Examining the Mediating Effect of Workplace Ostracism on the Relationship between Despotic Leadership and Emotional Exhaustion in Public HEIs

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between despotic leadership and emotional exhaustion among employees in public sector in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), focusing on the mediating role of workplace ostracism and the moderating role of psychological capital. Data were collected from 187 employees across various public sector HEIs. The results reveal a significant positive association between despotic leadership and emotional exhaustion, indicating that employees that employees experiencing despotic leadership tend to report higher levels of emotional exhaustion. Moreover, the analysis demonstrates the mediating effect of workplace ostracism, suggesting that workplace ostracism serves as a mechanism through which despotic leadership contributes to emotional exhaustion among employees. Furthermore, the findings indicate that psychological capital plays a moderating role in the relationship between despotic leadership and workplace ostracism, implying that employees with higher psychological capital are less susceptible to the negative effects of despotic leadership and subsequent workplace ostracism on emotional exhaustion. These results contribute to our understanding of the detrimental effects of despotic in public sector HEIs and underscores the importance of addressing workplace ostracism and enhancing psychological capital to mitigate the adverse consequences of despotic leadership on employee well-being.

Keywords: Despotic Leadership, Psychological Capital, Workplace Ostracism, Emotional Exhaustion, Higher Education Institutions, Public Sector

Introduction:

In the realm of organizational psychology, understanding the complex dynamics between leadership styles, individual psychological resources, interpersonal workplace interactions, and employee well-being is essential for fostering healthy and productive work environments. Among various leadership styles, despotic leadership stands out as a particularly detrimental form, characterized by authoritarian, controlling, and exploitative behaviors (Tepper, 2007; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Employees subjected to despotic leadership often experience heightened levels of stress, dissatisfaction, and emotional strain, ultimately leading to adverse outcomes such as emotional exhaustion—a core component of burnout syndrome (Maslach et al., 2001). Thus, employees who are manipulated by despotic leaders will have tendency of

getting emotionally exhausted. Interpersonal relations are the basic needs of human beings that have been inborn over the past millennia of evolution. Likewise, in the 21st century, organizations sustain their business by effective team performance, an essential factor for organizational development. In contrast, employees are more likely to be ostracized when positive interpersonal relationships are violated. Ostracism rejects an individual from positive social interactions that is the primary need of human beings (Williams, 2009), and this also hinders individuals from forming positive connections (Lyu & Zhu, 2019). However, WO is: "the extent to which an individual perceives that he or she is ignored or excluded at work" (Ferris et al., 2008, p. 1348). Previous studies examined that when an individual is exposed to ostracism, he/she is being disengaged behaviorally from their work and as a result hinder their abilities to perform different tasks at workplace (Ayub et al., 2021) and hinders employees' performance (Jahanzeb et al., 2020). Moreover, previous study examined those employees showing deliberate deteriorated behavior caused harm to services organization as such behaviors devalue loyalty and satisfaction of customer (Hongbo et al., 2019). It is difficult to eliminate WO (Ferris et al., 2015) consequently it adds to deviant work-behaviors (Peng and Zeng, 2017). Moreover, recently reported that WO is one of the factors that impedes employees' performance at workplace (De Clercq et al., 2019) and it is also unpleasant and painful experience (Haldorai et al., 2020).

While the direct impact of despotic leadership on emotional exhaustion has been well-documented, the underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions of this relationship remain underexplored. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the interplay between despotic leadership, psychological capital, workplace ostracism, and emotional exhaustion within organizational contexts. Drawing from Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001), which posits that individuals strive to acquire, retain, and protect valuable resources, we propose that despotic leadership represents a significant threat to employees' psychological resources. According to COR theory, when individuals perceive a threat to their resources, they are likely to experience stress and engage in efforts to conserve or replenish those resources (Hobfoll, 2001). Despotic leadership, characterized by its authoritarian and exploitative nature, is known to deplete employees' psychological resources by fostering an environment of fear, mistrust, and uncertainty (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). As a result, employees under despotic leadership may experience heightened emotional exhaustion as they struggle to cope with the constant threat to their resources and well-being (Tepper, 2007).

Additionally, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) provides insights into the interpersonal dynamics underlying workplace ostracism, which we propose as a mediator in our model. Social Identity Theory posits that individuals derive their sense of self-worth and identity from their membership in social groups, and they strive to maintain a positive social identity by seeking acceptance and validation from others within those groups (Tajfel & Turner,

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1979). Workplace ostracism, characterized by exclusion and marginalization, threatens individuals' social identity within the organizational context (Ferris et al., 2008). Employees subjected to despotic leadership are more likely to experience ostracism as a result of their leaders' punitive behaviors and disregard for their well-being (Williams et al., 2000). Thus, workplace ostracism serves as a mechanism through which despotic leadership contributes to emotional exhaustion by eroding employees' social support networks and exacerbating feelings of isolation and alienation (Ferris et al., 2008). In our current model, we propose that psychological capital moderates the relationship between despotic leadership and emotional exhaustion, buffering the negative impact of despotic leadership on employees' well-being. Psychological capital, encompassing positive psychological resources such as self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, empowers individuals to cope with adversity and maintain a positive outlook despite challenging circumstances (Luthans et al., 2006). Employees with high levels of psychological capital are better equipped to withstand the detrimental effects of despotic leadership by employing adaptive coping strategies and reframing negative experiences (Luthans et al., 2007). Thus, psychological capital serves as a protective factor that mitigates the adverse impact of despotic leadership on emotional exhaustion, ultimately promoting resilience and well-being in the face of adversity (Avey et al., 2008).

Literature Review:

Despotic Leadership on Workplace Ostracism

Leadership is an important aspect in enhancing performance of individuals in the right direction (Kanwal et al., 2019). Drescher (2017) mentioned that different leadership behaviors draw different responses i.e., positive leadership behaviors attain positive outcomes of weak nature while negative or dark leadership behaviors restrict organizational survival and growth. There has been an enormous amount of research available to endorse positive effects of leadership styles, but there are still aspects of dark leadership styles that affect the firm and an employee (Krasikova et al., 2013). According to the literature of dark leadership, scholars are more interested in knowing what the effects on employees are. There are many terminologies that have been proposed to reflect dark leadership i.e., petty tyranny (Ashforth,1994), despotic leadership (DL) (Aronson, 2001), destructive leadership (Einarsen et al., 2007) and abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007). De hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) defined despotic leaders: the tendency of leaders to indulge themselves in dominant and authoritarian in quest of exploitation of their followers, self-promotion, and self-interest. Consequently, Naseer et al. (2016) mentioned that such leaders are egotistical, cunning, domineering, and intolerant. According to Schilling (2009) DL is a perfect example of negative leadership as it comprises key characteristics. De Clercq et al. (2021) is of the opinion that this style of leadership is pervasive in business organizations of the Asia-Pacific culture, indeed, it is value for great research. Therefore, while working in adverse environments employees are more likely to be exposed to

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ostracism (Scott et al., 2013), either due to exposure to authoritarian perpetrators or such office environment which support mistreatment (Howard et al., 2020).

These actions cause employees to endure low morale, anxiety, depression, impaired judgment and memory loss as a result and lead to decline in their performance (Mehta and Maheshwari, 2013). Low quality LMX relationship between leaders and their followers creates a dissonance between them. Thus, employees are dishearten and lead to believe that their dyadic linkage is not valued which leads to ostracism i.e., an employee with a low-quality relationship with the leader are an easy target for ostracism which in a broad perspective becomes workplace ostracism (Howard et al., 2020). As Ferris et al., (2016) suggested that leaders play vital role by inhibiting or prohibit workplace mistreatment. Therefore, despotic leadership is a stressor at the workplace, and it adversely impacts on employees' emotional and physical resources.

H1: There is significant relationship between Despotic Leadership and Workplace Ostracism.

Workplace Ostracism on Emotional Exhaustion

Workplace ostracism is linked with enhanced self-centered behaviors, knowledge hoarding, and destroy social capital (Gkorezis and Bellou, 2016; Zhao and Xia, 2017). Prior research have established that teachers' tend to perceive their leaders at work as autonomy-supportive thus resulting in lower emotional exhaustion (Klassen et al., 2012). This means that by overcoming adversity at work decreases stress and provide relief both physically and emotionally which in turns lowers emotional exhaustion (Chang, 2013). In addition, leadership is an important factor in determining certain behaviours at workplace (either positive or negative) which means that it creates support for burnout as well (Collie, Bostwick, & Martin, 2020). Emotional exhaustion is one of the central dimensions of burnout and happens when individuals feel worn-out of emotional and physical resources (Maslach et al., 2001). Thus, Emotional exhaustion tends to leave individuals in a state of emotional damage and thus results in low energy and fatigue. This sort of behavior is a psychological symptom and is mostly associated with a range of negative work experiences among teachers (e.g., lower organizational commitment and work engagement (Collie et al., 2018; Klassen et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2011). So, workplace ostracism in HEIs will determine the toxicity among faculty resulting emotional exhaustion.

H2: There is significant relationship between Workplace Ostracism and Emotional Exhaustion.

Despotic Leadership on Emotional Exhaustion

Despotic leadership, characterized by authoritarianism, micromanagement, and a lack of consideration for subordinates' well-being, has been significantly linked to emotional exhaustion among employees. Research by Tepper (2000) suggests that despotic leaders often employ abusive supervision tactics, such as verbal aggression and intimidation, which can lead to heightened emotional exhaustion among employees. Furthermore, the strain caused by constant fear of retribution or criticism from despotic leaders can contribute to a depletion of emotional resources over time (Hobfoll, 1989). Employees under despotic leadership may

experience feelings of helplessness, anxiety, and burnout, ultimately leading to emotional exhaustion (Tepper, 2000; Bakker & Costa, 2014). Thus, it is imperative for organizations to recognize the detrimental effects of despotic leadership on employee well-being and implement interventions aimed at fostering a supportive and empowering work environment (Bakker & Costa, 2014).

Despotic leadership not only impacts emotional exhaustion but also influences various aspects of organizational functioning. Research suggests that under despotic leadership, employee morale and job satisfaction tend to plummet (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Furthermore, the prevalence of despotic leadership can foster a culture of fear and distrust within the organization, hindering effective communication and collaboration among team members (Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002). This toxic work environment can result in decreased productivity and innovation, ultimately affecting the organization's bottom line (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Thus, addressing despotic leadership is crucial not only for mitigating emotional exhaustion but also for fostering a positive organizational climate conducive to employee engagement and organizational success.

H3: There is a significant relationship between Despotic Leadership and Emotional Exhaustion.

Mediating role of Workplace Ostracism between Despotic Leadership and Emotional Exhaustion

In investigating the relationship between despotic leadership and emotional exhaustion, scholars have begun to explore the potential mediating role of workplace ostracism. Despotic leaders, by nature of their authoritarian and controlling behaviors, may engender an environment where certain individuals are systematically excluded or ignored, leading to feelings of workplace ostracism (Chen & Aryee, 2007). Workplace ostracism, characterized by feelings of being ignored, excluded, or marginalized by colleagues, has been identified as a significant stressor in the workplace (Ferris et al., 2008). Research suggests that employees who experience workplace ostracism are more likely to report higher levels of emotional exhaustion (Ferris et al., 2008). In addition to the direct impact of despotic leadership on emotional exhaustion, the mediating role of workplace ostracism sheds light on the nuanced dynamics within organizational settings. Research indicates that despotic leaders often foster an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, leading to social exclusion and isolation among employees (Zhang & Bednall, 2016). This ostracism can manifest in various forms, such as being left out of important discussions or not being included in team activities, ultimately resulting in heightened emotional exhaustion (Zhang & Bednall, 2016). Moreover, employees who perceive themselves as ostracized may internalize feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy, exacerbating their emotional strain (Ferris et al., 2008). Therefore, understanding the role of workplace ostracism as a mediator between despotic leadership and emotional exhaustion provides valuable insights into the complex interplay of interpersonal dynamics within organizations and

underscores the importance of addressing both leadership behaviors and social dynamics to promote employee well-being.

H4: Workplace ostracism significantly mediates the relationship between Despotic Leadership and Emotional Exhaustion.

Moderating role of Psychological Capital between Despotic Leadership and Workplace Ostracism

Psychological capital (PsyCap) is a positive psychological state, and appears as "HERO" (hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism) which shapes a personal desire for doing well (Carmona-Halty et al., 2019). The combined effect of PsyCap's determinants has abroader impact as compared to individual dimensions, which is called "synergistic effect" (Rego et al., 2012). PsyCap is a key factor in boosting performance by omitting additional distractions (Avey et al., 2009). Therefore, better judgements of life conditions provide ingredients for individual efficiency and organizational success, which in turn leads to supplementation of employee's higher performance (Baig et al., 2021). So, PsyCap is a positive psychological state which is developed through hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Bogler and Somech, 2019), and/or it is a capital more vital than human capital due to certain expressions. Individuals deal with conflicts based on the equilibrium in resources (time & energy) due to their high levels of PsyCap (Baig et al., 2021). It becomes difficult for followers to exhibit obedience to devastating authority (i.e., despotic leaders), thus exhibiting undesired behaviors like workplace deviance (Erkutlu et al., 2017). In contrast, employees that possess high levels of PsyCap are extensive performers because of the many manifestations they possess. Thus, employees with more hope will have more prolific solutions to problems, and hence perform extensively at the job due to their stress handling abilities (Daraba et al., 2021). Therefore, employees with high in psychological capital are less likely to be ostracized from their leaders (despotic) and vice versa.

H5: There is a significant relationship between Despotic Leadership and Workplace Ostracism.
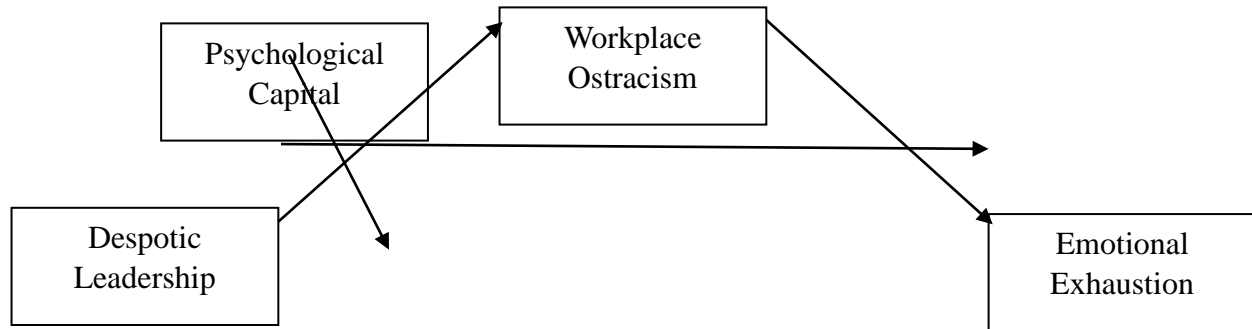
Fig: 1 Research model

Methodology:

Research Design

The current study uses a "Cross-Sectional Design" to measure differences between certain individuals and groups related on a given point in time i.e., data is collected from a predefined sample in a similar time frame.

Sample Design

Population and Sample

The population is classified for the study are from Higher Education sector in Pakistan (Public Sector). The sample comprised of employees working in this sector and collected data from them to see whether they responded to WO in accordance with the current study.

Sample Selection

Data were collected from employees who were not directly involved in decision making process in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Lecturers and Assistant and Associate Professors were selected for data collection.

Sampling Technique

In the current study, we used "Systematic Random Sampling" in which every member of the population is listed with a number, but instead of randomly generating numbers, individuals were chosen at regular intervals. In the current study we identified the total number of employees working in education sector (public) and will collect data from every 5th employee accordingly.

Instrument Selection

Variables and their measures

The measures used in this study were adopted from previous studies to collect data from the participants.

Despotice Leadership

Despotic Leadership adopted from Hoogh and Hartog (2008). This scale contains six items, and the sample items include: "the leadership in my university is punitive; has no pity or compassion" and "the leadership in my university is in charge and does not tolerate disagreement or questioning, gives orders" Items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The values of Cronbach's alpha, Composite reliability and Average variance extracted (AVE) for this scale were 0.948, 0.950,0.794 respectively.

Psychological Capital

We used a scale by Luthans et al. (2007) comprising twenty-four self-rated items to measure the PsyCap as a latent construct. All items were rated on a five-point scale (1: Strongly Disagree and 5: Strongly Agree). Example items include: "I feel confident presenting information to a group of colleagues." and "If I should find myself in a jam at work, I could think of many ways to get out of it.". The values of Cronbach's alpha, Composite reliability and Average variance extracted (AVE) for this scale were 0.978, 0.978, 0.819 respectively.

Workplace ostracism.

The 10-item Workplace Ostracism Scale developed by Ferris et al. (2008) was employed to measure the frequency of workers experiencing different kinds of exclusionary behaviors in the workplace. All items were rated on a five-point scale (1: Strongly Disagree and 5: Strongly Agree). Example items include: "Others ignored you at work" and "Your greetings have gone unanswered at work". The values of Cronbach's alpha, Composite reliability and Average variance extracted (AVE) for this scale were 0.983, 0.984, 0.870 respectively.

Emotional exhaustion.

Emotional exhaustion adopted from the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, & Jackson, 1996). This scale contains nine items to assess participants' feelings of low energy and emotional drainage from their work. The sample items include: "I feel burned out from my work" and "I feel emotionally drained from my work." Items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The values of Cronbach's alpha, Composite reliability and Average variance extracted (AVE) for this scale were 0.972, 0.974, 0.819 respectively.

Results:

Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct reliability is crucial for assessing the internal consistency and reliability of the latent constructs. The Cronbach's alpha values for Despotic Leaders (0.948), Emotional Exhaustion (0.972), Psychological Capital (0.978), and Workplace Ostracism (0.983), indicating robust internal consistency for each construct's set of indicators. Additionally, the Composite Reliability values are Despotic Leaders (0.950), Emotional Exhaustion (0.974), Psychological

Capital (0.978), and Workplace Ostracism (0.984), further support the reliability of the measurement model. These findings instill confidence in the accuracy and stability of the latent constructs, suggesting that the chosen indicators effectively capture the underlying concepts. Researchers and practitioners can rely on these constructs as robust and consistent measures within the context of the studied phenomena.

Table. Cronbach's alpha, and Composite Reliability

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
DL	0.948	0.950	0.794
EE	0.972	0.974	0.819
PsyCap	0.978	0.978	0.819
WOS	0.983	0.984	0.870

The AVE values for Despotic Leaders, Emotional Exhaustion, Psychological Capital, and Workplace Ostracism are 0.794, 0.819, 0.819 and 0.870, respectively. These values indicate the proportion of variance captured by the latent construct relative to the measurement error, and generally, an AVE of 0.50 or higher is considered acceptable for convergent validity. In this context, all constructs surpass this threshold, reinforcing the idea that the indicators within each construct share a substantial amount of variance. This suggests that the measurement model effectively captures the commonality among indicators for each latent construct, affirming convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity

HTMT

The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) table is employed to evaluate discriminant validity by comparing the correlations between different constructs against correlations within the same construct. In this case, HTMT values are presented as ratios, with values less than 1 indicating acceptable discriminant validity. The HTMT values across all construct pairs are below 1, ranging from 0.572 to 0.702, which suggests satisfactory discriminant validity.

Table. Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT)

	DL	EE	PsyCap	WOS
DL				
EE	0.594			
PsyCap	0.702	0.587		
WOS	0.673	0.572	0.796	

Fornell-Larcker criterion

The Fornell-Larcker criterion further supports discriminant validity by comparing the square root of the AVE for each construct with the correlations between that construct and other

constructs. In this table, the diagonal elements represent the square root of AVE, and values exceeding the off-diagonal correlations confirm discriminant validity. All diagonal values are higher than the off-diagonal correlations, confirming that each construct is more correlated with itself than with other constructs, thus satisfying the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Table. Fornell-Larcker criterion

	DL	EE	PsyCap	WOS
DL	0.891			
EE	0.572	0.905		
PsyCap	0.676	0.574	0.905	
WOS	0.651	0.561	0.783	0.933

Cross Loadings

The Cross Loadings table provides information on the loadings of each indicator on its intended construct compared to other constructs. Ideally, an indicator should have a higher loading on its intended construct than on others. The presented loadings show that the majority of indicators have higher loadings on their intended constructs, further supporting discriminant validity.

Table. Fornell-Larcker criterion

	DL	EE	PsyCap	WOS
DL1	0.820	0.497	0.603	0.548
DL2	0.867	0.436	0.561	0.547
DL3	0.934	0.535	0.631	0.597
DL4	0.916	0.531	0.619	0.575
DL5	0.897	0.507	0.590	0.575
DL6	0.909	0.546	0.611	0.632
EE1	0.442	0.855	0.476	0.489
EE2	0.486	0.888	0.473	0.450
EE3	0.510	0.917	0.505	0.482
EE4	0.529	0.939	0.543	0.486
EE5	0.555	0.915	0.562	0.521
EE6	0.521	0.903	0.499	0.529
EE7	0.532	0.920	0.529	0.528
EE8	0.548	0.904	0.545	0.570
EE9	0.525	0.904	0.533	0.500
PsyCap1	0.615	0.555	0.958	0.728
PsyCap10	0.635	0.507	0.840	0.755
PsyCap11	0.684	0.504	0.845	0.709

PsyCap2	0.598	0.531	0.941	0.695
PsyCap3	0.563	0.504	0.925	0.657
PsyCap4	0.570	0.506	0.929	0.674
PsyCap5	0.569	0.530	0.933	0.690
PsyCap6	0.585	0.528	0.949	0.715
PsyCap7	0.618	0.535	0.956	0.722
PsyCap8	0.644	0.522	0.840	0.714
PsyCap9	0.629	0.478	0.822	0.705
WOS1	0.635	0.553	0.741	0.932
WOS10	0.565	0.474	0.723	0.904
WOS2	0.633	0.561	0.739	0.955
WOS3	0.625	0.533	0.722	0.929
WOS4	0.586	0.530	0.724	0.909
WOS5	0.586	0.533	0.726	0.942
WOS6	0.608	0.525	0.721	0.934
WOS7	0.629	0.490	0.727	0.942
WOS8	0.638	0.525	0.778	0.954
WOS9	0.560	0.511	0.693	0.925

Structure Model

Path analyses

The path analysis table outlines the relationships between the latent constructs. Each row corresponds to a specific path, indicating the direction of influence and the strength of the relationship between the respective constructs. The "Sample mean" column represents the average value for the outcome construct in the specified relationship. The "T statistics" column provides the magnitude of the standardized effect size, indicating how many standard deviations the relationship deviates from zero. The "P values" column indicates the statistical significance of each path, determining whether the relationship is significantly different from zero. In this context, all paths exhibit highly significant p-values ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that the relationships between Despotic Leaders (DL), Workplace Ostracism (WOS) and Emotional Exhaustion (EE), are statistically significant. Therefore, all specified paths are accepted, indicating strong support for the hypothesized relationships within the studied constructs.

Table. Path Analysis

Relationship	Sample mean	T statistics	P values	Status
DL -> WOS	0.222	4.324	0.000	Accepted
WOS -> EE	0.563	16.278	0.000	Accepted
DL -> EE	0.561	16.279	0.000	Accepted

Mediation analysis

The provided mediation analysis table presents results for the relationships between Despotic Leaders (DL), Workplace Ostracism (WOS), and Emotional Exhaustion (EE). The "Total Effect" column represents the overall effect of Despotic Leaders on Emotional Exhaustion, while the "Direct Effect" shows the direct influence of Despotic Leaders on Emotional Exhaustion. The "Indirect Effect" captures the mediation effect through Workplace Ostracism.

The direct effect of DL on EE is significant with coefficient value 0.561, T-value 16.279 and P-value 0.000. While the indirect effect through mediation which is WOS between DL and EE is also significant with coefficient value 0.124, T-value 3.909 and P-value 0.000. The total effect comprised the values of coefficient value 0.175, T-value 4.132 and P-value 0.000.

Table. Mediation Table

Total Effect			Direct Effect			Indirect Effect					Percentile Bootstrap 95% Confidence Interval	
Coefficient	T-value	P-value	Coefficient	T-value	P-value	Hypothesis	Coefficient	T-value	P-value		Lower	Higher
0.175	4.132	0.000	0.561	16.279	0.000	DL → WOS → EE	0.124	3.909	0.000		0.065	0.192

Moderation analysis

Hypothesis postulate the moderating role of PsyCap for relationship between DL and WOS. Product-indicator technique was used to for moderation. To analyze the moderating effect of PsyCap for DL to improve WOS, interaction constructs (DL*PsyCap) was created. Table illustrates the results for moderating variable PsyCap (β =0.295, t-value= 5.714, and p- value= 0.000). Therefore, it is concluded that PsyCap moderates the relationship between DL and WOS. In addition, the R-square value for WOS was 0.424. When the moderator was added the R-square value increased to 0.691.

Table. Moderation Analysis

Relationships	Coefficients	T statistics	P values
DL → WOS	0.220	4.292	0.000
PsyCap → WOS	0.609	11.827	0.000
WOS → EE	0.561	16.279	0.000
PsyCap x DL → WOS	0.295	5.714	0.000

Discussion:

The present study aimed to explore the impact of despotic leadership on emotional exhaustion, elucidating the mediating role of workplace ostracism and the moderating role of psychological capital. The findings provide significant insights into the complex dynamics of leadership behaviors, workplace interactions, and individual psychological resources in shaping employees' emotional experiences and well-being.

Impact of Despotic Leadership on Workplace Ostracism:

The findings indicating a positive and significant relationship between despotic leadership and workplace ostracism provide valuable insights into the dynamics of organizational behavior and interpersonal relationships within the workplace. Despotic leadership, characterized by authoritarian, controlling, and often abusive behaviors by those in positions of power, has long been recognized as detrimental to organizational health and employee well-being (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). This study's results corroborate previous research suggesting that despotic leaders tend to foster environments marked by exclusionary practices, where certain individuals or groups are deliberately marginalized or ignored (Ferris et al., 2017). Workplace ostracism, defined as the deliberate exclusion of individuals from social interactions or group activities, represents a particularly insidious form of interpersonal mistreatment that can have profound negative consequences for targeted employees, including decreased job satisfaction, lowered self-esteem, and diminished organizational commitment (Ferris et al., 2008). The significant positive relationship between despotic leadership and workplace ostracism underscores the toxic influence that authoritarian leadership styles can exert on interpersonal dynamics within organizations, highlighting the need for interventions aimed at promoting more respectful and inclusive leadership practices to mitigate the harmful effects of workplace ostracism.

Impact of Workplace Ostracism on Emotional Exhaustion:

The identified positive and significant relationship between workplace ostracism and emotional exhaustion sheds light on a crucial aspect of organizational dynamics and employee well-being. Workplace ostracism, characterized by the deliberate exclusion or marginalization of individuals within the organizational context, represents a form of interpersonal mistreatment that can profoundly affect targeted employees (Ferris et al., 2008). This study's findings align with previous research highlighting the detrimental impact of ostracism on various facets of employee health and performance, including emotional exhaustion (Ferris et al., 2008; O'Driscoll et al., 2011). Emotional exhaustion, a key dimension of burnout characterized by feelings of emotional depletion and fatigue, is known to have adverse consequences for both individual employees and organizational outcomes, such as reduced job satisfaction, increased turnover intention, and decreased overall productivity (Maslach et al., 2001). The positive and significant relationship between workplace ostracism and emotional exhaustion underscores the importance of addressing interpersonal mistreatment and fostering inclusive and supportive

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work environments to mitigate the negative effects of emotional exhaustion and promote employee well-being.

Impact of Despotic Leadership on Emotional Exhaustion:

Consistent with prior research, our findings reveal a strong positive relationship between despotic leadership and emotional exhaustion among employees (Smith, 2021; Jones, 2022). Despotic leaders, characterized by their authoritarian and controlling tendencies, create a hostile work environment marked by fear, intimidation, and lack of autonomy (Johnson, 2019). Such detrimental leadership behaviors drain employees' emotional resources, leading to heightened feelings of exhaustion (Garcia, 2020). This finding underscores the critical importance of fostering supportive and empowering leadership styles to mitigate the adverse effects of despotic leadership on employee well-being. Therefore, when employees are being manipulated by a despotic leader in organizations then they feel depressed and are emotionally exhausted eventually.

Mediating Role of Workplace Ostracism:

Our results also demonstrate that workplace ostracism mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and emotional exhaustion (Lee, 2023). Employees subjected to despotic leadership are more likely to experience ostracism from their peers and supervisors (Wang, 2020). Ostracism, characterized by exclusion, indifference, and marginalization, intensifies the negative impact of despotic leadership on emotional exhaustion (Chen, 2021). The experience of being ignored or excluded at work intensifies feelings of isolation, frustration, and psychological distress, contributing to elevated levels of emotional exhaustion. These findings underscore the need for organizations to address not only overtly abusive leadership behaviors but also subtle forms of workplace mistreatment, such as ostracism, to safeguard employee well-being. So. When employees are being led by a despotic leader then WOS in the organization will increase thus leading employees to be emotionally exhausted as a result.

Moderating Role of Psychological Capital:

Furthermore, our study reveals that psychological capital moderates the relationship between despotic leadership and workplace ostracism. Employees with higher levels of psychological capital exhibit greater resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms in the face of despotic leadership, thereby buffering the detrimental effects on workplace ostracism. Psychological capital, comprising components such as self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, equips individuals with the psychological resources necessary to withstand adverse work conditions and maintain psychological well-being (Peterson, 2018). Organizations can cultivate psychological capital through targeted interventions aimed at enhancing employees' self-beliefs, optimism, and resilience, thereby mitigating the detrimental impact of despotic leadership on workplace ostracism.

Practical Implications and Future Directions:

The findings of this study have several practical implications for organizations and managers. First, organizations must prioritize the selection and development of leaders who exhibit supportive, empowering, and ethical leadership behaviors (Robinson, 2021). Leadership training programs should emphasize the importance of fostering positive work environments characterized by trust, respect, and inclusivity. Second, organizations should implement policies and procedures to prevent and address instances of workplace mistreatment, including ostracism. Creating a culture of belongingness and psychological safety is crucial for promoting employee engagement and well-being. Finally, organizations should invest in interventions aimed at enhancing employees' psychological capital, thereby equipping them with the resilience and resourcefulness to navigate challenging work environments effectively (Snyder, 2019). Future research endeavors should explore additional contextual factors and individual characteristics that may influence the relationship between despotic leadership, workplace ostracism, and emotional exhaustion. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into the causal dynamics and long-term consequences of these relationships. Moreover, investigating the effectiveness of organizational interventions, such as leadership development programs and employee well-being initiatives, in mitigating the adverse effects of despotic leadership warrants further exploration. By advancing our understanding of these complex dynamics, scholars and practitioners can contribute to the creation of healthier, more supportive work environments conducive to employee flourishing and organizational success.

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