# DESPOTIC LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE CYNICISM: THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL NEED THWARTING AND OBSERVER'S SCHADENFREUDE

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of one of the dark types of leadership from an organizational perspective on attitudinal and behavioral work outcomes. Among many types of destructive leadership, despotic leadership is the one that is under-researched and is grabbing the attention of scholars. Therefore, the adverse attitudinal and behavioral work outcomes of despotic leadership at workplaces have been investigated. The relationship between despotic leadership and cynicism has been studied with the mediating mechanism of psychological need thwarting and the moderating mechanism of the observer's schadenfreude. Self-determination theory (SDT) provides theoretical anchorage for the study's conceptual framework. The time-lagged data collection method was used from white-collar employees of Rawalpindi, Islamabad and KPK, Pakistan, manufacturing sector. The items related to despotic leadership and observer's schadenfreude were studied in phase one, whereas psychological need thwarting and cynicism in phase two to reduce common method variance. Smart PLS was used for the data analysis. The empirical findings of the research indicate that psychological need thwarting mediated the relationship, while the observer's schadenfreude moderated the relationship between despotic leadership and cynicism. Theoretical and managerial implications for eradicating the phenomenon of despotic leadership from the workplace are discussed, along with limitations and future research implications for advancing future research.

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of destructive leadership is becoming a substantial problem for organizations as far as its prevalence and consequences are concerned. (Burke 2006). Resultantly

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organizations are making efforts to avoid its negative repercussion. Several types of destructive leadership have been studied so far; however, despotic leadership is the one that is scarcely researched and is grabbing attention worldwide(Nauman et al., 2021). This novel leadership type has the potential for further exploration, and recent research studies have pointed to the search for its adverse attitudinal and behavioral outcomes in the form of a comprehensive framework (Zhou et al., 2021). Extant literature on despotic leadership emphasized exclusive and intradisciplinary moderating and mediating mechanisms (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018; Naseer et al., 2016; Nauman et al., 2018; Zhu et al., 2019).

Research indicates that the overall performance level of employees is influenced by their leaders(Ferine et al., 2021). How leaders interact with their followers to complete goals influences them ethically or unethically (Amore et al., 2022). The contemporary competitive and unpredictable business environment demands leaders to consider employees' basic needs so that they keep on performing well (Cyfert et al., 2022). Drawing on self-determination theory, destructive leaders disrupt employees' fundamental autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs by expecting unquestionable obedience. This immoral conduct rips employees' belief in their organization (Dobbs and Do,2019). Chaloupka (1999) defines this disbelief as cynicism which refer to distrust and a condition of disbelief regarding fairness in an organizational setup. Cynics capture an overarching lack of faith in their organization. Such mistrust of institutions across multiple and diverse sectors has been well-recognized in academia, government, financial institutions, big business, and the military (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Aydin & Akdag, 2016).

Destructive leaders sabotage victims' belief systems and negatively influence those witnessing their atrocities (Shao et al., 2018). Witnessing victimization by destructive leaders is sometimes joyous as opposed to feeling empathetic (Chen et al.,2021). This feeling of happiness about the misfortunes of others is referred to as observers' schadenfreude. Studies have pointed out that the observer's schadenfreude is an exciting avenue to be explored (Reich et al., 2021). This phenomenon was previously studied extensively in social psychology, but in management sciences, it is rarely explored (Li et al., 2019).

The potential mediator of the study, i.e., psychological need thwarting, has been included by answering a call for research which describes that need thwarting is an under-researched area in organizational set-up (Huyghebaert et al., 2018). Psychological Need thwarting refers to the maladaptive functioning of employees due to the denial of fundamental requirements of authority competence and relatedness (Gillet et al., 2015).

This study's purpose has been better understanding the phenomenon of despotic leadership in the work context. Furthermore, the relationship of despotic leadership is studied along with cynicism, psychological need thwarting as a mediator while observer's schadenfreude as a moderator.

This study offers worth mentioning theoretical and managerial implications. Based on self-determination theory (Deci et al.,2017), this study emphasizes the critical role of fundamental needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. When these needs are satisfied at the workplace, they promote autonomous motivation, wellness, and effective performance. On the contrary, when these needs are frustrated or denied, they give rise to negative attitudes among employees. Tyrannical leaders, like despotic leaders, tend to make their work situation negative (Naseer et al., 2016). This negativity is attributed to denying fundamental needs as despotism's merciless and morally corrupt conduct deprives employees of their essential needs.

Consequently, this negativity is manifested in the form of cynicism. Observers' schadenfreude as a potential moderator strengthens this negative relationship between despotic leadership and cynicism. Reason being those witnessing the mistreatment of destructive leaders create further negativity with their less empathetic and more joyous emotions towards others.

This study offers to meet notable theoretical objectives. The study addresses the call for research regarding an elaborative despotic leadership model(Raja et al., 2020). Previously victimized individuals were focused on workplaces, while attributes of preparators were highly ignored (Dåderman & Ragnestål-Impola, 2019). Secondly, studies indicate psychological need thwarting as a potential mediator for future research in the workplace (Bortolon et al., 2019). A possible argument is that despotic leaders significantly diminish their followers' sense of belongingness, worth, and value. A despot intends to achieve self-interest by mistreating subordinates (Aronson, 2001). Previous studies also suggest that destructive leaders thwart employees' fundamental needs of worth, value, and belongingness (Qian et al., 2019).

Thirdly, eastern culture, like that of Pakistan, is a relevant context for despotic leadership due to high power distance, collectivism, and risk aversion compared to the western context (Naseer et al., 2016; Raja et al., 2020). Despots are similar to the patriarchal family head in most eastern households (Zhou et al., 2021).

Lastly, the findings can help organizational leaders and managers mitigate the negative impacts of despotic leadership and cynicism. Measures can be taken to eliminate despotic leadership from workplaces through training, awareness and policy-making.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**Despotic Leadership and Psychological Need thwarting**

Research indicates that when basic needs are satisfied at the workplace, employees show their highest quality of effort and well-being (Ryan, 1995). However, despots discourage the provision of such needs through their merciless conduct of power (de Hoogh & den Hartog, 2008). Despotic leaders misuse their powers and extensively lack moral qualities (Bartholomew et al., 2014). Such leaders are demanding and manipulative and behave egotistically toward followers' needs (Bartholomew et al., 2011; Demaray & Malecki, 2002). Despots deprive their followers of fundamental needs through their morally corrupt conduct leading to the behavioural consequences of burnout, depression, and negative affect (Balaguer et al., 2012). adverse outcomes by destructive leaders have been referred to in several ways (Ashforth, 1994; Duffy et al., 2017; Tepper, 2000a). They all involve employees' perceptions that some of their fundamental psychological needs are impeded by an authority (Aquino & Thau, 2009). Recently, research on safeguarding basic psychological needs has been active and growing as workplaces are getting more concerned about the overall well-being of their employees (Bartholomew et al., 2011). Need thwarting is a negative psychological experience in complex work circumstances (Lagios et al., 2022). Thus, it can be hypothesized that:

*Hypothesis 1: Despotic leadership positively relates to the psychological need thwarting*

**Despotic leader and cynicism**

The concept of cynicism roots back to ancient Greece and the philosopher Antisthene (Dean et al.,1998). More recently, it has become the focus of study in various social science disciplines and has been purported to exist in various forms, ranging from police cynicism to personality cynicism to societal institutional Cynicism (Andersson, 1996; Dean et al., 1998). Organizational cynicism refers to the employee's perception that the organization lacks reliability and is consistently engaged in deceiving acts towards its employees (Dean et al., 1998). The detrimental effects of organizational cynicism on various work-related attitudes are well documented (Neves, 2012). Cynicism unfavourably influences employees' affective and behavioural outcomes such as lower self-acceptance, job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Song et al., 2007); poorer interpersonal relationships, poor health and well-being (Lisspers et al., 1998; Neves, 2012); increased turnover intentions, time theft and resistance to change (Lorinkova and Perry, 2017; Stanley et al., 2005). Regarding destructive leadership, cynicism impacts the exchange relationships employees develop with their leaders after their unmet expectations (Dean et al., 1998).

Despotic leaders' manipulative traits make them habitually accusers of others' mistakes and shortcomings (Rhodewalt et al., 2006). Their destructive attributes prompt workers' dissatisfaction, misery, and disbelief that their organization will exploit them (Kanter & Mirvis, 1989). Even though scholars have known about the issue of destructive leadership and cynicism for quite a while, they have not yet discovered a convincing answer, specifically in the context of despotic leadership. Therefore, it is hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 2: Despotic leadership positively relates to organization cynicism.*

**Psychological Need thwarting and Organization cynicism**

Psychological Need thwarting harms individuals' adjustment, integrity, and growth (Ryan, 1995). It refers to the frustration of fundamental needs, which increases the risk of passivity, ill-being, and defensiveness (Ryan & Deci 2000; Vansteenkiste & Ryan 2013). Mistreatment at workplaces influences' employees' perceptions that their fundamental psychological needs are hindered by an authority figure (Aquino & Thau, 2009). Victimized employees receive the signal that they are not competent, worthy, and valued by the higher authorities (Aquino & Douglas Some studies tend to view cynicism as a potentially conservative and self-defeating form of resistance that inherently prevents the possibilities of confronting managerial control (Karfakis& Kokkinidis, 2011). The hypothesis after the argumentation mentioned above is:

*Hypothesis: 3 Psychological need thwarting positively relates to organization cynicism.*

**The mediating role of Psychological need thwarting between Despotic Leadership and Cynicism**

Organizational cynicism is a belief that organizations lack honesty. In cynicism, expectations of morality, justice, and honesty are badly affected. At the same time, need thwarting taps the personal experience of having one's psychological needs undermined *because of* social contextual influences (Bartholomew et al., 2011). This violation of fundamental needs influences explicitly involves the creation of feelings such as anger, disappointment, and hopelessness (Özler et al., 2010). Similarly, the adverse shocks caused by needs depletion will likely enhance employees' organizational Cynicism (Chiaburu et al., 2013). Ultimately, numerous attitudinal and psychological problems emerge for organizations. The proposed hypothesis in this scenario is:

*Hypothesis 4: Psychological Need thwarting is positively related to cynicism.*

**Observer's schadenfreude as a moderator between Despotic Leadership and Psychological Need thwarting:**

Schadenfreude is a German term that describes Feelings of pleasure that a person experiences in response to another person's failures or misfortunes (Feather, 2006; Heider, 1958). Schadenfreude is an antisocial emotion shared with others, which can erode working relationships (Dasborough et al. 2009).

Schadenfreude was found to be positively related to psychopathy, narcissism, as well as Machiavellianism (James et al.,2014; Porter et al.,2014). Past research supports this notion that authoritarian leaders impact the subordinates' work-related outcomes (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). The argument that certain emotions are shaped by one's social rather than personal identities has been supported in multiple studies (Kuppens & Yzerbyt, 2012; Kuppens et al., 2013).

Despotic leaders violate basic psychological needs mentioned in the Self-determination theory (SDT) of authority competence and relatedness. Thus, they provoke reciprocity from employees in the form of negative work-related attitudes.

Following from the above line of reasoning, it is expected that observer's schadenfreude escalates conflicts and leads to more negative attitudes in the relationship between despotic leadership and need thwarting. Although schadenfreude has been mentioned frequently in the popular press and social media (Kramer et al. 2011; Leach et al. 2014), it has still received scant attention in the organizational literature. Thus, it can be hypothesized that:

*Hypothesis 5: Observer's Schadenfreude moderates the relationship between despotic leadership and psychological need thwarting such that it strengthens the relationship when Observer's Schadenfreude is high.*

**Figure 1.** *Conceptual framework of the research model*
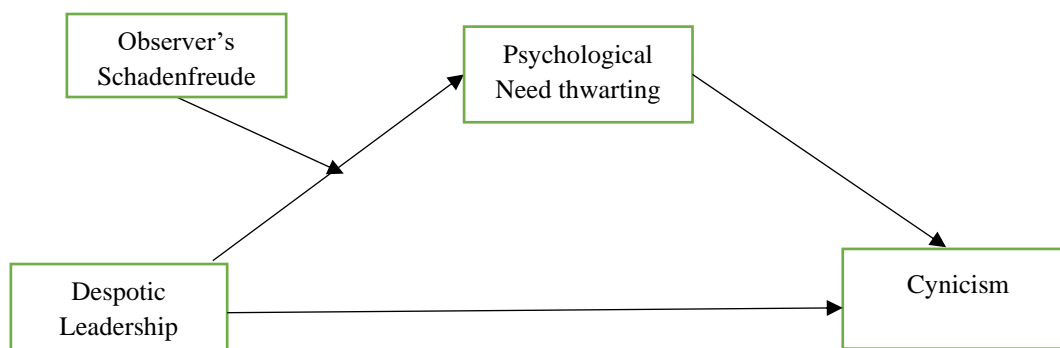


*Source: Author Developed*

## METHODOLOGY

The present research study follows a positivist research paradigm. Data was collected through personally administered questionnaires. The study's purpose and confidentiality were fully ensured to the participants. Participants completed the self-rated questionnaires in three phases to avoid common method variance problems (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Items related to despotic leadership and observer's schadenfreude in phase 1; psychological hardiness and psychological need thwarting in phase 2; estrangement (ES), ostracism (OS), Cynicism (CS), and state paranoia arousal (SPA) in phase 3 with a time lag of 3 weeks in each phase. Moreover, all study participants were required to report their age, gender, education, tenure, and a code in the last section of the questionnaire. Code was mentioned to identify the same respondent three times for the data collection process without any error and disclosure of identity.

### Variable Measurements

Despotic leadership, an independent variable, is adapted from (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). The sample item for the scale is "My Supervisor/Head/Boss is commanding, and he/she has no pity or compassion "and "My supervisor/Head/Boss is Revengeful, he/she seeks revenge when wronged."

As a moderator, Observer Schadenfreude's Five item scale was taken from (Van Dijk et al., 2006). The sample item for the scale is "Others enjoy whatever bad happens to me at work" and "Others feel happy on my misfortunes at work".

Psychological Need Thwarting was the mediator of the study, and its nine-item scale was adapted from (Gillet et al., 2012) The sample item for the scale is "I feel pushed to behave in certain ways "and "I feel other people around me are envious when I achieve success."

Lastly, the dependent variable Cyniism's seven-item scale was adapted from (Wilkerson et al.,2008). The sample item for the scale is " Any effort to make things better around here is likely to succeed" and "Company management is more interested in its goals and needs than employee's welfare".

### Data Collection

Data collected from the white-collar employees of manufacturing concern organizations were targeted due to organizational configuration and increased variance, which is optimum for moderation and mediation studies (Ansari et al., 2007; Paglis et al., 2002). Secondly, it was an excellent option due to English comprehension and better literacy rates(Abbas et al., 2012).

Manufacturing organizations in Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Taxila were selected as samples. Based on the formula proposed by Hair et al. (2010) which is as follows: (Number of indicators, number of latent variables) x (estimated parameters). The sample size for the proposed study is 302 based on the above proposition. A convenient sampling technique was used to collect data.

**Herman One Factor Test for Common Method Variance**

Harman's single-factor test was applied to check the issues of common method variance. This technique assures no inaccuracies and errors in the instrumentation used for research.

**Table 1.** Herman One Factor Test for Common Method Variance

| **Initial Eigenvalues** | | | | **Extraction sum of Squared Loadings** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Factor** | **Total** | **% Of variance** | **Cumulative %** | **Total** | **% Of variance** | **Cumulative %** |
| 1 | 6.346 | 24.408 | 24.408 | 6.346 | 24.408 | 24.408 |
| 2 | 4.530 | 17.423 | 41.831 | | | |
| 3 | 4.029 | 15.495 | 57.327 | | | |
| 4 | 1.979 | 7.611 | 64.938 | | | |
| 5 | .907 | 3.490 | 68.428 | | | |
| 6 | .844 | 3.246 | 71.674 | | | |
| 7 | .742 | 2.852 | 74.526 | | | |
| 8 | .601 | 2.311 | 76.837 | | | |
| 9 | .587 | 2.257 | 79.094 | | | |
| 10 | .516 | 1.983 | 81.077 | | | |
| 11 | .475 | 1.826 | 82.903 | | | |
| 12 | .455 | 1.751 | 84.654 | | | |
| 13 | .423 | 1.627 | 86.281 | | | |
| 14 | .397 | 1.526 | 87.806 | | | |
| 15 | .375 | 1.441 | 89.247 | | | |
| 16 | .356 | 1.371 | 90.618 | | | |
| 17 | .317 | 1.220 | 91.838 | | | |
| 18 | .314 | 1.209 | 93.046 | | | |
| 19 | .302 | 1.163 | 94.210 | | | |
| 20 | .263 | 1.010 | 95.219 | | | |
| 21 | .258 | .994 | 96.213 | | | |
| 22 | .234 | .898 | 97.111 | | | |
| 23 | .226 | .871 | 97.982 | | | |
| 24 | .202 | .777 | 98.759 | | | |
| 25 | .178 | .685 | 99.444 | | | |
| 26 | .144 | .556 | 100.000 | | | |

Note. n=302 Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring

**Table 2.** Demographics

| **Demographics** | | **Frequency** | **% Of Total** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 232 | 77% |
| | Female | 70 | 23% |
| | | | |
| Age | Age below 21 | 59 | 19.5 |
| | 22-40 | 214 | 70.9 |
| | Above 40 | 29 | 9.6 |
| Qualification | Bachelors | 127 | 42.1 |
| | Masters | 78 | 25.8 |
| | MS | 83 | 27.5 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Doctorate | 14 | 4.6 |
| Experience | Up to one year | 132 | 43.7 |
| | 2-5 years | 89 | 29.5 |
| | 6-9 years | 32 | 10.6 |
| | 10-13 years | 18 | 6.0 |
| | Above 13 years | 31 | 10.3 |

Table 2 describes the demographic characteristics of the samples. In terms of the sex ratio, 77% were male respondents, and 23% were female participants, which reflects that the number of male respondents is higher as compared to female respondents. Regarding age,70.9% of respondents lay between the age bracket of 22-40. With a more significant proportion of the younger population, Pakistan is blessed in this regard. The education level of respondents reflects that 42.1% of the survey participants had bachelor's degrees. Mainly white-collar employees of the manufacturing sector were targeted; therefore, the educational profile explains the notion that most of the respondents were bachelor's degree holders. From the experience perspective, most respondents were freshly appointed, i.e., 43.7 % of participants had below one year of workplace experience.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Smart PLS was used for the analysis of the data. It is one of the most prominent software applications for Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) and has advanced reporting features(Ringle et al., 2015) .The measurement model of Smart PLS was used to examine factor loadings along with composite reliability and average variance extracted The measurement model is also known as the "outer model".

The structural or inner model was used to identify the relationships between the constructs.

**Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted**

**Table 3.** Standardized Regression Weights.

| Items | Loadings | Composite Reliability (CR.) | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|---|---|---|---|
| DL 1 | 0.753 | | |
| DL 2 | 0.679 | | |
| DL 3 | 0.690 | 0.863 | 0.515 |
| DL 4 | 0.751 | | |
| DL 5 | 0.615 | | |
| DL 6 | 0.802 | | |
| PNT 1 | 0.783 | | |
| PNT 2 | 0.763 | | |
| PNT 3 | 0.781 | 0.933 | 0.630 |
| PNT 4 | 0.804 | | |
| PNT 5 | 0.825 | | |
| PNT 6 | 0.791 | | |
| PNT 7 | 0.856 | | |
| PNT 8 | 0.808 | | |
| PNT 9 | 0.726 | | |
| OS 1 | 0.852 | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| OS 2 | 0.834 | | |
| OS 3 | 0.836 | | |
| OS 4 | 0.864 | 0.924 | 0.710 |
| OS 5 | 0.826 | | |
| CS 1 | 0.851 | | |
| CS 2 | 0.806 | | |
| CS 3 | 0.833 | 0.936 | 0.676 |
| CS 4 | 0.821 | | |
| CS 5 | 0.796 | | |
| CS 6 | 0.828 | | |
| CS 7 | 0.818 | | |

*Note.* C.R >0.60, AVE> 0.50, p>0.05, n=302, DL=Despotic Leadership, OS=Observer's schadenfreude, PNT=Psychological need thwarting, CS=Cynicism.

Table 3 explains the factor loadings of the variables of the study. These values indicate that composite reliability and average variance extracted values of all four variables were in the acceptable range (Hair et al., 2017)

**Discriminant Validity**

The discriminant validility of the contructs were calculated using Fornell and Larcker (1981). This method determines that the values of the constructs should be above 0.5, for the average variance extracted (AVE).

**Table 4.** Model validity measures

| | DL | OS | PNT | CS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DL | **0.718** | | | |
| OS | -0.274 | **0.843** | | |
| PNT | 0.050 | 0.256 | **0.794** | |
| CS | 0.727 | 0.842 | 0.796 | **0.822** |

*Note.* The bold letters indicate the square root of AVE.DL=Despotic Leadership, OS=Observer's schadenfreude, PNT=Psychological need thwarting, SPA=State paranoia arousal.

Table 4 describes the values of discriminant validity of the research model. The average value extracted for all the studied variables reflects that variables had good convergent validity (CR). (Henseler et al., 2009) . The values are within the accepted range and below the threshold of 0.90. Thus table 4 describes the existence of discriminant validity among variables/ (Fornell & Larcker,1981).
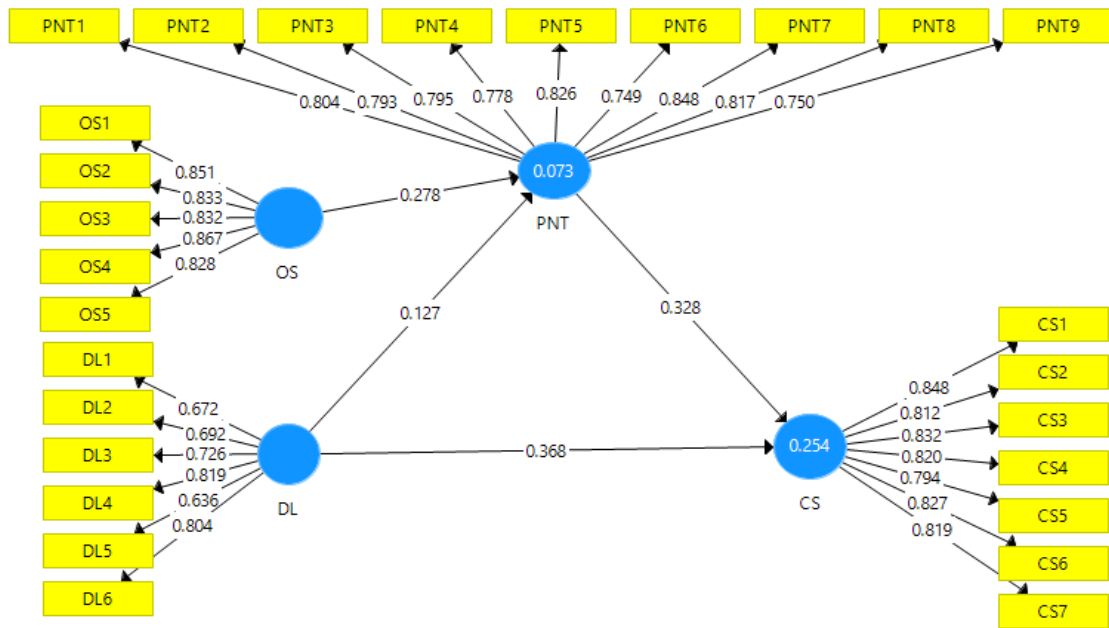
## Structural Model

The structural model of the PLS-SEM describes the relationship and the correlations between the constructs. It is also referred to as the "Inner model," and it predicts the path between the variables.

## Hypothesis Testing

| | Original Sample (O) | Sample Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (STDEV) | T Statistics (|O/STDEV|) | P Values | Status |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DL -> PNT | 0.139 | 0.142 | 0.066 | 2.115 | 0.035 | Accepted |
| DL -> CS | 0.367 | 0.371 | 0.046 | 7.904 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| PNT -> CS | 0.302 | 0.302 | 0.052 | 5.813 | 0.000 | Accepted |

*Note.* DL=Despotic Leadership, PNT=Psychological need thwarting, CS=Cynicism

As mentioned in table 5, the direct relation of DL with PNT and CS describes that DL has a direct and positive relationship with PNT ($\beta$=0.139, t=2.115, p=0.035), which means H1 is accepted. WithCL, the statistics are ($\beta$= 0.367, t=7.904, p=0.000), leading to acceptance of H2. Similarly, the direct relation of PNT and CS indicates that ($\beta$=0.302, t=5.813, p=0.000), which means the acceptance of H3.

## Psychological Need Thwarting as a mediator

**Table 6.** Psychological Need Thwarting as a mediator

| | Original Sample (O) | Sample Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (STDEV) | T Statistics (|O/STDEV|) | P Values | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DL -> PNT -> CS | 0.040 | 0.041 | 0.018 | 2.174 | 0.030 | Accepted |

*Note.* Significance p<0.05, t-statistics> 1.96 n=302, DL=Despotic leadership, CS=Cynicism

Table 6 describes the statistical mediation results between despotic Leadership and CS (B=0.040 t=2.174 and p=0.030). Hence it is proven that there is mediation. Therefore, hypothesis 4 is supported.
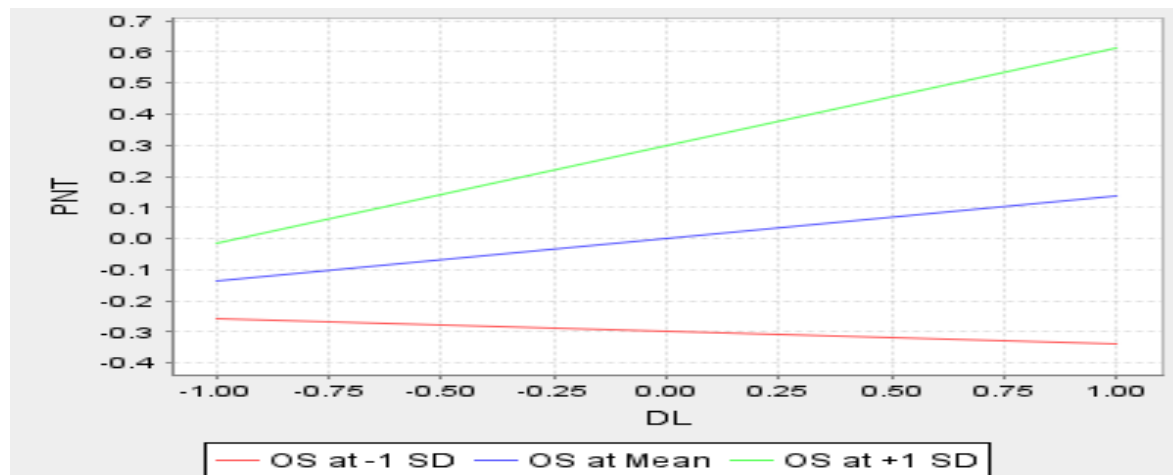
**Moderation of Observer's Schadenfreude between Despotic Leadership and Psychological Need Thwarting**

**Table 7.** Moderation of Observer's Schadenfreude between Despotic Leadership and Psychological Need Thwarting

| | Original Sample (O) | Sample Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (STDEV) | T Statistics (|O/STDEV|) | P Values |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DL*OS -> PNT | 0.175 | 0.169 | 0.053 | 3.327 | 0.001 |

*Note.* Significance p<0.05, t-statistics> 1.96 n=302 DL*OS=Despotic Leadership*Observer's schadenfreude (Interaction term) PNT=Psychological need thwarting.

The statistics mentioned in table 7 indicate significant values with (B=0.172, t=3.327, and p=0.001), which describes the existence of moderation through significant and accepted empirical findings. Hence hypothesis 5 is accepted.



The graph reveals that at higher level OS (Observer's Schadenfreude), DL (despotic leadership) strongly impacts PNT (Psychological Need Thwarting). However, at lower OS, DL had a much lesser impact on PNT, leading to the acceptance of hypothesis 5. Hypothesis 5 states that observers' schadenfreude moderates the relationship between despotic leadership and psychological need thwarting such that it strengthens the negative relationship between them.
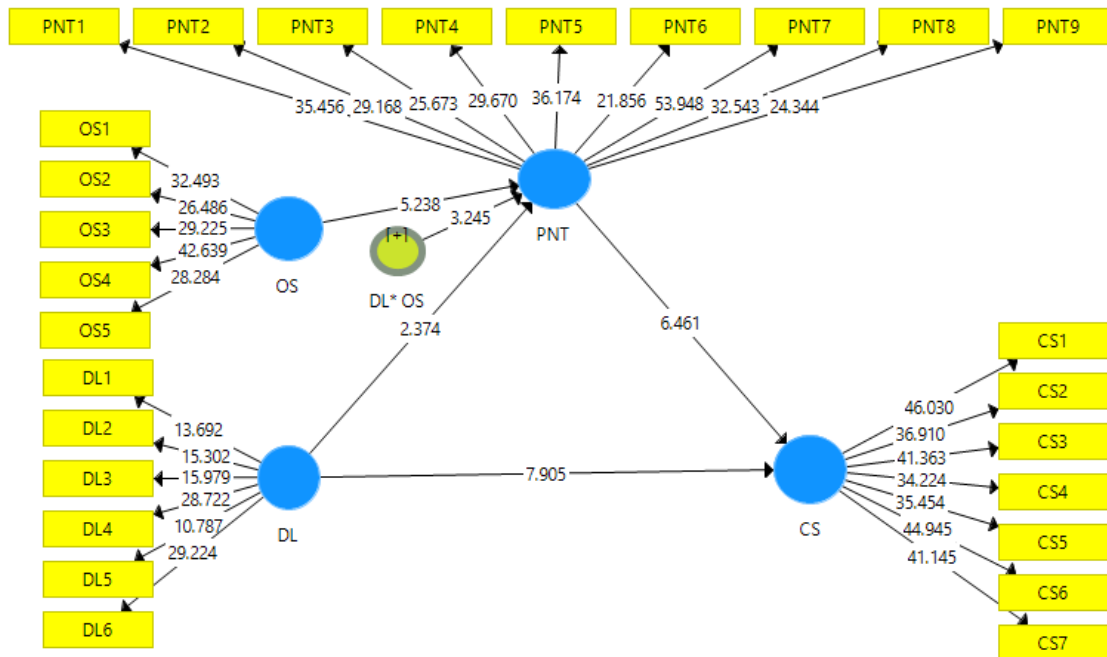
**Model Fitness**

**Table 8.** Model Fitness

| Chi-Square | 981.723 | 985.219 |
|---|---|---|
| NFI | 0.816 | 0.815 |

*Note*. NFI= Normed fit index, n=302

The model fitness table 8 describes that the research model has a good fit as indicated by the values of chi-square and NFI, which lie within the normal range.

**Figure 3.** Structural Model



## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show a significantly positive relationship between all the hypothesized relationships after statistical tests. Hence, this study contributes positively towards the extant literature on despotic leadership. Despotic leadership negatively affects psychological need thwarting and cynicism. Furthermore, the relationship between despotic leadership and psychological need thwarting becomes more robust in the presence of the observer's Schadenfreude (OS) as a moderator.

The relationship between despotic leadership and cynicism was positively significant after the study's empirical findings. These findings are consistent with the previous studies. Cynicism is the state of lost faith in an organization and is a big issue as Employees who perceive their higher-ups as destructive leaders become more cynical than others (Grama & Todericiu, 2016). After the great depression, one of the significant incidents was the prevalence of mistrust in sensitive and multiple institutions such as educational set-ups, the public sector, armed forces institutions and other big businesses (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Arsalan Khan, 2014). Recently, the US military began to recognize the adverse effects of destructive leadership and the phenomenon of Cynicism(Dobbs & Do,2019). Based on empirical evidence, it is postulated

that a despotic leader, because of morally corrupt conduct, makes employees cynical toward their respective organizations.

The mediating relationship of psychological need thwarting despotic leadership and cynicism was positively significant. Prior researchers argued the same notion by postulating cynicism relates to misery, dissatisfaction, frustration, and doubt and is specifically directed towards individuals who are in an influential place and can give positive and negative reinforcement(Gkorezis et al., 2018). One of the studies illustrated the negative relationship between cynicism and bad leaders involving supervisors and top management (Reichers et al., 1997). A meta-analytical study on cynicism showed that a leader's ethics and morality while dealing with employees substantially decrease the instances of Cynicism (Kilis et al., 2019). This study also elaborated that in the presence of cynicism, the perception of organizational support, justice and trust will decrease as employees hesitate to express their distrustful related thoughts, fearing rejection or punishment by the higher-ups. On a similar footing, it was found that rude supervisors with no interest in the subjective opinions of their followers led them to develop emotional exhaustion (Cho et al., 2016). Above argumentation leads to the notion of least disagreement on the empirical findings of this research.

The relationship between psychological needs thwarting and cynicism is also positively significant. These findings are also consistent with previous findings. When an organization does not keep its promises of safeguarding employees' fundamental needs, employees are likely to question its integrity (Andersson, 1996). According to SDT, the absence of basic psychological needs at workplaces increases the probability of employees losing trust and becoming cynics.

The moderating mechanism of the observer's schadenfreude was significant in this study. The modern era of intense cut-throat competition has decreased the compassion individuals feel towards others in bad times; therefore, people commonly express joy when they learn about others' misfortunes (Shahab & Taklavi,2021). This joy at others' misfortunes is called schadenfreude (Heider, 1958). Destructive leaders threaten ethics and morality at work (Ünal et al., 2012). With their corrupt conduct, such leaders affect not only their direct victims but also bystanders and those witnessing (Shao et al.,2018). Drawing on the underlying postulates of self-determination theory, when people are denied their fundamental needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness experience negative affective states, which eventually explain their involvement in immoral emotions of joy on the misfortunes of others.

## CONCLUSION

By examining the effects of despotic leadership, which has previously gained less attention among other types of destructive leadership, this study aims to add knowledge to the existing body of research. It demonstrates how despots negatively impact the views of the workforce. Leaders with despotic tendencies have a particularly damaging effect in the presence of those spectators who enjoy the mishandling and miseries of victims. According to the underlying assumption of self-determination theory, the fundamental needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness play an essential role in employees' motivation and well-being. Despots deprive employees of these needs by using their immoral conduct. The research seeks to establish new directions for advanced study in despotic leadership.

### Limitations Future Research Implications

Future research can examine additional destructive leadership pretty tyranny, pseudo-transformational leadership, and Machiavellism. This study focused on despotic leadership, while in future research studies, other destructive leadership types like petty tyranny, pseudo-transformational leadership, and machviallenism can be studied. Second, the study's sampling from the manufacturing industry might make its conclusions less generalizable. Future studies should attempt to imitate the findings of this study in various contexts, such as the telecom, service, and hospitality industries. The data collection used for this study involved a time-lag survey. Future studies should rely on longitudinal designs with numerous measurement points. Finally, future research may include additional dispositional or contextual variables significantly impacting the outcomes. For instance, some possible mediators are depression (Shaikh et al., 2021), emotional depletion, psychological distress, and insomnia (Thoroughgood, 2021).

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