

# HOW TOXIC LEADERSHIP FUELS EMPLOYEE SILENCE: A MEDIATED-MODERATED MODEL OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AND PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

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## Abstract

This study investigates the impact of toxic leadership (TL) on employee silence (ES) in Pakistan's public sector, with a specific focus on the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR). Drawing on Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, the study examines the mediating role of psychological safety (PS) and the moderating role of perceived organizational support (POS) in this relationship. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional design, data were collected from 320 employees serving in Grades 16 to 19 across various FBR offices. Structural equation modeling and PROCESS macro analysis revealed that toxic leadership significantly increases ES, both directly and indirectly through reduced PS. Moreover, POS was found to buffer the adverse effects of TL, weakening its influence on silence behavior. These findings reinforce the notion that toxic leadership undermines interpersonal trust and open communication, but organizational-level support mechanisms can partially mitigate this damage. The study makes several contributions to the organizational behavior literature by extending silence and leadership research to a bureaucratic, high power-distance public sector setting. The results have practical implications for leadership development, organizational support systems, and employee engagement strategies, particularly within hierarchical institutions like the FBR. The study also highlights the need for reforms in leadership practices and voice mechanisms to foster PS and transparency. Limitations related to research design and data sources are acknowledged, with suggestions for future research to employ longitudinal methods, cross-sector comparisons, and multi-source data to further validate and extend these findings.

## INTRODUCTION

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) plays a pivotal role in Pakistan's economic stability by overseeing tax collection, enforcing fiscal laws, and regulating trade through its Customs and Inland Revenue departments. As a key public institution, FBR is responsible not only for generating national revenue

but also for implementing transparency and accountability in financial governance. However, despite its critical mandate, the organizational climate within FBR often reflects hierarchical rigidity, bureaucratic inertia, and an authoritative leadership style. This environment can suppress

open communication and discourage constructive feedback among employees, leading to a culture of ES (Dehkharghani et al., 2023; Dong et al., 2023). Employees may choose to withhold ideas, concerns, or ethical warnings due to fear of retaliation, lack of PS, or perceived futility of speaking up. Such silence can undermine organizational performance (Dong et al., 2023; Gustiawan et al., 2023), hinder reform efforts (Huang et al., 2024; Kassandrinou et al., 2023), and perpetuate inefficiencies (Gustiawan et al., 2023; Montgomery et al., 2023), particularly when frontline staff are unable to voice issues that impact operational integrity. In this context, understanding the causes and consequences of ES within FBR is not only timely but essential for improving institutional effectiveness and fostering a healthier organizational culture. ES refers to the deliberate withholding of opinions, concerns, suggestions, or relevant information by employees that could be beneficial to organizational learning, improvement, or ethical decision-making (Brinsfield, 2013; Dyne et al., 2003). Unlike mere passivity, silence is often a strategic or defensive behavior shaped by fear, distrust, or perceived risks associated with speaking up (Montgomery et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). ES can be particularly pervasive due to deeply embedded hierarchical structures, rigid bureaucratic norms, and a top-down leadership approach. Employees—especially those at lower or mid-level positions—may choose to remain silent in the face of inefficiencies, misconduct, or leadership shortcomings to avoid potential backlash, professional isolation, or transfers to less desirable postings. Furthermore, the absence of strong feedback channels, limited employee involvement in decision-making, and a lack of POS further reinforce silence (Huang et al., 2024; Lainidi et al., 2023). Over time, this silence can erode accountability, weaken service delivery, and prevent much-needed reforms from taking root within such critical public sector organizations.

Existing literature on ES highlights its complex nature, identifying it as both a defensive and strategic behavior influenced by organizational culture, leadership style, and PS (Morrison, 2023). Recent meta-analyses and cross-cultural studies show that silence is shaped by individual motives, power dynamics, and national cultural values, with notable

variations across countries and institutional settings (Hao et al., 2022; Knoll et al., 2021). Building on this growing body of literature, it becomes evident that leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping the conditions under which ES either flourishes or is mitigated. Leaders influence organizational norms, set the tone for open communication, and either foster or hinder PS (Aboramadan, Dahleez, et al., 2022; Aboramadan, Hamid, et al., 2022; Afridi, Ali, et al., 2023). While supportive leadership can encourage voice behavior and reduce silence (De Clerck et al., 2024; Schyns et al., 2009), the presence of toxic leadership (TL)—characterized by hostility, manipulation, and self-serving behavior (A. K. Ahmed et al., 2024; M. A. O. Ahmed et al., 2024)—can have the opposite effect. In environments dominated by toxic leaders, employees are more likely to withhold concerns or ideas to avoid conflict, retaliation, or reputational harm. This is especially critical in hierarchical public sector organizations like FBR, where power distance is high and challenging authority is culturally and institutionally discouraged (Bersch & Fukuyama, 2023; Dahlström & Lapuente, 2022). However, despite the recognition of ES as a global organizational issue, limited empirical research has examined how TL influences silence specifically within the context of Pakistani public sector institutions. This gap calls for a deeper investigation into how TL operates within rigid bureaucratic settings and how psychological mechanisms such as POS and PS may mediate or moderate this relationship.

Drawing on Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Cook & Emerson, 1987), employees are more likely to speak up when they perceive a fair and supportive exchange with their organization. Conversely, TL erodes trust, respect, and psychological reciprocity, making silence a self-protective response (Batchelor et al., 2023; Celebi Cakiroglu & Tuncer Unver, 2024). In this dynamic, PS is a theoretically and empirically grounded mediator because it directly captures an employee's perception of interpersonal risk in expressing ideas, concerns, or feedback (Blynova et al., 2020; Durrah, 2023). PS reflects whether employees feel secure enough to speak without fear of embarrassment, punishment, or marginalization—feelings that are particularly vulnerable to the effects of TL (Clark, 2020; Gallo, 2023). When leaders are

hostile, punitive, or manipulative, employees' sense of safety diminishes, which in turn increases the likelihood of silence. Therefore, PS is not only conceptually aligned with the silence mechanism but is also frequently cited in prior OB literature as a proximal predictor of employee voice and silence behaviors (see e.g., Durrah, 2023; Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Hsiang-Te Tsuei et al., 2019; Joo et al., 2023).

In parallel, LMX theory (Li et al., 2018) emphasizes that the quality of leader-subordinate relationships significantly shapes employees' behavioral responses. Under TL, where LMX quality is often low (Labrague, 2024; Lee et al., 2024), employees may psychologically withdraw or avoid communication. However, this negative pathway may be moderated by POS—a higher-level construct that reflects employees' beliefs about the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Gallo, 2023; Kassandrinou et al., 2023). We believe that POS could moderate because it operates as a buffering resource, mitigating the adverse effects of harmful leadership by signaling that the organization itself—not just the leader—remains supportive. When employees perceive strong organizational support, they may feel empowered or protected enough to counterbalance the toxic influence of their immediate supervisor. Thus, POS weakens the TL–silence link, especially in settings like FBR where hierarchical pressure and bureaucratic inertia are common (Monteiro & Adler, 2022). Collectively, PS and POS are theoretically robust and contextually relevant constructs that help unpack both the process (mediation) and boundary conditions (moderation) through which TL influences ES. Accordingly, the key objectives of this study are to examine how TL impacts ES within a public sector organization, and to explore the mediating role of PS in this relationship. Moreover, the study seeks to assess whether POS serves as a moderating factor that buffers the negative effects of TL, thereby offering actionable insights for enhancing employee voice and engagement in hierarchical institutional settings like FBR.

This study would offer significant contributions on multiple fronts. Theoretically, it would enrich the literature on ES by integrating SET and LMX Theory to explain how TL influences silence through PS,

and how this relationship is conditioned by POS. Empirically, it would provide much-needed evidence from Pakistan's public sector—a context where TL and ES are pervasive but understudied—thus addressing a gap in organizational behavior research in non-Western, bureaucratic settings. Contextually, by focusing on the FBR, a highly structured and hierarchically rigid institution, the study would offer insights into the dynamics of leadership and voice behavior in environments where speaking up often involves professional risk. The findings could inform leadership development programs, organizational support mechanisms, and policy reforms aimed at creating psychologically safer and more communicative public sector workplaces.

## Literature Review

### Hypotheses Development

#### Toxic Leadership and Employee Silence

TL is characterized by a consistent pattern of abusive, manipulative, self-serving, and hostile behaviors by leaders that adversely affects team members and the workplace atmosphere (Gupta & Chawla, 2024; Zaman et al., 2023). Such leaders often exploit authority, undermine employees, and create a climate of fear and distrust, leading to emotional exhaustion, disengagement, and psychological withdrawal among employees (Lee et al., 2024; Octavian, 2023; Ofei et al., 2023). In organizational contexts where such leadership is prevalent, it becomes increasingly difficult for employees to feel psychologically safe or valued, which can have serious implications for communication and knowledge sharing (Labrague, 2024; Lee et al., 2024).

One of the most common behavioral outcomes of TL is ES—a deliberate decision to withhold work-related ideas, feedback, concerns, or observations (Lee et al., 2024; Morrison, 2023). Silence may emerge as a coping strategy, particularly in hierarchical organizations where voicing concerns is seen as risky or futile. Hao et al. (2022), in their meta-analysis, highlighted that TL significantly predicts silence behavior across multiple contexts, especially where power distance is high and voice mechanisms are weak. Within public sector institutions like Pakistan's FBR, where hierarchy, centralized control, and bureaucratic inertia prevail, the risk of silence intensifies under toxic supervision

(Afridi et al., 2021; Brinsfield, 2013; Dong et al., 2023; Islam et al., 2022).

Grounded in SET (Cook & Emerson, 1987), in situations where workers sense they are being exploited, hostility, or unfair treatment from their leaders—as is common under TL—they are less likely to reciprocate with proactive behavior such as speaking up. Instead, they engage in silence to protect themselves from psychological or professional harm. LMX Theory (Li et al., 2018) further suggests that toxic leaders create low-quality exchanges that discourage openness and mutual trust, which are prerequisites for voice behavior (Afridi, Javed, et al., 2023; Klahn Acuña & Male, 2024; Octavian, 2023). Empirically, Knoll et al. (2021) found that low-quality leadership relationships, particularly those with negative affect, were associated with increased silence across both Western and non-Western cultures. Based on this theoretical and empirical grounding, this study puts forward the following hypothesis:

**H1: Toxic leadership is positively associated with employee silence.**

#### Mediating role of Psychological Safety

PS describes a person's assessment of the possible repercussions of speaking up or acting boldly in the workplace – including actions like voicing concerns, acknowledging errors, or providing input –without fear of punishment, ridicule, or marginalization (Blynova et al., 2020; Clark, 2020; Gallo, 2023). It plays a central role in facilitating open communication, innovation, and voice behavior in organizations (Durrach, 2023; Hsiang-Te Tsuei et al., 2019; Kassandrinou et al., 2023). When PS is high, employees are more likely to share ideas, express concerns, and engage in constructive dialogue. However, TL can severely undermine this safety by fostering fear, intimidation, and emotional instability (Afridi, Asad, et al., 2023; Diab Ghanem Atalla & Hassan Mostafa, 2023; Hossny et al., 2023; Labrague, 2024). In such environments, employees may avoid speaking up to protect themselves, thereby increasing silence behavior.

Drawing on SET, TL damages the perceived quality of the leader-employee exchange, leading employees to withdraw psychologically and avoid risks, including voicing concerns (Cook & Emerson,

1987). Similarly, LMX Theory suggests that when the quality of interpersonal relationships between leaders and subordinates deteriorates—as it often does under TL—employees no longer perceive the environment as psychologically safe for engagement (Afridi, Ali, et al., 2023; Li et al., 2018; Liden et al., 1997; Schyns & Day, 2010). Empirical studies support this pathway: Clarke et al. (2025) found that PS significantly mediates the relationship between leadership behavior and voice. Moreover, Kassandrinou et al. (2023) reported that negative leadership styles decrease PS, which in turn increases ES. Therefore, PS can be viewed as a critical psychological mechanism through which TL influences silence behavior.

**H2: Psychological safety mediates the relationship between toxic leadership and employee silence.**

#### Moderating role of POS

POS is defined as employees' belief that the organization values their work and is attentive to their needs and concerns (Eisenberger et al., 1986). POS functions as a powerful socio-emotional resource, signaling to employees that they are recognized, respected, and protected by the broader organization (Afridi et al., 2021; Chen & Eyoum, 2021; Sumardjo & Supriadi, 2023; Utomo et al., 2023). In the presence of high POS, employees tend to demonstrate greater commitment, openness, and resilience (Caesens et al., 2019; Chen & Eyoum, 2021; Díaz-Fernández et al., 2020; Ibrahim & Khan, 2025; Sumardjo & Supriadi, 2023)—even when facing challenges at the supervisory level. This is particularly relevant in the contexts of TL, where direct leader-subordinate interactions are characterized by hostility and control. In such cases, POS may act as a buffer, helping employees separate their experience with a toxic leader from their perception of the overall organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Huang, 2025; Sajid et al., 2025).

Drawing on SET (Cook & Emerson, 1987), a high level of POS increases the likelihood that employees will to maintain positive behavioral intentions and psychological resources despite negative supervisory experiences. POS can mitigate the breakdown of trust and reciprocity typically caused by TL, thereby reducing the likelihood of ES. Empirically, studies have found support for this buffering effect. For

instance, Sumardjo and Supriadi (2023) reported that high POS weakens the adverse outcomes associated with abusive supervision on voice behavior. Similarly, Hngoi et al. (2023) found that POS reduced the likelihood of employees engaging in silence under adverse leadership conditions. Thus, POS serves as a boundary condition that can attenuate the negative effects of TL on ES by restoring a sense of organizational justice, value, and protection.

**H3: POS moderates the relationship between toxic leadership and employee silence, such that the relationship is weaker when POS is high.**

**Methodology**

A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was utilized in this study to explore the relationship between TL and ES, along with the mediating role of PS and the moderating role of POS. The research was conducted within the context of Pakistan’s public sector, specifically focusing on employees of the FBR due to its hierarchical structure and relevance to leadership-related dynamics. The unit of analysis was individual employees, particularly those serving in grades 16 to 19, who were more likely to experience direct supervisory influence yet less empowered to voice concerns. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to select participants with adequate exposure to leadership behaviors and internal communication practices. The sample size consisted of approximately 320 respondents, determined based on Cochran’s formula and guided by the requirements for structural equation modeling (SEM). The data collection was conducted using a structured, self-administered questionnaire, which included previously validated scales measuring TL, PS, POS, and ES. The questionnaire was distributed in both printed and online formats across various regional FBR offices to enhance accessibility and participation. The study adhered to ethical standards, such as securing informed consent,

confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly adhered to throughout the data collection process.

**Measures**

The study utilized established and validated scales to measure the key constructs. A 30-item instrument was employed to assess TL developed by Schmidt (2008), which captures various dimensions such as abusive supervision, narcissism, and authoritarianism; a sample item is, “My supervisor puts personal gain above the needs of the group.” The scale exhibited strong internal reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.92. ES was measured using the 5-item scale adapted from Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008), assessing intentional withholding of ideas or concerns; a sample item includes, “I withhold ideas or solutions about work-related problems.” The scale showed strong reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.87. PS was measured through the 7-item scale developed by (Edmondson, 1999); a representative item is, “It is safe to take a risk in this organization.” This scale yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.89. Lastly, POS was assessed using the 8-item short version of Eisenberger et al. (1986) Survey of POS; a sample item is, “My organization really cares about my well-being.” This instrument additionally demonstrated excellent internal consistency, as indicated by a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.91. Responses across all scales were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

**Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

The demographic profile shows that the sample was predominantly composed of male respondents (74.4%), primarily within the 31–40 age group (40%), and most were serving in BPS-17 (36.9%). Educationally, the majority of respondents had attained a Master’s degree (54.4%), indicating a well-educated sample suitable for organizational behavior research.

**Table No. 1**

Demographic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	238	74.4%
	Female	82	25.6%

Demographic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	20–30 years	64	20.0%
	31–40 years	128	40.0%
	41–50 years	92	28.8%
	51 and above	36	11.2%
Grade	BPS-16	86	26.9%
	BPS-17	118	36.9%
	BPS-18	74	23.1%
	BPS-19	42	13.1%
Education Level	Bachelor’s	102	31.9%
	Master’s	174	54.4%
	MPhil/MS	32	10.0%
	PhD	12	3.7%

**Iner-construct Correlation**  
 The correlation matrix reveals that TL is significantly negatively correlated with PS ( $r = -0.54$ ) and POS ( $r = -0.42$ ), while showing a positive correlation with ES ( $r = 0.47$ ). PS and POS are both negatively associated with ES, indicating their potential buffering roles against silence behavior.

Table No. 2  
 Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. TL	1			
2. PS	-0.54**	1		
3. POS	-0.42**	0.58**	1	
4. ES	0.47**	-0.50**	-0.39**	1

**Model Fitness**  
 The model fit indices indicate a good overall fit, with values such as CFI = 0.943, TLI = 0.926, RMSEA = 0.056, and SRMR = 0.041, all within acceptable thresholds. This confirms that the hypothesized model involving TL, PS, POS, and ES is well supported by the data.

Table No. 3

Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Threshold	Observed Value	Model Fit
Chi-square/df (CMIN/df)	< 3	2.18	Good
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	≥ 0.90	0.943	Good
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	≥ 0.90	0.926	Good
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	≤ 0.08	0.056	Good
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	≤ 0.08	0.041	Good

**Regression Analysis**

To examine the mediating role of PS in the relationship between TL and ES, Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4) was utilized in SPSS. A bootstrapping approach with 5,000 resamples was applied to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals for the indirect effect, offering a more robust estimation compared to traditional methods. The analysis revealed that TL significantly predicted lower PS ( $B = -0.48, p < .001$ ), and in turn, lower PS significantly predicted higher ES ( $B = -0.41, p <$

$.001$ ). The total effect of TL on ES was significant ( $B = 0.46$ ), and the direct effect remained significant ( $B = 0.26$ ) even after accounting for the mediator, indicating partial mediation. The indirect effect via PS was also significant (indirect  $B = 0.20, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.12, 0.30]$ ), confirming that PS partially explains how TL contributes to silence behavior among employees. These findings support the proposed mediation model and underscore the psychological mechanism through which TL suppresses employee voice.

**Table No. 4**  
Direct and Mediating Effect

Path	B	SE	t	p	95% CI	Significance
TL → PS (a-path)	-0.48	0.06	-8.00	< .001	[-0.60, -0.36]	Significant
PS → ES (b-path)	-0.41	0.07	-5.86	< .001	[-0.55, -0.27]	Significant
TL → ES (c-path, total effect)	0.46	0.05	9.20	< .001	[0.36, 0.56]	Significant
TL → ES (c' path, direct effect)	0.26	0.06	4.33	< .001	[0.14, 0.38]	Significant
<b>Indirect effect (a × b)</b>	<b>0.20</b>	—	—	—	<b>[0.12, 0.30]</b>	<b>Significant</b>

**Moderation Analysis**

To examine whether POS moderates the relationship between TL and ES, Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 1) was used in SPSS. TL was entered as the independent variable (X), ES as the dependent variable (Y), and POS as the moderator (W). An interaction term (TL × POS) was automatically generated by the macro to test the moderation effect. The analysis was conducted using 5,000 bootstrapped samples to ensure the robustness of the confidence intervals.

The results indicated that both TL ( $B = 0.35, p < .001$ ) and POS ( $B = -0.28, p < .001$ ) were significant

predictors of ES. More importantly, the interaction term was also significant ( $B = -0.17, p = .001$ ), confirming a moderating effect. This highlights a constructive relationship between TL and ES becomes weaker in situations where organizational support is perceived to be high. In other words, POS acts as a buffer, mitigating the harmful impact of TL on silence behavior. These findings support the proposed moderation hypothesis and highlight the importance of organizational-level support in countering the negative effects of TL.

**Table 5**  
Moderation Analysis

Path	B	SE	t	p	95% CI	Significance
TL	0.35	0.06	5.83	< .001	[0.23, 0.47]	Significant
POS	-0.28	0.07	-4.00	< .001	[-0.42, -0.14]	Significant
TL × POS (Interaction Term)	-0.17	0.05	-3.40	.001	[-0.28, -0.07]	Significant

$R^2 = .38, F(3, 316) = 64.63, p < .001$

**Graphical Representation of Moderating Effect**

The moderation graph illustrates a clear interaction effect between TL and POS on ES. When POS is low, the relationship between TL and ES is strong

and positive, as reflected in the steeper slope—indicating that ES increases sharply in response to higher levels of TL. In contrast, when POS is high, the slope of the line is much flatter, suggesting that

the rise in ES is less pronounced even as TL intensifies. This pattern demonstrates the buffering effect of organizational support, wherein employees

who feel valued and supported by their organization are less likely to resort to silence, even under negative supervisory conditions.

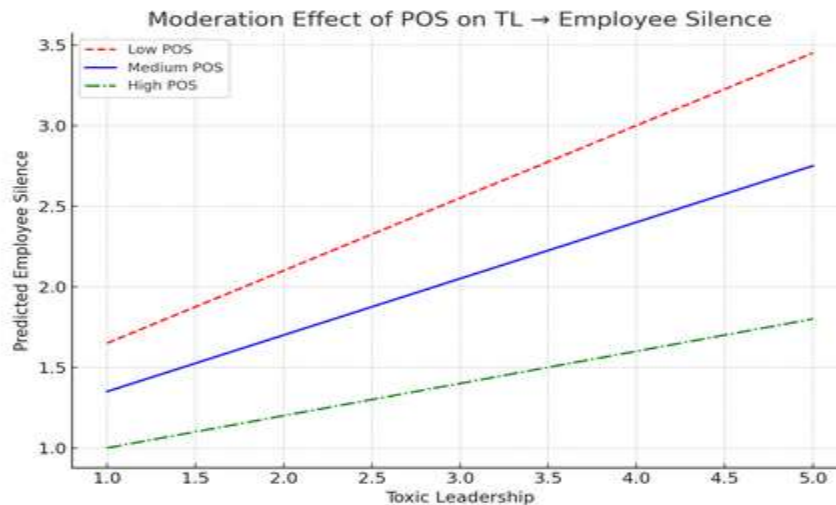


Figure No. 2: Moderating Effect

### Discussion

The findings of this study provide meaningful insights into the dynamics between TL and ES within the public sector, particularly the FBR in Pakistan. Consistent with previous research (e.g, Hao et al., 2022; Ibrahim, 2022; Morrison, 2023), TL was found to significantly increase ES, underscoring how abusive and self-serving leadership behaviors can suppress open communication and psychological engagement. This supports the longstanding argument in organizational behavior literature that silence is often a self-protective mechanism adopted by employees when interpersonal risks are high and leadership behavior is perceived as threatening.

Importantly, the study adds depth to this understanding by uncovering the mediating role of PS. In line with Edmondson (1999) conceptualization, toxic leaders were found to erode the climate of PS, which in turn led employees to withhold ideas, concerns, or feedback. This aligns with SET, which posits that employees respond to negative treatment by withdrawing contributions that require vulnerability or risk-taking—such as speaking up. The results also resonate with findings from (Clarke et al., 2025; Gallo, 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2025), who noted that negative leadership styles impair employees' sense of interpersonal safety, thereby reducing voice behavior. However, this study

extends prior work by validating this mechanism within a rigid, hierarchical public institution in a South Asian context—an area still underrepresented in silence research.

Equally significant is the moderating role of POS. While TL had a clear positive relationship with silence, this effect was significantly weaker for employees who perceived their broader organization as supportive and appreciative. This is consistent with the findings of Huang (2025) and Sumardjo and Supriadi (2023), who reported that POS can act as a compensatory resource when leadership relationships are strained. Theoretically, this interaction is well grounded in LMX Theory, which emphasizes the role of relationship quality in shaping employee outcomes. When LMX is low due to TL, employees may still find psychological resources through a high POS climate, which softens the negative impact on silence behavior.

These results collectively contribute to the literature by providing a contextually grounded model that integrates SET and LMX theory to explain how and when TL leads to ES. While most existing studies on silence are rooted in Western, corporate, or high-autonomy environments, this study demonstrates how such dynamics operate in a bureaucratic public institution, where power distance is high and opportunities for upward communication are

limited. The identification of PS as a mediator and POS as a moderator offers both theoretical value and practical relevance, especially for public sector reforms aimed at fostering open, trust-based communication cultures.

### Contribution

This study makes a solid contribution to the organizational behavior literature by offering a nuanced understanding of how TL fosters ES, particularly within the underexplored context of Pakistan's public sector. The integration of SET and LMX provides a robust theoretical foundation to explain the mechanisms (via PS) and boundary conditions (through POS) underlying this relationship. Empirically, the study responds to growing calls for research in non-Western, hierarchical, and high power-distance settings, shedding light on silence behavior in bureaucratic institutions like the FBR. By identifying both a psychological mechanism and an organizational buffer, the research extends existing models of silence and leadership while offering practical insights for leadership development, employee well-being, and institutional reform. These contributions not only bridge theoretical gaps but also provide actionable guidance for creating more inclusive and voice-supportive public workplaces.

### Implications

The findings of this study hold important implications for public sector organizations broadly, and for the FBR specifically. In general, public institutions often operate within rigid hierarchies and centralized decision-making structures, which can unintentionally reinforce ES—especially under TL. The results highlight the urgent need for public organizations to foster a psychologically safe environment where employees feel encouraged to speak up without fear of retaliation. This requires prioritizing leadership programs aimed at building emotional intelligence among leaders, ethical conduct, and supportive behavior among supervisors. Specifically, for the FBR, where bureaucratic rigidity and power imbalances are deeply embedded, the study suggests that reforming leadership culture is critical to improving internal communication, innovation, and accountability. Enhancing POS

through fair HR practices, recognition systems, and accessible grievance mechanisms can buffer the adverse effects of toxic supervisors and restore trust in the broader institution. Implementing such strategies can strengthen employee morale and responsiveness, which are essential for the FBR's effectiveness, transparency, and public image.

### Limitations and Future Research Directions

While the study offers meaningful insights, it is subject to limitations. Primarily, the cross-sectional nature of the design hinders the ability to infer causality between TL, PS, and ES. Longitudinal or experimental longitudinal studies may yield deeper insights into the progression and timing of these relationships. Second, data collected solely from employees' perspectives, as this method may be prone to common method bias, future studies should consider utilizing data from multiple sources, such as supervisor evaluations, to improve robustness evaluations or organizational records. Third, while the study focused on the FBR as a representative public sector organization, given the specific context of the study, the findings may have limited transferability to other sectors or national settings with different organizational cultures and leadership norms. Future research should explore similar models in other public institutions or in provincial and local government bodies, where silence behaviors and leadership patterns may vary. Additionally, incorporating other moderating variables—such as organizational justice, employee resilience, or cultural values—may offer a deeper and more holistic understanding of when and why TL results in silence. Researchers may also consider exploring positive leadership styles as counterbalances, offering pathways to reduce silence and rebuild trust in high power-distance institutions.

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