

Examining the Effect of Perceived Leader Integrity on Hotel Frontline Employees' Performance and Intention to Stay. Examining the Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

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Abstract

This study investigates a central question: How does employee job satisfaction (EJS) shape the relationships between perceived leader integrity (PCLI), employee performance (EMPF), and employees' intention to stay (ITST) within five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia? Although prior research acknowledges the importance of leadership integrity and workforce attitudes in hospitality settings, empirical evidence remains limited in luxury hotel environments in the Saudi context. Grounded in hotel management and human resources theories that emphasize leadership ethics and employee behavioral outcomes, this study aims to address this knowledge gap. A structured questionnaire measuring four core constructs (PCLI, EJS, EMPF, and ITST) was administered to 411 frontline hotel employees. Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM. Findings reveal that PCLI significantly enhances employee satisfaction, performance, and retention intentions. Additionally, EJS positively influences both EMPF and ITST and partially mediates the links between PCLI and each of these employee outcomes. This research advances understanding of how leader integrity and employee satisfaction interact to strengthen performance and reduce turnover intentions in luxury hotels, offering both theoretical contributions and practical insights for hospitality managers. Recommendations for future inquiry are also discussed.

Key Words: perceived leader integrity, job satisfaction, employee performance, intention to stay, hotel sector, Saudi Arabia.

JEL Classification: M12, L83, J28

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1. Introduction

In the hospitality industry, internal and external customers are important assets; both constitute human resources (HRs) and determine the success or failure of organizations within the industry (Valenti & Horner, 2020). Due to the nature of the service, both of them must exist; otherwise, the service will not be completed. In this respect, there is no point in having a five-star hotel with no one available to serve guests, or having a five-star hotel with no guests available. This underscores the importance of human resources in any hospitality organization (Nastase et al., 2025). Furthermore, why, for example, are two five-star hotels having the same level of services and amenities but one of them is better than the other one? Probably the answer to this question is going to be through this study that focuses on perceived leader integrity (PCLI) and its impact on frontline employees' performance (EMPF) and their

intention to stay (ITST), considering employees' job satisfaction (EJS) as a mediating variable between these variables in five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia. In other words, the primary key to hotel success depends significantly on the nature of the interactions among PCLI, frontline EMPF, ITST, and the mediating role of EJS, especially within the high-pressure environment of five-star hotels (Kim & Brymer, 2011).

In the hotel industry, to survive and compete in the market, hotels should avoid focusing on factors that are easy to imitate (e.g., technology, business scale, product offerings). Instead, they should focus on employee quality, which would ultimately be the distinguishing factor in achieving the hotel's goals (Nian Ng & Salamzadeh, 2020). The hospitality industry, particularly five-star hotels, follows standards for delivering exceptional service, making employees who are in direct contact with customers vital in shaping the first impression of customer experiences and overall organizational performance (Kurian & Nafukho, 2022). In addition to being the first and last point of contact for guests, frontline employees' performance is a critical determinant of service quality and customer satisfaction (Kim *et al.*, 2020).

The current role of HRs in the hotel sector is not only about selling services and products to guests but is also considered an imperative determinant of activities in other departments (Santya & Dewi, 2022). HRs thus have a huge role in determining the success or failure of hotels in the hotel sector. Besides, any progress or development of the hotels also depends on the quality and capabilities of the HRs working in these hotels. Therefore, managing HRs professionally can help balance employee needs, hotel capabilities, and the hotel's quality HR needs, as well as support the hotel's progress and development. By doing so, the hotel will be assured that it will be developed, employees will work professionally, and the hotel's goals will be achieved effectively (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020; Santya & Dewi, 2022).

Furthermore, the success of balancing employees' needs and hotel capabilities with HR needs to achieve the hotel's goals is also heavily dependent on the behaviors, attitudes, skills, and actions of leaders, which are often referred to as leadership style. The more applied the leadership style, the greater the improvements in the hotel's performance (Santya & Dewi, 2022).

Shabir and Muazzam (2024) stated that leader integrity is one of the most important qualities of influential leaders; however, the nature of leader integrity and its causes and effects remain unclear to many researchers. Therefore, Kouzes and Posner (2002) posed a question to over 75,000 individuals around the world about qualities that are most appreciated in a leader. The frequent answer is leader honesty, and that is synonymous with leader integrity. Moreover, leadership integrity, attributed to qualities such as honesty, trustworthiness, and ethical conduct, provides a roadmap for organizational culture and employee behavior (Tahernejad *et al.*, 2015).

Unfortunately, both organizations and leaders are unaware that qualities of a leader, such as integrity, power sharing, transparency, honesty, standards of ethical and environmental concerns, can enhance employees' satisfaction and influence employees to show the best of their abilities at work (Khan *et al.*, 2016; Dutra, Paiva & Helal, 2025). Therefore, it can be interpreted that a leader who has the ability to create a good organizational environment will, in return, encourage the employees to be motivated to work, increase employees' job satisfaction, and promote high creativity as well as achieve a high level of performance (Sami *et al.*, 2011; Santya & Dewi, 2022). Dimitriou & Schwepker (2019) indicated that perceived leaders as ethical and trustworthy will encourage frontline employees to follow them and create and promote an environment of integrity and high performance.

Job satisfaction is defined by Saleem *et al.* (2010) as an emotional state characterized by the joy of one's role and the joy of contributing to the achievement of organizational goals. Job satisfaction can be fostered among employees in the hotel sector when supported by an appropriate leadership style and accepted by all employees in hotels. Thus, Job satisfaction is about an employee's overall happiness with their job, which plays a crucial mediating role in influencing both performance and retention (Burke,

2018). The more satisfied the employees, the more motivated, engaged, and committed they are in their workplace, which consequently leads to improved performance and reduces the intention to leave the organization (Arici, 2019).

EMPF is another critical key in achieving the organizational goals and competitiveness in labor-intensive industries such as hospitality (Kvasić et al., 2021). This refers to the fact that labor-intensive industries require consistent EMPF and effective service delivery, both of which are essential for achieving competitiveness and satisfying customer needs (Phan *et al.*, 2023).

ITST is defined by Johanim et al. (2012) as the intention to maintain the current employment relationship with the same employer for a long-term basis. This is the opposite of the concept of intention to quit, which refers to the intention to leave the organization permanently in the near future (Vandenberg & Nelson, 1999). Usually, hotel companies suffer when highly talented employees leave and take other jobs elsewhere more frequently than corporate layoffs are reported (Mobley, 1982). This issue in the hotel sector is critical, as competition for talented employees is high and growing. Therefore, the increased turnover rates mean more challenges will be faced within the hospitality industry, particularly in the hotel sector. The reason is that the greater the intention to leave the organization, the greater the negative impact on financial performance and service quality (Gom et al., 2021).

These rates show the importance of understanding the factors that affect employees' intention to stay, as retaining professional employees is critical for maintaining the level of competition and the competitive edge (Gom et al., 2021; Khalid et al., 2025; Hajduová et al., 2025). In the hotel sector, frontline employees are crucial because they are expected to make a good first impression on guests (Shah et al., 2020). It is also well known that frontline hotel positions are not easy, with work overload and stress that eventually lead to burnout (Cheng & O-Yang, 2018). When employees are burned out by excessive workload, there is a greater likelihood of reduced performance quality and a damaging cycle of dissatisfaction (Prentice & Thaichon, 2019), which negatively impacts both employee morale and customer experience.

The proposition that the external and internal image of working in the hotel sector is further supported by this study and significantly impacts the challenge of either attracting or maintaining employees, a challenge where, today, many jobs and opportunities within the hospitality industry are available (Denvir & McMahon, 1992). More research needs to be conducted in the hotel sector because the hotel industry shows high rates of employees' turnover that result from employees' dissatisfaction with HRM practices, which leads them to quit from the hotel sector and look for employment in other sectors that present better and more benefits (Chan *et al.*, 2021). To bridge the gaps in this study, further examinations of perceived leader integrity (PCLI), employees' job satisfaction (EJS), employees' performance (EMPF), and employees' intention to stay (ITST) in luxury hotels (i.e., five-star hotels) in Saudi Arabia are needed.

Therefore, this study seeks to answer its principal question: what is the mediating effect of (EJS) on the relationships between (PCLI and EMPF) and (PCLI and ITST)? Specifically, this study further analyzes, from employees' perspective, the effect of PCLI on EJS, EMPF, and ITST, mediated by EJS, in the Middle East, particularly at luxury hotels (i.e., five-star hotels) in Saudi Arabia.

This study used variables that were primarily developed in Western settings and have rarely been applied in Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia. To the author's knowledge, this research is one of the first empirical investigations of the proposed model in the lodging industry at a large scale (five-star hotels) in Saudi Arabia. The model examines the direct links between perceived leadership integrity (PCLI) and the three critical outcomes: employee job satisfaction (EJS), employee performance (EMPF), and intention to stay (ITST). Furthermore, it investigates EJS's role as a mediator in the relationships between PCLI and EMPF, and between PCLI and ITST. The model posits that effective PCLI in Saudi Arabia's five-star hotels positively affects frontline employees' performance, their desire to remain with the organization, and their overall job satisfaction. Finally, the inclusion of EJS as a mediating variable is anticipated to strengthen the relationships between (PCLI and EMPF) and (PCLI and ITST).

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

This study draws on Social Exchange Theory (SET) as its theoretical foundation, proposing that workplace relationships are shaped by reciprocal obligations grounded in trust, fairness, and mutual benefit (Blau, 1964). When leaders demonstrate integrity, employees are more likely to perceive organizational support and ethical treatment, thereby fostering positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In luxury hotel environments where service quality relies heavily on frontline employee engagement, such reciprocal exchanges become especially critical (Karatepe, 2013). Accordingly, SET offers a robust framework for understanding how perceived leader integrity enhances job satisfaction, which in turn strengthens employee performance and reduces turnover intentions.

2.1 Perceived Leadership Integrity (PCLI) and Employees' Job Satisfaction (EJS)

Leadership integrity is considered an imperative element of effective leadership, affecting employees' performance and organizational outcomes (Park et al., 2019). Integrity in leadership creates a culture of trust and fosters honesty, both of which are essential for creating a positive work environment (Wen et al., 2020). Leadership integrity consists of a number of practices that a leader engages in within the service organization, such as moral conduct, honesty and transparency, and adherence to ethical principles in all transactions (Han, 2022). When leadership integrity is maintained in a service organization, it means that a standard for ethical behavior is distributed throughout the organization, influencing employees' commitment and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction refers to the extent to which employees feel positive about their jobs, including aspects such as duties and tasks at work, colleagues' affairs within the organization, and opportunities for growth (Deery, 2008). When employees perceive their leaders as integrity leaders, they are more likely to report higher levels of job satisfaction (Guchait, Cho). This is because integrity in leadership enhances psychological safety, where employees feel appreciated, respected, and supported in their jobs (Putra & Masdupi, 2019). Furthermore, leaders who act with integrity can also positively influence their employees' morale and commitment (Yates, 2014; Bernanthos, 2018; Qasim et al., 2022; Samar Reyaz, 2024). Accordingly, this study suggests the following hypothesis:

H1: PCLI will positively influence EJS.

2.2 Perceived Leadership Integrity (PCLI) and Employees' Performance (EMPF)

PCLI is a critical matter of organizational effectiveness, particularly in its impact on EMPF in the hotel sector (Elshaer et al., 2025). PCLI in the hotel sector has a huge role in impacting both leaders and subordinates, creating a win-win environment (Nangoli et al., 2020). Effective leadership must have integrity, which includes different qualities (i.e., honesty, transparency, consistency, and a commitment to moral conduct). Logically, employees are more likely to exhibit motivation, engagement and commitment to their jobs when they believe in their leaders that they are honest and ethical. Furthermore, when employees know their leaders have a high sense of integrity, this will create a culture of trust, respect, and psychological safety, which potentially to a high level of their job satisfaction and performance (Moorman et al., 2013).

Organizations can foster a culture of excellence and high performance by placing a high priority on leader integrity. Integrity in hotel managers and supervisors is a must, and both of them should be ethical because this will improve moral behavior and performance of frontline employees in terms of providing excellent service and guest-focused behavior (Dimitriou & Schwepker, 2019). Furthermore, in the hotel sector, where service quality is critical, employees who perceive their leaders as having high

integrity are more likely to embody values that enhance customer service and satisfaction (Kurian & Nafukho, 2022). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: PCLI will positively influence EMPF.

2.3 Perceived Leadership Integrity (PCLI) and Employees' Intention to Stay (ITST)

Attitudes and behaviors in the workplace are shaped by employees' perceptions of their leaders' integrity. Integrity is one of the most imperative aspects of leadership, mainly for encouraging and achieving desired results in the workplace. When employees perceive their leaders as honest and moral, they are less inclined to leave their jobs and stay where they work (Akther & Tariq, 2020). Further, the employees are convinced that PCLI means their leaders have faith in their decisions and have enhanced security and stability. A leader's integrity is defined by the consistency of their words and actions, moral conduct, and fairness. Leaders with perceived integrity can easily form an environment where trust and openness are foundations, and employees feel appreciated, respected, and valued. Consequently, increasing their intentions to stay (Sharma et al., 2019).

When leaders demonstrate integrity, a sense of trust, loyalty, and retention is instilled among employees in the workplace (Hauer et al., 2021). Organizations, and hotels in particular, can increase the intention to stay and boost employee involvement and loyalty by fostering a high level of leader integrity in the workplace. Employees are more likely to stay with a company when they feel appreciated, respected, and supported by leaders who demonstrate integrity in the workplace. Moreover, when employees trust their leaders, they are more likely to be committed to their jobs and workplace and to exhibit a lower intention to leave (Moorman & Grover, 2009). Leaders who act ethically, fairly, and consistently create an environment that fosters trust and security, as well as motivation for workers to stay with the company (Leigh, 2009).

Leaders who consistently demonstrate moral conduct are more likely to adhere to an ethical compass in their behavior and attitudes (Krisharyuli et al., 2020). Through their behavior, they reflected adherence to moral conduct, treating everyone with respect and being responsible for their actions. Therefore, organizations and hotels, in particular, should focus on the benefits of leadership integrity, as it is essential for creating positive employee attitudes and behaviors, reducing turnover rates, and fostering a more engaged workforce (Qalati et al., 2023). Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: PCLI will have a positive influence on ITST

2.4 Employees Job Satisfaction (EJS) and Employees Performance (EMPF)

EJS is a vital variable in employee performance in the hotel sector, especially in five-star establishments, where standards of service quality and customer experience are critical and expected (Chi & Gursoy, 2009). Satisfying employees where they work will lead them to be more motivated and involved, and to adhere to their jobs, consequently improving performance (Ruel & Njoku, 2021). When employees are happy, they are more likely to create a friendly, delightful environment and meet and exceed guest expectations (Wright et al., 2007).

Many factors can influence EJS. These include: competitive benefits packages, opportunities for promotion, quality-of-work-life practices, and a supportive work environment (Wang et al., 2017). When employees perceive care, appreciation, and support from their employers, they are more likely to be satisfied and perform at their best (Bello et al., 2024). EJS in their jobs is important in the hotel industry, as it directly influences guest satisfaction, loyalty, and the overall reputation of the hotel (Simons & Enz, 1995; Spinelli & Canavos, 2000; Amin et al., 2017). When employees are satisfied with their work, they are more likely to be friendly, attentive, and quick to respond to guests' requests (Al-Sabi, 2011), in addition to taking the initiative to solve problems, provide outstanding service, and improve the overall guest experience.

Organizations can improve employee satisfaction by making sure that fair compensation practices, opportunities for professional development, work-life balance initiatives, and a supportive work environment are provided, which ultimately will lead to improved employee performance and result in higher levels of guest satisfaction (Spinelli & Canavos, 2000; Indrayani & Wahyudi, 2020; Chigozie-Nwokorie, 2021). Drawing upon the preceding literature, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study:

H4: EJS will have a positive influence on EMPF

2.5 Employees Job Satisfaction (EJS) and Employees Intention to Stay (ITST)

The hospitality industry depends on its employees to deliver high service quality and maintain a competitive edge (Gom *et al.*, 2021). The success in retaining employees with the company can help control labor expenses (Ghani *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, hotel managers need to implement more effective retention policies and strategies (Ghani *et al.*, 2022). Maintaining and retaining top personnel has long been found as priceless by most hotel executives, and this is due to the significant influence of turnover crises on the hospitality sector (Fernandez and Worasuwan, 2017).

Keeping employees satisfied is important for the hotel business, as it helps reduce employees' intention to leave and retain qualified employees (Lam *et al.*, 2001). EJS and employee turnover are not met, and prior research by Muchinsky & Tuttle (1979) found a negative correlation between EJS and turnover. The hospitality industry is distinguished from other industries by a high rate of employee turnover, which can have serious consequences for the hotel business (e.g., service quality and profitability). Therefore, it has also been suggested that improving EJS involves treating them as customers (Rust *et al.*, 1996).

Maintaining a competitive level of service in hotels and competing with others in the market, where many five-star hotels operate, is vital, especially with regard to changing consumer preferences and the utilization of digital technological advancements (Gom *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, hotels play a major role in reducing turnover rates and creating a stable, committed workforce by making great efforts to achieve EJS among employees in the hotel sector, particularly in five-star hotels.

EJS has a significant influence on their desire to stay, especially in five-star hotels seeking to maintain a stable, professionally skilled workforce. Satisfying employees in their jobs will likely increase loyalty and commitment and reduce turnover rates and related expenses for the company. The number of elements influences EJS. These include promotion opportunities, competitive compensation, a healthy work-life balance, and a positive work environment (Yang, 2010; Coughlan *et al.*, 2014). When employees feel appreciated and encouraged, they are more likely to be satisfied in their workplace and less likely to leave, staying longer with the company.

Furthermore, Happy employees are more likely to be ambassadors for their hotels, promoting the hotel's reputation and drawing the attention of both customers and prospective employees. Unhappy employees, on the other hand, are more likely to be looking for opportunities elsewhere, resulting in higher intention to leave and decreased productivity. This is particularly a challenge for hotels that are dependent on a large number of employees, who serve different customers, who visit the hotels for different reasons (Basnyat & Clarence Lao, 2019).

According to Arıcı (2019), a happy employee is less likely to leave their job. Job satisfaction is crucial in determining whether people stay in their positions; if employees are dissatisfied with their work, they are more likely to leave, and vice versa (Heimerl *et al.*, 2020; Ratna & Maharani, 2021; Lintang & Rathakrishnan, 2024). Accordingly, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

H5: EJS will have a positive influence on ITST

2.6 The mediating role of Job satisfaction between (PCLI and EMPF) and (PCLI and ITST)

EJS, as a critical variable, mediates the relationships between PCLI and frontline EMPF on one side and between PCLI and ITST on the other side, particularly in the hotel industry (Alzyoud *et al.*, 2019). Employees who perceive their leaders as integrity leaders in the workplace are more likely to be happier, which in turn leads to enhanced performance and a greater desire to remain with the company (Javed *et al.*, 2014). PCLI creates trust and respect among employees, fostering a positive work environment in which employees feel appreciated and supported (Chigozie-Nwokorie, 2021).

This environment of trust and support raises job satisfaction and motivates employees to perform beyond expectations in their roles and to provide premium services to customers. Furthermore, EJS serves as a point of connection through which leaders' integrity influences employee performance, as satisfied employees are more likely to be committed and motivated to achieve organizational goals. For example, appraising employees' contributions to the organizational performance can simply foster their motivation and involvement (Virgana, 2021). In this respect, when leaders are perceived as honest and ethical by frontline employees, this will foster EJS, increase performance, and strengthen the desire to stay with the company. Therefore, hotel companies must foster a culture of integrity and ethical leadership to improve EJS and retention rates.

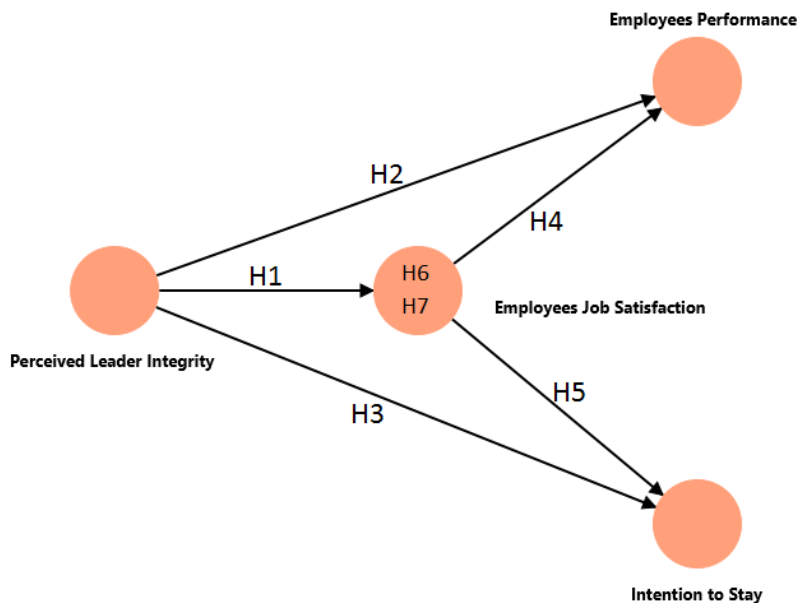
Ethical behavior and integrity are becoming increasingly important, and leaders who play the role of role models in the organizations by implementing the ethical standards in their behavior and decision-making processes have positive consequences (Tahernejad *et al.*, 2015). Among these consequences is the strong employee-employer relationships that support and encourage a work environment built on trust and motivation. Employees perform better and are more likely to stay with the company longer when leaders see them as more than just HR (Shahid, 2018).

This study suggests that EJS may act as a critical link between PCLI and employee outcomes (EMPF and ITST). By prioritizing ethical leadership and a supportive work environment, hotels can improve EJS, leading to increased performance and retention rates. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6: EJS mediates the relationship between PCLI and EMPF positively

H7: EJS mediates the relationship between PCLI and ITST positively

Figure 1. The study's conceptual framework



Source: Authors

3. Materials and methods

3.1 Study constructs

The scale used to measure the variables in this study was developed based on the literature reviews. The “perceived leader integrity” (PCLI) was measured by an eight-item scale, developed by Moorman et al. (. Sample of the phrases used in this scale to measure the variable are: My leader keeps his/her promises; my leader's actions align with the priorities they outline; and my leader lives by the same values and principles that he/she lives by they promote. As for “employee performance” (EMPF), the scale developed by Janssen & Van Yperen (2004) was adopted. The scale consists of five statements, investigating: the extent to which the employee successfully performs his/her basic duties, the employee's accomplishment of the duties specified in the job description, the employee's fulfillment of all official performance requirements of the job, the performance of all responsibilities required by the job, and the employee's failure to neglect the requirements of the work to be done. To measure the variable “intention to stay” (ITST), the three-item scale developed by Bloemer & Odekerken-Schröder (2006) was adopted in this study.

The phrases used in this scale to measure the variable are: I will not leave this hotel by choice, under any circumstances; I plan to remain with this hotel for the near future; I rank this hotel as my top choice. As for the mediating variable of this study, "employee job satisfaction" (EJS), a scale developed by Yu and Wu (2021) was adopted, consisting of four measurement statements, testing: I genuinely enjoy my work; I am generally excited about my work; I find my job pretty enjoyable; and I am pretty content with my current position.

3.2 Description of study population

The study focuses on frontline employees at five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia as the target population. According to the Small and Medium Enterprises General Authority (2021), Saudi Arabia had 145 five-star hotels in 2019, with 56,071 rooms. According to the best available international benchmark, which comes from hospitality industry practice, approximately two frontline staff per room is a commonly used baseline. Therefore, the total population for the study is 112142 frontline employees at five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia, based on the latest official statistics.

3.3 Sample selection method

A stratified random sampling technique was employed in this study to ensure representativeness across various regions in Saudi Arabia, capture diversity among frontline employees, reduce sampling bias, and enhance the generalizability of the results within the five-star hotel sector. The appropriate equation to determine sample size incorporates the finite population correction (FPC) applied to Cochran's sample size formula (Israel, 1992).

$$(1) n_0 = \frac{Z^2 * p * (1-p)}{e^2} \quad \text{and} \quad (2) n = \frac{n_0}{1 + (n_0 - 1)/N}$$

where:

n_0 = sample size for infinite population;

n = required sample size;

N = population size;

P = estimated proportion of the population (commonly 0.5);

Z = confidence level at 1.96; and e = margin of error ($\pm 5\%$).

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2 * 0.5 * (1 - 0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$n_0 = \frac{3.481 * 0.25}{0.0025^2} \quad n_0 = \frac{3.481 * 0.25}{0.0025} \quad n_0 = \frac{0.9603}{0.0025}$$

$$n_0 = 384.1$$

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + (n_0 - 1)/N}$$

$$n = \frac{384.1}{1 + (384.1 - 1)/112142}$$

$$n = 382.8$$

Accordingly, the appropriate study sample size is 383 respondents from a population of 112,142 frontline employees at five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia.

3.3 Data collection

This study employed a quantitative research design, using self-administered questionnaires to collect primary data. To enhance the instrument's validity and ensure its relevance to the hospitality field, the questionnaire was reviewed and refined by a panel of academic scholars and industry experts. To help ensure honest and unbiased responses, participants were assured complete anonymity and confidentiality throughout the data collection process. Data collection was conducted during January and February 2025, with the questionnaires distributed to 448 frontline employees working in five-star hotels across Saudi Arabia. In the end, 411 completed surveys were returned, resulting in a response rate of 91.7%, and were analyzed statistically.

To achieve the study's objectives, the questionnaire was organized into five distinct sections. The first section gathered demographic information, while the subsequent four sections focused on the study's key variables: Perceived Leader Integrity (PCLI), Employee Performance (EMPF), Intention to Stay (ITST), and Employee Job Satisfaction (EJS). Respondents assessed the items related to these constructs using a five-point Likert scale.

3.4 Data analysis techniques

To facilitate informed decision-making through comprehensive data interpretation, descriptive statistical analyses, and demographic profiling of the sample were conducted using Microsoft Excel (version 15, 2013) and SPSS (version 29, 2022). Furthermore, the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed using SmartPLS (version 4.1.0.9, 2024) to test the study's hypotheses and assess the structural relationships among the research constructs.

4. Results

3.1 Outer model

3.1.1 Validation of measurement constructs

Convergent validity was assessed to determine whether the items intended to measure a specific construct were indeed correlated with other items measuring the same construct. The results confirmed acceptable levels of construct validity, as all standardized factor loadings met the thresholds recommended by Hair et al. (2017), with all values exceeding the minimum acceptable level of 0.50 and most approaching or exceeding the ideal threshold of 0.70. In addition, composite reliability was examined to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. The results indicated that the composite reliability values (ρ_a) for all constructs exceeded 0.70, aligning with the criteria proposed by Bryman and Cramer (2011) and Hair (2017), thus confirming the reliability of the scales.

Furthermore, to evaluate the proportion of variance explained by the constructs relative to measurement error, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was calculated. The analysis revealed that AVE values for all constructs exceeded the recommended minimum threshold of 0.50, as proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981). This indicates that the items for each construct explain more variance than error, further supporting the convergent validity of the measurement model. For a detailed summary of these results, refer to Table 1.

Table 1. Construct measurement validity results

Factors	Items	" λ "	"AVE"	" α "	" ρ_a "
Perceived Leader Integrity "PCLI"	PCLI-1	0.927	0.677	0.933	0.951
	PCLI-2	0.748			
	PCLI-3	0.921			
	PCLI-4	0.653			
	PCLI-5	0.858			
	PCLI-6	0.747			
	PCLI-7	0.915			
	PCLI-8	0.766			
Employees Performance "EMPF"	EMPF-1	0.794	0.760	0.922	0.951
	EMPF-2	0.961			
	EMPF-3	0.961			
	EMPF-4	0.799			
	EMPF-5	0.829			
Intention to Stay "ITST"	ITST-1	0.824	0.797	0.871	0.871
	ITST-2	0.931			
	ITST-3	0.920			
Employees Job Satisfaction "EJS"	EJS-1	0.806	0.623	0.812	0.894
	EJS-2	0.672			
	EJS-3	0.836			
	EJS-4	0.832			

Source: Authors

According to the results shown in Table 1, "PCLI" demonstrates strong internal consistency and acceptable convergent validity. All items load well, range 0.653–0.927, and AVE is above 0.50, indicating the construct is measured reliably. "EMPF" has very strong construct validity, AVE is above 0.50, and factor loading range 0.794–0.961, and has very strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.922$ and $\rho_A = 0.951$). So all indicators load highly and consistently on the latent construct. Additionally, "ITST" demonstrates excellent convergent validity and reliability. With only three items, it still achieves high AVE and excellent factor loadings scores, ranging from 0.824 to 0.931. "EJS" also shows adequate reliability and validity.

Factor loadings are all above 0.60, and AVE is above the 0.50 threshold. Which means that all four constructs (PCLI, EMPF, ITST, EJS) demonstrate acceptable to excellent convergent validity, strong internal consistency, and adequate factor loadings. Thus, the measurement model for these latent constructs is strong and statistically valid.

3.1.2 Evaluation of construct distinctiveness

Discriminant validity, a key component of construct validity, was assessed to determine the extent to which each construct in the model is empirically distinct from the others. This evaluation ensures that constructs intended to be unrelated are indeed not highly correlated, thereby confirming that the measurement model accurately captures conceptually distinct variables. To establish discriminant validity, the cross-loading method and the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) were employed, in accordance with the guidelines outlined by Kock (2020). The statistical findings support the model's construct distinctiveness, confirming that each construct is sufficiently differentiated from the others. Refer to Table 2 and Figure 2 for detailed outputs.

Table 2. **Construct discriminant validity assessment (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)**

Factors	PCLI	EMPF	ITST	EJS
PCLI	0.823			
EMPF	0.670	0.872		
ITST	0.574	0.662	0.893	
EJS	0.770	0.704	0.719	0.789

* The square root of the Average Variance Extracted is shown by the bolded figures.

Source: Authors

As shown in Table 2, each factor in the proposed model explains the variance of its associated indicators more effectively than it does for indicators of other factors, consistent with the criteria established by Fornell & Larcker (1981) and Hair et al. (2017). These findings provide strong evidence for the model's discriminant validity. Furthermore, each measurement item exhibited a stronger factor loading on its intended construct than on any other construct in the model, indicating adequate discriminant validity, consistent with Chin's (1998) recommendations. In addition, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations was assessed to provide a more rigorous evaluation of discriminant validity. Detailed results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. **HTMT Results**

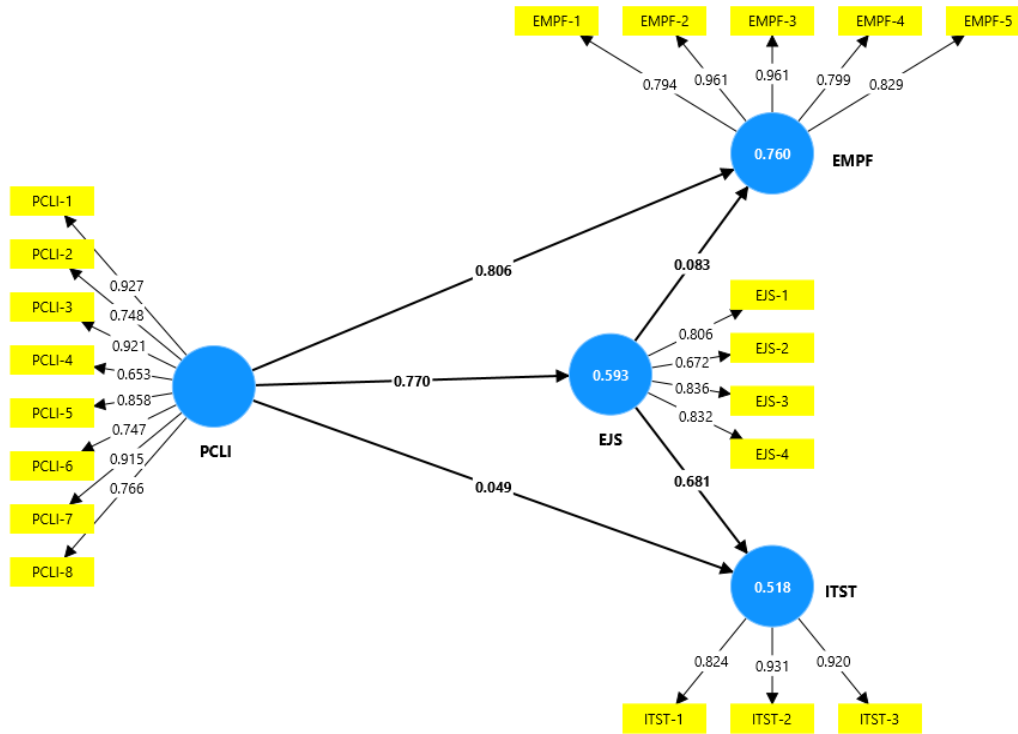
Factors	EJS	EMPF	ITST	PCLI
EJS				
EMPF	0.681			
ITST	0.728	0.727		
PCLI	0.828	0.827	0.560	

Source: Authors

The statistical findings in Table 3 support discriminant validity across constructs, as all HTMT values are below 0.9, as stated and proposed by Henseler et al. (2015). Although the construct pairs (EJS–PCLI) and (EMPF–PCLI) are high (0.828, 0.827), while still under 0.9, which may indicate potential

overlap between constructs, it is an unlikely possibility here, as the Fornell-Larcker and cross-loading analyses support distinct constructs.

Figure 2. Structural equation measurement model



Source: Authors

3.2 The inner model

3.2.1 Explanation power of the model (R²):

To evaluate the explanatory power of the proposed model and to assess the proportion of variance in the dependent variables explained by the independent variables, the coefficient of determination (R²) was employed. This statistic ranges from 0 to 1, where 1 indicates perfect predictive accuracy, and 0 indicates no explanatory power. According to the thresholds proposed by Chin (1998), the R² values in Table 4 indicate that the independent variables have a significant influence on the dependent variables, with predictive power ranging from moderate to high. These statistical findings demonstrate that the model possesses satisfactory explanatory capability.

Table 4. Explanation of the power of the model results (R²)

Factors	R ²	Level
EMPF	0.760	High
ITST	0.518	Moderate
EJS	0.593	Moderate

Source: Authors

According to results in Table 4, (EMPF) is strongly predicted by the independent variable, as the model explains 76% of the variation in performance, which suggests a particularly effective prediction of employee performance. Additionally, (ITST) is moderately explained, over half of the variance (51.8%) is accounted for, indicating solid predictive power. In addition, (EJS) shows moderate prediction, as the model explains nearly 60% of its variance, which is quite meaningful. Therefore, the model has strong explanatory power overall.

3.2.2 Variance explained (f^2)

The effect size test (f^2) was conducted to assess the magnitude of the impact of each independent variable on the dependent variable in the proposed model. Following Cohen's (1988) guidelines, the statistical findings in Table 5 indicate that the effect sizes of the independent variables on the dependent variables range from small to large. These findings provide additional insight into the relative contribution and practical significance of each predictor within the model.

Table 5. Variance explained/ squared effect size (f^2)

Factors	EMPF	ITST	EJS
PCLI	1.100 (Large)	0.152 (Small)	1.457 (Large)
EJS	0.152 (Small)	0.392 (Large)	

Source: Authors

The results in Table 5 indicate that (PCLI) is a very strong predictor of employee performance ($f^2 = 1.100$) and job satisfaction ($f^2 = 1.457$), while it has a small but meaningful effect on Intention to Stay ($f^2 = 0.152$). Therefore, it can be pointed out that (PCLI) is a key driver in the proposed model. In addition, (EJS) has a moderate effect on employees' performance ($f^2 = 0.152$) and a strong influence on intention to stay ($f^2 = 0.392$). Therefore, (EJS) is also an important mediator/predictor in the model, especially influencing intention to stay.

3.2.3 Model fit evaluation

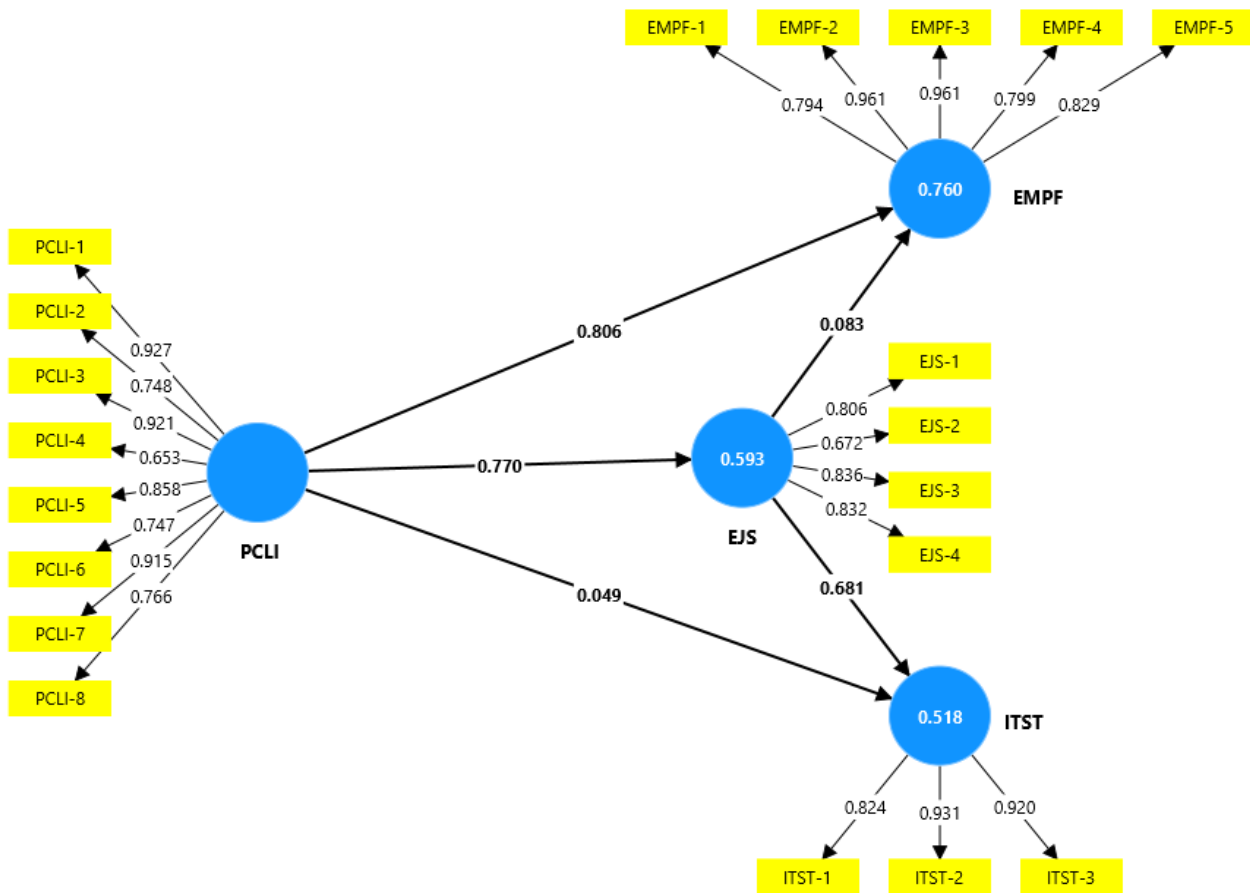
A model fit evaluation (GoF test) was conducted to assess the suitability and adequacy of the proposed model across the measurement, structural, and overall model frameworks. This assessment aimed to determine whether the model meets the criteria for a comprehensive global fit, as recommended by Chin (2010):

$$\text{GoF} = \sqrt{R^2 \times \text{AVE}}$$

$$\text{GoF} = 0.667$$

Based on the model fit evaluation test findings and the benchmark criteria established by Wetzels et al. (2009), it can be concluded that the GoF of the proposed model is sufficiently robust to be deemed appropriate as a global measure of model fit within the PLS framework, as it has excellent explanatory and predictive ability, which supports the theoretical framework and indicates that the proposed model adequately captures the relationships among the constructs.

Figure 3. Final model



Source: Authors

3.3 Assessment of hypotheses "Significance of Path Coefficients."

The test of path coefficient significance was conducted to assess how well the proposed theoretical model fits the primary data. The results of each hypothesis test are presented in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6. Structural model – direct path estimates (PLS-SEM)

Pathway	Standardized coefficient "B"	σ	Observed t-value	Sig.	Result
H-1: PCLI ->EJS	0.770	0.031	24.696	0.000	√**
H-2: PCLI ->EMPF	0.806	0.026	31.403	0.000	√**
H-3: PCLI ->ITST	0.049	0.009	5.444	0.005	√
H-4: EJS ->EMPF	0.083	0.032	2.604	0.009	√
H-5: EJS -> ITST	0.681	0.047	14.492	0.000	√**

Significant at P** = 0.000

Source: Authors

The SEM analysis findings in tables 5 and 6, and the three directly proposed hypotheses (Figure 1). As demonstrated by Figure 3, "PCLI" has a direct strong significant positive impact on "EMPF" [Effect size = 1.100; Standardized coefficient = 0.806; probability value = 0.000] and a weak statistically significant impact on "ITST" [Effect size = 0.152; Standardized coefficient = 0.049; probability value = 0.005], which suggests that leader integrity influences frontline employee's intention to stay mostly indirectly, possibly via "EJS". Moreover, "PCLI" has a direct, strong, significant positive impact on [Effect size = 1.457; Standardized coefficient = 0.770; probability value = 0.000].

Additionally, "EJS" has a small direct positive and significant effect on "EMPF" [Effect size = 0.152; Standardized coefficient = 0.083; probability value = 0.009] and has a strong direct positive and significant effect on "ITST" [Effect size = 0.392; Standardized coefficient = 0.681; probability value = 0.000], which indicates that job satisfaction is a key predictor of frontline employees' intention to stay at five stars hotels. Therefore, all direct hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 were accepted, since the results offer enough evidence to determine that the effect is present. See Figure 4.

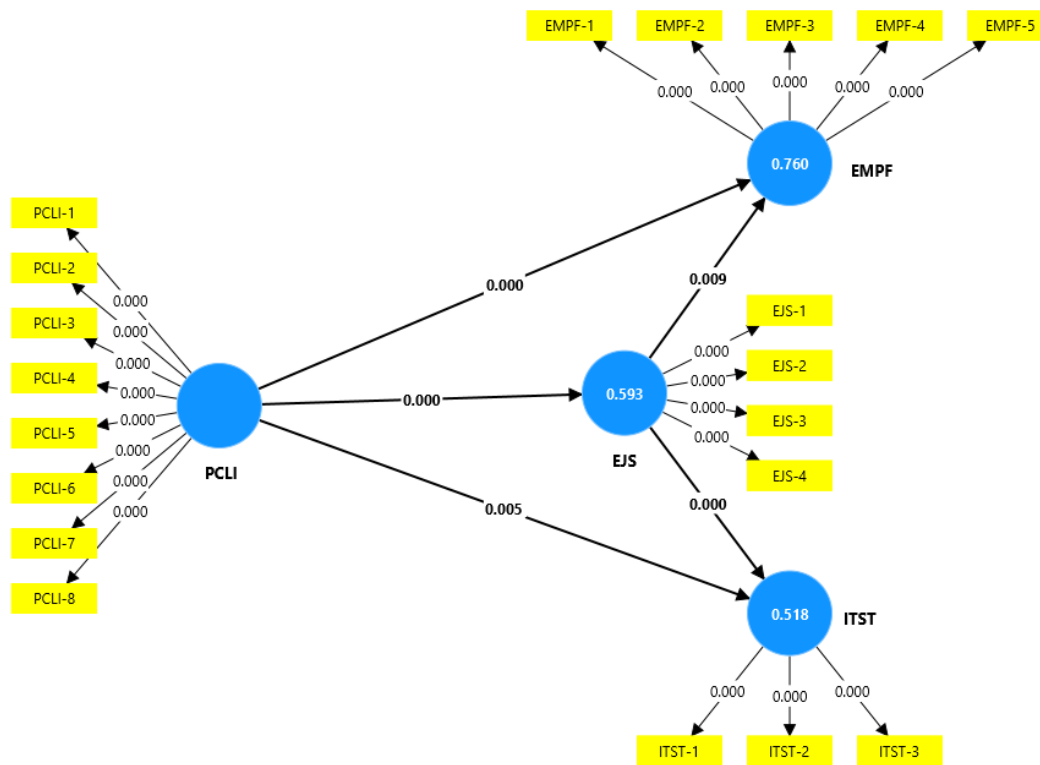
Table 7. Structural model – indirect path estimates (PLS-SEM)

Pathway	Standardized coefficient "B"	σ	Observed t-value	Sig.	Result
H-6: PCLI ->EJS->EMPF	0.064	0.026	2.504	0.012	√
H-7: PCLI -> EJS -> ITST	0.525	0.029	18.249	0.000	√**

Significant at P** = 0.000

Source: Authors

Figure 4. Significance of path coefficients



Source: Authors

As for the indirect relationship between the study variables, "EJS" shows a statistically significant but small mediating effect on the relationship between "PCLI" and "EMPF" [Standardized coefficient = 0.064, $p = 0.012$]. It shows a very strong and highly significant mediating effect on the relationship between "PCLI" and "ITST" [Standardized coefficient = 0.525 and probability value = 0.000]. Consequently, because the mediating relationship was significant, the hypotheses H6 and H7 were accepted. See table 7 and figure 4.

4. Discussion

This research is conducted to address research gaps across different variables and to expand the literature on PCLI, EJS, EMPF, and ITST, specifically within five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia. Based on research conducted on PCLI, EJS, EMPF, and ITST, a conceptual framework focusing on employees' perceptions working within five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia was developed. The study's model suggests that a leader who is perceived as an integrity leader and demonstrates integrity in all his/her transactions with employees in the hotel sector will potentially lead employees to be satisfied and have a positive sense regarding their performance and intention to stay in the hotel business. The study's model also aims to find out the mediating effect of the EJS variable on the following links: first, between PCLI and EMPF, and second, between PCLI and ITST, and suggests that the relationships between (PCLI and EMPF) and (PCLI and ITST) are going to be more positive when EJS is intervened between them. Accordingly, the study's results are presented as follows.

The results of PCLI have shown significant impacts on the organization's outcomes (i.e., EJS, EMPF, and ITST) within the lodging industry, specifically among five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia. This reflects that the practices that a leader should be conducted in hotel sector, such as; moral conduct, being honest and transparency, and showing ethical principals in all transactions were implemented effectively, beside the qualities that a leader should be possessed to reflect integrity such as honesty, transparency, consistency, and a commitment to moral conducts were shown in the behaviour and attitudes of the leaders, who play a role model, in the hotel sector at five star hotels in Saudi Arabia. In other words, the consistency of the words and actions, performance of the moral conduct, and fairness were clear that it has been implemented, which in turn achieves satisfied employees, improves the performance of the employees, and increases the intention to stay with the hotel business, particularly in five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia. These results were supported by many of the previous researchers who indicated that PCLI has a positive influence on EJS, EMPF, and ITST (Leigh, 2009; Moorman and Grover, 2009; Moorman et al., 2013; Yates, 2014; Guchait et al., 2015; Bernanthos, 2018; Dimitriou and Schwepker, 2019; Park et al., 2019; Putra and Masdupi, 2019; Sharma et al., 2019; Wen et al., 2020; Hauer et al., 2021; Kurian and Nafukho, 2022; Qasim et al., 2022; Qalati et al., 2023; Samar Reyaz, 2024; Elshaer et al., 2025).

The results of EJS have shown significant impacts on both EMPF and ITST. This means that employees at five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia were satisfied, which in turn led them to exhibit high performance and intend to remain in the hotel business in Saudi Arabia. In other words, competitive benefits packages, opportunities for promotion, quality-of-work-life practices, and a supportive work environment were provided to employees as critical factors influencing employees' job satisfaction. Consequently. This means that the employees were satisfied, and this satisfaction is reflected in them as greater motivation, involvement, adherence to their jobs, and, consequently, improved performance at five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia. These results were also supported and consistent with previous research, which confirmed the relationships between EJS and EB as well as EJS and ITST (Muchinsky and Tuttle, 1979; Spinelli and Canavos, 2000; Lam et al., 2001; Wright et al., 2007; Chi and Gursoy, 2009; Yang, 2010; Al-Sabi, 2011; Coughlan et al., 2014; Arıcı, 2019; Heimerl et al., 2020; Indrayani and Wahyudi, 2020; Chigozie-Nwokorie, 2021; Ratna and Maharani, 2021; Ruel and Njoku, 2021; Bello et al., 2024; Lintanga and Rathakrishnan, 2024)

On the other side, the results of EJS as a mediating variable between the following links: first, PCLI and EMPF, and second, PCLI and ITST have shown significant results. First, the relationship between PCLI and EMPF mediated by EJS is positive and significant. Second, the relationship between PCLI and ITST mediated by EJS is positive and significant. However, the role EJS has played in these relationships, whether as full or partial mediation, will be explained as follows.

First, when the relationship between the independent and the dependent is not significant, but the relationship among the independent, the mediator, and the dependent is significant, this implies that the mediator has a full mediation effect between the independent variable and the dependent variable. Second, when the relationship between the independent and the dependent is significant as well as the relationship reflected by the independent, the mediator, and the dependent is significant, then this means that the mediator has a partial mediation impact between the independent and the dependent. Based on the results, the role of EJS as a full mediator, in particular, did not appear. Therefore, the results confirmed that EJS partially mediates the relationships between PCLI and EMPF, as well as between PCLI and ITST, among five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia.

This implies that PCLI has a positive influence on EMPF and ITST, but these relationships become stronger and more positive when we include EJS between them. Moreover, this means that integrity is provided by the leader, which leads employees to improve their performance, have a positive sense of not leaving the hotel business, and be satisfied. Making employees satisfied encouraged leaders to maintain integrity in all their transactions, improved employee performance, and decreased the intention to leave five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia. These results were supported and consistent with previous research that indicated the positive role of EJS as a mediating variable between PCLI and EMPF and between PCLI and ITST (Javed, Balouch, and Hassan, 2014; Tahernejad *et al.*, 2015; Shahid, 2018; Alzyoud *et al.*, 2019; Virgana, 2021).

Additionally, it is worth emphasizing that the current findings are strongly aligned with international research across diverse hospitality and organizational contexts. Studies conducted in the United States, Europe, and Asia have similarly confirmed that leader integrity drives positive employee attitudes, greater performance effectiveness, and stronger retention intentions, often through enhanced job satisfaction as an intervening mechanism. The consistency between our results and these global investigations reinforces the model's broader applicability and suggests that ethical leadership and job satisfaction are universally relevant drivers of employee behavior—not only within Saudi Arabia's luxury hotel sector but also across global hospitality markets. This alignment with international evidence further strengthens the study's contribution to the global literature and highlights the importance of leadership integrity practices for hotel organizations worldwide.

5. Implications

Different contributions to the literature on PCLI, EJS, EMPF, and ITST have been identified from the hotel sector in Saudi Arabia and will be presented as follows. All variables in this study have been confirmed to be valid and reliable among employees at five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia. Further, the questionnaire items in this study have been shown to be an applicable tool and could be used in different contexts by other researchers in developing countries. From a theoretical perspective, and as far as the author is aware, this study is among the first empirical investigations to examine the proposed model in the lodging industry at a large scale (five-star hotels) in Saudi Arabia, contributing to the literature on each PCLI, EJS, EMPF, and ITST.

This study confirms that PCLI has shown a positive impact on EJS, EMPF, and ITST. EJS in this study also showed a significant impact on both EMPF and ITST. Additionally, EJS as a mediator has revealed a positive influence in the connections between (PCLI and EMPF) and (PCLI and ITST). These results are specifically applicable only to five-star hotels in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Therefore,

enough attention is required when generalizing the study's findings to other settings. Furthermore, these results may contribute to the knowledge of researchers examining these relationships in Western countries and to those investigating the same relationships in different settings within the lodging industry.

The study's findings also showed a positive effect of PCLI on the organization's outcomes (i.e., EJS, EMPF, and ITST). This indicates that PCLI has worked effectively in the context of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and could potentially be generalized and applied in other Arab countries. Although the study's variables were initially developed in Western contexts, EJS in particular has a direct and positive influence on (PCLI and EMPF, ITST) and indirectly as a mediator between (PCLI and EMPF) and (PCLI and ITST). This shows that EJS has a critical role in non-Western settings.

Finally, the results of this research were based on employees' perceptions of leader integrity, satisfaction, and how both can affect their perceptions of their performance and their intention to stay in five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia, rather than on managerial perceptions.

Practically, several contributions are provided as follows. In the hotel sector, management at all levels should be aware of integrity as both a quality and a practice, and of the importance of instilling this value among employees, given its influence on EJS, EMPF, and ITST. Therefore, managers should be assured that they demonstrate integrity to employees in all their behavior and attitudes, especially for those who want to be role models in the hotel business and expect their employees to follow them. Furthermore, managers in the human resources department should also be aware of the importance of ensuring that leaders have integrity and that their practices lead to integrity and to outcomes that can be generated if implemented effectively in the hotel business. Therefore, conducting training programs that explain the positive consequences of implementing integrity in the hotel business is crucial, particularly when it demonstrates its influence on organizational outcomes, such as improving performance, fostering satisfaction, and increasing the intention to remain in the hotel business.

All managers across different departments in the hotel industry should recognize the positive role of EJS for both EMPF and ITST, particularly in five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia. Thus, managers should also be assured that they can provide employees with what they require to ensure they are satisfied. The reason is that making employees satisfied, as we showed in this study, has a positive influence on EMPF and ITST, in addition to its role as a mediating variable between PCLI and EMPF and between PCLI and ITST.

Moreover, top management should empower all managers in five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia to act in ways that uphold integrity among employees. The reason here is that not all managers in the hotel business are fully empowered; they have the authority and responsibility to act, but are somehow limited. Therefore, top management should ensure they are fully empowered to instill integrity and cultivate its rewards without having to go back to top management. To fully empower managers, top management has two primary keys. First, structural empowerment, which means giving managers the authority and responsibility to act independently without consulting their superiors. Second, psychological empowerment means that managers feel empowered, which is the next step after structural empowerment. If the managers did not feel empowered, then there is a problem with the first step, which is structural empowerment. Full empowerment means that both structural empowerment and psychological empowerment were provided effectively to the employees.

6. Research limitations and recommendations for future research

For a better understanding of the research's findings, limitations, and recommendations for future research are provided. Quantitative data were gathered only from the lodging industry, particularly from five-star hotels in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; therefore, this research advises other researchers in the future to test the proposed model in other contexts (i.e., resorts, hotel apartments, etc.) for improving

the generalizability and expanding the literature of PCLI, EJS, EMPF, and ITST. Moreover, this study is conducted only in the hotel sector, and the findings can probably be generalized to the same category of lodging in the same country. Hence, this could lead us to encourage other researchers to test the study's model in five-star hotels across different Arab countries to compare results and enhance the generalizability of this research.

Furthermore, this study suggests that researchers in the future conduct a longitudinal study rather than a cross-sectional one, as this study was designed to track the impact of its variables over time. In this research, EJS is used as a mediating variable between (PCLI and EMPF) and (PCLI and ITST). Thus, we strongly recommended for future researchers include other constructs in the same model and test them as moderator variables, such as commitment and empowerment in the link between (PCLI and EMPF) and (PCLI and ITST) at five-star hotels in developed countries, for the purpose of enriching the literature of PCLI, EJS, EMPF, and ITST.

7. Conclusions

This study examined the influence of perceived leader integrity (PCLI) on employee performance (EMPF) and intention to stay (ITST), as well as the mediating role of employee job satisfaction (EJS), within five-star hotels in Saudi Arabia. The findings provide empirical support for all proposed hypotheses, confirming that PCLI significantly enhances EJS, which subsequently improves both performance and retention intentions. Furthermore, EJS functions as an important mediating mechanism that strengthens the impact of leader integrity on key employee outcomes. These results contribute to the existing body of knowledge by demonstrating the importance of ethical leadership practices in shaping employees' work behaviors and willingness to remain in luxury hospitality settings.

The study offers insights relevant not only to the Saudi hotel industry but also to international hospitality organizations seeking to foster high-quality leader–employee relationships, elevate service performance, and reduce turnover. However, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, employee performance was assessed through self-reported measures, which may introduce perceptual bias. Second, the research was conducted exclusively in one country, limiting the generalizability of findings across different cultural contexts. Third, the focus on five-star hotels may not reflect conditions in mid-scale or budget accommodation sectors, where leadership dynamics and workforce characteristics may differ.

Considering these limitations, future studies are encouraged to validate the proposed model in diverse cultural and organizational settings and employ multi-source data to improve measurement objectivity. Researchers may also expand the model by incorporating additional variables such as organizational commitment, empowerment, or leadership styles as potential moderators or mediators. Such efforts would deepen understanding of how leadership integrity influences employee outcomes and enhance the applicability of this framework across the broader hospitality industry.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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