Gordon Institute of Business Science
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The role of organisational ethical climate and management support in the sales performance goal pressure and ethical behaviour relationship

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Abstract

Salespeople's ethical behaviour has a significant part in maintaining the reputation of organisations in South Africa. While performance goal pressure is necessary for optimum sales performance, failure to act ethically can harm the organisation's brand image. However, there are indications in literature that pressure can impact behaviour.

This research employed a quantitative explanatory cross-sectional design, gathering responses from 212 participants in total to test the relationships between performance goal pressure, organisational ethical climate, and perceived management support as predictors, with salesperson ethical behaviour as the predicted variable. The analysis controlled for the influence of age, gender, business model, years of experience, education level, industry type and years of experience under the same manager.

The analysis depicted that higher performance goal pressure was associated with lower ethical behaviour among salespeople. Furthermore, it was found that an organisational ethical climate intensifies the adverse effects of performance goal pressure on salespeople's ethical behaviour. However, perceived management support did not correlate with salesperson ethical behaviour nor moderate the relationship between performance goal pressure and salesperson ethical behaviour.

Organisations looking to decrease unethical practices within sales teams must thoroughly understand the interactions between these constructs. Putting an organisational climate in place and management which motivates the salespeople to abide by the rules and regulations will lessen harmful effects and could assist in protecting the ethical reputation of the organisation.

key words

Salesperson ethical behaviour, performance goal pressure, organisational ethical climate, perceived management support, sales and ethics.

Plagiarism

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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List of abbreviations or accronyms

CFI – Comparative fit index

DA – Disciplinary action

EFA – Exploratory Factor Analysis

HQP – High-quality pressure

OEG – Organisational ethical governance

KMO – Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin index

OEC – Organisational ethical climate

PGP – Performance goal pressure

PMS – Perceived management support

RMSEA – Root mean square error of approximation

SEB – Salesperson ethical behaviour

UPB – Unethical pro-organisational behaviour

1 Chapter 1: Introduction to Research Problem.

1.1 Introduction

The persistent pressure in sales can create a conducive ground for unethical behaviours (Badrinarayanan et al., 2019; M. Chen & Chen, 2023; Lussier et al., 2021). While performance pressure can be essential for driving employees to leverage their creativity and excel, high sales target pressure can motivate salespeople to deviate negatively from ethical conduct. An ethical climate is crucial for organisational success because it can positively influence various aspects of salespeople's jobs and is tangible (Itani et al., 2019; Roy et al., 2024). Therefore, an ethical climate has a significant contribution to salespeople's success. This study examined how a company's ethical climate influences the link between ethical behaviour and pressure to meet sales targets. Support from ethical leaders and sales managers for salespeople to achieve their target influences ethical behaviours (Badrinarayanan et al., 2019; M. Chen & Chen, 2023; Cheng et al., 2019). Understanding how subordinates view managers' support is crucial, and moderation by managers' support on the link between ethical behaviour and performance goal pressure was examined.

The social learning theory was used as the lens to investigate how salespeople perceive organisational culture and the support they receive from their managers. (Bandura 1977; Bandura 1986). Thus, the support and culture will inform how they behave when faced with an ethical conflict.

The study examined how sales performance pressure and salespeople's behaviour links are influenced by the ethical atmosphere of the organisation. It also looked into how managers' support affected the link between salespeople's ethical behaviour and the ethics-related atmosphere of the organisation. Various research studies have evaluated the relationships of the constructs under review separately; however, no research has been found that examined the conceptual framework suggested in this paper. In particular, no research has been found that investigated simultaneously the moderating effect of managers' support and organisational climate related to ethics on the link between performance goal pressure and the ethics-related behaviour of salespeople across various industries.

An outline of the research issue was given in Chapter 1, starting with the background information in Subsection 1.2. The research problem was described in Subsection 1.3, and the purpose statement was presented in Subsection 1.4. The study's theoretical contributions were examined in Subsection 1.5 of the chapter, followed by its practical consequences in Subsection 1.6. Lastly, a summary of the chapter was provided in Subsection 1.7.

1.2 Background

Ethical and unethical behaviours have existed throughout human civilisation's history (Al Halbusi et al., 2021), and there is a sage of unethical behaviours worldwide (Zhi et al., 2023). Al Halbusi et al. (2021) noted that owing to ethical challenges and issues within corporations and governments, researchers worldwide have indicated that individuals with compromised ethical behaviour often prioritise and attain their objectives and ambitions, sometimes at the expense of organisations or corporations. Businesses that engage in unethical sales practices risk severe consequences and potential harm to their future company existence (Badrinarayanan et al., 2019; Roy et al., 2024). Despite governance and legislation, organisations' ethical transgressions are still happening (Sarwar et al., 2020). The sales context presents many challenges to salespeople, which makes it conducive to unethical conduct.

Only 50.00% of employees who interact with customers succeed despite many organisations investing large sums of money in enabling their salespeople to succeed (Lussier et al., 2021; Lyngdoh et al., 2021). Most working-class individuals are susceptible to ethical risks; however, salespeople are more at risk based on the nature of their work (Oh et al., 2022). Owing to the demanding characteristics of the work, salespeople and business development professionals may have several opportunities to engage in misbehaviour (Badrinarayanan et al., 201; Lussier et al., 2021). These opportunities for unethical behaviour can be worsened by sales performance targets intrinsic to salespeople and the fact that they sometimes work in remote areas where they are not physically monitored.

The employment of ethical climate in organisations influences salespersons' ethical behaviours. (Al Halbusi et al., 2021; Itani et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2017). The organisation's ethical environment strongly influences employees' ethical behaviour as employees perceive that the prevailing ethical climate affects organisational decision-making procedures and the performance target-setting structure. They tend to behave positively when the ethical environment is positive (Al Halbusi et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2024). Itani et al. (2019) and Oh et al. (2022) revealed a direct positive link between salespeople's ethical behaviour and a supportive ethical environment.

However, there is ever-increasing pressure on the organisation to increase sales performance, burdening salespeople to bring the business (Kadic-Maglajlic et al., 2019; Lussier et al., 2021; Schwepker, 2019). The burden and outcome-based sales targets cause sales performance pressure on the salespeople. This research will focus on sales target pressure, a part of performance goal pressure.

Leaders or sales managers should direct the salespersons to achieve targets; however, the achievement should be done ethically, and behaviours that destroy the image of organisations should be stopped (Cheng et al., 2019; Schwepker, 2019) The manager's ethical behaviour can potentially affect the salespeople's ethical behaviour and the execution of performance targets. Schwepker (2019) pointed out that another variable that has received limited focus is ambiguity in handling ethical circumstances. The support of the sales manager is crucial in clarifying grey areas regarding ambiguity in ethical behaviour. Even in a positive ethical climate, ambiguity requires managers' support to influence ethical behaviour outcomes. The several ethical scandals organisations have experienced in the last decade indicate the need for more managers' support in ethical decision-making (Fleischman et al., 2019; Schwepker, 2019). Thus, this current study intends to find out how a manager’s support can strengthen the correlation between performance goal pressure and the salesperson’s ethical behaviour.

It is necessary to influence salespeople's decision-making to remain within the parameters of ethical behaviour because they link their compensation system to their sales outcomes. (Kuenzi et al., 2020; Oh et al., 2022). Furthermore, the salesforce should be educated that it is unacceptable to defend unethical action as advantageous to the business or salespeople (Cheng et al., 2019). This calls for work

atmosphere and management support, which ensures that there is an enforcement for the salespeople to execute their work ethically.

1.3 Research problem

Badrinarayanan et al. (2019) suggested looking at the connection between salespeople's performance and unethical behaviour in terms of ethical management. According to Badrinarayanan et al. (2019), deeper enquiry is required to determine what motivates salespeople to imitate organisational behaviours. Ethical management connections and organisation-specific characteristics are among the ones that have been found to influence good decision-making emulation. The managers' support and organisational ethical climate can be considered as organisational characteristics, and hence their moderating effect on the correlation between ethical behaviour and the performance goal pressure was examined in this study.

Lussier et al. (2021) recommended research be done on how salespeople's weariness encourages them to act unethically. The role that managerial styles and exhaustion play related to employee misconduct are linked to the organisational ethical climate and sales target pressure. The research will not include an exhaustion construct; however, this highlighted the significance of the ethical climate on ethical behaviour. Furthermore, Newman et al. (2017) pointed out that organisations' rules and regulations are related to behaviours affected by the ethical climate. Therefore, this research included organisational ethical climate and sales target pressure in the design.

In Lussier et al. (2021), the supervisors' support moderating role between exhaustion and ethical behaviour was investigated. Although the current study will not focus on exhaustion, this call demonstrated the need to comprehend the function of management in the salespeople’s ethical behaviour. Al Halbusi et al. (2021) pointed out that "it was demonstrated by several studies that there are inconsistent outcomes for the relationship between ethical climate and ethical behaviour among employees" (p. 164). The results indicated conflicting findings on link between salespeople's ethical behaviour and the ethical climate. These inconsistencies indicate that various contexts or situations influence this relationship. According to this study, the

presence of performance goal pressure might affect the ethical atmosphere in several ways. Furthermore, Lyngdoh et al. (2023) recommended future research on management-salespeople dyads in relation to unethical behaviour, which further indicated the need to examine the management's influence on the salespeople's behaviour. The researcher looked into how managers' support might moderate between the pressure to meet performance goals and ethical behaviour. Furthermore, the research also tested the direct effect of management support on ethical behaviour.

Unrealistic goals put pressure on salespeople, which may result in them behaving unethically (DeTienne et al., 2022; Hong, 2019). The research proposed that sales performance pressure may influence the ethical behaviour of sales personnel. The underlying assumption is that pressure is a negative form of motivation and diminishes rewards. Although motivation and rewards are not studied here, the current research argues that sales target pressure, a form of performance goal pressure, can influence the ethical behaviour of the salesperson. The direct pressure to ethical behaviour relationship was tested before, and this study will act as a confirmatory study on this relationship with regards to the specific type (sales target pressure) of goal pressure.

Individual pairs of the proposed constructs have been found in literature: Lyngdoh et al. (2023) investigated supervisor support influence on ethical behaviours, Al Halbusi et al. (2021) investigated the direct effects of climate and leadership on ethical behaviour, Sarwar et al. (2020) and Badrinarayanan et al. (2019) did a quantitative analysis between ethical leaders on ethical behaviour. Brown & Treviño (2006) investigated role of climate and ethical behaviour. However, the basis for the research model in Figure 1, which applies the lens of social learning theory, is unique and has not been found in the existing literature in particular investigating the simultaneous moderation by ethical climate and management support on the link between a specific goal pressure element (sales target pressure) and salespeople ethical behaviour; hence, this investigation model will unpack the relationships based on this model as no study has been found which unified all the constructs into a single framework and conducted nationwide in South Africa spanning all sectors.

The research, therefore, asks what the role of organisational climate and management assistance is in the correlation between performance goal pressure (sales target pressure) and salesperson ethical behaviour. Does a target pressure increase the likelihood of salespeople acting unethically? Does perceived management support or organisational ethical artmosphere predict salespeople ethical behaviour? Does a positive organisational ethical climate increase how target pressure affects unethical behaviour in the sales context? Does the manager's support strengthen the link between sales target pressure and the ethical behaviour of salespeople?

1.4 Purpose statement

The study investigated the function of organisational ethical atmosphere (climate) and management support in helping to associate sales performance pressure with ethical behaviour. Specifically, the research looked into the moderating function of organisational ethical climate on sales target pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour relationship. It also investigated the moderating function of the managers' support on sales target pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour relationship.

In other words, the study examined the connection between the sales target pressure and salespeople's propensity for unethical behaviour in company-to-company and business-to-customer contexts (Itani et al., 2019). The study concentrated on how sales ethical behaviour was influenced by the pressure of performance goals exerted on the salesforce (Chen & Chen, 2023). Furthermore, the effect of the manager's support was investigated in terms of how it affects the connection between sales target pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour (Lussier et al., 2021). The study analysed the moderating function of the ethical environment on link between the target pressure and the salespeople's ethical behaviour. The direct effects of organisational ethical atmospheres and perceived management support on ethical behaviour were also investigated. After testing the relationships, mitigating techniques were suggested to help businesses reduce their salespeople's unethical behaviour.

Thus, the study examined the following relationships:

1. Sales target pressure linkage to salespeople's ethical behaviour.

2. Company ethical climate linkage to salespeople’s ethical behaviour.
3. Influence of company ethical climate upon the correlation between ethical behaviour and sales target pressure.
4. Investigation on the role of management support in the association between sales target pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour.

1.5 Contribution of research to theory

The study clarified the predictive mechanism in ethical behaviour by looking at the moderation role of the organisational ethical atmosphere (climate) and perceived management support between the sales target pressure and ethical behaviour relationship. Earlier studies already indicated an inverse goal pressure and ethical behaviour relationship (Chen & Chen, 2023; Zhu et al., 2023). However, they did not exhaust the mechanisms that influence the link. Supervisor support influence on ethical behaviour was investigated by Lussier et al. (2021) as a moderator, and ethical climate was used as a mediator in the scrutinisation by Al Halbusi et al. (2021) and Sookdawoor & Grobler (2022). This study uniquely couples ethical climate and management support as moderators. This approach uncovers the conditional implications of these factors on the behaviours of salespeople under performance pressure.

The insights gained from this study emphasised how management support and ethical climate can enhance the learning process by providing guidance and reinforcing ethical behaviour across various industries in South Africa, thus broadening the applicability of these findings beyond a single industry context. For instance, the Al Halbusi et al. (2021) sample was in Iraq, and theLussier et al. (2021) investigation was in North America, and they also selected particular industries. Therefore, the South African setting and multi-industry analysis contribute to the generalisation of the interplay between the variables, showcasing how these dynamics may function in diverse organisational environments. Additionally, the study highlights the function of control variables in analysing the relationships, revealing their effect on the outcomes.

The research contributes to social learning theory by providing critical insights into how organisational factors shape the learning and adoption of ethical behaviours

among salespeople, especially by zeroeing on the contribution of ethical climate and management support.

1.6 Contribution of research to practice

The South African Business Ethics Survey indicated that 71% of workers in organisations confirmed their commitment to following the organisation's ethical conduct (The Ethics Institute, 2019). Furthermore, 64% of organisations in South Africa have ethical responsibilities clearly defined within the companies. Despite these positive statistics, cases of unethical behaviour continue to occur, making it essential to understand the factors contributing to this behaviour and the mechanisms involved. The business environment has become more complex, and pressure is ever-increasing, making it necessary to examine the link between pressure and ethical behaviour (Anand, Bowen, & Rangarajan, 2023).

One of the characteristics of a sales leader is being fair and just, and the commandment of followership is done through valuing the rights of others and maintaining ethical behaviour during hardships (Badrinarayanan et al., 2019). The management has the potential to generate salesforce creativity in the presence of pressure without participating in unethical behaviours (Mai et al., 2022). The support of sales managers was investigated in this research to determine how it strengthens the link between performance goal pressure and salespersons' ethical behaviour. From the insights of understanding the manager's moderating role, organisations can develop strategies to create a work environment that promotes ethical behaviour. Training can also be made for managers to recognise the importance of ethical behaviour, which enhances management's ability to be role models and effectively promote ethical behaviours.

The effect of sales target pressure on salespeople ethics related behaviour of salespeople was analysed in this study. Once the relationships have been established and found to be significant, recommendations will be made on how salespeople can be motivated to conduct business ethically, even in the face of sales target pressure, which is a present reality in the sales environment (Anand Bowen, & Rangarajan, 2023). This can eventually improve the salesforce's motivation and

well-being. Furthermore, companies can balance sales outcomes and ethical considerations by understanding the effects of pressure.

In addition, a deeper awareness of the moderating function of the organisation's ethical atmosphere can assist companies in mitigating risks associated with unethical behaviour. Organisational climates are critical to influencing the ethical behaviour of employees, including salespeople (Newman et al., 2017). Companies can avoid reputational damage and customer dissatisfaction by proactively addressing unethical behaviour, leading to sustainable and successful business operations.

1.7 Conclusion

The study highlighted the crucial influence that management support and organisational ethical climate have on how salespeople behave ethically when under pressure to reach sales goals. By investigating the moderating roles of organisational ethical climate and management support on the relationship between performance goals, the research highlighted the sophisticated connections between these elements and their consequences on ethical behaviour in sales environments. A strong ethical atmosphere and supportive management can significantly reduce the propensity for unethical behaviour, even in high-pressure situations.

These insights advanced the theoretical understanding of ethical behaviour in sales and offered practical guidance for organisations seeking to balance performance expectations with ethical behaviour. By having a supportive and ethically grounded organisational climate, companies can enhance their salesforce's ethical behaviour, leading to more sustainable and prosperous business practices.

Chapter Two contained the literature review. Chapter Three presented the study hypothesis and research questions. The technique and design outline were presented in Chapter Four, while the data was analysed and unveiled in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively. The research conclusion was presented in chapter seven.

2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The social learning theory, which functions as the conceptual foundation for this investigation, and its analysis are covered in this section. The section defined the salesperson. The research constructs were reviewed: performance goal pressure (sales target pressure), organisational ethical climate, perceived management support, and salespeople's ethical behaviour. Theoretical framework development for comprehending the link between the constructs was done using the literature review. Furthermore, the aid of control variables was discussed.

2.2 Salespeople

Salespeople are individuals employed in organisations to sell products or solutions to the companies' customers (Bilro et al., 2023). The salespeople are compensated by organisations based on how much they sell and the relationships created for the sustainability of businesses. Their bonuses are linked to the sales figures. They perform these activities in person, such as in retail shops or online using internet tools. To succeed and achieve their goals, a salesperson should be able to convince customers to buy goods or services from the company in which they are employed. (Delpechitre et al., 2019). Thus, salespeople need to be regulated when they are trying to win a customer to accept a sale. At the same time, companies have strategies to grow continuously, and the burden of increasing sales and revenue is put upon the salespeople; hence, companies should ensure this pressure does not result in unethical behaviour (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). Companies may regulate this pressure through management or supervisor support and by having an atmosphere that promotes and discourages ethical behaviour during the selling process.

2.3 Theory

"Early work conceptualized Social learning as individual learning that takes place in a social context and is hence influenced by social norms, e.g., by imitating role models." (Reed et al., 2010, p. 2). Social learning theory is a framework for understanding how people learn behaviours through direct experience and indirect

through observing others and the surrounding environment (Bandura, 1971). The theory emphasises how important social connections are and how the environment shapes behaviour. The main components of social learning theory include observing, imitating, attention, motivation and reinforcement. Businesses can create an ethical environment that encourages moral behaviour and increases sales by shaping what employees observe and are motivated to do.

According to the social learning theory that Bandura (1971) created, people's knowledge of behaviours, skills, and attitudes is acquired through observing others (Bandura, 1971, 1986; Bandura & Walters, 1977). In the sales context, salespeople can learn rewardable or tolerated behaviour by observing managers, colleagues and the work environment and start imitating the same. Under conditions of a favourable ethical climate and ethical management, salespeople can emulate ethical behaviour even in the presence of sales target pressure (Badrinarayanan et al., 2019). The emulation of ethical behaviours may always result in ethical behaviours in the execution of their work.

According to social learning theory, individuals are able to acquire knowledge via reinforcement or punishment (Bandura, 1971, 1986; Bandura & Walters, 1977). Direct reinforcement, which involves rewarding and meeting sales targets ethically, will encourage ethical behaviour. Furthermore, vicarious reinforcement through celebrating ethical behaviours will encourage moral behaviours. In addition, punishment for unethical behaviours will discourage salespeople from engaging in such practices. Through motivation, role modelling encourages ethical conduct (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). Ethical managers who are supportive enhance the ethical environment and will be seen as role models by employees, and salespeople will be motivated to emulate their role models (Badrinarayanan et al., 2019). This resonates with the four study constructs, namely performance goal pressure, perceived management support, organisational ethical climate and salesperson ethical behaviour.

The theory also emphasises that the efficacy of one to carry out a task is crucial, such that the likelihood of adopting new behaviours is influenced by self-efficacy. Thus, higher self-efficacy salespersons are inclined to innovate in the face of stretched targets and continue to behave ethically (Lussier et al., 2021; Peterson,

2020). Although this study will not examine the self-efficacy and reward systems as conditions in the pressure-behaviour relationship, It recognises that salespeople with greater self-efficacy are prone to behaving ethically even when faced with heightened sales target pressure. In this case, the salespeople could resist the influence of sales target pressure to act unethically.

The social learning theory posits that what is given attention and focused on will influence behaviour (Bandura, 1986; Bandura & Walters, 1977; Bandura Albert, 1971). In the sales context of organisations, where attention is given to sales targets and ethical behaviour, employees can adapt their behaviours accordingly. The clarity of what is given attention gives importance to focusing on management support and the company's ethical climate, as this is the foundation for clarity of the rules and regulations. Thus, in the face of a positive ethical climate and clarity of consequences, salespeople are inclined to behave ethically, even under pressure from sales performance.

Furthermore, Al Halbusi et al. (2021) discussed and recommended the social learning theory to investigate variables that include employees' ethical climate and behaviour. Employees are likely to emulate their managers as role models for ethical decision-making as, according to Bandura (1971), people model their behaviour based on their environment. Therefore, the salespeople emulate the company codes of conduct and managers' direction when making sales decisions. Managers who set good examples for ethical behaviour are likely to produce and encourage ethical conduct of salespersons, mainly if they act ethically (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). They can direct the moral behaviour of salespeople through reward and punishment. The theory was also used in related studies on how employees can behave ethically through their leadership influence (Gabler & Kalra, 2024). Given the premises of social learning theory, the study examined each of the constructs of the study.

2.4 Performance goal pressure (sales target pressure)

The market environment has become very competitive, and companies set up strategies to remain relevant and competitive (Zhu et al., 2023). Organisations are looking for high performers in their workplace, including salespeople. Performance pressure is associated with various advantages in the workplace, and it is not

possible for organisations to eradicate pressure on employees, including the salesforce (Spoelma, 2022). Removing unethical behaviour is impractical as it is opined that under pressure, employees would perform at their best. “Performance pressure is employees’ perception of the urgency of achieving high performance.” (Zhu et al., 2023, p. 467). When pressure is exerted on high performers, they always desire to achieve more, and organisations take advantage of this pressure to increase performance continuously. When salespeople are challenged with pressure, they are expected to become ethically creative to increase revenue according to the organisation's expectations. Irrespective of the benefits, the pressure needs to be controlled so that it doesn’t result in unethical behaviour. The need for pressure and ethical behaviour, seen as inversely related, calls for further investigation of the mechanisms that can correct the relationship, as unethical behaviour has adverse effects on organisations.

DeTienne et al. (2022) and Rostami et al. (2019) also alluded that the world has become very competitive, and it now appears more challenging for salespeople to fulfil their objectives than before. Because companies are always looking for growth opportunities, there may be instances where they set stretched sales targets with the hope that the salespersons will be innovative and work harder ethically to achieve revenue (DeTienne et al., 2022; Rostami et al., 2019). Instead of motivating salespeople to be creative and execute their jobs, unrealistic goals put higher pressure on them, which may result in them acting in an unethical manner (DeTienne et al., 2022). On the upside, unrealistic targets can result in increased revenue but at the expense of increased pressure on the salespeople. Further to the dynamic and competitive environment, the pressure is compounded by performance management systems such as management by objectives, which requires salespeople to achieve their targets based on agreement with their management (M. Chen & Chen, 2023). Chen & Chen (2023) opined that performance pressure is negatively related to ethical behaviour and is one of the sources of employee misconduct.

Performance pressure is considered an antidote for organisational creativity and efficiency(Mitchell et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2023). The organisation's management consciously pressures employees to provide more deliverables and increase efficiencies. Under certain pressures, there is also a downside, where the employees may end up being involved in unethical behaviours due to the pressure to meet the

demanded sales targets. Salespeople may see challenging pressure as threatening and can consider unethical means to achieve desired goals (Zhu et al., 2023). Hence, there was a need to study the mechanisms that promote ethical behaviour among salespeople.

When set too high, performance goals become a breeding ground for unethical behaviour (Welsh et al., 2019). Welsh et al. (2019) declared that high-performance goals increase performance, while less-stretched goals decrease performance. Therefore, there is a conflict between setting goals higher, which increases performance pressure, causing potential ethical misconduct and lowering goals, which reduces performance and may resolve unethical behaviour. Organisations would instead stretch the goals to improve performance and look for mitigating actions for unethical behaviour. The main focus will be to set higher goals while motivating the salespeople to achieve the outcome ethically.

The part of the organisation that brings revenue is sales only, and employees involved in sales are under pressure to meet targets, which is vital to the survival of companies (Rapp et al., 2020). Sales target pressure accompanies various sales positions to meet the required goals or go beyond (B. W. Brown et al., 2022). The salespeople are under pressure to perform; however, some of the sales functions are conducted outside the organisations and away from the influence of supervisors, creating opportunities for unethical behaviour in order to meet sales targets (Hong, 2019).

It is argued that salespeople are more prone to encountering ethical issues due to their work which involves connecting the organisations to external parties (Wang et al., 2024). In the challenge of commission pressure and the drive to meet targets, salespeople may utilise available advantages to become successful by engaging in unethical behaviour. Because of the pressure, the unethical behaviour may include giving customers stretched and inaccurate information (Wang et al., 2024). To worsen the scenario, the management may be going through similar excessive challenges and prioritising financial goals compared to other objectives and may decide to overlook some of the unethical behaviours (Sookdawoor & Grobler, 2022). In the presence of excessive goals and pressure to deliver, a possible avenue to strengthen ethics will be management support and organisational rules and

regulations that guide the selling behaviour. Hence, over and above the pressure of the goal, the researcher looked at the contribution of the organisational ethical climate and management support.

Part of the rewards for salespeople is directly linked to achieving the sales targets, which may put unnecessary pressure on the salesperson (DeTienne et al., 2022; Oh et al., 2022). Schwepker and Good (2022) suggested that higher stress levels lead salespeople to act more unethically, and Lussier et al. (2021) opined that pressure and failure can motivate salespeople to act unethically. It was also suggested that higher performance goal pressure is directly linked to unethical behaviour (Zhi et al., 2023). In addition, in the presence of higher sales target pressure, salespeople may act unethically with the justification that they are working in favour of their organisation to meet objectives (Cheng et al., 2019). Higher targets are associated with higher target pressure; hence, it can be argued that a higher-pressure goal harms or discourages ethical behaviour. That is, higher sales target pressure negatively affects salespeople's ethical behaviour. Therefore, it is possible to hypothesise that:

H1. There is an inverse relationship between performance goal pressure (sales target pressure) and the ethical behaviour of salespeople.

2.5 Organisational ethical climate

The ethical environment is described "as a composite of organizational members' perceptions of the ethical values and behaviors supported and practized by organizational members" (Schwepker & Good, 2004, p. 170). According to Bandura (1971), the social learning theory put forward that individuals learn behaviours from their environment; therefore, the ethical climate creates an enforcing environment that shapes the ethical behaviour of the salespeople. Furthermore, Itani et al. (2019) observed that a strong ethical climate maintains an environment conducive to employee satisfaction; hence, this research proposes that organisational climate is instrumental in the employees' ethical behaviour role.

Organisations establish guidelines and behavioural standards regarding how they operate; this includes systems for measuring performance and goal setting and how

business is expected to be conducted (Al Halbusi et al., 2021; Kuenzi et al., 2020; Oh et al., 2022). An organisational control system encompasses a series of protocols designed to oversee, guide, assess, and reward employees. The effect on the salespeople is that they respect the organisational code of conduct as a reward system, which controls how they behave to align with the reward system. This research focuses on the organisational climate (atmosphere), which gives codes of conduct related to selling activities where a salesperson will be expected to exhibit ethical behaviours.

Ethical climates are designed to direct the employees' decision-making process and provide direction on acceptable behaviours when employees are executing their work (Newman et al., 2017; Sookdawoor & Grobler, 2022). Therefore, the ethical climate forces people to emulate the organisation's requirements and act responsibly, safeguarding the organisation's image. This supports the idea of social learning, which states that employees can easily emulate rewarded behaviour. Sales managers aid in the adherence to ethical behaviour by salespeople as this improves sales performance and job satisfaction (Oh et al., 2022). Therefore, managers shape salesperson behaviour by administering rewards and punishments to reinforce or align with the ethical climate.

Performance goal pressure has been attributed to influencing salespeople to behave in an unethical manner (Sookdawoor & Grobler, 2022). This is exacerbated by organisations that put too much pressure on sales performance goals without enforcing mechanisms to adhere to legitimate ways of doing business. In so doing, organisations push salespeople to meet targets in any possible way that may involve participating in non-ethical behaviour. Kuenzi et al. (2020) claimed that an atmosphere of ethics is a tangible attribute that employees can relate to when working for companies. Furthermore, employees develop a sense of belonging when working for an organisation, and their behavioural compass, which they can leverage to avoid unethical behaviour, is based on the ethical atmosphere of the organisation (Behera & Bala, 2023).

Climate, concerning ethics in an organisation, defines the perceived behaviour that is expected and awarded in an organisation, and it is very tangible to employees (Kuenzi et al., 2020; Oh et al., 2022). The ethical climate guides how ethical issues

should be tackled, and in a favourable climate, the acceptable behaviour guidelines reduce the desire for salespeople to disregard ethical behaviour to enable a sale. A positive ethical climate should increase salespeople's understanding to achieve their sales targets ethically(Oh et al., 2022). In turn, this should increase productivity and the ability of salespeople to meet their targets responsibly. A positive ethical climate has made salespeople exhibit commitment and behaviours that align with the company codes of conduct. The ethics code of conduct provides acceptable conduct and helps employees identify areas of concern regarding misconduct and choose the appropriate course of approach (Oh et al., 2022). A positive and strong ethical climate signifies that ethical behaviour standards are clearly defined, thereby decreasing unethical behaviour among employees(Lussier et al., 2021). Social learning theory also indicates that communication focused on ethics would help reinforce ethical behaviour. Therefore, salespeople's misbehaviour may be reduced by a positive ethical climate, suggesting that the ethical environment has a significant correlation with the ethics exhibited by salespeople. Hence, it is possible to hypothesise that:

H2a. A positive correlation exists between ethical climate and ethical behaviour of salespeople

The ethical atmosphere has received considerable focus as a critical element with significant potential to enhance employees' ethical behaviour (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). The climate can enforce practices and procedures that can result in the moral behaviour of salespeople. Based on the social learning theory, ethical behaviours are reinforced through rewards and negative behaviours are discouraged through punishment (Bandura, 1971). Thus, a positive ethical climate through enforcing behaviours can influence salespeople to behave ethically even when facing pressure from the sales targets. Ethical standards in organisations can potentially drive ethical behaviour even in the presence of goal pressure (Gino & Margolis, 2011). The positive ethical climate encourages salespeople to conduct their activities ethically and continuously motivates them to be less unethical in the presence of sales target pressure (Rostami et al., 2019). It is possible to hypothesise that:

H2b. A positive ethical climate moderates the relationship between the negative effect of sales target pressure and the ethical behaviour of salespeople.

2.6 Perceived management support

The social learning theory states that management serves as an example for staff members to follow (Bandura, 1977). The management reinforces an ethical climate through rewards and recognition. Management support is critical for setting employee targets and enabling employees to achieve their goals following the company's ethical norms. Management support is essential for organisations, resulting in various job outcomes, including increased ethical behaviours among employees (Zeni et al., 2013). Leaders who exhibit ethical behaviours and communicate with their subordinates in the same way can be replicated by followers (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

Employees' perceptions about the core procedures that make up their organisation, including perceived management support, which is a form of perceived organisational support, impact their behaviour (Maan et al., 2020; Newman et al., 2017). Managers who offer much support to their subordinates have experienced high output levels (Maan et al., 2020). Thus, salespeople will feel they belong and conform to the organisation's objectives to achieve high performance. Employees who associate positively with their organisation reciprocate by following the set rules and regulations. Hence, even with high-performance goals, the employees will continue to act ethically. The salespeople feel significant and are self-coerced to work in the best possible way that benefits the organisation. Employees with higher perceptions are likely to have higher esteem for their work and to behave ethically as they are concerned about what their managers think about their behaviour (Sguera et al., 2018). Furthermore, leaders who exhibit ethical behaviours can encourage salespeople in organisations to emulate ethical selling behaviours (Banks et al., 2021). Thus managers and leaders have a critical function to play to enable ethical behaviour via social learning. Seeing that employees' behaviours are highly influenced by management, It can be argued that their perception of management support positively influences salespeople's ethical behaviour.

In a workplace where ethics matter, employees are dedicated to achieving the company's goals, which is essential for success in a moral manner(Itani et al., 2019). The ethical environment guides salespeople to grasp what kind of ethical behaviour organisations expect, and supervisors or management support reinforces this (Itani et al., 2019). The moderating role of the supervisors' support was examined between emotional tiredness and ethical behaviour by Lussier et al. (2021). Sales target pressure, a construct for this study, has the potential to cause exhaustion; therefore, the process by which the moderating influence of management support reinforces the performance pressure to influence ethical behaviour will be investigated. The presence of stretched sales targets can act as a catalyst for salespeople's innovative ways of delivering ethically or misbehaviour; however, the strength of the sales targets adverse effects to influence the deviation of salespersons from ethical behaviour can be attenuated by the managers' support. Managers are expected to develop tactics that mitigate the adverse effects of target pressure on the salespersons (Lussier et al., 2021). With sales management support, salespeople can view this as positive reinforcement, and this will open doors for a better understanding of tasks, which will encourage the execution of sales in an ethical manner.

Salespeople may experience emotional tiredness emanating from managers' perceived lack of social resources to help staff members reach their objectives (Lussier et al., 2021). Lussier et al. (2021) demonstrated that emotionally spent persons may not be as resistant to immoral behaviour because their self-control breaks down. The sales targets imposed on employees can lead to exhaustion without adequate manager support, thereby contributing to salespersons' loss of resistance to unethical behaviour. This call highlights management support's contribution to ethical behaviour. Company managers have a crucial role in social influence, and followers typically adopt their management style. If managers act unethically, followers will do the same when doing their obligations (Badrinarayanan et al., 2019; Sarwar et al., 2020). Salespersons’ behavioural accomplishment is positively influenced by ethical management in organisations. It is possible to hypothesise that:

H3a. A positive correlation exists between perceived management support and a salesperson's ethical behaviour

Managers can provide adequate support to their teams, which enables them to focus on their goals rightly without getting involved in unethical behaviours. (Anand, Bowen, & Rangarajan, 2023). Additionally, sufficient management support may create a productive workplace, motivating salespeople to perceive ethical behaviour as critical to achieving their objectives. The salespeople could also confide and approach their management for assistance quickly.

Organisations make their moral stance visible to the outside world in the business-to-business environment by defining codes of ethics (Anand, Bowen, Spivack, et al., 2023). Even in the presence of the code of ethics, salespeople may deviate from the business moral compass due to competitive behaviours or target pressure. The intention created by the organisation for salespeople to act ethically may differ from the salespeople's actions due to several factors, one of which is time pressure (Rostami et al., 2019). The study will not look at time pressure; however, the findings from Rostami et al. (2019) strongly suggest that even in the presence of a code of ethics, salespeople can behave unethically; hence, the study included management support as a moderator between sales target pressure and behaviour.

To ensure that salespersons maintain ethical behaviour under pressure to meet targets, managers must consistently support and guide them to operate within ethical behaviour parameters (Fleischman et al., 2019). Even in a positive, ethical climate, the salesperson may ignore the company's norms and behave unethically if they emulate unethical leadership (Badrinarayanan et al., 2019). Strong manager support can strengthen the connection between salespeople's ethical behaviour and the ethical climate (Lussier et al., 2021). Another argument is that corrupt behaviour is lessened in an organisational environment where management can assist salespeople, attenuate the negative effect of sales target pressure and promote adherence to an ethical climate. Greater perceived sales manager support positively conditions sales target goal pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour link. Therefore, it can be suggested that:

H3b. Management support moderates the correlation between performance goal pressure and salesperson ethical behaviour.

2.7 Salesperson ethical behaviour

The term “ethics commonly refers to "just" or "right" standards of behavior among individuals in a situation." (Fraedrich, 1993, p. 207). Fraedrich (1993) pointed out that ethics justifies what is acceptable in society and just; however, it is subjected based on the principle being used. This study will use the organisation perspective as the baseline for ethics; therefore, ethical behaviour can be defined using the organisation as the reference. Ethical behaviour points to actions that correspond with the company's ethical standards and values and test whether salespeople act according to what is morally acceptable in the organisation (Newman et al., 2017).

The highly complex competitive environment that the salespeople work in is a source of pressure as sometimes they work remotely alone, dealing with external parties (Lyngdoh et al., 2023). The compensation and management of objectives create more pressure on the salespeople, which may result in unethical behaviour as they look for quicker wins to meet their financial obligations. However, this unethical behaviour damages the company's reputation and brand image. A company can lose its customer base once unethical behaviours are exposed.

Salespeople are constantly faced with dilemmas in their course of work. They deal with various levels of pressure emanating from factors such as targets, conflicts and failures to achieve multiple results (Lussier et al., 2021). In the sales context, the acceptable ethical behaviour will be for salespeople to deliver their work activity within the ethical norms of their company. The other biggest challenge occurs when the organisational ethical conduct may conflict with the outside ethical guidance, such as the value of a present that salespeople can offer to strengthen customer relationships (Veetikazhi et al., 2022). These conflicts of understanding would require effective management support for the salespeople to remain ethical. Deviation from either internal organisation or external expectations will be considered unethical behaviour. The study focuses on ethical behaviour related to selling, including being honest about how salespeople relate with customers.

Within the sales journey, the customer-facing personnel are subjected to different people from different organisations externally to the company controlling environment, especially in the business-to-business domain (Ameer & Halinen, 2019). The complex external environment exposes them to various interests, which can lure them to deviate from ethical behaviour. Combining a highly competitive environment, dealing with external parties with different interests, and targeting pressure to achieve sales may act as a breeding environment for unethical behaviour. To overcome the temptations presented by this environment, salespeople need grounding in ethics from their organisation and adequate management support; hence, there is a need to probe the contribution of these variables in the behaviour of salespeople.

Another ethical challenge is when salespeople are highly aligned with the organisation's, exhibiting unethical pro-organisational behaviour (UPB) (Mo et al., 2023; Sheedy et al., 2021). In this instance, salesperson justify their unethical behaviours as they would be doing actions in favour of their company to boost the organisation's going concern. (Chen and Chen (2023) also indicated that salespeople would conduct unethical behaviours through moral justification. Since the salespeople are part of the organisation, they may benefit indirectly; however, they intend to ensure that the organisation benefits, for example, by withholding information on defects products. The literature also points out that leveraging social learning may acquire such behaviours from management focusing on sales targets without emphasising other climates (Mishra et al., 2022; Sheedy et al., 2021). Sheedy et al. (2021) pointed out that such behaviours call for a strong climate that clarifies how salespeople should behave and avoid unethical behaviour. Furthermore, this calls for adequate management support to guide the salespeople in understanding the consequences of unethical behaviours. The mushrooming and existence of these unethical behaviours call for the need to know how they are fuelled to come up with mitigation strategies to have salespeople avoid unethical behaviour.

As per social learning theory, salespeople can adapt to their environment and their managers' instructions, resulting in ethical behaviours. The instrument that will be used to measure ethical behaviour is adopted by Lussier et al. (2021), and they are part of the normative dimension. Ethical behaviour will be operationalised as the perceptions of how the salespeople perceive their honesty and integrity to the

company's ethical standards. In a positive ethical climate, learning behaviours in the selling environment enabled by management support should ensure that ethical behaviours are avoided (Sheedy et al., 2021).

2.8 Control Variables

The researcher included the control variables in literature review of the constructs being scrutinised to mitigate potential bias. The controlled variables obtained from the literature are gender, industry type, years of experience, education level, business model and years of experience under the same manager (Al Halbusi et al., 2021).

The business environment is now characterised by stiff competition, which induces significant pressure on the salespeople and may result in unethical behaviour (Anand et al., 2023). Some selling practices in the business-to-business environment are governed by contracts and non-disclosure agreements, which may hide unethical practices between organisations. The salespeople are required to establish enduring relationships because the engagements are long-term (Behera & Bala, 2023; Itani & Chaker, 2022). Developing long-term relationships may encourage ethical behaviour; even under target pressure, salespeople are likely to act ethically in business-to-business settings.

In the business-to-customer environment, transactions are less complex and may not be exposed to stringent controls like those involving inter-business interactions. (Anand, Bowen, Spivack, et al., 2023). Salespeople have a shorter-term focus on business-to-customer sales and may focus on shorter-term selling rather than long-term relationships. The focus on shorter-term goals may compromise the salesperson's ethical behaviour.

Salespeople have a critical relationship to manage, which is their management (Gabler & Kalra, 2024). Ethical leadership facilitates a process where salespeople learn ethical behaviour from their superiors (Badrinarayanan et al., 2019). Social learning indicates that subordinates pick up knowledge through observation. The relationship between the salesperson and manager affects the learning period – the longer the period, the longer the learning period (Gabler & Kalra, 2024). A positive

link between a manager and a salesperson can increase employees' commitment to the organisational code of ethics, which results in ethical behaviour. Furthermore, effective management support will increase employee creative performance, enhancing ethical behaviour despite target pressure. Therefore, the study will explore the years of experience of a salesperson with a manager and the inclination to behave ethically, considering the intensity of management support.

Gender differences can affect perceptions of organisational support and ethical climate. Research shows that men and women may exhibit differing ethical decision-making processes and sensitivity to ethical climates (Chen et al., 2016). This can influence their alignment with organisational codes and responses to management support; hence, they are included as a control variable.

Industry sectors and companies have varying codes of ethics (Vitolla et al., 2021). Different industries have different climates, which also affects the tolerance of ethical behaviours. It was pointed out that people's satisfaction with age is high(Bartram, 2021). Even though this research is not about life satisfaction, it shows the importance of changing preferences due to age differences; hence, age is also used as a control variable. Older salespeople have more experience, and it can be argued that they have more knowledge of ethical behaviour and may be prioritising long-term relationships.

2.9 Proposed framework

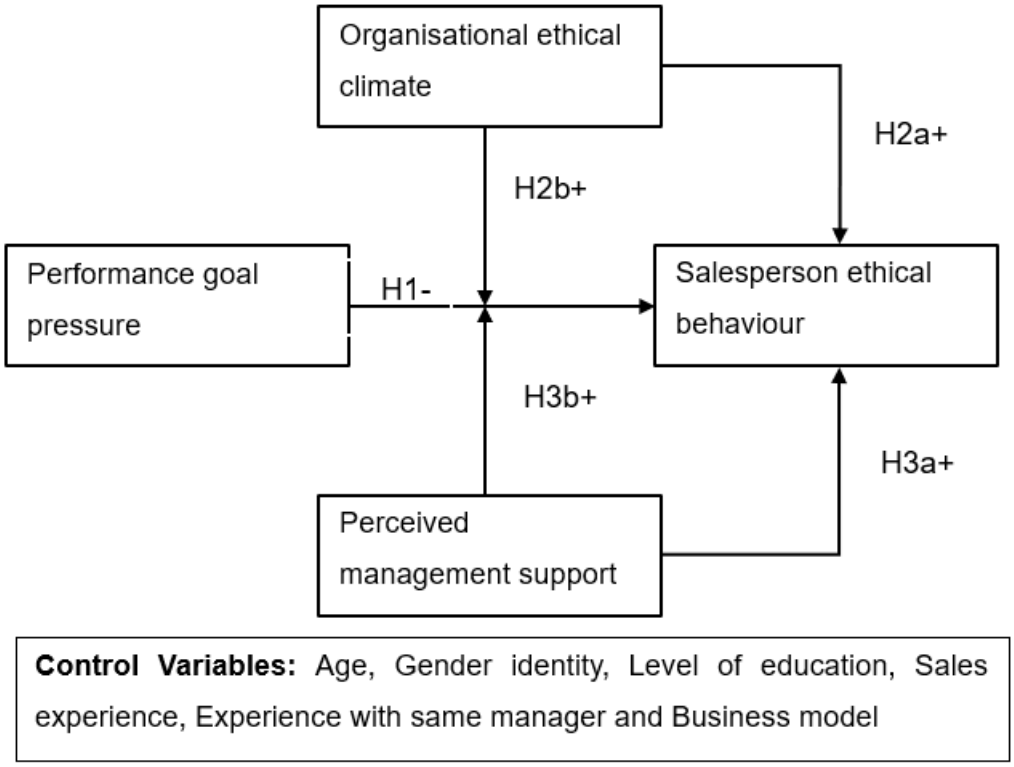

Figure 1
Proposed framework

Note: Author's compilation

Figure 1 explains the relationship between sales target pressure, organisational ethical climate, perceived managers' support and ethical behaviour among salespeople as extracted from existing literature. The framework in Figure 1 posits that sales target pressure negatively correlates to salespeople's ethical behaviour, and organisational ethical climate correlates with salespeople's ethical behaviour. Insight into the relationship can guide the management of sales target pressure in organisations to mitigate unethical behaviour. Unethical behaviour can dent the company image; hence, this study will add to the better management of salespeople in the presence of sales target pressure to mitigate unethical behaviour. The control variables that will also be assessed are age, gender, and period, with the same manager level of education as the salesperson and the business model.

2.10 Conclusion

The literature review examined key constructs and provided existing knowledge on their link to ethics-related behaviour by salespeople. Detailed information was gathered on the link between performance goal pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour. Furthermore, the contribution of perceived management support and the contribution of the company's ethical atmosphere were reviewed. The information on the selection of the control variables was discussed based on the literature.

The review highlighted that performance goal pressure is prevalent among salespeople, whose job responsibilities frequently expose them to ethical challenges. Effective management support is essential, particularly in addressing ethical dilemmas encountered on the job. Furthermore, the organisational ethical climate influences how salespeople align with company standards and ethical expectations. To enhance their understanding of ethical issues, salespeople require education and guidance, with Social Learning Theory suggested as a useful framework. This theory encourages learning from both the organisational climate and management, promoting ethical behaviour and reducing the likelihood of unethical practices. The theory has also been applied in other studies related to ethical behaviour.

An inverse relationship was observed between performance goal pressure and ethical behaviour, as pressure tends to act as a negative motivator. Meanwhile, the organisational ethical climate positively impacts behaviour and moderates the link between performance goal pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour. Similarly, perceived management support directly enhances behaviour and moderates performance goals and salespeople's ethical behaviour. The control variables were selected from established literature.

The literature study also emphasised the necessity of more investigation into these relationships, enabling management to understand the drivers of unethical behaviour better. With a clearer understanding of these causes, organisations can develop action plans that prioritise ethical climates and management support systems that promote ethical behaviour.

Chapter 5 will test the study's hypotheses, which have been developed. The existing literature review facilitated the creation of a model that illustrated these relationships and will serve as the basis for hypothesis testing.

3 Chapter 3: Research Questions and Hypotheses

This chapter provides the main research question and sub-questions formulated in sections 1 and 2. Furthermore, it will present the hypothesis for the research. Chapter Two discussed the literature supporting the questions and hypothesis.

3.1 Main research question

What part do management support and organisational climate (atmosphere) play in the relationship between ethical behaviour and pressure to meet sales targets?

3.2 Sub-research questions.

1. Does higher sales target pressure increase the likelihood of unethical behaviour among salespeople?
2. Does a positive ethical climate increase the likelihood of ethical behaviour among salespeople?
3. Does a positive organisational ethical climate moderate the correlation between sales target pressure and unethical behaviour?
4. Does managerial support moderate the correlation between performance goal pressure (sales target pressure) and the ethical behaviour of salespeople?

3.3 Hypothesis

H1: There is an inverse relationship between performance goal pressure (sales target pressure) and the ethical behaviour of salespeople.

H2a: A positive correlation exists between ethical climate and ethical behaviour of salespeople

H2b: A positive ethical climate moderates the relationship between the negative effect of sales target pressure and the ethical behaviour of salespeople.

H3a: A positive correlation exists between perceived management support and a salesperson's ethical behaviour.

H3b: Management support moderates the relationship between performance goal pressure (sales target pressure) and salespersons' ethical behaviour. That is,

managerial support reduces the adverse effects of performance goal pressure on salespeople's ethical behaviour.

4 Chapter 4: Choice of Research Design and Methodology

The primary research topic was examining how managerial support and organisational climate relate to the relationship between ethical behaviour and pressure to meet sales targets. The methodology was required to design how to experiment with the relationships of the constructs model suggested in Chapter Two.

This section communicated the rationale behind the selected research design for investigating the hypotheses presented in Section 3. Section 4,1 discussed the purpose. The design approach was discussed in Section 4.2. Section 4.3 addressed methodological choices, while Sections 4.4 and 4.5 covered the research strategy and time horizon. Additionally, the population was presented under Section 4.6, and the analysis unit in Section 4.7. Section 4.8 details the survey's sampling method and sample size, and the measurement instruments are outlined in Section 4.9. The process of gathering data from applicants was described in Section 4.10, with ethical considerations included in Section 4.11. Section 4.12 discussed the research analysis approach, and quality controls were detailed under Section 4.13. Limitations of the research were outlined under Section 4.14. As part of the methodology, common method bias, effects of outliers, construct validity, and data coding were also discussed.

4.1 Purpose of research design

The roadmap for conducting the study is outlined in the research design (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Based on the literature review, most studies have employed quantitative methods to explain ethical issues within organisations and among salespersons. There is a need, based on a positivist mindset, to progress qualitative findings to a quantitative design. Consequently, the research utilised a quantitative research design. This study's dependent variable or outcome is the salesperson's ethical behaviour, while the independent variables are sales target pressure, organisational ethical climate and perceived manager's support. (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

In order to inspect the moderating function of the organisational ethical atmosphere on the link between sales target pressure and salesperson ethical behaviour, the

study expanded on the components of the social learning theory. The attributes of social learning theory include how employees can follow behaviours or adhere to company procedures and avoid ethical behaviour, which was pertinent in this research. Additionally, an examination of how managers may increase the strength between salespeople's ethical behaviour and sales target pressure was conducted. The social learning theory also informed the interplay between salespeople and managers on how salespersons respond to rewards and punishments to avoid unethical behaviours. The research design helped the researcher explain the study variables' relationships. The research concentrated on obtaining the variables related to the perceptions of salespeople on the constructs that were being investigated.

Saunders and Lewis (2018) noted that using positivist philosophy when examining observable realities, including salespeople's behaviours, identifying causal relationships and making generalisations is appropriate. Given that this research concentrated on collecting empirical data to quantify the relationships between observable variables, it adopted a positivist philosophy (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.2 Approach selected

This deductive approach was chosen for its suitability for hypothesis testing, statistical analysis, and elucidating causal relationships among the variables under investigation (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.3 Methodological choices

The selected study entailed gathering categorical data. From the collected data, statistical methods were needed to scrutinise the relationships that existed between the factors by utilising the onion framework, as elucidated in Saunders and Lewis (2018). The classification of the methodology fell under mono-method quantitative research. Moreover, adopting a mono-method approach ensured data consistency, alleviated conflicts between methodologies, and facilitated the study's completion within a constrained timeframe (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Anan et al. (2023) pointed out that the quantitative approach was commonly used in ethics-related studies and supported the choice of a quantitative survey. Various

validated scales have been developed to measure the scales of the study constructs. Organisational ethical climate was deemed easy to measure using the established scales (Roy et al., 2024). Roy et al. (2024) also used the quantitative scale for studies that included organisational climate. Fleischman et al. (2019) also used quantitative methods to research ethical behaviours and management support. Furthermore, Rostami et al. (2019) also used the quantitative method when conducting studies on the ethical behaviours of salespeople. Following the guidance of the literature review, a quantitative method was employed in the study.

4.4 Strategy

For the chosen research data, structured data was gathered from participants through questionnaires, aligning with a survey strategy as illustrated by Saunders and Lewis (2018). The survey questions were cultivated using existing literature questionnaires to assess the identified constructs by selecting questions that obtained sufficient validity and reliability (Hair et al., 2010). The constructs were sales target pressure, organisational ethical climate, sales management support and salespeople's ethical behaviour. This survey approach facilitated the systematic collection of structured data across the sample. The survey offered a rapid method of collecting extensive data from diverse salespersons within the industry, thus mitigating bias as respondents responded to standardised questions. Anonymity was maintained among participants as they were not required to provide personal details that could identify them. Applicants were only allowed to complete the survey online, simplifying the transfer of collected data for analysis and expanding the survey's reach to a broader audience. The survey assisted in collecting data that was used to explain the link between the constructs and allowed correlation generalisation (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.5 Time horizon

Saunders & Lewis (2018) suggest that when time constraints are a factor, researchers should consider employing cross-sectional research methodologies to expedite project completion. In order to find trends or correlations, cross-sectional research looks at data from a population at one particular moment in time. The cross-sectional time horizon made it possible to accurately represent the data, which was

needed to capture the features of variables (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The chosen time horizon helped the researcher to understand sales target pressure, organisational ethical climate, perceived sales manager support, and salespeople's ethical behaviour. Furthermore, it allowed concurrent data gathering and analysis of all the variables. Given the ample literature available on the research subject, opting for an existing literature review combined with a snapshot approach yielded meaningful results and valuable insights without necessitating another survey (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.6 Population

The population of salespeople encompassed individuals who fulfilled the requirements for the investigation (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This population included salespeople or customer-facing personnel employed within business-to-business and company-to-customer environments. A salesperson is an employee who implements a sales function and is responsible for achieving a sales goal for an organisation (Herjanto & Franklin, 2019). Salespeople operating in a business setting often face heightened performance targets and may cover expansive geographical regions; hence, they are more exposed to ethical dilemmas (Oh et al., 2022). The population consisted of salespeople working in various industries. The population was chosen from multiple organisations to reach a broader response base and gather data, allowing the results to be generalised across the industry (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). Additionally, collecting data from a variety of businesses allowed sensitive information (such as ethical behaviour) to be received without being impacted by societal norms.

Additionally, individuals with titles beyond sales but engaged in selling within business-to-business or business-to-customer contexts were eligible to participate as long they had a sales function—titles such as but not limited to business development, sales executive and customer excellence professionals. The gatekeeper for the survey was defined as people with a sales function in their organisation who were deemed eligible to complete the survey. The population encompassed salespeople from diverse sectors and company sizes involved in business-to-business and customer-to-business sales (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

The selection of the salesperson employee population was justified by their susceptibility to ethical challenges inherent in their roles, which frequently present opportunities for ethical dilemmas (Anand et al., 2023). Salespeople are directly impacted by sales target pressures, organisational ethical climate, and the support of their sales managers, making them the most appropriate population to study these variables. Furthermore, salespeople in a business setup tend to experience separation from the business because of the nature of their work and feel less management influence. (Schwepker, 2001). Literature has well-documented information about the ethical concerns among salespeople, such as misrepresentation, bribery, and conflicts of interest (Anand, Bowen, Spivack et al., 2023; Kadic-Maglajlic et al., 2019). Furthermore, sales target pressure is intrinsic to salespeople. It is from this population that the requisite data was obtained to analyse relationships and test hypotheses.

Participants were encouraged to provide truthful feedback regarding the companies they were working for. They were also encouraged to provide correct demographic information to enable accurate analysis with the application of the control variables. The results directly influenced and enhanced the recommendations for the organisation's ethical standards and sales procedures.

4.7 Unit of analysis

This study defined a unit of investigation as an individual salesperson with experience in a business-to-business or business-to-customer environment. Each salesperson represents one unit of analysis. It was possible to receive multiple responses from salespeople within the same organisation if numerous individuals were willing to provide feedback from that company.

4.8 Sampling method and size

Accessing the entire universe of salespeople was not feasible; therefore, the employment of non-probability sampling was leveraged. (Saunders & Lewis, 2018; Scholtz, 2021). Specifically, Convenience non-probability sampling was used in the selection of applicants, aiming to reach salespersons easily accessible within the researchers network and through referrals. Furthermore, the researcher used

snowball sampling by asking participants to refer others. The main advantage of convenience sampling was that the sample was easy to identify from the most approachable, and the salespersons were willing to take part in completing the feedback since they were part of the researcher's network or referral (Scholtz, 2021). However, according to Scholtz (2021), the downside is that the sample does not represent the population and cannot be generalised. The targeted participants included salespersons operating in between businesses and business-to-customer environments.

The G*Power software was employed to estimate the required sample size for the study (Faul et al., 2007). Cohen (2013) proposed guideline measures for the expected effect size of 0.35, 0.15 and 0.02 and for large, medium, and small effects, respectively. Using the G*power software to compute sample size for the study of multiple regressions using a significance level of 5%, power of 80% and predictors set to three, the corresponding calculated sample sizes for small, medium and large are 36, 77 and 500 samples, respectively (Faul et al., 2007). A large effect was established in a similar study where Al Halbusi et al. (2021) studied ethical climate correlation with ethical behaviour. Therefore, a sample size of 200, greater than 77 samples, was targeted, and the statistical tests had adequate power to detect the effects.

4.9 Measurement Instrument

The survey strategy was implemented by administering a questionnaire (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This questionnaire consisted of structured questions with predetermined responses drawn from existing literature (Al Halbusi et al., 2021; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Additionally, demographic inquiries were incorporated into the questionnaires for control purposes, encompassing age, gender, education, sales experience in years, tenure under the same manager and industry. These selected demographic information were considered elements that influence salespeople's ethical behaviour. Furthermore, quantitative categorical data, ranked ordinally, was collected from survey participants. The employed scales were modified from earlier works written about the constructs and had sufficient validity (Hair et al., 2010). Furthermore, they confirmed the reliability based on past studies.

The sales target pressure was based on the outcome performance pressure scale used by Zhang et al. (2019). The scale was converted into five Likert scales to match other scales and simplify analysis and interpretation of analysis. The applicants responded to eight adapted questions. An example of a question was, "My company has set lofty performance goals for me" (Zhang et al., 2019, p. 249). Respondents provided feedback through a five Linkert measurement from one to five, where one denoted “strongly agree” and five denoted “strongly disagree”. The coefficient alpha found in the analysis by Zhang et al. (2019) was 0.8.

Measuring the organisational ethical climate entailed evaluating individuals' views of the systems influencing ethical decisions within their organisation. The ethical environment was evaluated with a Likert scale using five points applied to seven questions, as Schwepker (2001) utilised. Other researchers also used the measurement, including Kadic-Maglajlic et al.(2019), Schwepker (2001), and Schwepker et al.(1997). Seven items were selected from the body of literature. An example question was, "Does the company have a formal, written code of ethics?" (Schwepker, 2001, p. 45). Respondents provided feedback through a five Linkert measurement from one to five, where one denoted “strongly agree” and five denoted “strongly disagree”. The alpha found in the analysis was greater than 0.7, indicating satisfactory reliability (Schwepker, 2001).

Perceived management support is related to how the sales employees evaluate the support they receive from their managers to achieve targets. The salesperson's perceived managerial support was measured with a Likert scale using five points, utilising questions from Lussier et al. (2021). An example question was, "My sales manager is willing to help me if I need it" (Lussier et al. 2021, p. 762).). Respondents provided feedback through a five Linkert measurement from one to five, where one denoted “strongly agree” and five denoted “strongly disagree”. The Cronbach alpha reliability exceeded 0.7 in the Lussier et al. (2021) study.

A Likert scale using five points was adapted to assess each individual's self-reported ethical behaviour adapted from literature (Román, 2003). Wray et al. (2021) also used this ethical behaviour measurement instrument. The study featured eight questions specifically crafted to measure ethical behaviour. An example question was, "I apply sales pressure even though I know the product is not right for the

customer" (Roman, 2003, p. 925).). Respondents provided feedback through a five Linkert measurement from one to five, where one denoted “strongly agree” and five denoted “strongly disagree”. A coefficient alpha reliability exceeded 0.7 in the Roman (2003) study.

An anonymous questionnaire containing the scales identified above was loaded on Qualtrics. The applicants were asked to answer every question according to the abovementioned measurement scales. Appendices 1 and 2 contain the consent form and measurement instruments used during the survey.

4.10 Data gathering process

A questionnaire based on previously published research was used to investigate the constructs. Salespeople with experience in company-to-company and business-to-customer selling contexts completed the online survey questions (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

The survey was administered online through Qualtrics, allowing eligible individuals to provide feedback. An electronic version of the survey link was disseminated via the researcher's wide network of salespeople, and requested that they pass it along to their respective networks. The dissemination to the researcher's network was done through WhatsUp messaging. The survey link was actively promoted on LinkedIn to expand the pool of potential participants through a snowball sampling approach.

The researcher participates in various networking functions as part of the day-to-day work. Further recruitment efforts were made during networking events, guiding potential respondents to complete the survey online using the anonymous link or following the LinkedIn link.

The "Anonymize responses" option was set on Qualtrics to ensure that no personal information was collected during the survey. Qualtrics' "prevent multiple submission" setting was turned “ON” to prevent respondents from taking the survey more than once. In the case that participants tried to redo the survey, they received an end message notifying them that they had already completed it. Qualtrics ensured all completed survey responses were automatically saved with an option to download

in Excel, enabling progress and quality tracking. The forms used to capture data is shown in Appendix 3.

4.11 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were done in accordance with the GIBS requirements. Researcher applied and obtained approval from GIBS before the questionnaires distributions to the sample of salespeople. The clearance is shown in Appendix 4 . Survey participants were requested to provide consent before completing the survey. The landing form for the survey requested participants to review and agree to the terms before proceeding with the survey, with an option not to continue. Furthermore, applicants were advised that they have the ability to withdraw from a questionnaire at any stage of the process if they feel they do not want to continue. The consent details were shared as part of the email communication inviting participants to complete the questionnaire. The consent form contained the researcher and supervisor's name and provided information on the study's purpose.

Before the full-scale data gathering, a pilot test was done with ten salespeople. Pilot test feedback was used to adapt the final survey questions. Spelling errors were picked during the testing and were corrected accordingly. The researcher used the automatic function on Qualtrics, and it ordered the response, starting with strongly disagree and ending with strongly agree. Feedback from the pilot was used to rearrange the response to the question from strongly agree down to strongly disagree.

No email contact details were gathered as respondents were referred to the LinkedIn profile to access the survey. No contact information was shared with any third party as part of the data-gathering process. Potential applicants were contacted via established cellphone contacts.

Applicants were notified that the results would be analysed for the data group, not at an individual level. The results that will be published will be the final analysis, and no specific personal or company information will be linked to the results.

4.12 Analysis approach

Quantitative survey data was analysed using statistical models (Saunders & Lewis, 2018; Schwenker & Good, 2004). Initially, the data was extracted from Qualtrics then put into Excel datasheets to assess completeness. Incomplete entries were removed, that is, entries with incomplete survey questionnaires. Hair et al. (2010) indicated that incomplete data can be removed. Furthermore, blank rows were discarded. Next, the data was coded by converting string data into corresponding numerical values, facilitating analysis using SPSS software. Adjustments were made to ensure compatibility with the SPSS statistical software.

Descriptive statistics computation was done to generate a summary of the correctly completed survey sample (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This involved calculating the sample averages, mode, median and sample standard deviations. Frequency distributions were examined for the sample categorical ranges (demographic information). The sample demographics include the age of the applicants, gender identity, applicants' education level, years of experience, years under the same manager, industry type and business model.

Consistency testing of the survey data was conducted using the Cronbach coefficient, focusing on calculating coefficient alpha for internal consistency (Hair et al., 2010). The success of the Internal consistency was gauged on Cronbach alpha being greater than 0.70, as established by the measurement instruments' reference sources and also a value guided by Hair et al. (2010).

Using confirmatory factor analysis, the scale reliability examination was done; factor analysis was also employed to check for convergence validity (Hair et al., 2021). An exploratory factor analysis was executed to detect the relationships and structure of the constructs. All average variance extracted obtained values above 0.50, and the factor loadings were above 0.70, as expected from the guidelines that were given by Hair et al. (2021).

The study analysis included the function of organisational climate and management support on the correlation between sales performance pressure and ethical behaviour. The latent variables of organisational climate and sales management

support were hypothesised to influence the link between sales target pressure and ethical behaviour. The correlation between performance target pressure and ethical behaviour of salespeople was tested using non-parametric Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation and Kendall's tau methods, which are available in SPSS. Furthermore, the correlation between organisational ethical climate and salespeople's ethical behaviour was tested using the same non-parametric methods.

Hierarchical regression was used to test for prediction in alignment with Hair et al. (2010), who proposed linear regression can be used where there is one single dependent variable. Estimation of parameters was done using the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression method provided by the SPSS software. The researcher utilised the SPSS software for analysis. Furthermore, the researcher downloaded the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2018, version 4.0), available at processmacro.org, and this was used as a verification to investigate the moderating influence of perceived management support and organisation ethical climate on the model.

The PLS-SEM in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Analysis of a Moment Structures (AMOS) module was used for the confirmatory factor analysis. AMOS is the specialised module performing partial least squares structural equation modelling. PLS_SEM offers a powerful approach to modelling complex relationships among variables. In the context of this study, moderation in some models was incorporated to reveal the mechanism of the leading research question (Al Halbusi et al., 2021; Alshurideh et al., 2023; Lussier et al., 2021). Furthermore, PLS-SEM relies on partial regression, which reliably estimates parameters on smaller samples, achieving higher statistical power (Sarstedt et al., 2020).

4.12.1 Data Cleaning and coding

The survey feedback data was downloaded from Qualtrics and put into Excel format. The inputs were checked for completeness. All incomplete rows were deleted from the data. A total of 59 data rows were deleted. The rows were coming from people who did not complete the survey and those who were not eligible to provide feedback based on the gatekeeper question. There were three groups of questions classified by Qualtrics: the sample view and anonymous links from online and social media

inputs. The preview rows were also deleted from the survey list. Five rows with previews were removed. The remaining clean data was composed of 212 entries.

All the constructs were answered using a Likert scale of five points. The categorically coded data was based on Table 1, and the SPSS recode function was harnessed to code the data accordingly. The salesperson's ethical behaviour construct was reverse-coded. The demographic data, as depicted in Appendix 8, was also coded by assigning numerical values to enable SPSS analysis.

Table 1
Coding of categorical data

Variable Selected	Coded Value
Strongly Agree	1
Agree	2
Neutral	3
Disagree	4
Strongly Disagree	5

Source – Author's compilations

After the data cleaning, the Excel information was loaded on the SPSS statistical tool for further analysis. The SPSS functions were used to compute new variables directly on the analytic tool. The added variables were the sum of items, the average of items per construct and centred subconstructs (independent variables only) required for data analysis.

The main constructs failed the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), so the researcher performed the exploratory factor analysis (EFA). During the EFA analysis, the data collected questions were reduced into groups that measured the constructs. The performance goal pressure items were grouped into two groups, namely, high-quality pressure (PGP_HQP) and competitive pressure (PGP_CP). The perceived manager support items were loaded into one group represented by perceived management support (PMS). The organisational ethical climate items were grouped into organisational ethical governance (OEC_OEG) and organisational disciplinary action (OEC_DA). The salesperson's ethical behaviour items were loaded into one group and were termed the salesperson's ethical behaviour (SEB).

4.12.2 Validity of constructs

How successfully the questions capture the data they are intended to measure is known as construct validity. (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The questions were categorised into constructs. Group 1 was made of items with the performance goal pressure (PGP) measurement; Group 2 contained items for perceived management support (PMS); Group 3 contained items for organisational ethical climate (OEC); and Group 4 contained items on salesperson ethical behaviour (SEB). Each group represented a construct for the research. A bivariate Pearson correlation was executed on each construct item and the sum of the items. The criterion for a significant correlation was that each question must yield a significance value of less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) (Hair et al., 2010). All items met the criteria, and they were all considered for analysis of the data.

4.12.3 Effect of outliers

An outlier is a case or cases that are distant from other data points. Ignoring an outlier that differs from the remainder of the sample has consequences of having inaccurate estimations(Sullivan et al., 2021). Outliers may have a considerable influence on data analysis. Small portions have the influence to reverse the significance of a relationship in either direction and affect ordinary least squares regressions (Hair et al., 2021)

Trimming, which is typically based on sample percentiles and variable-by-variable aspects, eliminates a certain percentage of the most extreme occurrences (Sullivan et al., 2021). A descriptive test analysis was executed on SPSS on the constructs to check for the effect of 5% trimming for the bottom 5% and the upper 5%. After trimming, the mean and the average per construct were recalculated using the SPSS tool. The new modified mean was then compared to the original mean to check the difference between the two to establish the effect of the trimmed 5%. By inspecting the output from the SPSS, the researcher discovered the two means were insignificant. Furthermore, another method suggested as simpler was also used to assess the influence of outliers by looking at the trimmed mean overlap to the original mean to determine statistical difference significance. (Schenker & Gentleman, 2001). Even though it is considered not optimal, it can be used before exploratory data

analysis (Schenker & Gentleman, 2001). The averages of the data collected were found to be significant, and the 95% and 5% confidence intervals overlapped the original data mean without trimming. The Z-score variables were also calculated on SPSS, and they were all found to be less than three. Based on this observation, the effect of outliers was disregarded, and factor analysis was carried out on all the data points gathered.

4.12.4 Common method bias

Common method bias is a potential issue in survey research and data collection, particularly in the case of this study, where the same method was used to measure multiple constructs (Gabler & Kalra, 2024). The common method bias can skew results and lead to inaccurate conclusions. The common method bias checking was done using the Harmans one-factor test, a method used by Gabler & Kalra (2024). All the 27 observed variables were included in the analysis. The first factor from the total variance explained in the table was 21.76%, which is below the guideline of 50.00% (Hair et al., 2010). Table 2 shows the outcomes of the test. Therefore, the researcher concluded that no problem of common method bias existed during the data collection.

Table 2
Total variance explained results

	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.88	21.76	21.76	5.88	21.76	21.76
2	5.43	20.09	41.86	5.43	20.09	41.86
3	2.22	8.22	50.07	2.22	8.22	50.07
4	1.92	7.11	57.18	1.92	7.11	57.18
5	1.24	4.60	61.78	1.24	4.60	61.78
6	1.10	4.08	65.86	1.10	4.08	65.86
7	0.97	3.58	69.44			
8	0.83	3.06	72.50			
9	0.75	2.79	75.29			
10	0.72	2.68	77.97			
11	0.63	2.32	80.28			
12	0.57	2.11	82.39			
13	0.53	1.95	84.34			
14	0.49	1.83	86.17			
15	0.45	1.67	87.85			
16	0.39	1.43	89.27			
17	0.37	1.38	90.65			
18	0.36	1.32	91.97			
19	0.32	1.17	93.14			
20	0.30	1.11	94.26			
21	0.28	1.05	95.31			
22	0.27	0.99	96.30			
23	0.26	0.96	97.26			
24	0.24	0.88	98.14			
25	0.19	0.70	98.84			
26	0.17	0.61	99.45			
27	0.15	0.55	100.00			

Note: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Note: Adapted from data gathered.

4.13 Quality controls

The sample investigated was obtained from the salespeople community population. The gatekeeper question was used to ensure that only individuals engaged in sales activities responded to the questionnaire. The question inquired whether the respondents were involved in a sales function for the company, maintaining business relationships, or engaging with customers in the company-to-company or business-to-customer environment (Lussier et al., 2021). This gatekeeping mechanism facilitated self-selection among candidates and ensured the collection of quality feedback from the appropriate sample (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The logic function in Qualtrics was programmed to direct those not involved with the sales function to

the end of the survey without completing the questions. This formed part of the responses that were discarded as part of data cleaning.

The questionnaire emphasised the importance of providing accurate responses based on the actual situation within the company rather than the respondent's desired scenario to mitigate response bias (Lussier et al., 2021; Sarwar et al., 2020). Additionally, as part of the consent form, it was emphasised that confidentiality and anonymity of the responses will be kept and that the feedback for all responses will be integrated into a single report. The confirmation of anonymity encouraged applicants to answer honestly.

Clear instructions ensured the applicants knew how to fill in the data. Pilot testing was done on one of ten samples to check for possible misunderstandings, and the survey instructions were updated to provide clarity. The consent form explicitly stated the survey's goal to ensure clear understanding by the applicants.

Internal consistency of the data was assessed using the Cronbach coefficient, with data deemed internally consistent if the Cronbach alpha exceeded the threshold value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2021). The Harman single-factor analysis was carried out to check for standard method bias error, which may result from the use of the cross-sectional survey method (Badrinarayanan et al., 2019; Fleischman et al., 2019; Kadic-Maglajlic et al. 2019; Lussier et al., 2021; Oh et al., 2022). A maximum threshold of 50% was used to validate the findings. The examination showed that there was no common method bias.

4.14 Limitations

Theoretical framework restricted the subject of the study to the relationships specified thereof. This research did not examine other potential mediators and moderators affecting the correlation between sales target pressure and salespersons’ ethical behaviour.

Non-probability convenience sampling lacked random selection, potentially limiting the generalisability of the survey results (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Participants self-selected, potentially attracting individuals with specific characteristics, thus impacting

data validity. As a result, the findings might not be applicable to the universe. (Andrade, 2021).

Because of the non-probability sampling method, the samples may not accurately reflect the population. Moreover, the 212 participants obtained may inadequately represent the company-to-company and business-to-customer salesperson population. Furthermore, the initial focus on the researcher's network and subsequent referrals in non-probability convenience sampling may have introduced sampling bias, deviating from population representation (Andrade, 2021).

Ethics perceptions constitute a sensitive subject within organisations, potentially leading salespersons to hesitate in completing surveys, thereby affecting response rates and skewing results towards perceived norms (Hiekkataipale & Lämsä, 2019). This reluctance was addressed by emphasising the importance of ensuring applicants' anonymity and confidentiality.

5 Chapter 5: Results

5.1 Introduction

The study examined the function of organisational ethical climate and management support in the correlation between sales performance pressure and ethical behaviour. Cross-sectional quantitative methodology was used to investigate the study. Participants were prompted to score their perceptions of the presented constructs. The applicants' feedback was then used for hypothesis testing.

The survey consisted of a seven-page survey developed in Qualtrics. The landing page contained the consent form, allowing participants to proceed or exit without penalty. The second form or page was a gatekeeper question which asked the participants whether their responsibility included a sales function. If the question response was a “no”, using the Qualtrics logic, the participant would be directed to the end of the survey without completing any other information. The participants who confirmed that they were involved in a sales role were then directed to the first group of the survey. The third form contained the Group 1 data with demographic information, where applicants were requested to complete their personal information. The following form contained eight group two questions, which requested that the applicants complete details on the perceived performance goal pressure questions. The next group asked the applicants seven questions about the organisational ethical climate. Afterwards, the following form contained group four questions, which prompted applicants to fill in their perceived management support. In the last group, participants were asked to answer eight questions on how they may act with their customers as part of ethical behaviour feedback. After that, a thank you screen was displayed.

Once completed, if a participant tried to enter a second survey, they were directed to a page indicating that they had already completed the study, which is critical logic in Qualtrics to avoid duplicate entries. The logic in Qualtrics was also used to ensure that a participant could proceed to the next page only when all questions were answered on the current page. The participants were asked to select a radio button for their choice through a five-point Likert scale that ranged from (1) strongly agree to (5) strongly disagree.

A total of 271 responses were obtained from the sales community. The data gathered during the survey was analysed in Chapter 5. SPSS tool was used for the statistical analysis. The applicants who provided quality data answered a total of 36 questions.

5.2 Descriptive statistics

5.2.1 Sample description

Presented in Table 3 are the details of the participants' profiles. Most of the salespeople who met the criteria for clean samples were between 35 and 44 years old, constituting 42.00% of the sample. There were only four applicants above 55 years, which made up about one per cent of the sample. The sample mean was 35.42 years.

Table 3
Sample age profile

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
18 to 24 years old	24	11.32
25 to 34 years old	51	24.06
35 to 44 years old	90	42.45
45 to 54 years old	43	20.28
55 to 64 years old	3	1.42
65+ Years old	1	0.47
Total	**212**	**100.00**

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.2.2 Gender Identity

As shown in Figure 2, 58.00% of the sample comprised male respondents, while the females constituted 40.50%. This may suggest that the sales environment is male-dominated, especially considering the industries that contributed most of the responses. The main sectors are Manufacturing, Technology, Mining and construction.

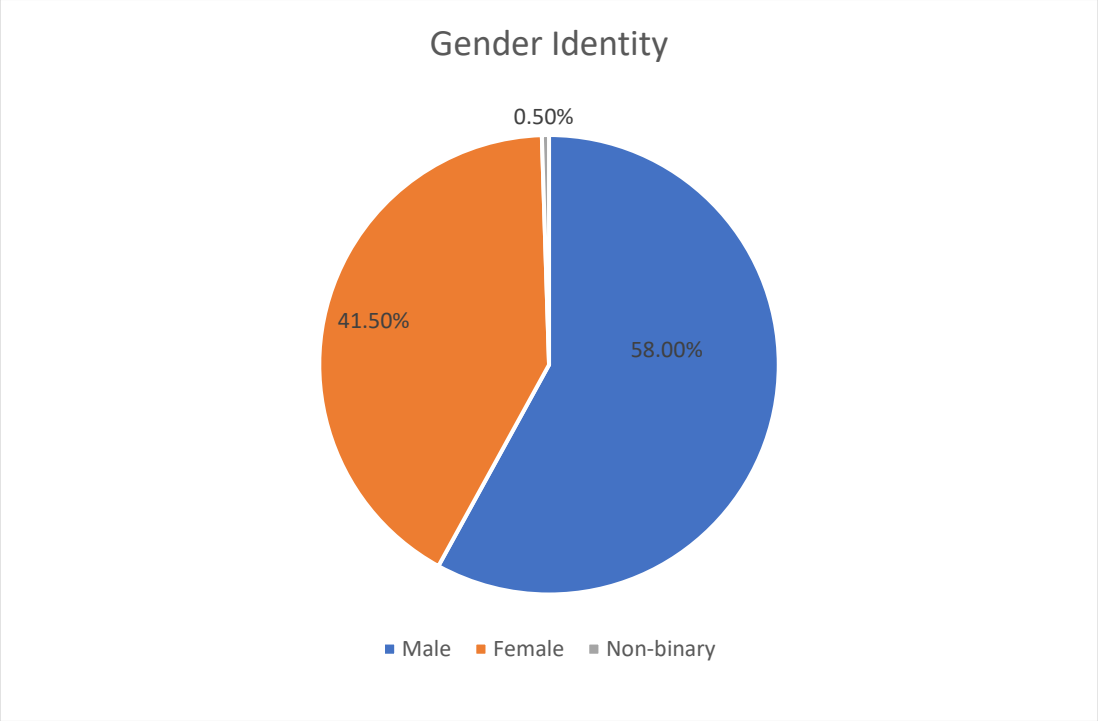

Figure 2
Sample gender identity

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.2.3 Level of education

Figure 3 shows that 42.00% of the sample had a postgraduate degree up to the master's level, followed by 29.70% who hold an undergraduate degree. Respondences with a diploma constitute 15.10%, while those with matric constitute 12.70%. Only one respondent had a doctoral degree. The snowball and convenience sampling may have contributed to the distribution of samples across the education levels. Most people in the researcher's network have bachelor's degree or higher; hence, most respondents reached a master's level qualification. 89 of the 112 respondents indicated that they possessed a master's degree.

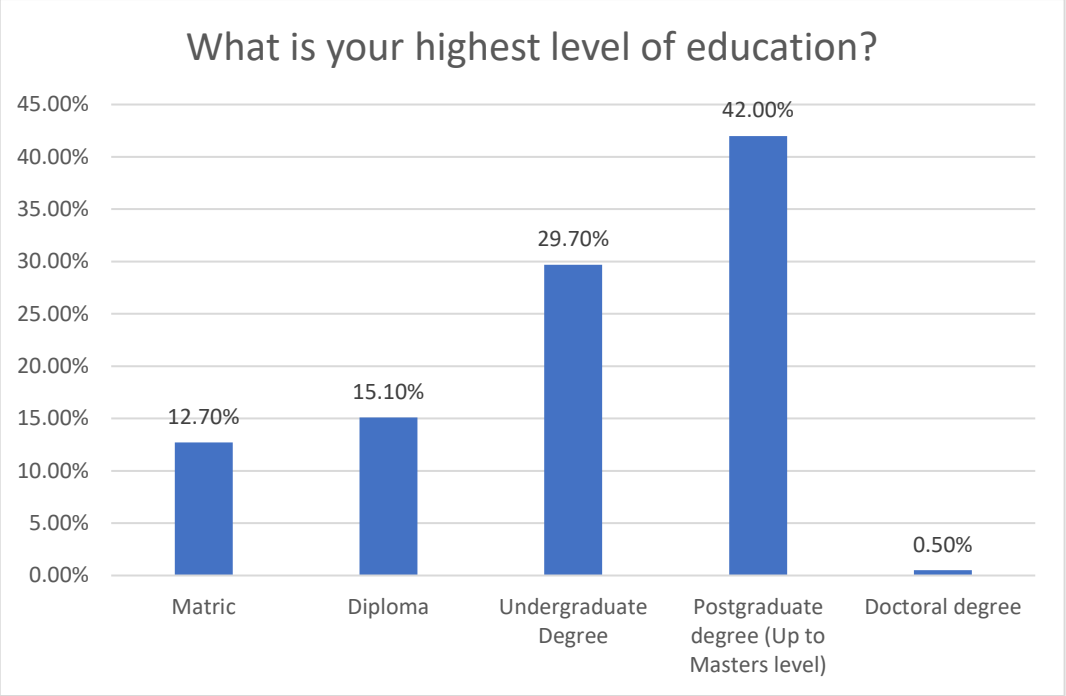

Figure 3
Level of education

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.2.4 Years of experience

A large proportion (37.70%) of the salespeople who responded said they have more than ten years of experience and were the mode of sales experience range. 17.50% indicated that they had between six and ten years of experience, 13,70% confirmed they had between four and five years, 18,90% had between one and three years experience duration, and 12.30% had less than one year of experience. The least number of respondents had less than one year of experience.

Figure 4 shows 26,40% of the sample had less than one year of experience with the same manager, 44.81% had between 1 and three years of experience with the same manager, 17,92% had between four and five years of experience under the same manager, 6.13% had between six and ten years of experience under the same manager and only 4,72% had more than ten years experience under the same manager.

The data shows that salespeople do not stay long under the same manager, and the mode for the same manager was between one and three years. Even though

salespersons over ten years are the mode for years of experience category, the salespersons do not stay longer reporting to one manager as the mode changed to be between one and three years.

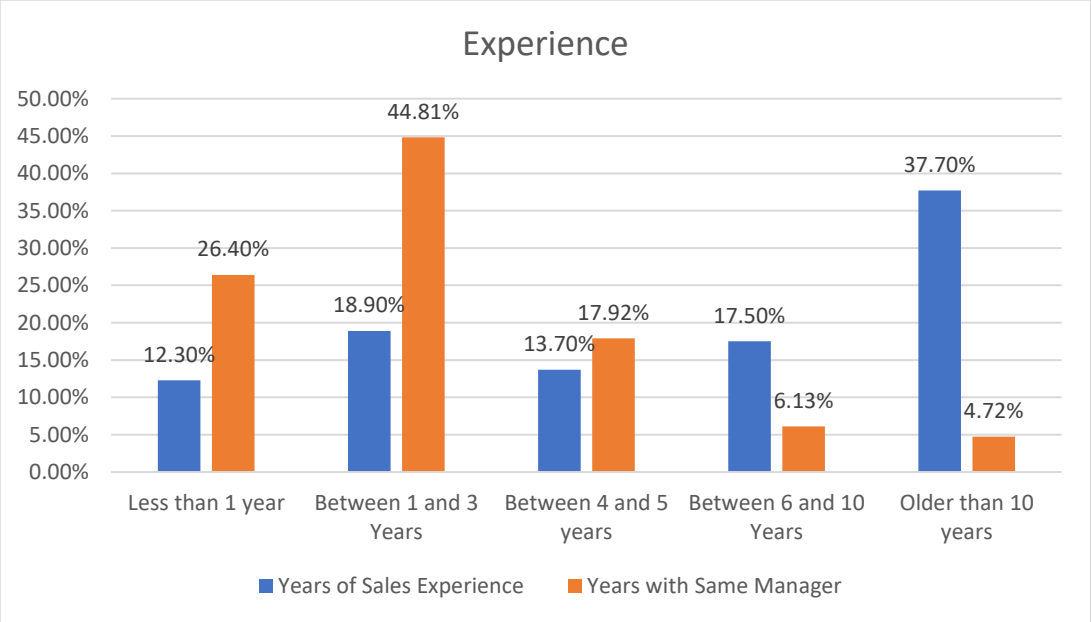

Figure 4
Experience of the survey respondents

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.2.5 Industry classification

Table 4 shows that most respondents were from the technology sector, constituting 27% of the sample with 57 salespersons. The fact that the researcher works in technology may have influenced the gathering of more samples from the snowball and convenience sampling as the method involves willing members completing the survey and identifying others in the same sector to complete the survey. Furthermore, the samples came from various industries, and salespeople referred others from other sectors.

Table 4
Industry classification

Sector	Frequency	Percentage
Agriculture	4	1.89
Arts culture fasion and entertainment	1	0.47
Automotive	6	2.83
Construction	11	5.19
Education	7	3.30
Fast Moving Consumer Goods	5	2.36
Financial Services	9	4.25
Healthcare	4	1.89
Hospitality and Tourism	3	1.42
Manufacturing	46	21.70
Mining	11	5.19
Professional services	5	2.36
Retail	10	4.72
Security	3	1.42
Technology	57	26.89
Other Sectors	30	14.15
Total	**212**	**100.00**

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.2.6 Business model

Figure 5 shows that the majority of salespeople (55.70%) operate in roles that involve both company-to-company and business-to-customer interactions, suggesting an important need for salespeople who can handle both types of clients.

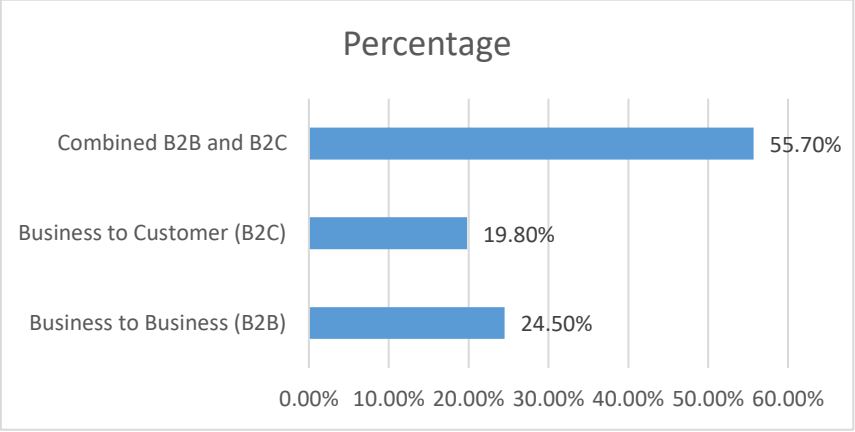

Figure 5
Applicants by Business Model

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.3 Reliability and validity of data

The constructs for the research were analysed against the threshold of 0.7 suggested by Meyers et al. (2013), and all were found to exceed the minimum threshold. Furthermore, a bivariate Pearson correlation was carried out, and for each construct item was tested against the sum of the items. The criterion for a significant correlation required each question to demonstrate a significance level lower than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). All questions met the criteria and were considered for further analysis.

5.3.1 Items total correlations reliability test

A bivariate Pearson correlation was carried out for each construct item against the sum of the items to test for reliability. The criterion for a significant correlation required each question to demonstrate a significance level lower than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) (Hair et al., 2010). All questions met the criteria and were considered for further analysis.

5.3.1.1 Performance goal pressure: item-total correlations

The results of the performance goal pressure instrument item-total correlations test are shown in Table 5. All the items had a positive correlation and a sigma value of less than 0.05, which indicated that they were all significantly related to the total score for the item. Based on this output, all questions were considered for the analysis.

Table 5
Performance goal pressure: item-total correlations

Item number	Items for performance goal pressure	Item-total corelation
1	My company has set lofty performance goals for me.	0.52**
2	My company pay close attention to individuals who demonstrate high levels of work quality	0.62**
3	I am obligated to deliver a high-quality outcome to satisfy the company leaders.	0.54**
4	Company leaders explicitly measure my performance by comparing my work with other employees.	0.66**
5	In my company, there is a great deal of competition between individuals.	0.65**
6	In my company, I must compete with other employees regarding performance.	0.68**
7	My prospects for advancement in the company depend on whether I demonstrate superior performance.	0.67**
8	I can win recognition from the company only if I demonstrate superior performance.	0.63**
	Notes. N=212 **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).	

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.3.1.2 Organisational ethical climate: item-total correlations

Table 6 contains the validity test results for the organisational ethical climate construct. All the questions had a sigma value of less than 0.05, which indicated that they were all significantly related to the total score for the item. Based on this output, the researcher considered all the questions for the analysis.

Table 6
Organisational ethical climate: item-total correlations

Item number	Organisational ethical climate items	Item-total corelation
1	The company has a formal, written code of ethics	0.71**
2	The company enforces a code of ethics	0.81**
3	The company has policies regarding ethical behaviour	0.75**
4	The company enforces policies regarding ethical behaviour	0.83**
5	Unethical behaviour is not tolerated	0.74**
6	The company reprimands behaviour leading to personal gain	0.61**
7	The company reprimands behaviour leading to corporate gain	0.55**
	Notes. N=212 **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).	

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.3.1.3 Perceived management support: item-total correlations

The results of the perceived management support instrument validity test are exhibited in Table 7. All the questions in the perceived management support construct had a sigma value of less than the maximum threshold of 0.05, which indicated that they were all significantly related to the total score for the item. Based on this output, the researcher considered all the questions for the analysis.

Table 7
Perceived management support: Item-total correlations

Item number	Percieved management support Items	Item-total corelation
1	My manager takes great pride in my accomplishments	0.84**
2	My manager really cares about my well-being	0.90**
3	My manager really considers my goals and values	0.91**
4	My manager is willing to help me if I need it	0.86**
	Notes. N=212 **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).	

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.3.1.4 Organisational ethical climate: item-total correlations

Table 8 contains the validity test results for the organisational ethical climate construct. All the questions in the salesperson ethical behaviour construct had a sigma value of less than the maximum threshold of 0.05, which indicated that they were all significantly related to the total score for the item. Based on this output, the researcher considered all the questions for the analysis.

Table 8
Organisational ethical climate: item-total correlations

Item number	Salesperson ethical behaviour items	Item-total corelation
1	I stretch the truth in product representations	0.71**
2	I try to convince customers to buy more than they need	0.83**
3	I paint a rosy picture of the products to make them sound as good as possible	0.73**
4	I make recommendations based on what I think I can sell and not based on long-term satisfaction	0.77**
5	I stretch the truth about the availability of the product to make the sale	0.82**
6	I stretch the truth about the competition to make my product more attractive to the customer	0.87**
7	I give answers when I don't really know the answers	0.71**
8	I apply sales pressure even though I know the product/service is not suitable for the customer,	0.76**
9	Salesperson Ethical Behaviour Items Total	
	Notes. N=212 **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).	

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.3.2 Item-to-item correlations

5.3.2.1 Performance goal pressure: items correlations

The results of the performance goal pressure instrument items correlations are shown in Table 9. All the items had a positive correlation and a sigma value of less than 0.05, which indicated that they were all significantly related to each other and hence can be confirmed to be measuring the same construct. Based on this output, all questions were considered for the analysis.

Table 9
Performance goal pressure: items correlations

Item number	Items for performance goal pressure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	My company has set lofty performance goals for me.	1							
2	My company pay close attention to individuals who demonstrate high levels of work quality	0.30**							
3	I am obligated to deliver a high-quality outcome to satisfy the company leaders.	0.32**	0.40**						
4	Company leaders explicitly measure my performance by comparing my work with other employees.	0.25**	0.24**	0.25**					
5	In my company, there is a great deal of competition between individuals.	0.15*	0.16*	0.27**	0.43**				
6	In my company, I must compete with other employees regarding performance.	0.20**	0.21**	0.21**	0.47**	0.67**			
7	My prospects for advancement in the company depend on whether I demonstrate superior performance.	0.25**	0.51**	0.22**	0.31**	0.21**	0.22**		
8	I can win recognition from the company only if I demonstrate superior performance.	0.18**	0.37**	0.23**	0.26**	0.25**	0.27**	0.60**	1

Notes. N=212
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.3.2.2 Organisational ethical climate: items correlations

The results of the organisational ethical climate items correlations are shown in Table 10. Six of the items had a positive correlation and a sigma value of less than 0.05, which indicated that they were all significantly related to each other and hence can be confirmed to be measuring the same construct. Item 7 and item 1 did not correlate with each other. Non-parametric correlation test was executed with Spearman's rho, and the correlation was found to be significant. Based on this output, all questions were considered for the analysis.

Table 10
Organisational ethical climate: items correlations

Item number	Organisational Ethical Climate Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	The company has a formal, written code of ethics	1						
2	The company enforces a code of ethics	0.66**						
3	The company has policies regarding ethical behaviour	0.73**	0.65**					
4	The company enforces policies regarding ethical behaviour	0.59**	0.72**	0.67**				
5	Unethical behaviour is not tolerated	0.42**	0.59**	0.50**	0.66**			
6	The company reprimands behaviour leading to personal gain	0.23**	0.32**	0.27**	0.36**	0.34**		
7	The company reprimands behaviour leading to corporate gain	0.13	0.24**	0.15*	0.25**	0.26**	0.35**	1

Notes. N=212
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.3.2.3 Perceived management support: items correlations

The correlations between the perceived management support instrument items are shown in Table 11. All the items had a positive correlation and a sigma value of less than 0.05, which indicated that they were all significantly related to each other and hence can be confirmed to be measuring the same construct. Based on this output, all questions were considered for the analysis.

Table 11
Perceived Management Support: items correlations

Item number	Percieved management support Items	1	2	3	4
1	My manager takes great pride in my accomplishments	1			
2	My manager really cares about my well-being	0.66**			
3	My manager really considers my goals and values	0.67**	0.80**		
4	My manager is willing to help me if I need it	0.67**	0.68**	0.71**	

Notes. N=212
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.3.2.4 Salesperson ethical behaviour: items correlations

The correlations between the salesperson's ethical behaviour instrument items are shown in Table 12. All the items had a positive correlation and a sigma value of less than 0.05, which indicated that they were all significantly related to each other and

hence can be confirmed to be measuring the same construct. Based on this output, all questions were considered for the analysis.

Table 12
Salesperson ethical behaviour: items correlations

Item number	Salesperson ethical behaviour items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	I stretch the truth in product representations	1							
2	I try to convince customers to buy more than they	0.62**							
3	I paint a rosy picture of the products to make them sound as good as possible	0.40**	0.59**						
4	I make recommendations based on what I think I can sell and not based on long-term satisfaction	0.44**	0.58**	0.50**					
5	I stretch the truth about the availability of the product to make the sale	0.58**	0.61**	0.54**	0.52**				
6	I stretch the truth about the competition to make my product more attractive to the customer	0.60**	0.69**	0.58**	0.58**	0.75**			
7	I give answers when I don't really know the answers	0.33**	0.47**	0.41**	0.55**	0.47**	0.57**		
8	I apply sales pressure even though I know the product/service is not suitable for the customer,	0.35**	0.55**	0.49**	0.61**	0.55**	0.60**	0.66**	
9	Salesperson Ethical Behaviour Items Total	0.71**	0.83**	0.73**	0.77**	0.82**	0.87**	0.71**	0.76**

Notes. N=212
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.3.3 Reliability of constructs

Reliability indicates the degree that the instrument deployed for the data collection produces consistent results when applied repeatedly under the same conditions (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Reliability tests aim to determine the degree to which unanticipated factors unrelated to the phenomenon under study do not alter the measuring scale. A reliable construct ensures that any variation in results is due to actual differences in the phenomenon being measured, not due to measurement errors.

Cronbach's alpha metric was implemented to review the scale dependability (Kumar, 2024). The internal consistency or reliability of a set of scale or test items is assessed using Cronbach's alpha. It gauges how closely a group of items are related by measuring the degree of correlation between items intended to evaluate a similar underlying construct. Cronbach's alpha analysis was done in the methodology section on the part of measurement instruments used to adapt the questions for this study, and all alpha values exceeded the guideline of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010).

Internal consistency of the grouped subconstructs was ascertained using Cronbach alpha in SPSS. Table 13 shows the variables' Cronbach alpha. The constructs for the research were analysed against the threshold of 0.7 suggested by Meyers et al. (2013), and all were found to exceed the minimum threshold; hence, a decision to proceed with the analysis with all items included was taken with the confirmation of validity.

Table 13
Summarised reliability statistics of the constructs

Variable	Sample Size	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha	Decision
Performance goal pressure	212	8	0.78	Proceed
Salesperson ethical behaviour	212	8	0.90	Proceed
Organisational ethical climate	212	7	0.82	Proceed
Perceived management support	212	4	0.90	Proceed
Note. No item loaded below 0.70 and none was deleted				

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.4 Factor Analysis test

Factor analysis (FA), which uses statistical methods to identify the underlying dimensions that explain the interactions between different variables or objects, can simplify a complex set of data (Tavakol & Wetzel, 2020). Exploring the interitem relationships of the constructs will result in massive correlations, and the factor analysis simplifies the matrix of correlations to make it more understandable.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was carried out on each survey construct (Kyriazos & Poga-Kyriazou, 2023; Tavakol & Wetzel, 2020). The exploratory factor analysis was employed to aggregate the construct items into appropriate factors categorised by their loadings. A loading of more than 0.3 indicated a moderate correlation. The exploratory factor analysis was carried out to discover the latent constructs that influence observed variables, and it helped in the reduction of observed items by grouping them into smaller sets of factors based on shared variance.

5.4.1 Confirmatory factor Analysis

CFA analysis was done to confirm or validate the factor structure and test the goodness-of-fit of the construct models. The results of the CFA analysis are illustrated in Table 14, and the AMOS output in Appendix 7. The chi-square goodness-of-fit for all the constructs was significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating a poor fit between observed data and the model (Marsh & Balla, 1994). This implied that the model needed improvement. Furthermore, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA > 0.05) for all constructs indicated a poor fit for the data, suggesting the model did not adequately capture the data's structure (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The researcher proceeded to carry out an exploratory factor analysis.

Table 14
CFA of the constructs

Variables	Chi Squared	CFI	RMSEA	RMR
Performance goal pressure	168.76 (p = 0.00)	0.66	0.18	0.11
Organisational ethical climate	71.01 (p = 0.00	0.92	0.14	0.05
Perceived Management Support	8.52 (p = 0.01)	0.95	0.12	0.01
Salesperson ethical behaviour	92.33 (p = 0.00)	0.92	0.13	0.08

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.4.2 Exploratory factor analysis

5.4.2.1 EFA: performance goal pressure construct

The analysis was carried out on the data collected for this construct using SPSS dimension reduction analysis and the guidelines state in Hair et al. (2010) were used. On the correlation matrix table, it was observed that all the questions had at least one correlation above 0.3. No problematic question was identified for deletion on the correlation matrix, and no changes were made to the number of questions. From KMO and Bartlett's Test results, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was found to be 0.74, which is greater than the threshold of minimum 0.50 and therefore, the construct elements were successful on this measurement. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity alpha was found to be less than 0,00 below the threshold of a maximum of 0.05; therefore, the researcher continued with exploratory factor analysis.

Total variance explained results showed that the eight questions from the performance goal pressure can be grouped into two groups as shown in Table 15. Leveraging the selection of the eigenvalue 1, the extracted components represented 55.95% of the variance. Only factors or components with eigenvalues greater than one were considered necessary because they explained more variance than a single observed variable. Therefore, two groups representing the two components were determined by analysing the performance goal pressure construct.

The items were allocated to the two groups. Items were allocated based on the component that the item loaded the highest while analysing the rotated matrix component levels. The questions were reviewed to identify their loadings on the two components. The loadings are shown in Table 15. Five items(PGP1, PGP2, PGP3 , PGP7 and PGP8) loaded on component 1 and three items (PGP4, PGP5 and PGP6) loaded on component 2. The set of questions in group 1 points to high-quality-related pressure. The group of items were named performance goal pressure – high-quality pressure (PGP_HQP). The component two set of questions underlying factors describe the competitive nature of performance evaluation and peer comparison in the workplace. The factor was named performance goal pressure - competitive pressure (PGP_CP).

Table 15
EFA: performance goal pressure

		Factor Loading	
	Performance goal pressure Items	1	2
Factor 1:	High quality pressure		
PG1	My company has set lofty performance goals for me.	**0.50**	0.17
PG2	My company pay close attention to individuals who demonstrate high levels of work quality	**0.79**	0.06
PG3	I am obligated to deliver a high-quality outcome to satisfy the company leaders.	**0.53**	0.24
PG7	My prospects for advancement in the company depend on whether I demonstrate superior performance.	**0.89**	0.10
PG8	I can win recognition from the company only if I demonstrate superior performance.	**0.70**	0.17
Factor 2:	Competitive pressure		
PG4	Company leaders explicitly measure my performance by comparing my work with other employees.	0.29	**0.67**
PG5	In my company, there is a great deal of competition between individuals.	0.11	**0.87**
PG6	In my company, I must compete with other employees regarding performance.	0.14	**0.87**
Notes.	Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. N=212 ; Factor loadings above 0,3 are in bold		

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.4.2.2 EFA: organisational ethical climate

The analysis was carried out on the data collected for this construct using SPSS dimension reduction analysis. On the correlation matrix table, it was observed that all the questions had at least one correlation above 0.3. No problematic question was identified for deletion on the correlation matrix, and no changes were made to the number of questions. From KMO and Bartlett's Test results, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was found to be 0.74, which is greater than the threshold of minimum 0.50 and therefore, the construct elements were successful on this measurement. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity alpha was found to be less than 0,00 below the threshold of a maximum of 0.05; therefore, the researcher continued with exploratory factor analysis.

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Total variance explained results showed that the eight questions from the performance goal pressure can be grouped into two groups. Leveraging the selection of the eigenvalue 1, the extracted components represented 55.95% of the variance. Only factors or components with eigenvalues greater than one were considered necessary because they explained more variance than a single observed variable. Therefore, two groups representing the two components were determined by analysing the performance goal pressure construct.

The items were allocated to the two groups. The allocation was based on the component that the item loaded the highest while analysing the rotated matrix component levels. The questions were reviewed to identify their loadings on the two components. The loadings are shown in Table 16. Five items (PGP1, PGP2, PGP3 , PGP7 and PGP8) loaded on component 1 and three items (PGP4, PGP5 and PGP6) loaded on component 2. The set of questions in group 1 points to high-quality-related pressure. The group of items were named performance goal pressure – high-quality pressure (PGP_HQP). The component two set of questions underlying factors describe the competitive nature of performance evaluation and peer comparison in the workplace. The factor was named performance goal pressure - competitive pressure (PGP_CP).

Table 16
EFA: organisational ethical climate

		Factor Loading	
	Organistational ethical climate items	1	2
Factor 1:	Organisational ethical governance		
OEC1	The company has a formal, written code of ethics	**0.85**	0.00
OEC2	The company enforces a code of ethics	**0.84**	0.23
OEC3	The company has policies regarding ethical behaviour	**0.87**	0.06
OEC4	The company enforces policies regarding ethical behaviour	**0.82**	0.29
OEC5	Unethical behaviour is not tolerated	**0.66**	0,37
Factor 2:	Disciplinary action		
OEC6	The company reprimands behaviour leading to personal gain	0.23	**0.74**
OEC7	The company reprimands behaviour leading to corporate gain	0.05	**0.84**
Notes.	Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. N=212 ; Factor loadings above 0,3 are in bold		

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.4.2.3 EFA: perceived management support

The analysis was carried out on the data collected for this construct using SPSS dimension reduction analysis. On the correlation matrix, it was observed that all the questions had at least one correlation which was above 0.3. No problematic question was identified for deletion on the correlation matrix, and no changes were made to the number of questions. From KMO and Bartlett's Test results, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was found to be 0.83, which is greater than

the threshold of minimum 0.50 and therefore, the construct elements were successful on this measurement. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was found to be less than 0,00 below the threshold of a maximum of 0.05; therefore, a decision was made to continue with the EFA.

The total variance explained results displayed that the four questions from the perceived management support were all loaded into one component, as shown in Table 17, representing 77.35% of the variance. No further review was done on the rotated matrix table. All the construct questions relate to professional support provided by managers to their employees, and therefore, the grouping was maintained as perceived management support (PMS),

Table 17
EFA: perceived management support

		Factor loading
	Perceived management support items	1
Factor 1	Perceived management support	
PMS1	My manager takes great pride in my accomplishments	**0.85**
PMS2	My manager really cares about my well-being	**0.89**
PMS3	My manager really considers my goals and values	**0.91**
PMS4	My manager is willing to help me if I need it	**0.87**
Notes.	Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. N=212 ; Factor loadings above 0,3 are in bold	

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.4.2.4 EFA: salesperson ethical behaviour

The analysis was carried out on the data collected for this construct using SPSS dimension reduction analysis. On the correlation matrix, it was observed that all the questions had at least one correlation which was above 0.3. No problematic question was identified for deletion on the correlation matrix, and no changes were made to the number of questions. From KMO and Bartlett's Test results, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was found to be 0.90, which is greater than the threshold of minimum 0.50 and therefore, the construct elements were successful on this measurement. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was found to be less than 0,00 below the threshold of a maximum of 0.05; therefore, a decision was made to continue with the EFA with the original number of questions.

Total variance explained results showed that the eight questions from the salesperson's ethical behaviour were all loaded into one component, representing 60.22% of the variance. The loading of items is shown in Table 18. The eight questions relate to behaviours where salespeople engage in manipulative practices to achieve sales; therefore, the grouping will remain as salespeople's ethical behaviour (SEB).

Table 18

EFA: salesperson ethical behaviour

		Factor Loading
	Salespersons ethical behaviour items	1
Factor 1	Salespersons ethical behaviour	
SEB1	I stretch the truth in product representations	**0.69**
SEB2	I try to convince customers to buy more than they need	**0.83**
SEB3	I paint a rosy picture of the products to make them sound as good as possible	**0.72**
SEB4	I make recommendations based on what I think I can sell and not based on long-term satisfaction	**0.77**
SEB5	I stretch the truth about the availability of the product to make the sale	**0.81**
SEB6	I stretch the truth about the competition to make my product more attractive to the customer	**0.87**
SEB7	I give answers when I don't really know the answers	**0.71**
SEB8	I apply sales pressure even though I know the product/service is not suitable for the customer,	**0.78**
Notes.	Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. N=212 ; Factor loadings above 0,3 are in bold	

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.5 Subconstructs

5.5.1 Descriptive statistics of subconstructs

Subconstructs were incorporated in the analysis determined by the factor structures obtained. Table 19 shows the descriptive statistics of the subconstructs. Perceived management support had a mean of 1.93 and a standard deviation of 0.78. The skewness was 0.52, with a negative kurtosis of -0.33. From the histograms shown in Appendix 5, the subconstruct showed more responses concentrated on the left, as indicated by the tall histograms on the left of the median. The distribution is also flatter in the middle compared to the normal distribution.

The salesperson's ethical behaviour construct had a mean of 2.62, standard deviation of 0.96 and a median of 2,50. The variable had a skewness of 0.41 and a negative kurtosis of -0.29. The histogram showed a flatter middle section with more respondents selecting around the median; however, it shows it is closer to a normal distribution profile.

The performance goal pressure (high-quality pressure) subconstruct had a mean of 2.03, standard deviation of 0.64 and a median of 2,00. The variable had a skewness of 0.93 and a positive skewness of 1.90. The subconstruct shows taller peaks on the left of the mean and appears to be more peaked at the centre than a normal distribution profile.

The performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) subconstruct had a mean of 2.64, standard deviation of 0.89 and a median of 2,67. The variable had a skewness of 0.83 and a negative kurtosis of -0.85. The histograms showed that the data is flat in the middle, with peaks more than the normal distribution curve on either side of the mean. The sample deviates from a normal distribution

The organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) construct had a mean of 1.47, standard deviation of 0.57 and a median of 1.20. The variable had a skewness of 1.71 and a negative skewness of 4.89. Ethical governance shows that the organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) has tall and lots of data in the tails.

The organisational ethical climate (disciplinary action) construct had a mean of 1.47, a standard deviation of 0.57 and a median of 1.20. The variable had a skewness of 0.5 and a negative skewness of 0.09. This subconstruct is taller and more concentrated on the right. The distribution deviates from a normal distribution profile.

Table 19
Subconstructs descriptive statistics

ruct	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
ived management support	1.93	2.00	0.78	**0.52**	-0.33
ɔersons ethical behaviour	2.62	2.50	0.96	0.41	-0.29
·mance goal pressure (High quality)	2.03	2.00	0.64	**0.93**	1.90
·mance goal pressure (Competitive pressure)	2.64	2.67	0.89	0.03	-0.85
ıistaional ethical climate (Ethical governance)	1.47	1.20	0.57	**1.71**	4.89
ıistaional ethical climate (Disciplinary action)	1.96	2.00	0.77	**0.51**	0.09
N (listwise)					

Notes: N=212, Minimum ststistics = 1, Maximum Statistics =5, Skewness standard error =0.16, Kurtosis standard error = 0.33, Skeness >|0.5| is shown in bold

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.6 Assumptions of Ordinary Least Squares Regression

5.6.1 Types of Variables

Continuous dependent variables are required to conduct linear regression (Olsen et al., 2020). A Likert scale with five points was used to collect the data. An assumption was made that the intervals between the intervals were equal. Empirical evidence from prior research shows that treating Likert-type responses as continuous produces reliable results, and a minimum of five categories is sufficient to approximate continuous variation in the underlying construct being measured (Harpe, 2015). The dependent variable, salesperson ethical behaviour, confirms the assumption of continuous and was used in linear regression analysis.

5.6.2 Multicollinearity

Highly correlated independent variables can distort the estimates of regression coefficients (Hair et al., 2021; Hayes, 2018; Olsen et al., 2020; Sarstedt et al., 2020). In order to mitigate against collinearity during the regression process, the values of the constructs were mean-centred, a transformation to reduce multicollinearity recommended by (Hayes, 2018). This was achieved by subtracting the mean of each variable from the variable points to obtain centred items. The centred independent variables were then used in the regressions, which needed to be tested for moderation. The mean centring helped reduce multicollinearity, and the transformed independent variables were used where an interaction term was involved in the moderation analysis.

The testing for multicollinearity was done in SPSS by checking the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance values for the independent variables. Table 20 shows the results for tolerances and variance inflation factors. The thresholds for Variance Inflation Factor and Tolerance were applied to examine the degree of multicollinearity in the regression model, and the values denote that the Variance Inflation factor should be less than ten and tolerance should be greater than 0.10 (O'Brien, 2007; Olsen et al., 2020, Hair et al., 2021). All the results for the independent variables' tolerances were greater than 0.10, and the results for variance inflation factors were less than 10.00; hence, the variables confirmed the assumption for non-multicollinearity.

Table 20
Results for collinearity checks

	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Performance goal pressure (High quality)	0,66	1,51
Performance goal pressure (Competitive pressure)	0,79	1,26
Organistaional ethical climate (Disciplinary action)	0,83	1,21
Organistaional ethical climate (Ethical governance)	0,53	1,89
Perceived management support	0,71	1,41
Interaction termPerceived management support*Organisational ethical climate	0,71	1,41
Note: Dependant Variable: Salesperson ethical behaviour		

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.6.3 Linearity of variables

With the use of ordinary least squares in linear regression to estimate the coefficients, one of the assumptions required is that linear correlations exist between the independent and dependent variables (Hair et al., 2010; Hayes, 2018). If linearity is violated, it may affect the output interpretation. A scatter plot analysis was done in SPSS, and linear lines were drawn for each independent subconstruct versus the dependent subconstructs. It was estimated that there are linear relationships between the predictors and dependent subconstructs guided by visual checks. Appendix 6 showed scatter plots satisfying the linearity requirement. Furthermore,

the effect of outliers was found not to be insignificant in the data gathered, as elaborated in Chapter 4

5.6.4 Test for Homoscedasticity

The residuals were plotted against the standardised predicted values to evaluate the homoscedasticity assumption (Figure 6) (Hair et al., 2010). A random scatter of residuals was observed, suggesting no significant violation of homoscedasticity.

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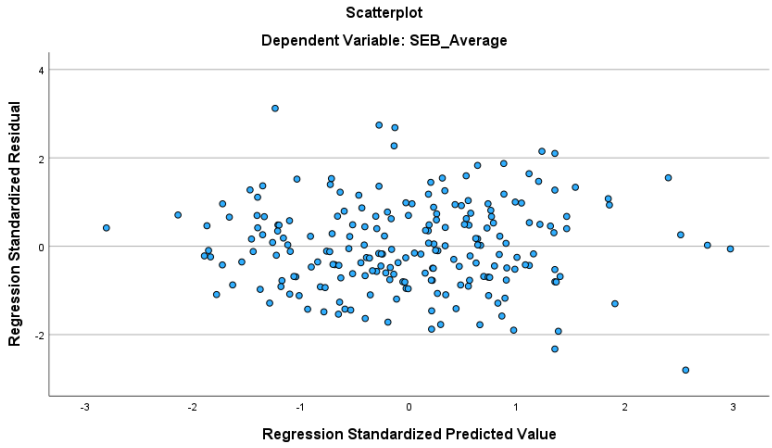

Figure 6
Test for Homoscedasticity

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.6.5 Test for Independent of errors

A result of 2 indicates no correlation between the residuals in the D-W test statistic, which ranges from 0 to 4. Adjacent residuals have an inverse correlation when the value surpasses two and a positive correlation when the value is less than two (Olsen et al., 2020). A Durbin Watson was executed between the independent subconstructs and dependent subconstructs, and a value of 1.78 was obtained, which is closer to 2. Therefore, no autocorrelation issues were identified in the model under investigation, and the assumption of independence of errors was satisfied based on the Durbin-Watson analysis.

5.6.6 Normality of sub-constructs

Appendix 5 indicates the histograms of the constructs. An analysis was run to check for skewness and kurtosis; as shown in Table 19, the skewness of the variables was found to be none zero. The kurtosis showed that three variables were negatively skewed and close to a normal distribution, and three other variables showed some deviation from normality. Visual inspection from histograms in Appendix 5 revealed that the data partially deviated from normality.

Furthermore, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were employed to validate the normality of data (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). The data can be considered to fit normal distribution when the p-value is more than 0.05. Table 21, an extract, showed that all sub-constructs sigma values were less than 0.05, meaning the data for all the constructs deviated from a normal distribution.

Table 21
Test for normality of sub constructs

	Kolmogorov-		Shapiro-Wilk	
Tests of Normality	Statistic	Sig.	Statistic	Sig.
Salespersons ethical behaviour	0.08	0.00	0.97	0.00
Perceived management support	0.13	0.00	0.92	0.00
Performance goal pressure (High quality)	0.13	0.00	0.94	0.00
Performance goal pressure (Competitive pressure)	0.11	0.00	0.96	0.00
Organistaional ethical climate (Ethical governance)	0.21	0.00	0.78	0.00
Organistaional ethical climate (Disciplinary action)	0.17	0.00	0.90	0.00
Note: Degrees of freedom (df)=212				

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.6.7 Skewness and kurtosis

The data was found to have a non-zero kurtosis and skewness, which indicated that the data deviated from normal distribution. This data was further confirmed to fit non-normality by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, which resulted in p-values below 0.05, as indicated in Table 21. The Pearson correlation test assumes that the data being analysed is normal; hence, it was impossible to examine the Pearson correlation test (Meyers et al., 2013). Therefore, Spearman's rho, considered the closest to the Pearson test, was used as an alternative to test for

correlations. Furthermore, the alternative Kendal tau-b. Non-parametric tests were utilised to test the non-normal data for correlation.

5.7 Correlations

5.7.1 Correlation between performance goal pressure and salesperson ethical behaviour

Spearman's rho correlation results between the performance goal pressure subconstructs and the salesperson's ethical behaviour are shown in Table 22. The Spearman's correlation results between performance goal pressure (high-quality pressure) and salesperson ethical behaviour indicated that the correlation coefficient rho is -0.24 and (sig 2-tailed) $p < 0.01$. It is considered that in the case that $p < 0.05$, then the correlation is significant (Meyers et al., 2013). Since the significance value was below 0.05, a statistically significant relationship was demonstrated between performance goal pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour. The rho value of -0,24 reflected the strength of the relationship between the two variables. The fact that the sign is negative demonstrates that the relationship was negative. The values between 0,10 and 0,30 are considered weak or small (Brandt et al., 2022; Meyers et al., 2017), and hence the strength of the relationship with a value of 0,24 was considered weak. The alternative Kendal tau-b correlation values also showed a significant negative, weak relationship.

The Spearman's correlation results between performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) and salesperson ethical behaviour variables indicated that the correlation coefficient *rho* is -0.27 and (sig 2-tailed) $p < 0.01$. Since the sig value is less than 0.05, it demonstrates that there is a significant relationship between performance goal pressure and salesperson ethical behaviour. The *rho* value of -0,27 reflected the relationship strength that existed between the two constructs. Since the sign is negative, it indicates that the relationship was negative. The Kendal *tau-b* correlation test was also carried out, producing a significant relationship with a negative weak strength.

Table 22
Performance pressure and salesperson ethical behaviour correlation

Variables	Kendall's tau_b	Spearman's rho
Performance goal pressure (High quality)	-0.17**	-0.24**
Performance goal pressure (Competitive pressure)	-0.20**	-0.27**

Notes: N=212, **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); Dependant variable is Salesperson ethical behaviour

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.7.2 Correlation between organisational ethical climate and salesperson ethical behaviour

Spearman's rho correlation results between the subconstructs of organisational ethical climate and the salesperson's ethical behaviour are shown in Table 23. The correlation analysis indicated a significant and weak positive relationship between salespersons' ethical behaviour and organisational ethical climate (ethical governance). Specifically, Kendall's tau-b showed a weak correlation coefficient of 0.14 ($p < 0.01$), while Spearman's rho indicated a correlation coefficient of 0.17 ($p < 0.05$). An insignificant relationship was identified between salesperson ethical behaviour and organisational ethical climate (disciplinary action) (Kendall's *tau-b* = 0.03, Spearman's *rho* = 0.03, $p > 0.05$).

Table 23
Performance pressure and salesperson ethical behaviour correlation

Variables	Kendall's tau_b	Spearman's rho
Organistaional ethical climate (Ethical governance)	0.14**	0.17*
Organistaional ethical climate (Disciplinary action)	0.03	0.03

Notes: N=212, **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); Dependant variable is Salesperson ethical behaviour.

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.7.3 Correlation between organisational ethical climate and performance goal pressure

Spearman's rho correlation results between the subconstructs of organisational ethical climate and the performance goal pressure are shown in Table 24. The

correlation analysis indicated that performance goal pressure (high quality) is positively correlated with both organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) (Kendall's tau-b = 0.22, Spearman's *rho* = 0.29, $p < 0.01$) and organisational ethical climate (disciplinary action) (Kendall's *tau-b* = 0.15, Spearman's *rho* = 0.19, $p < 0.05$), suggesting existence of a weak positive significant correlation between performance goal pressure and organisational ethical climate. In contrast, competitive performance goal pressure shows no significant relationship with organisational ethical climate (ethical governance), but it does exhibit a weak positive relationship with organisational ethical climate (disciplinary action) (Kendall's *tau-b* = 0.13, Spearman's *rho* = 0.17, $p < 0.05$).

Table 24

Organisational ethical climate and performance goal pressure correlation

Variables	Ethical governance		Disciplinary action	
	Kendall's tau_b	Spearman's rho	Kendall's tau_b	Spearman's rho
Performance goal pressure (High quality)	0.22**	0.29**	0.15**	0.19*
Performance goal pressure (Competitive pressure)	0.02	0.03	0.13*	0.17*

Notes: N=212, **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*; Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.7.4 Correlation between perceived management support and performance goal pressure

Table 25 presents the correlation between perceived management support and salesperson ethical behaviour using both Kendall's *tau-b* and Spearman's rho. The correlation results suggest a strong and positive association between perceived management support and salesperson ethical behaviour, with Kendall's tau-b yielding a coefficient of 0.51 and Spearman's rho yielding a coefficient of 0.49. However, $p > 0.05$, no statistically significant correlation exists between perceived management support and performance goal pressure.

Table 25
Perceived management support and salesperson ethical behaviour correlation

Variables	Kendall's tau_b	Spearman's rho
Perceived management support	0.51	0.49

Notes: N=212, **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); Dependant variable is salesperson ethical behaviour.

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.7.5 Correlations between control variables and salesperson ethical behaviour

Table 26 shows the correlations between control variables and salesperson ethical behaviour. The correlation between demographic factors and salesperson ethical behaviour revealed that age, level of education, years of sales experience, and industry are all weakly and negatively correlated with ethical behaviour. Kendall's *tau-b* and Spearman's *rho* for these factors range from -0.14 to -0.23, with all correlations being statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Gender identity and the business model were not significantly correlated with salespersons' ethical behaviour. Years of service under the same manager showed no relationship with salesperson ethical behaviour.

Table 26
Control variables and salesperson ethical behaviour correlation

Control Variable Item	Kendall's tau_b	Spearman's rho
How old are you?	-0.14**	-0.18**
Gender Identity	0.11	0.13
What is your highest level of education?	-0.14**	-0.19**
How many years of sales experience do you have?	-0.17**	-0.23**
How many years of service under the same manager?	0.00	0.00
In which industry is your organisation?	-0.14**	-0.19**
Which model does your business operate in?	0.05	0.07

Notes: N=212, **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); Dependant variable is Salesperson ethical behaviour.

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.8 Testing the hypothesis

5.8.1 Hypothesis H1

H1 stated that a negative relationship exists between performance goal pressure and the ethical behaviour of salespeople.

Even though a significant correlation was established earlier, it did not imply predictive relationships; hence, linear regression was carried out to test for prediction and additionally provide effect size (Meyers et al., 2013). The predictive relationship suggests that the researcher can predict the direction of the regression line. Before analysis, the linear regression assumptions were confirmed in section 5.8, and Hayes (2018) suggested that linear regression using ordinary least squares to estimate parameters can be used even if the data deviates from normality. Testing this relationship would also aid in explaining the first research sub-question, which states, "Does sales target pressure increase the likelihood of unethical behaviour among salespeople?"

Multiple linear regression was undertaken to assess the effect of several variables on salesperson's ethical behaviour. Model 1 included performance goal pressure (high quality) (independent variable), performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) (independent variable), age, gender identity, level of education, years of experience, services under the same manager, industry type, and business model (control variables) as predictors, and ethical behaviour (dependent variable). Model 1 was run on SPSS, excluding the control variables. Then, in Model 2, the analysis included the control variables. The insights gained from the hypothesis regression analysis are depicted in Table 27.

Table 27 Model 1 showed that the predictors before the control variables explained 10% of the variance in salesperson ethical behaviour, and the overall model was statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) with an adjusted R^2 of 10% ($R^2a = 0.10$). Performance goal pressure (high-quality pressure) had no significant inverse effect on salesperson ethical behaviour ($B = -0.11$, $p > 0.05$), while performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) had a significant negative effect on salesperson ethical behaviour ($B = -0.27$, $p < 0.01$). The negative strength of $B = -0.27$ denotes a

weak strength. The model effect size was f^2 = 0.11, indicating a small effect size (Cohen, 2013).

Upon addition of the control variables, Model 2 showed that the predictors' variables explained 21% of the variance in salesperson ethical behaviour with an adjusted R^2 of 17% (R^2a = 0.17). The overall Model 2 was statistically significant (p < 0.01). Performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) had a significant negative effect on salesperson ethical behaviour (B = -0.25, p < 0.01). In contrast, performance goal pressure (high-quality pressure) had no significant inverse effect on salesperson ethical behaviour (B = -0.11, p > 0.05). Upon addition of the control variables, a medium effect size was obtained (f^2 = 0.27).

The inclusion of control variables in Model 2 significantly improved the model's explanatory power, as demonstrated by the increase in R^2 from 0.10 in Model 1 to 0.21 in Model 2. After accounting for control variables, the adjusted R^2 also increased from 0.10 to 0.17, indicating a better fit. The f^2 statistic suggests a medium effect size in Model 2 (f^2 = 0.27) compared to a small effect size in Model 1 (f^2 = 0.11), suggesting an increase in explanatory power after adding control variables. The addition of the control variables also reduced the strength of the performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) from 0.27 to 0.25, suggesting that the incorporation of the control variables reduces the negative significant effect of competitive pressure on salespeople's ethical behaviour.

The analysis indicated that the level of education and industry type negatively and significantly affected a salesperson's ethical behaviour (p < 0.01). Age, gender identity, years of experience, services under the same manager, and business model were not statistically significant (p > 0.05) in predicting salespersons' ethical behaviour.

Table 27
Regression table for hypothesis H1

Variables	Model 1 *B*	Model 2 *B*
Performance goal pressure (Competitive pressure)	-0.27**	-0.25**
Performance goal pressure (High quality)	-0.18	-0.11
How old are you?		0.00
Gender Identity		0.07
What is your highest level of education?		-0.13*
How many years of sales experience do you have?		-0.12
How many years of service under the same manager?		0.06
In which industry is your organisation?		-0.03*
Which model does your business operate in?		0.12
R^2	0.10**	0.21**
R^2a	0.10**	0.17**
f^2	0.11	0.27

Notes: N=212; **.p < 0.01 ; *. p < 0.05 . Dependant variable is Salesperson ethical behaviour

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.8.1.1 Summary of H1 hypothesis testing

The analysis revealed a statistically significant two-tailed p-value ($p < 0.05$) in one of the performance goal pressure subconstructs, indicating that performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) significantly influences ethical behaviour among salespeople. The strength of the relationship was found to be weak ($B = -0.25$). The researcher accepted the hypothesis based on the significance value ($p < 0.05$) and negative direction (Unstandardised Beta Value $B = -0.25$) of the relationship. Therefore, higher sales performance goals (competitive pressure) lead to reduced ethical behaviour among salespeople.

5.8.2 Hypothesis H2a

H2a stated that a positive relationship exists between an organisational ethical climate and a salesperson's ethical behaviour.

Two hierarchical multiple regression models were undertaken to assess the prediction of salesperson ethical behaviour by organisational ethical climate. The predictive relationship suggests that the researcher can predict the direction of the

regression line. Before analysis, the assumptions for linear regression were confirmed in section 5.8. Hayes (2018) suggested that linear regression using ordinary least squares to estimate parameters can be used even if the data deviates from normality. Testing this relationship aided in explaining the second research sub-question, which states, “Does a positive relationship exist between organisational ethical climate and salesperson ethical behaviour?”.

Multiple linear regression was performed to examine the organisational ethical climate's effect on salespeople’s ethical behaviour. The independent variables for Model 2 included organisational ethical climate (governance) and organisational ethical climate (disciplinary action). The control variables for Model 2 were performance goal pressure (high quality), performance goal pressure (competitive pressure), age, gender identity, level of education, years of experience, services under the same manager, industry type, and business model (control variables). The Model 2 dependent variable was the salesperson's ethical behaviour. Model 1 excluded the control variables.

The hypothesis regression analysis results are summarised in Table 28. In Model 1, the predictors explained 2% of the variance in salesperson performance, and the model is insignificant (ANOVA $p > 0.05$). Organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) and organisational ethical climate (disciplinary action) are both not significant ($p > 0.05$). The effect size is negligible ($f^2 = 0.02$). R^2 and R^2 adjusted are not significant in Model 1; that is, the p-value of the ANOVA > 0.05.

In Model 2, where the control variables were incorporated, all the predictors explained 23% of the variance in salesperson ethical behaviour with an adjusted R^2 of 19% ($R^2a = 0.19$), and the overall model was statistically significant $p < 0.01$. As shown, Model 2 organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) had a significant direct effect on salesperson ethical behaviour ($B = 0.23$, $p < 0.05$). In contrast, organisational ethical climate (disciplinary action) had no statistically significant effect on salesperson ethical behaviour ($B = 0.02$, $p > 0.05$). The unstandardised beta coefficient of 0.26, as depicted by the organisational ethical climate (ethical governance), denotes a positive weak strength. The model effect size indicated a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.29$) (Cohen, 2013).

Model 2 improved the explained variance in the dependent variable, with an increase in R^2 to 0.23 ($p < 0.01$), and the adjusted R^2 also improved from 0.01 to 0.19. The f^2 statistic suggested a medium effect size in model 2 ($f^2 = 0.02$) compared to a negligible effect size in model 1. The improvement in the explained variance was introduced by including the control variables.

In Model 2, the analysis showed that the control variables, performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) ($p < 0.01$) and years of experience ($p < 0.05$), significantly affected a salesperson's ethical behaviour. The control variables, performance goal pressure (high quality), age, gender identity, services under the same manager, and business model, were not statistically significant in predicting salespersons' ethical behaviour in the model as all had a sigma value greater than 0.05.

Table 28
Regression table for testing hypothesis H2a

	Model 1	Model 2
Variables	*B*	*B*
Organistaional ethical climate (Ethical governance)	0.23	0.26**
Organistaional ethical climate (Disciplinary action)	-0.09	0.02
Performance goal pressure (Competitive pressure)		-0.23**
Performance goal pressure (High quality)		-0.21
How old are you?		0.00
Gender Identity		0.09
What is your highest level of education?		-0.11
How many years of sales experience do you have?		-0.14*
How many years of service under the same manager?		0.07
In which industry is your organisation?		-0.03
Which model does your business operate in?		0.11
R^2	0.02	0.23**
R^2a	0.01	0.19**
f^2	0.02	0.29

Notes: N=212; **.p < 0.01 ; *. p < 0.05 . Dependant variable is Salesperson ethical behaviour

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.8.2.1 Summary of H2a hypothesis testing

The Sig (2-tailed) value for the prediction of sales ethical behaviour by organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) was significant, with a p-value < 0.05. Even though a weak relationship was established, the hypothesis for the organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) was accepted based on the significant relationship and positive coefficient (B = 0.26). Therefore, a positive organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) increases salespeople's ethical behaviour.

5.8.3 Hypothesis H2b

H2b stated that a positive ethical climate moderates the relationship between an adverse effect of sales target pressure and the ethical behaviour of salespeople.

Three hierarchical multiple regression models were performed to examine the effects of performance goal pressure, organisational ethical climate, and their interactions on salespersons' ethical behaviour. The assumptions for linear regression were confirmed in section 5.8. The data deviated from normality; however, Hayes (2018) suggested that linear regression using ordinary least can be used even when data deviate from normality. Since the variables under study were continuous, to avoid multicollinearity, especially since an interaction variable was going to be used, the mean-centred independent variables were used for this analysis.

Model 1 included the main effects of performance goal pressure (competitive pressure and high quality) and organisational ethical climate (ethical governance and disciplinary action) as independent variables. Model 2 introduced interaction terms dependent variables (interaction = organisational ethical climate subconstructs x performance goal pressure subconstructs). Model 3 controlled for demographic factors, including age, education, gender identity, level of experience, and experience under the same manager and business models. The dependent variable was the salesperson's ethical behaviour in all three models.

Model 1 shows the main effects. The results in Table 29 in Model 1 indicate that the model explains 13% of the variance in salesperson ethical behaviour. The model is significant at $p < 0.01$. After adjusting for the number of predictors, the model explains

11% of the variance (R^2a = 0.11). This suggests that the model has moderate explanatory power. Performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) (B = -0.25 and p < 0.01) and performance goal pressure (High quality) (B = -0.28 and p < 0.01) both significantly negatively influence salespersons ethical behaviour. The result suggests that higher goal pressure tends to reduce ethical behaviour. The effect of the model is small (f^2 = 0.15). The organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) had a positive effect on ethical behaviour (B = 0.31, p < 0.05), suggesting that better governance promotes ethical behaviour in salespeople.

Model 2 shows the results when the interaction terms were added. The model indicated that a 19% variance in salesperson ethical behaviour is explained by the model (R^2 = 0.19), and it is significant (ANOVA p < 0.05) with an adjusted R^2 of 15% (R^2a = 0.15). Interaction term - performance goal pressure (high quality) x organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) is statistically significant (B = -0.50; p < 0.05). Other interaction terms, performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) x organisational ethical climate (ethical governance), performance goal pressure (high quality) x organisational ethical climate and performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) x organisational ethical climate (disciplinary action) interaction terms are insignificant in predicting salesperson ethical behaviour (p > 0.05). The performance goal pressure subconstructs remained negative and significant in the model (p < 0.05)—the effect increased from 0.15 in Model 1 to 0.23 in Model 2.

In Model 3, demographic variables were controlled for. The model explained 25% of the variance in salesperson ethical conduct and is significant (R^2 = 0.33 and ANOVA p < 0.01) with an adjusted R² of 20% (R^2a = 0.20). The increase in R^2 and R^2 suggested that including the control variables increased the model's explanatory power. Interaction term - performance goal pressure (high quality) x organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) is significant (B = -0.34, p < 0.05). The interaction term significance suggests that organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) moderates the relationship between performance goal pressure and the ethical behaviour of salespeople. The effect size of the model is medium (f^2 = 0.33).

In terms of model fit, Model 1 explained 13% of the variance in ethical behaviour (R^2 = 0.13, p < 0.01), while Model 2, with interaction terms, explained an additional 6%

of the variance (R^2 = 0.19, p < 0.01). Model 3, which included demographic controls, further improved the model's explanatory power, explaining 25% of the variance (R^2 = 0.25, p < 0.01). The adjusted R^2 values indicated that the models remained robust even when accounting for the number of predictors, with an increase from 0.11 in model 1 to 0.20 in model 3. Cohen's f^2 effect size also increased from 0.15 in Model 1 to 0.33 in Model 3, suggesting that including interaction terms and control variables increased the effect in explaining salesperson ethical behaviour. In Model 3, though the explanatory power of the model was increased, all the control variables did not significantly predict the salesperson's ethical behaviour (p < 0.05).

Table 29
Hypothesis H2b regression analysis

Mean centered variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	B	*B*	*B*
Performance goal pressure (Competitive pressure)	-0.25**	-0.28**	-0.25**
Performance goal pressure (High quality)	-0.28*	-0.27*	-0.22*
Organisational ethical climate (Ethical governance)	0.31*	0.56**	0.45**
Organisational ethical climate (Disciplinary action)	0.00	-0.10	-0.05
Performance goal pressure (Competitive pressure) X Organisational ethical climate (Ethical governance)		-0.11	-0.05
Performance goal pressure (High qualityX)Organisational ethical climate		0.10	0.06
Performance goal pressure (Competitive pressure)XOrganisational ethical climate (Disciplinary action)		0.12	0.11
Performance goal pressure (High quality)XOrganisational ethical climate (Ethical governance)		-0.50**	-0.34*
How old are you?			0.01
Gender Identity			0.11
What is your highest level of education?			-0.10
How many years of sales experience do you have?			-0.12
How many years of service under the same manager?			0.06
In which industry is your organisation?			-0.02
Which model does your business operate in?			0.09
R^2	0.13**	0.19**	0.25**
R^2a	0.11**	0.15**	0.20**
f^2	0.15	0.23	0.33

Notes: N=212; **.p< 0.01 ; *. p < 0.05 . Dependant variable is Salesperson ethical behaviour

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.8.3.1 Summary of H2b testing

The results suggested that both competitive and high-quality performance pressures negatively influenced the salesperson's ethical behaviour (p < 0.01). However, the

negative effects of high-quality pressure are moderated by organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) (B = -0.34, p < 0.05). Therefore, the organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) moderates the relationship between performance goal pressure and the ethical behaviour of salespeople however opposite from expectations.

5.8.4 Hypothesis H3a

H3a stated that a positive relationship exists between perceived management support and a salesperson's ethical behaviour.

Two hierarchical multiple regression models were conducted to probe the effects of perceived management support on salespersons' ethical behaviour. The assumptions for linear regression were confirmed in section 5.8. The data deviated from normality; however, Hayes (2018) suggested that linear regression using ordinary least can be used even when data deviate from normality.

Model 1 included perceived management support as the predictor variable and salesperson ethical behaviour as the predicted variable. The control variables were added in Model 2. The control variables included in Model 2 were performance goal pressure (high quality), performance goal pressure (competitive pressure), age, gender identity, level of education, years of experience, services under the same manager, industry type, and business model (control variables). The Model 2 dependent variable was the salesperson's ethical behaviour.

The outcomes of the hypothesis regression analysis are given in Table 30. In Model 1, the predictors explained 0% of the variance in salesperson performance, and the model is insignificant (ANOVA p > 0.05). The prediction of sales ethical behaviour by perceived management support does not exist (B = 0.00, p > 0.05). The effect size is negligible (f^2 = 0.00). R^2 and R^2 adjusted are not significant in model 1; that is, the p-value of the ANOVA > 0.05.

In Model 2, where the control variables were included, all the predictors explained 22% of the variance in salesperson ethical behaviour with an adjusted R^2 of 18% (R^2a = 0.19), and the overall model was statistically significant p < 0.01. As shown,

model 2 perceived management support had no significant direct effect on salesperson ethical behaviour (B = 0.13, p > 0.05). The model effect size indicated a medium effect size (f^2 = 0.28) (Cohen, 2013).

Model 2 improved the explained variance in the dependent variable, with an increase in R^2 to 0.22 (p < 0.01), and the adjusted R^2 also improved from 0.00 to 0.18. The f^2 statistic suggested a medium effect size in Model 2 (f^2 = 0.28) compared to a negligible effect size in Model 1 (f^2 = 0.00). The improvement in the explained variance was introduced by adding the control variables to the model.

In Model 2, the analysis showed that the control variables performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) (p < 0.01), years of experience (p < 0.05), level of education (p < 0.05), and industry (p < 0.05) significantly affected the salesperson's ethical behaviour. The control variables, performance goal pressure (high quality), age, gender identity, services under the same manager, and business model, were not statistically significant in predicting salespersons' ethical behaviour in the model as all had a sigma value greater than 0.05.

Table 30
Regression table for testing hypothesis H3a

`	Model 1	Model 2
	B	*B*
Perceived Management Support	0.00	0.13
Performance goal pressure (Competitive pressure)		-0.22**
Performance goal pressure (High quality)		-0.18
How old are you?		0.00
Gender Identity		0.09
What is your highest level of education?		-0.13*
How many years of sales experience do you have?		-0.15*
How many years of service under the same manager?		0.06
In which industry is your organisation?		-0.03*
Which model does your business operate in?		0.12
R^2	0.00	0.22**
R^2a	-0.01	0.18**
f^2	0.00	0.28

Notes: N=212; **.p < 0.01 ; *. p < 0.05 . Dependant variable is Salesperson ethical behaviour

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.8.4.1 Summary of H3a hypothesis testing

The Significance (2-tailed) value for the prediction of sales ethical behaviour by perceived management support was not significant, with a *p*-value ($B = 0.13$, $p > 0.05$). Therefore, based on the significance value greater than 0.05, it can be suggested that perceived management support does not predict salespeople's ethical behaviour in this test.

5.8.5 Hypothesis H3b

H3b stated that management support moderates the relationship between performance goal pressure and salespersons ethical behaviour.

Three multiple linear regression models were performed to test the influence of performance goal pressure, management support, and their interactions on salespersons' ethical behaviour. The assumptions for linear regression were confirmed in section 5.8. The data deviated from normality; however, Hayes (2018) suggested that linear regression using ordinary least can be used even when data deviate from normality. Since the variables under study were continuous, to avoid multicollinearity, especially since an interaction variable was going to be used, the mean-centred independent variables were used for this analysis.

Model 1 included performance goal pressure (competitive pressure and high quality) and perceived management support as independent variables. Model 2 introduced interaction terms dependent variables (interaction = organisational ethical climate subconstructs x perceived management support) independent variables, while Model 3 controlled for demographic factors, which included age, education, gender identity, level of experience, and experience under the same manager and business models. The dependent variable was the salesperson's ethical behaviour in all three models.

Model 1 shows the main effects. The results in Table 31 in Model 1 indicated that the model explains 10% of the variance in salesperson ethical behaviour. The model is significant at $p < 0.01$. After adjusting for the number of predictors, the model explains 9% of the variance ($R^2a = 0.11$). This suggests that the model has low explanatory power. In model 1, competitive pressure significantly negatively impacted

salespersons' ethical behaviour (B = -0.26 and p < 0.01), meaning that higher competitive pressure is associated with lower ethical behaviour. However, high-quality performance pressure did not significantly impact ethical behaviour (B = -0.21 and p > 0.05). Perceived management support was not significant in model 1 (B = 0.07 and p > 0.05).

Model 2 introduced the interaction terms. The model indicated that an 11% variance of salesperson ethical behaviour is explained by the model (R^2 = 0.19), and it is significant (ANOVA p < 0.01) with an adjusted R^2 of 9% (R^2a = 0.09). There was no change in adjusted R^2 from Model 1 to Model 2. Performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) continued to have a significant negative relationship with salesperson ethical behaviour (B = −0.25, p < 0.01), while the subconstruct performance goal pressure (high-quality) remained non-significant (B = −0.18, p > 0.05). The interaction term between performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) and perceived management support was also non-significant (B = 0.08, p > 0.05), indicating that perceived management support does not moderate the effect of competitive pressure on ethical behaviour in Model 2. The effect size increased from 0.11 in model 1 to 0.12 in model 2 but remained small.

In Model 3, demographic items were included. The model explained 22% of the variance in salesperson ethical conduct and was significant (R^2 = 0.22 and ANOVA p < 0.01) with an adjusted R^2 of 18% (R^2a = 0.18). The increase in R^2 and R^2a suggested that including the control variables increased the model's explanatory power. Performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) remained a significant negative predictor of salesperson ethical behaviour (B = −0.22, p < 0.01), while the subconstruct performance goal pressure (high-quality) remained non-significant (B = −0.16, p > 0.05). The Interaction term performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) x perceived management support is non-significant (B = 0.13, p > 0.05). The Interaction variable performance goal pressure (high quality) x perceived management support is also non-significant in predicting the salesperson's ethical behaviour (B = -0.12, p > 0.05). The lack of significance of the interaction terms suggests that perceived management support does not moderate the relationship between performance goal pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour. Based on this, the hypothesis was rejected.

Model 1 explained 10% of the variance in ethical behaviour (R^2 = 0.10, p < 0.01). After introducing the interaction terms, model 2 explained an additional 1% (R^2 = 0.11, p < 0.01). Finally, Model 3, which included control variables, further increased the model's explanatory power and explained 22% of the variance (R^2 = 0.22, p < 0.01). The adjusted R^2 values indicated that the models remained significant even when accounting for the number of predictors, increasing from 0.11 in model 1 to 0.18 in model 3. Cohen's f^2 effect size also increased from 0.11 in Model 1 to 0.28 in Model 3, suggesting that including interaction terms and control variables led to a medium-sized effect in explaining salesperson ethical behaviour. In model 3, education level and experience were significant in predicting the salesperson's ethical behaviour (p < 0.05). The other control variables were not significant, with *p*-values greater than 0.05, including age, gender identity, industry type, and business model variables.

Table 31
Regression results for H3b hypothesis

Mean centered variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	B	*B*	*B*
Performance goal pressure (Competitive pressure)	-0.26**	-0.25**	-0.22**
Performance goal pressure (High quality)	-0.21	-0.18	-0.16
Percieved Management support	0.07	0.08	0.14
Performance goal pressure (Competitive pressure) x Perceived management support		-0.11	0.13
Performance goal pressure (High quality) x Percieved management support		-0.12	-0.12
How old are you?			0.02
Gender Identity			0.07
What is your highest level of education?			-0.12*
How many years of sales experience do you have?			-0.15*
How many years of service under the same manager?			0.06
In which industry is your organisation?			-0.03
Which model does your business operate in?			0.13
R^2	0.10**	0.11**	0.22**
R^2a	0.09**	0.09**	0.18**
f^2	0.11	0.12	0.28

Notes: N=212; **.p < 0.01 ; *. p < 0.05 . Dependant variable is Salesperson ethical behaviour

Note: Adapted from survey data

5.8.5.1 Summary of H3b testing

The results suggested that performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) negatively influenced the salesperson's ethical behaviour (B = -0.22, p < 0.01). Perceived management support did not moderate the relationship between performance goal pressure and ethical behaviour in this analysis, as the interaction terms were insignificant in predicting the salesperson's ethical behaviour (p > 0.05). Therefore, perceived management support failed to act as a moderator in the relationship between performance goal pressure and the ethical behaviour of salespeople.

5.9 Additional comments on the analysis

The PROCESS add-on application was installed on SPSS, and it makes use of the ordinary least squares regression (Hayes, 2018). The researcher tested the hypothesis using the PROCESS analysis tool, and similar results in terms of significance levels were obtained when compared with the SPSS hierarchical regression results shown in the document.

Furthermore, although outliers were found not to affect the analysis results, the researcher did the analysis after removing the outliers picked in the box and whisker SPSS plots. A total of 189 samples were used, and the results indicated the same significant variables compared to those with the outliers. This further supported the idea that the effect of the outliers was negligible, as analysed in Chapter 4.

5.10 Summary

This chapter provided a summary and interpretation of the survey feedback analysis. The analysis revealed an inverse relationship between sales target pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour. The results also indicated that performance goal pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour relationship were moderated by organisational ethical climate (ethical governance). It was also discovered that based on the data collected, the perceived management support does not significantly predict salesperson ethical behaviour. Furthermore, the data analysis revealed no significant moderation by perceived management between the performance goal pressure and salesperson ethical behaviour.

6 Chapter 6: Discussion of Results

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 focuses on discussing the findings established in Chapter 5. The study intended to find out how managerial support and organisational climate relate to the relationship that exists between salespersons' ethical behaviour and performance goal pressure. The findings could help organisations reduce the adverse effects of unethical behaviour on the salesforce. The theoretical lens used for the analysis was the social learning theory. A model was established to enable testing of the relationships established from the theory. The model found that salesperson ethical behaviour was the dependent variable and that performance goal pressure, organisational ethical climate, and perceived manager support were the predictors.

The hypothesis and research questions used in the investigations were developed using theory and a review of information available on the variables. Hypothesis H1 required testing the relationship between performance goal pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour. Hypothesis H2a was needed to test the link between organisational ethical atmosphere and salespeople's ethical behaviour. Hypothesis H3a was needed to test the perceived relationship between management support and salespeople's ethical behaviour. Hypothesis H2b and H3b were established and needed to test the moderation of organisational ethical atmosphere and management support on the link between performance goal pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour. The control variables established from the literature were age, gender identity, sales experience, experience under the same manager, industry type and business models (Al Halbusi et al., 2021; Kadic-Maglajlic et al., 2019; Kuenzi et al., 2020; Lussier et al., 2021; Sarwar et al., 2020; Schwepker, 2019; Schwepker et al., 1997; Schwepker & Schultz, 2015; Sookdawoor & Grobler, 2022).

The associations between the predictors and predicted variables' sub-constructs were examined using Spearman's correlation. The prediction of salesperson ethical behaviour by performance goal pressure sub-constructs was examined using linear regression. Additionally, linear regression evaluated the prediction of salesperson ethical behaviour by sub-constructs of perceived management support and organisational ethical atmosphere. The moderating conditioning of management

support and organisational ethical atmosphere on the connection between ethical behaviour and sales target pressure was also tested using multiple linear regression.

Discussions of the results in relation to the existing literature review from Chapter 2 were debated in Chapter 6. Some of the hypotheses were not supported in the statistical analysis; this chapter will analyse the findings based on available literature as to the potential reasons for the hypothesis rejection and mixed values.

In particular, the prediction of salespeople's ethical behaviour by performance goal pressure was partially aligned with the literature. Performance goal pressure related to competitive behaviour inversely predicted behaviour in alignment with the literature review; however, performance goal pressure related to high quality did not predict ethical behaviour.

The organisational ethical climate (governance) sub-construct predicted ethical behaviour, while the subconstruct related to rewards and punishment did not. Furthermore, in contrast to existing literature, the moderating effect of the organisational ethical climate was only partially realised. Further to the partiality of organisational climate, the moderation effects were found to be opposite to the expectations of the existing literature.

Finally, no significant moderation was found for perceived management support. The results of perceived management support were not expected as the literature expects that it predicts ethical behaviour and strengthens the relationship between performance goal pressure and ethical behaviour.

6.2 Sample Population and demographic information

There were 271 applications in the initial sample, and after cleaning the data, a total of 212 samples were available for analysis. The sample size exceeded the 200 applications that were the intended sample size; hence no concerns were noted.

Over half the sample was aged 35 or older and possessed at least five years of experience, so the participants likely provided a reliable perspective regarding insights into the variables investigated. Furthermore, there was a huge concentration

of applicants in their mid-career stage (ages 35-44) and with over five years of experience, which made the sample potentially have the age that influences perspectives on performance goal pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour. More experienced salespeople may have differing views or responses to ethical behaviour than younger, less experienced ones; hence, the literature points to age and experience as controlling variables for the relationships tested.

A huge sample proportion (37.7%) had over ten years of experience, highlighting a knowledgeable workforce in the sales environment. However, the short tenure with the same manager (mode between one to three years) suggests frequent role changes within teams. This sample would have added valuable insights based on their extensive experience; however, lack of continuity with the same manager might have had a negative influence on giving responses on perceived management support.

Based on gender identity, most (58%) of the applicants were male, suggesting that male people may dominate the salespeople environment. Furthermore, the majority of the sample was from the technology industry, which is considered a male-dominated industry; hence, the distribution of the survey to have more males is aligned with the literature (Bridges et al., 2020). Furthermore, (Behera & Bala, 2023) indicated that there are more males in business-to-business sales environments, further suggesting this observation aligns with existing literature. This could have influenced the findings on controlling for gender-specific experiences, as the sample had an imbalanced representation to fully test potential differences in performance goal pressure and ethical behaviours between genders.

The education could have indicated notable insights into the salespeople profession. The very small percentage (0.50%) with doctoral degrees likely reflects the sales industry norms, where practical experience often holds more value than academic research qualifications for sales roles. This would have added value to the findings focusing on more practical applications than theoretical approaches to salesperson ethical behaviour and sales performance goal pressure. Most of the sample (87.30%) had a minimum diploma education, highlighting an educated sample. The applicants were likely to have good analytical skills and understanding of the survey questions,

influencing their ability to reflect on the ethical and pressure issues in the sales environment.

The sample of salespeople came from diverse industries, with the mode of people being from the technology sector. Fifty-seven salespeople were from the technology sector, followed by 46 persons from the manufacturing sector. The lowest responses were from people from the Arts, Culture, and Fashion sector, with only 0.47%. The sample was from various sectors, and the results represented a diversity of perceptions, which helped the researcher to have a more generalised comprehension of the links between the study variables.

Most salespeople (55.70%) operated in roles that involve both business-to-company and business-to-business interactions. This aligns with the literature suggesting that companies are now more inclined to operate in both models to increase and maximise revenue and customer satisfaction (Bilro et al., 2023). The sample of salespeople with experience in both business models enabled the findings to be generalised across the business models.

Control variables related to demographics, which included age, education levels, years of experience, and industry type, were each associated with a significant (5%) relationship with the salesperson's ethical behaviour-dependent construct. Gender identity, time spent with the same manager, and business model control variables were found not to significantly correlate with the salespersons' ethical behaviour, suggesting they do not independently influence ethical behaviour in the sales context. These control variables were used in past research experiments during regression. For that fact, the researcher proceeded to use them in the regression models as they were deemed critical to control the predictions of the main independent variables (Fleischman et al., 2019; Rostami et al., 2019; Schwepker, 2001, 2019; Schwepker & Good, 2022).

6.3 Characteristics of the sample for the variables

The salespeople scored below the mean for whether they engage in unethical behaviour (Mean = 2.62). It appears that they leaned to not agreeing that they engaged in unethical behaviour, for instance, trying to get customers to buy more

than what they need or lying about product availability (Román, 2003). One explanation for this could be social desirability inclination, where applicants align their answers with what is acceptable and not the reality (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). However, it is reassuring that the salespersons' unethical behaviour was below the mean.

The salespeople indicated that they agreed that management supported them (Means = 1.93). For instance, this shows that they agree that their manager considers their goals and is willing to help if needed. The findings indicated a positive manager relationship, which can enhance ethical behaviour and employees' understanding of goals.

Performance Goal Pressure (High Quality) of 2.03 indicated the respondents' perception of a highly pressurised environment. The applicants tended to agree with questions reflecting that they are obligated to deliver high-quality output and that the organisations pay close attention to employees who deliver high-quality results. Performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) had a mean of 2.64, which showed that respondents neither agreed nor disagreed but tended to agree that they were mildly working in a pressurised environment and agreed to items such as in my organisations, there is a serious competition, and one must compete with other employees regarding performance Zhang et al. (2019). This aligns with Zhu et al. (2023), who argued that organizations often apply performance pressure to drive competitiveness and encourage employees to perform at peak levels, a practice commonly seen in the technology industry, which forms the industry with the majority responses for this study.

The means of organisational ethical climate (Governance) and organisational ethical climate (disciplinary action) were 1.47 and 1.96, respectively. The very low score for ethical governance (1.47) reflected a strong perception of ethical climate, and respondents tended to strongly agree that companies have formal codes of conduct, such as having formal written codes and having policies regarding ethical behaviour Schwepker (2001). Furthermore, the applicants tended to strongly agree that the companies' reprimand of unethical behaviour led to personal or company gain. The prevailing results for organisational ethical behaviour indicated that most companies in South Africa have an ethical code of conduct. This aligns with the South African Business Ethics Survey, which reported that 71% of employees confirmed they must

commit to ethical conduct within their organisations (The Ethics Institute, 2019). Organisations' strong ethical climate will likely promote ethical standards, leading to low salespeople's unethical behaviour.

The frequency histograms for organisational (disciplinary and organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) show low positive skew and kurtosis, meaning most respondents rate these factors very positively. The distribution indicated that most of the respondents are experiencing a positive ethical climate, which aligns with the South African Business Ethics Survey, which stated that 71% of employees are required to commit to ethical conduct. The performance goal pressure histograms also showed peaks on the left, indicating the applicants perceived higher pressure goals, aligning with Zhu et al. (2023) when working in a competitive environment. The perceived management support also showed peaks on the left-hand side, indicating that most respondents were receiving support from their management. The salespersons' ethical behaviour had peaks around the centre (skewness = 0.41 kurtosis = -0.29) and almost exhibited a normal distribution.

As expected, performance goal pressure (high quality) and performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) had an inverse relationship with salesperson ethical behaviour. Anand, Bowen, & Rangarajan (2023) suggested that higher performance goals may lead to unethical behaviour, therefore informing a negative correlation. Organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) also showed a significant positive correlation with salesperson ethical behaviour, as expected in the literature (Roy et al., (2024) suggested that a positive climate encourages ethical behaviour. The perceived management support did not correlate with salespeople's ethical behaviour and deviated from literature expectations; for instance, Zeni et al. (2013) proposed that good management support positively influences ethical behaviour. Regressions for predictions were still done with the view that the controlling variables would introduce some modification to the relationships between perceived management support and salesperson ethical behaviour. Furthermore, perceived management support was included in the regression models to investigate potential moderating effects.

6.4 Hypothesis

6.4.1 Hypothesis H1

H1 posited that a negative relationship exists between sales target pressure (performance goal pressure) and the ethical behaviour of salespeople. The research question is, “Does higher sales target pressure increase the likelihood of unethical behaviour among salespeople?”. This research question assessed whether salespeople who faced increased performance goal pressure were likelier to engage in unethical behaviour. If this relationship held, it would have supported the prediction that performance goal pressure negatively influenced salespersons' ethical behaviour.

The research found an inverse correlation between competitive pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour. This aligns with Aligning with Zhi et al. (2023) and Lussier et al. (2021), who identified that pressure to meet performance goals was positively correlated with unethical behaviour. This confirms that higher performance goal pressure results in a decrease in salesperson ethical behaviour (Welsh et al., 2019). Hong (2019) also opined that salespeople may act unethically in increased performance goal-pressure environments.

This hypothesis was informed by the suggestion of Rapp et al. (2020) that employees in sales are under pressure to meet targets. Welsh et al. (2019) and Hong (2019), studies also discovered that higher performance goals are associated with reduced ethical behaviour. Some salespeople view unethical behaviours as a strategy to accomplish sales targets (Hong, 2019). Sales target pressure accompanies various sales positions to meet the required goals or go beyond (Brown et al., 2022). Because the world is becoming more competitive every day, it is becoming more difficult for salespeople to achieve their targets. Sales target pressure accompanies various sales positions to meet the required goals or go beyond (Brown et al., 2022). In that way, the performance goal pressure is a negative form of motivation; It may encourage unethical behaviour among salespeople as they try to be ahead of the competition and meet their targets. Therefore, competitive pressure creates a conflict between achieving sales performance goals and maintaining ethical standards, which may compromise ethical behaviour.

Next, the research showed that performance goal pressure (high-quality pressure) did not significantly predict the salespersons' ethical behaviour. Research suggests that when performance pressure focuses on long-term outcomes or customer satisfaction, it may encourage ethical sales practices (Gino & Margolis, 2011). However, this study did not find these relationships. This could be because the study was based on self-reported behaviour. These findings suggested that more research is required to determine the circumstances under which ethical behaviour will be encouraged in the presence of performance pressure.

Gino and Margolis (2011) found that emphasising long-term ethical standards can lead to better ethical behaviour among salespeople. Thus, performance goal pressure emphasising quality over immediate results may not drive unethical behaviour, which aligns with the observed lack of performance goal pressure (high quality) significance in predicting the salesperson's ethical behaviour.

6.4.2 Hypothesis H2a

H2a posited that organisational ethical climate positively correlates with salespeople's ethical behaviour. The research question associated with the hypothesis was, "Does a positive ethical climate increase the likelihood of ethical behaviour among salespeople?". This question helped to show how the context created by the organisation's climate could strengthen relationships between the pressure on the salespeople and their behaviour. Two types of organisational ethical climate were examined: organisational governance, which pertains to ethical guidelines, and disciplinary action, which involves responses to conduct.

The organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) had a significant direct effect on salesperson ethical behaviour). However, the organisational ethical climate (disciplinary action) had no statistically significant effect on salesperson ethical behaviour. Therefore, the hypothesis was partially accepted. In other words, an ethical climate of governance directly affects salespeople's tendency not to act unethically; however, no significant prediction was found with a disciplinary ethical climate.

Organisational ethical climate (organisational governance) aligns with existing research work, as shown by Sarwar et al. (2020) and Kuenzi et al. (2020). Organisational ethical climate (organisational governance) items involve formal structures, policies, and leadership that promote ethical behaviour. An inclusive workplace environment increases the likelihood that people will react. (Sarwar et al., 2020). Therefore, this implies that when employees perceive governance to be fair and inclusive, they encourage employee ethical behaviour.

In the organisational ethical climate (disciplinary action), the items focused on punitive measures to respond to unethical behaviour. Sarwar et al. (2020) suggested that employees do not prefer punitive climates that increase stress. It was also pointed out that the organisational ethical climate may have curvilinear relationships, where strict ethical climates like disciplinary action may create stress and negatively influence the employee's ethical behaviour (Newman et al., 2017). Therefore, while disciplinary actions may instil a fear of punishment in salespeople, their influence on ethical behaviour may be weaker than that of governance. This could explain why this subconstruct failed to predict ethical behaviour significantly.

6.4.3 Hypothesis H2b

H2b posited that a positive ethical atmosphere moderates the adverse effect of sales target pressure on ethical behaviour. The associated research question is “Does organisational ethical climate strengthen the link between performance goal pressure and ethics-related behaviour of salespeople?”.

The combination of high-performance goal pressure (high quality) and a positive ethical climate (ethical governance) did not reduce perceptions of unethical behaviour among salespeople. Instead, this combination increased the adverse effects of performance pressure on ethical behaviour. Although ethical governance within the organisations is expected to strengthen ethical behaviour tendencies, when combined with intense performance pressure, the findings indicate it led salespeople to engage less in ethical practices rather than improving their adherence to them.

In organisations with a positive ethical climate (ethical governance), employees, including salespeople, often develop a sense of belonging and seek to align themselves thoroughly with the organisation's ongoing goals (Mo et al., 2023). Mo et al. (2023) suggested that this deeper alignment with the organisation's vision may lead individuals to engage in unethical behaviour to meet sales targets. Additionally, a higher organisational ethical climate is often associated with supportive leadership. When salespeople identify with leadership, they may engage in creative unethical practices, believing that such actions are part of their dedication to supporting organisational success and driving sales revenue. Therefore, in this case, a strong ethical climate will worsen the implications of performance goal pressure on salesforce ethical behaviour.

The study by Chen and Chen (2021) examined how performance pressure, even within a strong ethical climate, has unintended consequences, leading to unethical behaviour. Chen and Chen (2021) study suggests that a highly supportive ethical climate, in the presence of high-performance pressures, may push employees towards unethical behaviour as they strive to meet organisational goals. The salespeople would be driven and justified by loyalty to the organisation and a desire to contribute to its success under challenging targets. The positive ethical climate, which is meant to promote ethical conduct, would inadvertently promote unethical behaviour. Therefore, this would result in an organisational ethical climate exacerbating the catastrophic effects of sales target pressure, as indicated in the results.

The other interaction variables performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) x organisational ethical climate (Ethical governance), performance goal pressure (high quality x organisational ethical climate (disciplinary action) and performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) x organisational ethical climate (Disciplinary action) were not significant in the model. This indicated no moderation effect of organisational climate (disciplinary action) on performance goal pressure and the relationship between salespersons' ethical behaviour. It was anticipated that all organisational climate constructs would play a moderating role. However, this outcome may stem from the high-performance goal pressure leading salespeople to align more closely with the organisation's vision, resulting in creative unethical behaviour.

Thus, the study confirmed that organisational ethical climate (governance) contributed significantly to enhancing the connection between the pressure to be competitive and the salespeople's likelihood to engage in unethical behaviour. In other words, if organisations introduced a governance climate, the pressure to be competitive is less likely to result in ethical salesperson behaviour. However, a disciplinary environment will not have the same effect.

6.4.4 Hypothesis H3a

The H3a hypothesis posited that perceived management support positively correlates with salespeople's ethical behaviour. The research question associated with the hypothesis was, "Does positive perceived management support increase the likelihood of ethical behaviour among salespeople?". This question tested the feedback from the salespeople to assess if high perceived management support encouraged ethical behaviours of salespeople, irrespective of the presence of performance goal pressure. This would inform the prediction of salesperson ethical behaviour by perceived management support.

The result was not aligned with expectations from the literature review. Lyngdoh et al. (2023) depicted that management support had a positive relationship with ethical behaviour. In contrast with existing literature, perceived management support was found to have no significant influence on salespeople's self-rated ethical behaviour, both with and without control variables. This suggests that, according to survey feedback, perceived management support does not effectively predict ethical behaviour among salespeople. This outcome was unexpected, indicating that support from management alone may not influence ethical behaviour.

The desired effects of management support can be diminished with higher performance goal pressure and more job stress variables (Zeni et al., 2013). Furthermore, if management support does not address concerns related to higher performance goals, then the ethical behaviour of the salespeople will not be influenced. Furthermore, in cases of heightened performance goals, managers may indirectly/directly facilitate unethical behaviour to achieve the company goals (Anand, Bowen, & Rangarajan, 2023). Effective management, which is focused on driving

sales misconduct to achieve sales objectives, may cause the rejection of the hypothesis that management support is associated with ethical behaviour. This may explain why the perceived management support was not significant.

If there is effective management support, salespeople will be motivated to perform at their best and still be obligated to express their satisfaction with the support offered by their managers (Mai et al., 2022). In acknowledging the support from their managers, salespeople may be obliged to reciprocate the support they are getting by stretching their sales activities and engaging in unethical behaviours. Mai et al. (2022) posit that employees may become unethically creative in trying to meet higher sales targets and reciprocate management support. This practice may have affected the prediction of management support in predicting ethical behaviour. Therefore, the prediction was insignificant, which can be attributed to higher performance goal pressure.

6.4.5 Hypothesis H3b

According to hypothesis H3b, the link between a salesperson's behaviour related to ethics and performance goal pressure is moderated by management support. The associated research question was "Does perceived management support moderate the link between performance goal pressure and ethics-related behaviour of salespeople?".

The study found no evidence that perceived management support had the expected moderating function on the association between performance goal pressure (both high-quality and competitive pressure) and salespeople's ethical behaviour. This suggests that perceived management support does not moderate how performance goal pressures affect ethical behaviour among salespeople, contrary to the initial hypothesis.

Lussier et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of management support in effectively coaching salespeople. By offering appropriate support, managers can help sales staff maintain focus on their objectives and successfully achieve targets set by organisations. This supportive mechanism enhances salespeople's success, minimising unethical behaviour during selling. Management support is anticipated to

promote ethical behaviour in the face of high-performance objectives; however, the results indicated that the perceived management support does not moderate the relationship. Schwepker, (2019) also pointed out that management support can positively influence the ethical behaviour of employees.

Even with effective management support, Anand, Bowen, & Rangarajan (2023) suggest that a lack of a clear ethical guideline can exacerbate the effects of performance pressure on salespeople, leading to unethical behaviour. When explicit ethical guidelines are not given, the salespeople may prioritise sales performance goals over ethical behaviour. In highly pressurised environments, salespeople will be compelled to meet targets by all possible means, including unethical behaviour. Without clear guidelines, even in the face of adequate management support, salespeople may justify their unethical conduct as, in the process, they will be acting in the organisation's favour(Cheng et al., 2019).

6.5 Conclusions

Irrespective of literature confirming that performance goal pressure (sales target pressure) negatively affects salespeople's ethical behaviour, this correlation has not received much attention in South Africa across industries. The research partially confirmed the results that have been obtained in the literature. The results supported the hypothesis that performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) negatively predicts salespeople's behaviour, while performance goal pressure (high-quality pressure) did not significantly predict salespeople. Organisational ethical climate (organisational governance) significantly predicted salesperson ethical behaviour, while organisational ethical climate disciplinary action did not predict salesperson ethical behaviour. No moderation effect was found by perceived management support and organisational ethical climate (disciplinary action) on the link between performance goal pressure and salesperson ethical behaviour. The organisational ethical climate (organisational governance) significantly moderated the pressure-salespeople's ethical behaviour relationship; however, it is in a direction not expected based on previous work. Table 32 shows the summary of the hypothesis findings. Figure 4 shows the relationship model obtained from the analysis

Table 32
Summary of the hypothesis findings

Hypothesis	Predictor Variable	Expected Relationship	Result
H1	Performance Goal Pressure (Competitive Pressure)	Negative influence on ethical behavior	Supported
H1	Performance Goal Pressure (High Quality)	Negative influence on ethical behavior	Not supported
H2a	Organisational ethical climate (Ethical Governance)	Positive influence on ethical behavior	Supported
H2a	Organisational ethical climate (Disciplinary Action)	Positive influence on ethical behavior	Not supported
H2b	Organisational ethical climate (Ethical Governance)	Moderates quality pressure effect on ethical behavior	Supported (Unexpected Direction)
H2b	Organisational ethical climate (Disciplinary Action)	Moderates quality pressure effect on ethical behavior	Not supported
H2b	Organisational ethical climate (Ethical Governance)	Moderates competitive pressure effect on ethical behavior	Not supported
H2b	Organisational ethical climate (Disciplinary Action)	Moderates competitive pressure effect on ethical behavior	Not supported
H3a	Percieved management support	Positive influence on ethical behavior	Not supported
H3a	Percieved management support	Moderates quality pressure effect on ethical behavior	Not supported
H3b	percieved management support	Moderates competitive pressure effect on ethical behavior	Not supported

Notes: Dependent Variable is Salesperson ethical behaviour
H1 - A negative relationship exists between sales target pressure and the ethical behaviour of salespeople.;
H2a -There is a positive relationship between organisational ethical climate and a salesperson's ethical behaviour. ;
H2b - A positive ethical climate moderates the relationship between sales target pressure and the ethical behaviour of salespeople. ;
H3a - There is a positive relationship between organisational ethical climate and salespersons ethical behaviour
H3b - Management support moderates the relationship between performance goal pressure (sales target pressure) and salespersons' ethical behaviour.

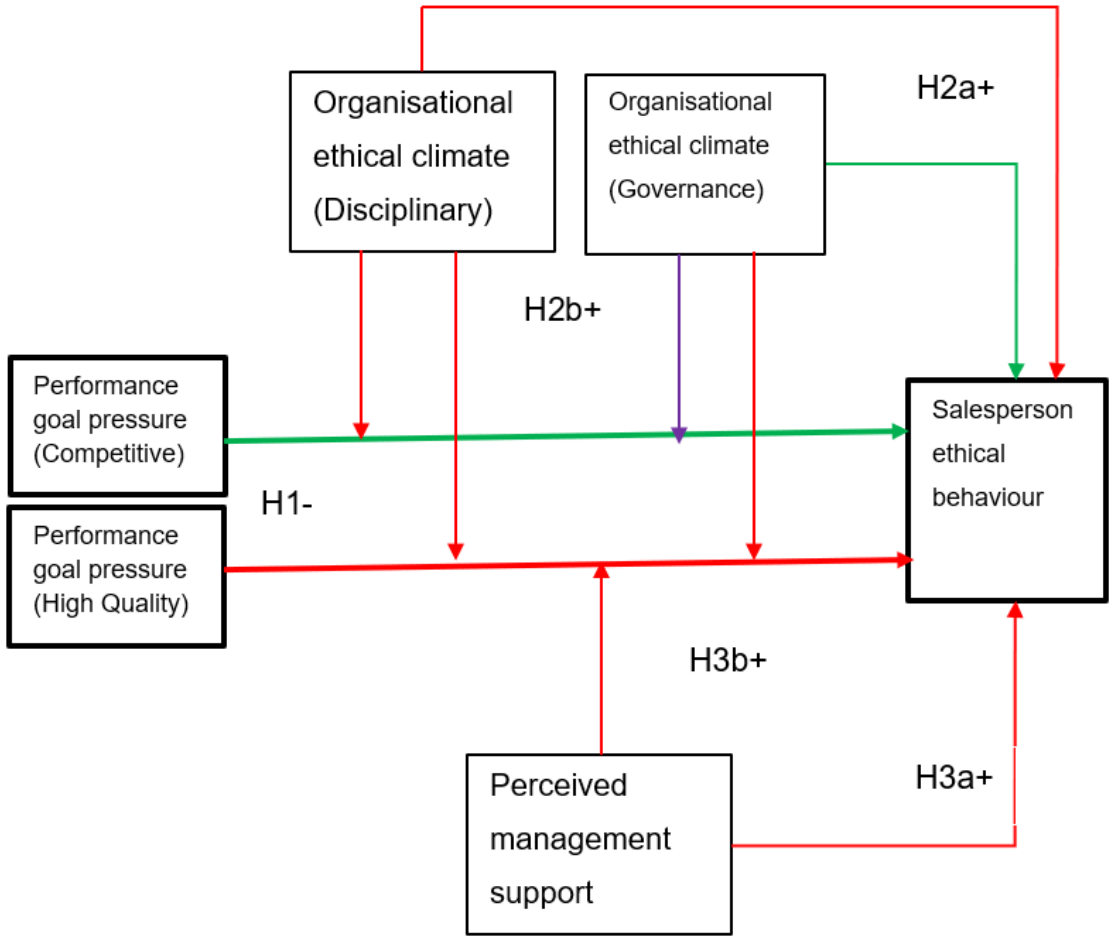

Figure 7
Model of findings after hypothesis testing

Note: Authors compilataion

7 Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations.

7.1 Introduction

The study tested the interactions among performance goal pressure, organisational ethical climate, and perceived management support influencing salespeople's ethical behaviour. A model illustrating these relationships was developed through a literature review using social learning theory. A quantitative methodology was employed, utilising survey questionnaires for data collection and linear regression analysis to evaluate the thesis hypotheses. Chapter 6 discusses the results, and this concluding chapter summarises the key findings.

The study discovered partial support for the influence of performance goal pressure on salespeople's ethical behaviour and partial moderation by organisational ethical climate on performance goal pressure and salesperson ethical behaviour relationship. No significance was established between perceived management support and salesperson ethical behaviour relationship, nor was there significant moderation by perceived management support on ethical climate and salespeople's ethical behaviour relationship.

Chapter 7 summarises the investigations carried out and highlights the conclusions obtained in Chapter 6. In 7.1, the researcher provided the Chapter 7 introduction. In sub-section 7.2, the researcher provided the principal findings of what was studied and why it matters. In section 7.3, the researcher provided the theoretical contributions that addressed the research context and why it matters. Section 7.4 provided the business contributions, including what is already known and what is unknown. In section 7.5, the researcher provided the limitations of the research. Future research recommendations were done in section 7.6. Lastly, in section 7.7, the researcher provided the conclusion to the study.

7.2 Principal findings

The main overarching question was, “What is the function of organisational climate and management support on the link between sales target pressure and ethical behaviour?” Five hypotheses were analysed in Chapter 5 to address this main

question. Chapter 5 provided insights into how the variables interacted based on the survey data collected.

7.2.1 Hypothesis H1

Hypothesis H1 was meant to probe the effect of performance goal pressure on salespersons' ethical behaviour. The results showed a significance between competitive pressure and salespersons' ethical behaviour relationship. This finding was aligned with the confirmation from the literature, which suggested a negative correlation between performance goal pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour; for instance, Hong (2019) and Lussier et al. (2021)also opined that salespeople may act unethically in increased performance goal-pressure environments.

The performance goal pressure (high-quality pressure) did not significantly correlate with salespersons' ethical behaviour. Gino and Margolis (2011) found that emphasising long-term ethical standards can lead to better ethical behaviour among salespeople, and performance goal pressure may trigger creative thinking to increase sales without participating in unethical behaviour. While literature supports the lack of significance in predicting ethical behaviour, this finding highlights the need for further research on the conditions that might encourage ethical behaviour even when high-performance goal pressures are present.

7.2.2 Hypothesis H2a

Hypothesis H2a was meant to probe the organisational ethical atmosphere (climate) and dependent variable salesperson's ethical behaviour association. As proposed in the literature, the results showed a relationship between sub-construct organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) and salesperson ethical behaviour. This finding aligned with Sarwar et al. (2020), who proposed that workers are likely to respond positively to governance ethics, which include inclusiveness and avoiding unethical practices.

Hypothesis H2a was rejected concerning the subconstruct organisational ethical climate (disciplinary action) and salesperson ethical behaviour relationship. Sarwar et al. (2020) suggested that employees do not prefer punitive climates that increase

stress; hence, this may have contributed to the lack of significance of this subconstruct. With this sub-construct of organisational ethical behaviour not showing a significant relationship, continued investigation is warranted to clarify this complex relationship, identify additional moderating or controlling variables that might support a more nuanced understanding.

7.2.3 Hypothesis H2b

Hypothesis H2b was meant to probe the moderating function of organisational ethical atmosphere on the link between performance goal pressure and dependent variable salesperson's ethical behaviour. The results showed a significant moderating effect by organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) on the link between performance goal pressure and salesperson ethical behaviour. Literature expects the organisational ethical atmosphere to strengthen the link between performance goal pressure and salespersons' ethical behaviour. That is, an organisational ethical climate reduces the effect of increased pressure. Mo et al. (2023) suggested that in the existence of a constructive ethical environment, employees are expected to be aligned with the organisation, which may lead individuals to execute their job functions ethically. However, in this study, it was discovered that the organisational ethical climate worsens the adverse influence of goal pressure on the ethical behaviour of the salespeople. The opposite results may be explained by Chen and Chen (2021), who opined that even with a highly supportive climate, the presence of performance goa; pressure may push employees to act unethically. These unexpected results are a basis for further investigation to establish other variables that contribute to the organisational ethical climate to worsen the harmful effects of sales targets' goal pressure on ethical behaviour of salespeople.

The organisational ethical climate (disciplinary action) did not demonstrate or moderate the link between performance goal pressure and salesperson ethical behaviour. While some literature supports this finding, it also highlights the need for further research to identify variables that might contribute to nuanced moderating effects. This could involve exploring additional factors that shape how disciplinary action influences ethical behaviour under high goal performance pressure.

7.2.4 Hypothesis H3a

Hypothesis H3a was meant to probe the influence of perceived management support on a salesperson's ethical behaviour. Only insignificant association links were realised between perceived management support and salesperson ethical behaviour, as proposed in the literature. Zeni et al. (2013) suggested that management support influence can be diminished by higher performance goal pressure; hence, this may have caused the lack of management support on salespeople's ethical behaviour. Although the results could be explained from the literature, this also forms a basis for further investigation of the complex relationship that exists between management support and organisational ethical climate.

7.2.5 Hypothesis H3b

Hypothesis H3b was meant to probe the moderating function of management support on the dependent variable, salespersons' ethical behaviour. The results indicated no significant moderating influence by management support considering the association between performance goal pressure and ethical behaviour. (Lussier et al. (2021) opined that supervisor support can lessen salespeople from participating in unethical behaviour. While literature can partially explain these results, as seen with Hypothesis H3a, this also provides a foundation for further investigation to probe the moderating complex relationship of management support on the association between performance goal pressure and salesperson ethical behaviour.

7.3 Theoretical contributions

Various researchers have investigated the relationships between performance goal pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour (Chen and Chen, 2023; Zhi et al., 2023). Chen and Chen (2021) discovered that high goal pressures often increase moral justifications for unethical actions in competitive environments, emphasising the need for clear ethical guidelines to mitigate such pressures effectively. Zeng et al. (2023) provided insights into how performance pressure can encourage unethical behaviours when it leads to the justification of salespeople for being passionate about the organisations' success. Various studies indicate that when salespeople

experience high-performance goals without adequate management support or codes of conduct, they will engage in unethical behaviours (Anand, Bowen, Spivack, et al., 2023). Furthermore, the researchers suggest that organisational ethical climate and perceived management support moderate or mediate the relationships between performance goal pressure and salespeople's ethical behaviour.

Even though the relationships have been established, there was a need to study further variables that contribute to the lack of significance of the established relationships. This study investigated additional factors that could contribute to perceived management and the organisational ethical climate (disciplinary action) and found that this variable did not predict the salespeople's ethical behaviour. The lack of significance of performance goal pressure (referring to pressure to perform high quality) highlights the need for further research into the complex relationship between performance goal pressure and the underlying mechanisms influencing its effect on salespeople's ethical behaviour. The study makes a meaningful contribution by establishing that some forms of organisational ethical climate, specifically ethical governance, strengthen the relationship between performance goal pressure and lower ethical behaviour.

Thus, the study meaningfully expands the comprehension of the drivers of unethical behaviour among salespeople. It shows that not only does the pressure from needing to be competitive lead to unethical behaviour among salespeople, but that a climate of governance can weaken this relationship, and an ethical climate that drives governance can directly lessen the chances of salespeople acting unethically.

The measures used accordingly showed that when the company compares the output workers, and there is a lot of competition among salespeople, then the salespeople may display many unethical behaviours, such as lying when making presentations, lying about competitors, making up answers when they don’t know, and so on. However, introducing a governance climate can have a positive effect. A governance climate means, based on the operationalisation of the construct, that the company has implemented codes of ethics and other policies in support of ethical behaviour.

7.4 Business contributions

Unethical behaviour by salespeople acting on behalf of organisations can significantly damage a company's reputation. Companies need to understand the factors that drive salespeople toward unethical practices, whether for personal gain or perceived organisational benefit. Managers and salespeople are critical resources that organisations need to consider when working to improve ethical behaviours.

Prior research substantiates the positive association between organisational ethical climate and ethics-related behaviour. This study highlights that certain organisational ethical atmospheres can exacerbate the adverse effects of performance goal pressure.Chen & Chen, (2023) recommended that organisations should be mindful of the influence of pressure on ethical behaviour and ensure goals are balanced to mitigate the effect. Organisations must be explicit on ethical behaviours so that expectations of ethical behaviour are made clear to the salespeople. This insight calls for a balanced approach to performance goals and ethical climates to minimise salespeople's likelihood of unethical behaviour. Moreover, with certain subconstructs showing no significant prediction, organisations are encouraged to implement specific interventions reinforcing ethical behaviours.

The results also indicated the need to understand the important factors contributing to unethical actions. (Cheng et al. (2019) recommended that organisations should provide more ethical training to ensure they can guide the salespeople to perform their duties ethically. Companies should train management to address ethical considerations alongside performance targets. Additionally, employee training should clarify that while commitment to the organisation is valued, it must not justify unethical actions. Such training reinforces the importance of maintaining ethical behaviour, even when pursuing sales organisational goals.

The non-significance of perceived management support in this study suggests that management support should explicitly target performance goals and ethical behaviour to ensure it promotes ethical behaviour. Chen & Chen (2023) also recommended that managers should address ethical-specific issues emanating from performance goal pressure and support salespeople to avoid ethical misconduct.

Both managers and salespeople would benefit from targeted training for ethical considerations and performance goal pressure management.

Ethical climate is essential in ensuring compliance by salespeople with ethical sales behaviour. (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). Management is responsible for effectively disseminating the ethical codes to the employees. Al Halbusi et al. (2021) recommended that organisations implement systems through the management structure that enforces the positive climate to promote ethical behaviours. Management's participation in promoting codes of conduct, especially in addressing ethical behaviour, would ensure that salespeople are educated to conduct business ethically.

7.5 Limitations of the research

Instead of capturing the dynamic character of the variables involved, the cross-sectional design employed in the research approach only recorded a single moment in time. This can limit understanding of prediction relationships and dynamic aspects of ethical behaviour. Without longitudinal data, assessing changes over time or the long-term impact of performance pressure and ethical climate on behaviour would be challenging. Roy et al. (2024) recommended longitudinal research to be carried out on how ethical factors change across time.

Furthermore, convenience and snowball sampling have attracted applicants linked to my network and may have skewed the sample populations. There was only one response from the Arts and Culture sector compared to forty-six from the manufacturing sector, indicating an uneven distribution of responses across industries within the sample.

The constructs used to measure variables (organisational ethical climate, performance goal pressure, perceived management support, salesperson ethical behaviour) may not adequately convey the relationships. The reliance on specific scales could have overlooked other factors influencing ethical behaviour.

The applicants self-reported the ethical behaviour construct, which can introduce bias. Participants may not accurately report their ethical behaviour due to social desirability bias or lack of self-awareness, leading to skewed results.

It may not be possible to generalise the findings due to the limited sample size. For example, only one person responded from the Arts and culture industry. Even though the study on ethical behaviour in sales was conducted across all sectors, the response contribution per industry may not be able to generalise the results across all sectors.

7.6 Suggestions for future research

This study investigated the relationship between the independent variables, performance goal pressure, perceived management support, and organisational ethical climate and their effects on salespersons' ethical behaviour. However, the questionnaire did not allow participants to elaborate on the reasons behind their responses, limiting the depth of insight into their answers. Future studies could benefit from a qualitative approach to help firms better understand the reasons influencing these factors. Conducting in-depth interviews would enable researchers to probe further into respondents' answers, providing more insights into the mechanisms influencing their ethical behaviours.

The cross-sectional design of this study is another drawback, as it hindered the ability to see patterns over time and made it challenging to prove causation. Additionally, some variables did not align with commonly established research findings, which the snapshot nature of the research design may have caused. To address these limitations, future research should replicate this study to analyse the resulting model Figure 5 using a longitudinal approach to better track changes over time and to establish causality for the variables under investigation.

The interactions between organisational climates and performance goal pressures to understand salesperson ethical behaviour align with current research trends. It was indicated that high-performance goal pressures combined with ethical climates could result in complex outcomes, where ethical climates sometimes intensify pressures that may lead to unethical behaviours (Chen & Chen, 2021). Additionally,

Lussier et al. (2021) emphasise the importance of understanding how organisational goals and climates influence sales ethics, suggesting that future research should examine varying climates and goal pressures longitudinally to better capture causal relationships and salesperson ethical behaviour characteristics over time. This would help to understand how some ethical climates worsen the negative effects of performance goal pressure.

7.7 Conclusions

The study provided useful observations into the function of organisational ethical climate and perceived management support on the link between performance goal pressure and salesperson ethics-related behaviour. The findings suggested that performance goal pressure (competitive pressure) negatively predicts salesperson ethical behaviour, while performance goal pressure (high quality) does not predict salesperson ethical behaviour. Furthermore, the organisational ethical climate (ethical governance) indicated that it strengthens the negative effects of performance goals in predicting salespersons' ethical behaviour, while no prediction was found regarding the organisational ethical climate (disciplinary action). Additionally, perceived management support did not directly predict salespersons' ethical behaviour nor moderated the association between performance goal pressure and ethical behaviour.

These insights challenge organisations to understand how performance goal pressure, organisational ethical climate, and perceived management support influence salespersons' ethical behaviour and to implement interventions that reduce negative consequences. The research suggests that, unlike the generally agreed assumptions that a positive climate and strong support yield ethical outcomes, there may be situations where these elements need closer alignment with ethical concerns. Consequently, organisations should focus on implementing targeted training programs that help to ensure that these relationships, including the controlled variables, support ethical behaviour rather than compromise it.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 –Informed consent

Informed Consent

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA.

You are invited to participate in my research project on the role of the organisational ethical climate and management support in the relationship between sales performance pressure and ethical behaviour. We would like you to complete an anonymous online questionnaire. This may take about 20 minutes. All information will be kept confidential, and no names will be collected from the questionnaire.
The Research Ethics Committee of the Gordon Institute of Business Science has granted approval for this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. By completing the survey, you indicate that you voluntarily participate in this research.

If you have any concerns, please contact me or my supervisor. Our details are provided below.
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Appendix 2 –Questionnaires and mesurément scales

Group 1 - Demographic information

Please answer the following questions on your background

1. Are you involved in sales, or do you hold a sales function role at your workplace?
    a. Yes – You may proceed with the survey
    b. No – You do not qualify for the study and are welcome to leave.
2. How old are you?
    a. 18 to 24 years old
    b. 25 to 34 years o
    c. 35 to 44 years old
    d. 45 to 54 years old
    e. 55 to 64 years old
    f. 65+ Years old
3. Gender Identity
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Non-binary
    d. Transgender
    e. Prefer not to reply
4. What is your highest level of education
    a. Matric
    b. Diploma
    c. Undergraduate degree
    d. Postgraduate degree (Up to Masters level)
    e. Doctoral Degree
5. How many years of sales experience do you have
    a. Less than 1 year
    b. Between 1 and 3 Years
    c. Between 4 and 5 years
    d. Between 6 and 10 years
    e. Older than 10 years
6. How many years of service under the same manager
    a. Less than 1 year

b. Between 1 and 3 Years
c. Between 4 and 5 years
d. Between 6 and 10 years
e. Older than 10 years

7. In which industry is your organisation
    a. Agriculture
    b. Arts, culture, fashion, entertainment
    c. Automotive
    d. Construction
    e. Education
    f. Fast Moving Consumer Goods
    g. Financial services
    h. Healthcare
    i. Hospitality and Tourism
    j. Manufacturing
    k. Mining
    l. Professional Services
    m. Retail
    n. Security
    o. Technology
    p. Not listed (please specify)
8. Which model does your business operate in?
    a. Business to Business (B2B)
    b. Business to Customer (B2C)
    c. Combined B2B and B2C

Group 2 - Performance goal pressure

Evaluate how you perceive your company on the following questions. from strongly agree to strongly disagree: On a five-point scale, choose one response on the scale between 'Strongly Agree' and 'Strongly disagree'

1. My company has set lofty performance goals for me.
2. My company pay close attention to individuals who demonstrate high levels of work quality
3. I am obligated to deliver a high-quality outcome to satisfy the company leaders.

4. Company leaders explicitly measure my performance by comparing my work with other employees.
5. In my company, there is a great deal of competition between individuals.
6. In my company, I must compete with other employees regarding performance.
7. My prospects for advancement in the company depend on whether I demonstrate superior performance.
8. I can win recognition from the company only if I demonstrate superior performance.

Group 3 - Organisational ethical climate – Provide feedback on how you perceive the following questions on your company. On a five-point scale, choose one response on the scale between 'Strongly Agree' and 'Strongly disagree'

1. The company has a formal, written code of ethics
2. The company enforces a code of ethics
3. The company has policies regarding ethical behaviour
4. The company enforces policies regarding ethical behaviour
5. Unethical behaviour is not tolerated
6. The company reprimands for behaviour leading to personal gain
7. The company reprimands for behaviour leading to corporate gain

Group 4 - Perceived manager support –State your perceived manager support by answering the following questions. On a five-point scale, choose one response on the scale between 'Strongly Agree' and 'Strongly disagree'

1. My sales manager takes great pride in my accomplishments
2. My sales manager really cares about my well-being
3. My sales manager really considers my goals and values
4. My sales manager is willing to help me if I need it

Group 5 – Sales ethical behaviour: The statements below describe how you may act with your customers. For each statement, please indicate to what extent you may behave this way. On a five-point scale, choose one response on a scale between 'Strongly Agree' and 'Strongly disagree.'

1. I stretch the truth in product representations
2. I try to convince customers to buy more than they need
3. I paint a rosy picture of the products to make them sound as good as possible

4. I make recommendations based on what I think I can sell and not based on long-term satisfaction
5. I stretch the truth about the availability of the product to make the sale
6. I stretch the truth about the competition to make my product more attractive to the customer
7. I give answers when I don't really know the answers
8. I apply sales pressure even though I know the product/service is not suitable for the customer,

Appendix 3 – Survey Qualtrics forms

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Group 1 - Demographic Information

Please answer the following questions on your background.

How old are you?

- ◯ 18 to 24 years old
- ◯ 25 to 34 years old
- ◯ 35 to 44 years old
- ◯ 45 to 54 years old
- ◯ 55 to 64 years old
- ◯ 65+ Years old

Gender Identity

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female
- ◯ Non-binary
- ◯ Transgender
- ◯ Prefer not to reply

What is your highest level of education?

- ◯ Matric
- ◯ Diploma
- ◯ Undergraduate Degree
- ◯ Postgraduate degree (Up to Masters level)
- ◯ Doctoral degree

How many years of sales experience do you have?

- ◯ Less than I year
- ◯ Between I and 3 Years
- ◯ Between 4 and 5 years
- ◯ Between 6 and I0 Years
- ◯ Older than I0 years

How many years of service under the same manager?

- ◯ Less than I year
- ◯ Between I and 3 years
- ◯ Between 4 and 5 years
- ◯ Between 6 and I0 years
- ◯ Over I0 years

In which industry is your organisation?

- ◯ Agriculture
- ◯ Arts culture fasion and entertainment
- ◯ Automotiva
- ◯ Construction
- ◯ Education
- ◯ Fast Moving Consumer Goods
- ◯ Financial Services
- ◯ Healthcare
- ◯ Hospitality and Tourism
- ◯ Manufacturing
- ◯ Mining
- ◯ Professional services
- ◯ Retail
- ◯ Security
- ◯ Technology
- ◯ Not Listed (Please specify)

Which model does your business operate in?

- ◯ Business to Business (B2B)
- ◯ Business to Customer (B2C)
- ◯ Combined B2B and B2C

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Group 2 - Performance goal pressure

Evaluate how you perceive your company on the following questions. On a five-point scale, choose one response on the scale between 'Strongly Agree' and 'Strongly disagree'

My company has set lofty performance goals for me.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

My company pay close attention to individuals who demonstrate high levels of work quality

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

I am obligated to deliver a high-quality outcome to satisfy the company leaders.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

Company leaders explicitly measure my performance by comparing my work with other employees.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

In my company, there is a great deal of competition between individuals.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

In my company, I must compete with other employees regarding performance.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

My prospects for advancement in the company depend on whether I demonstrate superior performance.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

I can win recognition from the company only if I demonstrate superior performance.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

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Group 3 - Organisational ethical climate

Provide feedback on how you perceive the following questions on your company. On a five-point scale, choose one response on the scale between 'Strongly Agree' and 'Strongly disagree'

The company has a formal, written code of ethics

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

The company enforces a code of ethics

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

The company has policies regarding ethical behaviour

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

The company enforces policies regarding ethical behaviour

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

Unethical behaviour is not tolerated

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

The company reprimands behaviour leading to personal gain

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or 'Neither Agree Nor Disagree')
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

The company reprimands behaviour leading to corporate gain

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or 'Neither Agree Nor Disagree')
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

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Group 4 - Perceived management support

State your perceived manager support by answering the following questions. On a five-point scale, choose one response on the scale between 'Strongly Agree' and 'Strongly disagree'

My manager takes great pride in my accomplishments

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or 'Neither Agree Nor Disagree')
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

My manager really cares about my well-being

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or 'Neither Agree Nor Disagree')
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

My manager really considers my goals and values

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

My manager is willing to help me if I need it

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

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Group 5 – Sales ethical behaviour:

The statements below describe how you may act with your customers. For each statement, please indicate to what extent you may behave this way. On a five-point scale, choose one response on a scale between 'Strongly Agree' and 'Strongly disagree.'

I stretch the truth in product representations

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

I try to convince customers to buy more than they need

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

I paint a rosy picture of the products to make them sound as good as possible

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

I make recommendations based on what I think I can sell and not based on long-term satisfaction

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

I stretch the truth about the availability of the product to make the sale

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

I stretch the truth about the competition to make my product more attractive to the customer

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

I give answers when I don't really know the answers

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

I apply sales pressure even though I know the product/service is not suitable for the customer,

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral (or "Neither Agree Nor Disagree")
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

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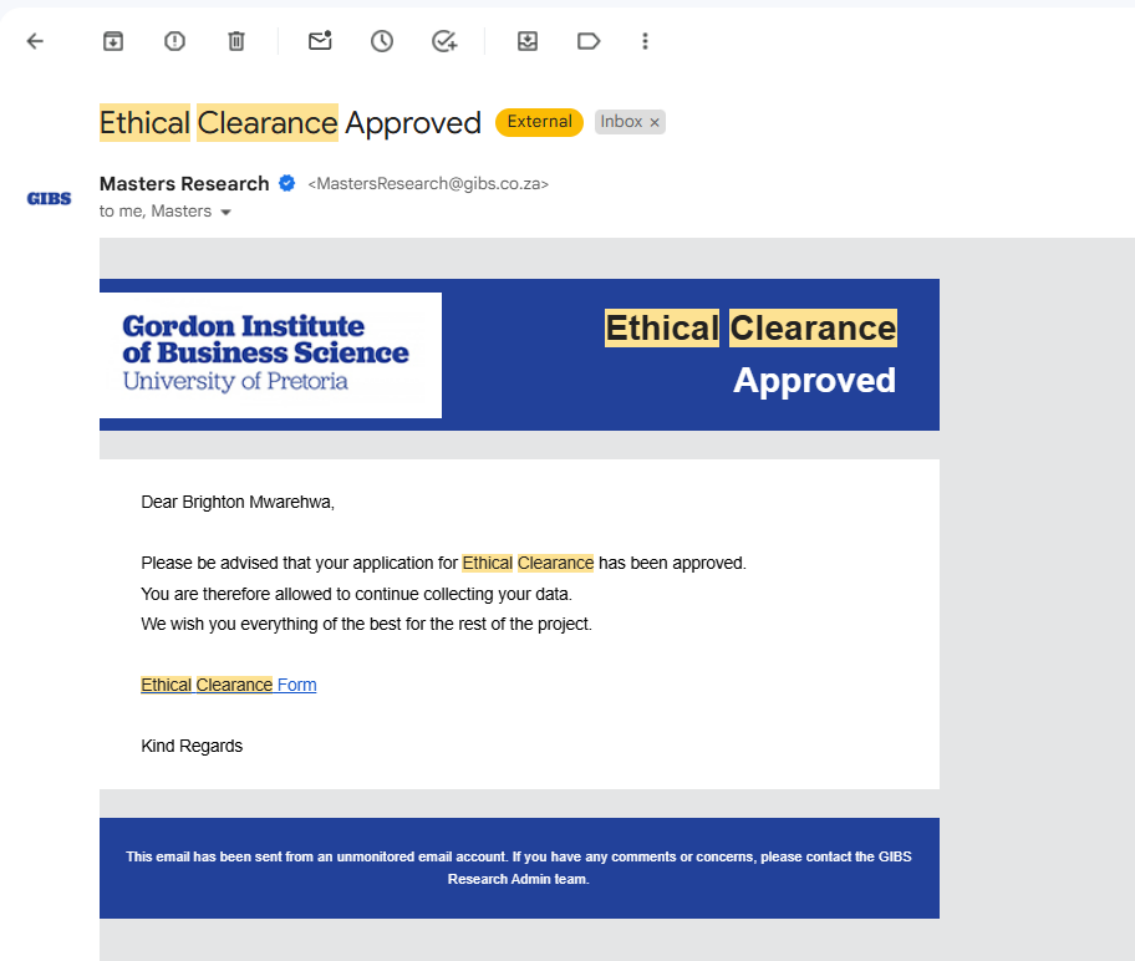
We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.
Your response has been recorded.

Survey Completion

0% 100%

Appendix 4 – Ethical clearance letter



Ethical Clearance Approved External Inbox ×

GIBS **Masters Research** <MastersResearch@gibs.co.za>
to me, Masters

Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

Ethical Clearance Approved

Dear Brighton Mwarehwa,

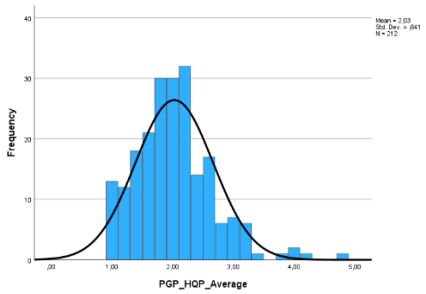
Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.
You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.
We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

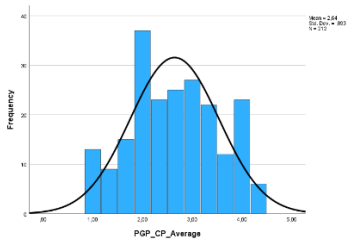
Ethical Clearance Form

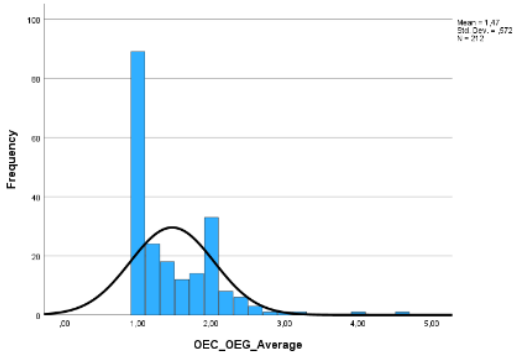
Kind Regards

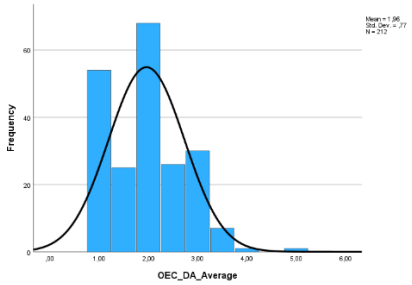
This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS Research Admin team.

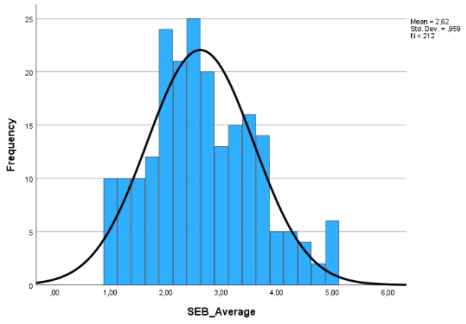
Appendix 5 – Subconstructs Histograms

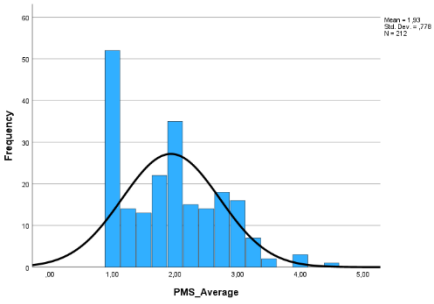






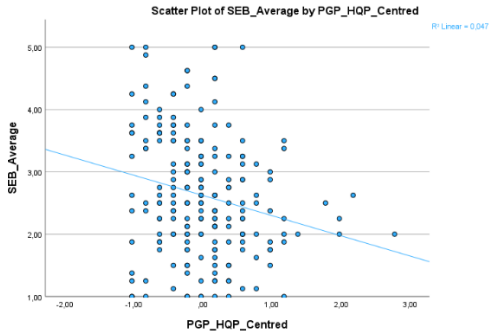


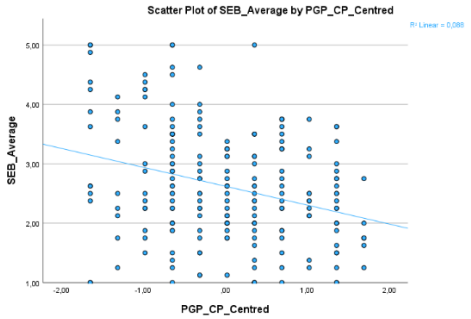


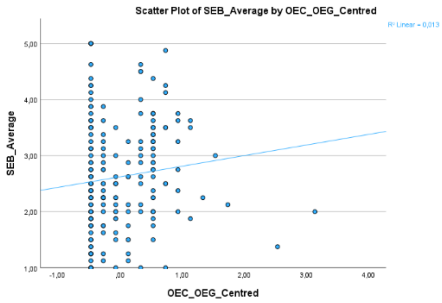


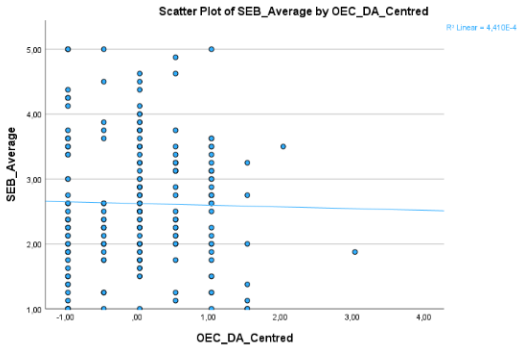
Notes: Histograms of the constructs

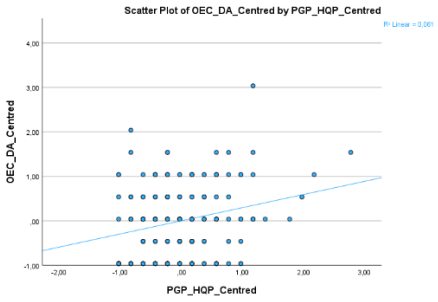
Appendix 6 –Scatter plots of the independent variables versus the depended

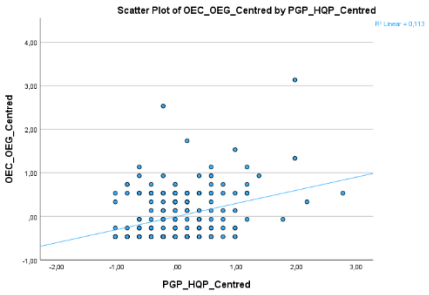


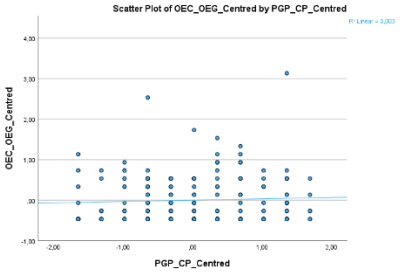


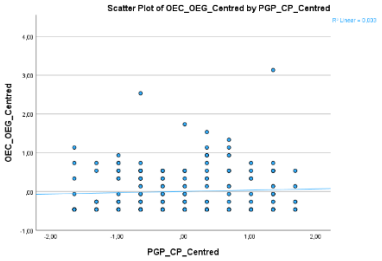








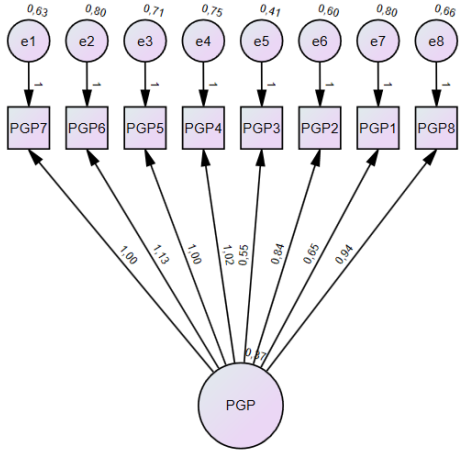




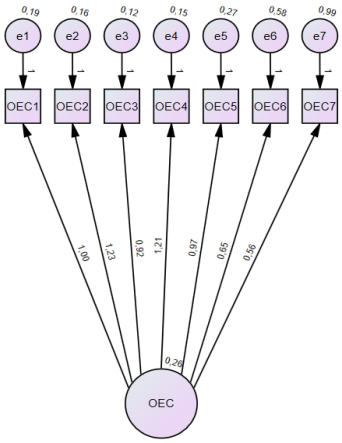
Notes: Adapted from SPSS output

Appendix 7– CFA Analysis

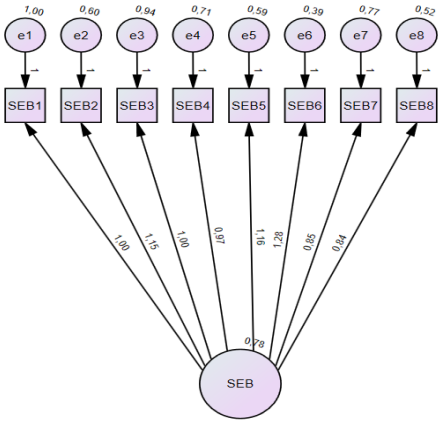
Performance goal pressure



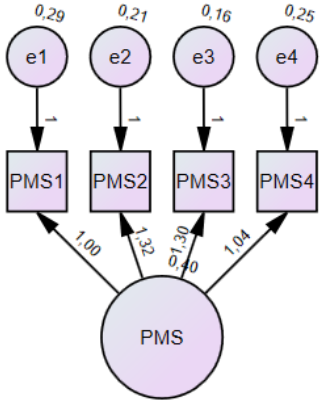
Organisational ethical climate



Salesperson ethical behaviour



Perceived management support



Appendix 8 – Codebook for control variables

Demographic variable	Details	Code
2. How old are you	a. 18 to 24 years old	1
	b. 25 to 34 years o	2
	c. 35 to 44 years old	3
	d. 45 to 54 years old	4
	e. 55 to 64 years old	5
	f. 65+ Years old	6
3. Gender Identity	a. Male	1
	b. Female	2
	c. Non-binary	3
	d. Transgender	4
	e. Prefer not to reply	5
4. What is your highest level of education	a. Matric	1
	b. Diploma	2
	c. Undergraduate degree	3
	d. Postgraduate degree (Up to Masters level)	4
	e. Doctoral Degree	5
5. How many years of sales experience do you have	a. Less than 1 year	1
	b. Between 1 and 3 Years	2
	c. Between 4 and 5 years	3
	d. Between 6 and 10 years	4
	e. Older than 10 years	5
6. How many years of service under the same manager	a. Less than 1 year	1
	b. Between 1 and 3 Years	2
	c. Between 4 and 5 years	3
	d. Between 6 and 10 years	4
	e. Older than 10 years	5
7. In which industry is your organisation	a. Agriculture	1
	b. Arts, culture, fashion, entertainment	2
	c. Automotive	3
	d. Construction	4
	e. Education	5
	f. Fast Moving Consumer Goods	6
	g. Financial services	7
	h. Healthcare	8
	i. Hospitality and Tourism	8
	j. Manufacturing	9
	k. Mining	10
	l. Professional Services	11
	m. Retail	12
	n. Security	13
	o. Technology	14
	p. Not listed (please specify)	15
8. Which model does your business operate in?	a. Business to Business (B2B)	1
	b. Business to Customer (B2C)	2
	c. Combined B2B and B2C	3