Moderating Effect of Ethical Climate between the Relationship of Coach Ethical Leadership and Affective Commitment: An Evidence from Thailand Nonprofessional Soccer Player

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Abstract

A multitude of ethical dilemmas perpetually besets non-professional soccer. It is believed that coaches can be beneficial in preventing unethical behavior. Therefore, this study examines the moderating effect of perceived ethical climate on the relationship between coach ethical leadership and the affective commitment of non-professional soccer players. A convenient sampling technique was utilized to collect data from 300 amateur Thai soccer players for this purpose. The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) demonstrated that the direct effect of player-perceived coach ethical leadership and player-perceived ethical climate has a significant and positive relationship with affective commitment. The indirect impact of the critical findings indicates that players' perceptions of the ethical environment moderate the relationship between their perceptions of the ethical leadership of their coaches and their affective commitment. These findings suggest that ethical climate is integral because it significantly mediates exogenous and endogenous variables. Therefore, this moderating effect relationship is a significant contribution to the study. This study could assist athletes and clubs in understanding the significance of coaching ethical leadership and ethical climate in enhancing the affective commitment of non-professional athletes.

Keywords: ethical leadership, affective commitment, ethical climate, Thailand

Introduction

Thailand's national football squad is the most successful in Southeast Asia, having won nine gold medals at the senior level of the Southeast Asian Games and five AFF Championship titles. Thailand finished third as the host nation in the 1972 AFC Asian Cup and has made seven overall appearances in the AFC Asian Cup. In addition, the team won four medals in the 1990 and 1998 Asian Games and competed twice in the Summer Olympics (Kruatiwa & Yimlamai, 2021). Thailand, however, has fallen short of continental and global milestones established by the United States and other nations. After their first victory at the 2007 AFC Asian Cup, the team had to wait 47 years before qualifying for this year's competition (Apanukul, 2021). In 2002 and 2018, Thailand also advanced to the final round of World Cup qualification but failed to qualify for the FIFA World Cup (Sampurna, 2020). According to the report, most players' lack of professionalism was the primary reason for the team's failure (Sanpasitt, Intiraporn, & Yimlamai, 2021). Recent examples demonstrate that unethical behavior may present itself on and off the field in non-professional (amateur) soccer, despite the media's tendency to focus on professional soccer when discussing ethical issues (Aarts et al., 2015). Non-professional soccer sources in Thailand, for instance, assert that authorities (match officials) are not adequately safeguarded from players' escalating verbal and physical aggression (Chantaramanee, 2016). Despite various (international) anti-racism programs, the documented incidences of racism in amateur soccer have increased dramatically (Conn et al., 2015). Finally, non-professional soccer clubs have a poor reputation for misusing tax-free voluntary allowances to offer players large amounts of money (Thibaut, Scheerder, & Pompen, 2016). Ethical issues in amateur soccer are diverse, varied, and rooted. Due to this, no one individual or organization is solely responsible for resolving these issues (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2003). However, those in positions of authority, such as those responsible for building and maintaining a safe and ethical workplace, are viewed as highly effective (Mostafa, Farley, & Zaharie, 2020). We focused primarily on the influence of intelligible coach ethical leadership (CEL) on non-professional soccer players' perceptions of ethical behavior (EB) because of leadership's positive role in combatting unethical behavior. Coaches continue to be a vital shareholder group at this time. In other words, it aims to favorably affect soccer players' moral thinking and behavior, despite multiple instances of unethical coach behavior (e.g., sexual assault) (Woodburn et al., 2021). In response to recent calls from Peachey, Burton, and Wells (2014) and Constandt, De Waegeneer, and Willem (2019) to evaluate the influence of CEL within the sport, this study investigates how soccer clubs perceive their coaches' CEL. Several recent studies have been published on the importance of EL in athletics, but empirical research on the topic is still in its infancy (Gudrunardottir et al., 2016; Jandl et al., 2014; Kees et al., 2017). Thus, the discipline of sports organizational studies is distinguished from the rest of the literature on business ethics by the increasing number of CEL studies (Bedi, Alpaslan, & Green, 2016). In addition, empirically, past investigations have yielded conflicting results, with some studies showing beneficial results (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015; Zehir, Müceldili, & Zehir, 2012). Nonetheless, some research indicates a negative correlation (Borhani et al., 2014; Shapira-Lishchinsky & Rosenblatt, 2010). While these characteristics have been demonstrated as a moderating component of ethical climate in the study of Borhani et al. (2014); Yukhymenko-Lescroart, Brown, and Paskus (2015).

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Given the contemporary significance of leadership and ethics in the academic field of sports management, the delayed development of sport CEL is perplexing. In addition, previous research has not examined how soccer players perceive the involvement of coaches in creating an ethical (as well as unethical) club environment, so this study will examine how perceived coach CEL influences the perceived ethical environment of a soccer club. Therefore, the ethical climate of a corporation is based on a knowledge of ethically correct behavior and how ethical difficulties should be treated (Victor & Cullen, 1988). In addition to providing members with guidance regarding EB, the moral climate is intimately associated with EB (Gano-Overway, Thompson, & Van Mullem, 2020).

An ethical atmosphere reflects the restrictive aspect of ethical conduct since it can prevent unethical behavior. Another study examines the relationship between coaches' perceived CEL and players' affective commitment (AC). EB includes AC, or loyalty to the organization, as a form of pro-social conduct (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986). Therefore, AC is a significant resource for soccer players and clubs. In the context of amateur team sports, players with a high AC are also a critical success factor in terms of long-term sustainability and firm success, even though AC is a significant factor for players.

To summarize the preceding discussion, it can be stated that previous research has yielded inconsistent results, direct relationships, and mediating effects. The moderating effect of ethical climate on the relationship between coach ethical leadership and affective commitment has not been demonstrated. On the other hand, previous research in sports has focused primarily on other nations, while Thailand has received little attention. In light of these gaps, the purpose of the present study is to examine the moderating effect of ethical climate on the relationship between coach ethical leadership and affective commitment in Thailand soccer club sports. The study's five sections comprised the introduction, literature review, research methodology, data analysis and discussion, and conclusion.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

This section's literature review of studies has been formulated based on theoretical and empirical perspectives.
Coach Ethical Leadership

Coach ethical leadership (CEL) is vital to the long-term success of any company (Mendonca, 2001). Moreover, research demonstrates that leaders exert a substantial, positive or negative, influence on the morals of their employees and society. Leaders can influence the behavior of their subordinates by setting a good example and working closely with them. The seminal CEL paper by Brown, Trevino, and Harrison was published in 2005. In academic circles, the development of their constructs is frequently utilized. Brown and Treviño (2006) define CEL as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate behavior to followers through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such behavior to followers through two-way communication, reinforcements, and decisions." (Lawton & Páez, 2015) Brown and his colleagues' definition heavily relies on the different characteristics of ethical leaders. Moral leadership has two components: the moral manager and the moral individual. To be regarded as an ethical leader, you must possess strength on both of these levels.

Regarding CEL, the moral-person dimension considers the leader's ethical characteristics, such as honesty, forthrightness, integrity, and trustworthiness; behaviors that remain to perform suitable activities and indicate their concern for others; and decision-making principles, such as openness. This could also be considered an "ethical" component of ethical management. Regarding influencing followers' EB as a role model, discussing ethics and values, establishing a good incentive system, and the moral-manager dimension are all taken into account. Others have noted that, as a result of being a moral manager, leaders can empower their followers by providing them with opportunities to be heard and develop themselves. The leadership aspect of CEL consists of all components of the "moral-manager" dimension.

Ethical Behavior along with Coach Ethical Leadership in Soccer

In any industry, coaching ethical leadership (CEL) is crucial. Despite substantial conceptual contributions regarding the significance of CEL in collegiate athletics, scholars have largely neglected the issue of CEL in sports (Snoberger, 2021). Despite the importance of conceptual research such as this one, there is yet no actual evidence to support the notion that CEL may address the ethical concerns in sports (Burton & Peachey, 2014; Burton, Peachey, & Wells, 2017; Constandt, De Waegeneer, & Willem, 2018; Hamelink & Mahmoud, 2022). Recent research by Wells and Walker (2016) indicates that open communication is a crucial success factor during organizational transformation in a college athletic department as part of a company's ethical leadership.

These other characteristics of the two dimensions of CEL were deemed insignificant and omitted from this study. In light of Trevio and Brown's (2007) integrated CEL model, it is justifiable to investigate sports leadership. Due to our opinion that empirical research on CEL in sports is vital, we limited our investigation to soccer. This conclusion is based on the notion that soccer is a medium-contact sport with a high number of social interactions and, as a result, a great deal of opportunity for pro-social or antisocial behavior (Bredemeier & Shields, 1994; Kavussanu, 2019; Kavussanu & Al-Yaaribi, 2021).

The scope of our study does not provide a complete examination of these ethical issues. Still, the brief examples of fraud, violence, and racism paint a worrisome picture of soccer's unethical practices. In addition, soccer players are frequently accused of unfair play on the field, as evidenced by behaviors such as diving, elbowing, retaliation, and injury pretension; however, this list is not exhaustive. In conclusion, ethical issues in soccer tend to affect both professional and amateur teams, as evidenced by their respective behaviors (Cashmore & Cleland, 2014; Constandt et al., 2018). This study has not fully exploited the potential of soccer-based leadership evaluation based on general leadership theories, despite the notion that leadership can address these ethical challenges (Fransen et al., 2014; Regmi, 2022). Coaches of soccer teams are researched because they have the closest interaction with their players and, consequently, a more substantial capacity to influence the moral behavior of their players (Constandt et al., 2018; Kavussanu, 2019; Thompson & Dieffenbach, 2016).

The vital feature of role modeling is a further advantage of testing the ethical leadership concept in a soccer coaching and leading situation. Due to the exclusive emphasis on athletes (Hurst, Ring, & Kavussanu, 2020), it might be argued that the current role modeling standards in soccer place less emphasis on coaches (despite their powerful position).

Researchers have found a strong correlation between CEL and a business's individual and collective success.

Empirical research into the influence of CEL on ethical behavior has produced unclear and inconsistent results, which the moderating effects of regional and industry-specific characteristics may explain. A low frequency of destructive social behaviors or unfair play is an example of ethical behavior in sports, according to Constandt et al. (2018). This concept of sports ethics implies a more negative approach; however, sports ethics has two dimensions: an inhibitive (refraining from asocial and unethical behavior) and a pro-social (acting socially) dimension. Due to its social nature, soccer contributes explicitly to an environment where unethical behavior is more likely to occur.

Coach Ethical Leadership, Ethical Climate, and Affective commitment in Soccer Clubs

Despite extensive research on the effects of CEL in various businesses, little is known about how it acts in the sports industry (Bedi et al., 2016; Constandt et al., 2018). In addition to substantial media coverage, specialized shareholders, and a focus on performance that extends beyond the financial side, sport's distinctiveness is defined by the practically unconditional passion and dedication of everyone involved (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Chadwick & Dawson, 2018; Mahsud, Yukl, & Prussia, 2010).

Even though the literature acknowledges the importance of fan and volunteer loyalty to sports teams, the loyalty and commitment of other significant shareholder groups to sports teams are mostly disregarded (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007; Park, Kim, & Song, 2015). As a result, our research analyzes if and how ethical leadership might impact a crucial club and team sports influence: players' firm commitment to their organizations. Additionally, Commitment to the Organization may be regarded as an EB procedure (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986). These three components are a requirement to remain a member of the firms ("affective commitment": association with, attachment to, and involvement in a particular organization), a cost ("continuance commitment": the price of leaving the institution), and a sense of obligation ("(normative commitment): a sense of duty to remain in the organization) (Hassan et al., 2013). Because it has been found as the most crucial and robust firm commitment component for moral development, the AC aspect will be investigated in full (Jeon et al., 2018) .

Prior research has demonstrated that AC has individual and organizational benefits (Zhu, May, & Avolio, 2004). In conclusion, it can be stated that both soccer clubs and their players can benefit from a win-win situation, provided a high level of intense dedication and a positive club environment. In addition, committed soccer players benefit financially (e.g., more excellent salary) and psychologically (e.g., improved social status, more trust, stronger ties) by staying with their current team (Zhu et al., 2004). Additionally, soccer teams can profit from the competition and organizational success that result from having committed members (Zhu et al., 2015; Zhu et al., 2004). Currently, soccer players and AC are viewed as mutually exclusive. The leadership of a soccer club can utilize players with and without contracts as pawns, but this is commonly neglected (Koukiadaki & Pearson, 2016). The delicate relationship between soccer players and AC is illustrated by the fact that contracts are brief and frequently unwritten, and training is conducted in isolation (Koukiadaki & Pearson, 2016). Similarly, amateur soccer clubs are concerned about the AC of their players. Non-professional

soccer clubs employ tax-free voluntary allowances to provide players with enormous amounts of money (Di Perri et al., 2016).

Since raising off-the-record non-professional soccer player salaries has a snowball effect, this practice threatens to create a revolving door of players that will benefit both teams living over their means and clubs unable and unwilling to keep up with the latest trends. (Di Perri et al., 2016). Contrary to common assumption, research indicates that intrinsic motivation, rather than money and other external rewards, is essential to success and can assist soccer players in establishing a positive attitude toward the game (Garcia-Mas et al., 2010). When soccer coaches can effectively build and express a team vision, players' commitment increases tremendously (Molan, Matthews, & Arnold, 2016). We believe that when soccer coaches fulfill both components of CEL, such as being a moral manager and a moral individual, they can strengthen the emotional connection between their players and the company. Demïr et al. (2004); Neves and Story (2015) have identified an association between CEL and AC at multiple organizational and supervisory levels. In contrast, this study explores the relationship between ethical coaching leadership and AC in non-professional soccer clubs. The current study's much-awaited findings allow us to compare the impact of CEL across sectors. Consequently, an initial hypothesis is stated below.

Research in sports organizations supports the assumption that ethical climate (EC) accomplishment and maintenance depend heavily on leaders (Burton et al., 2017; Malloy & Agarwal, 2001). This research on organizational leadership in North American athletic departments revealed a positive relationship between executive leadership and the EC of sports organizations. Despite the dearth of research on EC in sports organizations, the findings of this study may be thought-provoking (Burton et al., 2017).

With ethical culture, the ethical climate is a commonly used scientific phrase for assessing an organization's ethical environment (Bonner, Greenbaum, & Mayer, 2016). Bekir (2017) defines an ethical environment as the shared knowledge of what constitutes morally appropriate action and how ethical challenges should be addressed. Ethical environment theory does not describe real behavior, but it is closely related to EB because it conveys impressions of behavior (Arnaud & Schminke, 2012; Malloy & Agarwal, 2001). Since Cullen, Parboteeah, and Victor's (2003) ethical climate paradigm was demonstrated to be useful but also to have limitations, the alternative technique proposed by Kalshoven, Den Hartog, and De Hoogh (2011) was adopted. The second theory is preferable because it offers a more comprehensive explanation of how moral reasoning develops (Constandt, De Waegeneer, & Willem, 2017). According to Arnaud (2006), the moral reasoning process consists of four major components: ethical sensitivity (the presence of moral awareness and empathic concern), moral judgment (the use of internalized ethical rules to analyze situations), and moral motivation. Moral sensitivity is defined as (for example, prioritization of moral values at that time when planning to perform). Cullen et al. (2003) only view ethical judgment as a prerequisite for EB (for instance, the application of ethical values when performing; (Schminke, Arnaud, & Kuenzi, 2007). According to Arnaud's (2010) approach, the moral formation theory of Elm and Nichols (1993) gives the most theoretical support. Several studies have revealed the influence of CEL on the EC (kori, Maksimovi, and Mati). Due to their influence, leaders have a unique chance to assist build a more ethical environment (Mayer, Kuenzi, & Greenbaum,

2010). However, sport management scholars have not yet conducted sport-specific research on the effect of a particular CEL model on the ethical climate. Our second study hypothesis is therefore stated as follows.

Players' sense of affective commitment positively influences the perceived ethical atmosphere of amateur soccer clubs.

Additionally, EC has been developing a significant mediation role concerning various additional impacts of CEL, such as increased job satisfaction and decreased employee misconduct (Samuel & Harrison, 2020). In addition, the EC acts as a reference for the organization's members in assessing whether or not specific behaviors and attitudes are acceptable (UN) (Mayer et al., 2010). Consequently, leaders influence the EC, influencing the organization's pro-social and ethical conduct (Neubert et al., 2009). Consequently, CEL impacts the EC in addition to its direct effects. In other words, the relationship between CEL and the adherents' AC has been scientifically investigated, and this argument also applies (Buchan, Foley-Deno, & Flynn). In light of the well-documented significance of EC in creating firm commitment, our findings regarding AC's relationship with CEL are not unexpected (Martin & Cullen, 2006; Schwepker Jr, 2001). Due to the intimate interaction between the soccer coach and the players, we believe that the mediation effect of EC in our case is partial rather than total (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2009).

Utilizing a multi-dimensional, and hence more theoretically plausible, definition of EC, evaluating this theory is novel in its application to sports and implementation. In organizations, moral thinking occurs in four dimensions: sensitivity, judgment, motivation, and character. This is correct (Arnaud, 2010; Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2013). However, existing research on the relationships between CEL, EC, and AC assumes EC to be unidimensional (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015) .

In addition, the studies solely address EC about moral judgment, ignoring all other elements of moral development. Our application of Arnaud's (2010) EC paradigm provides a multi-dimensional perspective on a hitherto unidimensional method (Newman et al., 2017). Additionally, the research explores the idea that some characteristics of individuals and institutions serve as precursors to AC. Based on the studies of Demirtas and Akdogan (2015); Weeks et al. (2004), our analysis evaluates the influence of the soccer player's age, gender, and firm tenure (organizational characteristic). As described in the Methods section, these variables were included as covariates in our model. Specifically for AC, the period of an organization's existence is anticipated to have a slight but significant effect (Buchan et al.). The argument is predicated on the premise that AC contains a logical component. There is evidence that people are less likely to leave a company as their tenure increases since various observed benefits (such as familiarity with the organization and advancement chances) are cumulatively linked to the sustained functioning of the company (Qabool et al., 2021).

The link between player views of coach ethical leadership and the player's AC is partially reduced by the player-perceived ethical atmosphere of the non-professional soccer team.

Based on the previous part of the literature review, the study's research framework is depicted in Figure.1 below.
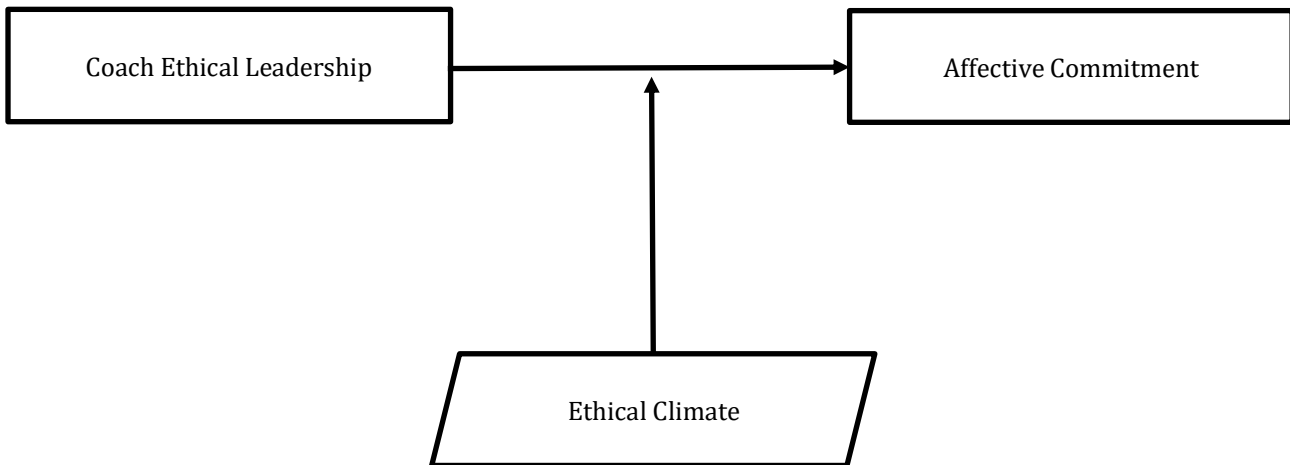

Figure.1: Research Framework

Research Methodology

There are two methods of investigation: qualitative and quantitative study. Qualitative research employs non-numerical data to comprehend better opinions, perspectives, and life experiences (Berrios & Lucca, 2006). In contrast to qualitative research, quantitative research involves collecting and analyzing numerical data to describe, predict, or manage elements of interest. Researchers use quantitative techniques to establish causal relationships between variables (Berrios & Lucca, 2006). Because we are collecting and analyzing numerical data in this study, we utilized a quantitative research methodology. In addition, the research design employed in this study was cross-sectional, implying that data were collected at a certain point. A researcher will use this technique to characterize the relationship between two variables and test hypotheses (Ab Talib, Rubin, & Zhengyi, 2013). Our study adopts a cross-sectional research design as a result. Comparing quantitative and cross-sectional study designs to qualitative research, the latter is believed to be more reliable, valid, and influential.

Data collection Procedures and Research Instrument

From April to September 2021, clubs in Thailand distributed an online questionnaire to their amateur soccer players. At the time of Covid-19, it was simple to conduct a face-to-face survey. Some demographic questions were included in the initial questionnaires of the instrument for research. Key variables in our study were also measured using Likert scales with five points. The construct of Coach Ethical Leadership (CEL) was evaluated using 10 items adopted from the research. Schminke et al. (2007) utilized the "Ethical Climate Index" to evaluate ethical climate. "Numerous recent studies demonstrate that employing the Arnaud's (2010) framework to evaluate the ethical climate of sports organizations is a

sound strategy." " Organizations' moral sensitivity (MS) (6 items), moral judgment (MJ) (6 items), moral motivation (MM) (8 items), and moral character (MC) are evaluated using the ECI. Meyer, Allen, and Gellatly (1990) created the eight-item "Affective Commitment Scale" to assess people's commitment to, contribution to, and documentation with the company.

Data Analysis and Techniques

The research analysis was done using two software, SPSS and Smart PLS. The SPSS was used for the descriptive statistics, and Smart PLS was used for the inferential statistics.

Research Result

Descriptive Analysis

Table.1

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
CEL	300	1.00	5.00	3.6268	.8597	-.335	.132	-.529	.272
EC	300	1.00	5.00	3.3325	.9036	-.467	.132	-.365	.272
AC	300	1.00	5.00	3.4606	.8919	-.358	.132	-.551	.272

SPSS is utilized for the computation of descriptive statistics. These analyses use central tendency and dispersion measures to identify trends in each model item. The Mean score of the responses is commonly used as a measure of central tendency; however, the measure of dispersion reveals how far responses deviate from the mean trend by calculating the Standard deviations of respondents. Descriptive analysis is used to gain a general understanding of the data because it provides the mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis for all variables under consideration. The predicted mean values for the independent (coach ethical leadership) and moderating (ethical climate) variables are provided in Table 1. The findings are in Table.1 indicated that the level of influence of the construct on the dependent variable was more significant than moderate.

Assessment of Measurement Model

The evaluation of the model was performed using Partial Least Square (PLS)-Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The model's convergent and discriminant validity were evaluated. Convergence validity was assessed using the extracted average variance (AVE) from all scales. The value of AVE must be more than 0.5 for the recommendation to be acceptable (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). All product factor loadings must be greater than 0.5 for convergence to occur. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient should have a value better than 0.7 when measuring reliability (Nunnally, 1994). In addition, the value of factor loading must exceed 0.5. (Hair Jr et al., 2017).

In contrast, for convergent validity, the composite reliability required that the value be more significant than 0.70. (Hair Jr et al., 2017). Table 2's anticipated values indicate that every value is more critical than the suggested value.

Table.2

Reliability and validity of the model

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
Coach Ethical Leadership	CEL1	0.820	0.787	0.875	0.701
	CEL2	0.811			
	CEL3	0.879			
	CEL3	0.894			
	CEL4	0.814			
	CEL5	0.743			
	CEL6	0.673			
	CEL7	0.871			
	CEL8	0.732			
	CEL9	0.672			
	CEL10	0.804			
Moral Sensitivity	MS1	0.805	0.81	0.882	0.714

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
	MS2	0.886			
	MS3	0.843			
	MS4	0.763			
	MS5	0.761			
	MS6	0.901			
Moral Judgment	MJ1	0.893	0.735	0.883	0.791
	MJ2	0.885			
	MJ3	0.809			
	MJ4	0.810			
	MJ5	0.835			
	MJ6	0.791			
Moral Motivation	MM1	0.817	0.729	0.847	0.649
	MM2	0.833			
	MM3	0.766			
	MM4	0.743			
	MM5	0.561			
	MM6	0.760			
	MM7	0.542			
	MM8	0.850			
Moral Character	MC1	0.728	0.71	0.821	0.534
	MC2	0.774			
	MC3	0.655			
	MC4	0.762			
	MC5	0.905			
	MC6	0.679			
Affective Commitment	AC1	0.845	0.821	0.893	0.736

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
	AC2	0.868			
	AC3	0.861			
	AC4	0.907			
	AC5	0.510			
	AC6	0.672			
	AC7	0.783			
	AC8	0.896			

"Note: CEL-coach ethical leadership; MS-moral sensitivity; MJ-moral judgment; MM-moral motivation; MC-moral character, AC-affective commitment."

Discriminant Validity

Fornell and Larker, cross-loadings, and hetrotrait monotrait correlations could be used to evaluate the discriminant validity of a construct (HTMT). Based on the previously mentioned criteria, the proposed diagonal values for the Fornell and Larker should be more significant than those presented below (Hair Jr et al., 2017). The projected values in Table.3 met the Fornell and Larker criteria. In addition, maximal correlations for the HTMT should be smaller than 0.85 or 0.90, as suggested by Hair Jr et al. (2017). The projected values in Table.4 indicated that the correlation between the constructs is less than 0.85, meaning that the concept has discriminant validity.

Table.3

Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	CEL	MS	MJ	MM	MC	MC
CEL	0.837					
MS	0.513	0.845				
MJ	0.359	0.648	0.811			
MM	0.429	0.566	0.549	0.889		
MC	0.515	0.357	0.394	0.561	0.806	
MC	0.634	0.549	0.548	0.650	0.499	0.858

"Note: CEL-coach ethical leadership; MS-moral sensitivity; MJ-moral judgment; MM-moral motivation; MC-moral

character, AC-affective commitment."

Table.4

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	CEL	MS	MJ	MM	MC	MC
CEL						
MS	0.774					
MJ	0.813	0.795				
MM	0.818	0.741	0.70			
MC	0.663	0.466	0.50	0.767		
MC	0.718	0.676	0.66	0.836	0.646	

"Note: CEL-coach ethical leadership; MS-moral sensitivity; MJ-moral judgment; MM-moral motivation; MC-moral character, AC-affective commitment."

Assessment of Structural Model

The hypothesis was tested in two models, one was direct, and the other one was an indirect model.

Direct Effect

The hypothesis was examined using the structural equation modeling (SEM) technique of SMART PLS. The bootstrap 500 resampling method was utilized to evaluate the study's premise. The direct effect results indicated that coach ethical leadership (CEL) had a positive and statistically significant association with the AC, supporting the first hypothesis. In contrast, the ethical climate (EC) was also found to have a positive and substantial link with the AC, supporting the second theory. These results indicate that both CEL and EC are strong predictors for increasing the AC of Thai players. All of the previously described outcomes are anticipated in Table.4 below.

Table5

Direct Effect Results

	Beta	SD	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
CEL -> AC	0.132	0.064	2.048	0.041	Supported
EC -> AC	0.134	0.062	2.093	0.033	Supported

"Note: CEL-coach ethical leadership; EC-ethical climate, AC-affective commitment."
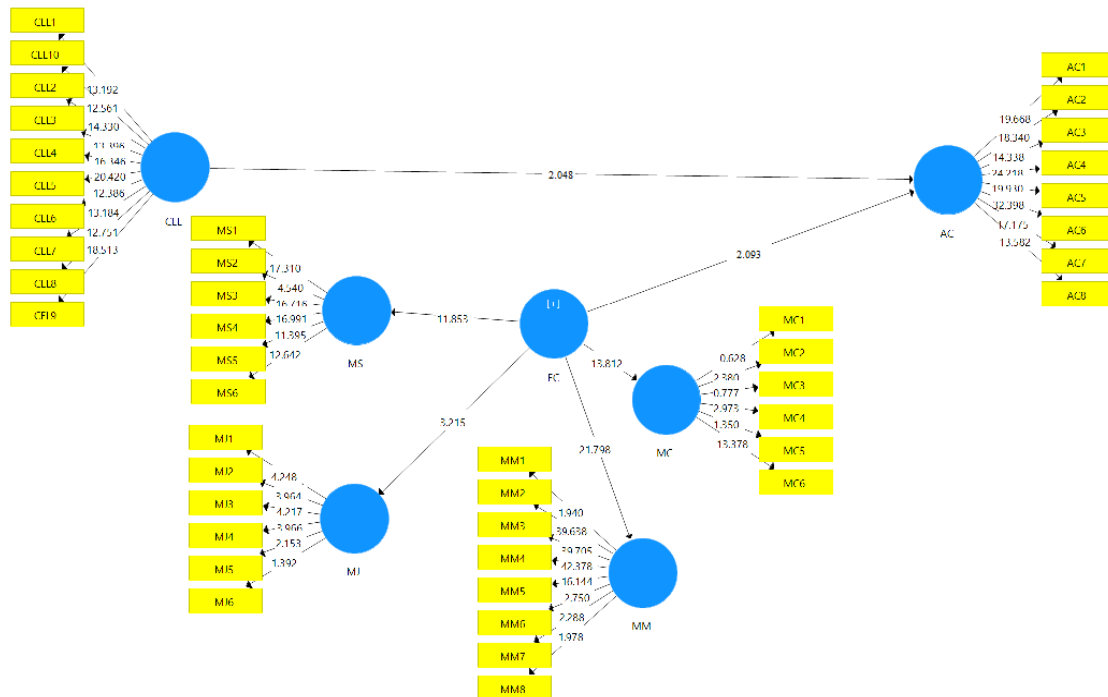
Figure.2: Direct Effect Result

Testing Moderating Effects

After testing the direct effect, a two-stage approach will be used to test the moderating effect of ethical climate (EC) on the relationship between coach ethical leadership (CEL) and affective commitment (AC). The two-stage method is employed when the study's objective is to examine the moderating effect relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables. The key findings of the moderating effect revealed that EC moderates the relationship between CEL and AC of Thailand SOCCER

players in a significant and positive way. These results indicate that EC is a significant moderator of the relationship between CEL and AC. Table.6 below predicts each of the previously discussed findings.

Table.6

Moderating Effect Results

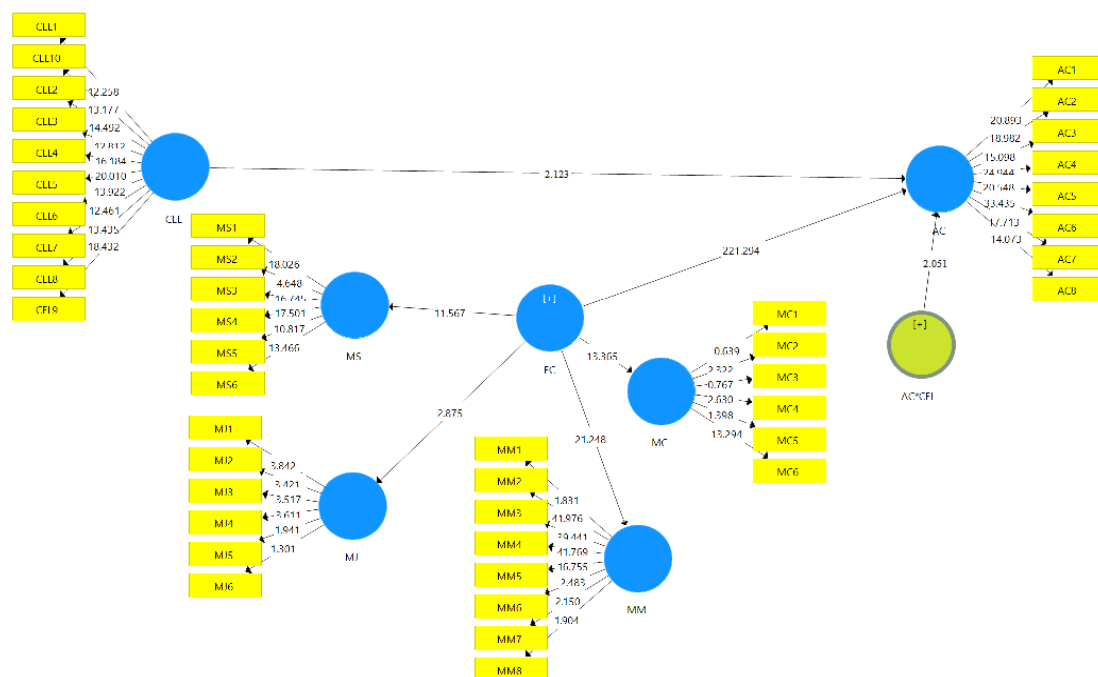|	Beta	SD	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
EC*CEL -> AC	0.125	0.061	2.051	0.040	Supported

Figure.3: Moderating Effect Model
"Note**:** CEL-coach ethical leadership; EC-ethical climate, AC-affective commitment."

Discussion and Conclusion

Players' emotional investment in their respective teams is considered a crucial aspect of soccer games. If employees lack commitment, the firm risks losing its competitive advantage. Several factors influence AC, particularly coach ethical leadership (CEL) and ethical atmosphere (EC) are significant predictors of an increase in AC among Thai soccer players. According to numerous recent studies on the ethical leadership of non-professional soccer coaches, coaches significantly impact players' ethical behavior. Consequently, the present study aims to evaluate the moderating effect of EC on the relationship between CEL and AC. Research indicates that a CEL influences the AC of their players in both a direct and indirect manner (through the ethical climate moderating relationship). Sports administrators and ethicists have known for some time that coaches can have a substantial impact on the ethical conduct of a sports organization (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2009; Thompson & Dieffenbach, 2016).

In contrast, this study contributes to our knowledge by demonstrating that the influence of soccer coaches on ethical player behavior persists long into adulthood. This study's findings support social cognitive theory and social learning theory concerning the interactions between adult soccer players and their coaches (Bandura, Kavussanu, & Ong, 2019). Individual ethical behavior is influenced by "the reciprocal interaction of personal and social influences," as stated by Bandura et al. (2019). It would appear that soccer players view their coaches as excellent moral guides. In addition, the researchers discovered that "people can learn what behavior is expected, rewarded, and punished by seeing others." According to our findings, soccer players strive to be like ethical coaches, and by setting a positive example, these coaches can boost their players' athletic competency. Increasing a player's AC is as simple as noticing that teammates with high AC are given a more significant role or more playing time by their coach. There are no significant differences between these processes and non-sporting situations.

In addition, by providing empirical support, this study contributes to understanding social exchange theory in coaching ethical leadership. According to a growing body of research, ethical leadership is usually motivated by pro-organizational behavior rather than financial benefit (Kalshoven et al., 2011, 2013). The assumption that soccer players display AC in response to ethical coaching is supported by statistical evidence. Even though this conclusion is unsurprising, given that soccer coaches are the closest and most influential leaders for their players, it does provide amateur soccer clubs with a fresh perspective. The findings should be interpreted with caution when applied to professional soccer teams and players, as the more significant pressure to accomplish in professional soccer creates an environment in which players' moral development is less effectively fostered (Constandt et al., 2018).

According to research, coaches' ethical leadership has an effect on both the inhibitive (as evaluated by the ethical environment) and pro-social (here measured by the players' AC) parts of ethical behavior (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2009). It is vital for various reasons to demonstrate the dual role of ethical leadership in shaping ethical behavior. Concerning the potential impact of coaches on the ethical climate, there are a variety of implications for soccer clubs, their members, and stakeholder groups. The outcomes of this study validate past research on leadership in sports by revealing the contextual influence of soccer coach leadership (Burton et al., 2017; Peachey et al., 2014). The second finding of this study is that coach leadership indirectly affects the prosaic component of ethical behavior via its inhibitive component. It makes it evident that restricting improper behavior would enhance proper conduct. The ethical climate was previously identified as having the potential to play a significant role in sports organizations (Burton et al., 2017). However, empirical research confirming the interaction between the inhibitive and pro-social characteristics of ethical behavior in sports leadership is still lacking. Nevertheless, even though unethical corporate cultures exist in other industries, our data demonstrates how important it is for soccer clubs to preserve an ethical culture. This is not surprising given the numerous recent examples of ethical issues on and off the soccer field.

Additionally, ethical climate research has advanced. Even though previous research (Laoruengthana et al., 2009) has focused on the impact of the ethical climate on North Thai athletic departments, this study broadens the scope by focusing on Thailand amateur soccer clubs. Also, paving the way for future cross-cultural comparisons of ethical behavior among athletes and sportspeople, we accept the challenge posed by Peachey et al. (2014) to investigate the functioning of leadership in the sport beyond the context of Thai sport. Therefore, Arnaud's (2010) conceptualization of Victor and Cullen's (1988) prevailing ethical environment, which recognizes all four processes of collective moral reasoning, is conceptually more legitimate than Victor and Cullen's (1988) conceptualization (Kalshoven et al., 2013; Newman et al., 2017). In other words, Victor and Cullen (1988) examined solely moral judgment, whereas Arnaud (2010) examined all four elements of collective moral reasoning (i.e., moral sensibility, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character). In addition, this study brought a new dimension to the literature by analyzing the many underlying mechanisms of coach ethical leadership of soccer clubs in relation to ethical behavior. It extends previous findings from the sports organization study that the length of an organization affects an individual's AC, particularly for the players. (Cuskelly & Boag, 2001; Kent & Chelladurai, 2001). According to mathematics, the more time one stays in a firm, the greater the associated benefits (such as knowledge with the company and the opportunity for advancement) (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). This analysis validates previous findings that organizational tenure only partially explains the variance in the AC (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). In addition, this study examines how a coach's ethical leadership influences the AC of their players. AC is undeniably a crucial competitive advantage for sports clubs in today's fast-paced environment, but it may also be advantageous for people (Cuskelly & Boag, 2001; Park & Kim, 2013).

Limitations ad Future Directions

In addition to several earlier contributions, the study featured several limitations that could become future research topics. Initially, the study was limited to Thailand because other industrialized nations could not be penalized. Consequently, future studies could focus on France, Canada, and other industrialized countries. Second, the study consisted of one moderating and one independent variable; however, several additional variables could influence AC. Thus a future investigation could include a moderating or another independent variable.

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