EXPLORING THE PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF DESTRUCTIVE LEADERSHIP ON EMPLOYEES' PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT: AN AZERBAIJAN RETAIL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Azerbaijan's dynamic and diverse retail landscape is driving an escalating demand for motivated personnel, both locally and globally, to address sustainable development requirements. In competitive and demanding retail environments, the success of organizations can rely on confident, skilled, motivated, and informed employees to meet challenging business demands and inclusive growth. As Azerbaijan's retail competitive edge continues to expand, there is a heightened need for effective employer-employee interactions and strategic human capital to navigate intricate organizational hurdles. The targeted population for this study included current retail employees, and semi-structured in-depth interviews with 15 participants from 15 different retail service organizations were conducted. Hence, this research study addresses a crucial gap in leadership literature by examining the interplay between destructive leadership and employees' psychological empowerment, encompassing dimensions like meaningfulness, self-determination, competence, and impact. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study delves into the real-life experiences of employees within the Azerbaijani retail sector. The study concludes that destructive leadership can significantly hamper employees' psychological empowerment, resulting in negative impacts on their work role orientation, engagement, productivity, and commitment.

INTRODUCTION

Azerbaijan is experiencing sustained economic growth and development and has transformed itself into a middle to upper-income country, which ranks high under the Human Development Index (Pürhani, Guliyeva, Teymurova, Guliyeva & Gahramanova, 2022). Additionally, the retail industry, which includes hypermarkets, convenience stores, supermarkets, health and beauty, hardware stores, and apparel retailers, continues to experience growth. Azerbaijan has emerged as an international destination for retail shopping due to the significant presence of foreign brands and the growth of shopping areas (Hasanov & Aghayeva, 2023; Valk & Yousif, 2023).

Consequently, Azerbaijan's development agenda contributes towards economic growth and creates a platform for stakeholder involvement to be part of progressive developments and macro-economic strength within retail services. As a result, an attractive retail environment that attracts potential talented employees is created (AlMazrouei & Zacca, 2021; Mirzayev, 2023).

Retail organizations in Azerbaijan show an increasing interest in developing inclusive communities, justice, and equity due to the influence of globalization that promotes ever-growing employment mobility and sustainable practices (Masimov & Aghayeva, 2023; Pürhani et al., 2022). Therefore, the commitment and competence of motivated employees are vital to enhancing productivity and business model innovation (Faccia, Corlise Liesl & Pandey, 2023; Nouf Nasser Al-Tamimi & Shifan, 2023; Valk & Yousif, 2023).

Consequently, leadership research tends to take a one-sided view of leadership by focusing primarily on positive leadership practices (Chénard-Poirier, Morin Alexandre, Boudrias Jean-Sébastien & Gillet, 2022; Elbers, Kolominski & Pablo Salvador, 2023). Thus, psychological empowerment (PE) as a cognitive state can be particularly sensitive to leadership practices and, in turn, may affect employees' perceptions, reasoning, emotions, behaviors, job security, well-being, and work role orientation (Çekmecelioğlu & Özbağ, 2014; Thoroughgood, Sawyer, Padilla & Lunsford, 2018).

Moreover, improved employee performance emphasizes the importance of the relationships between employees and their direct supervisors (Mirzayev, Suleymanli, Shirinizade, Farrukhlu, & Ramazanov, 2022; Valk & Yousif, 2023). Thus, ever-present demands are placed on retail organizations in Azerbaijan as applied leadership practices can favorably or unfavorably affect human capital resources, sustainable development, employee well-being, turnover intentions, justice, and equity (Hanan, Zacca & Alfayez, 2020; Hoffman & Sergio, 2020; Lu, Lu, Gursoy & Neale, 2016; Wu, Wang, Wang & Estay, 2022).

Consequently, a comprehensive body of empirical knowledge relevant to the interplay between destructive leadership and PE within a retail context is lacking within the current corpus of the leadership literature (Aasland, Einarsen, Hetland, Matthiesen, Nielsen & Skogstad, 2014; Chénard-Poirier et al., 2022; Shen, 2023). Hence, this study is the first empirical attempt in Azerbaijan to explore the phenomena of interest and address the lack of research within the leadership literature.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This section is divided into two parts and explores the concepts that include destructive leadership and PE. The literature review informed the current phenomenological qualitative study by reviewing appropriate scholarly research relevant to the phenomena of interest.

The Dark Side of Leadership

Effective communication, collaborative work settings, flexibility, innovative work behaviors (Faccia et al., 2023), moral leadership, and result-oriented employees/followers are just a few of the ongoing demands that organizations can experience in Azerbaijan. Therefore, retail organizations require motivated, skilled, informed, and results-oriented employees to nurture organizational competitiveness and inclusive growth (Hoffman & Sergio, 2020). It can be inferred from this that to balance internal and external pressures, retail organizations may consider implementing decentralized, flexible structures, teamwork, and PE to develop the talents of employees (Erdal & Budak, 2021; Shin, Kim, Sung & Choi, 2015; Valk & Yousif, 2023).

Traditionally, leadership research emphasizes the constructive aspects of positive leadership, though paying less attention to the darker side of

leadership (Maher, Baloch & Shah, 2021; Maria, 2021). However, research on the array of destructive or toxic behaviors suggests that abusive supervision, tyranny, immorality, victimization, intimidation, manipulation, and sexual harassment have received ample attention (Chénard-Poirier et al., 2022; Omer, Adeeq Mohd-Ezazee, Lee, Mohammad & Rahman, 2022).

According to Hoffman & Sergio (2020), destructive or toxic leadership can represent a gradual presence of harmful intentions that deliberately obscures detection by initiating ambiguity to distort incompetence and accountability and obscures the application of a remedy. Therefore, awareness and empirical knowledge regarding destructive leadership practices that explore phenomena such as bullying, workplace toxicity, abusive relationships, verbal violence, workplace aggression, human rights violation, sabotage, incompetence, deviance, narcissism, psychological maltreatment, discrimination, Machiavellianism, and laissez-faire are growing (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Omer et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022).

Workplace Toxicity

Consequently, leadership toxicity is a process that can inflict enduring severe harm on individuals, groups, organizations, and communities by virtue of their destructive behaviors and dysfunctional personal qualities or characteristics (Hoffman & Sergio, 2020; Maher et al., 2021). Therefore, destructive leadership is an all-embracing term that represents flawed leadership behaviors that can be linked with detrimental consequences for employees and organizations (Thoroughgood et al., 2018; Maria, 2021). Hence, the extant destructive leadership literature suggests behaviors that can be associated with the dark side of leadership can include, for example, arrogance, contemptuous, threats, incompetence, greed, egoism, emotional abuse, and carelessness (Omer et al., 2022; Erdal & Budak, 2021). Consequently, such condescending behaviors can be harmful, toxic, invasive, and offensive toward employees who have untainted intentions to support organizational goals (Elbers et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2022).

Additionally, the dark side of leadership can create and sustain a workplace climate of fear and mistrust that can cause malice, spitefulness, fear, and exploitation (Maher et al., 2022; Özcan & Özdemir,2022). Conversely, an integrative approach that includes flawed leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments that can form a toxic triangle is required when reviewing destructive leadership (Thoroughgood et al., 2018). Therefore, what all of this emphasizes is that leadership is a dynamic and co-creational process between the leader, employee/follower, and the workplace that can affect individual, group, and organizational outcomes (Ahuja, Puppala, Sergio & Hoffman, 2023; Dabke, 2016; Omer et al., 2022).

Leaders who exploit their authority within a leader-led partnership invariably leave the group in a deteriorated state, yielding a toxic and detrimental impact. These destructive leaders often disregard employees' long-term well-being, imposing goals or directives without their input. Destructive leadership is typified by a leader's malevolent or unscrupulous intentions that contribute to the downfall of a once-productive workplace (Maher et al., 2021; Omer et al., 2022). In instances of abusive leadership, employees must contend with persistent criticism, victimization, and workplace hostility. Rather than receiving due recognition and intrinsic or extrinsic rewards, employees are belittled and marginalized (Dinh, Lord, Garnder, Meuser, Liden & Hu, 2014; Maria, 2021).

Thus, it can be seen that the dark side of leadership can destroy individual, group, and organizational values and may adversely affect employees' workplace cognitions (Aasland et al., 2014; Thoroughgood et al., 2018). Similarly, the dark side of leadership can include behaviors, either direct, indirect, verbal, and/or non-verbal, that can cause severe adverse outcomes for employees, teams, and organizations (Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Shen, 2023).

Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment (PE) refers to the individual perceptions that employees have of their responsibilities inside the organization. According to Seibert, Wang, and Courtright (2011), PE's strategic aim is to unleash workers' latent potential and enable them to contribute positively to their job positions, teams, and within the broader organizational context. To boost employees' self-confidence and psychological well-being in the pursuit of

organizational competitiveness, positive psychological capital requires effectiveness in support of trust, resilience, and ethics (Erdal & Budak, 2021; Masimov & Aghayeva, 2023).

Hence, developing a skilled and results-oriented workforce requires ethical and responsive leadership practices (Ahuja et al., 2023) to create an innovative workplace environment (Faccia et al., 2023) conducive to supporting employees' PE towards improved productivity, collaboration, constructive interaction, and achievement of set objectives (Paola, Coello-Montecel & Tello, 2023).

Consequently, PE can enhance intrinsic motivation and, in turn, increase employees' commitment and creative engagement (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013; O'Donohue et al., 2018). Therefore, PE can include, for example, participative decision-making (Dabke, 2016), job enrichment (Hadi Dhafer & Radwan, 2023), delegation (Paliga, Kożusznik, Pollak & Sanecka, 2022), and sharing of appropriate job-related powers with employees (Cheng, Liu & Zhou, 2023). This underscores that PE can support the quest for performance improvement, organizational learning, and self-development, which in turn can enhance employees' self-determination, meaningfulness, competence, and influence (Paliga et al., 2022; Seibert et al., 2011).

Accordingly, workplace environment refers to the dominant atmosphere within the organization that addresses morale, the strength of belonging, caring, and goodwill among organizational members. Perceptions of the workplace environment reflect the nature of the employee-organizational relationship and the superior-employee relationship (Faccia et al., 2023). Hence, effective navigation of ever-evolving organizational challenges requires dynamic business drivers such as PE (Abdullatif et al., 2016), responsive leadership practices (Dinh et al., 2014), collaborative workplace environments (Ahuja et al., 2023), exemplary customer service (Valk & Yousif, 2023), innovative work behaviors (Phairat & Potipiroon, 2022), and results-oriented employees (Hadi Dhafer & Radwan, 2023).

Workplace Cognitions

Employees experience PE as intrinsic task motivation reflecting a sense of control in relation to their work responsibilities and an active orientation to their work role (Boudrias & Lajoie, 2014). Consequently, PE manifests in four workplace cognitions that can reflect a sense of control in relation to one's work and, thereby, create an active and positive orientation to one's work role (Spreitzer, 1995b). The respective workplace cognitions include:

1. Meaningfulness: "This assessment concerns the value of the task goal or purpose, judged in relation to the individual's own ideals, values, or standards. In other words, it involves the individual's intrinsic caring about a given task" (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, p.672).

2. Self-determination: "A perceived choice by an individual to initiate and regulate their own actions. Self-determination entails autonomy to initiate and continue processes and work behavior" (Spreitzer, 1995, p.1443.)

3. Competence: "This assessment refers to the degree to which a person can perform task activities skillfully when he or she tries" (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, p.672).

4. Impact: "This assessment refers to the degree to which behavior is seen as making a difference in terms of accomplishing the purpose of the task, that is, producing intended effects in one's task environment" (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990 p.672).

Furthermore, PE is positively associated with a broad range of worker outcomes, including, for example, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work role performance, and is negatively associated with employee strain, insecurity, negativity, and turnover intentions (Seibert et al., 2011; Spreitzer, 1995b). Accordingly, scholarly research concurs by proposing that the highest levels of intrinsic task motivation can emerge only when all four workplace cognitions are high (Seibert et al.; Spreitzer, 1995b; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Employee Engagement

Consequently, leaders need to consider the influence of workplace cognitions in the quest to enhance employees' orientations toward their work roles (Seibert et al., 2011; Shen, 2023). As a result, PE can play a vital role in employees' ability to pursue challenging goals, problem-solving, collaboration, and innovative work behaviors (Dabke, 2016; Faccia et al., 2023;

Özcan & Özdemir,2022; Phairat & Potipiroon, 2022).

Furthermore, scholarly research asserts that workplace learning and self-determination are strongly connected to PE (Pandithasekara, Erabaddage Ayoma & Áron Perényi, 2023). Similarly, employees experience a sense of control once they can engage to express their views or to participate in decisions that affect their performance (Hummer, 2016; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). What this means is that employees engage positively within workplace environments that support learning, creativity, participation, justice, equity, and the respective workplace cognitions (Handayani, Gian & Kruger, 2022; Özcan & Özdemir,2022; Paola et al., 2023; Paliga et al., 2022).

Conversely, the implication emphasizes that negative workplace environments can adversely affect workplace cognitions that can trigger work- and job withdrawal (Md, Ahmad, Ataul, Tan & Osman, 2023). Work (physical) withdrawal implies that employees attempt to distance themselves from a particular organization, and their approach can include tardiness, neglect, absenteeism, and laziness, which removes their efforts to assist the organization.

Similarly, job (psychological) withdrawal infers that while employees keep their existing organizational and work-role physical attendance, psychologically withdrawn employees tend to ignore and or neglect certain aspects of their job roles or decrease the efforts spent on their specific work responsibilities. Withdrawn employees lose commitment, which might involve plans to leave or sabotage the organization (Hoffman & Sergio, 2020; Pandithasekara et al., 2023). This, thus, underpins the relevance of a positive workplace environment to enable employees to perform at their best within challenging business conditions (Thanh Nguyen, Tat & Dang, 2023). Consequently, PE can contribute to psychological safety, well-being, productive work behaviors, creative engagement, and job satisfaction (Cheng et al., 2023; Paola et al., 2023).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study attempts to develop a comprehensive understanding of the perceived effects of destructive leadership on employees' PE by exploring their lived experiences relevant to the phenomena of interest. Therefore, the following objective was set:

- To explore employees' views of the perceived effects of destructive leadership on their PE in Azerbaijan within a retail context.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling

The research was conducted during June 2023 in Baku, Azerbaijan's commercial hub. Through the application of in-depth semi-structured interviews, the qualitative study addressed the saturation of data pertinent to the phenomena of interest by using homogeneous, non-probability, and purposeful sampling rather than random probability sampling. Non-probability sampling was adopted to optimize qualitative data saturation rather than statistical calculations. Furthermore, homogeneous sampling was used as opposed to heterogeneous sampling because the former included participants who had prior experience with the phenomena of interest, enabling better descriptions of the lived experiences of the targeted audience within a retail context. In this way, purposive sampling complemented the non-probability and homogeneous methodology by including specific criteria the respective participants had to meet at the time of selection.

As a result, the following selection criteria were used for each participant: (a) had at least two years of experience as an employee, working with or reporting to a destructive leader in Azerbaijan, (b) willing to participate anonymously, transparently, and voluntarily in English by sharing their lived experiences concerning the phenomena of interest, (c) currently employed, and (d) answered pre-qualifying questions to determine their suitability and intention to participate. Purposive sampling, therefore, fits the research design by allowing participants who had previously experienced the phenomena of interest to share valuable detailed data descriptions about their lived experiences.

The targeted population included 15 current employees across 15 retail organizations spread out across the central business district of Baku. Typical characteristics of the organizations encompass small to medium-sized enterprises and permanent establishments with the objective of pursuing profits and competing within the retail industry. The participants were

Azerbaijanis, and their demographics included seven females (47%) and eight males (53%) within the age range of 27– 48. The participants represented different organizational levels; 40% were at a supervisory level, and 60% were regular team workers. Regarding participants' education, 45% had higher educational degrees, and 55% had high school certificates.

Data Collection Method

The research encompassed 15 in-person, semi-structured interviews conducted over 10 days, delving into the subject matter within Azerbaijan's retail landscape. The choice of semi-structured interviews aligned with the qualitative research paradigm's ontological and epistemological nature, which sought an idealistic, insider, and subjective perspective to attain data saturation of high-quality, genuine information. This approach concentrated on distinct attributes of the specific target group, delving into the diverse perceived realities of a select number of employees who had encountered the phenomena of interest. Their narratives offered detailed depictions of their lived encounters, enriching comprehension of the phenomena. Participants were individuals who had firsthand experience with the impacts of destructive leadership within their workplace.

Data Analysis Method

Thematic analysis was applied to identify appropriate themes from the interview data as expressed in the participants' dialogue. Therefore, the data analysis framework embraced phenomenological reduction that included bracketing, horizontalization, organization of themes, and building of textural descriptions (Creswell, 2014). Thus, segments were clustered into themes that were synthesized into descriptions that represented the meaning and essence of the experience.

To find pertinent emerging themes from the interview data as voiced by the participants in the conversations, the data was captured and analyzed using verbal protocol analysis (Punch, 2014), and excerpts are available in Tables 1–4. During the semi-structured interviews, participants were invited to think aloud while reflecting on and exchanging firsthand experiences connected to the phenomena of interest. Therefore, the data analysis pursued a rigorous, non-linear, attentive, systematic identification, and clustered data into emerging themes, ensuring minimized bias and enhancing the trustworthiness of the study.

A tentative *priori codes framework was applied to inform* the data analysis framework to address the stated research objective. The *a priori* code's structure included the following workplace cognitions: Meaningfulness (Theme 1); Self-determination (Theme 2); Competence (Theme 3); and Impact (Theme 4). Consequently, empirical data was reviewed and then compared to the respective tentative *a priori* codes. Commonalities of emerging themes were clustered and included occurrences of the number of times participants' data descriptions matched the emergent themes.

As part of the analytical process, analytical induction entailed a meticulous examination of shared meanings within participants' responses, resulting in the emergence of recurring themes (Punch, 2014). This systematic approach facilitated the identification and comprehension of the contextual relationships and relevance among these themes. The data analysis encompassed essential cycles aimed at comprehending and categorizing the pertinent themes.

To ensure reliability, various techniques were employed, such as bracketing, epoche, horizontalization, negative case analysis, and member checking, all of which served to mitigate potential biases and bolster the study's trustworthiness. Thus, the study's trustworthiness was established through its adherence to principles of transferability, dependability, confirmability, and credibility (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

DISCUSSION

This section presents the researchers' understanding of the perceived impact of destructive leadership on employees' PE. Furthermore, *ad verbatim* excerpts from the semi-structured face-to-face interviews have been included to demonstrate employees' real-life workplace experiences relevant to the phenomena of interest.

The Effect of Destructive Leadership on Employees' PE

The findings addressed the stated objective by

indicating that destructive leadership can have a detrimental impact on employees' PE and, subsequently, their work role orientation, engagement, productivity, and commitment. The male and female participants experienced the same perceived psychological empowerment strain from being in contact with destructive leadership.

The study categorized occurrences related to each of the four individual workplace cognitions as follows: Meaningfulness (Theme 1: 156 occurrences); Self-determination (Theme 2: 175 occurrences); Competence (Theme 3: 151 occurrences); and Impact (Theme 4: 168 occurrences). See Tables 1–4 for example, excerpts of emerging themes as per the Verbal Protocol analysis.

Table 1: Excerpts of emerging themes as per Verbal Protocol analysis relevant to Theme 1

Theme 1: Meaningfulness	
Participants' ad verbatim excerpts	Emerging Themes
I do not find meaning in my work and I am demotivated to contribute towards team objectives…	Ineffectiveness
I am not sure what are the standards to follow that can help me to determine if I am making progress…	Lack of standards
I do not trust my manager as I am being humiliated…	Mistrust
I have a bachelor's degree and my manager is not applying my knowledge…My work is boring and making me feel lazy…	Lack of significance
I do not know how my work fits in with team objectives and the organizational vision…	Lack of relevance

Source: author's work.

Table 2: Excerpts of emerging themes as per Verbal Protocol analysis relevant to Theme 2

Theme 2: Self-determination	
Participants' ad verbatim excerpts	Emerging Themes
I cannot make any decisions within my day-to-day work…I am frustrated…	Lack Autonomy
My manager is micromanaging me and not considering my developmental and technical abilities…	Lack of Independence
I am not taking the initiative as my manager has never considered any of my suggestions…My manager is not being available for me to listen…	No Initiative
Without even attempting to discuss it with me beforehand, my management overrides my decisions…	Exclusion
I operate under rigid rules and regulations… My manager is authoritarian and inflexible to consider improvements …	No engagement

Source: author's work.

Table 3: Excerpts of emerging themes as per Verbal Protocol analysis relevant to Theme 3

Theme 3: Competence	
Participants' ad verbatim excerpts	Emerging Themes
I have not received any developmental training for the past 2 years…	No self-development
I have asked my manager numerous times to give me my performance indicators so that I can monitor my progress, but I have not received it…	Lack of Progress
I have asked my manager that I want to learn more about my department as I am interested in becoming a manager in the future…	No self-actualization
I have been in the same job for 3 years and am ready to take on more responsibility…My manager is ignoring my request and not giving me feedback…	Lack of responsibility
I am curious to see how I stack up against my peers. When I approach my manager for input, he ignores me…	Lack of proficiency measurement

Table 4: Excerpts of emerging themes as per Verbal Protocol analysis relevant to Theme 4

Theme 4: Impact	
Participants' ad verbatim excerpts	Emerging Themes
I feel powerless to influence the outcome because my management is not involving me...I am not motivated...	Discontent
I feel powerless since I cannot change how my team performs...	Powerless
I feel like I cannot succeed since it is impossible to get involved at work...	Insecurity
My manager is always making changes without informing or discussing it...I am confused, cannot focus, and do not understand the task requirements...	Confusion
I am unsure about my role within the team....	Disorder

Source: author's work.

Additionally, excerpts from participants' responses that highlight their perceived subjective views are included below. The corresponding themes, 1–4, are indicated in brackets after each respective participant's ad verbatim response.

My manager is not explaining my job role and I am not sure where I fit in (theme 1) ... My manager is overcontrolling my work (Theme 2) ... I do not see value in what I need to do (Theme 2)... I do not feel motivated to perform well, as my manager is only looking for mistakes (Theme 4) ... I get little training to progress in the company (Theme 3) ... I struggle to lead my team as I cannot make decisions relevant to day-to-day operations (Theme 2) ...I cannot make any decisions (Theme 2) and I cannot perform effectively within the team to make a positive contribution (Theme 4) ... My manager is not keeping me informed as I do not experience my manager as transparent (Theme, 3), I feel some policies are unfair and that justice and equity are not priorities (Theme 1) ... I am negative towards my work and do not find any importance within my work (Theme1) ... My manager makes me feel nervous and I feel stressed all day and I feel insecure (Theme 3)... I feel powerless as a manager as I cannot make any decisions within my job responsibilities (Theme 2) ... My manager makes me feel inferior can I struggle to focus on my work and feel that I do not contribute effectively (Theme 4) ... I am making many suggestions to improve workflow and procedures, but my manager is not listening (Theme 1) ... My manager is regularly making excuses that he is busy and cannot listen to me ... (Theme 4) ...I am looking for another job, the environment is negative, and I do not feel part of the team (Theme 1) ... I have a lot of experience, which can add value to the team. My manager is not considering my input (Theme 2)... I do not feel I fit in (Theme 1) ... I am not interested to engage (Theme 4) ... My manager is obstructing me, I want more development to grow in my career (Theme 3) ... I am not motivated to innovate and improve my work (Theme 4)...

The findings for Themes 1–4 suggest that destructive leadership can adversely affect participants' workplace cognitions, job satisfaction, self-motivation, and work role orientation. It can be concluded, then, that destructive leadership behaviors can affect employees negatively and strain their motivation and commitment to contribute productively to a competitive retail environment such as Baku. Participants perceived responses indicated that negative influences towards workplace cognitions can adversely affect, for example, their job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, self-efficacy, psychological safety, and turnover intentions.

Another conclusion is that the emotions the participants experienced when exposed to workplace toxicity encompassed a range of feelings, including annoyance, avoidance, anxiety, betrayal, discontent, exclusion, fear, hopelessness, ineffectiveness, inferiority, insecurity, and distress. Participants' responses indicated that negative workplace environments can hamper collaboration, creativity, and productivity within the organization. Hence, negative emotional responses arising from

participants' interactions with a toxic workplace environment can have a detrimental impact on employees' mental state, subsequently affecting their motivation and willingness to engage.

Furthermore, the presence of unhealthy leader-employee relationships can lead to apathy, job dissatisfaction, and work withdrawal. These consequences not only contribute to a lack of organizational competitiveness but also foster unproductive work environments.

The study also found that employees' perceptions of the workplace environment can reflect the nature of the employee-organizational and the superior-employee relationship. Therefore, the findings suggest that negative workplace environments can inhibit workplace cognitions necessary to contribute as productive team members. Thus, employees' commitment, work role orientations, innovative work behaviors, and organizational competitiveness can be negatively affected, and unethical and unresponsive leadership can facilitate unfavorable workplace climates, job dissatisfaction, and strained leader-follower dyads.

Another finding emphasized that adverse leadership behaviors such as bullying, victimization, injustice, divisiveness, intimidation, manipulation, discrimination, emotional neglect, psychological maltreatment, selfishness, and laissez-faire can create negative workplace environments and, thus, unhealthy workplace cognitions. As a result, placing employees at a disadvantage can create labor turnover, workplace distress, insecurity, job dissatisfaction, and work- and job withdrawal that can adversely affect work role orientation and organizational competitiveness. Therefore, the results concur with academicians who have suggested a significant negative association between job satisfaction, work role orientation, and destructive leadership (Hoffman & Sergio, 2020; Maher et al., 2021; Thoroughgood et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the study found that workplace toxicity can adversely affect positive characteristics of workplace cognitions such as collaboration, commitment, trust, independence, goal orientation, transparency, self-development, accountability, and innovation. The findings infer that positive PE can develop from positive workplace environments, which can strengthen employees' workplace cognitions, work role orientation, sense of security, and assertiveness. Accordingly, job satisfaction, task performance, creative engagement, job security, innovation, turnover intentions, and commitment depend on PE as a unitary construct within the workplace (Faccia et al., 2023; Hadi Dhafer & Radwan, 2023; Phairat & Potipiroon, 2022; Seibert et al., 2011).

LIMITATIONS

A lack of leadership literature that addresses the interplay between destructive leadership and employees' psychological empowerment continues to serve as a limitation that may include gaps and weaknesses beyond the control of this study. However, conscious and deliberate attempts to systematically collect, document, and track data analysis as the small sample hindered generalizability have been made. It was crucial to ensure the applicability of empirical implications to comprehend human complexity and gauge contextual transferability. Participants offered extensive descriptions of their daily experiences, so the results' transferability to contexts relevant to a retail context can apply. Furthermore, transferability within a retail setting was aided by the meticulous and systematic gathering of comprehensive data descriptions and methodical thematic analysis. Therefore, rather than asserting that the findings' generalizability related to larger populations is accurate, the study's worth rests on the actual synthesis of participants' authentic lived experiences relevant to the phenomena of interest.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that destructive leadership significantly hampers employees' PE, resulting in negative impacts on their work role orientation, engagement, productivity, and commitment. In competitive and demanding retail environments, the success of organizations relies on confident, skilled, motivated, and informed employees who contribute to sustained competitiveness.

Additionally, the study's findings emphasize the vital role of positive leader-follower relationships in fostering employees' PE, thereby preventing job and work withdrawal. This, in turn, enhances individual, team, and organizational performance. Scholarly research

supports these results, highlighting that positive leadership practices are crucial in shaping employees' experiences and development.

This research study contributes valuable empirical insights to the limited leadership knowledge regarding the detrimental effects of destructive leadership on employees' PE within a retail context. Furthermore, targeted leadership development interventions can raise awareness of ethical, inspiring, and responsive workplace environments. By enhancing empirical knowledge in the retail context, this study enriches both theoretical and practical understandings of leadership. Ultimately, this knowledge empowers organizations to swiftly identify, prevent, and counteract destructive leadership practices.

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