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Does Ethical Leadership Impact Whistleblowing Intentions? Moderation of Locus of Control and Mediation of Organizational Identification

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ABSTRACT

Considering the importance of whistleblowing in the public sector, this study aims to investigate the impact of ethical leadership on whistleblowing intentions by using organizational identification as a mediator and individual locus of control as a moderator. The data has been collected from mid-level managers working at the primary and secondary health care departments in Pakistan using survey questionnaires. Convenience sampling has been used to collect data. The data was analyzed through Smart PLS using the structural equation modeling technique. The study adds value to the literature by analyzing the impact of ethical leadership on whistleblowing intentions. Organizational identification has been analyzed to check its mediating impact, and LOC has been discussed as a moderator to see its influence on the relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing intentions. This study is helpful for public-sector healthcare organizations to boost whistleblowing. The Prime Minister Portal is also an effort to boost whistleblowing, and a large number of whistles have been observed during the past few months.

Over the past few decades, it has been asserted that unethical behavior has become more pervasive in commercial practices. Furthermore, the governance standards in the public sector of Pakistan are lacking from various perspectives (Rodgers, 2020). Whistleblowing serves as a crucial mechanism in the deterrence of corruption, fraud, and other unethical behaviors within public sector entities. Pakistan lacked a structured mechanism for reporting unethical conduct, commonly known as whistleblowing (Slemrod et al., 2019). Whistleblowers are widely acknowledged as significant and formidable actors due to their pivotal role in addressing whistleblowing within the realm of corporate ethics, particularly in the context of confronting unethical practices within complex organizational environments (Orbán et al., 2023; Schmitz et al., 2020). The Pakistani government has provided assurance to the general public regarding the maintenance of confidentiality pertaining to the identities of potential whistleblowers (Hussain et al., 2023). The Pakistani government will also use the services of businesses to assist in identifying and retrieving unlawfully acquired funds (Hussain, 2022). The firms that aid the government will be entitled to a predetermined portion of the sum that is recovered.

Whistleblowing refers to divulging information about perilous corruption within private or public organizations to make such occurrences known to the general public (Tomo et al., 2020). Whistleblowing is not commonly practiced in the majority of public sector organizations in Pakistan due to its obligatory nature rather than being a voluntary endeavor (Muhammad, 2022). Additionally, corruption has permeated many public institutions, leading to its institutionalization (Khan et al., 2020). In order to mitigate this rate, it is imperative to incorporate the involvement of an ethical leader who can effectively inspire subordinates to engage in whistleblowing activities against unethical and unlawful practices within the public health sector of Pakistan. Over the past two decades, whistleblowing has emerged as a commendable practice within numerous public institutions in industrialized countries. However, in the context of Pakistan, the implementation of this practice has not yet reached the desired degree of effectiveness. Prior research has been undertaken to investigate corruption inside the public sector, revealing that efforts to mitigate unethical practices, such as corruption, within public sector organizations have proven to be challenging (Javaid et al., 2020)

Researchers have looked into corruption in the public sector before and found that it is hard to stop unethical practices like corruption in public sector organizations (Javaid et al., 2020). Certainly, literature in organizational science studies has also applied the concept of locus of control. Not only this but the locus of control is also being studied as a moderating variable in different contexts and concepts, like the study by Chen et al. (2023), which was conducted to uncover the relationship between attributions affecting the internal customer's behaviors and the locus of control. The study found that the locus of control is the major antecedent regarding the behavior building of an individual (Chen et al., 2023). It also provides empirical findings regarding this model and shows the stronger influence of locus of control over one behavior.

A study in the context of South Africa was conducted by Maziriri et al. (2018) to uncover the influence of workplace spirituality on locus of control, which is being explored among employees. Study results uncover that locus of control mainly influences employee

perception, which is also helpful in enhancing the commitment of employees toward the organization (Maziriri et al., 2018).

If we talk about the integration of leadership with identification, organizational identification is strengthened by ethical leadership. Moreover, ethical leaders stimulate and motivate workers to give their self-ideas by presenting these qualities and ethical models charmingly and advantageously (Bavik et al., 2018; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Armas, 2019).

The objective of the present research on ethical leadership is to investigate the relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing intentions in the context of public sector organizations. Ethical leadership will be evaluated by using locus of control as a moderating variable and organization identification as a mediating variable. The moderating and mediating mechanisms will help in better understanding the factors that increase the likelihood of whistleblowing and reduce the likelihood of unethical activities. Thus, shedding light on how ethical leadership motivates or demotivates the reporting of wrongdoing seems essential.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Ethical Leadership - Historical Context and Evolution of the Concept

Literature defines ethical leadership as the type of leadership that shows ethical behaviors and practices the ethical activities in an organization (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Ethical leadership also involves the personal behavior and expectations of the leaders because followers behave according to the ethical leader's behavior. An ethical leader is recognized as someone with a strong ethical verdict about situations (Babalola et al., 2019).

The scholarly discourse on ethical leadership has substantially evolved over the past few decades, with seminal works shedding light on the attributes and behaviors that characterize ethical leaders (Brown et al., 2005). Significant contributions include Treviño et al. (2000), who developed a theoretical model delineating the factors influencing the effectiveness of ethical leadership. Brown and Treviño (2006) further conceptualized ethical leadership as demonstrating normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships.

Other notable works have examined antecedents and outcomes of ethical leadership. Mayer et al. (2012) found leader behavioral integrity to be a key antecedent, while Avey et al. (2011) highlighted its positive impact on employee satisfaction, commitment, and motivation. The mediating mechanisms through which ethical leadership affects follower attitudes and behaviors have also been elucidated (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2009).

Within the whistleblowing literature, ethics have been central, though often focusing on the moral considerations for potential whistleblowers (Jubb, 1999; Larmer, 1992). Employee loyalty vis-à-vis whistleblowing continues to be debated, with arguments that they may not be incompatible (Larmer, 1992). Our study aims to extend this discourse by exploring how ethical leadership itself shapes whistleblowing intentions, examining the mediating and moderating mechanisms involved. Overall, prior scholarship has made significant advances, providing a robust foundation. Our study seeks to build on these works to provide novel empirical and theoretical insights into the interrelations between ethical leadership, organizational identification, locus of control, and whistleblowing intentions.

Therefore, more research is needed on the ethical aspect of leadership. The ethical leader plays an active role in promoting subordinates' whistleblowing because an ethical leader serves as a role model for his subordinates, so that he acts in a way that influences his subordinates. They improve the organizational effectiveness against inappropriate behavior because they are thought to be trustworthy and responsible. Ethical leaders interact with employees daily for routine work (Alkahtani, 2015). Because of their daily interaction with subordinates, they develop social relationships with their subordinates (Avey et al., 2011). Thus, responding to an unethical situation is recognized as the duty of the subordinates. Ethical leadership could also encourage whistleblowing because it removes the fear of retaliation.

Whistleblowing Intentions-Historical Context and Evolution of the Concept

Whistleblowing is defined as "the disclosure by organization members (former or current) of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to persons or organizations that may be able to effect action" (Near & Miceli, 1985, p. 4). This is one of the most widely accepted definitions of whistleblowing in the literature. It was introduced in Near and Miceli's (1985) highly influential article that helped distinguish whistleblowing from related constructs. The key aspects of this definition are: 1) The whistleblower is a member or former member of the organization they are reporting on. 2) The misconduct is occurring within that organization. 3) It involves illegal, unethical or illegitimate actions or practices. 4) The whistleblower discloses this wrongdoing to parties who can act.

This encapsulates whistleblowing as an act of dissent by an organizational insider who exposes misconduct through reporting channels with the aim of remedying the wrongdoing. The definition emphasizes the role of the whistleblower in bringing unethical or illegal practices to light. The concept of whistleblowing has evolved substantially over the past few decades, with early discourse centered around defining whistleblowing and delineating it from related constructs like employee dissent (Near & Miceli, 1985). Seminal works have examined factors influencing whistleblowing intentions and behaviors across diverse settings.

Noe (1988) found perceptions of informal reporting channels within organizations strongly predicted whistleblowing likelihood. Near and Miceli (1985) highlighted individual and situational variables like perceived wrongdoing seriousness, personal responsibility, and organizational climate. Jubb (1999) argued for restricting the definition of whistleblowing to public interest reporting.

Other studies have focused on whistleblowing intentions in specific contexts like the police force (Rothwell & Baldwin, 2006), education (Park et al., 2020), and public accounting (Urbach & Ahlemann, 2010). Antecedents like ethical leadership (Liu, 2018), psychological safety (Schwartz, 2016), and motivational factors (Cohen et al., 2015) have been explored. Outcomes such as retaliation (Nayir et al., 2018) and observer reactions (Thaler & Helmig, 2016) have also received attention.

Our research aims to contribute to this evolving literature by investigating how ethical leadership shapes internal whistleblowing intentions, examining locus of control and organizational identification as underlying mechanisms. We strive to provide novel theoretical insights and empirically validated frameworks to advance whistleblowing models.

Literature argues that whistleblowers are helpful to the organization, and appreciating and rewarding their attitude of blowing the whistle will motivate other colleagues. The impact of leadership on ethical behaviors and whistleblowing has broadened our understanding of ethical leadership (Thaler & Helmig, 2016). It also researched ethical behaviors' specific to whistleblowing and concluded that the relationship of ethical leadership with whistleblowing is found to have a significant impact (Zhang et al., 2016) and (Bhal & Dadhich, 2011) also researched the relationship of whistleblowing and ethical leadership.

When ethical leadership is present in an organization, employees are more likely to inform the leader about unethical activities because the ethical leader acts as a role model for them. Literature also found that ethical leadership has a positive and indirect effect on internal whistleblowing (Cheng et al., 2019). A study by Cheng et al. (2019), discussed in their cross-culture study of organizational protection of whistleblowers, found that ethical leadership is an effective tool for increasing the likelihood of whistleblowing in China. Hence, the present study aims to prove the following hypothesis based on a literature review:

H1: Ethical leadership is positively related to whistle-blowing intentions.

Ethical leadership and Organizational Identification

Organizational identification can be described as a person's attachment to an organization, which includes both personal and interpersonal attachment. Employees' identification with the organization helps them build a strong and cognitive bond with the organization. Ethical leadership in an organization provides its employees with a self-generated mechanism to raise their voices against illegal activities because they are identified by the ethical leader (Islam et al., 2019). The ethical behavior of the leaders helps subordinates build identification with the organization. Literature explores the idea that when ethical leaders are highly identified by the organization, they will help build a positive attitude among the employees working in the organization (O'Keefe et al., 2019).

Individuals are strongly identified by their organization and perform extra-role behaviors because they take the organizational goals as their own (Covin et al., 2020). Given the rationale described above, we can say that ethical leadership operates through organizational identification because ethical leaders help employees achieve organizational goals, their motivation develops a sense of ownership in the workplace, and employees display a positive attitude towards blowing the whistle. In the studies of (Ilyas et al., 2020), a positive relationship has been found between ethical leadership and organizational identification. As per this research, a positive association exists between ethical leadership and organizational identification, which in this way is empathically related to job performance. Recent research has identified a positive relationship between organizational identification and ethical leadership (Svendsen et al., 2020).

Several researchers have found a positive relationship between ethical leadership and optimistic executive results, for example, identification of organization, commitment between the organization, organization performance, outcomes, behavior of citizens, and voice behavior, which have also been recorded and documented in a good manner (He et al., 2014; Lu, 2014; Neves & Story, 2015; Suifan et al., 2020). In any case, a huge part of the research has been driven by the for-benefit organization.

Therefore, this argued that the ethical leader's behavior will influences organizational identification, and this influence will help others to make their decisions in favor of whistleblowing. Accordingly, we expect that individual identification with the organization will mediate the relationship of ethical leadership with whistleblowing intentions. The above discussion leads to the following hypothesis.

H2: Organizational Identification mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing intentions.

Locus of Control and Whistleblowing Intentions

A personality trait that distinguishes one individual from another is the control center, known as the Locus of Control (LOC). As described in the theory of planned behavior, the LOC is an integral part of the perceived behavioral control that can affect a person's behavior (Valentine et al., 2019). Locus of control demonstrates how an individual sees the link between actions and outcomes. There are two types of LOC, namely internal and external (Bernawati & Napitupulu, 2018). A person who has an internal LOC can become a whistleblower because he can control what is happening around him. A person with an external LOC is less likely to take responsibility for what is happening around him, whether ethical or unethical. The locus of control impacts whistleblowing intensity positively and significantly (Purwanto et al., 2018). Literature also found that whistleblowing intentions are not affected by LOC (Bernawati & Napitupulu, 2018). LOC influences the intention of an employee to be a whistleblower within the organization (Yustina, 2020).

Literature can be interpreted as saying that when the LOC is higher than the auditor's attention to blow the whistle, it will also be higher. The locus of control influences the intention to conduct whistleblowing (Fitriyah & Nagara, 2017, p. 133). According to the above discussion, we can say that ethical leaders with a higher locus of control are more likely to control unethical situations and motivate others for whistleblowing than those with lower locus of control.

Moderating Role of Locus of Control and Organizational Identification as a Mediator

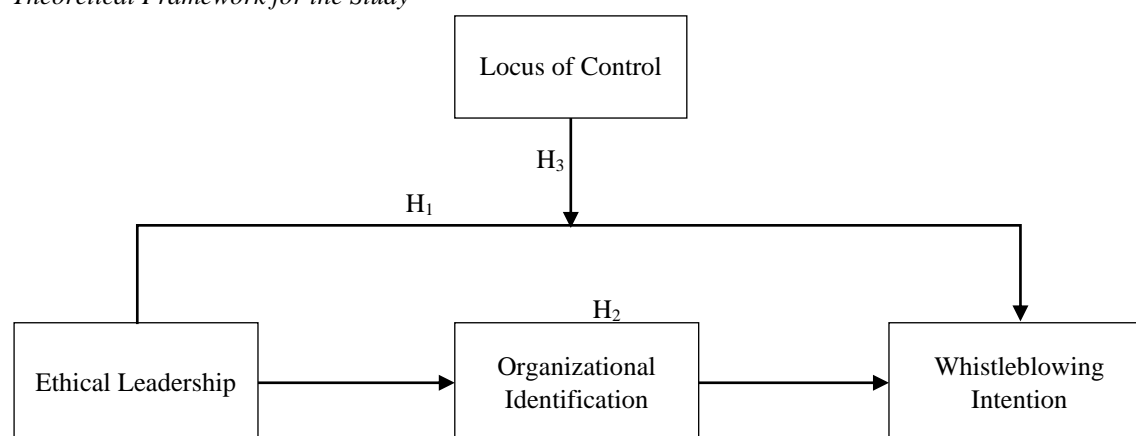
Prior research has established locus of control, defined as one's perception of control over life events, as an important individual characteristic influencing workplace attitudes and behaviors (Vivek & Nanthagopan, 2021). Employees with an internal locus of control believe they can influence outcomes through their actions, while externals believe results are shaped by external forces (Surya et al., 2021). Internals have been found to engage in more organizational citizenship behaviors (Muslim, 2020), show greater motivation (Hanifah & Clyde, 2022), and perceive more opportunities to impact ethical practices (Banerjee & Mehta, 2016). This suggests internals may be more inclined to voice concerns through whistleblowing due to greater perceived control. In contrast, externals' lower perceived control may inhibit whistleblowing. Thus, the locus of control forms a meaningful individual moderator. Organizational identification, referring to employees' sense of unity with the organization's goals and values, has been established as a key mechanism for shaping work behaviors (Neves & Story, 2015). Identification fosters loyalty, compliance, and advocacy for

the organization (Clyde et al., 2022). We expect stronger identification will reduce whistleblowing intentions, acting as an explanatory mediator between ethical leadership and willingness to whistle blow internally. Figure 1 shows our theoretical framing which was drawn based on the robust empirical evidence on how locus of control and identification fundamentally shape individuals' organizational attitudes and propensity to voice concerns. Testing them as moderators and mediators within our ethical leadership whistleblowing model provides novel, theory-driven insights.

H3: Locus of control moderates the relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing intentions.

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework for the Study



Based on the literature review presented in the manuscript, prior research has significantly contributed to our understanding of ethical leadership and its relationship to whistleblowing intentions. Studies have explored antecedents and outcomes of ethical leadership (Ashfaq et al., 2021; Ilyas et al., 2022) and how ethical leaders shape follower attitudes and behaviors through mediating mechanisms. Within the whistleblowing domain specifically, existing literature has examined factors influencing disclosure decisions across diverse organizational contexts (Valentine & Godkin, 2019).

However, fewer studies have investigated how ethical leadership itself impacts whistleblowing intentions. Moreover, studies have yet to unpack the intervening explanatory processes linking these constructs. The current study aims to address these gaps by empirically examining the direct relationship between subordinates' perceptions of their leaders' ethical conduct and individual willingness to disclose wrongdoing through official internal channels. In addition, it evaluates the potential mediating role of organizational identification and moderating influence of locus of control, thus providing novel theoretical insight into when and why ethical leadership spurs whistleblowing among followers. By modeling these explanatory mechanisms, this research study advances our understanding of the dynamics between ethical leadership and voice behaviors in organizations.

Method

A quantitative research approach was used to conduct the primary research. It is important to decide the research type being conducted—whether to use primary data or secondary data (Vivek & Nanthagopan, 2021) The present study has been conducted in the context of the

primary and secondary health care sectors of Punjab, Pakistan. The population in the current study is the 16th and 17th-grade employees of the targeted organization used as a unit of analysis because we have collected data from them.

Expanding on the sample selection, we chose to focus on mid-level managers within the 16th and 17th grades of the organization. Our rationale for this choice stems from previous literature indicating that mid-level managers often find themselves at the intersection of organizational hierarchies, where ethical issues and the decision to blow the whistle are most critical (Hanifah & Clyde, 2022). Their role places them in a unique position where they frequently encounter ethical dilemmas and may face challenges in deciding whether to report wrongdoing within the organization. By focusing on mid-level managers, we aimed to gain insights into the dynamics of ethical decision-making and its interplay with organizational factors within this pivotal group.

To collect the data, we employed a non-probability intercept-based convenience sampling technique, considering the absence of a predefined list for the entire target population. This method was pragmatic and allowed us to efficiently gather data from respondents who were accessible during the data collection period. The sample size of 370 respondents was determined based on the recommended 95% confidence level by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), ensuring a robust dataset for our study. In this study, the structured questionnaire was in printed form with a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" as the instrument of data collection. Both online and offline channels were utilized to ensure a diverse representation of the population. Data was collected through both online and offline channels of data collection. All the questions were adopted from existing literature, including eight items of whistleblowing intention (Park & Blenkinsopp, 2009) and 10 items on ethical leadership (Brown, 2005). The mediating role of organizational identification was measured using an organizational identification scale of six items (Liu, 2018; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). And lastly, the locus of control of the behavioral factor was measured by using 16 items (Spector, 1988). Data has been analyzed first in SPSS for descriptive purposes and then using the structural equation model technique through the software SmartPLS.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The information was collected regarding the respondent's age, gender, job grade, position, education, and, at the end, the employee's length of tenure. The questionnaires were offline and circulated among respondents. Table 1 shows the results of the demographic section regarding five different demographic questions. We can see that the maximum number of people were in the age group of 20–24 years of age. Almost 32% of respondents were female, and most held master's degrees.

Table 1
Demographic Results

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age	20-24 Years	151	41.0	41.0	41.0
	25-29 Years	83	22.6	22.6	63.6
	30-34 Years	69	18.8	18.8	82.3
	35-39 Years	46	12.5	12.5	94.8
	40 & above	19	5.2	5.2	100
	Total	368	100	100	
Gender	Male	253	68.8	68.8	68.8
	Female	115	31.2	31.2	100
	Total	368	100	100	
Employment Grade	16th Grade	164	44.6	44.6	44.6
	17th Grade	124	33.7	33.7	78.3
	Above 17th	80	21.7	21.7	100
	Total	368	100	100	
Education	Bachelor Degree	148	40.2	40.2	40.2
	Master Degree	154	41.8	41.8	82.1
	Doctorate Degree	66	17.9	17.9	100
	Total	368	100	100	
Job Tenure	Less than 1 Year	102	27.7	27.7	27.7
	1 to 3 Years	151	41	41	68.8
	4 to 6 years	69	18.8	18.8	87.5
	7 years & above	46	12.5	12.5	100
	Total	368	100	100	

Model Assessment using PLS Approach

PLS considers an approach that could be used for model evaluation by computing the estimations of the model parameters, even if it does not deliver an already established universal goodness-of-fit (GOF) criterion (Henseler et al., 2009). Table 2 shows the results of convergent validity and reliability statistics. Hair et al. (2014) recommended two measurements to obtain the results of convergent validity. Firstly, outer loading analysis by recommending criteria that the value should be greater than .70 for each selected item, and the second one is AVE by showing variance between variables and its value should be greater than .50 (Hair et al., 2014). Table 2 shows the reliability of data by assessing the internal consistency of data through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability; for this, both of the criteria's values should be greater than .70. Summarizing the whole table, the results support both criteria of convergent validity as well as a reliability test.

Table 2
Reliability and Convergent Validity

Items	Initial Loading	Reliable Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
EL1	.81	.81			
EL10	.75	.75			
EL2	.86	.86			
EL3	.76	.76			
EL4	.79	.79			
EL5	.81	.81	.94	.94	.64
EL6	.84	.84			
EL7	.76	.76			
EL8	.83	.83			
EL9	.79	.79			
LoC1	.67	-			
LoC10	.75	.75	.93	.94	.59

LoC11	.63	-			
LoC12	.62	-			
LoC13	.72	.72			
LoC14	.71	.72			
LoC15	.73	.73			
LoC16	.67	-			
LoC2	.79	.79			
LoC3	.81	.83			
LoC4	.76	.78			
LoC5	.77	.78			
LoC6	.80	.80			
LoC7	.81	.82			
LoC8	.77	.78			
LoC9	.71	.70			
OI1	.80	.80			
OI2	.85	.85			
OI3	.79	.79	.90	.92	.67
OI4	.81	.81			
OI5	.83	.83			
OI6	.81	.81			
WB1	.77	.77			
WB2	.77	.78			
WB3	.87	.87			
WB4	.82	.83	.90	.92	.64
WB5	.85	.85			
WB6	.73	.74			
WB7	.48	-			
WB8	.73	.72			

Note. EL = Ethical Leadership, LoC= Locus of Control, OI= Organizational Identification, WI= Whistleblowing intention.

The next second criterion to measure validity is discrimination validity, which shows that items and constructs are theoretically different from each other and have their concepts backed by some developed and tested theory (Urbach & Ahlemann, 2010). For this, two tests are considered: cross-loading analysis and the Fornell-Larcker criteria. Table 3 indicates that each question has met the criteria of having a maximum value for its variable. It also shows that the values of indicators are up to par with their construct and lower with others that support the analysis. This also supports the discriminant validity of the data.

Table 3

Cross Loadings

Factors	Eth_Lead	LOC Mod Whs_Int	Loc_Cont	Org_Iden	Whs_Intn
EL1	.814	-.569	.611	.658	.616
EL10	.757	-.515	.428	.646	.592
EL2	.863	-.560	.437	.696	.693
EL3	.764	-.458	.642	.586	.620
EL4	.796	-.489	.466	.321	.508
EL5	.819	-.540	.643	.664	.695
EL6	.841	-.539	.250	.676	.693
EL7	.764	-.590	.671	.607	.635
EL8	.831	-.514	.567	.695	.458
EL9	.797	-.562	.432	.384	-.692
Eth_Lead * Loc_Cont	-.663	1.000	-.596	-.602	-.553
LoC10	.654	-.383	.750	.652	.666
LoC13	.560	-.393	.725	.230	.209
LoC14	.617	-.430	.721	.583	.633
LoC15	.680	-.407	.738	.591	.529
LoC2	.435	-.468	.793	.423	.437
LoC3	.607	-.539	.831	.635	.605
LoC4	.522	-.521	.780	.605	.654
LoC5	.681	-.596	.786	.603	.658
LoC6	.521	-.470	.809	.648	.604
LoC7	.731	-.500	.827	.463	.423

LoC8	.692	-.483	.784	.500	.617
LoC9	.629	-.311	.708	.579	.640
OI1	.638	-.532	.693	.801	.629
OI2	.531	-.555	.487	.851	.615
OI3	.659	-.437	.504	.796	.635
OI4	.635	-.428	.506	.811	.665
OI5	.620	-.494	.684	.834	.632
OI6	.697	-.503	.530	.816	.613
WB1	.638	-.384	.688	.610	.776
WB2	.680	-.445	.634	.607	.780
WB3	.626	-.500	.667	.526	.871
WB4	.695	-.395	.627	.651	.833
WB5	.646	-.480	.588	.414	.858
WB6	.652	-.454	.658	.631	.747
WB8	.598	-.443	.614	.617	.729

Note. EL = Ethical Leadership, LoC= Locus of Control, OI= Organizational Identification, WI= Whistleblowing intention.

The result of the Fornell-Larcker criterion is shown in Table 4. This is because latent constructs have a greater variance with the items used to measure them than with any other variables. Table 4 shows the correlation of values; here, upper diagonal values are with their owning constructs, and other values are with other variables. The criterion for this is that upper diagonal values should be maximum and lesser than other constructs. The present study results show that the upper diagonal value is greater than .70 for each construct, as is the maximum in that column. All the upper diagonal values are between .77 and 1.00, which meet the criteria well enough to support the discriminant validity.

Table 4

Fornell-Larcker Criteria

	Eth_Lead	LOC Mod Whs_Int	Loc_Cont	Org_Iden	Whs_Intn
Eth_Lead	.805				
LOC Mod Whs_Int	-.663	1.000			
Loc_Cont	.289	-0.596	.772		
Org_Iden	.313	-0.602	.579	.818	
Whs_Intn	.147	-0.553	.274	.115	.801

Note. Eth_Lead = Ethical Leadership, Loc_Cont = Locus of Control, Org_Iden= Organizational Identification, Whs_Intn = Whistleblowing intention, MOD= Moderating effect

Model Fitness

Model fitness is measured through Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) to support the goodness of model measurement. SRMR is being discussed as a difference between the observed and predicted correlation of constructs (Henseler et al., 2015). Table 5 shows the values of SRMR, Chi2, and NFI. The value of NFI falls within the criteria and is near 1, which supports the model fit. The value of SRMR is also less than .10 (for both the saturated and estimated models), and the chi-square is also good enough to support the model fit. Values on both ends are good enough, e.g., structural model as well as estimated model.

Table 5

Model Fitness

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.05	0.06
d_ULS	1.69	2.44
d_G1	1.27	1.39
d_G2	1.14	1.24
Chi-Square	2,243.08	2,356.19
NFI	0.80	0.79

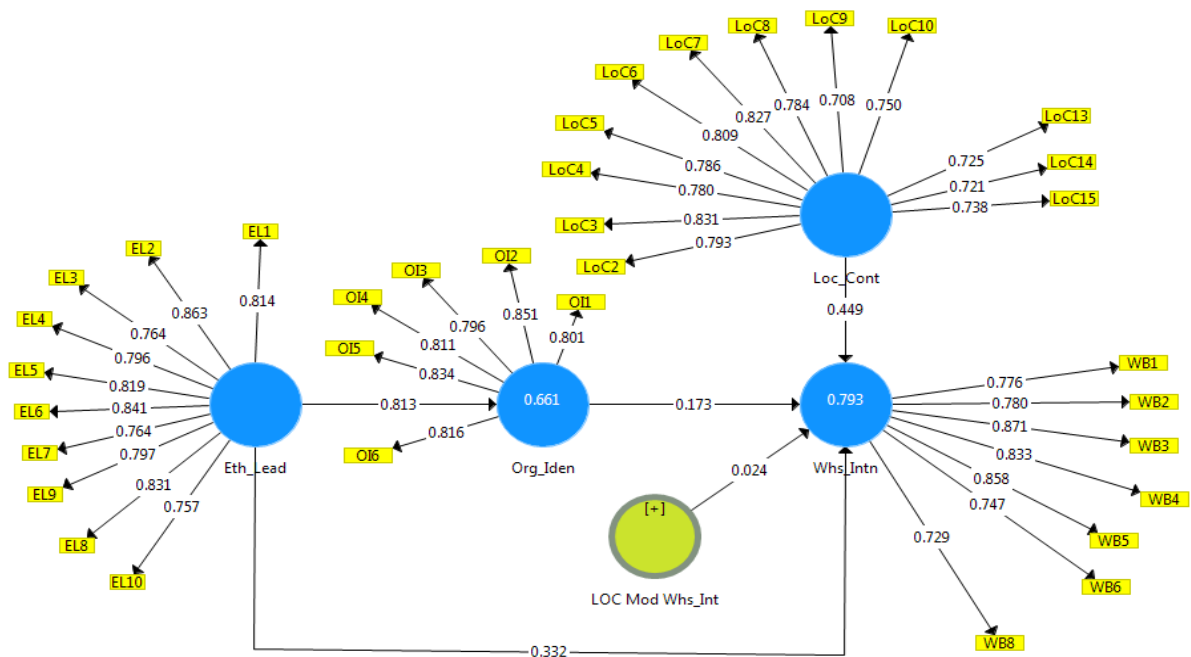
Algorithm Approach for Model Assessment

Coefficient values between the variables are considered the most important way to measure the power of a model. This value shows the strength of the relationship between independent and dependent variables, and the sign shows the direction of the relationship (Urbach & Ahlemann, 2010). Two models are supposed to be displayed: the inner and outer models. The inner talks about the relationship between constructs, whereas the outer shows items used to measure constructs.

Figure 2 shows the inner as well as outer measurement model results. Factor analysis is shown in the outer model, whereas the relationship between constructs and R square values is shown in the inner model, but this model shows just path model results, including direct relations and moderating variables, but does not show the impact of mediation. Here, all possible relationships are shown in Figure 2. R² tells us how well the partial least squares regression model predicts our data set (Surienty et al., 2013). The coefficient analysis measures the inner model by having relationships between endogenous and exogenous variables. If the value of R² is .25 or above, it means the target constructs are weak. If its value is .50 or above, target constructs are medium; if its value is .75 or above, target constructs are considered substantial (Hair et al., 2017). This study has a high-level significance value because the scoring value of behavioral intention is .79, which means that whistleblowing is measured at 79.3% through the independent variables of the model, which affect it directly or indirectly. Moreover, the value also met the goodness criteria of Hair et al. (2017) to be higher than at least .25 and .75 for having a sustainable and considerable impact.

Figure 2

Algorithm for Model Assessment



Mediating Impact of Variance Accounted For (VAF)

VAF is used to measure the mediating impact. This value is calculated by using all three values of the model (i.e., the below equation). According to Hair et al. (2017), the VAF value

is divided into three criteria, which show partial, full, and no mediation. To measure the mediation strength, use the following equation:

$$\text{VAF is } = (\beta \text{ of IV to MV} * \beta \text{ of MV to DV}) + \beta \text{ of IV to DV}$$

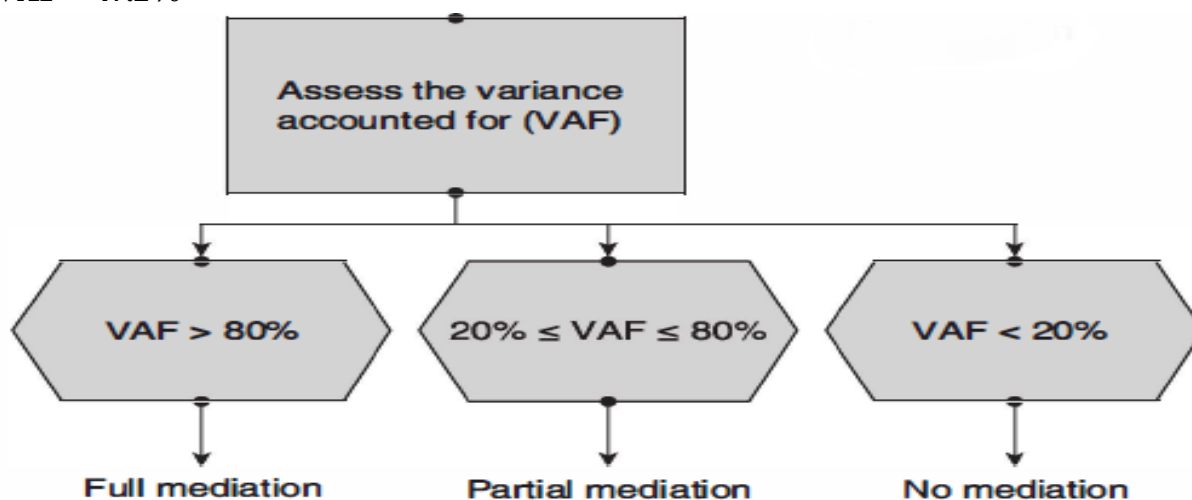
IV= Independent Variable, DV= Dependent Variable, MV= Mediated Variable, β = Path Coefficient

VAF of Eth_Lead -> Org_Iden -> Whs_Intn

$$= (0.813 * 0.173) + 0.332$$

$$= 0.140 + 0.332 = 0.472$$

VAF = 47.2%



The above equation shows that the mediating impact of both values shows that organizational identification partially mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and employees’ intention of whistleblowing by 47.2%.

Discussion

The predictive power of the structural model is measured through the path coefficient (Beta β) values between the relationships of variables which is displayed in Table 6. The magnitude and direction of the relationship are measured, i.e., if the value of the coefficient is positive, it means that with an increase in the independent variable, the dependent variable will also change positively, whereas if the value is negative, it means that there is an inverse relationship between the variables.

Table 6

Hypotheses Testing

	β	<i>M</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Eth_Lead -> Whs_Intn	.33	.33	4.90	.00
Eth_Lead -> Org_Iden -> Whs_Intn	.14	.13	2.57	.01
LOC Mod Whs_Int -> Whs_Intn	.02	.02	0.73	.46

The path analysis results provide strong support for our first hypothesis that ethical leadership is positively associated with internal whistleblowing intentions. The standardized coefficient of .33 indicates a moderate to large effect size (Schyns et al., 2017). This aligns with prior studies demonstrating that ethical leader behaviors like integrity, trustworthiness, and setting ethical standards promote voice behaviors, including speaking up about concerns (Heaphy et al., 2021; Liu, 2018). By fostering transparency and open communication, ethical leaders likely encourage disclosure of wrongdoings through appropriate channels (Cui, 2021). We also find empirical validation for the mediating role of organizational identification in the

ethical leadership-whistleblowing relationship. The coefficient of .14 denotes partial mediation, explaining 14.1% of the total effect. This resonates with social identity perspectives where identification fosters adherence to group norms, curbing deviance (Brieger, 2018). Strongly identified employees exhibit greater allegiance and loyalty, which may inhibit whistleblowing (Fehr et al., 2015). However, the moderating effect of locus of control was not supported, diverging from studies suggesting an internal locus strengthens the link between moral cognition and ethical behavior (Banerjee & Mehta, 2016). A potential explanation could be that whistleblowing intentions are shaped more by contextual factors like leadership than individual differences in control perceptions (Alpkan et al., 2020). Our study contributes unique insights into how ethical leadership and social identification mechanisms influence internal whistleblowing. But, further examination of individual and situational boundary conditions is warranted to enrich whistleblowing models.

The findings of this study advance our understanding of the relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing intentions in several key ways. First, by demonstrating a direct, positive association between ethical leadership and whistleblowing intentions, this research provides empirical validation for the premise that leaders who display normatively appropriate conduct motivate voice behaviors among followers. Second, the results support the notion that organizational identification acts as a partial mediator in this relationship. This suggests ethical leaders cultivate loyalty that initially inhibits dissent, though their influence remains impactful even after accounting for this process. Third, the non-significant moderating effect of locus of control implies contextual factors play a larger role than individual attributes in shaping disclosure decisions. This nuances perspectives that propensity for control uniquely affects moral action.

Taken together, these findings offer deeper theoretical insight into intervening mechanisms at work. They suggest ethical guidance empowers followers both relationally through heightened alignment with group values and directly through other dynamics like bolstered trust in leadership. From a practical standpoint, the outcomes demonstrate avenues for cultivating a speaking-up culture where wrongdoing is faced internally without fear of retaliation. Overall, this research contributes to a more holistic model of how and when ethical oversight encourages whistleblowing as a form of voice behavior.

Conclusion

This study was conducted by targeting employees of the primary and secondary healthcare sectors of Punjab province to measure the influence of ethical leadership directly on whistleblowing intention and also through the mediating role of organizational identification. The study also considers the locus of control as a moderator in the structural model. A study shows that, while considering the whistleblowing concept, leadership is the key factor that can positively and strongly influence it. There are also other factors, as described in previous literature, but without leadership and organizational identification, the model is incomplete in elaborating on the scenario. Now that we are moving towards in-depth leadership instead of other aspects, ethical aspects are the most valuable and vulnerable thing being considered while saying words about any issue in the organization. As a final point, the present study contributes significantly to the existing literature available regarding the health care sector in Pakistan. With the help of the present study, leaders may know that the ethical aspect is the

most important factor that directly and indirectly affects whistleblowing inside the organization.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has made an important contribution to the ethical leadership literature and whistleblowing, but it also has some limitations that could be addressed in future research. This study can also be used as a footprint for future research to have some valuable and fruitful results in the field of research in other specific industries, but it still has some drawbacks or shortcomings. These are some limitations of the study. First, the study only used Punjab as a sample, so future research may expand the population area and can also have a competitive study within and outside the provincial level. The present study used a limited sample size for data collection; future research may also expand the sample size to include some more in-depth aspects from respondents. The next study only considers a quantitative approach for study design; future studies may also use a qualitative or mixed-method approach to have more valuable results. Regarding potential biases, we acknowledge that convenience sampling may introduce selection biases due to the non-randomized nature of participant selection. Individuals who were more easily accessible or willing to participate might be overrepresented. Therefore, practitioners should exercise caution while generalizing the findings of this study.

Declarations

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