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Hassan. Sadeghi Niaraki¹, Masoud. Emaminejad^{2*}, Nowruz. Izadpanah²

- 1 PhD student in public administration, As.,C, Islamic Azad University, Astara, Iran
- 2 Department of public administration, As.,C, Islamic Azad University, Astara, Iran

Corresponding author email address: m-emaminejad@iaua-astara.ac.ir

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Identifying the Causal and Contextual Factors of Behavioral Ambidexterity Based on the Social Intelligence of Employees in the Ministry of Education

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to identify the causal and contextual factors of behavioral ambidexterity based on the social intelligence of employees in the Ministry of Education using a grounded theory approach. This study was conducted using a qualitative methodology based on the grounded theory approach of Strauss and Corbin. The research population consisted of experts, senior managers, educational administrators, human resource specialists, and experienced employees of the Ministry of Education who possessed substantial knowledge regarding organizational behavior, social intelligence, and employee development. Participants were selected through purposive and theoretical sampling, and data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used as the primary data collection tool. The collected data were analyzed through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The study focused exclusively on two dimensions of the grounded theory paradigm model, namely causal conditions and contextual conditions, in order to develop a conceptual understanding of the factors contributing to behavioral ambidexterity among Ministry of Education employees. The findings revealed that behavioral ambidexterity based on social intelligence is influenced by two overarching categories of factors: causal conditions and contextual conditions. The causal conditions included individual social competence, cognitive-behavioral capabilities, professional competencies, and leadership influences. Effective interpersonal communication, emotional regulation, social adaptability, learning orientation, innovative behavior, professional mastery, self-efficacy, supportive leadership, participative management, and trust-building leadership emerged as key antecedents of behavioral ambidexterity. The contextual conditions included organizational culture, human resource environment, structural context, and educational environment. Collaborative and innovation-supportive cultures, professional development opportunities, recognition systems, flexible organizational structures, information accessibility, resource availability, and organizational learning environments were identified as important contextual facilitators. The findings further indicated that social intelligence serves as the central mechanism enabling employees to balance exploratory and exploitative behaviors within complex educational settings. The study concludes that behavioral ambidexterity among employees of the Ministry of Education is a socially embedded capability shaped by the interaction of individual competencies and organizational conditions. Social intelligence plays a pivotal role in facilitating adaptive, innovative, and balanced behaviors by enhancing interpersonal effectiveness, professional confidence, and responsiveness to environmental demands. Strengthening social intelligence and creating supportive organizational environments can therefore contribute significantly to the development of behavioral ambidexterity and the overall effectiveness of educational organizations.

Keywords: Behavioral Ambidexterity, Social Intelligence, Grounded Theory, Causal Conditions, Contextual Conditions, Ministry of Education

Introduction

In today's highly dynamic and knowledge-driven organizational environment, organizations are increasingly required to achieve a delicate balance between maintaining efficiency in current operations and simultaneously pursuing innovation and adaptation to emerging challenges. This dual capability has been conceptualized in the organizational behavior literature as ambidexterity, a construct that reflects the ability of individuals and organizations to engage in both exploitative and exploratory activities concurrently. Exploitative behaviors focus on refinement, implementation, efficiency, and optimization of existing processes, whereas exploratory behaviors emphasize experimentation, creativity, flexibility, and the discovery of new opportunities. As contemporary organizations face accelerating technological, social, and environmental changes, the importance of ambidexterity has expanded beyond strategic management and organizational leadership to include the behavioral capacities of employees. Behavioral ambidexterity has consequently emerged as a critical determinant of organizational effectiveness because employees are expected to simultaneously comply with established procedures while adapting to changing demands and generating innovative solutions. Research has demonstrated that behavioral ambidexterity contributes to employee agility, organizational adaptability, innovation, and sustainable performance outcomes across diverse organizational settings [1-3].

The increasing significance of behavioral ambidexterity has stimulated extensive scholarly attention regarding its antecedents and facilitating conditions. Previous studies suggest that behavioral ambidexterity does not emerge spontaneously but is shaped by a combination of individual capabilities, organizational resources, leadership practices, and environmental influences. Organizational scholars have argued that employees who possess the capacity to alternate effectively between routine execution and innovative exploration are more capable of responding to uncertainty and complexity while maintaining productivity and service quality [4, 5]. Similarly, evidence indicates that employee ambidexterity functions as an important mechanism linking organizational systems and work performance, suggesting that employees who can integrate exploitation and exploration behaviors are better positioned to achieve superior outcomes and contribute to organizational success [3]. Furthermore, studies have highlighted the role of employee empowerment, knowledge sharing, organizational trust, and learning environments in facilitating ambidextrous behaviors and innovative performance [6]. These findings collectively indicate that understanding the factors that foster behavioral ambidexterity has become an important priority for both researchers and practitioners.

Within this context, educational organizations represent a particularly important setting for investigating behavioral ambidexterity. Educational institutions operate in environments characterized by continuous policy reforms, technological advancements, changing stakeholder expectations, and growing demands for accountability and innovation. Employees in ministries of education must simultaneously maintain administrative stability, comply with regulations, implement educational policies, and respond creatively to emerging educational challenges. Such demands require employees to balance exploitation-oriented activities related to routine operations with exploration-oriented activities associated with adaptation and innovation. Recent studies have emphasized that ambidextrous leadership and organizational cultures encouraging flexibility and participation significantly influence employees' innovative behavior and adaptive performance [7-9]. Likewise, research examining employee voice behavior has demonstrated that ambidextrous leadership practices encourage employees to contribute ideas, participate in organizational improvement initiatives, and engage in constructive problem-

solving behaviors [10]. These findings suggest that the educational sector may particularly benefit from understanding the mechanisms through which behavioral ambidexterity develops among employees.

Among the individual capabilities that may contribute to behavioral ambidexterity, social intelligence has emerged as a particularly relevant construct. Social intelligence generally refers to an individual's capacity to understand social situations, interpret interpersonal cues, manage relationships effectively, communicate appropriately, and adapt behavior in response to social contexts. Unlike purely cognitive abilities, social intelligence emphasizes interpersonal awareness and relational competence, allowing individuals to navigate complex social environments successfully. Contemporary research has increasingly recognized social intelligence as an essential factor in educational, managerial, and organizational settings because it influences communication quality, collaboration, leadership effectiveness, conflict management, and adaptive behavior. For example, studies have demonstrated that social intelligence contributes significantly to communication competence and intercultural sensitivity among future educators, thereby enhancing their effectiveness in diverse educational environments [11]. Similarly, investigations into social intelligence among university faculty members have identified multiple dimensions related to interpersonal understanding, emotional awareness, and effective social interaction that contribute to professional effectiveness and organizational success [12].

The growing attention devoted to social intelligence reflects a broader recognition that organizational success increasingly depends upon employees' ability to manage interpersonal relationships and social interactions effectively. Research has shown that social intelligence enhances communication skills, achievement motivation, self-efficacy, resilience, and adaptive functioning across diverse populations and professional contexts. Training interventions designed to improve communication competencies have been found to strengthen social intelligence and motivational outcomes among university students, demonstrating the developmental nature of this construct [13]. Similarly, information literacy training has been shown to improve social intelligence and problem-solving self-efficacy, suggesting that social intelligence can influence individuals' ability to navigate complex situations and respond effectively to challenges [14]. Additional evidence indicates that social intelligence contributes to psychological resilience and reduces anxiety by enhancing individuals' capacity to manage social relationships and environmental pressures [15]. These findings suggest that social intelligence may serve as an important resource enabling employees to respond effectively to organizational demands and uncertainty.

The theoretical relevance of social intelligence to behavioral ambidexterity is increasingly supported by organizational research. One of the most influential contributions in this area is the proposition that leaders' social intelligence constitutes a fundamental element in fostering organizational ambidexterity through employee engagement and adaptive responses to environmental change [16]. According to this perspective, social intelligence facilitates the development of interpersonal trust, communication quality, and collaborative relationships that support the simultaneous pursuit of exploration and exploitation activities. Employees with higher levels of social intelligence are more likely to understand diverse perspectives, manage interpersonal tensions constructively, and coordinate effectively with colleagues while adapting to changing organizational circumstances. Such capabilities appear highly compatible with the requirements of behavioral ambidexterity, which necessitate flexibility, adaptability, collaboration, and continuous learning. Moreover, social intelligence may enable employees to reconcile competing demands by facilitating constructive communication and mutual understanding within organizational settings.

Despite the growing body of literature concerning social intelligence and ambidexterity, several important gaps remain. First, much of the existing research has focused on leadership ambidexterity, organizational ambidexterity, innovation outcomes, and performance indicators rather than the underlying behavioral mechanisms through which employee ambidexterity develops [7, 8]. Second, previous studies have frequently employed quantitative methodologies that examine predetermined relationships among variables but provide limited insight into the contextual and causal processes underlying behavioral ambidexterity. Although quantitative studies have identified significant associations between leadership practices, organizational systems, and ambidextrous outcomes, they have often overlooked employees' lived experiences and interpretations regarding the factors that facilitate or constrain ambidextrous behavior. Third, relatively little research has examined behavioral ambidexterity within public-sector educational organizations, particularly ministries of education, where organizational structures, stakeholder relationships, and administrative responsibilities differ substantially from those found in private-sector settings. The unique characteristics of educational organizations necessitate context-specific investigations capable of capturing the complexity of employee experiences and organizational realities.

Furthermore, the relationship between social intelligence and behavioral ambidexterity remains insufficiently explored conceptually and empirically. Existing evidence suggests that social intelligence contributes to communication effectiveness, resilience, empowerment, innovation, interpersonal functioning, and professional development [17-19]. Research has also demonstrated that deficits in social intelligence can negatively affect interpersonal functioning and adaptive behavior, highlighting the importance of social competencies for effective social and organizational engagement [20]. At the same time, studies examining ambidexterity have identified the importance of empowerment, trust, organizational culture, leadership support, and professional thinking in facilitating ambidextrous behaviors [6, 21]. However, limited attention has been devoted to identifying the specific causal and contextual factors through which social intelligence contributes to behavioral ambidexterity among employees. Understanding these factors is particularly important because behavioral ambidexterity is not merely an individual characteristic but a socially embedded phenomenon shaped by interactions among employees, leaders, organizational structures, and environmental conditions.

Given these theoretical and practical considerations, a qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for exploring the complex and multidimensional nature of behavioral ambidexterity based on social intelligence. Grounded Theory offers a valuable methodological framework for uncovering the underlying processes, meanings, and contextual influences that shape employee behavior in organizational settings. By focusing specifically on the causal and contextual dimensions of the Strauss and Corbin paradigm model, it becomes possible to generate a deeper understanding of the antecedents and environmental conditions associated with behavioral ambidexterity in the Ministry of Education. Such an understanding may contribute to the development of more effective human resource policies, leadership practices, and organizational interventions aimed at fostering adaptability, innovation, and sustainable organizational performance within educational institutions.

Therefore, the present study aimed to identify the causal and contextual factors of behavioral ambidexterity based on the social intelligence of employees in the Ministry of Education using a grounded theory approach.

Methodology

This study was conducted using a qualitative research approach grounded in the principles of Grounded Theory as developed by Strauss and Corbin. The purpose of the study was to identify and explain the causal and contextual factors

associated with behavioral ambidexterity through the lens of social intelligence among employees of the Ministry of Education. Given the exploratory nature of the research problem and the limited availability of comprehensive theoretical frameworks addressing the interaction between behavioral ambidexterity and social intelligence in educational organizations, a qualitative methodology was considered the most appropriate approach. Grounded Theory was selected because it enables researchers to generate conceptual categories and theoretical explanations directly from empirical data rather than imposing predetermined theoretical assumptions on participants' experiences.

The philosophical orientation of the study was interpretivist, emphasizing the understanding of participants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations regarding the factors that shape behavioral ambidexterity within the organizational environment of the Ministry of Education. The research sought to uncover the underlying mechanisms and organizational conditions that contribute to the emergence of behavioral ambidexterity by focusing specifically on two dimensions of the Strauss and Corbin paradigm model, namely causal conditions and contextual conditions. Accordingly, the study did not attempt to develop a complete paradigm model encompassing intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences; instead, it concentrated exclusively on identifying the antecedent and contextual factors influencing the phenomenon under investigation.

The study population consisted of experts, senior managers, human resource specialists, organizational behavior scholars, and experienced employees affiliated with the Ministry of Education who possessed substantial knowledge regarding organizational behavior, employee development, leadership practices, and social intelligence in educational settings. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, and subsequently through theoretical sampling, which is considered one of the fundamental principles of Grounded Theory research. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning that no new concepts, categories, or relationships emerged from the collected data. Theoretical saturation was reached after conducting a series of in-depth interviews with knowledgeable participants who were able to provide rich and meaningful insights into the phenomenon of behavioral ambidexterity and its organizational antecedents.

The research process followed the logic of theoretical development rather than statistical representation. Therefore, participant selection was based on their expertise, experience, and ability to contribute to theory generation. Throughout the data collection process, emerging concepts guided subsequent sampling decisions, enabling the researchers to seek participants capable of clarifying, expanding, or validating developing categories. This iterative process enhanced the conceptual richness of the findings and facilitated the emergence of a substantive theory regarding the causal and contextual foundations of behavioral ambidexterity within the Ministry of Education.

Data collection was carried out through an extensive review of relevant literature and semi-structured, in-depth interviews with selected participants. The documentary review phase involved examining scholarly articles, books, organizational reports, policy documents, and previous studies related to behavioral ambidexterity, social intelligence, organizational behavior, human resource development, and educational management. The purpose of this phase was not to test predefined hypotheses but rather to enhance the researchers' theoretical sensitivity and facilitate a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The primary source of empirical data was semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen because it allows participants to express their experiences, interpretations, and viewpoints in a detailed and flexible manner while simultaneously enabling the researcher to explore emerging themes and concepts. An interview guide was developed based

on the study objectives and relevant theoretical literature. The guide included broad, open-ended questions concerning participants' perceptions of behavioral ambidexterity, organizational conditions affecting employee adaptability and innovation, interpersonal competencies, social intelligence capabilities, leadership influences, communication patterns, organizational culture, and environmental factors affecting employee behavior.

The interviews were conducted individually and in an environment conducive to open discussion and reflection. Each interview was recorded with the consent of the participants and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the collected information. During the interviews, probing questions were employed to encourage participants to elaborate on their experiences and clarify emerging concepts. Field notes were also maintained throughout the data collection process to capture contextual observations, nonverbal cues, and analytical reflections that contributed to the interpretation of findings.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, several strategies were employed. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants, member checking, and continuous comparison of emerging concepts throughout the analysis process. Dependability was strengthened through maintaining detailed records of coding procedures, analytical decisions, and category development. Confirmability was supported through systematic documentation of the research process and continual reflection on potential researcher biases. Transferability was facilitated by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, and analytical procedures, allowing readers to evaluate the applicability of the findings to similar organizational settings.

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection following the systematic procedures of Grounded Theory proposed by Strauss and Corbin. The analytical process involved continuous movement between data collection, coding, comparison, categorization, and theory development. This iterative approach enabled the researchers to refine emerging concepts and explore relationships among categories throughout the research process.

The first stage of analysis involved open coding. During this stage, interview transcripts were reviewed repeatedly and examined line by line. Meaningful statements, ideas, and experiences expressed by participants were identified and assigned conceptual labels. Through continuous comparison of data segments, similar concepts were grouped together, resulting in the formation of preliminary categories. The objective of open coding was to break down the data into discrete conceptual units and uncover the meanings embedded within participants' narratives.

Following open coding, axial coding was employed to establish relationships among categories and subcategories. At this stage, the researchers systematically examined connections between concepts to identify broader patterns and structures within the data. Consistent with the objectives of the present study, particular attention was devoted to identifying categories associated with causal conditions and contextual conditions. Causal conditions referred to the factors and circumstances that contributed directly to the development of behavioral ambidexterity among employees, whereas contextual conditions represented the organizational, social, cultural, and environmental settings within which behavioral ambidexterity emerged and evolved. Categories were refined, compared, and integrated to establish coherent explanatory relationships among the identified factors.

The final stage involved selective coding, during which the central phenomenon was linked to the major categories identified during previous coding stages. The researchers integrated the emerging categories into a coherent conceptual framework explaining how social intelligence contributes to the formation of behavioral ambidexterity through specific causal

and contextual mechanisms. Continuous comparison, memo writing, and theoretical integration were employed throughout this stage to refine conceptual relationships and enhance theoretical coherence.

The analysis process continued until theoretical saturation was achieved and all identified categories demonstrated sufficient conceptual density and explanatory power. The resulting framework provided a grounded explanation of the causal and contextual factors influencing behavioral ambidexterity among employees of the Ministry of Education, emphasizing the critical role of social intelligence in shaping adaptive, innovative, and balanced behavioral patterns within educational organizations.

Findings and Results

A total of 18 experts participated in the qualitative phase of the study. Participants included senior managers, educational administrators, human resource specialists, university faculty members in management and educational sciences, and experienced employees of the Ministry of Education. Participants were selected through purposive and theoretical sampling based on their professional expertise, managerial experience, and familiarity with organizational behavior, behavioral ambidexterity, human resource development, and social intelligence in educational organizations. The participants ranged in age from 35 to 61 years and had between 10 and 32 years of professional experience. Twelve participants were male and six were female. In terms of educational attainment, all participants held at least a master's degree, while most participants had doctoral degrees in educational management, public administration, human resource management, organizational behavior, or related fields. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning that the final interviews did not generate new codes, concepts, or categories beyond those already identified in the previous stages of analysis.

Table 1

Causal Conditions of Behavioral Ambidexterity Based on Social Intelligence

Main Category	Subcategory	Concepts	Representative Open Codes
Causal Conditions	Individual Competence	Social Effective interpersonal communication	Active listening; constructive dialogue; communication flexibility; empathy in interactions; understanding others' viewpoints; respectful verbal behavior; ability to manage difficult conversations
Causal Conditions	Individual Competence	Social Emotional perception and regulation	Emotional awareness; emotional control; understanding colleagues' emotions; managing emotional tension; patience in organizational interactions; emotional self-monitoring
Causal Conditions	Individual Competence	Social Social adaptability	Adaptation to changing situations; flexibility in social environments; responsiveness to organizational change; acceptance of different viewpoints; adjustment to diverse work groups
Causal Conditions	Cognitive-Behavioral Capabilities	Problem-solving ability	Creative problem-solving; analytical thinking; rapid decision-making; solution orientation; identifying alternatives; practical response to administrative problems
Causal Conditions	Cognitive-Behavioral Capabilities	Learning orientation	Continuous learning; willingness to acquire knowledge; openness to new experiences; learning from feedback; updating professional knowledge; curiosity toward new methods
Causal Conditions	Cognitive-Behavioral Capabilities	Innovative behavior	Generating new ideas; proposing improvements; encouraging innovation; challenging ineffective routines; using creative administrative solutions
Causal Conditions	Professional Competencies	Task mastery	Professional expertise; work proficiency; knowledge sharing; familiarity with organizational duties; technical competence; accurate performance of assigned responsibilities
Causal Conditions	Professional Competencies	Responsibility commitment and	Accountability; work engagement; organizational commitment; sense of duty; persistence in performing tasks; concern for organizational outcomes
Causal Conditions	Professional Competencies	Self-efficacy	Confidence in abilities; initiative taking; persistence in challenges; belief in personal effectiveness; readiness to accept complex tasks
Causal Conditions	Leadership Influences	Supportive leadership	Managerial encouragement; developmental feedback; empowerment practices; emotional support from managers; support for employee initiatives
Causal Conditions	Leadership Influences	Participative management	Employee involvement; consultation mechanisms; shared decision-making; attention to employee opinions; participation in organizational problem-solving
Causal Conditions	Leadership Influences	Trust-building leadership	Transparency; fairness; managerial credibility; ethical conduct; consistency between words and actions; reduction of fear in employee expression

The analysis of causal conditions showed that behavioral ambidexterity among Ministry of Education employees is formed through a combination of individual, cognitive, professional, and leadership-related factors. The first major subcategory was individual social competence, which indicates that employees' capacity to communicate effectively, understand others'

emotional states, regulate their own emotional responses, and adapt to different social situations directly contributes to ambidextrous behavior. Participants emphasized that employees who are socially competent can maintain constructive relations with colleagues and managers while also responding flexibly to new demands, policy changes, and organizational challenges. In this sense, social intelligence provides the interpersonal foundation through which employees can simultaneously preserve existing routines and engage in adaptive or innovative behavior. The second subcategory was cognitive-behavioral capabilities, including problem-solving ability, learning orientation, and innovative behavior. These concepts show that behavioral ambidexterity depends not only on social interaction but also on the employee's ability to analyze problems, learn continuously, and propose new solutions. Employees with stronger learning orientation are more likely to move beyond repetitive administrative patterns and search for improved ways of performing their duties. The third subcategory was professional competencies. Task mastery, responsibility, commitment, and self-efficacy were identified as causal factors because ambidextrous behavior requires both confidence in existing professional capacities and readiness to apply those capacities in new or uncertain situations. Employees who lack professional competence may resist change because they feel insecure, whereas competent employees can more easily combine efficiency with innovation. The fourth subcategory was leadership influences. Participants repeatedly stated that supportive, participative, and trust-building leadership practices are essential for activating employees' behavioral ambidexterity. When managers encourage initiative, provide feedback, involve employees in decision-making, and create trust, employees are more willing to express ideas, take responsibility, and balance exploitation-oriented behaviors with exploration-oriented behaviors. Therefore, the causal conditions indicate that behavioral ambidexterity based on social intelligence emerges when employees possess interpersonal sensitivity, cognitive flexibility, professional confidence, and receive leadership support that legitimizes adaptive and innovative conduct.

Table 2*Contextual Conditions of Behavioral Ambidexterity Based on Social Intelligence*

Main Category	Subcategory	Concepts	Representative Open Codes
Contextual Conditions	Organizational Culture	Collaborative culture	Teamwork; cooperation; collective learning; mutual support; shared responsibility; constructive interaction among units
Contextual Conditions	Organizational Culture	Innovation-supportive culture	Encouragement of creativity; tolerance for mistakes; openness to new ideas; support for experimentation; acceptance of different solutions
Contextual Conditions	Organizational Culture	Trust climate	Organizational transparency; mutual respect; psychological safety; confidence in colleagues; freedom to express opinions; reduced defensive behavior
Contextual Conditions	Human Resource Environment	Professional development opportunities	Training programs; workshops; competency development; continuous education; mentoring; skill improvement programs
Contextual Conditions	Human Resource Environment	Reward and recognition systems	Performance appreciation; incentives; acknowledgment of innovation; recognition of collaborative behavior; appreciation of responsibility
Contextual Conditions	Human Resource Environment	Career advancement opportunities	Promotion pathways; talent development; succession planning; merit-based advancement; attention to employee growth
Contextual Conditions	Structural Context	Flexible organizational structure	Reduced bureaucracy; decentralization; operational flexibility; faster administrative processes; empowerment of lower organizational levels
Contextual Conditions	Structural Context	Information accessibility	Knowledge-sharing systems; communication networks; information transparency; timely access to organizational information; interdepartmental information flow
Contextual Conditions	Structural Context	Resource availability	Technological support; financial resources; educational facilities; access to administrative tools; sufficient human resources
Contextual Conditions	Educational Environment	Stakeholder interactions	Communication with teachers, students, parents, and administrators; responsiveness to educational needs; interaction with diverse social groups
Contextual Conditions	Educational Environment	Environmental complexity	Diverse educational challenges; policy changes; social expectations; administrative uncertainty; multiplicity of educational responsibilities
Contextual Conditions	Educational Environment	Organizational learning environment	Reflective practices; experience exchange; continuous improvement culture; learning from previous programs; documenting successful experiences

The analysis of contextual conditions demonstrated that behavioral ambidexterity is not formed only through personal characteristics, but is strongly dependent on the organizational and educational environment in which Ministry of Education

employees work. The first subcategory was organizational culture. A collaborative culture, an innovation-supportive culture, and a trust climate were identified as central contextual factors because employees need a safe and cooperative environment in order to apply social intelligence in daily organizational interactions. In a culture based on trust and mutual support, employees can share knowledge, ask for help, express new ideas, and participate in collective learning without fear of blame or rejection. Such a culture enables the simultaneous pursuit of stability and change, because employees can perform routine duties while also exploring improved practices. The second subcategory was the human resource environment. Participants explained that professional development opportunities, reward and recognition systems, and career advancement opportunities shape employees' motivation to demonstrate ambidextrous behavior. Training programs and competency development strengthen employees' capacity for adaptation, while recognition systems encourage them to continue innovative and cooperative behaviors. When human resource systems reward only routine performance, employees may avoid creativity; however, when innovation, responsibility, collaboration, and learning are recognized, employees are more likely to show behavioral ambidexterity. The third subcategory was structural context. Flexible organizational structures, accessible information, and adequate resources were identified as necessary conditions for converting social intelligence into practical ambidextrous behavior. Excessive bureaucracy, limited access to information, and resource shortages restrict employees' ability to respond creatively to organizational demands. By contrast, decentralization, information transparency, and sufficient technological and administrative resources help employees act with greater flexibility and effectiveness. The fourth subcategory was the educational environment. The Ministry of Education operates in a complex setting shaped by policy changes, stakeholder expectations, administrative responsibilities, and continuous interaction with teachers, students, parents, and educational authorities. This complexity makes social intelligence especially important because employees must interpret different expectations, manage relationships with diverse groups, and respond to emerging educational needs. The presence of an organizational learning environment also helps employees transform experience into knowledge and use previous successes and failures to improve future behavior. Therefore, the contextual conditions show that behavioral ambidexterity based on social intelligence is embedded in culture, human resource practices, structure, resources, and the specific demands of the educational system.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to identify the causal and contextual factors of behavioral ambidexterity based on the social intelligence of employees in the Ministry of Education using a grounded theory approach. The findings revealed that behavioral ambidexterity is shaped by two broad categories of factors. The first category consisted of causal conditions, including individual social competence, cognitive-behavioral capabilities, professional competencies, and leadership influences. The second category consisted of contextual conditions, including organizational culture, human resource environment, structural context, and educational environment. Taken together, the findings suggest that behavioral ambidexterity is not merely a personal attribute of employees but rather a socially embedded phenomenon that emerges through the interaction of individual capabilities and organizational conditions. More specifically, the findings indicate that social intelligence functions as a central mechanism that enables employees to balance exploitative and exploratory behaviors simultaneously, thereby enhancing their ability to adapt to changing educational demands while maintaining organizational effectiveness.

One of the most important findings of the study was the identification of individual social competence as a key causal condition of behavioral ambidexterity. Participants emphasized communication skills, emotional perception and regulation, empathy, and social adaptability as critical antecedents of ambidextrous behavior. This finding is consistent with the conceptual foundations of social intelligence, which emphasize the capacity to understand social situations, interpret interpersonal cues, and adjust behavior appropriately in diverse contexts. Employees who possess stronger social intelligence are better able to maintain constructive relationships with colleagues, resolve conflicts, and coordinate collective efforts, all of which facilitate the simultaneous execution of routine responsibilities and innovative initiatives. This finding aligns with the study of Katou et al., which demonstrated that social intelligence contributes significantly to organizational ambidexterity by strengthening employee engagement and adaptive responses to environmental change [16]. Similarly, Esmaili et al. identified communication competence, interpersonal understanding, and relational effectiveness as major dimensions of social intelligence among academic staff, suggesting that these competencies enhance professional performance and organizational effectiveness [12]. The present findings also support the work of Özdoğru et al., who found that social intelligence positively influences communication and interpersonal effectiveness in educational environments [11]. Therefore, the ability to understand and manage social interactions appears to provide employees with the interpersonal flexibility required for behavioral ambidexterity.

Another significant finding concerned the role of cognitive-behavioral capabilities, including problem-solving ability, learning orientation, and innovative behavior. Participants described these capabilities as essential for balancing the competing demands of organizational stability and adaptation. Employees who demonstrate continuous learning, openness to new experiences, and creative problem-solving are more capable of exploring new opportunities while preserving established organizational processes. This finding is consistent with the broader ambidexterity literature, which emphasizes the importance of balancing exploration and exploitation activities. Okati et al. found that employee ambidexterity depends heavily on learning capabilities, adaptability, and knowledge-based competencies that enable employees to function effectively in dynamic organizational environments [2]. Similarly, Panda reported that employee ambidexterity significantly contributes to organizational agility by enabling individuals to respond rapidly and effectively to changing organizational conditions [1]. The findings also correspond with the arguments of Hiebl and Pielsticker, who suggested that modern organizations increasingly require employees capable of integrating innovation and routine execution in response to technological and organizational transformations [5]. Consequently, cognitive flexibility and learning orientation appear to serve as important foundations for behavioral ambidexterity.

The findings further revealed that professional competencies, including task mastery, responsibility, organizational commitment, and self-efficacy, constitute important causal factors underlying behavioral ambidexterity. Employees who possess high levels of professional expertise and confidence in their abilities appear more willing to engage in innovative and adaptive behaviors because they possess the knowledge and assurance necessary to manage uncertainty. This finding supports previous research demonstrating that employee competence and empowerment are closely associated with ambidextrous behavior. For example, Kord et al. argued that dimensions of ambidexterity and psychological empowerment contribute significantly to professional thinking and employee effectiveness [21]. Likewise, Ijigu et al. reported that employee ambidexterity mediates the relationship between high-performance work systems and employee performance, indicating that professional capabilities play a central role in translating organizational resources into positive outcomes [3]. The present

findings therefore suggest that social intelligence alone may not be sufficient to produce behavioral ambidexterity unless employees also possess the professional competence and confidence necessary to act effectively in complex organizational situations.

Leadership influences emerged as another major causal condition of behavioral ambidexterity. Participants emphasized the importance of supportive leadership, participative management, trust-building practices, and employee empowerment. This finding is highly consistent with contemporary research on ambidextrous leadership. Babu et al. found that ambidextrous leadership significantly enhances innovative work behavior and employee performance by creating conditions that support both exploration and exploitation activities [7]. Similarly, Jiang et al. demonstrated that ambidextrous leadership positively influences employee innovative behavior through the provision of guidance, support, and flexibility [8]. Ouyang et al. likewise reported that ambidextrous leadership fosters employee voice behavior through motivational mechanisms and the development of an ambidextrous organizational culture [9]. Furthermore, Peethambaran and Singh emphasized that leadership practices encouraging participation and employee voice strengthen organizational adaptability and innovation [10]. The findings of the present study extend this literature by suggesting that leadership influences not only innovative outcomes but also the broader development of behavioral ambidexterity through the cultivation of socially intelligent interactions and supportive organizational relationships.

Regarding contextual conditions, organizational culture was identified as one of the most influential factors shaping behavioral ambidexterity. Participants highlighted collaborative culture, innovation-supportive culture, and organizational trust as essential contextual foundations. These findings are strongly supported by previous studies. Berraies et al. found that organizational trust moderates the relationship between empowerment and ambidextrous innovation, emphasizing the importance of trust-based organizational environments for facilitating knowledge sharing and innovative behavior [6]. Likewise, Malekan et al. demonstrated that behavioral ambidexterity is significantly influenced by organizational culture and ethical climate, indicating that cultural conditions can either facilitate or constrain employees' entrepreneurial and adaptive behaviors [4]. A culture characterized by trust, collaboration, and openness encourages employees to exchange knowledge, experiment with new approaches, and engage constructively with organizational challenges. Such conditions reduce interpersonal barriers and create opportunities for socially intelligent behavior to contribute directly to ambidextrous performance.

The human resource environment was also identified as a major contextual factor influencing behavioral ambidexterity. Participants emphasized professional development opportunities, reward systems, recognition mechanisms, and career advancement opportunities. These findings correspond closely with research highlighting the importance of employee development and empowerment. Berraies et al. argued that empowerment initiatives strengthen ambidextrous innovation by encouraging knowledge sharing and employee engagement [6]. Similarly, Ijigu et al. found that organizational systems supporting employee development enhance ambidexterity and work performance [3]. Human resource practices that reward innovation, learning, and collaboration appear particularly important because they motivate employees to engage in behaviors that extend beyond routine task performance. Employees are more likely to explore new possibilities and propose creative solutions when organizational systems acknowledge and support such efforts.

The findings further demonstrated the importance of structural conditions, including organizational flexibility, information accessibility, and resource availability. Participants indicated that excessive bureaucracy, restricted information flow, and

resource limitations can hinder employees' ability to act ambidextrously. This finding aligns with previous ambidexterity research emphasizing the importance of organizational structures that facilitate flexibility and learning. Ouyang et al. noted that ambidextrous cultures and organizational systems encourage adaptive behavior by providing employees with the autonomy and resources necessary for innovation [9]. Similarly, Hiebl and Pielsticker highlighted the increasing need for organizational structures capable of accommodating both stability and innovation in rapidly changing environments [5]. These findings suggest that organizational structures can either enable or constrain the expression of social intelligence and ambidextrous behavior depending on the degree of flexibility and support they provide.

Finally, the study identified the educational environment itself as a critical contextual condition. Participants described the Ministry of Education as a highly complex environment characterized by continuous interactions with teachers, students, parents, policymakers, and administrators. Such complexity requires employees to exercise substantial social intelligence in managing diverse relationships and responding to competing expectations. This finding is consistent with research indicating that social intelligence plays a vital role in educational settings because it enhances communication, adaptability, resilience, and collaborative problem-solving. Studies by Ramadan and Abdou demonstrated that social intelligence contributes significantly to communication effectiveness and achievement motivation [13], while Mian et al. found that social intelligence enhances resilience and reduces anxiety in challenging educational contexts [15]. Similarly, Adeosun and Aruleba emphasized the importance of social intelligence for adaptive functioning, interpersonal effectiveness, and professional development [17]. Additional studies have shown that social intelligence contributes to self-efficacy, mindfulness, problem-solving effectiveness, and adaptive behavior across various contexts [14, 18]. Conversely, deficiencies in social intelligence may impair social functioning and adaptive responses to environmental demands [20]. Therefore, the complexity of educational organizations appears to increase the value of social intelligence as a mechanism through which employees achieve behavioral ambidexterity.

Overall, the findings suggest that behavioral ambidexterity among Ministry of Education employees emerges through the interaction of individual competencies and organizational conditions. Social intelligence serves as a foundational capability that enables employees to navigate interpersonal relationships, adapt to environmental changes, engage in collaborative problem-solving, and balance competing organizational demands. The study contributes to the literature by providing a grounded explanation of the causal and contextual factors associated with behavioral ambidexterity and by highlighting the central role of social intelligence in facilitating adaptive and innovative employee behavior within educational organizations.

The present study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research was conducted within the Ministry of Education, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other public or private organizations with different structures and operational environments. Second, the study relied exclusively on qualitative data collected through interviews, making the findings dependent on participants' perceptions and experiences. Third, although theoretical saturation was achieved, additional perspectives from employees in different organizational levels and geographical regions could have generated further conceptual insights. Finally, the study focused exclusively on the causal and contextual dimensions of the grounded theory paradigm and did not examine intervening conditions, strategies, or consequences associated with behavioral ambidexterity.

Future research could develop and test quantitative models based on the conceptual framework generated in the present study. Researchers may examine the relationships among social intelligence, behavioral ambidexterity, organizational

culture, and leadership practices using large and diverse samples. Comparative studies across different ministries, educational institutions, and private-sector organizations could provide deeper insight into the contextual variability of behavioral ambidexterity. Future investigations may also explore the remaining dimensions of the grounded theory paradigm model, including intervening conditions, action strategies, and outcomes, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable for examining how behavioral ambidexterity evolves over time in response to organizational and environmental changes.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that managers in educational organizations should invest in initiatives that strengthen employees' social intelligence, communication skills, and interpersonal competencies. Leadership development programs should emphasize supportive, participative, and trust-building behaviors that encourage innovation and adaptive performance. Human resource policies should create opportunities for continuous learning, professional development, recognition, and employee empowerment. Organizational structures should be designed to promote flexibility, information sharing, and collaborative problem-solving while minimizing unnecessary bureaucratic barriers. Creating a culture of trust, learning, and innovation can provide employees with the psychological and organizational support necessary to balance routine responsibilities with creative and adaptive behaviors, thereby enhancing both individual effectiveness and organizational performance.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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