

## Despotic Leadership and Employee Quiet Quitting: A Changing Global Economy

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### **Abstract**

*This paper reviewed literature on the relationship between despotic leadership and employee quiet quitting. The objectives of the paper were structured in line with assessing the relationship between despotic leadership dimensions such as authoritative behaviour and self-centeredness and outcomes of employee quiet quitting such as employee lacklustre performance and employee low engagement. The paper identified despotic leadership as tyrannical and as necessitating distrust and tension within the workplace, such that it impact negatively on the employee's behaviour. The paper also adopted the cognitive dissonance theory as its theoretical framework, utilizing the theory as a base for its argument on the implications of the breach between workers expectations and their realities in the work. The paper discovered that these attitudes affect the performance level of the organization in the global market which affects the economy. From the extant literature reviewed on the variables, It was concluded that despotic leadership creates conditions that weaken the morale of employees, lowers their engagement and further leads to their lacklustre performance in the organization. The paper therefore Recommends that organizations should engage leadership responsibilities to transformational and democratic person who will foster employee quite thriving instant of quitting to encourage rapidly changing economy globally, encourage participative leadership and the sharing of power in the workplace for healthier and more collaborative outcomes between leaders and their subordinates.*

**Keywords:** *Despotic leadership, employee quiet quitting, cognitive dissonance, organizational behaviour, global changing economy quite thriving.*

## INTRODUCTION

The nature of work, workplace and the perceptions individuals have about it is constantly changing (Saari & Judge, 2004). Granger (2022) argued that the perceptions of work and workplace in the 21<sup>st</sup> century differ substantially from those of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Granger (2022), such differences are linked to the changing expectations of work and the meaning attached to them. Given the dynamic nature of today's workplace (diversity, equality, inclusion, labour participation and population demography), the development in information technology, and the effect of changing socio-cultural values on work and relationships, concerns have increased over related behavioural issues such as work and family conflict, detachment, alienation and more recently quiet quitting. All of which mirror towards the growing disconnect between the worker and today's workplace (Granger, 2022; Harter, 2022).

The concept of quiet quitting refers to a lacklustre approach toward work. According to Arnet (2022) it is a disposition towards work that lacks vitality or vigour and barely offers what is necessary or required for sustained functionality. While the challenge of quiet quitting is not new to the workplace, there has been a surge in its popularity in the current year, 2022, owing to its coinage and emphasis by the Tik Tok user Zaid Khan, a 24 years – old software engineer and musician in New York whose quiet quitting video went viral on TikTok in July, 2022. He explained that “Quiet quitting is where an employee is not outright quitting your job, you're quitting the idea of going above and beyond.” You're still performing your duties, but you're no longer subscribing to the “hustle culture” mentality that work has to be your life. The reality is it's not and your worth as a person is not defined by your labour (Monsees, 2022; Harter, 2022). Hustle culture according to Callahan (2022) is the expectation to go above and beyond in your job, rather than simply doing the requirements of the job. It encourages employees to work more than normal working hours. Although quiet quitting recently became viral through social media, the origins of the concept seem to be rooted in an article published by Insider this past March, 2022. It was subsequently showcased by Brian Creely a former corporate recruiter and career coach, who encouraged employee to establish boundaries at work. Granger (2022) stated that quiet quitting stalls organizational growth. It has a negative impact on organizations as it deprives them of creativity and innovativeness. Most concerning is the fact that it is contagious as an attitude and can spread from one worker to others in the organization.

McGregor (2022) identified quiet quitting as a consequence of several factors, most notable however is the breach between the expectations and the reality of the worker. Rumschlag (2017) argued that workers experiences at the workplace, can be traumatic and demoralizing, especially when they are poorly treated or have to constantly deal with highly toxic and abusive work situations. This corroborates Wright, Cropanzano and Bonett (2007) view that while work features such as compensation, career growth opportunities, training and development have been revealed to impact significantly on the attitude and disposition of workers toward their responsibilities and the organization, it is however their relationship with their superiors and supervisors that holds a far greater significance with regard to their levels of commitment and attitude toward the organization.

Aronson (2001) stated that leadership is a crucial factor in workers development and wellbeing in the organization. Supportive leadership builds workers and enriches their work experiences; however, leadership which is despotic, tends to have a negative effect on the worker, causing distrust and further worsening the friction between leadership and subordinates in the workplace. Despotic leadership describes the form of leadership that is aggressive and overly authoritarian in its approach and style. Such creates an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty (Harvey, 2007), which according to Harvey (2007), can be emotionally strenuous for the worker. Malik and Satter (2019) noted that despotic leadership often express tyrannical tendencies and as such rely heavily on their use of power and threats in ensuring compliance at the workplace.

Quiet quitting can be considered relatively novel and hence there exists scarce literature addressing the behaviour in organizations. Related studies (Arnet, 2022; Pandey, 2022) indicate that the behaviour is one which holds negative implications for the organization; impacting negatively on organizational productivity and performance. Granger (2022) argued that the problem of quiet quitting is not tied only to the employee but rather to their experience of working conditions and their relationship with co-workers, and most especially with the leadership of the organization. Given the scantiness of research on the concept of quiet quitting, due to the recency of its coinage and emphasis as a concern in management, particularly in organizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but its effect has obviously been noticed in the global business environment thereby affecting the economy, In an attempt to cushion the effect raised by this concept of despotic leadership and quite quitting, its role in the rapidly shifting global economy, necessitated the scholarly attempt of this paper to contribute towards filling the gap by reviewing literatures on the conceptual relationship of the despotic and employee quite quitting: its impacts on rapidly changing global economy of the world business.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem of this paper is tied to the implications of employee quiet quitting for organizations. Pandey (2022) argued that it is far worse than turnover as instead of leaving, workers drag on with the organization, extending their lukewarm attitude toward ways that delimits and stalls the optimality over a long period of time. Thus, organizations underperform and, in that way, lose opportunities and resources over an extended period of time due to the lacklustre performance of their workers, their low engagement and poor morale in the workplace (Pandey, 2022). Quiet quitting is significantly harmful to the employer as argued by Klotz and Bolino (2022) quiet quitting is problematic for business organizations because a workforce that is willing to go beyond the call of duty is a critical competitive advantage. Many leaders have argued that losing employees who want to leave is difficult, but having them not quit is even worse. The workforce of the world is increasingly being taken over by the Gen Z and the Millennial who are between the ages of 18-24 and 25 - 45. Klotz et al (2022) states that a survey of 30,000 workers by Microsoft showed 54% of Gen Z workers are considering quitting their job. The 2022 state of the Global Workplace report from Gallup shows only 21% of employees are engaged at work. Masterson (2022) argued that this emerging workforce are most worried about security, health, finances, working conditions, social connections and keeping up with change. Northouse (2014) stated that leadership plays an essential role in employee behavioural outcomes. It has the capacity to either motivate or

demoralize the worker. Hence this paper addressed the role of despotic leadership in employee quiet quitting and their impact in rapidly changing the global business economy.

### Conceptual Framework

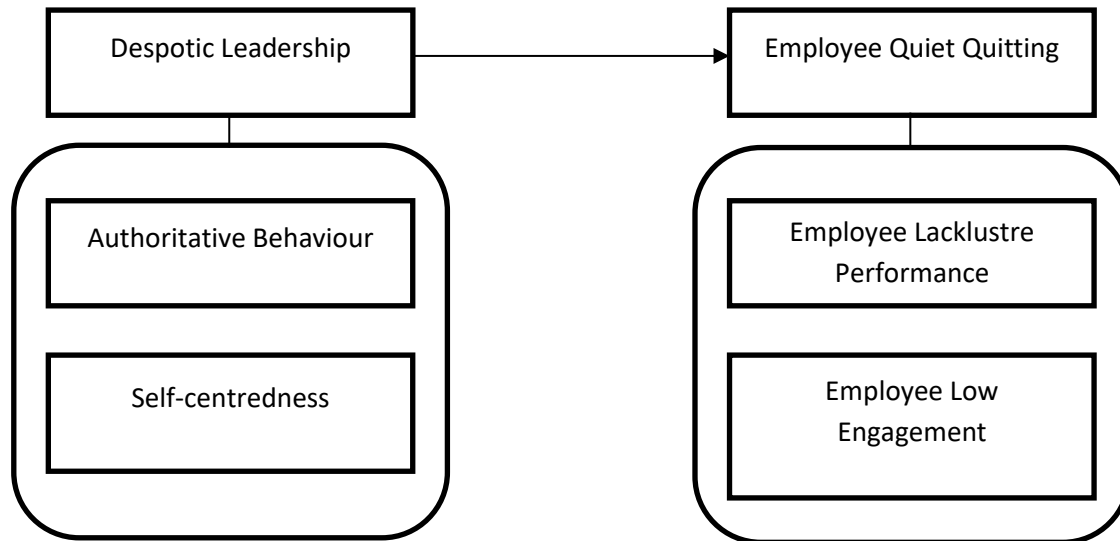


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Despotic Leadership and Employee Quiet Quitting

Source: Researcher's Desk (2022); Despotic leadership Dimensions (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008); Employee quiet quitting (Harter, 2022).

### Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this paper is to discuss the relationship between despotic leadership and employee quiet quitting. This is to be accomplished through the objectives of the study, which are to:

- i. Examine the relationship between authoritative behaviour and employee quiet quitting
- ii. Ascertain the relationship between self-centredness and employee quiet quitting

### Research questions

Drawing on the intent of this paper, the following research questions are put forward:

- i. Examine the relationship between authoritative behaviour and employee quiet quitting
- ii. Ascertain the relationship between self-centredness and employee quiet quitting

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Review

This paper adopts the cognitive dissonance theory in its discussion of the relationship between despotic leadership and quiet quitting. The cognitive dissonance theory was propounded by Leon

Festinger in 1957 (Tueanrat & Alamanos, 2022); identifying the mental strain and trauma associated with one's experience of realities that contradict expectations or beliefs. Tueanrat and Alamanos (2022) argued that cognitive dissonance mirrors the conflict that occurs within the individual in coming to terms with their conditions or situations, especially when such do not match prior assumptions of the individual. According to Blanton et al (2001), outcomes such as frustration, alienation and decreased morale are often associated with cognitive dissonance, and these demonstrate the individual's inability to accept or come to terms with their new realities.

The cognitive dissonance theory serves as the foundation for the discussion on the relationship between despotic leadership and quiet quitting as it identifies the breach between employee expectations of their workplace and their experience of despotic leadership as having a possible impact on their behaviour and disposition toward work (Tueanrat & Alamanos, 2022). The cognitive dissonance theory thus assumes that the inconsistencies in employee expectations of support from leadership, healthy relationships and collaboration with supervisors, could have a damaging effect on their workplace coping capacity and ability to function effectively within the workplace. As such, it is assumed that when the leadership of the organization is despotic, often authoritative, self-centred and exploitative, employees tend to experience low morale, are less engaged and often express lacklustre performance in their roles or responsibilities.

### **Concept of Despotic Leadership**

Despotic leadership originated from the research on Taiwanese enterprises in China in the 1970s and is considered an important part of patriarchal leadership [Brown., & Mitchell, 2010]. As an independent leadership style, such leadership has attracted wide attention from management circles, and has been studied by scholars all over the world. In more traditional Chinese enterprises, leaders usually choose to act as the father in an extreme leadership style to establish a centralized hierarchy that is easy to manage, so despotic leadership is prevalent in Chinese organizations. Despotic leadership emphasizes absolute control over employees and is an ubiquitous leadership style in the modern society of collectivism and high efficiency. Despotic leadership is conceptualized as a leadership behavior in which leaders advocate supreme severity and absolute domination over subordinates and require them to obey unconditionally.

Farh and Cheng (2023) describe despotic leadership as having four typical manifestations. First, the leaders have rigorous control over their subordinates, and such leaders want their subordinates to obey them. Second, despotic leaders are not accepting of any idea or suggestion from their subordinates. Such kinds of leaders take credit for successes and place the blame for failures on their subordinates. Third, despotic leaders usually seem very confident, and are sensitive to whether others respect them enough. Such kinds of leaders manipulate information and take advantage of others. Fourth, despotic leaders are rigorous, even harsh, with their subordinates. They are almost never satisfied with the work of their subordinates. Despotic leadership refers to authoritative behaviour and personal dominance that serve a leader's self-interests while being exploitative of others and self-aggrandizing. Despotic leaders are hegemonic, vindictive, and controlling (Frost, 2004; Palletier, 2010). Employees lose respect, faith, and pride in their organization when they believe their leader manipulates them to achieve personal goals or when their interactions with the

leader are unfair. As a result, they are less likely to be motivated to identify with the leader or the organization, resulting in lower workplace engagement (Aryee, 2008; Albashiti et al, 2021; Daft, 2014).

Despotic leadership, which elicits a stress response and is perceived as creating a hazardous environment, diverts an individual's focus from the job towards self-preservation, limiting employee engagement. Recent literature (Nauman et al, 2018; Malik & Sattar, 2019) in the service industry indicates that individuals who are subjected to abusive behaviours are more likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs. Moreover, individuals subjected to hostile treatment by their bosses frequently develop a high level of depression and a diminished sense of workplace belonging (Aryee, 2008; Einarsen et al, 2007). It's a leader's behavior that focus on gaining supremacy and dominance and are motivated by a leader's self-interests. Such leaders are arrogant, manipulative, bossy, authoritarian and unforgiven. (Naseer, Raja, Syed, Dona & Darr, 2016). This leadership style according to Schilling (2009) is reviewed as a negative leadership style.

Despotic leadership are exploitative and self-absorbing and likely to be insensitive towards the employee needs but a very little concern of their consequences of behavior on the organization or Employees (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). Despotic leadership is positively associated with follower's deviance and negatively associated with organizational identification (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018). Deviance of workplace is defined as "voluntary behavior that violates organizational norms and threatens the wellbeing of organization". Despotic leadership which focuses on leader gains rather than employee wellbeing which as a result can generate significant stress in the employees, and organization should do whatever it takes to discourage its presence (De Clercq et al., 2018).

**Authoritative behavior:** This refers to the leader controlling and commanding approach toward the management and coordination of the organization's workforce (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Authoritative behavior draws on the leader's expression of dominance over others and their use of coercion in ensuring compliance in the organization. Authoritative behavior is characterized by the overbearing attitude of the leader and their oppressive nature toward their subordinates in the organization (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008).

**Self-centeredness:** This refers to the leader's absorption with themselves and their own interests in the organization (Aronson, 2001). Such is revealed in the leader's lack of empathy, concern or consideration of the employee; thus, their engagement in actions that promote their own aggrandizement at the detriment of the employee's wellbeing in most cases. Nauman et al (2020) stated that self-centeredness is shown in leadership with high centralization of decision-making power, the use of threats rather than negotiation with stakeholders and the dependence on force or threats in the organizing and directing of the organization's workforce..

### **Employee Quiet Quitting**

The concept of employee quiet quitting refers to the lack of vitality, and disinterest in their roles, hence, they only offer the barest contributions or effort in their functions or responsibilities (Granger, 2022; Harter, 2022). McGregor (2022) argued that quiet quitting is a growing challenge

for organizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century because it demonstrates the growing gap in workers changing expectations and the realities of the business world today. Granger (2022) posited that millennial are more interested in autonomy and some control over their lives, as compared to the preceding generational group (Gen x) which were more focused on building families through the support organizational roles offered them. This aligns with Saari and Juge (2004) observation that there is a growing mismatch between today's worker and the workplace, especially given the changing societal values and their impact on workers values and perceptions of self, others and their work.

**Employee lacklustre performance:** This concept describes the workers minimal effort and lack of creative contributions toward their responsibilities and roles. As a measure of quiet quitting, lacklustre performance suggests a lack of interest and concern by the worker, but rather their fulfilment of responsibilities so as not to get fired but just to meet the required output required of them. Granger (2022) stated that such forms of disposition toward work, are in themselves a protest against the way they are treated in the organization. Harter (2022) argued that the workers engagement in lacklustre performance is also an indicator of their desire to continue with the organization despite their experiences.

**Employee low engagement:** This refers to the workers poor level of vigour and absorption with their work. Engagement according to Wright et al (2007) is physical, psychological and emotional and details the extent to which workers are active and at the same time emotionally attached to their roles and responsibilities. The lack of engagement signifies the workers detachment and poor concern for the outcome of their work. In such a case, the worker may be physically present but emotionally distant and far from being interested in their roles (Arnet, 2022; Harter, 2022).

### **Global shifting economy**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century was started with the dawn of a new economic puzzle of China's fast The global shift is the movement of manufacturing industry to countries that have been recently industrializing. It has involved the shift of activity from western regions (like the US or Europe) to Asia. The growth in cross-border economic activities takes five principal forms: (1) international trade; (2) foreign direct investment; (3) capital market flows; (4) migration (movement of labor); and (5) diffusion of technology (Stiglitz, 2003)The global economy is constantly evolving due to various factors, including technological advancements, geopolitical events, and changes in consumer behavior. Rapid shifts can have significant impacts on industries, job markets, and trade relationships. It's essential for businesses and governments to adapt to these changes to stay competitive and ensure economic stability. A rapidly shifting global economy refers to a situation where the economic conditions, trends, and dynamics in the world are changing quickly and significantly. They include:  
**Economic Growth and Decline:** Rapid changes in economic growth rates, with some countries or regions experiencing rapid expansion while others may be facing economic downturns.  
**Technological Advancements:** Swift advancements in technology can disrupt industries, create new opportunities, and render existing business models obsolete.  
**Global Trade:** Shifts in global trade patterns, such as changes in tariffs, trade agreements, or the emergence of new economic powers, can alter the economic landscape.  
**Consumer Behavior:** Changes in consumer preferences, such as the rise of e-commerce or the demand for

sustainable products, can have a profound impact on businesses. **Geopolitical Events:** Events like political instability, conflicts, or major policy changes can affect international relations and, in turn, the global economy. **Financial Markets:** Rapid fluctuations in stock markets, currency exchange rates, or interest rates can influence investment decisions and economic stability. **Environmental Factors:** Environmental concerns, like climate change and resource scarcity, can drive shifts in economic priorities and regulations.

### **Impact of global changing economy on despotic leadership and employee quite quitting**

In a study conducted by Tepper (2000) on the impact of despotic leadership style on employee turnover found that despotic leadership act in dictatorial and harsh manner to their followers necessitates employee's low satisfaction in the work field and will negatively impact followers overall performance in the organization, therefore Tepper (2000) identified the following as the impact despotic leadership and employee quiet quitting on global shifting economy

**Reduced Productivity:** Despotic leadership can lead to decreased employee morale and engagement. When employees are disengaged or fearful, they are less productive, which can have a cascading effect on a company's performance.

**Talent Drain:** High employee turnover due to despotic leadership results in the loss of experienced and skilled workers. In the global economy, the competition for top talent is fierce, and the loss of valuable human capital can hurt a company's competitiveness.

**Innovation Stagnation:** Innovation often thrives in environments with engaged and motivated employees. Despotic leadership can stifle creativity and innovation, hindering a company's ability to adapt to changing market conditions.

**Reputation Damage:** Companies with a reputation for despotic leadership are less attractive to potential employees, customers, and investors. This can impact the company's brand and its ability to expand in the global market.

**Economic Inequality:** Workplace mistreatment and inequity can contribute to broader economic inequality as employees endure unfair treatment and struggle to access opportunities for advancement.

**Global Workforce Challenges:** In a globalized economy, talent mobility is essential. Despotic leadership can discourage international talent from seeking opportunities in certain regions or organizations, limiting the flow of skills and knowledge across borders.

**Regulatory and Legal Consequences:** Companies with despotic leadership practices may face legal and regulatory challenges, leading to fines and penalties that can impact financial stability.

### **Ways of thriving and flourishing a rapidly changing global economy**



Addressing despotic leadership and reducing employee turnover can have a positive impact on both individual organizations and the global economy as a whole. It can also foster a more inclusive, innovative, and competitive business environment through encouraging employee transformational leadership system and employee quite thriving in the organization. In work, thriving indicates that an individual is experiencing a high level of engagement, satisfaction, and fulfillment. Thriving is not just about being productive or achieving a high level of performance; it is also about finding a sense of fulfillment and enjoyment in your work. Employees who are thriving and committed frequently experience a sense of vitality, positive energy, and personal growth at work (Spreatzer, et al., 2005).

Thriving at work is characterized by an integrated sense of vitality and learning that reflects a high degree of personal investment and engagement (Kleine, Rudolph, & Zacher, 2019). It is this engagement that enriches the quality of work life for employees while generating increased employee efforts, 6 greater personal dedication, and increased levels of concentration and focus (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). In the real world of work, thriving is subjectively defined and must be viewed by each individual in the long term, based upon one's personal definitions about life, one's values, and identity (Caldwell & Anderson, 2023). How individuals respond to their circumstances – including the context of their jobs -- is a function of one's perceptions and thoughts about those circumstances and is ultimately an intentional choice (Burke & Stets, 2009; Fishbein & Ajzek, 2015). Thus, thriving is about choosing how one will respond to their circumstances, rather than the circumstances themselves (Castillo, 2008; Eger, 2018).

The significance of thriving and flourishing in the modern organization is characterized by creating organizational cultures and relationships that thoughtfully integrate individual and organizational priorities (Trebesh, 2015). Kim and Beehr (2020) noted that great organizations challenge their employees to be excellent while 1) emphasizing the meaningfulness of work performed and 2) reinforcing in employees a sense of their self-worth and their value to the organization. Similarly, Imran and colleagues (2020) reported that organizational support systems and aligned employee relations policies generated both organizational and employee flourishing as well as increased levels of employee engagement.

### **Despotic Leadership and Quiet Quitting**

Followers of despotic leadership have more negative attitude to their organization as a whole (Burris et al., 2008). Due to stress on workers from despotic leadership it makes the huge difference in aspect of job, institution and the economy (Hanges & Dickson, 2004). We found only two studies which examined the relationship between destructive or despotic leadership to the organizational performance (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) found no relationship between despotic leadership and organizational performance. While Burris et al. (2008) show one significant relationship between destructive leadership and organizational performance which is cost overrun. The previous study suggest that despotic leadership has a negatively impact employees home life and then this effect intensify when the employee is anxious (Nauman et al., 2018).

Tepper (2000) found that despotic leadership is one of the major reasons in the low satisfaction of employee, because despotic leadership reacts to their employee in harsh and authoritarian style. Due to this despotic behavior of leader employee morale, inspiration and independency will be low to the organization (Naseer et al., 2016), as oppose to honest leader which encourage their employees and develop trust between them (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008).

despotic leadership is linked with circumstantial not with behavioral circumstances, and the employee is not hierarchal build for the situational work place in the despotic leadership style environment for the smoothness of the work to deliver result for the project (Goffee & Jones, 2007). De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) describe the despotic leadership as illegal leadership style. When such leaders treat their employees with authority, lack of honor, arrogance and lack of empathy then imbalance is created in the employees due to whom psychological strain is experience by the employee which will affect work attitudes, promote deviance and reduce overall employee performance in the work field (Carnevale, Huang, Crede, Harms, & Uhl-Bien, 2017).

## CONCLUSION/SUGGESTIONS

This paper reviewed literature on the relationship between despotic leadership and employee quiet quitting: its impact on rapidly changing business economy. The discussion centred on the extent to which despotic leadership, expressed through authoritative behaviour and self-centredness; all of which are identified as impacting negatively on the disposition of the worker toward their roles and the organization as well. From the discussion, it was noted that despotic leadership intensifies workers fears, stress levels and anxiety as it negatively influences their sense of job security and future with the organization which affects their level of commitment and engagement to the job roles and responsibilities This attitudes displayed by employees affects the company reputation in service delivery, company reputation, image and identity thereby affecting their performance in the global business environment. In this sense, it is therefore the conclusion of this paper that despotic leadership creates conditions that weaken the morale of employees, lowers their engagement and further leads to their lacklustre performance in the organization which affects their global changing environment. Following the outcome of the review, the following suggestion are put forward:

- i. Leadership in organizations should be more participative and democratic in their relationship and coordination of the organization. This can be achieved through improved availability of mediums or platforms for employee involvement and representation in decision-making actions in the organization.
- ii. Organizations should develop work systems that enable power sharing and the consideration of various group interests in the workplace. Such should focus on enabling a balancing of value for roles and responsibilities of the leader and also those of the worker, ensuring that power within the organization is not abused
- iii. Organizations ought to focus on developing a system of work that values and emphasizes on ethics, morality and principles in the workplace – necessary for developing and ensuring healthier and more positive exchanges between leaders and their subordinates. Such should

be supported by relevant policies that are designed to protect members of the organization from abuse and exploitation in the workplace.

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