EXAMINING FACTORS THAT COULD LEAD TO UNETHICAL BEHAVIOUR IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Issues related to unethical behaviour is also evident in institutions of higher learning. This paper will discuss some of the factors that have been shown to have an influence on unethical behaviour in the specific context in higher learning institutions in Malaysia. Ethical leadership and ethical climate are identified to be the variables that might influence the intention to perform such behaviour. It then discusses the importance of ethical leadership and ethical climate in shaping the ethical conduct in higher learning institutions.

Keywords: Unethical behavior; higher learning institution; ethical leadership; ethical climate.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of unethical behavior continues to be a concern in the workplace, inclusive of higher learning institutions. There is an increasing interest in problems related to academic integrity in higher education and it has become a topic that is being discussed continuously by various parties.

Moving forward to the year 2020, it has been the vision of the Ministry of Higher Education to realize their wish for Malaysia to be an educational hub. The aim is to have the public universities and the higher education sector to be referred to by the global community; through high achievement in quality, autonomy, collaboration and internationalization. The process of internationalization includes the effort to increase the number of foreign students coming to Malaysia to study. As at December 2018, there are 130,245 international students studying here either in public or private higher learning institutions. Under the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education), the aim is to attract 250,000 international students by 2025. Thus, having universities with good governance would certainly help to achieve this objective.

This paper identifies some of the factors that have been shown to influence the academicians/lecturers on the intention to commit unethical practices in higher learning institutions. It then concludes with the proposed conceptual diagram for this study. Maintaining a high academic integrity is essential to ensure the achievement of a high-income economy as aspired by the government, which is also in line with Vision 2020 and also to produce an ethical society.

The issues of organizational misconduct have been attracting many researchers inclusive of the public showing their concern. They have also looked at how the organization and their members (academicians, administrator and students) get themselves entangled in the issue and they are trying to find out the best way to overcome this problem. Unethical scandals can be in the form of corruption, bribery and fraud. These three common malpractices can occur

in any industry, although the degree may differ from industry to industry. Previous studies have shown that education system can be as corrupt as other components of government and the economy. The universal characteristics that can be found in the university systems are now being distorted by the interest of specific individuals in the institutions (Heyneman, 2015).

Previous studies have examined many forms of academic dishonesty and cheating in the education. Academic dishonesty or unethical behaviour in academic has also been part of the problems faced by higher education in various parts of the world. It can include problem such as cheating and plagiarism, bias, false research, abuse of power, abuse of authority and many more. As of now, the level of integrity practiced in the academic area is still declining and not improving (Sabli et al., 2016). Academic institutions need to investigate academic dishonesty proactively and develop solutions to counter this trend, or the problems will exist on an ongoing basis. Looking at the development and challenges of higher education, the quality in higher education should be now closely linked to ethics and moral values (Prisacariu & Shah, 2016). The academics who are among the main character in the teaching and learning process, are fully responsible and should be visible with works that are used by the community.

There are cases reported in institutions of higher learning. Recently, three individuals were arrested for allegedly involved in a syndicate producing fake degree certificates inclusive of masters, degree and diploma bearing few IPTS names. They only take one week to produce all the certificates with cost ranging from RM2,000 to RM16,000 depending on types of certificate and IPTS. (The Star, April 15, 2018). Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) is now trying to identify whether there are IPTS employees who abetting in the syndicate. An ex-lecturer of USM was caught for presenting false PhD certificates and documents in order to be accepted as a lecturer, and the university has to pay a sum of RM195,081.38 for his salary during his two-year service for the university before he resigned in 2010 (TheSun Daily, March 9, 2018). Another case involving a managing director of a private college who allegedly have taken bribes from the college students. It was reported that he managed to get RM2,500 from each 20 students, in order for him to issue certificates that allowed them to further their medical studies abroad. (NST, October 4, 2017). Two lecturers from Universiti Teknikal Malaysia (UTeM) who are also husband and wife were remanded on 6 September 2017 on the allegation of abuse of power, suggesting to the faculty's management to choose their company to buy lab equipment together with service for research amounting to RM52,000 in Mac 2015 and Jun 2016. (NST, September 6th, 2017).

Thus, this paper will discuss the different types of unethical behaviour in higher learning institution and will attempt to identify some of the factors that could influence the unethical behaviour in higher learning institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The occurrences of faculty misconduct which consist of plagiarism and fraud, unfortunately exists (Elliott, Marquis, & Neal, 2013). Study on the issue of comparative corruption in the national higher education sectors in the United States of America (USA) and the Russian Federation (RF) shows that both countries are facing similar problem when it comes into corruption (Osipian, 2014). Transparency International, has conducted several studies on corrupt practices in the academic institutions of different countries. Their monitoring exercises on corruption in the Middle East shows that 70% of respondents described that educational systems in their countries are either corrupt or extremely corrupt, and corruption perception in the region was very high (Heyneman, 2013). Meanwhile, Georgia also faces the same problem with their higher education institutions as students were found to have bought their admissions, including grades and diplomas (Mier & Griffin, 2005). Transparency International found the

most common forms of corruption in institutions of higher learning as follows: (i) bribes for passing examination, (ii) compulsory purchase of textbooks written by lecturers and (iii) purchase and selling of diplomas.

In the US, the reported misconduct is about several research papers found with similar content, followed by duplication, falsification and plagiarism. Some lecturers in higher institutions in Nigeria engage in unethical practices (Abanobi 2017). Among perceived factors to the situation are desperation for promotion, greed for money, and lack of commitment to the profession. This is in line with the study of Archibong 2012, which is also in Nigeria stating that the reason why lecturers commit the unethical practices, due to desperation for promotion, stagnation in career and many other causes.

McCornac (2008) explains that corruption in higher education in Vietnam is uncontrolled following a survey conducted on students, faculty and administrator. The information from students, faculty, and administrators provides clear indications that corruption in higher education in Vietnam is both rampant and institutional.

The perceptions of the ethics and frequency of occurrence of misbehaviors related to research especially in data analysis and reporting vary among business faculty in Malaysian Universities (Poon & Ainuddin, 2011). Data fabrication, manipulation and distortion are considered unethical; plagiarism due to weakness in language, undeserved authorship credit, using research data and submit simultaneously to more than one publication on the pressure to publish were all perceived differently.

Unethical Behaviour in Higher Learning Institutions

Unethical behaviour is an action that falls outside of what is considered morally right or proper for a person. This kind of behaviour may occur among students, lecturer and administrative staff of institutions of higher learning. The types of corruption in higher education can range from illegal procurement of goods and services, cheating in admission, grading, graduation, housing and academic product, professional misconduct such as favouring family members, sexual exploitation, bias in grading, research plagiarism, cheating in paying taxes and the use of university property (Heyneman, 2015). Examples of such behaviour among students are cheating in examination, plagiarism, fraud, unacceptable assistance. Students involved in cheating such as cheating on homework or assignment, cheating in the examination, individual assignment done in group and plagiarizing from printed materials in order to assist them in their study. (Balbuena & Lamela, 2015)

Examples of misconduct among academicians can be in terms of claim, bias in grading, research plagiarism and abuse of authority. Other examples are fake study and did not properly acknowledge the original resource. There is a relationship between stress and the perception of unethical behaviour in the academic resulting from lack of adequate support from supervisors and colleagues and a clear definition of commitment to work, especially for professors in the over 55 age range (Parlangeli et al., 2017).

Recent study by Tiong, Kho, Mai, Lau, & Hasan (2018) revealed that academicians as respondents have personally encountered at least one case of academic dishonesty involving their peers; and the major factors found because of low level of self-discipline and integrity. The study also identify that the most common form of misconduct is absenteeism from work. It is then followed by giving of publication authorship to non-contributor, academic plagiarism, covering up of student's exam malpractice, falsification of research data/finding, taking adjunct lectureship without permission from the university, leaking of exam questions, forcing students

to buy books or other learning materials, falsifying exam records, writing student assignments for money and accepting bribes to change student grades. The study conducted by (Keith-Spiegel, Tabachnick, & Allen, 1993) shown that lecturers did not take action when the student cheat, giving false information in students recommendation letter, giving higher marks to students without considering the quality of the assignment and preparing examination questions other than that have been discussed in class. De Russy (2003) shows that lecturer come to class late, using harsh words when dealing with students, abusing research grant, plagiarism, having sex with student, refuse to teach and do research and not being able to carry out the administrative work given. Meanwhile, (Saat, Jamal, & Othman, 2004) shown that lecturer's academic misconduct involves plagiarism, having relationship with students and not following the universities' rules and regulation. As for the administrative staffs, such behaviour could include the abuse of power for private and material gain, illegal procurement of products and services, exploitation of university assets and corruption (Heyneman, 2015). Table 1 shows examples of unethical behaviour involving lecturers.

Table 1: Cases of Unethical Behaviour by Lecturers

Authors	Examples of unethical behaviour
Keith-Spiegel (1993)	Lecturers did not take action when the student cheat, giving false information in students recommendation letter, giving higher marks to students without considering the quality of the assignment, including examination questions not following the syllabus
De Russy (2003)	Lecturer come to class late, using harsh words when dealing with students, abusing research grant, plagiarism, having sex with student, refuse to teach and do research and not being able to carry out the administrative work given
Saat, Jamal, & Othman (2004)	Plagiarism, having relationship with students and not following the universities' rules and regulation
Elliot, Marquis & Neal (2013)	Fake research and not able to give proper acknowledgement to the original author
Chapman (2014)	Embezzlement, misappropriation of funds, changing students grade for money or favours, selling admissions, selling examination scores or grade, falsifying data, gift authoring, ghost authoring
Abanobi (2017)	Desperation for promotion, greed for money and lack of commitment to the profession
Tiong, Kho, Mai, Lau, & Hasan (2018)	absenteeism from work, giving of publication authorship to non-contributor, academic plagiarism, covering up of student's exam malpractice, falsification of research data/finding, taking adjunct lectureship without permission from the university, leaking of exam questions, forcing students to buy books or other learning materials, falsifying exam records, writing student assignments for money and accepting bribes to change student grades.

Factors Influencing Unethical Behaviour

This research will look into the factors that influence the intention to perform unethical behaviour among lecturers in higher learning institution. Lecturers are human resources that have an important role in all activities in universities and colleges. Promoting the role of lecturers as one of the main contributors to the success of the organization is important to be explored. Schulte, Brown, & Wise, (1991) mentioned that it is important to look at the ethical

conduct of the faculty, whereby they are the one who can influence the ethical climate of the university environment, and at the same time being of special concern to the public.

Generally, the job of academicians/lecturers ranges through teaching, research, supervision, consultancy and contribution to the faculty, university and the society. Performance expectation of the faculty member is quite clear, even though it might differ by academic rank or by institution (comprehensive universities, research universities, private universities, colleges etc.). Teaching workloads can be around four courses a year, publish 1-2 articles in top-tier journal (senior faculty are expected to publish more) supervision, consultancy and involvement in community outreach (Wan et al., 2017).

Higher education institutions have to follow the academic workplace evolving nature. The focus now is more on the ranking of the universities, which is also the main expectation of the government on the higher education system. Huge investment has been made to produce educated workforce as well as attracting international investment. One of the easiest ways is to encourage the faculty members to actively involved in research and publication.

Measure of higher education excellence is also based on ranking of universities. The whole system of the universities and colleges were being evaluated, which at the same time consider the publication rates as one of the most important elements in most ranking system. Thus, to get higher ranking means the universities and colleges must ensure that their faculty are actively involved in research and publication.

Currently, there are intensified pressures for the faculty member to carry out research and publish. The push for more research somehow affects the work of the academician, created tensions together with the need to fulfil other expectation. It will further give impact to the academic integrity, by putting names to the work of other lecturers, or putting names to the work of students (Wan et al., 2017).

Student need to understand the importance of academic integrity. Lecturers need to instill in students the desire to be ethical and be more vigilant in ensuring proper recognition of intellectual property. (Cheah, 2016). There are many factors that might influence the unethical behaviour of lecturers in higher learning institution. As for this study, the factor of ethical leadership and ethical climate have been identified to be variables to be measured. First, the factor of ethical leadership in higher learning institutions.

Ethical Leadership

Leaders are considered as "tone at the top" that shapes the direction and ethical culture of an organization. Leaders are responsible for the conduct of the organization. Brown & Treviño (2006) explained the relationship between ethical leadership and employee unethical behaviour. The ethical leadership is known as moral manager whom considers ethics as important. They will ensure the importance of ethics is communicated well to their subordinates. These ethical leaders show good example and modelling ethical behaviour; and at the same time using the reward system to ensure the followers be responsible for their ethical conduct (McCabe, Butterfield, & Treviño, 2006).

Leaders are responsible for the conduct of the organization (Wan et al., 2017). Kanungo (2001) definition of ethical leadership as ethical leaders who engage in acts and behaviours that benefit others, and at the same time control their own behaviour. In Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, (2005) paper, they mentioned that ethical leadership always promote ethical conduct by practicing and managing; and at the same time making sure that everybody is accountable for their conduct. Furthermore, it is important for the leaders to ensure that the combination of

integrity, ethical standards and fair treatment becomes their main priorities (Brown, Trevino and Harrison 2005). As for Suar & Khuntia (2004), ethical leaders are those leaders who can incorporate moral principles in their beliefs, values, and behaviours. Leaders who have high integrity, they can be the trustworthy source of information and guidance to the followers (Rosenbach, Kouzes, & Posner, 2018, Kouzes & Posner, 2011, Brown & Treviño, 2006, Suar & Khuntia, 2004,) which further leads to commitment and confidence to the leaders and the organizations (Ng & Feldman, 2015). Leaders who have high moral character and consistently uphold ethical principles are more likely be followed by subordinates (Mayer, Nurmohamed, Treviño, Shapiro, & Schminke, 2013).

Leaders always are the source of guidance, whereby people will pay attention and follow their good attitudes, values and behaviour (Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Misati, 2017) points out that ethical leaders able to inculcate acceptable behaviour among the employees through group learning behaviour which lead to a conducive working environment. In institutions of higher learning, the academic leaders need to strategise to promote ethical conduct. The Deans and the Head of Departments are faculty administrators who are responsible to lead their respective units of education. They are the main source who can influence the faculty and the way they interact. In particular, they are well positioned to provide leadership in creating an inclusive and supportive culture for faculty, staff, and students (Seagren 2000; Bystydzienski, Thomas, Howe, & Desai, 2017).

A recent study by Bystydzienski et al. (2017) mentioned that leaders who are aware of the organization culture and have the knowledge to implement changes were more likely to report culture transformation. Further work behaviour of managers can ensure current performance and organizational effectiveness. Organization can discourage unethical practices by reducing individual centered approach by its member and promote work behaviour through caring and professional climate (Suar & Khuntia, 2004).

The type of leaders that lead the organization can show either positive or negative influence and power to their employees (Lunenburg, 2012). It is important to create a favorable working environment, so that the employees can carry out their duties efficiently. Leaders again can be the main factors that can contribute to the kind of environment (Meriläinen & Kõiv, 2018). Table 2 shows previous studies conducted on the relationship of ethical leadership to unethical behavior.

Table 2: Relationship of Ethical Leadership to Unethical Behaviour

Author (s)	Independent Variables	Methodology	Findings
Brown (2006)	Leadership – transformational, spiritual, authentic	Conceptual paper	Ethical standards must be effectively communicated to the employees. Performance management system is important to hold employees accountable for their conduct.
Elliot (2013)	Leadership (tone at the top) Organizational climate Culture	Conceptual paper	Leadership plays an important role in ensuring the ethical culture in the organization through formal ethical standard and reduce unethical act.
Mayer et al. (2013)	Ethical leadership	Three studies with varying methodologies	Ethical leadership is significant in encouraging ethical behavior among co-workers.

Author (s)	Independent Variables	Methodology	Findings
Bystydzienski, Thomas, Howe & Desai (2016)	Transformational leadership	38 item leadership inventories (multifactor leadership questionnaires) & interview coded using NVIVO software	Leaders must understand the culture of the organization. Proper training can shift administrator attitudes.
Alonderiene (2016)	IV Leadership style DV Job satisfaction	72 faculty members and ten supervisors from Lithuanian public and private universities.	Significant positive impact of leadership style on job satisfaction of faculty.
Meriläinen, & Kõiv (2018)	Quality of leadership	E-mail questionnaire 864 staff of universities	Quality of leaderships are part of factors that affect working environment.

Ethical climate

The organization's ethical climate is a shared knowledge of what a good behaviour is among the employees and how the organization resolved the problem associated to it. The climate may greatly modify personal values, attitudes and behaviours through instructions received in the workplace. Previous research identified that the behaviour of employees are always under the influence of organizational value system (Victor and Cullen 1988, Vardi, 2001). It is further described in terms of the perceptions of employees on organizational practices and procedures and the right or wrong behaviour within the organization.

The ethical climate is developed within the organization through code of ethics, ethical policies, implementation, and management procedures. Much have been done by the organization to ensure that their climate is appropriate. Good workplace ethics are important to ensure the success of the organization. It can facilitate members to be aware of what kind of behaviour are ethically correct together with the consequences following such behaviour. It is important to provide a clear policy of what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and such an important policy should be made known to all employees. Any form of unacceptable behaviour should be reprimanded and addressed quickly.

Managers had a big role to ensure the right ethical climate exist in their organizations. When employees operate in good ethical climate, they are less likely to engage in misconduct. Organization can invest in ethic training for leaders so that the leaders can help in reducing employee misconduct. They can emphasize the value of being an ethical employee through human resource practices, policies, and procedures. Universities must set formal ethical standard, must ensure their leaders are acting ethically which lead to an ethical culture and

reduce unethical act (Elliott et al., 2013). The climate of the department affects the attitudes and activities of department members (Bruhn, 2008).

The ethical climate helps the employees to understand what is expected from them in terms of values and behaviour at the workplace. If the employees fully understand the group norms regarding the appropriate behaviour, employees will be less likely to show or act unethically. Therefore, if ethical climate is higher in emphasizing ethical actions, employees will be less likely to perform unethical behaviours. Previous research has examined the consequences of ethical work climate on specific ethical outcomes, such as unethical and deviant behaviours. A meta-analysis on ethical climates conducted by Martin & Cullen (2006) suggest that positive ethical climates are negatively related to dysfunctional organizational behaviour. In addition, it is found that ethical climates were negatively related to misbehaviour in a non-western sample (Vardi, 2001). Thus, the more positively viewed the organization is, the less reported misbehaviour. (Peterson, 2004) found that organizational deviance was lower in ethical caring climates. Overall, there is strong support that ethical climates have an effect on misbehaviour in organizations

Many organizations inclusive of institutions of higher learning, have responded to ethical scandals in part by creating the Ethics and Compliance Officer (ECO) role in addition to their structure to help ensure employees ethical behavior. The ethics officers have an important role to help the organization manage ethical issues. They are the person who manage the policies, integrates the corporate ethics and organization's culture, maintain good relationships at all levels and supporting those who make ethics reports. One way that the ethic officer can boost their credibility is by enhancing their knowledge of their function and its importance and suitability in the organization (Treviño, Nieuwenboer, Kreiner, & Bishop, 2014).

Rothman (2017) study on ethics in higher education have shown that both administrators and full-time faculty in the studied higher education institution have chosen the deontological climate as the perceived ethical climate. They believe that when they follow and comply with the universities policies, professional standards, and applicable regulations can influence their decision making and behavior and will help them to be successful. A deontological ethical climate is positively related to good ethical behaviour. Shafer (2008) shows that egoistic climates can show employees intention to commit unethical act, while principle climate can reduce such intention. Table 3 shows previous studies conducted on the relationship of ethical climate to unethical behavior.

Table 3: Relationship of Ethical Climate to Unethical Behaviour

Author (s)	Independent Variables	Methodology	Findings
Damodar (2004)	Ethical climate (individual centered climate and caring & professional climate)	Questionnaires 340 middle level executives Manufacturing industries	Individual centered climate is positively related to unethical behavior and caring and professional climate is negatively related.
Bruhn (2008)	Value dissonance	Five vignettes – actual cases of ethics failure	When the value dissonance of employee is high, the chances that they will perform unethical behaviour is high. The climate of the department affects the

Author (s)	Independent Variables	Methodology	Findings
			attitudes and activities of department members.
Mayer (2011)	Ethical leadership Mediator: Ethical climate	Survey packets – Inclusive of five employee and one supervisor	Ethical climate was negatively related to employee misconduct.
Elliot (2013)	Leadership (tone at the top) Organizational climate culture	Conceptual paper	Leaders of universities have big responsibilities in setting ethical standard, ensuring the practice of ethical culture and manage to reduce unethical act.
Treviño, Nieuwenboer, Kreiner, & Bishop (2015)	Ethics officer	Interview	The role of Ethics and Compliance Officer (ECO) is important to ensure the employees are ethical and legal behaviour.
Shafer (2008)	Ethical climate	Questionnaires and vignettes	Egoistic climates are significant to employee intention to commit unethical act, while benevolent and principle climate reduce such intention.
Rothman (2017)	Ethical climate, egoistic, deontological, and utilitarian	Survey instrument	The deontological climate (correlates to good ethical behaviour) was accepted as the ethical climate for both administrators and full-time faculty in the studied higher education institution.

Theory used

This study uses Hunt and Vitell General Theory of Marketing Ethics (1993; 1986) as its underpinning theory. General Theory of Marketing Ethics or Hunt and Vitell's Theory of Ethics is proposed by Hunt and Vitell (1993; 1986). The theory shows that personal characteristics, culture, organizational and professional environment influence perceived ethical problems, which in turn affect intention and behaviour. The theory broadly evaluates ethical behaviours based on how individual factors interact with cultural, organizational and industrial factors to shape perception and later impact judgement, intentions and behaviours.

The Hunt and Vitell model was proposed in looking at how individual who faced with ethical dilemma go through the thought processes. The two main processes are deontological and teleological evaluation. The outcome of each of these processes is a cognitive evaluation of a specific action which is then used in developing an intention to act. The model's purpose

is to more fully explain how ethical actions are considered and how that consideration impacts eventual behaviors

Conceptual framework

This study proposes the exploration of factors leadership and ethical climate towards the intention to perform unethical behaviour among lecturers in the higher learning institutions in Malaysia. The framework of the study shall as what is portrayed in Figure 1.
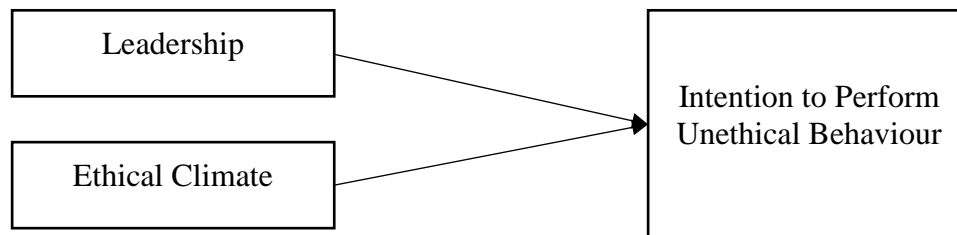

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Hypotheses development

Ethical leadership refers to ethical leaders who are engaged in acts and behaviours that benefit other employee, and at the same time control their own behaviour. According to Bedi, Alpaslan, & Green (2016) ethical leadership is related positively to numerous follower outcomes such as perceptions of leader interactional fairness and follower ethical behaviour.

Ethical leaders are fair, honest and principled individuals that use various forms of rewards, punishments and communication mechanisms to influence their followers ethical behaviour (Brown & Treviño, 2006). (Walumbwa et al., 2017) points out that ethical leaders able to inculcate acceptable behaviour among the employees through group learning behaviour which lead to a conducive working environment. Elliot (2013) and Jill Bystydzienski, Thomas, Howe & Desai (2016) shows that leaders who are ethical will result in lower intention to perform unethical behaviour. According to theory of Hunt and Vitell, personal characteristics, such as leadership will influence intention to perform unethical behaviour. Thus, based on findings from previous studies, this study hypothesizes that:

H1: There is a significant and negative relationship between leadership and intention to perform unethical behaviour in institutions of higher learning

Damodar (2004) shows that caring and professional climate is negatively related to unethical behaviour. Mayer (2011) found that ethical climate was negatively related to employee misconduct. In another study Shafer (2008) found that egoistic climates predicted employee intention to commit unethical act while benevolent and principle climate reduce such intention. According to theory of Hunt and Vitell, professional environment, such as ethical climate will influence intention to perform unethical behaviour. Thus, based on findings from previous studies, this study hypothesizes that:

H2: There is a significant and negative relationship between ethical climate and intention to perform unethical behaviour in institutions of higher learning

This conceptual framework suggest that leadership and ethical climate are expected to be the explanatory variables that will explain the intention to perform the behaviour. The framework shows the relationship of the independent variables (leadership and ethical climate)

with the dependent variable (unethical behaviour), indicating the existence of significant relationships between them.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Although there might be other factors that cause unethical behavior, this paper has only discussed two variables that might have an influence on unethical behavior, namely ethical leadership and ethical climate. Different types of unethical behaviour in higher learning institutions are also discussed. It is hoped that the findings of the study can assist institutions of higher learning to create a more ethical climate and to identify governors of the university who are ethical.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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