

Role of Psychological Safety and Religiosity Between Negative Leadership (Machiavellianism) and Employee Silence (Defensive): A study Among Teachers of Private Higher Education Institutes of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Employees' behavior at workplace depends on leader's behavior. The negative reciprocal relationship between leader and employee produces negative consequences for organization like employee silence. The leadership literature investigates the interaction of psychological and religious characteristics in understanding leader toxic behavior and employee silence, especially from a cross-cultural and organizational perspective. Thus, the study aims to substantiate the mediation-moderation effect of psychological safety and Religiosity between a leader's Machiavellianism Behavior and Employee Silence. The 643 self-administered questionnaire was distributed to teachers of thirty-one private universities operating in Pakistan through convenience sampling technique. The findings show that LMB positively impacted E.S. and psychological safety, and when psychological safety is controlled, it increases employee silence. Moreover, when high Religiosity is present, employee silence reduces even LMB is higher. The findings reveal that LMB is present in private higher education institutes that require immediate attention, whereas psychological training is necessary for faculty in higher education institutes in Pakistan.

Keywords: Leader's Machiavellianism Behavior (LMB), employee silence (E.S.), Psychological Safety(PS), Religiosity

Introduction

Organizational leadership has always been of interest to management academics, with an extensive amount of effort directed toward identifying the reciprocal relationship between leader and employee-related measures (Ghafoor & Shah, 2023). There has been growing attention paid to this phenomenon within the last decade with an emphasis on this negative aspect of leadership, including the features of such leadership based on the manipulation of power relationships, such as Machiavellianism, narcissism, and that kind of leadership, which is authoritarian one (Campbell & Foster, 2011; Mousa, Abdelgaffar, Aboramadan, & Chaouali, 2020; M. A. Qureshi, Ramish, Ansari, & Bashir, 2022). Such behaviors are characterized by egoistic, and narcissistic ones, which are increasingly observed in organizational contexts (Xu, Loi, & Lam, 2015). Such leadership styles not only lead to the loss of trust and organizational morale but also have hidden costs of interventions such as increased levels of unproductive work, withdrawal, and declining employee health (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2019b; Kassandrinou, Lainidi, Mouratidis, & Montgomery, 2023; Lainidi et al., 2023). Employees take steps to lessen their interactions with toxic leaders, such as avoiding criticism and using regulatory tactics (Tepper, Moss, & Duffy, 2011). When workers watch their employers' propensity to treat others harshly, they may keep information, thoughts, or concerns to themselves (Krishna, Soumyaja, & Sowmya, 2023). This lack of commitment can have several adverse effects on the organization, such as

poor decision-making, low innovation, disengagement and job burnout (Kassandrinou et al., 2023).

Existing Literature on negative leadership behaviors and their employee outcomes is based on dyadic linkages between the leaders and the subordinate or general leadership typologies (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2019a). Particularly, scholars are paying attention to understand the negative leadership behaviors on employee voice and silence through psychological processes (Liu, Mao, Chiang, Guo, & Zhang, 2023). The voluminous literature has documented various negative leadership traits and employee silence relationship from various contexts such as; Dedahanov, Abdurazzakov, Fayzullaev, and Sun (2021) studied how abusive supervision increases ineffectual and defensive silence in relation to self-efficacy and fear elements. Similarly, Kiewitz, Restubog, Shoss, Garcia, and Tang (2016) studied abusive supervision and defensive silence. In addition, Lam and Xu (2019) studied abusive supervision and employee silence in relation to power distance orientation. On other hand, various scholars studied narcissism leadership and employee silence (Khan, Nazir, & Shafi, 2021; Mousa et al., 2020; Nevicka, Ten Velden, De Hoogh, & Van Vianen, 2011). Similarly, scholars substantiated the link between authoritative leadership and employee silence (Chu, 2014; Duan, Bao, Huang, & Brinsfield, 2018). In addition, Scholars are studying the role of Leader's Machiavellianism Behavior and employee silence (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2019a; Zagenczyk, Restubog, Kiewitz, Kiazad, & Tang, 2014). However, the constructs of psychological safety as a precondition for effective communication have not been investigated as a mediating variable of this relationship. Psychological safety is especially at risk in organizations with leaders generally described as Machiavellian as they are manipulative and exploitative to cause climates of fear.

Even though a large selection of the studies focuses on the organizational and psychological factors, the author overlooked the individual-level antecedent, namely, Religiosity, especially the intrinsic orientation, reflects a strong and personal commitment to ethical-moral principles that inform the choices people make (Azeem, De Clercq, & Haq, 2024). Negative leadership, employees with high intrinsic Religiosity may react to adverse organizational environments differently, decreasing or increasing the propensity for defensive Silence (Dar, Usman, Cheng, & Ghani, 2023). This moderating role of Religiosity appears to be particularly important in culturally plural and religiously sensitive contexts like Pakistan, where religion invariably defines work-related beliefs and conduct. Intrinsic religious orientation concerns self-specified attitudes about appropriate moral and ethical bearings. While some employees may shut down in such environments by accepting the status quo, thus becoming defensive and silent, others may use their religious self-identity to fight off such fear and uphold ethical behavior (Lainidi et al., 2023). Intrinsic Religiosity has not been investigated sufficiently to explain the impact of individual differences on the relationship between toxic leadership and defensive silence (M. A. Qureshi et al., 2022).

This study underscores the role of psychological safety and intrinsic Religiosity on the Machiavellian leadership-defense silence relationship. In particular, the present research aims to understand how psychological safety explains this link and the underlying mechanism through which manipulative and exploitative leadership behaviors produce an environment that stifles employee voice. In this study, theoretical and practical implications have been provided. Conceptually, it builds on and updates the existing knowledge about the interactions between leadership behaviors, psychological climate for safety, and personal Religiosity in predicting employee voice. These advances make this study unique by filling the gaps of similar literature

that have not previously combined psychological safety and Religiosity into creating the model to analyze organizations' defensive Silence.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Employee Silence

When employees choose to withholding information, or 'voice,' often seen by others as employees' passive behavior, is known as Employee Silence (Milliken & Morrison, 2003). The absence of voice is not equated with Silence but is the conscious choice not to talk about what one may want to share, complain about, or contribute an idea (Brinsfield, Edwards, & Greenberg, 2009). Various authors provided frameworks like Dyne, Ang, and Botero (2003) and Milliken et al. (2003) and Brinsfield (2013). However, Knoll and Van Dick (2013) provided a more precise and structural approach to categorize Silence as mere operationalizable dimensions. Their framework allows researchers to analyze how Silence works and develops in organizational contexts that are happening in the workplace (see Table 1).

Table 1

Knoll and Van Dick's dimension of employee silence

Type	Definition	Motivation	Characteristics	Example
Acquiescent Silence	Employees refrain from speaking out because they have given up or do not think their opinions count.	sense of hopelessness	Passive and disengaged	Workers who never get a chance to speak during meetings because they assume that management does not care for their opinions
Defensive Silence	Employees do not share information or ideas to safeguard themselves from perceived negative repercussions.	fear	Active and self-protective.	Subordinates are deciding not to put forward their reports on ethical breaches since they foresee being prosecuted by the involved colleagues or supervisors.
Pro-Social Silence	Employees do not share information or ideas with others for the welfare of the person and organization.	devotion to others	Active and selfless.	An employee does not want to oppose another employee's work and embarrass him or her in front of the rest of the team.

Opportunistic Silence	Employees will decline to volunteer information to gain certain benefits or avoid inconvenience.	self-interest	Deliberate and strategic	An employee decides not to contribute value-added information during a meeting to be better placed to benefit from the outcome of the next project.
Quiescent Silence	Lack of interest includes non-disclosure of information or opinions due to emotional detachment	emotional detachment	Laissez-faire and Lack of emotionality	Those employees who do not contribute their input by avoiding asking questions or submitting ideas due to what they consider indifferent to the outcomes

In this study, defensive Silence, often called quiescent Silence, is considered the act of refraining from providing information due to fear (Dedahanov et al., 2021). The main driving force behind these methods of communicating Silence is a legitimate fear that voices should not be heard, defensive Silence can be characterized as a particularly appropriate and timely subject of study regarding negative leadership attributes, emphasizing Machiavellianism.

Leaders Negative Behavior

Machiavellianism

Machiavellianism is a theory that was developed by Niccolò Machiavelli, an Italian Renaissance diplomat, to explain the behavior that he believed to be ideal but immoral in the quest for effective royalty. Therefore, Machiavellianism could not be considered a psychological concept until the work of Christie and Geis in 1970. According to their operational description, it is a personality dimension that includes Machiavellianism, aggression, a lack of moral values, and a negative worldview (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2019a). The Machiavellian personalities of leaders is associated with self-interest and the willingness to try to dominate, to control and deceive in the workplace, in the aim of amassing personal power and resources, this might lead to organisational rigidity (Kwak & Shim, 2017). Because of its insinuating amoral characteristics, Machiavellianism has been approached negatively, garnering considerable interest in understanding the work-related outcomes (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2019a) and business ethics (Schepers, 2003).

Psychological Safety

The organizational behavior literature emphasizes psychological elements of employees such as motivation, commitment, satisfaction. Schein and Bennis (1965) underscore an important

psychological dimension i.e. psychological safety introduced as an environment that concerns decrease and learning culture promotion, their work set the foundation for subsequent studies but was missing operational definitions, which led to multiple interpretations and utilization possibilities (Shen, 2024). Further, Kahn (1990) built up this understanding by articulating psychological safety as a level-specific construct and described it as the extent to which individuals feel they can surface those thoughts and behaviors relevant to their job without the risk of punishment or censure in terms of dismissal or other forms of prejudice. He linked this safety to three engagement drivers: meaningfulness, availability, and safety, focusing on how people at work encounter or encounter other people (Frazier, Fainshmidt, Klinger, Pezeshkan, & Vracheva, 2017). Later, Edmondson (1999) tried to relocate it to the group level and gave the term, 'team psychological safety,' an organizational construct that defined psychological safety as the organization that was perceived by the team as being low risk for team members in terms of expressing personal and terrible ideas or making a mistake. Furthermore, Wanless (2016) stressed that the perception of psychological safety across an organization results from the formation process and early childhood experiences, including home and school background, that determine the ideas of leadership and risk management in the future. It focuses on the attitudes and actions originating from the choices made by the employees, recognizing that employee-characterized perceptions make up the perceived environment in workplaces. Cognitive and emotional-based psychological safety matches the individual level of psychological safety adopted by Kahn, which is more flexible for one context or another. Psychological safety entails significant benefits when discussed at individual level; it directly focuses on the individual employee, which can target specific phobias or barriers that discourage the production of voice and interest by specific workers.

Religiosity

Religion refers to a complex of beliefs, practices, and organizational structures. McCullough and Willoughby (2009) have mentioned religion as a tradition involving scripture reading, worship, prayer, or a combination of the two, with religious practices typically occurring within a church, mosque, or temple framework. J. A. Qureshi and Shahjehan (2021) notes that Spirituality or religion is an all-embracing moral guide of people's beliefs and actions. Intrinsic Religiosity is the kind of Religiosity in which religious values become incorporated, faith in God, and obedience to His will pervades the whole life, regulating conduct (Steiner, Leinert, & Frey, 2020). Extrinsic Religiosity is based on social security, status, or personal utility, and religion is used to attain these goals (Allport & Ross, 1967). Intrinsic Religiosity is especially important in organizations because it yields a correlation between personal beliefs and ethical behaviors, thus creating a coherent set of organizational values under which the company can stand firm and meet its share of organizational shocks (Arshad, Qasim, Reynaud, & Farooq, 2024). This internalized orientation breeds resiliency and commitment and becomes a more preferred unit of analysis for comprehending religion's impact on work-related behaviors.

Theoretical Approach

The analysis of psychological safety theory is well positioned to lend much understanding toward the influence of negative leadership behaviors on shaping and expression of employee voice. According to psychological safety theory, leadership behaviors are connected to Silence, which focuses on the perceived threat of expressing risks (Frazier et al., 2017; Shen, 2024). Autocratic, narcissistic, or abusive leadership negates psychological safety as employees feel they will suffer reprisal, ostracization, or, at worst, slander. This framework successfully

includes the environmental and relational variables hindering voice in an organization's 'lose-your-voice' cultures (Shen, 2024).

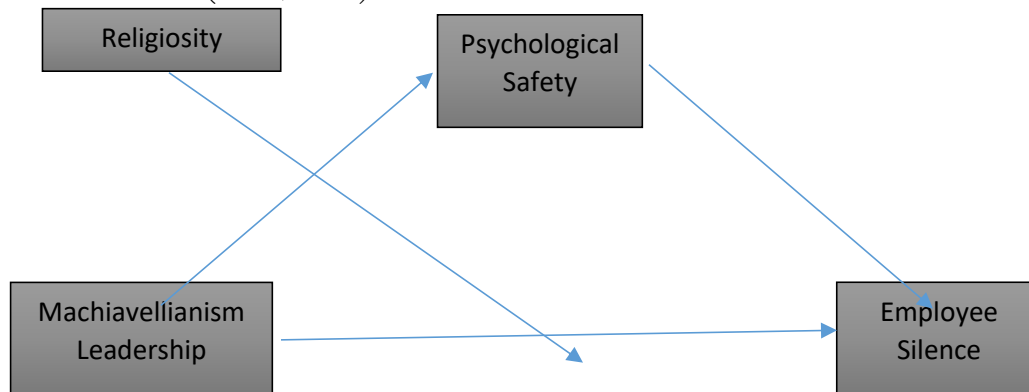


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Machiavellianism Leadership and Employee Silence (Defensive)

Machiavellianism stems from leaders' behavior by manipulation, self-interest, and tactical focus toward accomplishing one's agenda regardless of the adverse effects on other subordinates (Dahling, Whitaker, & Levy, 2009). Such leaders make the situation unsafe for speaking out, so employees see many dangers concerning complaints. Defensive Silence aligns with this dynamic for several reasons: Fear as a Central Driver Based on manipulation and control and bureaucratic authority systems, it discourages subordinates from voicing their concerns given the always looming threats of retaliation or facing job insecurity or negative information about their performance (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2019a). One is the primary form of retaliation, including demotion, discharge, and future reprisal; the second is secondary, which means social isolation and limited assignments (M. A. Qureshi et al., 2022). This multi-paradigm fear adds to the richness of defensive Silence, making it a rich and suitable lens to view employees in such situations. Machiavellian leaders are instrumental in depleting employees' psychological capital, hope, and self-efficacy, hence the widespread practice of defensive Silence. If they do not find the support or resources to handle their fear, the employees will suppress themselves and return to Silence, which is unproductive (Hao et al., 2022). Thus it is hypothesized that;

H1: Leaders' Machiavellian behavior impact employee silence

Mediating role of PS Between LMB and ES (Defensive)

Machiavellian leadership involves manipulative, exploitative, and self-serving leadership behaviors that develop a non-transparent working environment (Dahling et al., 2009). This kind of leadership brings about a sense of fear and anxiety among the employees; hence, employees will initiate defensive Silence where they withhold any information, concerns, or ideas due to the harmful repercussions they might face (Kish-Gephart, Detert, Treviño, & Edmondson, 2009). The Psychological Safety work as mediator (Edmondson, 1999). According to the Machiavellian model, the organizational psychological climate is damaged, and the staff perceives the climate as ill-tempered and insecure. It scares employees from reporting even more due to fear of being retaliated or sidelined, thus promoting defensive Silence. Employees who believe that their ideas, grievances, or protests will not attract respect or, to the contrary, will be met with negative consequences prefer to retaliate under Silence. On the other hand, when psychological safety is being ensured, employees are more willing to take interpersonal risks related to self-assertion

and voice in the organization, offer feedback, or report unethical practices regardless of the type of negative leadership styles identified (Bienefeld & Grote, 2014). Thus it is hypothesized that,

H2: PS mediates the relationship between LMB and ES

Moderating role of Religiosity between LMB and ES

Machiavellian leadership entails devious conduct that is typically exploitative and self-serving, with the primary objective being gaining an organizational or personal advantage over others, regardless of the consequences for workers and the ensuing decline in organizational trust (Dahling et al., 2009). Such leadership creates organizational cultures in which employees are compelled to remain silent, fearing the repercussions if they speak up. Integrating religious beliefs and values into personal life orientation helps to change this relationship. Religiosity has three dimensions: extrinsic, intrinsic, and non-religious. Intrinsic religious persons believe in moral obligation, honesty, and ethical practice. The higher intrinsic Religiosity protects against defensive Silence in the case of Machiavellian leadership (Arshad et al., 2024). It corresponds with the notion of endogenously religious people valuing the ethic of principled (full-for-life) organization over personal safety: expressing concerns as one's responsibility. On the other hand, employees with low intrinsic Religiosity may likely engage in defensive Silence under Machiavellian leadership. In the absence of intrinsic Religiosity, people are operating from the inside of the organization and are not likely to fight the system that exploits employees so that they eliminate adverse consequences affecting them (Van Cappellen, Toth-Gauthier, Saroglou, & Fredrickson, 2016). It explains that personal Religiosity moderates the effect of defensive Silence by reducing fear-related reactions. It also moderates Machiavellian leadership and defensive Silence by placing an ethical filter, intrinsic Religiosity, into the confrontation to help employees assess such leadership nuances more effectively and with a more explicit awareness of right and wrong. Thus it is hypothesized that;

H3: RL moderates the relationship between LMB and ES

Research Methods

Quantitative research was used for this study because it provides a structured framework for systemically investigating hypotheses and relationships between variables (Bell, Fisher, Brown, & Mann, 2018). In this design, descriptive and relational methods were practiced using a survey method. They are used extensively in the behavioral sciences as they allow access to the general population at a comparatively low cost (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The target population for this study included only the lecturers, assistant professors, associate professors, and professors teaching in thirty-one private universities in the capitals of provinces and Islamabad, Pakistan. The total population of faculty members in these universities was estimated to be around 50,000. Using a confidence interval of 96.5%, a margin of error of 3.5%, respectively, and a calculator for sample size weights (Preacher & Hayes, 2008), arrive at a total sample size of 772. A stratified sampling method in which each university was given a sample proportional to the population size. Second, this study used a convenience sampling technique due to lacking a definitive sampling frame, mainly for security reasons. The scales from earlier studies were borrowed and the items for the scales were measured with a five point seven-point Likert-type scale. The following scales were utilized:

Machiavellianism Leadership: 16 items were adapted from the Machiavellianism Personality Scale by Dahling et al. (2009). Examples are, "If my department chair stands to benefit from an unethical act, s/he will perform the act" and "My department chair gains much pleasure from a position of authority over others." The reliability coefficient of this scale was 0.80.

Religiosity: 20 items were adapted from Joseph & DiDuca's (2007). Examples are 'Perceiving God in my life makes me choose good even when such a choice is not easy.' The reliability coefficient for this scale was 0.89.

Psychological Safety: 05 items were adapted Liang, Farh, & Farh (2012). Examples are "At work, I can say what I feel" and "No one in my unit will bully me if I disagree with them." The reliability coefficient for this scale was 0.71.

Employee Silence: 31 items were adapted from Briensfield (2013). Examples are "I do not make suggestions for improvement for what is wrong with the current modes of operation because I am not interested," 'I do not express my ideas to change something, for fear,' and 'I do not complaint to the groups, about the issues, which affect the performance in the given day's schedule.' The reliability coefficient for this scale was 0.84.

Results

The descriptive states, reliability and validity and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique was applied because SEM is considered a proper method that delivers valid and accurate results (Ringle et al., 2005).

Demographic Profile

The descriptive analysis shows that 23% participants are from Baluchistan, 25% from Sindh, 14% from KPK and 24% from Punjab (see Table 2 for detail).

Table 2

Respondents Profile

Demographic	Balochistan	%	Sindh	%	KPK	%	Punjab	%	Islamabad	%	Total
Respondents											
Province	150	23%	160	25%	91	14%	152	24%	90	14%	643
Gender											
Male	84	56%	89	56%	50	55%	93	61%	53	59%	369
Female	66	44%	71	44%	41	45%	59	39%	37	41%	274
Qualification											
Masters	39	26%	41	26%	22	24%	38	25%	18	20%	158
M.Phil.	97	65%	104	65%	55	60%	102	67%	53	59%	411
PhD	14	9%	15	9%	14	15%	12	8%	19	21%	74
Designation											
Lecturer	65	43%	71	44%	41	45%	62	41%	31	34%	270
Assistant Professor	47	31%	45	28%	23	25%	51	34%	26	29%	192
Associate Professor	28	19%	33	21%	17	19%	30	20%	18	20%	126
Professor	10	7%	11	7%	10	11%	9	6%	15	17%	55

Table 3 contains tests of reliability measured by composite reliability and the convergent validity by Average Variance Extracted (AVE). According to the reliability criterion Eg, all the variables indicated in the table are highly reliable since they are above .60. In the case of convergent validity, AVE has to be greater than .50 (Hair Jr & Sarstedt, 2021); the results reveal that all these variables meet the criterion of convergent validity (Bell et al., 2018).

Table 3

Reliability and Validity

Variables	Composite reliabilities (CR)	Cronbach's α	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Leaders' Machiavellian	.952	.948	.575
Psychological Safety	.959	.946	.823
Religiosity	.952	.956	.620
Employee Silence	.969	.964	.758

The mean scores for Leaders' Machiavellian Behavior, Psychological Safety, Religiosity, and Employee Silence are 3.76, 3.78, 3.75, and 3.82, respectively, pointing out that all the variables are within an acceptable range and hence, their existence and existence within organizational context is confirmed. To demonstrate their discriminant validity, the correlation between these predictors should not be significant (O'Reilly III, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). The significance level between Leaders' Machiavellian Behavior and Employee Silence is 0.42**, below the cut-off point of 0.90, the square root of 0.90. In the same way, the coefficients of Religiosity and Leaders' Machiavellian Behavior have a small correlation coefficient of 0.28 **, which is below the threshold of the last expression, 0.90i. The coefficient of determination between Psychological Safety and Religiosity is 0.23**, less than 0.78. These results show that all used predictors (Leaders' Machiavellian Behaviour, Psychological Safety, Religiosity) have good discriminant validity.

Table 4

Descriptive statistics

Pearson correlations	Mean	S.D	1	2	3	4
1. Machiavellian Leaders	3.76	1.14	.76			
2. Psychological Safety	3.78	1.03	.42**	.90		
3. Religiosity	3.75	1.12	.28**	.23**	.78	
4. Employee Silence	3.82	1.27	.37**	.57**	.28**	.87

The hypotheses were tested using the regression analysis version of the study. Simple Regression analysis used to test Hypothesis (H1). As shown in Table 3, Leaders' Machiavellian Behavior (LMB) has a positive and significant relationship with Employee Silence (E.S.) (b = 0.19, t = 2.21, p < 0.05). Therefore, H1 is accepted. In order to examine Hypothesis 2, Hayes' (2013) Process Model 4 was adopted as a mediation procedure, with several iterations of 5000 and bootstrapped values and confidence intervals of 95% using the bootstrapping technique of Macro SPSS (Preacher & Hayes 2008; Kim et al. 2015). MacKinnon (2008) states that if the

LLCI and ULCI are not equal to zero, all paths must be significant to conclude mediation. Again, the first path analysis results reveal that Leaders' Machiavellian Behavior significantly and positively influences psychological safety (standardized regression weight, $\beta = 0.265$; $t = 4.534$; $p < 0.001$). Employee Voice, in the same way, is a significant determinant of Psychological safety ($\beta = 0.381$, $p < 0.001$), and this relationship is moderate in magnitude (ER = 0.500). Further, Hypothesis 3 proposed that Leaders' Machiavellian Behavior has a positive and direct relationship with Employee Silence when psychological safety is present ($\beta = 0.197$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect is also significant ($\beta = 0.062$, $p < 0.001$) support the mediation effect of psychological safety between LMB and ES. Therefore, H2 is accepted

Table 5

Mediation Analysis

Variables	Outcome	R ²	F-value	P	Coefficient	S.E	T	LICT	UICT
Psychological Safety									
Constant				.00	2.12	.17	11.93	1.77	2.47
Machiavellian Leader	Psychological Safety	.17	65.4	.00	.26**	.04	6.13	.18	.35
Employee Silence									
Constant				.00	1.06	.22	4.63	.61	1.51
Machiavellian Leader	Employee Silence	.35	82.40	.00	.19*	.03	6.48	.13	.25
Psychological Safety	Silence			.00	.23**	.03	6.74	.17	.30
A direct effect of ML on ES									
ML	ES				.19**	.03	6.48	.13	.26
Indirect effect PSS between ML and ES									
ML	E.S				.06	.04		.18	.35

Based on Hypothesis (H3) of the study, Religiosity moderates the relationship between leaders' Machiavellian Behavior (LMB) and employee silence. As a hypothesis of this study, Hayes' Process Model 1 was performed with a 95% confidence level and 5000 bootstrap samples. The regression analysis shows that there is a direct interaction effect between Leaders' Machiavellian Behaviour and Employee Silence [B (-0.07), 95 % CI (-0.13, -0.01), $t = 2.07$, $p < 0.05$]. The results for the conditional effect of Religiosity on Employee Silence shows that at low levels of Religiosity, the conditional effect on Employee Silence is [conditional effect = 0.41, CI [0.25, 0.56], $t < 0.05$], revealing that at a low level of Religiosity exhibited in the workplace, Employee Silence rises even for those with low LMB. On the other hand, at high levels of Religiosity, the conditional effect of Religiosity on Employee Silence is significant [conditional effect = 0.22, 95%

CI [0.10, 0.40], $p < 0.05$], meaning that religiosity decreases Employee Silence at high levels of Leaders' Machiavellian Behavior. Leaders' Machiavellian Behavior is invariably directly related to Employee Silence, yet if Religiosity is combined with Leaders' Machiavellian Behavior, Employee Silence will also be systematically weak and reduced in the given workplace. Hence, it can be concluded that leaders' Machiavellian behavior and their level of Religiosity should be considered to minimize employee silence. Thus H3 is accepted.

Table 6

Variables	Condition	Coefficient	S.E	T	P	LICT	UICT
Employee Silence	Low Religiosity	.41**	.07	5.24	.00	.25	.56
	High Religiosity	.22**	.05	3.77	.00	.10	.40
Interaction-1	Religiosity * ML	-.07**	.03	-2.36	.01	-.13	-.01

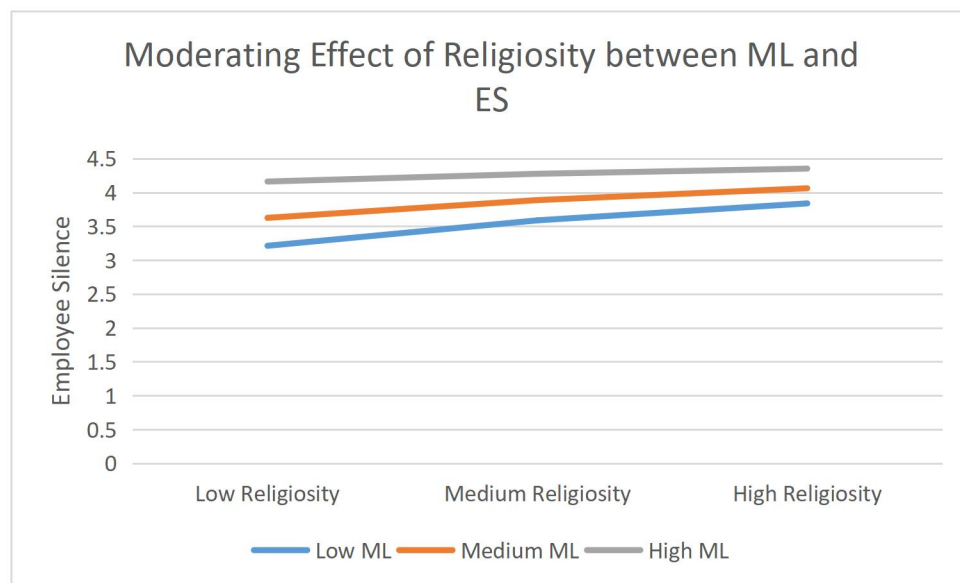


Figure 2: Moderating effect of Religiosity

Discussion

This research investigates the link between Machiavellian Behavior (LMB) of leaders and Employee Silence (E.S.) and finds the psychological safety and religiosity perspectives in the private HEIs of Pakistan. The study confirmed H1, LMB and E.S have significant relationship align with the prior studies. Bari, Ghaffar, and Ahmad (2020) and O'Boyle, Murray, and Cummins (2015) found that Machiavellian traits in leaders contribute to adverse effects that make employees lack voice. It is supported by Zhao, Yang, Wang, and Michelson (2023) who pointed out that LMB enhances ambiguity and negativity in the psychological climate of the

workplace. The second hypothesis, H2 where PS mediates LMB and E.S. The present study also aligns with the previous research, which has determined that psychological climate mediates the impact of toxic leadership. According to Zhao et al. (2023) self-schemas suggest that leaders with Machiavellian personalities establish an organizational culture that fosters low employee confidence to give their opinions. However, if there is psychological safety, depending on the level, employees will feel safe to voice their opinions amid manipulative or self-serving leaders. Detert and Burris (2007) and Tuckey, Dollard, Hosking, and Winefield (2009) also pointed out that high psychological safety decreases the effects of toxic leadership, where the employees will speak and share their concerns and ideas. The third hypothesis H3 shows that the moderating effect of Religiosity is significantly more apparent for the subset of organizations with a high level of LMB. Closely related, at higher levels of Religiosity, employees are generally more willing to speak up to express their concerns, apart from being a target of deceitful or unethical behavior. It supports the current studies by Jamal (2018) that require Religiosity to enhance ethical processes for decision-making and reporting unethical practices in organizations. Religious values like integrity, honesty, and fairness enable employees to stand up against leaders who portray Machiavellianism.

Implications

This study extends knowledge about the relationships of a Leader's Machiavellian Behaviour to employee silence, psychological safety and Religiosity. First, concept that LMB, like other toxic leadership styles, generates a culture of non-voice, where workers refrain from promoting grievances so that they do not become unemployed or face sanctions within the organization. Second, the study furthers the theoretical development of the concept of psychological safety by showing the mediating role it plays between LMB and Silence. In the current study empirical evidence pointing to the function of psychological safety as mitigating toxic leadership behaviors. Finally, this research adds another new theoretical perspective to the investigation of LMB and employee silence by proposing Religiosity as a moderator. The analysis of Religiosity in this study also provides a focus not covered in previous research: personal Religiosity as a mediator between work and individual moral values.

The research indicates that Religiosity sever as moderator in explaining relationship between LMB and ES. In particular, as Religiosity increases, silence decreases even in the presence of LMB. The practical contributions derived from this study are relevant to managing employee silence and the harmful effects of toxic leadership. First, it highlights that the issue of psychological safety within the organization should be addressed. Psychological safety can best be encouraged by encouraging communication and fostering organizational listening and trust levels. As a result, leaders must be equipped with knowledge of factors that indicate the levels of psychological safety the organization has regarding its employees to ensure everyone is valued. It can be done through making psychological safety part of leadership training and through policies that ensure employees are supported if they speak up or report something.

Limitations and Future Research Direction

The limitations are observed in this study. First, a descriptive and relational design was used, which caused a lesser focus on causal relationships. However, the study ensured all of the validity and reliability parameters, while causality is established through experimental research. As it is almost impossible to selectively activate or increase/decrease the LMB traits in the natural organizational environment for the following studies, a quasi-experimental design could be implied, which can be done more effectively in the organized environment (Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2022; Sendjaya et al., 2008). The second method is the limitation of a convenience sampling

design, a non-probability sampling technique that does not allow for true participant inclusion. It could have been done away by applying a probability sampling method, which would have given a better sampling frame. Future research could also look at other motivational theories, including the attitude motivational paradigm, to deepen the understanding of the connectivity between LMB and employee silence (Chang et al., 2012). Last but not least, future research should investigate whether the reasons for and the dynamics of unit and organizational success differ and remain constant or vary with the level of analysis.

Conclusion

This research aimed to explore mediation and moderation of psychological safety and Religiosity on the connection between LMBs and organizational Silence. The hypotheses were developed and tested among teachers of higher education institutes situated in Pakistan only. Previous literature has been sparing in its empirical analysis of relationships between LMB, psychological safety, Religiosity, and employee silence. The present study contributes to the literature in HRM, where LMB and Religiosity positively influence psychometric completeness and absence of employee voice. However, the five factors of the model reveal that employee silence is exceptionally high when Religiosity and psychological safety are perceived to be low. Consequently, organizations that create a culture of psychological safety and discourage LMB-related practices will create better conditions to eliminate employee silence, thus creating a more open and receptive working environment.

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