

## EXTERNAL LOCUS OF CONTROL AND ETHICAL CLIMATE AS PREDICTORS OF JOB SATISFACTION: A MODERATED MEDIATION MODEL OF JOB SATISFACTION

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**Abstract:** *The present research aimed at investigating the relationship between external locus of control, ethical climate, and job satisfaction. External Locus of Control a Sub Scale of Multidimensional Locus of Control Questionnaire (Levenson, 1974) Ethical Climate Questionnaire (Victor & Cullen, 1988), and Job in General Scale (Ironson, Smith, Brannick, Gibson, & Paul, 1989) were administered on a purposive sample of 240 employees from private and public organizations of Sargodha city, Pakistan to operationalize external locus of control, ethical climate, and job satisfaction respectively. Results revealed that external locus of control negatively predicted ethical climate and job satisfaction whereas ethical climate positively predicted job satisfaction. The ethical climate is fully mediated between external locus of control and job satisfaction. External locus of control moderated between ethical climate and job satisfaction by changing their positive relationship into a negative relationship. Moderated mediation analysis was undertaken through PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013), which revealed that the conditional indirect effect of external locus of control on job satisfaction was significant at higher levels of external locus of control. Implications of the study and suggestions for further research were discussed.*

**Keywords:** *External Locus of Control (ELC), Ethical Climate (EC), Job satisfaction (JS)*

### 1. Introduction

EC in an organization is considered as a moral atmosphere, where a high level of ethics is practised such as caring, following law and order, rules, and individuality of employees. Zagenczyk, Purvis, Cruz, Thoroughgood, and Sawyer (2020) determined EC as a climate in which employee could share their perceptions with having its roots in moral behaviour. When an organization exhibits ethical standards such as privacy respect and is not forced to do something against the personal convictions of employees in that way employees can show affiliation with their organization. Organizations that give their employees self-respect and honour may gain many rewards in the form of high self-esteem, improved ability and efficiency, reduced rate of turnover, increased employee and customer satisfaction, and increased reputation of company and believability. Such responses from employees within an organization are the sign of JS (Myer, Thoroughgood, & Mohammed, 2016).

Teng, Hsu, Lai, and Chen (2018) claimed that the employees who were working in an ethical institute felt good as they knew they were secure along with the other people. They proposed that such feelings gave them feelings of contentment about the workplace, which could enhance their performance by increasing their job satisfaction. This line of reasoning is also supported by Jovanović, Mijatov, Dragin, Simat, and Majstorović (2019) claimed that EC helped in creating a healthy environment in organizations. It reinforced their work behaviour and increased job satisfaction. They suggested that moral climate is an interactive cohesive climate, which supported effective attachment and reinforced employee's JS level.

Forte (2004) claimed that just EC was no sign of job satisfaction; the individual characteristics also had central importance in understanding the level of ethical climate. He proposed that employees with external

orientation understood that ethical issues were uncontrollable and such type of thinking decreased their shared participation within the ethical environment. Forte (2005) also supported the negative relation of ELC and EC by suggesting that externally-oriented depend on others and blame others for their faults and such a type of thinking is also considered as a buffer in creating EC in an organization. Locus of control is a person's beliefs and expectations that can be related to a particular environment and job. People with ELC expect others to show moral values and mainly focus on external rewards for JS (Zhang, 2020). Zhang (2020) defines JS as an internal state, which cannot be achieved by focusing on external factors such as fate or luck rather than believing in self. He proclaimed that people with ELC blamed the organization for personal failure, which could negatively affect their performance and satisfaction level.

Bano, Kausar, and Riaz (2020) suggest that externals do not depend on their actions. They believe that events are out of control and governed by luck and faith. They are not functional in creating a productive and moral environment, which can negatively influence their Job satisfaction. This study shows that the effect of ELC via EC becomes meaningful given that ELC is assumed to be the predictor of EC and job satisfaction and EC as a predictor of job satisfaction. Thus, EC may play a mediating role between ELC and JS. This proposition is supported by Gupta and Mehta (2020) who suggested that externally-oriented employees cannot create EC based upon moral values and equality of rights, which further lower their JS level.

EC is employee understanding at the group level regarding what are the right/wrong behaviours in their respective organization. This is employee feelings about equality of rights or treatment received from the organization. Employees who consider their organization as being ethical are also expected to believe in their organization and regard it as being fair to them. Such a type of thinking plays an important role in increasing JS (Jovanović et al, 2019). But McCaughey, DelliFraine, McGhan, and Bruning, (2013) based on their research finding claimed that this positive relationship of EC with JS would become negative when ELC buffer between them. They also proposed that blaming external factors would dampen the positive impact of EC on job satisfaction.

The people in organizations with ELC believe that one's destiny is not in one's own hands and external factors such as fate, significant others, and luck may be more influential in determining the outcomes of one's efforts. This belief may spawn feelings of helplessness owing to which one is no more focusing on reality and dissatisfaction may ensue. This belief negatively affects employee perception about organizational climate, which decreases his/her satisfaction level. The above literature showed ELC as a variable that can negatively influence employees' JS level, either the climate is ethical or not. In Pakistan, pertinent literature is available for recognizing the importance of JS but the present study is exploring the importance of employee and environmental characters for creating JS in a single model (Malik, Nawab, Naeem & Danish, 2010; Bano et al., 2020)). Thus present study proposed that the indirect effect of ELC on JS through EC will be significant when ELC will be high. Based on the above-cited literature the proposed model of current research is presented in Figure 1.

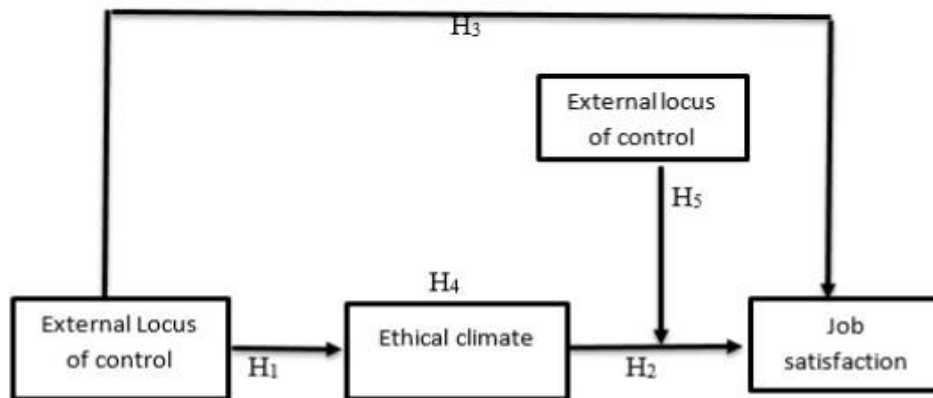


Figure 1. Hypothesized model of current research

### 1.1. The Hypotheses of Current Research

The current study aimed to examine the relationship between ELC, EC, and JS of employees from government and private sectors. The relationship between variables is explained in the introduction section and can be seen in Figure 1. The hypotheses of the present study are listed below.

1. ELC will have a direct negative effect on EC
2. EC will have a direct positive effect on JS.
3. ELC will have a direct negative effect on JS.
4. The relationship between ELC and EC will be mediated by EC
5. The relationship between EC and JS will be moderated by ELC
6. The indirect effect of ELC on JS through EC will be significant when ELC will be high.

## 2. Method

**2.1. Sample.** In the current research a purposive sample of 240, employees were recruited from private and public organizations of Sargodha city, Pakistan. Based on gender, the sample was equally divided into two groups (males = 120, females = 120). The inclusion criterion was set to include participants with ages above 25 years ( $M = 47.33$ ,  $SD = 15$ ), regular job status, and job experience of more than 2.5 years. Employees from both public and private sectors in equal proportion of gender were included in the study. A cross-sectional survey research design was used in the present study.

**2.2. Instruments.** The constructs of the present study were assessed through standardized and psychometrically sound instruments.

**2.2.1. Multidimensional Locus of Control Questionnaire.** External locus of control Scale a Subscale of Multidimensional Locus of Control Questionnaire (Levenson, 1974), a self-report inventory used in the present study. It has further two subscales such as chance and power full others. This subscale comprised 16 statements rated on six points Likert scale (1= strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). It has no reverse-coded item. This scale is a highly reliable scale with an alpha level. of .96 (Levenson, 1974).

**2.2.2. Job In General Scale.** Job In General Scale was developed by Ironson, Smith, Brannick, Gibson, and Paul (1989). This scale consisted of 18 items that were rated on 3- point scale (0 = not decided to 3 = yes). It has no reverse-coded item. It is a highly reliable scale having test-retest reliability of a week .90 (Ironson & Smith, 1978).

**2.2.3. Ethical Climate Scale.** The ethical Climate Scale was formulated by Victor and Cullen (1988). This scale comprised of 36 items for measuring four dimensions in climate i.e. caring, rules, instrumental, and independence. These items were rated on five points Likert scale (1= mostly false to 5 = completely

true). It has no reverse-coded item. This scale is highly valid (.89) and reliable (.77) scale (Martin, & Cullen, 2006).

**2.3. Procedure.** Participants of the present study were individually contacted after taking permission from the organization. They were informed about the purpose of the study and provided with thorough guidelines concerning the layout and completion of scales. All participants were selected based on their convenience. The participants were requested to give an honest and open response. They were assured that the information provided by them would be kept confidential and will only be used for research purposes. They were also assured that they have the right to withdraw from participating in the study.

### 3. Results

The data of the present study was analyzed by using Statistical Products and Service solution (SPSS-25) and Process Marco (Hayes, 2013). Various statistical techniques were used for analysis as correlation, regression, and moderated mediation. The psychometric properties of measures were also computed. The findings of the present study are presented in tabular form and also within the text.

**Table 1.** Descriptive, Psychometric Properties and Inter-correlations (N = 240)

Variable	M	SD	$\alpha$	Range		Sk <sup>a</sup>	Ku <sup>b</sup>	2	3
				Potential	Actual				
1. ELC	27	4.0	.70	0-6	20-38	.31	.34	-.13*	-.14*
2. ECQ	95.6	16.8	.87	1-5	62-132	.04	-.53	—	.30**
3.JS	32	6.41	.60	0-3	16-43	-.74	.08	—	—

Note. ELC = External Locus of Control; ECQ = Ethical climate Questionnaire; JS = Job Satisfaction. aStandard error of skewness = .15 bStandard error of kurtosis = .31

Table 1 depicts the mean and standard deviations of all variables analyzed in the present study along with the internal consistency index (alpha coefficients) for all scales used in the present study. Results in Table 1 shows that all scales achieved satisfactory alpha, and display the actual and potential range of various instruments in a satisfactory range. The range of skewness and kurtosis was also determined which is from -.74 to .31 and .53 to .34. Table 1 also presents the bivariate zero-order correlations between various constructs operationalized in the present study and the result shows the negative correlation of ELC with EC and JS. Whereas EC and JS are positively correlated with each other.

**Table 2.** Direct and Indirect Effects of Variables of Present Study on JS (N= 240).

Outcome	Variables	Direct effect			Indirect Effect		
		B	LL	UL	B	LL	UL
Ethical Climate	External Locus of Control	-.13*	-.26	-.01			
Job Satisfaction	External Locus of Control	-.93*	-1.7	-.14	-.06*	-.14	-.00
Job Satisfaction	Ethical Climate	1.2**	.36	2.0			
Job Satisfaction	Ethical Climate x External Locus of Control	1.4***	.69	2.2			

Note = Index of moderated mediation = -.20\*\*

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

Results in Table 2 shows standardized direct and indirect effects of predictors of job satisfaction, which were tested in the present study through Process macro model 74 of SPSS Hayes (2013). Results also show a significant direct effect of ELC on EC and JS in negative directions. The direct positive effect of EC on JS is also significant. Results in Table 2 further suggest a mediating role of EC between ELC and JS in a negative direction. Furthermore, results in Table 3 depict a significant moderating effect of EC and ELC on JS, which indicates that ELC weakens the positive relationship between EC and JS.

**Table 3.** Conditional Indirect effect of EC on JS at the Values of ELC (N=240).

Mediator	Moderator	$\beta$	UL	LL
Ethical Climate	-1.4	.13	-.01	.44

	-.69	-.02	-.19	.08
	.04	-.17	-.41	-.02
	.54	-.27	-.60	-.04
	1.2	-.43	-.89	-.04

Values for quantitative moderators are 10th, 25th, 50th, 75th, and 90th percentiles

Table 3 shows the conditional indirect effect of ELC on JS through EC at various values of ELC was examined through PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013). The conditional indirect effect of ELC on JS through EC at various values of EC revealed that the indirect effect was stronger when ELC was high. The confidence intervals for the indirect effect contained zero when ELC was low at 10th and 25th percentiles; however, it did not contain zero at moderate and high values of ELC (50th and 90th percentile). Thus the meditational role EC between ELC and JS was more pronounced when ELC was high.

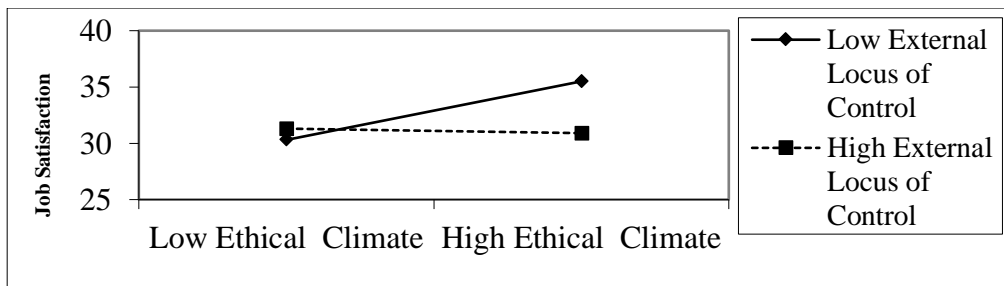


Figure 2. The moderating role of ELC in the relation between EC and JS

Figure 2 is showing the moderating role of ELC in the relation between EC and JS. The slope of the regression line shows that the positive relationship between EC and JS is much stronger at a low level of external locus of control. When ELC is high the relationship between EC and JS becomes negative.

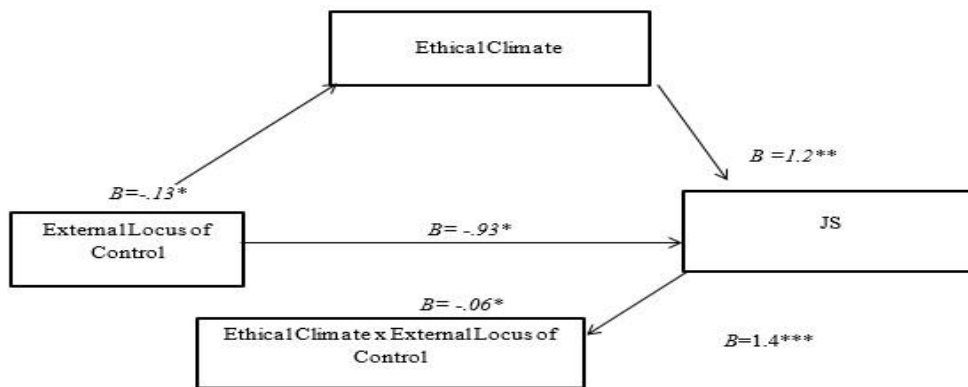


Figure 3. Statistical diagram of ELC as moderator of the indirect effect of ELC on JS through EC.

## 2. Discussion

The present study aimed at finding the relationship between ELC, EC, and JS. This study also proposed and tested a model of JS specifying EC as mediator and ELC as moderator of the relationship between EC and JS.

The results of the present study depicted a direct positive effect of EC on job satisfaction. These findings

are supporting the second hypothesis of the present study and are also supported on several fronts as according to Baranik, Wang, Gong, and Shi (2017) unethical environment is a threat to job satisfaction. The ethical environment is the moral climate based upon a mechanism that helps the individuals to understand organizational strategies, procedures, and incentive systems. Gao, Feng, and Zhao (2020) stated that EC in organizational settings provides shared standards, perceptions, and mutual understating of rules and regulations which all helped in increasing their job satisfaction.

In line with the first and third hypotheses of the present study, results demonstrated that ELC is negatively linked with EC and job satisfaction. This finding is in line with literature relating ELC with dissatisfaction in life. Ganji and Navabinezhad (2012) proposed that there are ample signs of disapproval, blame, abuse, disgrace, threat, and punishment in employees who are externally controlled. Externally controlled employees are less likely to see their flaws in the organization. They tend to blame other people for every problem, which mostly leads to dissatisfaction. Corso-de-Zúñiga, Moreno-Jiménez, Garrosa, E., Blanco-Donoso, and Carmona-Cobo (2020) conceptualization also supported present study findings; they asserted that personality factor such as ELC is negatively related to EC and JS. They proposed that externally-oriented people rely on outside forces such as organizational rules and supervisor's authority and this dependence gives them satisfaction. They cannot directly involve themselves in creating a moral and ethical environment because they perceive others as responsible for such activities. Such a type of thinking leads them toward job dissatisfaction.

Results of the present study elucidated that EC also fully mediated the relationship between ELC and JS which supported the fourth hypothesis of the present study. The mediating mechanism of EC between ELC and JS is soundly supported by Bear's (2003) statement, who reported ELC as an external acknowledgement of success and failure. This external acknowledgement leads them toward blaming external factors and poor evaluation of organizational climate. This poor evaluation of the organization climate further lowers their JS level. Mulki and Lassk's (2019) conceptualization is also affirming the mediating role of ethical climate, they suggested that employees having ELC are not creative and productive lacking the potential to change destructive environmental factors and fail to develop an ethical climate. These poor environmental factors create dissatisfaction in employees towards their job. This line of reasoning is also espoused by Valentine, Hanson, and Fleischman (2019) who proposed that employees having high ELC are judgemental and reactive to an external factor such as perceiving their needs in an organizational environment. This negative perception about the rules and regulations of their organization creates job dissatisfaction.

The findings of the present study supported the fifth hypothesis stating the moderating role of ELC between EC and JS. This moderating role of ELC is supported by pertinent literature that suggests that ELC is a negative approach that can create a buffer between EC and JS (Valentine, Gary, Fleischman, & Kidwell, 2011). Ethics in an organization refers to the organization's responsibility to run its institute in an honest, respectable, and appropriate manner. An organization's EC is important because it can improve employee morale, enhance organizational commitment, and raise an involved and engaged workforce. This positive culture encourages staff to be responsible for their conduct and behaviour. These all factors are stimulating factors for increasing job satisfaction. But employees having ELC are irresponsible, disengage, and uninvolved because they consider their organization to be responsible for each and everything in the organization even for their conduct and behaviour (Saygili, Özer & Karakaya, 2020).

The sixth hypothesis of the present study was also supported as ELC was the second-order moderator of the mediated relationship between ELC and JS through ethical climate. Dirks and Ferrin's (2002) research evidence are supporting the present study results as they claimed that external orientation creates dissatisfaction in employees towards their job because of their poor perception and evaluation of events and organization. They proposed that within EC employees have shared perceptions about rules and regulations of their organization but externally oriented persons even in EC cannot positively perceive them and cannot develop job satisfaction. This moderated mediation is also in line with the results of Galvin, Randel, Collins, and Johnson (2018) who found that within EC externally controlled employees exempted themselves from responsibility for the environment and their problems. They used to involve in blaming others and cannot perform friendly action, lacked reasonable alternatives or the cost of choosing the right action. These all factors make them vulnerable to experience job dissatisfaction. Adil, Kamal, and Atta's (2013) reasoning is also supporting the present study results as they asserted that employees all over the world for enjoying a high level of JS are seeking alternative employment where they may be able to experience a higher degree of job satisfaction. For achieving satisfaction the EC is very important. If the

climate is moral and ethical, it will motivate the employee to give his/her best and increase job satisfaction. But externally oriented employees cannot find their EC supportive which creates dissonance, which results in distress and job dissatisfaction.

### 3. Conclusion

Findings of the present research suggested that personality variable such as ELC has a significant effect on employee's perceptions and their way of evaluation. Present study findings revealed that ELC is negatively related to EC and job satisfaction. The results of current research indicated that employees with external orientation can negatively influence his/her climate and job satisfaction.

### 4. Theoretical and Practical Implications

This paper not only guides employees in private and government organizations but also provides suggestions to leadership for making the organizational environment ethical and productive. In organizations, it is essential for management to create an ethical environment that can internally motivate employees to increase their satisfaction level towards the organization. In Pakistani culture, people have strong beliefs in external factors such as fate and powerful others, which can hinder the development of EC leading toward poor JS (Seyal & Afzaal, 2013). Therefore, it needs to create awareness in employees about a careful, independent, and moral climate for enhancing JS by changing their attributional style.

### 5. Limitations and Suggestions

The present study involves certain limitations, which should be considered while interpreting the findings. In the present study, self-report measures were used, which might have introduced common method variance resulting in inflated relationships. The sample size was not much diverse therefore for future research large sample should be approached. Future research should take a closer look at more moderating and mediating variables to explore and expand more aspects of JS.

Further research should also continue to explore other variables affecting organizational climate and job satisfaction. Interventions should be planned to decrease the ELC of clients for fostering positivity and morality in the organization.

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