



**Impact of Despotic Leadership on Project Success in the Software Development Projects: Mediating role of Self-Efficacy and Job Autonomy**  
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*Despotic leadership in the form of abusive supervision is a negative form of leadership that badly affects the project's success and organizational goals. This study aims at measuring the impact of despotic leadership on project success through the mediation of Self-Efficacy and Job Autonomy. Data was collected from Software Development Projects of Punjab from the 212 professionals working in software development projects. The data analysis was performed through SmartPLS 3.3. The current study's findings showed that despotic leadership negatively affects project success. Findings also reveal that due to despotic behavior of the leader, employees lose their interest in their tasks which results in decreased self-efficacy and job autonomy that adversely affects the project success. This research work underwrites to the literature on Self-efficacy and Job Autonomy by revealing the relationship between Despotic leadership and Project Success. The results of this study show that the relationship amongst despotic leadership and project success is mediated by self-efficacy and job autonomy.*



## Introduction

With the growing interest in project management, project success has been broadly discussed (Ogunlana & Toor, 2010; Albert, 2017; Todorović, 2015). Academicians and practitioners emphasize studying the project success and its predictors (Albert & Spang, 2017; Mir & Pinnington, 2014; Veiga, 2017). Traditionally, researchers in the domain of project management focused on triple constraints (scope, schedule and cost) to determine project success (Koops et al., 2016). Projects were subjected to failure even if studies on technical aspects, such as risk and time, were performed (Neumeier et al., 2018; Whitney & Daniels, 2013). The literature clarifies that, despite years of neglect, human resources play a crucial part in whether a project succeeds or fails. Moreover, leadership has a vital role in achieving the goals and objectives of the Project (Yang et al., 2012). Likewise, Human resource development is crucial in determining how the organization will evolve (Edmonson et al., 2017). Different studies propose that the project's success depends on the form of leadership being implied in the organization by the project leaders (Radujković & Sjekavica, 2017; Yang et al., 2010).

Since the beginning of leadership, the valuable effects of leadership on groups and organizations have always been idealized and highlighted (Schilling, 2009; Mughal et al., 2019), but the negative leadership styles have always been ignored (Naseer, 2016). Consequently, with the developing interest in the leadership's negative style, numerous terms have been projected to catch this idea, including insignificant tyranny (Ashforth, 1994; Akhtar & Shaukat, 2016), offensive supervision (Tepper, 2007), authoritarian leadership, disparaging leadership (Einarsen, 2007), and despotic leadership (Aronson, 2001; Nauman et al., 2020). Due to the more interest in flawed attributes of leadership, it proposes a major significant shift which perceives the negative effects leaders can apply on their assistants or juniors (Karakitapoglu- et al., 2013). Employee performance is affected by the supervisor's behaviour (Chen, 2015). The outcomes of unethical control on team members are also important because the supervisor's destructive behaviour damages the employee's performance (Liu, 2012). That is why it is vital to study the dark side of leadership (Rossetti & Choi, 2005; Morrison, 2004). Despotic leadership is a negative style of leadership which is divergent from the proper type of leadership and is defined as harassing fellow members in the form of directive behaviour towards their team members (Tepper, 2000; Rasool et al., 2018). It is characterized as a highly egocentric leadership with formal authority where despotic leaders are bossy, directorial, controlling and dominating in nature to complete their tasks and have an abusive attitude towards their team members (Aronson, 2001). In this style of leadership, the leaders and managers act in a negative and unaccepted way. Such leaders are selfish and do not care about fellow employees and team members. They want to own and control their employees, try to manipulate others (Carstarphen, 2018), and have oppressive and aggressive behaviour (Soran, 2017). These leaders do not allow feedback and suggestions from their employees and team members (Schilling, 2009) and try to gain predominance and authority (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018).

Furthermore, it is evident from past studies that despotic leaders negatively impact team members' self-esteem (Burton & Hoobler, 2006) and job autonomy. Team members suffering from the despotic behaviour of leaders often have lower dignity for their work, affecting their



feelings and emotions, resulting in lower self-efficacy (Skogstad et al., 2017) where Self-efficacy is characterized as the personal resource that enables an individual to discover ways to deal with unfavourable circumstances at the workplace (Bandura, 1997; Schmitz and Ganesan, 2014). These characteristic increases confidence in one's self to cope with the deficiencies in the organization by applying related personal knowledge (Wood and Bandura, 1989). Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief that they can complete a particular task (Šimunovi'c; Babarovi'c, 2020). Thus, individuals with higher self-efficacy are primarily involved in relevant activities, and this continuous success further leads them to be interested in these activities (Nauman et al., 2020). Job autonomy can be defined as an aspect of human resources which allows a person to choose the direction or methods in which he will perform his job. Autonomy is a substantial part of proficient development (Gray & Pratt, 1989; Hart & Rotem, 1995). Job autonomy creates a sense of pride related to job (Mehmood, 2012). Despotic leadership adversely affects employee performance, job autonomy and organizational citizenship behaviour (Naseer et al., 2016). From the literature, it is evident that in the presence of a despotic leader, team members cannot take part in their job and hence lose their motivation to do the tasks (May et al., 2004). All these factors contribute towards the failure of the project.

As the software development projects in the organizations of Pakistan follow a power centre, leaders have the power to control job opportunities and resources of the employees and possess the right to directly determine the chance of promotion by management of the organization and assessment of their performance (Horne et al., 2016; Khan et al., 2020). In software houses, the degree of involvement in developing employees' careers is higher (Clercq et al., 2021). This interference is due to the despotic leaders who want to take control over everything and firmly believe that they have control of every detail of the job. In addition, such leaders take all the credit for team members' efforts and blame their employees for the team's mistakes (Farh et al., 2000). Individuals subjected to the despotic behaviour of the leaders, their self-efficacy reduces for work. Hence, they lose control over their work, resulting in no decision-making power for their responsible work, and they have to bear the blame while facing any difficulties (Hoogh & Hartog, 2008). Due to this behaviour of the leaders, team members have no authority about their jobs and tasks, which in turn becomes the reason for the development of a negative attitude towards their work while having no confidence in their job performance (Ariel & Mushfiq, 2019). Self-efficacy serves as the source of motivation through which employees proactively take part in their work (Salazar & Hayward, 2018), which is affected by the constraints of despotic leadership while having no chance of showcasing their abilities and capabilities by finishing their work on their own. In addition, nations with collectivistic cultures, including Pakistan (Wong, 2014), implement a despotic leadership style in software development projects, which is inherent in the system because of the bureaucratic style followed in Pakistan (Shao et al., 2019; Naseer, 2016). The main question of this research is, "what is the mechanism through which despotic leadership impacts project success?". Furthermore, the primary objective of this study is to assess the extent to which self-efficacy and job autonomy mediate the connection between despotic leadership and project performance.



## Theoretical Background

### Supporting Theory

Various theories have been postulated to assess the negative impact of negativity and unethical characteristics that reflect the dark leadership style. According to Transactional theory, stress is a condition that causes inconsistency between the resource and its demand by assessing and describing why stress occurs (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Individual behaviours consisting of various categories are relevant to the experience in the world (Crocker, 1984). Besides this, the follower compliance theory presented by Barbuto (2000) states that psychological viewpoints and processes help motivate employees to handle situations in despotic leadership (Good, 2012). As per our hypothesis and research model, Social Exchange Theory supports the approach. This theory is brought up by explaining the role of despotic leadership in forming the worker's attitude and conduct towards achieving project success. Job autonomy and self-efficacy can be measured later. Social Exchange Theory is famous for describing the team member's conduct in the team (Blau, 1964). Past studies show that social exchange involves a process of give and take among team members and organizations, which helps build commitments to the organizations based on mutualism (Emerson, 1976). This theory presents the idea of mutualism or sharing and is preventive towards both parties' behaviour (Blau, 1964). Social Exchange postulates that exchange includes interpersonal contact. For every action, there will be a reaction which in turn is responsible for triggering the self-efficacy and job autonomy of the employees. When a relationship quality is formed, certain factors are discussed frequently in social exchange literature (Park, 2015). That is why Despotic Leadership (DL) is considered unethical and disrespectful as a code of conduct (Hoogh & Hartog, 2008). The job autonomy and self-efficacy of the team members are prime factors that help achieve the project goals. Supporting theory can be Social Exchange theory in that it encourages the relationship between the leader's behaviour and, in return, the employee's attitude, which affects the project's success. Our evaluation of Project Culture as a moderator tends to the leader worker communication with negative leadership style.

### Despotic Leadership and Project Success

In the project management context, project success has been proved to be the premise of the leadership style. The results of previous studies show that the "iron triangle"—time, budget, and scope—relates to project success, and project managers were required to meet all three requirements for the project to be successful. At the same time, project success depends on the timely completion of the project within the available project budget and defined scope, along with customer satisfaction (Kerzner, 2017). With the passage of time, researchers discovered new measure for project success, including stakeholder satisfaction, efficient use of resources, and leadership (Ahmadabadi & Heravi, 2019). As project success has no clear definition and everyone perceives it on its own, it is significant in project management and project-based organizations (Arnold & Matthijs, 2010). the style of leadership of the project manager decides



the success and failure of the Project (Adnane & Clothilde, 2004). Project success is consistent on various measures that evaluate the end results of the Project (Ika, 2009). The three approaches are defined for the project success where the business approach is profit oriented, client approach has greater emphasis on customer satisfaction along with iron triangle (i.e. scope, schedule and cost) and team approach is mainly focused on motivation of team, efficacious scheduling and commitment of the team towards the Project (Rad and Anantatmula, 2010). These three approaches are handled and examined differently by different stakeholders (Creasy & Carnes, 2017). Moreover, Project leadership is one of the key factors for the project success. To achieve the project goals and purposes, there should be a proper leadership style to be followed. A lot of different leadership styles have been opted by managers. The destructive form of leadership as rude supervision has been mostly discussed in the last few years (Hwang & Cameron, 2008). In the early stages of this domain, the concept of abusive supervision, a form of despotic leadership was introduced, which was defined as the viewpoint of the employee towards their leaders has a persistent forceful disposition and conduct either verbally or non-verbally without having the actual contact (Tepper, 2000). Many authors carried out research on this style of leadership and its influence on project performance, work-family conflicts and many other measures. It has been found out from all the studies that negative and dark style of leadership always results in lower or bad performance of persons, and group and ultimately affects the project success. Not only project culture, teamwork and team collaboration has an impact on project performance but also it is affected by the style of leadership chosen in the Project (Yang, 2010) where efficient, dedicated and faithful project teams go on the way to project success (Crawford, 2005; Muller & Turner, 2010). Abusive style of leadership always has a dark impact on organizations affecting the new ideas within the teams and hence impact the productive behavior of the employee in the negative manner (Ai-Hua, 2018).

H<sub>1</sub>: Despotic leadership has negative impact on project success.

### **Despotic Leadership, Self-Efficacy and Project Success**

Different researchers have an interest in the employment domain and quantified self-efficacy to apprehend particular domains such as job search and creativity. Many different approaches on self-efficacy have intensified the knowledge of the human behaviour at organizational level in order to manage the challenges related to the job, work associated pressure, and its consequences (Shoji, Cieslak, Smoktunowicz, Rogala, Benight, & Luszczynska, 2016). Self-efficacy has been objectified as situation-specific belief (Sherer et al., 1982). Or can be apprehended as a set of person's beliefs and faiths to standardize and implement tasks and actions required for managing the intended circumstances and conditions (Bandura, 1997). Literature depicts that persons having with high-self efficacy manage their routine and is more able to cope with challenges of the workplaces. Thus, Self-efficacy is one's ability to rank the inspiration, intellectual assets and strategies needed in different situations (Wood and Bandura, 1989). This is one of the most significant resource of human ability contributing vigorous belief in oneself and motivation that instigates the trust in oneself in order to handle uncertain and stressful circumstances (Bayraktar & Jimenez, 2020). This affects the employees including their personal traits and characteristics





(Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001) that depends on situation or the phenomenon or environment in which they are performing (Bandura & Cervone, 1986).

Many researchers argued on how the leadership style affects the projects in positive way on team members and organizations which in turn helps in attaining the goals and objectives of the organizations (Erkutlu, & Chafra, 2018; Medler-Liraz & Seger Guttman, 2018). It has been communicated from past work that leadership has taken new forms and impacted the employees work behaviors, however, there is a neglected area which focuses on how the dysfunctional leadership negatively affects the employee attitude and conduct especially self-efficacy which is considered to be the prospective human resource and is considered to be the main element in organizational and personal growth (Naseer, 2016). It is evident from the researches that despotic leadership, which is socially unacceptable behavior, has a negative relation with self-efficacy and individuals who are subjected to despotic style of leadership often have a social stress disorder which is known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder leaving exhausting and tiring impacts (Arnsten, Raskind, Taylor & Connor, 2015). Consequently, employees under such destructive and despotic leaders endure from mental and psychological impacts that slows down self-efficacy and job autonomy which affects the project success (Einarsen, 1999). Therefore, Despotic leadership weakens well-being and decreases self-efficacy (Duffy et al., 2002). Researches also postulate that despotic leadership affects the individual's self-esteem and diminishes the self-confidences (Burton & Hoobler, 2006). When a person will have no self-belief then he will be unable to perform in job environment which will decrease the project success rate. This style of leadership has an adverse effect on employee's self-esteem and confidence, leaves a negative impact on employee's emotions and hence affects their self-efficacy (Skogstad et al., 2017). As, such leader are selfish and think of their own self so this style of leadership leaves destructive effects on team members. Employees working in the umbrella of despotic leadership always feel unwelcomed and hence become incapable of doing anything. An individual suffering from such behavior results in negative self-assessment, which is noticeable by their lower self-esteem, lower confidence and hence decreased self-efficacy (Peng, et al., 2017) and therefore lower chances of project success. Before self-efficacy evaluations, evaluation feedback is performed which has various disadvantages. Devaluation feedback diminishes self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). All of these factors results in lacking the power to be effective and individuals become less self-efficacious, and hence find them unable to meet the situational demands of workplace environment (Duffy, 2002). Hence it is hypothesized that,

H<sub>2</sub>: Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between Despotic Leadership and Project Success.

### **Despotic Leadership, Job Autonomy and Project Success**

Autonomy plays a significant role in professional development (Gray & Pratt, 1989; Hart & Rotem, 1995). Job autonomy is supposed to be the important human resource that allows the individuals or team members to choose and plan their tasks according to their own choices in their jobs (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Parker, 2001). The level of freedom and liberty regarding job required and given to the individuals working in an organization to perform daily tasks and



assignments is known as autonomy (Stamps & Piedmonte, 1986). Literature shows that employees perform well when they find their job autonomous. Employees demand job autonomy for efficient and effective work performance (Naqvi, 2013). Thus, an individual's interpretation of level of control and authority over his work or job in which he could incorporate choices related to how he would perform his work or job and what actions he would take to start his work is known as Autonomy (Spreitzer, 1995). Past studies show that employee autonomy enhances when organizations empower their employees in terms of performance evaluation (Stanton, 2000). When an individual knows that he can control personal work, this generates a solid motivation in employee's behaviour (Greenberger & Strasser, 1986). Due to having a wish for personal control, they want to retrieve their lost freedom (Brehm & Brehm, 1981). Therefore, Job Autonomy plays a substantial role in designing job attributes (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). It tells the degree to which an individual or employee in workplace environment can control the momentum, speed, sequencing of activities, and ways to complete the assignable tasks (Volmer, Spurk, & Niessen, 2012). It also creates a sense of self-governance and meaning (Ryan & Deci, 2006). Past studies shows that it enhances the feelings of job responsibility and is considered to be the important factor in creative work (Mirchandani & Lederer, 2014). As the power or authority in the job cultivates job improvements therefore employee's job autonomy increases. Hence, when autonomy is added in the job to a certain extent, it affects the relationship between the leader's behavior and the performance of the employees (Schaubroeck, Walumbwa, Ganster, & Kepes, 2007), which becomes the significant factor in attaining the goals and aims of the project.

According to (Naseer et al., 2016) despotic leadership has a negative connection with organizational citizenship performance, job autonomy, creativity and performance of the employees. Moreover, the relationship is negative in despotic leadership because employees always look for work with meaning to it or job meaningfulness. Job meaningfulness may be defined as the degree to which an employee is engaged at work (Jiang et al., 2015). So, Job Characteristic Model explains that a meaningful job is one that consolidates all the characteristics comprising of job autonomy also (Hackman & Oldham's, 1976). Contrary to it, meaningless work creates disinterest and a sense of boredom in one's job (Steger, Littman-Ovadia, Miller, Menger, & Rothmann, 2013). However, due to a leader's selfish behavior, employees do not find them capable to take part in their jobs which results in demotivation and detachment from work which affects the project's success (May et al., 2004). Hence, abusive supervision (despotic leadership) affects the employee's job autonomy, and they loss their belief that they have a meaningful work to do (Rafferty & Restubog, 2011). It is clear from the past researches that when leaders try to direct their employees appropriately, they loss their control and autonomy in their jobs. Moreover, transformational leadership is an ethical style of leadership, which increases job autonomy and independence at the workplace. From the above literature, we hypothesized that:

H<sub>3</sub>: Job Autonomy mediates the relationship between Despotic Leadership and Project Success.



## **Despotic Leadership, Self-efficacy, Job Autonomy and Project Culture**

Project culture is defined as ideas, beliefs, norms, individual's behavior and attitude in the project environment. When there is a well-built project culture, the culture is not affected by joining or leaving or people. It is affected only when activities of the people or norms changes. Webster explains culture as a set of shared beliefs and knowledge of functioning of organizations. Project culture is an arrangement of contrasting standards and principles that are developed over time (Weiling Ke, Kwok Kee Wei, 2008). To some extent, project culture decides the employee performance. Hence, it is the prime focus of organizations to create such constructive environment or workplace that enhances the employee performance and personal traits of the employee. People change their behavior according to their respective project culture because it is considered as frame of reference having ideas and values which team members share with each other. It is dynamic in nature and is developed quickly. Generally, project management considers that restrictions can be imposed on everything in the Project (Owen et al., 2012). Project includes many individuals with knowledge of many areas with varying skill sets who have their own style of performing jobs, which is normally not in line with the project culture or with one another (Wiewiora et al., 2012). These patterns may be a cause of inspiration or may become the cause of problems and misunderstandings among the employees (Anbari, 2010). That is why project-based organizations should be aware of their culture to predict the outcomes on different factors such as self-efficacy and job autonomy (Jalal, 2018).

In addition to this, Integrity and honesty are significant factors in developing organisational culture (Williams, 2012). This applies to all team members but major responsibility lies on the project leader, the project manager. In creating and shaping a strong and healthier project culture which promotes personal and professional growth, lies in the role of the project manager and this can only be done when a leader will be ethical and honest. Project culture impacts the work behavior and increases the productivity of the organization, relying on size of the organization (Rasool, 2018). In software houses, where there is no cooperation, this ends up having employees working in isolation and undermine their efforts, which adversely affects the person's self-efficacy and job autonomy. When employees are committed to organization's belief, they become internalized. Thus, organizations where project leaders are not supportive, employees live in fear of not performing. Whereas, culture provides workers and team members, a direction to choose a certain behavior to achieve long term development (Liao, 2019). The performance of employee is also affected by the project culture. Workplace environment has a strong impact on project success and hence where a project manager plays a crucial role in uniting team members (Thamain, 2004). Culture has an important role in project success or failure (Shore, 2008). Usually, project culture has a significant role in moderating the relationship between behavior of leaders and in formation of organization (Yiing & Ahmad, 2009). Therefore, it depends on the project manager to combine organizational and professional culture and make a project culture (Ajmal & Koskinen 2008). Here in this research, project culture is moderating between despotic leadership, self-efficacy and job autonomy in such way that relationship will be stronger if the project culture will be stronger and vice versa. When the project culture will be stronger and shared, employees will be satisfied more and hence their job satisfaction will be





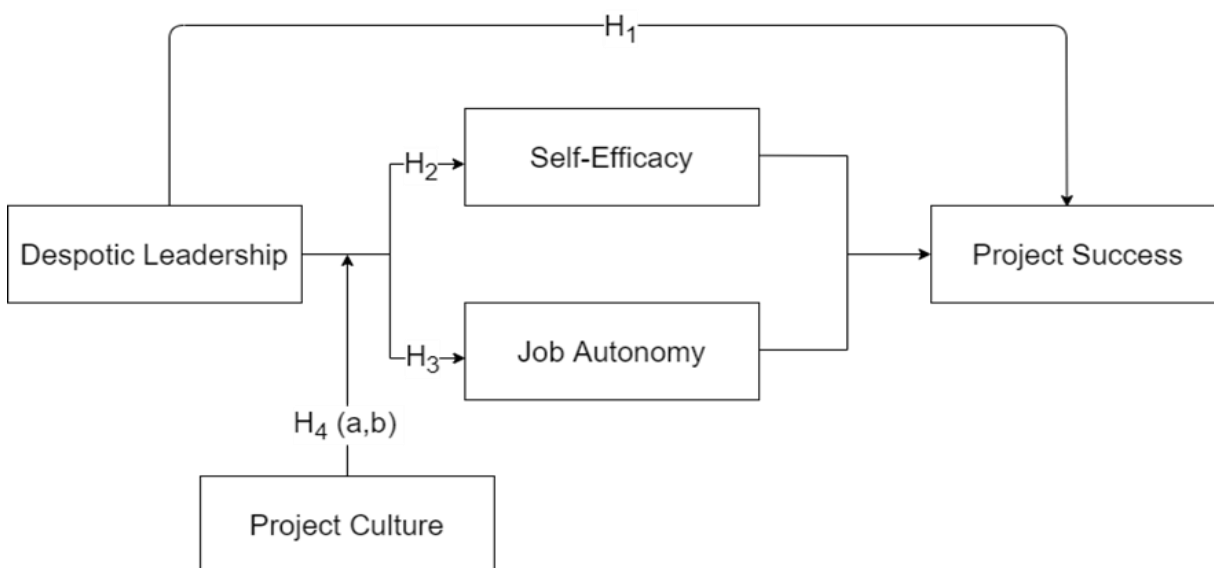
increased which will help in increased job autonomy (Lawrence, 2007). Project culture could be eliminated if the self-esteem is deliberated unobtrusively (Falk, 2015). When project team members are open and have no hesitation to share the knowledge and ideas, then a creative work environment and strong project culture is developed (Qubaisi, Elanain, Badri & Ajmal, 2015). It has been seen that several factors make up the project culture, where leadership is one of them. Employees demand empowerment, and sustainability from their leaders, if the project leader will be unethical towards their employees, then their performance will be deteriorated and hence will affect the self-efficacy and job autonomy. The absence of moral and ethical conduct of a leader cannot be ignored in decision making, and formation of project culture which are important factors in measuring the performance of the employees and project success (Raghupathy, 2011). As a result, excessive power distance in a workplace generally limits a person's ability to think independently and be creative by encouraging natural work patterns that routineize actions and thought. As a result, the link between self-efficacy and job autonomy would be negatively impacted. This study explores that positive and creative environment may have a negative impact on relationship between despotic leadership, team member's self-efficacy and job autonomy. From the above literature, we hypothesized that:

H<sub>4a</sub>: Project culture has a moderating effect on the relationship between despotic leadership and self-efficacy.

H<sub>4b</sub>: Project culture has a moderating effect on the relationship between despotic leadership and Job Autonomy.

**Hypothesized Research Model**

The research model for the current study is given as Figure 1. This model represents that Despotic Leadership and Project Success are independent and dependent variables, respectively. While self-efficacy and Job Autonomy mediates this relationship. In this model, Project Culture acts as a moderator.





### Fig. 1: Hypothesized Research Model

#### Research Methodology

The primary focus of current research is the interplay of Despotic Leadership, Self-Efficacy, Job Autonomy, Project Culture and Project Success in the Software Development Projects of Punjab, Pakistan. For sampling process, a target population is clearly defined. The next step is to choose the sampling technique and frame for the population that will be sampled. Data from the specified targeted demographic is gathered, and the sample size is chosen to evaluate the response rate.

#### Population and Sampling

As the population of current study is software houses of Punjab, Pakistan, therefore a list of active Software houses was obtained from the directory of Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB). According to the company directory, there are 345 firms registered with PSEB. We used a well-known and often used sample size table for a finite population first developed by (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). According to aforementioned table, 181 out of 345 were selected randomly for data collection purpose.

#### Data Collection

Data was collected through questionnaire survey form consisting of all items of variables under research from individuals working on software development projects randomly selected from the list of active software houses working in Pakistan registered under Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB). Individuals mentioned as population were approached personally and requested to fill the research questionnaire. Almost 400 employees were approached but only 212 responses were collected, hence making 53% response rate.

#### Measures

Data was collected by using the authentic scales referred by prior researchers. In whole, five constructs were used to conduct this study and draw the findings on proposed hypotheses. All questionnaire items were measured on the five-point Likert scale i.e. (1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree. The questionnaire is attached below in Appendix A along with their descriptive statistics and factor loading.

For the despotic leadership, six-item scale by Hanges & Dickson, (2004) has been used. It has been used to analyze the variable and measured using Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This scale was used by the author in development and verification of GLOBE culture and leadership scales. The items used in this are; "is revengeful, a control freak, acts like despot", and "become self-indulgence to tasks of projects".

For the project success, nine-item scale by (Pinto & Selvin, 2003) has been used to analyze the variable and measured using five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The items used in this scale are; "project is on schedule", "time", "budget", and "results define improvements in the performance".



Self-efficacy has been assessed using an eight-item scale developed by (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001). Respondents were inquired to assess the items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample items consist of "I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself, and "when facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will be able to accomplish them".

A three-item scale established by (Voydanoff, 2004) has been used to measure Job Autonomy. Respondents were asked to assess these items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample scale consists of three items including "I have significant freedom to decide how I will do my job".

In order to measure the strength of project culture, a five-item scale developed by (Goodman, Paul & Darr, 1998) was used. The items ranked from 1 to 5 on Likert scale. The items used will be analyzed based on sharing of practices, information and decision in order to solve the problems where project team will be accessed by innovative approach.

### **Data Analysis and Results**

Data collected for this study is evaluated through structural equation modeling (SEM) with software package Smart-PLS-3. According to Hair Jr et al., (2016), PLS-SEM is basically utilized to gauge the relation of two or more predicted and predictor variables. Furthermore Hulland, (1999); Lu et al., (2015) says in social sciences that SEM is often used due to its capability to test simultaneously multiple predictors and predicted variables, this enables analysis of small and asymmetric samples of data.

### **Model Measurement**

Firstly, reliability and validity were checked for the five constructs used for this study. For reliability, which is mostly emulated by internal consistency reliability and assessed by Cronbach's alpha's value. Nunnally et al. (1967) recommended to use constructs having Cronbach's alpha value 0.70 or greater. For this study, the values of Cronbach's alpha of Despotism Leadership (DL), project Success (PS), Self-efficacy (SE) are above 0.7 while Project Culture (PC) and Job Autonomy (JA) are above 0.80. Another measure is Composite Reliability (CR) that is generally used by social scientists for internal consistency. The values of CR in between 0.60 to 0.70 are reasonable and are ideally acceptable if they are above 0.70 and less than 0.90 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). For this research, the value of CR for Despotism Leadership (DL), Project Success (PS), Project Culture (PC) and Job Autonomy (JA) are 0.827, 0.875, 0.835, 0.899 while for Self-efficacy (SE) the value is 0.912. The value of CR is not acceptable if it exceeds 0.95, as explained by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), because if the value of CR is greater than 0.95, than it is contemplated that the picked items are assessing the unchanged event repetitively.

Secondly after assessing the reliability, we checked for the validity of constructs under study. First, we checked for convergent validity by assessing Average Variance Extracted (AVE).



According to Petter et al., (2007), convergent validity examines how well the statistics of a construct load or intersect on their own constructs. AVE values in this study for all the constructs are greater than 0.70 which is well-above the line and exhibiting to be superior in convergent validity. Secondly, Discriminant Validity (DV) was assessed for the data. Discriminant validity (DV) examines the extent of differentiation between the constructs in a model Hair Jr et al., (2016). Moreover, the square root of AVE is usually used to assess discriminant validity (DV). Whereas, the square root of AVE value should be higher or above than the correlations within the construct and that of the other constructs according to Fornell and Larcker, (1981). The value of the square root of AVE for all the given constructs is higher than the correlations within the construct, this implies reliable discriminant validity. Below in the Table 1, diagonally reported are the values of the square roots of AVE highlighted in bold, and the numbers mentioned off-diagonal are the values of correlations between the constructs.

**Table 1: Composite Reliability, Cronbach's Alpha, AVE and Discriminant Validity**

	CR	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	DL	JA	PC	PS	SE
DL	0.827	0.725	0.546	<b>0.739</b>				
JA	0.875	0.869	0.699	-0.549	<b>0.836</b>			
PC	0.835	0.889	0.544	-0.477	0.763	<b>0.838</b>		
PS	0.899	0.785	0.561	-0.623	0.801	0.827	<b>0.849</b>	
SE	0.912	0.742	0.565	-0.622	0.794	0.797	0.829	<b>0.751</b>

**Note:** DL= Despotism Leadership; PC= Project Culture; JA= Job Autonomy; SE= Self Efficacy; PS= Project Success

The square roots of AVE (the diagonal numbers in bold in the table) are higher than the correlation coefficients between the factors and others, showing that each factor has an acceptable discriminant validity".

As suggested by Kaplan (2008) and Wong (2013), 208 samples were utilized to ascertain the path coefficients of hypotheses by bootstrapping method using PLS-SEM. The results providing the evidence about the direction of the association and the relative intensity of the effect connected with our predictor variables on predicted variable. The path coefficient of greater value exhibits a greater influence of the predictor variable on the predicted variable. Likewise, according to the Hair et al. (2016) the T-value, higher than 1.96, exhibits the relationships significance, on the other hand P-value, lesser than 0.05, exhibits the relationships significance. It was established that the hypotheses 1, 2, 3 and 4a are supported because of their p-values and T-values but hypothesis 4b is not supported.

Therefore, structural model applied to produce the effects of the moderating variable. Our research theorizes project culture (PC) as a moderation variable and assesses its effects on the relationship between predictors and predicted variable. Firstly, between Despotism Leadership



(DL) and Self Efficacy (SE) and secondly, between Despotism Leadership (DL) and Job Autonomy (JA). The effect of moderation was evaluated by "moderation by interaction terms" method. In this process, the product of moderator variable and predictor variables was calculated, and after performing calculation, the combined effects were examined against the predicted variable. Table 2 below shows the outcomes of our hypotheses testing.

**Table 2: Hypotheses Results**

Sr. #	Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	T Statistic	P Values	Hypotheses decision
1	Despotic Leadership → Project Success	-0.075	2.512	0.012	Significant
2	Despotic Leadership → Self- efficacy → Project Success	-0.127	5.913	0.000	Significant
3	Despotic Leadership → Job Autonomy → Project Success	-0.129	5.116	0.000	Significant
4a	Despotic Leadership*Project Culture -->Job Autonomy → Project success <sup>[1]</sup>	0.204	1.997	0.046	Significant
4b	Despotic Leadership*Project Culture -->Self-efficacy → Project Success	0.092	1.857	0.064	Insignificant

## Discussion

### Direct Effects:

In direct paths, we postulated the negative influence of Despotism Leadership on Project Success, H1. The results of H1 support the proposed hypotheses which means that Despotism Leadership has negative influence on project success. The  $\beta$  value of -0.075 shows that a negative relation exists between DL and PS. This beta coefficient value depicts that one-unit increase in Despotism Leadership will bring 7.5% decrease in Project Success of an employee working in Software Houses. This value also tells the relationship to be inversely proportional. Much of the literature supports the relationship of despotism leadership with social responsibilities of the leaders (DeHoogh & Den Hartog, 2008) but very few of the studies are available on association of despotism style of leadership with the project success. This research is a valuable contribution in project management literature of Despotism Leadership style. It is postulated that negative leadership style directly affects the employee outcome and hence not suitable in achieving the success parameters (Gallagher, 2015). Like other projects, Software projects also have





constraints like scope, schedule, and cost but in software projects, it is difficult to achieve the iron triangle, which is the core responsibility of the project manager or leader. Therefore, such leaders cannot go further in achieving the iron triangle with such behavior with their co-workers. Thus, despotic leadership and project success found to be negatively associated with each other (Erkutlu, & Chafra, 2018).

### **Mediating effects**

Researcher used Job autonomy and self-efficacy as mediating variables. H2 and H3 both are postulated as "self-efficacy and job autonomy mediates the relationship between Despotic Leadership and Project Success". The hypothesis H2 is accepted as Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between Despotic Leadership and Project Success with having statistical analysis ( $\beta = -0.127$ ;  $t = 5.913$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). The hypothesis H2 is also supported by the literature, as Social Exchange Theory suggests that an exchange of behavior occurs between team members and the leaders (Blau, 1964). Despotic Leaders do not encourage their subordinates and seeks revenge (Naseer, Raja, Syed, Donia, Darr, 2016). Hence, employees working under such behavior find it difficult to showcase their talent and have a low sense of self-efficacy. Therefore, from the results it is evident that Self-efficacy negatively mediates the relationship of despotic leadership and project success. Similarly, the hypothesis H3 is accepted as "Job Autonomy mediates the relationship between Despotic Leadership and Project Success" with having statistical analysis ( $\beta = -0.129$ ;  $t = 5.116$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Thus, it is found out that Despotic Leadership diminishes Job Autonomy and latter decreases Project Success. The proposed hypothesis is proven by literature, as May, Gilson & Harter (2004) suggests that due to despotic behavior of the leader, employees are unable to develop interest in their routine tasks which becomes a great source of demotivation in their work behavior.

### **Moderating effects**

Although, Despotic Leadership has negative influence on Project Success, but it is debatable that how effective Despotic Leadership is in presence of Project Culture." Therefore, we have used Project Culture as a moderating variable on the relationship between Despotic Leadership and Job Autonomy and Despotic Leadership and Self-Efficacy. From the statistical analysis, it is proved that Project Culture has a moderating effect on the relationship between despotic leadership and Job Autonomy" ( $\beta = 0.204$ ;  $t = 1.997$ ;  $p = 0.046$ ). The beta coefficient tells that positive moderation exists between despotic leadership and job autonomy. Thus, H4 is accepted; such that positive Project Culture will increase the relationship. Therefore, Project Culture has a moderating effect on the relationship between Despotic Leadership and Job Autonomy. It is evident from the literature that providing a suitable workplace and culture is the core responsibility of the management. Therefore, positive culture enhances a positive change, and provides opportunities to the employee to show the best of their talent. Furthermore, Project Culture with Self-efficacy having the statistical results ( $\beta = 0.092$ ;  $t = 1.857$ ;  $p = 0.064$ ) shows that moderation is insignificant, as the p value is greater than 0.05 and t value is less than 1.96. Both does not meet the criteria for significance. Thus, PC does not have moderating effect on the relationship between DL and SE. Hence, H4 (b) is rejected.



## **Theoretical Implications**

This study puts forward some important theoretical and managerial implications. Theoretical assumptions of Social Exchange Theory support the current research study; which says that one person's behavior can influence the change in behavior of the other person. This behavioral exchange can be both ways, either positive or negative where parties involved in such relationship have a focus on increasing the benefits and decreasing the costs (Homans, 1958). So, it shows that behaviors and actions of despotic leader leaves a negative impact on self-efficacy and job autonomy as per Social Exchange Theory, which in turn decreases the chances of project success.

## **Managerial Implications**

Current research opened a new domain where despotic style of leadership is studied with different variables. This study recommends that despotic behavior of the leader should be discouraged to increase the chances of the project success because despotic leadership has negative relation with project success. It is suggested that managers should promote positive style of leadership which instigates positive attitude in the software houses. This study provides guidelines for top managers to discourage leader's despotic behavior and enhance employees' self-efficacy and facilitate job autonomy by developing appropriate type of project culture.

## **Limitations of the research**

Some limitations were there related to the current study. The data was collected from software houses of Punjab Region only and the sample size was small while response rate was low. Large sample size will provide much better predictability. Moreover, cross-sectional data was used in current study. Future studies may consider longitudinal data to assess the impact of despotic leadership during different time frames. Due to Covid-19 situations in the country, the corporate culture characteristics were not incorporated in the current study. These could have impacted the findings of the study in various ways. It is recommended that future researcher should add more negative constructs that may impact the relationship. Due to limited time, only one moderator was considered but future researcher may modify the model by adding different variables with Despotic Leadership and Project Success. It is suggested that after the addition of different variables, this model should be checked in other sectors of Pakistan such as construction industry.

## **Conclusion**

This research is an attempt to analyze the relationship between despotic leadership and project success in the software houses of Punjab region of Pakistan. In the context of Pakistan, it is revealed that employees work under despotic behavior which doesn't depict a good reflection of the society. Leaders force their subordinates to work under pressure, due to which they lose their interest in their jobs, hence depleting their self-efficacy and job autonomy. Top management should consider their employees, as they are the key resource for any project and organizations must have a legal requirement so that the leaders should conduct ethical and moral behavior.



The distance which is created by the sense of being powerful, should be discouraged among the leaders and team members and leaders should perform a self-analysis as social Exchange Theory postulates that behavior of the leader is the main reason which can provide a strong, creative, and positive culture where employee will be able to perform well.

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