

CONSEQUENCES OF DESPOTIC LEADERSHIP FOR WORK ENGAGEMENT WITH MEDIATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED JOB INSECURITY: STUDY OF BANKING SECTOR OF PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

In response to the challenging and uncertain business landscape, organizations, particularly in Pakistan's banking sector, are compelled to enhance employee engagement for sustained competitiveness. This study, conducted in six major Pakistani banks, delves into the impact of despotic leadership on employees' work engagement, considering the mediating role of perceived job insecurity. Addressing four research questions and hypotheses through a deductive approach and a cross-sectional design, the study sampled 625 employees via judgmental sampling. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis in AMOS revealed that despotic leadership significantly diminishes work engagement. Moreover, the study highlighted the partial mediating effect of perceived job insecurity on the relationship between despotic leadership and work engagement. The findings offer practical insights for human resource decisions, emphasizing the need for leadership development and careful policy reviews to foster improved work engagement. Additionally, the study contributes to knowledge enhancement by integrating recent literature reviews, advancing understanding in the field.

Keywords: Despotic Leadership, Perception of Job Insecurity, Work Engagement, Conservation of Resource Theory

Introduction and Background

As the business environment undergoes dynamic changes on a global scale, marked by workforce diversity and heightened globalization, organizations must harness maximum productivity from their human resources to establish a competitive edge (Heaney & Leifeld, 2015). Ensuring the longevity of this competitive advantage hinges on key factors, with engagement being identified as a pivotal element in organizational prosperity (Nair & Salleh, 2015). Despite growth in literacy, per capita income, and GDP, Pakistan faces challenges in human resources, finance, environment, and society (The World Bank, 2017). The UN Human Development Index ranks Pakistan low at 147 (2016) and 152 (2019) out of global countries

(United Nations Human Development Index, 2016, 2019). Work engagement is reported globally at 15%, with Pakistan's rate at the lowest 5% (Gallup, 2017). Empirical studies reveal low work engagement, especially in the banking sector (Ahmed, Majid, Al-Aali, & Mozammel, 2019; Raza et al., 2019).

Leadership's crucial role in achieving optimal engagement is noted (Naseer, Raja, Syed, Donia, & Darr, 2016; Nauman, Fatima, & Haq, 2018). Job insecurity is a significant stress source, affecting employee well-being and performance (Jabeen & Rahim, 2020; Mehmood et al., 2023; Quick & Tetrick, 2003). Employee work engagement poses a challenge in organizations, with studies showing lower job engagement (Harter, 2018). Leadership behavior is a crucial factor influencing employee engagement, recognized as vital for gaining a competitive edge (Abdalla & Azam, 2022). Academics stress the importance of leaders at all organizational levels in fostering work engagement and discretionary efforts from employees (Sharafizad, Redmond, & Morris, 2020).

Numerous studies emphasize the considerable impact of leadership and leader-employee relationships on work engagement and discretionary efforts (Brunetto, Farr-Wharton, Shacklock, Shriberg, & Teo, 2017; Cooper, Schindler, & Sun, 2006). Leaders' practices and behaviors shape the internal work environment, influencing employees' perceptions and behaviors, ultimately fostering work engagement (Brunetto et al., 2017; Chaurasia & Shukla, 2013). While despotic leadership's negative impact on various employee behaviors is documented, limited attention has been given to its effect on work engagement (Jin et al., 2022; Sharafizad et al., 2020). There is a need for further exploration of the role of despotic leaders in influencing employee behavioral outcomes and performance (Abbas & Raja, 2014; Mehmood et al., 2023; Naseer et al., 2016). Future studies should focus on understanding negative leadership behaviors that hinder employee engagement (Morris et al., 2019; Sharafizad et al., 2020). Psychological conditions are crucial for employee engagement (Ahmed et al., 2019; Malik & Khalid, 2016).

Employees under despotic leaders often perceive organizational injustice (Ali, Ali, Grigore, Molesworth, & Jin, 2020; Aslam, Arfeen, Mohti, & Rahman, 2015; Bhebhe, 2020). Yet, the potential impact of despotic leadership on job insecurity and its influence on attitudes, specifically work engagement, has been overlooked (van Prooijen & de Vries, 2016). Responding to scholars' calls to identify underlying variables connecting negative leader traits with work outcomes (Naseer et al., 2016; Nauman et al., 2018), limited studies have tested perceived job insecurity as a mediating variable, linking to unfavorable consequences such as reduced work engagement, turnover intentions, health issues, and anxiety (De Cuyper, Mauno, Kinnunen, & Mäkipangas, 2011; Schreurs, Hetty van Emmerik, Günter, & Germeyns, 2012; Shoss, 2017). Empirical research highlights low engagement in Pakistan, notably in the banking sector, with only 20 percent of employees perceived as engaged (Ahmed et al., 2019; Raza et al., 2019). Employee disengagement poses a significant threat to productivity and profitability (Lacy, Gupta, & Hayward, 2019; Saks & Ashforth, 2002), leading to absenteeism and increased costs (Cowart, 2014). Organizations are increasingly concerned with promoting work engagement (Afsar, Shahjehan, & Shah, 2018), making it crucial to identify factors contributing to low job engagement among Pakistani employees, especially in the banking sector (Sharafizad et al., 2020). Various models addressing work engagement have been proposed and studied by authors (Ahmed et al., 2019; Lacy et al., 2019; Raza et al., 2019). Conservation of Resource Theory (COR) has been recently introduced in work engagement literature, considering work engagement as a positive high-stimulation state, a resource reservoir resulting from job and personal resources, and introducing employees' perceptions of job insecurity as a mediating variable (Halbesleben, 2010; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008). According to COR theory, despotic leadership can lead to a sense of work insecurity among

employees, emphasizing the importance of investigating resource conservation in engagement research.

Prior research on work engagement has predominantly focused on immediate outcomes such as job performance, extra-role behavior, task performance, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction, often considering work engagement as a mediating variable (Orlowski, Bufquin, & Nalley, 2020; Wilmar B. Schaufeli & Arnold B. Bakker, 2004; Van Wingerden & Van der Stoep, 2018). To enrich both theoretical and practical understanding, it is valuable to explore additional factors influencing work engagement beyond its role as a mediating variable. Existing studies often draw data from specific sectors or professions, limiting the comprehensive understanding of work engagement that extends beyond the work-life spectrum (Hakanen, Rouvinen, & Ylhäinen, 2021). Kahn's 1990 social-psychological study introduced the term "engagement," conceptualized as a higher-order construct with affective, cognitive, and behavioral components (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011). Engaged and committed employees have been linked to numerous benefits for organizations, such as lower stress levels, reduced intentions to quit, improved service, and enhanced work-life balance (Gillet, Caesens, Morin, & Stinglhamber, 2019). Recognizing engagement as a key motivator, it not only benefits individual employees but also contributes to a competitive advantage for firms in the competitive business environment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Work engagement, as defined by (Wilmar B. Schaufeli & Arnold B. Bakker, 2004), is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor entails high energy, tenacity, and perseverance; dedication involves pride, relevance, and purposeful endeavor; and absorption signifies being deeply immersed in one's tasks(Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Despotic leadership, a form of negative leadership, embodies characteristics such as egocentric behavior, moral corruption, and engagement in deceitful practices with low ethical standards (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Schilling, 2009). Despotic leaders exhibit low moral standards, struggle to motivate followers, and deplete employees' self-resources (Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2009; Howell & Avolio, 1992). Employees under despotic leadership may engage in deviant behaviors, exhibit low organizational commitment, motivation, creativity, and performance (Altheide, 1984; Naseer et al., 2016).In cultures like Pakistan, characterized by high collectivism and power distance, employees may accept power inequalities and obey leaders due to economic vulnerabilities (Naseer et al., 2016; Nauman et al., 2018). Despotic leadership adversely impacts employee well-being, leading to emotional trauma and organizational deviance (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018; Kayani, Zafar, Aksar, & Hassan, 2019; Malik & Khalid, 2016). Job meaningfulness diminishes when employees perceive undesirable traits in their leaders, such as selfishness, violence, ignorance, self-interest, manipulation, and exploitation (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018). Kasi, Bibi, and Karim (2020) found that leaders' controlling and selfish attitudes lower employee engagement and increase intent to leave. Samad, Memon, and Ali (2021) revealed that despotic leadership negatively impacts job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion, particularly among nurses in public hospitals. Employees perceive despotic leadership as a threat, leading to unhappiness and work deviance (Islam, Ahmed, Ali, Ahmer, & Usman, 2022).

Drawing from the conservation of resource perspective and social exchange phenomena, Asrar-ul-Haq and Kuchinke (2016), argue that despotic leadership contributes to counterproductive employee behaviors. The negative impact of DL is partially mitigated by reduced organizational self-esteem and emotional stability. Despotic leadership, marked by excessive self-centeredness and resource-draining, has the potential to hinder organizational creativity, knowledge exchange, and promote employee silence. However, employees, influenced by power distance and self-enhancement motives, may strategically turn their despotic leadership experience into resource-gaining techniques, ultimately enhancing their position in the

workplace (De Clercq, Haq, Raja, Azeem, & Mahmud, 2018). The self-aggrandizing and authoritarian behaviors of despotic leaders deplete subordinates' resources, prompting employees to conserve their self-resources by reducing efforts and engagement in their work. This study defines despotic leadership as a leader's inclination to engage in authoritarian and dominant behavior for self-interest, self-aggrandizement, and the exploitation of subordinates (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008).

Despotic Leadership and Work Engagement

Work engagement is crucial for an organization's competitiveness and long-term success, demanding significant energy, emotional devotion, and concentration from employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Wilmar B. Schaufeli & Arnold B. Bakker, 2004). Disengaged employees pose a global annual cost of up to \$1 trillion in deviance (Christian et al., 2011). Numerous studies explore factors influencing work engagement, with leadership styles identified as fundamental (Mitchell, 2015). Leadership development initiatives, recognized for their importance by both academics and practitioners, play a key role in fostering employee engagement.

In line with the Conservation of Resource (COR) theory (Stevan E. Hobfoll, 1989, 2001; Stevan E. Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993), autocratic leaders deplete employees' physical and psychological resources, influencing well-being and job behavior (Stevan E. Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Despotic leadership is expected to have a negative impact on followers, as seen in past literature linking it to reduced creativity, citizenship behavior, and employee performance (Naseer et al., 2016). The detrimental effects extend to emotional exhaustion, increased work-family conflict, decreased life satisfaction, and lower trust in leader-subordinate relationships, particularly in high-power distance cultures (Nauman et al., 2018). Work-life quality mitigates the influence of despotic leadership on job performance, with employees exhibiting defensive efforts to protect their resources, such as reducing job engagement or seeking more personal time (Nauman, Zheng, & Basit, 2021).

Despotic leadership contributes to a stressful culture and erodes trust in leaders and the organization, leading to decreased work engagement and collective performance (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Wallace & Trinka, 2009). In the context of COR theory, the study hypothesizes the negative impact of despotic leadership on work engagement.

Hypothesis1: Despotic leadership has a negative relationship with work engagement of employees.

Despotic Leadership and Job Insecurity

Research has identified various factors influencing job insecurity, focusing on external elements (e.g., national unemployment, organizational change) and personal aspects (e.g., negative affectivity, locus of control) (De Witte, 2005; Lee, Petter, Fayard, & Robinson, 2011). Interpersonal issues, particularly relationships with leaders, are increasingly recognized as contributors to job insecurity perceptions (Glambek, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2018; Shoss, 2017). Leaders significantly influence followers' perceptions of workplace events (Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt, & Barrick, 2004), making interpersonal relationships a key source of job insecurity. Studies highlight the negative impact of unethical supervisor conduct, transactional leadership, and workplace bullying on job security perceptions, work engagement, and job satisfaction (Hoel, Glasø, Hetland, Cooper, & Einarsen, 2010; Park & Ono, 2017; Tepper, 2000).

There is a growing body of research highlighting the adverse effects of aggressive leadership on subordinates, including depression and anxiety (Tepper, 2000) and burnout (Wu & Changya, 2009). Despotic leaders, characterized by manipulative and aggressive traits, induce stress and burnout in employees, leading to reduced organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), creativity, and productivity (Naseer et al., 2016). This negative impact extends to employees'

family lives, causing anxiety and emotional exhaustion(Nauman et al., 2018). In cultures with high power distance, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and stressful work environments like Pakistan, despotic leadership is linked to the perception of high job insecurity due to its vengeful, authoritative, exploitative, and self-serving behavior(De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Nauman et al., 2018; Nauman et al., 2021).

Building on this discussion, the study suggests that the presence of an exploitative, vengeful, and manipulative leader (despotic) diminishes employees' sense of personal control, contributing to increased perceptions of job insecurity. Constant exposure to the unfair and dishonest behavior of despotic leaders creates a perceived misalignment between leadership behavior and organizational values, intensifying the sense of powerlessness among employees (Greenberg, 1990). Despotic leaders, with aggressive and unethical behavior, often avoid ethical discussions and fairness arguments with their subordinates.

Workplace ethics are closely related to employee's perception of job insecurity. Although little is known in the literature about whether an organization's observance of ethical and moral standards affects employee's perception of job insecurity. It is also postulated that, immoral conduct from the side of an organization trigger distrust among employees (Karnes, 2009). As despotic leaders are low on ethical standards, the perception of job insecurity among employees would increase among workers under such leaders. Empirical results of a longitudinal study posit that after six months of exposure to workplace bullying, perception of job insecurity increases (Glambek et al., 2018). Under workplace bullying, it is not easy for employees to protect themselves from the negative treatment of their bosses(Mehmood et al., 2021).

Past studies have theorized the mechanism for despotic leadership and employee outcomes but empirical research is still at its start (Aryee, Chen, Debrah, & Sun, 2008). To fill the gap, the study proposed that to explain the association between despotic leadership and its outcomes, individual's job insecurity perception is among the rational mechanisms. In particular, this study investigated whether employees who are open to despotic leadership behavior perceive high job insecurity and this job insecurity reduces their work engagement in turn.

This suggested association between DL and JIS is supported by Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. Situations (social support, relations), artefacts (equipment, computer), potentials (skill, knowledge), and individual qualities are examples of resources (resilience, self-efficacy) that people value. According to COR theory (Stevan E. Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), employees with more resources may be less vulnerable to stressors than those with fewer resources (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001). According to Gorgievski and Hobfoll (2008), people are always attempting to obtain, retain, and guard their resources, which become drained in persistent stressful situations.

Despotic leaders with their toxic behaviors work as a social stressor for employees (Nauman et al., 2018). COR theory posits that due to actual loss of resources or a threat of resource loss, employees experience threats in organizations (Stevan E. Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). It is also observed that individual notice loss of resources more as compared to resource gain in such toxic environment. Loss of any resource in one sphere mostly results in a resource loss in another sphere. Previous literature available concerning the lens of COR theory demonstrate that when employees face or work with destructive leadership styles they face stress and their personal resource reservoir became depleted (De Clercq et al., 2018; Mehmood et al., 2023). S. E. Hobfoll and Shirom (2001) suggest that individuals have a limited set of resources in the form of energy and time in their lives. When people are confronted with aggressive circumstances, such as despotic leadership, they devote their energy and attention to meet these demands, resulting in a loss of their personal energy resources. Furthermore, the losses of resources are more visible than the gains of the resource in reality, and any loss in energy resources may result in further resource loss (Nauman et al., 2018). Therefore, individuals

whose pivotal energy resources have been drained at job, especially because of ethically questionable and egoistic behaviors of their leaders, may perceive that their jobs are insecure. Such employees may not be able to show up high work engagement due to these stressors. On the basis of these literature arguments, the draining or nonexistence of resources can decrease energetic resources among employees (such as engagement) or increase stress and uncertainty (such as high job insecurity or burnout). Using the conservation of resource theory as a basis, the present study theorized that despotic leadership (as self-serving behavior) works as a source of social stress. Due to the self-serving behavior of despotic leaders, employees lose the support of a leader resulting in an increased perception of job insecurity and decreased positive work behaviors (such as WE).

Luthans, Peterson, and Ibrayeva (1998) asserted that in a highly collectivistic, uncertainty avoidant, and power distance culture, more research may appear in the domain of dark leadership. Tepper et al. (2009) recognized that the influence of culture (such as collectivistic, high power distance) on destructive leadership behavior is still unknown. Moreover, national culture should be taken as a significant element in the expansion of dark leadership research. According to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2013) report in Pakistan, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance are very high. The working environment in Pakistan is also more stressful and challenging as compared to other developed countries (Abbas & Raja, 2014). So, it is important to find factors that cause lower employee outcomes and job uncertainty in a country like Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistani society and economy are flawed with problems of high unemployment, low income, high poverty, and corruption (Naseer et al., 2016). Due to the higher unemployment rate in Pakistan, especially in the scenario of the Pandemic (COVID-19), a job is very indispensable for surviving in society. In such an environment, it is more likely that employees accept power inequalities and recognize themselves as bad leaders. In such conditions, employees value individual accomplishments in any way they can, even if it means compromising job performance and OCB (Naseer et al., 2016). According to the previously stated literature, the study argues and hypothesizes that:

Hypothesis2: Despotic leadership has a positive relationship with employee's perception of job insecurity.

Job Insecurity and Work Engagement

Huang, Niu, Lee, and Ashford (2012) stated that job insecurity is a common workplace phenomenon as it can take place independently of any particular calamity (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002) and as common job stressors (Sverke, Låstad, Hellgren, Richter, & Näswall, 2019). Various empirical research has revealed that JIS reduces work engagement (Karatepe, Rezapouraghdam, & Hassannia, 2020) and has harmful consequences (Elst, De Cuyper, & De Witte, 2011; Sverke et al., 2019). Employees experience negative reactions of emotion and stress when their employers fail to deliver them with secure employment (Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Hartel, 2002), resultantly this stress and bad emotions eventually impair their work efforts. As Cheng and Chan (2008) found that job insecurity adversely affects employees' trust, job involvement, job satisfaction, health, and organizational commitment. Several studies have previously discovered a negative link between job insecurity and job performance. Employee performance was identified as a behavioral consequence of job insecurity by Ferrie (2001), who suggested that prospective studies should address various types of job insecurity consequences, such as unfavorable job attitudes in the case of frontline employees.

In another meta-analysis Sverke et al. (2019) found this relationship not significant. According to the empirical studies of Loi, Lam, and Chan (2012) and König, Debus, Häusler, Lendenmann, and Kleinmann (2010), job insecurity is not associated with performance. Perceived job insecurity is linked to lower job engagement. According to Karatepe et al. (2020),

job uncertainty has a direct impact on employee engagement. Shin, Hur, and Choi (2020) observed that job insecurity saps employees' physical, psychological, and mental vitality, negatively affecting their wellbeing and health, resultantly lowering their engagement.

An significant line of research previously focused on figuring out the connection between employee attitudes and employees' perceptions of job insecurity. The literature convincingly depicts a link between job insecurity and undesirable employee behaviors. Job insecurity reduces employee satisfaction, involvement, commitment, and trust (Cheng & Chan, 2008), as well as productivity, loyalty, and trust (Sverke et al., 2019). (Ruvio & Rosenblatt, 1999). However, it promotes turnover and resistance to change in organizations (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2007; Holm & Hovland, 1999; Smithson & Lewis, 2000).

Individuals exert considerable effort to acquire and safeguard their resources, according to COR theory (Stevan E. Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). A resource is anything that a person values, such as personal attributes, energy, an artefact, or an ailment. The theory of resource conservation has been extensively utilized in research on burnout and stress (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Stevan E. Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993). COR has been used to describe the process of resource investment in the literature (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008).

Individuals' perceptions of job insecurity have an impact on the work engagement of the person as they attempt to conserve resources and supportive behaviors at work (Ng & Feldman, 2012), specifically in a collectivistic culture. As collectivistic societies place higher importance on job security than individualistic ones (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Moreover, the study is taking a qualitative perspective of job insecurity and hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3: Employee's perception of job insecurity has a negative relationship with work engagement of employees.

Despotic Leadership-Perception of Job Insecurity-Work Engagement

According to a growing body of research, interpersonal issues can contribute to job insecurity (Glambek et al., 2018; Shoss, 2017). The objective factors such as interpersonal connections in the workplace, organizational change, employment form, and future uncertainty contribute to employees' perceived job insecurity (Guo, Qiu, & Gan, 2022). Employees' perceptions of JIS have a detrimental impact on their work attitudes, pleasure, and engagement (Guo et al., 2022). As a result of the actual circumstance, DL causes employees to experience personal anguish, stress, and job insecurity. As a result, employees may be able to reduce their job input and therefore alleviate the psychological cost. Shahid and Sajid (2020) discovered that job insecurity perception is a mediation variable between workplace incivility and work engagement.

According to Bano et al. (2021) bullying at workplaces has a harmful influence on the level of work engagement of human resource and health problems through affecting their beliefs of job insecurity(Park & Ono, 2017). In a similar study, Glambek et al. (2018) discovered that workplace bullying predicts employment uncertainty. Furthermore, according to Park and Ono (2017), as a result of a leader's unethical actions, employees perceive job insecurity and tend to exaggerate the severity of the consequences, believing that they are unable to remedy the situation. Resultantly, they tend to save their own resources in order to come up with any coping tactics rather than using them for the organization. Based on this line of study of inquiry, researchers believe that interpersonal interactions with leaders are a key source of job insecurity. This is due to the fact that managers have a significant impact on employees' perceptions and interpretations of workplace events and occurrences (Colbert et al., 2004). A leader's unethical behavior is strong enough to have a long-term impact on employee work performance through job insecurity (Shin et al., 2020).

The current study envisioned that job insecurity mediates the interaction of the study's endogenous and exogenous variables, predicated on the conservation of resource theory (Stevan E. Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) and by incorporating the direct impacts between the variables of the study. People undertake a rational development to confront difficulties (stressors) in their work lives, according to (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). As a result, job insecurity is commonly seen as a common source of workplace stress (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989; Sverke et al., 2019) resulting in numerous kinds of strain (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This study employs COR theory (Stevan E. Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) as a theoretical model in the connection between despotic leadership and WE via job insecurity to better comprehend the basic cognitive mechanisms. The study assumes that the victims continually go through the assessment processes because of workplace DL, recurring negative incidents at the workplace.

While people witness despotic leadership behaviour, they may start to doubt the severity of the ramifications of DL. Among the potential repercussions of despotic leadership behaviour is the loss of essential job characteristics (job insecurity). Most people want to form meaningful and beneficial interactions with the others (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005). As a result, even after experiencing poor treatment for a long time, employees (who have experienced mistreatment) perceive the negative behavior of a leader, which creates a sense of insecurity among employees and adversely impacts their perceived self-esteem. Therefore, the despotic behavior of leaders may affect employee's perception of job security and as a result, create a sense of powerlessness to anticipate the loss of important job features, and a lack of ability to influence the scenario (De Cuyper et al., 2008).

This study specifically investigated whether employees who are exposed to despotic leadership experience job insecurity at a higher rate which ultimately diminish their work engagement. Despite the fact that numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between DL and its major outcomes (Naseer et al., 2016; Nauman et al., 2018), only a few have sought to investigate the mechanisms that underpin these connections. This study is adding perception of job insecurity as mediating variable using COR theory. This argumentation leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Employee's perception of job insecurity mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and work engagement.

Research Methodology

A total of around 35(public sector banks, specialized banks, domestic private and foreign banks) constitute the banking industry in Pakistan (SBP, 2016). Six big banks concentrate Pakistan's banking industry (Hadi, 2015). The population of this study is all the white-collar workers, more than 85000+ until (2019) working in six big banks of Pakistan namely: National Bank of Pakistan (NBP), Habib Bank of Pakistan (HBL), United Bank of Pakistan (UBL), Muslim Commercial Bank (MCB), Allied Bank Limited (ABL), and Bank Alfalah (BAF). Full-time white-collar workers comprising both males and females (individuals working directly under branch managers) in six big banks of Pakistan were the unit of analysis for this study. Taking into view the non-response rate, the study has taken a sample of 900. Also, a large sample is needed for the generalizability of the results (Hair, Sarstedt, Matthews, & Ringle, 2016; Hair Jnr, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Previous studies suggested a minimum 40 percent and maximum 83.3 percent response rate in the banking sector of Pakistan (Khan, Mahmood, Saeed, & Qureshi, 2013; Naseer et al., 2016; Umran & Mahmood, 2015).

The non-probability sampling is employed due to the unknown exact population of the employees due to the PDPB restriction and sensitivity of financial information of banks. Moreover, only the total number of employees are mentioned on the websites of banks.

Therefore, to draw a sample frame from web information is also not possible and probability sampling technique was not feasible for the study. Further, the present study intended to look into the perception of white-collar workers about their managers, in their respective organizations. Because, they are in the best position to explain the behaviors of managers.

The study is adopting survey method to collect data. The research was carried out in natural context without manipulating the work environment. The study is cross-sectional, researcher has used a questionnaire developed in the English language as an instrument for data collection. Work engagement is the dependent variable in this research. This study has adopted the scale on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "Strongly Disagree" to 5 "Strongly Agree".

(Braine & Roodt, 2011; Wilmar B Schaufeli & Arnold B Bakker, 2004) $\alpha: 0.91$. Despotic leadership is a reflective scale developed by (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). The scale is based on six items from the measure developed earlier by (Hanges & Dickson, 2004). The scale had internal reliability of .82 by (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). The study has adopted this seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "Strongly Disagree" to 7 "Strongly Agree". The study has adopted the global job insecurity scale (JIS), developed by (De Witte, 2005) with alpha .86

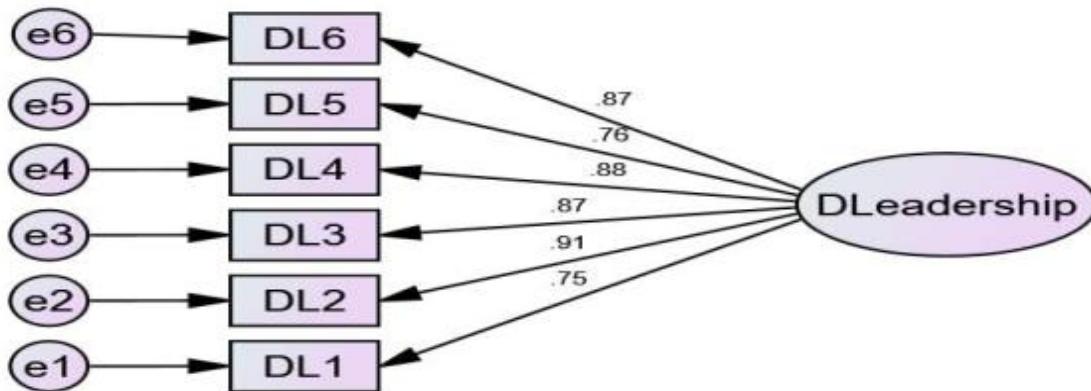
Structural Equation Modeling Analysis

The study has used AMOS-24 to perform two-step structural equation modelling (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The measurement model is evaluated in the first stage to corroborate the operationalization of the theoretical notions.

Convergent Validities, Discriminant Validities, and Construct Reliabilities

	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	DL	JIS	WE
DL	0.965	0.822	0.35	0.274	0.913		
PJI	0.990	0.628	0.72	0.436	0.589	0.844	
WE	0.971	0.766	0.29	0.220	-0.392	-0.516	0.874

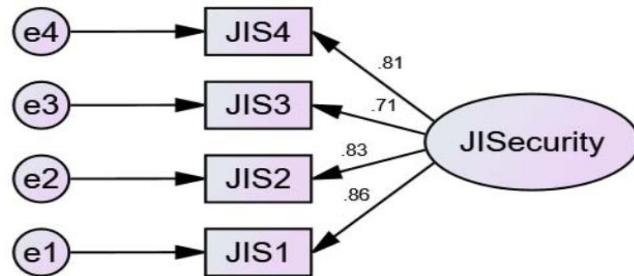
CR: Composite reliability, AVE: Average variance extracted, MSV: Maximum share variance, ASV: Average squared variance.



Standardized and Unstandardized Factor Loadings of Despotic Leadership

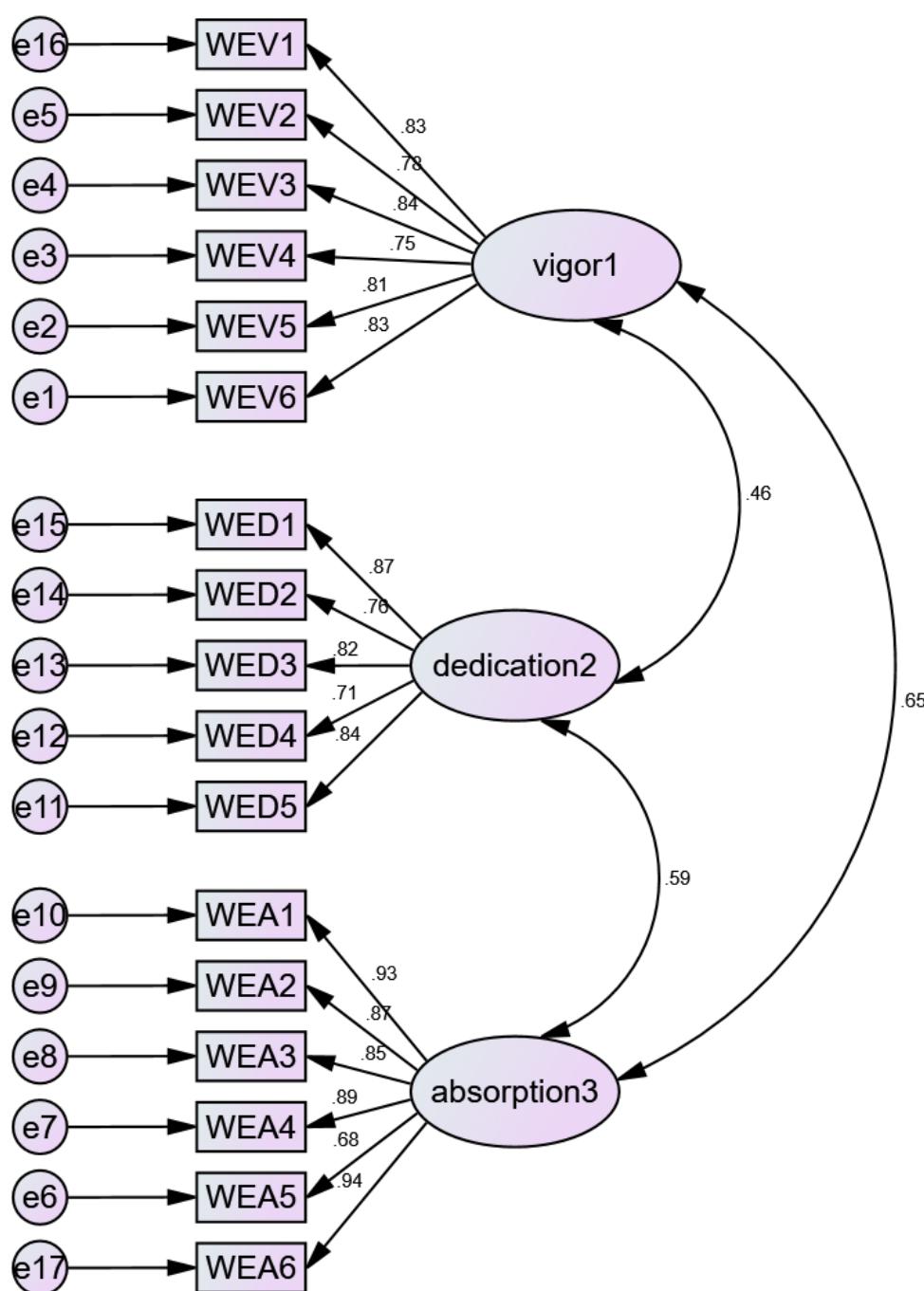
		Std. Esti mat es	Un- std. mat es	S.E. Estim ate	C.R. Estim ate	P Estim ate
Despotic Leadership1	<-- DLeadership	.748	1.000			
Despotic Leadership2	<-- DLeadership	.906	1.524	.064	23.530	***
Despotic Leadership3	<-- DLeadership	.869	1.219	.053	22.423	***

Despotic Leadership4	<--	DLeadership	.877	1.102	.048	23.814	***
Despotic Leadership5	<--	DLeadership	.764	1.063	.054	19.090	***
Despotic Leadership6	<--	DLeadership	.871	1.404	.061	22.780	***



Standardized and Unstandardized Factor Loadings of Perception of Job Insecurity

		Std. Estimates	Un. Std. Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
JonInsecurity1	<---	JISecurity	.814	1.000		
JobInsecurity2	<---	JISecurity	.725	.898	.037	24.033 ***
JobInsecurity3	<---	JISecurity	.847	.720	.036	20.188 ***
JobInsecurity4	<---	JISecurity	.853	.834	.036	23.259 ***

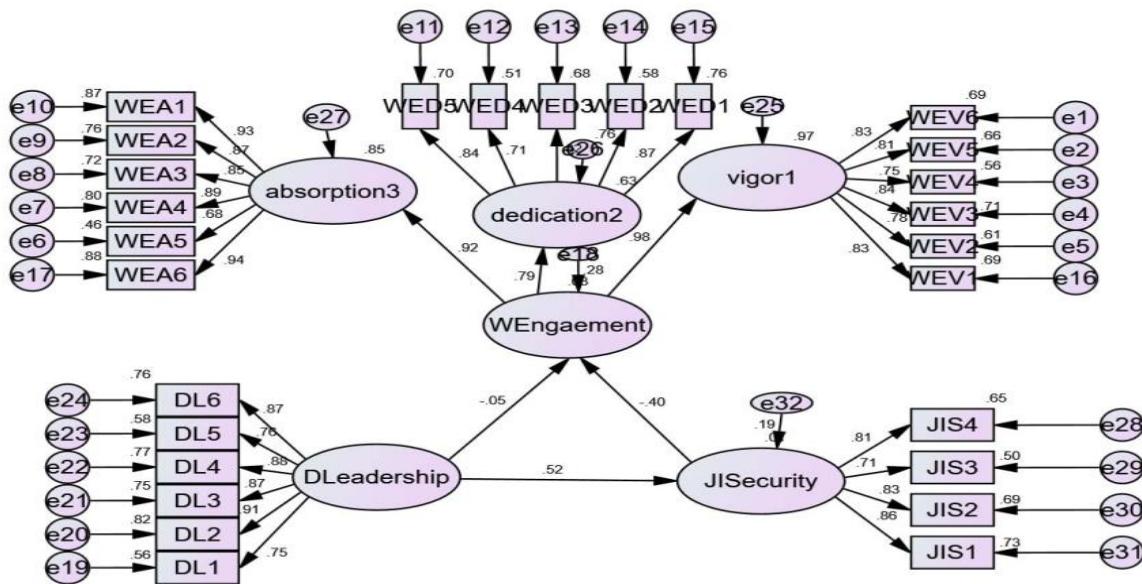


Standardized and Unstandardized Factor Loadings of Work Engagement

		Std. Estimates	Un. Std. Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
WE Vigor6	<--- vigor1	.829	1.000	.040	25.274	***
WE Vigor5	<--- vigor1	.813	1.127	.046	24.512	***
WE Vigor4	<--- vigor1	.749	.927	.043	21.709	***
WE Vigor3	<--- vigor1	.845	1.148	.044	26.028	***
WE Vigor2	<--- vigor1	.783	1.035	.045	23.171	***

WE	Absorption5	<---	absorption3	.678	1.000		***
WE	Absorption4	<---	absorption3	.892	.960	.047	20.470 ***
WE	Absorption3	<---	absorption3	.850	.895	.046	19.615 ***
WE	Absorption2	<---	absorption3	.873	.956	.048	20.093 ***
WE	Absorption1	<---	absorption3	.933	1.002	.047	21.285 ***
WE	Dedication5	<---	dedication2	.836	1.000		***
WE	Dedication4	<---	dedication2	.714	.799	.040	19.995 ***
WE	Dedication3	<---	dedication2	.824	.977	.040	24.583 ***
WE	Dedication2	<---	dedication2	.764	.832	.038	21.987 ***
WE	Dedication1	<---	dedication2	.869	.963	.036	26.619 ***
WE	Vigor1	<---	vigor1	.831	1.000		
WE	Absorption6	<---	absorption3	.937	1.233	.058	21.366 ***

Structural Model



This model shows goodness of fit $\chi^2 = 544.825$; $df = 318$ $p < .000$, $\chi^2/df = 1.713$, CFI index=0.983; $GFI = .938$, $TLI = .982$, $IFI = .983$ $RMSEA = 0.034$. The standardized coefficient between direct path DL and WE were significant ($\beta = -.057$; $p < .009$). While indirect impact of DL and WE through mediating role of JIS (path ab) was significant ($\beta = -.211$; $p < .000$). The total effect (c) is also significant ($\beta = -.268$; $p < .000$). Bootstrap method was used to find the significance of total and indirect effects through mediator recommend by (Hair et al., 2016; Hayes & Preacher, 2010).

Direct, Indirect and Total Effects of Structural Equation Model

Standardized Regression Coefficients β

Model	Estimates β	P value	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Direct				
Despotic Leadership				
Perception of Job Insecurity	.525	.000		
Work Engagement	-.057	.009		
Indirect				
Perception of Job Insecurity				

Work Engagement	-.211	.000	-.266	-.164
Total				
Perception of Job Insecurity	.525			
Work Engagement	-.268			

Source: AMOS

N=625, $p<0.05^*$, $p<0.01^{**}$

Summary of Hypothesis Results

No.	Hypothesis	Results
H1	“Despotic leadership has a negative relationship with work engagement of employees.	supported
H2	Despotic leadership has a positive relationship with employee’s perception of job insecurity.	Supported
H3	Employee’s perception of job insecurity has a negative relationship with work engagement of employees.	Supported
H4	Employee’s perception of job insecurity mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and work engagement.	Supported

Discussion

Numerous studies, including Kayani et al. (2019), emphasize the adverse impact of negative leader behaviors on employee well-being. Recognizing the substantial benefits of employee engagement for organizations (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bano et al., 2021; Baumeister et al., 2005; Mehmood et al., 2023), future research should not only focus on theoretical perspectives but also delve into individual mechanisms influencing employee engagement, such as leadership, to identify practical solutions. This study is crucial for uncovering the direct negative impact of despotic leadership on work engagement, aligning with prior research in Pakistan that highlights the need for an appropriate leadership style to enhance positive employee behaviors.

This study's findings align with research by Samad et al. (2021), demonstrating the negative impact of leadership on employee creativity, performance, citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, and job performance. Despotic leadership leads to emotional exhaustion, increasing work-family conflict and decreasing life satisfaction (Nauman et al., 2018). It also induces work-drawing behaviors, reducing employee engagement, entitlement, and job performance (Joplin et al., 2019), along with impacting job satisfaction (Zhou, Rasool, Yang, & Asghar, 2021) and self-efficacy, ultimately decreasing employee job satisfaction (Samad et al., 2021). Notably, this study contributes to the literature by exploring the direct impact of despotic leadership on work engagement, an aspect not extensively studied before.

Utilizing the resource acquisition principle of Conservation of Resource Theory (Stevan E. Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), it was anticipated that despotic leadership (DL) would lead to adverse outcomes for followers by depleting cognitive resources. DL, marked by unethical and exploitative behaviors, drains subordinates' resources, causing emotional exhaustion, escalating work-family conflict, and reducing life satisfaction (Nauman et al., 2018), aligning with the Conservation of Resource Theory. In high-power distance cultures, subordinates accept power inequalities. Despotic leadership fosters a culture of stress and mistrust, hindering the exchange process between leaders and employees. The unethical behaviors of leaders in

such cultures decrease employee work engagement. The emotional effects of DL are linked to the theme of work engagement, consistent with previous research.

The study reveals a negative and significant relationship between despotic leadership and work engagement. In the context of high unemployment, low per capita income, and a stressful work environment in Pakistan (Abbas & Raja, 2014), employees respond to despotic leaders by remaining silent and reducing their engagement, particularly in sectors like banking during the COVID-19 outbreak. This study significantly contributes to the existing knowledge by explicitly identifying despotic leadership in Pakistani organizations. The validated hypotheses not only answer the research questions but also enhance understanding of the relationship between despotic leadership and work engagement (WE) within the context of Pakistan's banking sector.

The perception of job insecurity is a cognitive outcome influenced by employer or leader incivility (Shin & Hur, 2019). Previous studies, such as Glambek et al. (2018) and Park and Ono (2017), have shown that workplace bullying, a negative behavior, elevates beliefs in job insecurity. This aligns with the current study, where despotic leadership, akin to workplace bullying, contributes to employees' perceptions of insecurity due to leaders' authoritarian and exploitative behaviors. Consistent with the findings of Hoel et al. (2010) and Glambek et al. (2018), the study affirms that despotic leadership heightens job insecurity perceptions among employees in Pakistan's banking sector. The authoritarian and self-serving behaviors of leaders create a sense of powerlessness among employees, particularly when they feel excluded from organizational decision-making processes and perceive a lack of equality standards, ultimately increasing job insecurity (Glambek et al., 2018).

From a conservation of resource perspective, encountering an abusive leader is viewed as a resource loss (Otto, Thomson, & Rigotti, 2018). Unethical treatment by employers can create doubt about the employer-employee relationship (Karnes, 2009), and workplace ethics closely relate to employees' perceptions of job insecurity (Ouyang et al., 2015). Interpersonal issues in organizations, including the unethical conduct of abusive supervisors, transactional leadership, and workplace bullying, are identified as detrimental to job security perceptions (Park & Ono, 2017; Tepper, 2000).

Nauman et al. (2018) argue that despotic leadership fosters an unethical working climate, leading to emotional exhaustion and resource draining among subordinates, contributing to a perception of job insecurity. This aligns with the growing evidence suggesting that interpersonal relationships, especially with leaders, contribute significantly to job insecurity perception (Glambek et al., 2018; Shoss, 2017). The perception of job insecurity and work engagement, revealing a positive and significant association aligns with previous research (Karatepe et al., 2020; Sverke et al., 2019), highlighting the direct and positive link between employee engagement and performance. Job insecurity, a common job stressor, induces negative emotions and stress, emphasizing the importance of organizations providing job security for employee well-being and optimal performance (Jordan et al., 2002; Sverke et al., 2019).

Based on the Conservation of Resource (COR) theory by (Stevan E. Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), this study provides a robust framework for understanding how individuals perceive job insecurity. In COR theory, job insecurity is seen as a threat to valued resources, leading to negative consequences like reduced performance, poor health, lower commitment, and increased turnover intention. Work engagement, viewed as an investment of personal energy and resources in role performance, is also explored. The study reveals a significant negative impact

of job insecurity on work engagement, emphasizing the importance of resource preservation in the workplace. The research findings indicate that employees view job insecurity as an inequity in the exchange relationship, interpreting it as a violation of the employer's obligation to provide stable employment (Wong, Wong, Ngo, & Lui, 2005). This perception influences the social exchange process and subsequent changes in employee work engagement. The COVID-19 pandemic has further heightened job insecurity, making it challenging for organizations to sustain employee engagement in uncertain times (Frare & Beuren, 2021; Hamouche & Marchand, 2021).

Perceptions of job insecurity have a negative impact on employees' work attitudes and engagement (Guo et al., 2022). Despotic leadership induces personal anguish, stress, and job insecurity among employees, leading them to conserve resources for coping rather than organizational investment (De Clercq et al., 2018; Park & Ono, 2017). Drawing from the conservation of resource theory (Stevan E. Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), the study supports the notion that unethical leadership contributes to long-term decreases in work performance through heightened job insecurity (De Witte, 2005; Shin & Hur, 2021; Shin et al., 2020). In the banking sector of Pakistan, where employees no longer trust in lifetime employment, despotic leaders prompt concerns about coping with workplace challenges. Under despotic leadership, the perception of job insecurity is linked to lower work engagement as employees conserve resources due to leaders' exploitative behavior. Workplace transactions involve reversible exchanges, and interpersonal interactions with leaders are identified as a significant source of job insecurity (Colbert et al., 2004; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

The study has numerous contributions from a theoretical perspective. This study addressed some research phenomenon in the banking sector of Pakistan. The study has investigated the impact of despotic leadership on work engagement, which was previously understudied. An important contribution of this study is the integration of leaders' behaviors and employee's perception and outcomes based on these perceptions. Moreover, the study also empirically supports the conservation of resource (COR) theory, which has its origin from stress theory and posited that as a higher level of work engagement state can be thought of as surplus resource or a resource reservoir (energy) as a consequence of having adequate job autonomy, task variety, responses, support, and resources such as company is regarded, positivity, and a sense of coherency to surpasses one's job demands (Hakanen et al., 2021; Halbesleben, 2010).

The study has offered many useful practical benefits. The study provides implications for organizations, specifically Pakistani banks that how they have to manage the behaviors of their leaders and perception of employees to improve their engagement. This research has identified that DL is the determinant towards low engagement during the current economic downturn. Effective leadership would act as a catalyst to retain talented and skillful employees in banks, to improve their engagement in their work, to be competitive and sustainable during the turbulent period.

The output from this study is useful to the human resource managers in their decision whether to adopt leadership practices and what benefits the organization could gain from it. Leadership, and job security for higher work engagement in the organization is important. Despotic leadership is a scourge for the span of control. As a result, corporations must implement seminars and religious lectures to train managers on a psychological and theological level. To combat the harmful impacts of despotic leadership, the institutionalization of ethical working standards must be properly planned. Furthermore, in order to intervene in the harmful influence of despotic leadership on work engagement, the hostile leader-subordinate relationships in companies should be in harmony. The results obtained from the study have important contributions to knowledge. It may be taken as an important consideration for policy-makers

and leaders and may help in policy implications. With the help of these implications, generally, policymakers and especially owners and managers can take essential actions which may prove significantly indispensable for the performance of banks especially in the context of developing countries in general and specifically in Pakistan. The study contributes to the literature by developing this conceptual framework. The study has encapsulated despotic leadership, job insecurity, and work engagement in the banking sector. As a result, the study adds to academic knowledge by empirically examining the conceptual model using SEM. The outcome from this research is expected to provide fresh insights into the effectiveness of leadership in terms of engagement. Besides that, the study incorporated a recent review of literature facilitating the advancement of knowledge.

5.5 Limitations and Future Recommendations

Every research faces some constraints. The present research is no exception to the phenomenon. The research was conducted in the banking sector where employees have to work under tough time schedules with the responsibility to serve a multitude of clients simultaneously. The findings may not be applicable to the other companies operating in other sectors of the country. It may be possible that the determinants of work engagement may vary in other sectors in the same country. Moreover, the study is confined to one country Pakistan, therefore, the results may differ in different cultural settings and economies. In terms of time horizon, the study uses a cross-sectional data collection approach. The longitudinal study can unveil many findings and aspects of causality of the predictor and criterion variables (Barczak, Lassk, & Mulki, 2010) that cannot be inferred from this study.

The limitations of this study provide the basis for future research like incorporating blue-collar workers to widen the scope of this study. Moreover, similar studies can be conducted in comparable economies of Asia to strengthen the applicability of the research framework. The business practices and leadership styles can be different between private and national organizations and between financial and non-financial businesses. Hence, the future studies can focus on replicating this study in a private setting, non-financial organizations and other countries for the generalization of findings. Longitudinal studies can be conducted to understand the behavior of employees towards work engagement in a changing scenario.

This study was quantitative in nature. The qualitative and mixed-method approach to explore the understudy relationships may provide valuable future avenues to researchers. Moreover, other mediators and moderators can be employed like, organizational structure, government support, organizational climate, ethics, organizational politics, leader-member exchange, or environmental culture to examine if any mediating or moderating effect exists in predictor and criterion variables.

5.7 Conclusions

Although in this decade, organizational scholars have conducted extensive research on employee behaviors and perceptions, little research has been done on the negative roles of leadership in the perspective of conservation of resources and social exchanges. The objective of this study was to examine the effect of despotic leadership, between employees and employers, and perception of employees about job insecurity on employees' work engagement. The study is based on the concept of conservation of resources (COR), which guides studies at the intersection of leadership and corporate ethics (Braun & Peus, 2018; Park & Ono, 2017). It expects employees' work actions to be impacted by their intention to avoid resource losses while reaping resource gains (Stevan E. Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). The term resources refer to entities that are either centrally appreciated in and of themselves or serve as a means to obtain centrally valued ends (Stevan E. Hobfoll, 2002). Key resources in this study environment are

the quality of employees' current and future job situations, which may be threatened by despotic leaders (De Clercq et al., 2018).

The study was conducted in the Pakistan banking sector. This study also contributes to the overall conceptual understanding of the antecedent of lower work engagement. Furthermore, the study also provides insight to top management, policy, and decision-makers to understand negative behaviors and their outcomes in organizations.

The main thrust of all of the foregoing section is that in today's world of intense competition among rival businesses, management and policymakers need to focus on the positive role of leadership, the psychological contract between employees and employers, jobs security, and work engagement. The summary of findings had indicated that despotic leadership highly influences the engagement of employees concerning their perception of job insecurity. An effective leader guides his/her followers in a preferred manner to accomplish the preferred organizational goals. While a self-serving, unethical, and exploitative behavior of leader affect engagement, creativity, performance, life satisfaction, and work-family life of employees.

This research added to the body of existing knowledge from differing viewpoints while also providing practical implications for banks. All research questions were effectively answered, and all objectives of the research were met.

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Appendix-I

Questionnaire

Section A:

Demographic Information

1) Gender:

Male Female

2) Age:

Less than 25 years 25 - 34 years 35-44 years
 45-55 years 56 and above

3) Educational Level:

Graduation Masters M.Phil. Other

4) Work experience:

5 years and below 6 to 10 years 11 to 15 years
 16 to 20 years 21 to 25 years 26 to 30 years

5) Salary

Less than 20,000 Rs 20,000 – 39,999 Rs More than 40,000 Rs.

6) Organization Name

NBP HBL
 UBL MCB
 ABL BAF

Section B:

1: Despotic Leadership:

Sr. No	Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	“My manager is disciplinary, takes no pity.							
2	My manager is in charge; does not tolerate disagreement.							
3	My manager acts like tyrant or despot; imperious							
4	My manager tends to be unwilling to relinquish control of projects or tasks.							
5	My manager expects unquestioning obedience of those who report to him/her.							

6	My manager is unforgiving; seeks revenge when wronged.”							
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2: Perception of Job Insecurity

1	“Chances are, I will soon lose my job.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I am sure I can keep my job.					
3	I feel insecure about the future of my job.					
4	I think I might lose my job in the near future.”					

3: Work Engagement

Sr. No.	Items	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Vigor:</i>						
1	“At my work, I feel that I am bursting with energy.					
2	At my job, I feel strong.					
3	When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.					
4	I can continue to work for long period of time.					
5	At my job, I am mentally resilient.					
6	At my job, I always preserve, even when things do not go well.					
<i>Dedication:</i>						
7	I find the work that I do meaningful and purposeful.					
8	I am enthusiastic about my job.					
9	My job inspires me.					
10	I am proud on the work that I do.					
11	My job is challenging enough.					
<i>Absorption:</i>						
12	Time flies when I am at work.					
13	When I work, I forget everything else around me.					
14	I feel happy when I am working intensely.					
15	I am involving deeply in my work.					
16	I get carried away when I am working.					
17	It is difficult to detach myself from job.”					