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Ethical Leadership and Innovative Behavior: Mediating Role of Voice Behavior and Moderated Mediation Role of Psychological Safety

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Abstract: Organizations increasingly emphasize and require their members to engage in innovative behavior because it is directly associated with organizational sustainability and survival. This study aims to address whether ethical leadership enhances subordinates' innovative behavior and investigates the mediating role of voice behavior in promoting innovative behavior. Psychological safety was tested to moderate the mediating effect of voice behavior on the relationship between ethical leadership and innovative behavior. We collected data from 296 full-time employees from small and medium-sized enterprises in China. The results suggest that ethical leadership positively influences innovative behavior through the mediating role of voice behavior. Furthermore, psychological leadership significantly moderates the mediating effect of voice behavior on the relationship between ethical leadership and innovative behavior. This study expands the scope of research on improving innovative behavior and provides a theoretical basis for related research.

Keywords: ethical leadership; innovative behavior; moderated mediation model; psychological safety; voice behavior

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1. Introduction

Organizational sustainability has become business organizations' major focus, and it provides development opportunities, financial viability, competitive advantages, and long-term growth [1]. However, the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly caused by the variant Omicron, continues to threaten human life and leads to organizational management problems worldwide. This creates an environment that is considered to threaten organizational sustainability and the survival of organizations. Additionally, the pandemic has catalyzed organizational management and culture changes and created enormous challenges in an uncertain environment. Most organizations pursue innovation to retain a competitive advantage and maintain organizational sustainability. Many previous studies have highlighted the importance of innovation. For example, Seclen-Luna, Moya-Fernández, and Pereira [2] emphasized that innovation can lead to change, which improves professionalism, service, quality, and care. Long, Blok, VDorrestijn, and Macnaghten [3] highlighted that innovation leads to new business models, products, and changes to socioeconomic systems. Moreover, innovation leads to sustainable entrepreneurship [4], changes in organizations, and improvements in the establishment of competitiveness [5]. Furthermore, innovation is a key factor related to sustainable competitiveness for organizations in both tangible (processes, services, and products) and intangible (organizational culture and leadership) areas [6]. Organizations should perceive the necessity of innovation to survive in challenging business environments and secure sustainable competitive advantages [6]. Such highlights explain the significance of innovation on organizational performance and the organizations' need for organizational members' innovative behavior.

As mentioned above, by emphasizing the importance of innovative behavior, this study investigates and verifies a research model that leads to organizational members' innovative behaviors. Innovation behavior is defined as how organizational members utilize new ideas to increase work efficiency [7]. Hence, it is worth exploring the process of increasing the level of innovative behavior. Although previous studies have explored variables that can influence innovation, this study emphasizes the importance of ethical leadership, which is expected to improve innovative behavior. Ethical leadership is defined as a leader's value system, decision-making, influence processes, and attitudes, and how these attributes impact organizational members' behavior [8]. Ethical leadership refers to the social practice by which professional judgments are autonomously exercised, and ethical leadership constitutes three dimensions: justice, care, and critique [9]. Ethical leader concerns about four ethical awareness, which are (a) multiple stakeholders' perspectives, (b) long-term, not just the short-term, (c) serving the greater good, and (d) means, not just ends [10]. Ethical leader behavior is defined as a leader's signaling behavior targeting individual followers, clients, or a group of followers comprising enactment of prosocial values combined with the expression of moral emotions [11]. Zahra, Ahmad, and Waheed [12] suggest that social exchange theory [13] provides the basis for the relationship between ethical leadership and innovative work behavior. Social exchange relationship recognition by members of the organization is increased through ethical leaders' balanced decisions and fairness [14,15], leading to behavior reciprocity by the subordinates [16] and innovative work behavior [12]. Therefore, ethical leadership is a positive element that facilitates innovative behavior.

This study seeks to test whether ethical leadership enhances innovative behavior and determine what factors mediate the process by which ethical leadership induces innovative behavior. Particularly, we argue that employees' voice behavior mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and subordinates' innovative behavior. Ethical leaders play a significant role in providing subordinates with opportunities to speak out [17,18]. According to the social learning perspective [16], if leaders actively create fair working environments, they become role models for their followers [18]. Moreover, leaders provide followers with strict ethical standards and foster them in communicating their opinions and ideas concerning methods and ethics to improve the work environment and procedures [18,19]. This explains why ethical leadership enhances organizational members' voice behaviors. Furthermore, voice behavior is positively related to innovative behavior [20]. In particular, promotive voice behavior is regarded as a strategy for improving organizational innovation [20,21]. This process predicts that ethical leadership enhances innovative behavior.

We argue that innovative behavior changes due to the mediating effect of voice behavior being moderated. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the moderating variable with a moderated mediation effect. We propose psychological safety as a moderator of the mediating effect of voice behavior. Psychological safety allows organizational members to build an atmosphere characterized by mutual respect and interpersonal trust, where they express their different opinions or positions comfortably and are unworried about negative judgment [22–25]. Moreover, ethical leadership is characterized by ethical values and characteristics, and leaders with such principles perform moral behaviors and do not engage in any inconsistency that affects cognitive trust [26]. In recognition of ethical leadership, which is characterized by fairness and morality, subordinates form cognitive trust in the leader, and this eventually fosters the subordinates' psychological safety. Therefore, the interaction between ethical leadership and psychological safety is highly likely to increase subordinates' voice behavior.

Thus, the rationale for conducting this research is as follows:

First, there are relatively few studies on the roles of ethical leadership in determining subordinates' innovative work behavior and task performance, which demand additional efforts for overall organizational effectiveness [12,27,28]. Therefore, this study aims to identify the relationship between ethical leadership and subordinates' innovative behavior.

In addition, we investigate and reveal the role of ethical leadership in innovative behavior. Furthermore, we express how ethical leadership leads to subordinates' innovative behavior.

Second, most studies have explored the antecedent variables of innovative behavior [29–32], verified the mediating roles in inducing innovative behavior [33–37], or focused on moderator variables that moderate innovation behavior level [38–42]. However, the challenges of exploring a framework that includes moderating and mediating roles are considerable. Nevertheless, we broadened the scope of innovative behavior research and simultaneously measured both mediating and moderating effects. Furthermore, we presented and verified the moderated mediation research model.

Third, most studies have focused on the mediating roles of psychological safety and the effect of ethical leadership on performance [43–47]. However, this study identifies the moderating role of psychological safety and examines its moderating effect. Specifically, by presenting the interaction between ethical leadership and psychological safety, we determine how the interaction effect changes the level of innovation behavior that moderates the mediating effect of subordinates' voice behavior.

Overall, the spotlight of this research is to provide the research model of increasing subordinates' innovative behavior and demonstrate the significance of this research model. Furthermore, we focus on expanding the scope of research on improving subordinates' innovative behavior and provide a theoretical basis for related research. Therefore, this research contributes to the scope of innovative behavior.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

2.1. Ethical Leadership and Innovative Behavior

We argue that ethical leadership is positively associated with subordinates' innovative behavior and directly influences it. In terms of social exchange theory, subordinates recognize their leaders' motivation, support, and they will always respond positively according to the principle of reciprocity. Furthermore, social exchange theory suggests that subordinates perform more effectively when they have healthy relationships with their leaders [48]. If ethical leaders offer meaning to roles of the subordinates in the workplace, make their work more meaningful [49,50], encourage them to be more innovative, and motivate them to be more adaptable to changes [18], then subordinates will perceive the leader's favorable treatment, establish emotional bonds, and feel obligated toward their leader. Consequently, this process may lead to high motivation and innovative behavior [51,52]. In addition, organizational members' recognition of social exchange relationships is improved through balanced decisions and fairness of ethical leaders [14,15], leading to subordinates' reciprocation of their behavior [16] and innovative work behavior [12]. Moreover, ethical leaders communicate with their subordinates by advocating two-way open communication, and such leaders always listen genuinely to their subordinates and encourage them to speak out their concerns and opinions, which in turn stimulates the subordinates to propose novel ideas to enhance the present work strategies, processes, and procedures [53,54]. Therefore, ethical leadership is a positive element that facilitates innovative behavior.

Hypothesis 1. *Ethical leadership will positively influence subordinates' innovative behavior.*

2.2. Ethical Leadership and Voice Behavior

Ethical leadership refers to demonstrating normatively appropriate performance through individual behavior and interpersonal relationships [17]. The authors suggest that ethical leadership promotes subordinates through decision making, reinforcement, and two-way communication. Ethical leadership shows regulated conduct in interpersonal relationships directed toward improving and strengthening organizational members' ethical behavior [55]. Ethical leaders have attracted attention to ethics [43], and such leaders facilitate subordinates' ideas and develop a workplace climate of mutual respect where subordinates feel safe and freely express their different views [19,43]. The roles of ethical leaders involve creating a feeling of safety and encouraging subordinates to provide new

ideas. Accordingly, subordinates feel safe and can express their opinions and thoughts when these roles are accomplished. Therefore, ethical leadership is expected to enhance subordinates' voice behavior. Voice behavior refers to an encouraging behavior that emphasizes the expression of constructive challenges and innovative proposals for change rather than merely critical aspects [56]. Individuals' voice behavior is evident when they choose to speak up on concerns and propose suggestions for improvement [57]. Organizational members' voice behavior is displayed when they recognize unethical or latent inappropriate behavior and can bravely speak out their ideas and opinions for organizational improvement while recognizing encouragement from ethical leaders [18].

According to social learning theory, individuals learn specific behaviors by observing people they recognize as legitimate in their behaviors. In addition, organizational members observe their leaders and regard their actions as a reference [18,58]. One of the central ways ethical leaders provide an opportunity is for subordinates to speak out [17]. Ethical leaders publicly emphasize appropriate organizational behavior while opposing inappropriate behavior [18]. That is, they speak publicly against inappropriate organizational behaviors and emphasize the need for their subordinates to do the right thing. Hence, these leaders encourage the same actions in their subordinates, who learn such behaviors by observing them [57,59]. Drawing on the social learning perspective [59], if leaders actively create fair working environments, they become role models for their followers [18]. Moreover, leaders provide followers with stringent ethical standards and encourage them to express their opinions and ideas concerning methods and ethics, which helps to improve the work environment and procedures [18,19]. This explains why ethical leadership enhances organizational members' voice behaviors. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. *Ethical leadership will positively influence subordinates' voice behavior.*

2.3. Voice Behavior and Innovative Behavior

Innovative behavior is a type of behavior in which individuals are willing to express their ideas and concepts [60]. It refers to the concept that organizational members intentionally create and apply new ideas to their work roles to improve group or organizational role performance [61,62]. Moreover, innovative behavior is understood as how organizational members realize, create, generate, apply, promote, and modify new ideas to benefit role performance [63]. We argue that voice behavior promotes innovative behavior. Previous research has emphasized that promotive voice behavior improves organizational innovation [21]. Additionally, employees' promotive voice behavior is a core variable that generates innovative behavior [20,64]. Therefore, voice behavior is positively associated with innovative behavior [20] and is a form of speech where individuals voluntarily express their opinions or ideas with the aim of organizational profit [65]. Innovative behavior is formed based on organizational members' constructive ideas, strategies, and creativity. If organizational members voluntarily express their opinions and freely present constructive ideas, technologies, work methods, thoughts, opinions, and issues related to the workplace, their innovative behavior will be induced. Moreover, organizations encourage their members to provide new ideas, and prefer to seek their support and suggestions in the schemes to be implemented in the organization; thus, organizational members' innovative behavior is created [20]. All these actions are perceived as content included in the voice behavior of organizational members. Indeed, organizational members perceive a work environment characterized by voice behavior as a group role [66], and their innovative behavior is enhanced through their engagement in tasks and motivation to speak up [67,68]. Overall, if a leader provides subordinates with the autonomy to speak up or create a similar environment, they can freely present their innovative opinions, constructive problem-solving methods, and strategies; these behaviors motivate innovation. In contrast, if subordinates' voice behavior is restricted or they are unable to speak up, they will not present creative ideas or constructive problem-solving methods. As a result, such

an organizational culture or climate eventually prevents subordinates' innovative behavior. Hence, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3. *Voice behavior will positively influence subordinates' innovative behavior*.

2.4. The Mediating Effect of Voice Behavior

The organization's culture or climate may influence organizational member's voice behavior, and we highlight that there is a solid relationship between leaders' behavior and subordinates' voice behavior. In particular, ethical leaders build highly truthful relationships with their subordinates [17]. Leadership entails a relationship between a leader and their subordinates. Ethical leadership is a relational concept that is constructed through and in social interactions with subordinates [69]. If the more a leader acts in the ways subordinates feel ethical leader behavior, they will more trust the leader [69]. Such truthful relationships play a vital role in reducing subordinates' fear of speaking out their thoughts and ideas, and this ultimately promotes subordinates' voice behavior. Furthermore, ethical leaders handle external pressure based on their abilities, and display espoused values. This behavior by the leaders gives the impression that the decisions depend on their fundamental values, and subordinates will open up [70]. These roles of ethical leaders encourage subordinates to voluntarily share ideas and speak about their concerns [71,72]. Moreover, the social learning perspective [59] suggests that when leaders create a fair workplace environment, they become role models for their followers [18]. Subordinates are provided with stringent ethical standards from their leaders, and leaders encourage subordinates to express their opinions, including ideas about methods and ethics, to help improve the work environment and procedures [18,19]. Thus, ethical leadership has a positive influence on subordinates' voice behavior.

Additionally, we predict that voice behavior leads to innovative behavior. As subordinates are stimulated by ethical leaders' honesty and fairness, they learn to provide plans and ideas through voice behavior. Therefore, subordinates' creativity is enhanced as the ethical leadership process increases voice behavior [18]. Furthermore, organizational members recognize the work environment in which voice behavior is a group role [66], and their innovative behavior is enhanced through their engagement in tasks and motivation to speak up [67,68]. If organizational culture is established, organizational members' voice behavior will be supported. Furthermore, even though a new task attempt fails, the subordinate will accept failure and try again without being criticized or having career disadvantages. Based on this, subordinates become more motivated and engage in innovative behavior [6]. These highlights indicate that ethical leadership creates an environment in which subordinates speak up their promotive voices about their constructive ideas and methods pertaining to innovation and solving problems. Eventually, increased subordinates' voice behavior leads to innovative behavior. Overall, ethical leadership enhances innovative behavior through the mediating role of subordinates' voice behaviors. Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4. *Voice behavior will positively mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and subordinates' innovative behavior*.

2.5. The Moderated Mediation Effects of Psychological Safety

We emphasize the moderating effect of psychological stability as a factor that increases the role of ethical leadership in subordinates' voice behavior. Thus, subordinates' voice behavior is determined by the interaction between ethical leadership and subordinates' psychological safety. Psychological safety is the degree of the psychological state characterized by mutual respect and interpersonal trust, where organizational members feel comfortable, and involves interpersonal risk taking [22]. Organizational members experience higher levels of psychological safety when they have mutually supportive and trustworthy relationships with their co-workers [23,47]. The subordinate possesses a high level of

psychological safety and feels confident that perceiving the interpersonal context may not be a threat. In addition, they trust their colleagues and are not punished or embarrassed for expressing themselves [73]. Therefore, organizational members are not shy or hesitant to express their needs for learning, self-doubt, and concerns about performing effectively in a psychologically safe environment [23,74]. This suggests that psychological safety is positively related to voice behavior [75]. According to these arguments, subordinates with high levels of psychological stability are believed to have less fear of risk taking in terms of being harmed or negatively affected when they present their ideas or opinions. Moreover, subordinates create interpersonal trust and supportive relationships in which they express their concerns, visions, and constructive ideas without fear and negative consequences. This process suggests that subordinates feel a higher level of psychological safety and exhibit higher levels of voice behavior.

In addition, organizations in environments with higher levels of psychological safety tend to tolerate their organizational members. Such organizations facilitate the expressions of organizational members' immature ideas, and they understand, protect, respect, and praise organizational members, hence reducing the psychological and material costs of staff voice. In this environment, organizational members' probability of facing negative consequences effectively decreases. Eventually, their promotive voice is improved [20]. Drawing on social exchange theory, if organizational members perceive that their work environment is safe for carrying out interpersonal transactions, they will develop positive perceptions of their team and engage in leadership functions related to overall team performance [76,77]. We suggest that subordinates' psychological safety is significantly related to leaders' behaviors and roles. Furthermore, psychological safety is expected to improve when subordinates trust their leaders. In general, subordinates can build a high level of trust in leaders who are consistent and maintain their promises [78]. Ethical leaders are characterized by consistent behavior through ethical roles [79], ethical values, moral behaviors, and consistency, which directly impact cognitive trust [26]. Thus, we emphasize that ethical leadership increases trust in leaders and that a higher level of trust in a leader may encourage subordinates to experience a higher level of psychological stability. Moreover, ethical leaders promote subordinates' ideas and develop a workplace climate of mutual respect where subordinates feel safe and freely express their different views [19,43]. Ethical leadership plays a significant role in facilitating subordinates' voice behavior. Likewise, when subordinates recognize psychological safety, their voice behavior becomes more active. Similarly, if subordinates recognize ethical leadership, then trust in their leader increases, and a high level of trust in leaders strengthens subordinates' psychological safety. Therefore, when subordinates experience increased awareness of ethical leadership and have a higher level of psychological safety, their voice behavior will be more active. This emphasizes the point that the interaction effect of ethical leadership and psychological safety determines the level of subordinates' voice behavior. Overall, the more subordinates experience a higher level of psychological safety, the stronger the effect of ethical leadership on their voice behavior. This explains why psychological safety is expected to moderate the impact of ethical leadership on subordinates' voice behavior. In addition, individuals who perceive a work environment characterized by voice behavior as a group role [66] will have their innovative behavior enhanced through engagement in tasks and be more motivated to speak up [67,68]. Therefore, subordinates' innovative behavior is expected to be determined by their voice behavior.

In this study, voice behavior was selected to mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and subordinates' innovative behavior. Furthermore, psychological safety was selected as a moderating factor in the relationship between ethical leadership and voice behavior. Therefore, this study emphasizes that psychological safety moderates the mediating role of subordinates' voice behavior. These theories contribute to our final hypotheses.

Hypothesis 5. *Psychological safety will have a positive moderating effect on the relationship between ethical leadership and subordinates' voice behavior.*

Hypothesis 6. *The mediating influence of subordinates' voice behavior on the relationship between ethical leadership and innovative behavior will be moderated by subordinates' psychological safety.*

3. Methods

3.1. Respondents and Procedures

We conducted a questionnaire survey to demonstrate the research model. Specifically, the research model examines the effect of ethical leadership on innovative behavior and the mediating effect of voice behavior on the relationship between ethical leadership and innovative behavior. Furthermore, the research model also examines the moderating effect of psychological safety on the relationship between ethical leadership and voice behavior. Finally, it tests the moderated mediation effect of psychological safety.

The main purpose of this research is to provide a way to increase subordinates' innovative behavior. In relation to this, this research reflects the importance and role of ethical leadership in innovative behavior. In addition, the sample selection criteria are as follows: In China, the most important thing for organizational members is considered to be leaders' moral quality [80], and the traditional Chinese culture emphasizes morality and ethics [81]. In addition, the importance of ethical leadership within Chinese organizations is constantly being emphasized [82]. Hence, we focused on Chinese employees to conduct a survey.

We distributed and collected our sample using an online questionnaire survey. We informed participants that the questionnaire survey was designed to demonstrate ways to increase innovative behavior and that their responses to this survey would be confidential. The respondents included 296 full-time employees of small- and medium-sized enterprises in China. Most of the employees who participated in the survey were subordinates. The major characteristics of the data are as follows: The data showed 129 males (43.6%) and 167 females (56.4%). In terms of age, respondents in their 20s showed the largest proportion, with 172 (51.8%) people. Other specific demographic characteristics are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Data characteristics.

		Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
	Total respondents	296	100
Gender	Male	129	43.6
	Female	167	56.4
Age	20–29	172	58.1
	30–39	70	23.6
	40–49	44	14.9
	50–59	9	3.0
	60 and over	1	0.3
Education	High school graduate	61	20.6
	Bachelor's degree	177	59.8
	Master's degree	48	16.2
	Doctorate degree	10	3.4
Service Year	1–2	107	36.1
	3–5	66	22.3
	6–8	65	22.0
	9–11	22	7.4
	12 and over	36	12.2

3.2. Measures

Ethical leadership refers to the demonstration of normatively appropriate performance through the main aspects of individual behavior and interpersonal relationships, and ethical leaders' promotion of their subordinates through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making [17]. We assessed [83] who used Brown, Treviño, and Harrison's [17] newly developed instrument to measure ethical leadership. The measurement tool consisted of 10 items. The sample items included "My leader disciplines employees who violate ethical standards" and "My leader sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics." We used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree) to measure ethical leadership.

Voice behavior refers to an encouraging behavior that emphasizes the expression of constructive challenges and innovative proposals for change rather than merely critical aspects [56]. Voice behavior was measured by Van Dyne and LePine's [56] instrument, based on Whithey and Cooper [84] and Van Dyne, Graham, and Dienesch [85]. The instrument for voice behavior consisted of six items. We replaced "particular co-worker" with "I". To self-report, each item began with "I". Sample items included "I speak up and encourage others in this group to get involved in issues that affect the group" and "I keep myself well informed about issues where his/her opinion might be useful to this work group". All items used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree) to measure employees' voice behavior.

This research defined psychological safety as the extent to which individuals believe their colleagues, including their leaders and coworkers, will not misunderstand or punish them for taking risks and speaking up their concerns or suggestions [21,86]. We used the psychological safety scale developed by Liang, Farh, and Farh [21] to measure psychological safety, which was adapted from previous research studies [87,88]. The measurement tool consisted of five items. The sample items included "In my work unit, I can express my true feelings regarding my job" and "Nobody in my unit will pick on me, even if I have different opinions". We used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree) to measure psychological safety.

Innovative behavior refers to employees' capability to produce or adopt useful ideas, implement ideas, and generate novel ideas or solutions [89]. Innovative behavior was measured by Scott and Bruce [89], who developed an innovative behavior scale. The instrument for measuring innovative behavior consisted of six items. "I search out new technologies, processes, techniques, and product idea" and "I investigate and secure funds needed to implement new ideas". All items used a Likert 5-point scale. Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1 (strongly disagree)" to "5 (strongly agree)". Figure 1 illustrates this research model.

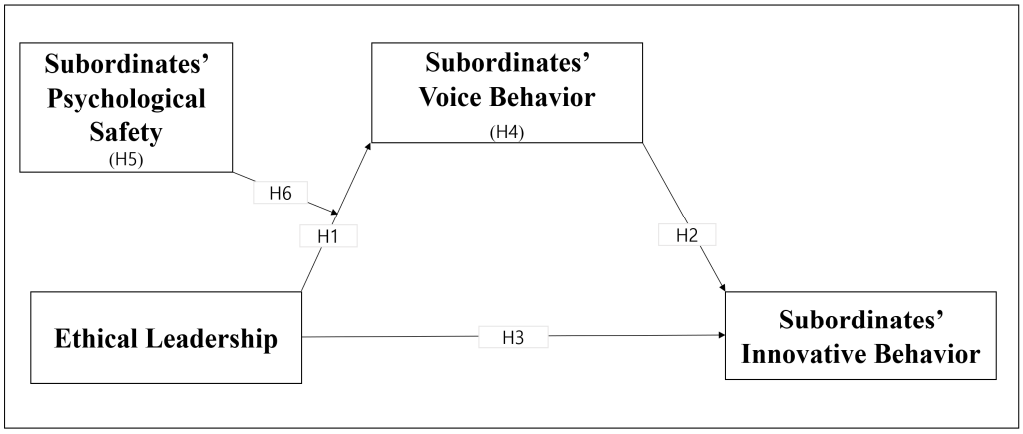

Figure 1. Research model.

3.3. Statistical Analysis

The order of the statistical analysis in this study is as follows. First, a demographic analysis was performed. Second, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Third, a reliability analysis was conducted to check the reliability of the measurement tool. Fourth, descriptive statistics and correlations between variables were analyzed. Finally, hypothesis testing was conducted. To perform demographic, reliability, descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analyses of the moderation effects, we used the statistical software SPSS ver. 22.0. In addition, CFA and path analyses were performed using AMOS ver. 22.0. Finally, the moderated mediation model was examined using SPSS PROCESS Macro 3.4 Model 7.

4. Results

4.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

CFA was performed using structural equation modeling with AMOS 22.0. First, six models were established to determine the model's fit index. Model 1 was an expected model, in which four factors were loaded independently and input simultaneously. The results showed $X^2(p)$ = 750.393(0.000), X^2/df = 2.375, RMSEA = 0.068, IFI = 0.904, CFI = 0.904, PNFI = 0.761, and PGFI = 0.715. Model 2 was designed using all items loaded on a single factor. The results showed $X^2(p)$ = 1495.584(0.000), X^2/df = 4.602, RMSEA = 0.110, IFI = 0.742, CFI = 0.740, PNFI = 0.641, and PGFI = 0.561. Model 3 was designed by combining ethical leadership and psychological safety (Factor 1) and combining innovative behavior and voice behavior (Factor 2) to set two factors. The results showed $X^2(p)$ = 1488.677(0.000), X^2/df = 4.581, RMSEA = 0.110, IFI = 0.743, CFI = 0.742, PNFI = 0.642, and PGFI = 0.566. Model 4 was designed by combining ethical leadership and voice behavior (Factor 1) and by combining innovative behavior and psychological safety (Factor 2) to set two factors. The results showed $X^2(p)$ = 1363.544(0.000), X^2/df = 4.196, RMSEA = 0.104, IFI = 0.771, CFI = 0.770, PNFI = 0.666, and PGFI = 0.586. Model 5 was designed by combining ethical leadership (Factor 1), innovative behavior (Factor 2), and voice behavior and psychological safety (Factor 3) to create three factors. The results showed $X^2(p)$ = 1089.382(0.000), X^2/df = 3.362, RMSEA = 0.089, IFI = 0.831, CFI = 0.830, PNFI = 0.716, and PGFI = 0.654. Model 6 was designed by combining voice behavior (Factor 1), innovative behavior (Factor 2), and ethical leadership and psychological safety (Factor 3) to create three factors. The results showed $X^2(p)$ = 1035.167(0.000), X^2/df = 3.195, RMSEA = 0.086, IFI = 0.843, CFI = 0.842, PNFI = 0.726, and PGFI = 0.673. Based on these results, we acknowledge that Model 1 is acceptable with a good fit. Table 2 summarizes the results of the structural model fit index.

The CFA of Model 1 (four-factor model) showed that the scale was a good fit and construct validity. Next, we conducted convergent validity, and the results were as follows: Standardized regression weights of ethical leadership ranged from 0.553 to 0.924, voice behavior ranged from 0.740 to 0.868, innovative behavior ranged from 0.812 to 0.898, and psychological safety ranged from 0.817 to 0.891. Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) for ethical leadership was 0.702, voice behavior was 0.676, innovative behavior was 0.719, and psychological safety was 0.728; these values were all greater than 0.5. The value of composite reliability (CR) of ethical leadership was 0.954, voice behavior was 0.925, innovative behavior was 0.936, and psychological safety was 0.918; all of these values were greater than 0.7. The measurement has significant validity if the AVE of variables is higher than 0.5 and CR is higher than 0.7 [90]. Furthermore, we examined three types of model fit indices: the absolute fit index, the incremental fit index, and the parsimonious adjusted index. First, the absolute fit index was $X^2(p)$ = 750.393(0.000), X^2/df = 2.375, and RMSEA = 0.068. Second, the incremental fit index was IFI = 0.904 and CFI = 0.904. Third, the parsimonious adjusted index was PNFI = 0.761 and PGFI = 0.715. Based on these results, CFA satisfies acceptability requirements [90]. Therefore, the structural equation model was found to be significant. Table 3 shows the results of the convergent validity.

Table 2. Summary of structural model fit results.

Model	$\chi^2(p)$	χ^2/df	RMSEA	IFI	CFI	PNFI	PGFI
Model 1 (Expected Model of four-factor [a])	750.393(0.000)	2.375	0.068	0.904	0.904	0.761	0.715
Model 2 (one-factor [b])	1495.584(0.000)	4.602	0.110	0.742	0.740	0.641	0.561
Model 3 (two-factor [c])	1488.677(0.000)	4.581	0.110	0.743	0.742	0.642	0.566
Model 4 (two-factor [d])	1363.544(0.000)	4.196	0.104	0.771	0.770	0.666	0.586
Model 5 (three-factor [e])	1089.382(0.000)	3.362	0.089	0.831	0.830	0.716	0.654
Model 6 (three-factor [f])	1035.167(0.000)	3.195	0.086	0.843	0.842	0.726	0.673

Note: [a] = Ethical leadership, Psychological safety, Voice behavior, and Innovative behavior. [b] = All items were loaded on a single factor. [c] = Ethical leadership & Psychological safety, Innovative behavior & Voice behavior. [d] = Ethical leadership & Voice behavior, Innovative behavior & Psychological safety. [e] = Ethical leadership, Innovative behavior, Voice behavior & Psychological safety. [f] = Voice behavior, Innovative behavior, Ethical leadership & Psychological safety.

Table 3. The results of convergent validity.

Variables		Estimate	SE	CR	*p*	Standardized Regression Weights	AVE	CR
Ethical Leadership (A)	A1	1				0.874	0.702	0.954
	A2	0.899	0.044	20.433	***	0.802		
	A3	1.022	0.033	30.713	***	0.924		
	A4	0.904	0.044	20.356	***	0.801		
	A5	0.881	0.037	23.896	***	0.855		
	A6	0.973	0.034	28.252	***	0.903		
	A7	1.170	0.044	26.47	***	0.885		
	A8	0.808	0.036	22.615	***	0.837		
	A9	0.493	0.045	10.907	***	0.553		
	A10	0.867	0.033	26.313	***	0.883		
Voice Behavior (B)	B1	1				0.866	0.676	0.925
	B2	0.923	0.042	22.082	***	0.821		
	B3	0.843	0.035	24.351	***	0.868		
	B4	0.755	0.037	20.582	***	0.812		
	B5	0.691	0.041	16.919	***	0.740		
	B6	0.796	0.038	20.909	***	0.819		
Innovative Behavior (C)	C1	1				0.898	0.719	0.936
	C2	0.856	0.034	25.286	***	0.874		
	C3	0.915	0.037	24.416	***	0.863		
	C4	0.864	0.041	20.838	***	0.812		
	C5	0.808	0.038	21.479	***	0.823		
	C6	0.785	0.038	20.914	***	0.813		

Table 3. *Cont.*

Variables		Estimate	SE	CR	*p*	Standardized Regression Weights	AVE	CR
Psychological Safety (D)	D1	1				0.850	0.728	0.918
	D2	0.89	0.042	21.215	***	0.825		
	D3	0.959	0.037	26.059	***	0.891		
	D4	1.003	0.040	25.095	***	0.880		
	D5	0.836	0.040	20.768	***	0.817		
Model Fit Index		$X^2(p)$ = 750.393(0.000), X^2/df = 2.375, RMSEA = 0.068, IFI = 0.904, CFI = 0.904, PNFI = 0.761, PGFI = 0.715						

Note: ***: $p < 0.001$.

Common method variance (CMV) threatens the validity of the linkage findings between constructs [91,92]. CMV threatens the results of research in the behavioral and social sciences in that researchers should consider the problem of CMV [93]. We checked the CMV to minimize the bias that occurs in common measures and drew more accurate results. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis to check for CMV and confirmed the eigenvalues and total variance values. Ethical leadership accounted for 20.240% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 5.465, innovative behavior accounted for 14.663% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 3.959, voice behavior accounted for 14.303% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 3.862, and psychological safety accounted for 11.873% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 3.206. These results showed that all eigenvalues were higher than 1, and the total variance value was lower than 50%. Our results verified that CMV was not considered a problem in this study.

4.2. Reliability Analysis

A reliability analysis was performed to test the reliability of the measurement tool. We used the value of Cronbach's alpha to examine the reliability of the variables. The reliability analysis results are summarized as follows: First, ethical leadership was measured using ten items rated on a 5-point Likert scale to assess participants' degree of recognition related to ethical leadership. The results showed that Cronbach's alpha for ethical leadership was 0.913. Second, employees' voice behavior was measured using six items rated on a 5-point Likert scale assessing participants' degree of speaking up in their workplace. The results showed that Cronbach's alpha for voice behavior was 0.839. Third, employees' innovative behavior was measured using six items rated on a 5-point Likert scale assessing participants' degree of performing innovative behavior in their workplace. The results showed that Cronbach's alpha for subordinates' innovative behavior was 0.870. Finally, psychological safety was measured using five items rated on a 5-point Likert scale to assess participants' feelings of psychological safety in their workplace. The results showed that Cronbach's alpha for psychological safety was 0.874. All coefficient values of Cronbach's alpha were confirmed to be higher than 0.7. Nunnally [94] suggested that reliability is significant when its value is higher than 0.7. Thus, the reliability of the variables was significant and valid. Table 4 shows the reliability analysis results.

Table 4. Reliability analysis results.

Variables	Item	Cronbach's Alpha
Ethical Leadership (A)	1. My leader listens to what employees have to say.	0.913
	2. My leader disciplines employees who violate ethical standards.	
	3. My leader conducts his/her personal life in an ethical manner.	
	4. My leader has the best interests of employees in mind.	
	5. My leader makes fair and balanced decisions.	
	6. My leader can be trusted.	
	7. My leader discusses business ethics or values with employees.	
	8. My leader sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics.	
	9. My leader defines success not just by results but also the way they are obtained.	
	10. My leader when making decisions, asks "What is the right thing?"	
Voice Behavior (B)	1. I make recommendations concerning issues that affect this work group.	0.839
	2. I speak up and encourages others in this group to get involved in issues that affect the group.	
	3. I communicate my opinions about work issues to others in this group even if my opinion is different and others in the group disagree with me.	
	4. I keep myself well informed about issues where my opinion might be useful to this work group.	
	5. I get involved in issues that affect the quality of work life here in this group.	
	6. I speak up in this group with ideas for new projects or changes in procedures.	
Innovative Behavior (C)	1. I Search out new technologies, processes, techniques, and/or product ideas.	0.870
	2. I generate creative ideas.	
	3. I promote and champion ideas to others.	
	4. I investigates and secure funds needed to implement new ideas.	
	5. I develops adequate plans and schedules for the implementation of new ideas.	
	6. I am innovative.	
Psychological Safety (D)	1. In my workplace, I can express my true feelings regarding my job.	0.874
	2. In my workplace, I can freely express my thoughts.	
	3. In my workplace, expressing your true feelings is welcomed.	
	4. Nobody in my workplace will pick on me even if I have different opinions.	
	5. I am worried that expressing true thoughts in my workplace would do harm to myself.	

4.3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Descriptive statistics analysis included the mean and standard deviation (SD). The means for ethical leadership, voice behavior, psychological safety, and innovative behavior were 3.733, 3.716, 3.603, and 3.665, respectively. In addition, the SDs of ethical leadership, voice behavior, psychological safety, and innovative behavior were 0.628, 0.581, 0.724, and 0.611, respectively.

To verify the correlation between variables, we conducted a correlation analysis, and the results are summarized as follows: Ethical leadership was positively associated with subordinates' voice behavior ($r = 0.622$, $p < 0.001$), psychological safety ($r = 0.700$, $p < 0.001$), and innovative behavior ($r = 0.599$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, voice behavior was positively associated with psychological safety ($r = 0.536$, $p < 0.001$) and innovative behavior ($r = 0.623$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, psychological safety was positively related to innovative behavior ($r = 0.595$, $p < 0.001$). These results indicated that all variables, namely, ethical leadership, voice behavior, psychological safety, and innovative behavior, had a significant positive relationship. Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics and correlation analysis.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis.

	Mean	SD	Ethical Leadership	Voice Behavior	Psychological Safety	Innovative Behavior
Ethical Leadership	3.733	0.628	-			
Voice Behavior	3.716	0.581	0.622 ***	-		
Psychological Safety	3.603	0.724	0.700 ***	0.536 ***	-	
Innovative Behavior	3.665	0.611	0.599 ***	0.623 ***	0.595 ***	-

Note: ***: $p < 0.001$.

4.4. Hypothesis Test

We established a total of six hypotheses in this research. First, we verified the effect of ethical leadership on subordinates' innovative behavior. Second, we verified the effect of ethical leadership on subordinates' voice behavior. Third, we verified the effect of subordinates' voice behavior on their innovative behavior. Fourth, we tested the mediating effect of subordinates' voice behavior on the relationship between ethical leadership and innovative behavior. A path analysis was performed using the AMOS 22.0 program to verify these four hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 established that ethical leadership positively influenced subordinates' innovative behavior. Ethical leadership had a significant positive influence on subordinates' innovative behavior (estimate = 0.236, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported, and this result suggests that ethical leadership improves subordinates' innovative behavior.

Hypothesis 2 established that ethical leadership positively influenced subordinates' voice behavior. Ethical leadership had a significant positive influence on voice behavior (estimate = 0.651, $p < 0.001$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 is supported, and this result explains why ethical leadership increases subordinates' voice behavior.

Hypothesis 3 established that subordinates' voice behavior positively influenced their innovative behavior. Voice behavior had a significant positive influence on subordinates' innovative behavior (estimate = 0.596, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported, and this result suggests that voice behavior increases subordinates' innovative behavior.

Hypothesis 4 established that voice behavior positively mediated the relationship between ethical leadership and subordinates' innovative behavior. The mediating role of subordinates' voice behavior was tested using 95% confidence intervals and 5000 bootstrapping re-samples. The indirect effect is 0.546. The bootstrapped confidence intervals were Boot LLCI = 0.255 and Boot ULCI = 0.555. As 0 was not included between Boot LLCI and

Boot ULCI, this proves that the bootstrapped confidence interval is significant. Furthermore, the model fit was checked. First, the absolute fit index was $X^2(p)$ = 452.967(0.000), X^2/df = 2.198, and RMSEA = 0.064. Second, the incremental fit index was IFI = 0.929, TLI = 0.920, and CFI = 0.929. Third, the parsimonious adjusted index was PNFI = 0.783 and PGFI = 0.717. According to these results, the model fit of the path analysis satisfies the acceptability requirements [77]. These results indicate that the mediating effect of voice behavior was significant. Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported. This finding suggests that ethical leadership increases innovative behavior through voice behavior, and Table 6 shows the results of the path analysis.

Table 6. The results of path analysis.

Path			Estimate	SE	CR	*p*	Model fit
Ethical Leadership	→	Voice Behavior	0.651	0.073	8.907	***	$X^2(p)$ = 452.967(0.000), X^2/df = 2.198, RMSEA = 0.064, IFI = 0.929, TLI = 0.920, CFI = 0.929, PNFI = 0.783, PGFI = 0.717
Voice Behavior	→	Innovative Behavior	0.596	0.095	6.260	***	
Ethical Leadership	→	Innovative Behavior	0.236	0.076	3.109	0.002	

Mediating Effect	Indirect effect	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Significant
Ethical Leadership→Voice Behavior→ Innovative Behavior	0.392	0.255	0.555	0.003

Note: ***: $p < 0.001$.

Fourth, we tested the moderating role of subordinates' psychological safety on the relationship between ethical leadership and their voice behavior. Multiple regression analysis was conducted using SPSS ver. 22.0 to verify the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5 established that subordinates' psychological safety positively moderated the effect of ethical leadership on subordinates' voice behavior. The results showed that psychological safety significantly moderated the effect of ethical leadership on voice behavior (β = 0.136, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was supported. Consequently, this result explains that the interaction between ethical leadership and subordinates' psychological safety leads to a higher degree of subordinates' voice behavior. Table 7 shows the results of the moderating effect of psychological safety.

Table 7. The result of the moderating effect of psychological safety.

Dependent Variable: Voice Behavior							
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		
	β	*t*	*β*	*t*	*β*	*t*	VIF
Ethical Leadership(A)	0.622 ***	13.619	0.484 ***	7.682	0.476 ***	7.657	1.962
Psychological Safety(B)			0.197 **	3.134	0.205 **	3.304	1.962
Interaction (A × B)					0.136 **	3.073	1.002
R^2(Adjusted R^2)	0.387(0.385)		0.407(0.403)		0.425(0.419)		
ΔR^2 (ΔAdjusted R^2)	-		0.020(0.018)		0.018(0.016)		
F	185.478 ***		100.434 ***		72.034 ***		

Note: ***: $p < 0.001$, **: $p < 0.01$.

Figure 2 shows the graph related to the moderating effect of psychological safety, and it explains why employees with high levels of ethical leadership reported greater voice behavior when their perception of psychological safety was high.

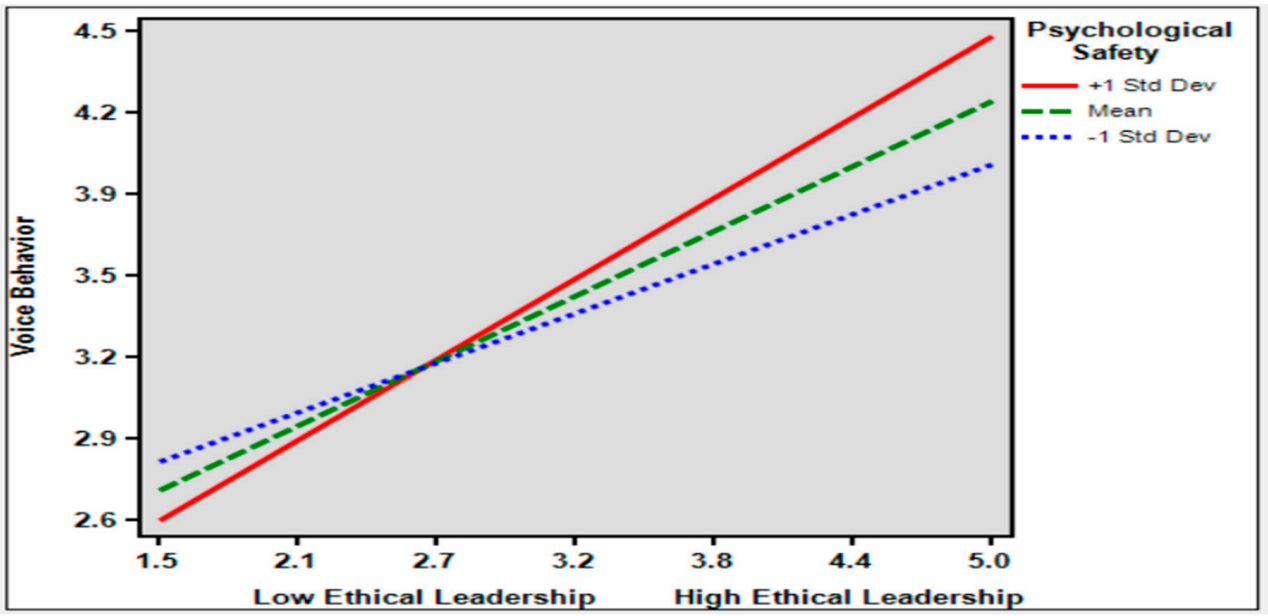

Figure 2. The moderating effect of psychological safety.

Finally, Hypothesis 6 established that psychological safety moderated the mediating influence of subordinates' voice behavior on the relationship between ethical leadership and subordinates' innovation behavior. The moderated mediation model was examined using SPSS PROCESS Macro 3.4 Model 7 and was tested using 95% confidence intervals and 5000 bootstrapping re-samples. When the significance of the mediating effect was established, the conditional indirect effect was evaluated to verify whether the effect of mediation depended on the moderating variable [95,96]. Hence, the conditional indirect effect of ethical leadership and subordinates' innovative behavior was evaluated by analyzing the index of the moderated relationship at three different moderator levels: −1 DS, mean (M), and +1 DS. Concerning the –1 DS level, the conditional indirect effect was 0.1437, Boot SE = 0.0386, Boot LLCI = 0.0712, and Boot ULCI = 0.2220. Regarding the level of M, the conditional indirect effect was 0.1891, Boot SE = 0.0386, Boot LLCI = 0.1218, and Boot ULCI = 0.2636. In terms of the +1 DS level, the conditional indirect effect was 0.2345, Boot SE = 0.1475, Boot LLCI = 0.1475, and Boot ULCI = 0.3342. Since 0 was not included between Boot LLCI and Boot ULCI at the level of −1 SD (standard deviation), mean level (M), and mean +1 SD (standard deviation) confidence intervals, it was concluded that statistical significance was confirmed. Furthermore, the index of moderated mediation was 0.0627, Boot SE = 0.0324, Boot LLCI = 0.0052, and Boot ULCI = 0.1329. As 0 was not included between Boot LLCI and Boot ULCI, this proved that the bootstrapped confidence interval was significant. Overall, the moderated mediation effect of psychological safety was significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 is supported. Table 8 shows a moderated mediation effect on psychological safety.

Table 8. The moderated mediation effect of psychological safety.

Dependent Variable: Innovative Behavior					
Moderator	**Level**	**Conditional Indirect Effect**	**Boot SE**	**Boot LLCI**	**Boot ULCI**
Psychological Safety	−1 SD (−0.7237)	0.1437	0.0386	0.0712	0.2220
	M	0.1891	0.0368	0.1218	0.2636
	+1 SD (+0.7237)	0.2345	0.1475	0.1475	0.3342
Index of moderated mediation					
	Index		Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
	0.0627		0.0324	0.0052	0.1329

5. Discussion

This study explored how to induce innovative behavior among full-time employees from small and medium-sized enterprises in China. We focused on subordinates' innovative behavior in SMEs because they should be highly aware of the importance of innovation and reinforce it [97]. The roles of ethical leadership and the mediating role of subordinates' voice behavior in the relationship between ethical leadership and subordinates' innovative behavior were identified to facilitate subordinate's innovative behavior. To increase the effect of ethical leadership on subordinates' voice behavior, we verified the moderating role of ethical leadership on their voice behavior. Moreover, we demonstrated the moderating effect of subordinates' psychological safety. Finally, this study demonstrated that subordinates' psychological safety moderates the mediating effect of subordinates' voice behavior on the relationship between ethical leadership and subordinates' innovative behavior. Based on these findings, we provide theoretical and practical implications and present directions for future research on innovative behavior and organizational sustainability.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

There are relatively few studies related to ethical leadership, particularly in determining subordinates' innovative work behavior and task performance, which demand additional efforts for overall organizational effectiveness [12,27,28]. It is worth considering that ethical leadership directly relates to subordinates' innovative behavior. This study's primary contributions lie in exploring and identifying how ethical leadership leads to innovative behavior. We did not simply focus on the direct influence of ethical leadership on subordinates' innovative behavior but rather specifically identified which key variable acts in the process of ethical leadership by inducing subordinates' innovative behavior.

First, it was predicted that voice behavior plays a vital role in the ethical behavior process, increasing innovative behavior. Therefore, the relationship between ethical leadership and subordinates' voice behavior and the effect of ethical leadership on voice behavior was investigated and verified, respectively. The results show that ethical leadership positively influences subordinates' voice behavior, implying that subordinates' voice behavior becomes more active when leaders perform ethical leadership. This results from leaders providing followers with stringent ethical standards and encouraging them to express their opinions and ideas regarding methods and ethics to improve the work environment and procedures [18,19]. Subordinates' voices are especially dependent on their leaders' behavior for two major reasons [98,99]. First, subordinates improve their voices to enable their leaders to focus on particular organizational problems and allocate resources to solve such problems. Second, leaders have control over penalties or benefits; thus, subordinates' voice behavior depends on their leaders' behavior [72,100]. For two reasons, when the leader is open and gives subordinates opportunities to raise their voice about the organization

or freely suggest ways to solve problems, subordinates' voice behavior is considered to increase. Overall, subordinates receive encouragement from ethical leaders to express their ideas, concerns, and opinions, thus improving the environmental procedures of the workplace. In addition, ethical leaders emphasize ethics and advocate against unethical behavior. According to social learning theory, subordinates freely express their thoughts, vision, and ideas when they recognize ethical behavior, and ethical leaders become role models.

Second, we identified the relationship between voice behavior and innovative behavior and tested the influence of voice behavior on innovative behavior. Voice behavior was verified to have a significant positive influence on innovative behavior. This implies that subordinates' voice behavior gives rise to their level of innovative behavior. Theoretically, an individual's voice behavior promotes new and active thinking methods that facilitate robust creativity evaluations. Leaders evaluate their subordinates as highly creative and display voice behavior when they provide their opinions for organizational benefit [18]. If organizational members are aware of a work environment characterized by voice behavior as a group role [66], their innovative behavior is fostered through their engagement in tasks and high motivation to speak up [67,68]. In an organizational environment where organizational members have the opportunity to express themselves, they can present their problem-solving solutions, improvement plans, constructive ideas, the need for innovation, and the pursuit of innovation. This implies that innovative behavior is expected to be formed.

Third, we verified the mediating effect of voice behavior on the relationship between ethical leadership and innovative behavior. The results show that voice behavior significantly mediates ethical leadership and innovative behavior. This finding suggests that ethical leadership positively influences innovative behavior through voice behavior. Ethical leaders create highly truthful relationships with subordinates [17], and these types of relations between ethical leaders and subordinates decrease subordinates' fear of speaking out. When subordinates trust a leader, they can build confidence that their leader will not harm them and be more willing to take risks. In addition, the social learning perspective [59] suggests that if a leader creates a fair workplace environment, they will become a role model for their followers [18]. Subordinates are provided with stringent ethical standards from their leaders, who encourage them to express their opinions or ideas about methods and ethics to improve the work environment and procedures [18,19]. Therefore, ethical leadership fosters subordinates' voice behavior. If organizational culture is established where organizations or leaders support subordinates' voice behavior, even though their attempts at new tasks fail, subordinates can accept failure and try again without criticism or career disadvantages. In such an environment, subordinates become more motivated and engage in innovative behavior [6]. Overall, ethical leaders help subordinates speak up and provide an environment in which they are more likely to engage in voice behavior. Voice behavior ultimately promotes innovation and serves as a mechanism that reflects how ethical leadership impacts individual creativity [18]. Our findings support those of Chen and Hou [18]. Therefore, we suggest that subordinates' voice behavior plays a significant role in ethical leadership, leading to innovative behavior.

Fourth, the moderating effect of psychological safety on the relationship between ethical leadership and speaking behavior was verified. The results indicate that psychological safety has a significant positive moderating effect on the relationship between ethical leadership and voice behavior. Drawing on social exchange theory, if organizational members perceive that their work environment is safe for carrying out interpersonal transactions, they develop a positive team perception and engage in leadership functions for overall team performance [76,77]. In such an environment, subordinates experience psychological safety and eventually trust their leaders or organizations. Moreover, ethical leaders promote subordinates' ideas and develop a climate of mutual respect in which subordinates in such workplaces feel safe and express their different views [19,43]. When subordinates recognize psychological safety, their voice behavior becomes more active. Suppose subordinates recognize ethical leadership; the trust in their leader increases in

such a situation. A high level of trust in leaders strengthens subordinates' psychological safety. Therefore, when subordinates have increased awareness of ethical leadership and a higher level of psychological safety, their voice behavior will be more active. This implies that subordinates become more active when they recognize ethical leadership and trust their leaders. In addition, subordinates in psychologically safe environments feel confident that perceiving the surrounding interpersonal context may not be threatening. Moreover, subordinates trust their colleagues and are not punished or embarrassed for expressing themselves [73]. Based on this, they feel free to express needs for learning, self-doubts, and concerns about performing effectively in a psychologically safe environment [23,74]. Drawing on the above suggestions, subordinates with high levels of ethical leadership exhibit higher levels of voice behavior when they perceive greater psychological safety.

Furthermore, to demonstrate whether the level of psychological safety moderates the mediating effect of voice behavior, this study verified the moderated mediation effect of subordinates' psychological safety. The results showed that psychological safety had a significant moderated mediation effect. This implies that voice behavior is moderated by the interaction between ethical leadership and psychological safety; ultimately, the mediating effect can be moderated. Attempts to verify the moderated mediation effect of psychological safety took a more integrated approach to inducing innovative behavior, which provided a foundation for exploring or searching for ways to induce more efficient innovative behaviors in the future.

5.2. Practical Implication

In addition to the aforementioned theoretical contributions, we present the following practical implications based on the theory and results of our research. First, ethical leadership qualities are the core qualities that Chinese organizational members consider most important [80]. In other words, traditional Chinese culture emphasizes morality and ethics [81]. Therefore, organizations in China have consistently emphasized the importance of ethical leadership. Leaders should have ethical qualities and provide opportunities to speak up on their constructive vision, ideas, and opinions. Moreover, they should be fair and participate in decision making. Through ethical leadership, subordinates' attitudes change positively. In addition, previous research proved that ethical leadership is positively associated with prosocial silence, organizational commitment, and academically positive behaviors [101]. Our findings highlight that ethical leadership plays a vital role in improving individual and organizational performance.

Second, ethical leadership comprises two parts [17]. One is the quality of a leader, which is characterized by honesty, trust, fairness, and consideration. The other aspect is the manager's role, which is centered on communication, reinforcement, and role models. Subordinates must be aware of these two aspects, as we believe that both enhance trust in leaders. Notably, previous studies have verified the importance of trust in leaders. For example, trust in leaders is positively associated with organizational citizenship behavior [102], relationship commitment, team satisfaction, and perceived task performance. However, it is also negatively associated with stress [103], job performance, and leader trust in followers [104]. This suggests that ethical leadership increases trust in leaders, which eventually promotes performance in various aspects.

Third, leaders' behaviors and roles enhance subordinates' voice behavior. Therefore, leaders should provide a working environment in which organizational members can speak. Such an environment can reduce subordinates' sense of harm and build confidence in speaking out without fear of negative consequences. This recognition allows subordinates to freely present their opinions, needs, feelings, thoughts, innovative strategies, visions, and problem-solving methods. These proposals on voice behavior can ultimately contribute to organizational growth, sustainability, innovation, and survival.

Fourth, psychological safety is one of the most critical factors in determining organizational members' attitudes and behaviors. If organizational members feel psychologically stable, their sense of belonging to their organization will be enhanced, leading to organiza-

tional satisfaction. Furthermore, as organizational members' identity increases, they are likely to consider the organization's goals as their own. In addition, organizational members with a high level of psychological safety are expected to increase their commitment to the organization. Previous research has proved that psychological safety is positively related to feelings of vitality and creative work involvement [105], knowledge sharing [106], and team performance [107]. Therefore, organizations and leaders should ensure that organizational members perceive psychological safety.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

Although our research provides noteworthy contributions regarding the verification effect of voice behavior on the relationship between ethical leadership and innovative behavior, it also has limitations, which are detailed below. In addition, we present directions for future research related to organizational sustainability, survival, and innovative behavior.

First, this study focused only on the mediating effect of voice behavior in ethical leadership leading to innovative behavior. However, we consider that various variables mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and subordinates' innovative behavior in addition to voice behavior. We argue that trust in leaders (affective and cognitive trust), leader-member exchange (LMX), leader identification, organizational identification, and creativity are expected to mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and subordinates' innovative behavior. Based on the above thoughts, we recommend proving these mediating variables in future studies.

Second, this research verified the role of ethical leadership as a variable that induces innovative behavior. In addition to ethical leadership, future research should clarify the role of ethical climate and explore the outcome variables through ethical climate. Ethical climate refers to the shared recognition of leaders and followers about what constitutes both ethical and unethical actions in the organization [108]. Therefore, it is worth investigating how the ethical climate functions in organizations.

Third, to examine the significance of the moderating effect of psychological safety, we should divide it into two groups: high-level perceived ethical leadership and low-level perceived ethical leadership. Specifically, it is necessary to measure the level of psychological safety of organizational members with a high perception of ethical leadership and a group with a low perception of ethical leadership. Additionally, the difference in the moderated level of voice behavior should be verified through the interaction between ethical leadership and subordinates' psychological safety in the two groups. Furthermore, previous research has demonstrated that perceived organizational support moderates the mediating effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between LMX and innovative behavior [109]. We expect that it is worth verifying the level of voice behavior through the interaction between ethical leaders and perceived organizational support. Specifically, it is assumed that perceived organizational support moderates the mediating effect of voice behavior on the relationship between ethical leadership and innovative behavior. Hence, future research should examine the moderating role of organizational support perception to verify this process.

Fourth, only psychological safety was selected as a moderating variable in the relationship between ethical leadership and subordinates' voice behavior. Nevertheless, we should further explore other moderating variables related to individual and organizational aspects, in addition to psychological safety. Regarding the individual aspect, it is necessary to focus on organizational members' self-efficacy, personal competency, personality, leader support, person-leader fit, intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation. Regarding the organizational aspect, future research should explore moderators, such as organizational support, person–organization fit, innovative organizational climate, and person–culture fit. We suggest that future research should identify these moderators' roles and verify their moderating effects.

Fifth, this study did not explore the positive or negative antecedent variables influencing innovative behavior. We suggest that future research explore which variables facilitate

innovation behavior. Furthermore, it is worth exploring which organizational culture and leadership style reduce innovative behavior. In addition to innovation behavior, researchers should explore ways to enhance creative performance. The previous study emphasized the importance of creative performance [110]. Thus, future research should validate that ethical leadership induces creative performance.

Sixth, voice behavior is divided into promotive and prohibitive voice behavior [21]. However, this study only examined the aspect of promotive voice. Promotive voice behavior is defined as organizational members proposing innovative suggestions and solutions using the motivation of cooperation to enhance organizational states [20]. On the other hand, prohibitive voice behavior is defined as employees' voices proposing preventive suggestions that can hinder the norms of organizational development. Promotive voice behavior protects organizations from potential crises and risks to avoid negative results [20]. Future research should verify the role of prohibitive voice behavior to expand our findings on promotive voice behavior.

Seventh, we emphasize the importance of LMX and perceived organizational and leader support to promote organizational members' voice and innovative behavior. If organizational members perceive organizational support and creative favorable relations with their leaders, they will typically form a high level of attachment to their organizations and leader, and they will also be more willing to work harder [111]. Therefore, organizations should support organizational members in performing voice and innovative behavior. Furthermore, a high level of LMX quality should promote organizational members' voice and innovative behavior. In future research, it will be necessary to explore ways to increase members' voice and innovative behaviors by using LMX and organizational support.

Finally, most of the employees who participated in the survey were subordinates. The survey was conducted using a method of self-reporting. We consider that the method of self-reporting leads to a problem that a variable's correlation is too high. Although we conducted CMV testing, we consider that there should be existing common method bias (CMB). Future research is necessary to proceed and design a way to collect data to avoid the problem of CMB. Therefore, leaders should report subordinates' voice and innovative behavior. Additionally, subordinates should report their psychological safety and leaders' ethical leadership.

6. Conclusions

We consolidated the research findings linking ethical leadership, voice behavior, psychological safety, and innovative behavior based on relatively few existing studies that have examined ethical leadership in determining subordinates' innovative work behavior. We aimed to identify this theory and examine the role of ethical leadership in increasing innovative behavior. In addition, we extended this to the field of research on innovative behavior and simultaneously measured both mediating and moderating effects. Moreover, we verified the moderated mediation research model to improve innovative behavior, which increases organizational sustainability and survival. Finally, we are aware of the need for future research to provide more theoretical perspectives that explain the types of outcomes that depend on innovative behavior.

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