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# The Relationship between Ethical Leadership and Whistleblowing: Moderating Effects of Job Security and Affective Commitment

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## Abstract

The present study examines the positive impact of ethical leadership on whistleblowing. The study further investigates the role of job security and affective commitment as moderators on the relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing. This study examined the fundamental moderating mechanism, which is unique because no such mechanism has been investigated in previous research. A cross-sectional representative sample of 285 Federal Government employees from various Ministries/Divisions and the Benazir Income Support Programme, a corporate body and a renowned social safety net under the Federal Government of Pakistan, was collected. Of the 285 questionnaires, only 241 were deemed useable and were analyzed. A statistical analysis was carried out through correlation, descriptive, and moderated regression analysis. The results supported the first three hypotheses that ethical leadership and whistleblowing had a positive relationship. Furthermore, job security moderated the positive relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing, such that the relationship is stronger for employees with high job security and weaker for employees with low job security. Affective commitment also moderated the relationship directly meaning that the relationship is stronger when the affective commitment is strong and weaker when it is weak. Discussion, implications, limitations, and future directions have been suggested in accordance with the results of the study. (Gupta & Dubey, 2019; Sims et al., 2016)

**Keywords:** affective commitment, ethical leadership, job security, Pakistan, public sector, whistleblowing

## Introduction

Governments across the world are facing different kinds of challenges ranging from corruption to unethical behaviors of employees in public sector organizations

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(Sims et al., 2016). Some other issues include abuse of resource, discrimination, favoritism, harassment and financial embezzlement (Gupta & Dubey, 2019). Those associated with the public sector must not misuse the trust and authority bestowed upon them (Ashkanasy et al., 2000). Considering its significance and implications, the fight against corruption has become popular in developed countries (Beeri et al., 2013). Not just governments but also international organizations have taken up the task of eradicating the curse of corruption from all over the world (Lasthuizen et al., 2011). In order to fight corrupt practices and mitigate the considerable fall in public trust (Cowell et al., 2011), it is essential to address the unethical standards prevalent at the organizational level (Nastase & Unchiasu, 2013).

Unlike many countries within its region, Pakistan faces an altogether different kind of corruption (Khan, 2018). Valuable capital is taken away from the country, while, the culprits do not face any serious prosecution (Uroos et al., 2022). This happens because of loopholes present in the judicial system, especially in the lower judiciary (Azeem, 2017), where culprits are set free if the price is right (Ismail & Rizvi, 2010). A majority of the recent government scandals in Pakistan have been highlighted by external agencies like Transparency International (Chaudhry, 2013), Wiki Leaks (Gerecht, 2010) or Panama Leaks (Byrne, 2016) etc. Past trends show that, normally, government employees have never come forward to disclose the wrongdoings in the Public Sector (“Mega cases”, 2019). A research study has established that if employees are working with ethical leaders, they would be persuaded to blow the whistle against malicious practices observed at the workplace (Ismail et al., 2021). Therefore, researchers have proposed that top management must focus on hiring ethically sound leaders and train existing leaders regarding the importance of ethics.

The overall objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing and explore the moderating role of job security and affective commitment in strengthening the proposed association. This study is likely to shed light on certain important aspects which are missing in the literature. Using the outcomes of this study, organizations can create better strategies to support whistle-blowers in Pakistan’s perspective.

### **Problem Statement**

Government employees have never come forward to report wrongdoings (“Mega cases”, 2019). Most of the time, if the whistle is blown by an anonymous or pseudonymous person, no action is taken on such complaints. Therefore, it is imperative to explore exactly why government employees never blow the whistle despite directly observing wrongdoings at their workplace. Caillier and Sa (2017) recommended to investigate the influence of ethical leadership on whistleblowing perceptions of public sector employees. The current study examines the positive

impact of ethical leadership on whistleblowing with the moderating effect of job security and affective commitment to fill the gap in literature.

## **Literature Review**

### **Ethical Leadership**

Ethical leadership refers to the individuals in supervisory roles demonstrating 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 (Brown et al., 2005). According to Trevino et al. (2000) it will not be wrong to use the term “moral persons” and “moral managers” for ethical leaders. The term “moral person” encompasses professional and personal traits expected of ethical leaders such as honesty, motivation, trust, power of persuasion, and fairness in dealings. (Brown et al., 2005). Ethical leaders follow ethical rules in their personal and professional activities.

According to the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), employees model their behavior in light of the sanctions they might experience in the event of unethical behavior and the rewards they will get for their ethical behavior. Similarly, the employer is an equally important element in streamlining the behavior of its employees in light of the organizational setup. This study will utilize the results of social learning theory for a multilevel exploration of the effects of ethical leadership on whistleblowing by its employees. The support and encouragement of an ethical leader is vital for their subordinates to report any possible wrongdoings within the system. The incentive of the leader pushes followers to go to any extent to disclose issues in the present system. In a nutshell, the leader is the one who can encourage the trend of whistleblowing among its subordinates.

Ethical leaders play an active part in promoting ethical behavior in two ways. On the one hand, they have to present themselves in an ethical manner, while on the other hand, they have to convey a clear message to their followers about doing the same and what they actually expect from them (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Also ethical leadership is directly associated with ethical training and close monitoring to ensure that the code of ethics is being followed in letter and spirit (West et al., 2004).

### **Job Security**

Job security implies what an employee expects from his organization regarding stability and the possible length of his job (Kraimer et al., 2005). Better communication and mutual understanding is fostered between the employer and

the employee only when the employer does everything to meet the expectations of employees regarding their job security (Conway & Coyle-Shapiro, 2012).

According to Ashford et al. (1989), job security is integral to employees that, in turn, ultimately leaves a strong impact on work performance, job satisfaction, and organizational work devotion. According to theory job insecurity also reduces commitment and devotion towards the organization. This suggests that there is a strong relation between performance, job security, and an employees' commitment to the organization. According to Baker and Abu-Ismael (1993), if an employee enjoys job security they would be more devoted and dedicated towards their organization.

### **Affective Commitment**

Affective commitment leads to emotional attachment associated with not only the organization but also its officials (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Employees high on organizational commitment feel strong bond with organization and generally feels a deep loyalty (Cole & Bruch, 2006). According to Bass (1998), organizational commitment is the emotional attachment and loyalty towards the workplace. Affective commitment, therefore, refers to how an employee affiliates emotionally and psychologically with the organization. The commitment of the employee refers to the level of association of the employee towards the organization in the form of attachment, identification and loyalty (Morrow, 1993). Therefore, this is the core objective of this study, where employee loyalty and sincerity towards the organization is considered the underlying cause behind adequate job satisfaction.

### **Whistleblowing**

Organizational wrongdoings are a common problem since the last few years. Acts like corruption, fraud, and similar unethical practices were reported in popular organizations like Enron, WorldCom, Andersen, and Tyco. Credit goes to the employees who felt the need to curb these malpractices by bringing them to the forefront. The action taken by the employees is referred to as whistleblowing. This can be defined as exposing practices labeled as unethical, illegal or illegitimate to influential people under the employers (Near & Miceli, 1985). According to the various research, whistleblowing is considered a pro-social and voluntary behavior, which is synonymous with organizational citizenship behavior (Dozier & Miceli, 1985; Near & Miceli, 1985).

It is often observed that possible whistle-blowers avoid doing so because they fear backlash from those who are involved in such malpractices. To avoid any untoward situation and be labeled as a rat or snake they try to stay away from reporting the wrongdoings within the organization. If it's too risky, they decide it's

better to stay away instead of being vocal (Gong, 2000). Keeping in view the utility of whistle blowing, it is taken as an ethical practice in different parts of the world.

### **Whistleblowing in Islam**

The teachings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) propagate the fact that the Ummah (followers) should take up the task of whistleblowing voluntarily and consider it a moral obligation towards *Maslahah* (public interest and for the benefit of society at large). From the perspective of *Amr bil ma'ruf* (enjoining goodness) and *Nahy annil Munkar* (forbidding wrongdoing), and *Shahada* (witness attestation), it is binding upon Muslims to ensure whistleblowing as it is synonymous with acts like promoting goodness and forbidding wrongdoing (Malik, 2018).

### **Ethical Leadership and Whistleblowing**

Brown et al. (2005) conceptualized that ethical leadership style has three distinct features. Firstly, ethical leaders exhibit normatively ethical behavior. Secondly, followers consider the ethical leader as their role model. Thirdly, the ethical leader becomes the epitome of ethical behavior and simultaneously creates a congenial environment with suitable systems, norms, and practices for his/her subordinates to do the same.

Social learning theory states that there are numerous ways to learn (Bandura, 1977). This includes observing the attitude and behavior of the people around oneself and through the possible outcomes of such actions. "Most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (Bandura & Walters, 1977). This theory states that human behavior is studied with respect to continuous reciprocal interaction among behavioral, cognitive and environmental influences. Drawing upon the social learning theory, this study explore how ethical leadership impacts whistleblowing in subordinates. Using the social learning theory by Bandura, Zhang et al. (2016) proved that subordinates can reveal wrongdoing through intent and capability only when ethical leaders act as role models and constantly reinforce ethical behavior. Ethical leaders are considered as moral managers (Trevino et al., 2000). Consequently, followers find role models in ethical leaders, who bring forward moral attitudes, and behaviors (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

Research reveals that ethical problems are reported more confidently by employees working in a principle-based environment governed by an encouraging leader (Graham, 1986). The role of the organizational leader ensuring ethical behavior makes the whistleblowing policy effective (Lewis, 2011). Internal whistleblowing is directly impacted by ethical leadership (Bhal & Dadhich, 2011; Mayer et al., 2013). Lu and Lin (2014) stated that ethical leadership has been

positively related to the ethical behavior of employees. Employees can learn through the response of the employer towards the whistle-blower, following which they will try their best to rise to the expectations of the employers who want wrongdoings to be reported (Mayer et al., 2013). A study of Shahalizadeh et al. (2022) proved that ethical leadership in auditing firms help strengthen employees' emotional abilities and increase their emotional intelligence. Moreover, auditors who are emotionally intelligent, can manage their emotions in stressful situations while observing misconduct of colleagues and are more inclined to whistleblowing. In view of the above discussion, the following is hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 1: Ethical leadership is positively related to whistleblowing.*

### **The Moderating Role of Job Security**

It comes as a surprise that there is limited research regarding the moderating role of job security (Fried & Ferris, 1987). This kind of research is the need of the hour because of globalization and the changing trends in technology, resulting in modified job structures. This is a matter of concern for both developed and developing countries, regardless of the availability of the jobs at a particular time. (Davy et al., 1997; Fried et al., 1996).

Loi et al. (2011) have pointed out that employees with low perceived job security are more sensitive towards the resources and support obtained from leader member exchange (LMX) than those with high perceived job security. Such employees perform better work and exhibit selfless behavior in order to react positively towards the relationship established with their supervisor. This is highly different from workers that have higher levels of job security, who are satisfied with their employment conditions, and are not concerned regarding LMX. Keeping in view these arguments by Loi et al. (2011) and relying on the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), it is argued that job security will strengthen the effects of ethical leadership. Putting together, ethical leadership has a positive impact on whistleblowing specifically for employees with secure jobs. Employees enjoying job security are more likely to take part in whistleblowing than employees reporting low levels of job security. As a consequence, employees with low job security are not sure if they will get any benefit from whistleblowing, as they lack dependable psychological bonds. Therefore, they do not consider it as an obligation to be responsive towards such kinds of incentives. Thus, the following is hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 2: Job security moderates the relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing such that the relationship is stronger for employees with a high job security*

### **The Moderating Role of Affective Commitment**

The foundation of a stable employee-organization relationship rests on the level of trust an employee has in their organization (Cook & Wall, 1980).

Miceli et al. (1991) observed a positively significant relationship between whistleblowing tendency and organizational commitment. Somers and Casal (1994) in their study explored that the whistleblowing tendency was seen mostly in individuals who were at the middle level career in the organizational hierarchy. According to Asiye (2013), individuals who were more related to the organization showed a lower tendency towards whistleblowing. Çiftçi and Bedük (2017) in their study found a strong relationship between organizational commitment and whistleblowing tendency. Westin (1981) observed that corporate whistle-blowers tend to be more loyal to the organization through internal whistleblowing. In another study, Miceli et al. (1991) explored the positive effect of commitment to the organization on all types of whistleblowing.

In light of the above discussion, it is evident that affective commitment is related to ethical leadership as well as whistleblowing. Therefore, it is proposed that the affective commitment will impact the relationship between whistleblowing and ethical leadership. Thus, the following is hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 3: Affective commitment moderates the relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing such that the relationship is stronger when affective commitment is high*

### **The Joint Moderating Effects of Job Security and Affective Commitment**

There is reasonable research available on the joint moderating effects of different variables. Liu et al. (2018) hypothesized the impact of a proactive personality and the perceived ethical climate on the relationship existing between internal whistleblowing and organizational identification. They relied on the theory of planned behavior, according to which the individual's attitude towards a particular behavior decides how they respond to it. In other words, it is the extent to which a person responds with regard to a particular behavior through their evaluation and appraisal (Ajzen, 1991).

According to Ashford et al. (1989), job insecurity plays an important role in an employees' work life as it has a strong impact on devotion, professional obligation, and how well they perform their assigned task. The theory reveals that job insecurity reduces the employee's commitment and devotion towards the

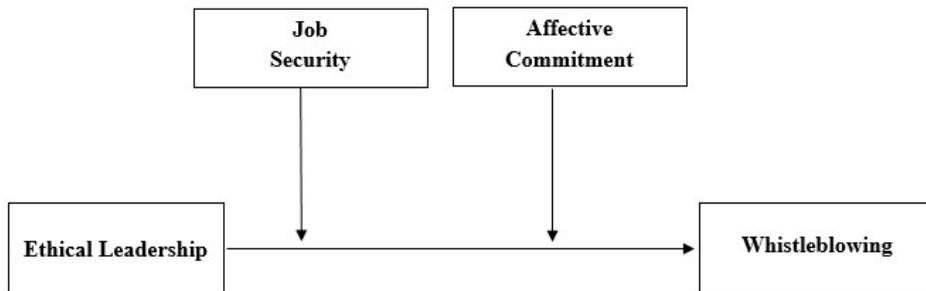
organization. Therefore, job security, employees' commitment with the organization and their performance are mutually related to one another. According to Baker and Abu-Ismael (1993), if an employee enjoys job security, they would be more devoted and dedicated towards their organization and complete their job successfully.

In view of the theories stated above an interaction model is proposed that includes ethical leadership, job security and affective commitment and their respective impact on whistleblowing. The three-way interaction model investigates the joint moderation impact of job security and affective commitment on ethical leadership and whistleblowing. The following is hypothesized with regards to the discussion above:

*Hypothesis 4: Job security and affective commitment have a joint moderation effect on ethical leadership and whistleblowing, such that the relationship is stronger for those who have high job security and a strong affective commitment than for those who have low job security and a weak affective commitment.*

**Figure 1**

*Research Model*



## Methodology

### Sample and Procedure

#### *Sample and Data Collection Procedures*

Being a cross-sectional study, it involves the analysis of data collected in the form of samples from the concerned population at one specific point of time. Primary data was collected from Federal Government employees belonging to various Ministries/Divisions and the Benazir Income Support Programme, an autonomous body and a renowned social safety net. In addition, the primary data was gathered on three demographic variables (age, education and gender) from the said respondents.

Out of 400 questionnaires, 285 responses were received, of these 44 were dropped from the sample due to various irregularities. Consequently, 241 useable questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS 20.0 and AMOS 23.

The population consists of public sector employees. Specifically belonging to the Federal Government based in Islamabad, including civil servants posted in various Ministries/Divisions, Attached Departments and Subordinate Offices, and non-civil servants from Autonomous Bodies operating under the federal government. Keeping in view the ease of understanding the questionnaire and avoiding future complications, officials with at least a graduation degree or those who acquired fourteen years of education, were included in the population irrespective of their designation and pay scale. Since, the size of the population was unknown the sample was taken considering the acceptable size for undertaking an empirical investigation as stated by (Schmitt et al., 1991). In this way, the sample size of 241 is appropriate to represent the population.

From the sample of 241 respondents, it was observed that 77.6 % were male, whereas, 22.4% were female. It is also observed that the respondents falling within the age group of 20 years and below were only 1.2 %. While, 6.2% respondents belonged to the age group of 21 to 25 years. The age group of 26 to 30 years constituted 11.2% of the total sample. Moreover, 26.6% respondents were within the age group of 31 to 35 years. Finally, 26.1% were between the ages of 36 to 40 years and 28.6% were 41 years and older. As for the qualifications, it is found that 32.4 % of the respondents had a Bachelor’s degree. Similarly, 53.5 % had a Master’s degree and only 11.6 % respondents were Masters of Philosophy. Lastly, 2.5% respondents had acquired a PhD qualification.

**Table 1**

*Sample Demography*

Item	Frequency	Item	Frequency	Item	Frequency
Age		Education		Gender	
20 or Below	1.20%	Bachelors (14 Years)	32.40%	Male	77.60%
21-25	6.20%	Master (16 Years)	53.50%	Female	22.40%
26-30	11.20%	MS/M.Phil.	11.60%		
31-35	26.60%	PhD	2.50%		
36-40	26.10%				
41 and above	28.60%				

**Note:** N = 241, Sample frequencies and percentages

## **Instrumentation**

The data was collected through a questionnaire comprising various tested measures. A 7-point Likert scale was used to measure the responses. The 7-point Likert scale used was as follows: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = moderately disagree, 3 = disagree, 4 = uncertain, 5 = moderately agree, 6 = agree and 7 = strongly agree. Although the items actually used by various authors were with different ranged Likert scale, however, in order to achieve uniformity, this study utilized the 7-point Likert scale.

### ***Ethical Leadership***

The independent variable of the study i.e. Ethical Leadership was measured using the ten-item Ethical Leadership scale developed and validated by Brown et al. (2005). For example, an item of the scale is as follows: “my supervisor listens to what employees have to say”. The value of Cronbach’s alpha for this variable was recorded as 0.928.

### ***Job Security***

Job security being a moderator was measured using a ten-item Job Security scale developed and validated by Oldham et al. (1986). An example item of the scale is: “I will be able to keep my present job as long as I wish”. The value of Cronbach’s alpha for this variable was 0.927.

### ***Affective Commitment***

The five-item scale developed by Meyer et al. (1996) was used to determine affective commitment. As an example one item from the scale is: “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization”. Affective commitment (a mental affection to, recognition with, and contribution in the association) is used as a substitute for the commitment with the organization (Caillier, 2015). The value of Cronbach’s alpha for this variable was 0.86.

### ***Whistleblowing***

Whistleblowing was measured using an eight-item scale developed by Park and Blenkinsopp (2009). The items represent two types of whistleblowing i.e., external and internal. A sample item of the scale for external whistleblowing is: “Report it to the appropriate authorities outside of the organization”. Similarly, an example item for internal whistleblowing is: “Report it to the appropriate person

within the organization". The value of Cronbach's alpha for this variable was 0.931.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

The results with respect to correlation are given below in Table 1. It is observed that the independent variable i.e., ethical leadership is positively correlated with the dependent variable i.e., whistleblowing ( $r = .304^{**}$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ), which supports the first hypothesis of the study that ethical leadership is positively related to whistleblowing. The results also show that job security has a significant positive correlation with the whistleblowing ( $r = .180^{**}$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ).

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities and Correlations among Variable*

Predictors	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
EL	4.847	1.029	<b>0.928</b>			
JS	4.605	0.744	.470**	<b>0.927</b>		
AC	4.531	0.823	.118	.179**	<b>0.86</b>	
WB	4.386	0.901	.304**	.180**	.114	<b>0.931</b>

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

This result supports the second hypothesis that job security moderates the relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing. Similarly, affective commitment is also significantly correlated with whistleblowing ( $r = .114$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ). This result too gives support to the third hypothesis that affective commitment moderates the relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing.

### Regression Analysis

#### *Impact of Ethical Leadership on Whistleblowing*

Hypothesis-1 proposed that the independent variable ethical leadership is positively related to the dependent variable whistleblowing. As reported in Table 4.8, ethical leadership significantly predicts whistleblowing ( $\beta = 0.266$ ), which provides support for Hypothesis-1. The value of Beta i.e.,  $\beta = 0.266$  shows that there is a positive relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing. The value of R square change i.e.,  $R^2 = 0.088$  indicating that ethical leadership accounts for 8.8% of the variability in whistleblowing. Similarly, the value of  $p = 0.000$  substantiated the 1<sup>st</sup> hypothesis.

**Table 2***Regression Results*

Ethical Leadership	$\beta$	t	Sig.
Value	.266	4.928	0.000

Dependent Variable: Whistleblowing

***Moderation Effects of Job Security (JS)***

It has been proposed in Hypothesis-2 that job security has a moderation effect on the relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing. In order to examine the moderation effect of job security on the relationship of ethical leadership and whistleblowing, PROCESS 3.4 macro was used. As shown in the Table 4.9, the interactional effect of ethical leadership and job security on whistleblowing was recorded as significant ( $\beta = 0.116, p < 0.0001$ ), as the zero value in respect of interactional term EL x JS didn't occur between LLCI and ULCI. The results further revealed a significant change in  $R^2$  ( $R^2 = 0.016, p < 0.001$ ) due to the moderation effect of job security. It is thus concluded that Hypothesis-2 is supported.

**Table 3***Moderation Effect EL X JS*

	B	SE	T	P	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	5.311	1.222	4.345	.000	2.903	7.719
EL	-.268	.259	-1.034	.302	-.778	.242
JS	-.489	.280	-1.745	.082	-1.041	.063
EL x JS	.116	.057	2.044	.042	.004	.227

Outcome variable: Whistleblowing

***Moderation Effects of Affective Commitment (AC)***

It has been proposed in Hypothesis-3 that affective commitment has a moderation effect on ethical leadership and whistleblowing. In order to examine the moderation effect of affective commitment on the relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing, PROCESS 3.4 macro was used. As shown in Table 4.10, the interactional effect of ethical leadership and affective commitment on whistleblowing was recorded as significant ( $\beta = 0.211, p < 0.0001$ ), as the zero value in respect of interactional term EL x AC didn't occur between LLCI and ULCI. The results further revealed significant change in  $R^2$  ( $R^2 = 0.030, p < 0.001$ )

due to moderation effect of affective commitment. It is thus concluded that the Hypothesis-3 is supported.

**Table 4**

*Moderation Effect EL X AC*

	B	SE	T	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	7.555	1.725	4.379	.000	4.156	10.954
EL	-.693	.337	-2.057	.041	-1.356	-.029
AC	-.985	.381	-2.587	.010	-1.736	-.235
EL x AC	.211	.074	2.860	.005	.066	.356

Outcome variable: Whistleblowing

***Joint Moderation Effects of Job Security (JS) and Affective Commitment (AC)***

It has been proposed in Hypothesis-4 that job security and affective commitment have moderation effects on ethical leadership and whistleblowing. In order to examine the joint moderation effects of job security and affective commitment on the relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing, PROCESS 3.4 macro was used. As shown in Table 4.11, when jointly moderated the interactional effect of ethical leadership and job security on whistleblowing was recorded as insignificant ( $\beta = 0.075, p < 0.0001$ ), as the zero value in respect of interactional term EL x JS exists between LLCI and ULCI. However, contrary to this, the interactional effect of ethical leadership and affective commitment on whistleblowing was recorded as significant ( $\beta = 0.185, p < 0.0001$ ), as the zero value in respect of interactional term EL X AC didn't occur between LLCI and ULCI. Although one of the moderators i.e., affective commitment moderates the relationship, but joint moderation effect on the relationship are rejected, therefore, it is concluded that the Hypothesis-4 is not supported.

**Table 5**

*Moderation Effect EL X JS X AC*

	B	SE	T	P	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	8.438	1.907	4.425	.000	4.681	12.196
EL	-.921	.378	-2.436	.016	-1.665	-.176
JS	-.317	.286	-1.108	.269	-.879	.246
EL x JS	.075	.058	1.292	.198	-.039	.190
AC	-.863	.392	-2.200	.029	-1.636	-.090
EL x AC	.185	.076	2.419	.016	.034	.335

Outcome variable: Whistleblowing

## Graphical Interpretation of Moderation

### *Moderating Effects of Job Security*

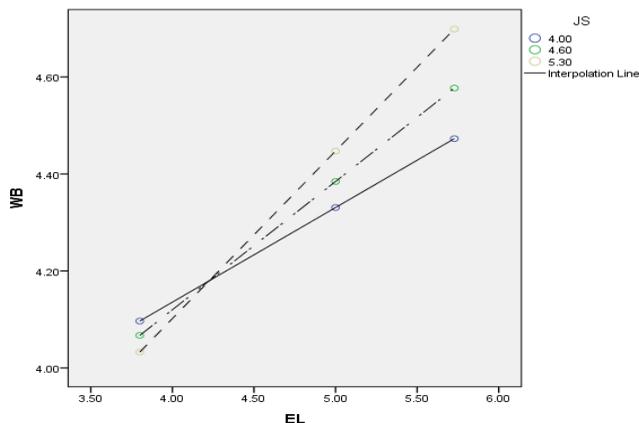
In order to visualize the moderating effect of job security on the relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing, graphs were plotted through PROCESS 3.4 Macro. Figure 2 shows the two-way interactional relationship between job security and ethical leadership. It illustrates, how regression supports Hypothesis-2 that job security moderates the relationship of ethical leadership and whistleblowing. The relationship is stronger when job security is higher. This indicates that high job security affected the likelihood that ethical leadership will give rise to whistleblowing. Similarly, the intersection between the low and high job security lines show that a substantial and significant positive relationship between ethical leadership and whistle blowing is moderated by job security.

### *Moderating Effects of Affective Commitment*

In order to visualize the moderating effect of affective commitment on ethical leadership and Whistleblowing graphs were plotted. Figure 3 shows the two-way interactional relationship between affective commitment and ethical leadership. It illustrates, how regression supports Hypothesis-3 that affective commitment moderates the relationship between ethical leadership and Whistleblowing. The relationship is stronger when the affective commitment is at a higher level. This indicates that high affective commitment affected the likelihood that ethical leadership will give rise to whistleblowing. Similarly, the intersection between the low and high affective commitment lines show that a substantial and significant positive relationship exists between ethical leadership and whistle blowing moderated by affective commitment.

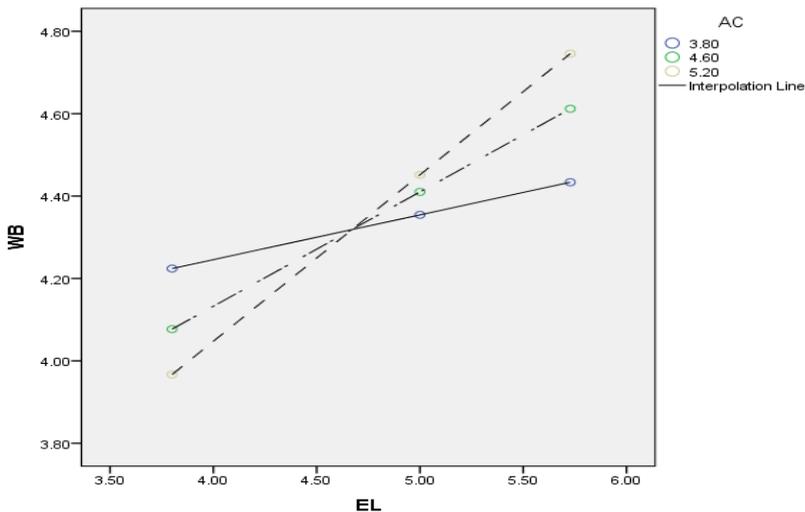
**Figure 2**

*Plots of the moderating role of Job Security*



**Figure 3**

*Plots of the moderating role of Affective Commitment*



### Discussion

As per the management literature, cross-cultural studies about the ethical issues are gaining traction. However, most of the research is limited to international organizations and developed countries. Little research is available on ethical issues within government sector organizations operating in developing countries like Pakistan. Hence, this research can have far reaching theoretical and managerial implications. The main addition of this research is the unique government sector sample from a country where whistleblowing was negligibly analyzed by any researcher.

Whistleblowing is broadly referred to as the reporting of all kinds of illegal acts or misconduct by workers who feel duty bound to do so, though this act is generally taken negatively by the organizations. According to different studies conducted on whistle-blowers, they face a myriad of challenges as harassment, disliked and retaliation either by the organization or by their colleagues which discourages them from further raising their voice against the misconducts (Dworkin & Near, 1997).

Through a thorough review of past literature, it was found that ethical leadership had been positively associated to whistleblowing. For example, in their study Bhal and Dadhich (2011) established the positive effects of ethical leadership and leader-member exchange (LMX) on whistleblowing. A study by Zhang et al. (2016) displayed that ethical leadership was positively related to

employees' internal whistleblowing. Wen and Chen (2016) in their study showed that ethical leadership was positively related to the whistleblowing intention of employees. Cheng et al. (2019) also investigated the relationship between ethical leadership and internal whistleblowing and found a positive relationship between the two. It may be noted that all the above researchers used different mediation or moderation models to test various hypotheses. Similar the results of the earlier discussed studies this research has also found a significant and positive relationship between the two variables.

The purpose of this study was to inspect the relationship among ethical leadership, job security, affective commitment and whistleblowing in the Federal Government of Pakistan. Based on the Social Learning, Social Exchange and Job Insecurity Theories, a theoretical model was developed and examined. The results showed that ethical leadership is positively related to the whistleblowing. Furthermore, this relationship was strengthened by the moderation effects of job security as well as affective commitment. However, the joint moderation effects of job security and affective commitment on the relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing was not supported.

The result offer ample understanding of the method by which ethical leadership facilitates the decision of whistleblowing and the specific conditions under which it is enhanced. Ethical leaders are not merely ethical people but rather they are equally important in encouraging and supporting ethical behavior in their employees. They are mentors who set ethical standards and at the same time ensure that these are followed (Treviño et al., 2003). This aspect of ethical leadership is significant for the whistleblowing. Yet, at the same time a great deal of resistance at the individual and organizational level can be faced against whom the whistle is blown. The chances of repercussions are reduced for whistle-blowers if they enjoy more trust and equity while communicating with supervisors as compared interacting via the formal procedure (Moorman, 1991).

The study also highlights the role of job security and affective commitment and their interaction with ethical leadership. The role of leadership cannot be ignored while talking of job security and affective commitment. As is evident from the results of the study, the two-way interaction effect of ethical leadership and job security is significant, i.e., the job security has moderation effects on ethical leadership and whistleblowing, such that the relationship is stronger for employees with high job security and weaker for employees with low job security. Similarly, the two-way interaction effect of ethical leadership and affective commitment on whistleblowing is also significant, i.e., affective commitment has moderation effects on ethical leadership and whistleblowing, such that the relationship is stronger when the affective commitment is strong and weaker when it is weak.

The results also show that the three-way interaction effect of ethical leadership, job security and affective commitment on whistleblowing is insignificant i.e., the job security and affective commitment does not have a joint moderation effect on ethical leadership and whistleblowing.

Finally, it is worth considering the religious and cultural backdrop in which this study is conducted. Studying whistleblowing in this context emphasizes collectivism as it is the landmark of the Islamic culture (Verma & Triandis, 1999). The term collectivism shows that people belonging to such social setups are bonded strongly with one another, thus forming cohesive groups since birth (Hofstede et al., 1991). Whistleblowing on an employee or employer, in such cultures, is challenging as the relationships are deep. Besides the cultural limitations, there is a lack of rules and regulations that foster whistleblowing in Pakistan. The role of the leader is also very important as it can do the task either by establishing good communication or through ethical leadership behavior.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

This study can have far reaching consequences for management literature as it explores the impact of the job security and the affective commitment on whistleblowing. The results reveal that if an organization wants to promote whistleblowing it must focus on creating an environment that is congenial for co-workers to disclose wrongdoings. Ethical trainings can further support the vision. The relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing are equally affected by several unique factors within the organization. These factors include reward, sanction, peer impact, and leadership values.

Secondly, a strong relationship between the ethical leadership and whistleblowing with a moderating effect of job security and affective commitment are consistent with the Social Learning, Social Exchange and Job Insecurity Theories as suggested by Bandura and Walters (1977) & Blau (1964)

Thirdly, this is the first study in Pakistan to test this extensive, multi-dimensional and diverse topic that can have an impact on the ethical environment of an organization. The results can be helpful in creating circumstances that can impact the whistleblowing phenomenon.

Lastly, the study can be fruitful in supporting future legislation in the Government of Pakistan regarding the whistleblowing policy.

### **Practical Implications**

The study highlights the various aspects that can support the whistleblowing. The pre-condition to successful whistleblowing is an ethical leader within the organization. Who workers can trust and comfortably report wrongdoings to. This requires the leader to have high moral values besides certain specialized roles

(Brown et al., 2005). Therefore, it is important to add moral conduct of employees in their job description. More importantly, leaders should be held responsible for ethical and moral conducts because of the trickle-down effects of their behavior. This information can be used in the future to find real leaders in the workplace that are the best fit for the position of being role models. Selection for these posts would require additional qualities of ethical leadership.

The ethical leaders' behavior is very important to develop the ethical behavior of the employees in the organization. Training sessions can also assist in fulfilling the needs of grooming an ethical person. Training can be done in a systematic way through planned development programs.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Certain limitations have been observed from the results of the study, which are elaborated below along with future directions. Firstly, limited sample was drawn from a particular group of civil service officers and employees of one autonomous body in the Federal Government. The results may show that the target group has a set of its own ethical standards. The validity of the results can be improved by including employees of other public sector institutions at the Federal and Provincial level.

Secondly, this study is a cross-sectional study. The cross-sectional study design in itself is limited as to the causality in variables (Levin, 2006). The study may be replicated with time lagged or longitudinal design.

Thirdly, no study or material on whistleblowing conducted at the Government level has been found. In light of the current Government's vision about policy making for whistleblowing and due to sensitivity of the topic, it is recommended that a comprehensive study should be conducted at the Government level and the results may be correlated with the present study.

Fourthly, the joint moderating effects of job security and affective commitment have not been supported, which might be due to the small sample size. It is recommended that the sample size may be increased for future study.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the past studies have established that various demographic variables and organizational characteristics impact whistleblowing (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Miceli & Near, 1984). Three demographic variables i.e., age, gender and education have been used in this study and contrarily, results showed their insignificant relationship with whistleblowing for control variables. It is suggested that more demographic variables such as: position, tenure, marital status, firm type, firm size and industry etc. may be used as well.

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