Unleashing the Effects of Leaders' Despotism on Employees' Innovativeness Via Mediation Role of Workplace Toxicity

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Abstract

The aim of this current study was to examine the complex association between despotic leadership, workplace toxicity, and innovative workplace behavior within the specific context of the Sugar Mills Industry in KP province. The findings demonstrate a statistically significant association between despotic leadership and workplace toxicity, implying that employees who regard their leaders as despotic are more likely to encounter heightened levels of toxicity within their professional setting. Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that despotic leadership exerts a detrimental impact on employee behavior, particularly in relation to creativity. Specifically, individuals under despotic leadership have a diminished propensity to engage in innovative endeavors. It is of great significance to acknowledge that workplace toxicity plays a pivotal role in moderating the association between despotic leadership and innovative behavior within the company. This implies that the adverse effects of despotic leadership on innovative conduct within the workplace are conveyed through a rise in toxic dynamics. The findings of this current study underscore the considerable impact of workplace conditions on employees' responses to despotic leadership within the particular industry setting. The aforementioned observations hold significant importance for businesses that aim to foster innovative work behavior while mitigating the adverse consequences of challenging leadership dynamics.

Keywords: Despotic Leadership, Innovative workplace behavior, workplace toxicity, sugar mills, KP

Introduction

In today's corporate world, the employees are seen as an invaluable asset that can help a firm gain and maintain a competitive edge (Kimani et al., 2020). Knowledge, innovation, experience, technical proficiency, productivity, service quality, and rapport with stakeholders are all dependent on the quality of the company's human resources (Pasban & Nojedeh, 2016). Organizations are more obligated than ever to invest in their human capital in order to maximize productivity in light of the growing recognition of HR's significance (Kimani et al., 2020). In today's world of cutthroat competition, it is crucial for businesses to maintain their edge in terms of competitiveness and innovation over their rivals. An enthusiastic and creative crew is the key to success here. To gain a competitive edge, businesses rely on the innovative work behavior (IWB) of their employees (Mansoor et al., 2020). Creating, sharing, and enacting original concepts are all components of employees' individual work plans (Janssen, 2000). In today's uncertain world, business is struggling to survive.

The phenomena of leadership have been suggested as one of the key elements that triggers innovative work behavior among employees as The aforementioned component is widely regarded as the primary situational determinant that facilitates the emergence of said behavior within the workforce (Huang et al., 2016). That is because a leader may foster an environment where their employees are more likely to take risks at work, leading to more fruitful creative results (Wu & Lin, 2018). Thus, a leader's influence on employees' propensity for creative problem-solving on the job can range from transactional to transformational (Oke, Munshi, & Walumba, 2009). That's why it's so important for leaders to foster an atmosphere where employees feel comfortable taking risks (Sethibe & Steyn, 2016).

Blumen's (2005) study, The Allure of Toxic Leaders, demonstrates that toxic leaders are activated by followers and that they are also formed by being accepted in the organizations where they are present. A nationwide study by Kusy and Holloway (2009)

found that toxic individuals can only flourish in poisonous environments. According to the previous studies conducted by Naseer et al., (2016) and House & Howell (1992), such awful leaders are known to be despots who are abusive and destructive in character and believe in using their position to weaken their subordinates' morale, loyalty, and dedication. They also cause stress and emotional tiredness in them.

When it comes to keeping up with the ever-evolving demands of the modern workplace, it's essential that businesses be willing to embrace change (Hosking and Anderson 2018). Businesses need to be agile enough to meet the changing demands of customers and consumers, and proficient enough to take advantage of emerging technologies and market openings. To thrive in today's fast-paced business environment and maintain a competitive edge, innovation is essential (Léo-Paul et al., 2022). Throughout the history of industrialization, the manufacturing and service sectors, where the introduction of new ideas plays a key role, have been seen as the ones most likely to benefit from encouraging and rewarding employee creativity (Lin et al. 2022; Ritala et al. 2015). So, the focus of the present investigation is on what factors, unique to the sugar industry, lead to a decline in innovative work behavior on the job. Which is more likely: psychological stresses at work (workplace toxicity).

This study contributes to the existing knowledge by developing a generalization about the relationship between employee creativity and despotic leadership. It also opens up new possibilities for future assessments of this paradigm in other institutional and cultural settings. The current investigation will focus on the interconnections among factors like authoritarian management, a hostile work environment, and a lack of trust in the company as they pertain to employee creativity and new ideas. The findings of this study have important significance for sugar industry officials, researchers, and managers who are interested in the innovative behavior of their employees. Leaders who take the time to learn about their positions can make their organizations better places to work

(Darvishmotevali & Altinay 2022). The research will also provide light on the causes of destructive leadership behaviors in the sugar industry.

There is a lack of empirical investigation on despotic leadership, despite claims that this damaging leadership style has received little attention in psychology and management research (Naseer et al., 2016; Nauman et al., 2020; De Clercq et al., 2018). This research will have significant repercussions for human resource and mental health practitioners because of the way it takes into account the role of psychological stressors in the workplace in influencing behavioral and organizational development. By operationalizing situational aspects using the concept of TAT, the proposed study will provide a useful theoretical framework for this effort. This theory can help shed light on why workers' actions might vary so much from one situation to the next.

Literature Review

Theoretical Basis

The concept of trait activation theory (TAT) is based on the long-standing debate over the relative weight that individual traits and environmental factors should be given. According to TAT, dispositional factors like a creative personality have a greater influence on trait-relevant outcomes (such as behaviors) in environments that offer those cues (Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000). Researchers refer to circumstances as being trait-relevant when they present chances for the manifestation of characteristics (Tett & Guterman, 2000). Earlier works have brought up similar themes, such as Beman and Funder's (1978) concept of individuals defining circumstances using "template-behavior pairs," Murray's (1938) concept of "situational press," and Allport's (1937, 1966) viewpoint on situational demands for trait activation. TAT explains why personality characteristics have a less impact on performance than was previously believed (Morgeson et al., 2007). According to Tett and Burnett (2003), for personality to have an impact in the workplace, there must be trait-relevant elements in the job, social

interaction, or organization that cause people to respond in ways that are consistent with their personalities. Several studies have demonstrated the significance of activation.

TAT promotes the general moderating idea of context trait relevance. It was developed as a means of taking into consideration the fact that the association between one's personality and their productivity at work can change depending on the circumstances (Tett & Burnett 2003; Tett et al. 1991, 1994, 1999). Researchers are increasingly zeroing in on within-person variance in an effort to better understand personality as a dynamic system (Wille & De Fruyt 2014). Personality dynamics refers to the theory-based, testable processes that moderate alterations in one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in response to both internal and external influences (Tett & Fisher 2020). When studying personality, the focus on change through time adds a layer of complexity on top of that already introduced by the interaction of traits and environments. It is vital to model such change in order to accurately depict personality influences in working contexts as dynamic systems.

Despotic Leadership

There is a limited body of work concerning the negative aspects of leadership (Islam et al., 2022c), particularly in relation to its higher prevalence in eastern countries of the world (De Clercq et al., 2021; Islam et al., 2021). The prevalence rate observed is very high in these countries can be linked to the predominance of high-power distance within collectivist societies (Islam and Hussain, 2022). The negative leadership styles that have been found in the literature are abusive, poisonous, autocratic, exploitative, impulsive, and despotic (Islam et al., 2022c; De Clercq et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2020). Undoubtedly, despotic leadership stands out as the most narcissistic and detrimental form of leadership. This style entails leaders possessing absolute authority over their subordinates, requiring unwavering allegiance and submission, and exhibiting unsympathetic treatment towards them (Mukarram et al., 2021). However, despotic leadership is considered as one of the most prevalent forms of dark leadership (Syed et

al., 2020), especially in societies like Pakistan having high power distance, (Chaudhary and Islam, 2022b). Despite its significance, this type of leadership has not been extensively studied within the domains of management studies and psychology particularly (Liu et al., 2020). The leadership style in question exhibits characteristics of self-centeredness, unethical behavior, and a focus on personal gain to the detriment of subordinates (De Clercq et al., 2021).

Innovative Workplace Behavior

In modern businesses, the innovative behavior of employees plays a crucial role in both reflecting the enterprise's capacity to adapt to a dynamic environment and serving as the foundation for fostering innovation within the organization (Hau and Kang, 2016; Liu, 2017). The comprehension of the factors that precede and contribute to the development of employees' innovative behavior is of great significance in the realm of academic study. The issue of effectively stimulating innovative behavior has emerged as a shared concern among corporate managers and scholars (Van Hove, 2021). The concept of innovative behavior in the workplace pertains to the inclination to generate, produce, and implement novel ideas with the aim of enhancing the performance of individuals, groups, and organizations (Niesen et al., 2018). The leader plays a crucial role in stimulating, directing, and influencing employee conduct to foster innovative practices within firms (Kim and Yoon, 2015; Overstreet et al., 2013). The investigation of employee inventive behavior has gained significant prominence in recent years, as evidenced by the works of Akbari et al. (2021) and Bagheri et al. (2020).

Workplace Toxicity as Mediator

In the contemporary professional environment, employees are constantly confronted with stressful circumstances that have a detrimental impact on their overall welfare (Srivastava and Dey, 2020; Islam et al., 2022a). The existing literature on innovation has addressed the significance of the physical work environment in influencing creative outcomes (Oksanen & Ståhle, 2013; Vischer, 2007). According to Rasool et al., (2021), a

toxic workplace environment may be seen as the dynamic that exists between employees and their work setting, resulting from several factors such as narcissistic conduct, assertive leadership, instances of harassment, exclusion, and intimidation perpetrated by both managers and colleagues. According to Masliani (2021), a survey conducted in England in 2021 on Breather HR revealed that approximately one-third of British employees resigned from their positions due to the presence of a toxic workplace culture. Furthermore, according to a study conducted by Wirotama (2022), researchers from MIT Sloan found that over 40% of employees expressed intentions to quit their jobs in early 2021.

This inclination was reportedly influenced by various factors including compensation, toxic culture, and limited self-development opportunities. Notably, the study by MIT Sloan reveals that toxic cultural issues exert a significantly greater impact, being 10.4 times more influential than compensation-related concerns. Hence, we suggested the following study hypotheses:

Research Hypothesis

1. Despotic leadership has significant association with innovative workplace behavior.

2. Despotic leadership has a significant impact over employee innovative workplace behavior.

3. Workplace Toxicity has a mediating role between the relationship between despotic leadership and employee Innovative workplace behavior.

Methods

The present study utilizes a cross-sectional research methodology to examine the impact of despotic leadership on innovative workplace behavior within the Sugar Mills Industry in KP province. The total sample included 400 employees of sugar mills industry of KP Province. This investigation also explores the potential mediating role of workplace toxicity in this relationship. The data is obtained by employing a structured questionnaire that is delivered to a purposive sample of employees. Total 331 questionnaires were

considered for analysis. This questionnaire includes validated measures that assess despotic leadership, workplace toxicity, and innovative work behavior. The study employs quantitative data analysis techniques, such as correlation analysis and mediation analysis using regression and bootstrapping procedures, to investigate the associations among the variables under investigation. The study method is characterized by a strict adherence to ethical issues, such as the principles of informed consent and confidentiality. This methodology offers a strong framework for conducting a comprehensive analysis of the complex dynamics inside the sector, thereby contributing to a complex understanding of the interaction between leadership, working environment, and innovative work behavior.

Results and Interpretation

Table1. Data Normality & Reliability

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Skewness		Kurtosis		Cronbach's Alpha
	Sample	Values	Values	Statistic	S.E	Statistic	S.E	α>0.7
DL	331	2.80	0.332	.446	.134	-1.196	.267	0.835
WT	331	2.47	0.517	.542	.134	-1.295	.267	0.834
IWB	331	4.13	0.741	-.631	.134	-.864	.267	0.912

Table1 highlighted above shows descriptive statistics of variables. The results of the current study showed that the sample of 331 sugar mills workers had mild supportive towards despotic leadership and workplace toxic behavior (M = 2.80, SD = 0.332), and (M = 2.47, SD = 0.517), respectively. while reported strong inclination towards innovative work behavior (M = 4.13, SD = 0.741). Field (2009) suggests that the ideal range for skewness and kurtosis is typically considered to be between -3 and +3. Skewness is a statistical metric that quantifies the degree of symmetry in a dataset, while kurtosis is a statistical measure that assesses whether the data exhibit heavy-tailed or light-tailed characteristics in comparison to the normal distribution. From the results above all the Skewness and Kurtosis statistics are in range which confirm that the data is normal. Moreover, for despotic leadership (α = 0.835), Workplace Toxic behavior (α= 0.834), and

innovative work behavior (α = 0.912) scores, the reliability analysis showed strong internal consistency. The basis for further investigation of these constructs in the study is laid by these findings, which offer significant information about the prevalence and validity of despotic leadership, workplace toxicity and innovative work behavior among sugar mills workforce of KP province, Pakistan.

Table 2 Correlation Analysis

Correlations				
		1	2	3
WT	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	331		
DL	Pearson Correlation	.571**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		
	N	331	331	
IWB	Pearson Correlation	-.294**	-.432**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	0.000	
	N	331	331	331
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *WT: Workplace Toxicity, IWB> Innovative Work Behavior, DL> Despotic Leadership*				

From the **Table 2**, the correlation analysis reveals significant relationships among Workplace Toxicity (WT), Despotic Leadership (DL), and Innovative Work Behavior (IWB). Notably, Workplace Toxicity and Despotic Leadership exhibit a strong positive correlation (r = 0.571, p < 0.01), indicating that higher levels of Workplace Toxicity are associated with increased Despotic Leadership. In contrast, Innovative Work Behavior demonstrates a negative correlation with both Workplace Toxicity (r = -0.294, p < 0.01) and Despotic Leadership (r = -0.432, p < 0.01), implying that higher levels of Workplace Toxicity and Despotic Leadership are linked to reduced Innovative Work Behavior. These findings underscore the significance of addressing Workplace Toxicity and Despotic Leadership to promote a more innovative work environment, aligning with the provided abbreviations and relationships.

Regression

Table 3 Linear Regression

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	S.E	F	p
1	-0.432	0.186	0.184	0.882	81.357	0.000
Summary		**B**	**S.E**	**B**	**T**	**p**
1	(Constant)	1.095	0.201		5.453	0.000
	DL	0.510	0.057	-0.432	9.020	0.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), DL, Dependent Variable: IWB						

The **Table 3** indicates that the regression model is statistically significant (f = 81.357, p < 0.001). It suggests that the model, with DL as the independent variable predict the accounts for a substantial proportion of the variance in Innovative Work Behavior. Specifically, the model explains 18.6% of the variance in IWB (R² = 0.186), signifying a moderate degree of explanatory power. Looking at the regression coefficients, DL has a significant negative effect on Innovative Work Behavior (β = -0.432, p < 0.001). This implies that as Despotic Leadership increases, Innovative Work Behavior tends to decrease. Furthermore, the constant term in the model is also statistically significant (β = 1.095, p < 0.001), representing the expected value of Innovative Work Behavior when Despotic Leadership is zero. Hence, as per the presented linear regression analysis, Despotic Leadership (DL) is a significant predictor of Innovative Work Behavior (IWB), demonstrating a negative relationship. This suggests that higher levels of Despotic Leadership are associated with decreased Innovative Work Behavior. The model itself is statistically significant and explains a moderate portion of the variance in IWB.

Mediation

DV	IV	R	R²	F	β	p
WT	Constant	0.571	0.326	172.44		0.000
	DL				0.571	0.000
DL	Constant	0.436	0.190	41.59		
	DL				-0.475	0.000
	WT				-0.075	0.000
IWB	Constant	-0.431	0.186	81.35		0.000
	DL				-0.431	0.000

WT: Workplace Toxcity , IWB> Innovative work behavior, DL> Despotic Leadership

From the table above **(Table 4)** the mediation analysis results suggest that Workplace Toxicity (WT) plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between Despotic Leadership (DL) and Innovative Work Behavior (IWB). The model accounted for a substantial portion of the variance in Innovative Work Behavior (R² = 0.326) and was statistically significant (F = 172.44, p < 0.001). Notably, Despotic Leadership positively predicted Workplace Toxicity (β = 0.571, p < 0.001), which, in turn, negatively predicted Innovative Work Behavior (β = -0.075, p < 0.001). These findings highlight that Workplace Toxicity serves as a mediator, partially explaining how Despotic Leadership influences Innovative Work Behavior, suggesting that addressing Workplace Toxicity may be instrumental in fostering a more innovative work environment, thus H$_3$ is substantiated.

Discussion

The findings regarding first study hypothesis uncovers significant associations between these variables. Workplace Toxicity and Despotic Leadership are positively correlated, implying that higher levels of Workplace Toxicity coincide with increased instances of Despotic Leadership (Odhiambo, 2022). Conversely, Innovative Work Behavior demonstrates a negative correlation with both Workplace Toxicity and Despotic Leadership. This suggests that as Workplace Toxicity and Despotic Leadership intensify, Innovative Work Behavior tends to diminish. These findings underscore the importance of addressing Workplace Toxicity and Despotic Leadership to cultivate an environment conducive to innovation and creativity (Zhou et al., 2020). Moving on second study hypothesis, it becomes evident that Despotic Leadership (DL) significantly predicts Innovative Work Behavior (IWB). The model itself is statistically significant, explaining a moderate proportion of the variance in IWB (Indradevi, 2016). This outcome highlights that as Despotic Leadership increases, Innovative Work Behavior tends to decrease. This aligns with the notion that authoritarian leadership styles can stifle employees' willingness to engage in innovative activities (Indradevi, 2016).

Finally, regarding third study hypothesis, the mediation analysis delves into the relationship between Despotic Leadership, Workplace Toxicity, and Innovative Work Behavior. The results indicate that Workplace Toxicity serves as a significant mediator between Despotic Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior. In this context, Despotic Leadership positively predicts Workplace Toxicity, which, in turn, negatively predicts Innovative Work Behavior(xxx). This suggests that Workplace Toxicity partially explains how Despotic Leadership influences Innovative Work Behavior, emphasizing the need to address Workplace Toxicity as a means to promote a more innovative work environment (Jia et al., 2022). Hence, these findings collectively underscore the critical role of workplace factors, particularly Workplace Toxicity and Despotic Leadership, in shaping employee behavior and innovation within organizations. The data provide valuable insights into the relationships between these variables and highlight potential areas for intervention and improvement in fostering innovative work behaviors among employees.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this research provides insight into the complex dynamics within the Sugar Mills Industry in KP province, highlighting the significant influence of leadership and workplace conditions on the development of employees' innovative workplace behavior. The current study findings indicate that despotic leadership exerts a significant detrimental impact on the processes of creativity. Furthermore, it has been noted that the presence of toxic work environments significantly influences the prevalence of these negative consequences. This study emphasizes the importance of fostering positive work environments and employing efficient leadership approaches to promote creativity within organizations. The aforementioned observations have significant for companies aiming to enhance creativity and innovation among their employees, ultimately resulting in a competitive advantage and long-term success.

Implications

The current study's findings have several practical implications for the sugar mill industry. Firstly, recognizing the positive correlation between Workplace Toxicity (WT) and Despotic Leadership (DL) underscores the need for sugar mills to prioritize cultivating a positive workplace culture. This involves implementing strategies such as conflict resolution mechanisms, communication improvements, and well-being programs to reduce Workplace Toxicity, leading to a healthier work environment. Furthermore, the adverse consequences of Despotic Leadership on Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) imply that the implementation of leadership development programs is imperative.

The primary objective of these programs should be to prioritize the cultivation of leadership styles that are characterized by increased participation, empathy, and support, hence fostering a climate conducive to employee innovation. The establishment of a culture that fosters creativity is of utmost importance. It is advisable for organizations to have policies that incentivize and acknowledge innovative endeavors, hence fostering a work atmosphere that promotes unrestricted employee participation in idea generation. This not only enhances employee motivation but also cultivates an environment conducive to the flourishing of innovative ideas. The ongoing assessment of the efficacy of treatments is crucial in order to maintain their relevance and their ability to contribute to the intended results. It is imperative for organizations to engage in ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of initiatives implemented to enhance workplace circumstances, leadership approaches, and employee well-being.

In conclusion, the establishment of partnerships between sugar mills and policymakers has the potential to facilitate the formulation of comprehensive industry-wide norms and regulations aimed at fostering healthier workplace environments and promoting effective leadership practices. The act of engaging in discussion with policymakers can effectively contribute to the successful implementation of supportive policies and regulations that have a positive impact on the industry as a whole. The

outcomes of the study highlight the significance of addressing Workplace Toxicity, cultivating effective leadership, promoting employee well-being, and developing a culture of innovation within sugar mills. These measures have the potential to foster a work atmosphere that is characterized by positivity, innovation, and sustainability, so yielding benefits for both employees and the sugar mill business.

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