



## The effect of despotic leadership on teachers' deviant behaviors with the mediating role of organizational anomie

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of despotic leadership on teachers' deviant behaviors with the mediating role of organizational anomie. This study was a correlation research method based on structural equation modeling. 264 teachers of Konarak (Iran) were studied by stratified random sampling method. To collect information, three questionnaires were used: despotic leadership, deviant behaviors and organizational anomie. For data analysis the Pearson correlation coefficient and structural equation modeling were used. Based on results the direct effect of despotic leadership on deviant behaviors, despotic leadership on organizational anomie and direct effect of organizational anomie on deviant behaviors was positive and significant. The indirect effect of despotic leadership on deviant behaviors was also significant with the mediator role of organizational anomie. Thus, school principals who use a despotic leadership style lead to the spread of organizational anomie in the school, and this organizational anomie in turn increase the deviant behaviors of teachers.

**Keywords:** Despotic leadership, deviant behaviors, organizational anomie, teachers

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### Introduction

Despite the positive aspects and effectiveness of leadership, it should not be overlooked that, in reality, not all leaders are effective and of worthy qualities. This is where the dark side of leadership such as inefficient and harmful leadership occurs (Barani & Nastiezaie, 2020) <sup>[5]</sup>. Scholars mentioned various types of leadership's dark side, including despotic leadership, which is defined as the verbal and nonverbal hostilities of a supervisor against subordinates (Breevaart & De Vries, 2017) <sup>[7]</sup>. Despotic leadership is employees' understanding of the verbal and non-verbal hostility of their supervisor (Avey, Wu & Holley, 2015) <sup>[5]</sup>. This kind of leadership roots in self-interest, along with dominance and despotic behaviors with others. Despotic leaders are hegemonic, intend to control the others, and vengeful; in contrast to moral leadership, this kind of leadership paves the way for the gradual weakening of employees in the psychological and organizational aspects (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008) <sup>[9]</sup>. Key aspects of despotic leadership include the mental quality of employees concerning despotic behaviors, the persistence of hostility imposed by the leader, and the self-sustaining and purposive nature of mistreatment (Javed, Fatima, Yasin, Jahanzeb & Rawwas, 2019) <sup>[21]</sup>. The despotic leaders, in particular, mistreat their subordinates because they have less power to stand against them. In addition, despotic and destructive leaders try to direct employees to achieve their goals without paying attention to the welfare of their subordinates (Aryee, Chen, Sun & Debrah, 2007) <sup>[3]</sup>. Studies show that despotic supervision with job dissatisfaction, perceptions of injustice, mental and physical illness, job frustration, deviant behaviors and reduction of organizational citizenship behaviors (Tepper, Duffy, Henle & Lambert, 2006) <sup>[37]</sup>, emotional exhaustion and decreased knowledge sharing behaviors (Lee, Kim & Yun, 2018) <sup>[25]</sup>, immoral behaviors, organizational anomie, job alienation and normative conflict (Golparvar, Javadian, Salimian, Ismaili Ardestani & Ahmadi, 2012) <sup>[17]</sup>, less efficiency, less productivity and less optimism of personnel (De Hoogh & Den Hartog employees, 2008) <sup>[9]</sup> is related.

By creating an inhumane environment, despotic leaders lay the ground for the deviant behaviors of staff (Bodankin & Tziner, 2009) <sup>[6]</sup>. Deviant behaviors are voluntary behaviors that attack certain organizational norms; hence, they are a threat to the health of the organization or its members or both. These behaviors are divided into two groups of organizational and interpersonal (Everton, Jolton & Mastrangelo, 2007) <sup>[13]</sup>. Deviant behaviors range from gentle behaviors, such as ignoring a person, to severe behaviors, such as violence (Lim, Cortina & Magley, 2008) <sup>[26]</sup>. There are various categories of deviant behaviors. For example, Robinson & Bennett (1995) <sup>[33]</sup> four common types of deviant behavior include production deviation, financial deviation, political deviation, and personal deviation. Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt & Barrick (2004) <sup>[8]</sup> state that deviant behaviors are divided into two types of individualistic (focused on members, such as rude behavior with colleagues) and organizational (focused on organization, such as not working with full efficiency). According to these researchers, deviant behaviors have a negative aspect, while Galperin & Burke (2006) <sup>[15]</sup> state that deviant behaviors are classified into two destructive and constructive types. Destructive deviant behaviors are voluntary behaviors that threaten the health of the organization and its members by violating organizational norms (such as theft and sabotage). In contrast, constructive deviant behaviors refer to voluntary behaviors that, while violating the organizational norms, are useful for the health of the organization and its members and can facilitate the achievement of organizational goals. Cases such as creative behaviors, lack of compatibility with useless objectives, and criticizing incompetent supervisors are among the constructive deviations; so even positive behaviors such as organizational citizenship and innovation are among deviant behaviors (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004) <sup>[35]</sup>. Deviant behaviors have become a pervasive and costly problem in organizations. In the United States, for example, three out of four employees have stolen from their employers at least once. Nearly 75% of employees are involved in at least one deviant behavior such as theft, internet fraud (cybercrime), embezzlement, slumber, sabotage, and absenteeism. The annual economic loss due to employee fraud is estimated to be \$10 billion (Ghorbani, Mohamadi Torkamani & Mousav, 2018) <sup>[16]</sup>. Unal (2013) <sup>[38]</sup> states that teachers are also prone to deviant behaviors, including (a) individualistic (e.g., insulting the principal and vice-chancellor of the school, threatening colleagues, physical conflict with school staff, inciting parents and students against other teachers, and not cooperating with colleagues); (b) Deviant behavior in education (e.g., lack of proper classroom management, lack of effective teaching, not pursuing the curriculum, physical punishment of students); (c) Deviant behavior at work time (e.g., leaving class earlier than main responsibilities, doing unrelated activities in the classroom, and not performing tasks at the specified time). Sarwar, Alam & Anwar (2010) <sup>[34]</sup> found that interpersonal deviant behaviors have formed the predominant deviant behaviors in school.

As a social phenomenon, organizations may struggle with anomie, disorder, and chaos. Organizational anomaly indicates a state in which behavioral rules and norms are broken, or ethical norms are disrupted, which means that self-centered cultural norms are prevalent (Johnson & Duberley, 2010) <sup>[23]</sup>. There are several theories about abnormal organizational behavior, including the theory of social exchange and the theory of social strain. The theory of social

exchange states that employees are less likely to commit deviant behaviors if they feel fair and trusted behavior in their relationships with the organization (manager, colleagues). While, the theory of social pressure points out that employees who are subjected to workplace pressure confront it in different ways, including committing deviant behaviors (Alias, Mohd Rasdi, Ismail, & Abu Samah, 2013) <sup>[2]</sup>. Hatam, Keshtkaran, & Nabiee (2012) <sup>[18]</sup> state that anomie organizations suffer from a lack of common norms in the work and organization environment. They mentioned two individual and organizational anomalies and believe that individual anomalies form the base of the organizational anomaly. Mousavi, Shariatnezhad & Arefnezhad (2016) <sup>[30]</sup> found that organizational anomie is a situation that the priorities and values of employees are in contrast to the organization's priorities and values, which paves the way for the occurrence of undesirable behaviors. Golparvar *et al.* (2012) <sup>[17]</sup> found that when the management of the organization irrationally emphasizes achieving a particular goal, without emphasizing on legitimate procedures of achieving the goal, organizational anomaly starts to form. Martin, Johnson & Cullen (2009) <sup>[28]</sup> found that the imposed changes in the organization cause anomies. Johnson, Martin and Saini (2011) <sup>[22]</sup> found that organizations with an aggressive strategic culture and competing organizational culture are more inclined to anomalies. . Eskandari, Eslami Farsani, Kargar & Hedyehloo (2018) <sup>[12]</sup> found that individual factors (e.g., personality, weak self-control, weak religious beliefs, individual and family problems) and organizational factors (e.g., improper organization control, incorrect selection of employees, negativity, and mismanagement) play a role in the occurrence of organizational anomalies. Mahmood Roshan Zamir, Irani and Yazdani (2017) <sup>[27]</sup> found that Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, ethical climate, organizational justice, organizational support and organizational policies all play a role in reducing organizational anomie. Examples of the organizational anomaly in schools include creating the grounds for competing with others (instead of nurturing the spirit of cooperation and participation), using traditional and passive teaching methods (instead of active, participatory, and creativity-based teaching methods), avoiding creating critique situations and intending to create an atmosphere of necessity and coercion in class (instead of freedom of choice), and covering educational weaknesses and providing incorrect education to students, and demotivating students to continue their education (Hosainpoor Toolaazdehi, Zainaabaadi, Alimardaani, & Kord Firoozjaee, 2016) <sup>[20]</sup>. School management is one of the few important positions in the educational system, so that an incompetent principal reduces the effectiveness of the school programs. Today's schools require principals with very high characteristics, abilities, and skills to guide their organization according to the current situation, and the sole role of doing executive affairs is no longer acceptable. However, currently, many schools are poorly managed (Barani & Nastiezaie, 2020) <sup>[5]</sup>. In many schools, there are signs of destructive and despotic leadership, such as lack of clear goals for teachers and the principal, hostile relationships between the principal, teachers, students, and parents, strong emphasis on organizational rules and mission, mistrust and dishonesty in conversations, emphasis on working independently (instead of teamwork and participation), greater use of punishment, feelings of insecurity and lack of support, controlling

interactions and conversations between colleagues, and being risk aversion (Epitropoulos, 2019) <sup>[11]</sup>. Such school principals cause deviant behaviors and organizational anomie in teachers. Rafiee & Barghi (2018) <sup>[31]</sup> state that work deviations and teachers' anomalies are an important phenomenon in schools with a wide spectrum, including process deviations (e.g. wasting class time, late entry to the class, early ending the class, excessive absenteeism, defying rules, not having a standard to deal with students, biased assessment of students, neglecting weak students, lack of cooperation and coordination with school colleagues and school administrators, communicating with parents without informing the principal, lack of seriousness and being carelessness when performing tasks, being physically present but mentally busy, aggression, and physical punishment), political deviations (providing inappropriate information, Pull the rug from under somebody, and disclosing confidential information), financial deviations (taking bribes from students or their parents, abusing their positions, not being careful when using school properties), and interpersonal deviations (backbiting, verbal conflict with colleagues, labeling colleagues, and sarcasm). Besides, teachers are an example for their students, and the occurrence of deviant behaviors and organizational anomalies by teachers is a highly unpleasant phenomenon. Deviant behaviors are a threat to all levels of the organization, and schools are not an exception; however, this issue is rarely discussed in the field of education (Reio & Sanders-Reio, 2011) <sup>[32]</sup>. Therefore, it will be important to examine the relationship between despotic leadership, deviant behaviors and organizational anomie of teachers. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effect of despotic leadership on teachers' deviant behaviors with the mediating role of organizational anomie.

## Method

The current study is experimental in terms of the objective and correlational based on structural equation model in terms of methodology. The statistical population of the study was all teachers Konarak city in Iran in the academic year of 2020-2021 (N=850). 264 teachers were randomly selected by

Cochran's sampling formula. Three questionnaires were employed for collecting the data:

### A) Despotic Leadership Questionnaire (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008) <sup>[9]</sup>

The questionnaire consisted of 6 items. It was organized on the 5-point Likert scale from "quite disagree" to "quite agree", being represented by mean 1 and 5, respectively. The minimum and maximum means of the questionnaire were 1 and 5, respectively. The closer to 5 mean it is a sign of more use of despotic leadership style in the school.

### B) Deviant Behaviors Questionnaire (Mulki, Jaramillo & Locander, 2006)

The questionnaire consisted of 8 items. It was organized on the 5-point Likert scale from "quite disagree" to "quite agree", being represented by mean 1 and 5, respectively. The minimum and maximum means of the questionnaire were 1 and 5, respectively. The closer to 5 mean it is a sign of more deviant behaviors.

### C) Organizational Anomie Questionnaire (De Lara & Rodriguez, 2007) <sup>[10]</sup>

The questionnaire consisted of 8 items. It was organized on the 5-point Likert scale from "quite disagree" to "quite agree", being represented by scores 1 and 5, respectively. The minimum and maximum mean were 1 and 5, respectively. The closer to 5 mean it is a sign of more organizational anomie.

Using the Cronbach's alpha test, the reliability was calculated to be 0.757, 0.813, and 0.825 for despotic leadership, deviant behaviors and organizational anomie, respectively. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and inferential statistics, involving Pearson correlation coefficient and structural equation model, employed to analyze the data in SPSS21 and Lisrel software.

## Findings

Table 1 represents mean, standard deviation, Pearson correlation coefficient of variables.

**Table 1:** Mean and correlation coefficient of variables

Variable	Mean	SD	r		
			despotic leadership	deviant behaviors	organizational anomie
despotic leadership	1.416	0.533	1		
deviant behaviors	1.411	0.520	0.765**	1	
organizational anomie	1.394	0.492	0.710**	0.809**	1

\*\*( $p\_value < 0.001$ )

The fitting indices of the structural equation model are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** The fitting indices of the structural equation model

	RMSEA	RMR	PNFI	CFI	IFI	NFI	NNFI	RFI	AGFI	GFI	$\chi^2/df$
Optimal amount	<0.1	<0.05	>0.05	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	<3
Value obtained	0.037	0.025	0.86	0.99	0.99	0.96	0.99	0.96	0.89	0.91	1.41

Figure 1 shows all the relationships between the latent variables and the factor loads of each item.

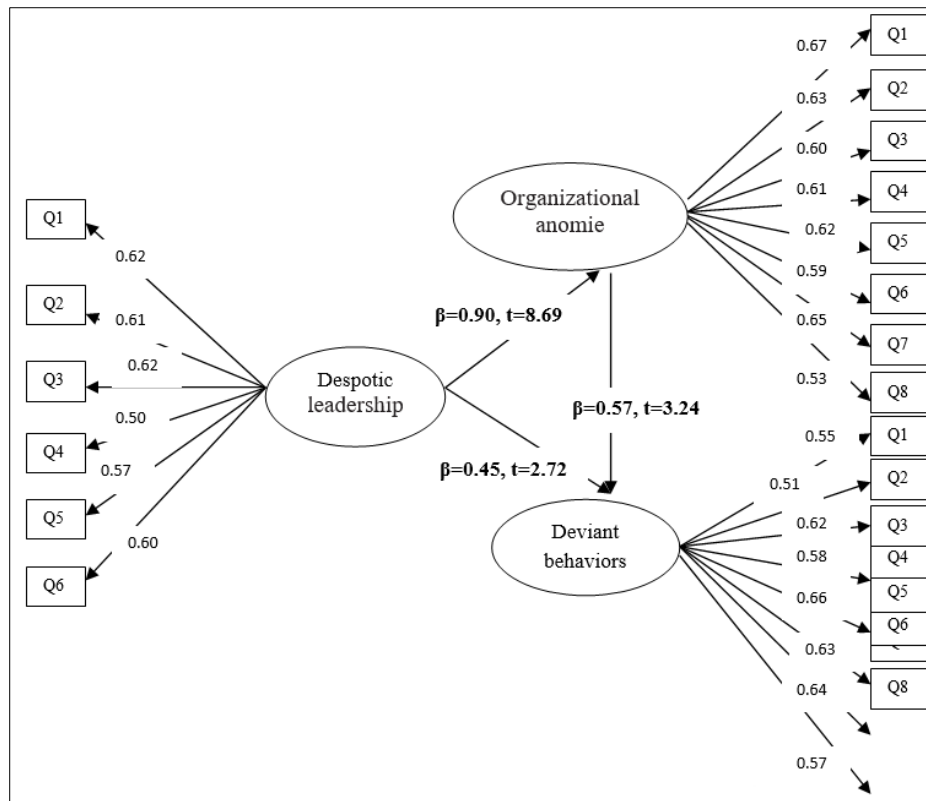


Fig 1: Fitted research model

According to the model (Figure 1), the research hypotheses can be analyzed as follows:

Table 3: Path coefficients for the study of research hypotheses

Hypotheses	Path coefficients	T	Conclusion
Despotic leadership→Deviant behaviors	0.45	2.72	Accept
Despotic leadership→Organizational anomie	0.90	8.69	Accept
Organizational anomie→Deviant behaviors	0.57	3.24	Accept
Despotic leadership→Organizational anomie→Deviant behaviors	0.513	3.03	Accept

**Conclusion and Discussion**

This study aimed to investigate the effect of despotic leadership on teachers' deviant behaviors with the mediating role of organizational anomie. The first finding showed that despotic leadership has a positive and significant effect on teachers' deviant behaviors. A similar research was not found to compare the findings of this study with it. In explaining this finding, it can be argued that despotic and destructive leaders do not have the necessary competence; indeed, they are incompetent and are not self-confident, feel fear and insecurity, have a low level of conscience and a high level of dependence, are inflexible, and do not have a sense of philanthropy. In addition, they have gained their authority and power by force and are inclined to decisive control over individuals and the workplace, which causes them not paying attention to novel ideas. They are impatient, grumpy, spiteful, incompetent, and law-breaking. Besides, they have unwise emotions and have a psychological potential for deviant behaviors (Heppell, 2011) [19].

The second finding showed that despotic leadership has a positive and significant effect on teachers' organizational anomies. A similar research was not found to compare the findings of this study with it. In explaining this finding, it can be argued that despotic and destructive leaders are those who

do not care about the welfare of their subordinates, harm them, abuse them, have a bully position, and impose additional working hours on their subordinates and humiliate them. Besides, they do not tolerate any constructive criticism, and through threatening, they suppress all questions or judgments about their actions. Moreover, they suppress any critical thinking. In such an environment, teachers feel that the principal has violated organizational norms, which increases their tendency towards organizational anomalies. Golparvar *et al.* (2012) [17] conclude that by violating human values and moral principles, despotic leaders pave the way for overt and hidden humiliation of the employees, which causes an internal feeling of being a worthless, chaotic, and organizational anomie. De Lara, Tacoronte and Ting Ding (2009) [10] conclude that the sense of being ignored and injustice, which can be interfered with from the behavior of non-moral leaders, can seriously cause a sense of normative disorder and normative conflict.

Third finding showed that organizational anomie has a positive and significant effect on teachers' deviant behaviors. A similar research was not found to compare the findings of this study with it. In explaining this finding, it can be argued that when the anomie is dominated, the staff turn their back to the moral principles of the organization and do not believe

in teamwork anymore. As a result, they only deal with their interest and do not accept responsibility, which causes experiencing situations such as a feeling of isolation, despair, separation, not belonging to the organization, and a sense of powerlessness. In such situations, the person feels not belonging to others (Talebi, Amini & Tolouparisa, 2015) <sup>[36]</sup>. Consequently, one's adherence to the group and organizational norms is diminished and increases the probability of deviant behaviors. It should also be noted that norms are imposed because of the stability of the conditions and cause insanity, order, integrity, and cohesion in the organization (Mazloomi & Sefid Chian, 2015) <sup>[29]</sup>; hence, ignoring norms causes disintegration and chaos and the occurrence of deviant behaviors.

Fourth finding showed that despotic leadership anomie has a positive and significant effect on teachers' deviant behaviors with the mediating role of organizational anomie. A similar research was not found to compare the findings of this study with it. In explaining this finding, it can be argued that by showing inappropriate behavior and being disrespectful to employees, aggression, and threats, disrespect for clients, conflicting behaviors, dishonesty, misreporting, ignoring their promises, excessive control even concerning minor matters, lack of trust in employees, undesirable political behavior, despotic and destructive leaders follow their personal promotion. Creating a system that encourages flattering, narcissism, pride, and claim, inattentiveness, insisting on their positions, not respecting others opinions, lack of expertise and poor communication skills, weak decision-making, misuse of organizational resources, personal use of organizational resources, lack of justice, waste of organizational resources, and pressure on employees (Khorasani Toroghi, Rahimnia, Malekzade & Mortazavi, 2018) <sup>[24]</sup> lead to teachers' tendency to organizational anomalies and deviant behaviors. Those who interact with a despotic and destructive leader are more likely to have a negative judgment concerning their relationship with the organization, which in turn undermines their value about their jobs or causes declined royalty (Gallus, Walsh, Van Driel, Gouge & Antolic, 2013) <sup>[14]</sup> and as a result, they will have more tendency toward organizational anomalies and deviant behaviors. Also, in anomie situations, due to weak governance of norms, their conflict, and even formation of areas without clear norms, and ignoring moral or organizational principles, the context is prone for employee's deviant behaviors (Abbaszadeh, Alizadehaghdam & Eslamibanab, 2012) <sup>[1]</sup>.

Overall, the findings showed that despotic leadership anomie has a direct and indirect effect, with the mediation of organizational anomie, on teachers' deviant behaviors. Therefore, it is recommended to the top managers of the education organization by carefully selecting committed and ethical people as the school principal (leader), organizational anomalies, and deviant behaviors of teachers can be prevented. It is also suggested to school principals that adherence to school rules, ethics, and norms, not pursuing personal interests, lack of humiliation, not threatening teachers, supporting teachers, and establishing desirable human relationships can play a role in reducing organizational anomalies and deviant behaviors of teachers. Since this study was conducted on teachers working in the City of Konarak, Iran, caution should be taken when generalizing the findings. Also, the authors recommend performing mixed studies (qualitative and quantitative) in the

future.

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