



In the Shadow of Ethical Abyss: Unraveling the Threads of Unethical Leadership and Job Embeddedness in Pakistan's Banking Sector through Ostracism and Lifeline of Support

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this research is to examine the impact of unethical leadership on job embeddedness with in Pakistan's banking sector, scrutinizing the role of perceived organizational support as a moderator and workplace ostracism as a mediator. The principle of Social Exchange and Conservation of Resources Theory were used to propose the hypotheses of this study. A Sample of 543 employees was collected from banking sector in Pakistan, which was analyzed by utilizing the SPSS and R project for reliability, validity of the instrument and statistical analysis. Results reveal a direct negative link between unethical leadership and job embeddedness. Workplace ostracism mediates this relationship, indicating that unethical leadership impacts job embeddedness through ostracism. Further, POS moderates this negative relationship acting as a buffering mechanism. This research contributes to the understanding of how unethical leadership affects job embeddedness by integrating the roles of workplace ostracism and perceived organizational support. It provides valuable insights for banking sector leaders and policymakers to develop strategies that promote ethical behavior and the role of perceived support in mitigating the adverse effects of unethical leadership, thereby offering practical implications for positive leadership practices and perceived support in the banking sector.

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1.0 Introduction

There has been a rise in corporate scandals over the past few decades (Mishra et. al, 2021; Nosrati et. al., 2024). The rise in instances of such scandals has raised the attention of media and governments towards unethical conduct carried out by organizational leaders (Malviya, 2023). The existing body of literature and various media outlets have extensively highlighted the unethical issues where leaders have been entangled. According to statistics, the involvement of senior executives in various unethical behaviors may exceed 26% within organizations (Hassan et al., 2022). Due to such incidents, firms and their leaders are facing growing pressure to exhibit ethical behavior (Hartog & Belschak, 2012). However, the currently available literature has not sufficiently investigated the concept of unethical leadership, particularly in comparison to related concepts like destructive leadership or abusive supervision (Hassan et al., 2022). Further, establishing a mutual constructive bond between employees and their leaders in the service sector can yield substantial positive consequences, particularly in the banking sector (Schwepker & Dimitriou, 2021; Nosrati et. al., 2024). Although the issue of UL is widely acknowledged in various industries, there is a scarcity of studies specifically focusing on UL in the banking sector, despite its widespread occurrence (Khumalo, 2019).

The concept of Job embeddedness captures the overall factors which explain why the employees stay in the organization and academics have extensively studied the construct of job embeddedness, as demonstrated by the works of Mitchell et al. (2001) and Elshaer and Azazz (2021). Scholars have examined these factors that influence job embeddedness in various studies, including those conducted by Perinelli et al. (2022) and Ghosh and Gurunathan (2015). Nevertheless, it is imperative to mention that the research literature has not yet examined the effect of unethical leadership style on embeddedness level (Wang, Jiao & Li, 2022).

Workplace ostracism refers to the perception of a staff member being rejected or excluded by other employees in the organization. It is considered a distressing and painful experience and has become increasingly important in recent years (Howard, Cogswell, & Smith, 2019; Yang & Weih, 2018; Tee, G. H. 2024). Workplace ostracism has been found to impair their quality of service and elevate employees' distress (Leung, Wu, Chen, & Young, 2011; Chung, 2018) and known to contribute to an increased negative work behavior / outcome (Turkoglu & Dalgic, 2019). While there have been some recent research examining the link between WO and intent to leave there is a need for a comprehensive theoretical model that explains how leadership styles play a role in managing workplace ostracism (Zhu, Shu, Feng, & Tan, 2019) in the banking sector. Further, the mediating role of workplace ostracism between UL and JE, particularly within the banking sector context, warrants deeper research (Hassan et al., 2022; Elkhwesky et al., 2022).

In addition, we explore the influence of perceived organizational support (POS) as moderator; the level up to which the organization values the offerings of its workers and demonstrates concern for their welfare (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). This examination is motivated by the arguments put forth by ethics researchers (e.g., Tenbrunsel, Smith-Crowe, & Umphress, 2003; Brown & Mitchell, 2010) who suggested that organizations can

mitigate impact of unethical leader behavior by providing support to workers (Hetrick, Mitchell, Villarosa-Hurlocker & Sullivan, 2022).

Based on the aforementioned gaps in the literature, this research aims to examine the relationship between UL and JE and enhance the existing literature by incorporating mediating variable workplace ostracism, as well as a moderating variable called POS on this relationship. The theoretical lens being deployed here is the COR theory (Hobfoll, S. E. 1989) and SET (Cropanzano, R., & Mitchell, M. S. 2005). Moreover, the availability of evidence from the banking sector in a developing nation like Pakistan is also limited. Prior studies have demonstrated that cultures with a strong inclination towards collectivism are more prone to experiencing unethical leadership (Hassan et al., 2022) including Pakistan. Therefore, in order to improve the applicability of results related to this leadership style i.e. UL and provide additional evidence from the banking industry in Pakistan, this study is contributing to the existing body of literature.

From a theoretical perspective, this study aims to fill a gap in the literature about the relationship between UL and JE. The previous research has established the detrimental effects of UL on employee behavior (Rivera et al., 2023). By integrating job embeddedness into the framework, the study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on organizational behavior and human resource management. It will provide insights into how UL can reduce job embeddedness, thereby decreasing employee retention and organizational commitment (Atmane et al., 2023). Furthermore, the study will explore the roles of POS and workplace ostracism, which can deepen the understanding of the dynamics between UL and JE, aligning with social exchange theory and COR theory (Fan et al., 2023). The study's insights can guide managers in implementing strategies that enhance POS and reduce workplace ostracism, ultimately leading to a more committed and engaged workforce (Holtom & Inderrieden, 2023). By addressing these issues, organizations can improve employee morale, reduce turnover and enhance overall performance.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Unethical Leadership and Job Embeddedness

Brown and Mitchell (2010) were the first to provide a definition for unethical leadership. They described it as "behaviors and decisions made by leaders in an organization that are both illegal and/or violate moral standards." Additionally, it includes "the establishment of processes and structures that encourage followers to engage in unethical conduct" (p. 588). Subsequently, Unal et al. (2012) asserted that leaders who exhibit unfair, egotistical, and immoral behavior and infringe upon the rights of others might be classified as engaging in unethical leadership. Unethical leadership leads to negative consequences for organizations, such as reduced productivity. Additionally, employees experience personal hardships as a result of unethical leadership. It also emerges as a threat to the workers' overall well-being (Singh & Srivastava, 2021; Karatepe et al., 2023). Unethical leadership, characterized by behaviors that violate moral standards, has profound implications for organizational outcomes, particularly job embeddedness.

The notion of JE pertains to the various dynamics that motivate workers to remain in workplace and stick with it. The main components are links, fit and sacrifice. Link is the level of interaction between employees and their leaders or colleagues, whereas, Fit is the level of

adjustment or integration that workers have into their work setting. Finally, the cost, in terms of material or non-material benefits, that may be endured while quitting the workplace is referred as Sacrifice (Mitchell et al., 2001; William et al., 2014). Research conducted by Khorakian et al. (2021) and Amankwaa et al. (2022) has demonstrated a significant correlation between leader styles and traits and the level of job embeddedness among subordinates.

Building upon the SET and COR theory, this study proposes that unethical leadership has a substantial adverse effect on employees' embeddedness based on following grounds. SET posits that if leaders provide subordinates with tangible assistance as well as moral support, employees will reciprocate by contributing their efforts and assisting the leaders, resulting in a range of valuable results (Cropanzano et al., 2017). On the other hand, when leaders display arrogance, sensitivity, anger, or a lack of empathy towards employees, they perceive an imbalance in the relationship or feel exploited. This leads to elevated emotional exhaustion and decreased levels of organizational commitment, embeddedness and overall negative behavioral consequences for the organization (Glad, 2002; Wang, H., Jiao, R., & Li, F., 2022). Therefore, under SET, the traits possessed by unethical leaders will erode the sense of embeddedness that employees have towards their job.

Conversely, COR explains how employees manage resources when faced with stress in an organization. It highlights the pattern of individuals seeking new resources and maintain existing ones. Workers consistently strive to proactively obtain additional resources as well as prevent the depletion of current resources to attain success. COR posits that unethical leadership diminishes the resources of personnel, which are necessary for maintaining favorable attitudes like intention to stay, empowerment and will power (Tepper et al., 2007). Whenever individuals witness the destructive characteristics of unethical leaders, they will actively search for alternative resources to cope with the resulting pressure. Consequently, workforce may opt to decrease will to stay or potentially depart from the workplace with intent to safeguard their resources and defend from potential losses. This directly results in a decreased sense of engagement as well as integration with their workplace (Wang, H., Jiao, R., & Li, F., 2022). Therefore, we propose as follows:

H1: Unethical leadership is negatively related to employees' job embeddedness.

2.2 Workplace Ostracism

Workplace ostracism (WO) refers to the feeling of estrangement and isolation experienced by employees from fellow workers in the workplace and it is commonly referred to as "the silent treatment" (O'Reilly et al., 2015). Ostracism in the workplace denotes the deliberate action of an individual or group disregarding, isolating, or reducing the social interactions of another person (Ferris et al., 2008). Typical signs of WO include isolation, avoidance of direct eye contact, and exclusion from informal social events (Zhu, Shu, Feng, & Tan, 2019). It is a display of social disrespect towards others and shows the absence of positive behavior among coworkers in interpersonal interactions (Ferris et al., 2008). WO has a detrimental impact on an employee's positive behavior, leading to a decrease in their positive behavior (Singh & Srivastava, 2021). Research has shown that when employees feel excluded or ignored in the workplace, it negatively affects their work routines and reduces their commitment. This can lead to greater discontent with

their job and a higher likelihood to leave the workplace (Scott & Duffy, 2015).

2.3 Unethical leadership, Workplace Ostracism and Job Embeddedness

Unethical leadership behaviors and ethical misconduct fosters feelings of exclusion among employees (Hassan et al., 2022). Employees subjected to unethical leadership practices may experience heightened levels of ostracism, which can manifest as social exclusion, neglect and differential treatment from peers and supervisors (Lin, Chen & Liu, 2023). This relationship is also reinforced by SET, which posits that when leaders engage in unethical behaviors, employees perceive a breakdown in the reciprocal exchange of support and fairness, leading to feelings of alienation and ostracism. As per COR, Unethical leadership behaviors can deplete employees' resources, leading to negative outcomes like workplace ostracism. The followers under unethical leadership may undergo psychological discomfort as well as lower self-esteem while being ostracized or excluded by a manager or coworker alongwith diminished trust and sense of powerlessness (Baloyi, 2020; Bayraktar, S. 2021). We propose as follows:

H2: Unethical leadership is positively related to workplace ostracism.

2.4 Workplace Ostracism and Job Embeddedness

Studies have revealed that ostracism which is equivalent to mistreatment, increases professionals' intention to leave (Zheng et al., 2016; Howard et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2023). Individuals experiencing ostracism may exhibit reduced productivity, a tendency towards unproductive behavior, and an impulse to quit the organization (Chen & Wang, 2019). COR's perspective on ceasing this resource depletion and parting ways with the organization is a customary alternative to prevent further harm. Hence, selecting not to continue working is a psychological strategy that reduces the importance of jobs for individuals, allowing them to naturally allocate their exceptional resources effectively (Singh & Srivastava, 2021). Furthermore, it is anticipated that individuals will not consider the possibility of exiting the business if they are able to enhance their social bonds. In contrast, their inclination to remain in workplace diminishes when they realize that endeavor to rehabilitate social links might prove unsuccessful (Ko & Lee, 2019). We propose as follows:

H3: Workplace Ostracism is negatively related to Job Embeddedness.

Recent literature has shown that ostracism in the workplace is linked to many negative outcomes such as decline in performance and greater intent to leave (Zhang et al., 2021), particularly in contexts characterized by unethical leadership (Lin, Chen & Liu, 2023; Liu et al., 2023). COR theory gives a perspective to understand the mediating role played by WO between UL and job embeddedness. Unethical leaders' behavior depletes these resources by generating a hostile work setting that can lead to the social exclusion of certain employees and they feel employees feel undervalued and excluded. This exclusion can further exacerbate the negative effects of unethical leadership, leading to increased feelings of isolation and decreased employee morale. When employees are ostracized, they often disengage from their work and reduce their efforts and contributions to conserve their remaining resources. This distress results in decreased engagement, intention to stay which adversely affects their level of job embeddedness. This study proposes as followed:

H4: Workplace Ostracism mediates the relationship between UL and employees' JE.

2.5 POS as a Moderator

The concept refers to the degree up to which workers perceive that their organization acknowledges their efforts are being acknowledged by their organization and it is concerned about employees' overall welfare (Eisenberger et al., 1986). It is based on SET, which suggests that the mutual connections between workers and their organizations influences the workplace behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Organizational support theory suggests that employees evaluate their interactions with the organization by considering the perceived support they receive in relation to their efforts and contributions. This evaluation involves a cost-benefit analysis (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). POS encompasses both tangible rewards, such as pay and benefits, and intangible incentives, including emotional support and recognition (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Previous research revealed that high levels of POS lead to higher commitment, job satisfaction and performance, as employees are motivated to reciprocate the support they receive (Fein et al., 2021; Rockstuhl et al., 2020; Oubibi, Fute, Xiao, Sun, & Zhou, 2022).

This study suggests that the perceived support/ cooperation from the workplace may lessen the detrimental impacts of unethical leadership and workplace ostracism on employees' job embeddedness. The perception of organizational support influences how individuals interpret the anticipated or unforeseen actions of other members within the workplace. Literature has revealed that work engagement contributes to the enhancement of employees' psychological well-being. Additionally, POS while working as a moderator strengthens the relationship between the level of engagement and well-being of employees (Yongxing, G., Hongfei, D., Baoguo, X., & Lei, M., 2017). Therefore, the occurrence of favorable actions among workers and within overall work environment is a progressive indicator that aids organizations in enhancing employee work-related outcomes (Virgolino, A., Coelho, A., & Ribeiro, N., 2017). In the presence of POS, such positive relationships enhance and it improves employee performance.

Conversely, when negative events occur in the working environment, it leads to a decrease in employees' well-being (Conway & Coyle-Shapiro, 2012) and a decline in performance (Ott, Haun, & Binnewies, 2019). The study conducted by Xu and Yang (2021) found that they also elevated psychological distress and increased employee turnover, as well as a decreased intention to remain in the organization. Under such circumstances, the POS plays a moderating role and helps mitigate such undesirable interactions (Scott et. al., 2014). Therefore, when unethical leaders and workplace ostracism are present in organizations, the employees' job embeddedness is expected to be low in the long run, but their perception of organizational support contributes to weakening these relationships in order to mitigate the impact of unethical leadership and workplace ostracism (Mehmood et. al., 2023). Based on the existing body of knowledge related to COR theory and SET, this study places POS as a moderator and formulates following hypotheses.

H5a: Employees' POS moderates the relationship between UL and JE, such that the direct relationship is stronger when POS is low.

H5b: Employees' POS moderates the indirect effect of UL on JE through WO, such that

the indirect effect is stronger when POS is low.

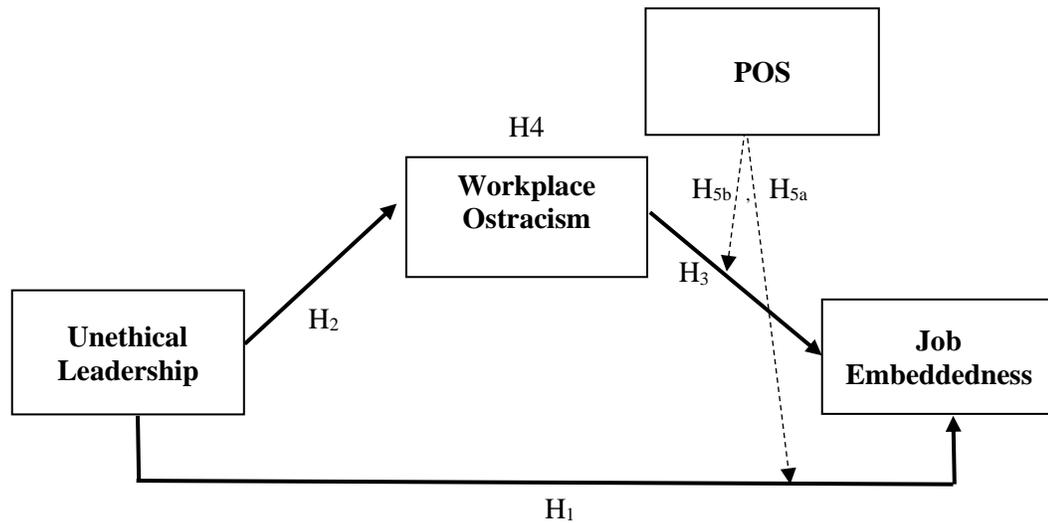


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Participants and Procedures

Data for this study was collected using a quantitative approach. A questionnaire survey was employed to collect data from the participants. The population of the study consisted of the employees from private and public banking sector of Pakistan. The sample was collected from banking sector employees through combination of stratified and convenient sampling. In line with similar recent previous studies (e.g., She et al., 2020), the convenience sampling technique was employed. Participation was voluntary but strongly encouraged and anonymity was guaranteed.

3.2 Measurements

The variables were measured using established measures from existing literature. Apart from demographic variables, Participants expressed their levels of agreement or disagreement with the statements using a 5-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 to 5. (“1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree”).

3.2.1 Unethical Leadership

UL was measured with seven items by scale of Pitesa and Thau (2013). A sample items was, “My leader says something hurtful to someone at work”. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for this scale was 0.887.

3.2.2 Workplace Ostracism

WO was measured using the ten-item scale developed by Ferris et al. (2008). A sample item was, “others ignored you at work”. In this study, the scale’s Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was 0.834.

3.2.3 Perceived Organizational Support

POS was measured using the 8-item scale of Eisenberger et al., (1986). A sample items was, “My organization really cares about my well-being”. This variable has a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.873.

3.2.4 Job Embeddedness

Job embeddedness was measured by using the scale of Crossley et al. (2007), containing seven items. A sample item was, “I feel attached to this organization”. The scale’s Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was 0.809.

3.2.5 Control variables

Due to their known effects in the study variables, gender, age, marital status, experience, level of education, sector and were utilized as control variables because of their relevance with employees’ behavior of staying in the organization (Howard et al., 2019; Weng, Wu, McElroy, & Chen, 2018).

4.0 Findings and Results

4.1. Demographics Analysis

A total of 700 questionnaires were distributed, and 577 were returned, resulting a response rate of 82.4%. After discarding any incomplete or inconsistent responses, a total of 543 valid responses were utilized for the purpose of data analysis, resulting in a final response rate of 77.5%.

Table 1: Demographics Analysis (N=543)

Items	N	%
Gender		
Male	351	65%
Female	192	35%
Age		
18-24	33	6%
25-31	295	54%
32-38	124	23%
39-45	61	11%
46 & Above	30	6%
Marital Status		
Single	165	30%
Married	378	70%
Sector	543	
Public	131	24%
Private	412	76%
Total Experience		
0-5 years	163	30%
6-10 years	279	51%
11-15 years	68	13%
16 years and above	33	6%
Education Level		100%
Graduation	68	12.5%
Masters	428	79%
M.Phil.	42	8%
PhD	5	1%

Table 1 presents the respondents’ demographic profiles included in the questionnaire age, marital status, gender, sector, education level and total experience. In terms of gender, male respondents were more (65%) than females (35%). Regarding the participants' age, 6% were 18-

24 years old, 54% were 25-31, 23% were 32-38, 11% were 39-45, and 6% were 46 and older. Regarding education level, all participants were educated: 68 (12.5%) had a graduation's degree, 79% had a master's degree, and 8% were having M.Phil. degree and 1% had a doctoral degree. Married participants were 378 (70%) while singles made upto 30%. Regarding experience, 30% had 0-5 years, 51% had 6-10 years, 13% had 11-15 years, and 6% had 16 years or more. Finally, the majority worked in the private sector (76%), while 24% worked in government sector banks.

4.2. Deviation test of Common Method Bias

In this study, a multi-stage data collection technique was used to avoid common method bias (CMB). Harman's single-factor test assessed CMB, revealing that the first un-rotated factor explained 24.65% of the variance, which is below the 50% threshold. This indicates that CMB was not a significant issue in our data.

4.3. Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlations

Table 2 displays the mean, standard deviations and correlation of the study variables. The mean average score for UL was ($M = 4.823$; $SD = .326$). The mean and SD of WO scale was 4.889 and 0.066 respectively. The mean of POS was 4.741 with SD value of 0.365. Finally, the mean and SD value of JE scale was 1.895 and 0.198 respectively.

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation

S. No.	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Gender	1.353	0.478	-									
2	Age	2.558	0.962	0.880**	-								
3	Marital status	1.696	0.460	0.489**	0.574**	-							
4	Sector	1.758	0.428	0.417**	0.524**	0.853**	-						
5	Experience	1.946	0.816	0.676**	0.782**	0.864**	0.748**	-					
6	Qualification	2.681	0.697	0.045	0.149**	0.396	0.495**	0.192**	-				
7	UL	4.823	0.326	0.012	0.025	0.009	-0.007	0.030	0.018	-			
8	WO	4.889	0.066	0.008	0.017	-0.005	-0.016	0.017	-0.056	0.280	-		
9	POS	4.741	0.365	0.070	0.078	0.077	0.060	0.084*	0.000	0.015	-0.030	-	
10	JE	1.895	0.198	0.003	-0.002	-0.001	0.016	-0.038	0.013	-0.447**	-0.260**	0.346**	-

UL= Unethical Leadership, WO= Workplace Ostracism, POS=Perceived Organizational Support, JE= Job Embeddedness, *p <0.05, **p <0.01, two-tailed, SD = standard deviation,

4.4. Measurement Model

The data analysis evaluated the measurement model to verify its reliability and validity. We estimated scale's reliability through Cronbach's Alpha. Table 3 displays Cronbach's alpha coefficients of each measure adopted in this study: Unethical Leadership $\alpha = .887$; workplace ostracism $\alpha = .834$; POS $\alpha = .873$ and job embeddedness $\alpha = .809$. The value of Cronbach's alpha in our study variables was above the threshold of 0.70 and were in acceptable range (Chin, Gopal, and Salisbury, 1997). We administered CFA to evaluate the measurement model. This study applied the items for analysis only if the factor loading was more significant than 0.5. The chi square value ($\chi^2/df = 3.14$, $p < 0.05$) less than the prescribed value limit of 5, Comparative Fit Index

(CFI) of 0.86 and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) of 0.85 are close to the acceptable threshold of 0.90, while the root means square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.06, and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) of 0.05 indicate a reasonable fit. This study utilized the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) to assess the discriminant validity. Table 4 displays HTMT values which are within acceptable threshold of below 0.90 (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

Table 3: Cronbach’s Reliability Coefficients

Variables	Cronbach’s alpha value	No. of Items	Source
Unethical Leadership	.887	7	Pitesa and Thau (2013)
Workplace Ostracism	.834	10	Ferris et al. (2008)
POS	.873	8	Eisenberger et al., (1986)
Job Embeddedness	.809	7	Mitchell et al. (2001)

Table 4: Discriminant Validity: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Variables	1	2	3	4
Unethical Leadership	–			
Workplace ostracism	0.377	–		
POS	0.050	0.016	–	
Job Embeddedness	0.880	0.539	0.267	–

4.5. Structural Model

The study hypotheses were test through path analysis. Table 5 displays the results of the regression models that provide insight into the hypotheses. First, we examined the direct effect of UL and JE. The UL has significant and negative direct effect on JE ($\beta = -0.452, p < 0.01$), thus proving the first hypothesis of the study. The adjusted R square=55.11% indicates UL variance in JE. The F-value 666.4 displays that model significantly predicts JE from UL. Moreover, UL ($\beta = 0.074, p < 0.01$) positively relates to WO, supporting Hypothesis 2. The adjusted R square=0.1306 indicates that the UL explains 13.06% of the variance in WO. The F-value 82.45 significantly predicts WO from UL. Furthermore, WO has a significant negative effect on JE ($\beta = -0.802, p < 0.01$). Higher WO is associated with lower job embeddedness. The adjusted R square value 0.6126 indicates that the WO explains 61.26% of the variance in JE. The F-value=429.6 is significant indicating that model significantly predicts JE from WO.

Table 5 Path Analysis

Hypotheses		Beta	T	p-value	Decision
H1	Unethical Leadership → Job Embeddedness	-0.452	-25.82	0.00	Supported
H2	Unethical Leadership → Workplace ostracism	0.074	9.08	0.00	Supported
H3	Workplace ostracism → Job Embeddedness	-0.802	-9.32	0.00	Supported

Remarks: **p < 0.01.

In order to investigate the mediating effects, the bootstrapping method (Jose, 2013) was

used to study the role of WO by following two-step approach (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Initially, the model was evaluated without mediator. Then, WO was evaluated as mediating variable, and the indirect effect was considered with 1,000 bootstrapping samples and confidence level of 95%. Table 6 displays the mediation analysis results, displaying the direct effect and indirect effects. The mediation analysis showed a significant negative indirect effect of WO on the relationship between UL and JE, with an ACME estimate of -0.0592 and a 95% CI of -0.1066 to -0.02 ($p < .001$). The ADE estimate was -0.3927 (95% CI: -0.4612 to -0.32, $p < .001$), indicating a strong direct negative effect of UL on JE.

Table 6: Mediation Analysis Results

	Estimates	95% CI Lower	95% CI Lower	P-value	Decision
Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME)	-0.0592	-0.1066	-0.02	***	Partial
Average Direct Effect (ADE)	-0.3927	-0.4612	-0.32	***	Mediation
Total Effect	-0.4519	-0.5215	-0.37	***	
Proportion Mediated	0.1310	0.0453	0.23	***	

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The total effect of UL on JE is -0.4519, (95% CI: -0.5215 to -0.37), highlighting the overall negative impact of UL on JE. The proportion of the total effect that is mediated by WO is 0.1310 (CI: 0.0453 to 0.23), indicating that WO serve as partial mediator in the relationship between UL and JE, supporting H4. In order to confirm partial mediation, the variance accounted for factor (VAF) was 0.1154 which confirms that 11.54% of the effect of UL on JE is mediated through WO. As stated by Hair et al. (2010), full mediation would be indicated if the VAF reached 100%.

Table 7: Moderation of Perceived Organizational Support

Hypotheses		Beta	T	p-value	Decision
H5a	Unethical Leadership * POS → Job Embeddedness	-0.473	-13.18	0.00	Supported
Adj. R square = 71.13%, F-value = 446.2					
H5b	Workplace Ostracism * POS → Job Embeddedness	-0.286	-1.264	0.207	Not Supported
Adj. R square = 74.77%, F-value = 322.2					

We examined POS as a moderator in the direct and indirect relationships between UL and JE via WO. In direct relationship the model ($R^2 = 0.7113$, $F = 446.2$) shows POS significantly moderates the effect ($\beta = -0.473$, $t = -13.184$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H5a. However, POS does not significantly moderate the indirect effect through WO ($\beta = -0.286$, $t = -1.264$, $p > 0.05$), thus, not supporting H5b.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

Unethical leadership has received less attention compared to ethical leadership, despite its

significance (Al-Dhuhouri & Shamsudin, 2023). Using COR Theory and Social Exchange Theory, this study contributes to our understanding of the relationships among UL, workplace ostracism, job embeddedness, and POS. We examined how UL impacts WO and JE, as well as the mediating effect of WO and the moderating role of POS in these relationships. The results show a significant negative relationship between UL and JE, indicating that unethical leadership weakens employees' job embeddedness. This aligns with prior studies that have shown how unethical leadership leads to lower job satisfaction and higher turnover (Majeed et al., 2023; Fairweather et al., 2022). For example, Majeed et al. (2023) found that unethical leadership decreases job satisfaction, while Fairweather et al. (2022) noted its role in fostering toxic environments that diminish employees' sense of belonging. The study also confirms that UL has a weak but positive effect on WO, while WO negatively affects JE. This suggests that employees who feel ostracized are less likely to be embedded in their jobs. Moreover, WO partially mediates the relationship between UL and JE, as UL both directly reduces job embeddedness and indirectly decreases it by increasing WO. Most of this effect (87%) is direct, suggesting that factors other than WO influence this relationship. Additionally, POS significantly moderates the relationship between UL and JE. Higher levels of POS mitigate the negative impact of UL on JE, consistent with Rhoades and Eisenberger's (2002) findings that POS helps employees maintain emotional resilience. Employees who feel supported by their organization are better able to withstand the negative effects of unethical leadership, maintaining their job embeddedness. Organizations should foster a supportive environment to buffer the harmful effects of UL, promoting job satisfaction and commitment (Eisenberger et al., 2019).

5.1 Theoretical Implications

The proposed study investigates the relationship between UL, WO, POS and JE in the banking sector of Pakistan. From an academic standpoint, this research adds into the current body of knowledge on unethical leadership by clarifying its negative impact on employee outcomes (Hassan et al., 2022). Additionally, it addresses the gap in the literature regarding the connection between this type of leadership and employee embeddedness levels. By including workplace ostracism as a mediating variable, researchers gain an enhanced awareness of effects of unethical leadership on employee outcomes (Hassan et al., 2022). This aligns with the SET, which highlights the reciprocal nature of relationships in organizational contexts (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In addition, the study also employs POS as a beneficial job asset within the framework of COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) to alleviate the adverse impact of resource depletion resulting from UL and ostracism/ social exclusion (Sarfraz et. al., 2019).

5.2 Practical Implications

From practical perspective, the results of this research have significant implications for banking institutions in Pakistan. To address the widespread occurrence of unethical leadership practices in the sector, organizations should give high priority to the formation and execution of ethical leadership training programs. These programs should focus on promoting fairness, transparency, and support for workers (Zafar, 2022). By cultivating a culture that promotes ethical leader behavior and discourage excluding behavior, banks can reduce the unfavorable impact on

employee morale, performance, and retention caused by UL. In addition, improving the POS by implementing supportive management strategies, acknowledging employee contributions, and providing essential resources can effectively decrease workplace ostracism and foster job embeddedness.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

When examining and understanding the findings of this study, it is crucial to take into account specific constraints. First of all, this study is cross-sectional. The methodology section of the study incorporated various precautions, following the suggestions of Podsakoff et al. (2003), specifically, the implementation of a two-stage data collection process. Nevertheless, it may not be viable to entirely eliminate the presence of CMV in a study of cross-sectional nature. Hence, it is recommended a prospective longitudinal study may be conducted in order to evaluate the authenticity of our findings. Moreover, the data was specifically gathered from a single geographical context in a developing country, namely Pakistan. While this location was deemed appropriate for studying our model, it is important to acknowledge that generalizability could potentially be a concern. It is advantageous to gather data from different regions with a more extensive sample in order to authenticate our results. Additionally, this research specifically targeted the banking sector in Pakistan. Examining various segments and others sectors would be more beneficial for gathering additional confirmation and recognizing any disparities among results. Furthermore, we exclusively examined WO as a mediator and POS as moderator in this study, thus, we suggest that future researchers to investigate these fundamental mechanisms by considering additional likely mediators/moderators, such as personal growth initiative, proactive personality, mindfulness (Singh & Srivastava, 2021).

5.4 Conclusion

This study offers a comprehensive analysis and a fresh outlook of the effects of unethical leadership in the workplace in the banking sector of Pakistan. Our results revealed that UL has a significant negative impact on both WO and JE, indicating that unethical behaviors in leadership can lead to detrimental effects on employee retention. Additionally, workplace ostracism was found to mediate the relationship between UL and JE, underscoring the role of social exclusion as a mechanism through which unethical behavior affects employee attachment in the workplace. Importantly, the study highlights the POS in the relationship between UL and JE. When employees perceive increased levels of POS, the adverse effects of UL on JE are less prominent. This finding underscores the importance of fostering a supportive organizational culture that prioritizes ethical leadership and employee well-being. However, the moderation of this mediated relationship by POS was not statistically significant, suggesting that organizational support does not alter the indirect effect of unethical leadership via WO on JE. The findings of this research carry significant implications for organizational practices. Future researchers may explore these relationships in different cultures with additional variables to further understand the dynamics of UL, WO, JE and POS for development of more effective strategies to improve employees' well-being in diverse work environment.

Rabia Ikram: Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework, Data Analysis,
Sadia Farooq: Supervision and Drafting

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

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