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Is Unethical Leadership a Negative for Employees' Personal Growth and Intention to Stay?: The Buffering Role of Responsibility Climate

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Abstract

Various forms of unethical leadership are associated with a wide range of negative outcomes, including decreases in subordinates' intention to stay, which is associated with higher turnover, among other negative organizational outcomes. Since the strength of the association between unethical leadership and intent to stay is variable, we examined personal growth satisfaction as a mediator and responsibility climate as a moderator of the relationship. In a Spain-based sample of 150 employees, we found as anticipated, that personal growth satisfaction mediated the negative impact of unethical supervision on intention to stay. In terms of moderation, also as expected, high (versus low) responsibility climate weakened the negative relationship between unethical leadership and subordinates' personal growth satisfaction, as well as the indirect negative impact of unethical leadership on subordinates' intention to stay. Importantly, since unethical leadership is difficult to eliminate totally, our findings are significant because they suggest several ways to minimize its negative effects.

Introduction

Leadership has been vastly studied during decades and much has been learned on its impact on organizational and individual outcomes (Zhao and Li, 2019). Despite such wealth of research, yet there remains much left to understand about the nature of leadership variables that synergize to produce effective outcomes. Though a wide range of leadership approaches are described in literature, in terms of commonalities among them, Yukl (2006, p. 3) noted that leadership typically involves "a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group and organization."

Given that the average employee in Europe spends more than 1,500 hours at work annually (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2020), *the manner* with which leaders attempt to influence others has important implications on their job response. Some approaches, such as ethical leadership (e.g., Bedi *et al*., 2016) emphasize the ethical responsibilities persons in such roles have to the community, the organization, and especially to their subordinates (Tourigny *et al*., 2019). Nonetheless, there are many forms of unethical leadership that involve practices (e.g., telling lies, demeaning subordinates, promoting discord among employees) that violate moral standards and potentially foster many negative work outcomes among the subordinates (Den Hartog, 2015; Mackey *et al*., 2020). Examples include leadership that is abusive (Tepper, 2007), toxic (Gallus *et al*., 2013; Pelletier, 2010) and destructive (Schyns and Schilling, 2013). Not surprisingly, approaches emphasizing ethical responsibilities (e.g., ethical leadership, Bedi *et al*., 2016), are positively linked to a wide range of positive outcomes including subordinates' intention to stay. In contrast, unethical leadership, perceived as destructive, is a negative for many work outcomes, including subordinates' turnover intentions (Schyns and Schilling, 2013; Mackey *et al*., 2020).

The intention to quit/to stay is an issue of great interest among researchers. The high costs associated with turnover (e.g., Sandhya and Sulphey, 2020), have driven researchers to investigate its antecedents during decades (e.g., Griffeth *et al*., 2000). One of the earliest explanations is March and Simon's (1958) for whom perceived desirability (job satisfaction) and ease of movement (job alternatives) are key antecedents. Also, of great interest is Michell *et al*.'s (2001), that introduces the job embeddedness concept (i.e., a net of influences and connections that make one become stuck to an organization) and emphasizes that both on- and off-the job forces make employees become stuck to a particular organization. These forces include the *links* to formal or informal connections to the environment (work or non-work friends), the *fit* with one's organization or the surrounding environment, and the perceived *sacrifice* (material or psychological benefits that may be forfeited) for quitting the organization.

Rooted in these both theoretical approaches (March and Simon, 1958; Mitchell *et al*., 2001) having a great leader is not only desirable but also a benefit that one may not be willing to forfeit, and that may make one be more willing to stay. In fact, employees are more likely to intent to stay under the presence of supervisors who are, for example, transformational (i.e., who convey idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration) (Bycio *et al*., 1995; Sun and Wang, 2016) or paternalistic (i.e., who combinedly uses authoritarianism, morality and benevolence) (Pellegrini and Scandura, 2008). Analogously, we can think that the opposite can be true, and that the presence of unethical leaders could be neither desirable nor a force that makes employees be more likely to stay. In fact, previous research has suggested that pseudo-transformational leaders (i.e., characterized by being egoistic and unethical) may have negative effects on turnover intentions (Syed *et al*., 2020) or that the authoritarianism dimension of paternalistic leaders –associated with exploitation, Kiazad *et al*., 2010)– can be negatively linked to subordinates' intention to stay (Liao *et al*., 2017). Thus, the ethical nature of the leadership exercised, which is the

characteristic subordinates look forward most from their leaders (Kouzes and Posner, 2002), could be a superior aspect to predict their intention to stay, and investigating how unethical leaders can hamper this decision may help advance the current understanding on this question.

Although meta-analytic reviews reveal that exposure to various forms of unethical leadership increases the likelihood that subordinates will seriously consider quitting, there is unaccounted for *variation* in the strength of the association (Schyns and Schilling, 2013). Since the intent to leave/stay is the single best predictor of employee actual turnover (Griffeth *et al.*, 2000; Hom *et al.*, 2012), even small changes in this regard can have important practical implications. Turnover is costly and disruptive to organizations in so many ways (Andresen *et al.*, 2018; Griffeth *et al.*, 2000; Rao and Argote, 2006) including losses in productivity, employee skills and talent, combined with subsequent increases in hiring and training costs, and disruption in established employee social networks (Demircioglu and Berman, 2019; Ghosh *et al.*, 2013). Beyond the cost considerations, efforts to enhance the intention to stay among the employees are important because these also typically have positive implications for various forms of commitment and engagement with the organization (Babakus *et al.*, 2017; Cohen and Golan, 2007) which may, in turn, account for both employee (Harrison *et al.*, 2006; Marescaux *et al.*, 2019) and unit-level performance (Fulmer *et al.*, 2003). In all, there is much to be gained by increasing our understanding of the mechanisms that underlie and/or buffer the negative impact of unethical leadership on the subordinates' intention to stay.

One mechanism that may underlie this relationship is job satisfaction. Very few studies have assessed this possibility (e.g., Palansky *et al.*, 2014), yet none has addressed this role for its multiple facets (e.g., pay, supervisors, coworkers). Of the numerous job satisfaction facets that have proved to foster intention to stay (Griffeth *et al.*, 2000), personal growth has not yet been explored. This is surprising as personal growth is one of the highest needs to be met, whose fulfillment is clearly important to experience authentic well-being (Pritchard *et al.*,

2020), including job satisfaction (Lee *et al*., 2017). In terms of potential buffers of this relationship, recent findings have shed light on the role of individual (i.e., emotional intelligence, Pradham and Jena, 2018a; gender, Pradham *et al*., 2018) and job-related factors (i.e., work meaningfulness, coworker support, Pradham and Jena, 2017, 2018b). Yet the buffering role of broader organizational variables has not been analyzed. However, the principal role of these variables in imbuing job-related factors (e.g., work meaningfulness, Walumbwa *et al*., 2019) suggests they may have a promising buffering role. In particular, a climate that fosters the sense of ownership in work activities (i.e., responsibility climate) may be relevant, given that such sense of ownership is linked to work meaningfulness experiences (Zheng *et al*., 2020).

The primary goal of this research is therefore to better understand the nature of the association between unethical leadership and follower intention to stay by developing and testing a moderated mediation model that encompasses personal growth satisfaction as a mediator, and the organization-based responsibility climate as a moderator. Specifically, we evaluate the extent to which responsibility climate can alleviate the negative indirect effect of unethical leadership on the intent to stay, through personal growth satisfaction. We see unethical leadership as being a negative for subordinates' personal growth satisfaction (i.e., the degree of satisfaction the job provides in terms of growth, challenge and sense of accomplishment; Oldham and Hackman, 2005) that filters through to impact the intention to stay. In terms of moderation, we examine the impact of responsibility climate, which is not under the direct control of supervisors. It refers to the extent to which employees feel responsible for their own job and have the authority to solve their problems, without the need to check with their supervisors (Ahmad *et al*., 2018; Carr *et al*., 2003; Litwin and Stringer, 1968). It is also a likely source of job autonomy, which enhances job satisfaction (Velez and Neves, 2017; Zangaro and Soeken, 2007) including the personal growth that the job offers and

may strengthen employees' intent to stay (Kovner *et al*., 2009). That is, responsibility climate, fostered by top management, acts as both a neutralizer (Kerr and Jermier, 1978) and an important resource (Demerouti *et al*., 2001) to both weaken the negative impact of unethical leadership on personal growth satisfaction, and ultimately, decrease its negative impact on subordinates' intent to stay. Thus, with our study we aim to identify new potential neutralizers and helpful resources that help avoid the negative effects of unethical leadership of supervisors in the workplace. Given that the total eradication of unethical leadership is a difficult endeavor (Abbajay, 2018; Harvey *et al*., 2007), the identification of neutralizers and helpful resources is an important undertaking that advances literature. Whereas Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara and Viera-Armas (2019) found "lack of autonomy" as a reason for why dishonest leadership could reduce firm performance, no studies have evaluated if high doses of control over the work could help neutralize such negative effect. With this study we advance this specific issue and offer ways to reduce the negative effect of unethical leadership on a valuable outcome such as intent to stay, that likely underlie individual and firm-level performance (Nuhn *et al*., 2019).

Organizational responsibility climate – which informs and encourages autonomous decision making related to the work – (Ahmad *et al*., 2018; Carr *et al*., 2003; Litwin and Stringer, 1968) is a factor that could weaken the impact of unethical leadership on the employee's intent to stay. The potential importance of responsibility climate in this regard is reflected in recent findings indicating that the perceived lack of control over work is a crucial mechanism underlying the negative effect of dishonest leadership on firm performance (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara and Viera-Armas, 2019), a firm outcome that can be affected by intent to stay (Nuhn *et al*., 2019). In particular, we expect this climate may buffer the negative impact of unethical leadership on employees' intention to stay, by increasing subordinates' personal growth satisfaction. Both the substitutes for leadership perspective (Kerr and Jermier, 1978) and Demerouti *et al*.'s (2001) JD-R theory support these expectations. Kerr and Jermier

(1978) contend that some situational aspects can influence – and even replace – the (negative) impact of the leader's behavior on positive employee outcomes, while JD-R theory (Demerouti *et al*., 2001) posits that positive outcomes, such as the intention to stay, result from the combined interaction of job demands (e.g., aspects of the job that require sustained physical and psychological effort) and job resources (e.g., aspects of the job that help to cope with job demands, to promote striving to accomplish work objectives and stimulate personal development). Thus, while unethical leadership could be considered a job demand that depletes employees' resources and energy (Velez and Neves, 2016), the perception that the organization encourages autonomous decision making via responsibility climate could lessen employees' vulnerability to the negative effects of unethical leadership by providing an avenue for personal growth satisfaction resulting in a positive reason to stay. Our overall research model is presented in Figure 1, which we now detail.

Figure 1. About here.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Leadership and subordinates' intention to stay

Although there are many factors associated with employees' intention to stay/leave their organizations (e.g., organization-wide, immediate work environment-related, job-related, and personal-related; Ghosh *et al*., 2013; Griffeth *et al*., 2000), most of them (in)directly relate to leadership practices (Haque *et al*., 2019), including the leadership style and the quality of leader-follower interactions (Waldman *et al*., 2015; Wells and Peachey, 2011; Yildiz, 2018). For example, the extent to which employees believe they receive fair treatment in the organization, something over which supervisors have a great control, is an important driver in the extent to which employees intend to search for alternative employment (Askun *et al*., 2018).

7

As we now discuss, unethical leadership has negative implications for both fairness and the quality of the leader-follower relationship, such that subordinates' intent to stay should be negatively affected.

As noted from the outset, just as there are various forms of ethical leadership with different areas of emphasis, the same can be said for unethical leadership (Den Hartog, 2015). In looking for common ground across a wide range of leadership concepts characterized as unethical (e.g., abusive supervision, destructive leadership, and toxic leadership), Schyns and Schilling (2013) highlighted the role of leader influence processes perceived by subordinates as hostile and/or obstructive. Notably, it is difficult to fully appreciate the impact of these and related forms of leadership apart from specific instances reported in qualitative studies. For example, from Pelletier (2010), unethical leadership includes influence attempts based on: (a) threats to job security, "do what I want or I will make life hard for you" (p. 381); (b) attacks to followers' self-worth, ''You make me want to throw up. How could you possibly think your idea could work?" (p. 379) and (c) physical aggression, "She threw a stapler at my head" (p. 381). Also, in a case involving multiple employee suicides at Orange SA, the then chief executive officer, referring to a group of employees who could not legally be fired said, "I'll ensure that people leave through the window or through the door" (Kostov, 2019, p. B3). In view of these examples, it is not surprising that some argue that even isolated instances of unethical leadership have the potential to be much *more* influential than instances of ethical leadership. Palanski *et al.* (2014), for example, argue that since people tend to expect to be treated reasonably as a matter of course, the negative emotions associated with the experience of unethical leadership can easily be more memorable and impactful.

All the forms of unethical leadership fail to meet the job-related needs of subordinates (e.g., respect, honesty, security, fairness), robbing them of personal dignity (Hodson, 2001; Sturm and Dellert, 2016) and opportunities to flourish. They can also contribute to various

types of emotional distress (Mackey *et al*., 2017), create inequities in the workplace (Pelletier, 2010), and ultimately cause employees to question their abilities and experience, likely resulting in a lower self-esteem (Harvey *et al*., 2007; Schyns and Schilling, 2013). In total, these are conditions some consider a breach of basic human rights (Lipman-Blumen, 2006) in which life satisfaction is impaired (Wong, 2012). As a group, these mechanisms likely result in a strong desire to search for alternative employment contexts that are more supportive of self-worth and human dignity. Indeed, the basic psychological needs for competence (i.e., opportunities to exercise one's abilities), and autonomy (i.e., possibilities to initiate action oneself) (Deci and Ryan, 2000) are less likely to be met in workplaces led by unethical managers. Unmet basic needs (e.g., security, control over things, being treated fairly), in turn, are likely to be a drain on subordinates and a cause of stress (Padilla *et al*., 2007; Park *et al*., 2018; Pelletier, 2010), that ultimately is a negative for their intent to stay (McKnight *et al*., 2009). Thus, it is not surprising that the various forms of unethical leadership are associated with the intent to leave (e.g., Labrague *et al*., 2020; Schyns and Schilling, 2013).

To fully appreciate the negative impact of *unethical* leadership on employees' intention to stay, it is helpful to consider the beneficial role of *ethical* leadership. For example, ethical leadership (Brown *et al*., 2005) is based on rational moral principles in which leaders are encouraged to treat subordinates in an honest and fair manner, as well as being concerned about their authentic interests. Many other "positive" leadership styles involve an authentic interest in meeting subordinates' needs in the daily work practice (i.e., servant, Eva *et al*., 2019; spiritual, Fry and Altman, 2013; virtuous, Wang and Hackett, 2016). Thus, practicing ethical leadership is consistent with being committed to subordinates' needs and well-being (Bedi *et al*., 2016), which have clear positive implications for these subordinates' intention to stay.

Consistent with previous findings (Schyns and Schilling, 2013), we expect an overall negative relationship between unethical leadership and subordinates' intention to stay, even

though our sample is from Spain, which is poorly represented in this literature (e.g., see Table 3, p. 1,953; Mackey *et al*., 2017). The qualification involving Spain per se, is that this country has a national culture characterized by high power distance, meaning that employees are relatively accepting of the unequal distribution of power (Hofstede, 2020). Since subordinates in high power distance cultures may be more tolerant of the abuse of power, which is central to the practice of unethical leadership, this could weaken its negative effect on followers' well-being (Lin *et al*., 2013) and in turn, on subordinates' intention to stay (Siu *et al*., 2015). Nonetheless, the theory we presented combined with existing research (Schyns and Schilling, 2013) suggest a negative relationship. Thus,

H1: Unethical leadership will be negatively associated with subordinates' intention to stay.

Unethical leadership and intention to stay: Personal growth satisfaction as a mediator

As explained above, leadership is expected to be a crucial contributor to subordinates' stay/leave intentions. Still, variables involving the design of the job, including the personal growth opportunities perceived to be associated with the job (Hackman and Oldham, 1980), are also expected to be involved. Specifically, we contend that one of the ways in which unethical leadership negatively impacts intention to stay is by hampering the extent to which personal growth can be experienced. Support for this expectation requires a negative link between unethical leadership and personal growth satisfaction combined with a positive link between growth satisfaction and the intent to stay.

Even when the job itself is designed to offer opportunities for personal growth (Hackman and Oldham, 1980), these can be hampered by unethical leaders. In contrast to ethical leaders who care for the professional development of their followers by devoting energy to address their specific growth needs (Bedi *et al*., 2016), subordinates' needs for personal growth and

10

empowerment are not a priority for unethical leaders (Lyu *et al*., 2019, Pelletier, 2010). Also, rather than building self-efficacy as is the case with ethical leadership (Bedi *et al*., 2016), unethical leaders use various means to attack subordinates' self-worth (Pelletier, 2010; Schyns and Schilling, 2013). Moreover, ethical leaders provide followers with fair, honest and respectful working conditions, communicate the value of ethical behavior at work and let them know how their work is linked to broader, ethical values to provide meaning and purpose for them (Demirtas *et al*., 2017). However, unethical leadership is associated with work alienation (Schyns and Schilling, 2013), that is, a lack of meaningfulness or a deficit of sense of greater purpose (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara and Viera-Armas, 2019). Finally, in contrast to the virtues showed in their relationships with others (e.g., fairness, honesty, trustworthiness), through which ethical leaders help followers to feel less insecure (Loi *et al*., 2012), unethical leaders employ various kinds of threats to job security as a means of influence (e.g., Pelletier, 2010; Schyns and Schilling, 2013). In all, we anticipate that exposure to unethical leadership will be a negative for personal growth satisfaction.

Support for our mediation-based hypothesis also requires that personal growth satisfaction be positively related to subordinates' intent to stay. From a theoretical perspective, this is expected because matters such as personal growth (Ghosh *et al*., 2013) and autonomy (McKnight *et al*., 2009) are basic psychological needs that, when satisfied, provide a reason for staying with an employer. In terms of empirical evidence, personal growth satisfaction is a component of overall job satisfaction (Lee *et al*., 2017; Oldham and Hackman, 2005), which is a well-established predictor of intent to stay (Calisir *et al*., 2011; Griffeth *et al*., 2000). Relatedly, personal growth satisfaction is negatively associated with turnover intention (Lee *et al*., 2017). Thus, as shown in Figure 1,

> **H2**: The negative relationship between unethical leadership and subordinates' intent to
> stay will be mediated by their job-related personal growth satisfaction.

Perceived responsibility climate as a buffer of the effects of unethical leadership

As reflected in our areas of emphasis to this point, there are many ways in which supervisory leadership impacts subordinates' intention to stay; still, supervisors are not the only source of influence. *Organizational-level* variables compete with those at the individual level to affect a wide range of outcomes including those associated with unethical leadership (Kusy and Holloway, 2009). An organizational variable of interest here, as a reflection of the practices and procedures associated with the upper echelons (Katz and Khan, 1966), is organizational climate, i.e., employees' perceptions of the overall environment that inform the attitudes and behaviors that are rewarded, supported, and expected by the employer (Carr *et al*., 2003; Reichers and Schneider, 1990). Climate influences a wide variety of individual-level outcomes, including satisfaction at work (Ahmad *et al*., 2018; Carr *et al*., 2003; Koh and Boo, 2001), and subordinates' intention to stay (Demircioglu and Berman, 2019; Li *et al*., 2019).

Organizational climate is comprised of several dimensions, one of which characterizes the level of responsibility or autonomy typically accorded to employees (Carr *et al*., 2003; Litwin and Stringer, 1968). Importantly for our purposes, high levels of responsibility climate foster the organization-wide belief that individual employees have the power to make their own decisions about how to do their job, with the supervisor providing guidelines only (Litwin and Stringer, 1968). It is reasonable to expect resulting feelings to enhance subordinates' beliefs in their competence to do the job as they feel trusted by their employer (Gagné, 2003), and also help fulfill the need for autonomy, which is associated with positive psychological states including work-related attitudes (Carr *et al*., 2003), thus extending to personal growth satisfaction. In all, by contributing both to a sense of self-confidence and autonomy, responsibility climate helps meet individual needs, that according to self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2000), are crucial to individuals' personal growth.

It is notable that in comparing organization-wide variables against those associated with the supervisor, there are instances in which aspects driven more by top management have the most influence (e.g., Dawley *et al.*, 2008). Indeed, we contend that subordinates' positive perceptions of responsibility climate will weaken the negative relationship between unethical leadership and their personal growth satisfaction. This expectation is supported, for example, by substitutes for leadership theory (Kerr and Jermier, 1978). Although the degree of overall support for the theory has been a matter of debate (Dionne *et al.*, 2002), a central concept is that certain subordinate, task, and organizational variables have the potential to *neutralize* the effects of leader behavior, making it less consequential to various outcomes. For example, Velez and Neves (2017) evaluated the effects of *task-based* neutralizers, job resources adequacy and role clarity, on the association between abusive supervision and job satisfaction. As hypothesized, abusive supervision was a negative for distributive justice and ultimately, for job satisfaction as well, but only when job resources and role clarity were low, as opposed to high. Our case involves an *organizational* neutralizer, responsibility climate, which should help mitigate the effects of supervisor influence attempts based on, for example, attacks to subordinates' self-esteem and competence.

Also supporting our hypothesis is the job demands-resources (JD-R; Demerouti *et al.*, 2001) model, which holds that when employees face job demands (e.g., aspects of the job requiring sustained physical and psychological effort; Pradhan and Jena, 2018b), various types of job-related resources can help reduce the demands and their corresponding costs, to help maintain feelings of personal growth and well-being (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007). Responsibility climate is an example of a resource associated with the organizational environment (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007) that can enhance personal resources, including feelings of competence. Importantly, responsibility climate and the associated boost to subordinates' competence has the potential to buffer the effects of adverse working conditions

on employees' psychological states, including well-being (Bakker *et al*., 2005). Thus, in our case, responsibility climate may be a resource that buffers the negative impact of unethical leadership on personal growth satisfaction. This perspective aligns well with Velez and Neves (2016) who used JD-R to argue that the level of autonomy associated with ones' job could moderate the relationship between abusive leadership and employees' psychosomatic symptoms. Indeed, they found that employees production deviance was positively related to abusive leadership, through psychosomatic symptoms, but only jobs where autonomy was perceived as low, as opposed to high. Although our perspective differs from Velez and Neves (2016) in that our interest is in evaluating the role of an organization-wide source of autonomy, not *task-level* autonomy tied to the job itself, the underlying idea is the same; employees autonomy perceptions have the potential to buffer the negative influence of unethical leadership. Thus, as shown in Figure 1, theory from both substitutes for leadership (Kerr and Jermier, 1978) and JD-R (Demerouti *et al*., 2001) support the following expectation,

> **H3**: Responsibility climate moderates the relationship between unethical leadership
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> and personal growth satisfaction such that the association will be weaker under high
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> versus low responsibility climate perceptions.

In making the case above, that heightened perceptions of responsibility climate would weaken the negative relationship between unethical leadership and personal growth satisfaction, we argued that responsibility climate would be a positive for employees' personal growth satisfaction. Relatedly, we expect responsibility climate to be a positive to employees' intention to stay as well, due to the empowerment and flexibility it may foster concerning the manner in which subordinates do their jobs (Ahmad *et al*., 2018). Together, these ideas have implications for our overall model in that responsibility climate should also moderate the *indirect relationship* between unethical leadership and intention to stay, through personal growth

satisfaction (see Figure 1). The reasoning for this expectation is analogous to H3. Specifically, responsibility climate should act as an organizational-level neutralizer (Kerr and Jermier, 1978) to lessen the impacts of unethical leadership. In turn, this should help counter the related adverse working conditions (Bakker *et al.*, 2005) that may otherwise hamper the intent to stay, by (for example) satisfying basic autonomy and competence needs (Dysvik and Kuvaas, 2010; Haivas *et al.*, 2013). Thus:

> **H4**: Responsibility climate moderates the indirect effect of unethical leadership on intention to stay through personal growth satisfaction, such that the indirect effect will be weaker under high versus low responsibility climate perceptions.

Methods

Sample and procedure

We gained the consent of the general managers involved and distributed 480 questionnaires directly to employees at a variety of manufacturing and services organizations (including in the public, social, retailing, and financial services sectors). Brislin's (1980) back-translation procedure was used to translate the English-based measures into Spanish to maintain semantic equivalence. These were pilot tested using focus groups consisting of six academics, ten employees and three human resources managers from services and manufacturing industries, to ensure clarity, readability, and suitability. After discarding incomplete questionnaires there were 150 usable surveys, for a response rate of 31%. Respondents average age was 34 years (ranging from 21 to 63 years). Most (68%) worked in services-related areas in the private and public sectors, and occupied positions in the lower (37%) or middle (60%) portions of the organizational hierarchy.

To limit and mitigate the incidence of common method variance (CMV) and social desirability bias, the questionnaire was designed in line with several Podsakoff *et al.*'s (2003)

recommendations. For example, to reduce social desirability bias, respondents were told that frankness was appreciated and that both individual and corporate anonymity were totally guaranteed. This complete anonymity could be authentically perceived by respondents as they saw they were not required to provide any information that could identify either themselves or their employers. To reduce CMV, the questionnaire also: (1) presented the predictor and criterion variable in different unrelated sections, (2) included various contextual variables as distracters, and (3) involved simple, specific, and concise items, as confirmed in pilot-testing. Thus, by reducing the possibility of these biases, we tried to ensure the reliability of the study results.

Measures

Following recommendations concerning the treatment of latent variables in partial least squares (PLS) analysis (Hair *et al*., 2017), this study included reflective Mode A first-order constructs for most variables (where indicators are highly correlated and caused by the construct they measure), with multiple indicators for each construct. The only exception involved the intent to stay variable, which as detailed below, has been regarded as a homogeneous attribute, such that multiple items are not required (Tett and Meyer, 1993). Table 1 shows the items used to measure the study variables and are reflective of the variable they intend to measure.

Unethical leadership. Ten items from Craig and Gustafson's (1998) scale were used as shown in Table 1. Each was selected for alignment with Pelletier's (2010) eight toxic leadership dimensions (i.e., attacks to self-esteem, lack of integrity, threats to security, ignoring employees' concerns, abusive behaviors, inequality promotion, divisiveness, and social exclusion) and their relation to the breach of employees' needs related to human dignity (just reward, equal opportunity, security, self-esteem, respect, truth, and friendship, Hodson, 2001; Table 1). Respondents indicated the extent to which each item described their supervisors, from

16

1 (not at all) to 5 (exactly), with higher scores reflecting greater levels of unethical leadership. On average, subordinates evaluated their supervisors as highly ethical (mean value= 1.68, Table 2), but the total preservation of anonymity in the data collection process do not suggest a problem of social desirability bias. Rather, these results confirm that this phenomenon is of a low-base rate (Aryee *et al*., 2007) and that it is not easily found in organizations, as the dysfunctionalities it provokes hamper their survival (cf., Zaleznik, 1990; Laguda, 2020).

A confirmatory factor analysis (EQS 6.1) using maximum likelihood estimation (Satorra and Bentler, 2001) revealed that a single factor was a good fit to the data. All the fit indices exceeded 0.90 (CFI = 0.97; IFI = 0.97; NNFI = 0.95; McDonald's Fit Index = 0.97; Hu and Bentler, 1999) and the RMSEA was 0.04, lower than the 0.08 cutoff (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

Personal growth satisfaction. Hackman and Oldham's (1980) four-item scale was used under a five-point Likert-type response format (1 = totally dissatisfied, 5 = totally satisfied).

Responsibility climate. Three items from the Litwin and Stringer's (1968) scale were used, and a five-point Likert format was adopted (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Intention to stay. From the Hackman and Oldham's (1980) questionnaire, a single item was used (i.e., I seldom think of quitting this job) with a five-point Likert format (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). This is in line with previous research (e.g., Kovner *et al*., 2009; Spector *et al*., 1988; Tett and Meyer, 1993) in which an explicitly worded single item has been sufficient to assess this variable.

Tables 1 and 2. About here.

Control variables

Several variables potentially related to intention to stay, but not of conceptual interest in this study, were controlled. We included sector industry (0= services; 1= manufacturing) because

it could affect working conditions and job type (e.g., monotonous work, direct contact with the client, work time flexibility), and thus, employee satisfaction (Kahya, 2007) as well as the intent to stay (McKnight *et al.*, 2009). Age in years (Griffeth *et al.*, 2000) and the level of benefits provided by the employer (i.e., pension plans, study grants, meals tickets, company car, and product/service discounts) were also controlled. With the inclusion of such controls, our study results on the variance of our two dependent variables (i.e., personal growth satisfaction, intention to stay) are more faithful reflection of our predicted relationships.

Data analysis

A structural equation modeling approach well suited to the assessment of mediation effects (Hair *et al.*, 2017) was enabled using Smart PLS 3.2.8 (Ringle *et al.*, 2005). In line with Hair *et al.* (2017), bootstrapping (5,000 re-samples) was used to generate standard errors and t-statistics for hypotheses testing. For our moderated mediation model, PROCESS 2.16.3 (bootstrapping with 5,000 re-samples) was also used (Hayes, 2017). An analysis using G*Power 3.1.9.2 revealed power of 99.9%, ensuring that the sample size was large enough to detect medium effect sizes without incurring Type II errors (Cohen, 1988). Thus, we ensured that with our data and statistical technique, we could ensure that we could explain a) the path that the practice of unethical leadership may follow to account for employees' intention to stay, b) that our predictor variables had a significant effect on our dependent variables and c) that it was not possible to find non-significant effects when they actually existed (type II errors).

Results

Measurement model

Table 1 shows that, despite some relatively low item loadings for unethical leadership, each of our targeted constructs had acceptable reliability (Hair *et al.*, 2017); both Cronbach's alphas

and Dijkstra-Henseler composite reliabilities (ρA) were all above 0.70. Supportive of convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct (see Table 1) was greater than 0.50 (Hair *et al*., 2017). Table 2 shows that the square root of the AVE for each variable was greater than its associated intercorrelations (see Table 2), which is supportive of discriminant validity (Hair *et al*., 2017, see Table 2); also supportive, the heterotrait-monotrait values (see Table 3) were below the most restrictive threshold of 0.85 and were significantly different from 1 (Hair *et al*., 2017). Finally, Harman's one-factor test to examine the potential impact of CMV (Podsakoff *et al*., 2003), suggested that CMV was not a major concern because many factors (five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1), as opposed to a single general factor were required to account for a majority of covariance (67%) in our data set (the first factor accounted for only 31% of the total variance). Findings using the marker variable technique (Lindell and Whitney, 2001) also lessened the CMV concern. Specifically, the second-smallest correlation between a variable theoretically unrelated to the major study variables (i.e., level of agility in executive decision making) was near zero (rm=.03). Moreover, when level of agility was partialled out from the uncorrected correlations, all the previously significant interrelations remained so. While these findings do no eliminate CMV as a concern, they suggest it is not a major threat to the interpretation of our findings.

Table 3. About here.

Control variables and hypotheses testing

Before addressing our hypotheses, it is notable that the control variables had little impact on our model (see Table 4); among them, only age was significantly related to the intent to stay ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.01$).

H1, of a direct negative relationship between unethical leadership and subordinates' intention to stay was supported ($\beta = -0.28$, $p < 0.001$, see Notes in Table 4). H2, predicting that personal growth satisfaction mediates the negative association between unethical leadership and intention to stay was also supported. Specifically, unethical leadership was negatively linked to personal growth satisfaction ($\beta = -0.30$, $p < 0.001$); personal growth satisfaction was positively tied to intention to stay ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$), and finally, the significant direct effect of unethical leadership on subordinates' intention to stay ceased to be significant when the mediator was included in the equation ($\beta = -0.11$, n.s., see Table 4). The bias-corrected and accelerated (BCA) bootstrap method (Hayes, 2017) with 5,000 subsamples also supported this conclusion (indirect effect $= -0.13$, 95% BCA CI $= -0.20, -0.08$). It is notable that the mediated model ($R^2_{\text{mediated model}} = 0.26$) doubled proportion of variance accounted for subordinates' intention to stay relative to the unmediated model ($R^2_{\text{unmediated model}} = 0.12$; $\Delta R^2 = 0.14$, Table 5); this effect is of medium size ($f^2 = 0.19$; Cohen, 1988; Table 5). Thus, these results indicate that the way unethical supervisors are likely to hamper their subordinates' intent to stay longer in the organization is by strongly reducing their subordinates' personal growth satisfaction.

Tables 4 and 5. About here.

H3, predicting that responsibility climate moderates the negative effect of unethical leadership on personal growth satisfaction was supported; the mean-centered interaction term (Aiken and West, 1991) was significant ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.01$; Table 4). To interpret the nature of the interaction, the high and low responsibility climate regressions (+1 and −1 SD from the mean) were plotted (see Figure 2). The simple slope analysis (Aiken and West, 1991) revealed that when high responsibility climate was perceived as high (+1 SD), the effect of unethical leadership on personal growth satisfaction was insignificant ($\beta = -0.16$, n.s.), whereas its

20

negative influence was retained under perceived low responsibility climate (−1 SD) (β = −0.44, p < 0.01). The incorporation of responsibility climate increased the variance accounted for in personal growth satisfaction ($R^2_{\text{moderated model}}$ = 0.28; $R^2_{\text{unmoderated model}}$ = 0.26; ΔR^2 = 0.02, see Table 5), though the size of the effect was small (f^2 = 0.03, Table 5; Cohen, 1988). These results indicate that by shaping a responsibility climate, general managers can breathe so high levels of organization-based autonomy with which to reduce the negative impact of unethical supervisors on the personal growth satisfaction of the subordinates of these supervisors.

To test H4, that perceived responsibility climate buffers the indirect effect of unethical leadership on subordinates' intention to stay, through personal growth satisfaction, we followed the recommendations concerning second-stage moderated mediation models (Hayes, 2017). Specifically, support for H4 requires that five conditions be satisfied. Three of these were addressed as part of earlier hypothesis testing; (1) unethical leadership was related to intention to stay; (2) personal growth satisfaction was linked to intention to stay, and (3) the interaction term for unethical leadership × responsibility climate was significant (see Table 4). The fourth condition, that the negative indirect effect of unethical leadership must differ at distinct levels of the moderator (i.e., responsibility climate) (Hayes, 2017) was also met, as tested using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 sub-samples. Specifically, Table 6 shows that, while there was a negative indirect effect of unethical leadership on intention to stay under low perceived responsibility climate conditions (-1 SD; B = −0.251, SE = 0.073, 95% CI= −0.431, −0.123), this effect was reduced and ceased to be significant under high perceived responsibility climate conditions (+1 SD; B = −0.099, SE= 0.058, 95% CI= −0.220, 0.012). Finally, the fifth condition (Hayes, 2017) that the index of moderated mediation must exclude zero, was also satisfied (index = 0.085, SE = 0.040, CI = 0.030, 0.192; Table 6). Thus, in line with H4, subordinates' perception of responsibility climate weakened the magnitude of the negative indirect effect of unethical leadership on employees' intention to stay. It was notable

that high levels of these climate perceptions completely negated the negative effect of unethical leadership on intention to stay, through growth satisfaction. This way, an organization-level responsibility climate can help general managers to reduce the negative impact of unethical supervisors on their subordinates' personal growth satisfaction to the point that employees' intention to stay ceases to be reduced by the presence of these supervisors.

Table 6, and Figure 2. About here

In terms of variance explained, the model accounted R^2-adjusted variance of 0.28 and 0.26 for personal growth satisfaction and intention to stay respectively, both of which are in between the benchmarks for weak versus moderate effect sizes (Hair *et al*., 2017). Also, the Stone–Geisser blindfolding sample reuse technique revealed Q^2 values larger than zero, reflecting the adequacy of the model for predicting both personal growth satisfaction ($Q^2 = 0.18$) and intention to stay ($Q^2 = 0.20$) (Hair *et al*., 2017). In terms of overall goodness-of-fit, the SRMR (standardized root mean square residual) was 0.04, reflective of a good fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999). The 95% bootstrap quantile for the SRMR (0.05) was higher than the observed SRMR, confirming our conclusion (Hair *et al*., 2017). Finally, the discrepancy indexes dULS (unweighted least squares discrepancy) and dG (geodesic discrepancy) were under the bootstrap-based 95% quantile (dULS = 0.46 < HI 95 of dULS = 0.49; dG = 0.22 < HI 95 of dG = 0.30) (Hair *et al*., 2017). Thus, the overall discrepancy between the empirical and the model-implied correlation matrix was insignificant, providing additional support for our representation (Henseler, 2017). Thus, our model and the variables selected appear to capture an important variance of the intention to stay of employees and, according to the fit indices described above, appears to be a true representation of what can really happen in organizations.

22

Discussion

As anticipated, we found unethical leadership to be a negative for subordinates' intention to stay with their job, as fully mediated through their level of personal growth satisfaction. Moreover, an organizational-level variable, responsibility climate, moderated both the direct and indirect effects of unethical leadership. Specifically, the negative impact of unethical leadership on personal growth satisfaction was significantly weaker when responsibility climate was perceived as strong versus weak. Also, responsibility climate moderated the link between unethical leadership and intent to stay, through personal growth satisfaction; under high responsibility climate levels, the negative indirect effect was completely negated. Thus, the novel contribution of our study lies in the identification of a means by which the negative influence of unethical leadership can be diminished.

Theoretical contributions

Our findings are important in several respects. First, we identified an organizational level variable, responsibility climate, that weakens the relationship between unethical leadership and subordinates' intention to stay. As noted from the outset, since unethical leadership is difficult to eliminate totally, it is important to identify ways that top managers can use to minimize its impact on workplace well-being and other resulting outcomes (i.e., intention to stay) that may affect firm performance (Nuhn *et al.*, 2019). Previous findings have revealed buffers of this relationship at the individual (i.e., emotional intelligence, Pradham and Jena, 2018a; gender, Pradham *et al.*, 2018) and job level (i.e., work meaningfulness, coworker support, Pradham and Jena, 2017, 2018b), but ours extends this literature by unfolding one organizational-level factor (i.e., responsibility climate) on which top managers can have a greater, direct influence.

Second, the identification of personal growth satisfaction as a mediator is of importance to the literature. Although there is research concerning the effect of unethical leadership on

23

overall job satisfaction (Schyns and Schilling, 2013; Mackey *et al.*, 2017), the implications for other facets of satisfaction, such as personal growth, have been unaddressed. Our finding of a medium-to-large mediation-based effect associated with personal growth satisfaction, is consistent with previous metanalytic findings yielding moderate associations of unethical leadership with job satisfaction (r = -.336, Schyns and Schilling, 2013), and of job satisfaction with intention to stay (r = -0.190, Griffeth *et al.*, 2000). Finally, the finding that a decrease of personal growth satisfaction underlies the negative impact of unethical leadership on subordinates' intention to stay is important to understand how unethical leadership operates in contrast to ethical leadership. Ethical leaders care for their followers' growth and trigger their subordinates' job satisfaction (Bedi *et al.* 2016), as a previous step through which these leaders enhance other work outcomes (Ruiz-Palomino *et al.*, 2011). As such, our finding that unethical leaders reduce followers' intention to stay by decreasing their personal growth satisfaction proves that unethical leadership may operate in a manner opposite to ethical leadership.

The Velez and Neves studies are also especially relevant to ours in that they showed that high levels of task-level autonomy weakened the relationships between abusive leadership and production deviance, through psychosomatic symptoms (Velez and Neves, 2016), and that high levels of task-based neutralizers (job resources adequacy, role clarity) attenuated the association between abusive supervision and overall job satisfaction, through distributive justice (Velez and Neves, 2017). We extend these findings by showing that *organization* driven autonomy, as reflected by responsibility climate, can also weaken the relationship between unethical leadership and subordinates' intention to stay, through personal growth satisfaction. Our findings thus extend previous research by proving that high levels of organization-based autonomy can weaken the negative impact of unethical leadership on several valued outcomes. Moreover, our findings complement those of Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara and Viera-Armas (2019), who found that a lack of control over work activities is a central mechanism through

which unethical leadership impacts firm performance negatively. We added to their findings by revealing that high doses of control over the work, as can be provided with a responsibility climate, can reduce the negative impact of unethical leadership on employees' intention to stay, which according to Nuhn et al. (2019), may underlie both individual and firm performance.

Finally, like Velez and Neves (2016, 2017), our findings are consistent with the Kerr and Jermier's (1978) substitutes for leadership model and Demerouti *et al*.'s (2001) JD-R theory. First, in line with Kerr and Jermier's (1978) theory, we identify responsibility climate as a new organizational variable that can replace or counteract the negative effects of supervisors' behaviors on subordinates' outcomes. Second, consistent with JD-R theory which posits that job demands are less harmful when employees also have high levels of job resources (Bakker *et al*., 2005), we show how the negative effects of unethical leadership on subordinates (i.e., emotional exhaustion, depression, anxiety, Mackey *et al*., 2017, 2020), which may reduce their intention to stay (Mackey *et al*., 2020), can be deactivated by an organization-level responsibility climate that helps employees feel less dependent on their supervisors' influence.

Practical implications

Given the wide range of negative outcomes associated with unethical leadership, including decrements to subordinates' personal growth satisfaction, it is crucial to engage the full range of human resource management systems and general management capabilities (Steffensen *et al*., 2019) to minimize the problem. Because some forms of unethical leadership are likely to be rooted in applicants' personality characteristics (Den Hartog, 2015), it is not necessarily easy to detect these tendencies in interviews or other selection processes. Employers should redouble their efforts to find a range of options to better select for moral goodness from the outset. In terms of dealing with unethical leaders already in place, training initiatives (e.g., positive psychology coaching) may help them become more mindful of the impact that their

25

behavior has on others; it is notable that leaders implicated in cases of subordinates' suicides appear to have lacked full awareness in this regard (Kostov, 2019). As such, training grounded in the moral foundations, especially care and fairness, may be useful (Egorov *et al*., 2019). Two-way communication mechanisms (i.e., hotlines, ombudspersons) may also be helpful in detecting instances of unethical leadership (Kish-Gephart *et al*., 2010).

Our findings combined with Velez and Neves (2016) also suggest that where possible, employee autonomy should be built into the design of job itself, as it could be an optimal strategy to retain talented employees (i.e., those who excel knowledge, skill and abilities required, Vance and Vaiman, 2008), especially as related to the generation Y labor pool, who as noted earlier, are especially interested in jobs that satisfy personal development needs (Terjesen and Frey, 2008; Vaiman *et al*., 2012). Sourcing the required quality and quantity of these employees to successfully implement business strategy to gain competitive advantage is a priority in the dynamic environments most employers face (Vaiman *et al*., 2017; Vaiman *et al*., 2012) and is highly resource consuming. Thus, failing to retain talented people typically results in high added costs for a business, which could by lessened by designing jobs and organizational culture in ways that meet the personal development and autonomy needs (Vaiman *et al*., 2012). The way in which jobs are designed is largely a matter of strategic choice for top management. Indeed, most jobs can be designed in a manner that accounts for the personal growth needs of employees, as reflected, for example, in the use of high-performance work practices (e.g., Kehoe and Wright, 2013). Finally, as directly reflected in our findings, top management has the responsibility to foster responsibility climate along with other aspects of a supportive overall climate (Carr *et al*., 2003). In doing so, employees should perceive that they have a substantial freedom and control to manage and make decisions concerning how to schedule their own work tasks, with little need to interact with or depend on their supervisors.

Limitations and future research directions

As with any study, our research has several limitations that suggest avenues for future research. First, our cross-sectional study design does not allow for strong causal inferences. However, as we were seeking honest responses concerning the possible presence of unethical leadership, we needed to assure respondents of absolute anonymity (Randall and Fernandes, 1991), so a longitudinal design was difficult to execute. Second, because data were collected on the same occasion from the same source, CMV may be a threat (Podsakoff *et al*., 2003). Several procedural remedies were used to minimize CMV and our post hoc tests (i.e., the marker test) suggested that our efforts were helpful. Nonetheless, future research could objectively assess organizational climate as opposed to relying on employee perceptions (Carr *et al*., 2003) and could rely on different subgroups of subordinates to collect the data (one subgroup for unethical leadership and another subgroup for the dependent study variables).

In considering our mediation and moderation findings, several opportunities for future research are evident. In terms of mediation, another potential mediator could be low-quality leader-member exchange (LMX) perceived under unethical supervisors. With low-quality LMX, socio-emotional experiences may be low (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005), and so may the experienced personal growth satisfaction. Thus, future research could test if low-quality LMX could explain why the unethical leadership of supervisors hamper the personal growth satisfaction of their subordinates, through which their future intention to stay could be reduced.

In terms of moderation, various research opportunities emerge to help delve into "how" to minimize the negative impact of unethical supervisors on employees' intention to stay. First, there is merit in assessing the moderating impact of variables grounded in subordinates' individual differences. Power distance orientation, for example, could be an option, as it may make individuals legitimize the threats, intimidation or abuse of power perceived under unethical leaders (Kiazad *et al*., 2010). Although Spain scores high in this aspect, power

distance is not as representative for Spain as is for other countries (i.e., Malaysia, Hofstede, 2020), so further research could clarify its softening potential on the subordinates' negative reactions to unethical leadership. Second, because the psychological benefits one has in an organization can shape the decision to stay (Mitchell *et al*., 2001), future research could test whether perceived organizational support (i.e., that the organization cares for one's well-being as reflected in, for example, the adoption of employee listening and assistance programs) could also help increase one's developmental experiences (cf., Wayne *et al*., 1997), and thus reduce the negative effects of unethical supervision on his/her intention to stay. Also, of interest would be to explore if the perception that one has numerous material benefits in an organization (e.g., pension plans, disability insurances, Muse *et al*., 2008), could retain employees despite the reduced personal growth satisfaction experienced under unethical supervisors. Finally, future research may compare the moderating effect of *task-level* autonomy (Velez and Neves, 2016) to *organization-based* influences (i.e., responsibility climate). Depending on the nature of the findings, the considerations involved are many, as lower, middle, and top-level managers all have responsibility for the specific manner in which task-level and organizational-level variables are experienced by employees. In all, the options for future research are plentiful.

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Table 1. Measurement model: item loadings and weights, construct reliability, and convergent validity.

Constructs and their corresponding items	Item loading	Construct reliability		AVE
		Cronbach's Alpha	Dijkstra-Henseler's ρA	
Unethical leadership (UL)		**0.94**	**0.95**	**0.66**
My supervisor…would blame me for his/her own mistake.	0.84			
…would treat me better if I belonged to a different ethnic group.	0.69			
…would risk me to get back at someone else.	0.87			
…would use my performance appraisal to criticize me as a person.	0.79			
…would lie to me.	0.61			
…makes fun of my mistakes instead of coaching me as to how to do my job better.	0.80			
…would deliberately distort what I say.	0.89			
…deliberately makes employees angry at each other.	0.83			
…is a hypocrite.	0.91			
…enjoys turning down my requests.	0.85			
Personal growth satisfaction (PGS)		**0.83**	**0.83**	**0.67**
The amount of personal growth and development I get in doing my				
The feeling of worthwhile accomplishment I get from doing my job.				
The amount of independent thought and action I can exercise in my				
The amount of challenge in my job.				
Intention to stay (IS)		**---**	**---**	**---**
I seldom think of quitting this job.				
Responsibility climate (RC)		**0.71**	**0.74**	**0.63**
In this firm, top management resents your checking everything with them: if you think you've got the right approach you just go ahead.	0.75			
In this firm, supervision is a question of setting some guidelines for employees and letting them take responsibility for the job.	0.81			
Our firm's philosophy emphasizes that people should solve their problems by themselves.	0.83			

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, correlation matrix and square roots of the reflective constructs' AVE.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Unethical leadership	1.63	0.82	**0.81**						
2. Personal growth satisfaction	3.56	0.84	-0.40**	**0.82**					
3. Intention to stay	3.52	0.98	-0.26**	0.49**	---				
4. Responsibility climate	3.18	0.95	-0.22**	0.37**	0.25**	**0.79**			
5. Age	34.60	9.10	0.11	0.10	0.20*	0.02	---		
6. Industry (Manufacturing)	---	---	0.06	-0.13	-0.12	-0.03	0.05	---	
7. Social benefits	2.00	1.43	-0.08	0.22**	0.18*	0.04	0.18*	-0.32**	---

Notes: Off-diagonal elements below the diagonal are correlations among the constructs; ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed test). SD = standard deviation.

Social benefits ranged from 0 to 5 according to the number of benefits (pension plans, study grants, meals tickets, company car, and product/service discounts) provided by the employer.

Bold values in the diagonal are square roots of AVE; for discriminant validity, diagonal elements should be larger than off-diagonal elements in the same row and column.

Table 3. Heterotrait-monotrait ratios of correlations (HTMT).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Unethical leadership							
2. Personal growth satisfaction	*0.44* *[0.30;0.57]*						
3. Intention to stay	*0.26* *[0.12;0.39]*	*0.54* *[0.40;0.64]*					
4. Responsibility climate	*0.26* *[0.13;0.43]*	*0.47* *[0.30;0.62]*	*0.30* *[0.21;0.49]*				
5. Age	*0.11* *[0.04;0.23]*	*0.10* *[0.03;0.15]*	*0.21* *[0.09;0.34]*	*0.12* *[0.03;0.16]*			
6. Industry (Manufacturing)	*0.09* *[0.04;0.12]*	*0.14* *[0.05;0.25]*	*0.12* *[0.01;0.15]*	*0.05* *[0.01;0.06]*	*0.05* *[0.01;0.14]*		
7. Social benefits	*0.08* *[0.04;0.14]*	*0.24* *[0.12;0.37]*	*0.17* *[0.10;0.35]*	*0.05* *[0.01;0.07]*	*0.18* *[0.06;0.30]*	*0.32* *[0.20;0.43]*	

Notes: For discriminant validity, HTMT values for each pair of constructs should be lower than 0.85 and their 95% confidence intervals should not contain the number 1.

Table 4. Hypothesis testing: direct, indirect, total effects, and explained variance.

Effects on dependent variables	Direct effects (t-value)	Indirect effects	Total effects	Variance explained (R^2)	Effect sizes[c]
Personal growth satisfaction (R^2= 0.28)					
Unethical leadership (UL)	-0.30*** *(5.12)*	---	-0.30	0.12	medium-large
Responsibility climate (RC)	0.24*** *(3.50)*	---	0.24	0.09	medium
UL x RC (interaction effect)	H3: 0.12** *(2.58)*	---	0.12	0.04	small-medium
Age	0.08ns *(1.26)*	---	0.08	0.01	
Industry (Manufacturing)	-0.06ns *(0.84)*	---	-0.06	0.01	
Social benefits	0.13ns *(1.64)*	---	0.13	0.01	
Intention to stay (R^2= 0.26)					
Unethical leadership	H1: -0.11ns *(1.27)* [a]	H2: -0.13[b]	-0.24	0.03	small-medium
Personal growth satisfaction	0.42*** *(4.96)*	---	0.42	0.20	medium-large
Age	0.17** *(2.74)*		0.17	0.03	
Industry (Manufacturing)	-0.06ns *(0.70)*		-0.06	0.00	
Social benefits	0.02ns *(0.29)*		0.02	0.00	

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p< 0.05$, ns. = not significant.
[a] In a direct model in which personal growth satisfaction is not included in the equation, the negative effect of unethical leadership on subordinates' intention to stay is significant, as predicted in H1 ($\beta = -0.28$, $p < 0.001$).
[b] Significant at $p < 0.05$ because zero is not included in the bias corrected and accelerated (BCA) 95% confidence interval (lower level = -0.19; upper level = -0.09) (Hayes, 2017).
[c] Effect sizes of $R^2 \geq 0.01$, ≥ 0.09, and ≥ 0.25 are small, medium, and large, respectively (Cohen, 1988).

Table 5. Mediation effect size of personal growth satisfaction.

Independent-dependent variable relationship	Variance explained			Size of the mediation
	Unmediated relationship	Mediated relationship	Δ variance explained	(f^2)
Unethical leadership-intention to stay	0.12	0.26	0.14	0.19 (medium effect)
	Unmoderated relationship	Moderated relationship	Δ variance explained	(f^2)
Unethical leadership-personal growth satisfaction	0.26	0.28	0.02	0.03 (small effect)

Notes: $f^2 = (R^2\text{included} - R^2\text{excluded})/(1 - R^2\text{included})$; effect sizes of $f^2 \geq 0.02, \geq 0.15$, and ≥ 0.35 are small, medium, and large, respectively (Cohen, 1988).

**Table 6.** Results for the moderated mediation analysis: The moderation of responsibility climate.

	Bootstrapping effect	SE	LL	UL
Conditional indirect effect of unethical leadership on intention to stay at values of the moderator				
Responsibility climate				
-1 standard deviation (-0.89)	-0.251	0.073	-0.431	-0.123
At the mean (0.00)	-0.176	0.059	-0.321	-0.072
+1 standard deviation (0.89)	-0.099	0.058	-0.220	0.012

	Index of moderated mediation	SE	95% BCA CI (LL, UL)	
			LL	UL
	0.085	0.040	0.030	0.192

Notes: SE = standard error; BCA CI = Bias-corrected and accelerated confidence interval; LL= lower limit; UL= upper limit.

Figure 1. Research model.
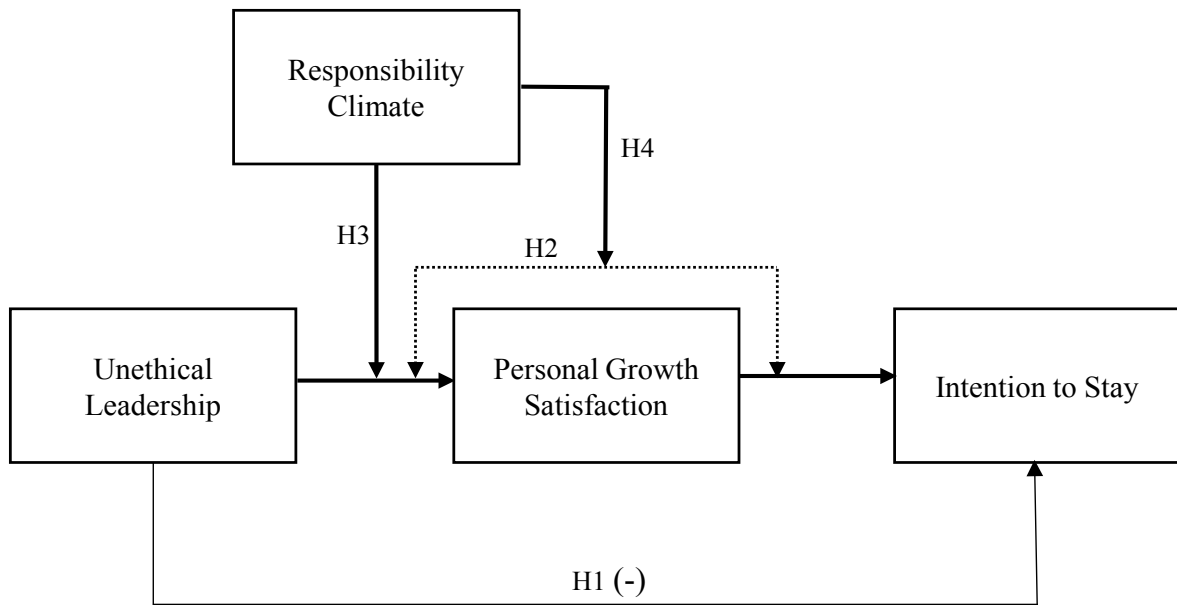
Figure 2. Interacting effects of unethical leadership with responsibility climate on personal growth satisfaction.