

Despotic leadership: a multiple mediation model of its impact on employees' outcomes

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Abstract:

This study examines the multiple mediating roles of trust in leader and voice climate in the relationship between despotic leadership and affective organizational commitment. The proposed linkages were hypothesized drawing on social exchange and signaling theories. The findings of this cross-sectional study indicate that despotic leadership is negatively associated with affective organizational commitment. Furthermore, trust in leader and voice climate play a mediating role in the relationship between despotic leadership and affective organizational commitment. The results highlight that leaders' despotic inclinations have detrimental effects on employees' outcomes. Discussion, implications, and limitations are presented.

Keywords: Despotic leadership, Trust in leader, Voice climate, Affective organizational commitment

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Introduction

The concept of leadership has gained considerable attention from management and organizational researchers because of the outcomes it is thought to influence (Elsaied, 2022; Robert and Vandenberghe, 2021). The majority of existing research has focused on positive forms of leadership, neglecting negative leadership styles (Schyns and Schilling, 2013). More recently, however, researchers have extended their focus to studying the destructive behaviors of people who are in authoritative positions within organizations (Ogunfowora, 2013; Tepper, 2007). Despite an increase interest in the dark side of leadership (Schyns and Schilling, 2013), the more destructive style of leadership, i.e., despotic leadership (De Hoogh and De Hartog, 2008) has received little attention (Nauman *et al.*, 2021).

Existing literature showed several negative outcomes of despotic leadership including reduced creativity, job performance, organization citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, psychological well-being, and an increase in the intentions to leave, emotional exhaustion, work-life conflict, and work withdrawal (Albashiti *et al.*, 2021; Naseer *et al.*, 2016; Nauman *et al.*, 2018; Nauman *et al.*, 2021; Raja *et al.*, 2020). Although studies on despotic leadership are growing, there remains a gap in the literature that explored its effects on followers' affective organizational commitment. Affective organizational commitment is an important concept that has received considerable attention from researchers and business leaders (Morrow, 2011). This is because highly committed employees are less likely to quit their jobs, have fewer work and family conflicts, higher job performance and satisfaction, and organization citizenship behavior (Meyer *et al.*, 2002).

Moreover, this study employs a parallel mediation approach, which helps to delve into the underlying mechanisms, i.e., trust in leader and voice climate, that explains how despotic leadership relates to affective organizational commitment. This research hopes to make the following meaningful contributions. First, despite an increased interest in destructive leadership styles, there are, however, many unexplored avenues, particularly in despotic leadership research, that need to be addressed (De Clercq *et al.*, 2018; Nauman *et al.*, 2021). In response to Ampofo and Karatepe (2022) and Wang *et al.* (2022) call for the need to examine the effects of despotic leadership on employees' affective organizational commitment. This study extends despotic leadership literature by empirically examining its effects on employee affective organizational commitment.

Second, research suggests that levels of trust affect social exchanges between leaders and followers (Podsakoff *et al.*, 1990). Trust in leader is viewed to be an important mechanism through which leaders influence followers' outcomes (Podsakoff *et al.*, 1990). A recent review reveals that the majority of research on the effects of destructive leadership on followers' outcomes via trust has focused on abusive supervision (Legood *et al.*, 2021). Surprisingly, empirical evidence pertaining to the underlying effects of trust in the relationships between despotic leadership and affective organizational commitment is yet to be explored. Likewise, this study responds to the call made by Haq *et al.* (2022) to investigate the effects of despotic leadership in relation to trust in the leader. This study does so by investigating the mediating role of trust in leader in the relationship between a newer form of destructive leadership style (i.e., despotic leadership), and employee affective organizational commitment.

Third, Börnfelt (2022) argues that empirical evidence pertaining to the effects of leadership styles on voice climate is insufficient, therefore, these effects remain to be fully understood. In responding to the calls (Albashiti *et al.*, 2021; Frazier and Bowler, 2015) made

to examine the effects of negative leadership behaviors on employee perceptions of voice behaviors. And more crucially literature on climates suggests that specific types of climate (i.e., voice climate) play a mediating role in the relationship between employee perceptions of wider organizational context (here: despotic leadership) and resulting work-related outcomes (Kuenzi and Schminke, 2009). Considering that voice climate has not been investigated in the association between despotic leadership and affective organizational commitment. This research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how despotic leadership influences affective organizational commitment through an intervening mechanism, i.e., voice climate. Also, this study contributes to the understanding of the factors that restrict this specific type of climate (i.e., voice climate) — which is a new developing construct — in organizations (Frazier and Bowler, 2015). Finally, consistent with Gentry *et al.*'s (2014) call to explore the effects of destructive leadership styles in the non-western context, this study contributes to the research on despotic leadership and affective organizational commitment by using a sample of Pakistani business professionals. To the best of the author's knowledge, this is the first study that has explored the linkages, as shown in Figure 1.

Hypotheses development

Despotic leadership and affective organizational commitment

A despotic leader has been described as an exploitative, vengeful, controlling, highly self-centered, dominating, and authoritative individual who demonstrates low moral integrity and ethical standards (De Hoogh and De Hartog, 2008). According to Naseer *et al.* (2016), leaders with despotic inclinations demand unquestioned obedience and submission and are highly manipulative. A limited but growing number of studies have shown that despotic leadership positively affects employees' turnover intentions (Albashiti *et al.*, 2021) organizational deviance (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2018) and negatively relates to citizenship behaviors, employee performance, creativity (Naseer *et al.*, 2016) and work engagement (Song *et al.*, 2022).

On the other hand, affective organizational commitment refers to employees' emotional attachment to and involvement in the organization (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Affective organizational commitment incorporates employees' psychological state related to their decision whether to withdraw their membership or remain in the organization (Wang *et al.*, 2022) which is believed to be an attitudinal outcome of leadership (Heimann *et al.*, 2020).

This study proposes that despotic leadership will negatively affect employee affective organizational commitment. First, prior research shows that employees exhibit lower affective organizational commitment when they encounter leaders' destructive behaviors (cf. Morrow, 2011; Wang *et al.*, 2021). When employees are unfairly treated by their leader, this, in turn, diminishes their sense of workplace belonging (Song *et al.*, 2022). Second, social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) can serve as a useful framework to explain and understand the negative relationship between despotic leadership and affective organizational commitment. Consistent with the assumptions of SET, a social exchange relationship is fortified when one party (e.g., leader) positively treats the other party (e.g., follower). As a result, the receiver of the positive treatment to balance the relationship will return something beneficial (e.g., positive work-related attitudes and behaviors). Likewise, following the reciprocity norm (Gouldner, 1960) individuals in a social exchange relationship will respond to the negative treatment received from others in a similar fashion. Considering that employees view leaders

as the representatives of the organization (Wang *et al.*, 2021), thereby the former may reciprocate the (positive or negative) treatment received towards the organization, i.e., with higher or lower commitment. Thus, when employees encounter a selfish leader who places his own interests above his followers, treats them unfairly, and asks for complete obedience, the former will consider the benefits received are not commensurate with the input and consider the exchange relationship exploited (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2018). Consequently, to balance the relationship, followers of a destructive leader will reciprocate the unfavorable treatment to the organization (Wang *et al.*, 2021). In line with reciprocity's negative tenet (Crawford *et al.*, 2019), a despotic leader is, therefore, supposed to reduce employee affective organizational commitment. Thus, it is expected that:

H1: There is a negative relationship between despotic leadership and affective organizational commitment.

The mediating role of trust in the leader

Trust has been acknowledged to play a critical role in relationships at work (Legood *et al.*, 2021). According to the widely accepted definition, "trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (Rousseau *et al.*, 1998, p. 395). Trust is considered to be an essential characteristic that facilitates positive social exchanges between the parties involved (Konovsky and Pugh, 1994), here; leaders and followers.

This research predicts that despotic leadership will be negatively associated with trust in leader. First, studies showed that negative leadership behaviors decrease the likelihood of employees' trust in their leader, e.g., abusive supervision in Japanese-American manufacturing firms (Duffy and Ferrier, 2003), and authoritarian leadership among employees working in various industries in Taiwan (Chen *et al.*, 2014). Although research on the destructive styles of leadership is growing (Nauman *et al.*, 2021), there is however a gap in the empirical scholarship that investigated the impact of despotic leadership on followers' trust in leader (Haq *et al.*, 2022). Second, consistent with SET (Blau, 1964), and its socioemotional aspect (i.e., feelings of trust, Shore *et al.*, 2006) this study contends that behaviors of a despotic leader will reduce followers' trust in leader. This is because behaviors such as putting followers' interests second to their own self-interests, exploitative and punitive together with unfair treatment (Albashiti *et al.*, 2021; De Hoogh and De Hartog, 2008) undermine the development of trust (cf. Kelloway *et al.*, 2012). Thus, the following is posited:

H2: There is a negative relationship between despotic leadership and trust in leader.

Destructive leadership behaviors threaten the psychological safety of followers and unfair treatment from the leader is likely to negatively influence followers' willingness to be vulnerable (i.e., trust) (cf. Legood *et al.*, 2021). Thus, in an environment of mistrust — created by despotic leaders — a closer bond between the leaders and followers would not emerge, which in turn, leads to negative work-related outcomes.

Trust in leader is recognized as a critical factor that affects the degree of leader-follower social exchanges (Podsakoff *et al.*, 1990). Therefore, the trust in leader is considered to play an intervening role in the relationship between numerous styles of leadership and followers' outcomes (Legood *et al.*, 2021) including paternalistic leadership and organizational citizenship behavior (Chen *et al.*, 2014), transformational leadership, ethical leadership, and organizational citizenship behavior (Newman *et al.*, 2014), transactional leadership and

psychological well-being (Kelloway *et al.*, 2012), transformational leadership and helping behavior (Kwok *et al.*, 2022), transformational leadership, and organizational citizenship behavior, job performance, and affective organizational commitment (Zhu *et al.*, 2013) and transformational leadership and affective commitment (Yuan *et al.*, 2022). These relationships have been facilitated by trust because trust is believed to play a crucial role in stabilizing interpersonal relationships and developing and maintaining social exchanges (Legood *et al.*, 2021). Following the socioemotional perspective of SET (Shore *et al.*, 2006) when followers perceive their leader to be untrustworthy, it negatively affects their sense of attachment to their leader and organization; hence, their affective organizational commitment is reduced (cf. Yuan *et al.*, 2022). Thus, the following is hypothesized:

H3: The relationship between despotic leadership and affective organizational commitment is mediated by the trust in leader.

The mediating role of voice climate

Voice climate refers to shared perceptions of employees regarding speaking up or engaging in voice behaviors (Morrison *et al.*, 2011). Voice climate is a specific type of behavior (i.e., voice behavior, Frazier and Bowler, 2015) that is thought to be an individual's personal cognition (see, Brykman and Maerz, 2022).

Leadership is considered to be one of the critical factors that influence voice climate perceptions because leaders interpret and implement organizational policies and practices pertaining to climate (Knoll *et al.*, 2021). Previous research shows that aggressive leadership behaviors negatively influence voice climate, e.g., supervisor undermining (Frazier and Bowler, 2015). Although there is an increased interest in examining the impact of different leadership styles in relation to voice climate perceptions, despotic leadership — which is the most destructive form — has yet to be explored (Albashiti *et al.*, 2021).

In this study, it is proposed that despotic leadership will be negatively related to voice climate. This can be explained using signaling theory (Spence, 1974) which assumes that leaders' behaviors send signals to various stakeholders (e.g., suppliers, customers, and followers) that help them in deciding which actions are acceptable (Banks *et al.*, 2021). A leader's despotic inclinations, such as intimidating, bullying, aggression, not tolerating questioning (Albashiti *et al.*, 2021), and creating a hostile work environment send clear signals to followers that speaking up is not welcomed and dangerous (Frazier and Bowler, 2015). Thus, employees in such situations would feel that voicing their concerns may have detrimental consequences for their careers as well as interpersonal relationships (Brykman and Maerz, 2022; Knoll *et al.*, 2021). Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H4: There is a negative relationship between despotic leadership and voice climate.

Allowing people an opportunity to voice has been linked to various work-related outcomes, including work engagement, and affective organizational commitment (Ditchburn and Hames, 2014; Farndale *et al.*, 2011; Vakola and Bouradas, 2005). On the other hand, when employees perceive that speaking up for their concerns is unsafe and will not be acted upon (i.e., low voice climate perceptions, Frazier and Bowler, 2015), in turn, they are more likely to be dissatisfied and their organizational commitment is reduced (Bashshur and Oc, 2015).

In general, the climate has been considered to play a mediating role in the association between work context (e.g., leader) and followers' behaviors and attitudes (Brykman and Maerz, 2022). This is because climate originates through a process of interaction and

exchange of information between the parties involved (e.g., leader and followers). Such as, leaders are believed to be an important source of information because of their influence and interaction with followers (Brykman and Maerz, 2022) which send signals to followers based on climate perceptions are developed (Liu *et al.*, 2017), which in turn, shape the individual's behaviors and attitudes toward work. In the previous research, voice climate was found to mediate the effects between leader humility and team innovation (Liu *et al.*, 2017), supervisor undermining and group voice behavior (Frazier and Bowler, 2015), and leader's reactions to voice and team voice intentions (Brykman and Maerz, 2022). Based on the above discussion, it is proposed that:

H5: The relationship between despotic leadership and affective organizational commitment is mediated by voice climate.

Method

Sample

The survey was created using Microsoft Forms and administered online between the months of September and November 2022. The participants were recruited through a professional social media platform (LinkedIn) (Baltar and Brunet, 2012; Muduli and Trivedi, 2020) and the researcher's personal contacts (Woodhams *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, during the recruitment of participants, they were also asked to share the survey with their social network. A total of 304 employees completed the survey, and the respondents consisted of Pakistani business professionals working in various industries. The responses were considered sufficient provided that a minimum threshold ratio level of 1:10 was met as suggested by Hair *et al.* (1998). Table 1 presents the respondents' profiles.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Measures

The survey questionnaires were conducted in the English language, as it is the official language of Pakistan. All the scales were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Despotic leadership was assessed using a four-item scale developed by De Hoogh and De Hartog (2008). Sample item was "My manager is punitive; has no pity or compassion". The reliability coefficient (α) of the scale was .953.

Trust in leader was assessed using a three-item scale initially developed by Podsakoff *et al.* (1990) to measure trust in and loyalty to the leader, which was later modified by MacKenzie *et al.* (2001) to fit for assessing trust in the leader. The sample item was "I feel quite confident that my manager will always try to treat me fairly". The reliability coefficient (α) of the scale was .971.

Voice climate was assessed using a three-item scale adopted from Knoll *et al.* (2021) that is built on the measures developed by Morrison *et al.* (2011). The sample item was "In this organization people feel free to express their views". The reliability coefficient (α) of the scale was .922.

Affective organizational commitment was assessed using two items from Meyer and Allen (1991). The sample item was “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization”. The reliability coefficient (α) of the scale was .937.

Control variables: In this study, gender (1 = male; 2 = female), age (measured on a four-point scale from 1 $\leq$ 30 years to 4 $>$ 50 years), and organizational tenure (measured on a four-point scale from 1 $\leq$ 5 years to 4 $>$ 15 years) are controlled (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer *et al.*, 2002).

[Insert Table 1 here]

Analysis strategy

The data had no missing values and the normality of the data was measured using skewness and kurtosis scores. The results demonstrate that the scores of skewness and kurtosis were less than 1 and 2, respectively, indicating that the data were adequately normal (Collier, 2020; Kline, 1998). Moreover, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS 24 to test the fitness of the hypothesized model, reliability, and validity. To assess the measurement model: “the comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), standardized root means square residual (SRMR), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)” indices were used. To establish a good model-fit the values of indices must be CFI $>$ 0.90, TLI $>$ 0.90, SRMR $<$ 0.08, and RMSEA $<$ 0.08 (Hair *et al.*, 2009; Kline, 2005). Moreover, for ensuring reliability and validity, different techniques were used, i.e., composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), average shared variance (ASV), and maximum shared variance (MSV). Followed by a hypothesized parallel mediation model was tested with a 5,000 bootstrap sampling technique using Hayes PROCESS Model 4 in SPSS 25 (Hayes, 2013). This is particularly a useful tool that provides evidence of significant indirect effects in a parallel mediation model when bootstrapping CI excludes zero. Furthermore, this methodological approach is consistent with current leadership research that increasingly relies on using PROCESS macro in SPSS to test mediation models (e.g., Aboramadan *et al.*, 2022; Luo *et al.*, 2019).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables. Considering the correlations between variables were higher than 0.70, a multicollinearity test was run. The scores of variance inflation factor (VIF) are between 3.024 and 4.742, which is below the rule-of-thumb cut-off of VIF less than 10 (Hair *et al.*, 2006), suggesting that multicollinearity is not a problem.

[Insert Table 2 here]

[Insert Figure 2 here]

Measurement model

As shown in Table 3, the results of the CFA indicated that the hypothesized four-factor model (comprising despotic leadership, voice climate, trust in leader, and affective organizational commitment) fits the data well ($\chi^2 = 96.773$, $df = 48$, $p < 0.01$, CFI = .990, TLI = .986, SRMR = .020, and RMSEA = .058) and superior to alternative models, including a three-factor ($\Delta\chi^2 = 244.277$, $\Delta df = 3$), two-factor ($\Delta\chi^2 = 404.039$, $\Delta df = 5$), and one factor ($\Delta\chi^2 = 742.45$, $\Delta df = 6$). The results, as shown in Table 2, demonstrate that for each variable, CR values were above 0.70 and the AVE scores of the variables were above 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The values of the CR were as follows: despotic leadership = 0.953, trust in leader = 0.971, voice climate = 0.922, and affective organizational commitment = 0.939. And of AVE: despotic leadership = 0.836, trust in leader = 0.917, voice climate = 0.798, and affective organizational commitment = 0.885. Moreover, the AVE values of each variable were higher than its respective ASV and MSV, which is an indication of good discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Common method bias

Given that the data for all the study variables were collected at one point in time, therefore, a concern for common method bias (CMB) exists. First, some procedural measures were followed in this study, such as, prior to the survey, all the participants were informed about the purpose of data collection, and no personal information was obtained that could identify the participants. Moreover, they were informed and assured that participation in this study is voluntary, there are no right or wrong answers, the survey can be quit at any point in time, and the responses will be kept confidential. After the collection of the data, the presence of CMB was measured using the CFA version of Harman's single-factor and latent common method factor (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). First, the results of the CFA single-factor model revealed that the model fit to the data was extremely poor ($\chi^2 = 839.223$, $df = 54$, $p < 0.01$, CFI = .838, TLI = .802, SRMR = .058, and RMSEA = .219) compared to the proposed four-factor model. Second, two measurement models were run, 1) the model without the inclusion of a latent variable, and 2) the model with the inclusion of a latent variable (Collier, 2020). A chi-square difference test of the two models was not significant ($\Delta\chi^2 = 0.67$, $p = 0.413$). These results are indicative that CMB is not a significant issue in this study.

[Insert Table 3 here]

Hypotheses testing

The hypotheses were tested using PROCESS Model 4 in SPSS, which allowed for an assessment of the two mediators simultaneously. Hypothesis 1 predicted that despotic leadership is negatively related to affective organizational commitment. As shown in Table 4, Hypothesis 1 was supported ($\beta = -0.6023$, $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 3 asserted that trust in leader mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and affective organizational commitment. Table 4 shows that the proposed hypothesis was supported ($\beta = -0.2863$, 95% CI [-0.4077, -0.1611]). The confidence interval does not include zero, suggesting that the negative indirect effect of despotic leadership on affective organizational commitment through trust in leader is significant. Moreover, a piecemeal approach to the mediation also suggests that the paths, i.e., from despotic leadership to trust in leader ($\beta = -0.8080$, $p < 0.001$; hypothesis H2 is supported) and then from trust in leader to affective organizational

commitment ($\beta = 0.3544$, $p < 0.001$) are also significant. Hypothesis 5 suggested that voice climate mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and affective organizational commitment. Results shown in Table 4 provide support for the hypothesized relationship ($\beta = -0.2356$, 95% CI [-0.3110, -0.1642]). The lower and upper bounds of the confidence interval do not contain zero, which suggests that the negative indirect effect of despotic leadership on affective organizational commitment through voice climate is significant. In addition, the piecemeal approach to the mediation suggests that the path, i.e., from despotic leadership to voice climate ($\beta = -0.6282$, $p < 0.001$; hypothesis H4 is supported) and then from voice climate to affective organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.3751$, $p < 0.001$) are also significant.

[Insert Table 4 here]

Discussion and implications

The purpose of this research was to deepen the understanding by empirically examining a model in which two underlying mechanisms explain the effects of despotic leadership on employees' affective organizational commitment. In this model, trust in leader and voice climate served as mediating variables. The survey data supported the hypothesized relationships. The results suggest that despotic leadership is related to lower levels of affective organizational commitment. As stated earlier that followers view a leader to be a representative of the organization, thereby mistreatment from a leader will not only influence the leader-follower exchange relationship but also influence the employee-organization relationship. Hence, the more such negative leadership behaviors are present in the workplace, the less likely employees will develop an emotional attachment to the organization. Also, these findings are consistent with previous research which suggests that leaders' destructive behaviors are negatively associated with affective organizational commitment (Wang *et al.*, 2021). This finding also lends support to SET, which assumes that, when employees are badly treated by their supervisor, their affective commitment toward the organization will be decreased.

Moreover, results demonstrate that trust in leader plays a mediating role in the relationship between despotic leadership and affective organizational commitment. This finding suggests that trust is indeed an effective underlying mechanism that is necessary for social exchanges to take place in the relationship between leaders and followers (Podsakoff *et al.*, 1990). Moreover, the results of the analytical approach employed in this study indicate that a leader who is self-aggrandizing, punitive, and exploitative of others, erodes trust in followers, which in turn, reduces affective organizational commitment. These findings are consistent with the theoretical assumptions of SET, which assumes that unfavorable exchanges between leaders and followers decrease trust, which in turn, leads to unfavorable outcomes (Legood *et al.*, 2021; Tepper, 2007)

The findings also suggest that the negative relationship between despotic leadership and affective organizational commitment is mediated by voice climate. These findings are consistent with the signaling theory (Spence, 1974) and its observability aspect (Connelly *et al.*, 2011) which suggests that the receiver of the signals (e.g., followers) interprets and makes sense of the information received (here: from despotic leader's behaviors). Thus, gain knowledge of the constraints and resulting outcomes of their actions at the workplace (Schneider and Reichers, 1983). Therefore, when employees receive stronger signals that their leader behaves selfishly to gain benefits, does not tolerate questioning, disagreement, or dissenting voice is not permitted nor will their concerns be taken care of seriously. Such

behaviors send a clear message that speaking up is not safe and may have detrimental consequences, which would ultimately reduce their commitment to the present organization. In sum, these findings suggest that trust in leader and voice climate are significant underlying mechanisms through which despotic leadership exerts its negative influence on employee affective organizational commitment. In addition, the results indicate that the mediation was full (see Table 4) because the direct effects of despotic leadership on affective organizational commitment were non-significant.

Theoretically, this research makes several contributions to the despotic leadership literature. First, responding to the scholarly calls (De Clercq *et al.*, 2018; Nauman *et al.*, 2021), this research advances the research on despotic leadership and its effects on affective organizational commitment (Ampofo and Karatepe, 2022; Wang *et al.*, 2022). Second, Legood *et al.* (2021) in their review on trust revealed that among the negative forms of leadership styles, abusive supervision has predominantly been the focus of researchers when examining trust in leader as an underlying mechanism. However, its intervening role among the more overt and most destructive form of leadership style (i.e., despotic leadership) and follower commitment remains unexplored. In response to the call by Haq *et al.* (2022) this research adds to the understanding of how the most destructive form of leadership (i.e., despotic leadership) impacts followers' outcome (here: affective organizational commitment) through the intervening mechanism, i.e., trust in leader. Third, several scholars called for more empirical evidence related to how dark leadership affects followers' perceptions of voice behaviors (i.e., voice climate) in the organization (Albashiti *et al.*, 2021; Frazier and Bowler, 2015), which would contribute to a fuller understanding of the factors that foster or restrict this specific type of climate, here; voice climate (Börnfelt, 2022). The findings of the present research can be useful and important as it helps to understand that despotic leadership negatively relates to the climate of voice, which in turn, negatively affects employees' affective organizational commitment. Finally, based on the call from Gentry *et al.*'s (2014) this research collected data from a non-western country to empirically establish the effects of despotic leadership on employee affective organizational commitment.

The findings of this study offer the ground for important practical implications. The higher management that seeks to enhance employee commitment should take several necessary steps that may help to curb the effects of negative leadership behaviors and provide a safer work environment characterized by trust and where a voice dissent is appreciated. First, considering that despotic leaders' threatening behavior prevents followers from speaking up even about their bullying and intimidating behaviors. Therefore, it is necessary for organizations to constantly monitor such behaviors in the workplace and encourage employees to complain about their supervisor's bad treatment. Importantly, complaint mechanisms should be made completely anonymous and a strict policy devising that the complainant's identity will not be revealed. Second, although analysis in the current study does not account for the effects of leaders' despotic behaviors on gender or people in the minority. In Pakistan, acts of violence and discrimination against women, transgender, and people in the minority are prevalent in the workplace and beyond. Considering that people who have despotic inclinations do create a hostile working environment, therefore, management of the organizations should be very sensitive to the complaints received and act immediately according to the international code of conduct at the workplace. Third, it is important that organizations increase awareness through training programs among individuals who hold positions of authority on how negative behaviors of a leader can affect followers' well-being and outcomes at work. Fourth, as an additional preventive measure, organizations may incorporate behavioral expectations into the managerial performance reviews and regularly provide feedback for their development. Finally, organizations should refrain from

hiring individuals who demonstrate despotic behaviors. For this purpose, organizations can make use of practitioner-oriented assessment scales that can facilitate them to select individuals for leadership positions who demonstrate an inclination towards a desired leadership style (cf. Legood *et al.*, 2021).

Limitations and future research directions

This study has several potential limitations. First, cross-sectional and self-reported data present concerns related to CMB. Although some methods indicate that the presence of CMB might have negligible effects on outcomes (Malhotra *et al.*, 2006), other methodological experts suggest that the CMB problem is misunderstood and therefore overstated (Spector, 2006). Nonetheless, to detect CMB, CFA was performed in AMOS 24. First, the results shown in Table 3 indicate that the one-factor model was poorly fit as compared to the proposed four-factor model (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Second, a latent common method factor (see “common method bias” section) technique was employed (Collier, 2020). The findings suggest that CMB is less likely to be a significant issue in this study. Furthermore, because of this study’s research design, it is not possible to infer causal relationships. Future research could address this issue by using an experimental design. Second, in this study, only one dark leadership style was included. Future research could investigate the relative effects of different destructive leadership styles, including authoritarian, exploitative, narcissistic, and punitive. Moreover, future research can explore the effects of destructive leadership (e.g., despotic leadership) on other outcomes, such as employee knowledge hiding, and employee well-being (psychological, physical, and social). Third, in this study, trust in leader and voice climate (employee perception about voicing is safe) were used as mediators. Future research should explore other underlying mechanisms in the relationship between despotic leadership and affective organizational commitment, such as meaningful work, job crafting, and psychological capital. Fourth, the data for this study were collected from one country, Pakistan, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research could collect data from different cultural contexts and geographical locations. Finally, and importantly, considering that despotic behaviors can be extremely harmful to the employee and organizational well-being, future research should consider identifying antecedents that cause despotic behaviors to occur. For example, it would be interesting to explore if there are organizational conditions that enable and support a despotic leadership style.

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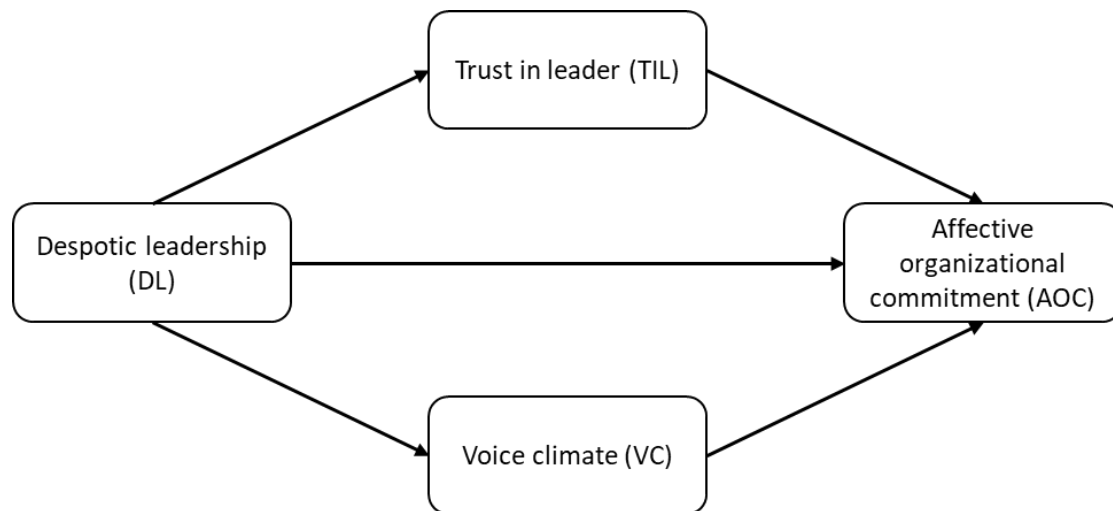
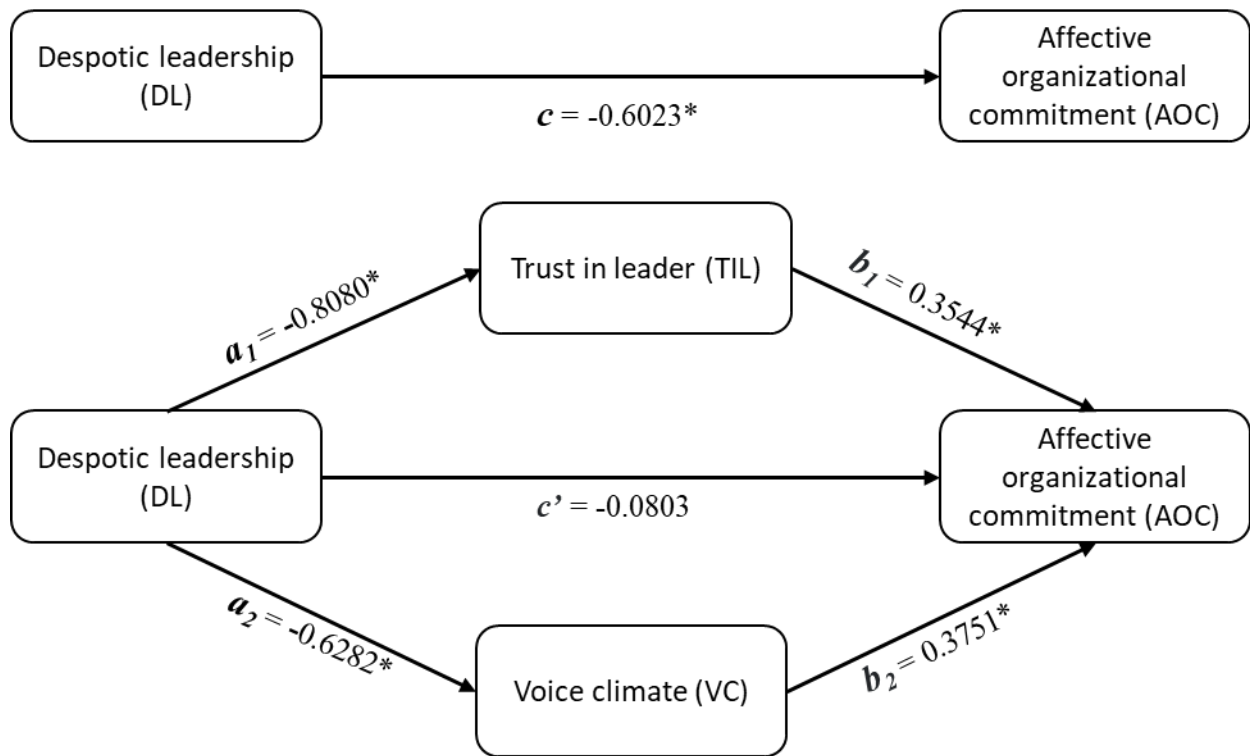


Figure 1: Research model



Notes: Indirect effects are measured using bootstrapping at 95% CI

DL → TIL → AOC = $a_1 * b_1 = (-0.8080) (0.3544) = -0.2863$, LLCI: -0.4077, ULCI: -0.1611

DL → VC → AOC = $a_2 * b_2 = (-0.6282) (0.3751) = -0.2356$, LLCI: -0.3110, ULCI: -0.1642

Figure 2: Direct and indirect effects

Table 1: Respondents' profile

Variable	Frequency	(%)
<u><i>Gender</i></u>		
Male	275	90.5
Female	29	9.5
<u><i>Age (in years)</i></u>		
≤30	112	36.8
31-40	119	39.1
41-50	65	21.4
>50	8	2.6
<u><i>Organizational tenure (in years)</i></u>		
≤5	219	72.0
6-10	52	17.1
11-15	23	7.6
>15	10	3.3
Note(s): N = 304		

Table 2. Correlation matrix with means and standard deviations

Variables	Means	SD	AVE	ASV	MSV	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. DL	2.886	1.442	0.836	0.677	0.778	(0.953)						
2. TIL	2.803	1.439	0.917	0.750	0.778	-0.846**	(0.971)					
3. VC	2.845	1.275	0.798	0.707	0.747	-0.745**	0.811**	(0.922)				
4. AOC	2.440	1.301	0.885	0.684	0.725	-0.728**	0.805**	0.789**	(0.939)			
5. Gender	1.095	0.294	--	--	--	-0.068	0.068	0.104	0.114*	--		
6. Age	1.898	0.824	--	--	--	-0.215**	0.270**	0.234**	0.296**	-0.164**	--	
7. Tenure	1.421	0.770	--	--	--	-0.290**	0.344**	0.293**	0.356**	-0.105	0.613**	--

Note(s): N = 304

** significant at 0.01 level and * significant at 0.05 level

Abbreviations: SD: standard deviation, AVE: average variance extracted, ASV: average shared variance, MSV: maximum shared variance, DL = despotic leadership, TIL = trust in leader, VC = voice climate, AOC = affective organizational commitment. Diagonal elements are composite reliabilities.

Table 3. Results of confirmatory factor analysis

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA
Hypothesized four-factor model	96.773**	48	--	--	.990	.986	.020	.058
<i>Three-factor model:</i> TIL and VC combined	341.050**	51	244.277**	3	.940	.923	.042	.137
<i>Two-factor model:</i> TIL, VC, and AOC combined	500.812**	53	404.039**	5	.908	.885	.045	.167
One-factor model	839.223**	54	742.45**	6	.838	.802	.058	.219
Note(s): N = 304. Four-factor model was compared to all alternative models. ** $p < 0.01$								
Abbreviations: TIL = trust in leader, VC = voice climate, AOC = affective organizational commitment								

Table 4. Results of mediation

Regression model	β	SE	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Outcome: AOC				
Gender	0.4279	0.1718	2.4899	<0.05
Age	0.1584	0.0769	2.0591	<0.05
Tenure	0.1866	0.0832	2.2432	<0.05
DL	-0.6023	0.0362	-16.6439	<0.001
Outcome: TIL				
Gender	0.1452	0.1503	0.9664	
Age	0.0872	0.0673	1.2967	
Tenure	0.1531	0.0728	2.1049	<0.05
DL	-0.8080	0.0316	-25.5332	<0.001
Outcome: VC				
Gender	0.3090	0.1683	1.8366	
Age	0.0858	0.0753	1.1391	
Tenure	0.1009	0.0815	1.2385	
DL	-0.6282	0.0354	-17.7309	<0.001
Outcome: AOC				
Gender	0.2605	0.1405	1.8537	
Age	0.0953	0.0628	1.5185	
Tenue	0.0945	0.0682	1.3867	
DL	-0.0803	0.0534	-1.5032	
TIL	0.3544	0.0618	5.7328	<0.001
VC	0.3751	0.0552	6.7939	<0.001
Bootstrapped				
Conditional indirect effects	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
TIL	-0.2863	0.0627	-0.4077	-0.1611
VC	-0.2356	0.0368	-0.3110	-0.1642
Note(s): N = 304				
Abbreviations: SE: standard error; LLCI = lower limit confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit confidence interval, DL = despotic leadership, TIL = trust in leader, VC = voice climate, AOC = affective organizational commitment				