

# **VOLUNTARY PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOR (VPEB): ROLE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP (EL) AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EI)**

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## **Abstract**

This study examines as to how EL (Ethical Leadership) and EI (Emotional Intelligence) affect employees' pro-environmental behavior in their organizations on voluntary basis, and how emotional intelligence amplifies the impact of EL on voluntary PEB of Employees. To conduct the research, quantitative tools and techniques were employed. Data were collected through adapted questionnaires. Systematic random sampling technique was adopted to draw a sample from population of a Public Sector University from Islamabad. Out of 500 questionnaires, 200 were properly filled, and returned. Based on theory of Social learning, it could be concluded tentatively, that EL and EI positively influenced the voluntary PEB of the employees. Smart PLS Software 4.0 was used to analyzed the results which were consistent with the literature. Moreover, future recommendations have also been put across.

**Keywords:** Pro-environmental behavior, Ethical leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Sustainability, Social Learning Theory

## **1. Introduction**

When someone consciously works to protect the environment without being compelled to do so, this is known as Voluntary Pro-Environmental Behavior, (VPEB). This includes cutting back on energy use, recycling, and water use. Green, sustainable, or eco-friendly conduct are other names for Pro-Environmental Behavior. People can use VPEB in their personal life and at business. Activities that lessen environmental harm or rehabilitate the natural environment can be included in VPEB. A person's mindset and their intention to conduct VPEB may be favorably correlated with VPEB-influencing factors. An individual's intention to execute VPEB may be favorably correlated with their personal moral standards. A person's intention to exercise VPEB Leadership may be favorably correlated with how they perceive their organization's environmental support.

Humanity has made environmental sustainability primary concern because of the environmental catastrophes that are ruining our world. The goal of sustainable development is to preserve ecosystems via concerted action. Environmental policies and practices across a range of human domains need to be evaluated and reassessed in light of the severity of the deterioration. Because of their substantial impact on the bad state of the environment, organizations are under tremendous pressure to reduce the harm. Research on organizational sustainability practices is still in its early stages. It has not yet sufficiently addressed number of aspects related to this topic. Not much research has been done on sustainable working practices in this field (Sulphey et al., 2024).

Understanding the mechanics of sustainability concerns connected to the environment in workplaces is crucial since individual sustainable behaviors contribute to an organization's overall sustainability (Cheng et al., 2021; Fatoki, 2021). The importance of individual sustainability to corporate success is shown in the explanation of VPEB, which is defined as individual discretionary actions which improve environmental performance and support official environmental policies (Fatima & Azhar, 2021). VPEB comprises voluntary information sharing about waste reduction, recycling, and work material reuse (Sulphey et al., 2024).

More study on the effects of various leadership philosophies on employees' voluntary environmental behavior and how those philosophies interact with other elements is usually recommended by the relevant literature (Blankenberg & Alhusen, 2019; Khan et al., 2021; Ullah et al., 2021). Notwithstanding advancements in research on the relationship among VPEB and leadership styles, there is conspicuous paucity of literature exploring the relationship between VPEB and EL (Cheng et al., 2021; Yusop & Adam, 2021). On the other hand, the relationship between an employee's VPEB and EL has received very little attention. Ethical leadership is defined as the normative display of behavior displayed in one's own actions and relationships with others (Nwanzu & Babalola, 2024). It also entails encouraging followers to exhibit this behavior through collaborative communication, cooperative decision-making, and reinforcement (Edevbie & McWilliams, 2023). A leader's job is essential to a company's success since they carry out several vital functions. One of a leader's primary duties is to provide vision for the organization.

Leaders thus cannot be undermined, and their role can never be ignored. Leaders in organizations, let the people unite and instill vision. By laying out the vision and the necessary steps to achieve it, the leader inspires and encourages people to work toward a common goal. A leader will inevitably be followed by those who are looking for direction, clarity, and leadership. People may develop and perform at better levels when they get guidance and mentorship from leader. In addition to offering direction, a competent team leader also makes substantial contribution to guaranteeing productivity. For workplaces that are now plagued by unethical behavior, research on voluntary PEB and ethical leadership is crucial. The impact of Emotional Intelligence (EI) on the link between VPEB and EL is unclear due to the paucity of research on the topic. It has to be fully investigated and properly

validated that EI can regulate and buffer the influence of various leadership ideologies on an employee's VPEB. There are currently gaps in the literature on leadership, EI, and employee VPEB. The lack of study on the relationship between employee VPEB and EL reflects this gap.

Second, thorough, and substantial classification of leadership styles has been made. In literature, some of the most recent types of leadership include spiritual, transactional, transformational, supportive, sincere, servant, positive, and ethical (Rothmann & Cooper, 2015). The VPEB of an employee may be impacted by these various leadership philosophies. However, because this study was restricted to EL, there may not be a significant correlation between some leadership ideologies. The conceptual underpinnings of the study, including a discussion of important variables and research hypotheses, are presented in Sections 1 and 2. Methodology is covered in full in Section 3. Section 4 presents the research design, test results for the hypotheses, and the validity and reliability of the suggested scales. Sections 5 and 6 discuss the results and their theoretical implications. Conclusion including limitation and suggestions for further study and research are presented in Sections 7 and 8.

## **2. Literature Review, Theoretical Background, & Hypothesis**

Educated people are viewed as both consumers, such as students or other external institutions, and human resources, such as professors and staff; leadership is a particularly delicate subject in educational and research companies. Researchers, academic institutions, and companies have long been interested in the leadership style and the traits of those attitudes and styles that distinguish leaders. The notion of leadership styles is one of the several theories that have been put out regarding the differences between leaders. Though the strategy idea is one of its components, the theoretical and practical elements of educational administration have only lately been examined.

The main thesis of this study is that EI influences the relationship between EL and VPEB, and that EI and EL promote an employee's VPEB. Social identity theory and social learning (Bandura, 1977) served as the foundation for the assumptions (Tajfel et al., 1979). The social learning hypothesis states that imitation, demonstrating, and observing are the ways in which learning takes place. Numerous fundamentals, including as motivation, emotions, attitudes, and attention, have an impact on it. The social learning hypothesis states that people use what they observe about the attitudes and actions of others, as well as the outcomes of those actions, to influence their own conduct. The hypothesis recognized that learning is influenced by the interaction between cognition and environment. Characteristics of ethical leaders include concern for justice, morality, compassion, and sustainability, and their perception of the surroundings may reflect these characteristics (Kim et al., 2023; Nørgaard, 2022).

Furthermore, environmental concern serves as the primary representation of these elements. As a result, moral leaders would be sensitive to the surroundings, which might drive them to behave appropriately. According to the social learning theory, employees may absorb the moral leader's characteristics and actions. In other words, employees would learn VPEB from

their ethical role models. People want to have positive sense of who they are, and community membership may either reinforce or erode that feeling, according to the notion of social identity. An organization is group of people who come together to work toward a shared objective. EI represents a strong sense of self inside the organization. Employee VPEB is the term for employee discretionary conduct that is advantageous to the company.

According to social identity theory, VPEB is an employee's voluntary conduct that can improve an organization's rating, and an organization's rating has an impact on its workers' self-esteem. Employee performance will be correlated with their level of identification, ownership, and belonging. The notion originated from studies that used the minimal group paradigm in the early 1970s. These tests demonstrated people's seeming natural desire to differentiate themselves from others by joining certain groups and their willingness to give up absolute benefits to maintain their relative superiority over group members. Research participants might accept fewer financial prizes for their in-group if payments for an out-group were substantially lower.

These studies yield a sophisticated model of how incentives connected to personal identification predict individual propensities for intergroup discriminating. The model also describes how those individual identification processes predict society responses to group status on both an individual and collective level. The suggested mediating function of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in the link between employee VPEB and EL is also explained by social identity theory. According to the concept of social identification, even if EL may have traits that lead to VPEB in workers, how these traits manifest in their conduct will rely on how much the workers connect with his company. A few studies have shown that it is worthwhile to look into the connection between workers' emotional intelligence and environmental consciousness (Wang et al., 2022).

## **2.1. Ethical Leadership and employee's VPEB**

Making choices that benefit the group as whole and take into account the demands of all parties involved is the practice of ethical leadership. Honest, responsible, and courteous, ethical leaders inspire their staff to follow suit. Leaders that are ethical are honest and have strong moral purpose. Their principles are always upheld. Leaders that are moral accept accountability for their deeds. Leaders that uphold ethics are aware of moral dilemmas and act appropriately. Even when their opinions are controversial, moral leaders are forthright in their statements. Everyone is treated equally by ethical leaders, including superiors and subordinates. Everyone should be treated fairly and equitably, according to ethical leaders.

EL is the practice of setting an example of appropriate social conduct for followers by one's own actions, interpersonal interactions, and disclosure of such behavior (Kim et al., 2023). Servant, honest, and responsible leadership are among the leadership ideologies that have been identified and examined in the literature on organizational behavior. However, because of its strong association with followers' ethical conduct and beliefs during these periods of egregious moral deterioration, EL is receiving lot of attention from scholars. By making

decisions, giving feedback, and communicating in both directions, leaders with strong moral set an example for proper conduct. The objectives of an ethical leader include upholding moral principles and exercising moral leadership. The core values of EL are integrity, fairness, power sharing, moral guidance, and people-orientees (Saleem et al., 2021).

The broad definition of PVB is personal activity that reduces negative environmental consequences. Such behavior may be involuntary or voluntary. Although formal is optional, organizations formally need the latter (Alzaidi & Iyanna, 2022; Fatoki, 2021). Employee voluntary PEB affects environmental sustainability even if it is optional and not explicitly acknowledged or rewarded by corporations (Khan et al., 2021). It shows how much employees go beyond the call of duty to act in an environmentally conscious way. These initiatives might include reducing workplace garbage, recycling, conserving energy, using less paper, submitting job proposals in an environmentally responsible way, and encouraging colleagues to follow suit (Sulphery et al., 2024; Ullah et al., 2021). Based on related characteristics, actual study findings, and the social learning theory, ethical leadership is thought to enhance employees' VPEB (Bandura, 1977). The EL is a representation of morality, justice, equality, fairness, social responsiveness, the ethical environment, accountability, and responsibility. Consequently, it was assumed that,

**H:1** “Employee VPEB is positively predicted by ethical leadership”.

### **Emotional Intelligence and employee's VPEB**

The significance of emotional intelligence (EI) in influencing workers' attitudes and behaviors at work has been shown in several research. Collaboration, dispute resolution, and creativity are among the positive workplace behaviors that employees with greater EI are more likely to display. It is suggested that people with higher EI are more involved and committed to their work since EI is also linked to better levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Emotional Intelligence (EI) has beneficial function in assisting in the conversion of organizational elements into the attitudes and actions of employees. Leaders with high EI, for instance, are more likely to provide a positive work atmosphere that encourages staff members to participate in VPEB.

In similar vein, workplace cultures that prioritize empathy, teamwork, and environmental responsibility may raise employees' emotional intelligence (EI) and, consequently, their readiness to act in ways that benefit the environment. This study proposed favorable correlation between employees' VPEB and EI based on relevant characteristics, prior research, and concepts from social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1979). Among the organizational traits that are part of EI are pride, identification, and devotion. These have shown a positive relationship with number of voluntary eco-friendly employee behavior categories (Shah et al., 2021). Empirical evidence indicates a positive correlation between an employee's VPEB and EI (Jiang et al., 2019). So, it is hypothesized that,

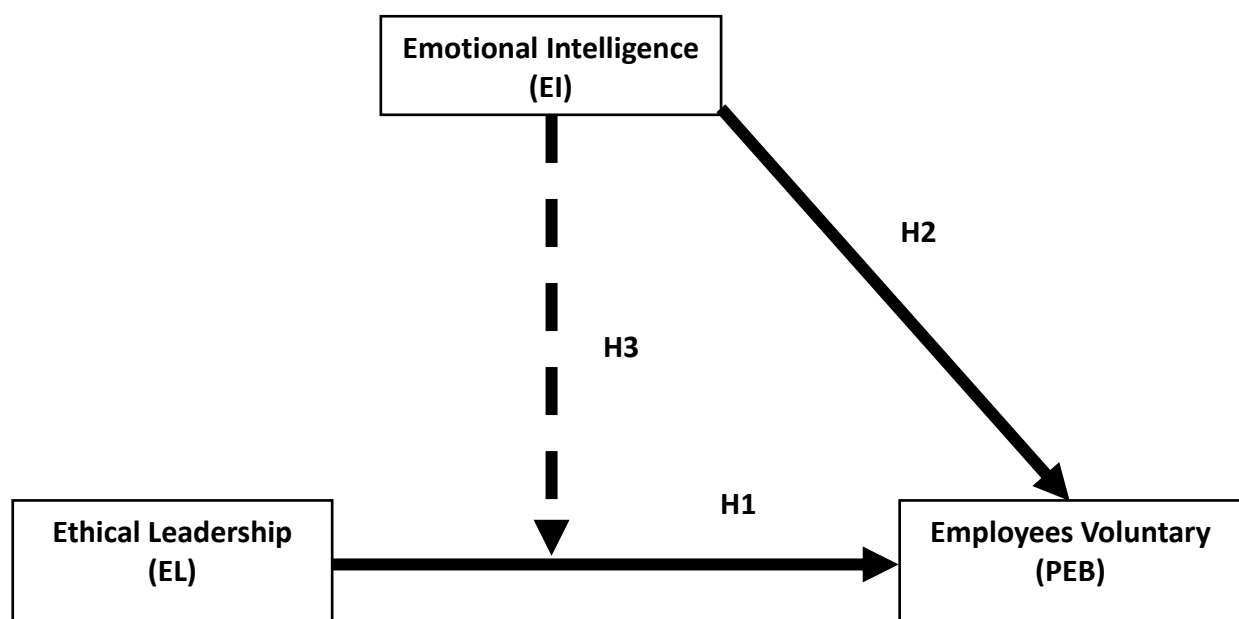
**H:2** “EI predicts employee VPEB positively”.

## 2.2 Emotional Intelligence being moderator in the relationship of EL and VPEB

This study also looked at EI's moderating impact in the link between VPEB and ethical leadership. The range of intervening interactions that already exist between these variables has an impact on the moderation hypothesis. For example, EI served as a moderator between the VPEB of employees and trustworthy, accountable, and compassionate leadership approaches. By affecting the direction and intensity of the link between VPEB and other factors, EI can serve as moderator. Employees with greater EI, for example, could be more able to handle stressors at work, including position ambiguity or time constraints, which might make it more difficult for them to adopt eco-friendly practices.

Here moderating role of emotional intelligence (EI) in the presence of ethical leadership and the manifestation get elaborated through the social identity theory lens. It can be observed that when people at work get strong association and attachment with their organization, it is more likely that they not only internalize but also emulate behaviors and values of their leaders. Thus ultimately, transparency, fairness, and even accountability get manifested in the behaviors of employees. On the other hand, if emotional intelligence is low, the employees may inclined to exhibit and adopt values which potentially undermine the positive effect of leadership on the outcomes of organization. Therefore, the investigation's hypothesis was that:

**H:3** The link between EL and employees' VPB is moderated by emotional intelligence, with higher correlation when emotional intelligence is high.



The link between emotional intelligence and the correlation needs more exploration and explanation in order to unearth the underlying mechanism at work. Generally, the system is supported by theoretical conceptualization, however specifically elucidation of why emotional intelligence may lead to a stronger and better correlation, this introduces moderating variable. The study of the moderating role of emotional intelligence is likely to provide the dynamic interplay of variable. Therefore, it strengthens the theoretical framework at hand. EI can amplify effective leadership through enhancement of not only leaders' understanding their emotions but also how to manage their emotions and those of organizational members and teams. This can foster higher association among team players, more informed decision making, and better work environment, which ultimately resultantly inspire the employees to perform better and more effective.

### **3. The Methodology Adopted for the Study**

The research article employs the type of quantitative research and data collected is cross-sectional data. The sample consisted of 200 workers from a Government Sector University in Islamabad, who worked for the organization. Average age varied from 23 to 60 years. To have adequate validity, the self-report measures were adapted, given that the participants possess sufficient understanding of the items and their responses.

By including all staff groups; the sample's ecological validity was enhanced. The sample size for this study is in accordance with the standard approach that has been established in the literature. The study's sample size was deemed sufficient. According to the idea that a medium or average effect size is enough if the impact size is ambiguous, the sample size also has more than 80% power to identify a relationship at the significance level. 0.05 is the significance threshold, if any.

Ethical Leadership (EL) and Emotional Intelligence (EI) are analyzed and conceptualized as independent variables. Emotional Intelligence (EI) in addition was examined as Moderator Variable (MV) in totaling the IVs. The employees' Voluntary PEB was examined and analyzed as the DV.

A self-reported questionnaire to 500 workers in universities of Islamabad, Pakistan, and Partial Least Squares (PLS) regression method was used to handle data. PLS-SEM was considered appropriate for the size of sample available. At a significance level of 0.05, 5,000 subsamples were used to test the bootstrapping option. The venue for publishing the questionnaire was Google Docs. Hard copies were also utilized to gather the data and 225 replies were obtained. There was a 45% response rate. Twenty-five of the replies had no answer. 200 questionnaires (N=200) were deemed valid for data analysis. A sample that was demographically varied in terms of age, gender, job titles, and service experience was chosen (Table 1).

**Table 1 Survey Sample and Control Variables Description (N=200)**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	<b>145</b>	<b>72.5</b>
Female	<b>55</b>	<b>27.5</b>
<b>Job Descriptions</b>		
Asst Manager	<b>50</b>	<b>25</b>
Managers	<b>77</b>	<b>38.5</b>
Team Member	<b>73</b>	<b>36.5</b>
<b>Age</b>		
23-35 yrs	<b>39</b>	<b>19.5</b>
36-45 years	<b>56</b>	<b>28</b>
46-55 years	<b>51</b>	<b>25.5</b>
55-60 years	<b>54</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Year of Service</b>		
Less than 3 years	<b>70</b>	<b>35</b>
3 to 6 years	<b>45</b>	<b>22.5</b>
6 and above	<b>85</b>	<b>42.5</b>

### **3.1 Measurement and Data Analysis / Interpretation**

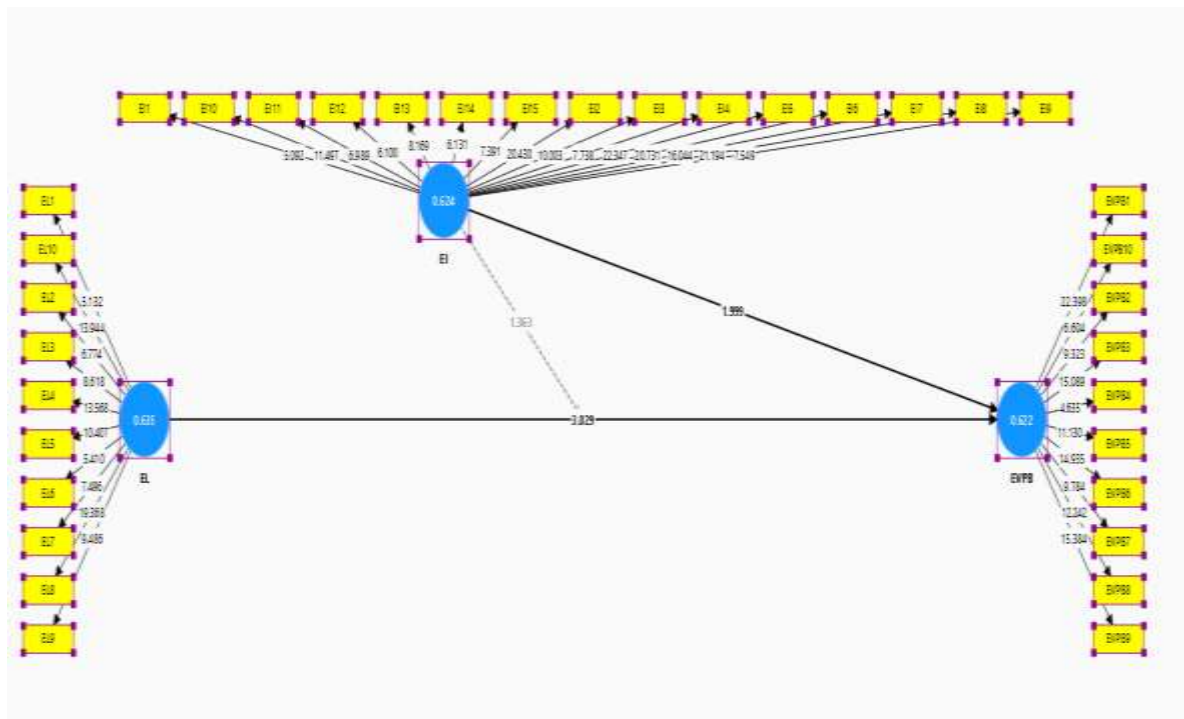
Variables have been assessed using response options on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). As being, self-reported data leading to common-method bias guidelines of and employed Harman's single-factor test in SPSS was followed. The results indicated that the single factor explained is 16.406%, supporting the inference of not affecting the results by the common method bias.

PLS regression is effective for handling small sample sizes (100–200). PLS-SEM path modeling was utilized in Smart PLS 4.0 to observe the constructs from a predictive perspective.

### **3.2 Measurement Model**

The measurement model in Figure 1 below was tested using composite reliability, discriminant validity, and convergent validity of components. Factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) tests have been used to ensure convergent validity for the application of outer measurement models. Given that the AVE and factor loadings were both more than 0.5, convergent validity was reasonable. The appropriate factor loading was 0.7 or higher. In specifically, the effects of removing the item on composite reliability and convergent validity were examined. Items with outer loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 were considered for deletion, subject to an increase in the CR required value (Hair et al., 2019).





**Figure 1. The measurement model with T value.**

In addition, for each construct, AVE coefficients were stated. Reliability of the constructs was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, CR, & rho\_A coefficient.

Construct Reliability and Validity				
	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	rho_A
EI	0.62	0.85	0.88	0.86
EL	0.58	0.82	0.86	0.84
EVPB	0.65	0.89	0.90	0.90

The table shows that the construct of the study reflects adequate validity (convergent validity) as AVE is higher than 0.5, while showing great reliability as reflected through Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and rho. Here rho is greater than 0.8. Similarly factor loadings show strong association as greater than 0.6 which suggests that the study model is robust. Overall stats show good reliability and validity of the constructs.

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
EI	0.624	0.619	0.073	8.589	0.000
EL	0.635	0.616	0.099	6.941	0.000
EVPB	0.622	0.620	0.067	9.264	0.000

Composite reliability (rho_c) - Mean, STDEV, T values, p values					
	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
EI	0.961	0.958	0.014	69.919	0.000
EL	0.945	0.938	0.029	32.674	0.000
EVPB	0.942	0.940	0.018	52.483	0.000

Composite reliability (rho_a) - Mean, STDEV, T values, p values						
	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)		P values
EI	0.965	0.965	0.011	84.446		0.000
EL	0.943	0.937	0.031	30.093		0.000
EVPB	0.939	0.937	0.020	45.927		0.000
EI x EL	1.000	1.000	0.000	N/A		N/A

Cronbach's alpha - Mean, STDEV, T values, p values						
	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)		P values
EI	0.956	0.953	0.016	60.947		0.000
EL	0.954	0.922	0.039	24.060		0.000
EVPB	0.931	0.927	0.024	39.532		0.000

f-square - Matrix					
	EI	EL	EVPB	EI x EL	
EI			0.274		
EL			0.517		
EVPB					
EI x EL			0.155		

	Original Sample (O)	Simple mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T statistics	P Value
EI-> EVPB	0.452	0.461	0.226	1.999	0.046
EL-> EVPB	0.759	0.690	0.251	3.029	0.002
EI x EL->EVEPB	0.096	0.072	0.070	1.363	0.173

**Table 2. Moderation Analysis**

## 4. Findings and Results

The findings show that a significantly positive effect of EL(Ethical Leadership) on Employees Voluntary PEB has been confirmed. Similarly, significant positive impact of EI on Employees VPEB has been confirmed. Additionally, this research article assessed the moderating role of EI on the relationship between EL and EVPEB. Analysis showed that the effect of EL on Voluntary PEB of emp was unaffected by EI as moderator. The substantial influence of Ethical Leadership on the Voluntary PEB explained clearly, as to why EI moderation role does not effect relationship between EL and VPEB. This is likely to be attributable to Ethical leadership's considerable influence on emp. Another argument is that since effect of Emotional intelligence on Voluntary PEB of employee was too small and unable to change the huge influence of Ethical Leadership on Voluntary PEB. Rationale is built on (Mowbray et al., 2019) thought.

New theoretical insights on EI, EL and Voluntary PEB were introduced to the literature, focusing on the interaction with VPEB due to dearth of research on these topics. The study addresses the lack of knowledge between EI and Environmental Organizational Citizenship Behaviour. Numerous studies have examined work attitudes like Organization's support, commitment of employee, psychological clean and green environment (Yusop & Adam, 2021). Being the first to look at the impact of EI as a moderator that influences how leadership styles affect employees' VPEB, this study is significant.

## **5. Conclusions**

The correlation between the employees Voluntary PEB and performance of organization is significant. The valuable results obtained from extensive research efforts have provided a deep understanding that can be used to enhance behaviour of employee. The existing study examined the effect of Emotional Intelligence and Ethical Leadership on the Voluntary PEB of employees to address this issue. Significantly, this study uncovered that Ethical Leadership and Emotional Intelligence are early indicators of the Voluntary PEB among employees.

### **5.1 Recommendations and Limitations for future research**

The limitations of this study may be taken into account when evaluating the results. Among these drawbacks, include the use of self-reported data and cross-sectional data and design. These factors need to be carefully taken into account before making any definitive conclusions from the study and choosing how to move forward with additional research. While cross-sectional design restricts the capacity to directly see and analyze data, self-reported data may be impacted by people's desire to present themselves in a way that is socially desirable. One of the limitations is that the response rate is low as 45% which is 200 out of 500. This may raise concerns regarding nonresponse bias, leading towards an understanding the findings of this study may not be entirely representative of the population. However, the results are interpreted with caution and within the context of the study. The future study on this can provide benefits from the strategies towards increasing response rates and then further in investigating the potential existing differences among the non-respondents and the respondents.

Longitudinal, experimental, and multisource data should be used in future studies to identify causal correlations between variables. Determining the relative effects of VPEB and involuntary activities should be the main goal of future research. Additionally, the study's model is straightforward and might be susceptible to under specification. Future studies must investigate more complex models, such as combinations of models, such as moderated mediated.

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