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# Despotic leadership and organizational deviance

## The mediating role of organizational identification and the moderating role of value congruence

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – Drawing on the social exchange theory, the purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between despotic leadership and employee's organizational deviance. Specifically, the authors take a relational approach by introducing employee's organizational identification as the mediator. The moderating role of value congruence in the relationship between despotic leadership and organizational deviance is also considered.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data were collected from 15 universities in Turkey. The sample included 1,219 randomly chosen faculty members along with their department chairs. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the proposed model.

**Findings** – The results of this study supported the positive effect of despotic leadership on employee's organizational deviance as well as the mediating effect of employee's organizational identification. Moreover, when the level of value congruence is high, the relationship between organizational identification and organizational deviance is strong, whereas the effect is weak when the level of value congruence is low.

**Practical implications** – The findings of this study suggest that educational administrators in the higher education should be sensitive in treating their subordinates, as it will lead to positive interpersonal relationship, which, in turn, will reduce organizational deviance. Moreover, they should pay more attention to the buffering role of value congruence for those subordinates with high distrust and showing organizational deviance.

**Originality/value** – This study contributes to the literature on workplace deviance by revealing the relational mechanism between despotic leadership and employee organizational deviance. The paper also offers a practical assistance to employees in the higher education and their leaders interested in building trust, increasing leader-employee relationship and reducing organizational deviance.

**Keywords** Organizational deviance, Organizational identification, Value congruence, Despotic leadership

**Paper type** Research paper

### 1. Introduction

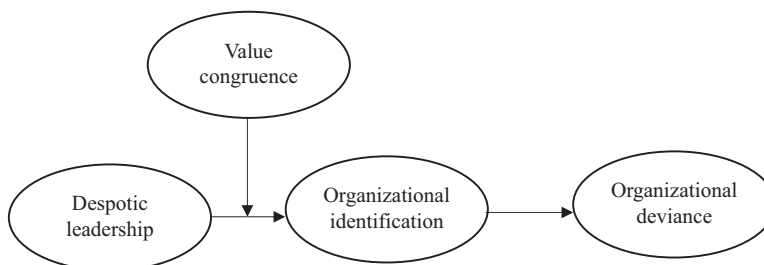
The phenomenon of leadership includes an individual's ability to influence others – i.e. followers – to help achieve organizational objectives. Since its inception, the domain of leadership has been romanticized, emphasizing the beneficial effects of leaders on followers and organizations (Schilling, 2009), while largely neglecting the dark side of leadership (Naseer *et al.*, 2016). However, the past few years have seen a steady growth in the literature focusing on the potentially ugly face of leadership (Naseer *et al.*, 2016). Rising interest in the dysfunctional aspects of leadership suggests a major paradigm shift (Karakitapoğlu-Aygün and Gumusluoglu, 2013) that recognizes the negative effects that leaders can exert over their subordinates.



In line with the growing interest in the dark side of leadership, many terminologies have been proposed to capture this construct, including petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994), abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007), tyrannical leadership, destructive leadership (Einarsen *et al.*, 2007), and despotic leadership (Aronson, 2001). Despotic leadership refers to leader behaviors that focus on gaining supremacy and dominance, and are motivated by a leader's self-interests. Such leaders are arrogant, manipulative, bossy, and unforgiving (House and Howell, 1992; Naseer *et al.*, 2016). According to Schilling (2009), despotic leadership is a prominent example that encompasses the most important features of negative leadership types. Yet, despite its long-standing presence in the political leadership literature as well as its intuitive appeal, related research in the broad management and applied psychology literatures is still in its infancy. To date, no study, to our knowledge, has contributed to an understanding of how despotic leadership relates to employees' organizational deviance, despite the fact that leadership is one of the most influential predictors of employee workplace deviance (Tepper *et al.*, 2009); thus, the first goal of this study is to address this very untapped issue.

In addition, this study investigates value congruence as the boundary condition for organizational identification, i.e. the organizational deviance relationship. Existing theories and research indicate that leadership and value congruence significantly influence individual workplace deviance (e.g. Brown and Treviño, 2006; Tepper *et al.*, 2009). Prior researchers have emphasized that value congruence is an important preventive source of undesirable outcomes such as workplace cynicism and deviant behaviors (Avey *et al.*, 2008), yet scholars have not considered the interactive effects of leadership and value congruence on deviance; this relates to how leadership and organizational members are able to reduce deviant behaviors (Avey *et al.*, 2008).

The present research is intended to contribute to the existing literature in several ways. First, our research seeks to fill the knowledge gap concerning the link between despotic leadership and workplace deviance. Previous research has demonstrated that leadership is one of the most influential factors affecting workplace deviance. This paper is designed to be one of the first studies to consider the link between despotic leadership and employees' organizational deviance. Second, determining how organizational identification decreases employees' organizational deviance has received little empirical attention in organizational identification-related literature (Umphress *et al.*, 2010). The present study uses social exchange theory as the core theoretical focus and takes a step further to identify the mediating effect of organizational identification on the leadership-deviance link. The findings could advance our understanding of the processes by which despotic leadership influences organizational deviance. Third, this study contributes to the literature by investigating how despotic leadership enhances followers' organizational deviance via organizational identification, which, in turn, accounts for the moderating effect of the value congruence. Finally, our study adopts a cross-level design and uses a multisource data collection enabling us to provide more robust and meaningful outcomes. Figure 1 shows the theoretical model that guided this study.



**Figure 1.**  
Proposed moderated mediation model

## 2. Literature review and hypotheses

### 2.1 *Despotic leadership and employee organizational deviance*

In the past decade, workplace deviance at work has become the focus of an increasing number of research studies (e.g. Colbert *et al.*, 2004; Sackett and DeVore, 2001). Workplace deviance is defined as “voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both” (Robinson and Bennett, 1995: p. 556). Examples of deviant behavior include withholding effort, stealing, and acting rudely to coworkers.

Robinson and Bennett (1995) identified two primary types of workplace deviance. Interpersonal deviance is targeted at members of the organization and includes behaviors such as saying something hurtful or acting rudely to a coworker. Organizational deviance is directed at the organization and includes such actions as stealing and withholding effort.

Social exchange is one of the most prominent theoretical frameworks for interpreting individual behavior in the workplace (Blau, 1964). Researchers unanimously agree that social exchange comprises a sequence of give-and-take between two parties that creates mutual obligations (Emerson, 1976). This theory contends that these exchanges are normally two-way and are dependent on the behavior of both parties (Blau, 1964). One of the major features of social exchange theory is that associations among individuals develop with the passage of time into trustworthy, dedicated, and shared obligations. In order for such mutual commitments to emerge, individuals must comply with certain norms of exchange (Emerson, 1976). Thus, the rules of exchange form the basic tenet of an exchange process. Mutual exchanges involve interpersonal contact in which the actions of one individual cause reactions in another. If an individual harms or indulges in evil deeds, the recipient of that treatment will react accordingly. According to social exchange theory, employees develop a reciprocal interdependent relationship with their managers and their organizational behaviors are contingent on the treatment they receive from their managers (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Consistent with the norm of reciprocity, employees will reciprocate beneficial leader behavior by demonstrating higher trust and commitment. On the other hand, when managers, who represent agents of the organization, treat them poorly by exhibiting narcissist, abusive or despotic behaviors, employees may feel that they are not valued and respected by their organizations and therefore engage in organizational deviance to get even (Lian *et al.*, 2012; Tepper *et al.*, 2009). With respect to despotic leadership, research has revealed despotic leaders score low on ethical code of conduct, personal commitment, sensitivity toward others, responsibility for one’s actions, and self-evaluation (De Hoogh and Den Hartog, 2008; Naseer *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, despotic leaders are autocratic, controlling, and limit participation in decision making (Aronson, 2001; De Hoogh and Den Hartog, 2008). In addition, they exploit and unfairly treat their followers and lack ethical values and norms (Naseer *et al.*, 2016). This, in turn, results in followers becoming less focused or willing to contribute effectively toward organizational progress. Last but not least, because despotic leaders use their position and authority to fulfill their own objectives, followers will react by showing less co-operative and altruistic motives toward the organization and individuals. Within this exchange relationship, followers may find it difficult to channel their reactions directly toward the offending authority figure(s) (i.e. despotic leaders), yet they may do so through indirect means, such as by exhibiting undesired behaviors like workplace deviance.

Specifically, we focus on organizational deviance as the consequence of being confronted with high despotic leadership (Naseer *et al.*, 2016), as earlier research shows that followers react to leader’s low ethical behavior with workplace deviance (Tepper, 2007). Since followers confronted with high despotic behavior often cannot retaliate toward

their leader directly due to the power difference, they tend to retaliate toward the organization instead (Tepper *et al.*, 2009). Thus, we hypothesize:

*H1.* The perception of despotic leadership is positively related to employee's organizational deviance.

### *2.2 Despotic leadership and organizational identification*

Organizational identification refers to an individual's psychological attachment to an organization. Previous studies have indicated that individuals who identify with their organizations to some extent may have a higher level of job satisfaction (Van Knippenberg and Van Schie, 2000; Van Knippenberg and Sleebos, 2006), in-role and extra-role performance (Tyler and Blader, 2000), effective inter-group relations (Richter *et al.*, 2006) and lower level of turnover intentions (Abrams *et al.*, 1998).

At the conceptual level, leader behaviors should promote and raise identification with the workgroup or organization, because such interpersonal treatment conveys to individuals that they are valued and respected (Tyler, 1997). Specifically, because despotic leaders exploit, unfairly treat their followers and lack ethical values and norms (Naseer *et al.*, 2016), we expect such leaders to decrease cooperation (Naseer *et al.*, 2016) which, in turn, lowers organizational identification. Mael and Ashforth (1992) found that identification is more likely to occur in the absence of competition within the organization. Furthermore, scholars (e.g. Tyler and Blader, 2000) suggest that people identify more with social institutions (i.e. organizations) when trust is present because the latter satisfies their need for psychological safety. Empirical research provides support for this notion. For example, several studies, including experimental work, have shown that characteristics of despotic leaders such as lack of openness and trustworthiness for others are negatively related to organizational identification (Bartels *et al.*, 2006; Smidts *et al.*, 2001). Drawing on this literature, we expect a negative despotic leadership-organizational identification relationship:

*H2.* The perception of despotic leadership is negatively related to employee's organizational identification.

### *2.3 The mediating role of organizational identification*

According to Loi *et al.* (2014), organizational identification is a mediating variable linking contextual factors to organizational deviance. We suggest that organizational identification plays a mediating role in the relationship between despotic leadership and follower's organizational deviance. Recent studies have indicated that despotic leaders are arrogant, manipulative, bossy, unforgiving (House and Howell, 1992; Naseer *et al.*, 2016), predisposed to exploit others, behave in unethical ways (Naseer *et al.*, 2016), have lower quality leader and follower relationships, and limit follower participation in decision making (Aronson, 2001; De Hoogh and Den Hartog, 2008).

Like research on abusive and unethical leadership, theorists draw from social exchange theory to explain consequences of despotic leadership (Naseer *et al.*, 2013). When a leader treats an employee with arrogance, anger or lack of empathy, the latter sees the exchange relationship as imbalanced or exploited, experiences lower organizational identification, which affects his/her work attitudes (e.g. O'Boyle *et al.*, 2012) and exhibits retaliatory behavior (e.g. deviance, Meurs *et al.*, 2013; reduced work effort, Harris *et al.*, 2007).

Self-resources principles (Brown and Mitchell, 2010) could also be used to explain consequences of despotic leadership. In particular, research works contend that abusive and despotic leadership drains employees' self-resources (e.g. attention, will-power, esteem) that are needed to maintain appropriate behavior. Consequently, the act of being victimized or threatened by a despotic leader impairs or marginalizes employees'

self-resources (Brown and Mitchell, 2010). When self-regulatory resources are impaired, victims experience more psychological unsafety, are unable to maintain appropriate behavior and engage instead in deviant behavior.

Similarly, conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2001) suggests that individuals struggle to obtain and maintain resources that help them accomplish goals. Experienced psychological unsafety (via despotic leader treatment) drains these resources and causes a spill-over effect to employees' work lives to the extent that they are less able to maintain positive work attitudes and engage in more workplace deviance (Meurs *et al.*, 2013).

This study proposes that employees are affected by the sets of behavior exhibited in despotic leadership in a way that decreases employees' organizational identification, which enhances their organizational deviance. This is in alliance with previous research works reporting a negative correlation between organizational identification and organizational deviance (e.g. Ali Al-Atwi and Bakir, 2014). In fact, employees with low organizational identification may question the efficiency and fairness of the organizational procedures and leader behaviors. They may be irritated by the despotic leadership behaviors such as exploiting others (Naseer *et al.*, 2016), having lower quality relationships (Naseer *et al.*, 2016) and behaving in unethical ways (Aronson, 2001; De Hoogh and Den Hartog, 2008) or the unspecified job descriptions. Hence, employees and perceive that their leaders and the organization care little about their working lives. We, therefore, hypothesize that organizational identification is negatively related to employee workplace deviance, and that it mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and employee deviance. Thus, we present the following hypothesis:

- H3.* The positive relationship between despotic leadership and employee's organizational deviance is mediated by organizational identification.

#### *2.4 The moderating role of value congruence*

Value congruence refers to the fit or similarity in terms of personal values between a leader and his/her followers. As the leader and his/her followers work around a common vision, they are likely to develop a core set of values that are more similar. Such experience increases interpersonal trust, personal attachment and, ultimately, motivation among followers (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002).

Research has shown positive effects of value congruence on individual attitudes, behaviors and performance, job satisfaction (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991; Bretz and Judge, 1994), satisfaction with leaders (Meglino *et al.*, 1991), organizational commitment (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991), extra-role behavior and contextual performance (Goodman and Svyantek, 1999) and career success (Bretz and Judge, 1994). Value congruence has also been shown to reduce job stress (Posner *et al.*, 1985), turnover intentions (Vancouver and Schmitt, 1991), and actual turnover (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991).

Although value congruence mainly describes the relationship within the supervisor-subordinate dyad, current research has shown that value congruence not only contributes to work outcomes pertinent to the vertical dyadic members but also to organizationally relevant attitudes such as organizational commitment, identification, and turnover intentions (Gerstner and Day, 1997).

Employees with high value congruence gain sponsorship from their supervisors and obtain salient organizational resources through supervisors' social network (Sparrowe and Liden, 1997). Because supervisors are the representatives of the organization (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2010), employees with high value congruence will attribute that the working organization also has ample resources and is willing to share them. Thus, employees are likely to see the organization as dependable. This addresses their uncertainty reduction motive, and increases their propensity to identify with organizations.

We also propose that the presence of goal congruence between employees and their supervisor should reduce their organizational deviance. The congruence of employee-supervisor relationships has positive effects that go beyond these relationships themselves (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005; Vancouver and Schmitt, 1991). The mechanism that explains this connection between the dyadic and organizational level is the perception of higher control in conditions of strong fit (Jelinek and Ahearne, 2010). When employees' personal goals are in line with those of their supervisor, they feel more in control of their work and empowered to allocate personal efforts to activities that benefit their organization (Vancouver and Schmitt, 1991). This would mitigate any agency conflict that may exist between their personal interests and those of their organization (Eisenhardt, 1989). Similarly, we argue that when employees experience higher levels of similarity between their own goals and those of their supervisor, they feel more positive about their work environment and are less likely to violate organizational norms (Colbert *et al.*, 2004). Conversely, because low goal congruence with the supervisor creates uncertainty about what is expected from employees (Edwards and Cable, 2009), it becomes less likely that employees focus their efforts solely on activities that contribute to the organization's welfare (Kristof-Brown and Stevens, 2001). Thus, lower levels of goal congruence create a sense of insecurity, which makes the pursuit of activities that could cause harm to the organization more likely (Witt, 1998). For example, when the supervisor sets out task priorities under conditions of low goal congruence, employees may experience conflict about the appropriateness of the selected tasks (i.e. those that accomplish personal goals vs those that do not) and engage in behaviors that benefit themselves and not necessarily the organization (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005).

In addition to the lack of security, there may be a more pragmatic reason that limited goal congruence with the supervisor spurs deviant behavior targeted at the entire organization. Previous research indicates that when employees experience an adverse relationship with their supervisors, they may not retaliate directly, for fear of immediate punishment, and engage instead in behaviors that harm the overall organization (Lyons and Scott, 2012). Because supervisors control important levers to punish employees, such as withholding rewards or promotion opportunities, a lack of goal congruence may fuel deviant behavior that targets the entire organization, which seems more covert and indirect than deviance directed at the supervisor (Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007). Furthermore, supervisors constitute organizational representatives, such that employees may hold the organization accountable for any discrepancy between their personal goals and those of their supervisor and, therefore, perceive deviant behaviors targeted at the organization as justified (Lian *et al.*, 2012). To the extent that such a discrepancy is absent, employees have less reason to harm the organization (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002) and, hence, should be less likely to engage in deviant behaviors. Therefore, both theory and empirical findings combine to suggest that value congruence can provide an effective buffer against high levels of leader's despotism. Accordingly, we propose that the strength of the relationship between organizational identification and organizational deviance may vary among employees possessing different levels of value congruence. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H4.* Despotic leadership influences employee organizational deviance through its relationship with organizational identification; and the indirect effect will be stronger when the value congruence is weak rather than when it is strong.

Combining *H1-H4*, we propose a moderated mediation model, shown in Figure 1, to test the relationship between followers' perceptions of despotic leadership and organizational deviance; the model incorporates organizational identification as a mediator and value congruence as a moderator.



### 3. Methods

#### 3.1 Participants

This study's population consisted of faculty members in Turkish Universities. The sample of this study included 1,219 faculty members along with their superiors (department chairs) from 15 universities in Turkey. These universities were randomly selected from a list of 193 universities in the country (The Council of Higher Education of Turkey, 2016).

Academic personnel employed in Turkish higher education institutions (public or private) are subject to the definitions and job descriptions stated in the Law on Higher Education (The Council of Higher Education of Turkey, 2016). The two main qualification levels of teaching staff members are the following: "Teaching Staff Members" are those who do not hold an academic title such as lecturer, instructor and ancillary staff and "Teaching Faculty Members" are those who hold an academic title such as professor, associate professor, and assistant professor (The Council of Higher Education of Turkey, 2016). Faculty members are the participants of this study. A faculty member is an academician responsible for teaching certain compulsory and selective subjects common to students in various programs and undertaking scientific and scholarly research for publication. Department chairs are also faculty members. They are elected by faculty members at the universities in Turkey. Before the data collection through the questionnaires, we conducted interviews with faculty members to find out any signs of despotic leadership and any signs of organizational deviance.

This study was completed in September-October 2016. A cluster random-sampling method was used to select the sample. In this sampling method, first, all the universities in Turkey were stratified into seven strata according to their geographic regions. Then, universities in each stratum were proportionally selected by a cluster random sampling; faculty members working at the selected universities comprised the study sample.

Ethics approvals were obtained from the research ethics boards of all participating universities in this study (approval number EKNBVU-069-10.16). A research team consisting of five research assistants visited the universities and received approvals from the deans of economics and administrative sciences, fine arts, science and literature, engineering and education faculties to distribute the questionnaires. Participants were told that the study was designed to collect information on the faculty members' organizational deviance levels and perceptions of their department chairs' despotic leadership in the higher education workforce.

A randomly selected group of faculty members from randomly selected departments completed the despotic leadership, organizational identification and value congruence scales (81-100 faculty members per university, totaling 1,219 out of 1,500 participants). Those faculty members' department chairs completed the organizational deviance scale (16-23 department chairs per university, totaling 301). Department chairs reports of organizational deviance were used instead of faculty members' reports in order to avoid same-source bias.

Matching survey packets were hand-delivered to department chairs and faculty members in each faculty. All respondents were informed that the survey was being conducted for academic research purposes in an attempt to better understand issues that affect people at work. To ensure confidentiality, the respondents were instructed to seal the completed questionnaires in the envelopes and return them directly to us on site.

Prior to administering surveys, we asked each department chair to generate a list of the names of all of his or her faculty members who were sent the survey. The survey included questions and questions assessing demographics, perceptions of despotic leadership, organizational identification, and value congruence. Questionnaires assessing faculty members' organizational deviance were hand-delivered to the department chairs. A coding scheme was used to ensure matched department chair-subordinate data. In total, 39 percent

of the faculty members were female with an average age of 37.23 years. Moreover, 69 percent of the department chairs were male with an average age of 40.09 years. The response rate turned out to be 81.27 percent.

### 3.2 Measures

*Despotic leadership.* It was measured using a six-item scale developed by De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008). Respondents were asked about how much their leader indulged in the behaviors mentioned in the questions. Examples of items included “Acts like a tyrant or despot, imperious (dictator)” and “Expects unquestioning obedience of those who report to him/her.” The scale in the present sample had an internal consistency reliability of 0.89.

*Organizational deviance.* Organizational deviance of the focal employee was reported by department chair of each focal employee. We used an adapted version of the original self-report items of Bennett and Robinson’s (2000) 12-item sub-scale for organizational deviance (Van Dijke *et al.*, 2010). Example items are “How often did your subordinate in the last year take property from work without permission?” or “How often did your subordinate in the last year intentionally work slower than he/she could have worked?” (1 = never, 5 = very often). Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of this measure turned out to be 0.88.

*Organizational identification.* It was measured with a five-item scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992). Sample items include “When I talk about my organization, I usually say ‘we’ rather than ‘they’” and “When someone praises my organization, it feels like a personal compliment.” Responses ranged from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of this measure was 0.91.

*Value congruence.* It was measured using a three-item scale developed by Posner (1992). Sample item includes “I really support the intent of the core value of my leader.” The reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ ) for this scale turned out to be 0.90.

*Control variables.* The demographic factors: age, gender and organizational tenure, found to be significantly related to organizational deviance (Jung and Yoon, 2012), were controlled. Age and tenure were measured in years whereas gender was measured as a dichotomous variable coded as 1 for male and 0 for female.

## 4. Results

Table I shows the descriptive statistics of the focal variables, including the means, standard deviations, and correlations. Zero-order correlations were all in the expected direction. Despotic leadership was positively related to employees’ organizational deviance and negatively related to organizational identification ( $\beta = 0.33$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and  $\beta = -0.31$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , respectively). Notably, the control variables (age, gender, and tenure) were unrelated to the focal variables in the model. Following Becker’s (2005) recommendations, we dropped those control variables from subsequent analysis. Becker recommended excluding control variables that are uncorrelated with the dependent variable to avoid

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age (year)	37.23	3.91						
2. Gender	0.39	0.61	0.05					
3. Job tenure (year)	7.33	1.96	0.12*	0.03				
4. Despotic leadership	3.41	0.78	-0.03	0.05	-0.04			
5. Organizational identification	3.17	0.81	0.07	0.04	0.05	-0.31***		
6. Value congruence	3.26	0.96	0.08	0.06	0.06	-0.27**	0.31***	
7. Organizational deviance	3.03	0.93	-0.06	0.01	-0.03	0.33***	-0.30***	-0.32***

Notes:  $n = 1,219$ . \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

**Table I.** Means, standard deviations, and correlations of studied variables

reduced statistical power and increased Type II error (i.e. erroneously concluding that no relationship exists between the substantive variables and the dependent variable).

To test *H1*, which states a positive relationship between despotic leadership and employee deviance and *H2*, which states a negative relationship between despotic leadership and employee's organizational identification, we, respectively, regressed despotic leadership on employee deviance and organizational identification ( $\beta = 0.32, p < 0.001; \beta = -0.30, p < 0.001$ ). We tested *H3*, which states that organizational identification mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and employee deviance according to Baron and Kenny's (1986) four conditions, which are necessary to establish mediation. The analysis results show a significant mediation effect ( $\beta = 0.09, p = \text{ns}; \beta = -0.27, p < 0.01$ ). The regression results for testing *H1-H3* are reported in Table II. Taken altogether, *H1-H3* were supported.

To test *H4*, which states a moderated mediation relationship between followers' perceptions of despotic leadership and organizational deviance; incorporating organizational identification as a mediator and value congruence as a moderator, we used an approach of Muller *et al.* (2005). Results were interpreted using the bootstrapping method suggested by Edwards and Lambert (2007). *H4* predicted that the indirect effect of organizational identification for the despotic leadership-organizational deviance relationships would be strengthened by low value congruence and weakened by high congruence. To assess moderated mediation (Muller *et al.*, 2005; Preacher *et al.*, 2007), we examined three conditions: the independent variable must be related to the dependent variable, but there should be no interactive effect between the independent variable and the moderator on the dependent variable; the independent variable must be related to the mediator; and the mediator  $\times$  moderator product term significantly predicts the dependent variable; there must be a partial effect of the mediator on the outcome on average; there should be an overall treatment effect on the mediator.

For the first necessary condition, Model 1 in Table III showed that the effect of despotic leadership on employee organizational deviance is significant ( $\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$ ). In addition, despotic leadership  $\times$  value congruence (moderator) is not significant ( $\beta = 0.06, \text{ns}$ ). For the second necessary condition, Model 2 showed a significant effect of despotic leadership on organizational identification ( $\beta = -0.27, p < 0.01$ ). Therefore, condition 2 has been met. For the third necessary condition, Model 3 showed a significant moderating effect of value congruence through organizational identification ( $\beta = -0.16, p < 0.05$ ). There is a partial effect of organizational identification on the outcome ( $\beta = -0.33, p < 0.001$ ). Hence, the results based on the first three conditions indicate that value congruence could moderate the mediation for despotic leadership.

To test the indirect effects using bootstrapping, we constructed bias-corrected confidence intervals based on 5,000 random samples with replacement from the full sample. We adopted Preacher *et al.*'s (2007) statistical significance test. Following Preacher *et al.*'s (2007) recommendation, we operationalized high, middle and low levels of value congruence as one standard deviation above and below the mean score of the sample. Table IV shows

Variables	Organizational identification		Organizational deviance	
	Model 1	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Despotic leadership	-0.30***	0.32***		0.09
Organizational identification			-0.30***	-0.27**
$R^2$	0.02	0.06	0.09	0.10
$\Delta R^2$	0.01	0.05	0.08	0.09
$\Delta F$	2.31	6.77***	10.86***	11.33***

**Table II.**  
Regression analysis  
for testing mediation

Notes: \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

	Model 1 Organizational deviance		Model 2 Organizational identification		Model 3 Organizational deviance	
	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
Despotic leadership (DL)	0.31***	3.13**	-0.27**	-2.66**	0.30***	3.02**
$R^2$	0.04		0.03		0.03	
Value congruence (VC)	-0.30***	-2.99**	0.29**	2.86**	-0.28**	-2.63**
$R^2$	0.04		0.04		0.03	
DL $\times$ VC	0.06	0.10	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.06
$R^2$	0.05		0.04		0.05	
Organizational identification (OI)					-0.33***	-3.69***
$R^2$					0.13	
VC $\times$ OI					-0.16*	-1.93**
$R^2$					0.16	

**Notes:** \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

**Table III.**  
Regression analyses for testing moderated mediation effects

Moderator (value congruence)	Conditional indirect effect	SE	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Level				
Low	0.046*	0.02	2.29	0.02
Middle	0.026*	0.02	2.13	0.02
High	0.013	0.01	1.63	0.09

**Note:** \* $p < 0.05$

**Table IV.**  
Moderated mediation results for despotic leadership across levels of value congruence

the estimates, standard errors, *z*-statistics, and significance values of the conditional indirect effects for employee organizational deviance across low and high levels of value congruence.

Results show that the conditional indirect effects of employee organizational deviance were weaker and significant in the high and middle value congruence condition (high-level effect = 0.042, \* $p < 0.05$ ; middle level effect = 0.030, \* $p < 0.05$ ), but were strong and not significant in the low value congruence condition (low-level effect = 0.019, ns). Thus, *H4* is supported.

## 5. Discussion

We explored and tested the positive relationship between despotic leadership (department chairs) and followers' (faculty members) organizational deviance of universities in Turkey. Data from our samples supported our initial hypotheses. Results showed that despotic leadership is positively associated with followers' deviance and negatively associated with organizational identification. Furthermore, organizational identification provided an explanation of the relationship between despotic leadership and organizational deviance. In addition, value congruence effectively buffered the negative relationship between organizational identification and organizational deviance.

### 5.1 Theoretical contribution

This study linked two conventionally independent research areas, despotic leadership and employee organizational deviance, thereby opening up new avenues for enriching the development of each field. Among the many negative consequences of despotic leadership to an organization, employee deviance is the most serious. Employees of despotic leaders perceive that their leaders are arrogant, emotionally isolated, distrustful, lacking in empathy, sensitive to criticism, exploiting, unfairly treating their followers and lacking

ethical values (Naseer *et al.*, 2016). Those leadership characteristics are clearly associated with difficulties in interpersonal relationships, which, in turn, lead to low trust in leader, leader-member exchange quality, organizational identification and high counterproductive work behaviors (Meurs *et al.*, 2013). This finding places despotic leadership as one important precedent to employee workplace deviance.

Another key contribution of this study rests on the role of organizational identification as a mediator of the link between despotic leadership and organizational deviance. Traditionally, the negative effects of organizational identification have been limited to turnover intentions and performance (Chang *et al.*, 2009). We have now expanded this to include the employee organizational deviance.

Given the call of broadening the criterion domain to include the interpersonal antecedents of organizational deviance (e.g. Lian *et al.*, 2012), this study adds to literature through the examination of the moderating role of value congruence.

One noteworthy finding of this research is the moderated mediation model that applied social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2001) to define the mediation path. This model provided a theoretical framework on how an independent variable (such as despotic leadership) may affect the dependent variable (organizational deviance) through the mediator (organizational identification). As for the moderator, value congruence moderated the mediating effect of organizational identification on the indirect relationship between despotic leadership and employee deviance. High levels of value congruence increased the mediating effect of organizational identification.

### 5.2 Managerial implication and conclusion

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research results (Naseer *et al.*, 2016) that despotic leadership has negative employee outcomes such as high levels of employee organizational deviance and low organizational identification. This study has important implications for higher education management. The results highlight the importance of leader despotism as it is positively related to employee deviance. Despotic leaders are prone to exploit others and have lower quality relationships (Aronson, 2001), and take short cuts or behave in unethical ways (Schilling, 2009). In terms of implications for organizations, these findings point to the importance of reinforcing an ethical context as well as to the significance of leader selection. Specifically, in order to ensure that despotic leaders do not thrive in organizations, it is important to maintain an ethical context. If the context is ethical, unethical, or interpersonally ineffective, behaviors will likely be more salient and evaluated more negatively by coworkers. Thus, it is unlikely that despotic leaders will be successful in advancing in a highly ethical context (Naseer *et al.*, 2016).

The findings of this study suggest that organizational identification acts as a link between leader's despotism and employee deviance. Generally, employees consider managers who behave disrespectful and abusive as a burden. However, employees do not always react or speak up to their manager, even if (she)he behaves abusively (Tepper, 2007). Employees, who identify themselves with their organization, identify themselves with the organization's goals, as being part of their own self-image and therefore tend to show less negative consequences when confronted with a despotic leader. Indeed, organizational identification seems to work as a mediator on followers' negative reactions to despotic leadership. However, newcomers in the organization might be deterred by the presence of despotic leaders because they do not yet identify with the organization or their organizational identification is just not strong enough to endure a despotic leader. In the course of time, this could result in significant costs for the employees and the organization, given the significance of despotic leadership on employees' work experience. Therefore, organizations should try to ensure a sense of belongingness and provide a solid basis for increasing employees' organizational identity. Employees' organizational identification can,

for example, be improved by employing clear communication about the decisions and the procedures in the organization or by applying identification-enhancing interventions (Decoster *et al.*, 2013; Van Knippenberg and Van Schie, 2000).

Given the goal of reducing the number of stresses in the workplace, acknowledging that a state of perceived leader despotism is stressful is a starting point for the design of preventative interventions. For instance, if perceived despotic leadership is recognized as a factor creating low organizational identification, human resources experts might include supportive leadership styles such as transformational, servant, ethical or authentic leadership behaviors in curricula for management training programs. In particular, ethical leadership would be more appropriate because a lack of ethical leadership has been identified as one of the main antecedents of follower organizational deviance (Van Gils *et al.*, 2015). With respect to the goal of improved management of existing low employee identification, the characterization of leader despotism as a factor of low organizational identification may benefit counseling and employee assistance initiatives. For instance, these programs may help employees recognize situations that lead to perceptions of despotic leader behaviors as a contributing factor in their experience of low identification. As such, employees may be able to learn how to cope with their feelings of the perceived despotism or manage its like source.

### 5.3 Limitations and future research

This study has potential limitations as well. First, it is important to recognize limits to generalizability. This study was conducted on a sample of faculty members from both state and private universities. Whether the universities had private or state funding may have affected their organizational culture or management-employees relationships (department chairs and faculty members in this study), which in turn, could influence employees' deviant behavior levels. It is also important to recognize that the universities in the sample were all subject to the regulations of the Turkish Higher Education Council, potentially limiting variability in some university-level practices. Therefore, study results might more readily generalize to different branches of a single organization. To provide evidence of generalizability, future-related research works shall need to support study findings within other industries and occupational settings. Another limitation arises from the cross-sectional data, as no causal relationships can only be established without longitudinal studies.

Future research can be conducted to address the limitations pertaining to this study. We call for continuing empirical research on the relationship between despotic leadership and organizational deviance based on samples from universities that operate in other economies. As consensus can only be reached by accumulating evidence from a more representative mix of samples, we offer the current findings as a basis for further research. It would be even more meaningful to conduct longitudinal studies to examine how the changes in leader's despotism affect organizational deviance. Moreover, future despotic leadership research might benefit from focusing on the role of context in reducing or exacerbating the impact of such leadership styles on work outcomes. In line with Johns (2006) admonition on the importance of acknowledging and integrating the influence of context in research, we argue that situational factors such as perceived organizational politics or organizational culture may exert an important effect on employee behavior.

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