leader integrity is linked to deviant behaviors, fairness, or leadership effectiveness, but not on how it enhances ethical outcomes from HR practices (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2020). Another important gap is contextual. Previous studies have been mostly carried out in Western or developed economies, and evidence from developing economies is scarce. Ethical issues, leadership styles, and HR practices vary widely from one culture to another and one institution to another. Thus, further studies are needed to explore how Responsible HRM, moral identity and leader integrity interact to impact employee ethics in less studied organizational contexts. Gaps can be filled with a more



integrated explanation of ethical behavior in organizations and an expansion of the literature on ethical management and responsible HR practices.

Despite the presence of formal policies, codes of conduct, and compliance systems, many organizations continue to have unethical employee behavior. These unethical practices erode trust within the organization, tarnish its image, and have a detrimental impact on sustainability. A significant contributing factor to this is that organizations tend to focus on the results of performance rather than the ethical and moral aspects of human resource practices. While Responsible HRM can foster ethical behavior through fairness, employee support and socially responsible policies, there is limited evidence that explains how the practices are translated into ethical employee behavior. Furthermore, the employees can react differently to responsible HR activities according to their internal moral values and perception of integrity of the leadership. A higher moral identity of employees could make it easier to internalize ethical HR practices, and the integrity of HR leaders could help to set an example and encourage ethical practices. But the current studies have not well incorporated these mechanisms. Consequently, the organizations do not have a complete understanding of the effect on employee ethics via the

psychological and leadership-related pathways of Responsible HRM. This issue is still not resolved and needs empirical investigation on the mediating role of moral identity and the moderating role of leader integrity between Responsible HRM and employee ethics.

The aim of this study is to analyze the impact of Responsible HRM on employee ethics and to explore the mediating effect of moral identity as well as the moderating effect of leader integrity in this relationship. This study is designed to give a detailed explanation of the impact of ethical HR on employee moral behavior in the organization. This study is based on the Social Learning Theory which is a theory that states that employees get their attitudes and behavior from observing the organizational practices and leadership behavior. Responsible HRM and leader integrity are ethical signals that affect employees' moral identity formation and ethical behaviors (Bandura, 1986; Zheng et al., 2022). Theoretically, this study makes a contribution by incorporating Responsible HRM, moral identity, leader integrity, and employee ethics into a single model. In practice, it aids in the development of HR systems that are ethical and boosts the integrity of leaders to enhance employee ethics. It adds to the evidence in developing organizational contexts where ethical



research in the workplace is a scarce phenomenon.

## Literature Review

Ethical behavior within organizations has become an increasingly significant concern due to rising incidents of workplace misconduct, declining organizational trust, and growing stakeholder expectations regarding responsible business conduct. In response, scholars have emphasized the importance of responsible human resource management, ethical leadership, and moral cognition in shaping employee ethical behavior. Contemporary research increasingly recognizes that ethical outcomes are influenced not only by formal organizational systems but also by employees' internal moral values and leadership integrity. Consequently, the present literature review critically examines the relationships among Responsible HRM, moral identity, leader integrity, and employee ethics to establish a comprehensive conceptual foundation for the study.

## Theoretical Foundation

Social Learning Theory is an excellent theoretical model to explain the role of organizational practices and leadership behaviors on employees' ethical behavior. The theory was originally developed by Albert Bandura and suggests that attitudes, values and behaviours are acquired by observing, imitating, reinforcing and socially

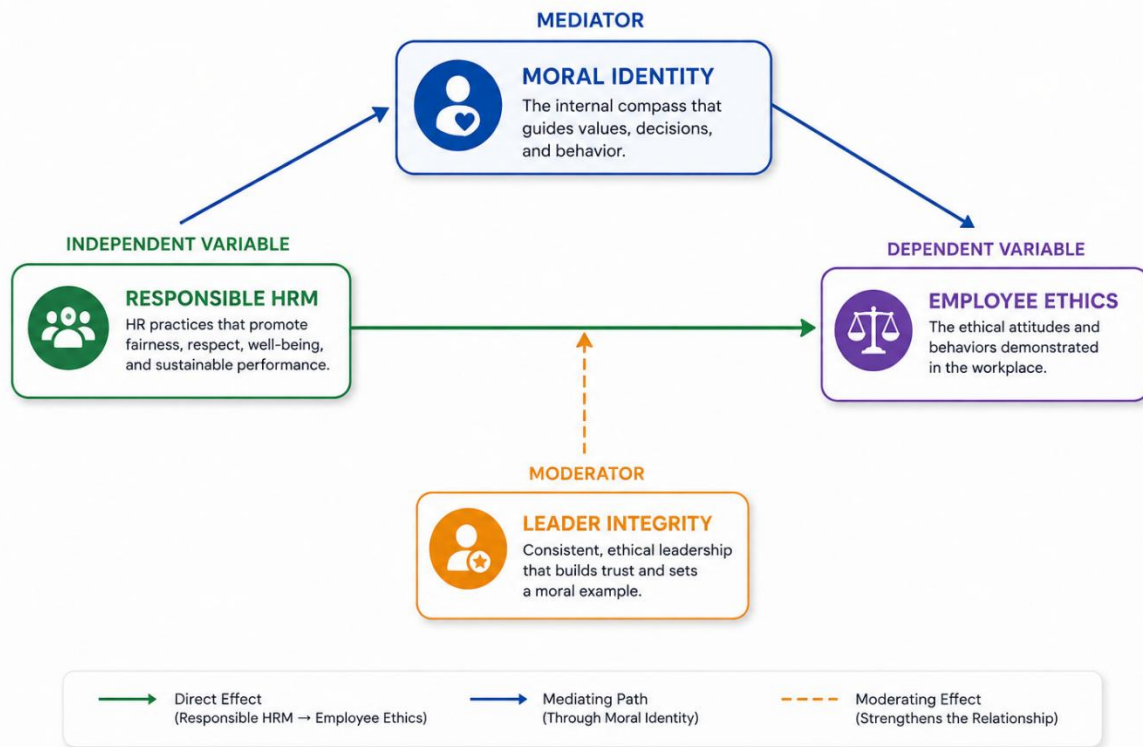
interacting. The theory suggests that employees learn from the systems, behaviours and norms in organizations to see what is acceptable. Thus, ethical actions are not developed in isolation but rather emerge in the process of ongoing interaction with social and organizational environments. In the organizational context, responsible HRM practices are institutional signals that convey the message of fairness, accountability, and ethical expectations to employees. Human resource systems that are perceived as supportive, transparent and socially responsible are more likely to lead to internalization of ethical norms and ethical behavior in the workplace. Likewise, when leaders are consistent with words and deeds, they become influential ethical role models whose behaviour influences employees' ethical decision-making and moral judgments. Thus, the Social Learning Theory can help to understand that the values of ethics are spread through organizational mechanisms and interpersonal interactions, which in turn affect the ethics of employees and the formation of their moral identity (Zheng et al., 2022; Saleem et al., 2020).

Social Learning Theory has been increasingly adopted in ethical management literature, especially in the research on ethical leadership, responsible human resource practices and moral behavior of employees. Previous research has applied the theory to understand the relationship



between ethical leadership and ethical voice, organizational citizenship behavior and pro-environmental behavior via observational learning and value internalization (Han et al., 2024; Mansour et al., 2022). Likewise, researchers have posited that the responsible HR systems influence the attitudes of employees through the development of an ethical organizational climate that promotes socially desirable behaviors (Khan et al., 2024). However, there are some drawbacks in previous theoretical applications. Firstly, many studies use Social Learning Theory in a limited way by concentrating mainly on the behavior of the leader and not the HR systems as learning mechanisms in the organization. Second, previous studies tend to view moral identity as a personal attribute, and not a psychological product of organizational experiences. These restrictions

knowledge of the impact of ethical HR practices on internal moral self-concept of employees. Third, the literature often considers ethical leadership and HR practices separately, and provides disjointed theories for ethical employee outcomes. Additionally, most empirical studies focus on direct relationships and offer little explanation for the mechanisms of ethical learning that are mediated and moderated. These restrictions suggest that there is a need for a more holistic theoretical model which explains how Responsible HRM can impact employee morality through moral identity and how leader integrity can play a strengthening role. Thus, Social Learning Theory provides a suitable framework for the understanding of the interaction between organizational systems, psychological mechanisms and leadership behavior that can impact the ethical conduct of employees.



### Hypotheses Section

Responsible HRM has become increasingly acknowledged as a strategic organizational mechanism that can foster ethical employee behaviours by integrating fairness, sustainability, employee welfare and accountability in organizational practices. HR systems can be viewed from a Social Learning Theory lens as institutional learning structures that help employees learn about organizational values and expectations for behavior. If HR practices focus on ethical treatment, transparency, participation and social responsibility, employees are more likely to see these practices as a sign of acceptable workplace behavior. This

results in improved employee moral sensitivity and increased employee moral compliance. Modern studies indicate that HR practices that are responsible and oriented towards ethics have a positive impact on the attitude, trust, and ethical behavior of employees, as such practices help to decrease the ambiguity about the values of the organization and promote socially desirable behavior (Khan et al., 2024). In the same way, Zhao and Zhou (2021) proposed that socially responsible HRM positively influences employees' citizenship behavior through the mediation of employees' perceptions of ethical organizational commitment. These findings are consistent with the idea that HR systems are not just



administrative and can be used as ethical governance devices that shape employees' behavioral orientation.

Theoretically and empirically, the relationship between Responsible HRM and employee ethics is still underdeveloped although there is increasing empirical evidence. The findings in the literature are diverse in terms of the impact of ethical HR systems on employee outcomes in different organizational settings. Some research suggests that ethical HR practices only influence employee behavior when employees view the manager's sincerity and organizational justice, which means that HR systems may not ensure ethical behaviors (Hu & Jiang, 2018). While some scholars suggest that formal HR policies can lead to symbolic rather than substantive moral results if there are gaps between what the organization says and what managers do (Islam et al., 2021). Caution should also be given to the methodological limitations that many studies are based on cross-sectional self-reported data, which may lead to common method bias and causal ambiguity. Moreover, most previous studies focus on employee-oriented HRM and its association with engagement, performance or environmental behavior, but not employee ethics per se. There is thus a limited amount of evidence that shows Responsible HRM can directly improve the ethical actions of employees in

larger organizations. The inconsistencies point to the need for further investigation of the ethical implications of Responsible HRM, which involves integrated psychological and leadership-based mechanisms. The study suggests that Responsible HRM has a positive impact on employee ethics, given that it is based on Social Learning Theory and previous empirical research.

**H1: Responsible HRM has a significant positive effect on employee ethics.**

The extent to which moral values and ethical principles are incorporated into the self-concept and behavioral orientation is called moral identity. In organizations, moral identity serves as a relevant psychological mechanism that can impact moral judgment, moral awareness, and socially responsible behavior. According to Social Learning Theory, people absorb the moral rules by observing the moral organization environment and the socially reinforced behaviours many times. Thus, HRM practices can help shape the moral identity of employees by consistently fostering values of fairness, respect, ethical responsibility, and employee welfare. If employees perceive supportive HR systems with a moral foundation, they are more likely to perceive that morality is important for the functioning of the organization and in turn integrate ethical values into their personal identity. Previous research



shows that there is a strong link between ethical organizational climate and socially responsible practices and the moral cognition and value internalization of employees (Han et al., 2024). Likewise, Alavi (2024) asserted that moral experiences in organizations have a significant role in shaping internalized moral outlook of employees and leaders. This indicates that the responsible HR system can influence the external action of the employees as well as the internal moral self-concept of the employees.

But there is limited empirical research on the relationship between Responsible HRM and moral identity. Previous research has tended to focus on moral identity as a moderator at the individual level, but not as a psychological outcome shaped by the organization. For example, previous research mainly focuses on moral identity as a boundary condition that enhances the impact of ethical leadership on ethical voice or organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Aktaş et al., 2025; Han et al., 2024). This method fails to take into account the fact that organizational systems can also shape and support the moral identity of employees. In addition, existing empirical research on moral identity is contextually disjointed, with many focusing on leadership actions and overlooking larger HR systems and practices. Some scholars also propose that the moral identity may be more

shaped by personal upbringing and cultural values than by organizational systems, thus there is theoretical uncertainty about the degree of influence of organizational systems on moral cognition (Wang et al., 2017). In methodological aspects, previous studies tend to rely on single-source perceptual data and neglect to analyze the longitudinal moral identity development processes. The current literature, therefore, offers little insight into the question of whether there is a systematic relationship between responsible HR practices and the internal moral identity of employees. This gap needs to be addressed as moral identity could provide a psychological pathway through which Responsible HRM leads to ethical employee outcomes. Therefore, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

**H2: Responsible HRM has a significant positive effect on moral identity.**

The concept of moral identity has become a focus of explanation in the study of employee ethical or unethical workplace behavior. People with high moral identity are likely to see morality as part of their self-construal and then use that as a basis for their choices, judgments and social interactions. Social Learning Theory holds that workers constantly internalize ethical standards that they observe and turn into their own norms of behavior. When moral values are internalized, the moral



behavior of employees is not controlled by others but by themselves. Thus, employees with a higher moral identity are more likely to exhibit socially responsible behaviors, honesty, fairness, and moral voice, as it will enhance their self-consistency and moral self-image. This argument is backed by previous empirical research, which indicates that moral identity positively impacts ethical voice, organizational citizenship behavior, and ethical decision-making (Han et al., 2024; Zheng et al., 2022). Likewise, Wang and Li (2019) reported that the moral identity of employees negatively influenced their tendency to engage in unethical pro-organizational behaviors, as moral self-control would prevent them from doing so even if they were in the organization's best interests. All these findings point towards the idea that moral identity serves as an internal moral compass that guides behavior at work.

However, the conceptual and empirical understanding of moral identity's link to employee ethics is still inconsistent. Although there is a lot of evidence that moral identity is positively related to ethical action, other research suggests that contextual factors, organizational politics, and leadership hypocrisy can weaken the impact of moral identity on behavior. However, some researchers believe that even if employees have a high moral identity, they can still act unethically if the reward systems in the organization are performance-driven or

unethical behaviours are embedded in the culture of the workplace (Shahid et al., 2023). Furthermore, previous studies mostly target at single ethical behaviors (e.g., voice behavior) and/or knowledge hiding, but not employee ethics as a multidimensional phenomenon. Findings are also complicated by cultural and contextual differences, as moral standards and ethical expectations vary from organization to organization and from country to country. Many previous studies have used cross-sectional research designs, which do not allow for causal inferences about the consistent prediction of ethical action by moral identity over time. Furthermore, few studies have investigated moral identity in an integrated organizational system that considers HR systems and leadership characteristics at the same time. The findings indicate that moral identity could be an important direct precursor to employee ethics in ethically structured organizational settings, which warrants additional research. Accordingly, the present study proposes the following hypothesis:

**H3: Moral identity has a significant positive effect on employee ethics.**

The mediating role of moral identity offers an important psychological explanation for the understanding of the process through which Responsible HRM gets transferred to employee ethical behaviours. The ethical framework and expectations within



companies can be created through responsible HR practices, but the employees' reactions might be related to whether the practices affect their internal moral self-concept. Social Learning Theory suggests that people learn moral standards by observing the behaviour of others in the same social environment and that behaviour is strengthened by reinforcement. Fairness, employee welfare, participation and ethical accountability in HRM practices, therefore, may enhance employee's moral identity, which in turn may motivate ethical behaviors. Moral identity is a cognitive and psychological mechanism that helps the process of internalization of external organizational values into internal personal values. Previous research has lent weight to this claim as ethical climates and responsible leadership have been shown to indirectly affect ethical behaviour via psychological processes including ethical efficacy, value internalization and moral cognition (Han et al., 2024; Zheng et al., 2022). Likewise, Wang, et al. (2017) discovered that organizationally-based ethical perceptions positively influence employee moral orientation, which in turn affects ethical outcomes. The results suggest that the ethical organizational system does not necessarily lead to ethical action unless there is psychological internalization of moral values.

Although there is theoretical support for mediation mechanisms, there is still limited and fragmented empirical evidence on the mediation role of moral identity in HR-related ethical relationships. Previous research mainly focuses on mediation models driven by leadership and insufficiently considers the role of HR systems as antecedents of moral identity development. Additionally, in prior studies, other mediators like organizational identification, trust or ethical efficacy are investigated, and moral identity is less studied in Responsible HRM literature (Hu & Jiang, 2018). Some researchers also doubt whether moral identity serves as a stable mediator as employees' moral self-concept might change due to the organizational pressures, leadership inconsistencies, or changes in the ethical climate of the context. Existing evidence is also limited by methodological issues, as many studies use single-wave survey designs, which cannot adequately capture the psychological internalization process of mediation relationships. Moreover, there is little research that has investigated mediation models in developing organizational contexts with ethical systems and HR structures that vary significantly from those in the West. Thus, questions remain whether Responsible HRM mainly works on strengthening the moral identity of the employees to improve their ethics. To fill this gap, it is essential to find out how organizational ethics systems relate



to employees' ethical behaviors through psychological mechanisms. Therefore, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

**H4: Moral identity mediates the relationship between Responsible HRM and employee ethics.**

Leader integrity is one of the most important attributes of a leader, which is the consistency between words, values and actions. Ethical and integrity based leaders are influential role models, they uphold organisational ethical standards through credible and morally consistent behaviour. According to the Social Learning Theory, workers model acceptable behaviour in the workplace when they see their leaders being honest, fair, accountable and consistent in their behaviour. Thus, leader integrity can enhance the effectiveness of Responsible HRM practices as employees are more likely to internalize ethical values of the organization when the leader is in line with the organizational policies. However, when HR systems and leadership practices are not aligned, this can undermine employees' trust in the organization's sincerity and lessen the impact of ethical HR practices on employee ethics. This is supported by previous studies which show that leader integrity has positive effects on ethical conduct, trust and workplace morality through role modeling mechanisms (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2020). Likewise, Aktaş et al. (2025) concluded that leadership

integrity enhances employees' sense of organizational fairness and moral responsibility. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the integrity of the leader is an important contextual factor that affects the effectiveness of the organizational ethical system.

While integrity of the leader has been studied more and more in the literature, its role as a moderator in Responsible HRM – employee ethics relationship has not been sufficiently investigated. The literature mostly examines leader integrity in terms of interpersonal deviance, fairness perceptions and/or psychological contract outcomes (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2020). In addition, previous research has tended to use the terms ethical leadership and leader integrity synonymously, even though there are significant conceptual differences between these two constructs. Ethical leadership is a general term that refers to the ethical influence processes, while leader integrity is a more specific concept that involves consistency in behaviors and moral credibility. This conceptual overlap makes it unclear what the unique moderating role of integrity-based leadership is. Empirical inconsistencies also lie in the fact that some studies indicate that formal ethical systems can affect employee behavior even if the leadership is not good, while others believe that the authenticity of the leader is essential for the success of the organizational ethics system (Shahid

et al., 2023). Many studies have methodological limitations such as homogeneous samples, and lack an examination of interaction effects across diverse organizational contexts. Furthermore, there is little evidence from developing economies where the credibility of leadership and trust in the organization can vary widely from Western settings. These gaps suggest that the issue of leader integrity needs to be explored as to whether or not it enhances the positive relationship between Responsible HRM and employee ethics. Accordingly, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

**H5: Leader integrity moderates the relationship between Responsible HRM and employee ethics.**

## Methodology

A positivist research philosophy is used in the study as the investigation is based on measurable constructs and hypothesis testing between Responsible HRM, moral identity, leader integrity and employee ethics. A positivist approach is suitable for research that focuses on empirical validity, causal explanations, and statistical generalizations based on structured quantitative data (Ghanad, 2023). In line with the above philosophical inclination, the study adopts a deductive approach to research where hypotheses are drawn from the Social Learning Theory and existing empirical studies. The deductive method is used in theory

verification to determine if there are relationships between variables in the selected organizational context that were predicted by the theory. This is appropriate since the study aims to test the predefined hypotheses and theory assumptions in mediation and moderation effects by using structure analytical procedures.

The study has a quantitative and explanatory research design, as it wants to investigate the causal relationships between multiple constructs in an empirical way within a theoretically grounded framework. These explanatory designs are suitable for studies that involve testing for direct, mediating, and moderating relationships in large groups of respondents (Ghanad, 2023). Moreover, the study is conducted using a survey research approach since surveys are an efficient method of obtaining standardized responses from employees in different organizations, and they are comparable and statistically reliable. The use of structured questionnaires enables the measurement of latent constructs by means of validated scales and the use of multivariate analysis procedures. The study is of a cross-sectional time horizon, where data is gathered at one point in time. Cross-sectional designs are the most common type of design used in organizational and behavioral research as they are practical and efficient in measuring theoretical relationships given the

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limitations of resources and time (Maier et al., 2023). While longitudinal designs offer better causal conclusions, the cross-sectional design is still suitable for the study of employees' perceptions, ethical attitudes and behavioral tendencies in present-day organizations.

The target population are employees who work in medium and large organizations in which formal HR systems and leadership structures are operationalized. The sampling technique used is non-probability purposive sampling technique due to the fact that the respondents are chosen based on their organizational experiences and their ability to assess HR practices, integrity of the leadership and ethical behavior. Sample size is based on guidelines for PLS-SEM analysis with a sufficient statistical power for testing mediation and moderation (Henseler & Schubert, 2022). Data are gathered using self-administered structured questionnaires that are physically and electronically sent after gaining permission from the organization and informed consent from respondents. To reduce response bias and ethical issues, confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation are maintained during the data collection process. All constructs are measured with multi-item scales previously validated and with some minor wording refinements to make them contextually appropriate. Four constructs namely responsible HRM,

moral identity, leader integrity and employee ethics are operationalized on five-point Likert scales from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Questionnaire items are based on existing ethical leadership, HRM and moral identity literature to ensure content validity and construct reliability. Before the instrument is used on a large scale, it is expert reviewed and pilot tested for clarity, uniformity of wording and appropriateness of measurement. SmartPLS 4 is used for data analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) which is suitable for analyzing complex predictive models that include mediation and moderation effects at the same time (Cheah et al., 2024). PLS-SEM has the advantage of being able to effectively deal with latent constructs, prediction-oriented models, and non-normal data distributions, and providing robust evaluation of measurement models and structural models (Fauzi, 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2024; Schubert et al., 2023).

## Data analysis

### Data Screening and Cleaning

Before conducting the main statistical analyses, the dataset was screened and cleaned using SPSS to ensure data accuracy, consistency, and suitability for multivariate analysis. Missing values were minimal and treated using mean substitution because the proportion of missing responses remained below the



recommended threshold of 5% (Ghanad, 2023). Multivariate outliers were assessed through Mahalanobis distance, while skewness and kurtosis values confirmed acceptable normality ranges. Multicollinearity was examined using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, all of which remained below the threshold of 5. Common method bias was assessed through Harman’s single-

factor test, where the first factor explained less than 50% of total variance, indicating that common method variance was not a significant concern. All questionnaire responses were coded systematically before analysis to maintain statistical consistency and analytical rigor.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	268	58.6
	Female	189	41.4
Age	21-30 Years	146	31.9
	31-40 Years	188	41.1
	41-50 Years	92	20.1
	Above 50 Years	31	6.9
Education	Bachelor’s Degree	181	39.6
	Master’s Degree	213	46.6
	MS/MPhil/PhD	63	13.8
Experience	Less than 5 Years	118	25.8
	5-10 Years	201	44.0
	Above 10 Years	138	30.2
Industry/Sector	Manufacturing	177	38.7
	Services	146	31.9
	Education	79	17.3
	Others	55	12.1
Position/Role	Supervisory Staff	196	42.9
	Middle Management	171	37.4
	Senior Management	90	19.7

The demographic results show that the sample was a diverse organizational workforce, both in terms of sectors and managerial levels. The proportion of males was relatively high in comparison to females, but the participation of females was also good, which increased representativeness. The majority of the respondents were in the 31-40 age

group and had master's level education, indicating that the respondents were mature and professionally qualified enough to assess the HR practices in the organizations, integrity of leadership and ethical behavior. Also, most of the respondents had more than 5 years of organizational experience, which means that they are familiar with the



organizational systems and workplace ethics. The diversity of the context was expanded by the presence of manufacturing, service and education employees, increasing the generalizability of the findings. This

distribution of age fits with the suggestions for behavioral and organizational studies that focus on heterogeneous samples in order to enhance the analytical validity and external applicability (Ghanad, 2023).

**Table 2: Reliability Analysis and Correlation Matrix**

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	1	2	3	4
1. Responsible HRM	0.914	1			
2. Moral Identity	0.901	.612**	1		
3. Leader Integrity	0.887	.538**	.491**	1	
4. Employee Ethics	0.928	.684**	.647**	.589**	1

Note:  $p < .01$ .

The reliability analysis showed that all the constructs had good internal consistency with Cronbach's Alpha values above the critical value of 0.70, which is recommended for good scale reliability and measurement stability. The reliability coefficient of the items in the Employee Ethics scale was the highest ( $\alpha = .928$ ) followed by the Responsible HRM scale ( $\alpha = .914$ ), indicating that the items in these scales were highly consistent. The correlation matrix also showed that all the variables of the study were positively and statistically significant. Responsible HRM had a strong positive relationship with Employee Ethics ( $r = .684, p < .01$ ), which is consistent with the theory that ethical HR systems are positively associated with ethical behavior in the workplace. In a similar manner, there was a significant positive correlation between Moral Identity and Employee Ethics ( $r = .647, p < .01$ ) which further highlighted the role of internalized

moral values in predicting ethical behavior. Multi-collinearity was not a serious problem as there were no excessively high inter-correlations, supporting the suitability of the data for SEM analysis (Henseler & Schubert, 2022).

**Measurement Model Assessment**

The measurement model was assessed using SmartPLS 4 to examine indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity. Following established PLS-SEM guidelines, outer loadings above 0.70 confirmed indicator reliability, while Cronbach's Alpha,  $\rho_A$ , and Composite Reliability values above 0.70 demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency reliability (Fauzi, 2022). Convergent validity was assessed through Average Variance Extracted (AVE), where values exceeding 0.50 confirmed adequate shared variance among construct indicators. These



procedures ensured that the latent and consistently before testing constructs were measured accurately structural relationships.

**Table 3: Measurement Model Results**

Construct	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Responsible HRM	0.742 - 0.891	0.914	0.918	0.929	0.687
Moral Identity	0.731 - 0.884	0.901	0.905	0.919	0.654
Leader Integrity	0.719 - 0.872	0.887	0.891	0.911	0.632
Employee Ethics	0.756 - 0.903	0.928	0.931	0.940	0.701

The results of the measurement model showed that all constructs had satisfactory psychometric properties. The outer loading values were between 0.719 and 0.903, which were all above the recommended value, suggesting good indicator reliability. Likewise, all constructs' Cronbach's Alpha, rho\_A and Composite Reliability values exceeded 0.70, indicating that the measurement items were internally consistent and that they consistently measured their respective latent variables. Moreover, the AVE values were between 0.632 and 0.701, which is higher than the recommended minimum value of 0.50, thus supporting

convergent validity. These results suggest that the constructs accounted for a significant amount of variance in their indicators compared to the variance due to measurement error. The measurement model was found to be adequate given the high reliability and validity statistics and the study proceeded with the next steps of discriminant validity and structural model evaluation. These results are in line with the methodological suggestions that have been recently put forward, which highlight the need for careful examination of reliability and validity in PLS-SEM studies (Ayu et al., 2024; Hair et al., 2025).

**Table 4: Discriminant Validity**

Constructs	1	2	3	4	HTMT
1. Responsible HRM	0.829				
2. Moral Identity	0.612	0.809			0.731
3. Leader Integrity	0.538	0.491	0.795		0.682
4. Employee Ethics	0.684	0.647	0.589	0.837	0.791

The discriminant validity assessment confirmed that all constructs were empirically distinct from one another.

According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its correlations



with other constructs, indicating adequate discriminant validity. Additionally, HTMT values remained below the recommended threshold of 0.85, further supporting construct distinctiveness and reducing concerns regarding conceptual overlap among variables (Rosli et al., 2024). These findings suggest that Responsible HRM, Moral Identity, Leader Integrity, and Employee Ethics represent theoretically and statistically separate constructs

despite their positive interrelationships. Establishing discriminant validity is particularly important in behavioral research because conceptually related constructs often exhibit overlapping variance. The results therefore strengthen the overall measurement quality and confirm that subsequent structural model findings are unlikely to be inflated due to construct redundancy or multicollinearity issues.

**Table 5: Structural Model Results and Hypothesis Testing**

Hypotheses	Path	Beta (β)	T-value	P-value	95% Confidence Interval	Decision
H1	Responsible HRM → Employee Ethics	0.421	8.714	0.000	[0.327, 0.518]	Supported
H2	Responsible HRM → Moral Identity	0.612	13.847	0.000	[0.528, 0.689]	Supported
H3	Moral Identity → Employee Ethics	0.291	5.973	0.000	[0.192, 0.384]	Supported
H4	Responsible HRM → Moral Identity → Employee Ethics	0.178	4.826	0.000	[0.116, 0.247]	Supported
H5	Leader Integrity × Responsible HRM → Employee Ethics	0.163	3.994	0.000	[0.084, 0.231]	Supported

The structural model results provided strong empirical support for all proposed hypotheses. Responsible HRM exerted a significant positive effect on Employee Ethics ( $\beta = 0.421, p < .001$ ), indicating that ethical and employee-oriented HR practices

substantially improve ethical workplace behavior. Similarly, Responsible HRM significantly influenced Moral Identity ( $\beta = 0.612, p < .001$ ), supporting the argument that ethical organizational systems contribute to employees' internal moral self-concept. Moral



Identity also positively predicted Employee Ethics ( $\beta = 0.291, p < .001$ ), confirming its role as an important psychological determinant of ethical behavior. The mediation analysis demonstrated that Moral Identity significantly mediated the relationship between Responsible HRM and Employee Ethics, indicating that employees internalize ethical HR practices through moral self-regulation mechanisms. Furthermore, Leader Integrity significantly moderated the relationship between Responsible HRM and Employee Ethics, suggesting that ethical HR systems become more effective when leaders demonstrate strong moral consistency and integrity. These findings align with Social Learning Theory and recent PLS-SEM research emphasizing the combined influence of organizational systems, psychological mechanisms, and leadership behavior on employee outcomes (Fauzi, 2022; Sani et al., 2023).

## Discussion, implications and Future directions

The main objective of this study was to understand the effect of Responsible HRM on employee ethics, and to explore the mediating role of moral identity and the moderating role of leader integrity. The results show that ethical and employee-oriented HR practices have a direct and indirect (via employees' internal moral identity) significant effect on ethical behavior in the workplace. Moreover, Responsible

HRM was more effective when leaders were highly integrity and moral in nature. Together, the results support the view that organizational ethics is not merely the formal system nor the individual employee's morality in isolation, but rather is the result of the interplay of organizational practices, psychological internalization and ethical leadership processes.

The findings indicate that Responsible HRM is positively related to employee ethics, indicating that ethical HR practices are seen as signals from the organization that they are fair, accountable and have moral expectations. If HR systems always encourage the welfare, participation, transparency and responsible treatment of employees, they will be more inclined to return the favor by acting ethically and complying with the rules. This discovery is very consistent with the Social Learning Theory that states that workers can observe organizational norms and socially reinforced behaviour and learn what is acceptable. Thus, Responsible HRM is not just a system of administration, but an ethical learning system that influences the behavioral orientation of the employees. The discovery also indicates that ethical behavior is reinforced if employees feel there is congruence between organizational policies and treatment in the workplace. This consistency minimizes the ethical confusion and enhances employees' psychological

commitment to organizational values. This finding aligns with previous studies suggesting that employee-focused and socially responsible HR practices can foster ethical and citizenship attitudes and behaviors by providing a morally supportive work environment (Hu & Jiang, 2018; Zhao & Zhou, 2021).

The results also show that Responsible HRM positively affects moral identity, suggesting that systems in the organization have a strong impact on employees' internal moral self-concept. This finding has theoretical significance as moral identity has often been considered as a rather stable personal attribute instead of an entity that can be formed by organizational experiences. The present results indicate that the moral values are internalized by the employees as they are exposed to the ethical practices of the organization and the socially responsible HR systems. Ethical HR practices can thus promote the perception of morality as an integral part of employees' personal identity, and this can then inform their behavior at work. This finding adds to the Social Learning Theory by providing an example of how ethical learning processes can go beyond mere modeling to psychological internalization. The finding also suggests that organizations have more influence than has been thought on employees' moral cognition. This aligns with recent research highlighting the importance of ethical

climates and responsible organizational systems in the internalization of values and moral awareness by employees (Han et al., 2024; Alavi, 2024).

Likewise, the positive correlation between moral identity and employee's ethics validates that employees with high moral identity are more likely to act ethically in the workplace. Those with high levels of moral identity seem to self-govern by internal moral standards, as opposed to just external monitoring or formal organizational controls. The above finding suggests that employees' moral self-regulation mechanisms are also the mechanisms that sustain the ethical behavior besides policies and supervision. Theoretically, the finding supports the notion that moral identity serves as an internal moral compass for making decisions in the workplace and behaving interpersonally. The discovery also indicates that, when morality is part of employees' self-concept, it is more likely to be consistent and sincere. This is consistent with previous research which found that moral identity is positively linked to moral voice, organizational citizenship behavior and resistance to unethical behavior (Wang & Li, 2019; Zheng et al., 2022). However, the present results offer a wider perspective by embedding moral identity in a comprehensive HRM and leadership perspective, as opposed to a stand-alone psychological construct.



Further, moral identity plays a mediating role to explain the psychological process by which Responsible HRM impacts employee ethics. The results show that even a good HR system does not necessarily lead to ethical action if employees are not psychologically internalized the moral values of their organizations. This mediation effect shows that responsible HR practice influences employee ethics through enhancing employees' moral self-concept, which in turn, affects their ethical decision making and behavior in the workplace. This kind of results offers a more sophisticated explanation of ethical organizational behaviours, combining organizational systems and internal psychological processes. Past studies have often focused on the direct impacts of ethical leadership or HR practices and have been limited in their consideration of how the organization's ethics are internalized by employees. The current results thus help in understanding how some moral systems are successful in influencing employee behavior, whereas others are symbolic or ineffective. The results also align with previous arguments that the internalization of values and ethical climates are crucial for the connection between organizational ethics and employee behavior (Han et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2017).

The moderating effect of leader integrity shows that the effectiveness of Responsible HRM can be enhanced

when the leaders are consistent, honest and credible in their moral actions. This result indicates that organizational ethics is also assessed by employees by observing the behavior of management. Consistency between leader's behaviour and the ethical values of the organization leads to greater trust in the intentions of the organization and enhances the internalization of ethical expectations. Conversely, when HR practices and managerial behavior are inconsistent, it can undermine employee trust in the organization's authenticity and hinder the success of ethical programs. Thus, the findings further underscore the need for alignment of organizational structure and managerial style. A Social Learning Theory approach sees leaders as role models, whose actions validate organizational ethics. This finding aligns with previous research which underscored the importance of leadership integrity in fostering ethical climates, perceptions of fairness and ethical conduct through the creation of trust and moral credibility in the organization (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2020; Aktaş et al., 2025). The present study, however, is an extension of the previous literature as it specifically shows that leader integrity enhances the impact of Responsible HRM on employee ethics.

The results corroborate the literature which has focused on the importance of ethical leadership, responsible HR systems, and moral cognition in the

development of ethical behaviors in the workplace. Previous research has consistently found that ethical organizational climate is positively related to ethical voice, organizational citizenship behavior, and socially responsible employee behaviors (Islam et al., 2021; Saleem et al., 2020). The present study corroborates these findings and further adds to them by having a more comprehensive framework of Responsible HRM, moral identity and leader integrity all at once. However, there are some earlier researches that found mixed results about the effectiveness of formal ethical systems because they argued that employees may feel that organizational ethics programs are symbolic if they are not authentic in their behaviour or when they are under more pressure to perform than to be ethical (Shahid et al., 2023). The present results partly explain these inconsistencies by showing that the effectiveness of Responsible HRM is enhanced by leader integrity, which could account for the varying results of ethical HR systems in different types of organizations. There are also inconsistencies in previous literature, which may be attributed to contextual differences since there are significant variations between cultures and institutional settings regarding ethical expectations, leadership credibility, and organizational trust.

The study offers a number of important theoretical implications. First, it

expands the Social Learning Theory by showing that ethical learning in organizations is a process of interconnected organizational, psychological and leadership processes and not merely a process of simple behavioral imitation. Second, the results conceptually extend the role of moral identity to be a psychological mechanism that is influenced by the organization, not just an individual attribute. Thirdly, this study adds to the ethical HRM literature by combining Responsible HRM, moral identity, leader integrity and employee ethics under one roof. This holistic approach contrasts with previous literature, which tended to focus on examining HR systems, leadership behavior and employee morality in isolation. Lastly, the moderating effect of leader integrity adds to theory in terms of the contextual factors that make ethical HR systems more effective at affecting employee behaviors.

The results also provide significant practical implications for organizations, managers and policy makers. It is important for organizations to understand that policies for compliance or formal codes of conduct are not sufficient to build a culture of ethics; rather, a responsible HR system that focuses on employee welfare, fairness, transparency, and moral accountability is crucial. HR managers need to integrate the ethics into the recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and



reward system to enhance the moral awareness and ethical behavior of employees. Moreover, leadership development initiatives need to focus on integrity, consistency of values and ethical role modeling, as the credibility of leaders can have a strong impact on the effectiveness of the ethical systems in the organization. Policymakers and organizational regulators can also incentivize organizations to embed ethical HR principles within other sustainability and governance frameworks. These strategic initiatives can help build trust within the organization, minimize unethical acts and help to make the organization more sustainable.

The study has a number of limitations. First, the cross-sectional design does not allow causal relationships to be inferred, as employee perceptions and ethical behavior were assessed at one point in time. Secondly, the study used self-reported data and although common method variance was controlled, it may have been possible to have social desirability bias in the data. Third, the results came from a restricted organizational setting, and this may impact the generalizability of the results in different industries and cultural settings. Future studies are needed that use longitudinal and multi-source research designs to enhance causal inferences and minimize perceptual bias. Furthermore, future research can focus on other mediators and moderators,

including ethical climate, organizational trust, psychological safety, and cultural values, to gain more insight into ethical behavior in the organization in different contexts.

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