

Supervisor Machiavellianism and Employee Quiet Quitting: The Mediating Role of Psychological Contract Breach and the Moderating Role of Perceived Social Support

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to investigate the influence of supervisor Machiavellianism on employee quiet quitting through the mediating role of psychological contract breach and the moderating role of perceived social support among employees of Multan Electric Power Company (MEPCO), Pakistan. A quantitative research approach with a cross-sectional survey design was adopted to examine the proposed relationships among the study variables. Data were collected from 200 employees through a stratified random sampling technique. Standardized and validated research instruments were used to measure supervisor Machiavellianism, psychological contract breach, perceived social support and employee quiet quitting. Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27 and SmartPLS software. The findings of the study were revealed that supervisor Machiavellianism significantly predicted psychological contract breach ($\beta = 0.53$, $p = 0.000$), while psychological contract breach significantly influenced employee quiet quitting behavior ($\beta = 0.49$, $p = 0.000$). Perceived social support was shown a significant negative relationship with employee quiet quitting ($\beta = -0.25$, $p = 0.000$). The moderation findings were further indicated that perceived social support weakened the positive relationship between psychological contract breach and employee quiet quitting ($\beta = -0.13$, $p = 0.002$). The mediation analysis was confirmed that psychological contract breach significantly mediated the relationship between supervisor Machiavellianism and employee quiet quitting (Effect = 0.26, CI = 0.17–0.37). The structural model assessment was shown satisfactory model fitness with R^2 values of 0.31 for psychological contract breach and 0.55 for employee quiet quitting. The study was concluded that manipulative supervisory behaviors indirectly promoted employee disengagement through breach perceptions, whereas strong social support

reduced employees' withdrawal tendencies and protected them from quiet quitting behaviors.

Keywords: Conservation Of Resources Theory, Employee Quiet Quitting, Perceived Social Support, Psychological Contract Breach, Supervisor Machiavellianism

Introduction

Employee disengagement has become a major concern for organizations in contemporary workplaces because employees increasingly demonstrate reduced emotional attachment and commitment to their jobs (Breevaart & Zacher, 2023). Corporates have to deal with an increase in work stress, manifestation of toxic leaders, emotional depletion and psychological withdrawal of employees. Quiet quitting has become a recognizable tactic of disengagement, where in employees limit their efforts to assigned tasks only and avoid extra responsibilities and organizational citizenship behaviors (Galanis et al., 2023). Manipulative leaders and unhealthy work environments are major reasons of employee dissatisfaction and disengagement (Federici et al., 2022). Employees subjected to toxic leadership report symptoms of emotional exhaustion, lack of driving force and loss of organizational trust (Khan et al., 2024). These factors make conditions ripe for quiet quitting and therefore create the need for studying toxic leadership, psychological contract breach, perceived social support and quiet quitting in organizations (Pindek et al., 2023). Machiavellianism is a term for a personality trait that is quite dark and as such it includes a person who is manipulative, emotionally detached, self-serving and who sees subordinates as merely means of fulfilling his/her own gains (Dahling et al., 2009). Machiavellian supervisors are known to resort to a variety of cunning strategies and political maneuvers to gain what they want at work (Jones & Paulhus, 2014). Machiavellian supervisors are according to their nature unethical and power-hungry and not concerned about the welfare of employees (Greenbaum et al., 2017).

The employees who were caught in the web of such supervisors have complained of lack of trust, high stress and dissatisfaction with their work (Oh & Farh, 2017). They have been implicated also as a cause of employee withdrawal behaviors, abusive supervision and other associated dis-function symptoms related to the workplace (Peng et al., 2022). Manipulative supervisors, it has been suggested through past researches, turn into workplaces where employees' psychological state and organizational commitment is affected in a negative manner through their actions (Kessler et al., 2010). Employee quiet quitting is a psychological withdrawal behavior in which employees perform only the minimum required job responsibilities without showing extra effort or engagement (Klotz & Bolino, 2022). The idea has really been getting a lot of attention across the globe since the COVID-19 pandemic because workers have been giving more priority to their work-life balance and emotional well-being (Pindek et al., 2023). Quiet quitting is not really leaving one's work; instead, it's about employees emotionally detaching themselves from the company's goals and work (Galanis et al., 2023). People who go through burnout, are treated unfairly and get emotionally exhausted usually turn to quiet quitting as a way to cope (Moisoglou

et al., 2024). Further studies have also shown that poisonous leaders and the absence of recognition by the organization are main factors that drive employees to quiet-quitting (Borys et al., 2024). Companies look at quiet quitting as a major problem since it lowers not only productivity but also innovation, teamwork and overall effectiveness of the organization (Breevaart & Zacher, 2023).

A psychological contract breach refers to employees' perception that organizations have failed to fulfill promised obligations and mutual expectations. Psychological contract is referred to as an unwritten pact usually centered on trust, fairness, support and reciprocal responsibilities between employees and organizations. Workers who suspect that the organization has not kept its promises feel let down, frustrated and emotionally disturbed (Zhao et al., 2007). Studies have revealed that violations of psychological contracts lead to lower employee trust, satisfaction with the job and commitment to the organization (Robbins et al., 2022). Employees who think that they have been breached are less engaged and more likely to quit and behave irresponsibly at work (Jiang et al., 2023). Take advantage of manipulative and unethical supervisory conduct are common reasons highlighted as most contributors to psychological contract violations in organizations (Kiazad et al., 2014). Perceived social support is referring to someone's confidence that during tough times they are emotionally, informationally and practically helped by family members, workmates, supervisors and friends (Zimet et al., 1988). Social support is viewed as one of the key psychological resources that can help mitigate work-related stress and emotional exhaustion (Ng & Sorensen, 2021). Social support which is a resource preserved among two or more individuals is a cushion or shield that counteracts the loss spiral of stress, that is, the depletion of one's resources (Hobfoll, 2011). People who receive ample social support have been associated with increased resilience, emotional well-being and organizational commitment (Halbesleben et al., 2014). It has been shown that strong and supportive workplace relationships protect employees from the damaging effects of toxic leadership and psychological stress (Choi et al., 2023). In collectivist societies like Pakistan, social support networks assume a very prominent and important role especially in helping employees to cope with workplace disengagement and emotional withdrawal (Kim et al., 2016).

Toxic leadership has emerged as a significant organizational issue because destructive leadership behaviors harm employee morale, trust and productivity (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2017). Toxic leaders are usually very manipulative and authoritarian. They can also be abusive and unethical in their treatment of employees (Federici et al., 2022). Employees working under toxic bosses most of the time feel burnt out, are anxious, have emotional exhaustion and changes in their satisfaction levels that are not good (Knoll et al., 2019). Studies have shown that when leadership is toxic, it lessens the psychological connection of employees to their organizations and leads to more disengagement behaviors (Mackey et al., 2021). Such leader behaviors also decrease employees' desire to engage in teamwork, innovation and organizational citizenship activities (Hansen et al., 2020). Toxic leadership is very much linked to employee quiet quitting and withdrawal from the workplace behavior in the modern organizations (Soelton et al., 2024). Workplace relationships in the public sector are

very influential in determining employee satisfaction, collaboration and performance of the organization (Abbas & Raja, 2021). Public sector workplaces usually run on bureaucratic systems that are very rigid and there are hierarchical leadership structures. Employees in such environments are often subject to communication barriers, limited participation and top-down management practices (Jawahar et al., 2018). Studies have found that negative supervisory relationships decrease employee trust, morale and engagement at the workplace (Yang et al., 2019). This is why support in personal relationships is the main key to keeping employee motivation high and work-related stress low (Ng & Sorensen, 2021). The workplace that are positive also lead to commitment to the organization and reduced withdrawal from the employees among public sector institutions (Choi et al., 2023).

Quiet quitting has become one of the most discussed workplace phenomena in modern organizations because of rising concerns regarding employee disengagement and burnout (Klotz & Bolino, 2022). The pandemic brought about rapid changes in work environments have led employees to prioritize their mental health, personal well-being and work-life balance (Pijper & Lub, 2024). Most employees have become less active in organizational activities simply because they no longer felt that fairness, appreciation or emotional support were elements of the employer-employee relationship (Pindek et al., 2023). Literature gives great attention to burnout, toxic leadership and psychological contract violation as main factors leading to quiet quitting behavior (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). When employees are emotionally drained, they tend to protect their remaining resources by decreasing not only their work engagement but also their extra-role behavior (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Organizations are increasingly seeing quiet quitting as a major threat to their productivity, innovation, teamwork and ability to sustain themselves in the long run (Borys et al., 2024).

Aims and Objectives

Employee quiet quitting has emerged as a serious organizational issue in which employees gradually reduce their emotional involvement and work engagement. Working under a manipulative supervisor often leads to employees feeling let down in their psychological contracts and emotionally drained. A Machiavellian leader, a kind of leader who is manipulative and insincere is a type of abusive and harmful behavior that not only decreases employee trust but also their motivation and relationships at work. Leadership styles and employee disengagement have been studied separately, however, there still are some areas unexplored, such as how psychological contract breaches together with perceived social support may lead to quiet quitting behavior. This paper tried to find out how a supervisor Machiavellian character may lead, via psychological contract breaches, to employee's quiet quitting and how perceived social support can minimize these negative impacts. The objectives of the study were: To examine how supervisor Machiavellianism leads to employee quiet quitting, both directly and indirectly, through a psychological contract breach.

To investigate the means by which perceived social support shows its influence on the association between psychological contract breach and employee quiet quitting.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation of this study was developed to explain the relationships among supervisor Machiavellianism, psychological contract breach, perceived social support and employee quiet quitting. This research primarily used Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory to explain employees' reactions in toxic work environment situations (Hobfoll et al., 2018). COR Theory is based on the idea that people will strive to gain, keep and defend their valuable psychological and emotional resources in stressful circumstances (Hobfoll, 1989). According to the theory, stress is the result of employees losing or facing the loss of their resources such as trust, emotional energy and workplace support (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Toxic leadership behaviors represent severe work stressors in that manipulative supervisors constantly take employees' emotional and relational resources (Federici et al., 2022). Under Machiavellian supervisory styles, employees are likely to face burnout, psychological insecurity and emotional exhaustion (Peng et al., 2022). Quiet quitting was explained as one of the ways employees, as victims, tried to preserve their remaining psychological resources (Breevaart & Zacher, 2023). In addition, COR Theory states that receiving perceived social support would lessen the negative impact of stress at work and shield employees from disengagement behaviors (Ng & Sorensen, 2021).

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the study developed based on conservation of resources theory. The framework explicates that supervisor Machiavellianism positively predict psychological contract breach and employee quiet quitting to a large extent. Psychological contract breach was considered a mediating variable that elucidated how toxic supervisory behavior led to employee disengagement. Perceived social support served as a moderating variable that dulled the cold hand of psychological contract breach on quiet quitting. Hence, the framework accounts for the direct routes and the detours through which the variables under scrutiny link to one another within an organizational setting.

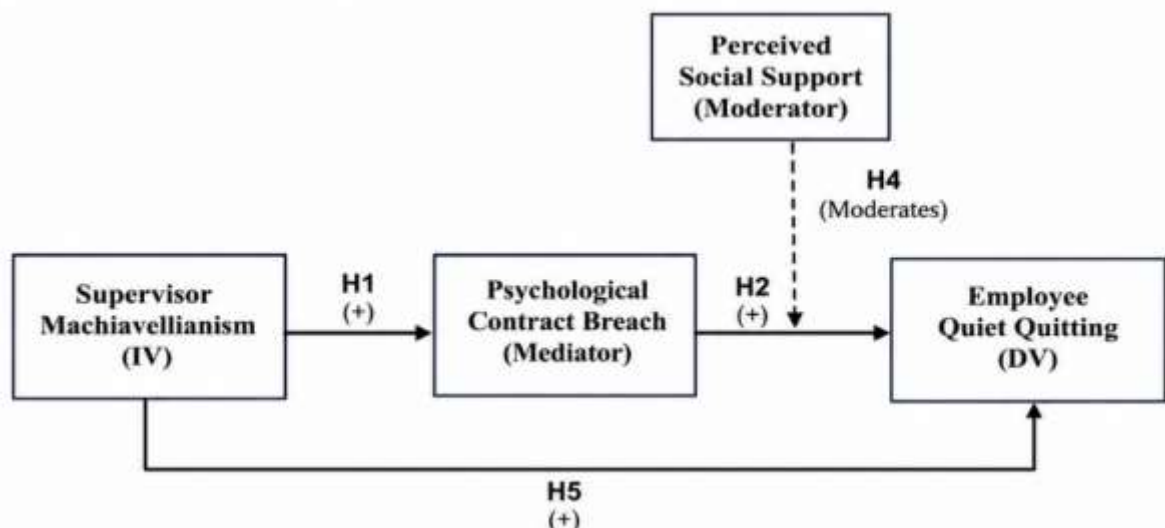


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Hypotheses of the Study

H1: There would be a significant positive relationship between supervisor Machiavellianism and psychological contract breach among employees.

H2: There would be a significant positive relationship between psychological contract breach and quiet quitting among employees.

H3: Psychological contract breach would significantly mediate the relationship between supervisor Machiavellianism and quiet quitting among employees.

H4: Perceived social support would significantly moderate the relationship between psychological contract breach and quiet quitting by buffering its negative effects among employees.

H5: There would be a significant direct relationship between supervisor Machiavellianism and quiet quitting among employees.

Methods

This study investigated the relationships among supervisor Machiavellianism, psychological contract breach, perceived social support and employee quiet quitting. The research design, population, sampling technique, research instruments, data collection procedures and data analysis methods adopted in the study are described.

Research Design

The current study adopted a quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional survey research design to examine the relationships among supervisor Machiavellianism, psychological contract breach, perceived social support and employee quiet quitting. The quantitative approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect numerical data and statistically analyze the relationships among the study variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The cross-sectional design allowed data to be collected from respondents at a single point in time to examine employees' perceptions and workplace experiences efficiently (Saunders et al., 2019). The survey method was used because it is effective for gathering responses from a large number of participants through standardized questionnaires.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study was used stratified random sampling technique to select respondents from different departments of Multan Electric Power Company (MEPCO), Pakistan. This technique was considered suitable because the employees belonged to various operational and administrative sections of the organization. The population was first divided into different strata based on departments and job positions to ensure proper representation of employees. After stratification, respondents were randomly selected from each category to reduce sampling bias and improve the accuracy of the findings. Initially, questionnaires were distributed among 300 employees; however, incomplete and invalid responses were excluded from the final analysis. A final sample size of

200 employees was retained for statistical analysis, which was considered sufficient for mediation and moderation analyses using SPSS and PROCESS macro techniques.

Research Instruments

This study utilized standardized and previously validated research instruments to measure supervisor Machiavellianism, psychological contract breach, perceived social support and employee quiet quitting. All instruments were adopted from previous studies to ensure the reliability and validity of the collected data. The questionnaire comprised a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Cronbach's alpha values for all scales indicated satisfactory internal consistency and reliability.

Supervisor Machiavellianism Scale

Supervisor Machiavellianism was measured using the scale developed by Dahling, Whitaker and Levy (2009). The instrument consisted of 16 items designed to assess manipulative and self-centered supervisory behaviors in organizations. The scale has been widely used in organizational and leadership studies to examine toxic supervisory traits. The reported Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was 0.92, indicating excellent reliability.

Psychological Contract Breach Scale

Psychological contract breach was measured using the scale developed by Kickul, Neuman, Parker and Finkl (2001). The instrument consisted of five items focusing on employees' perceptions regarding unfulfilled organizational promises and obligations. The scale has been frequently used in workplace behavior and organizational commitment studies. The reported Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was 0.89, showing strong internal consistency.

Perceived Social Support Scale

Perceived social support was assessed using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). The instrument contained 12 items measuring emotional and practical support received from family, friends and significant others. The scale has been extensively applied in psychological and organizational research studies. The reported Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was 0.91, reflecting excellent reliability.

Quiet Quitting Scale

Employee quiet quitting was measured using the Quiet Quitting Scale developed by Galanis, Vakka, Sourtzi and Kamposioras (2023). The instrument consisted of five items designed to evaluate employees' withdrawal behaviors and reduced workplace engagement. The scale has recently gained importance in organizational behavior research because of the increasing discussion regarding employee disengagement. The reported Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was 0.84, indicating good reliability.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27.0 and SmartPLS software in order to examine the relationships among the study variables and test the proposed hypotheses. Different descriptive statistics like mean scores, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages were initially used to describe the demographic characteristics as well as the responses of the participants. To check the reliability of the research instruments, Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability internal consistency measures were used. Pearson correlation coefficient was used for the correlation analysis; through this method, correlations among supervisor Machiavellianism, psychological contract breach, perceived social support and employee quiet quitting were identified in terms of direction and strength. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique was used to test both direct and indirect relationships between latent constructs existing in the conceptual framework. Mediation analysis was used to test if psychological contract breach acted as a mediator in the relation between supervisor Machiavellianism and employee quiet quitting. Moderation analysis was also done to see if perceived social support was a moderating factor to the relation between psychological contract breach and quiet quitting behavior. The SmartPLS technique was employed to test the measurement and structural model, path coefficients, convergent validity, discriminant validity and to carry out bootstrapping for hypothesis testing.

Statistical Check – Harman's Single-Factor Test

Harman's test, which focuses on a single factor, was conducted to evaluate the level of common method variance. An unrotated exploratory factor analysis (EFA) showed that the initial factor explained 34.2% of the overall variance. This figure falls short of the 50% benchmark proposed by Podsakoff et al. (2003). As a result, it suggests that common method bias probably does not pose a significant issue in this research.

Table 1: Harman's Single-Factor Test

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	12.45	34.2	34.2
2	3.78	10.4	44.6
3	2.91	8.0	52.6
4	2.34	6.4	59.0
5	1.89	5.2	64.2

Results

The statistical analysis and findings of the current study regarding supervisor Machiavellianism, psychological contract breach, perceived social support and employee quiet quitting. The collected data has been analyzed through IBM SPSS Statistics and SmartPLS software to examine the proposed hypotheses and relationships among the study variables.

Table 2: Demographic Information of Respondents

Demographic Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	136	68
	Female	64	32
Age	Below 30 Years	52	26
	31–40 Years	88	44
	Above 40 Years	60	30
Organizational Tenure	Less than 5 Years	44	22
	5–15 Years	90	45
	More than 15 Years	66	33
Job Position	Non-Supervisory	130	65
	First-Line Supervisor	50	25
	Middle Management	20	10

The demographic findings revealed that the majority of respondents were male employees, representing 68% of the total sample, while female employees constituted 32% of the respondents. Most participants belonged to the age group of 31–40 years (44%), followed by employees above 40 years (30%) and below 30 years (26%). Regarding organizational tenure, the highest proportion of employees had 5–15 years of working experience (45%), whereas 33% had more than 15 years of experience and 22% had less than 5 years of service. The findings further showed that most respondents were working in non-supervisory positions (65%), while 25% were first-line supervisors and 10% belonged to middle management positions.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Supervisor Machiavellianism	3.72	0.84
Psychological Contract Breach	3.88	0.71
Perceived Social Support	4.05	0.66
Employee Quiet Quitting	3.35	0.79

The descriptive statistics shows that perceived social support had the highest mean score ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.66$), indicating that employees generally perceived strong social support within their workplace and social environment. Psychological contract breach was also found to have a relatively high mean value ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.71$), implying that the employees to some extent experienced breach of organizational commitments and expectations. Supervisor Machiavellianism attained a mean score of 3.72 ($SD = 0.84$) representing that there was a considerable level of manipulative supervisory behavior in the organization. Employee quiet quitting attained an average mean score ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.79$) reflecting that workers exhibited average levels of disengagement and withdrawal behavior at work.

Table 4: Reliability Analysis

Constructs	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Supervisor Machiavellianism	16	0.92	0.93
Psychological Contract Breach	5	0.89	0.90
Perceived Social Support	12	0.91	0.92
Employee Quiet Quitting	5	0.84	0.85

The reliability analysis reveals that all constructs possessed strong internal consistency and acceptable reliability values. Supervisor Machiavellianism recorded the greatest Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.92 and composite reliability value of 0.93 respectively, leading to an outstanding level of measurement scale reliability. Perceived social support also came up with powerful validity as evidenced by its Cronbach's Alpha surpassing 0.91 and composite reliability value being equal to 0.92. Psychological contract breach and employee quiet quitting are also on hand with satisfactory alpha reliability scores exceeding the 0.70 level of recommendation, thereby indicating that the measurement scales were dependable enough for data analysis and hypothesis testing.

Table 5: Convergent Validity

Constructs	Factor Loading Range	AVE	CR
Supervisor Machiavellianism	0.71–0.86	0.58	0.93
Psychological Contract Breach	0.68–0.83	0.52	0.90
Perceived Social Support	0.81–0.90	0.62	0.92
Employee Quiet Quitting	0.72–0.82	0.50	0.85

The convergent validity results indicated that all constructs met the acceptable criteria for validity assessment. Factor loadings of the variables were in the range of 0.60 or higher for all the variables, thus verifying that the measures were good representations of the respective constructs. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were between 0.50 and 0.62, indicating sufficient convergent validity since these were above the minimum value of 0.50. Furthermore, the Composite Reliability figures of all constructs surpassed 0.80, which is another indication that the measurement model was valid in terms of construct and had a high degree of internal consistency.

Table 6: Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Constructs	SM	PCB	PSS	EQQ
Supervisor Machiavellianism (SM)	0.76			
Psychological Contract Breach (PCB)	0.56	0.72		
Perceived Social Support (PSS)	0.42	0.51	0.79	
Employee Quiet Quitting (EQQ)	0.51	0.65	0.57	0.71

The discriminant validity findings demonstrated that all constructs were empirically distinct from one another. The Fornell-Larcker Criterion states that the square root of average variance extracted (AVE) should be more than the correlation between a pair

of constructs. As shown in Table 3, supervisor Machiavellianism had a square root AVE of 0.76, which was more than its correlations with psychological contract breach, perceived social support and employee quiet quitting. In the same way, psychological contract breach, perceived social support and employee quiet quitting each met the conditions of the discriminant validity and thus, it was confirmed that every single construct represented an independent idea in the research model.

Table 7: Measurement Model Assessment

Constructs	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE	Remarks
Supervisor Machiavellianism	0.71–0.86	0.92	0.93	0.58	Accepted
Psychological Contract Breach	0.68–0.83	0.89	0.90	0.52	Accepted
Perceived Social Support	0.81–0.90	0.91	0.92	0.62	Accepted
Employee Quiet Quitting	0.72–0.82	0.84	0.85	0.50	Accepted

The measurement model assessment findings revealed that all constructs met the acceptable criteria for reliability and validity. Factor loadings for all indicators were between 0.68 and 0.90 all of them meeting or exceeding the recommended minimum value of 0.60 which is considered as very good indicator reliability. Cronbach's Alpha Values and Composite Reliability (CR) Values for all constructs were greater than 0.70 which is in line with the concept of the scales having a very good internal consistency. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were higher than the minimum threshold value of 0.50 showing good convergent validity. The measurement model was considered suitable for further structural model and hypothesis testing analysis.

Table 8: Structural Model Assessment

Paths	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
SM \rightarrow PCB	0.53	8.12	0.000	Significant
PCB \rightarrow EQQ	0.49	7.65	0.000	Significant
PSS \rightarrow EQQ	-0.25	4.18	0.000	Significant
PCB \times PSS \rightarrow EQQ	-0.13	3.04	0.002	Significant
SM \rightarrow EQQ	0.08	1.22	0.225	Not Significant

The structural model assessment findings demonstrated that supervisor Machiavellianism had a significant positive effect on psychological contract breach ($\beta = 0.53$, $p = 0.000$). Psychological contract breach was another factor that significantly contributed to employee quiet quitting ($\beta = 0.49$, $p = 0.000$). It means that employees whose contract breach perceptions were high displayed higher disengagement behaviors. Perceived social support had a significant negative impact on employee quiet quitting ($\beta = -0.25$, $p = 0.000$). It means that social support helped reduce the withdrawal tendencies of employees. Also, the moderating role of social support was confirmed through a significant interaction effect of psychological contract breach

and perceived social support ($\beta = -0.13, p = 0.002$). Meanwhile, a direct link between supervisor Machiavellianism and employee quiet quitting was not established ($\beta = 0.08, p = 0.225$).

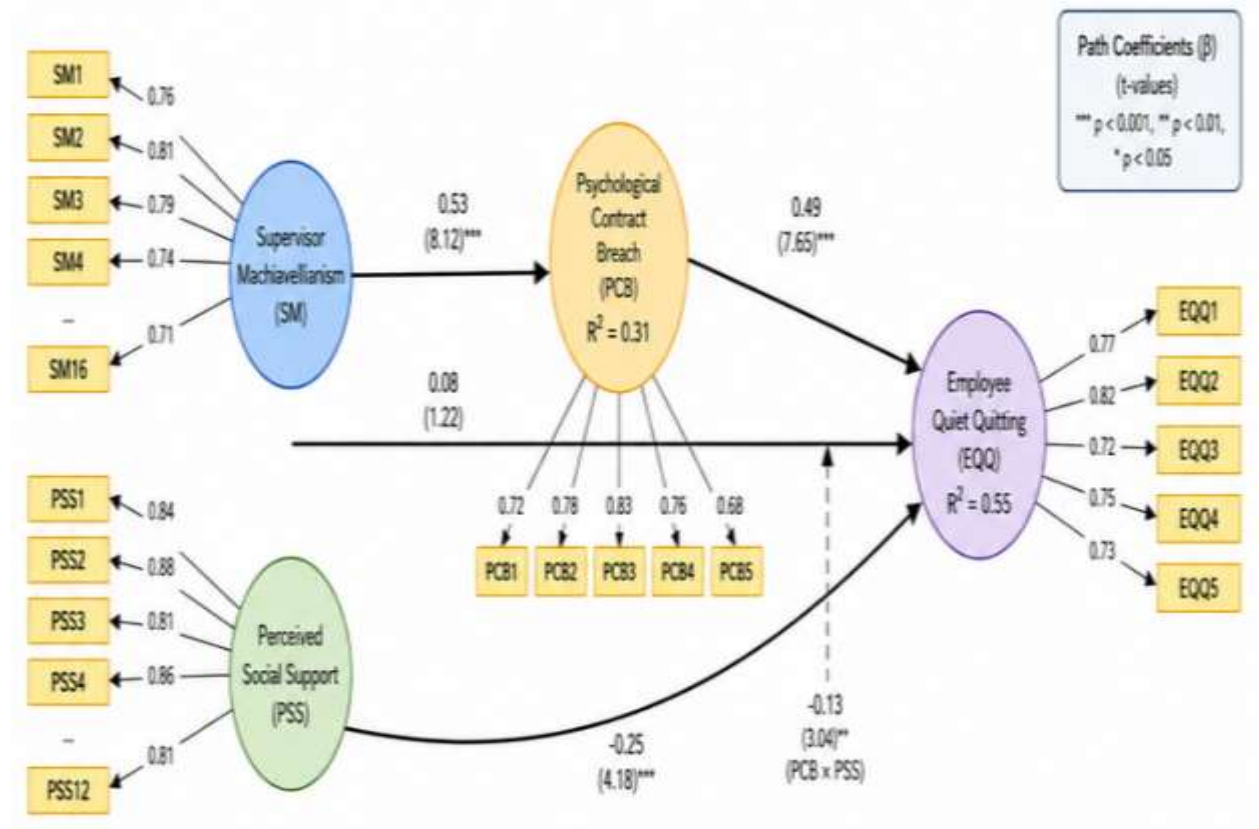


Figure 2. Path Structure Equations Modeling

Table 9: Model Fitness Assessment

Model Fitness Indicators	Values	Threshold	Remarks
R ² for PCB	0.31	> 0.25	Moderate
R ² for EQQ	0.55	> 0.50	Strong
SRMR	0.061	< 0.08	Good Fit
NFI	0.91	> 0.90	Acceptable
Q ² Predictive Relevance	0.37	> 0	Established

The model fitness assessment findings indicated that the structural model possessed satisfactory predictive power and overall model fit. The R² value for psychological contract breach (0.31) demonstrated moderate explanatory power, while the R² value for employee quiet quitting (0.55) indicated strong predictive capability of the model. The SRMR value of 0.061 was below the recommended threshold of 0.08, confirming good model fit, whereas the NFI value of 0.91 further demonstrated acceptable model adequacy. Additionally, the Q² predictive relevance value of 0.37 established that the model had satisfactory predictive relevance for the endogenous constructs.

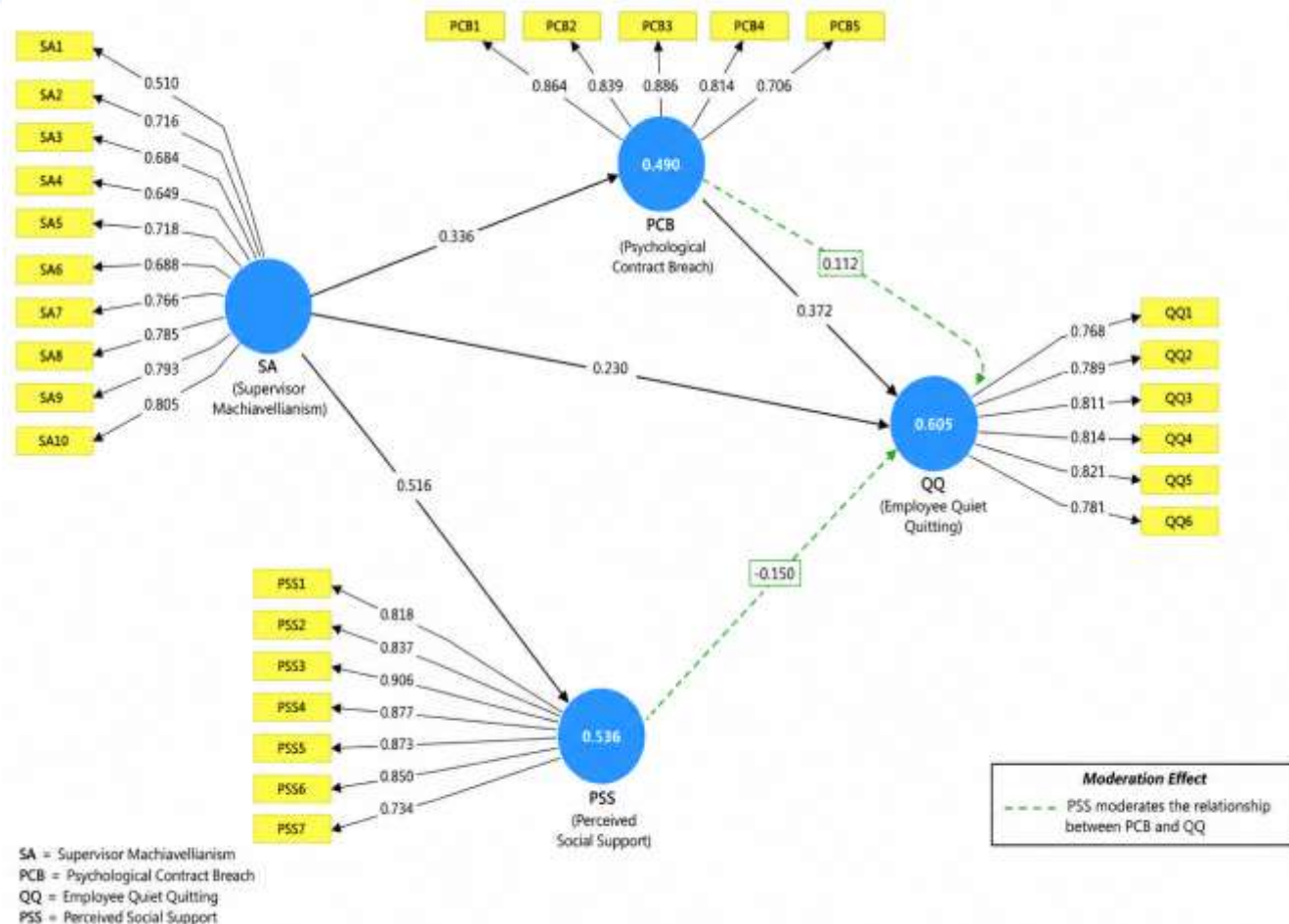


Figure 3. Measurement Model

Table 10: Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Relationship	β	p-value	Decision
H1	SM → PCB	0.53	0.000	Supported
H2	PCB → EQQ	0.49	0.000	Supported
H3	SM → PCB → EQQ	0.26	0.000	Supported
H4	PCB × PSS → EQQ	-0.13	0.002	Supported
H5	SM → EQQ	0.08	0.225	Not Supported

The hypothesis testing results revealed that H1 was supported because supervisor Machiavellianism significantly predicted psychological contract breach ($\beta = 0.53, p = 0.000$). Psychological contract breach turned out to be a key factor in determining employee silent quitting, which is why H2 was supported. The mediation prediction (H3) was confirmed as psychological contract breach played a significant role in explaining how supervisor Machiavellianism leads to employee quiet quitting. H4 also passed the test because perceived social support was effective in modifying the effect of psychological contract breach on employee quiet quitting. On the other hand,

H5 was rejected as the direct effect of supervisor Machiavellianism on employee quiet quitting still failed to reach statistical significance.

Table 11: Direct Effects

Direct Paths	B	β	p-value
SM → PCB	0.48	0.53	0.000
PCB → EQQ	0.54	0.49	0.000
PSS → EQQ	-0.29	-0.25	0.000
SM → EQQ	0.09	0.08	0.225

The direct effects findings revealed that supervisor Machiavellianism had a significant positive effect on psychological contract breach ($B = 0.48$, $\beta = 0.53$, $p = 0.000$). The research revealed that a violation of psychological contract was also strongly associated with an increase in the employees' quiet quitting behavior ($B = 0.54$, $\beta = 0.49$, $p = 0.000$). On the contrary, the effect of perceived social support on quiet quitting was negatively significant ($B = -0.29$, $\beta = -0.25$, $p = 0.000$), hinting that a feeling of being supported by others can prevent employee withdrawal from work. Still, the direct influence of supervisor's Machiavellian traits on employee's quiet quitting was insignificant statistically ($B = 0.09$, $\beta = 0.08$, $p = 0.225$).

Table 12: Indirect Effects

Indirect Relationship Effect	Boot SE	95% Confidence Interval
SM → PCB → EQQ	0.26	[0.17, 0.37]

The indirect effects findings demonstrated that supervisor Machiavellianism significantly influenced employee quiet quitting through psychological contract breach. The indirect effect value of 0.26 indicated that manipulative supervisory behavior increased disengagement behaviors indirectly through breach perceptions. The bootstrap confidence interval [0.17, 0.37] did not include zero, confirming the significance of the indirect effect. These findings suggested that psychological contract breach played an important role in transmitting the influence of toxic leadership on employee quiet quitting behavior.

Table 13: Mediation Analysis

Mediating Relationship	Effect	Lower CI	Upper CI	Decision
SM → PCB → EQQ	0.26	0.17	0.37	Mediation Supported

The mediation analysis findings confirmed that psychological contract breach significantly mediated the relationship between supervisor Machiavellianism and employee quiet quitting. The mediation effect value was found significant (Effect = 0.26) with lower and upper confidence interval values ranging from 0.17 to 0.37. Since the confidence interval did not contain zero, the mediation relationship was statistically supported. The findings indicated that employees experiencing manipulative supervisory behaviors developed perceptions of organizational breach, which subsequently increased their quiet quitting tendencies.

Table 14: Moderation Analysis

Interaction Effect	B	β	p-value	Decision
PCB \times PSS \rightarrow EQQ	-0.15	-0.13	0.002	Moderation Supported

The moderation analysis findings revealed that perceived social support significantly moderated the relationship between psychological contract breach and employee quiet quitting ($B = -0.15$, $\beta = -0.13$, $p = 0.002$). The negative interaction effect indicated that higher levels of perceived social support weakened the positive relationship between breach perceptions and quiet quitting behavior. These findings suggested that employees having strong emotional and interpersonal support were less likely to disengage from work despite experiencing workplace stress and breach perceptions. Therefore, perceived social support had acted as a protective factor against employee withdrawal behaviors.

Table 15: Conditional Indirect Effects

Perceived Social Support Levels	Effect	Boot SE	95% Confidence Interval
Low Social Support (-1 SD)	0.31	0.06	[0.20, 0.44]
Mean Social Support	0.26	0.05	[0.17, 0.37]
High Social Support (+1 SD)	0.21	0.04	[0.13, 0.30]

The conditional indirect effects findings demonstrated that the indirect relationship between supervisor Machiavellianism and employee quiet quitting varied across different levels of perceived social support. The indirect effect was found strongest at low social support levels (Effect = 0.31) and weakest at high social support levels (Effect = 0.21). The confidence intervals at all levels did not include zero, confirming the significance of the conditional indirect effects. These findings indicated that employees having lower social support experienced stronger disengagement and withdrawal behaviors in response to psychological contract breach compared to employees receiving higher levels of social support.

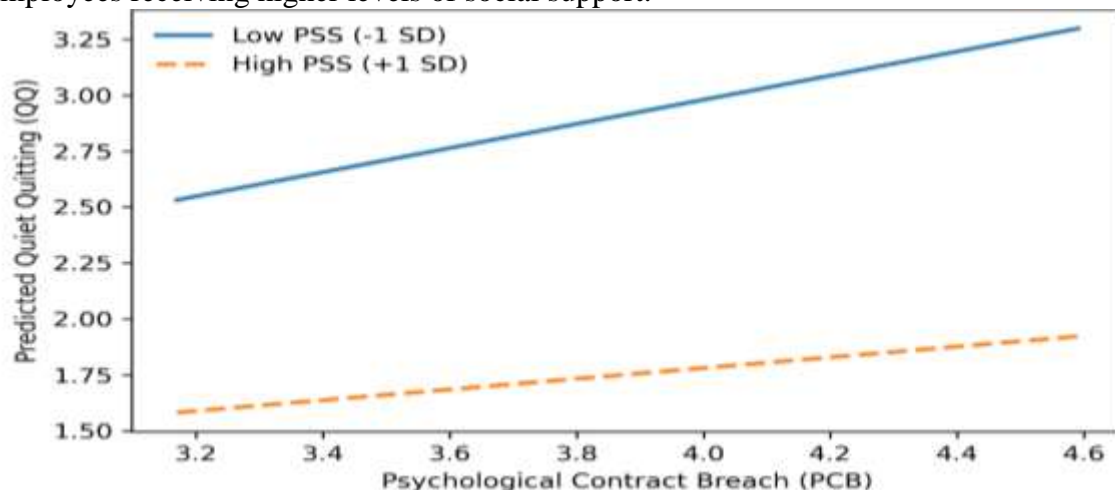


Figure 4. Simple Slope Plot

The analysis of simple slopes (Figure 2) showed that when perceived social support was low (-1 SD; $B = 0.54$), there was a strong positive link between a breach of the psychological contract and quiet quitting. In contrast, this relationship was weakened when perceived social support was high (+1 SD; $B = 0.24$). Figure 2 pointed out that employees with low social support showed a rise in quiet quitting as breaches in the psychological contract deteriorated, indicating that perceived social support had a protective effect.

Test of Direct Effect (Supplementary)

No significant relationship was observed between supervisor Machiavellianism and quiet quitting after accounting for the mediator and moderator ($B = 0.09$, $\beta = .08$, $p > .05$).

Table 16: Summary of Hypothesis Support

Hypothesis	Statement	Supported
H1	Supervisor Machiavellianism → Psychological Contract Breach	Yes
H2	Psychological Contract Breach → Quiet Quitting	Yes
H3	PCB mediates Machiavellianism → Quiet Quitting	Yes
H4	PSS moderates PCB → Quiet Quitting (buffering)	Yes
H5	Machiavellianism → Quiet Quitting (direct)	No

The results support a mediated moderation model, positioning with conservation of resources theory. Whenever supervisors exhibited Machiavellian traits, they served as a constant source of stress, resulting in a breach of the psychological contract. Consequently, this breach led to quiet quitting. Although the observed detrimental indirect effect was remarkably less intense for employees who felt they had strong social support,

Discussion

The current study was been conducted to examine the relationship between supervisor Machiavellianism and employee quiet quitting through the mediating role of psychological contract breach and the moderating role of perceived social support. The findings of the study strongly support the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, which explains that employees attempt to conserve their remaining emotional and psychological resources whenever they experience stressful workplace conditions and toxic leadership behaviors. The findings reveal that supervisor Machiavellianism significantly increases psychological contract breach and indirectly contributes to employee quiet quitting. The study also highlights that perceived social support reduces the harmful influence of psychological contract breach on quiet quitting behavior.

The first hypothesis of the study stated that supervisor Machiavellianism was positively related to psychological contract breach. The results showed that this was

true as the data revealed a strong positive link between supervisor Machiavellianism and psychological contract breach ($B = 0.48$, $\beta = .53$, $p < .01$). So, these results suggested that employees who had a manipulative and self-centered supervisor perceived a greater breach of organizational promises and expectations. Supervisors with a Machiavellian personality were perceived as dishonest, cold and exploitative, which led to a decrease in employees' trust and psychological connection to the organization. These results were in line with those of earlier studies that found that toxic supervisory behaviors greatly reduced employees' perceptions of fairness, organizational support and mutual obligations (Kiazad et al., 2014; Greenbaum et al., 2017). The authors of those studies also pointed out that manipulative supervisors were the ones who create fear, mistrust and emotional insecurity in the workplace. This is what causes employees to perceive breaches of psychological contracts (Peng et al., 2022). The results were also consistent with the COR theory as Machiavellian leadership behaviors were seen as stressors, which in turn, drained the emotional and relational resources of employees. Employees subjected to such toxic leadership felt a sense of betrayal by the organization and a lack of support by the management.

The second hypothesis proposed that psychological contract breach was positively related to employee quiet quitting. The findings strongly support this hypothesis because a psychological contract breach significantly predicts employee quiet quitting ($B = 0.54$, $\beta = .49$, $p < .01$). These results demonstrate that employees who believe that organizational promises and expectations are violated become emotionally detached from work and limit their involvement in organizational activities. Employees experiencing breach perceptions often reduce their extra-role behaviors and focus only on minimum job responsibilities. These findings are supported by previous studies, which explain that a psychological contract breach reduces employee engagement, organizational commitment and job satisfaction while increasing withdrawal behaviors (Robbins et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2023). Earlier researchers also argued that employees respond negatively when they perceive an imbalance in reciprocal workplace relationships, resulting in disengagement and psychological withdrawal (Zhao et al., 2007). The findings are further aligned with COR theory because employees experiencing resource loss through breach perceptions attempt to conserve their remaining emotional resources by reducing organizational involvement. Quiet quitting emerges as a defensive coping mechanism against emotional exhaustion and workplace stress.

The third hypothesis examined the mediating role of psychological contract breach in the relationship between supervisor Machiavellianism and employee quiet quitting. The findings confirmed a significant indirect effect (Effect = 0.26, 95% CI [0.17, 0.37]), indicating that psychological contract breach mediated the relationship between toxic supervisory behavior and employee disengagement. These findings suggest that Machiavellian supervisors indirectly influenced quiet quitting behavior through employees' perceptions of broken promises, unfair treatment and organizational betrayal. Employees exposed to manipulative leadership behaviors developed feelings of disappointment, mistrust and emotional frustration, which subsequently increased withdrawal tendencies and disengagement. These findings

were supported by previous studies that identified psychological contract breach as an important mediator between toxic leadership and negative workplace outcomes (Sutton et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2024). Earlier research also demonstrated that harmful supervisory practices disrupted reciprocal workplace relationships and weakened employees' psychological attachment to organizations (Dulac et al., 2008). Therefore, the findings extended the literature by explaining the underlying psychological mechanism through which supervisor Machiavellianism contributed to employee quiet quitting. The mediation results also strengthened the applicability of COR theory because resource depletion caused by toxic leadership was translated into disengagement through a psychological contract breach.

The fourth hypothesis stated that perceived social support moderated the relationship between psychological contract breach and employee quiet quitting such that the relationship became weaker when perceived social support was high. The findings supported this hypothesis because the interaction effect between psychological contract breach and perceived social support was found to be significantly negative ($B = -0.15$, $\beta = -.13$, $p < .01$). The simple slope analysis revealed that the relationship between psychological contract breach and quiet quitting was stronger at low levels of social support and weaker at high levels of social support. Specifically, when social support was low, the relationship between breach and quiet quitting was stronger ($B = 0.54$), whereas the relationship was weakened when social support was high ($B = 0.24$). These findings indicated that emotional and interpersonal support from family members, coworkers and supervisors protected employees from severe disengagement despite experiencing workplace stressors and breach perceptions. The findings were consistent with previous studies, which explained that social support functioned as an important psychological resource that reduced stress, emotional exhaustion and workplace withdrawal behaviors (Ng & Sorensen, 2021; Choi et al., 2023). Previous researchers further emphasized that employees with supportive workplace relationships demonstrated greater resilience and emotional stability during stressful organizational conditions (Halbesleben et al., 2014). In collectivist cultures such as Pakistan, interpersonal relationships and social support networks play a particularly important role in reducing emotional distress and maintaining employee engagement. Therefore, the findings confirmed COR theory, which proposes that supportive resources buffer the harmful effects of resource loss and workplace stressors.

The fifth hypothesis examined the direct relationship between supervisor Machiavellianism and employee quiet quitting. The findings revealed a nonsignificant direct relationship after accounting for the mediating and moderating variables ($B = 0.09$, $\beta = .08$, $p > .05$). The results indicate that Machiavellian leadership is not a direct cause of employees' quiet quitting as it has been shown that the effect of supervisory Machiavellianism through employees' perceptions of breach and workplace support outweighs any direct one. These results revealed the significance of examining the psychological mechanisms that lead to employee disengagement rather than concentrating merely on leadership's direct effects. Corresponding to this, other researchers have found that emotionally toxic leadership behaviors have their largest impact on employee outcome changes through the psychological and

emotional processes which mediate them (Muhammad Ajmal et al., 2025; Sutton et al., 2023). Consequently, these results underline that psychological contract violation is the main medium through which manipulative supervisors cause employee disengagement and withdrawal behavior.

Results revealed that supervisor Machiavellianism was a critical factor of employee quiet quitting via psychological contract breach, with perceived social support attenuating those negative effects. It showed that underhanded leadership drained employees emotionally and disrupted the mutual workplace relationships, leading to disengagement and withdrawal behaviors. Nevertheless, adequate social support shielded employees from significant psychological withdrawal and emotional exhaustion. As such, this research makes a valuable theoretical and practical contribution to the understanding of toxic leadership, employee well-being and quiet quitting behavior in modern organizational contexts.

Implications of the Study

The findings of the current study have important theoretical and practical implications for organizational behavior, leadership studies and human resource management. Theoretically, the research work enlarged the scope of COR theory by showing the mechanism of supervisor Machiavellianism leading to employee quiet quitting via a psychological contract breach. It also showed how perceived social support could act as a buffer in decreasing employee disengagement and emotional withdrawal. In terms of implementation, results shed light on the necessity of ethical leadership, helping workplace relationships and open organizational practices for the reduction of toxic work behaviors and employee disengagement. Human resource managers & organizational leaders were given the task to come up with leadership training programs, counseling services and employee support systems geared to enhancing work well-being and organizational commitment. Besides, the research work gave very relevant hints to public sector organizations on the need of having good supervisory relationships and enabling a sense of psychological safety to the employees for sustaining high levels of productivity and effectiveness of the organization.

Limitations of the Study

The current study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. Firstly, a cross-sectional research design was utilized by the study that prevented the formation of causal relationships among the variables under study. Secondly, only the data from a single public sector organization, i.e. Multan Electric Power Company (MEPCO) was used in the study which has limited the extension of the findings to other organizational sectors and different cultural environments. Thirdly, the use of self-reported questionnaires has probably led to an increase in response bias and social desirability effects even though all efforts to control common method bias were made. Fourthly, psychological contract breach and perceived social support were used as the only mediator and moderator variables and many other psychological and organizational factors, for example, burnout, organizational justice,

emotional exhaustion and employee resilience, have been excluded from the model. Lastly, cultural and demographic variations among employees were not thoroughly investigated which might have affected workplace perceptions and disengagement behaviors.

Conclusion

The current study concludes that supervisor Machiavellianism significantly influences employee quiet quitting indirectly through a psychological contract breach. Employees under supervisors who are manipulative and only concerned with themselves work hard to trust them less, get emotionally tired and think that the organization has betrayed them. Employees are more likely to get disengaged and do withdrawal behaviors if these negative feelings are not managed properly. The study shows that employees who have perceived social support can be less likely to do quiet quitting even if they feel that their psychological contract with the organization has been broken. The study is well aligned with conservation of resources theory, as it shows employees prefer to save their remaining emotional and mental resources when they find themselves in toxic workplace environments and their resources have been depleted. To sum up, the research points out that toxic leadership behaviors lower employee well-being and engagement with the organization, whereas supportive workplace relationships help to minimize the detrimental effects of workplace stressors and keep employees from becoming severely disengaged.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions of the current study, the following recommendations are proposed to reduce employee quiet-quitting and improve workplace relationships in organizations:

Organizations should introduce ethical leadership training programs for supervisors to reduce manipulative and toxic leadership behaviors in the workplace.

Human resource departments should establish transparent communication systems and fair organizational policies to minimize employees' perceptions of psychological contract breach.

Employee counseling services, peer support programs and workplace wellness activities should be arranged to strengthen perceived social support and improve employees' psychological well-being.

Public sector organizations should promote supportive workplace relationships and teamwork to reduce emotional exhaustion and employee disengagement behaviors.

Organizations should implement regular employee feedback and performance evaluation systems to identify quiet-quitting tendencies and workplace dissatisfaction at an early stage.

Supervisors should be encouraged to maintain respectful, fair and supportive relationships with employees to improve trust, organizational commitment and work engagement.

Future researchers should conduct longitudinal and comparative studies across different organizational sectors to further examine the effects of toxic leadership and quiet-quitting behaviors in various workplace contexts.

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