

## **Mediating Role of Security Measures in Developing the Attitude towards Whistle blowing among Faculty Members in Public Sector Universities**

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### **Abstract**

*This article aimed to examine the attitude of the university faculty towards whistle-blowing in public sector universities in Punjab, Pakistan. Further, to investigate the direct and indirect effect of perceived behavioral control (PBC), Organizational Ethical Culture (OEC) and colleagues' support (CS) mediating through job security measures (SM) on the attitude towards blowing the whistle (AttWB) when there is wrongdoing happens in the university. The quantitative survey research design was adopted to examine the faculty members' attitude towards whistle-blowing to report the wrongdoing within an organizational setting. Total 224 participants participated in the current study working as lecturer, assistant professor and associate professors in the three randomly selected public sector universities of Punjab province. Structural equation modeling was used to validate the model of the study. Results showed that the hypothetical model significantly validated and a significant and partial mediation of Job security measures between the effect of PBS, OEC, CS and attitude towards whistle blowing (CMIN/DF = 2.34, GFI = 0.93 & RMSEA = 0.06). while there is no gender difference found in this mediating role of SC. In the light of the findings, it was recommended that whistle-blowing mechanism, policies and procedures are required to be institutionalized to ensure the job security measures to*

*support the protection of whistle blowers and to improve the transparency process.*

**Keywords:** *Whistle blowing attitude, job security measures, perceived behavioral control, public university, organizational ethical culture.*

### **Introduction**

The term whistle-blowing is actually used to report an unethical concern of co-workers and also to report the wrongdoing accruing within the organization. Whistle blowing is an employee's conscious act of reporting within an organization or out of the organization which involves an ethical behaviour and high degree of risk. Whistle-blowing mechanism is the most vital system within an institution which can help to reveal the unethical misconducts as compare to any other mechanism (Miceli, Near, & Dworkin, 2008). A situation becomes unenthusiastic in which employees do not report or cannot report any wrongdoing due to the risks. The absence of enthusiasm within an organization should be a considerable issue for personnel. In this context, whistleblowing functions as a means for employees to disclose such issues to the appropriate authorities, either within or outside the organization (Becker, 2014; Delk, 2013).

Whistle-blowing is not commonly used in educational institutions in most of developing countries like Pakistan. Very few researches are available regarding whistle blowing in private corporations like banking sector where the situations and their mechanisms are absolutely different as compare to educational institutions especially when it comes to public sector universities. In educational context, there is lack of any proper mechanism of whistle-blowing, mostly existing ways include some internal committees to deal such matters. The vital ethical standards of higher education institutions cannot be compromised due to unethical conducts or wrongdoings, especially when government incurred significant cost in providing higher education. Thus, whistle blowing commonly considered as a productive mechanism to eliminate unethical activities. This action of employee as a whistleblower are useful and pay a positive impact on the growth of the organizations of developed countries. However, in Asian society like Pakistan, the situation of whistle-blowing

is totally different as compare to the other countries (Butt et al., 2022). In an environment, where enforcement of law is not upto the mark, whistleblower do not willing to report about the misconducts that happening in institutions. Employees feel low confidence in reporting the wrong doings in the public institution because of fear of retaliation and their job security issues.

A proper system and mechanism of reporting the wrongdoings lacks in the public sector higher educational institutions. If organizational environment supports to reporting of wrongdoings through a proper institutionalized policies and mechanism then it would have a positive impact on the organizational ethical culture as well as on the prospective whistleblowers (Abbas & Ashiq, 2020). This will also support in determining whether the employees are willing to do whistle blowing within the institution, and if not, identifying the barriers or challenges which prevent them to support the whistle blowing would be of immense importance. Because, if employees are not able to do whistle blowing it can be failure to run an institution positively,

These systems of whistle blowing would be useless if the whistle blower not use it to below the whistle. Literature revealed that most of the countries, where fraud and corruption are common element of the systems, employees are not willing to reports to the unethical wrongdoings due to fear of retaliation (Abbas & Ashiq, 2020). Furthermore, people would be less inclined to disclose if they believed that doing so would put their job in danger (Hwang et al., 2014). The inclination to whistleblower is significantly influenced by the type, frequency, degree, and nature of the offence (Richardson et al., 2017). Moreover, research also document that women may behave more morally than men and be more inclined to denounce crime because they have a greater sense of justice, equality, and compassion (Katam et al., 2024).

Literature revealed that previous several research studies have been conducting in order to determine that which factors affecting individual intentions towards the whistle is blowing within their institution (Park & Blenkinsopp, 2009; Winardi, 2013; Latan, Ringle, & Jabbour, 2016).

A perceived behavioral control which explores a person's confidence in their capacity to regulate certain behaviour is also a very crucial factor.

Winardi, (2013) concluded that perceived behavioral control influenced the individual's intentions towards the whistle-blowing. According to Carpenter and Reimers (2005), a person's impression of the ease or difficulty of carrying out a certain job affects how much behavioral control they feel they have. Both my own prior experiences and my observations of others' experiences can have an impact on this view.

Perceived behavioral control is actually relates to the perceptions of the employees or any individual that how it's easy of difficult to perform a specific behavior according to the situation. An individual when deciding to report any misconduct, he may become a judge for himself (Park & Blenkinsopp, 2009). Furthermore, if organizations neglect to take the action on the violation that was reported by the whistle blower it may reflect of the whistle blowers behavior, he will then decide to blow the external whistle or not. If positive action against the report would be taken and resources support the whistle blower for reporting the corruption (moral or financial), he may be inclined towards internal whistleblowing. Previous researches proved that perceived behavior control is a strong factor in influencing the whistle blowing intension (Chang et al., 2017).

The organizational ethical culture influence greatly the feelings of employees and their intention to report the authorities if they observe any unethical act or something happening against the rules and regulation of the organization especially if it is the public sector university. A positive and supporting ethical culture in the universities made the faculty more likely to blow the whistle and will feel safer and more motivated towards maintenance of the ethical culture of the organization (Potipiroon & Wongpreedee, 2020). This indicates that creating an ethical workplace can make workers feel safe reporting wrongdoing without fear of getting in trouble.

The perceived amount of organizational ethical culture can influence the propensity to disclose wrongdoing and the choice of reporting method, whether internal or external (Keenan, 2000). Strong organizational ethical culture encouraged a person to disclose a transgression within first before doing so outside (Miceli, Near, & Dozier, 1991; Jubb, 2004). Successful organizations recognize the power of the whistleblowing that can be as an ethical tool are more likely to strengthen their own ethics by telling

whistleblowers to report complaints within the organization. Universities with a strong ethical culture are more likely to encourage staff and students to speak out about wrongdoing (Farooqi & Ahmed, 2017).

All of these studies show how important an organization's ethical culture is in shaping how people feel about whistleblowing at universities. Academic institutions can make things more open and accountable by creating an environment that encourages ethical behavior and supports whistleblowers.

An individual's motivations for blowing the whistle may also be influenced by the colleagues' support. There is a chance that employees will disclose wrongdoings if the colleagues value whistle blowing and can stand with him. Sometime employees are familiar with the unethical activities and misconducts that happened in the organization but they cannot report against those irregularities due to unsupportive behaviour of their colleagues (Appelbaum & Shapiro, 2006). Social exchange theory explains that employees feel comfortable to do their work honestly within the organization only if the ethical culture of organization support them.

The feel easy to do a decision to blow the whistle when they observed unethical activities and similarly employees may not feel easy to make decision to do reporting against the unethical act if they sense threats to their job or in worst scenario to their lives (Rehg et al., 2008). Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, (2005) explained that if an individual feel satisfied with his organizational ethical culture, he feel a great sense of responsibility for the benefit of his organization and will focused on the betterment of the organization and he will try to report the unethical activities within the organization. Colleagues support factor was recognized by the supports of colleagues, co-workers, and members around the working place and close friends who are agree to do the whistle blowing within the organization.

The most sensitive issue in this entire scenario is the protection of whistle blower, who exposes the secret information about wrongdoers. As honest employees whistle blower should be rewarded by the authority of that organization (Lindblom, 2007). On the other hand, employees who raised their voice against the misconduct may face the negative consequences that includes fear of retaliation, punishment, job security measure and fired from the job by the authority. In our organizational

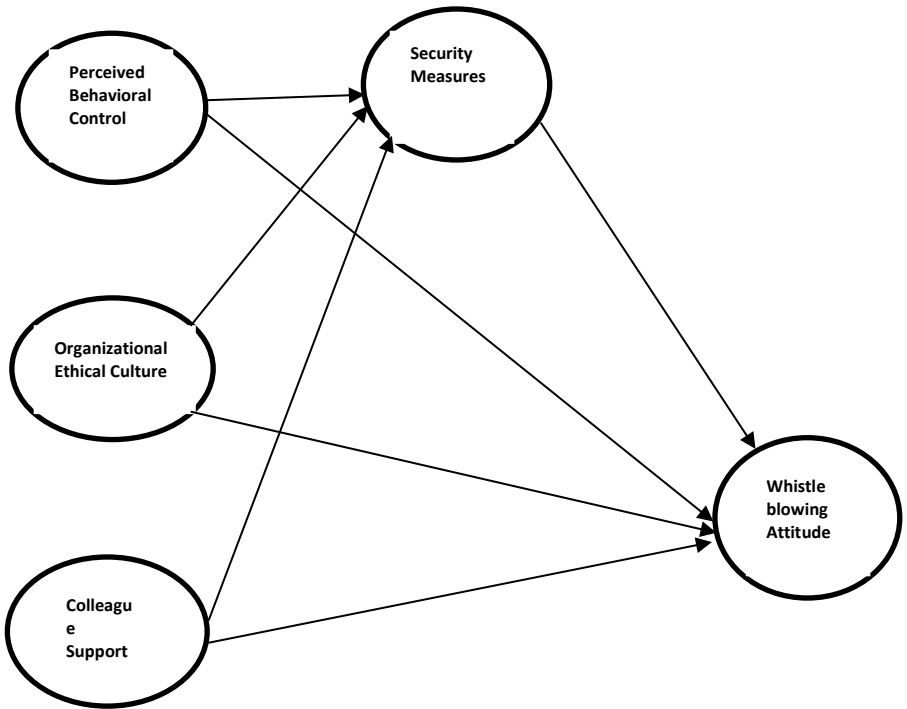
settings, whistle blower is not always welcomed by the leadership who follow the rigid policies. Sometime, organization reacts negatively towards the concerns and consequences are obviously retaliation, and whistle blower hesitate to do the whistle blowing and avoid to raise his voice against unethical activities due to the fear of retaliation (Pittroff, 2016). Job security measures and fear of retaliations was adopted as the mediator variable. The studies conducted in past related to the fear of retaliation were negatively associated towards whistle blowing intentions (Cho & Song, 2015). Furthermore, whistle blowers' security measure related to job is also one of the most sensitive concerns that lead him to avoid raising voice against any misconduct. Sometime employees do not to report against the misconducts that happened in the organizations in front of their eyes just because of joblessness fear and their personal reputation within the organization. If they have trust to take action against the wrongdoing reporting by the authority they will encouraged to report more confidently. Due to the fear of retaliation, personal attacks, blacklisting, joblessness and bullying employees remain silent and do not report.

The term whistle-blowing intention has not its exact theories as described in different research studies. Previous studies showed that researchers have applied different type of theories in their researches to measure the behavior of respondents, but it is difficult to analyze the actual behavior for whistle-blowing. So for that the researchers tried to predict the intentions toward whistle-blowing instead of actual behavior of respondents. Therefore, different behavioral theories were applied in previous research studies such as Arnold & Ponemon, (1991) applied an "ethical decision making theory" of Kohlberg in order to findout the relationship between moral resaoning and whistleblowing decision making intentions. On the other hand a theory of planed behaviour was applied to identified and analyze the factors that effect the intention of whistle-blowing (Park & Blenkinsopp, 2009). In the current study, attitude towards whistle blowing intention and perceived behavioral control was adopted from the Planned Behavior Theory (Ajzen, 2005).

The main purpose of this research study was to determine the effect of the factors that can predict the attitude of the university faculty member towards the whistle blowing in public universities of Punjab, Pakistan. In

the light of the literature, perceived behavioral control (PBC), colleague's support (CS) and organizational ethical culture (OEC) were selected as the independent variables to examine their effect on the attitude towards whistle blowing mediating through job security measures (SM)

Figure 1  
*Conceptual Framework and Hypothetical model*



Following the hypothetical model, following hypotheses were formulated;

H<sub>1</sub>: Perceived behavioral control has direct effect on the employee's security measures.

H<sub>2</sub>: Organizational ethical culture has direct effect on the employee's security measures.

H<sub>3</sub>: Colleagues support has direct effect on the employee's security measures.

H<sub>4</sub>: Security measures have a positive direct effect on employee's attitude towards whistle-blowing.

H<sub>5</sub>: Perceived behavioral control has significant indirect effect on the employee's attitude towards whistle-blowing.

H<sub>6</sub>: Organizational ethical culture has significant indirect effect on the attitude towards whistle-blowing.

H<sub>7</sub>: Colleagues support has significant indirect effect on employee's attitude towards whistle-blowing.

H<sub>8</sub>: Security measures significantly mediate the relationship between perceived behavioral control and employees' attitudes toward whistle-blowing.

H<sub>9</sub>: Security measures significantly mediate the relationship between organizational ethical culture and employees' attitudes toward whistle-blowing.

H<sub>10</sub>: Security measures significantly mediate the relationship between colleagues' support and employees' attitudes toward whistle-blowing.

## **Methodology**

This research study was conducted as quantitative research designed using descriptive survey research. The research data was collected using a survey questionnaire from the population from the public universities of Punjab, Pakistan. The target population of the study was all the teaching faculty of all the public sector universities of Punjab province, Pakistan. Sample of the study was selected through multistage sampling technique. Firstly, three public sector universities (university of Gujarat, Government Collage University Faisalabad and university of Sargodha) from each stratum (Northern, Central and Southern Punjab) of the Punjab province were selected randomly. At second stage, by using stratified sampling technique, 25% of the faculty members of three major faculties (Social science, Natural sciences, Arts & Humanities) were selected from each university to collect the data.

A self-administered questionnaire based on scales to measure the variable of the study was distributed among the faculty members. The scales were adapted from the HEC-NRPU project carried by Dr Nargis Abbas & Dr Uzma Ashiq.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts, first was demographic variable such as age, gender and work experience and the second was consist on the items of the variables to be measured as fear of retaliation, perceived fair treatment, security measures of whistle blowers and whistle blowing mechanism. All the items of the scale were measured on a seven-point Likert-scale such as strongly agreed was 7, agreed to 6, slightly agreed was 5 and neutral was measured as 4, slightly disagreed was 3, disagreed, 2 and strongly disagreed was 1. Total 417 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 213 questionnaires, that is, 51.1% was the response rate.

### Results

Data was analyzed by using the structural equation modeling method through SmartPLS. The loadings of the variables of the study and their respective number if items are shown in table 1.

**Table 1**

*Loadings of the variables*

| <b>Variables</b>                     | <b>No of Items</b> | <b>Loadings</b> |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)   | 5                  | 0.87            |
| Organizational Ethical Culture (OEC) | 7                  | 0.85            |
| Colleagues' Support (CS)             | 8                  | 0.89            |
| Job Security Measures (SM)           | 5                  | 0.91            |
| Whistleblowing Attitude (Att_WB)     | 10                 | 0.88            |

All indicator loadings were found greater than 0.7, which are indicating good reliability. Further, reliability and validity of the model were ensured through HTMT values in table 2.

**Table 2**

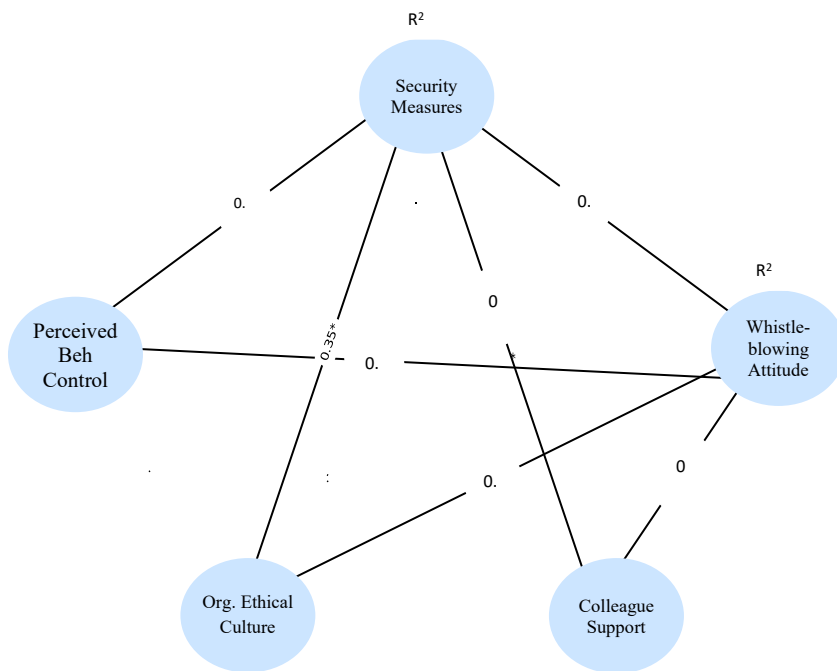
*HTMT (Discriminant validity) values*

| <b>Construct</b> | <b>Cronbach's Alpha</b> | <b>Composite Reliability</b> | <b>AVE</b> |
|------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| PBC              | 0.82                    | 0.88                         | 0.71       |

|        |      |      |      |
|--------|------|------|------|
| OEC    | 0.84 | 0.89 | 0.73 |
| CS     | 0.86 | 0.91 | 0.77 |
| SM     | 0.90 | 0.93 | 0.82 |
| Att_WM | 0.88 | 0.92 | 0.79 |

The cronbach' alpha values for all variables were found greater than 0.7 which shows the internal consistency of the scales. Further, the composite reliability greater than 0.7 means composite reliability of all independent, mediator and dependent variables is good. The Average Convergent values (AVE) measure the convergent validity. The values greater than 0.5 consider good indicates that the construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators. These all values indicate the good quality of the model figure 2.

**Figure 2**  
*Structural Model*



**Table 3**

*Model Fit Indices*

| Fit Index | Value | Threshold | Interpretation |
|-----------|-------|-----------|----------------|
| CMIN/DF   | 2.34  | <3.0      | Good fit       |
| GFI       | 0.93  | >0.90     | Good fit       |
| RMSEA     | 0.06  | <0.08     | Good fit       |
| PNFI      | 0.78  | >0.50     | Good fit       |
| CFI       | 0.96  | >0.90     | Excellent fit  |
| TLI       | 0.95  | >0.90     | Excellent fit  |

All model fit indices show that the hypothetical model is validated. Now to proceed further for the validation of the hypotheses, the direct and indirect paths are shown in following table 4.

**Table 4**

*Path analysis*

**Direct Paths**

| Path                    | $\beta$ (Beta)<br>Standard<br>Coeff. | t-values | p-values | Significance |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------|----------|--------------|
| H <sub>1</sub> : PBC→SM | 0.45                                 | 6.12     | 0.000    | Yes          |
| H <sub>2</sub> : OEC→SM | 0.35                                 | 5.47     | 0.000    | Yes          |
| H <sub>3</sub> : CS→SM  | 0.39                                 | 6.05     | 0.000    | Yes          |
| SM→Att-WB               | 0.58                                 | 10.23    | 0.000    | Yes          |
| PBC→Att-WB              | 0.17                                 | 2.89     | 0.004    | Yes          |
| OEC→Att-WB              | 0.21                                 | 3.76     | 0.000    | Yes          |
| CS→Att-WB               | 0.24                                 | 4.12     | 0.000    | Yes          |

**Indirect Paths (Mediation through SM)**

| Path          | $\beta$ (Standard<br>Coeff.) | t-values | p-values | Significance |
|---------------|------------------------------|----------|----------|--------------|
| PBC→SM→Att-WB | 0.41 x 0.58 =<br>0.24        | 5.12     | 0.000    | Yes          |
| OEC→SM→Att-WB | 0.35 x 0.58 =<br>0.20        | 4.87     | 0.000    | Yes          |
| CS→SM→Att-WB  | 0.39 x 0.58 =<br>0.23        | 5.33     | 0.000    | Yes          |

**Total Effects**

| <b>PBC</b>           | <b>OEC</b>           | <b>CS</b>            |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| $0.17 + 0.24 = 0.41$ | $0.21 + 0.20 = 0.41$ | $0.24 + 0.23 = 0.47$ |

All hypotheses were found statistically significant which shows that all independent variables direct and indirectly predict significantly the attitude towards whistle blowing. Thus, security measures (SM) significantly and partially mediate in the relationship between Perceived behavioral control, organizational ethical culture & colleagues; support, and the attitude towards blowing the whistle. Among all independent variables, Colleagues’ support (CS) has the highest total effect (0.47) on Att\_WB thus appeared as “strongest predictor” in developing the attitude towards blowing the whistle.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

The variable perceived behavioral control (PBC) has significant influenced employees’ intentions towards the whistle blowing. This significant impact of PBC on whistle blowing intentions highlights the importance of whistle blowers’ confidence to raise the wrong concerns. These findings support the findings of previous research conducted by Park and Blenkinsopp (2009), who explained that perceived behavioral control had a strong impact on employee’s intentions towards the whistle blowing in some of organizational settings. When wrongdoing is identified within the organization some barriers may create the difficulties for the employees who want to reports such as, lack of confidence in reporting, fear of losing colleagues’ support, and fear to loss the job may reduce the willingness of employees to do whistle bowing. These barriers may controlled by introducing transparent and accessible mechanism by the authorities of the universities which consequently promote the protection level of whistleblower.

Results of the study also showed the significant influence of colleagues’ support in developing employee’s intentions towards whistle blowing within the organization. If colleagues support the whistle blower, he will be more confident to report the wrong doing and may not face the

social isolation or bullying within the universities. This back hand support of peer can reduce the risk fear of retaliation and may also reduce the psychological risk. Moreover, results confirmed the positive impact of organizational ethical culture on the faculty's intentions towards the whistle blowing within the organization. As given literature affirmed that the ethical culture of an organization considered as the shared norms, values and practices that support the ethical behavior of all employees within the organization. These results were aligned with past study of Treviño et al. (2006), which confirms that the employees' behavior are influenced by the ethical culture of an organization.

The variable the security measures regarding to whistle blower's job and personal identity when doing whistle blowing within the organization was found as the significant mediator that have an impacts on employee's intentions towards whistle blowing. Whenever employees perceived strong ethical, emotional and organizational protections for their current job, they may feel more secure and willing to take action against wrong conducts.

Finding also suggests that there should be an effective and potential whistle blowing mechanisms within their institution, there need a well-defined whistle blowing process and also belief that this effective whistle blowing process would encourage the faculty more for reporting the wrongdoings within the ethical culture of universities. These findings were also supporting the previous researches that a well-designed mechanism of whistle blowing is not only important for ethical governance but also helpful to increasing the employees' confidence of reporting the unethical behaviour (Miceli, Near, & Dworkin, 2008). Faculty members likely understand this point that if a proper mechanism of whistle blowing would exist within the institution, they may more interested in reporting the misconducts without any fear of joblessness and fear of retaliation. Findings also suggested that there may be a gap between the whistle blowing mechanism and the practices as there may be a systematic process exists within the organization but not working without biasness.

### **Recommendation**

A systematic whistle-blowing mechanism should be introduced within the higher education institutions which aim to reduce the fear of retaliation,

fear of joblessness and promote the fair treatment when reporting any misconduct that may affect the organizational ethical norms. Higher authorities like vice chancellors of the public sector universities should need to consider gender sensitive approaches when formulating policies and mechanisms for the whistle-blowing to minimize any fear of exposing personal identity. To ensure that all faculty members feel protected equally regardless of religion, gender, status, a transparent and well-established whistleblowing policy and mechanism should be introduced within the university for the integrity of a healthy environment. To ensure a safe, fair and an ethical institution and working environment of that institution, authorities should implement a stable and strong security mechanism for whistleblower's protection as well. Strong communication strategies, support system and training programs should be introduced for gender inclusion and make sure to the female employees that they feel safe and respectful among all their colleagues. Vice chancellor/ chancellor/ rectors should encourage the employees by providing positive feedback and ensure them to investigate reported concerns through a systematic process. Whistle-blowing related workshops and seminars should be conducted within the institutions. The purpose of these activities should be to enhance the employees' knowledge and importance of whistle-blowing and decrease the rate of fraud and corruption within the institutions.

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