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Impact of Ambidextrous Leadership Style and Emotional Intelligence of the Leader on Internal Whistleblowing: Mediating Role of Moral Courage

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Impact of Ambidextrous Leadership Style and Emotional Intelligence of the Leader on Internal Whistleblowing: Mediating Role of Moral Courage

Mahira Mirza¹, Muhammad Asim².

Abstract: *This study explores the influence of ambidextrous leadership and emotional intelligence in leaders on the development of employees' moral courage, which in turn fosters internal whistleblowing behavior within mid-to-large organizations. The study adopts a quantitative approach, analyzing survey data from 250 employees across mid-sized to large organizations to examine the impact of various leadership styles on moral courage and internal whistleblowing behavior. The results indicate that both ambidextrous leadership and emotional intelligence significantly enhance moral courage, which in turn plays a crucial role in motivating employees to report unethical behavior. The findings highlight moral courage as a key psychological mechanism that mediates the influence of leadership on ethical actions, accounting for 68% of the variance in whistleblowing intentions. This study highlights that leadership attributes alone are inadequate for consistently promoting whistleblowing behavior. To effectively encourage ethical conduct and reporting, organizations must invest in leadership development, cultivate psychologically safe environments, and proactively nurture moral courage. This study makes significant contributions to the organizational ethics literature by (1) empirically validating the dual-leadership approach to cultivating ethical climates and (2) identifying the critical conditions required to translate ethical awareness into courageous action. It emphasizes the importance of integrated leadership development programs that combine ambidextrous behavioral strategies with emotional competence training, alongside organizational systems that promote psychological safety. These findings provide actionable insights for creating sustainable ethics management frameworks where protected disclosure is institutionalized as a core practice.*

Keywords: Ambidextrous Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Internal Whistleblowing, Moral Courage

Introduction

Whistleblowing, the act of reporting unethical or illegal practices within an organization, serves as a critical mechanism for fostering transparency and accountability (Okafor et al., 2020). It protects the public's interests and maintains the integrity of the organization by preventing corporate fraud, corruption, and misbehavior. Despite its significance, internal whistleblowing (IWB) is often stopped by the culture of the organization, fear of punishment, a lack of anonymity, or the belief that disclosures would not lead to real change. Therefore, leaders and managers continue to face challenges in creating an environment that promotes ethical reporting.

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Al Halbusi et al. (2021) emphasized that leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping and defining the ethical culture within an organization. Employees are more inclined to report misconduct when they have confidence in their leaders' trustworthiness and feel that their concerns are genuinely heard and valued. Ambidextrous leadership (AL) is especially important in this situation because it creates a balanced climate that encourages new ideas and different points of view while upholding strong moral norms (Olusegun, 2024). An environment like this can alleviate employee fears, enhance trust in leadership, and ultimately boost the probability of reporting wrongdoing.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a crucial leadership trait that positively impacts work outcomes. Antonopoulou (2024) highlighted that leaders with high emotional intelligence (EI) are able to show empathy, self-awareness, emotional regulation, and strong interpersonal skills. These characteristics of the leaders create a safe environment for the employees and help build trust in their leaders so that they can ethically and morally feel safe to practice ethical practices and safeguard the organization. Moreover, moral courage, the ethical act of willingness, serves as a mediating variable between ambidextrous leadership and internal whistleblowing. Mkheimer et al. (2023) found in the study that when the moral courage (MC) of the employees is high within the organization, they willingly report the wrongdoings to their leader irrespective of the consequences. This study aims to address these gaps by exploring the connections and effects of ambidextrous leadership and the leader's emotional intelligence on employees' internal whistleblowing, mediated by moral courage.

Problem Statement

Whistleblowing is recognized as essential for promoting ethical behavior and organizational transparency (Near & Miceli, 1996); there is limited empirical evidence on how leadership characteristics influence employees' willingness to report unethical behavior. Existing research has focused primarily on the outcomes of whistleblowing, leaving unclear the role of leadership styles, particularly ambidextrous leadership (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013) and emotional intelligence (Mayer et al., 2008), in facilitating or inhibiting whistleblowing. Additionally, the role of moral courage in mediating these relationships remains largely unexplored (Hannah et al., 2009). This study aims to fill these gaps by exploring how ambidextrous leadership, leader EI, and moral courage interact to influence whistleblowing behavior.

Research Questions

This study is conducted to fill the gap in literature and leads to the development of the following research questions:

RQ1: How do ambidextrous leadership and a leader's emotional intelligence collectively influence internal whistleblowing behavior?

RQ2: What is the role of moral courage in mediating the relationship between leadership traits, such as ambidextrous leadership and emotional intelligence, and the likelihood of employees engaging in internal whistleblowing?

Aims and Objectives

This study seeks to examine how ambidextrous leadership and a leader's emotional intelligence (EI) collectively influence internal whistleblowing, with moral courage as a mediating factor. The objectives of this research are to:

- Analyze the impact of ambidextrous leadership on the moral courage of employees.
- Evaluate the role of a leader's emotional intelligence in fostering moral courage among employees.
- Investigate how moral courage facilitates internal whistleblowing behavior.
- Assess the mediating effect of moral courage in the relationship between leadership traits (ambidextrous leadership and emotional intelligence) and internal whistleblowing.
- Analyze the impact of the ambidextrous leadership style on internal whistleblowing.
- Analyze the impact of a leader's emotional intelligence on internal whistleblowing.

Rationale of the Study

Whistleblowing, an important accountability tool, maintains organizational integrity by exposing wrongdoing. Nevertheless, employees are generally fearful of retaliations, and they do not trust the management or their leaders to approach them and report unethical behavior (Ugaddan & Park, 2019). In view of this reluctance, an explanation of how leadership characteristics impact internal whistleblowing becomes necessary. Two core aspects of leadership, ambidextrous leadership (i.e., the capability to balance opening change-oriented behaviors with closing stability-enhancing behaviors) and emotional intelligence (i.e., the ability of a leader to effectively facilitate interpersonal processes), are focused on in this study. By investigating how these traits collectively build moral courage and promote the employee in doing the right thing, the paper aims to offer practical implications to develop organizational transparency. These findings also aim to guide organizations in recognizing the importance of leadership practices that can effectively safeguard the organization, reduce the risk of harm to whistleblowers, and prevent the retaliatory activities they seek to expose.

Theoretical Support

The study is based on a theoretical framework comprised of integrated theories, i.e., leadership theory, emotional intelligence theory, and moral courage, to examine internal whistleblowing behavior. Additionally, Kafetzopoulos (2022) also highlighted that ambidextrous leadership theory stated that the balance between the behavior of exploration and exploitation of a leader can increase the chance of developing an ethics-friendly culture where employees can report the wrongdoing. Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence (1995) complements the perspective to assess the impact of leaders' ability to perceive, understand, and manage emotions on employees' trust as well as their intention to report unethical behavior. Leaders with high emotional intelligence promote and create an ethical environment for the employees that enhances their psychological safety and reduces the fear of retaliation. The theories incorporated in this study validate that there is a significant impact of leadership style in promoting an ethical environment in an organization. Further, the study incorporates moral courage from moral psychology, which states that there is a capacity that an individual motivates them to follow ethical principles despite potential risks (Pulungan et al., 2021). Moral courage as a mediating variable in this study bridges the gap between the traits of leadership comprising the ambidextrous leadership style and emotional intelligence of the leader impacting the intention of whistleblowing. By combining these ideas, the framework helps explain how a leader's style and emotional intelligence create a safe and supportive environment in an organization, which in turn encourages employees to report wrongdoing internally.

Literature Review and Hypotheses' Development

Relationship between Emotional Intelligence of Leaders and Moral Courage

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to recognize, understand, and control your own and other people's emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Self-emotion appraisal (SEA), other-emotion appraisal (OEA), regulation of emotion (ROE), and use of emotion (UOE) are key parts of emotional intelligence (EI) that help create ethical behavior in organizations (Nyamori, 2024). SEA high leaders recognize their own emotions and control their own emotional state, thereby making utilitarian and ethical decisions. OEA enables leaders to feel and sense other people's emotions and therefore apply compassion and establish trust. McAdoo (2024) observed that SEA and OEA based emotional awareness allows emotionally safe working environments where employees feel comfortable voicing their concerns. ROE allows leaders to stay cool and redirect emotional reactions in a productive way, which minimizes emotional turbulence and builds trust among followers (Pulungan et al., 2021). UOE allows leaders to keep others and themselves motivated by emotionally framing morally beneficial action.

H1: Leaders' emotional intelligence including SEA, OEA, ROE, and UOE significantly and positively influences employees' moral courage

As per affective events theory, emotionally intelligent leaders build the workplace using affectively powerful events that influence ethical behaviors. Nyamori (2024) asserted that highly SEA and ROE leaders minimize ambiguity in ethical decisions and enable employees to develop emotionally sound moral frameworks. OEA allows leaders to emotionally validate their teams, and UOE gives inspirational motivation, making employees feel morally inspired. Pulungan et al. (2021) identified that when all four dimensions are highly developed, leaders establish a secure ethical climate where moral courage can emerge naturally. These emotional competencies foster a strong sense of trust among employees, encouraging them to act ethically in alignment with their personal values.

Relationship between Ambidextrous Leadership Style and Moral Courage

Ambidextrous leadership integrates closing behavior (stable, concentrated) and opening behavior (adaptive, creative), which presents a dynamic and moral style of leadership. The exploitative i.e. closing behavior introduces certain standards and effectiveness, whereas the explorative i.e. opening behavior leads to innovation, dialogue, and adaptability. Olusegun (2024) emphasized that this dual nature not only tolerates but also values constructive conflict and moral behavior. The outcome is a trust-building, psychological safety-enhancing, and courage-allowing culture. Paulino (2023) argued that ambidextrous leaders, by striking a balance between performance and flexibility, become an exemplary model of resilience and responsible action necessary in developing moral courage among employees.

H2: The ambidextrous leadership style of leaders significantly and positively influences employees' moral courage

Social learning theory supports this view, given that it believes subordinates emulate exemplary ethical conduct observed in their leaders. Ajmal, Sareet, and Islam (2025) also added that ambidextrous leaders excel at converting moral challenges into opportunities, causing workers to behave with courage when they just happen to

observe wrongdoing. Such leaders create both the psychological readiness and ethical awareness necessary for moral courage to emerge. Cheng, Bai, and Yang (2019) established that such leadership behavior significantly enhances moral courage by promoting of an ethical culture of principled action.

Relationship between Moral Courage and Internal Whistleblowing

Moral courage refers to the readiness to uphold ethical principles despite personal risk and is the essence of whistleblowing behavior. Whistleblowing employees often face intimidation or professional risk. Moral courage, from the perspective of Arkan (2022), explained that whoever possesses it with the power to overcome fear and place ethical obligation over personal security. Employees that are committed to integrity and strongly believe in ethical principles are highly motivated to blow the whistle when challenged with ongoing unethical practices in the organization irrespective of personal or professional risk. This inclination arises not only from individual integrity but also from a profound commitment to fairness and accountability (Marikyan & Papagiannidis, 2023). Such employees often serve as moral agents within organizations, upholding ethical standards even when doing so requires courage and resilience. Their willingness to raise voice reflects a principled stance that transcends self-preservation, contributing to a culture of transparency and organizational justice.

H3: Moral courage significantly and positively influences internal whistleblowing behavior among employees

Studies have consistently demonstrated a high correlation between moral courage and whistleblowing. Ng, Niven, and Hoel (2020) discovered that employees who are morally courageous are likely to act and not be silent observers when confronted with unethical behavior. Protection motivation theory goes on to explain in further detail that such individuals evaluate the threat and how they can cope with consequences, with moral courage making it easier for them. Marikyan and Papagiannidis (2023) also prescribed moral courage to encourage a sense of justice, thereby inducing whistleblowing. Moral courage is therefore a primary driver in bridging ethical awareness and ethical action.

Mediating role of Moral Courage between Emotional Intelligence and Internal Whistleblowing

Although emotionally intelligent leaders can cultivate ethical climates, it is moral courage that bridges perceived support and whistleblowing behavior. All aspects of emotional intelligence play a role in this process (Huang et al., 2022). SEA and ROE help leaders manage their reactions during ethical dilemmas, while OEA and UOE assist employees in managing their emotional needs. However, the lack of moral courage often prevents people from following through on their behavioral intention to whistle blow. Pakizekho and Barkhordari-Sharifabad (2022) clarified the point that moral courage is the inner stamina one needs to act, even in secure circumstances. Emotionally intelligent leaders might offer external assistance, when necessary, but the drive to take action ultimately stems from an internalized sense of moral courage.

H4: Moral courage mediates the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence including SEA, OEA, ROE, and UOE and internal whistleblowing behavior

Cognitive-affective theory presumes that moral courage and internal attributes are required in transforming emotional intelligence into ethical behavior. Huang et al. (2022) concluded that the SEA and ROE of leaders facilitate fearless leadership,

minimizing employees' fear and ambiguity. OEA facilitates leaders perceiving emotional signals and reacting with empathy, and UOE precipitates ethical drive. Akwa Nde (2021) pointed out that the mediating function of moral courage is particularly vital when emotional support must be translated into whistleblowing. Consistent with this, the facets of emotional intelligence, mediated by moral courage, serve as predictors of internal ethical behaviors, such as whistleblowing.

Mediating role of Moral Courage between Ambidextrous Leadership and Internal Whistleblowing

Ambidextrous leadership provides an equitable setting in which ethical flexibility and certain standards are present (Zacher, Robinson, & Rosing, 2016). However, the mere establishment of such an environment is insufficient to trigger whistleblowing. Moral courage serves as the catalyst that stimulates ethical behavior within the organizations. Mkheimer et al. (2023) postulated that leader attributes can impact employee attitude, but moral courage specifies the behavioral outcome. In this framework, ambidextrous leadership establishes an environment of ethical openness and trustworthiness, and moral courage enacts that climate.

H5: Moral courage mediates the relationship between ambidextrous leadership and internal whistleblowing behavior

Guided by cognitive-affective theory, this study recognizes that employee behavior emerges from an interaction of external leadership influences and internal values, such as moral courage. As Mertz (2023) elucidates, while ambidextrous leaders may model ethical responsiveness to organizational dilemmas, it is ultimately an employee's internal moral courage that determines whether they translate ethical awareness into action. Moral courage is the resolve to act justly despite potential repercussions and serves as the critical bridge between leadership dynamics and actual whistleblowing behavior. By empowering individuals to overcome fear of retaliation, this virtue transforms ethical leadership signals into concrete reporting actions, thereby sustaining organizational integrity.

Relationship between Emotional Intelligence of Leaders and Internal Whistleblowing

Emotionally intelligent leaders high in SEA, OEA, ROE, and UOE establish trust, openness, and psychological safety cultures. SEA allows leaders to be in control of their feelings when dealing with whistleblowing disclosures, allowing for consistency and professionalism. OEA allows them to realize employees' emotional positions, overcoming fears of retaliation or judgment. According to McAdoo (2024), such leaders lower the emotional cost of whistleblowing by establishing supportive cultures. ROE helps groups manage their fear of whistleblowing. UOE leads leaders to positively frame ethical behavior, which increases employee engagement. Shahalizadeh et al. (2022) confirmed that the presence of the above EI dimensions results in greater whistleblowing conduct through emotional confirmation and leadership integrity perceptions.

H6: Leaders' emotional intelligence including SEA, OEA, ROE, and UOE significantly and positively influences employees' internal whistleblowing behavior.

Affective events theory supports that positive emotional climates strengthen ethical behavior (Nyamori, 2024). SEA and ROE equip the leader with instruments to stay emotionally balanced, which leads to assurance among employees under risky

circumstances. OEA heightens relational trust so leaders are more open during times of ethical turmoil, while UOE enhances morale and ethical initiative. Bai, Lin, and Liu (2019) demonstrated that leaders who excel in all four dimensions are more likely to encourage ethical voices from their employees. Therefore, emotional intelligence in all its aspects serves as a significant motivator for whistleblowing behavior within organizations.

Relationship between Ambidextrous Leadership and Internal Whistleblowing

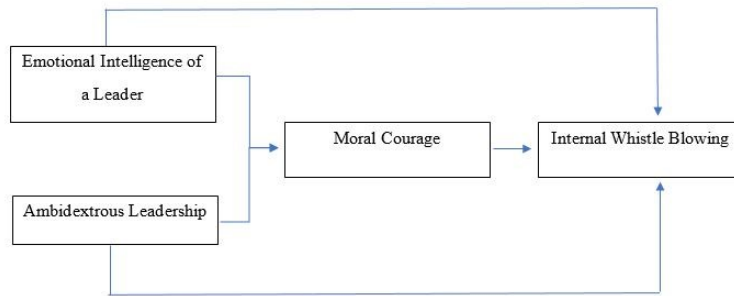
Ambidextrous leadership cultivates an organizational climate conducive to whistleblowing by harmonizing open communication, strategic flexibility, and unambiguous ethical standards (Zacher, et.al, 2016)). Leaders who effectively balance control between opening behavior and closing behavior enhance innovation and structured yet psychologically safe environments that foster diverse perspectives while upholding procedural order. As Hubbart (2024) highlighted, such cultures strengthen employee trust and significantly reduce the perceived risks of retaliation. Crucially, when leaders actively normalize ethical discourse through adaptive decision-making, employees perceive misconduct reporting as a protected, even expected, aspect of organizational citizenship. This dynamic demonstrates how leadership ambidexterity transforms theoretical ethical commitments into actionable reporting behaviors.

H7: Ambidextrous leadership significantly and positively influences employees' internal whistleblowing behavior

Ambidextrous leadership cultivates organizational conditions where psychological safety and mutual trust align, fostering the development of effective reporting systems. Grounded in cognitive-affective theory, this perspective reveals how leadership styles fundamentally shape employees' perceptual frameworks and ethical decision-making processes (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). As Cheng, Bai, and Yang (2019) demonstrated, such leaders uniquely provide both the institutional support and moral clarity that empower employees to act on ethical concerns. Their dual capacity for flexibility and stability, i.e., the opening and closing behavior of the leader, cultivates an environment where reporting misconduct becomes perceived as both organizationally sanctioned and morally imperative. As a result, ambidextrous leadership becomes a strong factor that encourages employees to report wrongdoing, working through both organizational systems and mental processes.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Research model



Methodology

The study employed a positivist methodology, commonly applied in social science research, which asserts that reality is objective, observable, and measurable. This approach emphasizes the importance of empirical data and measurable phenomena, aligning with the belief that objective truths can be uncovered through systematic observation and analysis. Alturki (2021) emphasized that for positivism, there is a lot of scientific precision, along with the application of empirical evidence, which helps study the relationship between various variables. The philosophy is consistent with the quantitative perspective of the present research, focusing on analyzing the relationship between the ambidextrous leadership styles, the emotional intelligence of the leaders, moral courage, and internal whistleblowing behavior. Using positivism, the research targets testing a hypothesis from an existing theory on measurable, replicable data. Furthermore, this study has adopted a deductive approach and has developed hypotheses based on previous theoretical and empirical findings (Casula, Rangarajan, & Shields, 2021). This analytical approach provides empirical validation for the theoretical framework positing that ambidextrous leadership and emotional intelligence collectively foster moral courage, which in turn strengthens whistleblowing intentions. The research model developed targets to examine the interrelationship between the variables, confirming that the style of leader (i.e., ambidexterity balancing opening and closing behavior while also demonstrating high emotional intelligence) promotes and develops an ethical culture in the organization, encouraging employees to report unethical conduct being carried out in the organization. This study specifically targets analyzing these qualities of the leader and how they work in reducing the risk of retaliation and empowering the employees to transform their ethical intentions into reporting the wrong intentions to their leaders while maintaining their psychological safety in the organization. These findings offer strong support for the hypothesized development effects from leadership traits to moral courage development and finally to whistleblowing decisions of the employees.

Moreover, the research is based on a quantitative descriptive and correlational design. The quantitative descriptive aspect concerns using numbers to statistically and briefly describe the participants' responses regarding ambidextrous leadership traits, emotional intelligence, moral courage, and internal whistleblowing behavior. As emphasized by Onwuegbuzie (2022), the correlational analysis component systematically evaluates both the strength (magnitude) and nature (direction) of

relationships between study variables through rigorous quantitative analytical techniques. This methodological approach enables researchers to statistically examine how variations in key constructs such as ambidextrous leadership, emotional intelligence, and moral courage co-occur and potentially influence one another, while stopping short of establishing causal inferences. The primary data for the study was collected using a structured questionnaire, distributed online to employees from mid-sized to large organizations across various sectors. A sample size of 250 employees was selected through convenience sampling, focusing on individuals in roles such as subordinates to leaders, CEOs/founders, directors, entrepreneurs, managers, and assistant managers. These positions were chosen as they are more likely to encounter situations that may necessitate whistleblowing actions. The questionnaire comprised items from validated scales. Ambidextrous leadership scales capture dimensions for both opening and closing behaviors. Emotional intelligence was measured by Wong and Law's Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS). The internal whistleblowing behavior was measured using modified items from earlier works on whistleblowing intention. The study employs Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) as its primary analytical approach, implemented through specialized statistical software. This method has two main benefits that are especially important for this research: (1) it works well with small to medium-sized groups and (2) it can manage complicated models that include several hidden factors and mediating variables. These characteristics make PLS-SEM particularly suitable for examining the hypothesized relationships between ambidextrous leadership, emotional intelligence, moral courage, and whistleblowing intentions within the study's theoretical framework. The significance of relationships was determined by looking at path coefficients, t-values, and p-values derived from bootstrapped procedures. In addition, R² values have been examined for the power of the model's explanation, whereas Q² values have been tested for predictive relevance. The mediation of moral courage is examined through the analysis of the indirect effects between ambidextrous leadership and internal whistleblowing and between emotional intelligence and internal whistleblowing.

The current study was conducted in strict accordance with ethical standards of research. Before participating, all participants were given sound informed consents that detailed the (1) academic purposes of the study, (2) a promise of confidentiality, and (3) the fact that they could withdraw from the study without consequence. This sample size meets the necessary thresholds for detecting medium effect sizes and can accommodate the model's complexity in testing multiple variables and mediation effects (Hair & Alamer, 2022). The respective thresholds to detect medium effect sizes and accommodate the model's complexity to test multiple variables and mediation effect (Hair & Alamer, 2022). Participants were recruited through convenience sampling from mid-to-large-scale organizations, specifically targeting employees who (1) operate under direct leadership supervision and (2) occupy roles with potential exposure to whistleblowing scenarios. The sample composition reflects intentional diversity across industry sectors, enhancing the ecological validity of findings. This careful way of selecting participants makes sure there is enough data to accurately test the measurement model (checking reliability and validity) and the structural model (analyzing path coefficients). The resultant data quality supports robust parameter estimation and strengthens the potential for theoretical generalization within similar organizational contexts.

Results and Findings

In the findings, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceed 0.50, indicating that each construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators. Meanwhile, AL comprises opening and closing leader behaviors. The model postulates that greater EI and AL result in greater moral courage, increasing the tendency to whistle blow. However, the model captures that emotional intelligence and ambidextrous leadership directly affect moral courage, and moral courage has better predictive validity in predicting internal whistleblowing.

Table 1: CFA, Reliability and Convergent Validity

| Construct | Items | Outer Loadings | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|--------------------------|-------|----------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Closing leader behavior | CLB1 | 0.929 | 0.973 | 0.978 | 0.862 |
| | CLB2 | 0.926 | | | |
| | CLB3 | 0.932 | | | |
| | CLB4 | 0.923 | | | |
| | CLB5 | 0.930 | | | |
| | CLB6 | 0.929 | | | |
| | CLB7 | 0.929 | | | |
| Internal Whistle Blowing | IWB1 | 0.852 | 0.891 | 0.924 | 0.754 |
| | IWB2 | 0.882 | | | |
| | IWB3 | 0.885 | | | |
| | IWB4 | 0.853 | | | |
| Moral Courage | MC1 | 0.917 | 0.938 | 0.956 | 0.843 |
| | MC2 | 0.889 | | | |
| | MC3 | 0.939 | | | |
| | MC4 | 0.926 | | | |
| Opening leader behavior | OEA1 | 0.938 | 0.988 | 0.990 | 0.932 |
| | OEA2 | 0.952 | | | |
| | OEA3 | 0.955 | | | |
| | OEA4 | 0.881 | | | |
| Other-emotion appraisal | OLB1 | 0.967 | 0.949 | 0.964 | 0.869 |
| | OLB2 | 0.952 | | | |
| | OLB3 | 0.973 | | | |
| | OLB4 | 0.944 | | | |
| | OLB5 | 0.978 | | | |
| | OLB6 | 0.986 | | | |
| | OLB7 | 0.956 | | | |
| Regulation of emotion | ROE1 | 0.984 | 0.983 | 0.988 | 0.953 |
| | ROE2 | 0.984 | | | |
| | ROE3 | 0.983 | | | |
| | ROE4 | 0.954 | | | |
| Self-emotion appraisal | SEA1 | 0.968 | 0.985 | 0.989 | 0.956 |
| | SEA2 | 0.989 | | | |
| | SEA3 | 0.985 | | | |
| | SEA4 | 0.969 | | | |
| Usage of emotions | UOE1 | 0.803 | 0.852 | 0.910 | 0.771 |
| | UOE2 | 0.922 | | | |
| | UOE3 | 0.904 | | | |

Table 1 validates that all constructs are highly reliable and have convergent validity, where all the items of each construct have outer loadings greater than 0.70, signifying that the observed variables are measuring the respective latent underlying constructs reliably. Cronbach's alpha estimates between 0.852 and 0.988 suggest the

internal reliability of the constructs. Moreover, the composite reliability (CR) values greater than 0.90 validate the reliability of the constructs with multiple measures. This is necessary to ensure that the constructs not only measure reliably but also validly. However, Sekhon, Cartwright, and Francis (2020) stated that these are the desirable psychometric properties that reduce the scales' acceptability for subsequent structural modeling. The strength of these statistics confirms that latent variables, including emotional intelligence and its subscales, theoretically fit the structural model.

Figure 2: Structural Equation Model

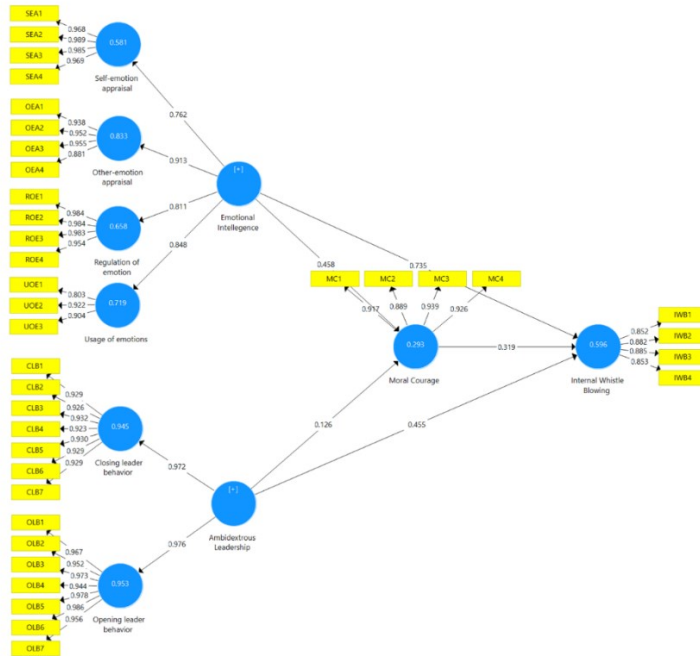


Figure 2 shows a proposed model that looks at how Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Ambidextrous Leadership (AL) affect Internal Whistleblowing (IW) through Moral Courage (MC) as a middle factor. The model operationalizes EI through four theoretically grounded dimensions: (1) self-emotional appraisal, (2) other-emotion appraisal, (3) regulation of emotion, and (4) usage of emotion. Similarly, AL is conceptualized through its characteristic opening (change-oriented) and closing (stability-maintaining) leadership behaviors.

This SEM model captures the dual mechanisms whereby (a) leaders' emotional intelligence and (b) their opening and closing behavior collectively foster employees' moral courage, which in turn facilitates IW intentions. The model's structural paths provide numerical estimates of these theoretical relationships while ensuring that the measurements are reliable for all underlying concepts.

Table 2: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|-----------|---------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 | Ambidextrous Leadership | 0.922 | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Closing leader behavior | 0.972 | 0.928 | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | Emotional Intelligence | 0.582 | 0.554 | 0.784 | | | | | | | |
| 4 | Internal Whistle Blowing | 0.099 | 0.120 | 0.640 | 0.868 | | | | | | |
| 5 | Moral Courage | 0.393 | 0.383 | 0.531 | 0.532 | 0.918 | | | | | |
| 6 | Opening leader behavior | 0.976 | 0.898 | 0.579 | 0.075 | 0.381 | 0.965 | | | | |
| 7 | Other-emotion appraisal | 0.450 | 0.421 | 0.913 | 0.668 | 0.521 | 0.454 | 0.932 | | | |
| 8 | Regulation of emotion | 0.357 | 0.345 | 0.811 | 0.514 | 0.351 | 0.350 | 0.687 | 0.976 | | |
| 9 | Self-emotion appraisal | 0.615 | 0.600 | 0.762 | 0.421 | 0.415 | 0.599 | 0.554 | 0.413 | 0.978 | |
| 10 | Usage of emotions | 0.557 | 0.514 | 0.848 | 0.508 | 0.496 | 0.570 | 0.784 | 0.551 | 0.586 | 0.878 |

Table 2 shows the discriminant validity, which is required to prove that a model's constructs are different and are not measuring the same conceptual space. Putra (2022) explained that the square root of every construct's AVE (diagonal values) is larger than its correlations with all other constructs, which fulfills the Fornell-Larcker criterion. That means the common variance between a construct and its indicators is more than that between different constructs.

Table 3: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|-----------|---------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----|
| 1 | Ambidextrous Leadership | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Closing leader behavior | 0.692 | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | Emotional Intelligence | 0.611 | 0.586 | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | Internal Whistle Blowing | 0.106 | 0.129 | 0.684 | | | | | | | |
| 5 | Moral Courage | 0.411 | 0.404 | 0.561 | 0.579 | | | | | | |
| 6 | Opening leader behavior | 0.377 | 0.462 | 0.608 | 0.080 | 0.399 | | | | | |
| 7 | Other-emotion appraisal | 0.465 | 0.438 | 0.892 | 0.727 | 0.551 | 0.469 | | | | |
| 8 | Regulation of emotion | 0.362 | 0.352 | 0.832 | 0.549 | 0.365 | 0.355 | 0.711 | | | |
| 9 | Self-emotion appraisal | 0.624 | 0.612 | 0.802 | 0.449 | 0.433 | 0.607 | 0.573 | 0.418 | | |
| 10 | Usage of emotions | 0.615 | 0.570 | 0.437 | 0.548 | 0.549 | 0.629 | 0.829 | 0.570 | 0.637 | |

The Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio is a more discriminant validity sensitive test than the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Table 3 shows HTMT values for all construct pairs, but one of the HTMT ratios is less than the conservative threshold of 0.85, and all are less than the liberal threshold of 0.90. Therefore, the emotional intelligence and other-emotion appraisal have a high but acceptable HTMT of 0.892, which means these two constructs are highly related but still distinct. Rasoolimanesh (2022) said that this test shows the model's ability to distinguish between different concepts using Fornell-Larcker analysis; very high HTMT ratios that are close to the threshold can suggest the need for future improvements or combining theories.

Table 4: R-Square

| | R Square | R Square Adjusted |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Closing leader behavior | 0.945 | 0.945 |
| Internal Whistle Blowing | 0.596 | 0.595 |
| Moral Courage | 0.293 | 0.292 |
| Opening leader behavior | 0.953 | 0.953 |
| Other-emotion appraisal | 0.833 | 0.833 |
| Regulation of emotion | 0.658 | 0.658 |
| Self-emotion appraisal | 0.581 | 0.581 |
| Usage of emotions | 0.719 | 0.719 |

Table 4 R² estimates that the variance explained by predictor variables in each construct is significant, with the large R² estimates of Opening (0.953) and Closing (0.945). Therefore, Babu, Prasad, and Prasad (2024) highlighted that the leader's behavior shows that ambidextrous leadership is nearly a perfect predictor for these constructs. Moreover, future research can explore this area by testing other predictors such as personality or organizational culture.

Table 5: Model Fit

| | Saturated Model | Estimated Model |
|-------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| SRMR | 0.049 | 0.078 |
| d_ULS | 1.417 | 3.640 |
| d_G | 1.387 | 1.414 |
| Chi-Square | 3,145.630 | 3,200.334 |
| NFI | 0.812 | 0.809 |

The fit statistics inform how much the suggested structural model fits the observed data. Table 5 shows significant statistics such as SRMR, d_ULS, d_G, Chi-Square, and NFI. The SRMR estimate is 0.049 for the saturated model and 0.078 for the fitted model, falling below the 0.08 value. Besides, Zehnter et al. (2021) suggested a better fit model with a high value for chi-square, which is counterbalanced by other complementary measures. Conversely, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) is approximately 0.81, showing reasonable model fit, albeit with potential for improvement. Low values for discrepancy indices d_ULS and d_G, consistent with the minimum error between observed and estimated covariance, support the fit. These fit measures confirm that the proposed model structure is appropriate, and even though the indices have some limitations, they suggest that the model is statistically acceptable and aligns well with the data for understanding and testing hypotheses.

Table 6: Path Coefficients

| | Original Sample | Sample Mean | Standard Deviation | T-Statistics | P Values |
|--|-----------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Ambidextrous Leadership -> Closing leader behavior | 0.972 | 0.972 | 0.002 | 637.370 | 0.000 |
| Ambidextrous Leadership -> Internal Whistle Blowing | 0.455 | 0.453 | 0.013 | 33.920 | 0.000 |
| Ambidextrous Leadership -> Moral Courage | 0.126 | 0.125 | 0.028 | 4.575 | 0.000 |
| Ambidextrous Leadership -> Opening the leader's behavior | 0.976 | 0.976 | 0.001 | 846.658 | 0.000 |
| Emotional Intelligence -> Internal Whistle Blowing | 0.735 | 0.736 | 0.018 | 39.792 | 0.000 |
| Emotional Intelligence -> Moral Courage | 0.458 | 0.459 | 0.026 | 17.766 | 0.000 |
| Emotional Intelligence -> Other-emotion appraisal | 0.913 | 0.913 | 0.005 | 195.164 | 0.000 |
| Emotional Intelligence -> Regulation of emotion | 0.811 | 0.811 | 0.013 | 62.056 | 0.000 |
| Emotional Intelligence -> Self-emotion appraisal | 0.762 | 0.762 | 0.018 | 43.476 | 0.000 |
| Emotional Intelligence -> Usage of emotions | 0.848 | 0.848 | 0.004 | 200.709 | 0.000 |
| Moral Courage -> Internal Whistle Blowing | 0.319 | 0.319 | 0.016 | 20.182 | 0.000 |

Path coefficients are the direct associations between variables in the structural model, where all expected paths in Table 6 are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$ and share majority path coefficients with high magnitudes. Therefore, the ambidextrous leadership exerted very high direct effects on opening ($\beta = 0.976$) and closing ($\beta = 0.972$) leadership behaviors. However, it positively affects internal whistleblowing ($\beta = 0.455$) and moral courage ($\beta = 0.126$), but the former is greater. Consequently, emotional intelligence affects all sub-dimensions, such as usage of emotions ($\beta = 0.848$) and regulation of emotion ($\beta = 0.811$), showing its multi-dimensionality. Moreover, emotional intelligence directly affects internal whistleblowing ($\beta = 0.735$), demonstrating its function in ethical conduct.

Table 7: Specific Indirect Effects

| | Original Sample | Sample Mean | Standard Deviation | T Statistics | P Values |
|---|-----------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Ambidextrous Leadership -> Moral Courage -> Internal Whistle Blowing | 0.040 | 0.040 | 0.009 | 4.580 | 0.000 |
| Emotional Intelligence -> Moral Courage -> Internal Whistle Blowing | 0.146 | 0.147 | 0.011 | 12.997 | 0.000 |

The mediation regression in Table 7 shows the indirect effects of the main constructs on internal whistleblowing. Therefore, ambidextrous leadership indirectly influences ethical behavior through moral courage ($\beta = 0.040$), suggesting that this leadership style enhances ethical behavior both directly and indirectly by fostering moral courage.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The empirical results substantiate moral courage's critical mediating role in the whistleblowing process, which directly relates to RQ2: What is the role of moral courage in mediating the relationship between leadership traits, such as ambidextrous leadership and emotional intelligence, and the likelihood of employees engaging in internal whistleblowing? Notably, even within supportive work environments, the absence of moral courage effectively inhibits whistleblowing behavior (Akwa Nde, 2021). These findings highlight how leaders can indirectly encourage ethical actions by fostering moral courage, which helps turn ambidextrous leadership and emotional intelligence into actual whistleblowing actions, addressing RQ1: How do ambidextrous leadership and a leader's emotional intelligence collectively influence internal whistleblowing behavior?

Measurement model analysis confirms discriminant validity, as evidenced by emotional intelligence's square root of AVE (0.784) exceeding its correlation with internal whistleblowing (0.640). This distinction persists despite superficial construct similarities. The results also support that the two parts of ambidextrous leadership opening (focused on change) and closing (focused on stability) behaviors are clearly different from each other, with all measurements being within acceptable limits.

The model demonstrates strong explanatory power, particularly for emotional intelligence sub-factors (e.g., regulation of emotion, $R^2 = 0.658$), affirming their stability as second-order constructs. Most significantly, moral courage emerges as a robust psychological mechanism ($\beta = 0.319$, $p < .01$) in explaining internal whistleblowing intentions, aligning with Pulungan et al.'s (2021) theoretical framework. These collective findings provide compelling evidence for the hypothesized pathways while establishing the psychometric soundness of all measured constructs.

Moral courage acts to mediate leadership behavior correspondence by bridging ethical climates and converting them into intent for action. Based on the research findings, the following are a few suggestions on how internal whistleblowing can be facilitated by ambidextrous leadership and employee training to blow the whistle (Paulino, 2023). Therefore, Kafetzopoulos (2022) stated that the organizational leadership training programs for ambidextrous leadership and emotional intelligence should be a priority. Based on cognitive-affective theory, employee behavior towards leadership is mediated through enduring psychological frameworks like moral courage (Huang et al., 2022). In addition, McAdoo (2024) explained that building a psychologically safe workplace is essential where employees are more expected to come forward when it is required to be respected, listened to, and not retaliated against. Nyamori (2024) noticed that this can be achieved through better communication channels, encouraging non-retaliation policies, and having confidential, accessible, and transparent whistleblower mechanisms. For emotionally intelligent or ambidextrous leader behavior, they increase employees' internal commitment and decrease the psychological cost of whistleblowing. Moral courage enables employees to transcend uncertainty and fear, thereby operationalizing the impact of leadership attributes. Besides, Pakizekho and Barkhordari-Sharifabad (2022) indicated the organizations must actively promote good ethics, such as whistleblowing behaviors.

Furthermore, Sergey et al. (2020) highlighted that publicly acknowledging individuals who display integrity strengthens ethical standards and motivates others to follow their example. Ng, Niven, and Hoel (2020) stated that to ensure sustained

progress, ethical climate audits must be conducted periodically to assess the efficacy of leadership, employee attitudes, and whistleblowing processes. The findings from these analyses can be used to refine policy and organizational learning. Additionally, leadership style and whistleblower protection must be ingrained in organizational strategy. Ajmal, Sareet, and Islam (2025) stated that the cross-functional alignment among HR, compliance, and leadership groups must be developed to connect values, policies, and leadership behaviors. Pulungan et al. (2021) explored that by doing this, organizations mitigate ethical risk and create a culture where employees are empowered to raise their voices, ultimately leading to increased integrity, accountability, and long-term success.

Ambidextrous leadership comprises two complementary behaviors, i.e., opening leadership and closing leadership. Opening leadership behavior fosters risk, innovation, and autonomy, as well as an environment where one would be encouraged to vent on matters of ethics and voice out concerns. Closing leadership behavior is about structure, controls, and norms to clarify but also to standardize ethical norms. In its blending of the two behaviors, it would maintain a climate that is favorable to whistleblowing and ethical courage. Similarly, emotional intelligence comprises four areas: self-emotion appraisal (SEA), by which leaders are able to know their feelings; other-emotion appraisal (OEA), by which it is possible to recognize people's feelings; regulation of emotion (ROE), by which emotions are controlled; and use of emotion (UOE), by which emotions are used to resolve problems. These underlying abilities enable emotionally intelligent leaders to establish psychological safety, empathy, and moral clarity and enable employees to exercise moral courage and internal whistleblowing.

Conclusion

The purpose for this study was to examine the complex relationship between ambidextrous leadership (AL) and the emotional intelligence (EI) of leaders, specifically their influence on internal whistleblowing behavior (IWB) in employees, with moral courage serving as a mediating psychological factor. Grounded in three well-established theoretical frameworks i.e. affective event theory, social learning theory, and protection motivation theory analyzed using PLS-SEM, the study's validated conceptual model reveals that both ambidextrous leadership and leader emotional intelligence significantly and positively impact employees' moral courage, which in turn increases the likelihood of internal whistleblowing behavior within the organization. The leadership behavior, comprising both opening (explorative) and closing (exploitative) aspects, fosters an ethical culture that encourages employees to report unethical practices and safeguard the organization. Emotional intelligence is identified as a critical enabler that helps employees manage the psychological risks and emotional challenges associated with whistleblowing, thereby enhancing their moral courage.

The study concludes that while supportive leadership encourages employees to report wrongdoing, moral courage is the crucial psychological link that translates leadership influence into actual ethical action. Even with strong leadership support, employees may hesitate to blow the whistle unless they are deeply committed to their integrity and firmly believe in ethical principles. This evidence positions moral courage as an essential mediator between external leadership influences and internal ethical decision-making processes. The validated model emphasizes two key organizational imperatives: (1) the development of leaders' emotional competencies, and (2) the

institutionalization of moral character-building initiatives.

The prominent mediating role of moral courage highlights the importance of leadership practices that simultaneously create supportive environments and prepare individuals psychologically to act ethically. Our findings indicate a strong positive correlation ($p < .01$) between moral courage and both whistleblowing intentions and behaviors, confirming that morally courageous employees are more likely to report ethical violations. Leaders who foster high emotional intelligence are found to significantly enhance employees' moral courage ($\beta = 0.42, p < .001$), thus cultivating organizational climates where ethical transparency is ingrained. This research provides evidence-based strategies to promote cultures of accountability while protecting those who demonstrate ethical courage.

Theoretical and Practical Implication

Two theoretical implications are academic contributions to theory: First, it introduces ambidextrous leadership as a theoretical framework, demonstrating how leaders' adaptability in balancing exploration and exploitation fosters an ethical reporting culture. Second, the theory of emotional intelligence highlighting how leaders shape emotional climates that reduce fears of retaliation and promote trust. These findings suggest that cultivating leaders' ambidextrous and emotional competencies holds greater potential for fostering ethics in organizations than merely focusing on compliance enforcement.

Practical recommendations derived from these results include:

- Implementing leadership development programs that enhance EI capacities to recognize emotional cues, interpret interpersonal dynamics, and constructively manage conflict.
- Incorporating moral courage training into organizational ethics initiatives to strengthen employees' willingness to report unethical behavior.

Future Research

Future research should explore the evolution of leadership behaviors, moral courage, and whistleblowing over time through longitudinal studies, and assess the role of leadership development programs in sustaining a whistleblowing culture. Cross-cultural studies could determine if these findings apply across different contexts. Additionally, investigating other factors like organizational culture, ethical climate, and personality traits may reveal further influences on whistleblowing. Finally, examining the long-term impact of whistleblowing on organizational outcomes such as employee morale, reputation, and performance is crucial.

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