

The influence of despotic leadership on innovative behavior in Ho Chi Minh City businesses: The mediating role of leader-member exchange

Anh Tuan Tran^{1*}, Thinh Thi Thu Duong², Minh Thi Binh Nguyen²

¹Hoa Sen University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

²Nong Lam University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

*Corresponding author: anhtrantuan804@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of despotic leadership on employees' innovative behavior, with a particular focus on the mediating role of leader-member exchange in businesses based in Ho Chi Minh City. Based on the social exchange theory, conservation of resources theory, and leader-member exchange theory, four hypotheses were developed to guide the research. Data was gathered from 308 employees through an online survey using convenience sampling. The analysis was conducted using Smart-PLS 3 with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to explore relationships between variables. The findings reveal that despotic leadership has a negative influence on both leader-member exchange and employees' innovative behavior, confirming that leader-member exchange serves as a mediator in this relationship. This suggests that fostering positive leader-member exchanges could mitigate the harmful effects of despotic leadership on innovation. The study offers both theoretical and practical implications for promoting innovative practices in businesses. Moreover, it provides valuable insights for leaders in Ho Chi Minh City, aiming to foster a more supportive work environment.

1. Introduction

In a competitive business environment, innovation is a key factor for organizational success and sustainability (Al-Adwan et al., 2022). Employees' innovative behavior contributes to gaining a competitive edge and enhancing sustainability (Omri, 2015), and it has become an essential element in modern workplaces (Wang et al., 2017). To achieve breakthroughs, businesses require innovative talent, as innovation relies on people (Yao & Hao, 2023). Thus, managers need to recognize that fostering organizational innovation starts with inspiring and nurturing individual creativity, as employees' innovative behavior forms the basis of organizational innovation (Bos-Nehles & Veenendaal, 2017).

Previous studies have emphasized the importance of leadership in fostering employees' innovative behavior (Javed et al., 2018; Li et al., 2019). According to Nazir et al. (2018), leaders are prominent agents who can nurture employees' innovative behavior in the workplace, thereby driving new changes among employees. Leaders should not only inspire employees to innovate

but also encourage them to overcome the fear of failure and embrace risks when facing setbacks (Yao & Hao, 2023). Previous research confirms that leadership styles play a positive role in promoting employee creativity (Herrmann & Felfe, 2013), fostering a sense of belonging, increasing organizational commitment (Top et al., 2014), and improving employee performance (Huang et al., 2015). In Vietnam, several studies have analyzed the impact of positive leadership styles, such as inspirational leadership (Nguyen, 2023), servant leadership (Pham & Trinh, 2023), and transformational leadership (Hoang & Ho, 2022; Vu & Phan, 2021), on innovative behavior. These studies have shown that such leadership styles encourage employees to actively engage in creative and innovative activities. However, most scholars have overlooked the dark side of leadership despite evidence suggesting that it can hinder employees' creativity and collaboration (Naseer et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2021). These studies have primarily been conducted in developed countries or cultural contexts distinct from Vietnam, such as China, where hierarchical respect is deeply ingrained. This raises the question of whether those findings can be applied to an East Asian cultural context like Vietnam, specifically in Ho Chi Minh City. In the context of diverse international integration, conducting research in Vietnam, an East Asian country, not only addresses calls to extend studies on despotic leadership beyond Western nations but also explores the impact of this leadership style in culturally distinct environments (Chaudhary & Islam, 2022; De Clercq et al., 2019).

In an organization, leaders play a crucial role in motivating and encouraging members to improve their work performance (Insan & Masmarulan, 2021). According to Gu et al. (2018), employees' perceptions of the leader-member exchange are influenced by despotic leadership styles. Employees assess the quality of their exchanges with leaders based on their own perceptions (Kong & Qian, 2015; Liang et al., 2022). When the level of leader-member exchange is high, employees are more likely to experience positive outcomes (Dansereau et al., 1995; Liang et al., 2022). They perceive themselves as having greater autonomy (Liang et al., 2022; Liden & Graen, 1980) and are more inclined to perform tasks beyond their job descriptions (Liang et al., 2022; Nahrgang et al., 2009). In Vietnam, there have been several studies on the impact of leader-member exchange, such as its role as a moderator in the relationship between despotic leadership and employee performance (Phan et al., 2024), its effect on employee work efficiency (Khuc, 2024), and its mediation role in the relationship between organizational justice and organizational citizenship behavior (Nguyen, 2021). Previous research has shown that leader-member exchange can mitigate the negative impact of despotic leadership, thereby promoting employees' innovative behavior (Gu et al., 2018). According to Gu et al. (2018), leader-member exchange plays a role in the relationship between despotic leadership and innovative behavior. However, this relationship has not been studied in the context of Vietnam. Therefore, we have decided to research the direct and indirect effects of leader-member exchange on the relationship between despotic leadership and employees' innovative behavior in order to fill this research gap.

This study is conducted with the aim of determining the impact of despotic leadership on employees' innovative behavior in businesses through the mediating role of leader-member exchange. The study is expected to provide important managerial implications, helping businesses minimize the negative effects of despotic leadership on employees while also promoting innovative behavior in companies in Ho Chi Minh City.

2. Theoretical framework and research model

2.1. Several concepts in research

2.1.1. Despotic Leadership (DL)

Despotic leadership refers to leadership behaviors based on dominance, the pursuit of supreme power, and autocratic actions that serve the leader's personal interests while exploiting others (Chaudhary & Islam, 2022; De Hoogh & Hartog, 2008; Naseer et al., 2016). Despotic leaders are often unwilling to show sympathy, empathy, or compassion toward employees. They find it difficult to relinquish control and expect complete obedience from their subordinates (De Clercq et al., 2019; De Hoogh & Hartog, 2008).

2.1.2. Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)

Leader-Member Exchange is defined as the quality of the relationship that a leader has with their subordinates (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Gioia and Manz (1985) argued that leaders treat employees differently based on their contributions, personal preferences, and other factors, which results in leader-member exchange relationships at varying levels. The quality of the LMX relationship further influences employee behaviors, such as creativity (Gu et al., 2018).

2.1.3. Innovative Work Behavior (IB)

Innovative Work Behavior is defined as how employees apply, implement, or use creative ideas to solve work-related problems (Yuan & Woodman, 2010). According to De Jong and Den Hartog (2007), three contextual factors play a critical role in promoting employees' creativity and innovation: leadership ability, the work environment, and organizational support.

2.2. Theories used in the research

2.2.1. Social exchange theory

According to social exchange theory, social exchange behavior arises from beneficial exchanges, which can be either tangible or intangible. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) highlighted that the concept of exchange is essential in the interactions between leaders and employees. This theory suggests that inappropriate leadership behaviors may lead to counterproductive actions directed at both the leader and the organization (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). When employees perceive negative treatment, they are likely to display behaviors that oppose their leader (Tepper et al., 2001) and may engage in deviant behaviors aimed at the leader (Inness et al., 2005) as well as the organization (Detert & Burris, 2007).

2.2.2. Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (1989) suggests that individuals have both psychological and physical resources, which may be depleted in response to workplace stress. This depletion can significantly influence their behavior and overall well-being. Despotic leadership serves as a significant source of stress, leading to the loss and depletion of these resources (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). As a result, employees may experience emotional instability and exhaustion of resources, which can culminate in psychological distress (Albashiti et al., 2021; Murad et al., 2021), ultimately detrimentally affecting their well-being. To cope with this stress, employees frequently try to prevent or minimize resource loss by opting for actions such as resigning from their positions, diminishing their creative output, or seeking alternative resources like new job opportunities (Hobfoll, 2001). In contrast, when employees are

equipped with adequate resources, they tend to perceive their work as more meaningful and enjoyable. This enhanced perspective enables them to tackle challenges effectively, maintain equilibrium, and feel less compelled to recover after each workday (Luu, 2019).

2.2.3. Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory

The LMX theory posits that the leader-member relationship is a two-way exchange grounded in trust and personal feelings (Vidyarthi et al., 2014). However, in today's organizational context, many companies do not fully align with the assumption of "one manager per employee" proposed by this theory (Benson & Pattie, 2009). Specifically, in project-based businesses, small firms, or family-owned companies, management roles can be less distinct, and employees often work with multiple managers simultaneously. According to LMX theory, leaders and employees build relationships that can be categorized into two types with differing qualities. High-quality leader-member relationships are characterized by trust, respect, and mutual benefits, both material and psychological, for the employee (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). Conversely, low-quality relationships are based on minimal contractual agreements, leading to goal achievement without strong emotional or personal commitment from the employee toward the leader. This study emphasizes the role of LMX theory in examining how despotic leadership negatively impacts relationships with employees and hinders creativity when there is no consensus or support from the leader. Therefore, the leader-member relationship plays an important mediating role in explaining the impact of despotic leadership on employee innovative behavior.

2.3. The impact of despotic leadership style on employee innovative behavior

Employee innovative behavior involves not only the creation of new ideas but also serves as the foundation for innovation (Janssen, 2000). Research has consistently shown that positive leadership styles promote this behavior (Gong et al., 2009; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). On the other hand, despotic leadership characterized by demands for absolute compliance, the dismissal of differing opinions, and a refusal to entertain questions (Gu et al., 2018) can lead to negative emotions. Employees in such environments experience fear, stress, and anxiety about making mistakes, all of which stifle the generation of new ideas (Zhang et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2015). The pressure to conform to leaders' directives limits independent thinking and suppresses innovative behavior (Chan, 2013; Gu et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2015). According to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, when negative stressors arise in the workplace, employees seek to conserve their resources. This response often triggers physical and psychological stress, making it hard for them to maintain a positive mindset, which ultimately diminishes creativity (Hobfoll, 1989; Mehmood et al., 2023). Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Despotic leadership has a negative impact on employee innovative behavior

2.4. The mediating role of Leader-Member Exchange

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) is a social exchange process that reflects the quality of the relationship between the leader and their subordinates (Graen & Scandura, 1987). According to Newman et al. (2015), LMX is negatively influenced by despotic leadership. Furthermore, Gu et al. (2018) argue that despotic leadership negatively affects employees' innovative behavior through the leader-member exchange process.

Previous studies have suggested that the quality of exchange with employees can be determined by leadership behaviors (Gu et al., 2018; Mahsud et al., 2010). Atwater and Carmeli

(2009) argue that an individual's imagination and innovativeness can be enhanced by a positive attitude from the leader. Employees with high-quality exchange relationships with their leaders are more likely to exhibit autonomy when solving problems at work (Kirrane et al., 2019; Liang et al., 2022). They are more willing to accept new challenges and take on the risks that may come with them. According to LMX theory, employees are categorized into "in-group" and "out-group." The "in-group" has close relationships with the leader, built on trust and respect, and often receives more attention and involvement in decision-making. In contrast, the "out-group" is only connected to the leader through the employment contract, has a less intimate relationship, and receives less support in their work. According to sociological theory, employees who are trusted, supported, and empowered by leaders are more likely to feel more confident in their work (Dan et al., 2018), thereby increasing their creativity (Gu et al., 2018).

However, despotic leaders tend to impose their demands on employees and punish them for disobedience (Gu et al., 2018; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008). Such authoritarian behaviors lead to reduced communication and poor information sharing between leaders and employees (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). The high levels of control and demands placed on employees by despotic leaders result in low-quality LMX (Gu et al., 2018), which restricts employees' creativity (Gu et al., 2018; Volmer et al., 2012). Employees may fear expressing their opinions and innovative ideas freely, ultimately hindering innovative behavior (Dedahanov et al., 2016; Gu et al., 2018). Despotic leadership can deteriorate the quality of the LMX relationship, thereby reducing employees' willingness to engage in creative activities (Gu et al., 2018). Based on these findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Despotic leadership has a negative impact on leader-member exchange

H3: Leader-member exchange has a positive impact on employee innovative behavior

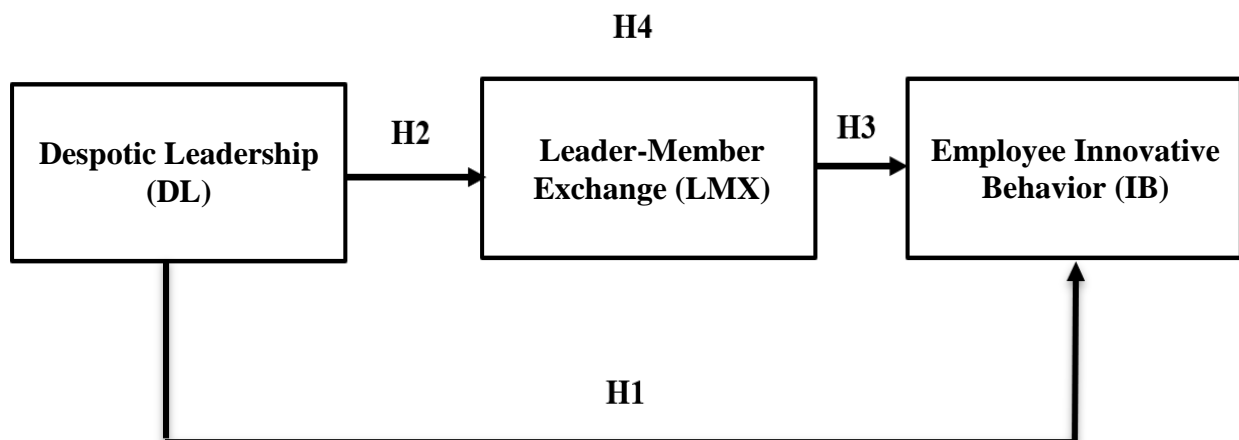
H4: Leader-member exchange mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and employee innovative behavior

2.5. The research model

The research model is constructed based on the four hypotheses outlined above:

Figure 1

The Proposed Research Model



Source. Suggested by the authors

3. Methodology

In this study, our survey subjects are employees currently working in businesses located in Ho Chi Minh City. We do not focus on the type of business, industry, or employees' job positions, aiming for more general and comprehensive results that can be applied widely to various situations. The research team distributed the survey questionnaire to employees online via Google Forms. Respondents were explicitly informed that the collected data would remain confidential, and only employees who had worked with their direct managers for at least six months were eligible to participate in the survey. The questionnaire consists of two sections: the first pertains to the demographic information of the respondents, and the second includes questions designed to measure the impact of despotic leadership style on employees' innovative behavior through the mediating variable of leader-member exchange.

According to the *Vietnam Business White Paper 2024*, Ho Chi Minh City currently hosts over 271,000 active businesses (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2024). However, due to limitations in resources, time, and budget, this study adopts a quantitative approach using an online survey and a convenience sampling technique (non-probability sampling). According to Hair et al. (2017), the PLS-SEM method accepts a minimum sample size that is 10 times the maximum number of arrows pointing to a construct in a model. Using the G-power statistical tool (version 3.1), the required sample size was calculated to be 222 (Hair et al., 2017). To ensure accuracy and minimize errors during data collection, the study gathered a sample of 350 responses, retaining 308 valid ones after excluding incomplete or identical responses (Appendix 1 (online version)).

The study employs measurement scales adapted from previous research, which were initially translated into Vietnamese. Subsequently, the content was refined with input from two experts in human resource management to ensure relevance to the research context in Vietnam. Before finalizing the official survey, the research team conducted pilot interviews with several employees working at companies in Ho Chi Minh City to assess the clarity and comprehensibility of the questions. Terms were adjusted to ensure coherence and accessibility. The reliability testing of the scales during the pilot phase indicated satisfactory results, leading to the finalization of the measurement scales and research model.

The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method was used to evaluate the measurement model and test the structural linear model using SmartPLS 3 software in this study.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Evaluation of the measurement model

Outer Loading: The outer loading is used to assess the quality of the observed variables, indicating the degree of association between an observed variable and its corresponding latent variable. If an observed variable has a low outer loading but the outer loadings of other observed variables are high, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) can still meet the threshold of 0.5. Therefore, before evaluating the AVE, it is essential to sequentially assess the quality of the observed variables and the reliability of the measurement scale before removing any insignificant variables. The results show that all observed variables were retained as they have outer loadings greater than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2016) (see Appendix 3 (online version)).

Table 1*Assessment of Reliability and Convergence of Measurement Scale*

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
DL	0.910	0.930	0.689
IB	0.898	0.920	0.622
LMX	0.860	0.899	0.642

Source. SmartPLS 3 test result

A model is considered reliable when both Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability coefficients meet or exceed the threshold of 0.7. Table 1 indicates that all measurement scales meet the required standards and demonstrate reliable values.

A measurement scale is deemed acceptable if the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is ≥ 0.5 , meaning that the latent variable explains 50% of the variance in the observed variable (Hair et al., 2016). The results presented in Table 1 show that the measurement scales achieve convergent validity.

Table 2 illustrates the examination of discriminant validity among the constructs in the model. Fornell and Larcker (1981) indicated that measurement scales have discriminant validity if the square root of the AVE for each construct is higher than the correlations with all other constructs. Henseler et al. (2015) further demonstrated that measurement scales possess discriminant validity if the HTMT value is below 0.9. Therefore, we conclude that the measurement scales achieve discriminant validity.

Table 2*Results of Assessment of Discriminant Validity*

Constructs	Fornell-Larcker			HTMT		
	DL	IB	LMX	DL	IB	LMX
DL	0.830					
IB	-0.644	0.789		0.707		
LMX	-0.647	0.643	0.801	0.727	0.726	

Source. SmartPLS 3 test result

4.2. Structural model evaluation

4.2.1. Results of multicollinearity assessment

Before evaluating the structural relationships, it is necessary to check for multicollinearity to ensure that the regression results are not biased. Multicollinearity is assessed through the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). According to Hair et al. (2019), an ideal VIF value should be below 03. The results indicate that the VIF values of all conceptual constructs are less than 3 (the highest VIF is 2.531), suggesting that there is no multicollinearity among the variables (see Appendix 4 (online version)).

4.2.2. Results of R-squared and Q-squared Assessment

It is necessary to assess the criteria for evaluating the quality of the structural model, such as R^2 and Q^2 . The R^2 value measures the explanatory power, while the Q^2 value assesses the

predictive power of the model. According to Hair et al. (2017), the R^2 value ranges from 0 to 1, and the Q^2 value should be greater than 0. A higher R^2 coefficient indicates that the structure is better explained by the latent constructs in the structural model. A high R^2 coefficient also suggests that the values of the variables can be well predicted by the PLS path model. The results in Table 3 show that the R^2 values for employee innovative behavior and leader-member exchange are 0.503 and 0.418, respectively, which are considered to have moderate and acceptable predictive capability.

Table 3

Results of R^2 and Q^2

	R Square	R Square Adjusted	Q^2
IB	0.503	0.499	0.304
LMX	0.418	0.417	0.265

Source. SmartPLS 3 test result

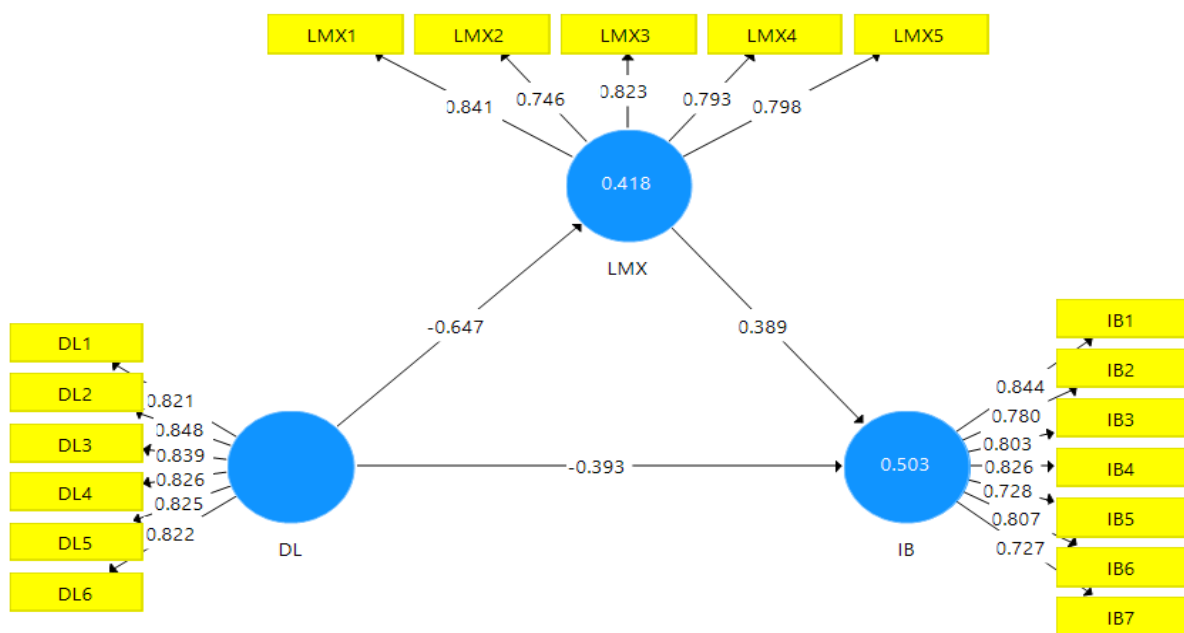
The Q^2 values for employee innovative behavior and leader-member exchange are 0.304 and 0.265, respectively, both greater than 0, indicating that the research model has a suitable predictive ability (Hair et al., 2019).

4.2.3. *Assessing the fit and statistical significance of relationships*

The evaluation of the fit and statistical significance of the relationships was conducted through path coefficients. The importance of these coefficients was assessed using the bootstrapping method with 1,000 samples in Smart PLS, based on an initial sample size of 308. The results indicate that all hypotheses were supported.

Figure 2

SEM Results



Source. SmartPLS 3 test result

Table 4*Hypothesis Testing Results*

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path coefficient	t-value	p-value	Results
H1	DL →IB	-0.393	6.196	0.000	Supported
H2	DL →LMX	-0.647	18.142	0.000	Supported
H3	LMX →IB	0.389	5.874	0.000	Supported
H4	DL →LMX →IB	0.251	5.276	0.000	Supported

Source. SmartPLS 3 test result

Regarding the indirect effect, despotic leadership has an indirect impact on employees' innovative behavior through the mediating role of leader-member exchange. The VAF coefficient is calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{VAF} = \frac{\text{Indirect Effect}}{\text{Total Effect}} = \frac{0,251}{|-0.393|} = 63.87\% \quad (1)$$

With a VAF coefficient in the range of $20\% \leq \text{VAF} < 80\%$, the role of LMX is considered partial mediation (Hair et al., 2014). This implies that the relationship between despotic leadership and employees' innovative behavior is partially explained through LMX. However, there remains a direct impact of despotic leadership on innovative behavior that is not mediated by LMX.

4.3. Discussion

Hypothesis H1 is accepted, indicating that despotic leadership has a direct and negative impact on employee innovative behavior, which is consistent with previous studies (Chan, 2013; Gu et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2015). Despotic leadership often diminishes employee participation and motivation in proposing and implementing new ideas. When employees feel restricted in their ability to contribute opinions or lack support from their leaders, they tend to shy away from innovative activities and become passive in their work. This also reflects that despotic leadership creates a high-pressure work environment, discouraging employees from making creative suggestions due to fear of criticism or lack of recognition.

Hypothesis H2 illustrates that despotic leadership negatively impacts leader-member exchange, aligning with previous studies (De Hoogh & Hartog, 2008; Gu et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2015). This leadership style often restricts open interaction, resulting in diminished trust and collaboration between leaders and employees. According to De Hoogh and Hartog (2008), the work environment under despotic leadership typically makes employees feel constrained and less able to engage, leading to a decline in loyalty and organizational commitment. When employees feel disrespected and have limited opportunities to participate in decision-making processes, it hinders the quality of the leader-member exchange.

Similarly, Hypothesis H3 is also accepted, positing that leader-member exchange positively impacts employee innovative behavior. In today's business environment, innovation stems not only from high-level policies but also from the daily interactions and support between leaders and employees. A high-quality leader-member relationship, characterized by mutual trust and support, enables employees to express their ideas and initiatives. Leaders play not only the

role of managers but also as encouragers who listen to their subordinates' opinions. This environment helps employees feel valued, thereby fostering creativity and a desire to contribute to the organization's development. Research by Xie et al. (2020) indicates that high-quality leader-member exchanges enhance employees' positive moods, motivating them to engage in creative problem-solving. When employees feel they can contribute to decision-making processes and are heard, they are more likely to participate actively in innovative activities.

Leader-member exchange serves as a mediating factor in the relationship between despotic leadership style and employee innovative behavior (H4), suggesting that the level of leader-member exchange can either weaken or strengthen the impact of leadership on innovative behavior. This aligns with previous research (Gu et al., 2018; Nazir et al., 2020). While despotic leadership may impose pressure and limit employee creativity, high levels of leader-member exchange not only enhance creativity but also alleviate the negative feelings that despotic leadership can instill within an organization (Zhang et al., 2021).

5. Conclusion

Our proposed model is developed based on Social Exchange Theory, Conservation of Resources Theory, and Leader-Member Exchange Theory, as well as prior studies, to analyze the impact of authoritarian leadership style on employees' innovative behavior through the mediating role of LMX in businesses in Ho Chi Minh City. Data were collected via an online survey using a convenience sampling method (non-probability sampling) with an official sample size of 308. Smart PLS 3 software was utilized for analysis. The research findings indicate that all hypotheses are supported.

The study applies theoretical foundations on despotic leadership, employee innovative behavior, and leader-member exchange, alongside theories such as social exchange theory, conservation of resources theory, and leader-member exchange theory, to construct and explain the research model. Based on the cultural and managerial context of Vietnam, the study adjusts the measurement scales and concepts to better align with the characteristics of the research area. This is one of the few empirical studies in Vietnam that analyzes the relationship between despotic leadership style and employee innovative behavior, with LMX as a mediating factor. The findings reveal that despotic leadership has a direct negative impact on both LMX and employee innovative behavior. However, LMX plays a critical mediating role by mitigating the negative effects of despotic leadership while supporting employees in maintaining and developing their innovative capabilities at work. The study's findings provide a scientific basis for businesses to better understand the interaction between leadership factors and employees' creative motivation. This enables businesses to develop effective management strategies aimed at fostering innovation and enhancing work performance. Additionally, the research helps bridge gaps in the existing literature on the relationship between despotic leadership, LMX, and innovative behavior in developing countries. It also offers empirical evidence from Vietnam - a distinct Eastern culture - providing a fresh and deeper perspective on this field.

From a practical perspective, building on previous theoretical foundations, we successfully explored and validated the impact of despotic leadership on employee innovative behavior with the mediating role of Leader-Member exchange (LMX). Based on these findings, we propose several key managerial implications to help businesses mitigate the negative effects of despotic leadership on employees while promoting innovative behavior within enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City. Specifically:

First, despotic leadership often creates a stressful work environment that stifles creativity and limits employee initiative. Therefore, businesses should consider gradually reducing excessive imposition and transitioning to a combined leadership style that maintains control while encouraging employee input and creativity.

Second, the study shows that leader-member exchange plays an important mediating role in promoting innovative behavior. Thus, businesses need to focus on building a friendly work environment where the relationship between leaders and employees is improved and becomes more collaborative. This can mitigate the negative impact of despotic leadership on employee innovative behavior and encourage openness in communication and feedback.

Third, while despotic leadership may yield quick results in certain stressful situations, leaders need to be more flexible in motivating employees and encouraging innovation. This can be achieved through leadership training programs focused on using different leadership styles in appropriate contexts.

Fourth, due to the negative impact of despotic leadership on employee creativity, businesses should create an environment that fosters innovation. This may include providing space for employees to experiment with new ideas without fear of criticism or excessive control from leadership.

Despite the achieved results, this study has several limitations that future research should address. Beyond LMX, many other factors could serve as mediators in this relationship, such as employee happiness, job engagement, and job satisfaction. Future studies should explore these additional factors to provide a more comprehensive perspective on this topic. Another limitation is the sample size, which is smaller than the population. Future research could employ a larger sample size and adopt probability sampling methods (such as stratified sampling) to ensure better representativeness, especially given the diversity of industries, scales, and types of business operations in Ho Chi Minh City.

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