

Ethical Leadership and Political Behavior in a National Government Agency as Predictors of Performance Among Public Sector Employees: A Sequential Explanatory Approach

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ABSTRACT

Public sector employees face growing demands to perform effectively in challenging and politically influenced work environments. This study examined how ethical leadership and political behavior predict employee performance in a national government agency. Using a sequential explanatory design, the research combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture both measurable relationships and lived experiences. The initial quantitative results revealed high levels of ethical leadership, political behavior, and employee performance. Regression analysis showed that both ethical leadership and political behavior significantly predict performance, with political behavior emerging as the stronger predictor. Following the qualitative phase, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted. Thematic analysis revealed five major themes: transparency and clear communication, fairness and equal treatment, flexibility and adaptability, integrity and role modeling, and commitment to public service on the Experiences of participants on ethical leadership, political behavior, and employee performance. Employees perceived that ethical leadership builds motivation and accountability through fairness, open communication, and transparency, while political behavior influences opportunities and exposure. Although politics sometimes fosters favoritism and unequal advancement, employees' flexibility, initiative, and resilience enable them to maintain productivity and commitment to public service. The study concludes that ethical leadership strengthens trust and organizational integrity, but political behavior exerts a greater impact on performance outcomes. In the joint display and integration of quantitative and qualitative results, it indicated that the nature of integration was connecting-confirmation, implying that the results of the quantitative phase were confirmed.

Keywords: public administration, ethical leadership, political behavior, employee performance, Philippines

SDG Indicator: #11 (sustainable cities and communities), #16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)

INTRODUCTION

Employee performance in the public sector is challenged and stressful, thereby affecting the delivery of public services. According to Ahmad, Mohamed, and Damin (2025), public employees' work is, by nature, demanding and requires them to perform many roles and function within complex systems, while facing mounting public demands. In support of this, Oladimeji and Abdulkareem (2023) mentioned that workload is detrimental to the well-being and productivity of employees in the public service sector. In addition, Mansor (2023) noted that the productivity and efficiency of employees in the public sector whose work is affected by the situation are expected to decrease.

Moreover, the public administrator, according to Kang, De Jiao & Gan (2024), serves as the backbone of public governance by providing high-quality, efficient public services and programs. Understanding of the factors influencing performance helps understand which factors must be corrected and improved, and how to improve public servants' productivity, accountability, quality of service, and, as such, the study on public servant performance is highly useful and necessary since they are expected to perform at a higher level than ever before in serving the public.

The researcher conducted an in-depth literature review; therefore, employee performance is positively associated with ethical leadership and political behavior. In fact, Dampson (2022) strongly believes that employee performance can be explained by ethical leadership and political behavior as work predictors in the public sector workplace. Supporting this idea, Jalali, Hamedani, and Bagheri (2023) found that employee performance depends on employees' dedication and the quality of their work. Likewise, Soriano (2024) asserts that employee performance refers to how employees achieve their job goals and organizational objectives.

Furthermore, Razak, Osman & Nadzri (2025) found that increased public demand for transparency and accountability encourages public employees to carry out their duties diligently; however, tight budgetary constraints pose challenges and contribute to overwork and low employee motivation, as employee performance is measured against organizational performance and objective achievement. Despite these constraints, employee performance is at the top because it is considered a significant variable influencing goal achievement and an organization's success. Confirming this, Dahkoul (2024) found that employee performance is a critical determinant that will ultimately dictate the success or failure of any given organization. Santillan (2022) stated employee performance as the "most inseparable resource in an organization". It is vital to the success of any organization; more importantly, it is vital to those who serve the public, as they are more often in touch with them.

Additionally, Santillan (2022) observed that many other circumstances facing a public sector employee can significantly affect work performance, such as resource shortages, red tape, political influence, and public demand. Likewise, Magcuro (2020) identified the major problems encountered by workers in the public sector as a lack of proper working conditions, overwork, manipulation, the effects of policies, challenges of organizing, and politics. Collectively, these are part of a work environment that is proving difficult and ultimately impacting their performance and well-being.

Also found in a survey conducted by Mahendra et al. (2023) that employee performance quality relies upon how well an employee works for the organization. Moreover, Mahendra (2024) stated that employee performance demonstrates an employee's ability to achieve task objectives in the workplace and helps the organization achieve its organizational goals. Performance is the sum of several performance indicators, including originality, production quality, work quality, initiative, and team cooperation ability. Hence, organizations must define what productive employee performance is to achieve high productivity.

The research by Osbert and Christine (2024) showed there was a relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance. If leaders are honest and employees are given a role in decision-making, their performance will improve. Likewise, Cheng, Bai, and Hu (2022) suggested that Ethical leadership establishes a workplace based on trust and fairness, where employees express themselves and share their opinions, thereby bringing change and improvement to an organization. Also, Kulachai and Tedjakusuma (2020) emphasized the need to understand organizational political behavior to foster a favorable environment and work effectiveness. They suggested encouraging positive behaviors, such as positive interactions and team spirit, and avoiding negative behaviors, such as blaming and attacks.

On top of that, the working environment of public sector employees, as mentioned above, might be stressful, and this variable can potentially have a significant impact on employees' performance. At the same time, political behavior within organizations has been recognized as a factor that can shape workplace dynamics, potentially fostering resilience and improving overall performance. However, the intersection of ethical leadership, political behavior, and work performance is underexplored. The researcher has not found any research in the local setting about the influence of ethical leadership and political behavior on employee work performance among public sector employees. This motivates the researcher to investigate the influence of ethical leadership and political behavior on work quality.

This study focused on ethical leadership of unit heads, political behavior and employee performance among the employees of Department of Social Welfare and Development in Region X. Specifically, this study has the following objectives: (1) to determine the level of ethical leadership of unit heads, political behavior and individual work performance of the employees, (2) to determine the significance of the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable, (3) to determine the best predictors of employee performance, (4)

to explore the lived experiences of study participants ethical leadership of unit heads, political behavior and individual work performance; (5) to describe the standpoints of study participants on the relationship of ethic leadership, political behavior and their individual work performance (6) to describe how qualitative data explain quantitative data.

The hypotheses put forth in this study encompass several key relationships and aspects of Employee Performance within the Department of Social Welfare and Development in Region X. Firstly, it posits that there is no significant relationship between Ethical Leadership, Political Behavior, and Employee Performance. Additionally, the study seeks to determine whether any independent variables, such as Ethical Leadership or Political Behavior, predominantly influence employee performance within a national government agency. Such questions then guide further discussion of leadership style and the interaction between internal politics and important organizational outcomes, providing a comprehensive insight into what drives or impedes employee performance in the public sector. These hypotheses serve as the foundation for testing the complex role of employee performance and its predictors in the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

The connection between ethical leadership and performance-improving political behavior also appears evident in the literature. Ethical leadership defined by Brown and Treviño (2006) says that ethical leadership creates a trust and moral climate that supports employee effectiveness. Political behavior, as Vigoda-Gadot (2007) stated, influences decision-making processes and resource allocation, thereby affecting employees' performance. Meanwhile, employee performance, as adapted from Esmael Tabouli, Habtoor, and Nashief (2015), encompasses indicators such as work efficiency, planning the work, creativity and innovation, effort, strategic emphases, and criteria of success.

Furthermore, Figure 1 presents the theoretical framework of the study, which illustrates the relationship of the key variables. The framework is primarily grounded in the Ethical Leadership Theory proposed by Brown, Treviño, and Harrison (2005), which explains that leaders influence employee behavior by demonstrating normatively appropriate conduct and promoting ethical standards through communication and behavior.

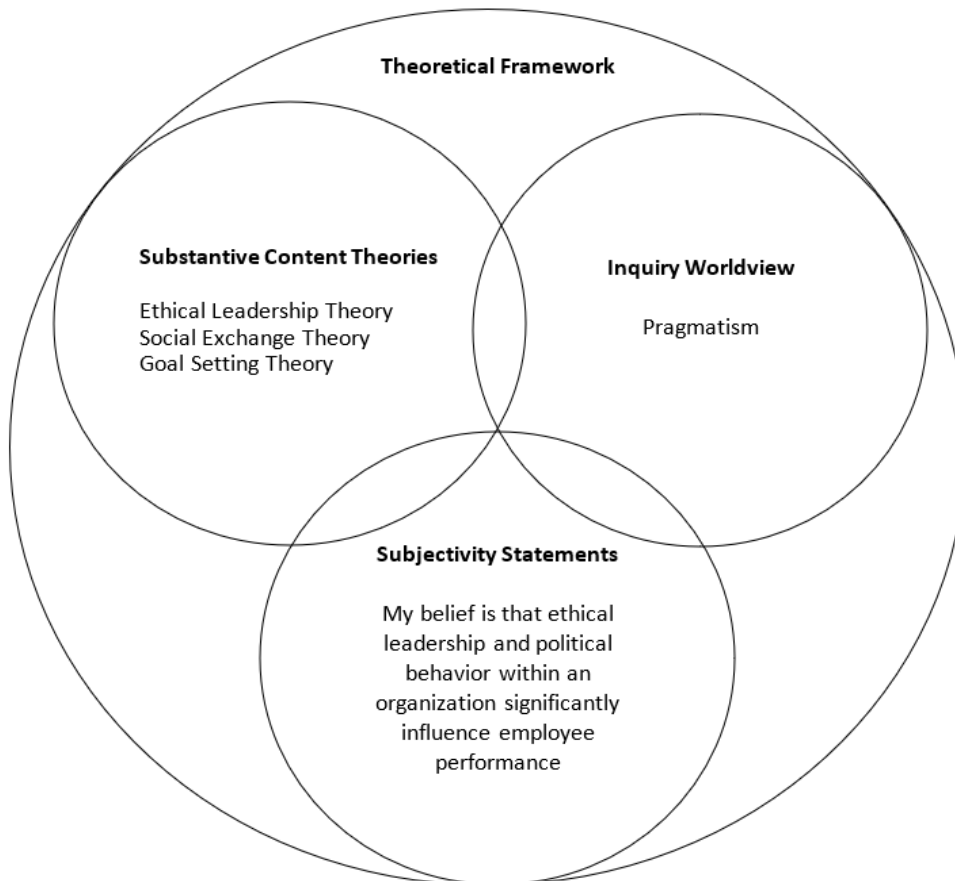


Figure 1 Theoretical Framework of the Study

Supporting this is the Social Exchange Theory of Blau (1964) from the literature. As far as SET is concerned, relationships between people are constructed through the exchange of resources. Ethical leadership can cultivate trust and respect among employees, thereby enhancing performance. When there is ethical leadership, employees have an obligation and mutual respect toward leaders, and consequently, they are less likely to get involved in politics.

In addition, the Political Behavior Framework of Ferris et al. (1989) is used to explore the impact of organizational politics on employees' behavior. Political behavior, such as favoritism and lobbying for one's own interests, can affect followers' morality and organizational efficiency, and therefore, these effects can be overcome through unethical leadership. Then they would engage in tasks that contribute to organizational performance. Moreover, Locke and Latham's (1990) Goal-Setting Theory also explains how leadership affects performance. Leaders who can develop clear, ethical, and challenging goals motivate employees to perform at the highest level. Political behavior, however, has a dual impact on the process.

Moreover, this study adopts a pragmatic paradigm, which differs from purely quantitative or qualitative approaches in how theory is linked to data and how inferences are drawn. As explained by Brierley (2017), pragmatism challenges the rigid objective–subjective distinction by recognizing that research may at times be objective, minimizing interaction with participants, and at other times subjective, involving interaction to construct meaning. Creswell (2014) emphasized that pragmatism focuses on what is practical and effective, particularly in addressing real-world problems rather than relying solely on abstract assumptions about knowledge. Similarly, Maarouf (2019) noted that while pragmatic researchers may acknowledge a single reality, they also consider the multiple interpretations individuals may hold about it. Brummer et al. (2022) further explained that truth is shaped by its practical consequences and social context rather than being absolute. In addition, Kelly and Cordeiro (2020) highlighted that pragmatism allows researchers to examine how experience, knowledge, and action interact within organizations, while Kaushik and Walsh (2019) described reality as dynamic and continuously evolving through ongoing processes and interactions. In this study, the pragmatic paradigm emphasizes the importance of lived experiences and the integration of theory and practice, supporting the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods in a sequential explanatory design. This approach enables the researcher to present both statistical findings and in-depth explanations, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of ethical leadership, political behavior, and employee performance. Ultimately, the study focuses on generating practical insights that can inform leadership practices, improve organizational dynamics, and enhance employee performance in the public sector.

The subject statement captures the researcher's underlying belief that ethical leadership and political behavior within an organization critically affect employee performance. This assertion serves as a foundation for interpreting results and, in specific terms, explains how ethical leadership influences political behavior and accounts for differences in public employee performance. Overall, the framework demonstrates that ethical leadership and political behavior are key determinants of employee performance, and their interaction is best understood through a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Furthermore, the study's conceptual framework is shown in Figure 2. This illustrates a path model analysis and a correlational link between dependent variables and independent variables. This model is introduced within the framework of an experiment. The study's dependent variable is employees' performance in the public sector, whereas the independent variables include political behavior and the ethical leadership of unit heads.

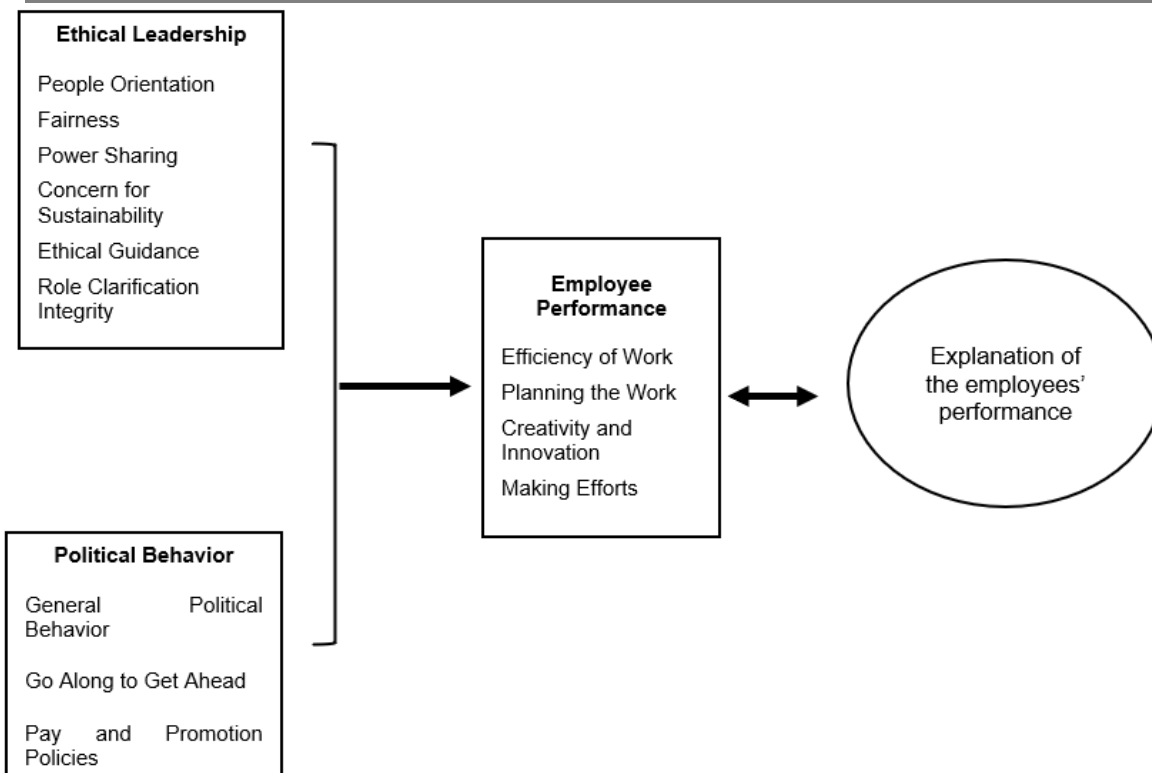


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of the Study

The first independent variable is ethical leadership, measured by seven indicators: Leadership Through People Orientation, Fairness, Power Sharing, Concern for Sustainability, Ethical Guidance, Role Clarification, and Integrity. Leadership through people orientation, emphasizing the importance of valuing and considering employees' needs and well-being. Fairness reflects how leaders treat their employees with justice and equity. Power sharing involves how leaders distribute authority and decision-making power among employees. Concern for sustainability reflects a leader's commitment to sustainable practices and ethical considerations regarding the environment and society. Ethical guidance involves providing directions on ethical behavior and decision-making within the organization. Kalshoven (2010) noted that role clarification concerns the clarity of roles and expectations within the organization, while integrity reflects the consistency between a leader's actions and their values and ethical standards.

The second independent variable is political behavior with three indicators: General Political Behavior, Go Along to Get Ahead, and Pay and Promotion. General political behavior in which individuals create their own self-serving rules that can lead to competition for scarce resources. Go along to get ahead refers to individuals adopting political behaviors to align with others to advance their own positions within an organization, and pay and promotion, which refer to organizational policies regarding pay and promotion that can significantly influence political behavior (Kacmar et al., 1997)

The study's dependent variable is employee performance, measured by three indicators: Efficiency of Work, Planning the Work, Creativity and Innovation, and Making Efforts. Work efficiency assesses how effectively employees carry out their tasks and responsibilities. Planning measures the employees' capability of planning their jobs and allocating their resources and time. Creativity and innovation reflect the employees' skill of coming up with and applying new ideas. Making efforts to measure how hard workers work, which reflects employees' motivation and commitment (Tabouli & Habtoor, 2013)

This study is of critical importance given the contemporary issues related to employee performance in the public sector, and it offers much-needed evidence to the ever-expanding body of knowledge. In the absence of prior studies, the research is of utmost importance, as it identifies what can be used to develop public sector office practices in Region X. It presents new ideas and serves as a guiding light for the development of management practices in public sector offices. The significance of the study, both in terms of social importance and global

implications, lies in highlighting issues related to employee performance and demonstrating a positive effect on SDG 16, which aims to build peaceful and inclusive societies.

As Hill and Plimmer (2024) pointed out, implementing "effective employee performance management in the public sector, ensuring a balance between accountability and development and reducing bureaucracy", will "strengthen public trust and increase transparency in public institutions", which may be closely related to SDG 16, "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. SDG 16 is essential to all other SDGs in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development because it establishes a foundation for an equitable and peaceful world and promotes a safe working environment for public sector employees to thrive. It aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, ensure equal access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. By advancing "peace, justice and strong institutions", it could further advance employee well-being and encourage their trust in public institutions, and clarify their duties and responsibilities in a way that includes and embraces all individuals within an organization, thereby improving employee performance, leading to enhanced services, public satisfaction, and advancing the achievement of SDGs.

Similarly, these principles support SDG 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities, insofar as an effective and well-managed public administration is the bedrock for equitable, secure, resilient, and sustainable public service delivery. Strong leadership and effective performance management would facilitate public institutions' responsiveness to citizens, ensure the accessibility of their services, and promote social inclusion. By fostering trust, fairness, and accountability within public institutions, both SDG 16 and SDG 11 are advanced, leading to improved employee well-being, stronger public confidence, better service delivery, and overall progress toward sustainable development.

This section presents the steps and procedures the researcher followed in implementing the mixed-methods approach. It described the study participants, materials, and instruments, and the design and procedures in both the quantitative and qualitative phases. It is also relevant to SDG 11

Study Respondents

Quantitative Phase

In the quantitative strand, the respondents in this study were employees of the Department of Social Welfare and Development Region X. A total of 400 employees were sampled from the 2,186 total population of employees in Region X as of February 2025. The number of samples was determined using the Rao-Soft sampling calculator. The respondents were distributed across provinces using proportional allocation based on the total population to ensure representativeness. According to VanVoorhis and Morgan (2007), sample sizes around 400 can be sufficient for many types of quantitative research. Given that the total population in this study is 2,186, this sample provides a representative subset while maintaining statistical reliability and feasibility.

The researcher used a stratified random sampling technique, with specific inclusion criteria that ensured the involvement of employees with at least 2 years of experience. Stratified random sampling (SRS) was performed by partitioning the population into subgroups, called 'strata.' An even sample was selected from each stratum. Various per-stratum samples are combined to form a stratified random sample (Nguyen, Shih, Srivastava, Tirthapura, & Xu, 2018). This is the best sampling technique because it provides a good opportunity for everyone in the population to participate in the study. Further, it can be considered the best representative of the overall population (Iliyasu & Etikan, 2021).

Regarding the inclusion criteria, willing DSWD employees in Region X were the respondents in this study. In contrast, in terms of exclusion, those who are unwilling, as well as employees working within organizations located outside Region X, are excluded. Regarding withdrawal, employees who expressed willingness but later changed their mind and opted to discontinue their participation have the right to do so; it is their prerogative, and the researcher will respect their decision.

Qualitative Phase

The researcher conducted interviews with fifteen (15) personnel assigned to Northern Mindanao who had at least two years of experience to collect qualitative data. Seven (7) were chosen for focus group discussions (FGD) and eight (8) for in-depth interviews (IDI). This number is acceptable and adequate for a phenomenological investigation to provide information about the likelihood of identifying and developing themes of the phenomenon, as well as for analysis. It is advised that there shouldn't be more than seven in a single phenomenological investigation. Additionally, Creswell (2013) stressed that an overwhelming number of examples will dilute a researcher's ability to deliver a high degree of information. The researcher used a purposive sampling method to select study participants. This is a sampling approach that involves selecting participants according to a specific criterion (Patton, 2002). The sample unit will be used because it has precise features or characteristics that will enable detailed examination and comprehension of the central themes and conundrums that the researcher wishes to study.

This study was conducted in Region X, Northern Mindanao, Philippines, among its five provinces: Misamis Oriental, Misamis Occidental, Bukidnon, Lanao del Norte, and Camiguin. Each province has employees and offices that cover all the services offered by the department.

Materials and Instruments

Quantitative Phase

For quantitative design, questionnaires were adapted from online journal sources. To evaluate the Ethical Leadership level of NGA Unit Heads, the researcher employed a questionnaire based on Kalshoven's (2010) work, comprising seven indicators and 35 items. To gauge political behavior in Northern Mindanao, the researcher used a questionnaire developed by Ferris and Kacmar in 1997. This questionnaire was designed to assess employees' perceptions of political behavior in their workplace and includes three indicators with 15 items in total. To assess the employee performance within NGA's in Bukidnon, the researcher employed the questionnaire developed by Tabouli, Habtoor, and Nashief (2015). This questionnaire aimed to collect collective perceptions of employees' performance within the organization and comprises four indicators and 17 items.

The adapted questionnaires were contextualized to the local setting. Refinement of the questionnaires was made possible with the assistance of the dissertation adviser and expert evaluators. The questionnaire received a validity rating of 4.56, indicating very good validity. Pilot testing was conducted to ensure The questionnaire has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.97, hence it is reliable.

The responses of the study participants on ethical leadership of unit heads, political behavior, and employee performance were analyzed using the following scale. A mean range of 4.20–5.00 was described as Very High, indicating that ethical leadership practices, political behavior, and employee performance are consistently observed among the respondents. A mean range of 3.40–4.19 was described as High, which means that these variables are manifested oftentimes among the respondents. A mean range of 2.60–3.39 was described as Moderate, indicating that ethical leadership, political behavior, and employee performance are moderately manifested. It is classified as Low when the mean range is 1.80–2.59, indicating that this variable appears rarely among respondents. Lastly, the mean range of 1.00–1.79 is classified as Very Low; the practices of ethical leadership, political behavior, and employee performance are not evident among the respondents.

Qualitative Phase

The researcher employed an interview guide and a tape recorder to fully capture participants' responses, collect the anticipated data, and proceed to the study's quantitative phase. Focus group discussions (FGD) and in-depth interviews (IDI) were used to collect qualitative data, with semi-structured or structured interview guides (Willis, 2007). Ethical, artistic, and rigorous standards were used to justify the interview guide and the design of the research questions.

Design and Procedure

An explanatory-sequential study design was used to evaluate the impact of ethical leadership and political behavior on employee performance among DSWD employees in Northern Mindanao. In this study, a QUAN–QUAL design was used, in which the initial data are quantitative, and the explanation phase involves collecting qualitative data to support the quantitative findings, as described by Schoonenboom et al. (2017). This research design was used to supplement the quantitative findings with qualitative data, adding breadth and depth to the understanding of the research variables, as emphasized by Creswell (2012) and Creswell (2017).

Additionally, because a mixed-methods study incorporates the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research, it offers a more comprehensive picture than a stand-alone study. According to George (2023), the behavioral, health, and social sciences frequently employ mixed-methods research, particularly in multidisciplinary contexts and in complex situations or societal studies.

The researcher used triangulation through corroboration and validation, a process of comparing and integrating quantitative statistical results and qualitative thematic findings. The primary purpose was to integrate quantitative statistical results and qualitative findings. The basic principle of this method was to allow for a more absolute use of data rather than dividing quantitative and qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2013). Data collection, collation, analysis, and interpretation in explanatory-sequential follow two distinct, rigorous phases.

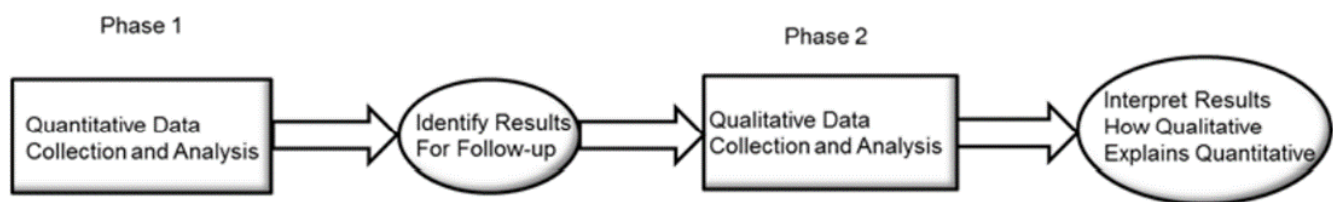


Figure 3. The Explanatory Sequential Design

Quantitative Phase

This study's quantitative component used correlational techniques in a non-experimental design. A statistical test intended to ascertain the propensity or trend for two (or more) variables or sets of data to vary consistently is known as a correlational design, according to Creswell (2012). Furthermore, Seeram (2019) noted that a correlational study is a research design in which a researcher aims to understand the natural interactions between variables.

Qualitative Phase

The researcher used descriptive qualitative methods during the qualitative phase. Creswell and Poth (2018) provide a foundational description of descriptive qualitative research. They define it as a qualitative approach focused on describing phenomena in their natural settings, emphasizing detailed portrayals of participants' experiences without preconceived hypotheses or statistical generalizations. Descriptive qualitative research is normally conducted through in-depth interviews of small samples of participants. Typically, a sequential explanatory strategy follows a systematic two-phase design. The sequential explanatory design's procedural approach was described by Creswell, Ivankov, and Stick (2006), with quantitative data collection followed by qualitative phases to explain preliminary findings. An outline of the processes for implementing a standard two-phase explanatory design is shown in Figure 4. In the first stage, the researcher developed and conducted the quantitative strand, which entails gathering and evaluating data using statistical tools and identifying quantitative findings that require further justification.

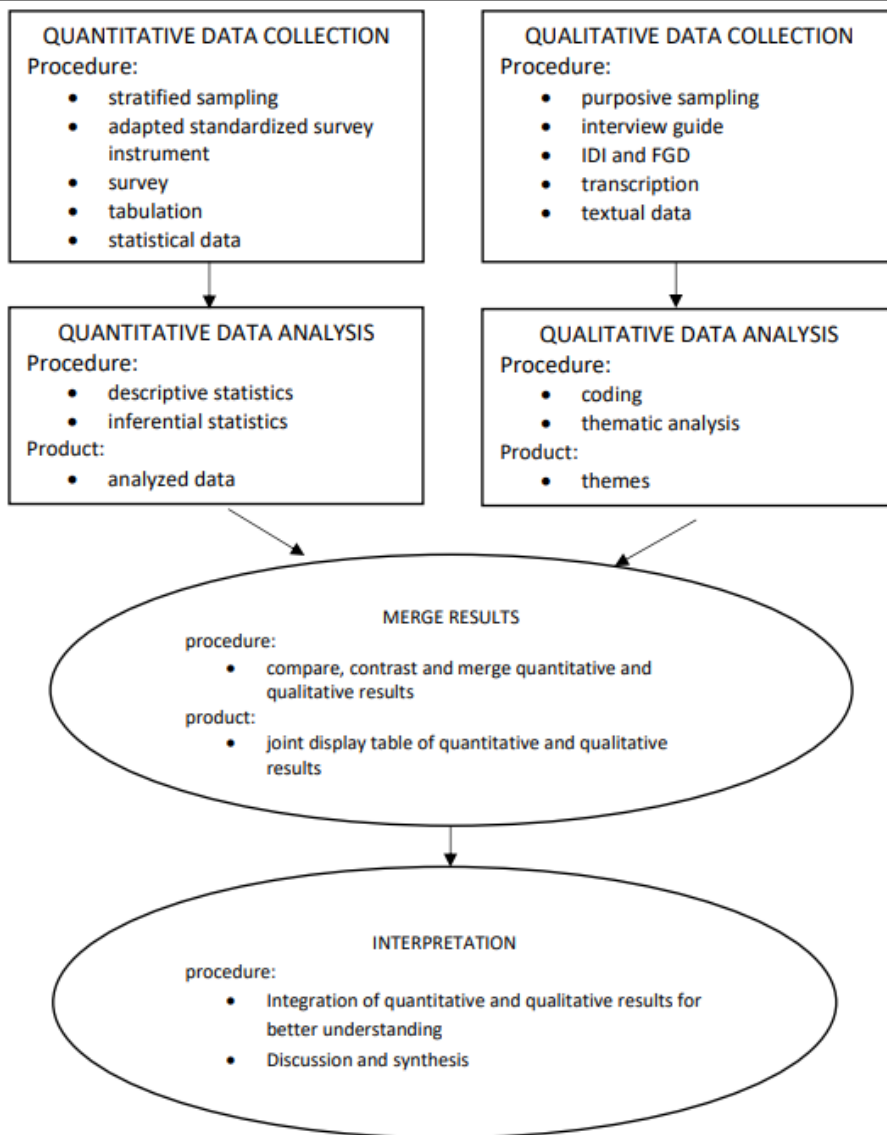


Figure 4: Model of Procedures

The Department of Social Welfare and Development, Region X, granted the researcher permission to carry out the study. Following approval, the researcher visited various DSWD Provincial offices to survey staff members. The survey was administered both in person and online via Google Forms—the tool used to guide included all study material and instructions for answering the corresponding questions. After all completed surveys were retrieved, the data were collated and tabulated. To remove the effects of outliers from the analysis, data scrubbing was done. A reputable statistician was then tasked with analyzing and interpreting the data. On the other hand, the second phase includes creating a qualitative study based on the quantitative analysis's findings, gathering and analyzing qualitative data, and evaluating the combined findings for substantiation.

The main idea is that the qualitative data collection was directly based on the quantitative results. According to Creswell (2014), the researcher developed and refined the qualitative research questions, used purposive sampling techniques, and systematically collected and analyzed the data, with the results referenced to the quantitative results. Lastly, the researcher used category integration to assess the extent to which and how the qualitative data supported the quantitative data.

Quantitative (closed-ended) and qualitative (open-ended) data were gathered separately to allow for emphasis, as the study employed a sequential explanatory research design. The quantitative phase was conducted before the qualitative phase so that the results could be confirmed using the quantitative data. Consequently, the quantitative phase was considered more significant because the qualitative study relies on quantitative data and can only generalize, as evidenced by the samples.

For the mixing procedure, a sequential explanatory design is appropriate to meet the study's purpose in both the quantitative and qualitative domains. The levels of ethical leadership among unit heads, political behavior, and employee performance within Region X were determined and correlated using statistical data.

The qualitative aspect, also conducted through IDI and FGD, was undertaken, and its outputs were used to support the survey data. Based on the end research question, the researcher was able to construct a generalizable integration of the research aims. The nature of integration was posted.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Phase

As with quantitative analysis, the data gathered were properly classified, analyzed, and interpreted using the following statistical tools. The mean was used to measure the levels of ethical leadership, political behavior, and employee performance. On the other hand, Pearson(r) was used to determine the significance of the relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance of DSWD employees in Region X.

Qualitative Phase

As with data analysis, the researcher followed a three-step proposal outlined by Creswell et al (2003). The first stage is data reduction, in which transcripts are selected, edited, and systematically arranged using data coding of core ideas and themes. The second stage is data display, in which core ideas and themes classify the information presented in tables. All themes are structured and presented relative to the research questions, whereas direct statements from participants are presented as confirmation responses. The third stage is data interpretation, where themes are interpreted, given meaning, and their implications are identified.

Given that the research design is relatively new and complex, the researcher recognized the study's limitations and constraints. Supporting this view, Creswell and Poth (2017) state that qualitative research has robust methodological approaches to "entry into the field" and to accessing unique or hidden populations. Qualitative methodologies have been conceptually weak, with "mixing" qualitative and quantitative data and the method of "inductive" meta-analysis and data integration. Creswell (2009) noted that these limitations include weaknesses in describing the interrelationships among two or more generated constructs or domains when integrating qualitative information.

For a time, this study faced a challenge regarding time availability. The duration and exhaustion of the time it took to complete, one stage after another—the quantitative stage and the qualitative stage—required endurance, strength of character, vigor, energy, and exertion. The activity was scheduled, and there was a reasonable time frame. However, there were cases where activities were delayed for unavoidable reasons. Additionally, as the researcher held a full-time position, juggling responsibilities as an employee and a student proved a considerable challenge for effective time management.

Participant selection is one of the perceived problems. While the target participants are spread across Region X, the nature of their work is so demanding that they are too busy to devote sufficient time to the interview and focus group discussion for this study. Another issue the researcher faced was a lack of resources. Since the study's scope is region-wide, covering five major provinces, financial resource constraints may pose a problem. As the paper involved two separate studies that were combined into a single whole, a significant amount of financial resources was required. Another dilemma is human resource constraints, as the researcher has no available personnel to lend assistance, especially during data collection and analysis. This is because only a few researchers have expertise in conducting mixed-methods research, which integrates quantitative and qualitative data into a single, well-substantiated result.

The ethical considerations involved in the researcher's study are strictly followed. It complies with the UMER protocol no. 2024-243 of the university research ethics committee. The researcher adheres to the following guidelines: Voluntary participation - the respondent will be given the option to participate in the study without any consequences, penalties, or loss of benefits. Properly informing the respondent about the time required to

complete the questionnaire requires their honesty. The researcher did this by presenting the objective and benefits of the study to participating employees in Region X. Privacy and confidentiality: The researcher meticulously collected the questionnaires, ensuring that each questionnaire was retrieved in complete privacy and confidentiality, thus preventing other employees or co-workers from seeing each respondent's name and their respective responses. Informed consent: to ensure that respected individuals, the researcher obtains consent from the institution and individual respondents for the distribution of the research questionnaire. Risks - the researcher believes there are no high-risk situations in the research process that will trigger physical, psychological, or socio-economic consequences for the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and analysis of the data gathered during both the quantitative and qualitative phases. The order of presentation follows that of the study objectives.

This section has three parts: Part 1 outlines the results and discussion on the quantitative aspect of the study. Part 2 illustrates the results and discussion on the qualitative aspect of the study. Part 3 presents the integration of both quantitative and qualitative results.

Ethical Leadership, Political Behavior and Employee Performance in the Public Sector

Indicators for ethical leadership consist of the following items: people orientation, fairness, power sharing, ethical guidance, role clarification, and integrity. Ethical leadership is high, with an overall mean of 4.04 and a standard deviation of 0.59. This may mean that unit heads are fair, transparent, and accountable in managing the divisions under them, and that their subordinates find their good leadership, ethics, and work attitudes to be qualities they must also exhibit.

These findings are consistent with the findings of Eva, Newman, Zhou, and Zhou (2020), who demonstrate that ethical leadership influences employees' prosocial motivation and internal citizenship behaviors by building trustworthiness, integrity, and team reliance at the individual and group levels, respectively. The work of these authors suggests that ethical leaders who share power with their employees promote conducive work environments in which employees take responsibility for their duties and follow behavior norms that align with the organization's needs. Thus, table 1 illustrates the responses to the level of ethical leadership of the unit heads, political behavior, and work performance of the employees of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Region X.

Table 1 Level of Ethical Leadership, Political Behavior, and Employee Performance

Indicator	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Ethical Leadership	0.59	4.04	High
People Orientation	0.73	3.78	High
Fairness	0.66	4.07	High
Power Sharing	0.68	4.03	High
Concern for Sustainability	0.64	4.13	High
Ethical Guidance	0.66	4.11	High
Role Clarification	0.65	4.10	High

Integrity	0.71	4.07	High
Political Behavior	0.62	4.05	High
General Political Behavior	0.75	4.08	High
Go Along to Get Ahead	0.63	4.14	High
Pay and Promotion Policies	0.76	3.95	High
Employee Performance	0.47	4.23	Very High
Efficiency of the Work	0.49	4.49	Very High
Planning to Work	0.54	4.36	Very High
Creativity and Innovation	0.56	4.03	High
Making efforts	0.64	4.03	High

Furthermore, current research emphasizes the importance of ethical leadership in the public sector for enhancing accountability, integrity, and professionalism. Ethical leadership in the Philippines is guided by Republic Act No. 6713 (Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees). It requires public officials to demonstrate "public service, devotion to duty, uprightness and sincerity, being politically neutral and being responsive to the public." Ethical leadership practices such as fairness, ethical guidance, honesty, power sharing, and clarifying roles align with these legal codes because they foster honesty and fair practices within the organization, thereby empowering and strengthening the role. Fan, Sun, and Wang (2024) discovered that ethical leadership promotes prosocial behavior toward the public (PBP) by strengthening public service motivation and demonstrated that ethical leadership has a positive relationship in improving positive behaviors in which trust and fairness matter.

In the Philippine public sector, leadership is expected to ensure the enforcement of ethical standards and to operate within a bureaucratic milieu defined by hierarchy, formal regulations, and administrative responsibility. For leaders, adherence to RA 6713 involves not merely embodying ethical behavior but also institutionalizing it through clearly delineated policies, appropriate mechanisms, and diligent supervision. As Archuleta (2025) has noted, the field of ethics develops the competence of public administration and empowers leaders to make appropriate and rational decisions and to exercise reflective judgment. In effect, leadership in the context of ethics guides employee behavior; strengthens the organization's culture and values; and ensures employees' compliance with ethical norms. It does not address the outcomes of individual behavior in relation to politics, as this research will.

The present study found that there is a high degree of ethical leadership among unit heads of DSWD Region X and a moderately favorable level of work performance among public sector employees. It implies that regardless of the workload, demands, and stress associated in public service delivery, ethical leadership style based on fair play, trustworthiness and ethical direction established the kind of work setting characterized by encouragement and responsibility. Based on both quantitative data and discussions on each indicator, the unit heads demonstrated ethical leadership, which is characterized by behaviors that uphold professionalism and are in accordance with the ethical requirements stipulated under Republic Act No. 6713. The results of this study are strongly parallel to those of Suriaga (2023), in which ethical leadership is seen as an instrument that strengthens accountability, trustworthiness, and integrity and positively affects governance performance.

Similarly, it is reflected in the same table that the level of Political behavior; measured through the variables of overall political behavior, go along to get ahead and pay and promotion policy was also high with the mean of 4.05 and SD=0.62. The result showed that political behavior is perceived as commonly existed but socially accepted behavior in the organization. Employees will go along with the powerful co-worker or superior for

gaining opportunities, recognition, and expedite some particular matters. In spite of potentially causing biasedness, political behavior will lead to networking, adaptability, and strategic teamwork as perceived in the bureaucratic environment.

Beyond this, it also has to be argued that current studies in organizational politics support the fact that it is pervasive in public organizations. Khan & Hussain (2022), had examined political behavior among faculty in public universities utilizing the Perceptions of Organizational Politics framework which contains the overall politics, 'going along to get ahead', pay and promotion policies. They found that such behavior is commonly utilized among employees as coping strategies towards the organizational processes and career laddering processes. Likewise Faiz (2022), reiterated that it can lead to positive or negative impact to perception on organizational politics, in what is known as the 'curate's egg'. While politics can carry some risks in terms of self-interest, personal relationships or favoritism, if handled properly, could give employees the benefit of gaining support, getting noticed, and adjusting to a difficult work atmosphere. The findings of the present study indicate that although political behavior is evident at a high level within the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Region X, it does not necessarily translate into dysfunctional outcomes. Instead, political behavior appears to operate as an adaptive response to the realities of public sector work, where employees must navigate formal rules, hierarchical authority, and limited opportunities for advancement. The results suggest that employees engage in political behavior strategically to cope with organizational demands while maintaining acceptable levels of performance.

When viewed alongside the high level of ethical leadership observed in the agency, political behavior seems to be moderated in a manner that allows collaboration and adaptability without severely compromising professionalism or ethical standards. Abdi, Hashi and Latif (2024) found that ethical leadership directly affects organizational performance and perceived organizational politics, with perceived organizational politics partially mediating the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational performance. These findings highlight the importance of ethical leadership and clear personnel policies in managing political behavior and ensuring that it contributes to, rather than detracts from, effective public service delivery.

Illustrated in table 1 is also the level of employee performance, assessed through efficiency of work, planning, creativity and innovation, and making efforts, revealed a very high level with an overall mean of 4.23 and a standard deviation of 0.47 This finding suggests that employees consistently demonstrate diligence, initiative, and dedication in accomplishing organizational goals, even in politically influenced environments.

Beyond this, it also has to be argued that current studies in organizational politics support the fact that it is pervasive in public organizations. Khan & Hussain (2022), had examined political behavior among faculty in public universities utilizing the Perceptions of Organizational Politics framework which contains the overall politics, 'going along to get ahead', pay and promotion policies. They found that such behavior is commonly utilized among employees as coping strategies towards the organizational processes and career laddering processes. Likewise Faiz (2022), reiterated that it can lead to positive or negative impact to perception on organizational politics, in what is known as the 'curate's egg'. While politics can carry some risks in terms of self-interest, personal relationships or favoritism, if handled properly, could give employees the benefit of gaining support, getting noticed, and adjusting to a difficult work atmosphere.

The results of this study found that employees in DSWD Region X were highly successful and efficient despite political influence within the organization. This shows that even with the political issues in the agency, employees remain competitive by providing high effort, being innovative and thinking on how to achieve and plan in a manner that would be successful. Soriano, Vallarta, Trinidad, and Agustin (2024) found similar results at Department of Public Works and Highways, which showed that ethics promote motivation and efficiency when there is pressure; ethical leaders and positive cultures bring a predictable success to public agencies. It can be concluded that to achieve the high productivity of the employees in Philippine public agencies, a leader should follow the principles of ethical leadership with a positive workplace culture.

While leadership is an important aspect of effective management, this study's results also suggest that internal political behavior within the agency shapes work dynamics. The high mean score for political behavior indicates that people are aware of alliances, informal networks, and the power structure, which, in turn, affect decision-

making and access to opportunities. Abdi et al (2024) established that perceived organizational politics mediated the relationship between ethical leadership and performance, allowing for work on hierarchical structure without disrupting service delivery when supported by leadership, while Kulachai (2025) found that politics undermines local government performance in the Thai government through job satisfaction and stress; however, participation offsets it under leadership support and transparency.

The outcome of the study contradicts the assumption that workplace politics has a negative influence on employee output. As the outcome demonstrated a high productivity rate, it implies that employees are still able to produce work despite working in a political organization. This is supported by Cabasag and Carillo (2024) which concluded that although political behavior can exist together with ethical climate in public sector organizations. They showed that the coexistence of ethical climate and political behavior can lead to productive results if leader establishes a higher perception of ethics, which in turn results in lower politics and high productivity.

To sum it up, ethical leadership provides the basis for trust, fairness, and accountability, while political behavior shapes the context that affects employees' job and career outcomes. The presence of ethical leadership and its core values (transparency, integrity, and so on) alters the nature of political behavior in the workplace, enabling the energy previously spent on political maneuvering to be redirected toward problem-solving. This balance between doing right and working the system produces an important result: keeping employee morale high while ensuring a truly valuable and meaningful contribution to the public service in the Philippines.

Relationship between Ethical Leadership, Political Behavior, and Employee Performance

In this specific item, the correlation was determined through an analysis of correlation. The findings as revealed in Table 2 suggest that there exists a significant association between ethical leadership and employee performance as revealed by the r value 0.610 and p value 0.000 ($p < .05$). Similar findings also reveal a significant association between political behavior and employee performance, as shown by the r value 0.634 and p value 0.000 ($p < .05$). This implies that ethical leadership and political behavior are significant predictors of employee performance in the public sector employees. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that no significant association existed between them is rejected.

Table 2 Correlation between the Independent and Dependent Variables

Employee Performance					
(Variables)	r value	p-value	Sig. Level		Dec Ho
Ethical Leadership	0.610**	.000*	Significant		Reject Ho
Political Behavior	0.634**	000*	Significant		Reject Ho

* $p < .05$

From these results, ethical leadership is essential for improving performance among employees of national government agencies because leaders who remain transparent, are fair, and are responsible result in more motivated and committed employees. These are in line with Reddick, Demir, and Perlman (2025), who indicated that multi-dimensional ethical leadership, particularly the integrity, fairness, and accountability, contributes to the prediction of ethical decision-making among local government managers, which also has the capacity to produce sustainable performance in the politically complex public settings. Furthermore, Abdi (2024) revealed that ethical leadership also enhanced trust, accountability, and employees' commitment, hence leading to better performance.

The results of this study indicate that ethical leadership influences the effectiveness and motivation of employees within national government agencies. Fair, honest, and transparent leaders will motivate employees to work harder towards the organization's aims. Cheng, Sun, and Lu confirm this, and He (2022) found that ethical leadership cultivates moral responsibility and trust in employees' attitudes, and induces employees to commit to greater effort and creativity, as well as to better task performance. In Philippine public institutions, leaders who exhibit these behaviors encourage positive and responsible workplace dynamics, increasing employee motivation, efficiency, and public service motivation.

On the other hand, because political behavior is significantly related to employee performance, organizational politics may have both positive and negative effects on it. This study found a significant relationship between employee performance and political behavior ($r = 0.634$). This indicates that employees who are skilled at navigating organizational politics or who are aligned with leadership may have a better chance of being acknowledged, rewarded, promoted, and influential in the workplace.

This interpretation was further enhanced by Faiz (2022), arguing that "a fair and ethics-guided strategy and device for employees to negotiate through their jobs and sustain productivity within tight, bureaucratic systems" defined politics. The study went on to warn that negative consequences may result from self-oriented, nontransparent political behavior. Similarly, Khan and Hussain (2022) found that excessive or poorly managed political behavior within public sector organizations leads to perceptions of favoritism, lowered morale, and reduced trust within the workplace.

In addition, the results further confirm Asif's (2025) findings, suggesting that public sector employees can both maintain their organizational citizenship behavior and task performance, as well as protect their occupational interests under pressure from superiors through behavioral adjustment in political circumstances. Organizational politics in the public sector is an unavoidable phenomenon (due to hierarchy and constraints on upward mobility), and in this case, the ability of employees to be adaptable while maintaining professional ethics becomes critical to maintaining standards.

In conclusion, this study found that both ethical leadership and political behavior were relevant factors that affected employee performance in the public sector. Ethical leadership serves as a foundation for motivation and trust; political behavior can, in an ethical manner, stimulate employee commitment and flexibility. Thus, public managers not only could directly exercise their authority but also could enhance their self-capacity to embody the morality of politics in the bureaucratic workplace.

Influence of Ethical Leadership and Political Behavior on Employee Performance

As shown in Table 3, the analysis examines the influence of ethical leadership and political behavior on public employee performance using multiple regression. From the values, it is evident that ethical leadership and political behavior can effectively predict employee performance in the public sector. The analysis indicates that ethical leadership (R-value = .610) and political behavior (R-value = .634) are strongly positively associated with employee performance in the public sector. Beta (β) for ethical leadership results in a value of .323 with a t-value of 6.175 and a significant level p-value of .000, and political behavior results in a β of .406, a t-value of 7.769, and a p-value of .000. It shows that ethical leadership and political behavior can significantly influence employee performance so that the null hypothesis can be rejected.

Table 3 Significance of the Influence of Ethical Leadership and Political Behavior on Employee Performance in the Public Sector

Employee Performance				
(Variables)	B	β	t	Sig.
Constant	1.946		15.284	.000

Ethical Leadership		.257	.323	6.175	.000
Political Behavior		.306	.406	7.769	.000

The results from the two predictors indicate that political behavior was a stronger predictor of employee performance, as the Beta value was larger (=.406). The research showed unequivocally that employees' political skills are a predictor of the outcome variable in public organizations. This finding is consistent with previous studies; Park and Lee (2020) reported that workplace politics significantly predicted job performance (= 0.32, $p < 0.01$) in public sector settings, and revealed that an employee's ability to negotiate workplace politics successfully can significantly impact performance outcomes. In the hierarchical, bureaucratic nature of the public sector, navigating politics ethically and adaptively is paramount for effective functioning and achieving organizational objectives.

Also, ethical leadership positively affects employee performance by providing moral guidelines that shape the organization's ethical environment, as a recent study shows. According to Gwamanda and Mahembe (2023), an ethical leader fosters an ethical environment that enhances employee job engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption), thereby improving work performance and productivity.

The positive impact of ethical leadership on performance provides evidence consistent with the study by Brown and Treviño (2020). The two researchers discovered that ethical leaders possess a moral compass and can develop ethics within an organization. Their role as leaders not only involves offering help and fair treatment to their subordinates, but also acting with ethics and integrity and taking responsibility for all they do. This builds employee confidence, reduces conflict within an organization, and motivates employees to work at optimum efficiency.

As Cheng et al. (2022) identified, an ethical leadership practice could encourage employees to generate ideas and be proactive, as employees would develop a higher level of affective commitment, thereby enhancing the enabling context for productive work. The findings of this paper are also consistent with previous correlation results: ethical leadership and political behavior influence performance, but in opposite directions. Ethical leadership enhances intrinsic motivation. This is to say that employees behave well because of moral guidelines and their responsibilities. On the other hand, the political behavior impacts extrinsic motivation. Employees behave for political aims, such as affiliating with organizational powers or seeking reputation and career development opportunities. The two forces coexist, reflecting the social and ethical complexities of governmental organizations.

The results concur with those of Khan, Mahmood, and Shoaib (2022), who found that ethical leadership enhances employee outcomes, such as Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Performance-Related Behaviors, through a conducive work environment and improved work-life quality. This research indicates that when leadership is characterized by fairness, transparency, and integrity, it builds trust, involvement, and motivation among employees, ultimately resulting in better organizational performance and organizational outcomes. In the case of the Philippine public administration, which merges politics with governance processes and maintains strict hierarchical orders, such a balance in management style is crucial for employee motivation and performance.

In summary, the findings indicate that both ethical leadership and political behavior are significant predictors of employee performance, with political behavior emerging as the stronger predictor. Although ethical leadership serves as the moral imperative for effective governance, political action can assist employees' and leaders' journeys through the bureaucratic landscape when applied positively. This illustrates that public sector leaders should ideally possess both ethical values and practical political skills to ensure that organizational politics are conducted fairly, transparently, and in an accountable manner, thereby maintaining morale among employees and trust among the public.

Qualitative Results

In this phase of the study, the participants' experiences with ethical leadership, political behavior, and employee performance are presented, gathered through in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD).

A total of eight key informants were interviewed in depth, while seven participants were interviewed in focus groups. For confidentiality and anonymity, study participants were given pseudonyms. Table 4 presents the profile of the study participants.

Table 4 Profile of Participants

Pseudonym	Office Assignment	Position	Years in Service	Study Group
Angela	Regional Office – CDO	Administrative Assistant III	3	IDI
Carlo	Regional Office – CDO	Administrative Aide IV	4	IDI
Liza	Bukidnon	Project Development Officer II	6	IDI
Mark	Bukidnon	Area Coordinator	4	IDI
Fatima	Camiguin	Project Development Officer II	3	IDI
Jun	Lanao del Norte	Project Development Officer	5	IDI
Rose	Misamis Occidental	Project Development Officer	5	IDI
Noel	Misamis Oriental	Administrative Aide IV	3	IDI
May	Misamis Oriental	Community Development Assistant	4	FGD
Kris	Camiguin	Project Development Officer I	5	FGD
Ella	Lanao del Norte	Social Welfare Assistant	3	FGD
Ryan	Bukidnon	Administrative Assistant	3	FGD
Joy	Bukidnon	Social Welfare Assistant	5	FGD
Alen	Misamis Occidental	Social Welfare Assistant	5	FGD
Beth	Misamis Oriental	Project Development Officer I	6	FGD

Experiences on Ethical Leadership, Political Behavior, and Employee Performance

In the public sector, public sector employees are expected to implement government programs, deliver services, and maintain good governance by demonstrating accountability and transparency in their work practices. Work experiences within the public service are largely dependent on the leadership they work under, political actions

within their own organization, and their own involvement and performance. In this research study, participants had the opportunity to discuss and express their lived experiences regarding ethical leadership, political behavior, and employee performance, which helped shape their professional values, work attitudes, and motivation as public servants.

Table 5 reflected the essential themes and significant statements from study participants on their experiences with ethical leadership, political behavior, and employee performance. These queries were the third set of questions that the researcher asked the participants. The participants freely narrated these things that transpired during the in-depth interview and focus group discussion.

Table 5. Thematic analysis on the Experiences of the participants on Ethical Leadership of Unit Heads, Political Behavior and Employee Performance among Public Sector Employees

Emerging Themes	Core Ideas
Transparency and Clear Communication	Head clearly gives instructions and are transparent in decision-making (IDI 1_Q4.1) explains the process and assign responsibilities properly in project implementation (IDI 2_Q4.1) always reminds us that public service should be done with integrity and compassion (FGD 4_Q4.1)
Inclusive and Consultative Leadership	evident consistency in applying rules and equal treatment (IDI 4_Q4.1) consult us before making decisions; so, we feel our opinions are valued (FGD 5_Q4.1)
Fairness and Equal Treatment	whether one is a regular or a job order employee, everyone is treated the same (FGD 7_Q4.1) there's no favoritism which motivates employees to follow the rules (IDI 7_Q4.1) inspired by the head's example (IDI 4_Q4.1)
Integrity and Role Modeling	heads are role models and encourage employees to be responsible (IDI 7_Q4.1) few leaders are inconsistent and appear selective (IDI 10_Q4.1)
Approachability and Supportive Leadership	approachable and willing to listen to staff concerns (IDI 3_Q4.1) allot time for consultations or team discussions which helps employees work more efficiently (FGD 2_Q4.1) opportunities are given only to those close to them which affects others' morale (IDI 6_Q4.1)

Transparency and Clear Communication. Another point raised several times by participants was that the leader should be transparent and establish clear communication lines. They gave the example that it is easier for employees to be clear about their role and responsibilities when a unit head is clear about the direction of task performance and the rationale behind the decisions. In a public sector case, the nature of work is highly structured, procedural, and time-bound, and clarity is an important element to ensure that employees are in control and that operations are efficient.

Carlo shared:

Oo, taas kay klaro sila mohatag ug instruction ug transparent sa decision-making. Sa among division, kung naay project, gina-explain gyud nila unsay proseso ug kinsa ang responsible. Dili pud sila magbuhat ug desisyon nga walay consultation, mao nga makabati mi nga gi-value among opinion (IDI 2_Q4.1)

Yes, because they clearly give instructions and are transparent in decision-making. In our division, whenever there's a project, they explain the process and assign responsibilities properly. They also consult before making decisions, so we feel our opinions are valued.

The importance of leaders clarifying their decision-making process and engaging employees in work-related decisions was evident in employee statements. This sentiment was reflected in several comments from other individuals who were aware that the procedures for projects had been communicated and that each individual was assigned a designated duty.

The above results align with Khurohman and Desiana (2024) on international public sector research, which proposes that transparency in leadership positively improves employees' confidence and reduces ambiguity in their work environment. In addition, Guo (2022) found that ethical leadership promotes transparent communication, thereby increasing employee satisfaction, trust, and behaviors such as engagement. In contrast, an unethical climate hinders this via poor communication. In addition, Zhang & Wang (2025) found that ethical leadership positively influences employees' promotive voice (proactive suggestions) by enhancing the role of employees' feedback-seeking behavior and significantly affects employees' role ambiguity. This mechanism is applicable in public or bureaucratic contexts, where explicit guidance from a leader on ethical issues increases employees' clarity and performance-based behavior. Henceforth, transparency can be seen as an outcome in which employees become familiar with the necessary details and are encouraged to perform to the best of their ability.

Inclusive and Consultative Leadership. Participative and collaborative leadership originated with the respondents, as reflected in the application of rules. It is seen that the leader consistently follows the rules and involves his subordinates in decision-making and planning. According to them, "the department heads can communicate with the employees during their consultations, which makes them feel they belong and have a part to play".

Ryan shared:

Oo, kay approachable sila ug andam maminaw sa concerns sa staff. Bisan busy, ilang time i-allocate para sa consultation or pag-istorya sa team, mao nga mas organized ug cooperative mi sa trabaho. (FGD 3_Q4.1)

Yes, because they are approachable and willing to listen to staff concerns. Even if they're busy, they allot time for consultations or team discussions, which helps us work more efficiently.

These practices also suggested that consultation was one of the core practices leaders used to demonstrate their respect for employees' voices and shared responsibility in public-sector contexts. Previous research confirms this. Wang et al. (2025) claim that inclusive leadership will boost employee participation because such a leader can foster a climate in which all employees feel honored and motivated to participate in organizational matters. As also demonstrated by Yang et al. (2025), inclusive leadership enhances voice through an open, supportive social atmosphere in which employees trust emotionally and are assured of resource support, enabling them to submit their ideas without threat. Omar & Auso (2025) stressed that consultative leadership practices increase employees' collaboration and trust by proactively including their contributions in the decision-making process. This approach becomes more critical in the public sector, where compliance and participation must be balanced. Within this study context, in line with the explanation shown in Table 5, inclusive and consultative leadership was demonstrated through employee participation in decision-making and rule application, aligned with ethical leadership and fostering a supportive atmosphere for a cooperative and engaged working climate.

Fairness and Equal Treatment. Fairness in treatment has also been a crucial part of ethical leadership regarding employee motivation and rule compliance. It was manifested in the response shown in Table 5, which indicates that unit heads apply the rule equally to all employees, regardless of their employment status (regular or job order).

Alen responded that:

In our office, whether regular or job order, our unit head treats us equally in terms of work and responsibilities. Because of this, management is fair and is more motivated to work, since there is no favoritism.

Sa among opisina, bisan regular o job order, pareho ra gyud ang pagtan-aw sa amo sa among unit head sa trabaho ug responsibilidad. Tungod ani, makabati mi og patas nga pag dala sa amoa ug mas ganado mi motrabaho kay walay favoritism. (FGD 6_Q4.1)

Such findings suggest that when people feel there is a fair leader, they are more likely to comply with rules and carry out their responsibilities more carefully. Current research confirms these findings: Moon & Christensen (2022) found that impartial behavior by ethical leaders enhanced public employees' commitment and extra-role behavior through organizational identification. Likewise, Ashikali (2023) states that fair leadership decreases work alienation and increases employee job satisfaction, particularly because fairness perceptions increase trust and motivation.

Integrity and Role Modeling. Leaders' integrity and role-modeling were among the leadership characteristics that are important for leaders to possess, as these qualities influence leaders' attitudes and perceptions, as well as employees' perceptions of the work environment towards leaders. As employees, they perceived that when leaders exhibit integrity and sincerity, employees will behave responsibly and follow their ethical standards. Particularly in the public sector, employees have to see the individual leader and make their own decision based on how the leader behaves toward others.

Mark shared:

Oo, kay role models sila ug ga-encourage sa amo nga mahimong responsable. Ang among head pirmi magpa-remind nga ang serbisyo publiko kinahanglan may integrity ug compassion, mao nga ma-inspire pud mi sa iyang example. (IDI 4_Q4.1)

Yes, because they are role models and encourage us to be responsible. Our head always reminds us that public service should be done with integrity and compassion; so, we're inspired by her example.

This supports Saleem, Bhutta, Abrar Bari & Bashir (2024), who argue that leadership integrity leads to higher employee motivation and better moral performance. This is because behaviors guided by ethical considerations increase employees' ability to manage their emotions and happiness. According to Liza, an IDI participant from Bukidnon, "the leader provides an inspiring example, employees become responsible for their work." The findings of this study are also consistent with the notion of Reddick et al (2024), who noted that an ethical leader who displays integrity, including fairness, shapes employees' behavior, motivation, and performance through example among public organizations. In contrast, there are also concerns about some leaders who exhibit inconsistent behavior in the organization, leading employees to feel that favoritism is present.

Ella pointed out:

Medyo, kay naa'y uban leaders nga dili consistent ug murag selective. Usahay makita nga kung kinsa lang ang close, mao ra ang mahatagan ug chance. Maka-apekto pud na sa morale sa uban. (FGD 3_Q4.1)

Somewhat, because a few leaders are inconsistent and appear selective. Sometimes, opportunities are given only to those close to them, which affects others' morale

This perceived selectiveness is a form of political malpractice: the leader decides based on personal knowledge rather than competence. As opined by Babalola et al. The evidence indicates that favoritism erodes employees' trust and perceptions of equity, thereby influencing their morale and performance.

Approachability and Supportive Leadership. The themes of approachability and supportive leadership emerged from participants' narratives, which indicated that leaders are prepared to spend time on consultations.

Joy shared that leaders are:

Dili mi mahadlok mo-duol sa among head kay open siya ug maminaw sa among mga problema ug suggestion. (FGD 5_Q4.1)

We are not afraid to approach our head because she is open and willing to listen to our concerns and suggestions.

It means accessible leadership helps enhance open communication and coordination in the public sector. Van der Voet & Steijn (2021) illustrated that visionary leadership behaviors promote coherence and cooperation within public sector teams, thereby leading to more favorable innovation outcomes. Recent meta-analyses (Backhaus & Vogel, 2022) demonstrate that multiple types of supportive/transformational leadership foster employee engagement in public bureaucracies through employee trust.

Standpoints of participants on the relationship of ethical leadership, political behavior, and individual work performance

The relationship between ethical leadership, political behavior, and employee performance is understood in several ways. Table 6 presents participants' perspectives on the connections among ethical leadership, political behavior, and their own work performance.

Table 6. Standpoints of Participants on the Relationship of Ethical Leadership of Unit Heads, Political Behavior, and Own Work Performance

Emerging Themes	Core Ideas
Alignment with Leadership as a Path to Advancement	<p>if the leader is ethical, employees are more motivated (IDI 1_Q5.1)</p> <p>ethical leadership gives clear directions (IDI 8_Q5.1)</p> <p>when assignments are clear, and there's no favoritism, everyone becomes more cooperative IDI 3_Q5.1)</p> <p>head recognized those who exerted extra effort, which encouraged employees to work harder even if the workload was heavy (FGD 4_Q5.1)</p>
Ethical Leadership as a Source of Motivation	<p>when workload is distributed fairly, employees are motivated (FGD 6_Q5.1)</p> <p>head listened to all sides and adjusted the process (IDI 5_Q5.1)</p> <p>unit head asked about the delays in reporting (IDI 3_Q5.1)</p> <p>when the leader is open to feedback, the output is better (FGD 2_Q5.1)</p>
Clarity and Guidance through Ethical Leadership	<p>when a leader listens, employees become more motivated (IDI 8_Q5.1)</p> <p>submissions became faster, and employees felt less stressed (IDI 1_Q5.1)</p>

Ethical leadership, political behavior, and employee performance are a complex and interwoven reality in public sector work. Ethical leadership shapes employees' attitudes and motivation to work, their feelings of fairness, trust, and responsibility toward work, their commitment to work and its standards, and their efforts to fulfill their job tasks. Political behavior is about an employee's attitude and motivation to work, to get resources, to navigate organizational politics, to access opportunities, and to cope with and respond to organizational pressures. Ethical leadership sets the standards and guidelines, whereas political behavior usually impacts and affects daily life

directly or indirectly, sometimes encouraging (by being inclusive and supportive) but sometimes discouraging (when a political behavior implies

Alignment with Leadership as a Path to Advancement. Another key perspective on how ethical leadership relates to employee motivation and performance concerns how employees align with leaders. Employees felt that the leader demonstrates ethical behavior and direction and clearly applies rules, which encourages employees to work together more willingly and be more motivated. Since assignments in the public sector are typically clearly defined and performance is monitored, the ethical leader provides direction that helps employees know what is expected of them and how to contribute to the organizational goal. Participants believed that clarity in tasks and the absence of bias contribute to teamwork and ease workplace tension, even during periods of work overload.

Fatima shared:

Kung makita sa among head nga naningkamot gyud ang empleyado, iyang gi-recognize, mao nga bisan bug-at ang trabaho, mas ganado mi motrabaho ug maningkamot pa gyud (IDI 5_Q5.1)

When our head recognizes employees' efforts, it motivates us to work harder, even when the workload is heavy.

Therefore, leadership recognition by unit heads helped boost employees' work motivation. According to participants, employees put in additional effort, even though their work is voluminous, if they see that their leaders have recognized those who give their utmost. In these situations, alignment with leadership is not only associated with motivation but also with maintaining high work effort under conditions of excessive workload. This finding appears consistent with current literature in public administration. Specifically, Khan, Zhongyi, Han, and Montes (2023) elaborated on how leadership in the public sector (accountability, rule-following, political loyalty, network governance) leads to better employee performance by facilitating team cohesion and behavioral coordination, an effect demonstrated across various public projects. Similarly, van der Voet and Steijn (2021) noted that the use of visionary leadership behaviors increased cohesion and cooperation within teams, resulting in higher team performance and innovation in the public sector. In this study, alignment with leadership as a pathway for promotion describes how ethical leadership practices (clarity and recognition) combined to affect employees' motivational and work effort outcomes, confirming a positive association between leadership as a construct and other key variables.

Ethical Leadership as a Source of Motivation

Ethical leadership was a motivating factor for employees, including how workload is distributed, leaders listening to their concerns, and leaders being open to suggestions. Respondents indicate that when employees see the workload fairly distributed among workers and a leader takes the time to acknowledge what they are dealing with, they become more motivated and committed to their tasks.

Beth shared:

Kung patas ang distribution sa workload, motivated mi. Sa among division, makit- an gyud nga kung klaro ang assignment ug walay favoritism, mas cooperative mi tanan. Naa pud time nga among head mismo ang mo-acknowledge kung kinsa ang ni-exert ug extra effort, mao na nga mas ganahan mi magtrabaho bisan loaded (FGD 6_Q5.1)

When workload is distributed fairly, we are motivated. In our division, when assignments are clear and there's no favoritism, everyone becomes more cooperative. There was even a time when our head recognized those who exerted extra effort, which encouraged us to work harder even if the workload was heavy.

Also in the public sector, there are rigid reporting processes and deadlines, so employees should feel safe and not stressed. Leaders who involve and accept feedback from all stakeholders can make employees feel safe. When asked, participants have expressed that leaders in units that solicit comments about why a report is late in being submitted, and demand reasons without blaming employees, make employees be responsible and perform better, and also that leaders are approachable for advice to improve the work product of their subordinates. This

can be supported from the studies conducted in the public administration field, it shows in the study of Soriano, Vallarta, Trinidad and Agustin (2024) about DPWH employees in Cabanatuan City, a study showed that ethical leadership has a substantial effect in employee's motivation and performance by fostering trust and organizational alignment in the public sector environment under the public sector environment's pressure; also Akerboom, Groeneveld and Kuipers (2024) found that through collaboration network leaders influence performance in the public sector more effectively through responsive network leadership.

Clarity and Guidance through Ethical Leadership

The employee highlighted that ethical leadership played a major role in employee motivation and working effectiveness. This is based on the employee's explanation, which states that if the leader pays attention to their concerns and shows clear directions of work, the employees will be highly motivated to complete their job effectively under less stress.

Liza shared:

Makita sa pagtuman sa deadlines ug quality outputs nga kung klaro ang giya sa lider, mas organisado ug mas epektibo ang pagtrabaho sa mga empleyado. (IDI 6_Q5.1)

This is evident in meeting deadlines and producing quality outputs, as clear guidance from leaders helps employees work in a more organized and effective manner.

Public sector employees face constant reporting requirements and deadlines; thus, leaders' directives will help them know where to focus and complete tasks on time. Some of the respondents also said they noticed work became much faster and less stressful after their leaders started listening to their concerns and making expectations clear. These findings are supported by literature from public administration, wherein Bian and Wang (2024) had identified that ethical leaders who provide clear direction and listen to employees improve motivation and decrease stress at public sector work. Similarly, Abdi and Hashi (2024) added that clear guidance given by an ethical leader to employees working in the public sector increases the employees' motivation and loyalty to the job and hence decreases the stress due to trust-based interactions

From the results described above, we can infer that, as respondents understood it, ethical leadership had a broad, holistic impact on how they were motivated, worked, and cooperated. These ethical leadership behaviors create an ethical atmosphere, establish fairness, transparency, and recognition, and open-ended communication as they shape how employees should and will behave in the workplace. Ethical leadership behavior operates with organizational politics. These leadership behaviors work in combination with the organization's political dynamics, sometimes adding to opportunities and sometimes creating challenges, thereby influencing the quality of employees' performance. Thus, according to the respondent and previous research, ethical leadership will enhance employee motivation, reduce stress, and improve productivity and employee morale by creating a favorable work environment

Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

The joint display below shows the main results from both quantitative data derived from 400 subjects and qualitative data transcripts from 15 research participants: 8 who had undergone an in-depth interview and 7 who participated in a focus group discussion. In mixed-method results, the way they are integrated into the joint display is crucial. In sequential explanatory mixed-methods, integration is typically defined as merging two sets of findings into a single analysis, with the results jointly evaluated. This will help deepen understanding of the "how" and "why" of the quantitative results and present them more integrally alongside the qualitative findings. The qualitative results explain the quantitative results.

Regarding employee performance in the public sector, the quantitative results revealed a very high level, suggesting that employees demonstrate strong dedication, efficiency, and commitment to their tasks. Such high ratings are also supported by the qualitative results, which suggest that the employees' motivation stems from fairness, responsibility, accountability, and recognition for their contributions. The employees described clear

expectations, supportive and equitable opportunities, that motivate them to make a more dedicated effort and deliver superior results. This connecting confirmation between quantitative and qualitative data makes a significant contribution to support Razak et al.'s (2025) claim that the performance of public sector employees is fostered by the perception of fairness, supportive leadership, and meaningful jobs, which in turn motivate them.

Meanwhile, on the influence of political behavior on employee performance, the quantitative data suggested that political behavior best predicts employee performance and has the highest regression beta coefficient. That political behavior, which could either be positive, in the form of forging alliances and being seen by superiors, or negative, such as favoritism or selective distribution of opportunities, plays a substantial role in shaping employee outcomes.

The qualitative findings further support these findings and conclude that political behavior is inherently an aspect of the organizational structure. Several participants said that supporting and following powerful leaders would provide them with easier entry into the projects, and allow for rapid development and greater publicity. Others conceded that politics may sometimes negatively impact morale due to unequal advancement opportunities where connections play a bigger role than efficiency. This integration conforms with the argument made by Fridan and Maamari (2023) in which they claim that politics have a major impact on performance due to their impact on allocation of resources and level of influence in decision-making within a bureaucracy

Table 7 Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

Research Area	Quantitative Findings	Qualitative Findings	Nature of Integration
1.Level of Ethical Leadership	The respondents rated ethical leadership at high level with an overall mean of 4.04 indicating that public sector employees is often observed the measures of this variable. The seven indicators were noted at high level: People orientation mean is 3.78, Fairness mean is 4.07, Power Sharing mean is 4.03, Concern for Sustainability is 4.13, Ethical Guidance mean is 4.11, Role Clarification mean is 4.10, and Integrity mean is 4.07 (Refer to Table 1).	Participants confirmed that ethical leadership is generally high. Based on IDI and FGD, unit heads were described as transparent, fair, consultative, and role models who treat regular and job order employees equally (Refer to Table 5)	Connecting (Confirmation)
Political Behavior	The respondents rated Political behavior at high level with an overall mean of 4.05 indicating that Political Behavior is often observed among public sector employees. Go-Along-to-Get-Ahead got the highest mean of 4.14 while Pay and Promotion policies obtained the lowest rating with a mean of 3.19 (Refer to Table 1).	Participants acknowledged that political behavior is present in daily work life. IDI and FGD revealed that a few leaders are inconsistent and appear selective. Employees often adjust, build relationships, and align with leaders to gain opportunities and exposure. While some viewed political behavior as helpful in facilitating processes and recognition, others noted concerns	Connecting (Confirmation)

		about favoritism and selective treatment. (Refer to Table 5)	
Employee Performance	The respondents rated employee performance at a very high level with an overall mean of 4.23. Efficiency of the Work obtained a very high rating with a mean of 4.49, while both Creativity and Innovation, and Making Efforts got a low rating with a mean of 4.03 (Refer to Table 1)	Participants confirmed that employee performance is very high. IDI and FGD revealed that employees remain committed despite heavy workloads, strive to meet deadlines, and maintain quality outputs. Clear instructions, proper assignment of responsibilities, and reminders about integrity and compassion in public service were perceived to strengthen employees' sense of accountability and commitment to quality work. (Refer to Table 6)	Connecting (Confirmation)
4. Relationship Between Ethical Leadership and Employee Performance	Ethical leadership showed a significant relationship with employee performance ($p < .05$), with Ethical Guidance, Integrity, and Power Sharing showing the strongest correlations (Refer to Table 2).	Participants agreed that ethical leadership has a positive influence on their performance. IDI and FGD revealed that motivation, fairness, clarity, recognition, and open communication lead to employees exerting more effort, cooperating with colleagues, and performing tasks more efficiently. (Table 6)	Connecting (Confirmation)
5. Relationship Between Political Behavior and Employee Performance	Political behavior also significantly predicted employee performance ($p < .05$). "Go Along to Get Ahead" had the strongest correlation with overall performance (Refer to Table 2).	Participants confirmed that political behavior strongly affects performance. IDI and FGD indicated that political behavior can increase motivation by aligning with fair policies, and when assignments are clear and there's no favoritism, everyone becomes more cooperative. (Table 6)	Connecting (Confirmation)
6. Influence of Ethical Leadership and Political Behavior on Employee Performance	Regression analysis showed that both ethical leadership ($\beta = .323$) and political behavior ($\beta = .406$) significantly influence employee performance. Political behavior emerged as the stronger influence on employee performance, having the highest beta coefficient. (Refer to Table 3)	Participants reinforced this finding by emphasizing that while ethical leaders promote fairness and motivate employees, political behavior more strongly determines access to opportunities, recognition, and participation in key projects. Many noted that aligning with influential figures often leads to faster career advancement and greater visibility, shaping actual work outcomes. (Table 5 & 6)	Connecting (Confirmation)

Despite these mixed experiences, a significant number of participants still felt they did a good job, irrespective of the political environment, demonstrating professionalism and commitment to the public sector. This supports Chughtai, Syed, Naseer, and Chinchilla (2023), who indicated that public sector employees develop strategies to maintain performance under political pressure, grounded in work values and mission.

In conclusion, the joint display of findings indicates the full connection among leadership, workplace politics, and job performance. In high-performance settings, ethical leadership establishes the ethical and structural foundation for maintaining and supporting high-performance behaviors. In contrast, political behaviors have a very close and significant relationship with job performance outcomes. The employees' job performance stays high due to the supportive leadership, process fairness, and their commitment to public service. The integrated results underscore that both ethical leadership and political behavior determine performance; however, politics is a more powerful determinant of employee performance, particularly in environments where access to opportunities and recognition is shaped by relational dynamics rather than purely meritocratic systems.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The present research aimed to determine the levels of ethical leadership, political behavior, and employees' performance of DSWD in Region X. Based on the findings, the employees experienced ethical leadership at a high level. This was verified through individual interviews and focus group discussions with employees, who described the level as high and the leaders as transparent, fair, and role models who treat regular and job-order employees equally. To sustain the high ethical leadership, continuous leadership development programs focused on the core of integrity, transparency, and accountability should be institutionalized in relation to a well-enforced and applied code of conduct to foster leader-employee trust, ensure fairness, and create a work culture that is more honest and productive for better performance from the employees.

In terms of political behavior, the findings show that public sector employees exhibit a high degree of political behavior, suggesting that politics is clearly visible and felt at work. Similarly, the study shows that employees perform at a very high level, indicating that they achieve excellent work performance consistently regardless of whether politics is involved. The study also reveals that although organizational politics can pose a threat, its high prevalence may benefit performance when expressed through alignment, adaptability, and relationship building. Employee performance is more susceptible to the impact of politics because the outcomes of political behavior are closely linked to opportunities, motivation, and organizational visibility. To maintain employees' job performance, management must address organizational politics through fair policies, transparent decision-making, and a merit system, ensuring that political dynamics support rather than undermine employee performance.

With regard to the relationship between independent and dependent variables, this research found that both ethical leadership and political behavior are positively associated with employee performance in public sector organizations, with political behavior having a much greater impact than ethical leadership. Ethical leadership encourages employees to perform at higher levels through clear expectations, fair and principled standards, and moral role modeling, which, in turn, builds greater accountability, trust, and motivation. Oladimeji and Abdulkareem (2022) highlighted the influence that ethical leaders have on employee performance; for example, it develops a higher sense of responsibility, active participation, and loyalty towards organizational objectives. Similarly, Abdi et al. (2024) reported that ethical leadership enhances the performance of public sector employees by building integrity and trust while minimizing organizational politics. Conversely, political behavior had a stronger impact on employee performance because it directly affects employee access to opportunities, exposure, and integration. Research showed that Nazir, Khadim, Asadullah, and Syed (2023) argued that perceptions of organizational politics had a strong influence on employees' motivation and behavior, as organizational politics causes employees to feel negative emotions, such as hostility, and decreases their level of intrinsic motivation. In an organization, when organizational politics are evident, employees learn to behave in ways that help protect their self-interest and opportunities when the level of perceived organizational injustice is high. From this point, if ethical leadership is the foundation on which trust and fairness exist in an organization, political behavior would have a stronger impact on workplace behavior and performance when there is bureaucracy in the organization.

Despite the significant contributions of this study to understanding the role of ethical leadership and political behavior in predicting employee performance in the public sector, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study relied primarily on self-reported data, which may have introduced response bias and influenced the accuracy of the results. Second, the use of a cross-sectional research design limits the ability to establish causal relationships among the variables examined. Third, the study was conducted within a single national government agency in Region X, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other public sector organizations or contexts.

Additionally, time and resource constraints, along with limited participant availability during the qualitative phase, may have affected the depth and richness of the data collected. These constraints are inherent in mixed-methods research, particularly in sequential explanatory designs where both quantitative and qualitative phases require substantial time and coordination.

In light of the identified limitations, future studies may consider employing longitudinal research designs to better establish causal relationships among ethical leadership, political behavior, and employee performance. Expanding the scope to include multiple government agencies or regions would enhance the generalizability of findings. Researchers are also encouraged to incorporate additional variables such as organizational culture and job satisfaction to provide a more comprehensive understanding of employee performance in the public sector.

Moreover, minimizing reliance on self-reported data through the use of multiple data sources and increasing the diversity of qualitative participants can further strengthen the validity and depth of future research. Finally, careful review and standardization of reference formatting are recommended to ensure full compliance with APA 7th edition and improve the overall scholarly quality of the manuscript.

Building on these considerations, the results of this study can lead to several recommendations for organizational improvement. First, the agency should work to increase ethical leadership behaviors by providing leadership development training on transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making. It should also conduct periodic evaluations of leadership behavior to ensure standardized behavior across units. Second, the study recommends that leadership address the disadvantages associated with political behavior, particularly favoritism and selective opportunity distribution, through clear, merit-based standards in promotions, task assignments, and performance evaluations.

Third, the agency is advised to maintain performance levels by continuously providing its supporting systems, such as fair distribution of work, recognition mechanisms, mentoring systems, and development opportunities. Fourth, an atmosphere of open communication needs to be promoted, as supported by the qualitative data. The qualitative results also indicate the need for leaders who listen to employees. Lastly, the agency can promote employee resiliency and performance through organizational capability-building programs such as emotional intelligence training, workplace communication workshops, and a workshop on managing politics ethically.

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