

# The Effect of Despotic Leadership on the Employee Work Withdrawal Behavior and Acquiescent Silence

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## ABSTRACT

### Purpose:

The main aim to conduct this research is to identify whether LMX mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and acquiescence silence. In addition, the study also takes into account the role of Quality of work life as a mediator in the relationship between despotic leadership and work withdrawal behavior

### Methodology:

The data was collected by sharing the adopted questionnaire with the target population a total of 247 valid responses were received from the employee working in the manufacturing sector of Pakistan. Smart PLS was used to measure the model. The research is conducted for the managers leading a team of professionals and the community of Human Resource Development that includes business consultants, advisors, employees, top management, scholars, specialists, and students.

### Findings:

The study found that despotic leadership increases withdrawal behavior and acquiescence in silence among employees. Moreover, leader-member exchange mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and work withdrawal behavior and quality of work-life mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and work withdrawal behavior.

### Conclusion:

The findings declared that despotic leadership has a destructive influence on subordinates concerning increased work withdrawal behavior and acquiescent silence.

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## 1. Introduction

Leadership is the term that resonates with the mass population from the very beginning of the human race (Neck & Houghton, 2006; Yammarino, 2013; Zhang et al., 2021). In the old English dictionary, the word leader originates from 'laden' which means the one who takes the charge (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). It was consistently used in different cultural or social contexts with the labels of e.g., Chief, Captain, General, or Master. Hence the concept of leadership has been long ingrained in human society (Day et al., 2014). The history of mankind has always accentuated the inevitability of appointing someone who owns the true abilities to lead others (Maddux, 2018). Similarly, the essence of leadership lies in influencing people to act in a manner that brings them closer to their collective objective (Denis et al., 1996). Throughout history, leaders are often known for their abilities to strategically lead their followers into the battlefield (Cortellazzo et al., 2019). But with time it begins to penetrate among other fields as well (Vito & Sethi, 2020). Therefore, the term "Leader" has evolved from time to time. Thus, over the years, Leadership has been under the radar of social scientists. For instance, an enormous amount of Literature is available on leadership which is studied under the lens of different theoretical foundations (Asif et al., 2020; Heath & McCann, 2021; Lee et al., 2020; Witzel, 2019). The earlier belief for studying leadership was to identify the physical, intellectual, and behavioral characteristics of successful leaders and provide them the opportunity to lead others (Deichmann & Stam, 2015; Zhang et al., 2021).

This thought opens the doors for social and management scientists to study Leadership in the organizational context, to identify the behavior of the leaders that enhances the effectiveness of the organizations (Azim et al., 2019; Harms et al., 2018; Zaitouni & Ouakouak, 2018). For this purpose, an immense amount of research has been conducted on leadership to examine its impact on the work behavior of subordinates (Tepper, 2000). Therefore, leadership is one of the central elements in encouraging subordinates to perform at their optimal level and assist in producing high-quality products and services. No matter how drastically the advancement in technology has changed the way of doing things, still, the positive social influence of the Leaders plays a crucial role in organizational success (Eva et al., 2019; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

The emphasis on the positive impact of leadership has been examined in many studies (Carnevale et al., 2017; Minh-Duc & Huu-Lam, 2019; B. Da Xu et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the consequences of the dark behavioral aspects of leadership on employee behavior are also of equal importance. A series of Leadership styles were studied depending on the personality, situation, and environment (Oyerinde, 2020). In literature there are many leadership theories, however, the origin of servant leadership circulates the philosophy to serve others by taking care of the overall well-being of the followers (Spears, 1996; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Such a style of leadership has an uplifting effect on the work behavior of the employees. Whereas, despotic leadership has destructive consequences on the work behavior of the subordinates (Nauman et al., 2018a).

In this age, where information is spreading within no time, maintaining high product quality is a major challenge for organizations (Akter & Wamba, 2016). Therefore the knowledge and expertise of the workforce are one of the principal sources to maintain product quality (Mowbray et al., 2020). The middle management in the organizations is accountable for the performance of their team which has a direct contribution to the production (Nauman et al., 2021). Thus, the work behavior of the workers is of utmost importance. Hence the negative behavior exhibited by the Leaders increases the work withdrawal behavior of the subordinates which results in the overall unfavorable outcome

for the organization. The studies have also explored that abusive leaders prompt negative consequences on the work behavior of subordinates (Hewawitharana et al., 2020). In the light of Hobfoll's (1989), Conservation of Resource (COR) theory, subordinates working under dark leadership attempts to safeguard their job or emotional resource by employing alternate means to survive the abusive behavior of the leaders or supervisors. Studies conducted by Greenbaum et al., (2017) and Sirgy (2018) have explained the need for programs that boost the quality of work life (QWL) and provide a conducive work environment to the employees. QWL is assessed by measuring how satisfied employees are in meeting their various needs while working for the organization (Dhamija et al., 2019).

Moreover, employees' readiness to share their views, proposals, and ideas is vital for the organization's sustainability as it enables organizational improvements and decreases organizational incompetence (Li & Tian, 2016; Mowbray et al., 2020). Previous research has specified that under unfavorable circumstances employees often opt to remain silent (Van Dyne et al., 2003). Such workplace behavior is categorized as employee silence e.g. acquiescent and defensive silence (Otsupius, 2019). Acquiescent silence in particular is when employees purposefully withhold information about social, intellectual, and emotional assessments of the organizational circumstances to the Leaders who are in the position to change the situation (Chou et al., 2018).

Even though the intention of the employee to remain silent has been principally connected to perceived dangers associated with speaking out (Kurzon, 2007). However, Milliken et al. (2003), explore that the silence of the employees is the psychological outcome of their feeling that speaking up has no apparent value or they hesitate to convey negative information due to the Leaders response to that particular information (Adeel & Muhammad, 2017).

Furthermore, a study led by Van Dyne et al., (2003) offers a significant academic underpinning for research concerning employee silence. The research emphasizes exclusively how Leaders make causal acknowledgments to followers' silence. The Leader's bias toward their followers is the key to measuring the quality of the dyadic relationship between the leaders and the subordinates (Estel et al., 2019).

However, a minimal amount of academic attention has been given to such aspects of leadership. Presuming these limitations in the literature, this study has three below-mentioned objectives.

- The first objective of this article is to study whether despotic leadership style influences work withdrawal behavior and increases acquiescent silence.
- The second objective is to study QWL as a mediator between despotic leadership and work withdrawal behavior.
- However, the third objective is to discuss how LMX mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and acquiescent silence.

### **1.1. Theoretical Background**

The study is built on the conservation of resource (COR) theory which explains the impact of organizational resources on people's psychological learning and growth. Resources can be either the company's work environment such as the level of strategic communication, knowledge sharing, freedom to share ideas, and participative decision making (Jabeen et al., 2021; Xia et al., 2019). Similarly, when employees are working under despotic leaders, they are inclined to safeguard their employment by utilizing other means for instance using the quality of work-life as a shield to outlive the dark behavior of the Leader (Fan et al.,

2020; Penney et al., 2011). Silence is another defensive strategy utilized by an employee to protect their jobs and psychological well-being while working under an abusive leader (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2019b).

Another theory that is incorporated in this study along with the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory is the Social Identity theory. According to Hogg et al. (2012) leaders generally draw the attention of their followers, when the followers consider their leaders to be friendly and charismatic, they are more likely to identify themselves with their leaders. On the contrary, when leaders are abusive the subordinates distance themselves from the leaders. It results in disagreeing and challenging the leader's recommendations and suggestions. Thus, it produces a status-based underlying differentiation among leader(s) and followers, which has physiognomies of inadequate work behavior (Jansen & Delahajj, 2020).

However, the Leader-Member exchange theory (LMX), circulates the dyadic relationships between leaders and followers (Graen, 1995). LMX theory explains that the leaders treat their subordinates differently and segregate them into two categories namely, the in-group and the out-group. The leaders tend to create a close connection with the subordinates belonging to the in-group, as compared to the subordinates from the out-group (Buengeler et al., 2021). The in-group subordinates enjoy the benefits over the out-group members such as active participation in making critical decisions, taking initiatives, and collaborative learning (Martin et al., 2018).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **4.1. Despotic Leadership (DL)**

Despotic leadership is when the leadership fails to promote a positive influence within the organization hence creating negative consequences which lead to an unfavorable work environment (Matos et al., 2018; Tepper, 2000; Tepper et al., 2001, 2007, 2008, 2009). Research conducted by Nauman et al., (2018) suggests that the dark side of leadership portrays negative behavior such as holding valuable information for personal gains, using abusive language, manipulating one's power, and having low ethical standards. Such leaders' prime focus is to work for their self-interest by gaining dominance and supremacy over their subordinates (De Clercq et al., 2021; Fors Brandebo et al., 2019; Kayani et al., 2020; Mukkaram et al., 2021).

The finding from recent research studies suggests that to deal with the dark side of the leaders the employees develop their defensive strategies. They begin to depict work withdrawal behaviors (Nauman et al., 2021) and their voice starts to fade away (Smallfield et al., 2020; Valle et al., 2019; C. C. Wang et al., 2020; E. Xu et al., 2012).

### **2.2. Work Withdrawal behavior (WWB)**

Withdrawal behavior is associated with the employee's lack of active participation at work. (Chi & Liang, 2013; Kim et al., 2019). The withdrawal behavior of the employees can be psychological such as constantly having thoughts of getting absent from work, prolonged chatting with co-workers on a topic other than work, and always looking to quit the job (Wang & Wang, 2017). Physical withdrawal behavior can be observed through actions such as falling asleep at work, taking longer time to return from lunch breaks, leaving early, or, reporting late at work without information (Lehman & Simpson, 1992; Liu et al., 2019).

### **2.3. Despotic Leadership and Work Withdrawal Behavior**

Under dark leadership, employees are inclined to withdraw themselves from work (Kim et al., 2019). Such withdrawal behavior is mirrored in the employees' psychological and physical attributes such as coming late to the team meeting, not taking part in group activities, frequently reporting late to the office, and always being ready to quit the organization (Liu et al., 2019). To study the impact of despotic leadership on work withdrawal behavior the below-mentioned hypothesis was proposed;

**H<sub>1</sub>: Despotic leadership increases work withdrawal behavior.**

### **2.4. Acquiescent Silence (AS)**

Employees experience different types of silence depending on their work environment (Knoll et al., 2021). Acquiescent silence refers to the type of silence in which an individual portrays a disengaged behavior by withdrawing themselves from sharing any sort of useful information and ideas' (Wang et al., 2020). In today's competitive business environment such silence can prove lethal because new ideas and knowledge of the employees support fostering an environment of continuous improvement. Therefore when employees are disengaged from taking active participation in knowledge sharing and problem-solving it undermines the chances of gaining a competitive edge over other firms operating in the same industry (Lam & Xu, 2019)(Otsupius, 2019).

### **2.5. Despotic Leadership (DL) and Acquiescent Silence (AS)**

In different studies, despotic leadership has been positively related to acquiescent silence (Xu et al., 2014). Therefore the despotic behaviors of the leaders tend to disengage employees from work (Manafzadeh et al., 2018). Due to this employees intentionally choose to stay silent and hide valuable information and ideas that could have a major impact on the business (Adeel & Muhammad, 2017; Erkutlu & Chafra, 2019b; Martins & Schilpzand, 2001; Martono et al., 2020). Thus, in this study, a hypothesis was proposed to measure the effect of despotic leadership on acquiescent silence

**H<sub>2</sub>: Despotic leadership increases Acquiescent silence.**

### **2.6. Quality of Work Life (QWL)**

It is commonly agreed upon that the more the quality of work-life more satisfied will be the employees. Concerning this, the leadership style plays a significant role in employee satisfaction at work that in turn has an encouraging influence on employee behavior (Butt et al., 2019; Nauman et al., 2018b; X. Zhao et al., 2013).

**H<sub>3</sub>. Despotic leadership has a direct effect on the quality of work-life**

### **2.7. Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)**

The literature has also directed that despotic leadership has negative consequences on employee silence and in particular acquiescent silence (Adeel & Muhammad, 2017; Barron et al., 2018; Erkutlu & Chafra, 2019a; Xu et al., 2014). The LMX theory was first coined by George Graen in the 1970s (Graen, 1976; Scandura & Graen, 1984) since then the theory has been explored further by other Social scientists. Initially theorized with the title of Vertical Dyad Linkage theory (Scandura & Graen, 1984), LMX theory has advanced from exploring the independent one-on-one relationships of the two individuals, to in what way these relationships work spontaneously within a greater corporate environment (George B. Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Embedded in role theory (Graen, 1976) the belief following LMX is that Leaders practice subjective dyadic associations with their followers (Decoster et al., 2014). These relationships appear to be in the arrangement of two

categories of exchanges: a high-quality known as in-group relationships; or a low-quality exchange termed as out-group relationships. Traditionally, scholars have dedicated their studies to finding the deviations that exist between members' involvement in superior and poor quality exchanges with their leaders (Sparrowe et al., 2006).

The members of the in-group also get more praise and recognition from the leader (Okafor et al., 2021). Over the years, scholars have come up with various conclusions regarding the distinction between in-group and out-group interaction (Wang et al., 2017). They claim that in-group members are subject to preferential treatment from the Leaders in a way that they are mentored, receive leadership support given the rights to access financial assets, actively contribute to participative decision making, and feel empowered (Lee et al., 2019). The style of leadership impacts the relationship between the leaders and followers, therefore;

#### **H4: Despotic Leadership has a direct effect on Leader-member exchange**

### **2.8. The Mediating Role of Quality of Work Life**

Studies have also claimed that the Quality of Work-life programs can mediate the impact of a leader's toxic action on the employee's work withdrawal behavior (Nauman et al., 2021). Sirgy et al. (2001) in their research found that there is a direct effect of quality of work-life on employee job satisfaction. Hence, improving the employees' quality of work-life increases employee commitment and makes employees more agile in their work (Bhende et al., 2020).

The most significant feature of QWL is addressing in what way people can perform better and feel better at work (Aruldoss et al., 2021). A set of methods was established by Sirgy et al. (2001) for quality of work-life which encompasses numerous employees' needs such as well-being, safety, financial, family, and social needs.

Quality of work-life, therefore, gauges employees' satisfaction in fulfilling their various needs by taking part in diverse corporate activities and meeting their personalized and professional requirements at the office (Kumari, 2019). Quality of work-life activities boosts employee engagement levels in decision-making, meetings, and team activities. (Aruldoss et al., 2021).

According to Marks et al. (1986), QWL can affect the employees' absence from work; reduction factory mishaps, complaints, and turnover. However, a few studies have taken into account the mediating role of QWL between despotic leadership and employees' work withdrawal behavior (Koonmee et al., 2010). Thus, it is proposed in this study that:

#### **H5: Quality of Work Life mediates the relationship between Despotic Leadership & Work Withdrawal Behavior.**

### **2.9. The Mediating Role of Leader-Member Exchange**

The research conducted by Okafor et al (2021), indicated that in-group exchanges are regarded as how Leader provides feedback to their subordinates regarding their overall job performance. On the other hand, out-group relations are categorized by leaders who hardly ever chat with their subordinates (D. Zhao et al., 2020).

Moreover, some in-group connections are also noticeable by communicative habits instance sharing humor, coaching, common challenges, and disagreements, (Jin et al., 2020) whereas some out-group connections are obvious by communicative habits like

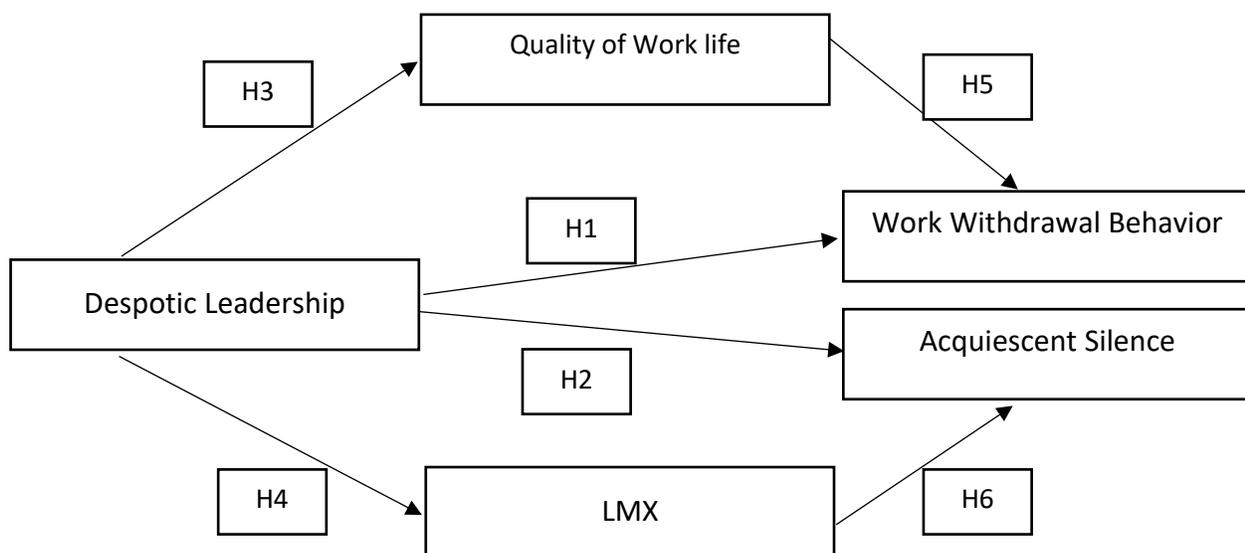
mistreatment, unhealthy competition and most often discussing the differential treatment (Dong et al., 2020).

In an organization, such findings can be applied to the Manager-subordinate relationship. The style in which subordinates wish to communicate with the Manager indicates whether they are part of in-group or out-group exchanges (Wijaya, 2019).

The perceived quality of Leader-member exchange affects subordinates' perception regarding their bond with the Leaders (Xu et al., 2017). In-group connection is considered to be respectful, trustworthy, and engaging. The subordinates who are part of in-group exchanges are encouraged to communicate for social, purposeful, and participatory causes at a greater rate in contrast with the subordinates who fall in an out-group (Pei et al., 2018). It is observed that followers who are involved in the out-group exchange opt to remain silent and share as little information as possible (Buengeler et al., 2021). Therefore, a hypothesis is proposed that

**H<sub>6</sub>: LMX mediates the relationship between Despotism Leadership & Acquiescent silence**

## 2.10. Conceptual Framework



**Figure.1. Conceptual Model of the Study**

Source: Author's own elaboration

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1. Sample

The target population was the employees associated with the manufacturing business in Pakistan where the prime target in the manufacturing setting is to meet the production targets. However, meeting the production targets and maintaining high quality is not the sole responsibility of the production team. Therefore, to meet those targets the expertise of the knowledgeable resources working in other departments is also of equal importance. Such as the supply chain department helping in managing inventory, the finance team managing the cash flow, the quality assurance team ensuring product quality, the sales &

marketing team generating leads, maintenance & electrical teams looking after daily maintenance work, HR & Admin maintaining the manpower requirement and other administrative tasks. For this purpose, all the departments have to achieve their set objectives and need to religiously follow the instructions of their leaders. Thus, it provided the ideal situation to collect the data according to the objective of the research. Therefore, the sample size consisted of 247 randomly selected respondents, currently associated with manufacturing firms across Pakistan.

### **3.2. Measure**

Since the study is explanatory in nature a quantitative research approach was applied. A five-level Likert scale questionnaire was used for the collection of data. The data was gathered from the respondents by sharing questionnaires via google forms and printing out of questionnaires with the employees working in the manufacturing sector. The medium of communication for data collection via questionnaire was the English Language. The data was gathered by using the online Google form. Participants' responses were recorded via a Google form link. The scoring was completed by extracting the data from Google forms in a spreadsheet. Covariance Based Structural Equation Modelling (CB-SEM) was applied to examine the proposed hypothesis. Smart PLS was used for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to observe both convergent and discriminant validities. The reliability was measured by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences i.e. SPSS 20.0, the Cronbach Alpha has to be above 0.7 for the variable to be considered reliable (Taber, 2018).

### **3.3. Despotic leadership**

Despotic leadership was observed through a 7 items scale adopted from De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008). The scale ranges from ("1= strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree") e.g. *"My leader is vengeful; seeks revenge when wronged"*.

### **3.4. Work Withdrawal Behavior**

Work withdrawal behavior was assessed using a 12-item scale established by Lehman and Simpson (1992). The scale used five-point responses ranging from "1 = never to 5 = very often" e.g. *"I thoughts of being absent & I usually fall asleep at work"*.

### **3.5. Quality of Work-Life**

A 12-item scale adopted from Sirgy (2001) was used to measure the Quality of work-life which ranks from 5 – very true to 1 – very untrue. The respondents reported their level of satisfaction in terms of a variety of needs in the context of Maslow's Need Hierarchy e.g. health and safety, economic, social, esteem, and self-actualizing needs e.g. *"My job provides good health benefits"*.

### **3.6. Acquiescent Silence**

A five-point Likert type scale ranging from ("1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree") with five items was adopted from Van Dyne (2003) for measuring the Acquiescent Silence e.g. *"I am unwilling to speak up with suggestions for change because I am disengaged"*.

### **3.7. Leader-Member Exchange (LMX7)**

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX7) scale was adopted from Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) which consists of 7 items Likert scale that describe the relationship between leader and follower ranging from ("1= strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree") e.g. *"My leader understands my job problems and needs"*.

## 4. Results and Analysis

The overview of the research sample demographics indicates that the age sections show that 56% of the respondent's age were less than 26 years. The Gender section represents 27% of respondents were female, whereas 72% were males. In the division of Job levels, the majority of the respondents that is 49 % were at an intermediate level. Concerning the Job level, the years of experience of the majority of the respondents were in between 5 – 9 years. The education level of the majority of respondents that is 54% was Bachelors. The majority of the respondents were associated with FMCG (32%) and most of the respondents belonged to Human Resource Department (17%).

Table 1 is associated with the construct's mean, standard deviations, and inter-correlations. The data is extracted through SPSS 19 software. The constructs are Work withdrawal Behavior (WWB), Despotic Leadership (DL), Leader-Member Exchange (LMX), Quality of Work-Life Balance (QWL), and Acquiescent Silence (AS). Results show that Work withdrawal Behavior is significantly and positively correlated with Despotic Leadership, Leader-Member Exchange, Quality of Work-Life Balance, and Acquiescent silence. Whereas Despotic Leadership is significantly and negatively correlated with LMX and Quality of work-life however it's positively correlated with Acquiescent Silence. The leader's member's exchange is significantly and positively related to the quality of work and negatively correlated to Acquiescent Silence. The Quality of work-life is negatively correlated to Acquiescent Silence.

**Table 1. Correlations**

Constructs	Mean	SD	WWB	DL	LMX	QWL	AS
WWB	2.20	0.75	-	-	-	-	-
DL	3.56	1.15	.283**	-	-	-	-
LMX	2.62	0.99	.207**	-.655**	-	-	-
QWL	2.63	0.79	.255**	-.505**	.742**	-	-
AS	3.52	0.92	-.356**	.540**	-.391**	-.289**	-

\*\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)".

**Source: Author's own elaboration**

N=247;  $p < 0.01$ \*\*; Note: WWB = Work withdrawal Behavior; DL = Despotic Leadership; LMX = Leader Member Exchange; QWL= Quality of Work Life Balance; AS=Acquiescent Silence

### 4.1. Model Measurement

For the model measurement, different tests were run using Smart PLS such as "Reliability, Convergent Validity, and Discriminant Validity".

### 4.2. Convergent Validity

In research carried out by Carmines and Zeller (1979), there is a correlation exists between the constructs which indicates the Convergent Validity. The cut of values of each item cross-loading is 0.5. To measure the Construct Reliability the value of Cronbach alpha and Average Variance Extract has to be equal to or more than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker,1981).

The Composite Reliability the cut-off value is equal to 0.7 or greater. (Gefen, Straub, & Boudreau, 2000).

In Table 2 all the values of Cronbach Alpha, Composite Reliability, and AVE is greater than their cut-off values. Table 5 represents the item's cross-loading values that are greater than 0.5 which indicates the scales used to measure the study constructs have Convergent Validity.

**Table 2. Convergent Validity**

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Acquiescent Silence	0.797	0.867	0.619
Despotic Leadership	0.932	0.946	0.747
LMX	0.917	0.935	0.707
Quality of Work	0.863	0.896	0.591
Work Withdrawal	0.854	0.887	0.568

**Source: Author's own elaboration**

### 4.3. Discriminant Validity

The discriminant validity exists when all the constructs in the study are different (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). There are multiple criteria to measure discriminant validity through assessing the construct's Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Hetrotrait - Monotrait (HTMT). In a study conducted by Fornell and Larcker (1981) for discriminant validity to exist all the constructs' non-diagonal values must be smaller than the diagonal values. Hetrotrait - Monotrait (HTMT) the values must be less than the cut-off value of 0.8 (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). The values shown in Tables 3, and 4 indicate that all the criteria of discriminant validity are met.

**Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Criterion**

Constructs	AS	DL	LMX	QWL	WWB
AS	0.787				
DL	0.526	0.864			
LMX	-0.423	-0.666	0.841		
QWL	-0.295	-0.499	0.751	0.769	
WWB	-0.400	-0.320	0.292	0.365	0.754

N=247; Note: WWB = Work withdrawal Behavior; DL = Despotic Leadership; LMX = Leader Member Exchange; QWL= Quality of Work Life Balance; AS=Acquiescent Silence

**Source: Author's own elaboration**

**Table 4. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)**

	AS	DL	LMX	QWL	WWB
AS					
DL	0.598				
LMX	0.466	0.710			
QWL	0.345	0.561	0.851		
WWB	0.483	0.339	0.298	0.363	

N=247; Note: WWB = Work withdrawal Behavior; DL = Despotic Leadership; LMX = Leader Member Exchange; QWL= Quality of Work Life Balance; AS=Acquiescent Silence

**Source: Author's own elaboration**

#### 4.4. Path Coefficient

Table 5 depicts the direct relationship. In the model, Hypotheses H1, 2, 3, and 4 were representing the direct relationship. Thus, the p-value is less than 0.5 for all the direct relationships in Table 6 which shows that despotic leadership has a significant impact on work withdrawal, acquiescent silence, quality of work-life, and leaders member exchange hence the hypotheses H1, H2, H3 and H4 are all accepted.

**Table 5. Direct Relationship**

		$\beta$	Mean (M)	SD	T Statistics	P Values
H1	DS -> WWB	0.190	-0.187	0.092	2.077	0.019
H2	DS -> AS	0.442	0.442	0.078	5.690	0.000
H3	DS -> QWL	-0.512	-0.516	0.055	9.290	0.000
H4	DS -> LMX	-0.667	-0.668	0.043	15.654	0.000

N=247; Note: WWB = Work withdrawal Behavior; DL = Despotic Leadership; LMX = Leader Member Exchange; QWL= Quality of Work Life Balance; AS=Acquiescent Silence

**Source: Author's own elaboration**

Table 6 shows the indirect relationship of the model. In the Table 9 there is a significant impact of LMX between Despotic Leadership and Acquiescent silence because the p-value is 0.058 ( $p > 0.01$ ) with  $\beta = 0.084$ , thus H6 is accepted. Similarly, the impact of the quality of work life between DL and WWB is significant because the p-value is 0.002 ( $p > 0.05$ ) with  $\beta = -0.129$ . Therefore, both H6 and H7 are accepted. Thus, it indicates that both LMX and QWL play a mediating role between Despotic Leadership, acquiescent silence, and work withdrawal behavior.

**Table 6. Indirect Relationship**

		$\beta$	Mean (M)	SD	T Statistics	P Values
H6	DS -> LMX -> AS	0.084	0.085	0.053	1.573	0.058
H7	DS -> QWL -> WWB	-0.129	-0.135	0.045	2.854	0.002

N=247; Note: WWB = Work withdrawal Behavior; DL = Despotic Leadership; LMX = Leader-Member Exchange; QWL= Quality of Work Life Balance; AS=Acquiescent Silence

**Source: Author's own elaboration**

## 5. Discussion and Implications

The study objective was to examine the effect of a despotic leader on the employee's work withdrawal behavior and acquiescent silence. All the research hypotheses of the study are accepted. According to the finding, the hypotheses 1 and 2 are accepted as despotic leadership increases the employee's work withdrawal behavior (Nauman et al., 2018a) and acquiescent silence (Chou et al., 2018) among employees. The direct effect of despotic leadership on the quality of work-life and LMX indicates that H3 and H4 are accepted. Furthermore, it was also identified that Quality of work life mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and employee work withdrawal behavior (H6). Similarly, hypothesis 7 is accepted as LMX mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and acquiescent silence. (Mumtaz & Rowley, 2020).

The outcome of the research imposes critical Leadership implications. In today's competitive environment organizations need to ensure that their leaders have a positive influence on their subordinates. Despotic Leadership hampers employee productivity, which will be reflected in the shape of poor product quality. It also results in employee acquiescence silence that is keeping the useful information to themselves and is not willing to share it with their Leaders. A good quality work-life program can help the employee to

balance their work-life, thus it will have a positive impact on the withdrawal behavior of the employees. When employees' social, economic, and financial needs are fulfilled it helps them to focus better on their job assignments. Organizations should encourage a culture that provides employees the freedom to share ideas with the leaders, e.g., promoting participative decision-making. Organizations have to implement a robust performance management system that measures the competence of leaders in terms of their relationship with their subordinates.

### 5.1. Limitations and Scope for Future

The research limitation comprised of single-source e.g., only subordinate responses were gathered which might lead to common method bias. Responses from supervisors can be used for future studies to further strengthen the research's credibility. The exploratory research method can also be used for data collection in place of the survey method. Other mediating or moderating variables such as perceived organization support, turnover intention, and organizational politics can be incorporated into the study. Furthermore, sectors other than manufacturing can also be examined.

### 5.2. Conclusion

The study examined the impact of despotic leadership on work withdrawal behavior and acquiescent silence. The main aim to conduct this research is to identify whether LMX mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and acquiescence silence. In addition, the study also takes into account the role of QWL as a mediator in the relationship between despotic leadership and work withdrawal behavior. The finding declared that despotic leadership has a destructive influence on subordinates concerning increased work withdrawal behavior and acquiescent silence. The research is supported by previous literature and theories which have also identified the negative influence of despotic leadership on employees (Nauman et al., 2021). The contribution of this study includes that previous research related to leadership was focused on its impact on employees' behavior only. Whereas, this study has also investigated the mediating role of leader-member exchange theory and quality of work-life along with the influence of despotic leadership on work withdrawal behavior and acquiescence silence.

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