

## Unlocking Employee Silence through Leader Machiavellianism: The Moderated Mediated Assessment

Haider Mahmood<sup>1\*</sup>, Nida Mahmood<sup>2</sup> and Nabila Abid<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Management Sciences, Riphah International University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: haider.mahmood7666@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Institute of Business, Management & Administrative Sciences, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. Email: nidajalal@outlook.com

<sup>3</sup>Department of Management and Business Administration, University "G. d'Annunzio" of Chieti-Pescara, Pescara, Italy.

Email: nabila.abid@unich.it, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9647-5347>

\*Corresponding Author: haider.mahmood7666@gmail.com



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### Abstract

Grounded on the social exchange theory, this study investigates the link between leader Machiavellianism and employee silence behavior by considering the employee's relational identification as a mediator and Perception of Politics as a moderator. Sampling Data was collected from Middle-tier employees of the banking sector in Pakistan through a convenient sampling technique. A sample of 315 bank officers is being selected. For testing the model, SPSS & AMOS has been used for data analysis. Preacher and Hayes methods were used for mediation analysis. The findings of this study demonstrated that leader Machiavellianism does not directly affect employee silence; rather, a strong positive link between leader Machiavellianism and employee silence has been identified through mediation. Relational Identification had an important mediating effect on leader Machiavellianism and employee silence. Furthermore, the perception of politics was discovered to be significant as a moderator, strengthening the unfavorable association between leader machiavellianism and relational identity. According to the conclusions of this study, banking officers should be more sensitive while interacting with their employees since it would build a happy work atmosphere with stronger interpersonal interactions, hence minimizing workplace silence. As a result, the banking sector must implement effective strategies to help bank managers deal with the Perception of Politics among workers at work.

**Keywords:** leader machiavellianism; relational identification; employee silence; social exchange theory

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## 1. Introduction

Employees are essential to the prosperity of organizations because they are sources of change, creativity, learning, and innovation. However, for a variety of reasons, many employees don't speak up about problems and issues at work (Liut et al., 2009). Scholars define the deliberate withholding of important information about a company's procedures and problems as Employee silence (Milliken et al., 2003). However, silence is not the only source of noncommunication. It only occurs when staff chooses to remain silent for various reasons or worries and retain sensitive knowledge about the organization (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). According to Brinsfield (2013), leaders' attitudes, behaviors, and attributes have an impact on employees' workplace quiet. Despite being one of the numerous indications of employee silence, leadership is equally essential (Brinsfield, 2013; Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018). Christie & Geis (1970) asserted that a Machiavellian leader is one who uses deception and manipulation to further their own goals. A lack of workplace ethics, dishonest

intent, and even white-collar criminality have all been linked to a leader's Machiavellianism in the earliest studies of this phenomenon (O'Boyle et al., 2012).

Results suggest that "high Machiavellians," as opposed to "low Machiavellians," are more charismatic (Goldberg, 1999), motivated (Mael et al., 2001), and interesting to listen (Deluga, 2001) than individuals with lower levels of Machiavellianism. Nonetheless, numerous researchers have argued that those with dominant Machiavellian traits are more likely to be manipulative. Because of this, they are more destructive (Christie & Geis, 1970), less harmonious (Paal & Bereczkei, 2007), more opportunistic (Sakalaki et al., 2007), more transactional with their subordinates (Zagenczyk et al., 2011), more interested in negative than positive reciprocity (Meyer, 1992), and more likely to adopt authoritarian leadership styles (Kiazad et al., 2010). So, we predicted that the current harsh corporate climate would magnify the undesirable character traits of Machiavellian employees, making it even more crucial. It's getting harder to keep commitments made by employees, especially in unstable firms. These promises serve as a basis for psychological contracts; in organizations where workers sense that their promises are being fulfilled, they are thankful and believe that the organization is bound to satisfy them in exchange for their efforts (Rousseau, 1995). Employees' perceptions that their psychological contracts are being broken are an issue for today's organizations since it has a negative impact on performance and a positive impact on negative attitudes and behaviors (Zhao et al., 2007).

When workers perceive their leaders as Machiavellian, they experience psychological strain, stress, and despair at work, leading to employee silence, low job satisfaction, low commitment, cynicism, and intention to leave (Dahling et al., 2009). Although Umphress et al. (2010) suggested that relational identification lowers employee quiet, an empirical study on organizational silence is still necessary. Researchers also discovered that organizational politics creates an unfair and unjust work environment (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991; Vigoda, 2002). According to Johns (2006), perception of politics or organizational culture may appear to be crucial for influencing employee behavior. Organizational politics impair organizational capacities and decreases organizational output (Schneider, 2016). Erkutlu & Chafra (2019) use relational identification as a mediator to determine the relationship between leader Machiavellianism and employee quiet. Furthermore, the researchers looked at the effect of psychological distance as a moderator in this association. Researchers also advised subsequent studies to test the same model with other contextual variables. In the future, it should be looked into how perceived organizational politics affect the link between leader Machiavellianism and relational identification, as this is an important factor that has implications for the workplace. The arguments above show how important it is to do empirical research on employee silence and how perceived organizational politics affect it, especially in public sector organizations. In this study, the effects of Machiavellian leadership on employee silence behavior are looked at, taking into account the moderating effects of Perception of Politics and the intervening effects of Relational Identification.

The current study made a variety of literary contributions. The first is how leader Machiavellianism affects important employee outcomes, such as employee silent behavior, with connection identification acting as a mediator. Despite the fact that Machiavellianism (as a personality characteristic) is present in the leadership literature, there is still a critical need for in-depth research using novel variables. By identifying how relational identity reduces employees' silence, this study added to the body of knowledge on relational identification. Second, most academics sought to shed light on this unexplored problem. The main theory is social exchange theory, which tries to figure out how relational identification affects the relationship between Leader Machiavellian and employee silence. With what it finds, we might be able to learn more about this mechanism. So far, few studies in human resources have used Perception of Politics as a moderator, which is such a manipulative leadership style. This study can, therefore, add something new to the field. After looking at a lot of studies, it's been said that there isn't enough research on how Leader Machiavellianism affects Employee Silence and that this needs to be looked into immediately. Therefore, it would be a valuable contribution to the body of literature to concentrate on how relational identification and the moderating impact of political perception interact to explain how leader Machiavellianism is related to employee silence.

This study looked at how perceived organizational politics influenced the link between leader Machiavellianism and employee silence, as mediated by relational identity. Finally, this research allows us to develop some actions to combat perceived organizational politics among employees. The current study aimed to address the following research questions by gathering data from Pakistan's banking industry. 1) Is there a link between Machiavellianism in leaders and employee silence? 2) Does relational identity serve as an intervening factor between Leader Machiavellianism and Employee Silence? 3) Does political perception function as a moderator between a leader's Machiavellian behavior and employee silence? Pakistan's banking system is one of the most centralized and turbulent, with a hostile atmosphere, due to this research's focus and the fierce competition between private, public, and international banks (Ul Hassan et al., 2013). In the banking industry, it has been seen that manipulative leadership styles, in which managers use unethical and deceptive methods to meet their own needs without caring about the well-being of their employees, cause most of the stress and pressure to be felt by middle-tier staff. This makes employees reluctant to voice their concerns, which leads to employee silence. We believe that using this strategy will result in a more pleasant work atmosphere with better interpersonal interactions, which will eliminate workplace quiet. Thus, the banking industry must implement effective strategies to enable managers to deal with workers' perceptions of politics at work.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 explains the theoretical foundation of the study, followed by hypothesis development. Section 3 presents the data methodology and results interpretation. Lastly, section 4 discusses the conclusion and implications of the study.

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development**

Based on the social exchange theory, the notion of reciprocity for reciprocal advantages creates and improves various social connections through harmony in the workplace (Blau, 1964), and the reciprocity norm is widely used to explain the negative impacts of violation (Gouldner, 1960). As per the social exchange concept, employees feel obligated to contribute to organizational success when their expectations for compensation and treatment are met (Rousseau, 1995). When a corporation falls short of its employees' expectations, they become disgruntled, less productive workers (Zhao et al., 2007), who may even take vengeful action against the company (Bordia et al., 2008) or refuse to assist clients in need (Bordia et al., 2010). The adoption of the adversarial reciprocity norm (Gouldner, 1960) explains this behavior, which asserts that those who have been wronged would want to get even with those responsible. The importance of the reciprocity rule, which requires people to help those who help them, was stressed by He et al. (2019). Those who choose not to reciprocate miss out on the benefits of cooperative relationships, workplace peace, and productivity (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2017; He et al., 2019).

Employees are less likely to return their bosses' trust when there is a bad impression of relational identity in social interactions (Wu et al., 2012). So, it is said that both a strong sense of politics in a leader and employee silence are dangerous to a relationship because they make it hard for people to talk to each other. Scholars say that Machiavellian leadership changes how people act at work through social exchange processes (Belschak et al., 2018). According to the social exchange theory, when people think their leaders are looking out for their best interests and meeting their obligations, they will do their best to return the favor and feel like they have to (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2017). When the roles are switched, leaders are more likely to be manipulative, abusive, and less empathetic toward their subordinates (Belschak et al., 2018; Dahling et al., 2009; Rauthmann, 2012). As a result, subordinates see this exchange as unfair or abusive. This causes psychological stress, which affects how employees act at work and encourages resistance and bad behavior from their subordinates, like deviance (O'Boyle et al., 2012) and less work effort (Dahling et al., 2009). Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework for this study.

### **2.1. Leader Machiavellianism and Employee Silence**

According to the authors' findings, employees who remain silent about concerns at work may be hurting themselves, their coworkers, and the company as a whole. They also demonstrated the potentially devastating

effects of workers' incapacity to address systemic issues (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Pinder & Harlos, 2001). According to Brinsfield (2013), there is widespread silence in corporations. Employees who are unable to voice their opinions or concerns may experience a decrease in job satisfaction, increased distrust and strain, and emotional dissatisfaction as a result (Cortina & Magley, 2003; Whiteside & Barclay, 2013). A culture of silence may hinder the productivity of an organization because mistakes are less likely to be found and fixed (Knoll & Redman, 2016), and serious ethical violations are less likely to happen (Clapham & Cooper, 2005). If workers can't say what they think or give feedback, it can kill innovation at work (Gambarotto & Cammazzo, 2010) and positive change inside an organization (Argyris & Schön, 1978), which limits employee growth and creativity (Knoll & Redman, 2016).

In any organization, leaders are the key source that affects their subordinates and employees (Bass, 1985). H. Erkutlu & Chafra (2018) argued that leadership is an important factor among the various determinants of employee silence. According to researchers, a Machiavellian leader is an expert manipulator who employs destructive tactics and possesses an unreliable soul; he also views the world through a pessimistic lens (Smith et al., 2009). Machiavellian leaders exist in every organization, including welfare organizations (Chen, 2010). Machiavellian leaders are influential falsehoods and manipulators who care less about ethical concerns (Schepers, 2003). Machiavellian personality is typically defined negatively because it is a demoralizing and corrupt attitude, and it has attracted interest in the study of organizational behavior (Belschak et al., 2013) and business ethics (Hartog & Belschak, 2012). Machiavellian leaders are habituated to deceiving, lying, and betraying others (O'Boyle et al., 2012). Due to a lack of interaction with their leaders, the supporters of manipulative leadership are reluctant to achieve organizational performance objectives. Subordinates, who are unlikely to identify with their Machiavellian leader, are reluctant to raise their concerns with that leader because they believe it is not secure to do so.

Employees are less likely to identify with their company or the leader if they think their relationship with their boss is unfair or if their boss uses them to get what he wants. This hurts subordinates' confidence, trust, and pride in the organization. Because of this mistrust, subordinates don't think of organizational issues as their own and think their opinions on these issues won't be taken as seriously. The increased level of pessimistic thoughts, such as pressure and frustration, can be attributed to Machiavellian leaders whose negative vision leads to a lack of confidence among those around them (Dahling et al., 2009). Belschak et al. (2018) contended that the lens of Machiavellianism creates an environment where subordinates mistrust and treat each other unfairly. This creates an uncomfortable environment where subordinates are more likely to respond negatively, leading to high emotional exhaustion and silence. Also, when employees don't trust their bosses, it hurts their sense of self-efficacy (Yang & Mossholder, 2010).

According to Belschak et al. (2018), followers' actions can be influenced by a leader's Machiavellian tactics via these social exchange mechanisms. According to social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), many social connections are founded on reciprocity and duties to pay back benefits. According to this notion, if workers perceive their boss as caring about them, they will be more likely to pitch in for him or her (H. V. Erkutlu & Chafra, 2017). So, based on this theory, we also have the concept of negative reciprocity. Machiavellians tend to break their relationships with others because of negative reciprocity, even though cooperatively working with others is important, just as group members help each other and managers build good relationships with their subordinates and do their jobs because they are loyal to their boss. So, it can be proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Leader Machiavellianism has a significant positive impact on employee silence.

## 2.2. Mediation of Relational Identification

Sluss & Ashforth (2007) described relational identification as a clear idea of what it means to be in a supervisor-subordinate relationship, and he accepted that role as part of his own definition. In organizations, subordinates work with their immediate boss and the organization (Masterson et al., 2000). Relational identification and organizational identification must be figured out by organizations (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Lord & Brown (2001) said that leaders are mostly in charge of helping employees fit in at work. Because leaders are the reason

an organization exists, employees who build strong relationships with their leaders are likelier to adopt the values their leaders want to instill. Lord et al. (1999) said that leaders affect how employees see themselves, what they do, and how they interact with others. According to Sluss & Ashforth (2007), a stronger relationship fosters mutual interest, emotional affiliation, a sense of belonging, and an openness to influence the admired and respected identity objective and relational identification. This makes it easier for employees to identify with their organization.

In turn, this keeps employees from acting of their own free will. The study also showed that, according to the social exchange theory, employees are less likely to respond to their leaders' trust if they have limited relational identification (Wu et al., 2012). If employees don't talk to their bosses as much, they will be more likely to have useful information and ideas for self-defense. Leader Machiavellianism may be a cause of employee silence because it affects how people feel about their relationships. Leader Machiavellianism, on the other hand, may make employees feel more stressed and insecure because leaders' punishing behavior is often unpredictable and out of the employees' hands. Studies have shown that employees who are quiet are more likely to feel fear, anxiety, and uncertainty (Kenworthy & Jones, 2009). In fact, (Zagenczyk et al. 2013) found that employee identification with a leader who acts like Machiavelli does not go well when the leader acts like Machiavelli. Literature suggests that if a leader is more like Machiavelli, people will feel less connected to them. This explains why followers don't want to talk to their leaders about high-level Machiavellian topics. Most employees of a manipulative leader with whom they don't identify aren't ready to meet that leader's standards for performance.

Leader Machiavellianism encourages employee reticence because of its detrimental effect on relational identification. Still, leader Machiavellianism may increase employee anxiety and reluctance because leaders' coercive behavior is hard to control and often hard to predict. Researchers have found that fear, anxiety, and not knowing what to do are linked to more silent behavior (Kenworthy & Jones, 2009). When employees think their relationship with their leader is unfair or that their leader uses them to reach their own goals, they lose confidence, trust, and pride in the organization and feel less empowered to work with the company and the leader. This mistrust makes it hard for subordinates to see organizational issues as personal, and it makes them feel like their thoughts on organizational issues won't be taken seriously.

Based on what we've discussed so far, we can say that relational identification will affect the connection between Machiavellian leadership and employee silence. Machiavellian leaders look down on their employees, care less about their well-being, and don't give them enough information so they can talk about their problems. This keeps them quiet and keeps them from identifying with their leader. In fact, Zagenczyk et al. (2013) found that followers' feelings of identification with their leader are linked to the leader's Machiavellianism in a bad way. So, we can say that a higher level of Machiavellian leadership will make it harder for employees to feel close to their leader. This then explains why the employees of Machiavellian executives are quiet at work. So, it could be hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2. Relational identification mediates the association between a leader's Machiavellianism and employee silence.

### 2.3. Moderation of Perceived Organizational Politics

Ferris et al. (1989) define organizational politics as using social influence to further one's interests at the expense of the organization's goals. To be clear, it only cares about getting personal gain and doesn't care about the needs of others in the organization ((Kacmar & Baron, 1999). In any organization where politics are a big deal, other powerful members who are trying to protect their own self-interests could completely ruin an employee's pay, career, and well-being (Poon, 2004). Zivnuska et al. (2004) say that any relationship or power structure in an organization can affect the employee benefits and compensation system. Under these circumstances, the company's atmosphere becomes more biased, and people are more likely to have a bloodthirsty and self-serving attitude that encourages them to work together to reach their goals without caring about the needs of others. This, in turn, can lead to unethical behavior at work (Cropanzano et al., 1997).

The way people think about politics causes stress at work. When subordinates think there is a lot of organizational politics, there will be more turnover than when there are no organizational politics. Employees who work in an environment where political activities are common will have mental stress because political activities are bad for their health and performance (Ferris et al., 1989; Haq, 2011; Miller et al., 2008). In a political workplace, people may think that their hard work and dedication won't always be valued, rewarded, and respected (Cropanzano et al., 1997). Miller et al. (2008) showed that the Perception of Politics makes employees more anxious and more likely to want to leave the organization, which may force them to look for work somewhere else. Consequently, politics in an organization has deleterious effects on both organizational performance and human capital.

Although several other contextual factors have been identified as significant political components of an organization's perception of politics (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992), leadership is regarded as the most important factor in defining and altering the work atmosphere (Colquitt & Rich, 2012). Leadership plays a crucial role in influencing the organizational politics perspectives of followers (Vigoda-gadot, 2007). According to Kacmar et al. (2011) and other scholars, there is a negative relationship between the perception of politics and ethical leadership. Unethical leadership, on the other hand, makes people like politics more, which shows that there is a strong link between Perception of Politics and the ethical or unethical leadership cycle. Even though variables like Machiavellianism and span of control have already been used to study how people see organizational politics, they are less likely to be affected by leadership styles (Valle & L.Perrewe, 2000). The authors said that relationships in the workplace are the most important thing for any organization to do well (Grant et al., 2011). So, when employees think their relationship with their leader isn't fair or when their leader attempts to deceive them to get them to keep his promises, it causes a lack of trust, which makes subordinates lose confidence at work, which in turn makes their relationship with the boss and organization worse. Literature cited previously indicates that employees' perceptions of politics will diminish their relational identification. Based on the above arguments, it could be said that there is no doubt that employees will not trust their leaders if they act politically and don't care about their employees. So, we can say that political perception will make it harder for people to identify with each other. So, it could be hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3: Perceived organizational politics will moderate the association between leader Machiavellianism and relation identification such that when perceived organizational politics is high, this negative relationship will be strengthened.

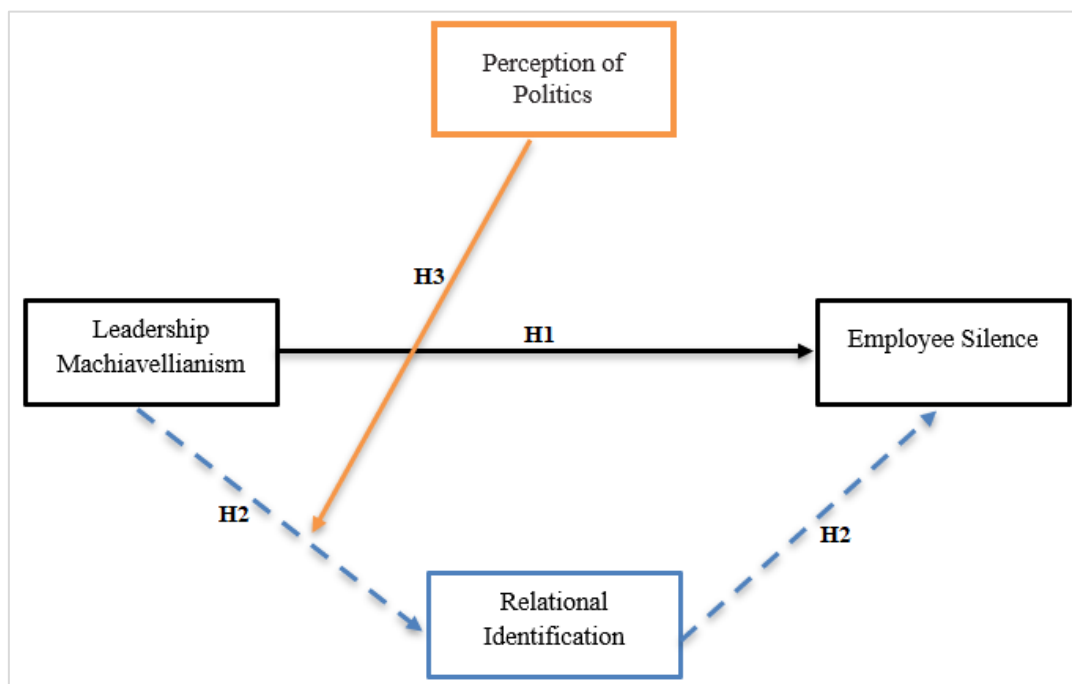


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Research setting

This investigation is conducted in the Pakistani banking industry. According to numerous researchers, Pakistan's banking industry is one of the most centralized, with an unpredictable and volatile environment, due to the intense competition between private, public, and multinational institutions (Ul Hassan et al., 2013). In the Banking Sector, it has been seen that middle-level employees feel the most stress and pressure when their managers use unethical and manipulative tactics to get what they want without caring about the well-being of their employees. Since employees aren't always willing to respond or stand up to their leaders, even if they act rudely (Burris, 2012), this makes them reluctant to show their concerns, which leads to employee silence. For a smooth and healthy working environment, the banking sector of developing countries like Pakistan must think about and take action immediately.

#### 3.2. Sample and Procedure

The population of this study consisted of employees of the banking sector in Pakistan. The sample size of this was 315, which included banking employees from various bank departments. A convenient-sampling method was used to select the sample. One of our co-authors visited these banks for approvals from the bank managers and other administrative authorities to distribute the questionnaires among their employees. Informed consent of participants was also taken. In the total sample of this study, 31.4 percent of the banking employees were female and whereas 68.6 percent of the banking employees were male (Table 1). The questionnaires were distributed to different age groups; the percentage of the age group 18-25 was 46.7 and, the percentage of the second age group of 26-40 was 44.8, and third, the percentage of the third age group 41-60 was 8.6. In this study sample, 67.6 percent of employees were single, and 32.4 percent were married. The questionnaires were given to the employees holding different positions in banks; in this study, the percentage of employees holding the position of supervisor/management was 58.1, maintenance employees were 4.8 percent, customer service employees were 29.5 percent, and the clerical staff was 7.6 percent. The respondents had different job experiences in the banking sector; their job experience was classified into four groups 71.4 percent of employees had experience from 1-5 years, 6-10 years 14.3 percent, and 11- 20 years 11.4 percent and only 2.9 percent employees who were having the job experience of above 20 years. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed, and 315 were received back. The response rate was 90 percent.

**Table 1.** Demographics.

Variables	Frequency	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	216	68.6
Female	99	31.4
Total	315	100.0
<b>Age group (years)</b>		
18-25 years	147	46.7
26-40 years	141	44.8
41-60 years	27	8.6
<b>Work experience</b>		
1-5 Years	39	71.4
6-10 years	97	14.3
11-20 years	75	11.4
20 + years	50	2.9
<b>Management role</b>		
Supervisor/Management	183	58.1
Maintenance employees	15	4.8
Customer service	93	29.5
Clerical staff	24	7.6

### 3.3. Variable Measurement

For the present study, the survey technique measures the proposed relationships among the constructs. In social science research, survey questionnaires are appropriate and effective (Aftab et al., 2022). A well-structured questionnaire was adopted by the previous researcher for collecting information. This highly structured questionnaire was divided into five sections: individual attributes (gender, age, responder position, and work experience), leader Machiavellianism, employee silence, relational identification, and political perception. This study adapted mature scales from the literature that fit our study situation to ensure reliability and validity. Questionnaires were created in English because it is widely utilized in the business sector in Pakistan. Initially, the researcher personally visited ten banking officers who were specialists in their industry and solicited feedback on the questionnaire's content validity. Some items were changed as a result of their suggestions. For pilot testing, corrected questionnaires were distributed to 25 bank workers; 17 were returned, and all scales had adequate internal reliability ( $>.70$ ). Finally, approximately 400 questionnaires were distributed among employees. Because there were more responses and the answers were better, a 7-point Likert scale was used to rate all of the questions. 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Disagree, 4 = Neutral, 5 = Somewhat agree, 6 = agree, and 7 = Strongly agree. The specifics are provided below.

#### 3.3.1. Leader Machiavellianism

In this model, "Leader Machiavellianism" is the independent variable. To evaluate the leader's level of Machiavellianism, the 16-Item Scale devised by Dahling et al. (2009) was used. Utilizing the Seven-point Likert scale, the items were evaluated. On a seven-point Likert scale, respondents rated items (1=Strongly disagree; 7=Strongly concur). "My supervisor believes that deception is necessary to maintain a competitive advantage over others" is an example of a sample item.

#### 3.3.2. Employee Silence

Employee Silence is the focal variable in this investigation. Detert & Edmondson (2011) introduced a Five-item Employee silence scale to measure it, e.g., "I suppress ideas for modifying inefficient work policies from my supervisor." Respondents rated items on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree).

#### 3.3.3. Relational Identification

The 10-item relational identification with the leader scale developed was used to assess it (Walumbwa & Hartnell, 2011). "When someone criticizes My Boss, it seems like an insult to me" for example. Items were graded on a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 being strongly disagreed and seven strongly agree.

#### 3.3.4. Perception of Politics

A 15-item scale developed by Kacmar & Ferris (1991) was used to measure the level of political perception at work. Respondents scored each item on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). One example of a sample item is "It is safer to think what you are told than to make up your own mind."

## 4. Results and Interpretations

For the analysis of the data, SPSS and AMOS are being utilized. The first section discusses descriptive statistics of sample results derived through analysis. The second section discussed the various forms of reliability analysis conducted for this study, including convergent and discriminant. Then, the proposed measurement and structural model's psychometric properties are examined in depth. The results of hypothesis testing are then analyzed, including analyses of moderating and mediating hypothesized relationships. AMOS 20.0 software was utilized to obtain measurements and structural model fits. The intended outcomes from the proposed relationships were obtained using structural equation modeling. SEM also made it possible to model



with latent variables that couldn't be seen and to estimate a model with no measurement errors. Similarly, AMOS is considered more reliable and has a strong method that combines regression and confirmatory factor analysis to estimate both the structural and measurement models simultaneously (Hair et al., 2010; Joseph F. Hair et al., 1998). In addition, AMOS computed the proposed relationship between the latent constructs and displayed its graphical interpretation. Therefore, AMOS was utilized in this analysis to determine the hypothesized relationship.

#### 4.1. Common Method Variance (CMV)

Common method bias usually refers to the difference in results that can be traced back to the measurement method instead of the interest itself (Bagozzi et al., 1991; Podsakoff et al., 2003). The problem with common method variance is that it explains the relationships between measured constructs differently than the one that was hypothesized. Controlling for common method bias strengthens the study's internal validity and rules out other possible explanations. Podsakoff et al. (2003) took a critical look at common method biases in research and made important suggestions to fix them. Authors have said that, for a study in which both the predictor and criterion variables come from the same place and are measured in the same way, the following fixes should be made:

- Use procedural remedies related to questionnaire design
- Controlled statistically by a single common method factor

As there may be a danger of CMV, procedures are designed to determine what characteristics the predictor measures share with all self-reported survey data (Podsakoff et al., 2003). There may be some common method bias because the data were self-reported and came from a single source. The fact that the data were self-reported suggests that there may be a technique to reduce the risk of CMV. This study did this using many iterations of our survey (Sharma et al., 2009). This study examined CMV using techniques that Podsakoff and his colleagues developed (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

#### 4.2. Reliabilities and Validity Analysis

Before going deeper into the characteristics of the proposed constructs, the entire sample data was tested with the anchor points and the mean of each proposed construct. The results of each analysis for each construct are presented in Table 2. The findings of this study indicate that none of the constructs exhibit significant issues, such as a lack of variability.

**Table 2.** Total Variance Explained (Harman's one factor test).

Component	Initial Eigen values			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	16.084	34.222	34.222	16.084	34.222	34.222	15.245	32.435	32.435
2	9.353	19.900	54.121	9.353	19.900	54.121	9.448	20.102	52.538
3	6.417	13.652	67.774	6.417	13.652	67.774	6.873	14.623	67.160
4	4.762	10.133	77.906	4.762	10.133	77.906	4.546	9.673	76.834

**Table 3.** Anchor points and means for each of the constructs.

Constructs	Anchor Points	Mean
Leader Machiavellianism	1-Strongly disagree and 7-Strongly agree.	3.38
Employee Silence	1-Strongly disagree and 7-Strongly agree.	4.02
Relational Identification	1-Strongly disagree and 7-Strongly agree.	3.97
Perception of Politics	1-Strongly disagree and 7-Strongly agree.	4.39

CFA was used to examine factor loading. As variables have no other dimensions, each construct item was loaded onto its corresponding latent variable. Current research indicates that the factor loading of each

construct item was above the permissible range, i.e., > 0.60. The specifications of factor loading and the number of items for each construct used in this study are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Reliability and convergent validity.

Constructs	Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
<b>Leader Machiavellianism</b>		0.961	0.98	0.81
LM1	0.993			
LM2	0.983			
LM3	0.981			
LM4	0.973			
LM5	0.961			
LM6	0.954			
LM7	0.934			
LM8	0.912			
LM9	0.853			
LM10	0.821			
LM11	0.812			
LM12	0.804			
LM13	0.8			
LM14	0.783			
LM15	0.776			
LM16	0.746			
<b>Perception of Politics</b>		0.861	0.96	0.61
POP1	0.856			
POP2	0.846			
POP3	0.839			
POP4	0.824			
POP5	0.822			
POP6	0.815			
POP7	0.811			
POP8	0.798			
POP9	0.778			
POP10	0.771			
POP11	0.761			
POP12	0.681			
POP13	0.678			
POP14	0.664			
POP15	0.663			
<b>Relational Identification</b>		0.871	0.94	0.61
RI1	0.634			
RI2	0.842			
RI3	0.838			
RI4	0.825			
RI5	0.81			
RI6	0.8			

Constructs	Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
RI7	0.785			
RI8	0.754			
RI9	0.748			
RI10	0.744			
<b>Employee Silence</b>		0.823	0.86	0.54
ES1	0.782			
ES2	0.755			
ES3	0.724			
ES4	0.709			
ES5	0.707			

#### 4.4. Convergent Validity and Reliability

Using Cronbach's alpha, factor loadings, and average variance extracted (AVE), this study examined the convergent validity and reliability of the construct employed in this study (Hair et al., 1998). All constructs exhibit the prescribed level of reliability (Cronbach's alpha > 0.70) after conducting CFA to evaluate the items' validity. Each construct item's factor loading was discovered to be above the acceptable threshold, i.e., >0.60. In conclusion, the AVE of each construct demonstrates that each construct's value exceeds the recommended termination limit, i.e., AVE > 0.50. A value of AVE greater than 0.50 indicates that the latent factor explains at least 50% of the variance between the elements. CFA was performed using AMOS to determine whether the study's variables have factor loadings greater than 0.6. (Hair et al., 2010). The results of the CFA indicated that the indices for the overall fit of the proposed model are valid because the resulting values (between 0.736 and 0.986) fall within the intended loading value cut-off. All corresponding Cronbach's Alphas were greater than the 0.80 thresholds. Both CR and AVE reached an acceptable level. As shown in Table 4, the reliability results are presented. Thus, it was demonstrated that all construct instruments were reliable.

Along with determining the convergent validity of our proposed constructs, we evaluated their discriminant validity in multiple methods. First, we analyzed the square root of average variance extracted (AVE) (Chin, 1998) for each of the constructs utilized in our study (Chin, 1998). The results demonstrate that the AVE for each construct is greater than the inter-construct correlations. AVE > inter-construct correlations demonstrated that discriminant validity is not an issue. Table 4 contains the inter-construct correlation matrix, indicating that each construct's AVE (bold and diagonal) is greater than the respective variable correlation. Following Table 5 is the correlation between each variable, as described in the preceding section. The correlation matrix demonstrates a significant correlation between the desired construct, and the correlation level is regarded as low, indicating that there is no CMB issue.

First, we looked at the correlations suggested by Pavlou et al. (2007); the authors say that correlations of more than 0.9 can be used to figure out CMV, but in the study, correlations were much lower and still significant. Table 5 shows the study variables' mean, standard deviation, correlation, and reliability analysis. The values are reliable enough that a smaller number of questionnaire items can be used to get slightly lower reliability values for each variable. Also, the correlation coefficients are not more than 65%, which shows that the study's variables are linked correctly, as predicted by the hypothesis.

Second, we tested for this bias using Harman's one-factor method. Using Harman's single factor 2 test, it was determined that common latent components shouldn't account for more than 50% of the variation. If not, a CMV could be present. In this study, many factors were retrieved, and they accounted for 76.83% of the variation. No one factor accounted for the majority of the variation, which suggested that common technique bias was unlikely to represent a significant danger to the study. The top factor only explained 34.22% of the overall variance. When considered collectively, all of these analyses show that common method bias is unlikely to apply to the data.

**Table 5.** Means, standard deviation, correlation, and reliabilities.

	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3	4
Leader Machiavellianism	3.38	0.64	(0.86)			
Relational Identification	3.97	0.57	-.204**	(0.82)		
Employee Silence	4.04	0.93	.865**	-.255**	(0.82)	
Perception of Politics	4.39	0.62	.990**	-.184**	.850**	(0.84)

n=315, \*\* p<.01. Cronbach's Alpha is given in parenthesis.

#### 4.5. Measurement Model and Structural Model

We connected each item to its corresponding construct in order to analyze the measurement and structural model fit. At the same time, we tested it separately using a single technique factor. It displays every variable from the suggested research model, including Employee Silence as the dependent variable, Leader Machiavellianism as the independent variable, Relational Identification as the mediating factor between Employee Silence and Relational Identification, and Perception of Politics as the mediating factor between Leader Machiavellianism and Relational Identification. All the constructs were freely correlated in order to test the measurement model. Table 6 displays measurement model fit indices and reveals a strong model fit.

**Table 6.** Summary of model fit indices.

Model Test	CMIN/DF<5	GFI>.9	AGFI>.9	NFI>.9	IFI>.9	CFI>.9	RMSEA <.1
Measurement Model	$\chi^2 (229.425) = 135, \chi^2/df = 1.69$	.971	.978	.924	.960	.60	.045
Hypothesized Model	$\chi^2 (13.4) = 15, \chi^2/df = .89$	.949	.906	.905	.941	.939	.054

In addition, just the structural path, which indicated the direction of the suggested relationships, was introduced to assess the structural model fit after all covariates had been eliminated. A decent model fit with all indices is above the cutoff limit, according to the results. Table 5 displays measurement and structural model fit indices. A good model fit is indicated by structural model fit indices that are above the necessary threshold, such as GFI>0.971, AGFI>0.978, NFI>0.924, IFI>0.960, CFI>.60, and RMSEA 0.45. The discussion of relationships being tested through hypotheses follows. To see if the proposed model fits the data the best, the study has also investigated other model fit indices.

#### 4.6. One-way ANOVA

One-way ANOVA was carried out to find significant differences in dependent variables across demographic factors; no significant difference was found in Employee Silence due to demographic factors; gender, Age, and Job Experience was found significant with relation identification; results are presented above in Table 7.

**Table 7.** One-way ANOVA.

Demographics	Employee Silence		Relational Identification	
	f value	p-value	f value	p-value
Gender	.189	.664ns	7.295	.007*
Marital Status	.001	.976ns	3.442	.065ns
Age	1.378	.254ns	3.891	.021*
Position	1.961	.120ns	.639	.590ns
Job experience	2.264	.081ns	10.888	.000*

n=315, ns = non-Significant, \* = Significant

#### 4.7. Regression Analysis

Table 8 demonstrates that H3 was evaluated utilizing the moderated regression analysis technique developed by (Cohen et al., 2003), wherein control variables were inputted in step 1, and demographics were controlled, resulting in  $R^2 = 0.07\%$ . In the second step, the independent and moderator variables were added.

**Table 8.** Regression analysis of relational identification.

Predictors	Relation Identification		
	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1			
Control Variables		.07	
Step 2			
LM	-.618	.126	.56
POP	.734		
Step 3			
LM x POP	-.046ns	.127	.001*

n= 315, \*=significant, ns= non-significant, LM=Leader Machiavellianism, POP= Perception of Politics

The third step concluded with the entry of the interaction term, which was found to be insignificant, indicating that moderation does not prove. The results of moderated regression analysis in Table 9 show that Perception of politics does not moderate the relationship between leader Machiavellianism and Relational identification ( $\beta = -.046$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .001$ ,  $p=ns$ , and, as a result, H3 was rejected.

**Table 9.** Mediation regression analysis of relational identification.

The direct effect of Leader Machiavellianism on Employee Silence							
Effect	Se	T	P	LLCI	ULCI	c' ps	c'cs
1.2304	.0415	29.6233	.0000	1.1487	1.3121	1.3202	.8483
Indirect effect(s) of Leader Machiavellianism on Employee silence							
	Effect	BootSE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI			
RI	.0243	.0127	.0036	.0529			

n=315, p=significant, RI= Relational Identification

Table 8 shows that H1 is supported as it is found to be significant, so leader Machiavellianism significantly impacts employee silence. And H2 is also supported as Table 9 results show the bootstrap results, so the same sign shows that it also has the indirect effect of Relational identification on the dependent variable employee silence in this study.

## 5. Discussion and Implications

Since personality traits and factors are not easily changed but still have an impact on people's interactions at work, companies should pay more attention to how the personalities of their leaders affect things like productivity, morale, the prevalence of unethical behavior, and even things like personnel silence behavior at workplace (Anderson et al., 2008; Barrick et al., 2002). As a result, strong Machiavellianism and other "dark" personality characteristics are a big cause for concern in the workplace (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The authors claim that Machiavellians are more likely than others to engage in damaging workplace behaviors and unethical decision-making (Schepers, 2003; Smith et al., 2009). This research looks at how Leader Machiavellianism, Mediated by Relational Identification, and Moderated by Perception of Politics, affects Employee Silence in Pakistan's Banking Industry.

The relationship between leader Machiavellianism and employee silence in Pakistani banks has been investigated and tested. Machiavellian leaders are bad for businesses because they cause tension in the workplace and cause employees to keep quiet. My sample results confirmed my first hypothesis (H1), positing that a leader's display of Machiavellian tendencies would positively affect employee silence at the workplace. As Hunter (2012) described, Machiavellianism is a worldview in which no one can be trusted on the most fundamental level. This is because a Machiavellian leader is inherently self-serving; he uses techniques and immoral tactics to further his own interest. In line with this other research, the present study finds that a leader's Machiavellianism is connected with silent personnel who refrain from speaking out. Employees' tension at work manifests itself in silence at some point.

Second, the findings of my study supported my second hypothesis, which was that relational identification breaks the link between a leader's Machiavellianism and employee silence. According to the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), developing strong social exchange relationships with others requires the development of trust, but building relational identification between leaders and employees is impossible because of a lack of trust between them. Moreover, relational identification illustrates how a leader's Machiavellianism and subordinates' silence are related. According to Cook & Wall (1980), trust is the degree to which a person is willing to believe that others have good intentions and have faith in what they say and do. This willingness affects how a person acts toward others. Considering these previous studies, we can conclude that relational identification intervenes in the connection between Machiavellian leadership and employee silence.

The results of this study indicate that perceived organizational politics does not moderate the relationship between leader Machiavellianism and employee, contradicting Hypothesis 3: Perceived organizational politics will moderate the association between leader Machiavellianism and relation identification in such a way that when perceived organizational politics is high, this negative association will be strengthened, as in the modern era things are changing and becoming more advanced, in rapidly evolving organizations of the twenty-first century where organizations appear to be more conscious with cognitive ability and putting more emphasis on personality (Afsar et al., 2017), and regular training can cognitively shape employee's minds to enhance the capacity for converting ideas into practice, reducing such perceptions among employees. In banks, upper management considers these things very seriously, providing a variety of training to banking employees and holding counseling sessions with them to ensure that this doesn't happen. Companies should continuously invest in their workers' growth and happiness so that they may be productive members of society.

### 5.1. Theoretical Implications

First, this research has shown the significance of Machiavellian Leadership in organizations, as leadership is essential. Constantly upholding ethics and fostering a conducive and productive work environment, a healthy leader assures the integrity of the organization at all times. Yet, if a leader is proven to be deceptive and unethical, this may have serious consequences, such as personnel quiet, staff turnover, absenteeism, workplace deviance, and so on. Employees are more commonly linked with ethics than CEOs. Therefore, current research has focused on this phenomenon, which demonstrates that it is equally associated with employees and their leaders and will ultimately enhance the performance of any organization.

Second, this study investigates the significance of relational identification as a mediating factor in the link between Machiavellian leadership and Employee Silence. It has previously been investigated as a mediator; however, it was combined with a different moderator in this study. When employees perceive the leader to be negative and deceptive, their attitude towards the organization will undoubtedly become negative, and they will reciprocate in a negative manner, which is detrimental to organizational culture and may result in a lack of organizational effectiveness, according to SET. Leaders and their staff cannot create healthy connections under such unethical and deceptive leadership. Finally, the current study considers political perception as a mediator in the association between Machiavellianism and Relational Identity among leaders. Literature that did not serve as a moderator may have been studied from a different perspective. When employees think that politics exist in their workplace, especially under such bad leadership that inhibits relational identification among them, an uncomfortable work environment is created, resulting in employee stress and, eventually, a lack of productivity. When Machiavellian leadership is present, and employees do not feel empowered, it is detrimental and leads to a non-productive and ineffective side, where employees do not speak out against wrongdoing in the workplace and withhold their ideas and valuable information that could increase organizational productivity. As a result, organizations' weak points should be reinforced by executing effective remedial methods that do not jeopardize the organization's goodwill and image.

Fourth, this study adds to the importance of the reciprocity norm within social exchange theory by indicating that individuals demand aid from those who help them. This positivism in their surroundings and environment results in a peaceful and healthy work atmosphere. Hence, in addition to the notion of positive reciprocity, according to (SET), the concept of negative reciprocity exists, which indicates that concentrating

on your surroundings makes you aware of what's going on at your workplace. According to the present study, Pakistan's banking sector demands constructive leadership capable of inspiring their employees, is accomplished enough to assess others, and can notice and grasp workplace difficulties to properly report them to senior management.

Finally, this study looked at the link between Machiavellian leadership and employee quiet, examining how relational identification and political judgments mediated its effects. As Muslims, we must carry out our responsibilities regardless of our status in the organization. We must take a stand against unlawful, improper, and corrupt activities. As a result, it is also viewed religiously.

## 5.2. Managerial Implications

The current study has a number of key management implications for companies in terms of managerial implications; by applying these implications, firms may increase their performance, productivity, and goodwill. These concepts are required to strengthen ethical phenomena, such as clarity in selecting suitable executives in the financial business. An ethical working structure must be maintained to reduce the number of Machiavellians in the financial industry. If the system is immoral, the repercussions will be bad, and its personnel will tend to keep silent (H. Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018). But, Machiavellian CEOs are unlikely to succeed in a high-quality, ethical atmosphere. (Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2013). Moreover, relational identity is key in the relationship between Machiavellianism and employee quiet. Employees generally regard harsh, manipulative, and unfriendly CEOs as a burden. The study argued that the majority of subordinates do not react to their boss until he acts abusively (Burris, 2012). Nevertheless, while engaging with Machiavellian leaders, individuals with relational identification with their employers have been treated with respect. Employees' unfavorable reactions to Machiavellian leadership may be mediated by relational identity. Consequently, the organization should provide additional resources and encouragement to employees with low-identification, as well as psychological consultation services.

Moreover, leaders should pay attention to employees' health progress initiatives to ensure their mental and overall fitness, and they should keep Machiavellianism in mind due to its negative outcomes. To address the challenges of the Machiavellian leadership style, leaders should be aware of the effects of their personalities on employees and attend leadership training sessions. The reform will begin by stressing Leader Machiavellianism in order to create a stress-free work atmosphere. Human resources experts may include additional positive leadership styles, such as ethical, transformative, and authentic, into successful management training programs. The study reveals that Machiavellian leadership is the key predictor of Employee Silence in the Workplace to an unethical working environment; employees are unwilling to give crucial knowledge and keep quiet for survival. This study indicates that bank personnel should be more sensitive in their interactions with coworkers to create a harmonious workplace with stronger interpersonal relationships and reduced workplace silence. Therefore, the banking industry must take effective measures to enable managers to deal with employee perceptions of politics.

## 5.3. Limitations and Future Research

The first limitation is related to generalizability because the sample was exclusively collected from Pakistani financial institutions. Second, this study is limited by its small sample size. Convenience sampling, the approach being employed, has its own drawbacks because it might lead to a common method bias. This research may have benefited from more cross-sectional data. Moreover, individuals may offer socially desired replies when utilizing a self-rating scale rather than selecting responses that represent their genuine emotions. The flaws in this study can be fixed by more investigation in the future. The findings of this study highlight the need for more empirical research on the link between leader Machiavellianism and employee quiet, ideally using a bigger sample size and/or data-gathering methods from various economies. In addition, it is advised to include any relevant moderator in future studies evaluating the effects of such leadership styles on workplace outcomes.

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