An Exploration of Moral Identity's Role in Mitigating the Impact of Despotic Leadership on Organizational Culture and Organizational Agility in the Public Sector of Pakistan

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Abstract

This study investigates the mitigating role of moral identity (Ml) in the relationship between despotic leadership (DL) and organizational agility (OA) while considering the intervening role of organizational culture (QC). This study examines the relations that are based on the integration of social identity theory (SIT), social learning theory (SLT), and social exchange theory (SET). Data is collected using a questionnaire survey from 271 employees from different public sector organizations in Pakistan. The data analysis is conducted through SPSS, MPlus, and AMOS. The findings suggest that DL has a significant but negative relationship with OA. The study findings also uncovered that DL has a significant and negative impact on the OC *that significantly but positively predicts OA. Furthermore, the results revealed that MI moderates the relationship between DL and* OC, *such that a high level of moral identity weakens this relationship, hence followers with high moral values will be less influenced by the despotic leaders. This study theoretically as well as practically contributes to the existing literature. Limitations and future directions are also discussed.*

Keywords: Organizational Agility, Despotic Leadership, Organizational culture, Moral Identity, Public Sector of Pakistan

Introduction

Change is an inescapable need of human life that takes place everywhere people live. The frequent changes in customer needs and demands have made it inevitable to adapt to changes (Akkaya & Tabak, 2020), and organizational leaders have commenced focusing more on agility as a key driver to success (Ludviga & Kalvina, 2023; Nafei, 2016). Organizational agility can be considered a potential path for any paradoxical situation (Cunha et al., 2020). The term agility is a new paradigm that was first officially introduced to the public in 1991 by Iacocca Research Institute (Dove, 1991; Qin & Nembhard, 2015). The roots of agility lie in lean manufacturing which through the agile manifesto makes the organizations agile (Sahid et al., 2020; Zaitsev et al., 2018). Organizational agility is supposed to be a basic

source of competitive edge for being a combination of speed, flexibility, and nimbleness (Singh et al., 2013) hence, it is hardly linked with the public sector (Rieckhoff & Maxwell, 2017). Most researchers argue that organizational agility is practically meaningless in the public sector due to its bureaucratic and hierarchical structure (Hamalainen et al., 2012; Rahimiatani et al., 2018). The public sector also faces specific restraints including a slow democratic decision-making process, absence of market pressure, requiring public backing, and employment constraints (Ludviga & Kalvina, 2023). The public sector demands more agility as compared to the private sector owing to more client frequency and also for the elimination of public needs (Kalimullah et al., 2019; Melian-Alzola et al., 2020). So, leaders play an effective role to improve organizational performance and responsiveness in achieving their goals and objectives.

Leadership and organizational culture are very important in achieving organizational agility (Felipe et al., 2017). Not only a good strategy but an upright culture will always lead to organizational agility (Griffin & Moorhead, 2014; Moran, 2015). A negative culture not only spoils the life of the organization but also influences the individual and overall performance of the organization (Chakrabarti et al., 2023; Xenikou & Furnham, 2022). The organizational culture is framed and influenced by leaders and also the other members of an organization (Jamali et al., 2022). Successful leaders can always sense or anticipate any awkward situation and hence can prepare themselves and their followers through coaching and learning (Harvey & Valerio, 2022; McKenzie & Aitken, 2012). Leadership helps in increasing the responsiveness of organizations by making them learning organizations (Joiner, 2019; Uyun, 2019). Leadership as well as OA both play important and direct roles in organizational performance (Lokman et al., 2019).

Despotic leadership is related to the exploitation of subordinates, and hence they reciprocate in such a way that results in their diminished job performance, and creativity, which adversely impacts the whole organization (Adiguzel, 2019). Despotic leaders treat followers in a self-centered manner because such leaders have low ethical values. Their actions create demotivation among the subordinates that result in low productivity with workplace incivility among the employees (Asiah, 2020). This sense that efforts are not being valued creates a sense of injustice among the employees which results in less collaboration and hence the organization suffers from the negative output of despotic leaders (Aydin, 2018; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). It is evident from the existing literature that the leaders' behavior trickles down to affect the employees negatively or positively at the lower level of the organization (Taylor et al., 2019). All the employees are not similarly influenced by the leaders (Abasilim et al., 2019). In response to negative leadership, the employees may use coping tactics by inducing counterproductive work behavior to preserve their emotional and psychological resources (Krischer et al., 2010). Negative leadership can also harm an organization by lowering the employee's performance and well-being (Shoss et al., 2016).

Several boundary conditions and mechanisms have neutralized the detrimental impacts of despotic leaders. The quality of work-life buffers the deleterious influence of despotic leaders (Nauman et al., 2020), and despotic leaders may also promote positive employee outcomes through the mechanism of impression management (Rasool et al., 2018). High moral standards will help organizations to reduce supervisory abuse and its downstream consequences (Taylor et al., 2019). The people self-regulate themselves by setting some moral standards which are influenced by moral identity and people act consistently with their moral identity. It indicates that employees with high moral identities behave ethically under

the influence of ethical leaders and employees' high morals deter employees' unethical behavior (Gan, 2018). That's why it would be thought-provoking to explore the brighter side of despotic leadership that may lead to constructive outcomes for the subordinates and also introduce boundary conditions and mechanisms in the despotic leadership and outcome relationship (Rasool et al., 2018).

Most erstwhile research has focused on the optimistic side and positive impacts of leaders on the followers and organization (Islam et al., 2022) but the negative and unethical side of leadership has not gotten too much attention (De Clercq et al., 2018; Hassan et al., 2023; ltzkovich et al., 2020; Naseer et al., 2016). For example, entrepreneurial leadership significantly and positively predicts organizational agility (Khalid et al., 2020). According to Akkaya and Tabak (2020), transactional and transformational leadership significantly predicts OA whereas laissez-faire leadership doesn't seem to influence OA. However, to the best of our understanding none of the researchers have studied the despotic leadership role in terms of organizational agility, hence it is yet to be investigated. Though destructive leadership has been studied where negatively affect organizational outcomes (Karabati, 2021) and despotic leadership positively affects organizational deviance (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018). Hence, this study intends to investigate the effect of DL on OA with the intervening role of OC in the public sector of Pakistan, as to the best of our understanding no single study has yet explored this framework. This study will further examine the buffering role of moral identity.

Review of Literature

Theoretical Framework

Drawing from social exchange theory, social identity theory, and social cognitive theory a research framework including outcomes of despotic leadership and organizational culture as a intervening variable, is presented in

Figure 1. Despotic leadership erodes organizational culture and hence alleviates outcome i.e., organizational agility. Organizational culture mediates the influence of DL on OA. Furthermore, moral identity moderates the impact of despotic leaders in such a way that it's weaker when the moral identity values are high.

According to social exchange, there is an interdependent relationship between the leaders and followers, as the rule of mutual exchange justifies that the actions of one cause the reaction of another (Crapanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Despotic leaders exploit and treat followers unfairly which makes the followers unwilling and less contributive to the organizational progress and performance (Naseer et al., 2016). Leadership is not a trait of an individual, but it is a characteristic of the whole organization. When leaders act with the organization's identity in mind, then they are less liable to propose any action or strategy that is not aligned with the prevalent organization's culture (Lawler & Worley, 2009). The leaders' attitudes and behaviors have a strong impact on organizational performance and both leadership and OA play an important role to improve organizational performance (Akkaya, 2019).

Abusive leadership behaviors don't need to trickle down to the individuals at the lower level, they may manifest less abusive or even ethical behaviors (Taylor et al., 2019). Individuals usually model their leaders' behaviors via the social learning process as proposed by social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986; Darvishmotevali & Altinay, 2022). To investigate the question posited by social cognitive theory, "Why negative leaders' behavior can be less

abusive and even ethical towards subordinates"? The extant research pinpointed moral identity as a boundary condition (Taylor et al., 2019) that has turned researchers' attention to social identity theory. According to the SIT, when individuals consider themselves a part of a vis-a-vis role relationship, they behave ethically otherwise they follow modeled behavior (Buil et al., 2019). The followers do not model leaders' behavior if their internal standards are not consistent with the norms and values. This confers that individuals having high moral standards would be less likely to follow their despotic leaders.

Despotic leadership (DL)

For a long time, leadership has been romanticized as a positive trait, and the absence of that specific leadership trait has been considered an absence of leadership (Rasool et al., 2018). In recent times many categories of the dark side of leadership have been studied including abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007), toxic leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 2010), destructive leadership (Einarsen et al., 2007), autocratic (Maseti & Gumede, 2011), and despotic leadership (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). DL is the most arrogant and destructive style of leadership whereby leaders advocate absolute dominance and supremacy over their subordinates and demand unconditional abeyance from their followers (Albashiti et al., 2021). Despotic leaders can be described as having four distinctive manifestations. Firstly, they always have a harsh attitude towards subordinates and wish that they obey them unconditionally. Secondly, they never accept any suggestions from their followers. Thirdly, they always credit success to themselves and blame subordinates for failure. Fourthly, they always try to manipulate information and take advantage of others (Zhou et al., 2021). Employees who become victims of such leaders feel powerless and hence induce deviant behaviors which result in negative outcomes (Jabeen & Rahim, 2020). Individuals have more tendency to pay attention to negative behaviors as compared to positive ones (Schilling, 2009).

Organizational agility (OA)

Organizational agility is the capacity of an organization to identify and respond quickly to environmental change to achieve the strategic goals of the organization and to gain a sustainable competitive advantage (Kirkpatrick et al., 2021; Lootah et al., 2020; Sharifi & Zhang, 1999). Sharifi and Zhang (1999) have proposed a conceptual model covering four main organizational capabilities i.e. speed, competency, flexibility, and responsiveness which make an organization agile (Motwani & Kataria, 2023). In a similar vein, a four-dimension framework comprising quickness, competency, responsiveness, and flexibility has been suggested for bringing agility to an organization (Khoshnood & Nematizadeh, 2017). Speed is the capability of an organization to execute activities swiftly and speed up its decision-making process so that the operations can run smoothly to deliver the product and services efficiently. Competency refers to the efficient use of resources to accomplish organizational goals bringing integration, cooperation, workforce competency, and technological improvement. Flexibility is the use of similar facilities required for the smooth running of processes for the accomplishment of diverse objectives (Attar & Abdul-Kareem, 2020) and employing a diversified workforce, organizational structure, and alternative resources to fulfill the needs of the organizations and increase productivity and profitability (Akkaya & Tabak, 2020). Responsiveness is the capability of any organization to forestall and respond to changes in the internal as well as external environment to take timely and appropriate actions to attain problem-solving (Akkaya & Tabak, 2020).

Organizational culture (QC)

The word culture expresses the notion of how something develops, nurtures, matures, improves, and retains itself (Cooren, 2015). OC is an array of common basic beliefs and assumptions learned by a group of individuals to resolve its worries about external adaptability and internal assimilation and can be educated new members to identify, think, and recognize those problems (MacQueen, 2020). Culture is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon and hence a variety of important dimensions emerged at different times, so it this necessary to take a multidimensional approach to understand the culture and its impacts on different prospects of society (Prajogo & McDermott, 2011). According to Wallach (1983), Organizational culture comprises three major dimensions namely innovative, bureaucratic, and supportive (Sarhan et al., 2020). Bureaucratic culture is a more organized dimension that is centered on power and control with definite obligations. Organizations having this sort of culture are more stable and less responsive due to strong internal, hierarchical, and power-oriented control (Burchardt & Maisch, 2019). An innovative culture is considered more creative, result-producing, stimulating, and risk-taking. Supportive culture is characterized by teamwork and is more people-oriented, promoting a credulous work environment (Quy, 2017; Sarhan et al., 2020). A strong culture demonstrates how well the core values, beliefs, and assumptions are being held and widely ordered and shared among the members of the organizations (Dan Barnwell, 1998; Meng & Berger, 2019). Whatever culture an organization has, the managers and leaders play a key role to develop a strong culture which would surely increase the performance both of employees and organizations (Shahzad et al., 2012).

Moral identity (Ml)

Moral identity means the extent to which the individuals analyze themselves in terms of moral traits (e.g. care, compassion, honesty, etc.) and self-concept that is structured around moral characters. These not only help to sense their behavior but also encourage others' moral actions as well (Ismail et al., 2021; Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2021). The researchers have described two main dimensions of moral identity: One of them is the internalization perspective, which is interior and indirectly captures the significance of these moral characteristics to one's self-concept (Qin et al., 2018). The other one is the symbolization dimension, which is external and clearly expresses the external manifestation of these moral traits, such as the dresses people wear and the products that they prefer to buy (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Cohen & Ehrlich, 2019). Moral identity can be regarded as a self-regulating mechanism that inspires employees to behave psychologically better (Farmaki et al., 2022). Individuals with high moral identities are expected to have moral consciousness during moral implications in any condition as they focus more on moral thinking and actions. As a result, they would not engage in unethical behaviors (Wang et al., 2019).

Despotic Leadership and Organizational Agility

Ethical leadership behaviors encourage positive behavior whereas destructive leadership exerts a negative impact on employee performance and behavior (Brandebo, 2020). Despotic leaders due to their self-dominance, don't like to involve subordinates in decision making and there is less collaboration and communication among the leaders and followers, this can harm work behaviors and attitudes (Aydin, 2018). As despotic leaders are morally corrupt and work for their self-interest hence, they do not own or praise the work of subordinates, they are less engaged resulting in low creativity and performance (Al-Sada et al., 2017). Leadership is not only an attribute of one individual but it is a characteristic of an organization as a whole (Ibrahim & Daniel, 2019). So leadership can develop a culture that

can be supportive or not depending on the behavior of leaders (Lawler & Worley, 2009; Young, 2013). Leadership can influence the behavior of the members to achieve goals (Hamidifar, 2010). Many researchers have highlighted that different leadership styles play an important role in building OA (Hosseini et al., 2014; Karimi et al., 2016; Khalid et al., 2020; Raeisi & Amirnejad, 2017; Veiseh & Eghbali, 2014). Researchers have also theorized that the behaviors of leaders have an impact on organizational agility (Holbeche, 2019; Lawler & Worley, 2009).

The social exchange theory is likely to better explain the reciprocal interdependent relationship between despotic leaders and their followers. This theory posited that the parties in mutual exchange always respond in a way as treated by the other members in an exchange relationship. In this situation, as the despotic leaders exploit the followers for their self-interest and asking unquestioning abeyance, the followers are likely to be less satisfied due to emotional and psychological distress, resulting in less performance and creativity this leads to organizational deviance and non-accomplishment of individual and organizational goals (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018).

The current study focused on the public sector of Pakistan where the autocratic leadership style is more prevalent. The bureaucratic structure is characteristic of the public sector and the chain of command and authority lies at the top (Wakabi, 2016). Most of the important decisions are made by the higher authority that is then communicated to the lowers' in the hierarchy who are directed to follow a stereotyped mechanism to obey these orders. (Asghar & Oino, 2017; Kaur & Randhawa, 2020). The tenure of stay in the public sector organizations is usually longer and individuals hold a particular position for a long time (Kim, 2018). So, despotic leaders may have a greater impact on their followers, and they are more likely to exploit their followers. Such behavior can create distress and disengagement among the followers which would result in diminished performance that would not lead to the accomplishment of the organizational objectives (Farmanara, 2021). So, it can be assumed that

HJ.   *Despotic leadership has a negative and significant relationship with organizational agility.*

Despotic Leadership and Organizational Culture

Cultural differences change the impact of one variable on the other. The importance of culture argued by researchers is that as much leadership influences the culture and similarly culture affects leadership (Areiqata et al., 2020; Bass & Avolio, 1993). Pakistan is characterized by high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, high masculinity, and a short-term planning country (Bashir et al., 2012; Mubarak & Naghavi, 2019). Low individualism produces centralization, discrimination, and fraud practices by individuals in administrative positions, and also strong kinship and family structure supports collectivist behavior in Pakistan (Ameer & Khan, 2019). Due to the power distance culture, the person holding the power is considered more respectful and privileged with all the powers (Matthews et al., 2021). The high uncertainty avoidance demonstrates the situation of greater stress, hostility, and extreme abeyance of rules and regulations (Zahidi & Siddiqui, 2023; Hofstede, 2011).

According to social exchange theory, the relationship between the leaders and followers is a two-way relationship based on giving and taking tires. Despotic leaders induce emotions and psychological issues among the followers which affect their psychological well-being and family life, resultantly followers may avoid these despotic leaders or may reduce interaction

with them (Nauman et al., 2018; Nauman et al., 2020). Sometimes they try to find an easy way of doing things and may behave unethically. They may form a cohesion group to counter this treatment from the leadership which would be resisted by the abusive leaders. This will cause less collaboration and communication between the two confronting groups and will result in a clash of interests (Zhao et al., 2019). So, it means the despotic leaders' behaviors with their followers will influence the common values, norms, and beliefs in the organization. Leadership and organizational culture are two sides of a single coin which means leadership influences the shared values and norms that represent a prevailing culture and culture also has an impact on the leadership style (Akanji et al., 2020; Chong et al., 2018; Schein, 1985).

Ethical and positive leadership styles have a significant and positive impact on OC (Aggerholm & Asmub, 2016; Belias & Koustelios, 2014; Li et al., 2017) conversely unethical leaders try to please seniors to earn personal favors and hence overlook subordinates and harm the environment and culture of an organization (Zheng et al., 2021). Supportive and bureaucratic dimensions significantly predict employee and organizational commitment while the innovative dimension of culture is found to be non-predicting (Sarhan et al., 2020). A control-oriented leader's behavior promotes bureaucratic culture whereas a flexible leader's behavior would be more likely to encourage a supportive and innovative culture (Taormina, 2008). Despotic leaders being authoritarian would discourage a supportive and innovative culture while bureaucratic culture will prevail (Yaghi, 2019). This- prompts the hypothesis that

> *H2.*   *Despotic leadership has a negative and significant relationship with organizational culture.*

Organizational Culture and Organizational Agility

Culture is not an intrinsic characteristic of an organization, but it is learned and acquired. The social cognitive theory proposed that individuals learn from their leaders by copying behavior just like a child learns from their parents. This modeled behavior then perpetuates to the others lower in level, then becomes part of shared values and beliefs (Bandura, 1986). Culture creates a framework for managers and employees (Hofstede, 2011; Mamatha & Geetanjali, 2020). This is not only the strategy but also the culture that brings success to the organization (Griffin & Moorhead, 2014; Griffin et al., 2016). The effect of OC has already been studied by many researchers that have argued that it has a significant and positive association with OA (Amirnejad, 2017; Fahami et al., 2017; Felipe et al., 2017; Moran, 2015; Sarshar & Hezarjaribi, 2016). A favorable culture will develop the behavior of the employees in such a way to achieve OA. The behavior of the individual is characterized by their cultural background which may differ from the OC (Gomez & Taylor, 2018). Cultural diversity may have an influence on different variables including communication, integration, satisfaction, conflict, creativity, and cohesiveness between the teams which eventually impact the team performance (Stahl & Maznevski, 2021). Power distance is a characteristic feature of Pakistan culture and also in the public sector, the followers cannot directly connect to authority to address their grievances (Ahmad & Begum, 2020; Islam, 2004). Hence, they are more likely to become distressed, and to counter they might involve in unethical behavior. Such behavior leads to an organizational culture that is non-supportive. So, it means the individual would retaliate against the whole organization instead in the form of their diminished individual performance. In most organizations there prevails an autocratic leadership style due to which the environment tends to adopt the bureaucratic culture (Bashir

et al., 2012). Similarly, two out of the three dimensions namely supportive and bureaucratic culture significantly predicts individual performance while the innovative dimension of culture doesn't seem to predict individual performance in the public sector (Isa et al., 2016; Sarhan et al., 2020). Successful leaders promote supportive and innovative culture (Sarros et al., 2002), conversely, negative leaders will have adverse effects (Javed et al., 2019). So, it can be hypothesized that

> *H3. Organizational culture has a positive and significant relationship with organizational agility.*

Organizational Culture as Mediator

The OC mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and OA (Khalid et al., 2020). According to the social learning theory, individuals learn from the behaviors of others through the modeling or copying mechanism because then they are part of the collective norms (Lian et al., 2022). This contributes to the shared values and beliefs as the culture is learned not built in any organization. Effective leaders play a major role in making organizations agile by promoting a culture where open and candid communication provides a forum to question organizational assumptions (Meyer, 2016). These leaders would foster a learning climate within the organizations. Those leaders realize that their position is not merely about authority and power as they don't have an answer to every query and therefore they should engage everyone in formulating organizational strategies (Brown et al., 1998; Holbeche, 2015). These leaders promote such systems within the organization that help in defining the objectives of the organization, setting clear goals, creating an appropriate feedback mechanism, and an effective appraisal system so that the incentives are aligned to achieve these goals (Worley et al., 2014). Conversely, despotic leaders do not want to be problem solvers because they are accustomed to unquestioning abeyance and they don't want to involve anyone in decisions making this would create fewer effective ways to accomplish the mission of the organization (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). Leadership and organizational culture, both play a major role in achieving organizational agility (Joiner, 2019; Moran, 2015). The leaders have an impact on the beliefs, assumptions, and shared values that exist within an organization, and these shared values and beliefs are linked to the overall organizational identity (Ehrhart et al., 2013; Hogan & Coote, 2014). Khalid et al. (2020) have advocated that leadership has an indirect impact on OA through OC. So, it can be said that the right culture will direct the behavior of the employees in a way to achieve OA and hence, it can be assumed that

> *H4. There is a relationship between despotic leadership and organizational agility that is mediated by organizational culture.*

Moral Identity as Moderator

Consistent with cognition theory, moral identity enables individuals to keep consistency between moral standards and behaviors (Weaver, 2006). The effect of ethical leaders is not always similar, personality traits like moral emotions, moral awareness, and mindfulness augment the impacts of ethical leadership on employee outcomes (Haller et al., 2018). Unethical leadership produces negative outcomes but the impact of negative outcomes can be minimized using an intervening variable (Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2021). Employees high on moral identity strive to behave ethically towards others by engaging themselves in public service and extra-role performance (Arain et al., 2017). Various researchers have explored

different boundary conditions e.g., quality of work life (Nauman et al., 2020), and self-concordance (Syed et al., 2020) have moderating impacts on the association between DL and other outcome variables. Research has further advocated that moral identity moderates the impacts of despotic leadership (Akhtar et al., 2021), ethical leadership (Gan, 2018; Wu, 2017), and work-related deviance (Fan et al., 2021) on individual behavioral outcomes. Drawing on social cognitive theory, the followers model the behavior of their leader through the learning process but not all the followers exhibit the same behavior as that of leaders. Furthermore, the identity theory, posits that only those will behave unethically by modeling the abusive leader's behaviors that consider themselves part of their social identity while others being disidentified themselves behave ethically (Taylor et al., 2019). Additionally, based on the self-regulatory mechanism, it is proposed that moral identity promotes moral actions (Al Halbusi et al., 2023). The internalization dimension of MI is a more consistent and robust forecaster of individual moral behaviors as compared to the symbolization dimension (Mesdaghinia et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021; Yan et al., 2022). So, on the above logical grounds, it can be hypothesized:

> **HS. Moral identity** *is* **likely to moderate the relationship between despotic leadership and organizational culture. This means high moral identity values will weaken the negative relationship and vice versa.**
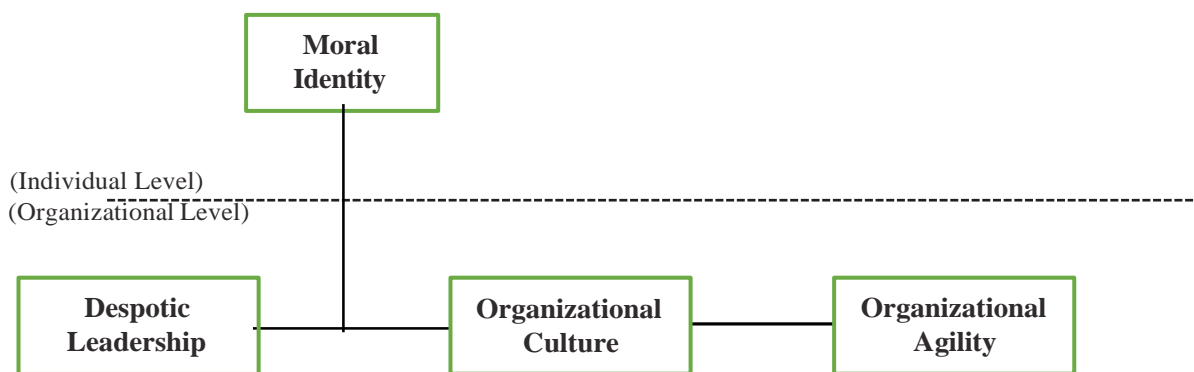

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework for Moral Identity's Role in Mitigating the Impact of Despotic Leadership on Organizational Culture and Organizational Agility in the Public Sector of Pakistan

Methodology

Data and Methods

Organizational agility is commonly associated with the manufacturing sector as it is considered a source of competitive advantage (Rahimiatani et al., 2018; Rieckhoff & Maxwell, 2017) but the public sector organizations demand more agility owing to rendering quick services to the public (Kalimullah et al., 2019; Melian-Alzola, Dominguez-Falcon, et al., 2020) which adds to the significance of research on this novel notion. Moreover, this study can provide insights for practitioners and researchers into how a despotic leader's longer tenure in the public sector of Pakistan affects follower and how followers' moral identity mitigate its impacts resulting in positive outcomes for individuals as well as organizations.

Cross-sectional data is collected from employees working in different positions in the public sector of Pakistan, especially the Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA), Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC), and Punjab Education Department from the cities of Lahore and Faisalabad. Convenient sampling is used to reach the respondents as the personal

links and contacts made the data collection more convenient and due to time and resource constraints. This sampling technique is widely adopted in public sector research (Kayani & Alasan, 2021; Kayani et al., 2021). This study is conducted by online survey method through self-reported questionnaires developed on Google Forms and distribution is made through emails and different social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, etc. Each questionnaire included general information about the research and researcher to acquaint the participant with the purpose and goal of the research. It was ensured that employees have completed at least one year of tenure in the organization.

The common method bias may occur as the data is cross-sectional in nature and social desirability bias may also occur as the data is collected from human beings who rely on personality traits and personal liking and disliking as well. The occurrence of CMB and social desirability bias is reduced by following the recommendations (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To reduce the social desirability bias, the anonymity of respondents is guaranteed not asking for any information about them and their organization. Firstly, CMB is minimized by designing the questionnaire in such a way by presenting independent, dependent, and contextual variables in separate and unrelated sections. This is further ensured by keeping the questionnaire simple, clear, and specific. Secondly, Harman's single-factor test is conducted to check the presence of CMB. Table 1 showed that the total variance extracted by one factor was 37.11% which is less than the threshold value of 50% and this suggests CMB is not present in this study (Aguirre-Urreta & Hu, 2019; Podsakoff et al., 2012). The elimination of these biases insured the validity and reliability of our constructs.

According to Roscoe (1975), a sample of more than 30 but less than 500 is considered most suitable for most behavioral and social sciences studies as a sample size of more than 500 respondents may lead to type-II error (Memon et al., 2020; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Therefore, 500 structured forms were distributed and only 281 questionnaires were received from the respondents. 10 questionnaires were found useless as the answers given by the respondents didn't seem to be logical and hence were excluded. 271 were completed in all respects and are found workable for data analysis. There were no omitted values in the questionnaire as the answer to every question in Google Forms are set as mandatory.

A post-hoc power analysis is also conducted using G*power software latest version 3.1.9.4 to check the adequacy of the sample size for the current research mediation and moderation model (Faul et al., 2009). The analysis indicated a high power value of 0.99 while the acceptable threshold is 0.80 (Cohen, 2016). Existing researchers also believe that a sample of more than 200 is adequate for a complex theoretical model involving both moderation and mediation (Boomsma, 1983; Kotrlik & Higgins, 2001). Hence, the final sample size of 271 can be considered adequate for conducting research. The final response rate of the study was 56.2%. The possible reasons for the lower response rate were that participants were voluntarily asked to fill out the online questionnaire survey and the average response rate for such online surveys is 44.1% (Wu et al., 2022). Similar research conducted with comparable lower response rates didn't much affect the results (Majeed & Fatima, 2020; Nauman et al., 2018).

Demographics

Pakistan is a male dominating society, so the majority of our respondents are male. 82% of the respondents are male while 18 % are female. 32% of the respondents are between the age of 25-30, 33% are between 31 to 35, 16% are between the age of 36 to 40, 12% are above 40 years of age, and only 7% are less than 25 of the age. Most of the participants are young and are between 25 to 35 years. Only 3% are matric, 6% are inter, 45% are graduates, 44% are

masters, and 3% are with Ph.D. degrees. Most of the participants are bachelor's or master's degree holders. Only 4% have O to 1 year of experience, 30% have 2 to 5 years of working experience, 42% have 6 to 10 years of work experience, 14% have 11 to 15 years of working experience, while only 10% have 16 and above years of experience. Most of the participants i.e., 84% are working in non-managerial posts while only 16% are working in managerial posts in our selected sample from the public sector of Pakistan.

Measures

All self-reported measures were rated using the 5-Point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). As all the scales are adapted from already tested measures, their reliability and validity were not a concern.

Despotic Leadership

Despotic leadership is measured by a six-item scale developed by De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008). Adiguzel (2019) and Erkutlu and Chafra (2018) reported reliability a=0.892 and a=0.89 respectively. The sample item for these measures includes, "Our leader is an absolute authoritarian". Convergent validity is established as factor loadings for all six items of the scale range from 0.739 to 0.827 with AVE= 0.747. The reliability coefficient of the scale is showing strong internal consistency (a=0.946).

Organizational Agility

Organizational agility is measured by 10 items scale Pantouvakis and Bouranta (2015) with a reported a=0.92. The scale was originally developed by (Sharifi & Zhang, 1999) that is based on four proposed distinct capabilities i.e. responsiveness, competency, flexibility, and quickness. The sample item of this scale comprised, "Our organization senses, perceives and anticipates changes". Convergent validity is established as factor loadings for all ten items ranged from 0.617 to 0.909 with AVE= 0.720. The reliability coefficient of the scale is 0.962 which represents high internal consistency.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is measured by 24 item scale OCI (Organizational cultural index) developed by Wallach (1983). The OCI is the index comprising three dimensions of OC including bureaucratic, supportive, and innovative (Wallach, 1983). Suvaci (2018) reported scale reliability a=0.98. The sample question of this scale includes, "Our organization has a hierarchical structure". Convergent validity is established as all the factor loadings ranged from 0.533 to 0.817 with AVE = 0.524. The reliability coefficient of the scale (a=0.962) indicated high internal consistency.

Moral Identity

It is measured by 10 items scale developed by (Aquino & Reed, 2002). There are two dimensions of the scale, internalization, and symbolization, each includes five items. The scale is already used and tested by Erkutlu and Chafra (2019) with a reported a=0.93. The reliability coefficient of the scale is 0.970. Convergent validity is established as all the factor loadings ranged from 0.765 to 0.913 with AVE= 0.768. The sample item of this measure is, "The kinds of books and magazines that I read identify me as having these characteristics".

Results

Measurement Model Fit

CFA is performed to test the discriminant and convergent validity of all the constructs using AMOS software (23 version). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), any measured construct is said to have convergent validity when it satisfies these three criteria (a) the value of CR is greater than 0.80; (b) all the loading factors exceed 0.65, and (c) the AVE for each construct is higher than 0.50. *Table 1* showed that our constructs fulfilled all three conditions required for convergent validity. The discriminant validity of the constructs is evaluated on the bases that the MSV of any latent variable should be less than the AVE (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). *Table 1* displayed that the AVE for all the latent variables is higher than their respective value of MSV. So, our measurement model ensures discriminant validity.

Table 1

Convergent and Discriminant Validity

Variable	CR	AVE	MSV	Factor Loading	% Variance
Despotic Leadership	0.947	0.747	0.416	.739 - .827	37.11%
Organizational Agility	0.962	0.720	0.685	.617 - .909	
Moral Identity	0.970	0.768	0.685	.765 - .913	
Organizational Culture	0.963	0.524	0.122	.533 - .817	

N=271; CR=Composite Reliability; AVE=Average Variance Extracted; MSV=Maximum Shared Variance

The extant literature has suggested validation of the proposed model before examining the study hypotheses to check the uniqueness of study variables (Liao et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2019). Our four-factor measurement model is tested through fit statistics. the value of all fit indices should be more than 0.90, and the RMSEA value should be less than the cut of 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The CMIN/DF value should be less than the acceptable threshold of 3 (Kline, 2010). Researchers proposed that the model will be considered a good fit for CFI, TLI, and IFI values higher than 0.80. The value of SRMR and RMSEA should be ideally less than 0.08 (Spector, 2001; Yu, 2002). The value of CMIN/DF = 2.94, GFI = 0.92, CFI = 0.895, TLI = 0.89, RMSEA = 0.06 and SRMR= 0.08. The value of a few fit indices is found less than the acceptable threshold of 0.90 as it is highly dependent upon the proposed sample size (Hooper et al., 2008; Karatepe et al., 2020).

Table 2
Mean, standard deviation, Pearson Correlation

Variable	Mean	SD	DL	OA	MI	OC
Despotic Leadership	2.24	1.17	(.86)			
Organizational Agility	3.44	1.00	-.619[**]	(.85)		
Moral Identity	3.76	.763	-.596[**]	.645[**]	(.87)	
Organizational Culture	4.12	.370	-.285[**]	.282[**]	.318[**]	(.72)

*N=271**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). DL= Despotic Leadership; OC = Organizational Culture; OA= Organizational Agility; MI= Moral Identity*

Pearson correlation coefficients range between +1 and -1 and the value of the correlation coefficient demonstrates the strength of the relationship while the sign with the coefficient depicts the direction of association (Pearson, 1920). Table 2 shows the correlations between all the study variables are significant at p<0.01 (two-tailed).

Direct and Indirect Effects

Table *3* showed there is a significant but negative relationship between DL and OA as the value of the regression coefficient (B=-0.530) is significant at p<0.01. Despotic leadership negatively and significantly influences the organizational culture of the public sector of Pakistan (B=-.090, t=-4.8, p<.01). There is a positive and significant relationship between OC and OA (B=.768, t=4.823, p<.01). Hence, Hypothesis H1 to H3 are supported and accepted. We used Andrew Hayes Macro Process Model 4 to check the mediation. Two-tailed normal theory test assuming the normal distribution is found positive and significant for organizational agility (Sobel Effect=.028, z=-2.06, p<0.05). Bootstrapping also confirmed the results of Sobel test and indicated that the indirect effect (a x b = -.03) of despotic leadership on organizational agility through the organizational culture is also significant as the values of Bootstrapped 95% LLCI= -.06 and ULCI= -.01 do not contain zero between them and both the confidence intervals bear the same sign, therefore, mediation exists between the variables. Hypothesis H4 is supported and hence accepted. As both the direct and indirect effects are significant and also the path from X to Y has decreased in size but is still non-zero. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), if both the direct effect (c') and indirect effect (a x b) are significant and also in a similar direction either positive or negative then such mediation is termed complementary partial mediation. Our results show that some effects are passing directly from the predictor to the outcome variable and a portion of effects is passing indirectly through the intervening variable, so it means organizational culture partially mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and organizational culture.

Table 3

Regression results for direct and indirect effects

Direct Effects	B	R^2	ΔR^2	SE	t	Sign.
DL → OA	-.530	.383	.381	.041	-12.9	.000
DL → OC	-.090	.081	.078	.018	-4.8	.000
OC → OA	.768	.080	.076	.159	4.8	.000
Bootstrap results for indirect effects						
			M	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Effect OC (a x b)			-.03	.01	-.06	-.01
Indirect effect and significance using a normal distribution						
			Effect	SE	Z	p
Sobel Test			.028	.01	-2.06	.04

DL= Despotic Leadership; OC = Organizational Culture; OA= Organizational Agility;

Moderating Effects

Moderation is tested through the Hayes Process Macro Model 1 and a simple slope test is also used for confirmation of moderation. Table 4 indicates that the interaction term (DL x MI) has a significant impact on organizational culture (B= .24, ΔR^2=0.21, p<0.05). Adjusted R square value demonstrates that the moral identity brings about a decremental variance of 21% in the impact of DL on OC. The bootstrapping results of conditional effects for despotic leadership and organizational culture low, medium, and high levels of moral identity are found significant at p<0.05 and 95% CI as the bootstrapped ULCI and LLCI do not contain zero. So, hypothesis H5 is supported and accepted. The MI moderates the relationship between DL and OC.

Table 4

Regression results for Moderation

Predictor	Moral Identity	R^2	B	SE	T	p
Step-1		0.32				
Constant			5.63	.25	22.75	.00
Despotic Leadership			-.79	.08	-9.40	.00
Moral Identity			-.43	.07	-6.42	.00
Step-2	ΔR^2	0.21				
Despotic Leadership*Moral Identity			.24	.03	9.10	.00

Conditional direct effects of X on Y at values of the moderator						
Moral Identity	**Effect**	**Boot SE**	**T**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
-1 SD (3.00)	-.08	.02	-3.79	.00	-.11	-.04
M (3.76)	.11	.03	4.09	.00	.06	.15
+1 SD (4.53)	.29	.04	6.90	.00	.22	.36

Note. N=271; Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap Resample =5000; SE = Standard Error; CI = Confidence Interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit

A simple slope test interaction plot using the mean-centering approach (Aiken et al., 1991) as Figure 1 showed as the function of conditional direct effects of MI changes, the relationship between DL and OC also changes. The simple slope for low moral identity is steeper as compared to that for high moral identity which shows the negative relationship between DL and OC is stronger when the moral identity is low but it is weaker and less significant when the moral identity is high.
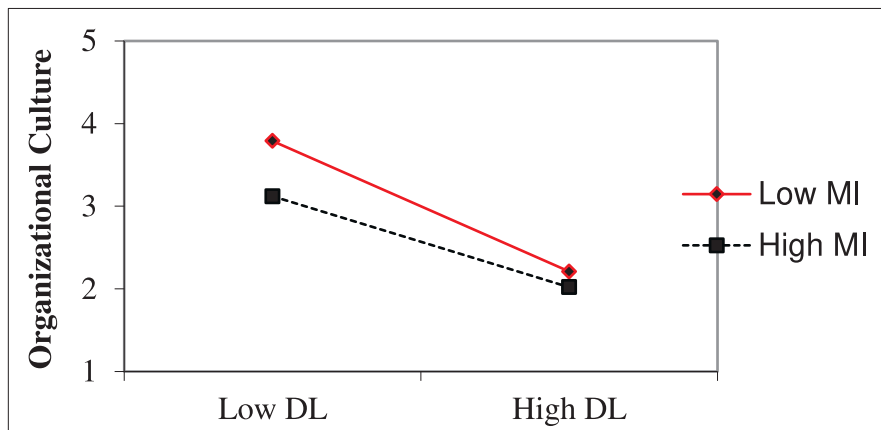
Figure 1: Interaction Plot

Model 7 of the Andrew Hayes Process is used to test the moderated mediation and conditional indirect effects. Table 5 shows the results of the index effect test for moderated mediation suggested by Hayes (2012), the effect index is 0.07 and bootstrapped 95% (LLCI=.02 LLCI=.13) both have the same positive sign and zero does not lie between the confidence interval. Hence, we can say that the mediation effect between the DL and OC is moderated by moral identity. The indirect conditional effects result shows that for all levels of moral identity, the boot LLCI & ULCI does not contain zero so, it confirms there exists moderated mediation in our model. It means at a high level of moral identity the indirect effect from DL to OA through the organizational culture will be weaker.

Table 5
Regression results for Moderated Mediation

Conditional indirect effects of X on Y				
Moral Identity	**Indirect Effect**	**Boot SE**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
-1 SD	-.02	.01	-.05	-.01
M	.03	.01	.01	.06
+1 SD	.09	.03	.04	.16
Index of Moderated Mediation				
Mediator	**Index**	**SE**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
O C	.07	.03	.02	.13

Note. N= 271; Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap Resample =5000; SE = Standard Error; CI = Confidence Interval, LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit

Discussion

This study has investigated despotic leadership as a central predictor of OA in the public sector of Pakistan prior research has mostly explored OA from the manufacturing perspective. The mediating role of organizational culture with organizational agility as the outcome variable and ethical leadership as a predictor has already been advocated in the existing literature (Khalid et al., 2020) but this relationship has not been studied in despotic leadership as an independent variable. This study has explored the moral identity's role as a moderator and has found that moral identity mitigates the impacts of despotic leaders. Though it is not an organizational-level study in a context where responses are gathered only from individual employees, the individual as well as organizational level factors are considered and their inter-relationship is examined. Many studies at the individual level have

revealed that despotic leadership significantly but negatively affects the followers (Chaudhary & Islam, 2022) and despotic leadership positively and significantly influences the employee outcome i.e. emotional exhaustion and turnover intention (Iqbal et al., 2022; Khan, 2022). This study is also of great importance as it explores how these effects on individuals impact the overall performance and goals of the organization.

The statistical findings supported all the proposed hypotheses. In congruent with the social exchange theory proposed that despotic leadership significantly but negatively influences organizational agility and also results are in line with the existing literature (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018). The study findings disclosed a significant negative relationship between DL and OC that was based on the axiom from the social cognitive theory. Our study findings are also consistent with (Aubrey, 2012), that bad leadership will influence the weakening of OC which means leadership plays a role in creating and strengthening organizational culture. As findings suggest that the bureaucratic dimension is weakly but negatively correlated with despotic leadership, which interprets that such leadership indicates the prevailing of more controlled, authoritarian, and hierarchical attributes in the public sector of Pakistan (Taormina, 2008). In contrast, there is a moderate and negative correlation between DL and supportive and innovative cultural dimensions interpreted as discouraging collaborative, sociable, and friendly cultures (Arfat et al., 2017). Results revealed that culture is one of the key components of an organization to gain OA. This is not the only strategy that brings success to organizations but culture also plays a role (Griffin et al., 2016). Our study results are also in line with the existing research that organizational culture significantly and positively predicts organizational agility (Fahami et al., 2017; Khalid et al., 2020; Sarshar & Hezarjaribi, 2016).

The results indicated that there exists a significant but negative relationship between DL and OA that is mediated by OC. Our study results are also congruent with Khalid et al. (2020), that OC mediates the relationship between leadership and OA. The results of our study are also consistent with the previous study that the organizational culture partly mediates the association between toxic leadership and employee outcome because all the direct and indirect effects are significant (Brouwers & Paltu, 2020). The results of the study unveiled that the dispositional variable MI weakened the relationship between DL and OC in such that employees with moral identities are less involved in immoral actions and unethical behaviors. The findings are also consistent with those of Taylor et al. (2019), the internalization dimension mitigates the impacts of abusive leaders on their followers. The results are also congruent with Akhtar et al. (2021) that MI moderates the impacts of DL in such a way that it is weaker in the case of high moral identity. Our study results are also in line with those of Gan (2018), who advocated that moral identity moderates the relationship between ethical leadership and moral justification in such a way that a high moral identity strengthens this relationship.

Theoretical Implications

This study has theoretical implications for extant literature in various ways. Firstly, our study is the novel concept of organizational agility in the public sector context. As mostly organizational agility has been studied from the manufacturing perspective where it is advocated to implement the agile manifesto for increasing productivity and gaining a competitive advantage. Organizational agility is more important to the public sector owing to providing quick services to the public and managing duplication of tasks among the different departments. So, leadership can play an important role in making this possible by implementing effective strategies and developing a supportive culture to improve performance. Secondly, the study has significant implications for understanding the best

strategies that leadership can develop for the promotion of an effective organizational culture because culture is not built but learned. The social cognitive theory also posited the same concept that the followers usually modeled the behavior of their leaders just like children learn from their parents. As culture is a set of beliefs, shared values, norms, and assumptions, individuals' characteristics have an important role to build an effective organizational culture. So, those organizations which want to improve their organizational performance should focus more on building a strong learning culture. Thirdly, this study was performed both at individual and organizational levels. These add to the existing literature to have a better understanding of how the individual factor may aggregate to become characteristic of the whole organization. The relationship of leaders with a subordinate as well as moral identity is based on individual traits, and these contribute to the development of the overall culture and agility of the organization.

Practical Implications

This piece of work has important implications for the management and followers as well. Firstly, organizational management may identify the intensity of the impact of despotic behaviors on the subordinates and hence can take preventive measures by educating the leaders through leadership development programs, seminars, workshops, or even individual coaching for their personal development and bringing ethical awareness among them. Secondly, the human resource department and recruitment teams can address the issue of ethical and moral standards beforehand in the participant applicants. Moral identity has a moderating effect that helps in diminishing negative behavior among followers. Moral standards help them maintain ethical behavior despite facing despotic leaders. The human resource department may introduce a fair appraisal and performance system assuring the followers that their services will be valued and regarded and hence they are less likely to be involved in counterproductive behaviors. Finally, this study helps to identify the important glitches in the working environment that are caused due to despotic behaviors. This would help the management to suggest important improvements in the conducive work environment which would improve individual performance as well as relieve distress and exhaustion among the workers. It would also help employees to maintain a balance in their professional and family lives.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study also presents a few potential limitations as well. This is a cross-sectional study, and no causal relationship can be established. Future research should use a longitudinal study using the time lag approach. As the participants are willingly accessed using self-reported questionnaires and can't provide a representative sample of the population, hence, study findings can't be generalized. Future researchers should use a mixed design exploring both self-reported and observed reported questionnaires as the qualitative method can provide more in-depth information about the key constructs and relationships investigated.

The current study is performed with a single moderator and a single mediator, so future researchers may explore more contextual factors as boundary conditions or can replicate this study by including other mediation and moderating mechanisms. The public sector of Pakistan is explored as the population of study including only a few departments or organizations. The other researchers should replicate the study by including more public sector organizations and even exploring the public as well as private sectors of Pakistan for the generality of results. The research can be replicated from different cultural perspectives in the context of other countries. The study has only used despotic leadership as a central predictor of an outcome variable i.e., organizational agility, future researchers should use

other forms of dark leadership and even ethical leadership to view their influence on organizational agility.

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