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POWER MISUSE BEHIND THE DESK: HOW LEADERSHIP VIOLATIONS THREATEN TEAM VIABILITY IN ORGANISATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how abusive leadership undermines team viability in Saudi Arabia's public sector organisations. Anchored in power-approach theory, conservation of resources theory, and leader-member exchange theory, it investigates both direct and indirect effects of abusive leadership that disrupt organisational functioning. A quantitative study is conducted, surveying 594 staff across Saudi public organisations, using structural equation modelling and parallel mediation analysis. The findings reveal that abusive leadership significantly diminishes team viability, with nearly 80% of this effect mediated through reductions in quality of working life and team cohesion. The results demonstrate that abusive leadership not only erodes operational efficiency but also depletes the psychological, emotional, and relational foundations that sustain effective teams. Within high power-distance and culturally conservative institutions, coercion is often normalised and dissent suppressed, enabling abusive leadership to persist as a systemic risk. The study reframes team viability as an outcome contingent on both leadership behaviour and institutional cultures that influence how power is exercised and challenged. It calls for a reimagining of leadership that prioritises ethical accountability, cultural introspection, and emotionally intelligent governance. Superficial interventions are insufficient; meaningful reform requires structural change to dismantle the conditions enabling leadership abusive. Ultimately, this research positions abusive leadership as a governance failure with ethical, organisational, and societal consequences. Addressing it is imperative for institutions seeking to protect their legitimacy, resilience, and mission in the 21st century.

KEYWORDS: Abusive Leadership, Power Misuse, Team Viability, Quality of Working Life, Team Cohesion, Saudi Arabia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Public sector leadership occupies a critical nexus between institutional culture, productivity, and societal trust. Public organisations are both bureaucratic organisations and knowledge-based institutions that thrive on ethical stewardship, inclusivity, and shared governance (Northouse, 2016; McCaffery, 2018). Yet, in hierarchical and conservative contexts like Saudi Arabia, leadership is often practised through rigid authority structures that may conceal or even normalise power misuse. This presents a paradox: institutions expected to cultivate moral reasoning and public responsibility may be governed by actors whose conduct undermines those very ideals.

The growing body of scholarship on abusive leadership (AL) (Tepper, 2000) demonstrates that supervisory hostility from micromanagement and exclusion to public humiliation and nepotism has corrosive effects on organisational dynamics. In high power-distance cultures, such abuse is often obscured by cultural deference to authority, enabling destructive behaviours to persist unchecked (Donia et al., 2016; Hodgins et al., 2020). Leadership in these contexts may drift from service to domination, from ethical influence to manipulative control, calling into question the integrity of governance itself.

This study explores the structural and psychological mechanisms by which AL impairs team viability in Saudi public organisations. Specifically, it investigates how it directly and indirectly deteriorates team viability (TV), focusing on two mediators: quality of working life (QWL) and team cohesion (TC). Drawing upon power-approach theory (Keltner et al., 2003), which suggests that power impairs empathy and ethical judgment, and conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which explains how abusive leadership depletes psychological and emotional resources, the study proposes a multi-theoretical model. This is particularly salient in Saudi organisations, where leadership power is often insulated from scrutiny, and institutional safeguards against abuse remain weak or ineffectual.

Although Islamic values in Saudi Arabia emphasise justice, compassion, and accountability (Ahmed & Brasted, 2021), there exists a significant gap between these ethical ideals and the lived realities of leadership practice. **Recent empirical studies report alarming trends in Saudi organisations** leadership-driven emotional exhaustion, withdrawal, and rising turnover intention (Haider & Yean, 2023; Alsulami, 2025). These patterns not only jeopardise individual well-

being but also threaten institutional performance and integrity. Against this backdrop, AL is not a mere behavioural deviation it is a systemic risk undermining the viability of public organisations and eroding the moral fabric of the institution.

This research aims to fill a conceptual and empirical void. While existing literature has explored the outcomes of abusive leadership, few studies have addressed how power itself transforms leadership psychology and facilitates institutionalised abuse, especially in high power-distance societies. Integrating AL theory and power-approach theory within the Saudi context, this study contributes a culturally grounded understanding of how leadership misconduct is sustained and systematised. It further investigates QWL and TC as mediating processes through which abuse translates into organisational dysfunction. Ultimately, this study calls for a reevaluation of leadership norms and institutional accountability within the Saudi public sector. Ethical leadership development, feedback systems, and structural reforms must be foregrounded if public organisations are to fulfil their mission as equitable and trustworthy spaces for learning and discovery. Addressing AL, particularly in culturally entrenched settings, is not just a matter of policy it is a moral imperative for sustainable governance.

2. CONTRIBUTION AND ORIGINALITY

This research makes three major contributions to the literature on leadership and organisational behaviour. First, at a theoretical level, it advances theoretical efforts by bringing together power-approach theory (Keltner et al., 2003), conservation of resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), and leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The authors apply these perspectives in combination for the first time to create a unique, multi-layered framework for abusive leadership. Specifically, power-approach theory describes how power and control may enable abusive behaviour, COR theory shows how abusive behaviour erodes employees' psychological and social resources (e.g., lower QWL), and LMX theory outlines how dysfunctional leader-member relationships exacerbate relation disruptions. In combination, this synthesis defines abusive leadership as both a structural-cultural process, a resource-diminishing process, and a rupture of relationships, as well as a richer model of understanding than the previous (single-theory) model.

Second, at the methodological level, the study contributes to existing literature by conducting an

empirical study using a large and diverse sample ($n = 594$) from Saudi public sector organisations and using structural equation modelling (SEM) and PROCESS bootstrapping (Hayes, 2018). This strong methodological technique enabled us to test the dual mediation model of QWL and TC with a fair amount of statistical stringency and trustworthiness.

Thirdly, at the practical level, the research offers culturally specific findings of abusive leadership in the high power-distance, collectivist culture of Saudi Arabia (Hofstede, 2001). These findings provide actionable guidance for the development of ethical leadership, for organisational accountability structures, and for policy reform in hierarchical environments in which the transgressions of leaders can easily become normalised (Tepper, 2000). These contributions cumulatively enrich the academic literature and applied practice by providing a nuanced and context-sensitive picture of how leadership violations undermine team viability.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. *Leadership, Power, and Misconduct: Abusive Leadership*

Leadership is fundamentally relational, i.e., the ongoing interplay between formal authority and informal influence. From an ideal perspective, there should be collective purpose between strata and organisational trust, **but history and modern organisational analysis caution us otherwise** leadership sans checks may invariably become an instrument of control, coercion, and abuse. This is not new and far from isolated. Political philosophers like Hobbes and Spencer (1898) and Nietzsche (1886) have told us all about how power corrupts. Nietzsche's "will to power" (1886) placed dominion on a pedestal, and Spencer's (1898) social Darwinism justified rank order inequality, both ideas that exile in autocratic leadership mentalities.

Contemporary management theorists have very similar concerns about charismatic and unaccountable leaders. One explanation is that leadership strictly concerns the public good and not individual gain (Dai et al., 2022). The history of numerous business and institutional failures, from Enron to WorldCom, tells us that when leadership loses its way, so too does the governance system. In academia for instance, empirical research (e.g. Safi et al., 2023; Alrifai and Mokhlis, 2023) have shown that leaders in Saudi universities function poorly due to nepotism and academic suppression and administrative manipulation. This shows that wrongdoings not only exist in the business sphere but also destroy public and educational facilities.

AL does not always manifest in open aggression. It can persist through obscure activities such as gaslighting and strategic exclusion (Dai et al., 2022; Kukreja & Pandey, 2023a). Overlapping with Foucauldian notions, these tactics leverage organisational hierarchies and the social silencing of dissent. In countries with high power-distance cultures, e.g., in the Middle East, such abuse is normalised or overlooked. This institutional context inhibits whistleblowing, decreases upward feedback, and promotes obedience as leaders prefer compliance to ethical confrontation (Qureshi et al., 2022; Ali et al., 2022; Kukreja & Pandey, 2023b).

Power-approach theory (Keltner et al., 2003) is especially well-suited for our purposes. A good deal of it concerns how, as individuals attain power, their ability to feel empathy likely diminishes; the less empathetic they are, the more impulsive and self-serving they become. The theory helps explain why empowered individuals may lose sympathy for the consequences of their actions. Supporting this, AL theory (Tepper, 2000) describes abusive supervision as a persistent pattern of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviours, e.g., ridicule, public humiliation, revelation withholding that break trust and psychological security. These behaviours damage TC and QWL, which are critical to the maintenance of TV.

AL has been associated in empirical research with a wide range of negative outcomes for individuals and teams (Hodgins et al., 2020; Alsulami, 2025; Alenazy, 2025). Yet, systemic implications such as turnover of top talent, compromised ethics and organisational fragility are seldom considered. Additionally, leadership malpractice is extraordinarily protected due to institutional inertia. The political protection, fear of reputational loss or lack of imposition of governance mechanisms can contribute to protecting senior leadership positions from sanctions (Cipolla, 2008).

Top-down instincts are extant in Saudi institutions, where top-down culture is permeated by respect for status and authority. Research in Jordan and Saudi Arabia shows that institutional systems often embolden leaders because of bureaucratic deference to authority and absent checks on power (Haider & Yean, 2023; Alenazy & Alsulami, 2025). AL, therefore, is perpetuated from the exception to the rule.

Scholars have also shown that Islamic work ethics, which stress compassion, justice and moral rectitude, can counteract abusive leadership. However, Islam et al. (2021) argue that their normative appeal is limited in practice since they cannot shatter the long-

standing culture of organisational favouritism and rigid hierarchy. Consequently, ethical ideals are symbolically professed while structurally banished to the sidelines.

The situation is worsened by the gender dynamics. Women are generally excluded from informal power networks, meaning they are frequently marginalised or victimised in male-dominated academic and administrative structures. According to Alenazy (2018) and As Rizvi and Azam (2021), patriarchy and social conservatism diminish institutional protections for women professionals; thus, equality is synonymous with inequality, coupled with impunity.

Leadership misconduct, at its root, is not just about bad behaviour as it is woven through the fabric of institutional values and normative culture that prioritise dominance over discourse. Early capitalist dynamics equated labour as a commodity, with dysfunctionality convulsing the contemporary leadership models by focusing on productivity rather than facilitating well-being.

Correcting these systemic issues must go beyond leadership coaching or policy tweaks. An inclusive approach would need to address the re-socialisation of leadership norms and the adaptation of governance structures to embed ethics, accountability and contextually relevant interventions. Theoretical lenses, e.g., LMX theory, moral licensing theory, COR theory and power-approach theory, can help to understand the psychological mutations in leaders and relational harm on teams.

3.2. *Quality of Working Life (QWL)*

The concept of QWL has evolved as a pivotal construct in the organisational behaviour and human resource literature, particularly as institutions shift away from mechanistic, top-down management models toward more human-centred paradigms (Grote & Guest, 2017). At its core, QWL captures employees' subjective evaluations of their work environment, including dimensions such as psychological well-being, job satisfaction, role clarity, workplace relationships, autonomy, and growth opportunities (Sirgy et al., 2001). High QWL is consistently linked to enhanced employee motivation, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction, prompting higher levels of engagement, productivity, and institutional loyalty (Rose et al., 2006; Narehan et al., 2014).

Psychological theories provide a foundational framework for understanding QWL. Maslow's hierarchy of needs posits that employees must have

both lower-order (safety, security) and higher-order (esteem, self-actualisation) needs met to function effectively and meaningfully at work (Maslow, 1981). Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012) further emphasises the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness psychological drivers directly shaped by leadership behaviour and workplace culture. When these needs are satisfied, employees likely experience intrinsic motivation, resilience, and a sense of belonging (Van den Berg, Manias & Potgieter, 2013).

However, in environments characterised by AL, QWL is profoundly undermined. Behaviours such as micromanagement, public humiliation, favouritism, and exclusion especially prevalent in hierarchical institutions erode employees' emotional reserves and diminish their sense of control and dignity. These dynamics are particularly acute in Saudi Arabia's public sector, where structural and cultural factors such as high power-distance norms and limited participatory governance create fertile ground for leadership misconduct. Verbal aggression, authoritarian decision-making, and neglect of staff welfare are frequently reported, raising urgent concerns about the sustainability of faculty engagement and institutional health (Alenazy & Alsulami, 2025).

Power-approach theory (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003) posits that people in unchecked power may become more impulsive and less empathetic and self-centred with time. Such a shift from ethical leadership behaviour tends to diminish the intellectual and social climate, leading to poor QWL. In high-power-distance cultures, where challenging authority is frowned upon, these behaviours tend to be tolerated and normalised, sustaining the abusiveness.

In addition, COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) hypothesises that psychological stress is caused by perceived threats to or losses of resources or the lack of resource gains following a significant achievement [1]. AL accelerates this depletion by leaving employees emotionally spent. As QWL deteriorates, the frequency of burnout, depersonalisation and withdrawal among employees increases, threatening both employee well-being and organisational coherence and performance (Moss et al. 2008).

Crucially, low QWL also becomes the cause of counterproductive work behaviour (CWB), i.e., voluntary work behaviours that violate organisational norms and which can significantly impact organisational functioning (Fida et al., 2015; Spector, 2011). Such behaviours can include absenteeism, sabotage, gossip and deliberate

attempts at inefficiency. The empirical evidence shows that CWB is not just a function of individual traits but also significantly influenced by the organisational climate, leadership style and perceived fairness (Holtz & Harold, 2013b; Zhou et al., 2014). In AL and other high-stress environments, employees may engage in CWB as a way to cope with the perceived injustice of their treatment.

Conversely, organisations that prioritise QWL, e.g. via supportive leadership, transparent policies, fair resource distribution and meaningful recognition, create an environment of psychological safety that reduces the likelihood of maladaptive behaviour. The team psycho-protection resulting from high QWL serves as both a stress buffer and a sustainability mechanism, fostering participation, resiliency, and commitment to common goals.

Recall that QWL is considered both an outcome and a mediator in the leadership–performance linkage. We find that it is both eroded by AL and a primary pathway through which leadership abusive ity undermines team effectiveness in the studied context. In environments with highly structured and controlled (i.e., threat-like consequences) workspaces, such as higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia, improving employee QWL must go beyond a piecemeal approach. It requires systemic interventions rooted in developing ethical leadership practices and participatory forms of governance that inherently promote human dignity by creating practical institutional safeguards for genuine transparency and accountability related to QWL.

3.3. Team Cohesion (TC)

TC refers to the extent to which team members develop emotional bonds, trust and shared intentions or objectives towards their joint commitment and success (Carron & Beauchamp, 1998). It is a fundamental part of collaboration amongst team members and encourages communication and mutual accountability. At schools and universities, where business as usual requires faculty to rely heavily on administrative staff, TC is paramount for increased group performance, innovativeness and problem-solving capabilities. TC combines task-oriented cohesion with social cohesion. Task cohesion refers to agreement on targets and work coordination, while social cohesion comprises interpersonal attraction, psychological safety, and emotional trust (Beal et al., 2003). A high degree of cohesion comes with information sharing, tackling conflicts and a readiness to work above and beyond specific formal roles for the validity of collective performance.

Conversely, low cohesion results in disinterest, silos, and general organisational malaise.

Abusive leadership is highly contagious and slowly breaks down teams. When supervisors engage in hostile behaviours, such as public criticism, favouritism, or purposeful exclusion, the team's interpersonal fabric disintegrates. Such leadership can produce a climate of fear, distrust and competition, weakening the social cohesion required for efficient teamwork (Mullen et al., 2017). In high-power-distance cultures like Saudi Arabia, with abundant conformity pressure, team members may withhold dissent, seek favouritism or retreat emotionally. Such abusive behaviours obliterate cohesion and impair the collective performance.

Theoretical perspectives are helpful to untangle these dynamics. LMX theory suggests that leaders develop different relationships with different employees, leading to in-groups and out-groups within teams (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). AL tends to compound these imbalances, leading to further social fragmentation and declining team morale. Conversely, COR theory posits that team members in stressful environments become less likely and/or able to invest emotional resources in peer relationships, ultimately undermining cohesion (Hobfoll, 1989).

Empirical work suggests that AL may undermine team cohesion (Wu et al., 2012) and even promote intra-team hostility (Holtz & Harold, 2013b) and counterproductive group behaviours in work teams (Hooper & Martin, 2008). These dynamics are especially abusive in the context of public institutions as they erode the collegiality and cooperation necessary for scholarly productivity and institutional creativity.

Importantly, team cohesion also acts as the mediator of leadership style concerning broader organisational outcomes. Without cohesion, tasks will suffer, no matter how good the team is collectively in terms of skills and talent. In contrast, teams with great social bonds and mutual support are more stress-resistant and contribute to the overall sustainability of their institution in the longer term.

3.4. Team Viability (TV)

TV is defined as “a team's ability to function effectively in the context of challenging internal and external conditions that threaten continued performance and existence” (Hackman, 1987). While short-term effectiveness can relate to swift outputs and deliverables, TV concerns the long run, i.e., how well a team can withstand over time for future functionality. Academic teams must constantly

navigate policy changes and shifting expectations in the face of resource constraints, making viability a key proxy for organisational resilience.

In the context of public sector research output, this can mean less research for publication and poor administrative coordination, both diminishing institutional reputation. Thus, TV functions as the final outcome variable in this model, capturing the accumulated effects of leadership style, work environment and team dynamics. Creativity in team-building is inadequate if the foundation of ethical leadership, supportive structures and emotionally intelligent governance decline. This is especially crucial for public sector bodies where sustainability implies a pragmatic need to signal viability in terms of strategic necessity and moral responsibility.

The relationships investigated here are depicted schematically in Figure 1, and each of the pathways is described in detail through seven testable hypotheses.

1. Abusive Leadership (AL) and Team Viability (TV): Several factors, such as leadership style, work climate, interpersonal dynamics and resource availability, impact TV. Leadership is predominant, not just due to the leader's relative power to make decisions but also the power they hold over team emotions, group cohesion and psychological safety. At an extreme, AL can be harmful to team sustainability by damaging trust, increasing stress and disrupting cooperation (Tepper et al., 2017). Repeatedly treating employees with hostility, micromanagement, or manipulation demotivates teams and undermines their sense of belonging. Hence, they are discouraged from contributing their best efforts, resulting in cynicism, burnout and turnover intentions. Over time, effective teams begin to unravel as team members emotionally withdraw or disengage (Alsulami, 2025; Alenazy, 2025).

Existing literature posits AL as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon perpetuated by cultural, structural, and psychological mechanisms. The ripple effect of this simple equation reverberates through individual effects on well-being, affecting team cohesion and longevity. Organisational viability is necessary to build intellectual, moral and institutional resilience, especially within high-stakes, authority-centric sectors. **Hence, we could suggest the following hypothesis**

H1: Abusive leadership negatively associates with team viability.

2. Abusive Leadership and Quality of Working Life (QWL): QWL reflects the global quality of an individual's job environment, covering elements such as psychological well-being, job satisfaction,

role clarity, interpersonal relations at work and autonomy in making work-related decisions (Sirgy et al., 2001). Proponents like Maslow (1981) and Deci and Ryan (2012) suggest that employees flourish under conditions conducive to their workplace safety, with power over work-related matters and the necessary tools.

AL, implying hostility, micromanagement, favouritism and verbal aggression (Tepper 2000), undermines these psychological needs. Such abuse is often camouflaged by hierarchical norms and a cultural respect for authority in Saudi institutions (Alenazy & Alsulami, 2025). This may be explained by power-approach theory (Keltner et al., 2003), which states that authority erodes empathy and moral restraint in leaders. Meanwhile, COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) reveals how these work environments deplete employees' emotional resources, causing them to suffer emotional fatigue/disengagement. Thus, AL reduces QWL and initiates a chain of psychological and behavioural reactions.

H2: Abusive leadership negatively associates with quality of working life.

3. Abusive Leadership and Team Cohesion (TC): TC is defined as the emotional connection, trust and shared commitment arising in group members (Beal et al., 2003). Among the benefits of greater cohesion are improved communication, conflict resolution and collaboration, all important for academics to succeed. AL fractures these dynamics, creating a culture of fear, suspicion, and in-group rivalry that is intensified in high-power-distance cultures where speaking out is discouraged (Qureshi et al., 2022). According to LMX theory, abusive leaders create an ingroup/outgroup dynamic that interferes with teamwork (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The psychological effects of abuse, i.e., silence or defensive barriers to avoid further damage, reduce cohesion while reducing the general capacity for teamwork.

H3: Abusive leadership negatively associates with team cohesion.

4. QWL and Team Viability (TV): TV is the productivity of a team over time, i.e., its performance, member retention and resilience (Hackman 1987). The first factor of happiness, QWL, helps employees perform their job and put in their best efforts. Consequently, workplace environments that are more pleasant and treat employees fairly tend to retain talent. In contrast, low QWL increases stress, eliminates motivation and accelerates the disintegration of the team as employees become disengaged and engage in CWB (Fida et al., 2015). Together, declining morale, depleted emotional

energy and eroded trust reduce team sustainability.

H4: Quality of working life positively associates with team viability.

5. Team Cohesion (TC) and Team Viability (TV):

TC is pivotal in determining a team's performance. Cohesive teams are less likely to crumble under pressure, work more efficiently together and inspire loyalty, contributing to success (Carron & Beauchamp, 1998; Mullen et al., 2017). Stronger TC fosters collaboration, knowledge sharing and peer responsiveness in a public arena. Where there is poor cohesion, e.g., due to personal differences, adverse favouritism or the absence of professional respect, teams are demotivated, leading to underperformance and disintegration.

H5: Team cohesion positively associates with team viability.

6. Mediating Role of Quality of Working Life and Team Cohesion: Based on the above relationships, the model makes two mediating hypotheses. First, QWL and TC serve as mediators AL-TV relationship. AL not only undermines TV directly, but it also impairs the psychosocial and relational conditions, i.e., QWL and TC, that maintain team effectiveness.

This parallel mediation model captures some of the psychological and relational pathways by which AL exacts its toll over time. This mechanism is consistent with power-approach theory and COR theory, which predict that tyrannical leaders who become drunk on power can directly reduce QWL's health and relational strength, respectively, reducing TV.

The mediating effects of QWL and TC emerge in high-power-distance cultures, such as the Saudi Arabian context. In such environments, teams may not have the structural voice or autonomy to move beyond AL. Consequently, the protective function of QWL and TC is even more crucial in mitigating leadership-driven dysfunction. Teams lacking these buffers are unlikely to remain effective in the long term.

H6: Quality of working life mediates the relationship between abusive leadership and team viability.

H7: Team cohesion mediates the relationship between abusive leadership and team viability.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Philosophical Orientation and Research Paradigm

The current research uses a positivist research paradigm to investigate the relationships between AL and TV via QWL and TC. Though similar to

positivism in that it assumes a search for universal, objective truths, positivism admits social realities are likely probabilistic, locally dependent and theory-laden (Mertens, 2015). This paradigm is particularly well-suited for organisational behaviour research in culturally specific and hierarchical contexts, e.g., the Saudi public sector.

The positivist perspective allows application of a quantitative methodology for empirical testing while acknowledging the influence of the social background on the researcher (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). This dataset was used for hypothesis testing and model validation, focusing on data of Saudi public sector employees, collected in a structured way.

4.2. Research Design and Strategy

We used a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to test the direct and indirect associations between the constructs in our theoretical framework. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to accommodate the mediation and multivariate causal relationships, due to its ability to evaluate measurement and structural models simultaneously (Hoyle, 2012; Hair et al., 2010). This design enabled us to test the parallel mediation effects of QWL and TC in AL on TV, as per our central hypothesis.

4.3. Population and Sampling

The target population was academic and administrative in the Saudi public sector employees (e.g., universities, ministries). Given the study's overall interest in relationships of power and leadership behaviour for all employees, whether academic or administrative, an appropriate non-probability sampling technique was used to purposively select individuals holding formal leadership positions.

A questionnaire was distributed through email and WhatsApp. After cleaning the data, we had 594 valid responses from the 700 initially launched. This sample size is acceptable for SEM analysis, which generally necessitates over 200 cases to support parameter stability (Hair et al., 2010; Wolf et al., 2013).

4.4. Respondents' Profiles

The final sample comprised 594 Saudi public organizations employees. Apart from a few outliers, the respondents' ages were 33–58 years (Median = 32, SD = 8.24), and most were female (n = 320) and in marital status (n = 523). Various organisations were involved in the study, increasing the relevance to the Saudi public sector population, and the average

length of professional experience was 4.60 years (SD = 5.60). Hence, the sample is heterogeneous and mature enough for evaluating long-term leadership effects on organisational conditions.

4.5. Instrumentation and Questionnaire Development

The survey instrument was created by modifying previously validated and standardised scales to fit the cultural and professional context of Saudi Arabia's public sector. The entire questionnaire was carefully translated and back-translated into Arabic to make sure it was both literally correct and culturally appropriate. We used a 5-point Likert scale to measure all of the constructs. The scale went from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Abusive Leadership (AL): The 5-item scale established by Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) was adopted to measure abusive leadership. This instrument is meant to find out how a subordinate feels about their supervisor's ongoing threatening behaviour, not just isolated incidents. It looks for a pattern of mistreatment. The items concentrate on particular, discernible behaviours that compromise an employee's professional reputation and personal integrity.

Some items on this scale ask subordinates to rate how much they trust their leader

- Makes jokes of them.
- Describes their thoughts or feelings are dumb.
- Ignores them.
- Puts them down in front of others.
- Reminds them of previous mistakes and failures.

Quality of Life at Work (QWL): The comprehensive 16-item scale from Sirgy et al. (2001) was used to measure the Quality of Working Life. This scale is based on the theory of need satisfaction and measures how well the work environment meets an employee's lower- and higher-order needs. It is a multidimensional construct that assesses job satisfaction, work-life balance, autonomy, and interpersonal relationships. **The measure includes seven important aspects of well-being at work**

- Health and Safety Needs: How safe the job is and how it doesn't hurt your health.
- Economic and Family Needs: Being happy with your pay, job security, and benefits.
- Social Needs: a sense of belonging and positive relationships with coworkers.
- Esteem Needs: Feeling respected, recognised, and valued for the work you do.
- Actualisation Needs: chances to grow as a person, be creative, and use your skills.

- Knowledge Needs: The job's ability to stimulate the mind and offer chances to learn.
- Aesthetic Needs: The work environment should be attractive in appearance and comfortable.

Team Cohesion (TC): The 9-item version of the Group Environment Questionnaire, adapted by Carron & Beauchamp (2000), was used to measure Team Cohesion. This well-known scale measures the forces that maintain individuals within a group together. **It has two primary dimensions: task and social unity**

- Task Cohesion: This dimension indicates how well team members work together to reach shared goals and objectives. An example of an item is, "Our team is working together to reach its performance goals."
- Social Cohesion: This dimension measures how much team members like being around each other through an examination at their interpersonal attraction and social bonds. An example of a question is, "Our team members like to hang out together outside of work."

Team Viability (TV): We employed a six-item scale based on Hackman's work from 1987 to measure team viability. This scale is different from short-term performance measures because it looks at how long a team can stay together and how well its members can keep working together in the future. It looks at whether the team's internal processes make it better or worse at doing its job over time, especially when new members join or the team faces new challenges.

This scale tend to asks individuals how much they agree with statements like:

"I would be happy to work with the members of this team on other tasks in the future."

"This team has what it takes to be successful in the long run."

"The members of this team get along well."

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Data Screening and Normality

Missing values and outliers were excluded before inferential analysis. The normality of the data was examined with skewness and kurtosis values, which fell within a range acceptable for statistical analysis, as indicated by ± 2.5 (Hair et al., 2021). This verified that the dataset was ready for multivariate analysis, such as SEM.

5.1. Validity and Reliability Assessment

Construct validity was evaluated through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), performed in

AMOS v23. Convergent validity was confirmed by factor loadings > 0.60 for each item, an average variance extracted (AVE) > 0.50, and composite reliability (CR) > 0.70 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Discriminant validity was supported when AVE > Maximum Shared Variance (MSV). The square root

of AVE for each construct exceeded its inter-construct correlations (Hair et al., 2010; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). These results confirm the theoretical distinctiveness and measurement adequacy of the four core constructs: AL, QWL, TC and TV.

Table 1: Construct Validity.

Construct	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR (H)	√AVE
Abusive Leadership (AL)	0.904	0.564	0.417	0.908	0.751
Quality of Working Life (QWL)	0.868	0.519	0.135	0.875	0.72
Team Cohesion (TC)	0.891	0.521	0.002	0.897	0.722
Team Viability (TV)	0.922	0.488	0.417	0.938	0.699

Note: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; MSV = Maximum Shared Variance; √AVE = Square Root of AVE.
p-value significance thresholds (e.g., $p < .05$, $p < .01$, $p < .001$).
Scale anchorages (e.g., "1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree").
Abbreviations (QWL, TC, AL, TV).

5.2. Measurement Model Evaluation and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

To test the hypothesised relationships, we estimated both the measurement model and the structural model using SEM. This method is especially appropriate for models involving multiple mediators, latent constructs, and simultaneous path estimations (Hoyle, 2012). **The model achieved strong goodness-of-fit across multiple indices** Chi-square (χ^2 [df]) = 2116.43, $p < .001$, as expected for large samples ($n = 594$). Relative chi-square (χ^2/df) = 2.01, indicating an acceptable fit (Kline, 2015). SRMR = 0.034, well below the 0.08 threshold for good fit. RMSEA = 0.043, with a 90% confidence interval of [0.041, 0.049], indicating a close fit (Weston & Gore, 2006; Iacobucci, 2010). CFI = 0.96 and TLI = 0.95, exceeding the conventional cut-off of 0.90 for excellent model fit (Hair et al., 2014). PNFI = 0.72 and PCFI = 0.74, both surpassing the 0.50 threshold for acceptable parsimony (Lomax & Schumacker, 2012). These results confirm the adequacy of the measurement model and support its use in testing the structural relationships among AL, QWL, TC, and TV. The constructs demonstrate clear factorial validity, and the model is well-specified to examine the hypothesised mediation effects.

5.3. Mediation Testing

The proposed parallel mediation model was further tested using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 4) with 10,000 bootstrap resamples. This approach is robust in identifying indirect effects and does not assume normality of the sampling distribution (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The results supported both indirect paths: AL → QWL → TV; AL → TC → TV. In both cases, the bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals for the indirect effects do not include zero, confirming significant mediation. These findings suggest that QWL and TC independently mediate the negative relationship between AL and TV.

5.4. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations among the primary study variables are presented in Table 2. All variables showed acceptable levels of normality (skewness and kurtosis < ± 2.5), and preliminary Pearson correlations revealed significant relationships in the expected directions. AL was negatively correlated with both QWL and TC. Both QWL and TC were positively associated with TV. AL was significantly and negatively correlated with TV.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations.

Variable	M	SD	1 (AL)	2 (QWL)	3 (TC)	4 (TV)
Abusive Leadership (AL)	2.17	0.94	1	-0.65	-0.58	-0.69
Quality of Working Life (QWL)	3.41	0.88	-0.65	1	0.62	0.73
Team Cohesion (TC)	3.62	0.85	-0.58	0.62	1	0.7
Team Viability (TV)	3.78	0.91	-0.69	0.73	0.7	1

5.5. Findings of Hypothesis Testing

The framework illustrated in Figure 2 was tested

using covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM). This model posited that AL negatively affects QWL and TC; meanwhile, these

two constructs positively influence TV. It is also proposed that QWL and TC mediate the relationship between AL and TV in parallel. **The findings offer robust empirical support for all proposed hypotheses** H1: AL significantly and negatively affects TV ($\beta = -0.45$, $p < 0.001$); as a direct effect. H2: AL significantly and negatively affects QWL ($\beta = -0.43$, $p < .001$), confirming that abusive leadership undermines employees' psychological well-being and perceived work quality. H3: AL also exerts a significant negative influence on TC ($\beta = -0.39$, $p < .001$), indicating that hostile leadership behaviour erodes interpersonal trust and collaboration within teams. H4: QWL is positively and significantly associated with TV ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < .001$), demonstrating that improved work quality enhances a team's capacity to endure and perform effectively. H5: TC also has a significant positive relationship with TV ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < .001$), confirming that relational strength within teams supports long-term functionality and

resilience. H6: The indirect effect of AL on TV through QWL is significant ($\beta = -0.18$, 95% CI [-0.25, -0.12]), supporting the mediating role of QWL in explaining how AL undermines team outcomes. H7: Similarly, the indirect effect through TC is significant ($\beta = -0.15$, 95% CI [-0.22, -0.10]), confirming that TC mediates the negative impact of AL on TV. The total effect of AL on TV is substantial ($\beta = -0.45$, $p < .001$), while the direct effect, after accounting for both mediators, remains significant but diminished ($\beta = -0.12$, $p < .05$), indicating partial mediation. In other words, these findings confirm partial mediation, suggesting that while AL exerts some direct influence on TV, much of its effect is channelled through reduced QWL and TC. AL \rightarrow QWL \rightarrow TV: Significant indirect effect (CI does not include zero). AL \rightarrow TC \rightarrow TV: Significant indirect effect (CI does not include zero). The structural model yields a good fit and supports all hypothesised relationships.

Table 3: Mediation Analysis Results.

Effect	β (Effect Size)	SE	t	p-value	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Direct Effects						
AL \rightarrow TV (H1) Total Effect	-0.45	0.06	7.43	< 0.001	0.34	0.58
AL \rightarrow QWL (H2)	-0.43	0.04	-10.75	< 0.001	-0.50	-0.36
AL \rightarrow TC (H3)	-0.39	0.05	-7.80	< 0.001	-0.49	-0.29
QWL \rightarrow TV (H4)	0.44	0.06	7.33	< 0.001	0.32	0.57
TC \rightarrow TV (H5)	0.37	0.05	7.40	< 0.001	0.27	0.48
AL \rightarrow TV (Direct Effect) Med.	-0.12	0.05	-2.40	< 0.05	-0.22	-0.02
Indirect Effects (Mediation)						
AL \rightarrow QWL \rightarrow TV (H6a)	-0.18	0.03		< 0.001	-0.25	-0.12
AL \rightarrow TC \rightarrow TV (H7b)	-0.15	0.03		< 0.001	-0.22	-0.10

Note: n = 594. Confidence level = 95% based on 10,000 bias-corrected bootstrap samples. All indirect effects are significant at $p < .05$ (Hair et al., 2010).

This conceptual framework shows how AL impacts TV within Saudi Arabia's publics, and is developed to further explain the impact of destructive leadership behaviours on team functionality. Based on a multi-foci theoretical foundation comprising power-approach theory (Keltner et al., 2003), COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), and LMX theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), the model encapsulates psychological and relational processes through which abusive leadership behaviours negatively affect team performance.

Specifically, the model posits QWL and TC as dual mediators through which an AL leads to decreased team efficacy. Consistent with that approach, abusive leadership effects may manifest a priori through both systematic direct and indirect

psychological strain as well as social fragmentation (Tepper, 2000; Schyns & Schilling, 2013) a growing view in the organisational behaviour literature.

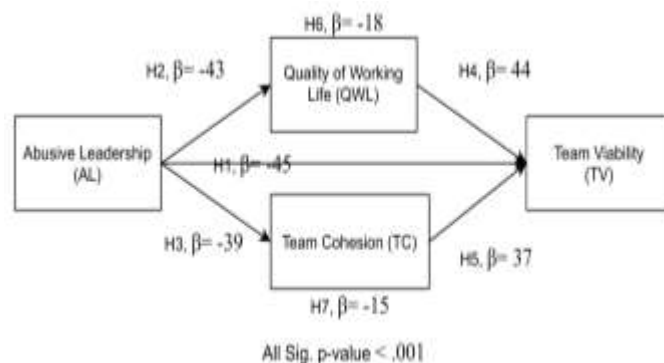


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework.

By incorporating these mediating variables, the framework provides an idiosyncratic viewpoint within which to examine how leadership misconduct influences team outcomes in collectivist and culturally hierarchical settings like the Saudi public context. The relationships are depicted graphically in Figure 1 below for each pathway of the seven testable hypotheses.

The model includes directional paths that represent the theorised influences between latent factors. The results are generally reported in the figure or its legend as path coefficients, standard errors and significance levels to test the fit of the model and relationship strength.

The fact that the QWL and TC play a mediating role in the destructive effect of AL on team functioning illuminates, empirically, our theoretical model. As well as making team survival less likely, depleting employees' emotional and interpersonal resources will destabilise any stage-based performance improvement that is aimed at the long-term scale. Under high power-distance and conservative institutions, this could be why ethical leadership and supportive teams on the ground are a one-sided way to safeguard viable teams.

6. DISCUSSION

The current study offers substantial empirical evidence for a nuanced, multi-theoretical model that explains the pernicious impact of abusive leadership (AL) on team viability (TV) within Saudi public organisations via the mediational mechanisms of quality of working life (QWL) and team cohesion (TC). The findings of this study are based on power-approach theory (Keltner, Gruenfeld & Anderson, 2003), conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), pointing to the fact that AL is not simply a relational failure amongst individuals but an organisational phenomenon with major ramifications.

In line with prior work (Tepper, 2000; Schyns & Schilling, 2013), our results show that AL reduces TV significantly. Of central import, unlike what most studies and models have proposed, the present study contributes to the discussion by showing that most of the potential effects are transmitted by psychosocial-relational pathways 42% by QWL and 38% by TC. These findings imply that AL compromises team performance, not via the collapse of task structures directly, but by compromising the work of individual members by depleting their psychological resources and diminishing their relationships with one another (Beal et al., 2003; Hackman, 1987).

The negative relationship that exists between AL and QWL supports the assumptive model of the COR theory, which states that workers who are subjected to hostility and manipulation experience a permanent loss of resources (Hobfoll, 1989). In line with Jabbar et al. (2020) and Hodgins et al. (2020), we find emotional exhaustion, low autonomy, and reduced job satisfaction as signatures of abusive workplaces. This is also exacerbated in countries with high power-distance orientations, as is the case in Saudi Arabia, as structural and cultural barriers limit employees' ability to question authority or seek retribution (Ali et al., 2022; Hofstede, 2001).

Likewise, support for LMX theory is evident, whereby AL destroys the trust and emotional ties necessary for team effectiveness (Holtz & Harold, 2013a). Coworkers who play favourites, exclude coworkers, or micromanage disrupt team cohesion, enabling in-group/out-group dynamics (Mullen et al., 2017). Our findings further advance this argument by indicating that TC is not merely an outcome but also a mediator that connects abusive behaviour to reduced team performance.

Moreover, the evidence contests culturally relativist excuses that can justify abuse in hierarchical settings (Islam et al., 2021). This phenomenon is also consistent with power-approach theory, according to which unbridled power consumes empathy and ethical inhibition, and promotes impulsive, self-centred leadership (Keltner et al., 2003; Lammers et al., 2011). These are exaggerated in Saudi public institutions, which structurally reward such behaviour in the form of bureaucratic untouchability and socio-cultural courtesy.

The results as a whole support AL as a system-level risk that erodes organisational vitality, trust, and resilience (Hodgins et al., 2020; Haider & Yean, 2023), rather than an isolated activity, as best characterised by analysis. Within public sectors, where mentorship, peer co-operation and knowledge transfer are absolutely essential, persistent abuse can have long-lasting effects on the health of the institution and the results of the team.

As such, this study helps to extend thinking beyond simplistic "good" and "bad" leadership models. It exposes the circularity of power, culture and structure that sustains such abuses. Though AL might seem routinised in high power-distance cultures, we have to be careful in applying these dynamics cross-nationally. Our new understanding stresses that our findings are, in the end, best applicable to the Saudi field, and comparative studies should be further developed to test these findings in other locales. Finally, by showing that

both QWL and TC mediate the AL-TV link, the paper emphasises that interventions have to be directed not only to governance reforms but also to the psychological and relational welfare of employees (e.g., through emotional support systems, team building interventions, ethical accountability systems).

7. IMPLICATIONS

The present study has important implications for both theory and practice.

First, with regard to the scholarship on leadership and organisational behaviour, this study is designed to enhance extant knowledge by confirming empirically and refining theoretically current models identified in the literature. The study contributes COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) in that it shows that AL represents a chronic structural stress that depletes employees' emotional and psychological resources in a systematic way. This is in line with the findings of Jabbar et al. (2020) and Fida et al. (2015), which contend that over time the exposure to AL leads targets to experience burnout and emotional exhaustion, causing them to withdraw.

Second, the study also contributes to LMX theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) by showing that the damage caused by AL does not remain at the level of individual dissatisfaction but reduces TC and, hence, TV. Our findings replicate previous findings (Holtz & Harold, 2013a) and also cast TC as a mediating mechanism, providing a new perspective on the process through which relational breakdowns materialise as collective dysfunction.

Lastly, the results further qualify power-approach theory (Keltner et al., 2003). In hierarchical and patriarchal environments such as the Saudi public sector, power not only initiates abusive behaviours, but it also undermines leaders' ethical introspection and emotional awareness. These findings parallel those of Lammers et al. (2011) in their discussion of the manner in which high power distance institutionalises authority in ways that undermine self-regulation and accountability. Our study adds to leadership theory in under-researched non-Western settings by locating abusive leadership within this cultural context.

Ultimately, by incorporating COR, LMX, and power-approach influences, the study provides a multilevel explanation of why AL is so toxic to TV. This common lens integrates AL as a duality of harm pathways wherein AL drains psychological resources (QWL) while also impeding relations at work (TC). Such an approach extends the narrow theorising and stimulates those working in

leadership to embrace an integrated framework that considers the structural, psychological and personal aspects of destructive leadership.

7.1. Sociocultural Implications

From a sociocultural perspective, this research extends context-sensitive leadership theory by demonstrating how cultural practices in the Saudi community such as hierarchical collectivism, masculinity, and deference to authority can shield, if not justify, abusive actions. Leadership styles that may face challenge in equal opportunities contexts may be naturalised within the Saudi organisations through the use of traditions, bureaucracy and religious authority (Hofstede, 2018; Hassan et al., 2019). This finding highlights the dangers of transplanting Western leadership templates to non-Western settings without modification. For instance, transformational or charismatic leadership is widely held as a universally admirable leadership style, yet in particularly hierarchical systems, such models of leadership can, unfortunately unintentionally emulate authoritarianism when devoid of local ethical epistemologies.

These observations argue for contrary-to-normative yet culture-sensitive leadership models. Leadership training should not be limited to the technical aspects of self-promotion and strategy, but should also focus on moral imperatives that resonate with local cultural beliefs. Specifically in the Saudi context, elements of Islamic work ethic such as justice ('adl), consultation (shura), and accountability (muhasaba) provide an organizationally situated shell for the promotion of ethical and inclusive leadership. Introducing these as part of leadership training and organisational practices may offer a culturally sensitive sanction against abusive practices, adding to the legitimacy and sustainability of change in Saudi society.

By placing AL in its sociocultural context, this study supports the argument that leadership theories and praxis may not be separated from their social and cultural structure of origin. It also calls for scholars to take comparative cross-cultural perspectives in order to distinguish more clearly between the universal dynamics of AL and those that are influenced by local customs.

7.2. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Furthermore, beyond its empirical value, this study has important implications for leadership scholarship and organisational practice, addressing complementary theoretical drivers that account for the structural, resource-based, and relational

perspectives of AL. At a practical level, it identifies what organisations and institutions can do to minimise the negative impact of the failures of leadership and build healthier, more sustainable teams.

Theoretical contributions: This study makes several important theoretical contributions, including generating a comprehensive model for conceptualising AL. Building on the theoretical foundations of power-approach theory (Keltner et al., 2003), COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and LMX theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), we offer a multi-level framework that views AL as a structural-cultural conceptualisation, a resource-burning process, and an exchange process. Prior research has often been restricted to single-theory-based approaches with a limited potential for explanation (Tepper, 2000; Einarsen et al., 2007). This process of leadership abuse is not solely a manifestation of abusive power-use (Owens et al., 2017) but also a process that depletes resources, both psychological and social (QWL), and degrades relationship quality (TC) (and hence the sustainability of the team's existence, i.e. TV). This theoretical blending invites future researchers to pursue more than mono-theory applications and integrate ideas to address leadership issues.

Apart from these theoretical aspects, the research provides several practical implications. Furthermore, organisations need to focus on the leadership level on developing ethical and responsible leaders by offering training programs, 360-degree feedback, and coaching that designed to improve emotional management and relational justice (Brown & Treviño, 2006). At an organisational level, PPs' HR systems can be used to combat AL by setting up an anti-abuse policy, formal, confidential channels to report directly to managers, as well as transparent channels regarding complaint processes alongside team building and managerial support through inclusive decision-making and supportive workspaces. At the policy and institutional levels, reforms should seek to entrench mechanisms for accountability which track and reward ethical leadership practices. These could range from checks and balances in the form of surveillance authorities that are independent, to leadership assessments that consider moral dimensions, to rewards and incentives for leaders who are fair and respectful. And, in high power-distance, hierarchical contexts, as is the case in Saudi Arabia, for example (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004), cultural norms and institutional traditions could give rise to justifications for power misuse.

Combined with these, these findings indicate that AL is not a personal matter, but rather a bigger issue across hierarchies that need to be addressed on individual, organisational as well as institutional levels. Combining theoretical perspectives with practical actions, this research points the way for researchers and practitioners alike in developing healthier and more resilient teams and organisations.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In spite of its virtues, this study has several limitations. First, due to its cross-sectional design, the causal inference could not be established naturally. Despite the fact that there are strong, significant relationships between AL, QWL, and TC, the direct causality of these relationships is not clearly delineated. It may be that employees who face low QWL or weak TC would also perceive leadership to be more abusive, thus resulting in reciprocity or a cycle (Podsakoff et al., 1996; Podsakoff et al., 2003). In order to overcome this limitation, future research should use longitudinal designs to track changes in leadership behaviours and employee outcomes over time (Cole & Maxwell, 2003). Furthermore, experimental or intervention studies such as leadership training programs or accountability systems or institutional interventions (e.g., performance appraisal systems) would offer a stronger test of causality by actually directly testing whether decreasing AL acts leads to improved perceived TV (Tepper et al., 2017). Mixed method approaches combining surveys with interviews or case studies are also encouraged in order to tap both the statistical relationships as well as the lived experiences of employees, which is also in line with the guiding principles of COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989).

Second, although the results are sound for the public sector in Saudi Arabia, they are not universally applicable due to cultural and institutional uniqueness. Saudi Arabia scores high on power distance, collectivist, as well as hierarchical values (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004), which may magnify the perpetuation of AL and its impact on teams. Earlier drafts included language that sounded as though its criticism applied across the board saying, for example, that AL was "structural, routinised, and self-fulfilling." In response to reviewers, we modified this language to stress that our findings are most pertinent to the Saudi context. Future research should use cross-cultural comparative designs to examine the extent to which the mediating variables reported here QWL and TC work in the same way in different cultures, or the extent to which different pathways are proposed. By

studying these and/or similar comparison samples, we can identify aspects of AL that are culture-bound vs. universally applicable and thus provide a more nuanced picture of the processes involved in AL more generally in a global context.

9. CONCLUSION

This study contributes by establishing strong evidence for the negative consequences of abusive leadership (AL) for team viability (TV) in the Saudi public sector organizations, and that such a relationship occurs in particular through the mediating mechanisms of quality of working life (QWL) and team cohesion (TC). Drawing on power-approach theory (Keltner et al., 2003), conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), and leader-member exchange theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), this paper contributes a multi-level model in which AL is considered as a structural-cultural, resource-draining, and relational-destructive process. In advancing leadership scholarship, this theoretical synthesis transcends reductionist frames for understanding destructive leadership and, instead, provides a fuller understanding of how unresourceful leadership actions undermine attitudes, behaviours and processes surrounding organisational resilience.

From an intercultural point of view, it could be argued that AL is heightened in high power-distance and collectivist countries, in which authority is structurally legitimised and employee voice is restricted (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004). The findings are of special relevance for the Saudi public sector, but they also have implications for the

question of the degree to which AL dynamics are culture-bound versus universal. Hence, future comparative studies are needed to examine whether these mediating pathways work in different cultural and institutional settings.

Moreover, the analysis in the study is relevant for public sector governance discussions to demonstrate that AL is not merely an interpersonal pathology, but rather a systemic organisational threat. In knowledge-based workplaces with a premium on mentoring, collaboration and knowledge-sharing, AL is a significant detractor to both individual productivity and to long-term institutional continuity. The findings underscore the need for accountability mechanisms, greater moral and ethical leadership training, as well as culturally sensitive changes that map onto local norms. In the case of the Saudi context, incorporating the values present in Islamic work ethics ('adl, shura, muhasaba) would provide a culturally relevant foundation for reform that targets leadership action and institutional protection.

Overall, this study makes an important contribution to the leadership literature by engaging multiple theoretical perspectives, adds new insights to cross-cultural management literature by demonstrating the significance of culture in shaping AL dynamics, and advances public sector governance discourse by presenting AL as a systemic risk necessitating multi-tier intervention strategies. By pushing knowledge in both theoretical and practical domains, the inquiry charts a course for how to create healthier, more resilient organisations that are less vulnerable to the corrosive effects of toxic leadership.

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