

## The Relationship between Ethical Leadership and Followers Voice: A Moderated-Mediated Model

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### Abstract

Past research studies have proven the relationship between ethical leadership and several constructive follower outcomes particularly their voice behavior (i.e., an extra role behavior and contextual performance). Further, follower relational identification to leader has been shown to mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and follower's voice. This study has incorporated a different and research-wise crucial kind of relevant contextual process, follower power distance orientation, and examine its moderating effect on the relationship between ethical leadership and follower voice outcome. We bring follower power distance orientation to the literature of behavioral ethics and explore its role as a moderator. Using a Pakistani sample of 397 followers working under the administrative control of 35 supervisors, and confirm that ethical leadership indirectly influences follower constructive discretionary feedback i.e., voice (via the mediating mechanism of follower's relational identification to leader). Further, we found that the direct relationship between ethical leadership and follower's voice strengthens by follower's power distance perception. The direct relationship between ethical leadership and follower's voice is stronger for those followers possessing high power distance cultural beliefs and weaker for those possessing low power distance cultural beliefs. Discussions and implications are presented.

**Keywords:** *Ethical Leadership, Voice Behavior, Relational Identification, Power Distance Orientation, Pakistan.*

### 1. Introduction

It has long been studied and apprehended that leadership is paramount to foster ethical conduct in organizations. Within the organizational framework, leaders play a crucial role in setting the tone for their goals and employees' desired behavior. Certainly, leaders occupy an influential role in the organization to regulate several tangible and intangible outcomes that affect employees (e.g., reward and punishment, target-setting, feedback, promotions, transfers/placements, performance standards setting, evaluation and controls, logistic support, etc.). What leaders are rewarded conveys about their priority and tends followers to behave in manners to attain such returns. In addition to legitimate job responsibilities, employees also seek guidance from their leaders in ethical challenges. Thus, it is not astonishing that employees are contingent on directives of their supervisors and leaders for seeking guidance when encountered with moral queries or issues (Trevino, 1986). Literature corroborates this notion, and intimate followers' conformity to moral principles and other ethical conducts of their leaders (Schminke, Wells, Peyrefitte, & Sebor, 2002). Moreover, figureheads who are supposed to ethical, affect followers counterproductive work conduct negatively (Brown & Treviño, 2006) while affect employee fruitful and productive work conduct positively (Trevino, 1986). In sum, studies pertaining to individual and organizational outcomes as a result of positive leadership are manifold. However, for the current cram we spotted ethical aspects of leadership.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Background**

Brown, Treviño, and Harrison (2005) defined the construct of ethical leadership as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making". Morally enriched and ethically equipped leaders are authentic, dependable, amicable, kind, credible, and fair-minded in their pronouncement and decision making.

Ethical leaders' top priority is to lead on morals. Unambiguously, ethical leaders are prominent ethical role models for their employees/followers. They create, convey moral values, set ethical benchmarks for their underlings, reinforce and foster such ethical values and standards through the mechanism of incentives and penalties accordingly. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1986) was used by (Brown et al., 2005) to posit that employees/followers of ethically enriched leaders vicariously learn acquire and adopt suitable activities and behaviors by seeing the conduct and behavior of these gorgeous, formal, legitimate, and reliable role models.

Several recent studies have reinforced the meaningful influence of leader ethical behavior (Brown et al., 2005) on follower outcomes, embracing follower voice as well (Avey, Palansk & Walumbwa, 2011) and non-positive actions (Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2012; Stouten et al., 2010). In the near past, more focus has been given to comprehension of the mediating and moderating mechanisms to reinforce said relations. The concept of ethical leadership was primarily anticipated to base its roots in social learning procedures to harvest and develop its consequences (Brown et al., 2005). Recently, scholars ought to highlight the protuberant character of the social bonding process by concentrating on social-relational identification with the leader as a mediating mechanism (Walumbwa & Hartnell, 2011).

Follower social-relational identification appears to be mainly vital as, predominantly for immediate controlling supervisors/manager/leaders, where the likelihood of frequent collaboration with the leader is more, and the association to the figurehead/supervisor/ leader is mentally nearer than is the association to whatever another element in the organizational structure (Feng, Zhang, Liu, Zhang, & Han, 2018; Zhu, He, Treviño, Chao, & Wang, 2015).

Indeed, more notably, researchers proposed that the relationship between ethical leadership and follower extra-role performances will function in a different way for followers holding dissimilar perception levels of power distribution in the organization or society at large. Entities embrace and employ different power distribution perception to comprehend the cultural context (Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992; Kelly George, 1955; Li, Xu, Tu, & Lu, 2014). Such cultural beliefs denote contextual norms that may affect how the public apprehend and imagine their practices. The power distance perception of employees has been appeared to impact people's apprehension of and their replies toward ethical circumstances (Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997; Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995). Empirical evidence has not yet been conducted to consider that how this vital cultural belief affects the responses of followers toward ethical leadership. These cultural beliefs seem pertinent to the research of ethical leadership as indirectly apprehended suppositions about moral and ethical individuals, and arrangements should affect how followers respond to ethical leaders. Hence, researchers proposed that the cultural context will support to elucidate why entities with distinct cultural views about the distribution of power in the organization will respond differently to ethical leaders.

The study makes a few significant contributions. Firstly, this study answers question about how the mediating mechanism relevant to the process of social identification which connect leader ethical practices to follower outcome. We substantiated the previous research in the sense that relational identification significantly contributed to the success of leader ethical conduct. Secondly, research contributed to the literature about leader ethical practices by familiarizing

the contextual moderator, perceived power distance orientation into the discussion about 'who' responds differently to the construct of ethical leadership. As the literature about ethical leadership has so far given less attention to the role of employees and moderating mechanisms. We incorporate both, introducing a moderator that appears mainly suitable to comprehend follower responses to leader ethical conduct in different contexts. Thirdly, researchers studied a relevant outcome, i.e., constructive extra-role feedback, voice behavior. Thus, our work contributed to the literature on perceived power distance orientation thereby examining its influence in the leader and follower interaction context.

## 2.2 Ethical Leadership and Follower Relational Identification

Morally enriched and ethically equipped leaders are authentic, dependable, amicable, kind, credible, and fair-minded in their pronouncement and decision making. Ethical leaders' top priority is to lead on morals. Unambiguously, ethical leaders are prominent ethical role models for their followers. They create, convey moral values, set ethical benchmarks for their underlings, reinforce and foster such ethical values and standards through the mechanism of incentives and penalties.

Social learning theory (Bandura & McClelland, 1977) was used by Brown and colleagues (2005) to posit that followers of ethically enriched leaders vicariously learn acquire and adopt suitable activities and behaviors by seeing the conduct and behavior of these gorgeous, formal, legitimate, and reliable role models. Nevertheless, other psychosomatic impact mechanisms through which ethical leadership could influence follower behaviors have also begun to investigate by Walumbwa and Hartnell (2011) as well. Present research conforms to that stripe of effort by concentrating on the intervening processes of employee's social-relational identification.

Follower relational identification with frontrunner which is referred to the degree to which the follower self-concept is well-defined by their affiliation with the frontrunner" (Walumbwa & Hartnell, 2011). The theory of Social identification suggests that team affiliates will recognize the pivotal team or an imperative individual about the team (e.g., the team leader). Through such identification mechanisms, they attain their basic social needs (i.e., self-esteem as defined by Maslow's hierarchy of needs) like affiliation, attachment, and belongingness. Leaders who are high on ethics, handle followers with equality, considerateness, kindness, sympathy and, veneration and they make pronouncements that are supposed to be righteous. Thus, follower tends to be more likely to recognize with the leader and to exhibit supportive activities and behaviors including both in-role and extra-role performances (Zhu et al., 2015). Empirical evidence suggests that a leader's ethicality should influence follower social-relational identification to frontrunner as they are "appealing, reliable, behaviorally imitable, and authentic as the moral and ethical exemplary individual's in part by involving in activities and behaviors that are monitored and appraised by a follower as normatively suitable, and that promote and suggest philanthropic (instead of egotistic) enthusiasm," (Brown et al., 2005). At the operational level, the follower is expected to intermingle recurrently with their immediate controlling authority i.e., leader, and see his or her activities, behaviors, movements, pronouncements, and decisions making, all of which offer an opportunity for affiliation and identification to happen. Thus, the existence of follower social-relational identification appears to be particularly crucial if the moral supervisor is a guiding level frontrunner (Zhu et al., 2015). Based on aforesaid evidence we can formulate the following premise.

**H1:** *Ethical leadership is positively related to follower's voice.*

**H2:** *Ethical leadership positively influence their follower relational identification with the leader.*

### 2.3 Follower Relational Identification as a Mediator

Researchers proposed that the relationship between ethical leadership and follower's voice is mediated by the concept of follower relational identification i.e., a social process. (Walumbwa & Hartnell, 2011) have shown that followers who recognize themselves with their leader incline to accomplish better in both extra-role and in-role behaviors. A further follower who strongly recognize themselves with their leader, line up their benefits with those of their leader, or even give up and sacrifice their benefit for the shared (Van Knippenberg & Van Schie, 2000).

Van Dick, Grojean, Christ, and Wieseke (2006) followers who highly recognize themselves with their leader are also highly expected to involve in optional pro-organization fruitful extra-role activities and behaviors. Speaking up (i.e., voice) is one such constructive behavior that could be an outcome of such social identification process (Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010). Morrison (2011) voice is an extra role contextual performance that includes keeping an eagle eye over organizational processes, procedures, policies, operational activities, and functions and proactively making discretionary proposals to overseers and administration to minimize leakages and boost organizational efficiency and effectiveness by articulating concerns about the present and possible glitches or arduous tasks to be accomplished. Thus, voice behavior is discretionary feedback to help organizational accomplishment to succeed, followers with sturdier relational identification beliefs are highly expected to involve invoicing.

Zhu et al. (2015) followers of a moral leader usually possess stronger degrees of social-relational identification with their supervisor. They view, their leader as a symbol of the organization, its procedures, and policies. Thus, followers are highly expected to trust and believe that the dealing they obtain from their supervisor shows, up to some extent, the organization the leader represents. Consequently, such followers would desire to assist that organization with which they recognize via proposals for development and modification (i.e., voice). Walumbwa and Hartnell (2011) argued that leading individuals are acknowledged to impact follower action and behavior thereby determining follower identities. Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley (2008) proposed that "supervisors can deeply influence follower concepts about self-identification, and thus impact their pro-organizational conduct and further social mechanisms." We reasoned that stronger moral and ethical conduct of the leader will be linked with sturdier relational identification of the follower with the leader. As its implication, such social-relational identification would support to elucidate why employees of a moral role model and ethical leader are highly expected to speak up to their leaders. Follower having sturdier relational identification engenders social magnetism, interactive linking, a sense of psychological closeness, and frankness to impact from the venerated and valued identification target (i.e., the leader) (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007).

A review of the literature identifies that followers of an ethically enriched leader with whom followers recognize themselves would desire to achieve their supervisor's job-related hopes. Further, a follower who recognizes themselves with their ethically enriched leader would likewise feel highly easy while voicing to that leader about complications as, with identification, would perceive ease with the leader and believe that voicing is harmless. Therefore, we proposed that,

***H3:** Relational identification of follower mediates the positive relationship between ethical leadership and follower voice behavior.*

### 2.4 Follower Power Distance Orientation as a Moderator

Due to growing diversity in the workforce and the globalization of resources and business interests, leaders will more and more manage individuals having diverse cultural values and beliefs (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2005). Cultural beliefs or cultural values are defined as "a

consciously and subconsciously held set of beliefs and norms often anchored in the morals, laws, customs, and practices of a society that define what is right and wrong and specify general preferences” (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Follower collective cultural value orientations, individually held cultural principles and perceptions, play a crucial role in how followers respond to different facets of their work (Kirkman, Lowe, & Gibson, 2006; Tsui, Nifadkar, & Ou, 2007). In the leadership realm, like explicit and implicit leadership philosophies (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Brown et al., 2005), individually held cultural principles and perceptions could outline beliefs about what actions, activities, working conducts, manners, elegances, competencies, and personality qualities describe actual and effective leadership (Javidan, Dorfman, De Luque, & House, 2006). So, for effective management of a culturally diverse workforce is concerned, leaders need to comprehend how exclusively held cultural value orientations influence follower responses to leadership, further, how different leadership conducts interact with follower' individually held cultural principles and perceptions to affect follower social consequences.

Preliminary investigation proposes that individual cultural value orientations could play principally substantial roles in how followers respond to ethical leaders (Walumbwa, Lawler, & Avolio, 2007).

Hofstede (1980) acknowledged power distance as “the degree to which the less powerful people in an organization or society accept that power is distributed unequally, and this inequality of power creates hierarchical superior-subordinate relationships”.

Though leader ethical conduct has been demonstrated to affect employees' workplace behaviors less is known about whether employees having distinct features respond distinctly to leader ethical conduct. Researchers suggested that employees are expected to change in the degree to which they engage in speaking up recognize with and adopt the conduct and values of their front runners. Researchers introduced followers' power distance perceptions into the present discussion and proposed that followers' power distance perceptions are expected to play a crucial role in how employees respond to ethical leaders. Social learning theory offers direction for the development of hypotheses specified its focus on entities perceptions about power distribution in the organization, ethics, ethical individuals' and structures.

Commonly followers hold perceptions about the legitimate position of their leader in the organization to assist them to shape their experiences (Heider, 1958; Kelly George, 1955). Such perceptions engender a meaning system that affects their judgments, interpretations, and behavioral reactions. These perceptions have been found to structure followers' reactions to diverse social conditions and personal experiences in organizations (Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Lin, & Wan, 1999). Predominantly individuals holding either high or low power distance perception will respond differently to ethical leaders.

Followers' power distance perceptions have the likelihood to affect how followers believe and respond to their frontrunners. As the followers' power distance perceptions are organization culture-specific, distinct power distance perceptions are expected to be applicable contingent upon what kinds of leadership attributes are to be explored. As the present study has to investigate the influence of leaders' ethics on followers' workplace behavior, perceptions about power distance are relevant. In the ethical realm, those with strong power distance perceptions consider ethical leaders as creating a harmless workplace environment. Consequently, tend to break their silence about organizational effectiveness. They start to engage in pro-organizational behaviors i.e., voicing. Therefore, followers' having high power distance perceptions should be more responsive and receptive to ethical leadership conducts, enabling them to engage more in pro-organizational behaviors and speaking up. Contrarily, followers' who are low on power distance perception will assume leaders' as not different individuals' in the organization and would be less likely to engage in voice (i.e., speak up).

Briefly, followers with strong power distance perceptions should consider ethical leaders to be

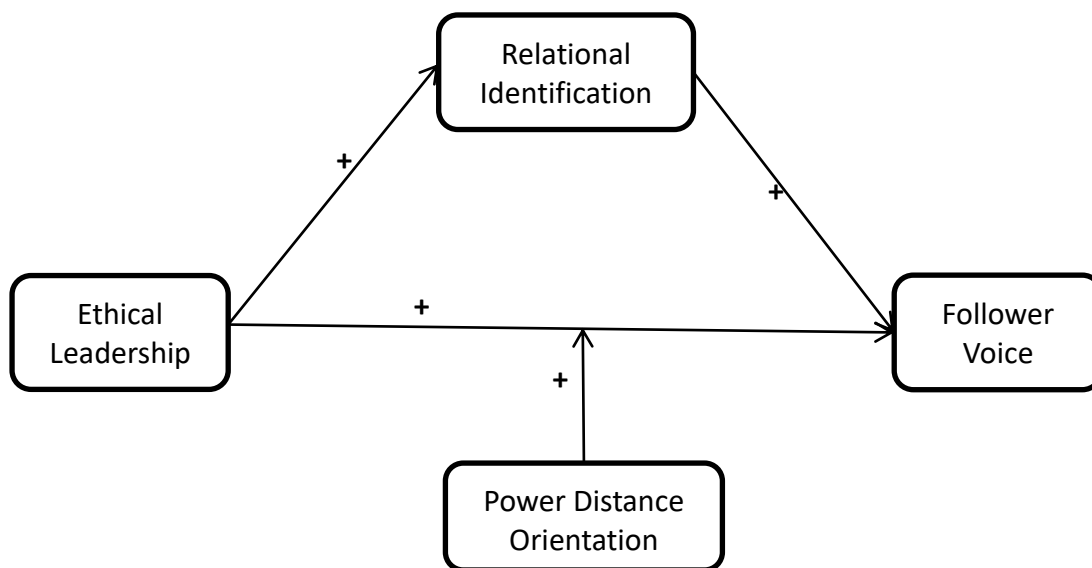


harmless, caring, fair, trustworthy, sympathetic, honest, and credible. As a result, they ought to be more receptive to ethical leadership and follow behavior accordingly (Ashforth et al., 2008). Thus, studies assumed more engaging and voicing behavior of employees as a result of ethical leadership when power distances are high.

Finally, researchers expected that leader ethical conduct will employ strong influence on follower's voice for those followers with high power distance perceptions. Thus, we expect the followings;

**H4:** *The direct influence of ethical leadership on follower voice behavior is stronger for followers with high power distance orientations.*

Figure 1. Conceptual model



### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Sample and Procedure

Researchers obtained data from core employees employed in the elementary and secondary education department district Haripur Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan. Data collection access was obtained via personal and professional links with the district education officers (both male and female) of the education department district Haripur. Significant support was acknowledged from all educational institution administrators randomly selected in a sample for data collection. There are 110 high and higher secondary schools and all the teacher's working in these schools constitute the entire population of the present study. Follower (i.e., teachers) who had no managerial ranks in the department were chosen as study subjects.

The study sample (i.e., schools) for data collection was chosen through a simple random sampling technique. Out of 110, 35 educational institutions (23 female, 12 male) were selected randomly. Within each school, a convenient sampling technique was adopted to choose the follower as a study subject. Maximum 30 and minimum 6 followers were selected working under the supervision of the same school head. On average, there were  $397/35=11$  followers selected per leader.

During the survey, we visited each selected school for data collection. To minimize fears of common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012), we collected survey data in a single visit from each school but virtually in two waves. For the first wave, we held a detailed discussion with selected teachers' in each school about the study purpose, confidentiality, and survey questionnaire. The data collection process was virtually divided into

two waves, during the first wave, we could approach 435 of these employees during their working times. For data collection, the structured survey questionnaire was formulated in English. Questionnaires containing exogenous variables (i.e., ethical leadership), moderator (i.e., power distance orientation), mediator (i.e., relational identification), and demographic questions were disseminated to these 435 followers' during visits to each school. Employees used the self-administrated technique to complete these questionnaires either in their staff room or participants' classrooms. Each participant was educated about the determination of the research work to guarantee them of stern secrecy and confidentiality of the individual and collective data that would not be shared with the educational institution head or the organizational management. Participants were coached about the way to fill and complete the survey and guaranteed that their involvement in the research process was optional. As we are proficient in speaking both English and Urdu, participant's queries could be replied to while collecting data. Most participants completed the questionnaires within about 20 min without facing any problems. Participants fold filled questionnaires and give back them personally to a researcher in the staff room. In the staff room, the researcher recorded the respondent's names and designations on the questionnaires to facilitate matching the school head scores. From the first field survey, we collected 411 responses. Out of 411 responses, 397 responses were found useful (i.e., females=245 and males=152) from 35 schools, which resulted in a response rate of 79.4%. having KMO, the measure of sampling adequacy of 0.89, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity with approx. Chi-Square value of 4287.12,  $df=561$ ,  $p=.000$ . Present study response percentage is near to some other research works getting solid backing from department tactical and operational authorities (Huang, Iun, Liu, & Gong, 2010).

The final sample comprises participants between 20 and 59 years of age, with an average age of 37.1 (S.D. = 8.07). Academically, most (80.86%) respondents held Master's degrees, 13.6% had bachelor degrees, 2.52% had MPhil degrees, 0.76% had Ph.D. degrees and others had higher secondary or high school education. Also, professionally, a majority (59.19%) of participants held MEd degrees, 26.70% had BEd degrees, 4.28% had CT, 9.07% had other professional education. The average service length of the employee in the organization was 17.55 years with a standard deviation of (S.D. = 5.52). The average tenure of the employee in the current educational institution was 7.52 years with a standard deviation of (S.D. = 7.30). For the follower, women comprised 61.71% while men 38.29% of the respondents. For leaders, women comprised 65.7% while men 34.3% of the participants.

Grounded on collected data from followers from each school during foresaid visits, we then discussed with the school head, to assess the selected participant's voice behaviors (i.e., the dependent variable). The direct administrators are the educational institution principals, headmasters who are answerable for employees' routine teaching performances and other operational activities, thus they are of utmost suitable for assessing followers' extra-role performance i.e., (voice). All selected school administrators replied to our request, give rise to a response rate of 100%.

### 3.2 Study Constructs Measurement Scales

Except otherwise specified, respondents scored all relevant survey questions, using a 5-point Likert scale through response choices extending from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Table 5 shows the reliabilities for all measures.

#### 3.2.1 Ethical Leadership

A ten-item scale developed by brown and colleagues, (2005) for measuring the construct of ethical leadership was adapted to measure it. Respondents were asked to keep in mind the working behavior of their direct supervisory heads, the way they deal with them, and specify the degree to which they agree or disagree with laid down elaborations of their supervisory heads. Survey questionnaire items example embrace "listens to what employees have to say";

and “disciplines employees who violate ethical standards.” The scale reliability score is .85. As we were found in how each respondent replies to their leader's ethical conduct, thus the concept of ethical leadership was measured at the individual level (i.e., unit of analysis). Ethical leadership within-team variance scores were checked by calculating ICC1 and ICC2 scores (see Table 2). In the case of ethical leadership these coefficients scores are .33 and .83 respectively, which advocates that instead of group influence, individual observation accounts for most of the variance of the evaluation (Bliese, 2000). These scores represented that inter-rater reliability is high and consistency exists among them is above the acceptable limit of .70. As some restricted variance of the concept of leader ethical behavior could be described by group (employees who are working under the same head) relevance.

### 3.2.2 Follower Relational Identification

Walumbwa and Hartnell (2011) developed a 10-item scale for measuring follower relational identification adapted to measure it. Sample items embrace “When someone criticizes my supervisor, it feels like an insult to me,” and “The values of my supervisor are consistent to my own.” The scale reliability score is .74.

### 3.2.3 Follower Power Distance Orientation

To measure power distance orientation, this study used the measurement instrument developed by (Earley & Erez, 1997) which is an 8-item scale for an individual-level measure. Sample items include “Teachers should not express disagreements with their head” and “heads who let their employees participate in decisions lose power.” Scale reliability (i.e.,  $\alpha$ ) score is .59.

### 3.3.4 Follower Voice

We measured follower voice by taking the items from the (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998) measure and adapt the items to fit the organizational context. A sample item was “develop and make recommendations to me concerning issues that affect the school.” The reliability (i.e.,  $\alpha$ ) score is .89.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Constructs Validity

After a scale fine-tuning process, we detached one item of the ten-item relational identification scale (“When someone criticizes my head, it feels like an insult to me”), due to low factor loading ( $r=.38$ ) (see Table. 6). Upon examination, it was noted that this item has somewhat distinct semantic connotations as compared to other items of the scale. Further, the relationship between original measurement and refined measuring scale is high enough (i.e.,  $r = .99$ ). None of the items were detached from any other measuring scale.

Consequently, the CFA having planned factor construction attained satisfactory model fit with:  $\chi^2 = 337.052^{**}$ ,  $df=233$ ,  $\chi^2/df=1.447$ , CFI=.97, TLI=.96, RMSEA=.05, P-close=0.837, KMO measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) = 0.89,  $p=.000$  (see Table 3). Further, for the fundamental concepts, the estimated factor loadings of the indicators are significant entirely (i.e.,  $p\text{-value} \leq .01$ ) and higher than the least thresholds of .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) except foresaid one item. Furthermore, researchers assessed the fit of the suggested model with a more controlled model that fit the data more effectively. Results established that the assumed model fits the data meaningfully well than the alternate model because it achieved a significant difference in the change of Chi-square value between the suggested model and the alternative model. Altogether (see Table 1), the significance of foresaid assessments suggest independence and the construct validity of all the measurement devices employed for conducting a present research study.

AVE (average variances extracted, see table 1) values in the manipulated model of all measures surpass the threshold value of .50, which provides support for convergent validities of measuring scales (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). All latent variables reliability estimates exceeded



the threshold of .70 (Nunnally, 1978) except power distance orientation (i.e.  $\alpha=0.59$ ) which is a bit lower than the threshold value of .70. The measured value of correlations between any pairs including the principal variable is lower than square roots of all AVE values, thus, discriminant validities of measuring scales are corroborated (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Further, AVE scores of the focal variable are higher than the maximum shared variance of the focal variable, which furthermore provides support for measuring the scale's discriminant validities (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Thus, results, provide adequate backing for the discriminant and convergent validities of the measurement scales. Additionally, maximum reliability values for all focal variables scales are also satisfactory which support study scales consistency in measuring the study constructs with high reliability. Hence the above-elaborated tests support that study variables scales are highly valid and reliable.

Correlational analysis exposed significantly positive relationship between ethical leadership and follower voicing ( $r = .24$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and ethical leadership and organization relational identification ( $r = .59$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and relational identification and follower voicing ( $r = .23$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). A significantly negative relationship is found between follower power distance orientation and ethical leadership ( $r = -.14$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and follower relational identification ( $r = -.18$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The relationship between follower power distance orientation and follower voicing is also negative ( $r = -.7$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) but statistically insignificant.

**Table 1.** Correlations, Reliabilities, and Descriptive Statistics of study variables

Predictors	1	2	3	4
1 Follower Voice	(.76)			
2 Ethical Leadership	.24**	(.74)		
3 Relational Identification	.23**	.59**	(.75)	
4 Power Distance Orientation	-.07	-.14**	-.18**	(.71)
Mean	3.72	3.77	3.90	3.03
SD	.773	.674	.547	.593
Cronbach alpha	.89	.85	.74	.59
MaxR(H)	.95	.91	.79	.95
MSV	.10	.22	.48	.01
AVE	.57	.55	.56	.50

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  and are bivariate. SD = Standard deviation. MaxR(H) = Maximum reliability.

MSV=Maximum shared variance, AVE = Average variance extracted, The Diagonal denotes the square roots of AVE.

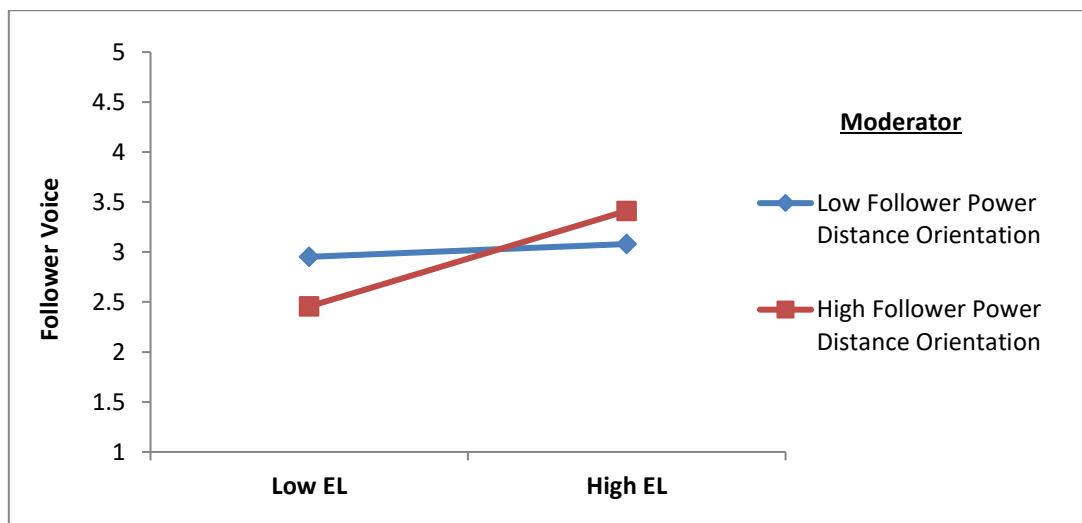
Researchers applied (Hayes & Scharkow, 2013) process macro model 5 to data which simultaneously measured moderation and mediation paths. Study hypotheses were tested using the SPSS 20 program (IBM), and using ordinary least square regression un-standardized regression coefficients, as its performance in calculating multifaceted models containing both moderation and mediation is better than traditional regression analyses techniques (Hayes & Scharkow, 2013).

We used SPSS software with Hayes process macro Indirect effect (Hayes & Scharkow, 2013) to concurrently assess the mediation and moderation model including independent variable (i.e. ethical leadership) mediator (i.e., relational identification), moderator (i.e., power distance orientation), and single dependent variable (i.e. follower's voice). This model tests the moderation and mediation in a single model and computes the conditional direct and indirect effects, indirect effects of products, and total indirect effect across an independent variable concurrently. In totality, using SPSS, presented path analysis enables investigation of the statistical significance of the indirect effects to pass on through mediator and offers a dominant

and strong technique (bootstrap) of finding confidence intervals for definite indirect effects and their levels of significance (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Based on the proposed conceptual framework, we ran a model with a direct path from ethical leadership to the dependent variable (i.e., follower voice behavior) as well. The direct total effect of ethical leadership on a follower's voice is equal to the sum of the indirect effect through relational identification and conditional direct effect.

Adequate overall fit achieved by the proposed conceptual model (i.e.,  $\chi^2 = 6.15^{**}$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 6.15/3 = 2.05$ , GFI=.99, CFI=.99, TLI=.96, RMSEA=.09, Pclose=0.40). The exceptional model fit is specified by CFI and TLI scores. Though the RMSEA score is somewhat closer to the threshold value, even then, the value is below the upper limit of .10 (Browne, Cudeck, Bollen, & Long, 1993).

**Fig. 2 Interaction Plot**



Hypothesis H<sub>1</sub> projected that ethical leadership is positively related to follower voice behavior. H<sub>1</sub> is supported ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $t = 2.64$ ,  $CI = .047$  to  $.316$ )

Hypothesis H<sub>2</sub> projected that the positive relationship between ethical leadership and follower voice behavior is mediated by follower relational identification to the leader. H<sub>2</sub> is supported as the indirect effect of ethical leadership on follower positive voice behavior via follower relational identification (i.e., the mediator) with the leader is significant (i.e.  $\beta = 0.10$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $CI = (.012$  to  $.183)$  that mediate the effect of ethical leadership on follower's voice.

Hypothesis H<sub>3</sub> projected that ethical leadership will employ a strong influence on followers' voice for followers with high power distance orientation. H<sub>3</sub> is supported as the conditional direct effect of ethical leadership on followers' positive voice behavior is significantly moderated by the follower perceived power distance orientation. Results revealed that as follower' power distance orientation changes (i.e. plus / minus one standard deviation around mean value), the direct effect of ethical leadership on follower voice behavior changes i.e. when follower' power distance orientation is high, the direct effect of ethical leadership on follower voice behavior is stronger ( $\beta = .30$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $t = 3.667$ ,  $CI = .141$  to  $.467$ ). On contrary, when follower power distance orientation is low, the direct effect of ethical leadership on follower voice behavior is weaker ( $\beta = .05$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ,  $t = 0.650$ ,  $CI = -.119$  to  $.236$ ).

The combined effect of the interaction of follower power distance perception and ethical leadership on follower's voice is positive and statistically significant (i.e.,  $\beta = .21$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $t = 2.326$ , bootstrap  $CI = .0320$  to  $.3819$ ). The overall examination of these statistical results implies that the impact of leader ethical practices on follower's voice is stronger for followers with high power distance beliefs. On contrary, the impact of leader ethical practices on

follower's voices is weaker for followers with low power distance beliefs. We plotted these moderating effects (see Fig. 2) to explain the moderating mechanism pictorially, following with one standard deviation below and above the mean value standard plotting procedure showing lower and higher values of moderator and verifying simple slopes significance (Edwards & Lambert, 2007).

Fig. 2 revealed moderator (i.e., power distance orientation) strengthens the direct positive relationship between ethical leadership and follower voice behavior, thus confirm its moderation. Implies that when follower cultural power distance perceptions are high, the impact of leader ethical practices over follower voice behavior is stronger. While when followers' cultural power distance perceptions are low, the relationship is weaker and statistically insignificant. Thus, entities that held a level of power distance beliefs affect and strengthen the positive impact of ethical leadership over follower voice behavior.

## **5. Discussion**

In the present study, we confirmed that ethical leadership is positively related to follower's voice both directly and through relational identification to a leader. Further, the direct impact of ethical leadership over voice behavior is contingent on individual perception about power distribution in the organization or society at large. Notably, though followers with higher power distance perception are fewer expected to participate in the extra-role contextual performance. But in presence of ethical leaders, who deal follower with fairness, integrity, and balanced decision-making, as social reciprocity, these same followers incline to be more open to the impact of leader ethical practices thereby engaging more in positive responses, which consequently rises followers voice behavior. On the contrary follower with weaker power distance beliefs, are already more expected to involve in voice behavior irrespective of leader ethical practices, thus the strength of influence of ethical leadership on their voice behavior is weak.

### **5.1 Theoretical Implications**

Study results confirmed that relational identification to leader act as a significant mediating mechanism between leader ethical conduct and follower voice behavior in the Asian context as well. Theoretically, it is understood that followers would be tending to recognize themselves personally with a spearhead who treats them equitably with fairness, upkeeps about them is friendly and receptive to follower positive feedback, and introduces ethical standards, and that doing so would affect follower crucial outcomes. This research illustrates that a substantial positive association exists between leader ethical conduct and social relation identification to a leader and that social relation identification to leader has a noteworthy positive impact on follower voice behavior. The results suggest that in addition to other identification mechanisms (e.g., organizational, etc.), social relation identification to leader must also be assumed as a crucial mediator in the apprehension of leader ethical conduct effects on positive follower outcome. Individuals initially develop a strong psychological attachment with the leader then start to identify themselves individually with their moral and ethical frontrunner which has an imperative contribution to follower outcomes including, voice behavior.

Bandura and McClelland (1977) a social learning theory offer the theoretical support for comprehension of ethical leadership effects. Follower vicariously learns from their leaders who are ethical, trustworthy, reliable, dependable, responsible, sincere, authentic, and exemplary personal character holders and they tend to follow their moral principles. Further, from a social reciprocity viewpoint (Cook & Emerson, 1987), ethical leaders behave with their followers transparently and kindly, resulting in perceptions of confidence in leader actions and want to exchange socially (i.e., possibly wish to recognize with the leader). For further understanding and comprehension of the mediating mechanisms, we may desire to include several intervening

variables in one study.

For theoretical refinement the present study further discusses an essential question of when leader ethical practice concerns more attention thereby recognizing an effective individual-level variance that has not yet been well-thought-out in the literature of ethics and social behaviors. We brought the cultural contextual beliefs (i.e. individual perception about power distance and power distribution in the organizations) to behavioral ethics to understand how these individual-level perception differences affect the relationship between ethical leadership and follower's voice. The application of cultural contextual perceptions to comprehend organization level behavior, leftovers inadequate despite empirical evidence has shown that individual's holding different power distance orientation generally have deep implications for their interpretation and significant differences in responding to leader's ethical behaviors (Dupeyrat & Mariné, 2005). Presently, the application of cultural contextual perceptions to comprehend the influence of leadership on follower outcomes is inadequate and restricted to a single realm of culture (i.e., collectivistic). As pointed earlier, cultural perceptions are applicable across cultural domains (e.g., individualistic, collectivistic and mixed, etc.). The selection of cultural perception about power distance is fitting for this research work because of its emphasis on in what way followers respond to ethical leadership belonging to different cultures. This study reveals that follower' power distance orientation moderates how follower possessing different cultural beliefs, respond to their ethical leaders differently. Particularly, the relationship between leader ethical conduct and follower' voice behavior is improved for the follower with stronger power distance perception, and consequently, such followers are expected to provide positive feedback and positive extra-role response in the form of voicing. These followers are highly prone to be affected by leaders' ethical conduct as they perceive their leaders as reliable and dependable ethical representatives who are led by ethical requirements. The present research work has also contributed to the follower power distance orientation literature by indicating that (a) power distance orientation is an important contextual factor that affects ethical leadership influence on follower voice behavior, and (b) positive relationship between ethical leadership and follower voice behavior is moderated by follower power distance orientation.

## **5.2 Practical Implications**

Although the positive effects of ethical leadership on follower voice behavior are not as stronger as in previous studies but are in line with the previous research work findings, proving the importance of leader ethical conduct for positive follower behaviors in different cultural contexts. One of the reasons could be the relatively medium Pakistani cultural power distance index PDI=49 (Minkov & Hofstede, 2014). Creativity and innovative business idea generation are demands of present product and service industries survival. To foster an organizational culture of creativity and innovation, organizational leaders must promote employees' positive voicing. An organizational management may not be concerned to encourage leader ethical practices for its own sake, even then present study provides solid empirical evidence about the significant contribution of ethical leadership for organizations seeking higher employees voice. This research work advocates that leader ethical conduct must be promoted within organizations as it enhances voice behavior by reducing the impact of high-power distance culture and by promoting crucial social identification to a leader. Traits associated with ethical leadership have been identified in previous research studies (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009), describing ways to identify ethical leaders during the process of selection in managerial recruits. After identification of ethical leaders during the recruitment and selection process, thereby using 720-degree assessment and evaluation mechanisms then incentivize for related behaviors may be included into the performance management system of the organization. Furthermore, this research study advocates that employees and followers engage differently in

positive voice behavior in response to leader ethical conduct contingent on their power distance cultural beliefs. On the one side, employees high on power distance perception are unwilling to voice up, as they feel powerlessness and perceive that transformation is not expected and therefore think that voicing is not beneficial for them. But, undoubtedly, a leader's prominent ethical conduct could influence follower behavior thereby breaking their silence and get them engaged in a positive voice (i.e., speak up). More importantly, we uncovered that leader ethical behavior is specifically effective in fostering identification with leader and voice for those followers who are high on power distance perception. Hence, if leader ethical behavior is prominent and visible to followers living in a society or working in the organization, the probability of having followers holding high power distance perceptions as unwilling "voicers" is likely less of a worry for an organization.

Foresaid elaboration clarifies that, though employees holding high power distance perceptions are less expected to involve in speaking up to their managers. But, these followers will feedback more useful, productive, and beneficial proposals to their managers if they observe that their leaders have stronger ethical conduct.

### 5.3 Study Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

Firstly, the present research work has contributed to the literature on ethical leadership through offering and testing mediation and moderation mechanisms in a single model which explored the effectiveness of leader ethical practices in a Pakistani context-based sample, an under-investigated background specifically in human resource and management study. Study results advocate that leader's ethical conduct functions in and are predominantly imperative in the present cultural context. But we acknowledge that the present research Pakistani sample from within a single organization could bound the generalizability of its findings. Thus, we advocate that upcoming studies may test the present study theoretical model (a) in other cultural contexts (b) using broader and larger samples to broaden its finding's generalizability. The acceptable but not falling in excellent categories of reliability values should be considered while generalizing the results as well as the study results could provide guidance to though important but a specific population of educational institutes.

Further, study design may have contaminated research findings as we collected study data in a single wave of survey (virtually divided into two waves of the survey) and attained administrator assessments of their follower outcome (i.e., voice). Thus, common methods bias may be inherently incorporate in the present research design. However, because of the cross-sectional nature of collected data and the study, causal inferences must be avoided. But a priori, the suggested model is hypothetically comprehensive and reverse causality is unexpected. Nevertheless, future studies may advantage from a longitudinal design.

Furthermore, considerable individual-level variations in the influence of leader ethical behavior on follower voice behavior are important to identify and introducing contextual variables to behavioral ethics literature supports to answer questions about 'when' leader ethical conduct influences are more significant. Future studies may investigate the part of further individual level variances, including different kinds of cultural contexts like gender and other demographics (e.g., gender differences about perceived power distance in culture (Hong, Chiu, Dweck, & Sacks, 1997). This type of study may help in comprehending the complication of the construct of leadership and its effect mechanisms in different contexts through comparative study.

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