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THE IMPACT OF PSYCHOPATHIC LEADERSHIP ON ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of psychopathic leadership on organizational culture and employee performance in public and private sector organizations in Pakistan. While much of the literature addresses this issue in Western settings, there is a lack of research in hierarchical, collectivist cultures such as Pakistan. Using a quantitative design, data were collected from 250 employees via structured surveys. Psychopathic leadership was assessed using an adapted Triarchic Psychopathy Measure, while standardized tools evaluated organizational culture and employee performance. Correlation, regression, and MANOVA analyses revealed a significant influence of psychopathic leadership on both outcomes. Notably, traits such as boldness and superficial charm showed a temporary positive association with performance and cultural perception. However, these traits may conceal deeper risks, including long-term cultural decline and employee disengagement. The findings underscore the need for context-sensitive leadership assessment in non-Western environments, offering practical guidance for HR professionals and policymakers to promote ethical leadership and foster resilient organizational cultures.

Keywords: Psychopathic Leadership, Organizational Culture, Employee Performance, Ethical Leadership.

Introduction

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping the performance, culture, and long-term sustainability of organizations. While most scholarly attention has traditionally focused on constructive leadership paradigms, such as transformational or servant leadership, which foster employee motivation, trust, and organizational well-being, an emerging body of research has shifted its focus toward the darker dimensions of leadership. One such phenomenon is psychopathic leadership, characterized by manipulative, callous, and exploitative behaviors that threaten organizational harmony and employee welfare.

Although psychopathic traits may initially be masked by charisma and bold decision-making, they are often accompanied by deception, lack of empathy, and

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unethical conduct (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Boddy, 2015). These behaviors can erode trust, normalize unethical practices, and create toxic work environments. Such leadership styles thrive particularly in environments where hierarchical structures and power distance are prevalent conditions common in many Pakistani organizations, where respect for authority often overshadows accountability.

Despite growing global interest, empirical investigations of psychopathic leadership within South Asian or collectivist cultural contexts remain scarce. Most of the literature now in publication is based on Western workplace environments, where democratic principles and flatter hierarchies offer a more balanced distribution of power. The organizational ecosystem in Pakistan, on the other hand, poses risks because of its strict hierarchies and high loyalty to authority. Cultural norms or job uncertainty may deter employees from reporting toxic leadership (Sandhu & Fatima, 2021). Thus, the purpose of this research is to investigate how psychopathic leadership affects employee performance and organizational culture in both public and private sector firms in Pakistan.

This study offers fresh perspectives on the global conversation about toxic leadership by examining these connections in a culturally unique and understudied setting. It advances organizational development practices, human resource policies, and leadership theory.

Scope of the Study

This study investigates the influence of psychopathic leadership on organizational culture and employee performance in Pakistani public and private sector organizations. To examine data from a diverse sample of employees across hierarchical levels, a quantitative methodology is applied that incorporates theories from industrial psychology, organizational behavior, and leadership studies.

Although the results are based on the Pakistani context, they are theoretically and practically applicable to other hierarchical and collectivist cultures that face comparable leadership issues. Through an analysis of both direct effects and moderating factors, the study provides a multifaceted understanding of how psychopathic leadership develops in intricate organizational environments..

Rationale

In hierarchical, collectivist countries like Pakistan, where power distance is large and organizational structures are inflexible, this study fills a vital gap in the literature on psychopathic leadership. Most of the material currently available on psychopathic leadership is centered on Western, individualistic countries, where leadership practices and workplace standards diverge significantly from those seen in South Asian contexts (Boddy, 2021; Landay et al., 2019). It has been demonstrated that psychopathic leadership degrades corporate culture, undermines trust, and impairs employee performance. It is typified by manipulation, emotional detachment, a lack of empathy, and unethical behavior (Mathieu et al., 2014; Babiak & Hare, 2019). However, little is known about how these processes unfold in Pakistan's sociocultural context, where leaders often act with unbridled freedom and authority, which is rarely questioned (Hofstede Insights, 2023). By experimentally investigating the effects of

psychopathic leadership in Pakistani public and commercial sector organizations, this study closes that gap. The study has valuable implications for HR professionals, organizational policymakers, and management practitioners, in addition to its goal of contributing to the global conversation on toxic leadership. The results will inform the development of strategies to prevent psychopathic tendencies in leadership, foster moral leadership growth, and promote more positive company cultures that enhance worker productivity and well-being.

Problem Statement

Leadership behavior has a significant influence on the organizational climate and employee outcomes. While positive leadership encourages innovation, participation, and well-being, destructive leadership styles, especially those marked by psychopathy, can have the opposite effect, cultivating environments of fear, reduced morale, and disengagement (Boddy, 2015; Davis, 2016). Psychopathic leaders are often self-serving, manipulative, and emotionally indifferent, which results in organizational dysfunction, employee turnover, and strategic drift (Khan et al., 2019).

Although there is increasing global recognition of these risks, limited empirical evidence exists in non-Western, high power-distance cultures such as Pakistan, where such toxic behaviors may remain unchallenged. The lack of localized studies creates a gap in both academic understanding and practical response. This study addresses that gap by investigating the influence of psychopathic leadership on organizational culture and employee performance in Pakistan, and by identifying possible pathways and interventions to mitigate its harmful effects.

Research Questions

1. How does psychopathic leadership impact organizational culture in public and private sector organizations in Pakistan?

2. What is the effect of psychopathic leadership on employee performance, especially in terms of creativity and engagement?

Research Objectives

The following key objectives guide this study:

- To examine the relationship between psychopathic leadership and organizational culture, with a focus on its impact on employee morale, satisfaction, and workplace dynamics.

- To assess the influence of psychopathic leadership on employee performance, particularly regarding creativity, engagement, and psychological well-being.

Significance of Study

This research contributes to the expanding body of literature on destructive leadership by offering novel empirical insights from a South Asian, high power-distance cultural setting. In Pakistan, where hierarchical authority often impedes

transparency, the presence of psychopathic leadership may have profound yet underreported effects on organizational functioning.

The study is particularly relevant for human resource professionals, organizational psychologists, and policymakers, as it provides data-driven evidence to inform the development of ethical leadership, the early detection of toxic traits, and the implementation of employee protection mechanisms. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of psychological variables such as autonomy support and hostile attribution bias as potential buffering mechanisms, making it particularly valuable for the design of evidence-based HRM strategies.

Literature Review

Leadership is a crucial force in shaping an organization's direction, culture, and outcomes. While traditional research has predominantly emphasized the positive attributes of leadership, such as integrity, vision, and motivation, contemporary scholarship has begun to shed light on the "dark side" of leadership. Among the dark triad of traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy), psychopathy is increasingly recognized for its profoundly detrimental effects in the workplace. Psychopathic leaders often display charm and confidence, but beneath the surface lies manipulation, emotional coldness, and a lack of remorse (Babiak & Hare, 2006).

Psychopathic leadership has emerged as a significant threat to organizational health, particularly in high power-distance cultures where authority is rarely challenged. Such leadership undermines trust, encourages unethical behavior, and damages employee morale. This review examines the literature surrounding psychopathic leadership, focusing on its impact on organizational culture and employee performance, while emphasizing the contextual importance of South Asian, especially Pakistani, organizations.

Psychopathic Leadership: Defining Characteristics

Corporate psychopathy is characterized by interpersonal manipulation, deceitfulness, lack of empathy, and reckless behavior (Babiak & Hare, 2006). In organizational settings, psychopathic leaders may initially appear charismatic and competent, enabling them to ascend to leadership roles. However, their core traits — boldness, meanness, and disinhibition — are fundamentally harmful in the long term (Stapleton, 2023; Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013).

Boldness often manifests as confidence and risk-taking, which may offer short-term gains. However, meanness (cruelty and lack of empathy) and disinhibition (impulsivity and rule-breaking) lead to organizational toxicity. These leaders often exploit others for personal gain and show a lack of concern for ethical consequences (Webster et al., 2016). The danger lies in their ability to conceal their true intentions until their influence is deeply embedded in organizational structures (Boddy, 2015).

Psychopathic Leadership and Organizational Culture

Organizational culture encompasses shared values, norms, and practices that guide behavior within an organization. Healthy cultures foster trust, collaboration, and

psychological safety. In contrast, psychopathic leadership erodes these foundations. Such leaders foster environments characterized by fear, dishonesty, and unethical conduct (Boddy, 2010).

Boddy (2014) and Davis (2016) demonstrate that psychopathic leaders damage the organizational fabric by promoting bullying and silencing employee voice. In the Pakistani context, Sandhu and Fatima (2021) found that psychopathic leadership contributes to workplace anxiety, alienation, and high turnover. Al-Suraihi et al. (2021) similarly highlight the collapse of organizational values when toxic behaviors become normalized. This transformation from a value-driven to a fear-driven culture significantly hampers organizational resilience and innovation.

Psychopathic Leadership and Employee Performance

Employee performance is inherently tied to leadership style. Supportive leadership promotes engagement, creativity, and well-being, whereas toxic leadership has the opposite effect. Psychopathic leaders, through intimidation and manipulation, contribute to demotivation, stress, and burnout among employees (Boddy, 2015).

Khan et al. (2019) demonstrated that psychopathic leadership undermines creativity and engagement in Pakistan's public health sector. Emotional exhaustion and reduced innovation were attributed to abusive supervision and a lack of autonomy. While boldness may produce short-term performance gains, meanness and disinhibition inevitably degrade productivity and morale (Stapleton, 2023). Over time, this leads to increased errors, absenteeism, and talent attrition.

Psychopathy, Innovation, and Workplace Dynamics

Leadership psychopathy impacts organizational innovation through both overt and covert means. While boldness may spur innovation in crisis settings, it often stems from fear-driven compliance rather than genuine engagement. Boddy and Taplin (2020) introduce the concept of "dark innovation," where creativity occurs under duress rather than inspiration.

Such innovation lacks sustainability, as fear suppresses psychological safety and open communication. Employees become risk-averse, disengaged, and unwilling to contribute novel ideas. Ultimately, the fade of short-term progress masks long-term dysfunction and decline. Organizations must assess whether performance is derived from genuine engagement or coercion and fear.

Regional and Cultural Context

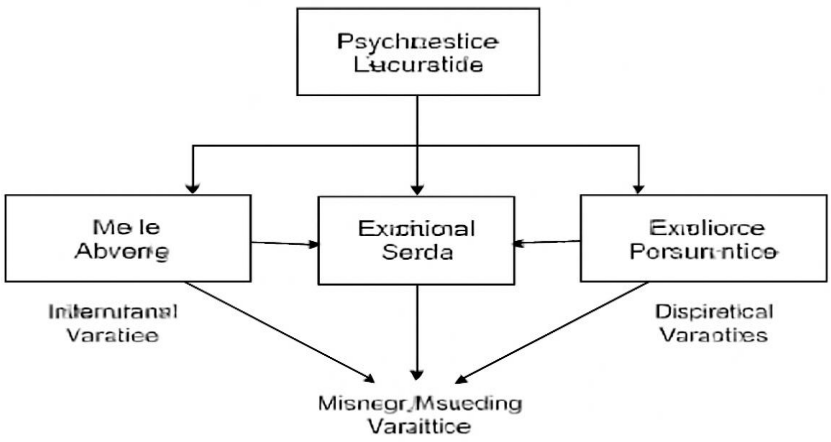
Most empirical studies on psychopathic leadership originate from Western contexts, with limited exploration in South Asian settings. This is a critical oversight, as cultural dimensions such as high power distance and collectivism significantly alter the perception and impact of toxic leadership (Sandhu & Fatima, 2021).

In Pakistan, hierarchical structures and a culture of respect for authority often prevent employees from speaking out against unethical behavior. Public-sector organizations are vulnerable due to bureaucratic inertia and rigid hierarchical structures

(Khan et al., 2019). The corporate sector, though more flexible, still struggles with leadership accountability. As a result, psychopathic leaders exploit structural and cultural gaps to maintain control, exacerbating organizational dysfunction.

Theoretical framework

Organizational culture and employee performance are the two primary dependent variables that are influenced by psychopathic leadership, the independent variable in this study's conceptual framework. Workplace dynamics can be seriously distorted by psychopathic leadership, which is typified by manipulativeness, shallow charm, and emotional detachment (Babiak & Hare, 2006). Moderating factors, including gender, work type, and job designation, are included in the model and may change the direction or intensity of these correlations (Landay et al., 2019). Furthermore, mediating factors like hostile attribution bias, emotional stress, and work-phobic anxiety are included to explain indirect effects because these psychological responses often moderate the ways in which toxic leadership traits impact employee behavior and cultural norms (Sandhu & Fatima, 2021). Reflecting the intricate relationships between organizational mechanisms and leadership traits, this framework emphasizes how individual differences and contextual factors influence the outcomes of destructive leadership in hierarchical and collectivist settings, such as Pakistan (Khan et al., 2020; Stapleton, 2023).



Conceptual Framework

Organizational culture and employee performance are two dependent variables that are influenced by psychopathic leadership, which is the independent variable in this study's conceptual model. It is believed that characteristics such as dishonesty, emotional coldness, and manipulation can directly undermine employee productivity and cultural ideals.

Additionally, the framework suggests the existence of mediating and moderating factors such as hostile attribution bias, emotional stress, and work-phobic anxiety (Sandhu & Fatima, 2021). These factors contribute to explaining the indirect mechanisms by which toxic leadership influences outcomes. Thus, the model offers a

comprehensive understanding of the organizational impact of psychopathic leadership, capturing both direct and indirect consequences.

Hypothesis Development Based on the literature reviewed, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_1: Psychopathic leadership negatively impacts organizational culture.

H_2: Psychopathic leadership negatively affects employee performance.

Research Gap

While the detrimental effects of psychopathic leadership have been well-documented in Western settings, there is a notable dearth of research in South Asian contexts, particularly Pakistan. This is concerning given the unique cultural characteristics that influence workplace dynamics.

Existing studies often utilize cross-sectional designs, which fail to capture the long-term consequences of toxic leadership. Additionally, the differential impact of psychopathic leadership across public and private sectors remains underexplored. Mediating variables such as employee resilience, stress, and attribution bias are insufficiently addressed in current models.

Research Methodology

The research framework, design, and procedures used to examine the impact of psychopathic leadership on organizational culture and employee performance. It encompasses the research type, paradigm, sampling strategy, instrument design, data collection, and statistical methods employed to ensure the reliability and validity of the results.

Research Design and Approach

An explanatory and applied research approach was used in this study. By elucidating the causal connections among psychopathic leadership, organizational culture, and employee performance, it seeks to address a real-world organizational problem: harmful leadership. The study's quantitative methodology enables the objective measurement of variable interactions and the testing of hypotheses using statistical techniques and structured instruments (Zikmund et al., 2013; Saunders et al., 2019).

Research Paradigm

The study is grounded in the positivist paradigm, which posits that social processes are amenable to objective, empirical measurement. According to Bryman (2016), positivism places a strong emphasis on testing hypotheses using observable facts, allowing conclusions based on statistical evidence to be applied broadly. This paradigm aligns with the study's examination of leadership outcomes through statistical methods and structured surveys.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised employees working in public and private sector organizations across Pakistan. These sectors were selected due to their hierarchical structures and formal leadership systems, which are conducive to examining the research variables.

Using Slovin's formula

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N\ (e)!}$$

With a population estimate of 10,000 and a 5% margin of error, the recommended sample size was approximately 385 respondents. Due to time and logistical constraints, a sample of 250 respondents was deemed adequate for robust statistical analysis, following Hair et al. (2014). A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed to access willing participants via online platforms, acknowledging limitations in generalizability.

Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

Data was collected using a structured online questionnaire developed in Google Forms. The survey was distributed through email and messaging platforms to reach a diverse set of professionals. Participation was voluntary, and an informed consent statement was provided prior to completing the questionnaire. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained.

Instrumentation and Scale Design

The questionnaire used standardized 5-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), drawing from validated instruments in the literature. A pilot test with 10 respondents was conducted to refine clarity and structure.

Operationalization of Variables

Below is the operational definition and structure of the key variables measured in this study:

Variable	Definition	Source of Scale	Items	Measurement Scale
Psychopathic Leadership	Manipulative, unemotional, and risk-prone leadership style.	Triarchic Psychopathy Measure (TriPM)	10	5-point Likert Scale
Organizational Culture	The shared values, beliefs, and behaviors shaping the work environment	Adapted from Boddy (2015) and Davis (2016)	8	5-point Likert Scale
Employee Performance	Employees' self-reported effectiveness, creativity, and work engagement	Adapted from Khan et al. (2019)	6	5-point Likert Scale

Note: Mediating factors such as socio-emotional behavior and engagement, while acknowledged in the literature, were not tested due to scope limitations.

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Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using Jamovi, an open-source statistical software. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondent demographics and measure central tendencies, including means and standard deviations. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to evaluate the linear relationships between the independent variable (psychopathic leadership) and the dependent variables (organizational culture and employee performance). Multiple linear regression was used to assess the predictive power of psychopathic leadership on both outcomes. Additionally, Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was applied to examine the joint effect of psychopathic leadership on organizational culture and employee performance, while also identifying potential interaction effects between variables.

Analysis and Interpretation

The empirical findings derived from the quantitative analysis conducted to assess the impact of psychopathic leadership on organizational culture and employee performance within public and private sector organizations in Pakistan. The analysis begins with a summary of respondent demographics, followed by detailed results from descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and MANOVA. Each analytical component aligns with the study's objectives and tests the proposed hypotheses, offering insights into how psychopathic leadership traits influence workplace dynamics in hierarchical, collectivist organizational contexts.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 250)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	105	42.0
	Male	145	58.0
Age (in years)	< 25	49	19.6
	26–35	47	18.8
	36–45	53	21.2
	46–55	42	16.8
	56 and above	59	23.6
Education Level	Matric	47	18.8
	Intermediate	49	19.6
	Graduate	54	21.6
	M.Phil.	54	21.6
	PhD Degree	46	18.4
Monthly Income (in Pakistani Rupees)	< 20,000	47	18.8
	20,000–40,000	52	20.8
	40,000–60,000	49	19.6
	60,000–80,000	50	20.0
	80,000 and above	52	20.8

The demographic profile of the 250 respondents shows a well-distributed and diverse sample. Gender representation was balanced, with 58% of the participants

being male and 42% female. Participants represented various age groups, with the largest proportion aged 56 and above (23.6%), followed by other brackets ranging from under 25 to 55, ensuring generational diversity.

Education levels were notably high, with 21.6% holding graduate degrees, 21.6% holding M.Phil. degrees, and 18.4% holding PhDs. Additionally, 19.6% held intermediate and 18.8% held matric-level qualifications, indicating the inclusion of both managerial and operational staff.

Income distribution was evenly spread, with 20.8% of the population earning Rs. 20,000 and Rs. 40,000, and similar proportions across higher brackets, reflecting a varied socioeconomic background. Overall, the sample's diversity enhances the reliability and applicability of the study's findings.

Table 02: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Median	St.Dev	Mini	Maxi
Psychopathic Leadership	3.20	3.30	0.719	1.10	4.80
Organizational Culture	3.20	3.25	0.761	1.25	4.75
Employee Performance	3.29	3.33	0.742	1.00	4.83

Descriptive statistics indicate that all three variables hover around the midpoint of the 5-point Likert scale, reflecting moderate perceptions among respondents. Psychopathic Leadership had a mean of 3.20 (SD = 0.72), suggesting a moderate presence of psychopathic traits in leadership. Organizational Culture also recorded a mean of 3.20 (SD = 0.76), indicating a moderately positive perception. Employee Performance was slightly higher at 3.29 (SD = 0.74), reflecting a generally favorable self-assessment. The observed variability supports the robustness of subsequent inferential analyses.

Table 03: Reliability Analysis

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Psychopathic Leadership	0.854
Organizational Culture	0.851
Employee Performance	0.767

Reliability analysis confirmed strong internal consistency across all scales. Cronbach's alpha values were 0.854 for Psychopathic Leadership, 0.851 for Organizational Culture, and 0.767 for Employee Performance, all exceeding the 0.70 benchmark (Hair et al., 2014). These results indicate that the measurement instruments are reliable and consistently capture their respective constructs.

Table 04: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Psychopathic Leadership	Organizational Culture	Employee Performance
Psychopathic Leadership	1		
Organizational Culture	0.866	1	
Employee Performance	0.923	0.723	1

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Correlation analysis revealed strong positive relationships among the key variables. Psychopathic Leadership was significantly correlated with both Organizational Culture ($r = 0.866$, $p < .001$) and Employee Performance ($r = 0.923$, $p < .001$). Additionally, Organizational Culture was positively correlated with Employee Performance ($r = 0.723$, $p < .001$). These findings, while statistically robust, are unexpected given that psychopathic traits are typically associated with negative organizational outcomes. A potential explanation may lie in the short-term functional effects of boldness, a subdimension of psychopathy which could be perceived as assertiveness or decisiveness (Stapleton, 2023).

Table 05: Regression Analysis

Dependent Variable	Predictor	R	R^2	F	p-value	β (Estimate)	T value	P-value
Organizational Culture	Psychopathic Leadership	0.866	0.750	744	< 0.001	0.916	27.28	< 0.001
Employee Performance	Psychopathic Leadership	0.923	0.852	1427	< 0.001	0.952	37.78	< 0.001

Regression analysis revealed that psychopathic leadership significantly predicts both organizational culture and employee performance. It explained 75% of the variance in organizational culture ($R^2 = 0.750$, $\beta = 0.916$, $t = 27.28$, $p < .001$) and 85.2% of the variance in employee performance ($R^2 = 0.852$, $\beta = 0.952$, $t = 37.78$, $p < 0.001$), with both models showing high statistical significance.

Notably, the strong positive relationships diverge from prior literature that typically associates psychopathic leadership with negative outcomes (Boddy, 2015). This may reflect the influence of the boldness dimension linked to assertiveness and confidence, which can enhance perceived performance in the short term (Stapleton, 2023). These results highlight the importance of context and the dual nature of psychopathic traits in leadership.

Table 06: MANOVA

Test	F-Value	Df (Hypothesis, Error)	P-Value
Pillai's Trace	8.280	62, 436	< 0.001
Wilks' Lambda	24.900	62, 434	< 0.001
Hotelling's Trace	59.488	62, 432	< 0.001
Roy's Largest Root	118.959	31, 218	< 0.001

A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine the combined effect of psychopathic leadership on organizational culture and employee performance. The multivariate tests, including Pillai's Trace, Wilks' Lambda, Hotelling's Trace, and Roy's Largest Root, all yielded statistically significant results ($p < 0.001$), confirming a substantial overall effect.

Table 07: Summary of MANOVA

Dependent Variable	F-value	p-value	Adjusted R^2
Organizational Culture	25.466	< .001	0.753
Employee Performance	48.718	< .001	0.856

Follow-up Tests of Between-Subjects Effects indicated that psychopathic leadership significantly influenced each dependent variable. For organizational culture, the effect was strong and significant ($F = 25.466$, $p < 0.001$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.753$), while for employee performance, the impact was even greater ($F = 48.718$, $p < 0.001$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.856$).

These results reinforce the earlier correlation and regression findings, confirming that psychopathic leadership is a powerful predictor of both organizational culture and employee performance within the sampled context.

Discussion

The results of this research can serve as a good source of information concerning the connection between psychopathic leadership and organizational culture and the performance of employees in Pakistani public and private institutions. It is crucial to note that the obtained results revealed significant positive relationships between psychopathic leadership and organizational culture ($r = 0.866$, $p < 0.001$) and employee performance ($r = 0.923$, $p < 0.001$). Such findings can be described as counterintuitive given that, in most of the foreign literature, the phenomenon of psychopathic leadership is still associated with workplace dread in most cases (Boddy, 2015; Mathieu et al., 2014).

One of the reasons that explains such unpredictable positive relationships is the cultural and structural particularity of Pakistan's organizational setting. According to Hofstede (2001), high power distance and collectivist norms could be used to explain why the psychopathic boldness and superficial charm are mistaken for confidence, decisiveness, and good leadership. Although such characteristics are often associated with disguises (Babiak & Hare, 2006), in some cases, they may be momentarily perceived as signs of effective leadership, especially in hierarchical environments, and in the process, overestimate their positive impact on employees and the organization's culture.

These paradoxical results are also identified in the research by Stapleton (2023), which suggests that an ambitious attitude in psychopathic managers can be motivating at the beginning of the process, as it conveys a sense of vision and decisiveness. Nonetheless, as the years move on, the meanness and disinhibition aspects of psychopathy are likely to wear down the morale and trust of employees, causing them to become disengaged and burn out. This contradiction can be a reason, despite short-term perceptions being positive, long-term organizational health in the case of psychopathic leadership is likely to deteriorate (Boddy & Taplin, 2021; Khan et al., 2020).

Moreover, both the organizational culture ($R^2 = 0.750$) and employee performance ($R^2 = 0.852$), which were predicted by psychopathic leadership, are sufficiently strong to be critiqued. The reason behind this strong explanation may be attributed to either the ingrained leadership bias in these institutions or the bias against a response guided by cultural subordination of authority. In collectivistic cultures such as Pakistan, subordinates are less likely to criticize people in positions of authority, leading to overly complacent self-reports in survey answers (Sandhu & Fatima, 2021; Volmer et al., 2016).

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Furthermore, the dramatic results of the MANOVA test, which demonstrated a strong multivariate effect of a psychopathic leadership style on the two dependent variables, align with the work by Smith and Lilienfeld (2013), who warn that psychopathic leaders often mask their destructiveness by being charming and strategic communicators. Such a mask of effectiveness can therefore postpone the discovery of disastrous workplace relationships.

The findings also raise questions about ethical blind spots in the leadership selection and evaluation processes. Misinterpreting psychopathic characteristics as expressions of competence could put organizations at risk of elevating individuals who can undermine psychological safety, ethical conduct, and the long-term sustainability of the company (Jonason et al., 2012; Cunha et al., 2024). This demonstrates the necessity of incorporating behavioral assessment and multi-source feedback into leadership assessments, ensuring that there is no tendency to normalize poor leadership.

The results depict a complex situation where psychopathic leadership appears promising, particularly within the matrices that normalize the arrogance of power and decision-making. However, these seem to be short-term and merely advantageous gains, as reported in Boddy (2017), who admits to 26 years of destruction and decay within organizations with psychopathic executives. Therefore, in future studies, the author should investigate the longitudinal effects, cultural mediators, and employee coping strategies to comprehensively describe the characteristics of such leadership in non-Western cultures.

Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of psychopathic leadership on organizational culture and employee performance in public and private sector organizations in Pakistan. Grounded in a sample of 250 employees and guided by quantitative analysis techniques, including correlation, regression, and MANOVA, the findings revealed that psychopathic leadership has a significant influence on both outcome variables. Specifically, psychopathic leadership accounted for approximately 75% of the variance in organizational culture and over 85% of the variance in employee performance.

Interestingly, while prior literature often highlights the negative implications of psychopathic traits in leadership, the present study found a strong positive association. This may be attributable to boldness and assertiveness subcomponents of psychopathy, which can be perceived as strength in hierarchical and collectivist cultures like Pakistan. However, these short-term perceived gains may obscure deeper dysfunctions, such as reduced trust, ethical compromise, and psychological strain among employees.

The findings underscore the nuanced nature of psychopathic leadership in non-Western contexts, where power distance and reverence for authority may inadvertently legitimize toxic leadership. This research contributes to the global discourse on destructive leadership by highlighting the context-specific risks and implications, and it calls for proactive HR strategies to mitigate long-term organizational harm.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following practical recommendations are proposed for organizational leaders, HR professionals, and policymakers:

1. **Leadership Screening**: Adopt validated psychological assessment tools during recruitment and promotion processes to detect psychopathic tendencies early.
2. **Ethical Leadership Development**: Design training programs focused on emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, and empathy to counteract toxic traits.
3. **Robust HR Policies**: Establish clear protocols and anonymous reporting mechanisms to address unethical leadership behavior promptly and confidentially.
4. **Psychological Safety**: Foster an open and transparent culture where employees feel secure in expressing concerns about leadership without fear of retaliation.
5. **360-Degree Feedback**: Incorporate multi-source evaluation systems to ensure leadership assessments reflect the perspectives of subordinates and peers.
6. **Cultural Audits**: Conduct regular evaluations of organizational culture to identify early signs of erosion linked to leadership style.
7. **Employee Support Structures**: Implement counseling, stress management, and burnout prevention programs to safeguard employee well-being.
8. **Ethical Succession Planning**: Prioritize integrity, empathy, and people-centered values in leadership transitions to promote sustainable organizational health.

Limitations

Despite its valuable contributions, this study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged:

Cross-Sectional Design

The study employed a cross-sectional research design, which limits the ability to infer causal relationships. Longitudinal studies would provide stronger evidence of cause and effect over time.

Self-Reported Data

All data were collected through self-administered questionnaires, which may introduce response bias, including social desirability and subjective perceptions, particularly in assessing leadership behavior and personal performance.

Convenience Sampling

The use of non-probability (convenience) sampling restricts the generalizability of the findings. Although the sample was diverse, it may not fully represent all public and private sector employees across Pakistan.

Single-Country Focus

The study was conducted solely within Pakistan. Cultural and organizational norms specific to the region may limit the applicability of the findings to other countries or contexts with different leadership expectations.

Lack of Mediators or Moderators

The research did not include potential mediating or moderating variables, such as job satisfaction, organizational trust, or emotional exhaustion, which may influence the observed relationships.

Focus on Perception, Not Behavior

The study assessed employees' perceptions of psychopathic leadership, rather than relying on direct behavioral observation or leader self-assessments, which may not capture the full complexity of leadership dynamics.

Scope of Variables

The study focused solely on psychopathic leadership, organizational culture, and employee performance. Other related constructs, such as job stress, turnover intention, or ethical climate, were not explored.

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