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THE ROLE OF ETHICAL CLIMATE ON SALESPERSON'S ROLE STRESS, JOB ATTITUDES, TURNOVER INTENTION, AND JOB PERFORMANCE

Fernando Jaramillo, Jay Prakash Mulki, and Paul Solomon

This study builds on previous research to investigate the effects of ethical climate on salesperson's role stress, job attitudes, turnover intention, and job performance. Responses from 138 salespeople who work for a large retailer selling high-end consumer durables at 68 stores in 16 states were used to examine the process through which ethical climate affects organizational variables. This is the first study offering empirical evidence that both job stress and job attitudes are the mechanisms through which a high ethical climate leads to lower turnover intention and higher job performance. Results indicate that ethical climate results in lower role conflict and role ambiguity and higher satisfaction, which, in turn, leads to lower turnover intention and organizational commitment. Also, findings indicate that organizational commitment is a significant predictor of job performance.

The pervasiveness of ethical scandals involving numerous organizations has shaken American confidence in business. As a result of this, business leaders and academics have revived interest in ethics. This paper examines the role of ethics in firm performance and long-term viability by explaining the role of company ethics on the salespeople within the firm. Ethical perceptions about a firm are closely related to its public image and success in building long-term relationships with customers (Schwepker and Hartline 2005; Thomas, Schermerhorn, and Dienhart 2004). Salespeople, as boundary spanners, are representatives of the firm and are responsible for managing relationships with customers. In view of this, there has been a growing awareness of the need to investigate the role of ethics in sales force success (e.g., Valentine and Barnett 2003; Weeks et al. 2004).

Sales force researchers have been particularly concerned about the effects of ethical climate on turnover intention and job performance (e.g., Schwepker 2001; Valentine and Barnett 2003; Weeks et al. 2004). Recent empirical evidence suggests that the effects of ethical climate on both turnover intention

and job performance are mediated by the salesperson's job attitudes. Research has shown that ethical climate results in higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which leads to lower turnover intention (Mulki, Jaramillo, and Locander 2006; Schwepker 2001; Valentine and Barnett 2003). Similarly, the positive effect of ethical climate on organizational commitment can result in better job performance (Weeks et al. 2004). The above-mentioned studies have extended our understanding of the processes by which ethics affect job performance and turnover intention. Another key mechanism—not included in these studies, which can explain why an ethical climate results in positive job attitudes, lower turnover intention, and higher performance—is found in role stress theory (Kahn et al. 1964; Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman 1970).

Research of the past three decades points out that salespeople are particularly prone to experience role conflict and role ambiguity (e.g., Netemeyer, Brashear-Alejandro, and Boles 2004; Walker, Churchill, and Ford 1975). This is because salespeople are in a boundary-spanning role and have to cope with multiple expectations from customers and management (Dubinsky and Mattson 1979; Walker, Churchill, and Ford 1975). Role conflict occurs when the salesperson believes that group expectations and demands are incompatible and cannot be simultaneously satisfied (Walker, Churchill, and Ford 1975). On the other hand, role ambiguity results when the salesperson is unclear about the duties and actions required in her or his job (Walker, Churchill, and Ford 1975). Because ethical climate provides cues about the ethical behaviors expected from salespeople, this research shows that it can constitute an important antecedent of the salesperson's role conflict and role ambiguity, ultimately resulting in lower sales force turnover and higher performance.

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The sales literature points out the role that ethics can play in role stressors (e.g., Chonko and Burnett 1983; Ho et al. 1997; Schwepker and Hartline 2005). In spite of this, research about the relationships between ethical climate and role stress is limited (Ho et al. 1997; Schwepker and Hartline 2005; Schwepker, Ferrell, and Ingram 1997). Examining the ethical climate and role stress relationship is critical given the known negative effect of role conflict and role ambiguity on salespersons' job attitudes, behavioral intention, and job performance (Brown and Peterson 1993; Churchill et al. 1985; Naumann, Widmier, and Jackson 2000).

Although previous research has examined some of the relationships depicted in Figure 1 (e.g., Schwepker and Hartline 2005, Weeks et al. 2004), research investigating the chain of effects from ethical climate to salespersons' job stress, to job attitudes, and, ultimately, to turnover intention and job performance is still lacking. The objective of this study is to extend our understanding of the mechanisms by which ethical climate affects turnover intention and sales force performance. Using role stress theory as the underlying framework, this objective is achieved by empirically testing a model that explains how ethical climate affects organizational variables. The importance of the above-described process is highlighted in *JPSSM*'s recent call for empirical models linking ethics with role stress (forthcoming Special Issue on Sales Force Ethics).

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Ethical climate can have both a direct and an indirect effect on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The indirect effect of ethical climate on job attitudes can be explained by the mediating function of role conflict and role ambiguity. In addition, job satisfaction and organizational commitment play a mediating role in the relationships among (1) role stress and turnover intention and (2) role stress and job performance. In summary, this study suggests that both job stress and job attitudes are the mechanisms through which a high ethical climate leads to lower turnover intention and higher job performance.

Ethical Climate and Role Stress

Role theory states that individuals become dissatisfied and performance drops when behaviors expected from them are inconsistent (Kahn et al. 1964; Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman 1970). A similar effect occurs when the individual perceives that the information about job duties is unclear (Kahn et al. 1964; Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman 1970). There has been a consensual view across business disciplines that role conflict and role ambiguity have a pervasive effect on job outcomes (Perrewé et al. 2002; Shepherd and Fine 1994; Turbe and

Collins 2000). These constructs are particularly important in sales. Role stress is inherent to salespeople, because, as boundary spanners, they often face multiple and often conflicting expectations from customers and the organization (Chonko and Burnett 1983; Dubinsky and Mattson 1979). In view of this, sales force researchers have long been interested in identifying organizational factors that can influence the salesperson's role conflict and role ambiguity (e.g., Behrman and Perreault 1984; Walker, Churchill, and Ford 1975).

Prior research indicates that organizational climate and management styles are important predictors of role stress (e.g., Bravo et al. 2003; Sager 1994; Singh 1998). Researchers have noted that organizations are likely to create role stress for workers when they fail to adequately communicate their expectations to them (Velde and Class 1996). Failure to communicate expectations is likely to be high when they are ethical in nature. This is because standards for judging what is right and wrong are based on social expectations that are neither universal nor static (Bartels 1967; Ho et al. 1997). In fact, some researchers have noted that managerial ethical judgments are often irrational and inconsistent (e.g., Curlo and Strudler 2001; Messick and Bazerman 2001). Lack of clarity about the firms' ethical expectations can be particularly troublesome in sales settings, because salespeople are known to face numerous ethical conflicts in their interactions with customers (Chonko and Burnett 1983; Lacznak and Murphy 1993; Schwepker 2003).

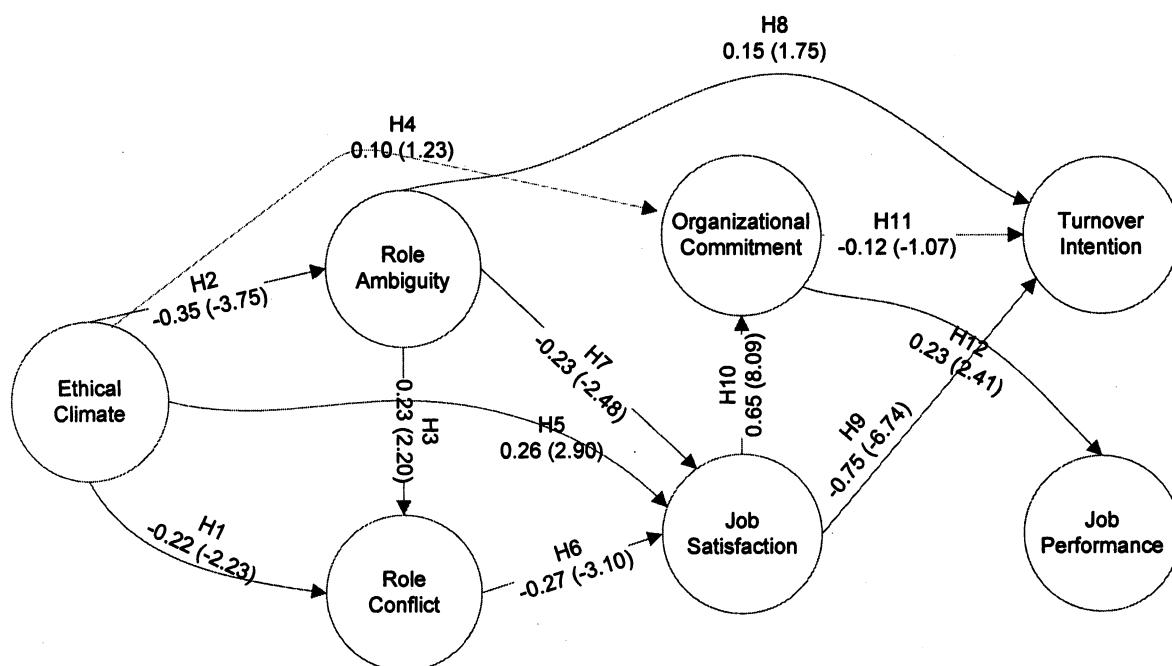
Ethical climate relates to the salesperson's perceptions about the organization's current practices, procedures, norms, and values with an ethical content that provides cues about acceptable behaviors (Babin, Boles, and Robin 2000; Schwepker 2001). These guidelines may reduce the salesperson's temptation to disregard ethical courses of action to make a sale. Ethical climate can help the individual answer the question "what should I do?" (Treviño, Butterfield, and McCabe 2001, p. 305), thus reducing role conflict and role ambiguity. There is empirical evidence of a significant negative relationship between ethical climate and salesperson's role conflict, $r = -0.35$ (Schwepker, Ferrell, and Ingram 1997). Also, a recent study found that ethical climate is related to customer service representatives' role ambiguity, $r = -0.21$ (Schwepker and Hartline 2005). However, the relationship between ethical climate and the salesperson's role ambiguity has not yet been tested. The above discussion suggests that

Hypothesis 1: Ethical climate is negatively associated with role conflict.

Hypothesis 2: Ethical climate is negatively associated with role ambiguity.

Numerous studies have found that the salesperson's role conflict and role ambiguity share a significant amount of variance (e.g., Boles, Johnston, and Hair 1997; Singh 1998). This

Figure 1
Ethical Climate Effects on Job Outcomes



Notes: Standardized paths are shown; dotted lines indicate that the path is statistically insignificant at $\alpha = 0.05$.

may be explained by the fact that both constructs primarily arise from the behavior and practices of the organization and the supervisor (Spector 1996). Although it has been suggested that role conflict may lead to role ambiguity (Behrman and Perreault 1984), it appears that a reversed directionality has received greater empirical support (e.g., Babakus et al. 1999; Low et al. 2001). When salespeople are not clear about what the organization expects from them (high role ambiguity), they are more likely to perceive that expectations from entities such as customers and management are incompatible (high role conflict) (Babakus et al. 1999). In view of this:

Hypothesis 3: Role ambiguity is positively related to role conflict.

Ethical Climate and Job Attitudes

Organizational commitment and job satisfaction are two of the most extensively studied attitudinal constructs in sales force research (Brown and Peterson 1993; Jaramillo, Mulki, and Marshall 2005). Organizational commitment relates to an individual's attachment to his or her organization, and is reflected in the relative strength of the individual's identification and involvement with it (Jaramillo, Mulki, and Marshall 2005). On the other hand, job satisfaction is a measure of the degree to which a person likes or dislikes his or her job (Spector 1997).

Research indicates that individuals develop a positive attitude toward the organization when the firm has explicit standards that help them distinguish between ethical and unethical behaviors (e.g., Treviño, Butterfield, and McCabe 2001; Valentine and Barnett 2003). The relationship between ethical climate and job attitudes may be explained by two factors. First, ethical climate may help the salesperson avoid engaging in unethical behaviors, such as using deceptive or coercive selling practices that will ultimately harm him or her via increased levels of stress (McFarland 2003; O'Dwyer and Madden 2006). Second, ethical climate is significantly related to customer orientation, which has been shown to enhance the salesperson's ability to develop long-term relationships with customers (Schwepker and Good 2004). When the level of stress experienced is low, salespeople are likely to be happier with their jobs, committed to the organization, and motivated to develop a mutually satisfying relationship with the customers. There is empirical evidence of the relationship between ethical climate and both job satisfaction and organizational commitment for salespeople (Mulki, Jaramillo, and Locander 2006; Schwepker 2001; Weeks et al. 2004).

Hypothesis 4: Ethical climate is positively related to organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 5: Ethical climate is positively related to job satisfaction.

Consequences of Role Stress

Job stress theory suggests that intrinsic job characteristics such as role conflict and role ambiguity lead to psychological strain (Cooper, Dewe, and O'Driscoll 2001; Jex 1998). Role conflict and role ambiguity are among the two most widely recognized sources of psychological strain in sales settings (Low et al. 2001; McFarland 2003; Netemeyer, Brashear-Alejandro, and Boles 2004). Role conflict is experienced when the salesperson perceives that some of the job requirements are incompatible, resulting in greater anxiety, tension, and, ultimately, low job satisfaction (Dubinsky and Mattson 1979; Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman 1970). Role ambiguity occurs when the salesperson is confused about what his or her job responsibilities are (Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman 1970). Such confusion leads to lower job satisfaction and high turnover intention (Low et al. 2001; Netemeyer, Brashear-Alejandro, and Boles 2004). Based on the above discussion, it is hypothesized that

Hypothesis 6: Role conflict is negatively related to job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 7: Role ambiguity is negatively related to job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 8: Role ambiguity is positively related to turnover intention.

Job Attitudes and Behaviors

Due to its effect on numerous employee outcomes, job satisfaction is the most widely studied variable in organizational research (Spector 1997). Turnover theories have suggested that turnover occurs because people who dislike their jobs will look for alternative employment opportunities (Spector 1997). Three meta-analyses have confirmed that a significant relationship exists between job satisfaction and turnover intention (Brown and Peterson 1993; Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner 2000; Tett and Meyer 1993). Furthermore, longitudinal studies have shown that job dissatisfaction leads to greater job search and causes turnover (e.g., Bretz, Boudreau, and Judge 1994; Fields et al. 2005).

On the other hand, researchers have noted that job satisfaction also has an indirect effect on turnover intention (e.g., Babakus et al. 1999; Low et al. 2001). This indirect effect of job satisfaction on turnover intention is explained by organizational commitment (Brown and Peterson 1993; Tett and Meyer 1993). When employees receive a sense of satisfaction from their jobs, they show a favorable overall attitude toward their workplace and respond with increased commitment to the organization. Ultimately, these employees have lower intention to quit (Raabe and Beehr 2003; Ramaswami and Singh 2003).

Organizational commitment reflects the individual's psychological identification and attachment to the organization.

Such attachment is associated with greater performance. Two meta-analyses provide evidence of a significant relationship between organizational commitment and job performance (Jaramillo, Mulki, and Marshall 2005; Meyer et al. 2002). Furthermore, the relationship between organizational commitment and job performance is stronger for sales as compared to nonsales employees (Jaramillo, Mulki, and Marshall 2005). This is because salespeople have (1) greater control over their job outcomes, and (2) their job outcomes are likely to be more visible than those of nonsales employees (Jaramillo, Mulki, and Marshall 2005). This leads us to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 9: Job satisfaction is negatively related to turnover intention.

Hypothesis 10: Job satisfaction is positively related to organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 11: Organizational commitment is negatively related to turnover intention.

Hypothesis 12: Organizational commitment is positively related to job performance.

METHOD

Sample

To collect data for this study, we received the cooperation of a large retailer that sells new and used boats and related marine products. The firm provided names and addresses for 265 salespeople working at 68 stores in 16 states. Each salesperson was mailed a cover letter requesting participation, a questionnaire, and a postage-paid return envelope. A personalized reminder letter was sent by the researchers two weeks after the first letter. A total of 138 usable responses were received, rendering a 63 percent response rate. Response rates of 60 percent or above are normally obtained when the study is sponsored by a firm and when reminders are used (e.g., Dixon and Schertzer 2005; Tuten and Neidermeyer 2004).

The age of the respondents ranged from 22 to 63 years, with a mean of 39.48 years (standard deviation = 10.26); seven participants were female and 131 were male. Selling experience ranged from a few months to 40 years, with a mean of 14.07 years (standard deviation = 10.38). The number of years worked for the company ranged from less than a year to 31 years, with a mean of 3.98 years (standard deviation = 4.68). The mean annual salary was \$79,600 (standard deviation = 34,739). A comparison of the means of both the model and demographic variables was used to test for nonresponse bias. A tercile split comparison revealed that no differences existed between early responses and later responses (Armstrong and Overton 1977; Larson and Chow 2003).

Measures

All constructs included in this study were operationalized with published scales (see the Appendix). *Ethical climate* was measured using Schwepker's (2001) seven-item scale, which has been widely used in sales settings (e.g., Mulki, Jaramillo, and Locander 2006; Weeks et al. 2004). The instrument contains items that measure (1) the existence of a written code of ethics, (2) the communication of ethical expectations to employees, (3) a commitment from management to ethical values, and (4) perceptions about the enforcement of ethical codes. A salesperson responding to the questionnaire would perceive a higher ethical climate when the managers of the firm communicate and demonstrate commitment to enforce ethical guidance in no uncertain terms.

Although the awareness of a code of ethics is different from the ethical conduct per se, codes of ethics can affect ethical behaviors because they send an unambiguous sign that the organization is aware of the need for ethical behaviors and mandates a commitment of such behaviors from the workforce (O'Dwyer and Madden 2006). In fact, salespeople who work for organizations that have ethical codes and enforce them are more likely to perceive ethical problems as more severe than salespeople who work for firms that do not have a code of ethics (Singhapakdi and Vitell 1991). In view of this, codes of ethics constitute a first step in achieving high ethical behaviors, particularly when the employee believes that there are consequences to violating codes of ethics (McClaren 2000; O'Dwyer and Madden 2006). Typical items from this scale include "My company strictly enforces policies regarding ethical behavior" and "Top management in my company has let it be known in no uncertain terms that unethical behaviors will not be tolerated." Cronbach's alpha was 0.88.

Role conflict and *role ambiguity* were measured using Singh, Verbeke, and Rhoad's (1996) three-item scales. Item examples were "I receive incompatible requests from two or more people" (RC) and "I know exactly what is expected of me" (RA). The reliability indices (α) were 0.77 and 0.76, respectively.

Job satisfaction was operationalized using Spector's (1985) three-item scale. The scale includes items such as "All in all, I am satisfied with my job" and "In general, I like working here." Cronbach's alpha was 0.92.

Organizational commitment was measured using Speier and Venkatesh's (2002) three-item scale. Item examples were "I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization" and "I talk up this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for." The reliability index (α) was 0.83.

Job performance was measured using Low et al.'s (2001) nine-item instrument. Salespeople were asked to compare their performance with their peer performance on issues such as "Achieving annual sales targets and other objectives" and

"Building effective relationships with customers." Cronbach's alpha was 0.90.

Turnover intention was measured using a single-item scale developed by Spector (1985), that is, "How often have you seriously considered quitting your present job?" The use of a single-item scale for measuring behavioral intention has been found appropriate to capture the construct (Wanous, Reichers, and Hudy 1997). Single-item measures have been widely used in the marketing literature to assess frequency of behaviors and to ask factual questions (e.g., Andrews et al. 2004; Valentine and Barnett 2003). A reliability of 0.85 was used to set the factor loading value and error variance (Donavan, Brown, and Mowen 2004).

Measure Validation

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to investigate the measurement properties of the scales used in this paper (Anderson and Gerbing 1988; Diamantopoulos and Siguaw 2000). The parameters of the model were estimated using the maximum likelihood method, CALIS procedure of SAS 8.0. The resulting indices suggest an acceptable fit ($\chi^2 = 365$, degrees of freedom [df] = 210, $p < 0.01$; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.076, CI_{90%} 0.063 to 0.089; comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.92; normed fit index [NFI] = 0.82; Bollen's nonnormed index [NNI] = 0.92), especially given that the power of the measurement model was high ($\pi = 0.98$, at $\alpha = 0.05$, $0.05 < \text{RMSEA} < 0.08$) (Diamantopoulos and Siguaw 2000; MacCallum, Browne, and Sugawara 1996; McQuitty 2004). Evidence of convergent validity exists when all indicator loadings (λ) are statistically significant (Diamantopoulos and Siguaw 2000; Speier and Venkatesh 2002). The results showed that all indicator loadings were significant at $\alpha = 0.05$ as indicated by t -values in excess of 1.96, thus providing validity evidence in favor of the items used to represent the constructs.

Reliability was assessed with the composite reliability (ρ_c) and average variance extracted statistics (ρ_v). As shown in Table 1, both indices suggest that the scales used are reliable (Diamantopoulos and Siguaw 2000). Table 1 also indicates that Cronbach's alpha is higher than 0.7 for all multiple-item measures.

Structural Model

The CALIS procedure of SAS 8.0 (maximum likelihood method) was used to perform a structural model to test the hypotheses implied in Figure 1. Hypotheses testing were conducted following a two-step process. First, the overall fit of the model was assessed with an evaluation of chi-square, RMSEA, CFI, NFI, and Bollen's NNI. Second, the signs and statistical significance of the path coefficients were used for hypothesis

Table I
Correlations, Reliabilities, and Descriptive Statistics

| | EC | RC | RA | OC | JS | JP | TI | GEN | AGE | TENR | EXPT |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------|------|-------------------|-------------------|-------|
| Ethical Climate (EC) | 0.88 ² | | | | | | | | | | |
| Role Conflict (RC) | -0.28 ¹ | 0.77 ² | | | | | | | | | |
| Role Ambiguity (RA) | -0.40 ¹ | 0.31 ¹ | 0.76 ² | | | | | | | | |
| Organizational Commitment (OC) | 0.42 ¹ | -0.28 ¹ | -0.41 ¹ | 0.83 ² | | | | | | | |
| Job Satisfaction (JS) | 0.43 ¹ | -0.37 ¹ | -0.41 ¹ | 0.64 ¹ | 0.92 ² | | | | | | |
| Job Performance (JP) | 0.37 ¹ | -0.23 ¹ | -0.32 ¹ | 0.27 ¹ | 0.26 ¹ | 0.90 ² | | | | | |
| Turnover Intention (TI) | -0.38 ¹ | 0.33 ¹ | 0.29 ¹ | -0.54 ¹ | -0.75 ¹ | -0.28 ¹ | | | | | |
| Gender (GEN) | 0.05 | -0.02 | 0.10 | -0.01 | 0.01 | 0.05 | -0.07 | | | | |
| Age (AGE) | 0.16 | -0.01 | -0.04 | 0.09 | -0.01 | 0.08 | 0.06 | 0.07 | | | |
| Tenure (TENR) | -0.02 | 0.15 | 0.10 | 0.01 | 0.08 | 0.05 | 0.09 | 0.07 | 0.25 ¹ | | |
| Total Work Experience (EXPT) | 0.18 ¹ | 0.04 | 0.02 | 0.12 | 0.06 | 0.09 | -0.03 | 0.09 | 0.82 ¹ | 0.23 ¹ | |
| Mean | 5.84 | 3.07 | 2.24 | 5.96 | 6.05 | 5.94 | 2.15 | . | 39.48 | 3.98 | 14.07 |
| Standard Deviation | 0.93 | 1.31 | 0.92 | 1.08 | 1.17 | 0.77 | 1.19 | . | 10.26 | 4.68 | 10.38 |
| Composite Reliability (ρ_c) | 0.84 | 0.75 | 0.68 | 0.81 | 0.86 | 0.85 | . | . | . | . | . |
| Average Variance Extracted (ρ_e) | 0.52 | 0.59 | 0.51 | 0.59 | 0.57 | 0.49 | . | . | . | . | . |

Notes: ¹ Correlations are significant at $\alpha = 0.05$; ² Cronbach's alphas in matrix diagonal.

testing. The overall fit of the model shown in Figure 1 was acceptable ($\chi^2 = 453$, df = 265; RMSEA = 0.076, CI_{90%} 0.064 to 0.088; CFI = 0.91; NFI = 0.81; Bollen's NNI = 0.91). The statistical power of the model was high $\pi = 0.99$, at $\alpha = 0.05$, $0.05 < \text{RMSEA} < 0.08$. When power is high, the likelihood of not rejecting a *truly bad model and theory* is low (MacCallum, Browne, and Sugawara 1996; McQuitty 2004). Given the satisfactory fit and power of the model, the significance and signs of the structural paths were used to evaluate the hypotheses (Figure 1). The model depicted in Figure 1 was compared to an alternative partially mediated model that contains direct effects from ethical climate to both turnover intention and job performance. The direct paths were statistically insignificant at $\alpha = 0.05$ ($\gamma = -0.02$, $t = -0.17$ and $\gamma = 0.21$, $t = 1.52$, respectively), providing evidence for the fully mediated model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main objective of this paper was to describe the process through which ethical climate affects the salesperson's job attitudes and behaviors. Results indicate that ethical climate is an important predictor of numerous organizational outcomes. This study draws attention to the important role played by firms and managers in communicating ethical guidelines, bringing clarity about ethical expectations, and thus reducing stress. It also discusses the urgent need to manage these perceptions to alleviate the negative impact on salesperson's performance and turnover intention, two variables that sales managers are mostly concerned with. This is the first study offering empirical evidence that both job stress and job attitudes are the means through which ethical climate leads to high turnover intention and low job performance. A clear understanding of these causal links is critical for successful managerial intervention.

Due to the nature of their boundary-spanning role, salespeople must deal with multiple expectations from customers and management (Johnston and Marshall 2005). Driven by the need to meet their performance quotas, salespeople often face an ethical dilemma in making the choice to use coercive selling tactics or lose sales (McFarland 2003). The resulting inner conflict faced by the salesperson is likely to result in emotional distress and, ultimately, higher turnover intention and lower performance (Laczniak and Murphy 1993; McFarland 2003; Schwepker 2003). Because ethical climate provides cues about the firm's ethical expectations, it can help salespeople resolve the inner conflict about inconsistent expectations from organizational stakeholders, diminish the confusion about job responsibilities, and enhance job satisfaction (Schwepker and Hartline 2005).

Table 2 summarizes the research hypotheses, structural path coefficients, and associated t -values. All hypotheses except for H4 and H11 were supported. As stated in H1 and H2, re-

sults indicate that ethical climate has a negative effect on role conflict ($\gamma = -0.22$, $t = -2.23$) and role ambiguity ($\gamma = -0.35$, $t = -3.75$). Also, consistent with H5, results demonstrate that ethical climate is an important predictor of job satisfaction ($\gamma = 0.26$, $t = 2.90$). Results of this study are consistent with previous findings about the negative effects of both role conflict ($\beta = -0.27$, $t = -3.10$) and role ambiguity ($\beta = -0.23$, $t = -2.48$) on job satisfaction,¹ thus offering support for H6 and H7, respectively (e.g., Boles, Johnston, and Hair 1997; Netemeyer, Brashears-Alejandro, and Boles 2004). Also, as indicated in H3, findings are consistent with prior research of salespeople showing that role ambiguity is a significant predictor of role conflict, $\beta = 0.23$, $t = 2.20$ (e.g., Babakus et al. 1999; Low et al. 2001). This study makes an important contribution to role stress research by showing that role conflict and role ambiguity partially mediate the effect of ethical climate on job satisfaction.

As predicted in H8 ($\beta = 0.15$, $t = 1.75$), this study confirms prior research indicating that role ambiguity is a significant antecedent of turnover intention (e.g., Brown and Peterson 1993; Netemeyer, Brashears-Alejandro, and Boles 2004). Also, results indicate that ethical climate has an indirect impact in reducing turnover intention via role conflict and role ambiguity.

Researchers have noted that job satisfaction is a critical organizational variable because of its known effect on both organizational commitment and turnover intention (Spector 1997). Results of this study are in line with previous sales research that found job satisfaction to have a direct effect on turnover intention (e.g., Low et al. 2001; Netemeyer, Brashears-Alejandro, and Boles 2004). Job satisfaction is negatively related to turnover intention (H9: $\beta = -0.75$, $t = -6.74$) because satisfied employees are less motivated to search for a new job (Spector 1997).

Also, satisfied employees are more likely to develop a positive emotional attachment to the organization (organizational commitment), which, in turn, results in better performance (Brown and Peterson 1993). Results show that job satisfaction predicts organizational commitment (H10: $\beta = 0.65$, $t = 8.09$), and organizational commitment leads to higher performance (H12: $\beta = 0.23$, $t = 2.41$). This is consistent with the results of a recent meta-analysis that found a positive relationship between the salesperson's organizational commitment and job performance (Jaramillo, Mulki, and Marshall 2005). This work adds credence to the notion that it is worth the effort for sales managers to develop strategies that improve job satisfaction. A critical finding of this study is that higher satisfaction occurs when salespeople are aware of organizational ethical values.

Although in the hypothesized direction, the direct relationship between ethical climate and organizational commitment (H2) was statistically insignificant ($\beta = 0.10$, $t = 1.23$).

Table 2
Hypotheses and Structural Paths

| Hypotheses | Parameter Statistics | | Hypotheses Testing* |
|---|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| | Standardized Parameter | t-Value | |
| H1: Ethical climate → role conflict | -0.22 | -2.23 | Supported |
| H2: Ethical climate → role ambiguity | -0.35 | -3.75 | Supported |
| H3: Role ambiguity → role conflict | 0.23 | 2.20 | Supported |
| H4: Ethical climate → organizational commitment | 0.10 | 1.23 | Not supported |
| H5: Ethical climate → job satisfaction | 0.26 | 2.90 | Supported |
| H6: Role conflict → job satisfaction | -0.27 | -3.10 | Supported |
| H7: Role ambiguity → job satisfaction | -0.23 | -2.48 | Supported |
| H8: Role ambiguity → turnover intention | 0.15 | 1.75 | Supported |
| H9: Job satisfaction → turnover intention | -0.75 | -6.74 | Supported |
| H10: Job satisfaction → organizational commitment | 0.65 | 8.09 | Supported |
| H11: Organizational commitment → turnover intention | -0.12 | -1.07 | Not supported |
| H12: Organizational commitment → job performance | 0.23 | 2.41 | Supported |

* Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Even though this relationship is significant at the correlation level ($r = 0.42, p < 0.01$), it becomes insignificant once the direct effect of job satisfaction and the indirect effects of role conflict, role ambiguity, and ethical climate are taken into account. However, this is consistent with the notion that ethical climate results in organizational commitment because it reduces role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) and increases job satisfaction.

Another unexpected finding was the lack of significance in the relationship between organizational commitment and turnover intention (H11: $\beta = -0.12, t = -1.07$). Organizational commitment becomes an insignificant predictor of turnover intention when the effects of job satisfaction and role ambiguity are taken into consideration. This is consistent with the findings of longitudinal research indicating that job dissatisfaction causes turnover (Bretz, Boudreau, and Judge 1994; Fields et al. 2005). Also, this is in line with the notion that stress resulting from the confusion of job responsibilities prompts employees to search for new jobs (Low et al. 2001; Netemeyer, Brashears-Alejandro, and Boles 2004).

This study confirmed that ethical climate has a positive effect on the salesperson's job attitudes and behaviors. But, more importantly, it presents evidence of the process by which ethical climate results in lower turnover intention and better job performance. Results indicate that ethical climate reduces role stress and job satisfaction, thereby increasing organizational commitment and job performance. Also, the increase in job satisfaction that results from ethical climate reduces turnover intention. This work highlights the positive effect on organizational variables of communicating the firm's ethi-

cal expectations to the sales force. Communication of ethical expectations is particularly important because it helps salespeople objectively assess whether organizational values are consistent with their personal values (Dubinsky and Ingram 1984). This assessment could result in perceptions of congruency between organizational expectations and personal values that are known to reduce stress and ultimately lead to positive job attitudes (Schwepker 1999).

A post hoc analysis was conducted to investigate the relationships between ethical climate and demographic variables. As shown in Table 1, the relationship between total work experience and ethical climate was statistically significant. This suggests that the salespeople who have been in the profession for a longer period are better aware of the importance of ethical climate and the implications of violating the ethical norms. Also, results indicate that ethical climate perceptions are not related to age, gender, or company tenure.

The findings of this study confirm the crucial role of sales force managers in creating an organizational climate where decisions are based on formally stated ethical guidelines (cf. Schein 1985). Such guidance helps salespeople solve the ethical dilemmas that are common to their positions, thus reducing role conflict and role ambiguity. By reducing role stress, the firm's ethical standards have a significant effect on the salesperson's job attitudes, ultimately reducing turnover intention and increasing performance. These research findings have important implications for both practitioners and academics, because they demonstrate that creating an ethical climate is not only the right thing to do but also has significant benefits for both the salesperson and the organization.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has shown that ethical climate is an important driver of a salesperson's well-being and performance. However, the positive effects of ethical climate on organizational outcomes are likely to depend on whether the existing ethical climate is a reflection of high moral principles. In fact, sales force researchers have recognized that a firm's ethical climate could contain organizational expectations that actually result in unethical sales force behaviors (Weeks et al. 2004). Future research is needed to distinguish between organizational ethical climate and ethical level.

Researchers have shown that a structural equation model can have an infinite number of statistically equivalent models that can provide equal fit (Hair et al. 1998; MacCallum et al. 1993). Because the acceptable fit indices for the model do not ensure that the proposed model is the best model, we used theory/prior research and meaningfulness of the model to justify the hypothesized causal links (MacCallum et al. 1993; Markus 2002). Additional research using experimental designs or longitudinal data may be used to further investigate the causal links among the model constructs. Also, the structural model tested in this paper assumes linear associations among variables, when, in fact, second-order or third-order relationships as well as interactions may be present (cf. Bhuiyan, Menguc, and Borsboom 2005; Singh 1998). Another limitation of this study is that data were collected from a single company. Finally, this study is limited by the social desirability bias inherent to self-reported measures of job performance (Jaramillo, Carrillat, and Locander 2003).

NOTE

1. Some researchers have argued that moderate levels of stress can have a positive effect on job satisfaction (e.g., Bhuiyan, Menguc, and Borsboom 2005; Singh 1998). The implied inverted U-shaped relationship between role stress and job satisfaction was tested with a quadratic regression model. Results of this analysis show no evidence of a curvilinear role stress and job satisfaction relationship ($\beta RC^2 = -0.06$, $t = -1.4$; $\beta RA^2 = 0.11$, $t = 1.4$).

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APPENDIX
Scale Items for Construct Measure

Ethical Climate

1. My company has a formal, written code of ethics.
2. My company strictly enforces a code of ethics.
3. My company has policies with regard to ethical behavior.
4. My company strictly enforces policies regarding ethical behavior.
5. Top management in my company has let it be known in no uncertain terms that unethical behaviors will not be tolerated.
6. If a salesperson in my company is discovered to have engaged in unethical behavior that results in primarily *personal gain* (rather than corporate gain), he or she will be promptly reprimanded.
7. If a salesperson in my company is discovered to have engaged in unethical behavior that results in primarily *corporate gain* (rather than personal gain), he or she will be promptly reprimanded.

Role Conflict

1. I receive incompatible requests from two or more people.
2. I receive an assignment without the manpower to complete it.
3. I receive an assignment without adequate resources and materials to execute it.

Role Ambiguity

1. Clear, planned goals and objectives exist for my job.
2. I know exactly what is expected of me.
3. I know how my performance is going to be evaluated.

Job Satisfaction

1. In general, I do not like my job (reversed item).
2. All in all, I am satisfied with my job.
3. In general, I like working here.

Organizational Commitment

1. I am proud to tell others that I am a part of this organization.
2. I talk up this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for.
3. I feel a sense of ownership for this organization rather than just being an employee.

Job Performance

1. Building effective relationships with customers.
2. Making effective sales presentations to customers and prospects.
3. Achieving annual sales targets and other objectives.
4. Understanding our services and their applications.
5. Understanding customer needs and work processes.
6. Contributing my sales unit profits.
7. Providing feedback to management.
8. Increasing territory market share.
9. Keeping expenses at acceptable levels.