Policy Research Journal
ISSN (E): 3006-7030 ISSN (P) : 3006-7022 Volume 3, Issue 12, 2025

SALESPERSON BEHAVIOR PERFORMANCE IN PAKISTANI B2B MARKETS: THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF ROLE CONFLICT UNDER ETHICAL SALES LEADERSHIP

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20716112

Keywords
Ethical sales leadership, role conflict, salesperson behavior performance, B2B, Pakistan, structural equation modeling

Article History
Received: 28 October 2025
Accepted: 12 December 2025
Published: 26 December 2025

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Abstract

This study investigates the critical role of ethical sales leadership in enhancing salesperson performance within Pakistan's business-to-business (B2B) sector, with role conflict serving as a full mediator. Employing structural equation modeling (Smart PLS 3) on a purposively selected sample of B2B sales professionals, this study reveals that ethical sales leadership enhances salesperson performance by mitigating role conflict. Our findings reveal that managers who practice ethical leadership significantly decrease role conflict among their teams, thereby indirectly improving sales performance outcomes.

The research makes three key contributions: (1) it empirically validates role conflict as a complete and full mediator in the ethical leadership-performance relationship, (2) provides contextual insights specific to Pakistan's B2B marketplace, and (3) offers practical strategies for sales managers to enhance team performance through ethical practices. The study addresses a gap in existing literature by examining these dynamics in an emerging market context, where ethical leadership may have distinct cultural implications.

These findings have important managerial implications for sales organizations seeking to improve performance while maintaining ethical standards. The study concludes with limitations and suggests future research directions, including cross-cultural comparisons and longitudinal assessments of ethical leadership's impact.

Introduction

Research has extensively explored the key factors influencing salesforce productivity. Among these, leadership—particularly ethical sales leadership—plays a crucial role in shaping salespeople's behavior and performance. Sales managers (including national sales managers and marketing managers) directly influence their teams, as subordinates often mirror their leaders' actions to gain motivation and guidance. This dynamic is vital for achieving both individual and organizational goals, making ethical leadership a critical focus for firms and their broader ecosystems.

Within Pakistan's B2B sector, this study analyzes the critical role of ethical sales leadership in shaping sales management practices, building upon foundational work by Ingram et al. (2005). Leadership styles, especially those rooted in ethics, strongly affect salesperson performance and role-related tensions. However, a 2023 literature review by Adams, using Harzing's Publish or Perish tool, highlights a gap in research on ethical sales leadership within Pakistan's B2B context.

The connection between leadership and job success is well-documented (Mulki et al., 2006). Transactional leadership, for instance, has been shown to predict fluctuations in sales performance (Lee et al., 2023). Yet, given the diversity of leadership approaches, assessing sales effectiveness requires a broader framework

to fully understand managerial influence. While transactional leadership remains relevant for performance-based rewards and discipline, other leadership traits also contribute to sales success.

Modern sales strategies must not only meet targets but also adhere to ethical standards. Unethical practices can harm relationships between sales managers, employees, and clients—particularly in Pakistan's B2B sector—leading to operational inefficiencies and long-term reputational damage.

Brown et al. (2005) found that ethical sales leadership actively discourages dishonest practices in sales environments. Ethical leaders demonstrate integrity, fairness, and trustworthiness, setting a standard for their teams to follow. Research by Bedi et al. (2016) further confirms that a leader's ethical conduct significantly predicts follower performance.

The relationship between leadership and job performance warrants deeper exploration. Bouckenooghe et al. (2015) found that ethical sales leadership indirectly enhances work performance, particularly in sales. Building on Schwepker Jr.'s (2019) recommendations, this study investigates how mediating factors like role conflict influence salesperson behavior in Pakistan's B2B markets.

Significance of the Research

Most studies on ethical leadership in sales have centered on Western perspectives, leaving other regions underexplored. This research explores how business-to-business (B2B) markets function within Pakistan's unique economic and cultural setting. By analyzing role conflict as a mediating factor, this study helps uncover how sales personnel perceive their supervisors and managers. This research addresses an underexplored area in current scholarship by examining how ethical leadership in sales influences the effectiveness of sales team behaviors. Furthermore, the study explores whether role conflict acts as a mediating factor between these variables. The findings contribute to theoretical refinement of sales maximization principles in contemporary business contexts.

The findings enable Pakistani business leaders to evaluate the extent to which ethical leadership approaches enhance salesforce productivity within their organizations. The study examines how field training programs and managerial pressure influence salesperson performance, while also analyzing the dual impact of ethical sales leadership in reducing role conflict among sales managers. This study explores how the phenomenon influences the dynamic relationships between suppliers, distributors, and sales representatives in Pakistan's business-to-business marketing environment. This research seeks to develop an ethical sales leadership framework by analyzing how such leadership approaches influence salesforce motivation and persuasive capabilities in meeting organizational sales objectives. For Pakistani firms, implementing these findings could lead to measurable improvements in B2B sales outcomes.

Research Problem

Intense competition among Pakistan's industrial firms has eroded long-term customer relationships—including distributors, retailers, and end consumers—and weakened sales performance over the last ten years. Meanwhile, rising sales pressures in business markets raise an important question: how does this trend contribute to role conflict among professionals? Sales personnel are likely to adopt their supervisors' ethical leadership behaviors if they perceive such actions as desirable or expected. Furthermore, this strengthens a manager's ethical credibility, encouraging greater compliance from their team. When salespeople perceive their manager as inspiring, it can motivate them to achieve better sales results. The study analyzes whether ethical sales leadership can mitigate problematic behaviors among B2B sales professionals in Pakistan when examined through the lens of role conflict.

Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To assess whether ethical sales leadership predicts improvements in salesperson behavior performance.
2. To analyze how ethical sales leadership shapes the experience of role conflict in b2b sales teams.

3. To investigate how role conflict influences salesperson behavior performance in b2b sales teams.
4. To assess whether role conflict mediates the ethical sales leadership-salesperson behavior performance in b2b sales teams in the context of Pakistan.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of ethical sales leadership on salesperson's behavioral performance?
2. What is the effect of ethical sales leadership on role conflict?
3. Does role conflict influence salesperson behavioral performance?
4. Can role conflict explain the connection between ethical sales leadership and the way salespeople perform behaviorally?

Research Hypotheses

1. Ethical sales leadership is positively associated with improved salesperson behavioral performance.
2. Ethical sales leadership demonstrates a significant negative association with role conflict among sales professionals.
3. Role conflict demonstrates a significant negative association with salesperson behavioral performance.
4. Ethical sales leadership affects salesperson behavior performance indirectly through the presence of role conflict.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Social learning theory provides a mechanism by which ethical leadership influences follower attitudes and actions. New behaviors are acquired through the observation and imitation of influential role models, as outlined in Bandura's (1986) social learning theory. This study builds its conceptual foundation on the integrative model of sales performance antecedents proposed by Walker Jr et al. (1977). Extensive meta-analyses in sales performance literature, including the work of Verbeke et al. (2011), have provided robust empirical validation for this model. In their comprehensive review, the researchers classified the sales performance factors originally proposed by Walker Jr et al. (1977) into six fundamental dimensions, encompassing both individual characteristics (aptitude, skills, personal factors) and contextual elements (role perceptions, organizational/environmental variables) (Verbeke et al., 2011).

Literature Review

Ethical Leadership

Leaders who demonstrate ethical principles consistently show reliable patterns of behavior that foster organizational trust. Leaders with strong ethical standards consistently engage in respectful, professional conduct toward their staff. Recognized for their integrity, these managers fostered supportive environments for their sales teams while maintaining a commitment to social progress. Authentic leaders garner respect through substantive ethical actions, not just moral persuasion. Ethical leaders' personal qualities become symbolic representations of character that influence organizational culture. Ethical leaders utilize regulative indicators to promote honest obligation in subordinates (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

Scholarship has transitioned from ethical leadership inquiry to examining regulatory language, highlighting how positive framing influences managerial ethics (ao & Páez, 2015). Systematic review evidence demonstrates that moral leaders are consistently characterized by fairness, transparency, and adherence to ethical principles (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Rewards, penalties, and informational cues are strategically used by ethical leaders to shape their followers' moral development, as argued by Bedi et al. (2016).

According to Sharif and Scandura's (2014) research demonstrates that organizational pressures and external scrutiny reveal authentic ethical leadership qualities. Leading with ethics builds team trust and reduces workplace uncertainty. Scholars have empirically examined the effects of moral leadership on workplace systems and performance metrics. Moral leadership is observed and emulated by employees, consistent with Bandura's (1986) theoretical perspective. Bedi et al. (2016) demonstrated that leaders' ethical standards affect both staff actions and institutional climate. Throughout organizational change, ethical practices must be upheld by leadership.

Scholars have produced varied findings when studying how ethical leadership connects to job performance, especially in marketing contexts, demonstrating that researchers must account for mediating variables.

Ethical Sales Leadership

Sales leaders must set clear ethical expectations to guide their team's conduct. The relationship between sales leadership behaviors and salespeople's service excellence will be examined in this study. Ethical leadership is defined by Anser et al. (2021) as the demonstration of justice through actions with social consequences, along with the motivation of followers to replicate this behavior. The connection between ethical sales leadership, managers' aggressive conduct, and service renewal efficacy is examined through COR (Conservation of Resource) theory by Stouten et al. (2010). Salespeople are helped by ethical sales leadership to adopt the COR method for earning, keeping, and using resources through enhancing team productivity and resilience. Ethical sales managers actively guide their staff toward discovering valuable B2B connections, including potential distributors and retail partners, to rebuild sales performance.

Enwereuzor et al. (2021) found that toxic workplace conditions fuel interpersonal role conflicts, while ethical leadership simultaneously fosters skill development and oversees sales team performance. Stouten et al. (2010) empirically demonstrated that ethical leadership reduces managerial aggression, subsequently enhancing organizational climate.

Role Conflict

Building on role transition theory, Ashforth and colleagues (2000) conceptualize occupational roles as composites of professional identities, each associated with specific duties and socially constructed behavioral norms. Workers frequently demonstrate dominant leadership behaviors (e.g., assertiveness, task direction) during peer-level interactions, as evidenced in workplace communication studies. Hierarchical interactions predict distinct behavioral scripts, with subordinates consistently exhibiting protocol-conscious behaviors (including verbal deference and attentiveness) during upward communication. Empirical work reveals institutional mechanisms that mutually constitute (a) self-concept, (b) authority relations, and (c) class-based capital distribution (Joshi & Fast, 2013; Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). The role conflict paradigm (Kahn et al., 1964; Rizzo et al., 1970; Hirsh & Kang, 2016) explains how competing role obligations create contradictory performance expectations across social domains.

Competing role prescriptions may develop in separate domains of life. For example, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) as well as Rizzo et al. (1970) have described that conflicting pressures regarding work and family responsibilities as well as concerning particular organizational tasks could generate additional role conflict. As role conflict is enhanced according to types of positions and character – build responsibilities throughout are Rizzo et al. (1970) and Roethlisberger (1965) writes superiors and subordinates are stuck in role conflict, mostly due to their managerial position, given the structure, Tubre and Collins (2000), Hobfoll 2002, Jackson and Schuler 1985, Molinsky 2007. As per Floyd and Lane's (2000) argument, middle managers are likely to experience greater levels of role conflict than lower level employees because they must adopt multiple conflicting strategic responsibilities and must manage complex expectations.

Salesperson Behavior performance

Behavioral performance refers to the extent to which a salesperson effectively carries out their job-related tasks (Babakus et al., 1996). This concept rests on the assumption that sales professionals have more direct influence over their behaviors than over the actual outcomes they produce. These behaviors include various competencies such as providing customer support, engaging in negotiations, executing marketing activities, demonstrating technical know-how, adapting sales strategies, working collaboratively, and presenting proposals. A range of behavioral effectiveness dimensions has been explored in earlier literature. For example, prior research on supervisory practices in sales has highlighted how senior executives assess a salesperson's abilities, confidence, and presentation skills—while also offering feedback

and outlining budget constraints (Cravens et al., 1993; Oliver & Anderson, 1994).

In many marketing environments, effective interactions between salespeople and clients hinge on the sales process itself, along with technical proficiency and the ability to adjust strategies according to context. An important element of such studies involves evaluating how sales representatives communicate complex strategies and explain associated costs, underscoring the significance of both delivery and clarity in influencing buyer decision-making.

The formulation of Hypothesis and Model Development

Ethical Leadership and Salesforce Role Conflict.

Modeling acceptable behavior by use of personal actions and their association with others as well as spreading acceptable behavior among juniors makes use of interactive discourse, support and action. It is known as Ethical Leadership (Brown et al., 2005). Subconsciously encouraging good behavior and that of ethical nature through modeling good behavior on the way they behave at work and at home. Leaders of ethical conduct indicate organizations to avoid indulging in detrimental relationship behavior. Brown and Trevino (2006) opined that ethical leadership studies how they affect the society and individuals at the same time to the benefit of the organization. According to the study by Kalshoven and colleagues (2011) and Mayer and colleagues (2012), ethical leadership is in contrast to real and creative leadership. It stresses the morality and ethics of Leader communication.

Moral leaders transmit ethical values by creating high standards at their workplaces. This is what is explained in the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986). The Social Learning Theory (SLT) will be used to prove the notion that the staff members always seek credible and reliable models, which could act as role models to proper employee behavior as well as standards (Brown & Trevino, 2006). They subsequently mimic such behaviors at work and in relations with their work mates. On practice or watching, employees learn to trust each other in order to become morally competent and efficient in addressing challenges that may arise in the process of relating with people.

Role modeling and practical tips of managing conflicts or effectiveness of resolving conflicts are facilitated by the ethical leadership to the workers.

Employees may encounter conflicting expectations across multiple functions, a phenomenon referred to as role conflict (Michaels et al., 1987). Empirical studies indicate that such conflict negatively influences critical job outcomes (Rizzo et al., 1970). Scholars have documented that role conflict does not directly deteriorate after-sales service quality (Bhuian et al., 2005; Dubinsky & Mattson, 1979; Singh et al., 1994), yet it diminishes performance in trading specialist and promotion manager positions (Dubinsky & Hartley, 1986; Dubinsky et al., 1992; Babin & Boles, 1996). Nevertheless, Singh et al. (1994) reported that persistent role conflict hampers organizational productivity. It is not clear how far role conflict has a relationship into work related factors. Daniels (2006) observed that previous studies provide limited evidence of consistent associations between role stress and work outcomes. Based on this literature, the current study examines role conflict as the intermediary between ethical sales leadership and behavior performance on salesperson in business-to-business markets in Pakistan. The aim is to put to perspective the fact of whether ethical sales leadership has any impact on role conflict and whether this has any impact on sales performance. Specifically, the study will be able to test whether the relationship between ethical sales leadership to the salesperson behavior performance is completely mediated by the role conflict or only partially mediated. From Stealthwriter

Thus, we propose that.

H1 Ethical sales leadership is expected to reduce role conflict among sales professionals in Pakistan's B2B sector.

Role Conflict and Behaviors Sales Performance

Performance of salespeople is usually classified under the two categories namely conduct performance and result performance. Behavioral performance is defined as the

behavioral actions and tactics to complete the duties of the salespeople. The results that subsequently occur due to the implementation of such tactics and actions are commonly referred to as salesperson outcome performance as stated by the study carried out by Baldauf and his team of researchers (2005). Ajzen and Fishbein (1977), and Ferguson and Bargh (2004), hold that the current study dwells on performance of behavior of sales people due to sentiments and perception of behavior. According to the study by Baldauf and the research associates (2001) as well as Piercy and the study associates (2009), the conduct of the salesperson changes the performance of the salesperson.

Kahn et al. (1964) proposed a foundational conceptual framework that explores the relationship between role conflict and salesperson performance. Their work suggests that individuals experiencing high levels of role conflict tend to struggle with effective job performance. Given the complexity of this issue, further investigation into how role conflict affects productivity within professional settings remains both necessary and insightful.

Subsequent large-scale studies have reinforced these findings. Gilboa et al. (2008) and Tubre & Collins (2000), through studies involving over 11,000 and 35,000 participants respectively, demonstrated a consistent negative correlation between role conflict and job performance—particularly within the sales domain. Similarly, Onyemah (2008) found a significant inverse relationship between role conflict and salesperson effectiveness.

A meta-analysis conducted by Verbeke and colleagues (2011), which analyzed data from 79,747 marketing professionals across approximately 4,317 organizations, confirmed that role conflict is one of the most significant—yet negative—predictors of sales performance. In addition to role conflict, the study identified two other critical determinants of sales success: the salesperson's ability to adapt and their knowledge relevant to the sales process.

Though there is scanty empirical evidence; related results concerning the role conflict and the sales performance have been observed. Although the relationship between the role conflict and the job performance has been formally evaluated, researchers have established a negative correlation between each factor in the companies that offer services (Johlke & Duhan, 2000). Adverse Association between role conflict and performance in the workplace amongst the salespeople was the most supportive information to the argument and this was as shown in the research work of Rhoads and colleagues (1994). The ability of the salespersons to establish relationships with consumers is not only likely to be affected by the level in which they treat customers with honesty, truthfulness, and ethical manner but it means the behavior and performance on the job of the salespersons. The role conflict could be minimized through ethical behaviors of selling managers as it becomes clear to the employees that they are expected to behave in their jobs because of the experience. Due to this, it will indirectly affect their behavior and productivity at the work place.

Therefore, it was hypothesized that

H2: A negative relationship is proposed between role conflict and salesperson behavioral performance in Pakistan's B2B sector.

Ethical leadership and salesperson performance

Ethical leadership represents one of the most responsible and value-driven approaches that sales professionals can adopt. The study investigates the connection between ethical leadership and employee output, with an emphasis on non-financial and non-sales-related factors. The study by Babakus et al. (1996) suggests that ethical leadership has a positive effect on team motivation, which in turn boosts both performance and efficiency in the workplace.

Extending this perspective, Piccolo et al. (2010) provide empirical evidence that morally grounded leadership serves as a catalyst for increased employee effort and commitment. Building on this foundation, In a seminal study of Chinese industrial firms, Liu et al. (2013) demonstrated how ethical leadership behaviors directly influence work efficiency through unique leader-follower interactions. While descriptive statistics indicated a promising association, confirmatory statistical testing could not substantiate a significant direct

relationship between ethical leadership practices and measurable productivity gains.
Bouckenooghe, Zafar, and Usman (2015) further observed that employees in China's financial sector experienced improved performance outcomes when guided by ethically oriented leadership. Walumbwa et al. (2010) identified multiple mediating mechanisms - including intellectual capital, LMX quality, self-efficacy, and organizational recognition - in the ethical leadership-performance relationship. These mediators help determine how strongly ethical leadership influences job outcomes.
Through rigorous systematic review methodology, Bedi et al. (2015) established empirical consensus regarding the performance benefits of ethical leadership practices. Based on these cumulative insights, the current study proposes a series of hypotheses grounded in these observed trends.

H3: Sales managers who demonstrate ethical leadership behaviors tend to positively influence the behavioral performance of their sales staff.

Investigating the mediating role of role conflict in the relationship between ethical leadership and salesperson performance.
Recent studies indicate that in Pakistan's B2B sector, customer orientation serves as a partial mediator in the relationship between ethical sales leadership and salesperson behavioral performance. Unlike customer orientation, role conflict was identified as a complete mediator. Both variables were assessed concurrently as parallel mediators in the research (Brohi, 2023).
Based on these findings, we propose that.
H4: Role conflict plays an intermediary role in shaping how ethical leadership impacts salesperson behavior performance.

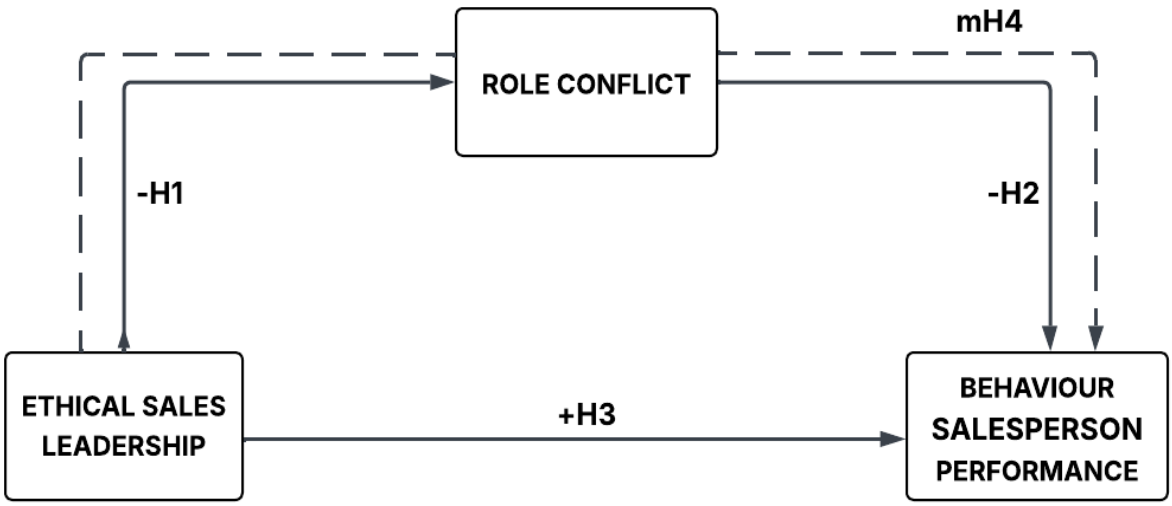

Figure: 1
Source: Research model developed by the authors.

Target Population, Research Sample, and Sampling Technique
The researchers have analysed the quantity of registered companies within different sectors in Pakistan according to the Trade and development authority of Pakistan (TDAP) web site. Subsequently, phone numbers and corporate addresses were reviewed and consent was sought over the phone.

During COVID-19, a purposive sample Google form questionnaire was emailed to people. Physical access to the street was limited due to the outbreak and therefore the questionnaire was impossible. The sales managers were the respondents- a cross-sectional study. Individuals were willing to provide their data between August, 2019 and November, 2020.
The study examined responses from 430 sales managers operating within Pakistan's B2B

sector. Participants were selected using a Google Form distributed through a B2B organization's internal network. To ensure statistical validity with a 5% margin of error, the sampling guideline provided by Saunders et al. (2009) recommends a minimum of 384 respondents when dealing with a large or unspecified population size. The final sample size thus exceeded this requirement, enhancing the study's reliability.

Arbuckle (2010) used SPSS and Smart PLS 3 to count the observation. At the beginning there were 200 at most. Form a credible model of 200 representative individuals. Hofmann and Nieberg (2018) noted that larger samples are required when confidence interval increases. Arbuckles (2010) recommends analysis of Smart PLS using initial 200 samples. The different studies covered in the literature recommend the use of the Krejcie and Morgan equations to calculate sample size in large populations, as Alkindy et al. (2016) revealed.

Variables, operational definitions with reference, and number of items.

Variable	Operational definition	Items	Reference
Ethical Leadership	Ethical leaders partake in normatively appropriate behavior toward followers.	10	(Brown et al., 2005)
Role Conflict	Fulfilling one role's requirements can make it hard or even impossible to meet the demands of another role.	08	(Perrewe´ et al. 2004)
Behavior Sales Performance	It involves the behavioral activities and strategies pursued by salespeople in carrying out their sales role.	04	(Miao & Evans, 2007)

Respondents demographic profile

The information was obtained in 430 respondents and 411 represented the men and only 19 mentioned the woman. This will imply that the majority selling job is performed by a male with an acceptable percentage of 95. The highest participation was contributed by the age of between 31 years and 40 years that had a percentage of 46 and 198 respondents which comes under 430 respondents. The descriptive statistics for education reveal that the majority of respondents held a master's degree, with 300 participants falling into this category. This suggests that the sales workforce surveyed is composed of highly educated and professionally skilled individuals. Regarding sales experience, the data indicate that most participants had over eight years of experience in the field. Specifically, 275 out of 430 respondents—approximately 64%—reported extensive

experience, reflecting a well-established level of professional competence. In terms of job designation, a significant portion of the sample consisted of field sales officers, who maintain direct interactions with clients, including distributors and retailers. These roles are especially critical in Pakistan's B2B market. Field officers accounted for 172 respondents, representing 40% of the total sample. The final demographic variable assessed was the employment sector. Among all sectors represented, the manufacturing industry had the highest participation rate, comprising 45.6% of the total sample. Further details of these demographic distributions are presented in Table 01.

Table 01	Demographic Analysis	N=430	
Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	411	95%
	Female	19	05%
Age	20-30	96	22.3%
	31-40	198	46%
	41-50	100	23.3%
	51 years and above	36	8.4%
Education	Intermediate	07	1.6%
	Graduate	30	7%
	Masters	300	69.8%
	MS/MPhil/PhD	93	21.6%
Sales Experience	Last than one year	47	10.9%
	1-3 years	41	9.5%
	4-5 years	37	8.6%
	6-8 years	30	7%
	More than eight years	275	64%
Designations	Area Sales Managers	88	20%
	Branding Executive	31	8%
	Field Sales Executives (FSE)	07	1 %
	Field Sales Officers (FSO)	172	40%
	Marketing Development Officer	52	13%
	Marketing Executives	05	1 %
	Managers Planning & Logistics	15	3 %
	(RSM) Regional Sales Managers	22	5 %
	Sales Managers	38	9 %
Job Sector	Government Sector	16	3.7%
	Manufacturing Sector	196	45.6%
	Nonprofit Industry	23	5.3%
	Service Sector	95	22.1%
	Wholesaling Sector	100	23.3%

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Analysis and results

Sarstedt et al. (2021) emphasize that the strength of the relationship between indicators and their associated constructs is reflected through outer loadings. In exploratory research, an outer loading value of 0.40 or higher is generally acceptable, though a threshold of 0.70 or above is preferred to establish stronger indicator relevance (Hair et al., 2021). Loadings exceeding 0.70 suggest that the construct accounts for a substantial portion of variance in the corresponding indicators—typically more than 50%. Such values are considered satisfactory, indicating that the items reliably contribute to the construct's internal consistency.

Hair et al. (2021) offer further guidance on evaluating outer loadings, particularly for items with values between 0.40 and 0.70. In such cases, it is advised to consider removing these indicators and reassessing the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) to determine whether their exclusion improves the overall measurement model. In this study, five items—ES1, ES2, ES3, ES6, and ES8—were removed due to their loading values falling within this marginal range. Their exclusion not only enhanced the AVE but also maintained the scale's content validity, as the composite reliability remained robust (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2021).

Following this refinement, five ethical leadership indicators—ES4, ES5, ES7, ES9, and ES10—were retained for further analysis. Any remaining item with an outer loading below the 0.40 threshold would also be subject to elimination, in accordance with standard measurement criteria.

Role conflict, serving as a mediating construct in this research, was initially measured with eight items. Upon analysis, the outer loading values for most items exceeded the acceptable cutoff of 0.70. However, items RC1 and RC6 did not meet this standard and were removed. Despite RC2, RC3, and RC7 also presenting loadings below 0.70 (0.672, 0.633, and 0.674, respectively), they were retained. Their removal did not result in any improvement in the AVE or CR values, as confirmed through detailed examination aligned with Hulland (1999). Moreover, none of the remaining role conflict items scored below the critical threshold of 0.40, and thus no further eliminations were necessary, as shown in Table 02.

As for the dependent variable—behavioral sales performance—four items were used: BSP1, BSP2, BSP3, and BSP4. All of these indicators met the recommended outer loading criterion of exceeding 0.70, and therefore, no items were discarded. The summary of these results is provided in the accompanying table.

Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Items	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability (CR)*	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)**
Ethical Sales Leadership	ES4	0.724	0.769	0.844	0.520
	ES5	0.724			
	ES7	0.645			
	ES9	0.756			
	ES10	0.752			
Role Conflict	RC2	0.672	0.819	0.865	0.519
	RC3	0.633			
	RC4	0.744			
	RC5	0.750			
	RC7	0.674			
	RC8	0.832			
Behavior Salesperson Performance	BP1	0.878	0.898	0.929	0.767
	BP2	0.884			
	BP3	0.912			
	BP4	0.825			

(CR)* Composite Reliability = Square of the summation of the factor loading/ (square of the summation of factor loading) + (square of the summation of the error variance)

(AVE)** Average Variance Extracted = summation of the square of the factor loadings/ (summation of the square of the factor loading) + (summation of the error variances).

Table 02

In line with PLS-SEM standards, a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.700 is considered essential for confirming internal consistency and reliability. As presented in Table 2, the constructs utilized in this research demonstrated strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.769 to 0.898—well above the minimum threshold. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE), which assesses convergent validity, fell between 0.519 and 0.767, thereby surpassing the recommended minimum of 0.500.

Composite reliability scores further affirmed the robustness of the constructs. Specifically, Ethical Sales Leadership (ESL), Role Conflict (RC), and Behavioral Salesperson Performance (BSP) recorded values of 0.844, 0.865, and 0.929, respectively—each exceeding the 0.700 benchmark. These findings confirm that all measurement items demonstrated both reliability and validity, thereby reinforcing the credibility of the study's results.

Discriminant validity

This section addresses the degree to which a construct is empirically distinguishable from related concepts, focusing on whether it effectively captures the intended variable. One method used to assess this is the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations, introduced by Henseler et al. (2015). The HTMT technique serves as a robust approach for evaluating discriminant validity by quantifying the relationship between two constructs. Conceptually, HTMT compares the average correlations across items measuring different constructs (heterotrait-heteromethod) against those measuring the same construct (monotrait-heteromethod), providing an estimate of construct overlap.

According to existing literature, elevated HTMT values may suggest issues with discriminant validity. The commonly accepted threshold for HTMT is 0.90, as recommended by scholars such as Kline (2011). However, some researchers advocate for a more conservative cutoff of 0.85 to ensure stronger discriminant validity, especially in contexts where conceptual overlap between constructs may be a concern.

Table 03 HTMT

	Behavior Sales Performance	Ethical Sales Leadership	Role conflict
Behavior Sales Performance			
Ethical Sales Leadership	0.420		
Role Conflict	0.628	0.717	

The findings indicate that all HTMT values in the analysis fall below the 0.85 threshold, which is within the acceptable range suggested by Henseler et al. (2015). These results confirm that the constructs meet the criteria for discriminant validity, thereby supporting the reliability of the measures used in the study.

PLS-SEM Path Analysis

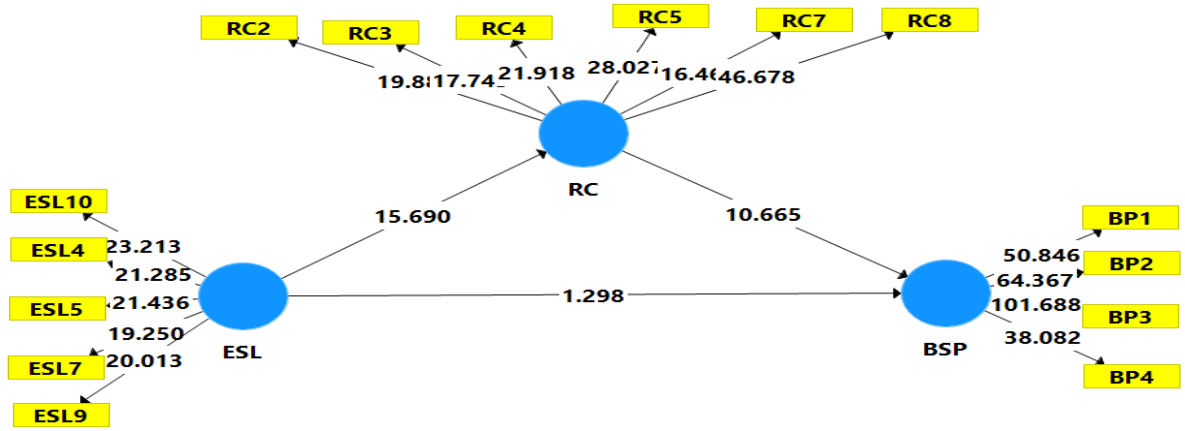

Figure 02: Measurement model and structural model

Further evidence supporting the path analysis is presented in Table 4, which includes key statistical indicators such as p-values, path coefficients, and t-statistics. The analysis reveals a significant negative relationship between Ethical Sales Leadership and Role Conflict (β = -0.577, p < 0.001), supporting the first hypothesis. Additionally, Role Conflict demonstrates a significant indirect effect on Behavioral Sales Performance (β = -0.503, p < 0.001), providing support for the second hypothesis. However, the direct relationship between Ethical Sales Leadership and Behavioral Sales Performance was found to be statistically insignificant (β = 0.071, p = 0.195), thus supporting the third hypothesis. Collectively, these findings lend empirical backing to hypotheses H1, H2, and H3.Path test with hypothesis testing

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values	Hypotheses Test
ESL -> RC	-0.577	-0.580	0.037	15.690	0.000	H1: Supported
RC -> BSP	-0.503	-0.504	0.047	10.665	0.000	H2: Supported
ESL -> BSP	0.071	0.071	0.055	1.298	0.195	H3: Not supported

Mediation analysis: Role Conflict's indirect impact on the salesperson behavior performance and ethical sales leadership.

The mediator variable defines the essence of the causal relationship between the antecessor and consequent factors. The total conception of the interdependence of the predictor variable and the outcome variable depends massively upon the explanation of the causative process that constitutes that association. The mentioned table indicates the particular mediated effects or the indirect effects of the mediators i.e., Role Conflict. Indirect Path.

Indirect Path

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values	Hypotheses Test
ESL -> RC -> BSP	0.290	0.293	0.036	8.047	0.000	H4: Supported

The Mediation hypothesis 04 is confirmed with t-statistics of 8.047 and path coefficient 0.290 that goes well above the significant value of 1.96. It should also be noted that the calculated

value of the p (0.000) is smaller than the statistical limit (0.05). In accordance with the principles, it can be inferred that in B2B markets in Pakistan, Role Conflict plays the role of mediator of Ethical Sales leadership and conduct performance of salespeople. The exploratory modelling adopted in the study is one with full mediation that is evidenced by the value of VAF that was found to be 87%. This will be in the agreeable range of between 20 to 80 percent proposed by Hair et al. (2021). The evidence of this conclusion can be seen in the t-statistics and p-value. Hypothesis Four is backed or supported by findings of this study. In accordance with this, it is possible to find the variable frequency (VAF) that is calculated in the following way: VAF = (-0.574 • -0.436)/ (-0.574 • -0.436 + 0.037)=0.87. The equation finds out the percentage of the variable in both populations. In the given instance, the derived VAF will come out as 0.87 where it can be converted to percent using 100 where it would yield a VAF of 87%.

Conclusion and discussion

This study aimed to analyze B2B employees' perceptions of their direct supervisors and evaluate how these views might affect sales performance outcomes. Our research captures insights from Pakistani B2B professionals about workplace dynamics within their organizations. The investigation focused specifically on understanding the relationship between Ethical Sales Leadership, Role Conflict, and Salesperson Behavior Performance through voluntary participant responses.

We employed a quantitative research approach using carefully designed questionnaires grounded in established literature. The collected data was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to ensure robust findings.

Current scholarship offers limited understanding of leadership approaches and their mediating factors. However, as Ingram et al. (2005) demonstrated, leaders can significantly impact their organization's sales success. Our study examined a leadership style capable of developing ethically-driven sales teams while building sustainable customer relationships. This approach appears to help sales professionals establish trust with clients more effectively.

Supporting evidence from Trevino and Nelson (2021) shows that ethically-grounded businesses often achieve better financial outcomes, including increased sales revenue, reduced operational costs, and potential for premium pricing. Our findings suggest similar benefits may exist for Pakistani B2B sales professionals through Perceived Ethical Sales Leadership behaviors.

The empirical analysis revealed statistically significant negative relationships among the studied variables. Most importantly, our results demonstrate that Role Conflict serves as a complete mediator in the relationship between ethical sales leadership and sales performance. This mediating effect is both negative and substantial, confirming role conflict's full mediation role in this dynamic.

Theoretical Implications

A deeper understanding of ethical leadership theory is facilitated through the present study. The empirical work of Verbeke, Dietz, and Verwaal (2011) offers substantial evidence that underscores a strong link between supervisory leadership and employee performance within sales settings. Likewise, research in the field has consistently shown a measurable relationship between ethical leadership in sales and the performance outcomes of sales personnel.

However, this relationship is not purely linear. The influence of ethical leadership on the behavior and outcomes of salespeople appears to operate indirectly—mediated by factors such as the role conflict experienced by employees. Earlier studies have demonstrated that ethically grounded leaders often show sincere concern for their team members, thereby serving as moral exemplars. This behaviour has been empirically associated with lower levels of perceived role conflict among subordinates. These insights lend strong support to Hypothesis 1 presented in the current research.

Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) further noted that when employees perceive their supervisors as genuinely invested in their welfare, they tend to identify more closely with them. In such cases, sales personnel are more inclined to experience reduced role conflict when engaging with distributors, retail clients, and upper-level

managers, particularly within Pakistan's B2B (business-to-business) landscape.

Despite its importance, the role of role conflict has received limited scholarly attention. This study seeks to address that gap by contributing new findings to the literature. Notably, the empirical validation of Hypothesis 2 demonstrates that lowering role conflict can yield significant improvements in both salesperson behaviour and performance. This represents a key addition to the discourse on sales roles and responsibilities.

Interestingly, prior research—including Schwepker (2016)—has shown that ethical leadership and job performance among salespeople do not exhibit a statistically significant direct relationship in B2B markets. The present study confirms Hypothesis 3, asserting that ethical sales leadership does not directly influence salesperson behaviour and performance in Pakistan's B2B sector.

However, findings associated with Hypothesis 4 reveal a full mediation effect: role conflict entirely mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and sales performance, as determined through the Variance Accounted For (VAF) metric. This underscores the nuanced but vital role of ethical leadership in indirectly shaping success in B2B sales, thereby enriching the theoretical understanding of its dynamics in the Pakistani market context.

Managerial Implications

Ethical sales managers in Pakistan's B2B sector should openly communicate their stance on workplace issues, particularly ethical dilemmas, while actively soliciting employee input during decision-making. This inclusive approach not only safeguards employee welfare but also aligns with the relationship-driven norms of Pakistani business culture. Critically, ethical standards must govern hiring, selection, and termination processes, as violations risk reputational damage in Pakistan's tightly knit industrial networks. Structured reward systems can further reinforce desired behaviors within sales teams operating in this competitive market.

Piercy, Cravens, and Lane (2009) establish a connection between salespersons' behavioral compliance (e.g., ethical conduct) and outcome performance (e.g., deal closures). In Pakistan's B2B context, blending transactional leadership (target-based incentives) with ethical leadership proves particularly effective. Notably, firms with senior sales leaders in Pakistan report lower role conflict and improved team performance, suggesting that experience mitigates the ethical pressures endemic to distributor-retailer negotiations in this region.

Recommendations, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

It is essential to recognize that all research efforts come with inherent limitations. This study is no exception. Nevertheless, these limitations should not be viewed solely as constraints; rather, they offer meaningful avenues for future scholarly exploration. The present research introduces a comprehensive framework that integrates role conflict as a mediating variable, specifically tailored to the Pakistani business-to-business (B2B) environment. While the model contributes to our understanding of ethical sales leadership, it does not capture the full spectrum of variables that may influence or result from ethical conduct in sales.

Within the Pakistani market, the study seeks to broaden this understanding by proposing additional constructs such as social selling, ethical conflict, and turnover intentions as both potential antecedents and consequences of ethical sales leadership. These dimensions can help illuminate the complex and dynamic nature of ethical leadership in local sales practices.

Assessment of ethical sales leadership in this study relies on sales personnel's perceptions of their supervisors' ethical behavior. However, if the criteria or lens for evaluating ethical leadership were to change, it is possible that the resulting insights could differ. Moreover, the behavior of salespeople is often shaped by their personal perceptions of leadership—suggesting that motivation arises not from objective realities, but from subjective interpretations of ethically charged interactions with their managers. To improve future research, it is recommended that objective sales performance indicators be incorporated alongside self-reported data, enabling a more reliable comparison and broader validation of findings. While self-assessment remains a common method in sales research, integrating external

performance measures could significantly enhance the robustness of conclusions.

Further investigation is needed into the strategic role that ethical sales leadership plays within sales teams. Future research might benefit from exploring how customers' perceptions of a company's ethical standards influence their purchasing behavior, particularly in terms of trust-building and long-term engagement with ethically guided sales managers. These considerations are especially relevant in the context of Pakistan's B2B markets, where sustained relationships and ethical reputations are central to business success.

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