

## Impact of Despotic Leadership on Workplace Deviance: Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction and Moderating Role of Islamic Work Ethics

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### Abstract

Leadership has long been recognized as a key determinant of employee attitudes and behaviors, yet recent studies emphasize the destructive effects of toxic forms of leadership. Despotic leadership, characterized by authoritarianism, arrogance, and self-interest, undermines employee well-being and may provoke counterproductive workplace behaviors. In parallel, research on Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) suggests that values rooted in fairness, responsibility, and community serve as protective personal resources in organizational settings. Building on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory, this study investigates how despotic leadership influences workplace deviance directly and indirectly through job satisfaction, while also examining the moderating role of IWE. The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional design with data collected from employees of medium to large-scale manufacturing organizations in Pakistan. A stratified random sampling approach ensured representation across diverse departments. Validated instruments were used to measure despotic leadership, job satisfaction, workplace deviance, and IWE. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through SmartPLS 4 to test direct, mediating, and moderating effects. Findings revealed that despotic leadership had a significant positive effect on workplace deviance, confirming that authoritarian and exploitative leadership behaviors trigger retaliatory and counterproductive responses among employees. Job satisfaction was found to mediate this relationship, highlighting that reduced satisfaction is a critical pathway through which despotic leadership fosters deviance. Importantly, the results also demonstrated that IWE moderated the relationship between despotic leadership and deviance, such that employees with higher levels of IWE were less likely to engage in deviant behaviors under despotic leadership conditions. The study contributes to leadership and organizational behavior literature by integrating destructive leadership, employee satisfaction, deviance, and ethics into a unified model.

Keywords: Despotic Leadership, Workplace Deviance, Job Satisfaction, Islamic Work Ethics

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## Introduction

Organizational scholars have turned increasing attention toward the darker dimensions of leadership and their effects on employee outcomes. Leadership that embodies authoritarianism, exploitation, and self-serving motives erodes psychological safety and damages workplace morale (Mehmood et al., 2023). At the same time, employees' personal values especially those anchored in ethical or religious frameworks shape how they interpret and respond to such leadership (Anjum et al., 2025). Exploring the interplay between oppressive leadership styles and employees' moral orientations opens the path to understanding not just who misbehaves (Abid et al., 2024). This study navigates that intersection, looking at how despotic or toxic leadership may diminish job satisfaction and provoke workplace deviance, while considering how Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) may serve as a stabilizing force. The goal is to engage with current debates about leadership's "dark side" and the potential for culturally grounded ethical frameworks to offer resilience or resistance.

Research on toxic or despotic leadership has established its links with various negative employee outcomes. For instance, destructive leadership styles are associated with increased turnover intentions, workplace stress, and diminished performance, as observed in academic institutions (e.g., in China) where despotic leadership contributed to toxic work environments and distraction (see Syed et al., 2022). Studies on Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) indicate that IWE is negatively correlated with workplace deviance (Waris & Awan, 2022), and that IWE strengthens the negative relationship between leader-member exchange and deviance in Islamic banking contexts (Zia et al., 2022). Meanwhile, in Pakistani banking contexts, IWE has been found to positively relate to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and loyalty (Aman-Ullah & Mehmood, 2023). This literature highlights both the damage caused by oppressive leadership and the potential protective role of personal ethical orientations like IWE (Quadri et al., 2024).

Organizations are grappling with the hidden costs of toxic leadership low morale, absenteeism, counterproductive behaviors, and erosion of trust. Research underscores that toxic leadership not only damages individual well-being but also increases organizational vulnerability through disengagement and deviance (Ahmed et al., 2025). In Pakistan and similar cultural contexts, workplace norms often include hierarchical and authoritarian dynamics, heightening the risk of deviant employee responses when leadership becomes despotic. Job satisfaction is a pivotal outcome: dissatisfied employees are more prone to engage in deviant acts that harm organizational functioning (Griffin & O'Leary-Kelly, 2025). Simultaneously, Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) ceasing from values of fairness, responsibility, and communal duty emerge as salient personal resources in such settings. Empirical evidence suggests IWE may mitigate deviance (Waris & Awan, 2022) and bolster positive outcomes like satisfaction and commitment in local banking employees (Aman-Ullah & Mehmood, 2023). However, repeated exposure to despotic leadership may overwhelm even strong ethical commitments, creating dissonance and potentially escalating workplace deviance. Understanding how these forces converge is vital for designing effective, culturally attuned interventions that promote ethical conduct and employee well-being (Islam et al., 2022).

Despite the growth of literature on destructive leadership and on Islamic Work Ethics, their integration remains limited. Most studies treat IWE as a standalone predictor of outcomes like satisfaction or deviance, or examine despotic leadership and deviance in isolation (Khan et al., 2021). Few incorporate job satisfactions as an intermediary or explore IWE's role within that pathway. While despotic leadership is known to fuel

workplace deviance and turnover intentions (e.g., Syed et al., 2022), and IWE can reduce deviance (Waris & Awan, 2022), it is unclear whether and how IWE moderates or mediates the relationship between leadership, job satisfaction, and deviance. Local scholarly work, such as in Pakistani contexts, has demonstrated IWE's positive relationship with job satisfaction and commitment (Aman-Ullah & Mehmood, 2023), but has not connected these to leadership dynamics or deviance outcomes. The literature lacks a comprehensive model that integrates despotic leadership, job satisfaction, workplace deviance, and IWE. There is a need to investigate whether employees with higher IWE can maintain satisfaction and resist deviance under despotic leadership and conversely, whether low IWE exacerbates harmful outcomes (Raza et al., 2024). This gap limits both theoretical nuance in leadership-ethics research and practical insight for culturally sensitive organizational design.

Understanding how despotic leadership, job satisfaction, workplace deviance, and Islamic Work Ethics interrelate matters in several ways (Khan et al., 2021). It advances integrative models that bridge leadership, ethics, and employee behavior fields often studied in isolation. Practically, organizations in cultures where religious values shape work identity (such as Pakistan) stand to benefit by recognizing how personal ethics like IWE can be leveraged to buffer against damaging leadership practices. Workplace deviance withdrawal, sabotage, non-compliance costs organizations via lost productivity and reputational harm (Griffin & O'Leary-Kelly, 2025). If IWE can be shown empirically to preserve satisfaction and reduce deviance even in adverse leadership climates, this insight could inform HR policies, leadership training, and ethics programs tailored to local contexts (Zia et al., 2022). For policymakers, it offers evidence to support cultural competence in leadership selection and development a critical factor for maintaining healthy organizations amid rising concerns about employee disengagement and ethical lapses globally (Pour et al., 2024).

This study contributes a novel, unified model that situates despotic leadership, job satisfaction, workplace deviance, and Islamic Work Ethics within one empirical framework. By examining whether IWE moderates or mediates the impact of despotic leadership on satisfaction and deviance, the research offers theoretical clarity and extends leadership ethics literature in culturally sensitive ways. It also provides practical leverage for organizations seeking to cultivate resilience among ethically grounded employees facing toxic leadership dynamics. Grounded in the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, this study frames despotic leadership as a job demand that depletes resources (job satisfaction) and triggers deviance. Islamic Work Ethics is operationalized as a personal resource that may buffer the negative effects of leadership stressors. This theoretical configuration allows clear linkage among variables: demands (leadership), resources (IWE), outcomes (satisfaction, deviance). The framing supports both predictive modeling and practical interventions highlighting how personal ethics can be harnessed to sustain employee well-being under adverse leadership conditions.

## Theoretical Foundation

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory stands as a comprehensive framework that emerged to address limitations of earlier models of workplace stress and motivation. Developed originally by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli, JD-R offered a more flexible structure than models such as Karasek's Demand–Control or Siegrist's Effort–Reward Imbalance by allowing any working condition to be classified broadly into either demands or resources (Demerouti et al., 2001; as summarized in occupational health psychology literature, 2022). Demands represent aspects of work requiring sustained effort, often causing strain, whereas resources encompass any support or

motivational element that helps achieve work goals or foster personal growth. The model drew attention by proposing two distinct but co-existing pathways one leading toward impairment and burnout under high demands, and another fueling engagement and motivation where resources are sufficient (Demerouti et al., 2001; see also Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). This dual-process structure has since been validated repeatedly across sectors and cultures. Recent systematic reviews, for instance, reaffirm that job demands predict negative outcomes such as burnout, while resources consistently predict positive outcomes like engagement, and that resources often buffer demand-induced strain (Frontiers systematic review, 2022).

JD-R theory matured into a robust and evolving framework. A 2023 review reflecting on a decade of research notes that current applications investigate nuanced interactions including gain and loss spirals, wherein employees may either leverage resources to enhance motivation or spiral into escalating strain and even challenge the assumption that demands are always harmful, suggesting some demands may be motivating (Annual Review, 2023). The theory’s adaptability has also grown. Early versions distinguished only job demands and job resources. Later revisions incorporated personal resources, such as self-efficacy and optimism, recognizing the interplay between organizational context and individual capacity (Frontiers leadership review, 2021). Further, researchers have extended JD-R into education, healthcare, and crisis contexts illustrating its versatility in explaining well-being beyond typical workplace boundaries (study demands–resources in education, 2024). JD-R offers a coherent conceptual backbone. It accommodates pressure from harmful leadership behaviors as “demands,” while recognizing the protective potential of ethically grounded personal outlooks such as Islamic Work Ethics as “resources.” The theory’s emphasis on dynamic interactions and spiraling effects aligns neatly with viewing workplace satisfaction and deviance as outcomes shaped by both external strain and internal ethical resilience, without forcing the discussion into direct variable causality (Zia et al., 2024). This allows the logic of this integrated model to rest on a well-established, up-to-date theoretical foundation.

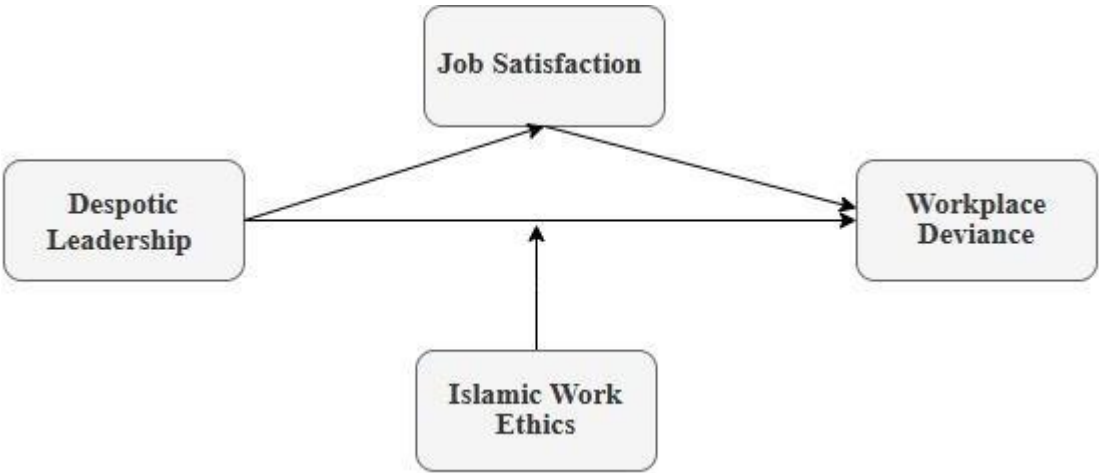


Figure 1: Research Model

Hypotheses Development

Leadership continues to be recognized as one of the most influential determinants of employee attitudes and behaviors. Yet, scholars have increasingly cautioned against an overemphasis on leadership’s positive aspects, highlighting instead the destructive potential of authoritarian and exploitative leadership forms (Einarsen et al., 2022). Despotic leadership, a form of destructive leadership, has attracted particular attention



due to its reliance on manipulation, dominance, and the pursuit of self-interest at the expense of employees' dignity and well-being (Ahmad et al., 2021). This type of leader could be characterized as arrogant and domineering who tend to establish a culture of fear, rather than cooperation. Whereas organization hierarchies usually centrally place the leader in the role of enabling growth, despotic leaders are more stress-making individuals who corrupt power to make personal or political gains (Islam et al., 2024). The effects of such leadership do not just stop at the psychological; but are observed at the behavioral level at the workplace. Research pursued in varied areas revealed that autocratic leadership destroys faith, stifles worker opinion and it creates the setting where workers feel outsiders in their activities (ShamsPour et al., 2025). Under these circumstances, the likelihood of workplace deviance which is considered to be any behavior that is voluntary and violates organizational norms and compromises the well-being of the organization increases (Griffin & O'Leary-Kelly, 2025). In the cases of employees experiencing disrespect, unequal treatment, or exploitation at the workplace, their platform to correct this situation to ensure that they feel respected, treated equally and not exploited may include deviant behaviour like withdrawal, diminishment of efforts, or even retaliation behaviour. This is in line with frustration-aggression theories, which posit that when one experiences unrelenting frustration with the power holders, one would project his/her feelings towards acts that could result in the downfall of organizational interests.

Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory provides further explanatory power. The theory defines despotic leadership as a job demand, causing psychological resources to be exhausted by the continuous pressure of the leaders, humiliation and inhibition of autonomy (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). Even in an environment of high demands, employees find it hard to maintain motivation and when the resources or the job itself does not have adequate resources, strain related outcomes like deviance will also be likely to occur. In other words, the issue of deviance may be treated as an inappropriate coping mechanism to the environment in which the demands exceed resources available. By using JD-R framework, despotic leadership could be placed in a larger context of a stress-strain process rather than as a stand-alone force. This reasoning is proved empirically in colleges and universities as well as governmental organizations, despotism is associated with psychological burnout, contempt, and unconstructive attitudes (Islam et al., 2024). Along the same vein, studies conducted in business establishments also demonstrate that tyrannical and management-exploitive leaders will increase the withdrawal-retaliatory behaviour among the employees, which becomes workplace deviance (Ahmed et al., 2025). These results highlight the disastrous ripple impacts that this type of leadership has not only on individual well-being but also on organizational performance.

H<sub>1</sub>: Despotic leadership is positively associated with workplace deviance.

Employee job satisfaction has long been regarded as a cornerstone of organizational health, influencing productivity, engagement, and overall workplace climate. Engaged workers tend to exhibit increased organizational commitment and less prone to acts of sabotage because they are fulfilling their needs and are, therefore, happier in the organization (Valaei & Barzoki, 2023). Dissatisfaction is associated with non-attendance, withdrawal, and counterproductive behaviors at the workplace. This renders job satisfaction an influential psychological process which leadership can have a say in the way the employees behave. Inconsistently, despotism, the tyrannical style of leadership that is based on authoritarian power, self-interest and ignoring the aspects of fairness has been demonstrated to diminish work satisfaction. These leaders create unfavorable working conditions because they encourage subservience and obedience instead of trust and mutual cooperation (Einarsen et al., 2022). Supervising the activity of employees

under the despotic system, they can feel unrecognized, lacking liberty and without respect, which leads to the decline in satisfaction of their professional activities (ShamsPour et al., 2025). Consistent with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) approach, despotic leadership can be conceptualized as a demand that saps employee energies and corrupts intrinsic motivation, lowering the levels of satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). Employee attitudes cannot be positive until they have such resources as fair treatment and psychological safety. In its turn, the loss of job satisfaction has influential consequences on the deviance. The reason is that unsatisfied workers are more prone to committing actions that break the organizational rules of conduct, which include decreased performance, alienation, or revenge (Griffin & O Leary-Kelly, 2025). Through the frustration-aggression approach, discontent satisfies one of the psychological conditions of committing deviance as the workers react to or recapture a sense of justice in the workplace (Anjum et al., 2025). Also, social exchange theory argues that when employees do not receive what they expect the organizational leaders to provide; they will tend to perform in ways that reflect the lack of good treatment and respect of the workers by their leaders, such as deviance (Cropanzano et al., 2023). Poor satisfaction is a high-probability pathway leading to the bad result between destructive leadership and severe workplace results.

Empirical findings provide support for this mediating process. A study conducted by Islam et al. (2024) established that despotic leadership has a negative strong impact on staff job satisfaction that, in its turn, leads to increased counterproductive work behaviors. Similarly, literature in the field of both the public and corporate institutions has shown that poor job satisfaction is the common mediational variable between toxic leadership styles and the deviance exhibited by the employees (Ahmed et al., 2025). These results have pointed out job satisfaction as an essential process contributing to the fact that employees working under despotic leaders are more likely to engage in deviant behavior.

H2: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and workplace deviance.

Workplace deviance often emerges in response to unfair or destructive leadership, yet not all employees react in the same way. Values, beliefs, and cultural orientation are some of the factors that form differences in individuals, and they are key in the interpretation and response of negative leadership behaviors experienced by workers. Among value systems that have become extremely popular in the culture of predominantly Muslim societies is Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) that focuses on honesty, responsibility, diligence, and adherence to collective good (Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2023). The first role of IWE is to act as a guide in the moral acts of employees in addition to serving as a cope mechanism to allow the employees to overcome workplace obstacles without engaging in counterproductive behaviour (Anjum et al., 2025). In relation to other causes of deviant workplace behaviors, there is broad evidence on despotism leadership as the cause, which is the autocratic leadership described as authoritarian, self-interested, and unconcerned with justice (Einarsen et al., 2022). Employees employed under such leaders may feel helpless, belittled and estranged triggering punitive deviance or disengagement (ShamsPour et al., 2025). Yet, studies reveal that the toxic leadership and deviance correlation does not apply similarly in all settings which indicates that cultural and ethical systems might mediate the reaction to toxic leadership in employees (Griffin & O’Leary-Kelly, 2025).

Islamic Work Ethics provides an important theoretical lens to understand this dynamic. Rooted in Islamic teachings, IWE emphasizes patience in adversity, avoidance of harmful actions, and fulfillment of responsibilities as a form of worship (Ali & Al-Kazemi, 2024). In moral terms, workers who absorb the IWE doctrine may not participate in deviance when

subjected to negative leadership because these behaviors would be against their religious and moral beliefs. Social exchange theory means that, although individuals can be provided with a stimulus (deviance against leaders or organizations), the employees should maintain integrity and serve the needs of society and, therefore, are not likely to engage in reciprocal deviance when provoked by leaders or organizations (Cropanzano et al., 2023). Recent empirical evidence shows the moderating ability of IWE. Hayat et al. (2023) revealed that the association between perceived organizational injustice and counterproductive work behaviors was notably weakened by IWE. Similarly, research in an Islamic cultural setting reveals that the employees with high IWE are more resilient to stressors in the workplace since it is against Islamic ethics to take some harmful or revengeful actions (Rahman et al., 2024). This implies that IWE can provide resilience that mitigates the unfavorable behavioral outcomes of despotism leadership. On the other hand, workers who have lower commitments to IWE might not have such moral protection mechanisms and they are at risk of committing workplace deviance when they are subjected to despotic leaders. This falls with conservation of resources (COR) theory which lays that individuals use their personal resources to deal with stressors, like values and ethics. The latter second will have their strong IWE better positioned to preserve the psychological resources they have and avoid destructive reactions, whereas the former, low IWE, people will tend to use deviance as the mechanism of psychic coping (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

H<sub>3</sub>: Islamic Work Ethics moderates the relationship between despotic leadership and workplace deviance.

## Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design, which allows for testing relationships between leadership styles, workplace attitudes, and deviant behaviors at a single point in time. The population for this study comprises employees working in medium to large- scale manufacturing organizations in Pakistan. This population is appropriate because the manufacturing sector has hierarchical structures where authoritarian leadership styles, such as despotic leadership, are more prevalent and may have a stronger influence on employee outcomes (Khan et al., 2023). Employees in these organizations are also directly engaged in operational processes, making them more likely to experience both satisfaction and strain from leadership practices, which can translate into workplace deviance. This population is contextually relevant for investigating the proposed research model.

A stratified random sampling technique is employed to ensure representation from diverse functional areas (e.g., production, quality control, human resources, and finance) within manufacturing organizations. Stratification increases the representativeness of the sample and reduces sampling bias (Sekaran & Bougie, 2023). The sample size is determined using Item Response Theory (IRT), which provides a statistically robust basis for estimating the minimum required responses by considering the number of items in the research instrument and the complexity of the model. Following IRT guidelines, a ratio of at least 10 responses per item was applied, ensuring adequate statistical power and parameter stability (de Ayala, 2022). Based on this, a sample size of approximately 400–450 respondents are considered sufficient for structural equation modeling. Data will be collected through self-administered questionnaires distributed physically and electronically to employees. To minimize non-response bias, participants will be assured of confidentiality and anonymity. For analysis, SPSS 21 will be employed to conduct descriptive statistics, preliminary screening, and tests for common method bias. SPSS is well- suited for assessing normality, reliability, and correlations, providing a foundation



for further analysis. For hypothesis testing, SmartPLS 4 will be utilized to conduct structural equation modeling (SEM) and path analysis.

Measurement

All constructs were measured using established scales from prior literature to ensure validity and reliability. Despotic leadership was measured with items adapted from De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008). Job satisfaction was measured using the scale by Brayfield and Rothe (1951), which has been widely validated in organizational research. Workplace deviance was assessed using the scale developed by Bennett and Robinson (2000). Finally, Islamic work ethics was measured with

items adapted from Ali (1992). All responses were recorded using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. This scale provides sufficient variability for capturing respondent perceptions with precision and is commonly used in organizational studies for cross-sectional surveys.

Data analysis:

Table 1: Factor Loadings

		DL	IWE	JS	WP
Despotic Leadership	DL1	0.883			
	DL2	0.868			
	DL3	0.846			
	DL4	0.826			
	DL5	0.862			
	DL6	0.892			
	DL7	0.808			
	DL8	0.905			
Islamic Work Ethics	IWE1		0.820		
	IWE2		0.828		
	IWE3		0.821		
	IWE4		0.866		
	IWE5		0.859		
	IWE6		0.791		
Job Satisfaction	JS2			0.798	
	JS3			0.768	
	JS4			0.805	
	JS5			0.864	
	JS6			0.809	
	JS7			0.817	
Workplace Deviance	WP1				0.866
	WP2				0.908
	WP3				0.869
	WP4				0.910
	WP5				0.845
	WP6				0.862



In structural equation modeling, factor loadings represent the degree to which each observed indicator reflects the underlying latent construct, serving as a critical measure of construct reliability and validity. Large loadings indicate that the manifest variable plays an important role in explaining the latent construct and lower loadings indicate that the variable is less important. Most researchers claim that the minimal thresholds of 0.40 can be appropriate in exploratory studies, whereas 0.70-0.80 or more is accepted as good construct validity in confirmative studies (Hair et al., 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2022). Loadings on indicators that are large reinforce both internal consistency and construct convergent validity, yet weak loadings confer problems on the interpretability of the constructs and exaggerate measurement error. Incorporating factor loadings is therefore indispensable in order to look at whether a particular indicator is assessed to measure a particular latent construct adequately. Before any rationales about the factor loading in this study could be formed, it is evident because of the robust factor loadings in this research that show high levels of support to the constructs. All eight items that constituted despotic leadership had a loading above 0.80, the range being 0.808 to 0.905 suggesting that each item strongly reflects the latent construct and can be retained with confidence. Equally, Islamic Work Ethics items also scored within 0.791 to 0.866 and hence all values adopted strong construct validity in these Islamic Work Ethics items. Job satisfaction items loaded between 0.768 and 0.864, demonstrating adequate convergent validity, with each indicator meaningfully capturing employees' satisfaction levels. Workplace deviance items showed particularly high loadings, ranging from 0.845 to 0.910, underscoring a strong and consistent representation of the construct. Since all items exceeded 0.70, no indicators require exclusion, and the findings suggest that the measurement model demonstrates high reliability and validity across all constructs, supporting its robustness for structural analysis.

Table 2: Reliability analysis

	Cronbach's alpha	(rho_a)	(rho_c)	(AVE)
Despotic Leadership	0.950	0.953	0.958	0.743
Islamic Work Ethics	0.910	0.912	0.931	0.691
Job Satisfaction	0.896	0.899	0.920	0.657
Workplace Deviance	0.940	0.941	0.952	0.769

Assessing the reliability and validity of constructs in structural models is essential to ensure that the measurement model accurately reflects the latent variables. The commonly used measures of internal consistency are Cronbach Alpha, rho Alpha and the Composite Reliability (rho C), with Average Variance Extracted (AVE) looking at the convergent validity. The lowest graded reliability includes Cronbach Alpha, rho A and rho C, and a value of more than 0.70 is generally valid when these reliability indices are tested, with values being higher, the better the consistency between items that supposedly measure the same construct or concept (Hair et al., 2022). Likewise, a value of AVE of 0.50 and above is sufficient in determination of adequate convergent validity because it proves that the construct is capable of explaining at least half of the variances in its indicators (Sarstedt et al., 2022). The results of the present study indicate robust measurement quality across all constructs. Despotic leadership demonstrated very high internal consistency. Islamic Work Ethics also showed high reliability. Job satisfaction achieved acceptable reliability while workplace deviance reported very high reliability.

Table 3: HTMT Ratio

	DL	IWE	JS	WP
Despotic Leadership				
Islamic Work Ethics	0.645			
Job Satisfaction	0.431	0.517		
Workplace Deviance	0.581	0.607	0.488	

Discriminant validity examines whether constructs are empirically distinct. Common techniques include the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). HTMT is generally considered the more sensitive diagnostic; values below 0.85 (strict) or 0.90 (more liberal) indicate adequate discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2022). Applying these guidelines to the reported HTMT matrix shows that all construct pairs fall comfortably within acceptable limits: despotic leadership with Islamic Work Ethics (0.645), job satisfaction (0.431), and workplace deviance (0.581); Islamic Work Ethics with job satisfaction

(0.517) and workplace deviance (0.607); and job satisfaction with workplace deviance (0.488). Because none of the HTMT estimates approach the 0.85 threshold, the evidence supports that each latent variable captures a conceptually unique domain rather than overlapping excessively with others. The comparatively higher associations (e.g., IWE–WP = 0.607; DL–IWE = 0.645) remain well below concern levels and are theoretically sensible given the model’s logic that ethical orientations and leadership demands can relate to behavioral outcomes without being interchangeable constructs.

Table 4: Model Fitness Indicators

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.059	0.078
d_ ULS	1.228	2.146
d_ G	0.763	0.786
Chi-square	1357.566	1366.403
NFI	0.819	0.818

Model fit indices provide insight into how well the measurement and structural models represent the observed data. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) values of 0.059 (saturated) and 0.078 (estimated) are below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating acceptable model fit (Hair et al., 2022). The discrepancy measures (d\_ ULS and d\_ G) are low, further supporting adequate fit. The chi-square values, while significant, are expected in large samples and less informative. The Normed Fit Index (NFI) values of 0.819 and 0.818, though slightly below the conventional 0.90 cutoff, suggest a reasonably good but improvable model fit

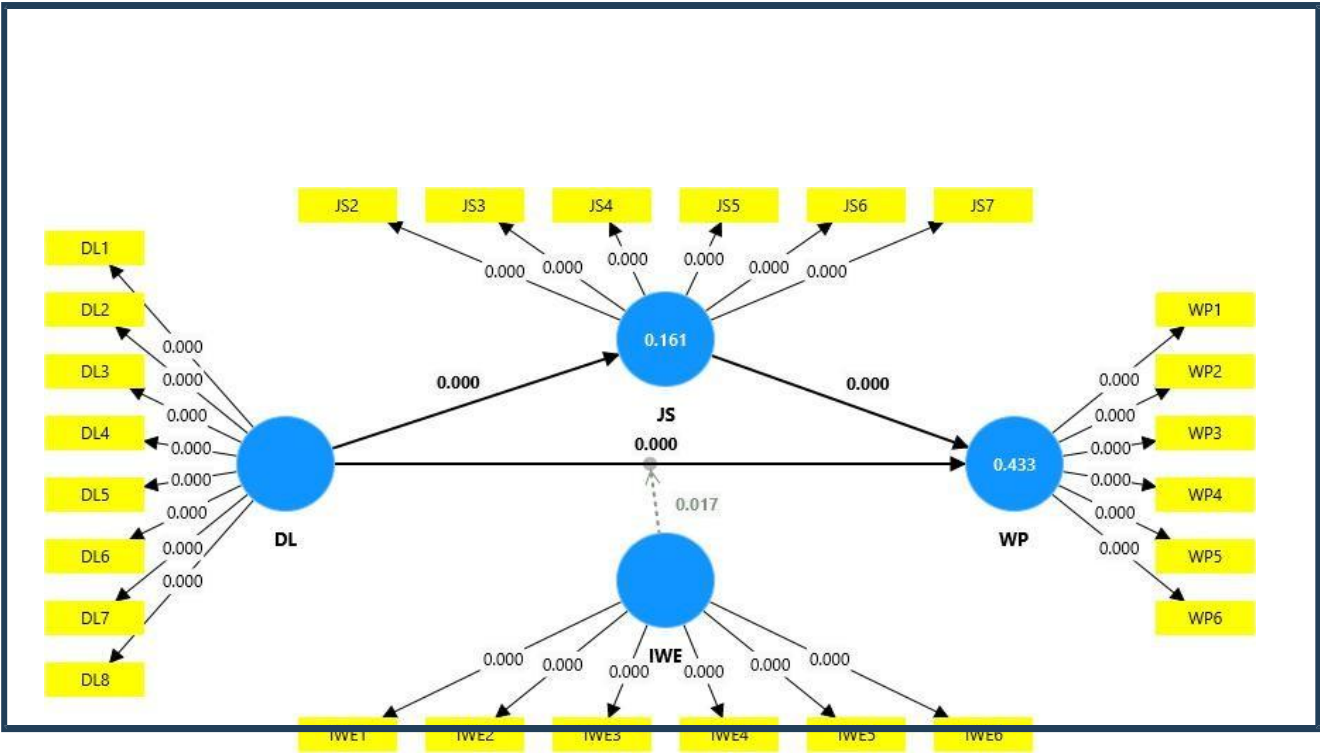


Figure 2: Structural Equation Modelling

Table 5: Results

	Original sample	Sample mean	(STDEV )	T statistics	P values
Despotic Leadership -> Workplace Deviance	0.319	0.320	0.058	5.515	0.000
Despotic Leadership -> Job Satisfaction -> Workplace Deviance	0.075	0.076	0.024	3.097	0.002
Islamic Work Ethics x Despotic Leadership -> Workplace Deviance	-0.103	-0.105	0.043	2.378	0.017

The results of hypotheses testing provide strong empirical support for the proposed relationships in the model. The first hypothesis, which predicted a positive association between despotic leadership and workplace deviance, is supported. The path coefficient ( $\beta = 0.319$ ) is positive and statistically significant at  $p < .001$ , with a t-value of 5.515, well above the critical threshold of 1.96, confirming that despotic leadership substantially increases the likelihood of deviant behaviors. This finding aligns with theoretical arguments that authoritarian and exploitative leadership styles create environments that foster frustration and retaliation. The second hypothesis proposed that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and workplace deviance. The mediation effect is also supported, with a path coefficient of 0.075, a significant p-value of .002, and a t-value of 3.097. Although the coefficient is smaller in magnitude compared to the direct effect, it remains statistically meaningful, indicating that part of the influence of despotic leadership on deviance operates indirectly through reduced satisfaction. This confirms that job satisfaction functions as a key psychological mechanism linking destructive leadership to harmful workplace outcomes. The third hypothesis predicted that Islamic

Work Ethics (IWE) would moderate the relationship between despotic leadership and workplace deviance. The interaction effect is significant ( $\beta = -0.103$ ,  $t = 2.378$ ,  $p = .017$ ), suggesting that IWE weakens the positive relationship between despotic leadership and deviance. The negative sign of the coefficient indicates that higher levels of IWE reduce the likelihood of deviance in contexts of despotic leadership. Collectively, the results demonstrate that all three hypotheses are supported, reinforcing the theoretical framework and highlighting the importance of both mediating and moderating mechanisms in understanding the effects of destructive leadership.

## Discussion:

The results provide meaningful insights into how despotic leadership shapes employee outcomes, particularly workplace deviance, and how psychological and ethical mechanisms such as job satisfaction and Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) intervene in this process. Each hypothesis is discussed in turn to provide a deeper understanding of the findings.

The first hypothesis predicted that despotic leadership would be positively associated with workplace deviance. This connection was attested well by the numbers, with a despot leadership having a positive impact on deviance that is statistically significant. This finding is consistent with the available literature on despotic leader unpleasant and trendy, arrogant, and exploitive of the status, leading to a hostile atmosphere in which the workers may act out in revenge or disengagement via deviant acts (Einarsen et al., 2022; ShamsPour et al., 2025). In the Job Demands & Resources (JD-R) model, despotic leadership is a job demand that deactivates the psychological resources and demotivates employees to increasing their coping behaviors into maladjustment, including deviance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). These considerations are also supported with empirical evidence, and it has been demonstrated that toxic leadership increases counterproductive work behaviors due to the loss of trust and respect in the workplace (Ahmed et al., 2025; Syed et al., 2022). The Indian style of management is based on leadership styles promoted in the cultural environment of Pakistan, where the hierarchical norm supports authoritarian relations and where powerless employees are bound to adopt deviant behaviors due to despotic style of leadership. Therefore, the results confirm both the theoretical and empirical support that despotic leadership acts as a major source of deviance in the workplace.

The second hypothesis argued that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and workplace deviance. This mediating role was also supported, as despotic leadership significantly reduced job satisfaction, which in turn increased deviant behavior. This result resonates with social exchange theory, which suggests that when leaders fail to uphold fairness, recognition, or respect, employees reciprocate through negative behaviors, including deviance (Cropanzano et al., 2023). From the JD-R perspective, job satisfaction represents a psychological resource that is undermined when demands such as despotic leadership dominate, leading to strain outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). Dissatisfied employees, lacking intrinsic motivation and a sense of value in their roles, are more likely to retaliate against perceived injustice by engaging in counterproductive acts (Griffin & O'Leary-Kelly, 2025). These findings echo prior studies that confirmed the mediating role of satisfaction in the destructive leadership-deviance link (Islam et al., 2024; Ahmed et al., 2025). The significance of this mediation highlights that deviance does not arise solely as a direct reaction to despotic leadership but also through the erosion of employees' psychological well-being, making satisfaction a critical mechanism in this relationship.



The third hypothesis proposed that Islamic Work Ethics would moderate the relationship between despotic leadership and workplace deviance. It is statistically significant and negative indicates that increases in IWE decrease the positive relationship with despotic leadership and deviance. This result corroborates with the fact that IWE instills resilience and deters negative behaviors because it conditioned responsibility, patience, and ethical behavior (Ali & Al-Kazemi, 2024; Rahman et al., 2024). Increased personal resources in the form of IWE potentially facilitate the conservation of restricted resources theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018) because such employees are less prone to destructive behaviors due to the psychological stress that accompanies despotic leadership characteristics. These finding forms part of the empirical evidence in South Asia settings in which IWE was found to mitigate the impact of organizational injustice and toxic leadership on the development of counterproductive behaviors (Hayat et al., 2023; Zia et al., 2022). IWE was an efficient protective factor in the current research by reducing the potential of deviance even in case of oppressive leadership. It is worth noting, however, that albeit IWE impaired this bond, it did not abolish it entirely, which implies that repeated exposure to depredation-based rulership might ultimately dislodge an even well-established moral persuasion, a fact that has already been echoed in the past literature on leadership ethics studies (Islam et al., 2022).

## Limitations and Future directions

Like all empirical research, this study is not without its limitations, which should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings and considering their broader applicability. One limitation concerns the research design. As a cross-sectional study, the relationships identified between despotic leadership, job satisfaction, workplace deviance, and Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) were tested at a single point in time. This design restricts the ability to draw causal inferences, as it cannot fully capture the dynamic nature of leadership behaviors and employee responses that evolve over time (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). Longitudinal studies would allow future research to explore how prolonged exposure to despotic leadership gradually shapes employee attitudes and behaviors, as well as whether IWE continues to act as a buffer across extended periods. Methodological limitations also warrant attention. The reliance on self-administered questionnaires raises the possibility of common method bias, as respondents reported on both predictors and outcomes. Although statistical procedures were applied to minimize this risk, self-report data can still be influenced by social desirability or response consistency biases (Podsakoff et al., 2012). To strengthen validity, future research may benefit from multi-source data collection, such as combining supervisor assessments of employee behavior with employee self-reports of job satisfaction and ethical orientations. Experimental or quasi-experimental designs could provide more robust tests of causality between despotic leadership and deviance. The scope of variables included in the present study represents another limitation. While job satisfaction was identified as a mediator and IWE as a moderator, other potential mechanisms were not considered. For instance, psychological safety, trust, or emotional exhaustion may serve as mediating variables through which despotic leadership influences deviance (ShamsPour et al., 2025). Likewise, contextual moderators such as organizational justice, ethical climate, or cultural values beyond IWE may shape the strength of these relationships (Islam et al., 2022). Future research could incorporate these factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how destructive leadership translates into workplace deviance.

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