



IMPACT OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND THRIVING AT WORK ON PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF EMPLOYEES: MEDIATING ROLE OF VOICE BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract. *Purpose* – We investigated how thriving at work and ethical leadership affects the employee psychological well-being. Further, we also examined the mediating role of voice behaviour between thriving at work and employee psychological well-being as well as ethical leadership and employee psychological well-being.

Research methodology – A quantitative research method was utilized to collect data from employees of a telecommunication company. SPSS and Process Macro were used for data analysis.

Findings – Results demonstrated that thriving at work and ethical leadership are positively associated with employee psychological well-being. Furthermore, the employee voice behaviour acts as a mediator between thriving at work, ethical leadership and employee well-being.

Research limitations – All of the data in this study were collected from single source i.e., employees of information technology industry and also specific to a metropolitan city like Lahore. Further, study has a very limited representation of the females.

Practical implications – the findings suggest that organizations should create such an environment where managers are able to have positive verbal interactions with employees that may facilitate their well-being and makes them satisfied with their jobs.

Originality/Value – This study is one of the first studies to investigate the association between voice behaviour, thriving at work, employee psychological as well as psychological well-being.

Keywords: thriving at work, ethical leadership, well-being, voice behaviour.

JEL Classification: D23, O15, Q56.

Introduction

Voice behavior is often considered to be significant in the organizations because nowadays organizations depend on innovative ideas and rapid response to grow in the ever-changing

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marketplaces and excessive competition (Guzman & Espejo, 2019; Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010; Edmondson, 1999; Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Voice behavior is defined as “proactively challenging the status quo and making constructive suggestions” (Van Dyne, Cummings, & McLean Parks, 1995, p. 266). Employee voice provides a mechanism for organizational learning and to rectify the errors occur in the organizations which is critical for organizational effectiveness (Morrison, 2014). Employee voice behavior has been largely focused in the scholarly research from the past two decades, realizing the fact that raising voice is crucial for the efficiency of both employees and the organizations (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Weiss & Morrison, 2019). Even though the existing models to voice acknowledged that employees should share their ideas about the organizational errors (Morrison, 2011; Detert & Burris, 2007), however, the recently extended work has emphasized more on the role of leaders in encouraging their employees to raise their concerns and voices (Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010; Edmondson, 2003).

Extensive research indicates several predictors of employee voice behavior, which can be categorized into three broad lines (Detert & Burris, 2007). A first research stream focuses on the relationship of individual characteristics to employee voice behavior (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001). For example, research shows that satisfaction (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998) and self-efficacy (Morrison & Phelps, 1999) have a positive association with employee voice behavior. A second stream based on exit, voice, and loyalty as the primary choices for the dissatisfied employees grounded on the work of Hirschman’s (1970). A third research stream focuses the organizational factors that emphasize the employees’ willingness to raise their voice. For example, even employees who are most proactive assess that it is useful or safe to raise voice in the particular situation (Edmondson, 2003; Milliken, Schipani, Bishara, & Prado, 2015). Further, past researchers have showed a link between thriving at work and other organizational outcomes e.g. well-being and employee health (Wallace, Butts, Johnson, Stevens, & Smith, 2016; Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009), however, the underlying mechanism yet to be explored through which thriving effects those variable. Similarly, leadership behavior effects employee well-being (Donaldson-Feilder, Munir & Lewis, 2013; Kuoppala, Lamminpaa, Lira, & Vainio, 2008), but the process through which ethical leadership improves employee well-being is still to be researched. Specifically, in relation to this study the mechanism of how thriving at work and ethical leadership impact employee well-being, is still unexplored. In the light of above streams, we seek to further develop i) the individual stream by examining a new antecedent i.e. thriving at work which influences employee voice behavior. ii) The contextual stream by focusing that ethical leadership plays an important role to influence employees to provide their suggestions for the improvement of the organization and hence enhance employee psychological well-being. In addition, research shows that thriving has a positive association with some significant outcomes e.g. performance, well-being and employee health (Cullen, Gerbasi, & Chrobot-Mason, 2015), we yet have to explore how and why is this case. Similarly, previous research indicates that leader’s work behavior is associated with employee well-being (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2013), but the process through which leader’s behavior effects employee well-being is unknown (Tuckey, Bakker, & Dollard, 2012). Specifically, the mechanism of how thriving at work and ethical leadership influence employee psychological well-being is

still unexplored. Therefore, we propose that voice behavior may be a significant mediator that describes how thriving at work and ethical leadership interprets into better employee psychological well-being. Overall, the main objective of this research is to empirically test the mechanism through which employee voice behavior mediates the relationship between two independent variables thriving at work, ethical leadership and a dependent variable employee psychological well-being at workplace.

With regard to the literature in individual stream, many researchers have explored the positive features of individual stream as the predictors of voice behavior. For example, research shows that employee’s decision to speak up is influenced by their dispositional affectivity (George & Zhou, 2002). Another research established a link between voice behavior and personalities (e.g., extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness) (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001). In this study, we are suggesting thriving as a new positive antecedent of employee voice to further advance the literature in this stream (see Figure 1). In the recent literature of positive organizational scholarship, the concept of thriving has gained attention of resaerchers (Abid, Torres, Ahmed, & Qazi, 2019; Abid, Sajjad, Elahi, Farooqi & Nisar, 2018; Patterson, Luthans, & Jeung, 2014). Although researchers have emphasized on thriving for organizations (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012), “research on thriving at work has been quite sparse” (Walumbwa, Muchiri, Misati, Wu, & Meiliani, 2017; Niessen, Sonnentag, & Sach, 2012, p. 468).

Moreover, with respect to the contextual stream, the importance of leaders to help employees raising their voice is more focused in the recent years (Morrison, 2011; Detert & Burris, 2007). Some examples include, McClean, Burris and Detert (2013) investigated the relationship of leaders’ characteristics with employee voice. Another research shows impact of psychological attachment and influence of LMX on employee voice (Burris, Detert, & Chiaburu, 2008). Detert and Burris (2007) tested how leaders’ openness encourages improvement-oriented voice behavior. To extend this track, we researched the impact of ethical leadership on employee voice. The outcomes of ethical leadership behavior have been addressed in few studies (Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009). However, the recent research supports the evidences that there is a favorable range of outcomes of ethical leadership (Mayer et al., 2009; Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005).

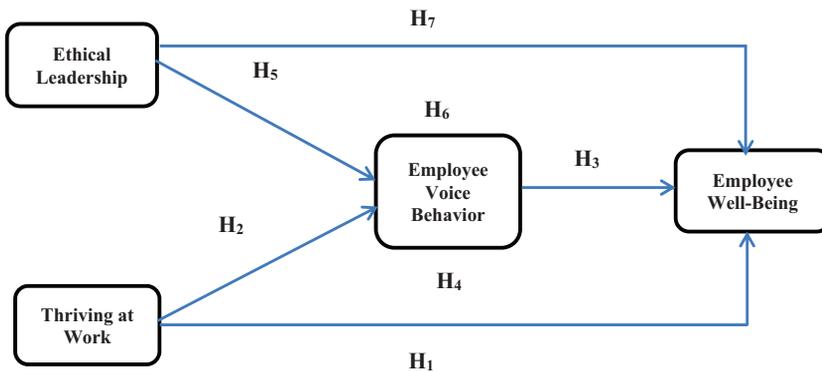


Figure 1. Theoretical model

In addition, a more clear research is required to know the process by which ethical leadership affects some significant outcomes for the leadership research and practice (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009).

Previous research indicates that speaking up may influence the employees themselves. By raising voice, employees can individually demonstrate their opinions, which may lead to create a constructive work attitude (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Voice may help to improve the motivation and satisfaction of employees (Greenberger & Strasser, 1986) and their social status (Weiss & Morrison, 2019). Morrison (2011) suggested that the outcomes of voice behavior can benefit employees in the workplace as it brings constructive ideas, recovers everyday work conditions, and improves task efficiency. We study the impact of thriving and ethical leadership on employee psychological well-being. Employee well-being is important as the organizational commitment is associated with it (Danna & Griffin, 1999) and deficiency of well-being results in reduced job performance (Motowidlo, Packard, & Manning, 1986).

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) suggests that individuals build social or transactional relations at work on the basis of their personal experiences with each other. These relations may depend on monetary or social exchanges (Bishop, Scott, & Burroughs, 2000). Relationships based on monetary exchanges are short term and transactional in nature. Employees feel obligated in economic exchange for the period of that particular exchange. While, social exchange relationships are long term and based on trust and emotional associations with each other. This theory particularly explains that people behavioral reactions depend on the kind and level of attachment with the other person. Moreover, the theory posits that the beneficial decisions taken by the leaders help to build high quality relationships with their employees. In this way, employees feel obligated to respond back in the same constructive way at work (Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996).

Employee voice behavior is also a way of social exchange. Leaders can build trustful relationships with their employees by treating them fairly. Ethical leadership encourages employees' positive behaviors. Ethical leaders are concerned about the well-being of their employees (Brown et al., 2005). Leaders have authority over rewards and resources and they may use this authority to motivate employees to fulfill their obligations/contracts. When the leader takes honest and fair decisions, then employees see this relationship with their leader as a social exchange and take it as an obligation. Raising constructive voice is another way to fulfill this obligation. Employees give innovative ideas and suggestions or they raise voice against inappropriate actions to improve the organizational system (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009).

The socially embedded model of thriving (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005) suggests that individual's growth, development and well-being improves with thriving at work. Spreitzer's model explains that individuals thrive more when they work in a particular context. Two characteristics of work have been taken in this study. The unit contextual features and the resources produced at work. The environment encourages honesty and respect, and then they are more likely to thrive by responding with agentic behaviors. Agentic behavior means that individuals perform actively and they show more determination at work (Bandura, 2001). The agentic behaviors give rise to such resources which promote back these agentic behaviors more and thus increase thriving at work.

1. Literature review and hypotheses development

1.1. Employee voice behavior

The notion of the voice was initially mentioned by Hirschman (1970). He believed that voice behavior was critical because employees can identify some kind of dissatisfaction for improving their well-being (Hirschman, 1970). In this way, deficiencies can be substituted by interventions and modifications in the organization. Since in today's competitive organizational life, it is required to adapt the changing environment and to intervene accordingly. Thus, voice behavior is inevitable serving to the realization of this goal. Employee voice behavior is conceptualized as "promotive behavior that emphasizes expression of constructive challenge intended to improve rather than merely criticize" (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998, p. 109).

In another research, employee voice behavior is described as a deliberate exchange of concerned information and ideas to make an organizational improvement (Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). Similar dimensions of voice behavior has been defined by some other researchers (e.g., Liang, C.I. C. Farh, & J. Farh, 2012), including the intentional behaviors at work for the organizational betterment. This conceptualization of voice as constructive has become the prominent one in the literature. It explains that voice is a constructive expression of new ideas, suggestions, or concerns (Chamberlin, Newton & Lepine, 2017). Indeed, employee voice is considered to be an extra role challenging behavior that is important for modernization, growth and avoidance of error at work (Weiss & Morrison, 2019; Morrison, 2014).

1.2. Thriving and well-being

The concept of thriving at work is crucial in today's complex organizational environment because "it helps individuals to promote their development by changing their work context and it increases their functioning and adaptability at workplace" (Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 537). Thriving at work is defined as "one's feeling of personal growth, getting better or gaining forward momentum at work" (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009, p. 173). When employees thrive, their personal abilities continuously grow at work (Abid et al., 2018). Spreitzer conceptualized "thriving as the combined experience of sense of learning and vitality at workplace" (Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 538; Spreitzer & Sutcliffe, 2007). Learning is characterized by the sense of continuous improvement towards employees' work (Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, & Garnett, 2012). Whereas vitality is the feeling of positivity and aliveness on the basis of available energy among employees (Porath et al., 2012). Learning and vitality are the two components of thriving and help to improve each other. If employees learn at work but they feel lethargic, they are not thriving. Similarly, thriving doesn't exist if employees feel energetic but unable to learn at work (Elahi, Abid, Arya, & Farooqi, 2019).

Employee well-being is the synonym for happiness (Fan et al., 2014), and refers to the employees' positive evaluation about their quality of lives. Individuals make judgments about their lives after subjective analysis, summarizing and measuring their living conditions (Keyes, 2014). As everyone wants happiness, so well-being is considered to be the ultimate aim of human survival and one of the most precious goals of an individual's life (Diener &

Oishi, 2000). Indeed, well-being has been conceptualized by different means (Van de Voorde, Paauwe, & Van Veldhoven, 2011). For example, Danna and Griffin (1999) conceptualized that we should consider the whole employee while explaining employee well-being. Another example is of work-related well-being which takes the employee's experience and functioning as a whole at work. (Warr, 1987; Grant, Christianson, & Price, 2007). Therefore, as the previous research indicates, employee well-being is the general attitude of employees at work and towards the organization. Grant et al. (2007) described that employee psychological well-being (i.e. happiness) emphasis on the subjective practices of employees at work. Employee psychological well-being is the state in which individuals perceive their lives positively and describe that how much they are satisfied in their lives (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). It further involves that how an individual responds emotionally and how much he is satisfied from his work, health or family life etc. (Spreitzer et al., 2005) which eventually brings the positivity in life.

Research shows that thriving is related to many organizational outcomes like innovation, improved health, better performance and self-improvement (Wallace et al., 2016). Thriving at work is a crucial aspect that may help to attain long term productivity through employee well-being (Abid, Contreras, Ahmed, & Qazi, 2019). Further, the consequences of thriving in employees at workplace include better identification of career opportunities and fond of learning prospects (Elahi et al., 2019). Employees who experience thriving at work tend to be proactive, resilient and more physically and psychologically healthy (Nawaz, Abid, Arya, Bhatti, & Farooqi, 2018). In today's challenging work setting, thriving is significant for employees as they need to learn to promote their development and to maintain their physical and psychological health and well-being (Spreitzer et al., 2005; Pfeffer, 2010).

Spreitzer and Porath (2014) defined, "thriving is a desirable subjective experience that helps individuals to understand what and how they are doing, and whether it is increasing their individual functioning and adaptability at work" (p. 247). An experience of vitality and aliveness in individuals helps to overcome the anxiety and depression and thus they feel healthier mentally and physically which brings positivity in life and improves their well-being (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012, 2014; Keyes, 2002). Employees get motivated by their own energy when they thrive at work (Spreitzer et al., 2005), which may help to improve employee psychological well-being. Thriving is a desirable psychological state that forecasts how individuals develop the skills to thrive at work (Kira & Balkin, 2014; Spreitzer et al., 2005) and thereby enhance well-being. Qaiser, Abid, Arya, and Farooqi (2018) found a positive association between thriving and happiness at work. Spreitzer et al. (2005) explained that thriving has two components, i.e. learning and vitality, and with the blended experience of both components of thriving, employees may improve their well-being. Thus we hypothesize that,

H1: Thriving has a positive relationship with employee psychological well-being.

1.3. Thriving and employee voice behavior

Thriving is an essential factor to promote employee voice behavior. It encompasses learning and vitality (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Individuals learn when they obtain new skills and knowledge according to the demand of their work (Edmondson, 1999), while vitality encompasses

feelings of aliveness and energy as an outcome of an individual's efforts at work (Nix, Ryan, Manly, & Deci, 1999). Thriving at work enhances employee's creativity, productivity and satisfaction at work. Due to constant learning and feelings of vitality at work, employees show more commitment and devotion towards the organization (Elahi et al., 2019).

Learning at work, being the first element of thriving, is an important foundation for employee voice behavior. When individuals learn at workplace, they can better predict and identify issues, and propose better solutions (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009). In today's competitive business environment, firms need better ideas from workers, particularly where employees are often engaged directly with clients and find prospects for improvement in the system. Thriving flourishes skills and abilities, which legitimizes the individuals in the eyes of others and further increases their confidence to raise voice to bring necessary changes and 'move beyond the status quo' (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009) and they implement whatever they learn so that they can bring constructive change at work. Vitality at work, being the second element of thriving, brings energy and motivation to the workers. This energy encourages individuals to do more than the defined duties and roles. Thriving is a desirable state at workplace; and when individuals thrive, they are intrinsically motivated which encourages their voice behavior. With continuous learning and energized feeling, employees experience momentum and thrust at workplace. Edmondson (1999) and Spreitzer et al. (2005) argued that if an atmosphere of care, respect and trust is built between employees, it also encourages raising voice because employees feel safe at workplace which enhances risk taking behavior. Employees who experience thriving at work are psychologically strong which helps them to take initiatives (Abid et al., 2018). The feelings of thriving at work enhances self confidence of employees so they share and implement new ideas and practices (Elahi et al., 2019). Hence, when employees experience thriving at work their level to raise voice at work is likely to increase. We thus hypothesize that:

H2: Thriving at work is positively associated with employee voice behavior.

1.4. Employee voice behavior and well-being

Hirschman (1970) believed that voice behavior is critical; because employees can raise their voice in some kind of dissatisfaction or they may take the opportunity to improve their well-being. Employee voice behavior is defined as "an individual's voluntary and open communication directed towards the individuals within the organization that is focused on influencing the context of the work environment" (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014, p. 88). As employees raise voice, they expect from the leaders or management to make necessary changes and resolve the organizational errors, it may help to improve employee well-being. If employees get a sense that their ideas or concerns are not valued at work, then they may feel reduced self-efficacy, self-control and well-being (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). On the other hand, the leaders who are concerned to improve the well-being of their employees, motivate them to speak up and listen their concerns and make rational decisions about problems at work (Brown et al., 2005).

If employees feel that speaking up about their problems, ideas and suggestions would be listened positively by the managers, then it can have encouraging effects on their individual

behavior (Milliken et al., 2015). One of the positive effects of providing voice opportunity to employees might lead to employee's well-being. Hence, we hypothesize that:

H3: Employee voice behavior has a positive relationship with well-being.

1.5. Employee voice behavior as a mediator between thriving and employee well-being

Van Dyne and LePine (1998) conceptualized employee voice as “primitive behavior that emphasizes expression of constructive challenge intended to improve the situation” (p. 109). Employee voice behavior is based on constructive and promotive dimensions. It is defined as “the voluntary expression of ideas, information, or opinions focused on effecting organizationally functional change to the work context.”

When individuals experience thriving at work, they feel healthy both psychologically and physically and less depressed which leads to the positivity in life and well-being (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012, 2014; Keyes, 2002). According to Spreitzer et al. (2005), thriving develops the innovation skills among employees hence they feel more creative. Due to the feelings of learning and vitality at work, employees build strong social connections and share their knowledge at work (Elahi et al., 2019). This brings out more confidence in employees and they raise their voice for constructive change at work. The socially embedded model of thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005) states that employees' development, health foster with thriving. Employees who thrive at work, raise their voice to create new and eminent ideas which helps to improve their well-being as well.

Moreover, in the light of Blau's social exchange theory (1964), it can be argued that employees who experience thriving have a better constructive voice behavior because they feel positive emotions (vitality), which enhances their cognitive capacities and self-efficacy, and this will urge them to speak up easily. Furthermore, in their career development process, employees would try their best in exchange for what organization has provided them. They exhibit constructive voice to bring about positive initiate the change to work in a more efficient and effective way, which helps to improve their well-being as well. On the basis of the above arguments, we postulate the following hypothesis:

H4: Employee voice behavior mediates the relationship between thriving and well-being.

1.6. Ethical leadership and employee voice behavior

Ethical leadership remained a topic of interest from years for effective leadership (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). The recent research on leadership is also focused on ethical behaviors of leaders (Anwar, Abid & Waqas, 2020) and their influence on employee's voice (Islam, Ahmed, & Ali, 2019). Ethical leadership is defined as the “demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and social interactions, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (Brown et al., 2005, p. 120). Ethical leaders built quality relationships with the employees that are not only dependent on the mutual financial benefits, but also the exchange of social norms (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Ethical leaders construct highly truthful relations with their employees (Brown et al., 2005). As a result, followers idealize their leaders who make

ethical decisions and they pay attention to improve the well-being of their employees and the organization (Brown et al., 2005). Ethical leaders have the ability to handle the external pressures and their actions show their espoused values. When leaders' actions give impression that their decisions are according to their fundamental values, employees also get the feelings of openness (Cha & Edmondson, 2006) which encourage them to speak up about their concerns and share their ideas with personal consent (Wood & Wall, 2007).

The concept of employee voice behavior revolves around whether employees raise their voice about problems at work and give recommendations for the betterment at work or decide to remain silent. Employees' choice of raising voice depends on their personal evaluation that their concerns will be valued by the management and they will not be penalized for raising voice. To speak out for the need to improve a program or policy may feel hazardous. Employee voice is dependent on leader's behavior for two major reasons (Emerson, 1962; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). First, employees raise their voice to managers to get the attention of organization about the particular problem and to allocate resources to solve it. Second, managers have a control over benefits or penalties; therefore, employee voice behavior depends on the behavior of their leaders (Depret & Fiske, 1993).

Ethical leaders make balanced decisions and raise their voice if any improper actions are taken in the organization. Employees observe those actions taken by the leaders and they try to follow the same ethical behavior at work (Bandura, 1977). Managers who speak up and disagree with the erroneous organizational actions convey inspiration for employee's behavior at work. Ethical leaders may reinforce these norms by giving the rewards and punishments to the employees. Employees intensely observe the consequences of speaking out as being punished or encouraged. Therefore, when leaders give message through their actions that they encourage ethical and fair evaluation procedures and they listen to their employees, then employees get inspiration to raise their voice against inappropriate actions. If such ethical behavior is missing in the leaders then employees may find subordinates may find some risk (e.g., demotion or humiliation) as outweighing perceived benefits (e.g., money or promotion). Thus, leaders' actions are most important for the organization as employees follow their actions and hence considered to be the actions of the whole organization (Grojean, Resick, Dickson, & Smith, 2004).

Managers may influence the employee voice behavior through status or by supporting them socially. Employees trust ethical leaders as they listen to employee apprehensions (Brown et al., 2005) and they create environment for the employees to raise voice about their concerns. Brown et al. (2005) research shows a significant association between ethical leadership and employees' willingness to speak up. Moreover, another research shows a strong cross-level relationship between ethical leadership and employee voice behavior (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009). Ethical leaders are not only concern about the ethical matters but they also encourage their subordinates to raise voice against other work related issues in the organization. When employees feel that leaders are interested in listening their concerns at work and they encourage better communication and periodically ask questions about employees' problems, then employees try to follow-up the same. In these ways, ethical leaders can convey that speaking up is appreciated and important for organizational improvement. Therefore, our hypothesis is:

H5: Ethical leadership is positively related to employee voice behavior.

1.7. Employee voice behavior as a mediator between ethical leadership and employee well-being

Ethical leaders are altruistic and honest. Employee voice behavior is encouraged when personal values and workplace values are supposed to be aligned, which also create personal congruence among employees (Bono & Judge, 2003). Contrarily, Cha and Edmondson (2006) proposed that employees get disappointed and perceive negative feelings, if the leaders show the expression of incongruence at work. Employees get positive emotions when speaking up and actions are in congruence with their values, which raises the sense of self-empowerment. Employee empowerment is related to employee performance as it gives the feelings of power and involvement at work (Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004) and also enhances the employee well-being (Prilleltensky, 2005).

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), states that individuals see relationships at work as an economic or social exchange. Ethical leaders encourage their employees to speak up about their problems and take honest and sincere decisions which are important for the well-being of subordinates (Brown et al., 2005) and hence voice behavior also becomes a way of social exchange to pay back the obligation. Therefore, we argue that ethical leadership and employee well-being has a significant relationship that will be indirectly transmitted through employee voice behavior. Thus we hypothesize that

H6: Employee voice behavior mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and well-being.

1.8. Ethical leadership and employee well-being

Research shows that manager's leadership behavior and style inspires employee behaviors and well-being (Gerstner & Day 1997; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996). Ethical leadership is conceptualized as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement and decision making" (Brown et al., 2005, p. 120). While, employee well-being involves employees' general experience towards the work and the organization (Danna & Griffin, 1999). Social exchange theory proposes that beneficial and positive actions demonstrated to the employees by their managers develop higher quality relationships that create responsibility in employees to response back in the same constructive way (Blau, 1964; Settoon et al., 1996). Ethical leaders are reliable and concerned about the well-being of their employees and they raise voice against unfair decisions and also encourage employees to speak up to make rational judgments (Chughtai, Byrne, & Flood, 2014; Brown et al., 2005).

When leaders keep a direct contact with their employees, it may help to inspire employees' work lives. Leaders may communicate with their employees by giving them feedback about work and tell them about achievements or laggings. Leaders use different techniques to motivate employees, e.g. rewards, promotions, awards and coaching, etc. Therefore, leaders' actions may create a significant impact to improve employees' well-being. Leaders' positive behavior may enhance employee's well-being (Liu, Siu & Shi, 2009; Nielsen & Munir, 2009).

Ethical leaders are honest and perceived as ethical decision makers. They always try to improve their employee's well-being and their actions show their ethics both at work and in their personal lives (Chughtai et al., 2014). Furthermore, ethical leaders follow themselves what they say (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Ethical leaders try to create an ethical environment at work by demonstrating ethical behavior and communicating ethical standards to employees (Brown et al., 2005; Brown & Trevino, 2006) which may improve the employee well-being. Thus we hypothesize,

H7: Ethical leadership has a positive relationship with employee well-being.

2. Methodology

In order to collect data, we employed purposive sample technique and collected data from one of the largest fiber optic telecommunication company in south asia providing telecommunication and data services. We chose telecommunication industry because it is an important fast growing sector in Pakistan but yet underexplored in the domain of employee voice behavior. There are more than 150 m cellular users and the industry employed over 1.36 m people. The company selected to collect data is the first one to commercially roll out a WIMAX network nationwide. It has more than 250,000 WIMAX subscribers, provides enterprise solutions and data services to over 200 leading organizations. Purposive sampling technique was adopted because, to the best of our knowledge the voice behaviour of employees from telecommunication sector has not been investigated previously. Among two large telecom organizations working in the region, one was selected to collect the sample as the other refused to share data. Prior to the survey, the respondents were briefed verbally and also it is written on the questionnaire that their confidentiality would be secured and that the data they provide will only be used for research purposes. Moreover, the employees were ensured that their managers would not see the responses they filed in and that their performance appraisals would in no way be affected by this survey. To minimize common method bias, a time lag of two weeks between data collection was used. At Time 1 information regarding demographics, thriving and ethical leadership was collected, while at Time 2 (two weeks after T1) information on voice behavior and well-being was taken. The interference of researcher was kept minimal during data collection so that the responses remain free from the observer effect and unbiased results could be obtained.

In order to generalize our study outcomes, the sample size is selected by following Kline (2015) who suggested that 10 respondents against each item in the questionnaire (i.e., No. of items in the questionnaire \times 10 respondents from targeted population) from target population is an essential condition to infer best possible results about the target population. As our survey instrument consisted of 28 items, so the sample size of 280 participants would be quite sufficient to analyze our model as well as to generalize our findings. By keeping in mind the possibilities of missing data and non-respondents, we targeted 400 employees.

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed out of which 320 were returned. Screening of incomplete questionnaires and those that were positive on extremity bias was carried out giving us a final usable sample of 297 employees for both times 1 and 2 collectively. This

gave us a response rate of approximately 93%. Out of 297 respondents, 254 were males while the rest were females, giving us a male-dominated sample. According to the marital status, most of the respondents were married ($n = 203$) followed by single (74). As per education, the majority ($n = 197$) respondents had 16 years of education.

2.1. Measures

2.1.1. Ethical leadership

Ethical leadership was measured by a ten item scale by Brown et al. (2005). A sample item was "Listens to what employees have to say". The scale was measured on 5-point Likert type scale (1 = extremely unlikely to 5 = extremely likely). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.80.

2.1.2. Thriving at work

Thriving at work was measured by a ten item scale by Porath et al. (2012). A sample item was "I find myself learning often". The scale was measured on 5-point Likert type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.78.

2.1.3. Voice behavior

Voice was measured by a three item scale by Detert and Burris (2007). A sample item was "I challenge manager to deal with problems around here". The scale was measured on 5-point Likert type scale (1 = never to 5 = always). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.75.

2.1.4. Employee well-being

Well-being was measured by a five item measure through Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985). A sample item was "In most ways my life is close to my ideal." The scale was measured on 5-point Likert type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.70.

2.1.5. Control variables

Since the data for this study was conducted in the non-contrived organizational setting there could be have been multiple factors that were affecting the well-being of employees. Hence, variables like age, gender, marital status, educational level and tenure were taken as control variables, so that the effect of ethical leadership and thriving on the well-being of employees can be seen above and beyond these control variables.

3. Data analysis

We followed previous approaches of researchers to conduct data analysis (Abid et al., 2019; Butt, Abid, Arya, & Farooqi, 2018) and tested the proposed hypotheses. Specifically, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using the IBM AMOS (maximum likelihood) software version 24 to test the factorial structure and the adequacy of our hypothesized four-factor measurement model. Subsequent to the CFA, hypotheses were tested using a PROCESS macro analysis (Hayes, 2012). The PROCESS macro analysis was selected because

based on bootstrap sampling it has been recognized as a solid and rigorous approach for detecting the significance of conditional indirect effects (Abid et al., 2019; Anwar et al., 2020).

A total of two models were tested: a four-factor model (i.e. ethical leadership, thriving at work, voice behavior, and well-being) were compared with one-factor (all constructs combined into one factor) alternate model. The CFA results advocate that our four factor model (full measurement model) has proved better fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.93$, GFI = 0.92, IFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.91, SRMR = 0.04, RMSEA = 0.08) (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Hu & Bentler, 1999) as statistics are provided. Furthermore, it is considered better as compared to the other one-factor alternative model ($\chi^2/df = 7.42$, GFI = 0.55, IFI = 0.28, CFI = 0.27, SRMR = 0.10, RMSEA = 0.15).

3.1. Construct validity

The discriminant validity among the study constructs was examined using Fornell and Larcker (1981) approach. According to this approach, the square root of AVE of constructs should be greater than the correlations of other study constructs. The square root of AVE for well-being (0.66), ethical leadership (0.68), thriving at work (0.87) and voice behavior (0.75) were found greater than the correlations of other construct and consequently, discriminant validity has been established. Moreover, composite reliability values of all the study constructs range from 0.70 to 0.85, hence meeting the threshold criteria and ensuring the convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Correlational analysis was carried out to initially test the hypotheses. Table 1 shows that age, education and tenure, have insignificant correlations with our study variables. Ethical leadership which is one of the independent variable of the study, is observed to have a significant relationship with the voice behavior ($r = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$) which is the mediator of the study. Similarly, thriving ($r = 0.39$, $p < 0.01$), the other independent variable also has a significant relationship with the mediator, voice behavior. These significant behaviors between the independent variables and the mediator fulfill a necessary pre-condition for mediation analysis. Moreover, voice behavior is significantly related with well-being ($r = 0.39$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 1. Standard deviations, means, and correlation

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	32.76	4.77	1					
2. Education	16.23	0.94	-0.06	1				
3. Tenure	6.84	4.23	0.27**	-0.02	1			
4. Ethical Leadership	4.04	0.53	-0.01	0.08	0.00	1		
5. Thriving at Work	4.14	0.42	-0.01	-0.01	-0.00	-0.02	1	
6. Voice Behavior	3.72	0.90	-0.04	0.06	0.07	0.18**	0.39**	1
7. Well-Being	3.80	0.49	-0.03	-0.02	-0.05	0.12*	0.29**	0.39**

Note: n = 297;

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

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In order to carry our regression analysis it is necessary to test a few assumptions first. In the current study multicollinearity and autocorrelation was checked and verified prior to hypotheses testing. Table 2 shows that the VIF values for all study variables is less than 5 which is the cut-off acceptable value for this test. In order to check the autocorrelation (a relationship between values separated from each other by a given time lag), Durbin-Watson (Durbin & Watson, 1951) test was carried out. Since the value of Durbin-Watson for our study is 0.274, there is a positive autocorrelation in our data.

Table 2. Assumptions of regression

Multicollinearity		
Variables	VIF	Tolerance
Thriving at work	1.19	0.84
Voice Behavior	1.23	0.81
Ethical Leadership	1.05	0.96
Autocorrelation		
Durbin-Watson		0.27

3.2. Mediation testing

We analyze whether the influence of thriving at work on employee well-being could be explained through employee voice behavior. The outcomes of SPSS Process Macro (Table 3) illustrated that the direct effect of thriving at work on employee well-being was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.18, t = 2.66, p < 0.01$), providing support for Hypothesis 1. Consistent with our expectations for Hypothesis 2, thriving at work showed a positive and significant impact on voice behavior ($\beta = 0.83, t = 7.17, p < 0.00$). Further, the association between employee voice behavior and well-being was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.18, t = 5.71, p < 0.00$), favoring Hypothesis 3.

Table 3. Regression results for thriving at work and well-being

	B	SE	T	p		
Direct and total effects						
Well-being regressed on thriving at work (total effect)	0.32	0.07	5.01	0.00		
Voice behavior regressed on thriving at work	0.83	0.12	7.17	0.00		
Well-being regressed on voice behavior, controlling for thriving at work	0.18	0.03	5.71	0.00		
Well-being regressed on thriving at work, controlling for voice behaviour	0.18	0.07	2.66	0.01		
	Value	SE	LL 95%CI	UL 95%CI	Z	P
Indirect effect and significance using the normal distribution						
Sobel	0.15	0.03	0.10	0.21	4.44	0.00
	Value	SE	LL 95%CI	UL 95%CI		
Bootstrap results for indirect effect						
Effect	0.15	0.03	0.10	0.21		

Note: n = 297; β = Unstandardized Regression Coefficient; SE = Standard Error; Bootstrap Sample Size = 1000; LL = Lower Limit; CI = Confidence Interval; UL = Upper Limit.

Moreover, the outcomes of simple mediation model (Table 3) support the indirect influence of thriving at work on employee well-being. Outcomes of the mediation model were also examined using the Sobel test. This test is used to authenticate whether or not a mediator explains the association between predictor and the criterion variable. The formal two-tailed significance test (assuming a normal distribution) demonstrated that the (unstandardized) indirect effect (0.15) was positive and significant as Sobel $z = 4.44$ and $p < 0.00$. The bootstrapping, without making any assumption about the shape of the sampling distribution (i.e., normality), confirmed the Sobel test results with identical indirect effect value 0.15, as a 95% bootstrap confidence interval for this indirect effect did not contain zero (0.10, 0.21). This provides support for Hypothesis 4.

Table 4 shows the relationship of ethical leadership on employee well-being through voice behavior. The direct effect of ethical leadership on voice behavior is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.29$, $t = 2.86$, $p < 0.00$), providing support for Hypothesis 5. The association between ethical leadership and employee well-being is not significant ($\beta = 0.06$, $t = 1.21$, $p > 0.05$), so our hypothesis 7 is not supported.

Table 4. Regression results for ethical leadership and well-being

		B	SE	t	p	
Direct and total effects						
Well-being regressed on ethical leadership (total effect)		0.12	0.05	2.22	0.03	
Voice behavior regressed on ethical leadership		0.29	0.10	2.86	0.00	
Well-being regressed on voice behaviour, controlling for ethical leadership		0.20	0.03	6.94	0.00	
Well-being regressed on ethical leadership, controlling for voice behaviour		0.06	0.05	1.21	0.23	
	value	SE	LL 95%CI	UL 95%CI	Z	P
Indirect effect and significance using the normal distribution						
Sobel	0.06	0.02	0.02	0.11	2.62	0.01
	value	SE	LL 95%CI	UL 95%CI		
Bootstrap results for indirect effect						
Effect	0.05	0.02	0.02	0.11		

Note: $n = 297$. β = Unstandardized Regression Coefficient; SE = Standard Error; Bootstrap Sample Size = 1000; LL = Lower Limit; CI = Confidence Interval; UL = Upper Limit.

However, the outcomes of simple mediation model support the indirect influence of ethical leadership on employee well-being. The two-tailed significance test demonstrated that the (unstandardized) indirect effect (0.06) was positive and significant as Sobel $z = 2.62$ and $p < 0.01$. The bootstrapping, without making any assumption about the shape of the sampling distribution (i.e., normality), confirmed the Sobel test results (see Table 4) with indirect effect value 0.05, as a 95% bootstrap confidence interval for this indirect effect did not contain zero (0.02, 0.11). This provides support for Hypothesis 6 that employee voice behaviour mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and employee well-being.

4. Discussion

This study aimed at investigating the inter-relationships between ethical leadership, thriving, voice behavior and well-being of employees. Ethical leadership and thriving are the predictor variables, whereas the well-being of employees was taken as the criterion variable. In order to fully investigate the mechanism through which these variables interact with each other, voice behavior was taken as the mediator variable. Our findings can be discussed with various perspectives. Firstly, results of current study revealed that thriving at work has a positive relationship with the psychological well-being of employees in telecom industry. The experience of learning and vitality in the organisation gives employees a sense of personal growth which help them to feel satisfied at workplace. This brings positivity in their lives and the sense of improved psychological well-being. Kern, Waters, Adler, and White (2014) also conducted a study on employee's well-being and thriving but in the educational sector, yielding similar results that thriving at work was directly related to the well-being of employees. Spreitzer et al. (2005) also pointed that thriving helps to improve the employee well-being. Secondly, results of our study indicated that thriving has a positive relationship with employee voice behavior which coincides with the findings of Abid (2016), which reflected that employee thriving was positively related to their constructive voice behavior. In telecom sector, employees are often engaged directly with the customers. When employees feel thrive at work, it improves their skills and abilities which further boost their confidence to identify problems and raise voice to bring constructive changes. Thirdly, the results indicated that voice behavior has a positive relationship with employee's well-being. Employees respond that the environment which encourages to raise voice about the problems at workplace or giving solutions and ideas brings positivity in the their lives and hence improve their psychological well-being. Wood (2008) also suggests that voice behavior does indeed have a constructive relationship with employee's well-being. Fourthly, voice behavior mediated the relationship between thriving at work and well-being of employees. Results in our research shows that employees who feel sense of learning and vitality at work, raise their voices to give ideas and solutions to problems which improve their psychological well-being. Literature also support that thriving at work improves skills and creativity in employees which encourages them to raise voice (Spreitzer et al., 2005) and thus improves their well-being. Patterson, Luthans, and Jeung (2014) explain that thriving at work is an essential element for the development and efficient performance of the workers in every organization. Fifthly, ethical leadership had a positive significant relationship with voice behavior in this study. The results demonstrates that employees trust ethical leaders and get encouraged to speakup and maintain better communication with them. Our results are thus in line with the findings of Walumbwa and Schaubroeck (2009) who also concluded that voice behavior of supervisors in the financial institution of USA was positively affected by their ethical leadership. This constructive voice behavior is appreciated by the organizations that focused on improving their work standards as employees who show voice behavior raise concerns regarding problems and issues that cause hindrances in work performance (Brown et al., 2005; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Sixthly, voice behavior mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and well-being of employees. However, hypothesis 7 that states a positive significant relationship between ethical leadership and employee psychological well-being is not supported. So our results

do not support the direct relationship between ethical leadership and employee well-being but supports the indirect relationship between these two through voice behavior. Hence, due to the presence of ethical leadership in this organization, employees are encouraged to speak up which results in improved psychological well-being. When managers take care of voice mechanism then workers perceive to work together as a partner with the management for company's growth. Avey, Wernsing, and Palaski (2012) also identified that when managers use ethical leadership skills with their employees, they create a safe cocoon in the organization. In such an environment, subordinates and colleagues feel secure enough to interact with their superiors (Prottas, 2013). This in turn creates a positive work environment in which employees flourish and their well-being escalates.

4.1. Theoretical contribution

Drawing from the theories of social exchange (Blau, 1964) and socially embedded model of thriving (Sprietzer et al., 2005), this study contributes to the literature by supporting and extending the previous findings in the multiple ways.

First, our main purpose was to explore how voice behavior acts as a mediator between thriving at work, ethical leadership and employee well-being. Previous research is extended by arguing that employee voice behavior is a mediator (Avey et al., 2012) which explains the positive impact of thriving at work and ethical leadership to improve employee psychological well-being. The empirical results suggest that thriving and ethical leadership help employees to speak up against organizational errors and eventually improves their well-being. This research not only indicates that thriving at work may help to improve employee well-being (Cullen et al., 2015), but also the underlying mechanism of voice behavior is explored and empirically tested. Similarly, previous research has been extended that leaders behavior and employee well-being has a positive relationship (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2013). In addition, findings show that voice behavior acts as a mediator between these two variables.

Second, we contribute to the recent research of thriving (e.g., Walumbwa et al., 2017), providing empirical evidence that it is an important individual antecedent of employee voice. Our research also includes a contextual antecedent (ethical leadership). So the empirical results in this research show that employee voice behavior is encouraged by both individual (thriving) and contextual (ethical leadership) factors. Employees who experience thriving at work come up with innovative ideas which help them to voice their thoughts. Additionally, ethical leadership sets an example for employees to follow ethical practices and raise voice against unethical actions.

Third, this study adds literature on employee well-being (Van de Voorde et al., 2011). Existing research shows that speaking up improves employee's performance and enhance their well-being, yet this assumption had received little empirical attention. This research empirically tested that raising voice may help employees to improve their well-being.

4.2. Limitations and recommendations

Every empirical study that is conducted in non-contrived settings has its limitations. Similarly, our study also lacks in certain areas. Firstly, our data is primarily comprised of males and has a very limited representation of the females. Therefore the results are somewhat

ambiguous when generalized to both genders at large. Similarly, there is a bulk of the sample that belongs to married people which again makes inferences with relation to demographics skeptical. Although our study takes these demographics as control variables and establishes that they have no effect on dependent variable, generally voice behavior and well-being both could be possibly affected by gender and marital status. Hence, we suggest that future scholars should consider samples that equally represent both genders and different marital status so that their effect on the study variables can also be seen.

Secondly, our sample is limited to the information technology industry and also specific to a metropolitan city like Lahore. This also makes inferences difficult when explain the voice behavior in for example, lesser industrially developed cities within Pakistan or in industries that are product-oriented instead of service oriented. Hence, scholars should also investigate the difference in employee behavior regarding voice and well-being between product-oriented industries and service-oriented industries.

Thirdly, this empirical research is a single source as the data has been collected from the employees. We primarily considered employees' perception about their leaders and related it to other outcomes. Therefore, common method biases may have occurred between the constructs. However, on the basis of recommendations posited by P. M. Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and N. P. Podsakoff (2003), a time interval of two weeks was taken for independent variables (Time 1) and the criterion variables (Time 2). Future researchers may utilize alternative data sourcing to reduce biasness errors. For example, self-assessment of ethical leadership can be investigated by the leaders.

The fourth limitation is that this research is cross sectional. Thus, causality among the study variables cannot be drawn. Therefore, future studies may consider the causation among the study variables by conducting a longitudinal and experimental study.

4.3. Practical implications

The current study aimed to analyze work behavior of employees, the results of which are beneficial to scholars and practitioners alike. Today's work environment demands more innovative ideas and creativity to grow and overcome work problems. In this research, the outcomes of hypotheses testing shows that in situations where employees feel thriving under ethical leadership, the managers create certain norms and values which their sub-ordinates follow with free-will. This creates a secure work climate where employees feel free to voice their concerns and suggestions. This environment where managers are able to have positive verbal interactions with employees facilitates their well-being and makes them satisfied with their jobs.

Organizations mostly offer impressive benefits to motivate creative and innovative employee behavior which can help to overcome the shortcomings in the organization. This study suggests that such goal can also be achieved by encouraging an environment where employees experience thriving and under ethical leadership they feel secure to raise their voice to overcome the flaws in the organization. In such a scenario, the organizations should hire managers who have strong leadership qualities and also possess strong ethical values so that a healthy work climate may be formed. Having strong ethical managers would not only encourage their voice behaviour, but also that of the employees and would subsequently lead to well-being of employees at large.

Moreover, managers can improve their ethical practices in the light of the ethical leadership instrument. For example, “Ethical leader listens to what employees have to say” and “Sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics” may help managers to improve their ethical behavior and encourage employee voice behavior.

Conclusions

This paper aimed at shedding light on one of the critical factors in the business world: voice behavior of employees. Globally, every organization requires human resource in order to carry out its functions and achieve excellence in their performances. Our study has contributed theoretically and practically by explaining that in order to achieve high levels of well-being in employees it is important that managers use ethical leadership skills and focus on thriving in their work environment. This combination leads to a positive work setting where management encourages employees to raise their voice. This voice behavior raises the concerns of employees that hinder their efficient performance and it is of benefit to the organization since addressing these issues would lead to a higher output that would lead profits.

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