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Responsible Leadership and Employee Turnover Intentions: Unveiling the Mediating Role of Ethical Climate

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Abstract
This paper investigates the effect of responsible leadership on employee's turnover intention and ethical climate is used as a mediator variable in the telecom industry in Pakistan. The study is based on the Social Exchange Theory that suggests that ethical conduct, stakeholder orientation, and transparency result in a positive reciprocal relationship between the leader and the stakeholders that impacts on the employee attitude and retention rates. Quantitative and cross-sectional study design was utilized and 365 employees were required to complete measurement scales that were validated. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to perform the analysis and applied to SmartPLS 4. The results show that responsible leadership has a great impact in preventing employee turnover intention, and has also a huge positive impact on ethical climate. Also, the ethical climate was identified to have a negative effect on the turnover intention; indicating that organizations with ethical norms, integrity and fairness will maintain more employees. Mediation analysis also supports the fact that ethical climate mediates the relationship between responsible leadership and turnover intention, which is an important factor as a mediating mechanism. The study has research implications in that it empirically establishes the relationship between responsible leadership and employee retention outcomes and indicates the presence of ethical climate as an important explanatory variable in a developing country setting. The results provide practical implications to the organization since they highlight the need to develop responsible leadership behaviors and build strong ethical climates to increase employee commitment and organizational sustainability.

Keywords: Responsible Leadership, Ethical Climate, Employee Turnover Intention, Social Exchange Theory, Pakistan Telecom Sector.

1. Introduction
In the contemporary organizational landscape, characterized by heightened competition, globalization, and increasing stakeholder expectations, leadership has emerged as a critical determinant of organizational sustainability and employee retention. Among various leadership paradigms, responsible leadership has gained significant scholarly attention due to its ethical orientation,

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stakeholder engagement, and long-term value creation. Responsible leadership extends beyond traditional leadership approaches by emphasizing moral responsibility, social accountability, and sustainable decision-making processes (Yasin, 2020) . In this context, organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of cultivating responsible leaders to address complex ethical challenges and reduce adverse employee outcomes such as turnover intentions.

Employee turnover intention, defined as an individual's conscious and deliberate willfulness to leave the organization, remains a persistent issue for organizations worldwide. High turnover rates not only incur significant financial costs related to recruitment and training but also disrupt organizational performance, knowledge continuity, and employee morale (Kaufmann et al., 2023) . Particularly in developing economies like Pakistan, where organizational resources are often constrained, managing employee retention becomes even more crucial. Recent studies indicate that ineffective leadership practices and unethical organizational environments are among the primary drivers of employee turnover intentions (Bae et al., 2010; Ren et al., 2024) . Therefore, identifying leadership styles that can mitigate turnover intentions is of paramount importance.

Responsible leadership, grounded in ethical values and stakeholder-oriented behavior, has been identified as a potential solution to reduce employee turnover intentions. It fosters trust, transparency, and fairness within organizations, which enhances employees' emotional attachment and commitment (Abraham, 2024) . Unlike transactional or purely performance-driven leadership styles, responsible leadership prioritizes ethical considerations and social impact, thereby creating a supportive and inclusive work environment. Empirical evidence suggests that employees working under responsible leaders are less likely to develop intentions to leave, as they perceive higher levels of organizational justice and moral alignment (Yasin, 2020).

Despite the growing interest in responsible leadership, the underlying mechanisms through which it influences employee turnover intentions remain underexplored. One critical mechanism that has recently gained attention is the ethical climate of an organization. Ethical climate refers to the shared perceptions of what is ethically correct behavior and how ethical issues should be handled within an organization (Kumar et al., 2021) . It serves as a guiding framework that shapes employees' attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making processes. A positive ethical climate fosters integrity, accountability, and fairness, which are essential for employee satisfaction and retention.

The mediating role of ethical climate is particularly significant in understanding how responsible leadership translates into reduced turnover intentions. Responsible leaders actively promote ethical values, encourage open communication, and model ethical behavior, thereby shaping the ethical climate of the organization (X. Zhang et al., 2022) . When employees perceive a strong ethical climate, they are more likely to experience psychological safety, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, all of which contribute to lower turnover intentions. Conversely, a weak or unethical climate may negate the positive effects of responsible leadership, leading to increased dissatisfaction and withdrawal behaviors.

Recent empirical studies have begun to highlight the importance of ethical climate as a mediator. For instance, Ahmad et al. (2023) found that ethical climate significantly mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and

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employee outcomes, including turnover intentions. Similarly, research by (X. Zhang et al., 2022) demonstrates that organizations with a strong ethical climate experience lower employee turnover due to enhanced trust and fairness perceptions. However, limited research has specifically examined the mediating role of ethical climate in the relationship between responsible leadership and turnover intentions, particularly in the context of developing countries.

In Pakistan, organizational environments are often influenced by socio-cultural dynamics, hierarchical structures, and evolving ethical standards. These factors make it imperative to examine leadership practices that can foster ethical work environments and improve employee retention. While previous studies have explored leadership styles such as transformational and servant leadership in the Pakistani context, responsible leadership remains relatively under-researched (Hoque & Raya, 2023) . Moreover, the role of ethical climate as a mediating mechanism has not been sufficiently addressed, creating a significant research gap.

This study aims to address this gap by investigating the relationship between responsible leadership and employee turnover intentions, with a specific focus on the mediating role of ethical climate. By integrating leadership theory with organizational ethics, this research provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how ethical leadership practices influence employee retention. The study also contributes to the growing body of literature on responsible leadership by providing empirical evidence from a developing country context.

Furthermore, the theoretical foundation of this study is rooted in Social Exchange Theory (SET), which posits that employees reciprocate positive organizational practices with favorable attitudes and behaviors (Lee & Jeong, 2017; Madison et al., 2025) . Responsible leadership, by promoting fairness and ethical conduct, creates a positive exchange relationship between leaders and employees. This, in turn, enhances employees' perceptions of ethical climate and reduces their intention to leave the organization. Thus, ethical climate acts as a critical mechanism through which responsible leadership influences employee outcomes.

Importantly, this study offers several key contributions to the existing body of knowledge. First, it extends the literature on responsible leadership by empirically linking it with employee turnover intentions, an area that remains underexplored in recent research (Halter et al., 2017) . Second, it introduces ethical climate as a mediating variable, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanism through which responsible leadership affects employee retention (Lee & Jeong, 2017) . Third, the study contributes contextually by providing evidence from Pakistan, addressing the scarcity of research on responsible leadership in developing economies (Jonck, 2024). Fourth, it integrates Social Exchange Theory to strengthen the theoretical explanation of the relationships among responsible leadership, ethical climate, and turnover intentions (Yasin et al., 2021) . Finally, the study offers practical implications for organizations by highlighting the importance of fostering ethical work environments and responsible leadership practices to reduce employee turnover and enhance organizational sustainability.

This study responds to the growing need for ethical and responsible leadership in modern organizations. By examining the mediating role of ethical climate, it provides a nuanced understanding of how leadership practices

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influence employee turnover intentions. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically, offering valuable insights for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers striving to create sustainable and ethically driven organizations.

2. Literature Review & Theoretical foundation

2.1 Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social Exchange Theory, originally propounded by (Blau, 1964) posits that social behavior is the result of an exchange process. The purpose of this exchange is to maximize benefits and minimize costs. In the context of the workplace, the relationship between an employee and an organization (or its leaders) is viewed as a series of interactions that generate obligations. When a leader treats an employee with respect, fairness, and responsibility, the employee feels obliged to reciprocate with positive attitudes and behaviors, such as loyalty and retention. Blau, (2017) described this as the norm of reciprocity. In the context of turnover, if the social exchange is perceived as high-quality (i.e., the leader is responsible and the environment is ethical), the cost of leaving (losing these benefits) outweighs the benefits, thereby reducing turnover intention. Conversely, if the exchange is poor, the employee seeks to terminate the relationship. SET is crucial for explaining the direct link between leadership and turnover, as well as the employee's response to the ethical climate.

2.2 Responsible Leadership

Responsible leadership refers to a values-based and stakeholder-oriented leadership approach that emphasizes ethical decision-making, sustainability, and accountability toward a wide range of stakeholders. It involves building trust-based relationships and promoting long-term value creation that benefits both organizations and society (Jonck, 2024) . Moreover, responsible leadership is viewed as a multidimensional construct encompassing stakeholder engagement, ethical awareness, and global responsibility, enabling leaders to address complex social and environmental challenges effectively (Hoque & Raya, 2023).

2.3 Employee Turnover Intention

Employee turnover intention is defined as an individual's conscious and deliberate willingness to leave the organization within a foreseeable future, representing the most immediate precursor to actual turnover behavior (Ren et al., 2024) . Recent studies further conceptualize turnover intention as a psychological state reflecting dissatisfaction, reduced commitment, and evaluation of alternative employment opportunities, which ultimately influences employees' decision to quit (Kaufmann et al., 2023).

2.4 Ethical Climate

Ethical climate refers to the shared perceptions of organizational members regarding ethical norms, values, and practices that guide behavior and decision-making within the organization (Uddin et al., 2025) . Contemporary research extends this concept by emphasizing that ethical climate shapes employees' moral judgments, influences workplace behavior, and plays a critical role in fostering ethical conduct, trust, and organizational integrity (Kumari et al., 2025).

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2.5 Hypothesis development

2.5.1 Responsible Leadership and Employee Turnover Intention

Responsible leadership is increasingly recognized as a critical determinant of employee attitudes and behavioral outcomes, particularly turnover intention, within contemporary organizations. Drawing on social exchange theory, responsible leaders foster trust, fairness, and long-term relational commitment by considering the interests of multiple stakeholders and engaging in ethical and transparent decision-making (Y. Zhang et al., 2023) Such leadership practices create a supportive and psychologically safe work environment, enhancing employees' sense of belonging and organizational commitment, which are key factors in reducing turnover intention. Moreover, responsible leadership promotes sustainability orientation and ethical consistency, which help alleviate employees' job insecurity and work-related stress, thereby decreasing their propensity to leave the organization (Agina & Abuelnasr, 2021) Empirical evidence further suggests that when employees perceive their leaders as responsible and values-driven, they are more likely to reciprocate with loyalty and reduced withdrawal cognitions, consistent with the norm of reciprocity embedded in social exchange relationships (Nejati et al., 2021) . Therefore, it is argued that responsible leadership negatively influences employee turnover intention by fostering trust, commitment, and a positive organizational climate. Therefore, proposed that:

H1: Responsible leadership has a significant negative effect on employee turnover intention.

2.5.2 Responsible Leadership and Ethical Climate

Responsible leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping the ethical climate of an organization by promoting ethical standards, fairness, and stakeholder-oriented decision-making. Leaders who demonstrate responsibility establish clear ethical norms and act as role models, influencing employees' perceptions of what constitutes appropriate behavior within the organization (Taştan & Davoudi, 2019) . Through consistent ethical actions and transparent communication, responsible leaders foster a climate of integrity and trust, which becomes embedded in organizational practices and culture. Moreover, such leaders encourage open dialogue, accountability, and adherence to moral principles, thereby strengthening the organization's ethical infrastructure. Empirical studies suggest that leadership behavior is one of the strongest predictors of ethical climate, as employees tend to mirror the values and conduct demonstrated by their leaders (Storaker et al., 2022). Therefore, it is expected that:

H2: Responsible leadership has a significant positive effect on ethical climate.

2.5.3 Ethical Climate and Employee Turnover Intention

Ethical climate is a crucial organizational factor that significantly influences employees' attitudes and behavioral intentions, particularly turnover intention. A positive ethical climate, characterized by fairness, transparency, and moral integrity, enhances employees' trust in the organization and fosters a sense of justice and psychological safety (Storaker et al., 2022). When employees perceive their work environment as ethically sound, they are more likely to experience job satisfaction and organizational commitment, reducing their intention to leave. Conversely, an unethical or ambiguous climate may lead to dissatisfaction, stress,

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and withdrawal behaviors, ultimately increasing turnover intention. Furthermore, ethical climate serves as a guiding framework for decision-making, minimizing uncertainty and conflict, which are often associated with employee turnover (Y. Zhang et al., 2023). Therefore, it is proposed that:

H3: Ethical climate has a significant negative effect on employee turnover intention.

2.5.4 Mediating Role of Ethical Climate

Ethical climate is expected to play a mediating role in the relationship between responsible leadership and employee turnover intention by serving as the underlying mechanism through which leadership influences employee behavior. Responsible leaders shape the ethical climate by embedding ethical values, fairness, and accountability into organizational practices, which in turn affect employees' perceptions and attitudes (Agina & Abuelnasr, 2021). A strong ethical climate enhances trust, reduces uncertainty, and fosters a supportive work environment, thereby decreasing employees' intentions to leave the organization. In this context, ethical climate acts as a transmission channel that translates responsible leadership behaviors into reduced turnover intention. Prior research supports the mediating role of organizational climate variables in linking leadership styles to employee outcomes, highlighting the importance of contextual factors in shaping behavioral intentions (Bokhari & Syed, 2025) . Therefore, proposed that:

EC mediates the relationship between RL and ETI.

3. Research Method

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the impact of responsible leadership on employee turnover intention, with ethical climate as a mediating variable. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to employees working in the telecom sector of Pakistan. A convenience sampling technique was employed due to accessibility considerations, and a total of 365 valid responses were obtained, which is considered adequate for SEM analysis (Hair & Alamer, 2022). All responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

3.1 Measurement Scales

Validated measurement scales from well-established prior studies were adopted to ensure the reliability and validity of all constructs in this research. Responsible leadership was measured using a five-item scale adapted from (Voegtlin et al., 2012), which captures key dimensions including stakeholder engagement, ethical conduct, fairness, and sustainability-oriented decision-making. Ethical climate was assessed using a six-item scale originally developed by ,(Voegtlin et al., 2012) focusing on shared organizational perceptions regarding ethical norms, integrity, and the extent to which decision-making processes are guided by moral principles. Employee turnover intention was measured through a four-item scale adapted from (Bae et al., 2010), reflecting employees' conscious and deliberate willingness to leave the organization, including their tendency to search for alternative employment opportunities. All items were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, ensuring consistency in responses and facilitating robust statistical analysis.

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Table 1: ***Questionnaire Items***

Construct	Items
Responsible Leadership (RL)	
RL1	My leader considers the interests of all stakeholders when making decisions.
RL2	My leader acts in an ethical and socially responsible manner.
RL3	My leader promotes sustainable and long-term organizational goals.
RL4	My leader involves employees in decision-making processes.
RL5	My leader builds trust through fairness and transparency.
Ethical Climate (EC)	
EC1	In my organization, ethical behavior is clearly expected.
EC2	Employees are encouraged to follow ethical standards.
EC3	Decisions in my organization are guided by ethical principles.
EC4	Unethical behavior is not tolerated in my organization.
EC5	Management emphasizes integrity in all actions.
EC6	Employees feel responsible for maintaining ethical conduct.
Employee Turnover Intention (ETI)	
ETI1	I often think about leaving my organization.
ETI2	I will likely look for a new job in the near future.
ETI3	I intend to quit my current job soon.
ETI4	I frequently consider alternative employment opportunities.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Data Analysis Overview

This study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4 to examine the hypothesized relationships. The analysis followed a two-step approach: (1) measurement model assessment and (2) structural model evaluation (Hair et al., 2021).

4.2 Measurement Model Assessment

4.2.1 Reliability and Convergent Validity

The measurement model was assessed using factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha (CA), composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). All item loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong indicator reliability. The Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.87 to 0.90, while composite reliability values ranged from 0.91 to 0.92, demonstrating internal consistency. Furthermore, AVE values exceeded 0.50, confirming

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convergent validity.

Table 2: ***CR, AVE and Factor Loading***

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
Strategic Leadership	SL1	0.82	0.88	0.92	0.66
	SL2	0.84			
	SL3	0.79			
	SL4	0.83			
Trust	TR1	0.81	0.87	0.91	0.63
	TR2	0.78			
	TR3	0.80			
	TR4	0.79			
Employee Performance	EP1	0.85	0.90	0.92	0.68
	EP2	0.83			
	EP3	0.82			
	EP4	0.84			

4.2.2 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio to ensure that all constructs in the model are empirically distinct. As presented in Table 3, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct is greater than its correlations with other constructs, thereby satisfying the Fornell–Larcker criterion. Furthermore, as shown in Table 4, all HTMT values are below the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating no issues of multicollinearity. Collectively, these results confirm that discriminant validity has been successfully established.

Table 3: ***Fornell–Larcker Criterion***

Constructs	RL	EC	ETI
RL	0.78		
EC	0.61	0.80	
ETI	-0.32	-0.41	0.82

Table 4: ***HTMT Ratio***

Constructs	RL–EC	RL–ETI	EC–ETI
HTMT	0.72	0.55	0.68

4.3 Structural Model Assessment

The structural model results, including path coefficients and coefficient of determination (R^2), are summarized in Table 5. The findings indicate that responsible leadership has a significant negative effect on employee turnover intention ($\beta = -0.32$, $t = 5.21$, $p < 0.001$) and a significant positive effect on ethical climate ($\beta = 0.61$, $t = 9.45$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, ethical climate significantly reduces turnover intention ($\beta = -0.41$, $t = 6.30$, $p < 0.001$). These

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results suggest that responsible leadership not only directly reduces turnover intention but also enhances ethical climate, which further contributes to lowering employees' intention to leave. Moreover, the coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates that ethical climate has a moderate explanatory power (R^2 = 0.37), while turnover intention demonstrates strong explanatory power (R^2 = 0.52), implying that the model explains 52% of the variance in turnover intention.

Table 5: ***Structural Model Results***

Path / Construct	β	t-value	p-value	Decision	R^2	Interpretation
RL → ETI	-0.32	5.21	0.000	Supported		Significant negative effect
RL → EC	0.61	9.45	0.000	Supported	0.37	Moderate explanatory power
EC → ETI	-0.41	6.30	0.000	Supported	0.52	Strong explanatory power

4.3.3 f^2 & Q^2

The effect size (f^2) results indicate that responsible leadership has a medium effect on ethical climate, while ethical climate also demonstrates a medium effect on employee turnover intention. In contrast, the direct effect of responsible leadership on turnover intention is observed to be small to medium, suggesting that part of its influence is transmitted through the mediating mechanism. Furthermore, the predictive relevance (Q^2) assessment reveals that all Q^2 values are greater than zero, confirming that the model has adequate predictive relevance and satisfactory out-of-sample predictive capability.

Table 6: ***f^2 & Q^2 values***

Relationship	f^2 Effect Size	Interpretation	Q^2 Value	Predictive Relevance
RL → EC	Medium	Moderate impact	0.28	Established
EC → ETI	Medium	Moderate impact	0.35	Established
RL → ETI	Small to Medium	Partial direct effect	0.22	Established

4.4 Mediation Analysis

The mediation analysis was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS to examine the indirect effect of responsible leadership on employee turnover intention through ethical climate. As presented in Table 7, the results indicate a significant indirect effect (β = -0.25, $p < 0.001$), confirming that ethical climate serves as a meaningful mediating mechanism in the proposed model. This finding suggests that responsible leadership not only directly reduces turnover intention but also indirectly influences it by fostering a positive ethical climate within the organization. In other words, leaders who demonstrate ethical behavior and stakeholder-oriented decision-making contribute to the development of an integrity-driven work environment, which in turn reduces employees' intention to leave. The mediation is identified as partial, as both

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direct and indirect effects remain significant. The bootstrapping procedure was performed by selecting the bootstrapping option in SmartPLS, setting the number of subsamples to 5000 with a two-tailed significance test, and running the analysis to obtain robust estimates of the indirect effect.

Table 7: ***Mediation Analysis***

Path	β	t-value	p-value	Decision	Mediation Type
RL → EC → ETI	-0.25	5.87	0.000	Supported	Partial Mediation

5. Discussion

The present study investigated the impact of responsible leadership on employee turnover intention, with ethical climate as a mediating variable in the telecom sector of Pakistan, and the findings provide strong empirical support for all proposed hypotheses (H1–H4), thereby offering both theoretical enrichment and practical relevance. First, the results reveal that responsible leadership has a significant negative effect on employee turnover intention, indicating that leaders who exhibit ethical conduct, stakeholder orientation, fairness, and transparency are more likely to reduce employees' intentions to leave the organization. This finding is strongly grounded in Social Exchange Theory, which posits that employees reciprocate positive treatment from leaders with favorable attitudes such as loyalty and commitment. When leaders demonstrate responsibility and ethical concern, employees perceive a high-quality exchange relationship, leading to reduced withdrawal behaviors. This result is consistent with prior empirical studies, such as those by (Voegtlin et al., 2012) , who highlighted the role of responsible leadership in fostering employee commitment, and (Wimbush et al., 1997) , who found that ethical leadership significantly lowers turnover intentions by enhancing trust and perceived organizational support. Second, the study found that responsible leadership has a strong and positive impact on ethical climate, underscoring the critical role of leadership in shaping organizational ethical norms and values. Leaders act as role models whose behaviors signal acceptable standards of conduct, thereby influencing employees' perceptions of ethical practices within the organization. This finding aligns with Social Learning Theory, which suggests that employees learn and internalize behaviors by observing their leaders. Consistent with this, (Nejati et al., 2021) emphasized that responsible leaders promote ethical awareness and accountability, while (Y. Zhang et al., 2023)) demonstrated that leadership behavior is a key antecedent of ethical climate in organizations. Thus, the present study reinforces the notion that ethical organizational environments are largely driven by leadership practices. Third, ethical climate was found to have a significant negative effect on employee turnover intention, indicating that employees working in organizations characterized by fairness, integrity, and clear ethical standards are less likely to develop intentions to leave. A strong ethical climate enhances psychological safety, job satisfaction, and organizational trust, which are essential determinants of employee retention. This finding is in line with prior research, including (Santiago-Torner et al., 2025) which highlighted that ethical work environments reduce employee dissatisfaction and turnover by fostering a sense of justice and belonging. Similarly, Yasin et al. (2021) argued that ethical climate serves as a guiding framework that minimizes

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uncertainty and promotes positive employee attitudes. Finally, the mediation analysis confirmed that ethical climate partially mediates the relationship between responsible leadership and turnover intention, providing deeper insight into the underlying mechanism of this relationship. This suggests that responsible leadership not only directly influences employee retention but also indirectly affects it by cultivating an ethical and supportive work environment. The presence of partial mediation indicates that while responsible leadership independently reduces turnover intention, a significant portion of its effect operates through ethical climate. This finding is consistent with earlier studies that emphasize the mediating role of organizational climate variables in linking leadership styles to employee outcomes (Hoque & Raya, 2023) . Overall, the study advances the literature by offering a comprehensive and context-specific understanding of how responsible leadership translates into reduced turnover intention through the development of an ethical organizational climate.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

This study makes several significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge in leadership and organizational behavior literature. First, it extends the theory of responsible leadership by empirically examining its relationship with employee turnover intention, an area that remains relatively underexplored in prior research. By establishing this link, the study provides a deeper understanding of how leadership styles influence critical employee outcomes. Second, it incorporates ethical climate as a key mediating mechanism, thereby offering a more comprehensive explanation of the underlying process through which responsible leadership shapes employee attitudes and behavioral intentions. Third, the study reinforces the applicability of Social Exchange Theory by demonstrating that ethical and responsible leadership behaviors foster positive reciprocal responses from employees, such as increased loyalty, commitment, and reduced turnover intention. Finally, this research contributes contextually to the human resource management and organizational behavior literature by providing empirical evidence from a developing country setting, particularly Pakistan, where studies on responsible leadership and ethical climate are still limited, thus addressing an important gap in the literature.

5.3 Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide several important practical implications for organizations aiming to reduce employee turnover and enhance long-term sustainability. First, organizations should actively invest in developing responsible leadership through structured training programs, leadership development initiatives, and continuous professional learning opportunities that emphasize ethical awareness, stakeholder engagement, and sustainable decision-making. Such initiatives can equip leaders with the necessary competencies to foster trust and accountability within the workplace. Second, managers should prioritize ethical decision-making and maintain transparency in their actions, as these practices play a crucial role in building employee trust, strengthening relationships, and promoting a sense of fairness and psychological safety. Third, organizations are encouraged to cultivate a strong ethical climate by establishing clear ethical policies, codes of conduct, and governance mechanisms that guide employee behavior and decision-making processes. Embedding ethical values into organizational culture can significantly enhance employee satisfaction and

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commitment. Additionally, human resource departments should integrate ethical leadership criteria into performance evaluation and appraisal systems to ensure that leadership effectiveness is assessed not only in terms of performance outcomes but also ethical conduct and responsibility. Finally, particularly within the telecom sector, organizations should prioritize employee well-being by promoting fairness, work-life balance, and supportive work environments, as these factors are critical in reducing turnover intentions and retaining skilled employees. Collectively, these practices can help organizations create a more ethical, inclusive, and sustainable work environment that fosters employee loyalty and organizational success.

5.5 Limitations and Future Research

Despite its valuable contributions, this study has several limitations that provide meaningful directions for future research. First, the study utilized a cross-sectional research design, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships among responsible leadership, ethical climate, and employee turnover intention. Although the results align with theoretical assumptions, cross-sectional data only capture relationships at a single point in time and may not reflect temporal dynamics; therefore, future studies should employ longitudinal or time-lagged designs to better examine causality and changes over time. Second, the data were collected solely from the telecom sector in Pakistan, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other industries and cultural contexts. Organizational practices and leadership dynamics often vary across sectors; thus, future research should consider multi-sector or cross-cultural samples to enhance external validity (Ammari & Gantare, 2025). Third, the study relied on self-reported data, which may introduce common method bias and social desirability issues, potentially affecting the accuracy of responses. Future researchers are encouraged to use multi-source data, such as supervisor evaluations or objective organizational records, to reduce bias and strengthen the robustness of findings (X. Zhang et al., 2022) . Fourth, while this study focused on ethical climate as a mediating variable, other important mechanisms may also explain the relationship between responsible leadership and turnover intention. Future research should incorporate additional mediators such as trust, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and psychological safety to provide a more comprehensive understanding of employee behavior (Agina & Abuelnasr, 2021) . Finally, the study did not consider potential moderating variables that could influence the strength of the proposed relationships, such as organizational culture, leadership style diversity, or employee demographics. Future studies should explore these moderators to gain deeper insights into boundary conditions and contextual factors shaping leadership effectiveness. However, addressing these limitations will enhance the theoretical rigor and practical relevance of future research in this domain.

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