Despotic Leadership and Employees' Outcomes: Mediating Effect of Impression Management

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Abstract

This article aims at analyzing the mediating role of impression management in the relationship between despotic leadership and the employees' outcomes which include organizational career growth, job performance and creativity. Using self motive theory, we hypothesize that despotic leaders might force individuals, out of fear or out of personal self-interests, to engage in impression management techniques thus promoting high career growth, job performance and creativity. Field survey was used for the collection of data at three different time intervals containing a time lag of one and a half month between each time wave from respondents serving at different positions in public sector organization and their peers. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique was used to test and verify the hypothesis of the study. The results prove the mediating role of impression management in the relationship between despotic leadership and the employee's outcomes. The study attempts to bridge a gap in the dark side of leadership through opening up a sunny side of a negative leader that how and why a dark leader such as despotic leader might produce positive outcomes for followers.

Keywords: despotic leadership, impression management, organizational career growth, job performance, employee creativity, self-motives.

1. Introduction and Literature Review

In every organization, effective leadership is vital since it plays a significant role in shaping the workplace environment and influence employees work related attitudes as well as enhance organizational productivity. For many decades, leadership is idealized as a positive trait which is used to motivate the followers. A major stream of research has

given more attention to the analysis of the traits of effective leaders assuming that absence of specific leadership traits means the absence of leadership (Ashforth, 1994; Kelloway et al., 2006). The findings of prior research suggest that negative events in social interactions are perceived as more influential as compared to the positive events (Baumeister et al., 2001). In a similar manner, it is worthwhile for researchers to give more attention to the "dark side" of leadership so that an accurate understanding of leadership and its effectiveness can be examined (Burke, 2006).

Many terminologies of the dark leadership have been used by the researchers to describe the dark leadership concept which includes petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994), abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), destructive leadership (Einarsen et al., 2007; Schyns & Hansbrough, 2010), despotic leadership (Aronson, 2001) and personalized charismatic or pseudo-transformational leadership (Ashforth, 1994; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999) etc. Among all these dark leadership styles, despotic leadership style is considered as a highly self-serving leadership style because such leaders are perceived as morally corrupt and have low ethical standards (Schilling, 2009). Such leaders are more inclined toward the involvement in fraudulent and unsocial activities to save their own interest. The behavior of such leaders with their subordinates is also reported as unethical and deceitful. Prior research also suggests that despotic leaders are morally corrupt, operate in high power distance environment and demand unquestioned obedience and submissiveness from the employees (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Naseer et al., 2016; Schilling, 2009). Specifically, unethical behavior of leaders create an inequality in leader-subordinate relationship which causes adverse effects on the performance, work attitudes of employees (Tepper, 2000) and increases their retaliatory behavior (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Tepper et al., 2006; Thau et al., 2009). Similarly, in the past, researchers have found that the employees who did not follow their leaders' destructive policies and expressed their dissent lost their jobs (Coleman, 1987) and at the same time, the employees who follow the despotic leaders' policies, have received rewards and became favorites of their leader (Anand et al., 2004).

According to Tepper (2007), a leader may not be able to influence their followers or subordinates in a similar way. Offerman (2004) argued that despite the fact that employees are well aware about the negative outcomes of destructive leadership but still they become willing to follow such leaders for the sake of their own progress in the organization and to gain their personal agenda (McClelland, 1975; Kellerman, 2004). The main focus of prior research have remained limited to the negative outcomes of despotic leadership however there is a greater need to address the role of those employees who voluntarily get involved in supporting the destructive vision and coercive policies of despotic leaders for their self-interest. Therefore, researchers have suggested exploring the brighter side of dark leadership which is currently in its nascent form (Judge et al., 2009; Resick et al., 2009; Scheuer et al., 2015). In a recent study, Naseer et al. (2016) identified some negative effects of the despotic leadership on the performance of employees and suggested to explore the brighter side of the despotic leadership. The authors suggested future researchers to examine additional mechanisms through which the despotic leaders can be beneficial for the followers (Naseer et al., 2016). Schyns and Schilling (2013) in their meta-analysis on destructive leadership pointed out that there are very few studies which have explored the role of despotic leadership therefore more attention is needed to explore this research domain (Naseer et al., 2016).

The present study attempts to address the gap identified by prior researchers and investigate the ways through which despotic leadership can be beneficial for some employees. This study is different from prior studies because it is an effort to address the positive side of dark leadership such as despotic leadership and contends that employees, for their survival, play their cards wisely and gain their personal agenda by favoring a negative leader. Thus, the present study takes impression management tactics as a mediating mechanism in the relationship of despotic leadership and employee's outcomes.

Impression Management can be defined as the tactics which are used by the individuals to influence the reactions and images which are possessed by other people about them and their own ideas (Bolino & Turnley, 2003; McFarland et al., 2003; Rao et al., 1995). Using the tenants of Self-Motive theory (Leary, 2007), we believe that employees when faced with a dominating and morally corrupt leader such as despotic leader might get involved in impression management tactics so as to minimize the undesirable consequences or pursue personal gains which might makes them advance their careers, perform well and be more creative. This study entangles a complex phenomenon and opens a new domain in the bright side of dark leadership and examines how and under which situations, a despotic leader might be beneficial for some employees and the organization.
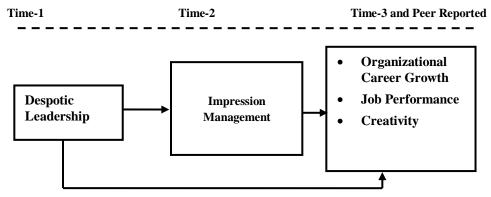
Time-1   **Time-2**   **Time-3 and Peer Reported**

Figure 1: Research Model

The above figure depicts a time lagged research model where Despotic Leadership promotes positive employee's outcomes (organizational career growth, job performance and creativity) through the mechanism of Impression Management.

2. Theory and Hypotheses

2.1 Despotic Leadership and Employee's Outcomes Relationship

Despotic leadership refers to negative leader behaviors that violates the legitimate interest of the organization and undermines the motivation and well beings of the subordinates (Conger, 1990). Despotic leaders are considered as having little regard for others and do not behave in socially constructive ways. These leaders are exploitative and self-absorbing, likely to be insensitive towards the employees' needs and have relatively little concern about the consequences of their behavior on the organization and employees (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). Research shows that such leadership behavior negatively influences employees' attitudes (Pelletier & Bligh, 2008; Tepper, 2000; Tepper et al.,

2008), their task and contextual performance (Harris et al., 2007), resistance behaviors (Tepper et al., 2001) etc. and positively influences the deviant and unethical work behavior (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Tepper et al., 2008; Thau et al., 2009).

Employing Self motive theory (Leary, 2007), it can be said that if individuals are afraid to perform certain actions or not to perform due to fear of reprisals from a negative leader, then it will affect not only their attitude, but their job performance as well (Adams & Bray, 1992). In the work environment where leaders treat the employees abusively and unethically, they feel fearful and their individual performance and creativity is hampered (Harris et al., 2007; Tepper et al., 2001). We believe that an immoral leader such as a despotic leader might make employee's feel appalling which restricts their job performance to the defined role and lowers their creative abilities. Recent research has already corroborated that despotic leadership is negatively related to employee's job performance, OCB and creativity (Naseer et al., 2016). Considering the fact that employee's in an unethical and corrupt environment might be unable to perform well or demonstrate out of the box thinking in the form of creativity, such employees might not be able to climb up the career ladder negatively affecting their career growth prospects too. Thus we hypothesis:

➢ **H₁:** Despotic leadership is negatively related to (a) organizational career growth, (b) job performance and (c) creativity

2.2 Despotic Leadership and Impression Management Relationship

Despotic leaders are morally corrupt, exhibit low ethical standards, behave callously toward employees' needs and engage in morally incorrect behaviors (Aronson, 2001; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Naseer, et al., 2016; Schilling, 2009). Past research corroborates that the leaders use harmful methods on employees who block the leaders' goals or retaliate against perceived mistreatment (Ashforth, 1994; Tepper et al., 2001). We believe that subordinates in an exploitive and oppressed environment are more likely to experience anxiety, depression and strain etc. and feel that the only way of survival is to comply with the destructive leader. A recent study by Lukacik & Bourdage (2018) found abusive supervision to be positively related to the use of impression management strategies by followers. In line with this recent study, we believe that followers under a despotic leadership due to their self-interested motives might be motivated to apply impression management strategies so as to attain favorable outcomes.

Based on the assumptions of Self-Motive Theory (Leary, 2007), we contend that when subordinates experience an autocratic and dishonest leader in the form of despotic leader; then such employees in order to survive in a repressive environment will engage in ingratiation, flattery or agreeing with the leader's opinion leading to high levels of impression management. Self-motive theory assumes that employees engage in behaviors that seek to maximize their self-interest and create a positive image in the eyes of others (Leary, 2007).This self-motive and self-interested desire in subordinates will give them a cue that under a dominating and unethical leader such as despotic leader they have to portray a favorable image through impression management. Consistent with this theory, we assert that employees under a dictator and corrupt leader such as a despot might appear hard working and kind increasing impression management behaviors. Such employees in order to protect their self-image might try to appear more dedicated,

capable than others (Salamon & Deutsch, 2006) and willing to go an extra mile leading to higher levels of impression management. Thus, we hypothesize:

➢ **H₂:** Despotic leadership is positively related to impression management

2.3 Impression Management and Employee's Outcomes Relationship

Impression management refers to an individuals' capacity to portray a favorable image on others so as to gain rewards and benefits (Grant & Mayer, 2009). Empirical work of Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson (1980) showed that the upward influence attempts are towards the immediate superiors of the employees. According to Ferris & King (1991) and Villanova & Bernardin (1989) subordinates' influence their evaluations in the performance evaluation process. When employees in the organizational setting finds opportunities and rewards and wants to minimize threats, it seems quite reasonable to expect that such self-serving employees will find it advantageous to manage their impressions that others form of them, especially in front of superiors who hold power in the organization.

According to Self-Motive theory (Leary, 2007), individuals with self-enhancement motive, tend to have a self-serving attribution. They attribute positive events to their own personal characteristics and make self-presentational efforts to develop/ maintain a positive image in the eyes of others. According to Salamon and Deutsch (2006), when subordinates expect desirable organizational rewards for their behavior, they are more likely to engage in behaviors which differentiate themselves from others in order to show that they are more capable than others. Past research depicts that employees involved in the ingratiation tactics are generally successful in positively influencing their supervisors and obtain good performance evaluations (Gordon, 1996). Bolino, Varela, Bande and Turnley (2006) found that employee's impression management behavior directed toward their supervisors positively influenced the performance evaluation through fostering supervisors' affinity toward them. Subordinates often use impression management as tool in order to achieve greater career success (Judge & Bretz, 1994) etc. Some employees may use impression-management strategies to convince their supervisors that they are willing to go the extra mile for their organizations by being helpful, tolerating inconveniences on the job, encourage their coworkers when they are down, attend the non-required organizational functions, and so on. An individual who can use impression management to his or her advantage is likely to be viewed as socially competent, diligent and friendly increasing their chances of gaining career growth, performance and creativity. Building on self-motive theory (Leary, 2007), we assert that individuals with an enhanced tendency to portray a desirable image in the form of impression management tactics by praising their supervisor, or highlighting their own achievements or going above the call of duty will help them achieve their desired selfish motives of attaining higher performance, showing more creativity and would attain greater chances of being successful in their careers. Thus, we hypothesize:

➢ **H₃:** Impression management is positively related to (a) organizational career growth, (b) job performance and (c) creativity

2.4 The Mediating Effects of Impression Management

Despotic leadership is self-aggrandizing and exploitative of others. Such leaders are domineering, vengeful and controlling (House & Howell, 1992; Howell & Avolio, 1992).

As per Self-motive theory (Leary, 2007), employees manage their behavior in an attempt to create a specific impression in front of others that will result in attainment of their desired goals (Rosenfeld, Edwards, &Thomas, 2005). Some employees act on the instruction of destructive leaders out of fear whereas other employees actively participate to fulfill the destructive leader's agenda. Both types of these employees are motivated by their self-interest; however their concerns are different i.e. to minimize the negative consequences and/ or seek personal gain through association with a destructive leader which gives them a benefit from destructive activities and thus willingly contribute to the toxic vision of the leaders (Higgins, 1997).

In line with the Self-motive theory, we contend that followers under despotic leader will behave to construct a favorable image, engaging themselves in impression management tactics which is the only way they consider to get favor of the leader, minimize negative consequence and achieve their personal goals. In recent studies, it has been corroborated that the abused subordinates tend to engage in surface acting which is an attempt to hide certain emotions, most often negative emotions that are not considered acceptable to display in the workplace environment (Carlson, Ferguson, Hunter, & Whitten, 2012). Such battered individuals might present themselves in a favorable light and adjust their behavior to create association with the despotic leader increasing impression management. Impression management research suggests that such behaviors tend to influence the degree to which employees are liked by their superiors (Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Wayne & Liden, 1995). It may also influence the performance appraisal ratings that supervisors give their employees (Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003). Employees who are able to positively create an image in front of a despot will be rewarded favorably through higher career growth opportunities, job performance and creativity. Thus we hypothesize:

- ➢ **H$_4$:** Impression management mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and (a) organizational career growth, (b) job performance and (c) creativity

3. Methods

The main purpose of the current study is to empirically analyze the mediating role of Impression Management between Despotic Leadership and Employee's Outcomes. This study is based on hypotheses testing wherein the proposed direct and indirect (mediation) relationships were tested based on the quantitative data collected through the survey method. There are many advantages of using the survey design such as time and cost constraints as well as methodological benefits (Robson, 2002). Many research studies, conducted in Pakistan, have used the survey for the research design and significantly promising results were reported (Abbas et al., 2012; Jamal, 1999; Saeed et al., 2010).

This research utilized a time lagged design because cross-sectional methods limit the inferences regarding causality and the longitudinal designs are more appropriate to test causal models which help to address reverse causality issue in the causal links. The researchers of the behavior research while studying methodological issues in meditational models have highlighted that the cross-sectional research designs do not give true picture of the reality as the data, collected at one time, has serious casualty problems of the correlated variables (Selig & Preacher, 2009). Thus, there is need to addresses the reverse causality issues arising due to collection of data at a single point of time and variables should be temporally separated at different measurement points (Lindell &

Whitney, 2001; Selig & Preacher, 2009). Therefore, the present study was casual in nature and in order to separate cause and effect time lagged research design was used and data was temporally segregated at three different time periods.

3.1 Sample and Data Collection

Field survey was conducted utilizing a temporally segregated data from employees and their fellow peers in government sector organizations belonging to Islamabad, Pakistan. Government sector was chosen as the prevalence of dark leadership is more in bureaucratic and hierarchical organizations. Further in government sector, the tenure of the leader is longer due to permanent contract which makes leaders exploit the organizations' resources. In such organizations, employees in order to survive are more likely to indulge in impression management tactics which makes government sector highly suitable for conducting research. Lastly, as the data was temporally segregated at 3 different time periods, the primary concern was to gain access to employees for a period for approximately 5-7 months for three waves of data collection. Since we had access to these government sector organizations on the basis of personal and professional references so we decided to choose these organizations for collecting time lagged data. In order to address the reverse causality issues arising because of single shot collection of data, the current research employs a time lagged design with three time waves and a time period of approximately one and a half month between each measurement point. The study's independent variable (despotic leadership) was tapped at time 1, impression management i.e. mediation variable at time-2 and one of the dependent variable (i.e. organizational career growth) at time-3. The remaining two outcomes of job performance and creativity were tapped at time 3 from employee's co-workers. In our opinion, peers are in a good position to comment on colleague's performance and creativity as past studies have also rated performance or other outcome variables from peers (Naseer et al., 2016; Raja & Johns, 2010).

Each survey contained a unique ID which was used to contact the same respondents for filling the questionnaire at time-2 and time-3 and to match the self as well as peer reported forms too. At time 1, 675 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents and 581 questionnaires were completely usable which generated a response rate of 86% at this stage. After a time interval of one and a half month, the respondents who completed questionnaires at time 1 were again contacted and provided time-2 questionnaire to fill the study's mediator variable. At this stage, 523 respondents filled time-2 questionnaire and in this way response rate of both Time 1 and Time-2 was 77%. After a time lag of one and a half month on completion of time-2 questionnaire, third time wave started and same respondents who completely filled time-1 and time-2 questionnaires were approached and requested to fill the Time-3 questionnaire consisting of employee's outcome variable (i.e. organizational career growth). At the time wave-3, the respondent's peer were also contacted and asked to fill their fellow employee's job performance and creativity. At this stage 23 questionnaires of time wave-3 were found incomplete and were dropped. Thus complete matched for all the three time wave questionnaires from the same respondents and their peer was 458, and final response rate was approximately 68%.

The demographic analysis revealed that most of the respondents i.e. 31.4% belonged to the operations department, were holding supervisory positions (66.4%) and were Master's degree holders (33.4%). The sample statistics revealed 18.11 years average

employee's working experience in the current organization with Standard Deviation =10.98 ranging from 1 year to 40 years whereas total working experience of the respondents was 19.5 years with Standard Deviation =10.80 years. The average age of the respondents was 42.2 years with Standard Deviation ==9.95 years in the age bracket of 20 years to 59 years.

3.2 Measures

All measures were used in English language as English is official language of all public sector organizations in Pakistan. Previous research has also indicated that English is considered to be adequate for conducting research surveys in Pakistani organizations (Butt, Choi, & Jeager, 2005; Raja & Johns, 2010). Further the data was collected in three time waves, complete procedure was explained to the same respondents at each time lag. During briefing it was noticed that the respondents were well equipped to use and apply the English language. Hence, questionnaires were not translated into Urdu and the original English version of the scales was utilized. All self-reported scales were measured on a 7 point likert scale ranging from 1= "Strongly Disagree", to 7= "Strongly Agree", whereas the peer reported scales of job performance and creativity had anchors of 1= "Never" to 7= "Always".

Despotic Leadership was measured at time wave-1 using a 6 item scale developed by De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008). Sample items include "My leader expects unquestioning obedience of those who report to him/her"; "My leader is in charge and does not tolerate disagreement or questioning, gives orders". The alpha reliability for this measure was reported as α= 0.90.

Impression Management was measured by employees at time-2 using the 17-items scale developed by Wayne and Ferris (1990).This is a three dimensional scale consisting of supervisor focused, self-focused and job focused impression management. Sample items include "I praise my immediate supervisor on his/her accomplishments."; "I try to be polite when interacting with my supervisor." and "I work hard when I know the results will be seen by my supervisor". The cronbach alpha reliability of the aggregate impression management scale in the present study is α= 0.90. Since the objective of the present study and our hypothesis indicated the use of an aggregate impression management variable therefore we conducted a three factor model comprising of the three dimensions and compared it with a single factor impression management. The CFA results revealed that 1 factor impression management model demonstrated superior model fit (χ^2 =290.12, *Df* = 106, *p<0.001*, CFI =.93, NFI = .90, GFI = .92, RMSEA = .06) as in comparison to the 3 factor model (χ^2 =374.78, *Df* = 112, *p<0.001*, CFI =.90, NFI = .87, GFI = .90, RMSEA = .07).

Organizational Career Growth was tapped by a 15 item scale adopted from Weng and McElroy's (2012) at time 3. Sample items include "My present job moves me closer to my career goals", and "My present job encourages me to continuously gain new job-related skills". The alpha reliability of the scale in the study is α= 0.90.

Job Performance was rated by their peers utilizing a 7 item scale (William & Anderson, 1991). Sample items include "This person fulfils responsibilities specified in job description." and "This person engages in activities that will directly affect his/her performance". The cronbach alpha reliability for this measure is α= 0.76.

Creativity We used three-item scale of Oldham and Cummings (1996) to measure employee's creativity. The sample items include "How original and practical is this person's work?" and "How adaptive and practical is this person's work?" Cronbach alpha reliability for this measure in the current study is α= 0.81.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis Our research model employed a temporally segregated research design where data was collected at three different time periods from independent sources. Nonetheless, in order to establish the discriminant validity of the variables a series of CFAs were performed so as to check whether each of the variables possess adequate validity or not. In order to ensure convergent validity, all items of the constructs demonstrated acceptable factor loading above 0.4 ranging from .41 to .86 (for details see Table no.1 below).

Table 1: Factor Loading

Items of the Questionnaire	IV	Mediator	DV		
	DL	IM	CD	JP	C
Item 1	.82	.67	.65	.59	.77
Item 2	.86	.57	.69	.57	.76
Item 3	.74	.64	.66	.63	.76
Item 4	.75	.68	.67	.63	
Item 5	.73	.62	.61	.48	
Item 6	.71	.58	.56	.59	
Item 7		.61	.59	.41	
Item 8		.59	.54		
Item 9		.54	.57		
Item 10		.58	.55		
Item 11		.62	.67		
Item 12		.60	.58		
Item 13		.49	.59		
Item 14		.59	.54		
Item 15		.57	.61		
Item 16		.56			
Item 17		.50			
Item 18					
Item 19					
Item 20					

IV= independent Variable, DV= Dependent Variable DL= Despotic Leadership, Mach= Machiavellianism, GC=Goal Congruence. IM=Impression Management, CD=Organizational Career Growth, JP=Job Performance and C=Creativity.

For testing discriminant validity of variables, we followed the recommendations proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988; 1992). According to their suggestion, the three and two factors models were compared with a one factor model for each of the probable combinations of variables which were tapped at the same time wave and from the same source. The study's independent variable (despotic leadership) was measured at Time-1 and the mediating variable (impression management) at Time-2. The variables tapped at time 3 included employee outcomes i.e. organizational career growth, job performance and creativity wherein organizational career growth was self-reported whereas job performance and creativity was peer reported. The results revealed that in each case, the two or multiple factor model demonstrated better model fit as in

comparison to the single factor model proving discriminant validity of the study variables. The full measurement model comprised of five variables and our results revealed that the 5-factor model fit statistics showed adequate fit to the data (χ^2 =1826.74, DF=1031, *p<0.001*; CFI= 0.91, GFI= 0.84, NFI= 0.82, RMSEA= 0.04) as compared to the 1-factor model (χ^2 =5935.61, DF=1063, *p<0.001*; CFI= 0.45, GFI= 0.46, NFI= 0.41, RMSEA= 0.10) (see table # 2 below for further details of each of the probable combination of models).

Table 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

No	Measurement Models	χ^2	DF	CFI	GFI	NFI	RMESA
1.	DL- OCG (2 Factor Model)	**368.21**	**178**	**.95**	**.92**	**.91**	**0.05**
	DL- OCG (1 Factor Model)	1774.16	179	.60	.63	.57	0.14
2.	DL- JP (2 Factor Model)	**121.42**	**62**	**.97**	**.96**	**.95**	**0.05**
	DL- JP (1 Factor Model)	452.30	63	.82	.83	.80	0.12
3.	DL- C (2 Factor Model)	**61.72**	**23**	**.98**	**.97**	**.97**	**0.06**
	DL- C (1 Factor Model)	499.34	27	.76	.80	.75	0.20
4.	IM- OCG (2 Factor Model)	**882.50**	**427**	**.92**	**.87**	**.85**	**0.05**
	IM- OCG (1 Factor Model)	2429.18	447	.64	.61	.59	0.10
5.	IM- JP (2 Factor Model)	**471.89**	**232**	**.93**	**.91**	**.87**	**0.05**
	IM- JP (1 Factor Model)	1081.17	235	.75	.79	.71	0.09
6.	IM- C (2 Factor Model)	**343.86**	**152**	**.94**	**.92**	**.90**	**0.05**
	IM- C (1 Factor Model)	761.08	153	.81	.84	.78	0.09
7.	DL- IM (2 Factor Model)	**541.43**	**212**	**.93**	**.90**	**.89**	**0.06**
	DL- IM (1 Factor Model)	1375.06	213	.74	.68	.71	0.11
8.	JP-C (2 Factor Model)	**42.56**	**32**	**.99**	**.98**	**.97**	**0.03**
	JP- C (1 Factor Model)	234.79	33	.83	.88	.81	0.12
9.	OCG- JP- C (3 Factor Model)	**492.57**	**259**	**.94**	**.91**	**.88**	**0.04**
	OCG-JP-C (1 Factor Model)	1220.87	265	.76	.77	.71	0.09
10	DL-IM-OCG-JP-C (5 Factor Model)	**1826.74**	**1031**	**.91**	**.84**	**.82**	**0.04**
	DL-IM-OCG-JP-C (1 Factor Model)	5935.61	1063	.45	.46	.41	0.10

n= 458; where DL= Despotic Leadership; IM= Impression management; OCG= Organizational career growth; JP= Job Performance; C= Creativity.

4. Results

Pearson bivariate co-relations indicated that despotic leadership is significantly negatively related to organizational career growth (r=-.10, $p<0.05$), job performance (r=-.39, $p<0.01$) and creativity (r=-.14, $p<0.01$). Despotic leadership showed positive and significant association with impression management (r=.48, $p<0.01$). Impression management also showed significant positive relationship with organizational career growth (r= .33, $p<0.01$), job performance (r=.16, $p<0.01$) and creativity (r=.21, $p<0.01$).

Table 3: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliabilities for Main Variables of Interest in the Study

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. DL	3.32	1.62	(.90)				
2. IM	4.35	1.08	.48**	(.90)			
3. OCG	3.49	0.73	-.10*	.33**	(.90)		
4. JP	4.48	0.64	-.39**	.16**	.36**	(.76)	
5. CE	5.21	1.20	-.14**	.21**	.49**	.47**	(.81)

Note, n=458; control variables are department (6) and education (1); where DL= Despotic Leadership; IM= Impression Management; OCG= Organizational Career Growth; JP= Job Performance; and CE= Creativity. Alpha reliabilities are given in parenthesis. *$p< 0.05$ **$p<0.01$

4.1 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Analysis

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique using AMOS software was employed to test the research model hypotheses. The SEM model requires testing of a full measurement model (CFA model) followed by hypothesis testing through performing structural models (Byrne, 2016). First of all, we performed Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to check and authenticate the full measurement model which consists of the 5 constructs. The model fit statistics showed that the measurement model (Full CFA model) adequately fits the data (χ^2 =1826.74, DF=1031, $p<0.001$; CIMN/DF=1.77; CFI= 0.91, GFI= 0.84, NFI= 0.82, RMSEA= 0.04. Figure 2 depicts the full measurement model showing factor loadings of each item drawn to portray the full CFA. Each of the items showed factor loading above 0.40 and loaded on to their respective constructs (see table no.1 for further details).

Once the validity of the full measurement model was established for our hypothesized 5 factor model, we performed structural model analysis utilizing SEM technique so as to test our research hypotheses. Structural equation modeling is identified as a highly reliable technique and is considered more sophisticated than various other multivariate data analytical techniques of conducting regression. To start with, SEM utilizes a confirmatory approach rather than an exploratory method for conducting data analysis. Another unique characteristic of Structural equation modeling is that it allows to test a

sequence of structural paths independently as well as collectively thus making hypothesis testing easier yet comprehensive. In addition, the calculation of individual path estimates (beta values) and full range of model fit statistics increases the value of this technique. Finally, by utilizing the SEM approach, Full CFA model can be verified which decreases errors thus making hypothesized relationships among latent or unobserved variables less influenced by the presence of measurement errors. As a result of these benefits of Structural equation modeling over regression we therefore decided to test our hypothesized research model through SEM technique in our current study.
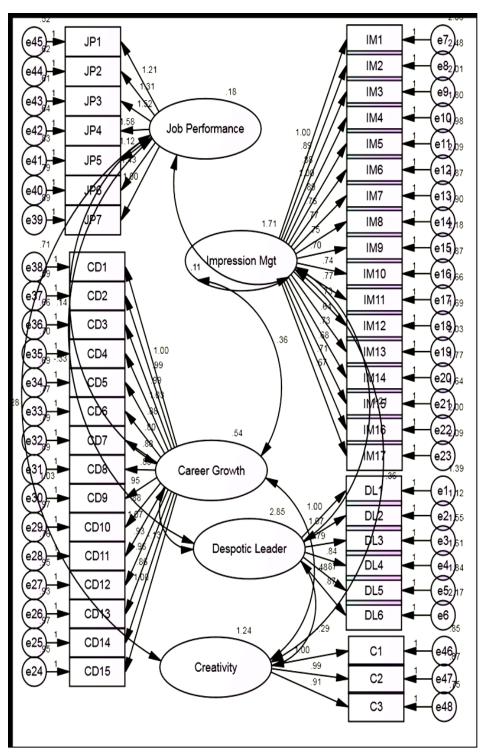
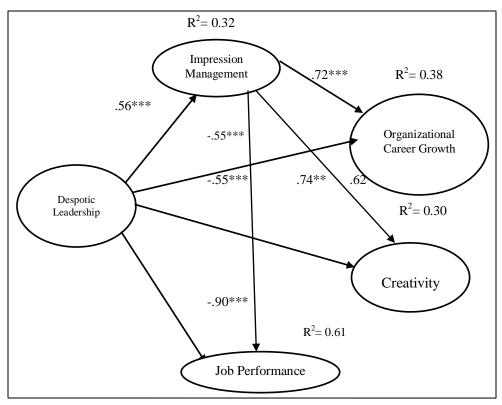**Figure 2: Full Measurement Model (AMOS Path Diagram)**

Figure 3: Hypothesized Structural Model: SEM Results

N = 458; Full Structural model showing direct and mediating effects for variables under study. Mediation paths run from Despotic leadership to impression management to organizational career growth, job performance and creativity. Standardized Regression weight values are shown on the paths with asterisks indicating the significance values. R^2 denote the percentage variance for each path respectively.

4.2 Direct Effects Results

H_1 (a, b & c) stated that despotic leadership is negatively related to organizational career growth, job performance and creativity. Our structural model results showed that the direct paths running from despotic leadership were significant and negative for organizational career growth (β = -0.55, *p<0.001*), job performance (β = -0.90, *p<0.001*) and creativity (β = -0.55, *p<0.001*). It shows that despotic leadership, a dark leadership style being morally corrupt and showing low ethical standards has a negative impact on employee outcomes. These results supported the previous findings (Harris et al., 2007; Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Naseer et al., 2016; Tepper, 2000; Zellers, Tepper & Duffy, 2002). Thus, H_1 (a, b & c) was accepted.

H_2 states that despotic leadership is positively related to Impression management. Our findings highlighted that the direct effects of despotic leadership on impression management were significant and positive (β = 0.56, *p<0.001*). Despotic leadership depicted 3.2% variation in impression management. Results of the study fully support it and demonstrated significant positive relationship between the despotic leadership and impression management. It shows that under the despotic leadership, employees indulge

in impression management tactics. Despotic leaders, having low ethical standards, are exploitative and require unquestioned compliance from their subordinates. Utilizing the dynamics of self-motive theory (Leary, 2007), employees under a despotic leader, perform impression management tactics and make self-presentational efforts to develop a positive image in the eyes of others as they realize that the only way to survive is to avoid confrontation and maintaining positive image which is only possible through impression management tactics. Our results are in line with the findings of Lukacik and Bourdage (2018) who found that followers under an abusive supervisor use impression management strategies. Thus, H_2 was supported.

H_3 (a, b & c) stated that impression management is positively related to organizational career growth, job performance and creativity. Our findings demonstrated that impression management significantly and positively relates to organizational career growth (β = 0.72, *p<0.001*), job performance (β = 0.61, *p<0.001*) and creativity (β = 0.62, *p<0.001*).

The findings lend full support for the hypothesis and revealed that impression management has significant negative relationship with these employees' outcomes. It shows that the employees find it beneficial for them to manage their impression in the eyes of their supervisors etc when they see rewards, opportunities or threats at their workplace. Our results fully support the past findings (Ellis et al., 2002; Grant & Mayer, 2009; Salamon & Deutsch, 2006).Hence, H_3 (a, b & c) was supported.

4.3 Mediation Effects Results

H_4 (a, b & c) state that impression management mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and employee outcomes. We employed bootstrapping approach to test our indirect effects hypotheses. The results indicated that the indirect effects of time lagged despotic leadership on employee's organizational career growth (Indirect Effect = 0.41, *p< 0.001*), job performance (Indirect Effect = 0.42, *p< 0.001*) and creativity (Indirect Effect = 0.35, *p< 0.001*) through impression management was significant (two tailed significance with normal distribution). Findings were corroborated through the bootstrap bias corrected confidence interval (95% CI) which showed non zero for organizational career growth (0.33, 0.51), job performance (0.34, 0.53) and creativity (0.27, 0.46). Thus, H_4 (a, b & c) was supported (see table no.4 for mediation effects results).

Table 4: Mediation Analysis Results Based on Standardized Regression Weights from SEM

	Indirect Paths	**Bootstrapping**		**BC 95% CI**	
		Indirect Effect	**SE**	**Lower Limit**	**Upper Limit**
H₄a	DL* → IM** → Org. Career Growth	.41***	.01	.33	.51
H₄b	DL* → IM** → Job Performance	.42***	.01	.34	.53
H₄c	DL* → IM** → Creativity	.35***	.02	.27	.46

Note: n=458; BC 95% CI= Bootstrap Confidence Intervals
*Despotic Leadership **Impression Management
*p<.05 **p<.01, ***p<.001*

5. Discussion

Despotic leadership, a dark leadership style has emerged as one of the most pertinent, burning and suitable topics not only in the literature of leadership but also in the context of the global workplace environment where hostile treatment from bosses/ superiors has become widespread (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Schilling, 2009; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Research on the 'Dark side' of the leadership in general and despotic leadership in particularly, has focused on its negative impact on employees and organizations. Recently, a new line of inquiry which is currently in its nascent form is the brighter/ beneficial aspects of the dark leadership styles (Judge et al., 2009; Scheuer et al., 2015). Contemporary research on despotic leadership highlights the value of examining how and why dark leadership particularly despotic leadership reveals favorable effects for employees (Naseer et al., 2016; Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

The statistical analysis provided good support for all hypotheses. First 3 hypotheses were main effect hypotheses based on the direct effect of the despotic leadership on the employee's outcomes (organizational career growth, job performance and creativity). All the direct hypotheses received support and showed significant direct impact in the desired direction.

H_4 suggests the mediating role of the impression management in the relationship of despotic leadership and employees' outcomes which was supported in our study. The model fit statistics for structural model indicates that the mediating path model adequately fits the data. Further the bootstrap indirect effects of despotic leadership on organizational career growth, job performance and creativity through impression management were significant. The present study highlights the sunny side of the dark leadership and offers new contentions for theory building and expansion in this domain. Utilizing the dynamics of self-motive theory (Leary, 2007), the current study argues that under a despotic leader, employees in order to survive or to seek personal gains, perform impression management tactics which promotes positive consequences in the form of better individual work related effects.

5.1. Theoretical Contribution

The current research provides theoretical implications for researchers as well as the domain of dark leadership. As per Self-motive theory (Leary, 2007), individuals take advantage of the positive events and relate it to their personal characteristics and make self-presentation efforts to create a favorable image in front of others. Employees manage their behaviors and create specific image in front of others in an attempt to achieve their career and work related goals (Cialdini, 2001; Gordon, 1996; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Rosenfeld et al., 2005).

It has been corroborated in recent research on abusive supervision that abused subordinates tend to engage in surface acting and hide certain emotions, specifically the negative emotions which they consider as unsuitable to display on the job (Carlson et al., 2012). We believe that studying impression management as a mediator in the relationship of despotic leadership and outcomes extends this line of limited research whereby subordinates in order to avoid the abuse engage in impression management or portray fake emotions. Our study contributes to the dark leadership literature by suggesting how a despotic leader might result in beneficial outcomes through the mediating effects of impression management. Our mediation effects results support our above theoretical

contention and add to the growing body of knowledge on despotic leadership and outcomes.

5.2. Research Limitations

Although the present study possesses theoretical and methodological strengths, nonetheless there are a few limitations which present an opportunity to the future researchers for expanding the despotic leadership domain. The current study utilized research design with temporally separated data collected at three different time periods; however it cannot be classified as a full longitudinal design. In future, the researchers can employ complete longitudinal design involving more than one time periods where all the research model variables are tapped at all the time intervals. Secondly, the data was collected from a single organization i.e. employees working in a public sector utility organization lacking generalizability of the findings.

5.3. Future Research Directions

Future researchers should replicate the suggested research model in other sectors and environment. The current study examined one mechanism of impression management as mediating variable in the relationship of despotic leadership and outcomes. Future studies should further extend the bright side of despotic leadership by highlighting other processes that can promote constructive outcomes for followers of a despot. For instance, it might be fruitful to examine status striving as an underlying mechanism through which despotic leadership might create valuable effects for employees. It might also be interesting to examine other dispositional and situational factors as boundary conditions or moderators in the despotic leadership and outcomes relationship. For example Machiavellianism or self-monitoring personality trait and goal congruence with a despotic leader might indicate under what conditions a despotic leader might promote beneficial consequences for followers. In addition, other positive effects in relation to a despotic leader might be investigated by future researchers such as pro-social rule breaking and unethical pro-organizational behaviors etc.

5.4. Managerial Implications

The current study offers practical implications for managers and organizations. Managers in organizations need to provide employees with impression management trainings as impression management tactics help employees to achieve organizational and personal goals without creating a stressful environment. Employees equipped with supervisor, self or job focused impression management can deter a despotic leader from showing harmful tendencies which further results in constructive outcomes for them. Organizations also need to curtail the presence of despotic leadership as our direct effects results show the negative effects of working with a morally corrupt and dominating leader such as despotic leader. Top management need to conduct anonymous surveys and also monitor departmental heads and supervisors in order to identify dishonest and autocratic leadership tendencies. In case where despotic leaders are prevalent, managers and organizations need to take appropriate steps so as to eliminate such leaders. In addition, accountability mechanisms should be introduced and reinforced for the eradication of despotic leadership at all management levels.

In conclusion, the turn of the 21st century has exposed organizations and employees to dark leaders whose integrity and values pose a tremendous threat to the functioning and survival of employees and organizations. In such a scenario, where professional existence

and career growth of employees are at stake, we highlight that employees who engage in impression management tactics in the presence of a despotic leader might turn the tables in their favor and attain positive career and performance outcomes. Our study opens a new side to the dark side of leadership and asserts the value of impression management tactics as a successful process through which despotic leaders might create favorable outcomes for followers in a developing country like Pakistan.

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