

Bending Without Breaking: How Cognitive Flexibility Converts Despotic Strain into Creative Response.

Yuxin Liu ¹, Muhammad Qasim ², Tahir Farid ³, Sadaf Iqbal ⁴

Author's Affiliation:

^{1,2}Business School, University of International Business and Economics, Beijing, China

^{3,4}Department of Psychology, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Pakistan.

Article History:

Submitted: March 26, 2025

Revised: June 14, 2025

Accepted: June 21, 2025

Published online: June 30, 2025

Corresponding author(s):

Muhammad Qasim

Email:

gasmimuhammad@uibe.edu.cn

Co-author(s) Email:

Yuxin Liu

liuyuxin@uibe.edu.cn

Tahir Farid

tahir.farid@awkum.edu.pk

Sadaf Iqbal

sadafiqbal@awkum.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Purpose—Despotic leadership imposes strict control and punitive authority, often draining employees' psychological resources. Yet, employees do not respond uniformly. Drawing on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, we test how cognitive flexibility and self-regulation difficulty explain creative responses, and how value congruence conditions these effects.

Study Design/methodology/approach—We conducted a multi-wave, multi-source survey in Pakistan's service sector, followed by a controlled 2×2 factorial designed study.

Findings—Despotic leadership reduced creativity directly ($\beta = -.27$ “contrary to our prediction”) but enhanced it indirectly through cognitive flexibility (effect = .080). Self-regulation difficulty increased under despotic leadership ($\beta = .312$), and the indirect effect was also not significant. The interaction between despotic leadership and value congruence was significant for cognitive flexibility ($\beta = .18$) but not for self-regulation difficulty. The results of Study 2 were consistent.

Research Practical Implications— Organizations need to invest in training to help employees learn how to be flexible and maintain adaptive thinking under pressure. An organization can monitor self-regulation, as prolonged exposure to despotism might drain resources. Strengthening value alignment can buffer this strain and sustain creativity. However, the study relied on data from Pakistan and partly self-reported measures; future work should validate these findings in other contexts with multi-source data and longitudinal data.

Originality/value—This research integrates destructive leadership and creativity literatures, showing that under specific relational and cognitive conditions, employees can transform adverse leadership contexts into opportunities for creative adaptation.

Keywords: Despotic leadership, Cognitive flexibility, Self-Regulation Difficulty, Creativity, Value congruence, Conservation of Resources theory

JEL Classification Codes: M12, D91, O31, M14, M54

1 | INTRODUCTION

Workplace creativity is associated with a climate of autonomy, psychological safety, and intrinsic motivation. Yet history and everyday observations show that creativity sometimes emerges from the most adverse conditions ([Herzog & Demps, 2025](#)). Among the many constraints employees face, despotic leadership (a style marked by authoritarian control, moral rigidity, and punitive enforcement) ([De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008](#)) is one of the most restrictive. Such leadership erodes the very conditions associated with

creativity ([Zhou & Shalley, 2024](#)), narrowing decision scope and suppressing voice. Still, some employees manage to sustain, or even enhance, their creative engagement under these circumstances ([Forgeard, 2025](#); [Li et al., 2025](#)). This paradox raises a critical question: why do some individuals adapt and innovate under despotic rule while others disengage?

Although constraints on creativity have long been recognized as decisive in shaping whether ideas are pursued or abandoned ([Zhou & Shalley, 2024](#)). Yet, despite increasing attention to how adversity influences innovation, research on leadership-induced constraints has developed largely apart from work on self-regulatory and cognitive functioning. This leaves a blind spot: we still know little about the cognitive and relational conditions that enable employees to remain creative. Our study addresses this gap by examining whether despotic leadership can, in certain contexts, be countered with creative adaptation, and by identifying the internal mechanisms and relational factors that enable such adaptation.

Despotic leadership creates an environment of psychological adversity by restricting autonomy, applying moral pressure, and fostering interpersonal threat ([Hamid & Kundi, 2025](#)). These conditions align with the chronic loss environments described by the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, wherein individuals strive to safeguard and optimize their limited psychological resources under threat ([Hobfoll et al., 2018](#)). In such climates, self-regulation becomes a coping tool and central determinant for creativity. This study focuses on two contrasting self-regulatory mechanisms. Cognitive flexibility (the ability to shift mental frames, accommodate multiple perspectives, and reframe challenges) enables employees to transform constraints into opportunities for ideation ([Rademacher et al., 2023](#); [Tromp, 2023](#)). Self-regulation difficulty, by contrast, reflects the breakdown in managing thoughts, emotions, and behaviors due to resource depletion, which narrows focus and undermines progress ([Baumeister & Heatherton, 2009](#)). The interplay between these mechanisms determines whether adversity serves as a platform for adaptation or a barrier to innovation.

Creativity under despotism is not shaped by leadership but by employees' internal resources and their perceived alignment with leaders' values. From a COR perspective, despotic leadership operates as a chronic threat to psychological resources, influencing creativity through two primary pathways: cognitive flexibility and difficulty with self-regulation (see Figure 1). This inquiry is particularly relevant to Pakistan's service sector, where entrenched hierarchical norms, centralized decision-making, and deference to authority are deeply embedded in organizational culture ([Khan et al., 2024](#)). When employees perceive high value congruence, reflecting shared goals and priorities, they are more likely to interpret authoritarian behavior as structured guidance rather than coercive domination. This shared interpretive lens can legitimize the leadership constraint it helping them to preserve psychological resources and support adaptive coping responses such as cognitive flexibility. Conversely, when employees perceive low value congruence, despotic leadership may intensify moral dissonance and ambiguity.

COR theory ([Hobfoll, 1989, 2001](#); [Hobfoll et al., 2018](#)) suggests that individuals are driven to conserve, protect, and strategically invest resources. In adverse conditions, resourceful employees can resist depletion and create gains. Cognitive flexibility functions as a resource, which helps in shifting attention, generating alternatives, and reframing constraints as affordances ([Rademacher et al., 2023](#); [Tromp, 2023](#); [Tromp & Baer, 2022](#)). Conversely, prolonged resource loss erodes self-regulation, narrowing focus and reducing persistence ([Baumeister & Heatherton, 2009](#); [Muraven & Baumeister, 2000](#)). Resource dynamics are socially embedded,

value congruence with leaders can legitimize demands, preserve psychological reserves, and support adaptive coping, whereas incongruence magnifies coercion, fuels moral dissonance, and hastens depletion ([Byza et al., 2019](#)). Unlike prior studies, which have examined general job constraints or abusive supervision, our work focuses on despotic leadership (a systemic, morally inflexible, and punitive form of control) and tests a dual-pathway model incorporating both adaptive (cognitive flexibility) and depleting (self-regulation difficulty) mechanisms, moderated by value congruence. Moreover, we employ a combined multi-wave field study and experimental design to establish both ecological validity and causal inference.

This research makes several key contributions. First, it advances the literature on destructive leadership and creativity by indicating how the effects of despotic leadership vary according to employees' internal psychological mechanisms and shared understanding of values and priorities. By integrating cognitive flexibility, self-regulation difficulty, and value congruence into a single model, we show why some employees sustain creative engagement in authoritarian environments while others withdraw ([Fang, 2024](#); [Liu et al., 2024](#)). In doing so, we challenge the prevailing view of despotic leadership as uniformly detrimental, revealing that its impact is contingent upon the resources employees can mobilize and the interpretation they adopt. Second, we extend COR theory by applying it to a destructive leadership context. This extension addresses two gaps: (a) the underexplored question of how employees preserve and reallocate resources to sustain creativity under despotic leadership, and (b) the role of value congruence in moderating these processes. Our dual-pathway model captures both adaptive (cognitive flexibility) and depleting (self-regulation difficulty) mechanisms, demonstrating that creativity emerges only when cognitive flexibility is activated and declines when self-regulation difficulty predominates. Third, we contribute to value congruence research ([Byza et al., 2019](#)) by showing that alignment in beliefs and goals can conserve psychological resources and legitimize demands, whereas incongruence accelerates depletion. This integrated perspective enriches the understanding of resilience in high-pressure environments. From a practical standpoint, our findings identify specific psychological capacities and relational alignments that organizations can cultivate to protect creativity even in authoritarian climates.

Creativity thrives in autonomy and safety, but despotic leadership is punitive with no concern for others. Still, employees generate creative ideas under such climates. This paradox highlights a core problem that remains unclear and theoretically unresolved. Without clarifying whether employees' adaptive resources, rather than the leadership itself, account for these outcomes, our understanding of creativity under constraint is incomplete. Accordingly, this study pursues these objectives:

1. To examine how despotic leadership influences employee creativity through cognitive and self-regulatory pathways?
2. To test value congruence with the supervisor's role, and (3) to clarify whether creativity is in adaptation or.
3. To clarify whether creativity is in adaptation or not. Consequently, we ask: How does despotic leadership shape creativity through cognitive flexibility and self-regulation? Under what conditions does value congruence buffer these effects?

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Despotic Leadership and Employee Creativity

[De Hoogh and Den Hartog \(2008\)](#) defined despotic leadership as a form of supervisory control characterized by authoritarian decision-making, punitive enforcement, and disregard for subordinates' well-being. At its core, despotic leadership embodies a climate of psychological adversity, wherein employees experience diminished autonomy, intensified moral pressure, and heightened interpersonal threat ([Hamid & Kundi, 2025](#)). These conditions closely resemble what COR theory describes as chronic loss environments, in which individuals are compelled to preserve, protect, and carefully invest their remaining psychological resources to avoid further depletion ([Hobfoll, 1989, 2001; Hobfoll et al., 2018](#)).

When faced with such resource threats, employees often experience impaired emotional regulation and diminished cognitive capacity, which weaken their ability to engage in creativity ([Baumeister & Heatherton, 2009; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000](#)). Prior research confirms that coercive leadership practices are associated with fear, silence, and dense idea generation ([Zhou & Shalley, 2024](#)). Yet, history and organizational practice suggest that adversity does not always ruin creativity. Sometimes employees may channel their remaining resources into adaptive problem solving and to protect their role, signaling competence, and reducing uncertainty ([Cannon et al., 2019; Younis et al., 2023](#)). In this sense, creativity may function less as an act of self-expression and more as a coping response ([Ghafoor, 2020](#)).

This duality highlights the paradoxical role of despotic leadership, and drawing on COR, that under conditions of threat, individuals mobilize whatever resources remain to maintain their continuity and well-being ([Hobfoll et al., 2018](#)). Accordingly, despotic leadership is theorized to act as a baseline constraint on creativity, with the potential for adaptive outcomes only under specific relational and cognitive conditions examined later in our model. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: *Despotic leadership is positively related to employee creativity.*

2.2 | Despotic Leadership and Cognitive Flexibility

Cognitive flexibility, the capacity to shift perspectives, reframe problems, and adapt behavioral strategies, has long been viewed as a vital psychological resource for managing complex, uncertain, and high-pressure work environments ([Rademacher et al., 2023](#)). According to COR theory, such cognitive resources are valuable and can be actively mobilized when individuals confront stressors that threaten their resource reserves ([Hobfoll, 1989, 2001; Hobfoll et al., 2018](#)). In this view, individuals under pressure are motivated to invest in available resources to protect themselves from further loss or regain lost resources. Studies suggested that cognitive flexibility is a resource to be built on ([Martin & Rubin, 1995; Rademacher et al., 2023](#)), but less is known about the conditions under which employees are prompted to activate this capability, and at what cost.

Despotic leadership induces emotional strain, limits autonomy, and creates uncertainty ([Naseer et al., 2016](#)). Following COR perspectives of during loss spirals, employees may activate cognitive flexibility as a last-resort coping mechanism, generating novel responses, adjusting themselves to retain a sense of efficacy and control. Studies suggest that cognitive flexibility plays a crucial role in disengaging from rigid,

maladaptive response patterns and adopting more context-appropriate strategies ([Rademacher et al., 2023](#); [Tromp, 2023](#); [Tromp & Baer, 2022](#)). As a meta-resource, cognitive flexibility facilitates attention switching, behavioral adaptability, and emotion regulation, allowing individuals to reinterpret constraints as manageable challenges ([Goldfarb et al., 2017](#); [Rademacher et al., 2023](#)). Thus, cognitive flexibility can serve as a central mechanism through which despotic leadership influences creativity, helps in preserving functionality, and pursues innovative responses.

Extending these arguments, we hypothesize cognitive flexibility as an adaptive response to psychological threat. In turn, this heightened cognitive flexibility will enhance creativity, allowing employees to generate novel ways to maintain functionality in resource-draining environments. Therefore, we predict the following:

H2a: *Despotic leadership is positively related to employees' use of cognitive flexibility as an adaptive coping resource.*

H2b: *Cognitive flexibility mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and employee creativity.*

2.3 | Despotic Leadership and Self-Regulation Difficulty

Self-regulation is a finite reservoir of psychological energy needed to control impulses, manage emotions, and maintain goal-directed behaviors ([Baumeister & Vohs, 2018](#)). This capacity, critical for self-monitoring, focus, and behavioral control ([Halbesleben et al., 2014](#); [Muraven & Baumeister, 2000](#)), but it's sensitive to vulnerable and high-stress environments. Drawing on COR theory, prior research has shown that adverse conditions can erode this reservoir, leading to difficulties in self-regulation ([Hobfoll et al., 2018](#); [Schmid et al., 2018](#)).

Despotic leadership creates a threatening environment and undermines employees' emotional safety and autonomy ([Naseer et al., 2016](#)). In line with COR theory, we argue that under despotic leadership, employees choose to invest significant regulatory energy to protect themselves. Over time, this effort taxes their self-regulatory system, which is essential for adaptive functioning in complex work environments ([Baumeister & Vohs, 2018](#)).

Importantly, the depletion of self-regulatory capacity under despotic leadership is important for momentary performance and for employees' creativity. Creative work requires focus, tolerance for ambiguity, and persistence. These behaviors rely heavily on intact self-regulation ([James et al., 2021](#); [Rademacher et al., 2023](#)). When those facilities are compromised, employees may retreat from complex problem-solving. Thus, we propose that despotic leadership contributes to difficulties in self-regulation, which in turn hinders employees' ability to be creative.

H3a: *Despotic leadership is positively related to employees' self-regulation difficulty.*

H3b: *Self-regulation difficulty mediates the negative relationship between despotic leadership and employee creativity.*

2.4 | Value Congruence as a Moderator of the Indirect Effects of Despotic Leadership on Creativity

Grounded in COR theory, which underlines the preservation and mobilization of personal and relational resources in threatening contexts ([Hobfoll, 1989, 2001](#)), we argue that supervisor-follower value congruence

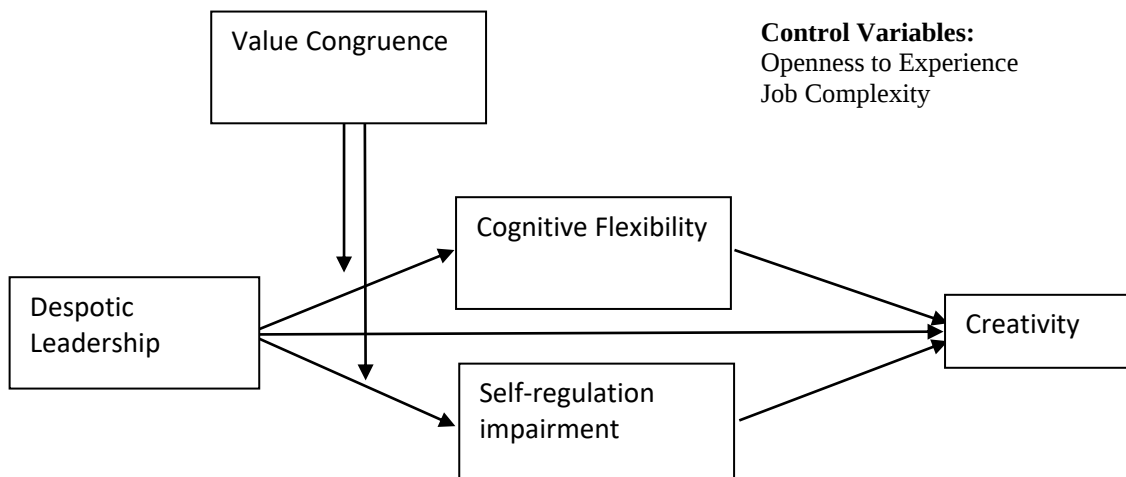
can buffer the indirect effects of despotic leadership on creativity through two key psychological mechanisms: cognitive flexibility and self-regulation. Value congruence functions as a socio-emotional resource that fosters trust, clarity, and shared meaning (Cable & Edwards, 2009), allowing employees to interpret coercive leader behaviors in a less personally threatening way (Byza et al., 2019; Peyton et al., 2023). When congruence is high, employees are in a better position to maintain the mental agility needed to reinterpret adversity and generate novel responses (Martin & Rubin, 1995), as well as the emotional control required to align thoughts and behaviors with performance goals (Baumeister & Heatherton, 2009). This relational alignment reduces cognitive load, protects against ego depletion, and sustains the attentional and emotional bandwidth needed for creative thinking. Conversely, low value congruence strips away this protective layer, making despotic actions seem illegitimate and personally demeaning, which heightens strain, narrows mental scope, and undermines both cognitive flexibility and self-regulation. So, we hypothesize that:

H4: *Indirect effect of despotic leadership on creativity through cognitive flexibility will be stronger when supervisor–follower value congruence is high (vs. low).*

H5: *The indirect effect of despotic leadership on employees' creativity via self-regulation difficulty will be less pronounced when they perceive stronger value congruence with their supervisor.*

Figure 1

Conceptual Model



3 | METHODOLOGY & DESIGN

Study 1 Method

3.1 | Participants and Procedure

Data was collected from the service sector in Pakistan, particularly from telecom firms and commercial banks. These sectors are fast-paced, customer-oriented, and highly competitive contexts in which leadership dynamics, adaptive thinking, and creative behavior are especially salient (Cardinale, 2022; Dadhich et al., 2022). Our goal was to examine how despotic leadership shapes creativity through psychological mechanisms

in a non-Western setting, in line with calls to expand leadership research beyond Western contexts ([Bharanitharan et al., 2019](#)).

A convenience sampling technique was employed, and we contacted human resources departments at multiple organizations. Eligibility criteria were established to be a full-time employee with a minimum of 6 months of tenure in their current organization to ensure adequate exposure to workplace conditions and leadership. All participants were informed that their responses had been kept confidential and that their participation was voluntary. No personal data was collected beyond what was required to match responses across waves.

To minimize common method bias, we used a four-wave, time-lagged survey design spanning five months, from November 2023 to March 2024. Each wave was spaced four weeks apart. Participants were assigned unique identification codes to track responses over time without compromising anonymity. We also conducted a common method bias test, even though creativity was peer-rated.

3.2 | Data Collection

At Time 1, we contacted 400 employees. Of those, 372 completed the first survey, which included measures of despotic leadership, value congruence, and demographic information (age, gender, education, designation, and tenure). At Time 2, conducted four weeks later, we re-contacted the 372 respondents and received 339 complete responses. This wave measured cognitive flexibility and openness to experience. At Time 3, 320 participants completed additional measures, including job complexity and self-regulation difficulty. At Time 4, peers nominated by focal participants provided creativity ratings. These coworkers, selected for their familiarity with the participant's work, were blind to the study's aims and told only that they were evaluating a colleague for a confidential academic project. To ensure candor, they were assured full anonymity and informed that their responses would be used solely for research purposes. This final wave yielded 245 fully matched responses from focal participants and peers, representing a final usable response rate of 61.25%.

After a significant dropout after the peer rating phase, we tried to compare respondents who completed all four waves ($n = 245$) with those who dropped out earlier ($n = 127$). Results showed no significant differences in despotic leadership perceptions, $t(370) = 0.48$, $p = .63$, or age, $F(1,370) = 0.60$, $p = .44$. However, completers reported higher value congruence, $t(370) = -2.28$, $p = .023$, were more likely to be female, $\chi^2(1) = 27.58$, $p < .001$, and had shorter tenure, $F(1,369) = 25.14$, $p < .001$. These patterns were toward employees with stronger value alignment, more women, and relatively shorter tenure.

The final sample included 138 employees from telecom firms and 107 from banks. Of the 245 participants, 169 (69%) identified as female. The average age was 32.18 years. In terms of tenure, 41.6% of participants had worked in their organization for 1–3 years, while 17.6% reported 4–6 years of tenure.

3.3 | Power Analysis

To assess the adequacy of our sample size, we conducted a priori power analysis using G*Power version 3.1.9.4 ([Faul et al., 2009](#)). Assuming a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), an alpha level of 0.05, and a desired power of 0.95, the analysis indicated a required sample size of 74 participants. Our final sample of 245 exceeds this threshold. A post hoc power analysis using the same parameters confirmed a power estimate of 0.99, well above the minimum threshold of 0.80 recommended by [Cohen \(1992\)](#).

3.4 | Measures

Study variables were measured using previously validated scales, and participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), unless otherwise noted.

The self-regulation difficulty is measured using a 16-item scale adapted from [Arslan and Gelişli \(2015\)](#), adopted for workplace relevance. Items reflect goal setting, behavioral monitoring, and adaptive learning (e.g., “I stick to the plans I’ve made to complete my work”). Lower scores on such scales reflect difficulty maintaining focus and motivation (consistent with regulatory fatigue; cf. [Muraven & Baumeister, 2000](#)). The scale's internal consistency value was $\alpha = .94$.

Cognitive flexibility is measured using a 3-item scale adapted from [Martin and Rubin \(1995\)](#), which evaluates the ability to consider alternatives, reframe problems, and adapt thinking. Participants responded to items including “I consider alternatives when dealing with work problems”, “I can communicate an idea in many different ways,” and “I am willing to work at creative solutions to problems.” The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .72. Similarly, Job complexity is assessed using a 3-item measure from [Shaw and Gupta \(2004\)](#), which captures perceptions of task variety, information load, and problem-solving demands. Items included “My job is very complex” and “My job involves many different tasks.” The reliability of the scale in this study was satisfactory ($\alpha = .81$).

We assessed openness to experience using a 4-item subscale from [Donnellan et al. \(2006\)](#), a short version of the Big Five Inventory. Sample items included “I have a vivid imagination” and the reverse-coded item “I am not interested in abstract ideas.” Internal consistency for this scale was acceptable ($\alpha = .86$). The moderating variable value congruence was measured using a 3-item scale developed by [Cable and DeRue \(2002\)](#). The scale captures perceived alignment between employee values and organizational values. Items included “The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that my leader values.” The internal consistency for this measure was $\alpha = .77$.

The independent variable “Despotic leadership” was assessed using a 6-item scale from [De Hoogh and Den Hartog \(2008\)](#), which evaluates authoritarian and exploitative leader behavior. Sample items include “Acts like a tyrant or despot; imperious” and “Is punitive; has no pity or compassion.” The scale exhibited high reliability in our sample ($\alpha = .81$).

The dependent variable “Creativity” was evaluated using a 4-item scale from [Tierney and Farmer \(2011\)](#), which focuses on creative output in work contexts. Peer raters assessed items such as “This employee identifies opportunities for new ways of dealing with work” and “This employee generates novel but operable work-related ideas.” The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .72.

Study 2 Method

3.5 | Participation and Procedure

Data was collected from full-time employees working across various organizations in Pakistan. To recruit participants, we relied on personal contacts; often, just one individual helped by sharing our questionnaire in their company’s official WhatsApp group. With HR’s permission obtained through these current employees, we were granted access to groups strictly limited to full-time staff and used for internal coordination. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and only full-time employees were instructed to complete the survey. We also verified employment status via a screening question at the beginning of the questionnaire.

Participants were instructed not to complete the questionnaire while eating, watching TV, or traveling. Instead, we asked them to please be in a good state to give us just 10 precious minutes. Participation was both voluntary and anonymous. Participants were informed that the study focused on workplace leadership and that they would read a job-related scenario followed by a series of questions. After reading the assigned scenario, participants were required to answer an attention check item. Specifically, we added an attention check item, such as: ‘If you are reading attentively, please select “Strongly Disagree”’. Responses from participants who failed this attention check were excluded.

A 2 (Despotic Leadership: low vs. high) $\times$ 2 (Value Congruence: low vs. high) between-subjects factorial design was employed. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. Each condition consisted of a scenario manipulating both the leader's behavior (high vs. low despotic) and the degree of value alignment with the employee (high vs. low value congruence) (please see appendix). The value congruence scenario was adopted from [Qasim and Laghari \(2025\)](#). Following the scenarios, participants responded to measures of cognitive flexibility, self-regulation difficulty, and creativity, along with manipulation checks, realism assessments, and demographic questions.

A total of 213 individuals participated. All responses were complete and passed the attention checks, resulting in a final sample of 213 participants. Among them, 55.4% identified as female and 44.6% as male, with an average age of 37.38 years ($SD = 6.08$). Participants came from a range of sectors: 50.2% were from foreign capital or joint-venture companies, 32.9% from private enterprises, 7% from state-owned companies, and the remainder from public institutions, government offices, or individual businesses. Most participants held a bachelor's degree (54%), followed by 22.5% with an associate's degree, 17.8% with a master's degree, and 5.7% with either a high school diploma or a doctorate. In terms of position, 49.3% were regular employees, 22.5% were frontline managers, 20.7% were middle managers, and 7.5% were top managers. On average, participants had 7.39 years of work experience and worked 41 hours per week.

3.6 | Measures

The same scales used in Study 1 were employed in Study 2 with 7 Likert scale. A seven-point scale allowed participants to express finer distinctions when evaluating hypothetical leadership behaviors. This scale offers greater sensitivity, allowing respondents to express differences in their assessments ([Dawes, 2008](#)).

3.7 | Ethical Considerations

All procedures involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the corresponding author institution. Before participating, all respondents provided informed consent and were assured that their data would be treated confidentially. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. To ensure anonymity across waves, each respondent was assigned a unique identifier, and no personally identifying information was collected.

3.8 | Control Variables

We included several control variables based on their theoretical and empirical relevance to creativity: job complexity, openness to experience, age, gender, and tenure. Job complexity has been linked to creativity due to its effect on cognitive demands ([Chae & Choi, 2018](#)), while openness to experience has consistently been shown to predict creative performance through its association with divergent thinking ([Feist, 2019](#)). Demographic variables such as gender and age influence leadership perceptions and workplace behavior ([Ng](#)

& Feldman, 2010), and tenure affects familiarity with organizational norms, which may influence creativity (Kooij et al., 2018).

4 | RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This study conducted one-way ANOVAs to identify whether any demographic variables were significantly related to the study's core constructs. Results indicated that gender, age, and tenure were not significantly related to creativity or the mediators. For instance, the relationship between tenure and creativity was marginal ($F = 2.102$, $p = .066$) and was therefore included as a control variable in subsequent analyses. In contrast, job complexity was significantly associated with self-regulation difficulty ($F = 5.179$, $p < .001$), and openness to experience also showed a significant relationship with self-regulation difficulty ($F = 2.177$, $p = .014$). Given their empirical associations, these variables were controlled for in all hypothesis tests to ensure the robustness of our findings.

4.1 | Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to check the study model. We created all possible pairings for the study variable, including mediators, cognitive flexibility, and self-regulation difficulty.

The model fit indices indicate that the main five-factor model ($\chi^2 = 698.8$, $df = 454$, $\chi^2/df = 1.54$, $CFI = .93$, $TLI = .92$, $IFI = .92$, $RMSEA = .04$) demonstrates the best fit compared to all possible alternative models (See Table 1). The common method bias test, which combines all factors, shows the poorest fit ($\chi^2 = 2739$, $df = 464$, $\chi^2/df = 5.90$, $CFI = .67$, $TLI = .65$, $IFI = .67$, $RMSEA = .18$), indicating that common method variance is not a significant concern in this study.

Table 1

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Model	χ^2	Df	χ^2 / df	CFI	TLI	IFI	RMSEA
Main 5 Factors model	698.8	454	1.54	.93	.92	.92	.04
Alternate Model 1: 5 Factors Combine (CF+SRD)	872	458	1.90	.88	.87	.88	.06
Alternate Model 2: 4 Factors Combine	1071	461	2.32	.82	.81	.82	.07
Alternate Model 3: 3 Factors Combine	1343	463	2.90	.74	.73	.74	.16
Alternate Model 4: One Factor Model	2739	464	5.90	.67	.65	.67	.18

"CF= Cognitive Flexibility, SRD= Self-Regulation Difficulty, DL= Despotism Leadership, VC= Value Congruence"

Study 1 Results

Table 2

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation Analysis

	Mean	S. D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Despotic Leadership	2.76	.64	(.81)						
Value Congruence	3.71	.72	.267**	(.77)					
Cognitive Flexibility	3.62	.77	.260**	.269**	(.72)				
Self-Regulation Difficulty	2.96	.86	.339**	.124	.110	(.94)			
Creativity	3.66	.64	.299**	.262**	.361**	.084	(.72)		
Job Complexity	3.27	1.04	-.055	-.163*	-.071	-.293**	-.002	(.81)	
Openness to Experience	2.76	.84	.131*	.011	-.022	.134*	.076	.096	(.86)
Tenure	2.33	1.23	.002	.154*	-.054	-.028	-.079	.096	.031

N = 245, $p^{**} < .01$, $p^* < .05$ "Reliability values are presented in parentheses"

Statistical results in Table 2 show that despotic leadership is positively correlated with value congruence ($r = .26$), cognitive flexibility ($r = .26$), self-regulation difficulty ($r = .33$), and creativity ($r = .30$). Value congruence positively relates to cognitive flexibility ($r = .27$) and creativity ($r = .26$). Cognitive flexibility is positively correlated with creativity ($r = .36$). Job complexity is negatively associated with self-regulation difficulty ($r = -.29$). Openness to experience is positively related to self-regulation difficulty ($r = .13$). Tenure is positively associated with value congruence ($r = .15$).

4.2 | Study 1 Hypotheses Testing

Table 3

Regression Analysis

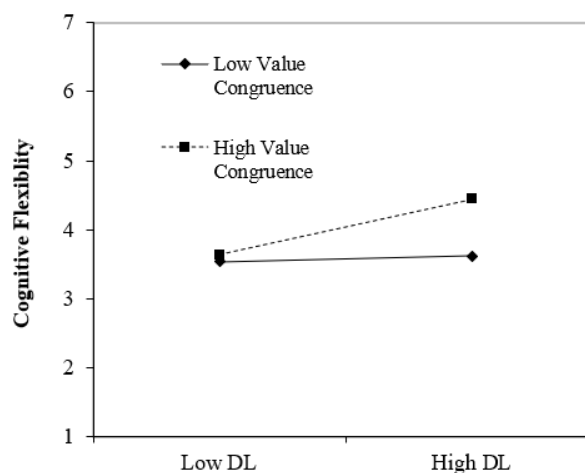
	Cognitive Flexibility				Self-Regulation Difficulty				Creativity			
	β	SE	t	p	β	SE	t	p	β	SE	t	p
Control Variables												
Job Complexity	-.004	.045	-.09	.92	-.236	.049	-4.81	.00	.016	.039	.42	.67
Openness-to-Experience	-.050	.055	-.90	.36	.108	.059	1.84	.07	.045	.046	.96	.33
Tenure	-.041	.038	-1.1	.27	-.005	.041	-0.11	.91	-.036	.031	-1.1	.24
Study Variables												
Despotic Leadership	.223	.054	4.11	.00	.312	.057	5.44	.00	-.269	.050	-5.35	.00
Value Congruence	.229	.067	3.40	.00	-.011	.074	-.15	.87				
Cognitive Flexibility									.273	.057	4.83	.00
Self-Regulation Difficulty									-.021	.050	-.41	.67
DL x VC	.182	.066	2.74	.00	-.019	.070	-.278	.78				
Cognitive Flexibility	R2-chng	.027										
Self-Regulation Difficulty	R2-chng	.000										

N = 245, "DL = Despotic Leadership, VC = Value Congruence"

The regression analysis results are presented in Table 3. Our control variables, job complexity and openness to experience results for self-regulation difficulty were, ($\beta = -.24, p < .001$), ($\beta = .11, p > .05$). In our study variables, despotic leadership was found to have a significant effect on cognitive flexibility ($\beta = .223, p < .001$), self-regulation difficulty ($\beta = .312, p < .001$), and negative effects on creativity ($\beta = -.27, p < .001$). Value congruence also showed a significant positive effect on cognitive flexibility ($\beta = .23, p < .001$), but it did not have a significant effect on self-regulation difficulty ($\beta = -.011, p = .87$). Cognitive flexibility was positively related to creativity (coefficient = .27, $p < .001$). The interaction between despotic leadership and value congruence (DL x VC) was significant for cognitive flexibility ($\beta = .18, p < .001$). However, this interaction was insignificant for self-regulation difficulty ($\beta = -.02, p = .78$). (See Figures 2 and 3 for moderation).

Figure 2

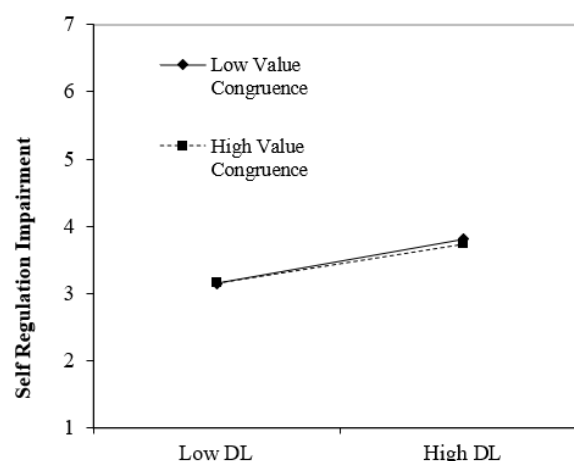
Moderating effect of value congruence on the relationship between despotic leadership (DL) and cognitive flexibility.



Note: Solid line = low value congruence; dashed line = high value congruence.

Figure 3

Moderating effect of value congruence on the relationship between despotic leadership (DL) and self-regulation difficulty.



Note: Solid line = low value congruence; dashed line = high value congruence.

Table 4*Indirect Effect*

	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LL	Boot UL
H2b DL→CF→Creativity	.080	.027	.033	.139
H3b DL→SRD→Creativity	-.007	.023	-.050	.043

N 245, Bootstrap sample size is 5000 with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI).

* The indirect effect was deemed significant if the confidence interval did not encompass zero. DL: Despotism Leadership, CF= Cognitive Flexibility, SRD= Self-Regulation Difficulty.

Table 4 presents the indirect effects of despotic leadership on creativity through cognitive flexibility and self-regulation difficulty. The results indicate that the indirect effect of despotic leadership on creativity via cognitive flexibility was significant (Effect= .080). In contrast, through self-regulation, difficulty was (-.007) not significant.

Table 5*Conditional Indirect Effect of Despotic Leadership on Creativity at the Values of the Moderator*

Moderator: Value Congruence					
	VC	β	S. E	LLCI	ULCI
Cognitive Flexibility on Creativity (Low)	-.713	.026	.022	-.017	.073
(Medium)	-.046	.059	.021	.025	.106
(High)	.620	.092	.031	.042	.161
Self-Regulation Difficulty on Creativity (Low)	-.713	-.006	.018	-.040	.031
(Medium)	-.046	-.006	.017	-.037	.030
(High)	.620	-.005	.017	-.036	.030

N=245, "LL lower limit, UL upper limit, SE standard error" "VC= Value Congruence."

To examine the conditional indirect effects, we tested whether value congruence moderated the mediation pathways. For cognitive flexibility, the indirect effect of despotic leadership on creativity was not significant at low levels of value congruence (β = .026, ns) (please see Table 5). At medium levels, the effect was positive and significant (β = .059, p < .05), and at high levels, it was stronger (β = .092, p < .01). For self-regulation difficulty, the indirect effect was not significant at any level of value congruence, remaining negligible at low (β = -.006, ns), medium (β = -.006, ns), and high levels (β = -.005, ns).

Table 6*Index of Moderated Mediation*

	Index	SE (Boot)	BootLLCI	BootULCI
CF	.050	.026	.007	.108
SRD	.000	.004	-.006	.009

"CF= Cognitive Flexibility, SRD= Self-Regulation Difficulty"

The results in Table 6 show that the index of moderated mediation is significant only for cognitive flexibility (Index = 0.050).

4.3 | Study 1 Results Discussion

Study 1 results showed that despotic leadership increased cognitive flexibility but also raised self-regulation difficulty, and it reduced creativity directly. Creativity appeared only through cognitive flexibility, and the self-regulation path was non-significant. Value congruence strengthened the despotic leadership-cognitive flexibility link but did not alter the link with self-regulation difficulty. A key limitation of this study was that despotic leadership and value congruence were measured rather than experimentally manipulated, leaving the possibility of perceptual bias. Participants reported their experiences retrospectively rather than reacting to leadership behavior in real time, which differs from how employees encounter and interpret authority in practice. Moreover, this study did not provide causal evidence. To address these limitations, we conducted Study 2.

Study 2 Results

4.4 | Manipulation Checks

For Despotic Leadership, participants in the high-despotism condition ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.27$) reported significantly higher levels of perceived despotic leadership than those in the low-despotism condition ($M = 1.57$, $SD = 0.71$), $t(211) = -10.36$, $p < .001$. For Value Congruence, those in the high-congruence condition ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.12$) reported significantly greater perceived alignment with the leader's values than those in the low-congruence condition ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.22$), $t(211) = -4.94$, $p < .001$.

4.5 | Realism Check

Participants completed a series of questions assessing the realism of the vignette scenarios (see Chen et al., 2011). 81% of participants agreed with the item, "It is realistic that I might work with a supervisor like Mr. Ahmad" ($M = 5.56$, $SD = 1.19$, on a 7-point scale). 77.7% ($M = 5.49$, $SD = 1.26$), agreed with the item, "It is realistic that I might work with colleagues as described in the scenario". Additionally, for the third, 73.2% agreed with the item, "At some point during my career I will probably encounter a situation like the one described above" ($M = 5.08$, $SD = 1.54$). These checks indicated that participants felt the scenarios to be real.

4.6 | Hypothesis Testing

We conducted independent-samples t-tests to assess the effects of despotic leadership on cognitive flexibility, self-regulation difficulty, and employee creativity. Cognitive Flexibility was significantly higher under high despotic leadership ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.48$) than low ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.41$), $t(211) = -4.61$, $p < .001$. Self-regulation difficulty was also significantly greater in the high despotic leadership group ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.35$) than in the low condition ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.69$), $t(201.58) = -6.76$, $p < .001$. Employee Creativity also shows differences higher under high despotic leadership ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.15$) compared to low ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.08$), $t(211) = -2.08$, $p = .039$.

Similarly, cognitive Flexibility was significantly higher among participants in the high value congruence condition ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.50$) than in the low value congruence group ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 0.37$), $t(128.69) = -13.97$, $p < .001$. Self-regulation difficulty was significantly lower in the high value congruence condition ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.48$) compared to the low condition ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.86$), $t(186.92) = 2.21$, $p = .028$. Employee creativity did not differ significantly across the two groups, $t(211) = .14$, $p = .886$.

4.7 | Interaction Effects: 2×2 ANOVA for Cognitive Flexibility

To ensure the robustness of our findings, we conducted a factorial ANOVA including key control variables: openness to experience, job complexity, gender, age, tenure, workstation, education level, and hierarchical position. The model accounted for 56.5% of the variance in Cognitive Flexibility ($R^2 = .565$; adj. $R^2 = .542$).

Crucially, the main effects of despotic leadership ($F(1, 201) = 26.63$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .117$) and value congruence ($F(1, 201) = 163.92$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .449$) remained significant. The interaction between despotic leadership and value congruence also remained significant ($F(1, 201) = 5.05$, $p = .026$, partial $\eta^2 = .025$) (See table 7), even after accounting for all control variables.

Table 7

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Cognitive Flexibility						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	274.942a	11	24.995	23.771	.000	.565
Intercept	47.567	1	47.567	45.238	.000	.184
Job Complexity	.775	1	.775	.737	.392	.004
Openness to experience	4.040	1	4.040	3.842	.051	.019
Gender	.138	1	.138	.131	.717	.001
Age	.563	1	.563	.535	.465	.003
Tenure	.239	1	.239	.227	.634	.001
Station	.916	1	.916	.871	.352	.004
Education	.342	1	.342	.325	.569	.002
Position	1.673	1	1.673	1.591	.209	.008
Despotic leadership (DL)	27.995	1	27.995	26.625	.000	.117
Value Congruence (VC)	172.359	1	172.359	163.924	.000	.449
DL x VC	5.310	1	5.310	5.050	.026	.025
Error	211.344	201	1.051			
Total	3433.667	213				
Corrected Total	486.286	212				

a. $R^2 = .565$ (adj. $R^2 = .542$)

4.8 | Interaction Effects: 2×2 ANOVA for Self-Regulation Difficulty

We conducted a two-way ANOVA to examine the effects of despotic leadership, value congruence, and their interaction on self-regulation difficulty, while controlling for openness to experience, job complexity, and demographic variables (gender, age, tenure, education, and position level).

The overall model was statistically significant, accounting for 31.7% of the variance in self-regulation difficulty ($R^2 = .317$; adj. $R^2 = .280$), $F(11, 201) = 8.50$, $p < .001$. Despotism had a strong main effect on self-regulation difficulty ($F(1, 201) = 49.75$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .198$). Openness to experience also emerged as a predictor ($F(1, 201) = 21.79$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .098$). Value congruence showed a marginal main effect ($F(1, 201) = 2.82$, $p = .095$, partial $\eta^2 = .014$). The interaction between Despotism and value congruence was statistically significant ($F(1, 201) = 13.00$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .061$) (See table 8).

Table 8

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Self-regulation Difficulty						
Source	Type III Sum	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta
Corrected Model	191.014 ^a	11	17.365	8.498	.000	.317
Intercept	2.027	1	2.027	.992	.320	.005
Job Complexity	3.580	1	3.580	1.752	.187	.009
Openness to experience	44.528	1	44.528	21.791	.000	.098
Gender	.380	1	.380	.186	.667	.001
Age	.014	1	.014	.007	.934	.000
Tenure	.183	1	.183	.089	.765	.000
Station	3.046	1	3.046	1.491	.224	.007
Education	.010	1	.010	.005	.945	.000
Position	.846	1	.846	.414	.521	.002
Despotism (DL)	101.664	1	101.664	49.751	.000	.198
Value Congruence (VC)	5.755	1	5.755	2.816	.095	.014
DL x VC	26.574	1	26.574	13.004	.000	.061
Error	410.736	201	2.043			
Total	3345.695	213				
Corrected Total	601.750	212				

a. $R^2 = .317$ (adj. $R^2 = .280$)

5 | DISCUSSION

This study applied COR theory ([Hobfoll et al., 2018](#)) to examine how employees remain creative not because of despotism, but despite it. While prior research highlights its uniformly negative effects ([Schyns et al., 2018](#); [Schyns & Schilling, 2013](#)), our findings show that employees with strong cognitive flexibility and high value congruence can reinterpret coercive pressure as a challenge and engage in adaptive problem-solving ([Tromp, 2023](#); [Tromp & Baer, 2022](#)). Study 2 confirmed that this combination enables employees to maintain creativity under despotism.

Crucially, Study 1 showed a negative direct effect of despotism on creativity ($\beta = -.27$), contradicting Hypothesis 1. This creativity emerged through compensatory pathways when cognitive flexibility and value congruence are activated. Thus, despotism does not stimulate creativity; creativity is enabled by adaptive mechanisms. Cognitive flexibility allows employees to shift perspectives and generate alternatives, which supports novel thinking when resources are strained ([Ghosh & Halder, 2020](#); [Nakhostin-Khayyat et al., 2024](#)). In contrast, self-regulation difficulty reflects resource depletion that limits

persistence ([Ay, 2023](#)). Similarly, [Boss and Sims Jr \(2008\)](#) show that reappraisal facilitates constructive performance, whereas suppression and effortful control often reduce it. Although despotic leadership heightened self-regulation difficulty, H3b was not supported, as this pathway did not significantly mediate the link to creativity. This suggests that regulatory strain, while evident under despotic climates, was not the mechanism driving creative outcomes in our data.

Our findings suggest that employees under despotic leadership are not passive victims. With cognitive flexibility, they can reframe adversity into opportunities for creativity. Without it, despotic leadership undermines performance. Value congruence serves as a buffer that sustains adaptive cognition ([Cable & Edwards, 2009](#)), but its benefits depend on being paired with flexibility. In sum, creativity under despotism is conditional. It requires flexibility and shared values and may also need additional motivational or relational cues. These findings extend COR theory by showing that resource protection alone is insufficient; employees also reallocate cognitive effort to adapt under high-pressure conditions ([Hobfoll et al., 2018](#)).

5.1 | Theoretical Implications

We offer a theoretical model explaining how employee creativity unfolds under sustained despotic leadership by drawing on COR theory ([Hobfoll, 1989, 2001](#)). Although previous research focused on how toxic leadership undermines well-being and engagement ([Schyns & Schilling, 2013](#)), we extend this lens to explore how despotic leadership impacts creativity. Our research advances the idea that creativity in adversity hinges not only on what is lost but on what remains, and how that remainder is reconfigured through adaptive mechanisms. Although frameworks such as JD-R ([Bakker & Demerouti, 2017](#)) and affective events theory ([Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996](#)) could explain this study concept, they do not fully account for the resource reallocation processes that sustain creativity under strain. COR theory is better suited because it emphasizes how employees conserve and redeploy cognitive resources, which matches our evidence that flexibility and value congruence enable creativity in spite of adversity.

Specifically, we propose that two proximal psychological mechanisms, cognitive flexibility and self-regulatory difficulty, shape how employees navigate creative functioning under despotic control. Cognitive flexibility functions as a critical cognitive resource that enables adaptation when environmental autonomy is restricted ([Rademacher et al., 2023](#); [Tromp, 2023](#)). We show that despotic leadership depleted resources overall, producing a negative direct effect on creativity in Study 1. Yet, employees with greater cognitive flexibility maintained creativity. In contrast, the hypothesized mediation through self-regulation difficulty was not supported. Although despotic leadership increased difficulty, this pathway did not translate into reduced creativity. Consistent with recent evidence, affective flexibility, rather than other indices of cognitive control, accounted for unique variance in resilience outcomes ([Rademacher et al., 2023](#)).

Crucially, we theorize that value congruence between employees and their supervisors serves as a relational moderator that conditions these resource dynamics. When value congruence is high, employees perceive despotic demands as more legitimate, which reduces emotional resistance and conserves psychological resources. This alignment fosters reinterpretation of constraints and sustains cognitive engagement. Our theorizing extends COR theory by illustrating how dual resource pathways, reallocation (flexibility) and depletion (difficulty), jointly shape employee outcomes. We contribute to COR theory by showing that... (a) creativity under coercion may rely on interpretive cognitive reallocation; (b) relational

alignment can buffer resource loss; and (c) dual pathways, strain, and adaptation, can make things different under constraints.

5.2 | Practical Implications

Our findings suggest that creativity can be sustained, despite despotic leadership, but with enough psychological and value congruence resources. First, organizations may benefit from fostering employees' capacity for cognitive flexibility. Targeted interventions, such as scenario-based problem solving, reflective journaling, or perspective-taking exercises, can help cultivate this adaptive mindset over time. Second, organizations need to take proactive steps to monitor employees' self-regulations. Prolonged exposure to authoritarian control can exhaust emotional and attentional capacity. Structured recovery practices, such as rest periods, emotional check-ins, or workload cycling, may help preserve psychological functioning while maintaining engagement.

Third, our study highlights that when employees perceive alignment between their values and those of their supervisors, they are more likely to stay engaged, interpret pressure as purposeful, and retain a sense of agency. Organizations can strengthen this alignment through leader communication that emphasizes shared purpose, as well as through structured dialogue that invites employees to express what matters to them. These highlight the importance of building internal capacities (not appreciating despotic leadership), cognitive, emotional, and relational, that allow employees to transform adversity into creative energy without incurring severe psychological costs.

5.3 | Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the reliance on a convenience sample from Pakistan's service sector restricts external validity. Future research should consider employing random sampling techniques and try to test similar concepts in different contexts ([Etikan et al., 2016](#)). Because leadership perceptions and coping resources are culturally shaped, future studies should prioritize testing these dynamics in other cultural and industry settings using probability-based sampling. Second, self-reported data for some variables may introduce common method bias ([Podsakoff et al., 2012](#)) despite our time-lagged design and peer-reported creativity. To better assess constructs, more studies should include multi-source data like supervisor or peer evaluations ([Conway & Lance, 2010](#)). Although vignette experiments strengthen validity, they cannot fully show the long-term and emotionally intense dynamics of real despotic leadership. Future research should triangulate these findings with field experiments or leader-employee interaction tasks to assess how adaptive and depleting pathways unfold in actual workplace relationships. Third, our study focused on cognitive flexibility and self-regulation difficulty as mediators. Future research can extend to use resource-based mechanisms such as emotional intelligence or resilience, which may capture different adaptive pathways. Because despotic leadership heightened self-regulation difficulty, this pathway did not significantly mediate creativity. Future research should revisit this mechanism to clarify. Fourth, while our experimental vignette design allowed causal inference, longer-term longitudinal studies are needed to observe whether adaptive responses can be sustained under prolonged despotic conditions. Fifth, attrition analyses suggested no systematic bias on key study variables, but differences in gender and tenure caution against drawing overly broad conclusions, and future studies should replicate these findings with more balanced samples. Finally, focusing on value congruence as the sole moderator may be

restrictive. Future work should examine additional contextual moderators (e.g., organizational culture, job autonomy, or personality traits like Machiavellianism) to better specify the boundary conditions of these effects.

6 | CONCLUSION

Building on COR, this research demonstrates that employees exposed to despotic leadership face a persistent threat to their psychological resources, which they can manage through adaptation. Creativity in such contexts does not arise because of despotic leadership but despite it, as employees harness their adaptive capacities. Specifically, they rely on (a) their cognitive flexibility and (b) their alignment of values with supervisors. Notably, these adaptive responses are more pronounced among employees with strong value congruence, as shared perceptions help legitimize demands. These findings challenge the predominantly negative narrative surrounding despotic leadership, offering a more nuanced perspective that recognizes its potential to elicit creative performance when specific cognitive and relational resources are present. By highlighting this paradox, our research broadens the understanding of destructive leadership, underscoring its complex and multifaceted influence on employee functioning.

Acknowledgment: The authors would like to express their sincere thanks to the editor and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, M.Q.; methodology, M.Q., Y.L., and T.F.; software, M.Q.; validation, M.Q., and Y.L.; investigation, M.Q.; data curation, M.Q., and S.I.; writing original draft preparation, M.Q.; writing—review and editing, M.Q., and Y.L. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest: The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Licenses and Copyright: This is an open-access article, free of all copyright, and fulfills the DOAJ definition of open access. This work is licensed under a “[Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#)”. This permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Funding: The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data Availability Statement: Data that supports the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Plagiarism Statement: This article was scanned by the plagiarism program. No plagiarism was detected.

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions, and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of the publisher “AGASR” and/or the editor(s). The Publisher AGASR and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions, or products referred to in the content.

REFERENC

- Arslan, S., & Gelişli, Y. (2015). Development of perceived self-regulation scale: Validity and reliability study. *Sakarya University Journal of Education*, 5(3), 67-74.
- Ay, İ. (2023). Exploring the relationship between cognitive flexibility and mindfulness with self-regulation in university students. *Afr Educational Res J*, 11(3), 460-467.
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2017). Job demands–resources theory: taking stock and looking forward. *Journal of occupational health psychology*, 22(3), 273.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Heatherton, T. F. (2009). Self-regulation failure: An overview. *Psychological inquiry*, 7(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli0701_1
- Baumeister, R. F., & Vohs, K. D. (2018). Strength model of self-regulation as limited resource: Assessment, controversies, update. In *Self-regulation and self-control* (pp. 78-128). Routledge.
- Bharanitharan, K., Chen, Z. X., Bahmannia, S., & Lowe, K. B. (2019). Is leader humility a friend or foe, or both? An attachment theory lens on leader humility and its contradictory outcomes. *Journal of Business ethics*, 160(3), 729-743.
- Boss, A. D., & Sims Jr, H. P. (2008). Everyone fails! Using emotion regulation and self-leadership for recovery. *Journal of managerial psychology*, 23(2), 135-150.
- Byza, O. A., Dörr, S. L., Schuh, S. C., & Maier, G. W. (2019). When leaders and followers match: The impact of objective value congruence, value extremity, and empowerment on employee commitment and job satisfaction. *Journal of Business ethics*, 158(4), 1097-1112.
- Cable, D., & Edwards, J. R. (2009). The value of value congruence. *Journal of applied psychology*, 94(3), 654-677.
- Cable, D. M., & DeRue, D. S. (2002). The convergent and discriminant validity of subjective fit perceptions. *Journal of applied psychology*, 87(5), 875.
- Cannon, C., Goldsmith, K., & Roux, C. (2019). A self-regulatory model of resource scarcity. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 29(1), 104-127.
- Cardinale, R. (2022). State-owned enterprises' reforms and their implications for the resilience and vulnerability of the Chinese economy: evidence from the banking, energy and telecom sectors. *Networks and Spatial Economics*, 22(3), 489-514.
- Chae, H., & Choi, J. N. (2018). Contextualizing the effects of job complexity on creativity and task performance: Extending job design theory with social and contextual contingencies. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 91(2), 316-339.
- Cohen, J. (1992). Statistical power analysis. *Current directions in psychological science*, 1(3), 98-101.
- Conway, J. M., & Lance, C. E. (2010). What reviewers should expect from authors regarding common method bias in organizational research. *Journal of business and psychology*, 25(3), 325-334.
- Dadhich, M., Hiran, K. K., Rao, S. S., Sharma, R., & Meena, R. (2022). Study of combating technology induced fraud assault (TIFA) and possible solutions: the way forward. International Conference on Emerging Technologies in Computer Engineering,
- Dawes, J. (2008). Do data characteristics change according to the number of scale points used? An experiment using 5-point, 7-point and 10-point scales. *International journal of market research*, 50(1), 61-104.
- De Hoogh, A. H., & Den Hartog, D. N. (2008). Ethical and despotic leadership, relationships with leader's social responsibility, top management team effectiveness and subordinates' optimism: A multi-method study. *The leadership quarterly*, 19(3), 297-311.
- Donnellan, M. B., Oswald, F. L., Baird, B. M., & Lucas, R. E. (2006). The mini-IPIP scales: tiny-yet-effective measures of the Big Five factors of personality. *Psychological assessment*, 18(2), 192.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American journal of theoretical and applied statistics*, 5(1), 1-4.
- Fang, H. (2024). A Study on the Relationship Between Motivation and Job Satisfaction on Employee Performance among Employees at Telco Company in Beijing, China *Journal of Digitainability, Realism & Mastery* 3(1), 10-18. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.56982/dream.v3i01.198>
- Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Buchner, A., & Lang, A.-G. (2009). Statistical power analyses using G* Power 3.1:

- Tests for correlation and regression analyses. *Behavior research methods*, 41(4), 1149-1160.
- Feist, G. J. (2019). Creativity and the Big Two model of personality: Plasticity and stability. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 27, 31-35.
- Forgeard, M. (2025). Creativity and resilience: creativity from, or through adversity? *Creativity Research Journal*, 37(2), 222-229.
- Ghafoor, A. (2020). *Exploring Employee Creativity Behaviours at Work: The Impact of Psychological, Organisational and Work Factors* Auckland University of Technology].
- Ghosh, S., & Halder, S. (2020). Emotional regulation and cognitive flexibility in young adults. *Journal of Psychosocial Research*, 15(2), 609-617.
- Goldfarb, E. V., Froböse, M. I., Cools, R., & Phelps, E. A. (2017). Stress and cognitive flexibility: cortisol increases are associated with enhanced updating but impaired switching. *Journal of cognitive neuroscience*, 29(1), 14-24.
- Halbesleben, J. R., Neveu, J.-P., Paustian-Underdahl, S. C., & Westman, M. (2014). Getting to the "COR" understanding the role of resources in conservation of resources theory. *Journal of management*, 40(5), 1334-1364.
- Hamid, Z., & Kundi, Y. M. (2025). A multi-method study of servant leadership and despotic leadership—work engagement nexus: the roles of identification with leader and political skill. *Journal of managerial psychology*.
- Herzog, N. M., & Demps, K. (2025). Adaptive Responses to Adversity Drive Innovation in Human Evolutionary History. *Evolutionary Anthropology: Issues, News, and Reviews*, 34(3), e70006.
- Hobfoll, S. E. (1989). Conservation of resources: a new attempt at conceptualizing stress. *American psychologist*, 44(3), 513.
- Hobfoll, S. E. (2001). The influence of culture, community, and the nested-self in the stress process: Advancing conservation of resources theory. *Applied psychology*, 50(3), 337-421.
- Hobfoll, S. E., Halbesleben, J., Neveu, J.-P., & Westman, M. (2018). Conservation of resources in the organizational context: The reality of resources and their consequences. *Annual review of organizational psychology and organizational behavior*, 5(1), 103-128.
- James, K., Brodersen, M., & Eisenberg, J. (2021). Workplace affect and workplace creativity: A review and preliminary model. *Emotion and Performance*, 169-194.
- Khan, F., Arshad, M., Raoof, R., & Farooq, O. (2024). Servant leadership and employees' performance: organization and information structure perspective. *The Service Industries Journal*, 44(11-12), 832-850.
- Kooij, D. T., Kanfer, R., Betts, M., & Rudolph, C. W. (2018). Future time perspective: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of applied psychology*, 103(8), 867.
- Li, J., Liao, Y., Wang, W., Han, X., Cheng, Z., & Sun, G. (2025). Is stress always bad? The role of job stress in producing innovative ideas. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, 23(1), 77-88.
- Liu, B., Shah, T. A., & Shoaib, M. (2024). Creative leadership, creative mindset and creativity: A self-regulatory focus perspective. *Current Psychology*, 43(29), 24375-24389.
- Martin, M. M., & Rubin, R. B. (1995). A new measure of cognitive flexibility. *Psychological reports*, 76(2), 623-626.
- Muraven, M., & Baumeister, R. F. (2000). Self-regulation and depletion of limited resources: Does self-control resemble a muscle? *Psychological bulletin*, 126(2), 247.
- Nakhostin-Khayyat, M., Borjali, M., Zeinali, M., Fardi, D., & Montazeri, A. (2024). The relationship between self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, and resilience among students: a structural equation modeling. *BMC psychology*, 12(1), 337.
- Naseer, S., Raja, U., Syed, F., Donia, M. B., & Darr, W. (2016). Perils of being close to a bad leader in a bad environment: Exploring the combined effects of despotic leadership, leader member exchange, and perceived organizational politics on behaviors. *The leadership quarterly*, 27(1), 14-33.
- Ng, T. W., & Feldman, D. C. (2010). The relationships of age with job attitudes: A meta-analysis. *Personnel psychology*, 63(3), 677-718.
- Peyton, T., Gip, H., Pasamehmetoglu, A., & Guchait, P. (2023). How authentic leadership cultivates trust and desirable workplace behaviors in hotels: Commitment and leader-follower value congruence matters. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, 22(4), 534-561.
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2012). Sources of method bias in social science research and recommendations on how to control it. *Annual review of psychology*, 63(1), 539-569.
- Qasim, M., & Laghari, A. A. (2025). Belonging through values: ethical leadership, creativity, and psychological safety with ethical climate as a moderator. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16, 1559427.
- Rademacher, L., Kraft, D., Eckart, C., & Fiebach, C. J. (2023). Individual differences in resilience to stress are associated with affective flexibility. *Psychological Research*, 87(6), 1862-1879.

- Schmid, E. A., Pircher Verdorfer, A., & Peus, C. V. (2018). Different shades—different effects? Consequences of different types of destructive leadership. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*, 1289.
- Schyns, B., Felfe, J., & Schilling, J. (2018). Is it me or you?—How reactions to abusive supervision are shaped by leader behavior and follower perceptions. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*, 1309.
- Schyns, B., & Schilling, J. (2013). How bad are the effects of bad leaders? A meta-analysis of destructive leadership and its outcomes. *The leadership quarterly, 24*(1), 138-158.
- Shaw, J. D., & Gupta, N. (2004). Job complexity, performance, and well-being: When does supplies-values fit matter? *Personnel psychology, 57*(4), 847-879.
- Tierney, P., & Farmer, S. M. (2011). Creative self-efficacy development and creative performance over time. *Journal of applied psychology, 96*(2), 277.
- Tromp, C. (2023). Integrated constraints in creativity: Foundations for a unifying model. *Review of General Psychology, 27*(1), 41-61.
- Tromp, C., & Baer, J. (2022). Creativity from constraints: Theory and applications to education. *Thinking Skills and Creativity, 46*, 101184.
- Weiss, H. M., & Cropanzano, R. (1996). Affective events theory. *Research in organizational behavior, 18*(1), 1-74.
- Younis, S., Bashir, S., Irshad, M., & Javed, B. (2023). Impact of the paradoxical leadership on employee creativity: Testing a moderated mediation model. *Sage Open, 13*(2), 21582440231182615.
- Zhou, J., & Shalley, C. E. (2024). *Handbook of organizational creativity*. Psychology Press.

*Appendix I: Vignette Scenarios

A.1. High Despotic Leadership Condition

Your leader, Mr. Ahmad, maintains strict control over work and does not consider input from employees. He disregards others' perspectives and responds harshly to mistakes. He frequently uses manipulative tactics and is not shy to criticize employees publicly to assert his authority. He keeps important responsibilities to himself and expects unquestioned compliance from the team. Disagreement is viewed as disloyalty and seen as a challenge to his authority. Under Mr. Ahmad's leadership, decisions are made unilaterally, and employees are expected to follow instructions without question.

A.2. Low Despotic Leadership Condition

Your leader, Mr. Ahmad, encourages open communication and seeks input from team members when making decisions. He handles mistakes with understanding and sees them as learning opportunities. He shares responsibilities across the team and encourages initiative. Mr. Ahmad respects diverse viewpoints, even when they differ from his own. Employees feel safe speaking up or offering suggestions, as he listens actively and responds thoughtfully. His leadership is assertive but grounded in mutual respect and fairness.

B.1. High Value Congruence with a Despotic Leader

Imagine working under a leader, Ahmad. Although Ahmad leads with strict authority and expects unquestioned compliance, you find that many of his values mirror your own. He prioritizes discipline, accountability, and structure, principles you also believe are essential for high performance. Like you, Ahmad emphasizes efficiency, goal clarity, and maintaining order in the workplace. While his approach can be forceful, you recognize that his expectations reflect a shared commitment to results and responsibility. Even beyond work, his beliefs and moral priorities often feel aligned with yours.

B.2. Low Value Congruence with a Despotic Leader

Imagine working under a leader, Ahmad. From early on, it becomes clear that his values do not align with yours. While you value fairness, mutual respect, and collaborative decision-making, Ahmad insists on absolute obedience and enforces his authority through threats and rigid control. He dismisses differing views, punishes dissent, and rarely considers employee input. His definition of success centers on fear and domination, which

clashes with your belief in fair leadership and shared accountability. This misalignment becomes increasingly evident in both his decisions and his treatment of others.

Measures for Manipulation Checks

Value Congruence

1. “The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that my organization values.”
2. “My personal values match my organization’s values and culture.”
3. “My organization’s values and culture provide a good fit with the things that I value in life.”

Source: Cable, D. M., & DeRue, D. S. (2002). The convergent and discriminant validity of subjective fit perceptions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(5), 875-884

Despotic leadership

1. “Is punitive; has no pity or compassion.”
2. “Is in charge and does not tolerate disagreement or questioning, gives orders.”
3. “Acts like a tyrant or despot; imperious.”
4. “Tends to be unwilling or unable to relinquish control of projects or tasks.”
5. “Expects unquestioning obedience of those who report to him/her.”
6. “Is vengeful; seeks revenge when wronged.”

Source: De Hoogh, A. H. B., & Den Hartog, D. N. (2008). Ethical and despotic leadership, relationships with leader's social responsibility, top management team effectiveness and subordinates' optimism: A multi-method study. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 19, 297–311.

Source: Bharanitharan, K., Chen, Z. X., Bahmannia, S., & Lowe, K. B. (2019). Is leader humility a friend or foe, or both? An attachment theory lens on leader humility and its contradictory outcomes. *Journal of Business ethics*, 160(3), 729-743.