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Towards Sustainable Leadership: Investigating Self-serving Leadership's Effect on Employee Green Behavior, Exploring Mediators and Moderated by Organizational Ethical Climate

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ABSTRACT

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*Self-serving leadership,
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Leadership in organizations plays an important role in shaping organizational dynamics, which have a significant impact on employee work behavior. Self-serving (Self-interested) leadership, particularly in the hotel business, emerges as a critical factor influencing employee performance and behavior. This study examines the intricate nexus between self-serving leadership and its impact on employee green behavior within the hospitality sector. This study undertakes a comprehensive analysis to explore not only the explicit influence of self-serving leadership on the environmentally conscious conduct of employees but also the potential moderating effect of the ethical climate within the organization on this association. In order to examine the direct and indirect hypothetical relationships among the main constructs, Mplus software was utilized. By analyzing a comprehensive sample of 370 employee questionnaires obtained from employees and teams of tourism hotels, this study investigates in depth the relationship between self-serving leadership, environmental responsibility, worker green behavior, and self-serving motivation. The empirical findings showed a significant negative relationship between self-serving leadership and employee green behavior, with environmental responsibility and self-interested motivation as intermediary factors. Moreover, the research emphasizes the critical significance of the ethical climate within the organization in reducing these impacts. This research contributes to the body of knowledge by suggesting that hotel managers foster environmental responsibility, reduce self-serving motivation, create an ethical environment that aligns with green practices and mitigate self-serving leadership styles to promote employee green behavior.

Businesses are responsible for generating a significant amount of pollution and waste during their operations (Gaur et al., 2020). Pursuing green and sustainable development emerges as a pivotal concern in the business growth paradigm, particularly within the tourism sector, which maintains an intrinsic connection with environmental well-being (Chen et al., 2020). This issue is particularly important for the tourism industry, which is closely connected with the environment. Interestingly, the tourist sector is thought to be responsible for 8% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, a comprehensive figure that includes emissions from aircraft, hotels, and food services (Lenzen et al., 2018). Meanwhile, as a pillar of the tourism sector, the hotel business has shown characteristics of high input, high consumption, and high pollution during its rapid development (Asadi et al., 2020). Consequently, this industry is crucial for promoting sustainable environmental development, highlighting the urgent requirement for integrated strategies that tackle these environmental challenges (Han, 2021).

Numerous hotels have implemented management policies to enhance environmental performance (Rehman et al., 2023; Tritto, 2020). However, implementing environmental management measures in hotel enterprises does not necessarily mean that these measures are effectively executed. As the most active elements in an organization, employees' green behaviors directly reflect the extent to which the hotel's environmental management policies and measures are implemented (Zientara & Zamojska, 2018). Employees' environmentally friendly actions at work are referred to as "green behaviors" by Luu (2019). These organizational citizenship behaviors significantly contribute to hotels' achievement of long-term strategic objectives (Tuan, 2022).

Engaging in green behavior often entails opportunity costs for employees, including time, energy, and financial resources. Such actions may not yield immediate benefits but are essential for fostering long-term societal and environmental sustainability (Afsar et al., 2020; Ahmed et al., 2020) and have the typical contradictory characteristics of benefiting others at a cost to oneself (Davis et al., 2018). Under the framework of rational self-interest, the higher the degree of individual rational self-interest, the lower the consideration for the interests of others; conversely, the more an individual will prioritize the interests of others and society (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009). Consequently, the green behavior of employees in the hotel industry can be viewed as a choice between self-interest and altruism, underscoring the complex interplay between personal motivations and environmental responsibility.

Leaders, acting as pivotal organizational influencers, shape employees' engagement in environmentally responsible green behaviors through their leadership styles (Cai et al., 2023; Shah, Fahlevi, Jamshed, et al., 2023). For instance, scientific studies have revealed that effective leadership styles, including green transformational leadership, promote employees' commitment to green behaviors (Lathabhavan & Kaur, 2023; Mi et al., 2019). In contrast, leaders' instances of self-serving behavior stand out clearly in organizational practice, as they fail to carry out their duties as representatives of the organization honestly. Self-serving leaders prioritize personal gain over organizational and environmental well-being, as demonstrated by notable corporate disgraces involving excessive personal spending and misappropriation (Zona et al., 2013). The former CEO of Merrill Lynch, for instance, allocated a considerable sum of money towards office renovations when the firm was on the precipice of liquidation (News, 2009). Similarly, a senior manager at Microsoft misappropriated almost \$9 million from the organization for a lavish lifestyle (Office, 2020). This leadership style, driven by selfish needs

and increasing personal benefits and welfare at the corporation's or its employees' expense, is known as self-serving leadership (Decoster et al., 2014; Peng et al., 2019). According to Jiang and Gu (2016), negative leadership styles have a greater impact on employee behavior than positive ones because individuals are more attentive to negative behaviors. The question then arises: Does self-serving leadership inspire staff to avoid engaging in green performances based on the assumption of self-interest? Scholars have not yet widely investigated this impact mechanism. This study investigates the precise impact of self-serving leadership on employees' inclination to participate in environmentally friendly actions. Doing so fills a significant void in the existing academic discourse.

Moreover, Environmental responsibility, conceptualized as an altruistic moral motive, reflects individuals' perception of their role in environmental protection and their willingness to engage in behaviors that benefit the environment, even at a personal cost (Punzo et al., 2019). According to social information processing theory, the work environment greatly influences employees' perceptions and behaviors, including leadership styles. When employees perceive self-serving leadership as the norm, they may perceive it as natural to reduce the importance of environmentally conscious behaviors, thus reducing their sense of environmental responsibility (Greenbaum et al., 2018). Employees may focus more on their own gains than larger environmental goals due to the change in corporate culture. The purpose of this research is to test the hypothesis that self-interest motivation and environmental responsibility are parallel mediators that explain the relationship between self-serving leadership and employees' green behavior at their workplace. This study seeks to understand the factors that drive employees to engage in environmentally friendly actions and how self-serving leadership impacts this participation.

In addition, Victor and Cullen (1987) argue that the corporate ethical environment relates to employees' collective perceptions of the company's ethical standards and practices. The inclination of employees to engage in environmentally sustainable practices is notably impacted by the organizational environment (Al-Ghazali & Afsar, 2021). The workplace ethical climate may play a pivotal role in determining whether employees in a self-serving leadership-dominated setting feel empowered or restricted to pursue environmental responsibility.

This study examines whether the ethical climate of a firm influences workers' willingness to adopt environmentally friendly practices in the presence of self-serving leadership. This endeavor aims to enhance the theoretical comprehension of how leadership styles impact environmental sustainability and ethical behavior at work and provide organizations with practical insights. In particular, the results may help firms enhance their governance and ethical climate to reduce the detrimental effects of self-serving leadership and promote an environment that encourages environmentally conscious conduct among staff members.

Review Literature and Hypothesis Development

The Role of Environmental Responsibility as a Mediator

As organizational executives, leaders' primary duty is to maintain collective interests and motivate employees to achieve organizational goals (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). However, not all leaders in organizational work are positive and place organizational interests above their own; some negative leaders prioritize their interests. Such leaders, like self-serving leaders,

may not faithfully fulfill their duties as organizational representatives. The term “self-serving leadership” refers to executives prioritizing their own well-being and interests over their employees’ requirements and the organization’s objectives (Schmid et al., 2019). Their self-interested actions are related to promotions and salary increases or the size of their office space and the efficiency of their paper usage (Rus, 2009). Self-serving leaders in the workplace will exhibit these characteristics (Decoster et al., 2021).

Environmental responsibility reflects an individual perceived psychological state that encourages them to participate in environmental protection activities (Punzo et al., 2019), and it possesses the characteristics of a proactive moral motive (González-Benito & González-Benito, 2006). Leadership styles can influence them in organizations (Azhar & Yang, 2022). Within the workplace context, leaders are among the most important sources from which employees obtain information regarding their work and interactions (Jiang & Gu, 2016). According to social information processing theory, leaders’ behaviors and informational cues in the workplace can affect the development of employees’ perceptions and attitudes (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Self-serving leaders in their daily work often make decisions based on satisfying their interests first (Williams, 2014). When faced with conflicts between “self-interest” and “other’s interests,” they usually sacrifice others’ interests to satisfy their own (Camps et al., 2012). Similarly, when faced with green behaviors that incur action costs and do not increase their benefit, self-serving leaders do not base their decisions on actively taking on the social responsibility of protecting the environment. Based on this, employees infer from the information and cues transmitted by the leaders’ decisions that self-serving behavior is permitted in the organization. They believe that if the leaders are unwilling to incur extra costs to undertake environmental responsibilities, they are not obligated to spend their resources to implement green behaviors beneficial to others, the organization, or even society, thus reducing their psychological motivation to protect the environment. Henceforth, the present study proposes that leadership driven by self-interest negatively affects employees’ environmental responsibility levels.

Furthermore, when adopting green behaviors, employees must choose between “self-interest” and “altruism.” People become aware of their adopted feeling of environmental responsibility when faced with the challenge of acquiring green behaviors (Peng & Mao, 2018). According to research, empowering employees with a profound concern for organizational and natural environmental issues is the most effective way to motivate green behavior (Afsar et al., 2016). Several empirical studies have provided evidence that a sense of environmental responsibility can positively influence employees’ environmentally beneficial behaviors (Hui et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2022).

Therefore, employees whose sense of environmental responsibility is awakened will actively care for and protect the environment. They will be more motivated to be actively involved in environmentally friendly activities because they see safeguarding the environment as defending their interests. As a result, the present study proposes that an employee’s green behaviors positively correlate with their sense of environmental responsibility. This study sets out the following hypothesis in light of the discussion above:

H1: *The relationship between self-serving leadership and employee green behavior is mediated by environmental responsibility.*

The Mediating Role of Self-Interest Motivation

Motivation that emerges in people based on their wants and self-interest is called self-interest motivation (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009). According to this definition, people make self-serving behavioral decisions to meet their requirements partially. Employees with high self-interest motivation in the workplace may prioritize personal objectives over the company's long-term success, society, and others, even to the point of sacrificing them.

The social information processing theory posits that the information disseminated by leaders in the workplace impacts employees' attitudes and behaviors (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). When leaders make decisions for their organizations, they often have to decide how to divide resources. Self-serving leaders have a propensity to allocate additional resources to advance their interests while neglecting the concerns of other organization members (Rus et al., 2012; Williams, 2014)

The leaders' selfish attributes are profoundly imprinted upon the employees through this conduct. In this particular context, it is observed that employees, desiring to safeguard their interests from potential injury, will ultimately exhibit selfish traits by making decisions that solely benefit themselves as a means of offsetting the effect of leaders appropriating resources to which they are entitled (Sheedy et al., 2021). On the other hand, employees may think that the company encourages these selfish actions and that maximizing their interests is in line with company policy. This makes it easier for them to create self-interest and motivation. Moreover, individuals who possess a strong motivation for self-interest exhibit greater concern for fulfilling their requirements and aligning their efforts with the benefits they receive (Wildavsky, 2018).

They may neglect or even sacrifice the interests of others, the organization, or society to benefit themselves. These workers are committed to pursuing their interests. Adopting environmentally friendly practices results in personal costs and fails to yield immediate benefits in the short run. Therefore, these employees may develop resistance to green behaviors and be less likely to engage in them. Based on the analysis discussed previously, the following hypothesis is developed for this study:

H2: *The relationship between self-serving leadership and employee green behavior is mediated by self-interest motivation.*

The Moderating Role of Organizational Ethical Climate

The term 'organizational ethical climate' was originally used by (Victor & Cullen, 1987). It describes staff members' consistent beliefs and actions about organizational ethics, practices, and rules. This reflects the ethical standards that are internally enforced within the organization. Employee perceptions of the ethical atmosphere at work greatly influence their attitudes and conduct (Valentine et al., 2014).

An organization can create a pro-environmental and ethical environment if it promotes employees to adopt environmentally friendly and selfless actions and has clear ethical guidelines for them to follow. According to social information processing theory, when an organization has a high ethical climate, workers can see that the organization strongly supports protecting the environment, which boosts the organization's credibility (Oh, 2022). Individuals will perceive the organization as ethical and socially responsible; consequently, they will be

motivated by its environmental values and consider environmental protection a necessary obligation (Dey et al., 2022). Employees who work in an ethical and pro-environmental environment might still sense that the company prioritizes protecting the environment, even in the presence of self-serving leadership.

Self-serving leadership cannot substantially diminish employees' sense of responsibility for environmental protection in an environment characterized by a high-quality, ethical climate where green environmental protection and ethics are emphasized (Nmai, 2023). In other words, the negative correlation between self-serving leadership and employees' environmental responsibility will be feebler. Moreover, the self-serving behaviors of self-serving leadership cannot completely sway employees' ethical standards in an environment where green environmental conservation and ethics are valued. The 'selfless altruism' concept fostered by the corporate ethical environment will purify workers' selfish views, even if they are affected by the self-serving character of self-serving leadership (Leung, 2008). Employees will thus continue to be committed to environmental protection and altruism. The optimistic relationship between self-serving leadership and self-interest motivation can be weakened or eliminated, and the negative possessions of self-serving leadership can be mitigated or even eliminated. Employees' emergence of self-interest motivation can also be suppressed.

An organizational ethical environment characterized by self-interest will be fostered if decision-making is encouraged from a utilitarian perspective, where individuals can neglect or even sacrifice the interests of others to attain goals (Sheedy et al., 2021). The company only offers its staff a limited amount of moral and ethical training in such an environment. Employees are inclined to prioritize their interests more when confronted with dilemmas involving altruism and self-interest (Sheedy et al., 2021).

According to Walther's Social Information Processing Theory, interactions between employees and self-serving leaders are most common when ethical ambiguity exists in organizational environments. Because of the sense of scarce resources and the frequency of self-serving activities, employees in such circumstances are more likely to feel insecure and uncertain when self-serving leaders are present. Employees may, therefore, put protecting their interests ahead of environmental responsibility because these initiatives may require the commitment of personal resources. Essentially, self-serving leadership amplifies the decrease in workers' sense of duty to protect the environment, creating a more robust negative relationship between self-serving leadership and workers' awareness of environmental issues.

In addition, workers know when their company is based on utilitarian principles because it tends to reward self-interested behavior. In this environment, leaders motivated by self-interest and fellow members are proactive in their pursuit to maximize personal gains. Consequently, this prevailing mindset impacts employees, motivating them to put their interests first. As a result, a more pronounced positive correlation arises between self-serving leadership and the development of employee motivations motivated by self-interest. To sum up, this work comes up with the following hypotheses:

H3: *Organizational ethical climate negatively moderates the association between self-serving leadership and environmental responsibility.*

H4: *Organizational ethical climate negatively moderates the association between self-serving leadership and self-interest motivation.*

This study indicates that the organizational ethical climate should also have a cross-level moderating influence on the suggested mediating effects (H1 and H2) based on H1–H4 and their derivations. In a strong organizational ethical climate, self-serving leadership styles may not prevent employees from developing environmental responsibility. Likewise, the presence of ethical standards within the institution might motivate personnel to implement their environmental ambitions. Moreover, an exceptional ethical climate within an organization can moderate the adverse effects of self-serving leadership on self-interest motivation. As a result, employees will be less inclined towards selfishness and more motivated to participate in environmentally sustainable practices. In a strong organizational ethical atmosphere, the indirect impacts outlined in H1 and H2 may no longer be significant.

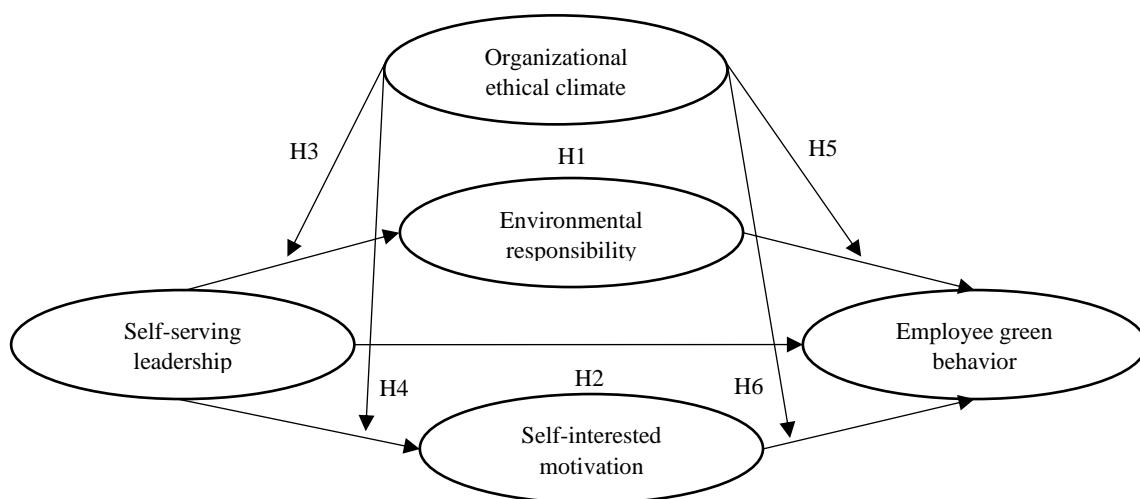
However, in contrast, in an organization with a weak ethical climate and a culture that is oriented toward self-interest, a self-serving leadership style is likely to suppress further the formation of environmental responsibility among employees, making it more difficult for employees to engage in environmentally responsible behavior. Furthermore, a self-serving organizational value system will encourage workers to participate in self-serving conduct by enhancing the negative impact of self-serving leadership on self-interest motivation. This will decrease the extent to which employees are inclined to be involved in sustainable activity. The hypothesized indirect effects in H1 and H2 will likely be amplified in an unethical work environment. In light of this, the research puts up the following two hypotheses:

H5: *Organizational ethical climate moderates the indirect effect of self-serving leadership on employee green behavior through environmental responsibility, such that a weak organizational ethical climate negatively strengthens this effect.*

H6: *Organizational ethical climate moderates the indirect effect of self-serving leadership on employee green behavior through self-interest motivation, such that a weak organizational ethical climate negatively strengthens this effect.*

Figure 1

Proposed Conceptual Model



Method

Sampling and Data Collection

The tourism industry relies on hotels, which face issues like resource use and environmental damage (Perkumienė et al., 2023). Employee participation in environmentally conscious behaviors is of utmost significance for the sustainable development of the hotel sector. This is because employee involvement is the most active force inside businesses.

The study propositions were tested by gathering data from team leaders and employees in Pakistani tourist hotels. In order to examine a large number of tourist hotels in three main cities Islamabad, Murree, and Lahore, which are well-known tourist attractions, this study used a structured questionnaire approach. Initially, we reached out to the staff managers of 120 tour hotels to confirm the willingness of the respondents to fill out the surveys and asked for their support in the research. The surveys were sent to 520 hotel employees and team leaders. Fifty hotels agreed upon participation. These surveys asked them to fill out basic personal information questionnaires and evaluated the self-serving leadership style of their immediate superiors. In addition, they evaluated the organization's ethical atmosphere, environmental responsibility, and self-interest motivation. 460 legitimate employee questionnaires were gathered from 103 hotel teams out of the distributed 520 questionnaires. After removing the unacceptable or incomplete answers, we obtained 370 useful questionnaires for final analysis with an effective response rate of 71.15%. Further, the demographic characteristics of all respondents can be shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Profile of Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 370)

Demographic Aspects	n	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male Employees	315	85%
Female Employees	55	15%
Age		
Less than 25 years old	30	8.1%
25-34 Years	121	32.7%
35-44	87	23.5%
45-50	75	20.3%
above 50	57	15.4%
Education		
High School Degree	55	14.9%
Bachelor's Degree	228	61.6%
Master's Degree or Higher	87	23.5%
Organizational Tenure		
Under five years	153	41.4%
Under ten years	84	22.7%
Under 15 years	83	22.4%
Under 20 years	21	5.7%
Over 20 years	29	7.8%

Measure

The study assessed self-serving leadership, employee green behavior, environmental responsibility, motivation, and organizational ethical climate among hotel employees. A pretest or pilot testing was administered to 60 front-line employees to determine the questionnaire's precision, consistency, and understanding. All scales used a 5-point Likert scale, with one representing "completely disagree" and five representing "completely agree".

The researchers used a four-item scale developed by Camps et al. (2012) to quantify self-serving leadership. Scale responses include "My superior does not consider their subordinates,

only cares about themselves.” This scale’s Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient is .87, indicating good internal consistency.

Organizational ethical climate variables were evaluated using items adapted from previous research (Schwepker Jr & Hartline, 2005). As an example, “I understand that this hotel is more concerned with making money than satisfying customer needs.” This scale has a reliability coefficient of .71, which indicates that it is internally consistent.

Environmental responsibility was evaluated using a 5-item scale developed by Punzo et al. (2019). The statement includes "I believe pollution harms the environment". The Cronbach’s alpha reliability value for this scale is .85, which indicates strong internal consistency.

Employee self-interested motivation is based on three items developed by De Dreu and Nauta (2009). The statement includes: "It is imperative to me to pursue my personal goals and ambitions at work." The scale has strong internal consistency with an alpha reliability coefficient of .74.

An employee green behavior assessment is conducted using a six-item questionnaire developed initially for research purposes by Bissing-Olson et al. (2013). The items include statements such as “Today, the employee completed the tasks specified in the job description in an environmentally friendly manner”. This scale has a Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of .91, showing excellent internal consistency.

Data Analysis

A multilevel structural equation model was used to interpret the data in SPSS 27 and Mplus 8.3. SPSS 27 was used for variable reliability and correlation analysis, Mplus 8.3 for confirmatory analysis of discriminant and common method variance (CMV), and regression and bias-corrected bootstrapping for hypothesis testing.

Results

Data Aggregation Test

Organizational ethical climate is a construct at the team level; therefore, it is necessary to examine the agreement of opinions within teams. This study examines the Group-Level Reliability (GLR) and Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) as indicators of aggregation standards. The results show that the between-group variability ICC (1) is .27, exceeding the standard value of .12. The within-group variability ICC (2) is .56, reaching the generally acceptable standard of .47. Additionally, the indicator of within-group consensus, Rwg, is .91, surpassing the standard value of .70, meeting the requirements for data aggregation. As a result, measured variables can be aggregated from an individual to a team. As a result, measured variables can be aggregated from an individual to a team.

Discriminant Validity Test

In order to determine the discriminant validity of the variables before testing the research hypotheses, confirmatory factor analysis was performed. The research examined the chi-square discrepancy between the five-factor baseline model and six variant models to determine the most effective factor model. The fit indices for the five-factor baseline model are displayed in

Table 2 ($\chi^2/df = 2.06$, RMSEA = .05, CFI = .93, TLI = .92, SRMR = .06, $p < .001$). These values of CFA suggest that the five-factor model possesses favorable discriminant validity.

Table 2
Variable Discriminant Validity Comparison

Models		χ^2 Value	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	SRMR
Five-Factor Model	SL; ER; SIM; EGB; OEC	540.12	262	2.06***	0.05	0.93	0.92	0.06
	SL+SIM; ER; EGB; OEC	805.45	266	3.03***	0.07	0.87	0.85	0.08
	SIM+ER; SL; EGB; OEC	865.78	266	3.25***	0.07	0.85	0.83	0.08
Four-Factor Model	SL+ER; SIM; EGB; OEC	1105.23	266	4.16***	0.09	0.79	0.77	0.12
Three-Factor Model	SL+ER+SIM; EGB; OEC	1342.56	269	5.00***	0.10	0.74	0.71	0.12
Two-Factor Model	SL+ER+SIM+EGB; OEC	1505.67	271	5.57***	0.11	0.70	0.67	0.11
Single-Factor Model	SL+ER+SIM+EGB+OEC	1770.89	272	6.53***	0.12	0.64	0.60	0.11

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. SL = Self-Serving Leadership, ER = Environmental Responsibility, SIM = Self-Interested Motivation, EGB = Employee Green Behavior, OEC = Organizational Ethical Climate.

Common Method Variance

The variables in this study are assessed by both leaders and employees, which may introduce the possibility of common source bias. Consequently, a single-factor Harman test was conducted, and the findings indicated that the first principal component accounted for 35.36% of the variance. This percentage did not reach the recommended threshold of 50%, indicating that common technique variance had no substantial impact on study results (Chang et al., 2010).

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistical results of the variables and their correlation coefficients and Alpha (α) Value.

Table 3
Mean, Variance, Alpha (α) and Correlation Analysis of Variables

Variable Categories	M	SD	Age	Gender	EL	Tenure	SSL	ER	SIM	EGB
Individual Level										
Gender	1.58	0.50								
Age	2.60	1.01	-.07							
Education Level	2.69	0.79	-.05	-.14**						
Tenure	2.61	1.58	.03	.81**	-.08					
Self-Serving Leadership	2.40	1.03	-.09	.04	-.03	.06				
Environmental Responsibility	4.22	0.65	.13*	-.04	.14**	.02	-.30**			
Self-Interested Motivation	2.42	0.87	-.02	-.11*	.04	-.09	.40**	-.26**		
Employee Green Behavior	4.03	0.60	.11*	.04	-.06	.04	-.33**	.63**	-.38**	
Team-Level										
Team Size	3.62	0.90								
Organizational Ethical Climate	3.31	0.52	0.04							

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Table 3 provides an exhaustive review of many variables classified as individual- and team-level characteristics. Individual-level factors show a substantial negative association between self-interested leadership and environmental responsibility ($r = -.30$, $p < .01$). Self-interested leadership and self-interest motivation correlate positively ($r = .40$, $p < .01$). The association between environmental responsibility and employee green behavior is positively and statistically significant ($r = .63$, $p < .01$). On the contrary, there exists a statistically significant inverse correlation ($r = -.38$, $p < .01$) between self-interest motivation and employee green behavior. The standard deviation of the team size is .90, and the average size of the team is 3.62. The relationship between team size and the ethical climate of an organization is moderately positive ($r = .04$, $p < .05$). These preliminary data support some of the hypotheses.

Hypothesis Testing Direct and Mediating Effects

The results of the hypothesis analyses are displayed in Table 4. Model 1 shows a negative correlation ($\beta = -.18, p < .001$) between self-serving leadership and environmental responsibility. In contrast, Model 4 shows a positive relationship ($\beta = .57, p < .001$) between employees' green behavior and environmental responsibility. Model 6 shows a significant change in the association between self-serving leadership and employee green behavior, with the coefficient of impact decreasing from $\beta = -.18$ ($p < .001$, Model 3) to $\beta = -.08$ ($p < .001$). This research implies that the connection between self-serving leadership and environmentally conscious employee behavior is mediated by environmental responsibility. In addition, a Bootstrap mediation test is performed to evaluate the indirect impact of environmental responsibility. Hypothesis 1 is supported by the results, which indicate an indirect effect of $-.10$ with a 95% confidence interval of $(-.14, -.06)$. The estimated magnitude of the impact of environmental responsibility on the relationship between self-serving leadership and employee green behavior is signified by the indirect effect of $-.10$.

Model 2 shows a significant positive connection ($\beta = .34, p < .001$) between self-interested motivation and self-serving leadership. This suggests that higher levels of self-interested motivation led to more self-serving leadership behaviors among employees. In contrast, Model 5 indicates a negative correlation ($\beta = -.24, p < .001$) between the self-interested motivation of employees and their environmentally conscious actions, implying that lower levels of environmentally conscious behavior are associated with higher levels of self-interested motivation. Furthermore, it is observed that the impact coefficient of self-serving leadership on employee green behavior diminishes from $\beta = -.18$ ($p < .001$, Model 3) to $\beta = -.12$ ($p < .001$) in Model 7. This finding suggests that the association between self-serving leadership and employee green behavior is partially mediated by self-interested motivation. In addition, the Bootstrap mediation test confirms Hypothesis 2 by generating an indirect effect of $-.07$, accompanied by a 95% confidence interval of $-.10$ to $-.04$.

Table 4
Results of an Analysis of Direct and Mediating Effects

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Gender	.15*	.02	.10	.04	.13*	.03	.11
Age	-.06	-.09	.01	.05	-.00	.04	-.00
Education Level	.10*	.05	-.05	-.11**	-.04	-.11***	-.04
Tenure	.05	-.02	.01	-.02	.00	-.01	.01
Team size	.07	-.07	.08*	.05	.07*	.04	.06*
Self-serving leadership	-.18***	.34***	-.18***			-.08***	-.12***
Environmental responsibility				.57***		.53***	
Self-interest motivation					-.24***		-.18***
R ²	.12	.18	.13	.41	.15	.43	.18
F	9.77***	14.47***	10.01***	43.33***	11.96***	40.36***	13.08***

Note. N = 370, *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

The findings derived from the Mplus 8.3 investigation demonstrate a correlation ($\beta = .41, p < .001$) that is statistically significant between the organizational ethical climate and the relationship between self-serving leadership and environmental responsibility. It is crucial to note that while the primary effect demonstrates a negative impact ($\beta = -.18, p < .001$), the moderating effect yields inconsistent results. This finding adds evidence to the hypothesis that the organization's ethical climate moderates this relationship negatively across levels. Furthermore, the findings indicate that in organizations with low ethical standards, self-serving leadership has a more significant adverse outcome on the environmental responsibility of

employees. This supports Hypothesis 3. These results emphasize the significance of an ethical climate within an organization in influencing the behavior of leaders and the level of environmental awareness.

The findings from Mplus 8.3 demonstrate that the random slope between employees' feeling of environmental responsibility and self-serving leadership is significantly affected negatively by the ethical climate of the firm ($\beta = -.79, p < .001$). This suggests that the link between self-serving motivation and self-serving leadership is legitimately moderated at the cross-level by the ethical environment of the company. The findings reveal that when the ethical climate of the organization is placed at two distinct conditional values, employees' self-serving motivations are more strongly positively impacted by self-serving leadership when the ethical climate is weak. Therefore, H4 is supported.

The predicted indirect impacts of self-serving leadership on employee green behavior vary significantly depending on the interplay between organizational ethical climate and environmental responsibility. The identified indirect effect is statistically insignificant in environments with a strong ethical culture ($\beta = -.03, p > .05$), with a 95% confidence interval of $-.07$ to $.01$. On the contrary, environments characterized by less robust ethical climates within organizations exhibit a significantly negative indirect effect ($\beta = -.18, p < .001$), which is corroborated by a 95% confidence interval $(-.25, -.11)$. Notably, there is a significant difference ($\Delta = .15, p < .001$) between the two indirect effect estimates, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from $.09$ to $.23$. Thus, the data strongly supports Hypothesis 5, which supports the findings of Hypothesis 3 as shown in Table 5.

Table 5 shows the estimated indirect effects of self-serving leadership on employees' green behavior through self-serving motivation. The table considers two different conditional values for the ethical environment of the company. In a high organizational ethical environment, this indirect effect is deemed statistically insignificant ($\beta = -.008, p > .05$), with a 95% confidence interval of $(-.03, -.02)$. Conversely, in environments characterized by weak organizational ethical climates, this indirect effect is significantly negative ($\beta = -.11, p < .01$), with a 95% confidence interval of $(-.19, -.03)$. Moreover, there is a significant difference ($\Delta = .10, p < .01$) between the estimates of these two indirect effects, with a 95% confidence interval of $(.03, .18)$. Therefore, we can confidently state that H6 is supported based on the test results of H4.

Table 5

Results of Moderated Mediating Effect Test

Effects	Estimate	S.E.	Est./S.E.	P-value	95 % CI	
					Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Self-serving leadership – Environmental responsibility – Employee green behavior						
Low organizational ethical climate	-.18	.03	-5.50	<.001	-.25	-.11
High organizational ethical climate	-.03	.01	-2.30	>.05	-.07	.01
Differences between the two groups	.15	.04	3.31	<.001	.09	.23
Self-serving leadership – Self-interested motivation – Employee green behavior						
Low organizational ethical climate	-.11	.03	-2.97	<.01	-.19	-.03
High organizational ethical climate	-.00	.01	-0.57	>.05	-.03	-.02
Differences between the two groups	.10	.04	2.70	<.01	.03	.18

Discussion

In recent years, there has been an increasing scholarly focus on the relationship between sustainable leadership and the environmentally conscious behavior of employees (Cai et al.,

2024; Luo et al., 2024; Nawaz Khan, 2023). The current study extends a step further to investigate how self-serving leadership affects employee green behavior. This research uses the principles of social information processing theory to build a thorough theoretical framework that explains the complex relationship between leadership that serves their interests and employees' involvement in sustainable practices. Environmental responsibility and self-interested motivation as mediating variables and organizational ethical climate as moderating variables, this study constructs a moderating multiple mediation model.

This research makes a substantial scholarly contribution to the field by examining the influence mechanism of self-serving leadership. This study closes a significant gap in the literature by expanding on the argument made by Jiang and Gu (2016) that the effects of negative leadership styles are greater than those of positive leadership. Firstly, the study highlights the negative effects of self-serving leadership on employee green behavior. In contrast, previous research has mostly concentrated on how "positive" leadership styles encourage "positive" tendencies in employee green behavior dilemmas, with less emphasis on the inhibitory effects of negative leadership styles (Ahmad et al., 2022; Hu et al., 2022; Noor et al., 2023; Omarova & Jo, 2022). Exploitative leadership practices are frequently noticed in enterprises, indicating a destructive leadership style with serious consequences for employee behavior (Alajhar et al., 2024). The results of this study confirm earlier findings that self-serving leadership negatively impacts employee behavior (Bajaba et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Therefore, this study takes the negative characteristic of self-serving leadership as the antecedent variable and associates it with employee-green behavior, verifying that it inhibits employee-green behavior. This supports the view in previous studies that self-serving leadership can hurt employee behavior (Li, 2024; Uzma Sarwar et al., 2023; Zhining Wang, 2021).

This study investigates the psychological mediators underpinning the association between employees' engagement in eco-friendly activity and self-serving leadership. It uses empirical evidence to build a theoretical model that supports self-serving motives and environmental responsibilities as mediators. First, based on Hui et al. (2021) and Mi et al. (2021), this study finds that environmental responsibility is a proactive psychological element that encourages employee compassion. Notably, studies on its relationship with negative leadership styles, such as self-serving leadership, are scarce. This study introduces an entirely novel approach for future research on the effects of negative leadership styles by using the feeling of environmental responsibility as a mediating variable.

Second, employees often imitate their leaders' self-serving attitudes and behaviors, viewing them as benchmarks. As a result, employees undergo a cognitive transformation characterized by an elevated motivation to prioritize personal interests (Sun et al., 2023), which raises the probability that they will choose to participate in actions that are detrimental to the environment rather than those that are altruistic. Additionally, the study's conclusions show that self-serving leadership hinders employees' adoption of green practices by simultaneously amplifying negative mediators and reducing good ones. This shows how self-serving leadership leads to employee environmental activism.

Finally, this study examines how employees view the workplace ethical climate about self-serving leadership and green conduct. The findings support the idea that it can interfere with the self-serving leadership's persuasion mechanism, suppressing employees' green behavior

by emphasizing environmental responsibility and self-interest. Consistent with existing research findings, the organizational ethical climate perceived by employees is generated by the collective cognition and behavioral intentions of organizational members (Gok et al., 2023), and it does not change the entire atmosphere due to the presence of self-serving leadership within the organization. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that a strong organizational ethical atmosphere may correct unethical behavior inside a company. In an organization with a strong ethical climate, employees can successfully resolve ethical quandaries between self-interest and altruism despite encountering self-serving leadership.

Theoretical Implications

This study initially contributes to the existing body of knowledge regarding the mediating role of self-serving leadership in relation to innovative behavior among employees. Previous research has primarily focused on positive leadership styles that promote positive employee green behavior (Liu et al., 2023; Sürücü, 2024), with less emphasis on the inhibitory effects of negative leadership styles; and mostly concentrated on various mediating factors, including self-efficacy and training (Ahuja et al., 2023), environmental passion (Shah, Fahlevi, Rahman, et al., 2023). However, there is a lack of a comparative investigation of the various processes that mediate the relationship. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of research that has examined the mediating role of self-interested motivation and environmental responsibility in the relationship between self-serving leadership and green behavior among employees. The study suggests that self-serving leadership influences employee green behavior through both environmental responsibility and self-interested incentives.

Moreover, this study adds to the existing body of knowledge regarding the border conditions that determine the strength or weakness of the mediating effect of environmental responsibility and self-interested motivation. To the best of our understanding, there is currently no research that has investigated the moderating effect of self-serving leadership on employee green behavior through its mediating effect. This study uses organizational ethical climate as a moderating variable to fill this gap. Previous studies have established that an organization's ethical climate has the potential to motivate employees to engage in more environmentally green behaviors (Dey et al., 2022; Sabokro et al., 2021; Zacher et al., 2023). The results indicate that the ethical climate of an organization moderates positively not only the relationship between environmental responsibility and green employee behavior but also the relationship between self-interested motivation and green employee behavior. This result supports the concept that a strong ethical climate in a firm leads to increased willingness among employees to engage in green activities (Qasim et al., 2023; Song et al., 2023).

Practical Implications

The hotel industry must address the negative impacts of self-serving leadership, which primarily focuses on personal benefits. To achieve sustainable growth, the industry should intensify personality testing for managers and support leaders with a global perspective on environmental sustainability. Leadership should inspire employees to support environmental protection and align with the hotel's objectives. Limiting authority and resources to self-serving leaders is crucial, as they can manipulate power for personal gain.

Motivating employees is essential, as leaders' environmental values can influence their sense of responsibility. Hotel companies should hire employees with high responsibility and

understand their selfish needs to optimize operational efficiency. Educating staff about environmental conservation and encouraging simple changes can help promote sustainable development. An ethical atmosphere within the organization is crucial, as it influences employees' perspectives and conduct. Hotel businesses should create green working procedures, train staff, and align their green development strategies with employees' work.

Conclusion

The findings show that the relationship between self-serving leadership and employee green behavior is multifaceted, with employees' conceptions of environmental responsibility and self-serving motives functioning as important mediators. The relationship between employees' environmental consciousness and green conduct is also strongly influenced by the ethical climate that exists inside the firm. A positive ethical climate is a barrier against the negative effects of self-serving leadership on employees' environmental consciousness. The indirect effects of self-serving leadership on employee green behaviors are moderated by their environmental responsibilities.

The researcher emphasizes in concluding this study the critical roles that environmental responsibility and self-serving motivations play as mediators in forming the complex interactions between employee behavior and leadership style. In addition, the research reveals that an organization's ethical environment has a considerable moderating influence, and it highlights the fact that this influence has the potential to offset some of the negative effects associated with self-serving leadership. These findings highlight the necessity of maintaining a favorable ethical climate inside firms to counterbalance the potentially adverse impacts of particular leadership styles on employee behavior and organizational outcomes.

Research Limitations and Future Directions

The research emphasizes the subjectivity in self-evaluations of environmental accountability and self-interest. The research was based on questionnaire data from leaders and employees. It is recommended that future research utilize comprehensive assessment techniques and investigate the underlying processes of the impact of self-serving leadership on environmentally conscious behavior among employees by utilizing cross-cultural approaches and longitudinal monitoring. The study focuses on country hotel workers, but more research across cultures is needed to confirm the findings. In order to comprehend the intricate relationship among self-serving leadership, organizational ethics, and employee conduct, it is necessary to investigate the potential moderating and mediating effects of psychological variables. Future research should examine how corporate ethical climates affect this relationship to improve conclusions and knowledge of the complicated dynamics.

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