

# The Impact of Despotic Leadership on Employee Turnover: Understanding the Role of Toxic Workplace Culture

Unzila Fatima <sup>a\*</sup>, Laiba Nawaz<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a,b</sup> Department of Business Administration, Rawalpindi Women University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

## Abstract

Leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the workplace environment and influencing the behavior of employees. Despotic leadership which is characterized by authoritarian control and unethical practices, can have a profound impact on employee turnover, especially when combined with a toxic workplace. This study aims to investigate the relationship between despotic leadership and employee turnover, with the mediating role of a toxic workplace environment. This study utilizes a quantitative approach and the data was collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to 201 employees from both public and private banks in the twin cities. A total of 100 valid responses were obtained to assess the influence of despotic leadership, toxic workplace environments, and employee turnover. The analysis was conducted using statistical methods to evaluate the direct and indirect relationships between these variables. The results of the study revealed that despotic leadership has a strong positive correlation with employee turnover. Moreover, the toxic workplace environment was found to mediate this relationship, further intensifying turnover intentions among employees. This study provides the practical contributions that organizations must foster healthier leadership styles to enhance employee retention and reduce the negative consequences of a toxic work environment.

**Keywords:** *Despotic Leadership, Employee Turnover, Toxic Workplace Environment, Banking sector*

## 1. Introduction

Leadership is widely accepted today as one of the most important determinants of employee conduct, organizational climate, and organizational effectiveness in contemporary organizational scholarship. It is the act of steering an organization and guiding it to deliver outcomes, and not just a process of establishing goals and ensuring that they are met. However, not all leadership styles create such positive results (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020; Hosseini et al., 2019). One of the worst types of leadership is despotic leadership, which specifies the type of leadership whereby self-centered and autocratic behaviors of leaders are detrimental to the health of employees and the collectiveness of the company. This paper seeks to explore both the direct and mediated effects of

despotic leadership on employee turnover. Despotic leadership, which is also known as unethical or tyrannical leadership, occurs when the leaders have more regard for their self-serving authority than anything concerning the subordinates and even the firm as a whole. This is normally facilitated by deceitfulness, egocentricity, and a lack of respect for ethical standards, thereby promoting a culture of fear and hostility in the workplace (Asghar et al., 2019).

According to Howell and Avolio (1992), despotic leadership is the most unethical approach to leadership because of the autocratic use of power without regarding the followers' welfare. Authoritarian leaders foster environments that are characterized by fear and suspicion, where employees are alienated, exploited, and unmotivated. These negative perceptions can escalate into toxic environments, an aspect that has severe consequences on morale contentment, job satisfaction, and, in essence, turnover. Employee turnover, as the ability of an organization to rate its employees' turnover, is a crucial issue affecting businesses since it brings about a lack of skilled workforce, high costs of recruitment and training, and low efficiency (De Clercq et al., 2020; Park et al., 2015). Studies have found that a despotic working atmosphere is the cause of high turnover rates since employees working under despotic leaders are not motivated and are even given little or no support when handling tasks. Frequent workplace bullying leads to the withdrawal of employees from the workplace, and constant pressure, manipulation, and hostility make them abandon their duties and search for other jobs. This is important for studying the link between despotic leadership and turnover because it shows how leadership behavior influences organizational results. The toxic workplace environment provides the context in which this relationship between burnout and psychological detachment occurs. Toxic workplaces are those that contain elements of hostility, ineffective communication, fear, and absence of psychological safety. Such employees develop many health problems, including increased stress, decreased motivation, burning, and overall poor health (Iqbal, Asghar, & Asghar, 2022). According to Schyns and Schilling (2013) and Brown and Mitchell (2010), despotic leadership was found to be the most toxic in organizations, and leaders who practice unethical behaviors are known to terrorize their employees, denying them a voice. The end product is a work environment that fosters a lack of satisfaction, grumbling, and overall employee job alienation that leads to attrition.

This is worsened by autocratic leadership, which is similar to despotic leadership, making the working environment even more intolerable for subordinates. Autocratic leaders have the prerogative of making decisions independently of their subordinates, and they do not tolerate their opinions. Kanungo (1998) pointed out that in these conditions, learners are powerless, and they cannot speak up for their concerns due to being punished. This, in turn, leads to a vicious cycle, aggravated by despotic leadership, where employees suffer from autocratic decisions while suffering from job alienation as a result of their dissatisfaction. In toxic workplaces, the staff is likely to be faced with burnout, lack of satisfaction in their work, and the willingness to work elsewhere. The impact of a toxic work environment on employee turnover cannot be overstated. Toxic environments, driven by poor leadership practices, result in decreased employee motivation, engagement, and productivity. Moreover, toxic workplaces are often marked by high levels of

stress, harassment, and burnout, all of which have been linked to increased turnover rates. When leaders engage in despotic behavior, they contribute to the deterioration of the work environment, making it unsustainable for employees to remain in their roles. Reyhanoglu and Akin (2022) have emphasized that long-term exposure to such negative environments can lead to serious physical and psychological harm to employees, further increasing their desire to leave.

The relationship between despotic leadership and employee turnover, mediated by the toxic workplace environment, represents a significant gap in existing leadership and organizational behavior literature. While much research has focused on the positive effects of transformational and transactional leadership styles, less attention has been paid to the destructive impact of despotic leadership on organizational outcomes, particularly employee turnover. The majority of studies examining turnover tend to focus on individual-level factors, such as job satisfaction or personal motivation, while neglecting the organizational factors, especially the leadership style and workplace environment, that contribute to an employee's decision to leave. This study intends to pick up on this gap by examining the mediating role of a toxic work environment in the despotic leadership and employee turnover relationship. By understanding how tyrannical leadership behavior manifests itself and leads to unfavorable work conditions that force workers to quit, this study gives an exhaustive appreciation on how leadership behavior drives employee turnover. The present research implications are useful for organizations that aim at decreasing turnover and enhancing leadership practices as well as eliminating toxic organizational cultures. Moreover, this study raises awareness to the fact that organizations must take responsibility for combating toxic organizational cultures before they are reflected through high turnover and dissatisfied employees.

This study provides several contributions: Firstly, this study adds to the existing literature by analyzing despotic leadership's indirect relationship with employee turnover by proposing a toxic workplace environment as a mediator. Past research has mainly concentrated on positive leadership behavior; this research advances current literature by examining the negative effects of despotic leadership, thus providing a valuable addition to the leadership and turnover literature. Secondly, this study examines a toxic workplace environment as a mediating variable, on the relationship between despotic leadership and intention to turnover. Expanding on how despotic leaders help to facilitate hostile and toxic work environments that are considered dysfunctional, the study shows how such factors increase levels of turnover intentions. Hence, this study brings another dimension to the existing knowledge through which the impacts of workplace environment on the behavior including turnover can be explained. Finally, this research contributes a better understanding of the presumably negative impacts of despotic leadership within the frameworks of organizations with a focus on factors associated with employee turnover. Such leaders also cultivate toxic workplace environments that demoralize the workers, erode synergy, and force the employees to consider resignation. Hence, the study outlines the exact processes that lead to the development of a toxic culture under despotic leadership enabling organizations with the information required to reduce leadership-induced turnover.

The structure of this paper is organized into five key sections. The first section provides an introduction, focusing on the challenges faced by employees in SMEs due to despotic leadership and turnover. It outlines the study's objectives and the theoretical framework applied. The second section reviews the relevant literature, alongside the development of hypotheses. The third section details the research methodology employed in the study. The fourth section presents a comprehensive analysis of the results, while the fifth section discusses the findings, draws conclusions, and highlights the managerial and theoretical contributions of the study.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Background**

The study is grounded in the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, which incorporates elements of stress theories and provides valuable insights into the relationship between the behavior of a leader and employee responses. According to COR Theory, resources refer to various aspects that individuals value which include conditions (e.g., social support, workplace relationships), objects (e.g., necessary equipment, tools), energies (e.g., skills, knowledge), and personal characteristics (e.g., resilience, self-efficacy). COR Theory posits that employees who have a larger stock of these resources are generally less vulnerable to workplace stressors, while those with fewer resources are more susceptible to experiencing stress.

As noted by Gorgievski et al. (2010), individuals strive to acquire, retain, and safeguard their resources. However, under prolonged and stressful conditions, for instance, a toxic workplace led by a despotic leader, these resources become increasingly depleted. COR Theory suggests that stress arises from either the actual or threatened loss of resources, with losses being felt more acutely than gains. This potential or real resource depletion leads to lower positive behaviors and engagement among employees, which can ultimately affect their motivation to remain with the organization. Drawing on COR Theory, this study theorizes that despotic leadership (DL) acts as a social stressor. Under the authoritarian, self-serving, exploitative, and unethical behaviors typically which is exhibited by despotic leaders (Den Hartog, 2008; Naseer et al., 2016), employees experience a breakdown in the supportive exchange relationship with their leader. This type of toxic environment depletes resources critical to employee well-being and satisfaction which thereby increases the likelihood of turnover. Moreover, in a culture like Pakistan's, which is characterized by high levels of collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance (Hofstede, 2010), the impact of despotic leadership is likely to be more pronounced, as employees are socialized to show deference to authority and tolerate power imbalances (Luthans et al., 1998). This cultural context thus provides an appropriate setting to study the effects of despotic leadership and workplace toxicity on employee turnover (Naseer et al., 2016).

## **2.2 Relationship of Hypothesis**

### *2.2.1 Effect of Despotic Leadership on Employee Turnover*

Employee turnover can be significantly impacted by dictatorial or autocratic leadership, which is typified by authoritarian control, a lack of employee empowerment, and an emphasis on the leader's power and authority. This is a condensed explanation with references: Decreased organizational commitment, elevated stress and burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and increased intentions to leave the company. In general, authoritarian leadership fosters a poisonous workplace that may prompt bright workers to look for opportunities elsewhere, increasing an organization's turnover rate.

When employees in an organization become discouraged or dissatisfied, they plan to quit. Poor performance or employee turnover results from dissatisfied or dissatisfied employees, which is bad for managers in the organization. Research shows that leadership style significantly predicts employees' turnover intentions. This study was conducted to investigate the impact of management culture on employees' mindset change in various organizations, including factories, shops, residential private banks, and two universities in Pakistan. According to the findings, leadership style is a positive construct that predicts employees' intentions to change. According to the information above, we formulated the subsequent hypothesis:

H1: Despotic leadership positively affects employee turnover.

### *2.2.2 Effect of Despotic Leadership on Toxic Workplace Environment*

High turnover, stress and anxiety, fear and intimidation, lack of trust, and poor communication. Overall, fear, deteriorating trust, tension, communication barriers, and employee turnover are all caused by authoritarian leadership, which poisons the workplace. Despotic leadership is one of the primary reasons for a toxic workplace because it fosters an environment of fear, intimidation, and mistrust. Authoritarian and punitive techniques are often employed by despotic CEOs, who prioritize their power and control over the well-being of their employees. This behavior inhibits employee cooperation, open communication, and innovation because it makes people prioritize avoiding difficulty in over-performing their tasks well. The atmosphere that results is one of extreme stress, low morale, and pervasive uneasiness. Workers are more prone to burnout, feel dissatisfied with their positions in such circumstances, and are more likely to resign, which fuels the destructive cycle of turnover.

H2: Despotic leadership positively effect toxic workplace environments.

### *2.2.3 Effect of Toxic Workplace Environment on Employee Turnover*

Employee turnover rates can be greatly impacted by a hostile work environment. Here's how, with citations to back up each point: reduced job satisfaction, increased stress and burnout, poor work-life balance, a lack of support and trust, and a reduction in organizational commitment. These results underscore the negative impacts of toxic workplace conditions on employee attrition and emphasize how crucial it is to create a supportive and upbeat work culture. Several scholarly investigations have explored the psychological effects of a hazardous workplace on workers, which can result in adverse behavioral outcomes. Likewise, a hostile workplace reduces employee

involvement and encourages conflict among coworkers. Rudeness is a result of unpleasant emotions like tension and dissatisfaction. According to a study, rudeness is one trait of a toxic workplace that has been shown to predict employees' propensity to leave (Reyhanoglu & Akin, 2022). A follow-up study examined employee willingness to leave a business, workplace toxicity, and job happiness. The findings showed that workplace toxicity harmed job satisfaction and a positive influence on employees' intentions to leave. The following theory is suggested by this hypothesis:

H3: Toxic workplace environment positively affects employee turnover.

#### *2.2.4 Effect of Toxic Workplace Environment on Despotic Leadership and Employee Turnover*

The role of an intervening variable that may affect or vary the strength of this link is referred to as the mediator's effect on the association between employee turnover and dictatorial leadership. The following is how a mediator might influence this relationship, with citations to back up each point: Job Embeddedness, Perceived Organizational Support (POS), Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment. These mediators may provide insight into various ways in which the detrimental impacts of autocratic leadership can be lessened or increased, as well as the intricacies of the relationship between dictatorial leadership and employee turnover.

Several academic studies have investigated the relationships between the workplace, authoritarian management style, and the intention of employees to leave in various international settings. The study highlights the connections between authoritarian leadership and the goal of staff turnover. In a similar vein, researchers looked into workers' intentions to quit as well as their emotions of disinterest and apathy, raising the question of what conditions might make authoritarian management less detrimental to employees. Iqbal et al. (2022) additionally anticipated that authoritarian leadership would influence organizational conspiracy theories, which would, therefore, heighten staff turnover intentions and job insecurity. It seems that the research is not as concentrated on the role that a hazardous workplace environment plays as a mediator. This study aims to assess this mediation and advance our understanding of

H4: Toxic workplace environment mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and employee turnover.

### **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

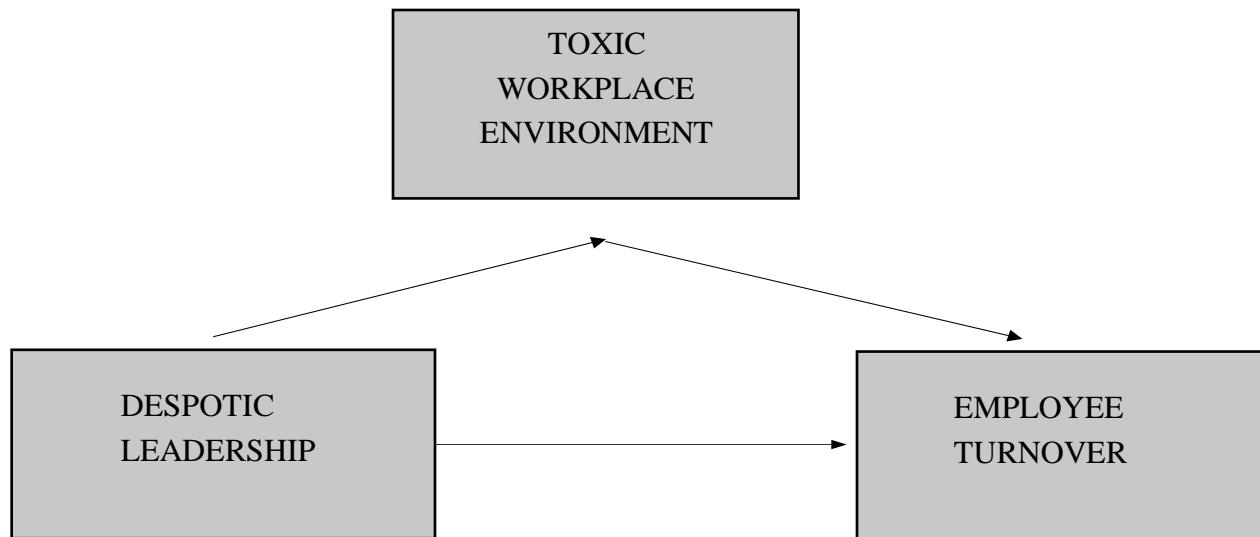


Figure 1: Theoretical framework

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Sample size and population

The study population comprises employees from the banking sector located in the Rawalpindi and Islamabad regions of Pakistan. Because of its intense competition and the importance of staff performance and retention to sustaining operational effectiveness and customer satisfaction, the banking industry was selected for this study. Because the industry frequently faces high levels of stress, strict rules, and ongoing pressure to meet performance targets, leadership styles, and workplace culture have a substantial impact on employee turnover in these kinds of workplaces. The study's participants comprise employees from many banking industries, such as frontline staff, middle managers, and senior executives possessing workplace management knowledge. These workers were picked to offer a variety of perspectives on management effectiveness, employee turnover, and workplace dynamics. A total of 305 participants were selected to be the sample size for this investigation. The sample was meticulously chosen to guarantee that it offered adequate representation and statistical power for a confident analysis of the relationships between leadership performance, employee turnover, and workplace climate in the banking sector.

#### 3.2. Variable Measurements

Despotic leadership was measured using a 3-item scale adapted from Naseer et al. (2016), which captures the authoritarian behaviors, manipulation, and self-serving tendencies exhibited by leaders. To assess the toxic workplace environment, a 5-item scale was employed which was adapted from Anjum et al. (2018). These items reflect factors such as interpersonal conflict, lack of support, and general negativity within the work environment that can contribute to a harmful

atmosphere for employees. Employee turnover intentions were measured using a 6-item scale, adapted from Colarelli (1984), which focuses on thoughts and the likelihood of employees of leaving the organization. This scale addresses factors such as job dissatisfaction, consideration of alternative employment, and overall intent to resign. Each of the items across all three scales was rated using a 5-point Likert scale which ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The complete list of items used for each construct can be found in Appendix A.

## 4. Data Analysis

### 4.1 Demographic Analysis

Table 1 reveals a predominately male workforce, with 40.2% of respondents identifying as female and 59.8% of respondents as male. The majority of participants, or 36.9%, are between the ages of 31 and 40, indicating that most are in the early to mid-career stages of their careers. The remaining 13.6% are between the ages of 41 and 50. With 45.5% of individuals earning between 20,000 and 50,000 and 38.2% earning between 30,000 and 80,000, the participants' income levels are concentrated in the lower to mid-income brackets, indicating a modest earning range. Of these, just 16.3% claim to make more than 81k. In addition, forty-two percent of respondents have between two and five years of job experience, while almost half (48.8%) have less than a year's worth. Of the participants, only 11% had more than six years of experience.

**Table 1**

#### Demographic Analysis

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	180	59.8
Female	121	40.2
<b>AGE</b>		
31-40years	111	36.9
41-50years	41	13.6
<b>Income</b>		
20k-50k	137	45.5
51k-80k	115	38.2
81k-110k	39	13.0
111k-150k	10	3.3
<b>Experience</b>		
Less than 1year	147	48.8
2year-5 year	121	40.2
6year-10year	33	11.0

### 4.2. Descriptive Statistics



Based on Table 2, the average view of despotic leadership is moderate, with a mean score of 3.41. Nonetheless, a standard deviation of 0.922 indicates that there is a considerable degree of response variability, indicating notable variations in people's perceptions of autocratic leadership. The scores, which vary from 1.00 to 5.00, indicate that some people detect extreme levels of autocratic behavior while others see considerably lower levels of it. On the other hand, the average score for the perception of a toxic workplace is 2.87, which is generally lower. When compared to autocratic leadership, the standard deviation of 0.613 shows that there is less variation in the experiences of workplace toxicity. The scores, which range from 1.00 to 4.29, demonstrate that although the majority of people report less toxicity at work, some people report very high levels of toxicity. With a mean score of 3.11, employee turnover is considered to be moderate inside the company. The moderate variation in turnover experiences among the respondents is indicated by the standard deviation of 0.765. There are notable disparities in the turnover rates amongst the scores, which range from 1.00 to 5.00. Some have large turnover rates, while others have low turnover.

**Table 2**

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Max	Min	SD
Despotic Leadership	3.41	5.00	1.00	0.922
Toxic Workplace	2.87	4.29	1.00	0.613
Employee Turnover	3.11	5.00	1.00	0.765

#### 4.3 Correlations Analysis

The correlation analysis in Table 3 shows how toxic workplace environments, despotic leadership, and employee turnover are related to one another. despotic leadership and toxic workplaces have a weak but statistically significant positive connection (0.292), suggesting that workplace toxicity tends to rise in tandem with an increase in despotic leadership. Conversely, a larger relationship (0.507) between despotic leadership and employee turnover indicates that higher despotic leadership levels are linked to higher employee turnover. This suggests that a leader's style significantly impacts the decisions made by staff members to leave the company. Furthermore, there is a moderate to strong correlation (0.558) between toxic workplaces and employee turnover, indicating that greater turnover rates are a direct result of toxic work environments.

**Table 3**

### Correlational Analysis

Variable	1	2	3
Despotic Leadership	1		
Toxic Workplace	0.292**	1	
Employee Turnover	0.507**	0.558**	1

### 4.4 Reliability Analysis

Employee turnover, toxic workplaces, and despotic leadership are all measured using scales whose reliability is indicated by their Cronbach's alpha values. The items used to evaluate the concept of despotic leadership have a high degree of internal consistency, as indicated by the Cronbach's alpha of 0.799, which denotes good reliability and consistency shown in Table 4. Although it is marginally lower than Despotic Leadership's, Toxic Workplace likewise exhibits acceptable dependability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.705. With a Cronbach's alpha of 0.701, Employee Turnover is within the acceptable range for reliability in social science research. All three dimensions are consistently measured overall, with the highest level of internal consistency being exhibited under despotic leadership.

**Table 4**

#### Reliability Analysis

Variable	$\alpha$
Despotic Leadership	0.799
Toxic Workplace	0.705
Employee Turnover	0.701

### 4.5 Hypothesis testing

#### 4.5.1. Direct and mediation effects

The findings in Table 5 indicate a strong correlation between employee turnover (ET), despotic leadership (DL), and the toxic working environment (TWE), with TWE acting as a mediator. Despotic leadership dramatically raises employee turnover, as evidenced by the positive beta value of 0.441 for DL  $\rightarrow$  ET. This means that employees are more likely to leave when

leadership becomes more dictatorial or abusive. With a 0.000 p-value, this association is very significant. Furthermore, the DL -> TWE association (beta coefficient: 0.452) indicates a high correlation between despotic leadership and the emergence of a toxic workplace. The strong correlation between despotic leadership and the development of a toxic workplace culture is supported by the high t-statistic of 9.855 and the p-value of 0.000. Furthermore, as employees who work in toxic environments are more inclined to resign, the link TWE -> ET, with a beta coefficient of 0.567, shows that toxic work environments further increase employee turnover. A p-value of 0.000 and a t-statistic of 6.677 indicate that this link is likewise statistically significant.

**Table 5**

Direct relationship

<i>Hypothesis</i>	Beta Coefficient	Standard Deviation	T statistics	P values
<i>DL -&gt; ET</i>	0.441	0.034	12.970	0.000
<i>DL -&gt; TWE</i>	0.452	0.085	5.317	0.000
<i>TWE-&gt; ET</i>	0.448	0.023	19.478	0.000

4.5.2 Mediation analysis

The findings in Table 6 show that Despotic Leadership (DL) has a direct and overall impact on employee turnover (ET). With a p-value of 0.000 and a coefficient of 0.4205 for the entire influence of DL on ET, there is a clear and statistically significant correlation. The combined effect of the toxic workplace environment (TWE) and the direct effects of autocratic leadership on employee attrition are included in this overall effect. With a coefficient of 0.3120 and a p-value of 0.000, the direct effect of DL on ET demonstrates that, even in the absence of TWE's mediation role, autocratic leadership considerably raises employee turnover.

**Table 6**

Mediation analysis

Total Effect			Direct Effect		
Hypothesis	Coefficient	P values	Hypothesis	Coefficient	P values
DL-> ET	0.4205	0.000	DL-> ET	0.3120	0.0000

The findings in Table 7 demonstrate how the toxic workplace environment (TWE) has an indirect impact on employee turnover (ET) due to despotic leadership (DL). The value of 0.1085 suggests that by fostering a toxic work environment, which in turn causes higher turnover, DL indirectly raises employee turnover. The p-value of 0.000 and the standard deviation of 0.0214 indicate that this indirect effect is statistically significant, which further supports the strength of the association.

**Table 7**

**Indirect effect**

	Coefficient	Standard deviation	P values
DL -> TWE-> ET	0.3485	0.0214	0.000

**5. Discussion**

The goal of this research was to identify how despotic leadership influenced turnover rates among employees and whether the toxicity of the workplace mediated this relationship. The analysis shows several crucial connections between these variables. The results indicate that despotic leadership has a positive and strong relationship with employee turnover. This suggests that the employees working under such leadership are likely to leave the organization. These are in parity with the findings of other researchers like Albashiti et al. (2021) who have postulated that despotic leadership has a negative association with employee turnover rates especially in the hospital sector. In their study, they noted that despotic leadership escalated the intention of their employees to leave the organization. The congruency of these results with the literature validates the research and emphasizes the acceptance of H1. The study also validates H2 by confirming that despotic leadership also plays a major role in fostering a toxic workplace environment. This is consistent with prior studies that show a positive correlation between authoritarian patterns of leadership and toxic workplace culture. For instance, Anjum et al. (2018) have also pointed out that while despotic leadership is an influential factor in emanating a toxic workplace environment that has a negative impact on the employees' health and well-being, the physical and mental job satisfaction of the employees are also impacted. This research also supports these conclusions, as it seems that despotic leaders cause stress and a negative environment affecting the climate. Such environments are harmful not only to employees' morale but also to productivity and satisfaction with work, which provides evidence to H2. The findings of this research also confirm H3 indicating that a toxic workplace environment enhances employee turnover rates. This result is supported by prior studies indicating that employees tend to leave organizations that create unhealthy working environments. For instance, Abubakar et al. (2017) have shown that stress, bullying, and unethical working conditions make the organizational environment hostile, forcing

employees to self-organize and seek new employment opportunities. Similarly, Tepper (2000) found that toxic environments contribute to higher turnover as employees often leave to escape ongoing mistreatment and stress. These findings confirm that a toxic workplace environment directly affects employee retention which thus supports H3. Finally, the study provides evidence that a toxic workplace environment partially mediates the relationship between the despotic leadership and employee turnover, thus supporting H4. The significant direct and indirect effects suggest that while despotic leadership directly leads to employee turnover, its impact is exacerbated when mediated by a toxic work environment. This supports previous research, such as Malik and Sattar (2019), who found that despotic leadership in combination with a toxic workplace significantly increases turnover intentions. Furthermore, Albashiti et al. (2021) also explored the mediating role of psychological distress (a concept closely related to toxic work environments) between despotic leadership and turnover, finding that both the direct and mediated effects were significant. These results confirm that despotic leadership not only pushes the employees toward turnover but also fosters a workplace environment that amplifies this effect which validates H4.

### 5.1. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The implications of our research are important for both research and practice. Our findings highlight the need for organizations to simultaneously address despotic leadership behaviors and toxic work cultures. By implementing strategies such as leadership development programs, promoting transparency and accountability, and improving employee support mechanisms, organizations can mitigate the negative effects of autocratic leadership on turnover and foster a healthier organizational climate that promotes long-term employee retention. This study offers several important theoretical implications for the fields of leadership and organizational behavior. First, by demonstrating the direct link between despotic leadership and employee turnover, the research highlights the important role that leadership styles play in influencing employee behavior and organizational outcomes. It highlights that despotic leadership which is characterized by control and unethical practices, not only impacts the satisfaction of employees but also contributes significantly to employee turnover. This expands the theoretical understanding of how authoritarian leadership affects the stability of the workplace and provides a basis for future models examining leadership behaviors' impact on organizational health. Secondly, the study's findings on the mediating role of a toxic workplace environment add a new dimension to the existing leadership literature. It shows that the toxic atmosphere created by despotic leaders does more than directly harm employees; it intensifies the likelihood of turnover of employees. This suggests that theories of leadership should incorporate workplace toxicity as a mediator when examining leadership's impact on employee outcomes.

The practical implications of this study are therefore critical for despotic leaders and Employees. It begins by emphasizing how crucial it is for establishments to identify and deal with the covert inclinations of authoritarian leadership. Micromanagement, authoritarianism, and a lack of empathy are characteristics of dictatorial tendencies in leaders, and these individuals must

participate in training and development programs that employ effective leadership strategies. The study also suggests that reducing the levels of toxic workplace environments will lower employee turnover. Organizations can do this by increasing the culture of openness, fairness, and respect in the workplace. Promoting work-life balance through policies, offering professional development, and practicing open communication are some of the strategies to create a positive work environment. Thirdly, the findings of this study point toward the presence of employee feedback mechanisms and organizational climate assessments. These can be regularly conducted through surveys and assessments for realization of the nascent signs of such toxic workplace dynamics and therefore let an organization take precautionary measures to rectify things.

## 5.2. Limitation and Future Direction

Despite the valuable insights gained from our study, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Our study relied on self-report measures, which may be subject to response bias. In addition, the generalizability of the results may be limited to certain organizational contexts and industries. To overcome these limitations and enhance our understanding of the linkages being studied, future research ought to consider applying objective assessments and longitudinal methodologies. Future research should continue exploring the complex relationships between workplace toxic environments, employee turnover, and despotic leadership in light of the results of our study. It is also necessary to research the efficacy of tactics meant to lessen the negative impacts of despotic leadership and foster a positive work environment. Gaining more knowledge about these intricate occurrences could help build evidence-based strategies that promote worker engagement, well-being, and retention in businesses.

## 6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of leadership styles, specifically despotic leadership, on employee turnover, and to examine how the workplace environment mediates this relationship within the workplace environment. By understanding these dynamics, the research aimed to provide insights into the factors which contribute to higher turnover rates and how leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the organizational climate. A total of 305 respondents participated in this study, forming the sample size used for data collection and analysis. The participants were carefully selected to represent employees working in the organization which provides a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. This sample size ensured sufficient statistical power, allowing the findings to be generalized to the broader population within the organization.

The analysis of the data collected revealed several significant insights. It was observed that despotic leadership is strongly linked to employee turnover which indicates that authoritarian leadership styles contribute to higher employee attrition. Furthermore, the study found that a toxic workplace environment is a key factor that exacerbates the turnover issue. A negative work environment which is characterized by stress, low morale, and unethical practices, not only diminishes employee satisfaction but also drives them to leave the organization.

**Funding:** The authors have not disclosed any funding.

### Declaration

Competing Interests: The authors have not disclosed any competing interests.

## Appendix A

### Scale Items

Factors	Serial No	Items	References
Despotic Leadership	1	My supervisor expects subordinates to obey.	Naseer et al. (2016)
	2	My supervisor is bossy.	
	3	He or She acts like atyrant.	
Toxic Workplace Environment	4	My supervisor often appreciates my physical appearance.	Anjum et al. (2018)
	5	My supervisor spokrudely to me in public	
	6	My supervisor often tries to be frank withme and shares dirty jokes with me.	
	7	My supervisor assignsme work that is not of my competence level.	
	18	My supervisor often tries to talk about my personal and sexuallife.	
Employee Turnover	9	I think a lot about leaving the organization.	Colarelli (1984)
	10	I am actively searching for an alternative to the organization.	
	11	If I had another job offer that paid the same as the one I have, I would leave here in a few minutes.	
	12	It doesn't matter if I am working for this company or another, as long as I have work.	
	13	I love working for thiscompany.	
	14	I think a lot about leaving the organization.	

## References

Abubakar, A. M., Namin, B. H., Harazneh, I., Arasli, H., & Tunç, T. (2017). Does gender moderates the relationship between favoritism/nepotism, supervisor incivility, cynicism and workplace withdrawal: A neural network and SEM approach. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 23, 129-139.

- Albashiti, B., Hamid, Z., & Aboramadan, M. (2021). Fire in the belly: the impact of despotic leadership on employees work-related outcomes in the hospitality setting. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 33(10), 3564-3584.
- Allen, D. G., Bryant, P. C., & Vardaman, J. M. (2010). Retaining talent: Replacing misconceptions with evidence-based strategies. *Academy of management Perspectives*, 24(2), 48-64.
- Anjum, A., Ming, X., Siddiqi, A. F., & Rasool, S. F. (2018). An empirical study analyzing job productivity in toxic workplace environments. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 15(5), 1035.
- Asghar, M.Z.; Gul, F.; Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, P.; Tasdemir, M.Z. Validating Entrepreneurial Intentions Questionnaire to Assess the Impact of Entrepreneurship Education. *Eğitim Bilim* 2019, 44, 383–399.
- Brown, M. E., & Mitchell, M. S. (2010). Ethical and unethical leadership: Exploring new avenues for future research. *Business ethics quarterly*, 20(4), 583-616.
- Den Hartog, D. N., & Belschak, F. D. (2012). Work engagement and Machiavellianism in the ethical leadership process. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 107(1), 35-47
- De Hoogh, A. H., & Den Hartog, D. N. (2008). Ethical and despotic leadership, relationships with leader's social responsibility, top management team effectiveness and subordinates' optimism: A multi-method study. *The leadership quarterly*, 19(3), 297-311.
- De Clercq, D.; Azeem, M.U.; Haq, I.U.; Bouckennooghe, D. The stress-reducing effect of coworker support on turnover intentions: Moderation by political ineptness and despotic leadership. *J. Bus. Res.* 2020, 111, 12–24.
- George, A. S. (2023). Toxicity in the Workplace: The Silent Killer of Careers and Lives. *Partners Universal International Innovation Journal*, 1(2), 1-21.
- Gorgievski, M. J., Bakker, A. B., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2010). Work engagement and workaholism: Comparing the self-employed and salaried employees. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 5(1), 83-96.
- Hofstede, G. (2010). *National Cultural Dimensions*. New York City, NY: McGrawHill Education
- Howell, J. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1992). The ethics of charismatic leadership: submission or liberation? *Academy of management Perspectives*, 6(2), 43-54.
- Hosseini, S.H.; Hajipour, E.; Kaffashpoor, A.; Darikandeh, A. The mediating effect of organizational culture in the relationship of leadership style with organizational learning. *J. Hum. Behav. Soc. Environ.* 2019, 30, 279–288.
- Iqbal, J., Asghar, A., & Asghar, M. Z. (2022). Effect of despotic leadership on employee turnover intention: mediating toxic workplace environment and cognitive distraction in academic institutions. *Behavioral sciences*, 12(5), 125.
- Kanungo, R. N. (1998). Leadership in organizations: Looking ahead to the 21st century. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie canadienne*, 39(1-2), 71.
- Lin, C.-Y., & Huang, C.-K. (2021). Employee turnover intentions and job performance from a planned change: the effects of an organizational learning culture and job satisfaction. *International Journal of Manpower*, 42(3), 409-423.
- Luthans, F., Peterson, S. J., & Ibrayeva, E. (1998). The potential for the “dark side” of leadership in post communist countries. *Journal of World Business*, 33(2), 185-201.



- Malik, M. S., & Sattar, S. (2019). Effects of despotic leadership and sexual harassment on emotional exhaustion of employees in health sector of Pakistan: Moderating role of organizational cynicism. *Review of Economics and Development Studies*, 5(2), 269-280.
- Naseer, S., Raja, U., Syed, F., Donia, M. B., & Darr, W. (2016). Perils of being close to a bad leader in a bad environment: Exploring the combined effects of despotic leadership, leader member exchange, and perceived organizational politics on behaviors. *The leadership quarterly*, 27(1), 14-33.
- Paais, M.; Pattiruhu, J.R. Effect of Motivation, Leadership, and Organizational Culture on Satisfaction and Employee Performance. *J. Asian Financ. Econ. Bus.* 2020, 7, 577–588. [CrossRef]
- Park, J.H.; Newman, A.; Zhang, L.; Wu, C.; Hooke, A. Mentoring functions and turnover intention: The mediating role of perceived organizational support. *Int. J. Hum. Resour. Manag.* 2015, 27, 1173–1191.
- Rasool, S. F., Wang, M., Tang, M., Saeed, A., & Iqbal, J. (2021). How toxic workplace environment effects the employee engagement: The mediating role of organizational support and employee wellbeing. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(5), 2294.
- Reyhanoglu, M., & Akin, O. (2022). Impact of toxic leadership on the intention to leave: a research on permanent and contracted hospital employees. *Journal of Economic and Administrative Sciences*, 38(1), 156-177.
- Schyns, B., & Schilling, J. (2013). How bad are the effects of bad leaders? A meta-analysis of destructive leadership and its outcomes. *The leadership quarterly*, 24(1), 138-158.
- Tepper, B. J. (2000). Consequences of abusive supervision. *Academy of management journal*, 43(2), 178-190.