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Leaders' Emotion Regulation and the Influence of Respect and Entitlement on Employee Silence

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Abstract: Although numerous researchers have examined leaders' behavior in promoting employee voice, so far, there have been limited empirical studies in interpersonal emotion regulation (IER) and employee silence literature. This study aims to investigate how leaders' IER can break the barrier of employee silence through examining the mediating roles of perceived mutual recognition respect and psychological entitlement. To enhance sustainable organization practices, this may be the first study that identifies leaders' IER strategies as an effective communication tool for diminishing employee silence. By collecting data from 315 management employees in Pakistan, the hypothesized relationships were tested using path analysis and bootstrapping technique with AMOS. Our findings support the mediating role of mutual recognition respect and psychological entitlement in leaders' IER and employee silence relationship. More specifically, while mutual recognition respect mediates the relationship between leaders' problem-focused strategies and employee silence, psychological entitlement mediates the association of both problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies with employee silence. In line with the research findings, we have highlighted some notable theoretical contributions and managerial implications. Further, we present limitations and future research directions.

Keywords: interpersonal emotion regulation; mutual recognition respect; psychological entitlement; employee silence; emotional communication

1. Introduction

Respect is a substantial interpersonal phenomenon that numerous employees value beyond compensation and job stability [1]. Recognition respect relates to the quality of interpersonal treatment towards others in a dignified, ethical, and trustworthy manner [2,3]. Indeed, mutual recognition respect, an equality-based respect, can be regarded as a central ingredient for promoting organizational sustainability and also for maintaining an innovative workforce. Meanwhile, in today's competitive work environment, and despite other challenges [4], leaders have to deal with employees who view their exchanges as biased and inequitable. For instance, psychologically entitled employees believe they deserve preferential treatment irrespective of their performance [5]. The entitlement belief causes the perception of injustice [6] and could enhance aggressiveness and frustration among employees [7]. Employees consequently become dissatisfied even in more extreme cases, thereby intentionally suppressing communication [8]. These situations may lead to employee silence, referring to the deliberate suppression of ideas and information [9], which could be a possible threat to the maintenance of sustainable workplace practices. Likewise, leaders who are unable to obtain useful information from employees may face the danger of organizational stagnation [8,9]. Whereas extant literature has identified workplace bullying [10] and abusive supervision [11] as a precursor to employee silence, to date, empirical studies focusing on how to overcome employee silence are scarce [12,13]. More specifically, the role of leaders in dealing with their employees' silence and encouraging them to speak up is still limited in the literature.

To address these gaps, we explore leaders' interpersonal emotion regulation (IER), a social process for achieving emotional goals to break the barrier of employee silence. IER was found to be highly relevant to social relationships, through which one could be able to regulate emotions with the support of others [14]. Although leaders' behavior in promoting employee voice has extensively been investigated [15], to the best of our knowledge, we may be the first to directly investigate leaders' IER–employee silence link. In addition, we argue that employees' perception of getting fair treatment, equity, and worthiness could also play a significant role in this regard. For this, we investigated and compared the mediating roles of perceived mutual recognition respect and psychological entitlement. Due to the significant implications of mutual recognition respect in leader-member exchange relationships [16], the mediating role of mutual recognition respect between leaders' IER and employee silence cannot be overlooked. However, what is less prevalent in the extant literature is the neglected aspect of perceived entitlement perceptions of employees [17]. As psychologically entitled employees are more inclined towards status-seeking and obtaining praise and recognition [18], they tend to create potential risks for maintaining organizational sustainability. In order to encounter these workplace challenges, the other goal of our study is to analyze and compare the mediating roles of perceived mutual recognition respect and psychological entitlement in the leaders' IER and employee silence relationships.

Our research offers several noteworthy contributions to the literature on leaders' emotional communication and employee silence. First, we highlight and emphasize the significance of perceived mutual recognition respect and entitlement perception as pre-cursors to employee silence behavior, which extends the scope of empirical studies in employee silence research. For this, we examined employees' judgments and expectations based on their perception of fair treatment and worthiness. Second, drawing on emotion regulation and social exchange perspective, this study contributes to empirical research on IER by probing how leaders' IER strategies regulate employees' negative emotions and help them overcome their silence. It provides a comprehensive understanding of utilizing these strategies as a potential tool for effective emotional communication, which has significant implications for sustainable organizational practices. Third, by comparing the mediating roles of perceived mutual recognition respect and psychological entitlement, we contrast two different perceptions that can either contribute to or disrupt sustainable organizational practices. In doing so, we propose the groundwork for creating workplace respect and managing entitlement perceptions to hinder the threat to long-term organizational sustainability.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

The theoretical framework that guided this research is shown in Figure 1. We propose that leaders' IER can influence the perception of mutual recognition respect and psychological entitlement in breaking the barrier of employee silence.
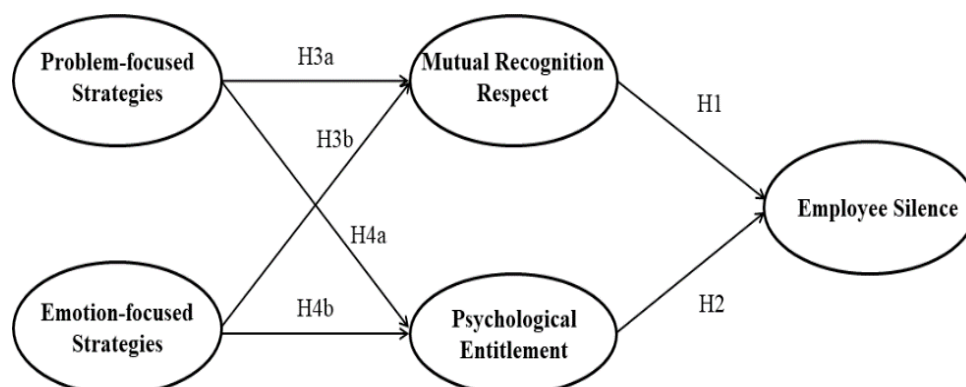

Figure 1. Hypothesized research model.

2.1. Mutual Recognition Respect and Employee Silence

Even though extensive research has been conducted primarily on employee voice, researchers have recently started to recognize the critical prevalence of employee silence, an intentional withholding of ideas or information concerning organizational issues [19,20]. In this study, we focus on acquiescent silence (a disengaged behavior stimulated by resignation) and defensive silence (a self-protective behavior stimulated by fear), as we are interested in the types of employee silence that are of negative consequence to organizations. Empirical studies have shown that when employees keep silent, it is because they feel unsatisfied and uncommitted [21] and so purposely limit their communication, which then causes them stress and other psychological issues [8]. In this condition, employees engage in undesirable actions, such as disengagement, and become prone to turnover. They restrict themselves from actively participating and sharing their inputs, which can detract from the organizational development process [22]. Thus, how to reduce employee silence has become a big challenge for managers and has attracted wide academic attention.

Mutual recognition represents a kind of interpersonal relationship mode beyond value creation [16]. Recognition respect illustrates that employees should be treated with dignity and respect regardless of their abilities and performance [23]. This type of respect arises when individuals exhibit honesty, fairness, and justice in treatment, which are felt to be morally correct. Darwall [24] distinguished recognition respect as a kind of workplace respect granted as a moral duty by virtue of a person having rights with appraisal respect, which comes from a positive appraisal of a person. To support this, Clarke and Mahadi [25] introduced the notion of mutual recognition respect in workplace relationships, which they believed could facilitate both employees' well-being and their organizational performance. Previous studies have shown its association with employees' job commitment and satisfaction, employee well-being, and job performance [25,26]. As such, mutual recognition respect can confer numerous key benefits where interdependence exists.

We therefore propose mutual recognition respect as an important antecedent to reduce silence because it fulfills employees' psychological needs for belongingness and self-esteem [27] and enhances trust and commitment in workplace relationships. It is also undeniable that workplace relationships are conditioned on high-quality exchanges associated with an even higher level of trust and respect [28]. Individuals who retain relationships are known to do so where exchange activity is prolific, and there are mutual benefits [29,30]. These high-quality exchange relationships signal to employees that they are valued and treated fairly by their leaders. Based on this logic, individuals who perceive equity, worthiness, and common values are more likely to share their inputs because they believe they will be acknowledged in return for their efforts. Therefore, it is plausible to assume that this favorable social environment created by mutual recognition respect will potentially help employees overcome their silence at work. Based on the above premises, we developed our first hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *The more mutual recognition respect employees perceive, the less they will incline to engage in silence.*

2.2. Psychological Entitlement and Employee Silence

Psychological entitlement is a relatively stable tendency toward inflated self-perceptions and unrealistic expectations concerning praise and rewards [5]. According to equity theory [31], employees seek out referents for co-workers and compare what they get with others. Highly entitled individuals believe that they are better than others and should get what they want. Due to such a biased perception, they naturally perceive their entitlements as more than what the organization offers [32]. They usually believe they are paid less than they deserve, which causes them to be dissatisfied with their jobs, subsequently intensifying their aggressive behaviors [6]. Research has also identified some similarities between psychological entitlement and narcissism. While entitlement inflates one's sense of self in response to others' treatment, narcissism inflates one's sense of self regardless

of others' treatment [33]. Previous studies show that psychological entitlement has been linked to supervisor conflict, turnover intentions, job frustration, lower work satisfaction, and perceptions of abusive supervision [34].

Certainly, employees require equity and worthiness in terms of getting rewards and the way they are being handled. However, entitled employees distinguish between the fairness of organizational procedures and interactions by comparing their duties, time, pay scales, and benefits with those of their co-workers. When these individuals feel that they are being treated unfairly, they perceive a lack of justice, which results in their aggressive behaviors and low commitment [35]. The more psychologically entitled individuals remain dissatisfied, the more they retaliate strongly under the aforementioned circumstances as compared to others. Based on this biased self-perception, when their unrealistic expectations are not met, they end up being frustrated [36], with increased deviant behaviors [37,38], such as knowledge-hiding behaviors [39]. Applying this logic to the context of our study, we argue that these biased attributions will increase their disengagement towards work, causing them to intentionally disengage. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *The more psychological entitlement employees perceive, the more they will incline to engage in silence.*

2.3. Mutual Recognition Respect as a Mediator in Leaders' IER–Employee Silence Relationship

Interpersonal emotion regulation (IER) is defined as the management of one's own and others' emotions within the context of social and environmental realms [40,41]. Past studies demonstrate that the phenomenon of IER is highly related to better negotiation and workplace relationships [42,43], enhancing leader-follower relationship quality, follower trust, and citizenship behavior [44]. According to emotion regulation theory, regulation of one's own emotions is intrinsic, while regulation of others' emotions is extrinsic [45]. Here, we focus on extrinsic emotion regulation to facilitate employees in dealing with their negative emotions. Drawing upon Gross's process model of emotion regulation, Williams [14] proposed interpersonal emotion management (IEM) strategies based on managing followers' negative emotions. Problem-focused strategies (PFS) involve changing the causes of emotions through removing a problem (situation modification) or altering how individuals think about a situation (cognitive change), whereas emotion-focused strategies (EFS) change negative emotions by taking someone's attention away from the origin of negative emotions (attentional deployment) or suppressing negative emotions (modulating emotional response).

When leaders utilize PFS to deal with the source of negative emotions, it signals to employees that their leader cares about their well-being and workplace stressors [44,46]. The amount of time and effort a leader invests in their employees demonstrates their worthiness to be trusted. In turn, it may help employees feel better and develop high-quality relationships. Based on the central tenet of interpersonal respect, employees who receive recognition respect are likely to believe that their leader will respond to them, thereby increasing the likelihood of engaging in sharing opinions [3]. They feel that their leaders are providing them with an opportunity for open dialogue, which motivates them to speak up. In contrast, when leaders apply EFS that fails to rule out the source of negative emotions, it does not fulfill employees' role expectations of their leader [44,47]. The absence of perceived social support may cause psychological distress among employees [48]. Consistent with the tenets of social exchange theory, employees could become disappointed and unable to contribute to their role if expectations are not fulfilled [49]. They become reluctant to invest in voluntary actions because they perceive that their efforts will not be repaid. We thus infer that followers might consider this action a lack of empathy and concern about their matters. These perceptions will weaken their relationship quality, and they will be unable to overcome their silence. Based on the above arguments, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 3a (H3a). *The more leaders use PFS, the more it will lead the perception of mutual recognition respect to break silence.*

Hypothesis 3b (H3b). *The more leaders use EFS, the less it will lead the perception of mutual recognition respect to break silence.*

2.4. Psychological Entitlement as a Mediator in Leaders' IER–Employee Silence Relationship

Individuals who feel entitled are more likely to perceive getting disproportionate and unworthy preferential treatment [50]. These self-centered employees, when encountering a leader who accommodates them, presume a chance of getting favorable treatment. It can be viewed as an opportunity to achieve their desired goals. Due to these expectations, employees believe that their leaders will realize their actual potential and will accommodate them with favorable treatment. As they are more ambitious towards getting recognition, they are more inclined to link organizational success with their successes and commensurate rewards [51,52]. Thus, it is reasonable to believe that when leaders use PFS, there is a lower probability that these entitled employees will engage in silent behavior. On the other hand, while they might first perceive the opportunity of garnering their leader's attention as gratifying, it may further exaggerate their expectations of obtaining proportionate rewards [53]. Though EFS seems useful to resolve the issue of controlling ambiguity and negative emotions, it can only work on a short-term basis. As long as the actual problem remains unresolved, there may be a chance of hurting their self-esteem and "me-first" attitude [54]. As a result, the employees who are more inclined towards achieving social goals may become more upset in the absence or delay of reaching the desired results [55]. This may increase their disengagement, and they are more likely to engage in silence. Based on these considerations, we postulate the following:

Hypothesis 4a (H4a). *The more leaders use PFS, the less it will lead to employees' psychological entitlement to engage in silence.*

Hypothesis 4b (H4b). *The more leaders use EFS, the more it will lead to employees' psychological entitlement to engage in silence.*

3. Research Method

In this section, we discuss our data collection procedures, details of measures, and the overall data analysis used to test the study hypotheses.

3.1. Participants and Procedure

The participants of this study were 315 management employees working in the health care, pharmaceuticals, banking, customer service, NGOs, and telecommunication industries of Pakistan. This ensured a diverse occupational background of employees working in different services departments, reducing the likelihood of their association with specific organizational cultures. The participants had a minimum of one year of working experience, implying that they had broad awareness of the organization's procedures and norms. Selected firms were chosen through a purposeful sampling in order to meet our desired study objectives. To check the applicability of measurements in the context of Pakistan, we conducted a pilot study of 20 respondents. Consequently, the sample appeared to be suitable for our research purposes.

After assessing its feasibility, an online survey questionnaire link was sent to employees working in different service departments. Participants were encouraged to answer all questions candidly and were assured of complete anonymity. We eliminated incomplete and missing data from the raw dataset. Out of 380 responses, 65 respondents were seemed uninterested; hence, their observations were excluded from the study to avoid confounding results. In the end, we obtained usable data from 315 employees (an effective response rate of 83%). The demographic statistics revealed that most participants were male (52.4%), ranging from 35 to 44 years of age (47.3%), and university graduates (54%). Mostly, participants were found working as permanent employees (54.6%) for 3–5 years (29.2%) in Administration/HR (27.6%), Marketing/Customer service (27.3%), and IT departments (18.7%).

3.2. Measures

The measures were adapted from previously developed scales with slight modifications to reflect the specific context of this study. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statements provided in the questionnaire. Responses to each item were scored on 5-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). A brief description of the selected measurement items for each construct is as follows.

3.2.1. Interpersonal Emotion Regulation

Leaders' interpersonal emotion regulation was assessed with a 20-item interpersonal emotion management strategies scale proposed by Little et al. [56]. As such, it captures two PFS: situation modification, "My supervisor removes the negative aspects of situations that are negatively impacting me", and cognitive change, "When my supervisor wants me to feel less negative emotions, s/he puts my problems into perspective". The EFS include: attentional deployment, "My supervisor distracts my attention from the aspects of problems causing undesired negative emotions in me", and modifying the emotional response, "When I am experiencing undesirable emotions, my supervisor suggests strategies to suppress my emotions". The reliability estimates of these data (Cronbach's alpha) were 0.89 for PFS and 0.92 for EFS.

3.2.2. Mutual Recognition Respect

To measure mutual recognition respect, we used the 8-item scale of Clarke and Mahadi [25]. Sample items include "We value each other simply because as people we deserve it" and "We demonstrate sensitivity to each other's personal or moral beliefs". The reliability of the scale was 0.89.

3.2.3. Psychological Entitlement

The 9-item measure developed by Campbell et al. [5] was adapted to measure a sense of psychological entitlement. A sample item includes, for example, "I feel entitled to more of everything". Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.88.

3.2.4. Employee Silence

Employee silence was assessed using 10 items adapted from Dyne et al. [20]. To investigate the dimensions of silence that negatively influence organizations, we used acquiescent and defensive silence. Sample items include "I passively keep ideas about solutions to problems to myself" and "I avoid expressing ideas for improvements due to self-protection". The reliability estimate for these data was 0.93.

3.2.5. Control Variables

We used gender, age, education, job tenure, and dyad tenure as covariates to exclude potential confounding effects. Some past studies have discovered a link between job tenure and dyad tenure when it comes to leader member exchanges [57]. Thus, we felt it was critical to keep these variables under control throughout our research.

3.3. Overview of Analysis

The model in Figure 1 was tested with a two-step approach, as suggested by Anderson and Gerbing [58]. We first tested the measurement model, and then tested our theoretical model with structural paths. Next, to evaluate the significance of the mediating effect, we used a bootstrapping method by applying a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval [59,60].

4. Results

4.1. Test of Reliability and Validity

The assessment of the measurement model was conducted by examining internal reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of all constructs were conducted simultaneously for this purpose. The EFA results from Table 1 demonstrates that all factor loadings are higher than 0.5 and Kaiser–Mayer–Olkin (KMO) is 0.86, which is higher than 0.6. Next, the construct reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR). The reliability coefficient of each factor as well as the whole instrument is higher than the acceptable level ($\alpha \geq 0.7$) recommended by Nunnally [61]. The CR for each construct also ranged from 0.86 to 0.93, exceeding the established threshold of 0.70 [62].

The average variance extracted (AVE) was considered to measure the convergent validity. AVE values exceeded 0.50, indicating the convergent validity for all constructs. Additionally, the square root of each construct's AVE was found to be higher than the respective inter-construct correlation, indicating support for the discriminant validity of all constructs [62]. The measurement model showed an adequate fit to the data: χ^2 (25) = 138.685, goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.921, a comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.921, a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.072, and a standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.059. These values demonstrate further support for discriminant validity. Furthermore, Harman's single-factor test [63] suggested that CMB (common method bias) was not a serious issue for this research (the single factor accounted for 26.42%). Tables 1 and 2 summarize the results of validity and reliability tests. The results provide the evidence supporting the reliability and validity of the indicators of the research model.

Table 1. Factor analysis, instrument validity, and reliability.

Variables	Items	M	SD	% of Variance	Loadings		Cronbach's Alpha
					EFA	CFA	
Problem-Focused strategies (PFS)	SM1	4.00	0.86	14.70	0.51	0.56	0.89
	SM2	4.07	0.82		0.52	0.59	
	SM3	3.99	0.79		0.54	0.68	
	SM5	4.01	0.69		0.60	0.68	
	CC1	3.85	0.81		0.65	0.74	
	CC2	3,87	0.78		0.69	0.68	
	CC3	3.69	0.76		0.80	0.80	
	CC4	3.67	0.77		0.80	0.73	
	CC5	3.69	0.75		0.85	0.78	
Emotion-focused strategies (EFS)	AD1	2.85	1.01	14.67	0.73	0.80	0.92
	AD2	2.86	0.98		0.78	0.84	
	AD3	2.74	0.94		0.80	0.86	
	AD4	2.86	0.97		0.75	0.83	
	AD5	2.77	0.98		0.77	0.84	
	MER1	2.42	0.91		0.70	0.64	
	MER2	2.39	0.95		0.70	0.62	
	MER3	2.46	0.92		0.75	0.66	
	MER4	2.71	1.02		0.76	0.69	
	MER5	2.30	0.88		0.70	0.60	
Mutual recognition respect	MRR1	4.05	0.61	11.79	0.51	0.59	0.89
	MRR2	4.16	0.66		0.64	0.64	
	MRR3	4.00	0.85		0.70	0.74	
	MRR4	4.17	0.62		0.68	0.68	
	MRR5	4.15	0.73		0.80	0.80	
	MRR6	4.25	0.68		0.80	0.80	
	MRR7	4.26	0.61		0.75	0.77	
	MRR8	4.43	0.60		0.67	0.64	

Table 1. *Cont.*

| Variables | Items | M | SD | % of Variance | Loadings | | Cronbach's Alpha |
					EFA	CFA	
Psychological entitlement	PE1	3.80	0.82		0.64	0.63	
	PE2	3.94	0.63		0.63	0.55	
	PE4	3.73	0.85		0.79	0.80	
	PE6	3.93	0.71	11.01	0.74	0.73	0.88
	PE7	3.56	0.85		0.76	0.71	
	PE8	3.58	0.81		0.71	0.70	
	PE9	3.76	0.89		0.77	0.86	
Employee silence	AS1	2.15	0.94		0.60	0.70	
	AS2	2.15	0.96		0.72	0.79	
	AS3	2.19	0.99		0.63	0.74	
	AS4	2.38	1.00		0.65	0.62	
	AS5	2.20	1.01	9.90	0.67	0.75	0.93
	DS1	2.36	0.98		0.81	0.83	
	DS2	2.20	0.88		0.80	0.79	
	DS3	2.43	1.01		0.81	0.80	
	DS4	2.42	1.05		0.83	0.81	
	DS5	2.22	0.87		0.83	0.82	
Instrumental total	Cumulative (%)			62.06			0.83
	KMO			0.86			
	p-value			0.000			

Note. SM, situation modification; CC, cognitive change; AD, attentional deployment; MER, modulating emotional response; AS, acquiescent silence; DS, defensive silence; all loadings were significant at $p < 0.001$.

Table 2. Test of composite reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

	CR	AVE	MSV	PFS	EFS	MRR	PE	ES
PFS	0.86	0.51	0.36	**0.71**				
EFS	0.92	0.56	0.30	−0.12	**0.74**			
MRR	0.90	0.51	0.36	0.60	−0.07	**0.71**		
PE	0.88	0.52	0.20	0.43	−0.38	0.37	**0.72**	
ES	0.93	0.60	0.23	−0.38	0.48	−0.33	−0.30	**0.77**

Note. CR > 0.7; AVE > 0.5; MSV < AVE; $\sqrt{AVE}$ > inter-construct correlation, $\sqrt{AVE}$ is bold face diagonal. PFS, problem-focused strategies; EFS, emotion-focused strategies; MRR, mutual recognition respect; PE, psychological entitlement; ES, employee silence.

4.2. Hypothesis Testing

As our measurement model fit the data well, we incorporated structural links among the latent variables to test the efficacy of our proposed framework. The results of the SEM-analysis showed that the proposed model fit the data well: χ^2 (13) = 75.219, GFI = 0.947, NNFI = 0.926, CFI = 0.937, RMSEA = 0.078, SRMR = 0.054. The standardized path coefficient (β) was taken into consideration to test the hypotheses regarding the direct relationship among the constructs of the present study. Table 3 recapitulates the results of hypotheses testing. According to the path analysis results, mutual recognition respect ($\beta = -0.22$, $p < 0.001$) had a significantly negative relationship with employee silence, which supports our H1. However, in the case of psychological entitlement, a significant negative relation was observed ($\beta = -0.30$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, it fails to support H2.

Next, by using the bootstrap analysis option in AMOS [64], we tested indirect effects by generating 5000 samples and bias-corrected confidence intervals. First, we tested the indirect effect of PFS on employee silence through mutual recognition respect. Bootstrap analysis revealed that this indirect effect was significant ($\beta = -0.38$, $p < 0.001$). The bias corrected confidence interval (B-CCI) ranged from −0.57 to −0.20. This result validates H3a. Second, we tested the indirect effect of EFS on employee silence through mutual recognition respect. The results showed that this indirect effect was not significant ($\beta = 0.005$), and the bias corrected confidence interval (B-CCI) also included zero, ranging from −0.08 to 0.09.

Thus, the results fail to support H3b. Third, we tested the indirect effect of PFS on employee silence through psychological entitlement, which was also found to be significant ($\beta = -0.17$, $p < 0.001$, $-0.31 \leq$ B-CCI ≤ -0.06). The final bootstrap analysis results showed that the indirect effect of EFS on employee silence through psychological entitlement was also statistically significant ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.001$, $0.03 \leq$ B-CCI ≤ 0.20), hence providing support for H4a and H4b. Table 4 exhibits the results of the mediation hypotheses for this study.

Table 3. Results of the hypotheses (standardized regression weights).

Hypothesis	Paths	Estimate	Statement of Hypothesis	Results
H1	MRR→ES	−0.22 ***	MRR has negative association with ES	Supported
H2	PE→ES	−0.30 ***	PE has positive association with ES	Not Supported

Note. MRR, mutual recognition respect, PE, psychological entitlement; ES, employee silence. *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 4. Results of the mediation hypotheses (standardized regression weights).

Hypothesis	Paths	Indirect Effect	95% CI (Low, High)	Mediation
H3a	PFS→MRR→ES	−0.38 ***	(−0.57, −0.20)	O
H3b	EFS→MRR→ES	0.005	(−0.08, 0.09)	X
H4a	PFS→PE→ES	−0.17 ***	(−0.31, −0.06)	O
H4b	EFS→PE→ES	0.11 **	(0.03, 0.20)	O

Note. PFS, problem-focused strategies; EFS, emotion-focused strategies; MRR, mutual recognition respect; PE, psychological entitlement; ES, employee silence. ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

5. Discussion

In this paper, we examined how leaders' IER strategies have a different impact on mutual recognition respect and psychological entitlement in breaking the barrier of employee silence. The results demonstrated that both mutual recognition respect and psychological entitlement have a direct negative association with employees' silence. Our findings suggest that mutual recognition respect mediates the relationship between leaders' PFS and employee silence only, while the significant mediating effects of psychological entitlement were observed in the association of both PFS and EFS with employee silence.

Based on these findings, our study demonstrated that mutual recognition respect has a significant negative association with employee silence. Mutual recognition respect, as an environment of fair and equitable exchanges, ensures employees that their inputs will be acknowledged and given value. However, interestingly, we also found a negative association between the perception of employees' entitlement and their silence, suggesting that exchange relationships and reward expectations encourage employees to speak up. Specifically, in the case of entitled employees, the expectation of gaining rewards and a higher level of self-confidence about attaining goals may restrict them towards giving-up approaches [65].

The current research findings support the mediating role of mutual recognition respect in the leaders' PFS–employee silence link. Our finding is consistent with previous research, which revealed that mutual recognition respect perceptions encourage people to accept their vulnerability in front of others and so encourage risk-taking behaviors [66]. As employees focus more on socially related currencies, such as loyalty and respect [67], it seems logical that mutual recognition respect can play a significant role in breaking their silence. Contrary to our hypothesis, the mediating effect of mutual recognition respect was not observed between EFS and employee silence. One probable reason would be that it infers the leaders' ignorance and their avoidance behavior. In this case, employees may ruminate that they are not getting reciprocal treatment and the desired solution to their issues.

Our findings confirmed the mediating role of psychological entitlement between leaders' IER and employee silence. That is, entitlement perception mediates the negative effect of PFS and the positive effect of EFS on employees' silence. This reveals that when leaders use PFS, entitled employees perceive the leader's attention and support as a special treatment and an assurance of receiving rewards. Consistent with previous research [68,69], the perceived positive feedback empowers them to pursue their goals and boost their confidence. On the other hand, EFS can also control employee aggressiveness and reduce the likelihood of biased and inaccurate perceptions. Even though EFS signals a gesture of concern and empathy, it can only work on a short-term basis. The delays in commitments to create solutions would further increase the probability of disengagement and increased silent behavior.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

Our work contributes to the leaders' emotional communication and employee silence literature in three unique ways. First, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge in employee silence literature by emphasizing the significance of creating workplace respect and managing employees' entitlement perceptions. We suggest that employees responded to the climate of workplace respect by becoming more positively embedded in the organization. As a result, they reciprocate the benefits derived from the recognition respect by expressing their views and opinions. On the other hand, employees with entitlement perceptions are highly motivated and ambitious towards achieving their goals and achievements in life [70]. These employees have more potential to either contribute or disrupt organizational changes [71]. Hence, we paid attention to the need of accommodating rather than avoiding them.

Second, our study also contributes to the literature on interpersonal emotion regulation by extending the knowledge of leaders' different IER strategies and exploring their consequences in the dynamic exchanges between leaders and followers. We argue that through implementing IER strategies, leaders can manage employees' negative emotions by creating a respectful workplace environment and reducing biased attribution, which helps them realize the gap between their prospects and performance graph. More specifically, we argue PFS (situation modification and cognitive change) can work more effectively, as they signal to employees that their leaders are genuinely trying to resolve their issues. The use of EFS can also work on a short-term basis when immediate actions are required.

Third, we offer a rarely established perspective of comparing and contrasting the mediating roles of perceived mutual recognition respect and psychological entitlement to the literature. The basis of this comparison is to explore employees' judgments based on their perceived levels of equity and worthiness. Through comparing mutual recognition respect, an equality based respect, with psychological entitlement, a biased perception of getting unfair treatment, we also intended to add the value of accommodating entitled employees. Previous research has emphasized their association with increased self-esteem and considering organizational success as their own success [70]. Therefore, it is rational to believe that they can have a spark of either bringing creativity or limiting organizational change and sustainability.

5.2. Managerial Implications

Our study also offers several useful implications for managers. First, our findings suggest managers to create an environment of workplace respect, which in turn fosters a climate conducive to open communication; for example, being involved in direct face-to-face communication with employees and listening to their thoughts will show care and concern for them [72]. Furthermore, to promote sustainable workplace practices, managers need to assure their subordinates that there will be zero tolerance for discrimination, bullying, and sexual harassment issues. It is suggested that organizations should consider implementing an effective communication and response system that allows employees to report bullying incidents without fear of retaliation. Through this practice, managers can

encourage employees to express their opinions and convey to them that their suggestions will be used for the betterment of the organization. Managers can also foster the perception of fairness at work through skills-based hiring and by providing emphasis on the equitable distribution of work and compensation. For monitoring these practices, organizations should also conduct a time-to-time survey to take employees' feedback and suggestions.

Second, we emphasize that the ability to acknowledge the perception of entitlement might be a healthy process for meeting organizational growth and sustainability. Managers must understand how to manage their employees' entitlement perceptions, as they can also make some meaningful contribution to the firm. In line with our research findings, we suggest managers reframe their mindset through paying attention to their cognitive and emotional resources. Our findings suggest that frequent communication between leaders and employees can align the expectations of both parties and can help them understand what is expected of them [73]. Managers could minimize the likelihood of biased and misleading perceptions by considering the importance of interpersonal communication in employee performance-appraisal systems. Implementing methods such as precise performance-tracking strategies and monitoring through adequate accountability systems can help to prevent self-serving attributions, which can aid in the clarification of roles and expectations [74,75]. In doing so, managers could be able to bring out the best in entitled employees.

Third, in light of the linkage between IER strategies and psychological entitlement, our findings suggest managers use it as an emotional communication tool to capitalize on the benefits of these employees. To do so, it is advisable to grant idiosyncrasy credits to these employees through creating an open door for arguments and feeling like they have a voice [76,77]. Through taking their viewpoints on routine issues, managers could be able to read their minds and communicate with them more effectively [78]. As entitled employees have a strong desire for autonomy, managers need to utilize their talents by making them more empowered. Perhaps entitled individuals are useful for jobs involving negotiations, persuasion, and making demands because they are more prone to interpersonal and social interactions. Organizations should implement and invest in training programs to teach leaders how these sustainable workplace practices should be carried out with better interpersonal skills.

5.3. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The current study has some limitations that can be used to guide future research. First limitation is based on self-reported survey data, gathered from employees about their perceived leaders' IER tactics rather than leaders' own experiences. Leaders' actual motives for using these strategies may differ from the perceptions of their employees. Future studies could collect data from leaders while assessing their IER behaviors, adding some interesting findings for this domain.

Second, our findings are not immune to the possibility that the cultural communication norms of Pakistan may have influenced employees' silence. That is why probably perceived entitlement perception was found negatively associated with employee silence. For getting more generalizable results, future research can replicate the study in other countries, thereby broadening the applicability of our findings.

Finally, the study adopted a cross-sectional design to collect data from management employees in one country at a single point in time. The study used a reasonably homogeneous sample of respondents, thus reducing the likelihood of misleading results. However, future research is required using experimental or longitudinal designs to replicate its findings.

6. Conclusions

This study provides framework to understand the effects of leaders' IER on employees' silence through the lens of workplace respect and entitlement. It also suggests how leaders need to ponder which IER strategy they should choose and explain how their selection should be affiliated with their workplace practices. Incorporating this phenomenon into

the domain of employee silence research is significant in providing managers with insights into creating a positive organizational climate to encourage employees to speak up.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study due to the lack of sensitive data and the anonymity of all personal information of the people engaged in the study.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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