

Examining the relationship between toxic leadership, behavioural cynicism, employee well-being, and emotional exhaustion: The mediating role of employee silence

Toksik liderlik ile davranışsal sinizm, çalışan refahı, duygusal tükenmişlik arasındaki ilişkinin incelenmesi: Çalışan sessizliğinin aracılık rolü

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Abstract

Employees often perceive toxic leader behaviours such as arrogance, manipulation, and hypersensitivity as indicators of imbalance and injustice in the leader-employee relationship. This imbalance can suppress employee voice and contribute to adverse workplace outcomes, including behavioural cynicism, emotional exhaustion, and diminished well-being. This study investigates the mediating role of employee silence in the relationship between toxic leadership and three key outcomes: organisational cynicism, emotional exhaustion, and employee well-being. Data were collected from 414 employees working in hotel businesses in Turkey using a structured questionnaire. A quantitative research design was employed, and the relationships among variables were tested through structural equation modelling using Jamovi (version 2.6.26) software. The results indicate that employee silence partially mediates the effect of toxic leadership on both behavioural cynicism and emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, employee silence fully mediates the relationship between toxic leadership and employee well-being. These findings underscore the crucial role of silence as a psychological mechanism linking toxic leadership to employee outcomes in high-pressure service environments, such as the tourism sector.

Keywords: Toxic Leadership, Employee Silence, Behavioural Cynicism, Emotional Exhaustion, Employee Well-Being, Hotel Employees

Jel Codes: L83, M12

Öz

Çalışanlar, kibir, manipölasyon ve aşırı duyarlılık gibi toksik lider davranışlarını, lider-çalışan ilişkisinde dengesizlik ve adaletsizliğin göstergeleri olarak algılanmaktadır. Bu dengesizlik, çalışanların sesini bastırabilir ve davranışsal sinizm, duygusal tükenmişlik ve refahın azalması gibi olumsuz işyeri sonuçlarına neden olabilir. Bu çalışma, toksik liderlik ile üç temel sonuç (örgütsel sinizm, duygusal tükenmişlik ve çalışan refahı) arasındaki ilişkide çalışanların sessizliğinin aracılık rolünü araştırmaktadır. Veriler, Türkiye'deki otel işletmelerinde çalışan 414 çalışandan yapılandırılmış bir anket kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Nicel bir araştırma tasarımı kullanılmıştır ve değişkenler arasındaki ilişkiler Jamovi (2.6.26) yazılımı kullanılarak yapısal eşitlik modellemesi ile test edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, çalışanların sessizliğinin toksik liderliğin hem davranışsal sinizm hem de duygusal tükenmişlik üzerindeki etkisini kısmen aracılık ettiğini göstermektedir. Ayrıca, çalışanların sessizliği toksik liderlik ile çalışanların refahı arasındaki ilişkiyi tamamen aracılık etmektedir. Bu bulgular, turizm sektörü gibi yüksek baskı altındaki hizmet ortamlarında toksik liderliği çalışanların sonuçlarıyla ilişkilendiren psikolojik bir mekanizma olarak sessizliğin kritik rolünü vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toksik Liderlik, İşgören Sessizliği, Davranışsal Sinizm, Duygusal Tükenmişlik, İşgören Refahı, Otel Çalışanları

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Introduction

Toxic leadership refers to individuals in positions of authority who exhibit unpredictable, intense emotional reactions, lack emotional intelligence, display insensitivity and self-centeredness, and use harmful managerial strategies to manipulate subordinates (Schmidt, 2008). Such toxic leaders are inherently detrimental to the overall well-being of society. The existence of unattainable aspirations as a detrimental leadership strategy cultivates unease within team members, triggering a decline in their enthusiasm for executing work responsibilities. This predicament prompts employees to scrutinise their career growth to satisfy leaders' demands, ultimately benefiting themselves, and results in a depletion of trust among the workforce (Sahibzada et al., 2025). This issue is also present in other sectors, but the dynamic nature of jobs in the tourism industry makes the situation in this sector even more complex (D'Souza, Irudayasamy & Parayitam, 2023). Silence can be characterised as the deliberate choice of employees to withhold essential insights, concerns, recommendations, inquiries, and viewpoints about workplace and organisational matters (Osei et al., 2022). The quietude of employees poses a considerable peril due to its widespread harmful repercussions, such as the loss of invaluable information and innovative concepts, which resonate throughout every tier of the organisation when juxtaposed with other passive reactions to detrimental leadership behaviours (Xu, Loi & Lam, 2015; Li et al., 2024).

Toxic leadership wreaks havoc on emotional well-being, resulting in a draining sense of fatigue and a deafening silence among employees within the workplace realm (Farghaly Abdelaliem & Abou Zeid, 2023). Tepper (2007) and Morris (2019) elucidate that those who endure detrimental conduct from their leader often resort to evasive or subdued coping strategies, creating distance to shield themselves from the direct influence of their toxic superior. According to James and Shaw (2016), it is revealed that detrimental leadership fosters a sense of cynicism, embodying both a broad and focused disposition marked by disillusionment and exasperation, alongside adverse emotions and scepticism directed at an individual, collective, belief system, cultural norm, or establishment (Sun, Dedahanov, Fayzullaev & Abdurazzakov, 2022). Employee silence is when individuals do not speak up about organisational problems or suppress demands for change. This situation directly strengthens the toxic leadership effect. Employee silence causes employees who cannot defend themselves against poisonous behaviours to experience reactions such as cynicism more intensely. In addition, as silent employees cannot voice injustices and poor leadership practices, they are more likely to engage in cynical behaviours (Kaya, Göncü & Erarslan, 2021). Employee silence causes organisational cynicism (Mousa, Abdelgaffar, Aboramadan & Chaouali, 2021) and can indicate toxic leadership (Magdy & Salem, 2024).

Behavioural cynicism negatively affects employees' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural states (Dean, Brandes & Dharwadkar, 1998). Additionally, behavioural cynicism has adverse effects on employees' health and well-being (Sandhu & Chanana, 2025). Petitta and Ghezzi (2023) stated that behavioural cynicism negatively affects employees' mental health and causes an increase in mental errors. Behavioural cynicism, which involves strong emotional reactions such as anger and disappointment, has the most significant adverse effects on well-being (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003). Mishra and Afroz (2024) found that in companies with high levels of behavioural cynicism, employees experience lower levels of well-being. Behavioural cynicism typically stems from unmet expectations, the perception that psychological contracts have been violated, and perceived unfair or poorly managed organisational changes. Behavioural cynicism refers to employees developing negative attitudes towards the organisation regarding their beliefs, feelings, and behaviour (Kucharski, 2025). Cynical employees lose trust in management, become sceptical of organisational values, and weaken their emotional ties. This negatively affects employees' well-being (Sandhu & Chanana, 2025). In particular, emotional exhaustion is often considered a consequence of experiencing cynicism and toxic leadership. Exhaustion arises when employees' emotional resources are depleted, resulting in prolonged negative work experiences (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Ilyas et al., 2025).

The tourism sector, with its irregular working hours, seasonal employment, low job security, customer-focused, intense service pressure, and high workload, presents a structure that tests the psychological resilience of employees (Karatepe, 2013). In this context, phenomena such as toxic leadership, organisational cynicism, and employee silence will likely emerge more prominently and effectively in stressful and demanding environments. Furthermore, managerial practices in the tourism sector are often based on personal relationships. The rigidity of the hierarchical structure may limit employees' willingness to speak up, leading to "employee silence" becoming more visible (Millar & Baloglu, 2011). Furthermore, the high employee turnover rate in the sector is a significant factor that contributes to employee burnout and weakens organisational commitment (Kim, Shin & Umbreit, 2007). Therefore, the reason for choosing the tourism sector in this study is that employees working in this sector can

experience more intense psychological processes, such as perceptions of toxic leadership, organisational cynicism, silence, and burnout. Considering the structural conditions of the industry, it provides an appropriate and meaningful context for understanding the relationship between these variables.

The demeanour of leaders, including traits such as hubris, cunning, excessive emotionality, and harmfulness, will be viewed unfavourably by their teams, creating a chasm in the leader-employee dynamic. This chasm will hinder employees from voicing their thoughts (Aboramadan, Turkmenoglu, Dahleez, & Cicek, 2020) and ultimately lead to a series of adverse effects, including cynicism in the workplace. The harmful effects of inadequate leadership and widespread cynicism are increasingly recognised as significant business challenges (Dobbs & Do, 2019). Additionally, recent research on leadership has shifted from merely highlighting its beneficial effects to identifying its adverse effects and empirically validating them (Akinyele & Chen, 2024; SangWoo, 2025). When examining studies on toxic leadership, it appears that the relationship between toxic leadership and variables such as psychological climate (Zengin & Töre, 2024), job satisfaction (Eriş & Arun, 2020), and intention to leave (Yalçınsoy & Işık, 2018) has been investigated. Additionally, some studies directly examine the relationship between toxic leadership and employee silence (Şahin & Kaya, 2024), organisational cynicism (Karagöz & Yalçın, 2024), employee well-being (Magdy & Salem, 2024), and emotional exhaustion (Eker, 2024). However, no study has been found that examines the mediating role of employee silence in relation to these variables. Furthermore, when examining studies on toxic leadership in the tourism sector, it is evident that few studies investigate employee well-being and behavioural cynicism in practice (Wang & Xie, 2020). In this context, this study examines the mediating role of employee silence between toxic leadership and behavioural cynicism, employee well-being, and emotional exhaustion. While the impact of toxic leadership on employee outcomes has been explored, the underlying psychological mechanisms, such as employee silence, remain under-investigated, particularly in high-stress service environments. This study addresses this gap by empirically examining the mediating role of silence in the context of the hotel sector.

Literature review

Toxic leadership

Toxic leadership (TL) is characterised as a phenomenon in which leaders, through their deleterious conduct and maladaptive personal traits or attributes, exert profound and lasting detrimental effects on the individuals, groups, organisations, communities, and even the nations under their stewardship (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Toxic leadership constitutes a damaging form of leadership that jeopardises the core values and norms of the organisation and fosters maladaptive behaviours (Aubrey, 2012). Toxic leadership is conceptualised as a leadership paradigm characterised by deleterious behaviours and, owing to insufficient individual attributes, inflicts enduring harm on followers, organisations, communities, and potentially nations (Burdurlu & Ermiş, 2024).

Toxic leaders partake in unethical practices toward their followers, undermine their efforts, and may escalate their actions to illicit conduct due to their deficient leadership competencies (Heppell, 2011). Heppell (2011) defined a "toxic leader as an individual who behaves destructively and displays non-functional characteristics". Toxic leadership embodies a style that inflicts damage on the individuals within the organisation, casting a shadow of negativity over both the members and the institution itself. It is a leadership style in which the leader's, employer's, or supervisor's systematic and repetitive behaviours create obstacles to achieving goals and performing tasks, consume organisational resources, and reduce employee effectiveness, motivation, and satisfaction, thereby threatening the organisation's legitimate interests (Webster, Brough & Daly, 2016; Hadadian & Sayadpour, 2018). Negative leadership behaviour encourages counterproductive behaviours and unethical practices in the workplace (Krasikova, Green & LeBreton, 2013).

Employee silence

Silence can be characterised as the deliberate choice of employees to withhold essential insights, concerns, recommendations, inquiries, and viewpoints about workplace and organisational matters (Osei et al., 2022). Organisational silence denotes the phenomenon wherein employees deliberately and voluntarily refrain from expressing their opinions, suggestions, ideas, and knowledge pertinent to their work, thereby opting for silence in the face of organisational challenges (Song et al., 2017). Numerous underlying factors contribute to this silent and reticent behaviour within organisations. These factors are the fear of adverse repercussions, which may include the apprehension of jeopardising interpersonal relationships, experiencing self-neglect, facing punitive measures or retaliation, and fostering a detrimental perception among peers, inadequate personal competencies and experience, unsupportive

organisational policies, or frail and tenuous connections with senior management (Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003; Reyhanoglu & Akin, 2022).

According to Song et al. (2017), the detrimental behaviours exhibited by managers, coupled with their insufficient receptiveness to their subordinates, compel employees to adopt a posture of silence to ensure their security and safety. The quietude of employees poses a considerable peril due to its widespread, harmful repercussions, such as the loss of invaluable information and innovative concepts, which resonate throughout every tier of the organisation when juxtaposed with other passive reactions to detrimental leadership behaviours (Xu, Loi & Lam, 2015; Li et al., 2024). Employee silence constitutes a manifestation of detrimental leadership practices, as individuals within the organisation often choose to withhold their voices, particularly when faced with egocentric and self-serving toxic leaders (Coakley, 2021; Wang et al., 2020).

Behavioural cynicism

Cynicism constitutes a cognitive disposition marked by sentiments of exasperation, disillusionment, and a general sense of negativity, culminating in adverse consequences such as a decline in productivity and a reduction in loyalty across a multitude of industries and sectors (Acaray & Yildirim, 2017). This pessimistic perspective typically engenders unfavourable associations with performance, a decrease in prosocial behaviours, an escalation in interpersonal discord, heightened employee attrition, and an increase in absenteeism rates (Bang & Reio Jr, 2017; Ahmed et al., 2024). Organisational cynicism embodies the belief of employees that their organisation is devoid of honesty and frequently partakes in acts of deceit (Omar Ahmed & Zhang, 2025). Organisational cynicism, which resembles concepts such as scepticism, insecurity, and pessimism, articulates the adverse attitudes of employees toward their respective organisations (Özler, Atalay & Şahin, 2010).

Organisational cynicism is characterised as "the employees harbouring adverse sentiments towards the organisation in which they are employed, manifesting this disposition critically through their conduct (Aktaş et al., 2020). Furthermore, organisational cynicism is elucidated as the convictions held by employees that the tenets of equity, integrity, and authenticity are compromised for the organisation's benefit, resulting in a perception of moral frailty within the organisation (Berneth, Armenakis, Feild & Walker, 2007). Organisational cynicism denotes the deficiency of employees' perception of justice, confidence, equity, and integrity towards the organisation in which they are employed (Abraham, 2000; Chaudhry, Hameed & Ahmed, 2023). Organisational cynicism is not an inherent personality characteristic but rather a conditioned response. It embodies both a general and specific disposition marked by feelings of anger, despondency, disillusionment, and a propensity to mistrust individuals, collectives, ideologies, social competencies, or institutions (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Wanous, Reichers & Austin, 2000). Organisational cynicism represents a detrimental disposition towards the organisation, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioural elements (Keerthirathne & Gunasekara, 2025) that emerge from a critical evaluation of the organisation's intentions, actions, and core values (Yan, Li & Jeon, 2024).

Organisational cynicism is associated with unfulfilled anticipations and pessimistic forecasts regarding the conduct of the organisational leader. The impacts of poor leadership and cynicism are increasingly recognised as problems in organisations (Dobbs and Do, 2019). Organisational cynicism has recently garnered heightened scholarly interest attributable to the unethical conduct exhibited by leaders and the proliferation of corporate scandals, which have engendered an increase in employees' scepticism regarding the organisation (Gkorezis, Petridou & Krouklidou, 2015; Elsaied, 2022). Within organisations governed by toxic leaders, individuals are incentivised to conform to managerial perspectives and penalised for harbouring divergent viewpoints. In such contexts, individuals who acquiesce are often rewarded and elevated to leadership roles. At the same time, those who engage in critical thinking and inquiry are systematically excluded from decision-making and action frameworks (Özer, Ugurluoglu & Kahraman, 2017). Organisational cynicism is positively related to low leadership potential, excessive scepticism, high anxiety, introversion, and an exploitative belief system (Altınöz, Çakıroğlu, Çöp & Kahraman, 2017). If employees perceive their leaders as toxic managers, they are more likely to remain silent at work and exhibit higher levels of organisational cynicism (Aboramadan, Turkmenoglu, Dahleez & Cicek, 2020). While toxic leadership is often associated with emotional exhaustion (Pelletier, 2011), recent studies (e.g., Zhang, Koo, Jin & Cheong, 2025; Bai & He, 2025) suggest that employee silence acts as a coping response, mediating the emotional and attitudinal consequences of such leadership behaviours.

In this context, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H₁: *Employee silence has a mediation effect between toxic leadership and behavioural cynicism.*

Emotional exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion is defined as "a chronic state of physical and emotional exhaustion caused by excessive demands in professional and personal life and the stress associated with it" (Hwang, Hur & Shin, 2021). Emotional exhaustion is a sense of hopelessness that arises after experiencing stress, anxiety, and fatigue during challenging work efforts, accompanied by a decreased ability to focus (Yıldırım, 2019). Sarcasm and negative feelings toward both work and customers are essential indicators of emotional exhaustion (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Employees may experience feelings of exhaustion due to a combination of organisational and personal factors. Possible triggers for this burnout include lack of recognition, outdated organisational policies and procedures, excessive workload combined with strict supervision that erodes employee autonomy, unclear expectations and job roles, and the absence of friendship or collaboration-based work teams (Ordu & Yörük, 2024).

Toxic leadership is thought to be directly related to burnout (Budak & Erdal, 2022; Mandal & Haldar, 2025). When employees perceive their leader to exhibit toxic behaviour, their levels of burnout increase (Uzunbacak, Yıldız & Uzun, 2019; Bakan & Yılmaz, 2019). Burnout is a phenomenon that arises from the combination of organisational dynamics and personal factors, harming employee productivity (Moon & Hur, 2011). Managers' mindsets, organisational choices and practices, the general atmosphere in the workplace, or perceived inequalities can contribute to increased burnout (Pelit & Bozdoğan, 2014). This situation can also lead to direct organisational issues such as organisational silence (Yıldırım, 2019).

As employees feel more burned out, they may prefer to remain silent rather than express their thoughts, concerns, or suggestions, as doing so requires emotional vitality they no longer possess (Lainidi, 2025). Emotionally exhausted employees may fear that speaking up could lead to further emotional tension or adverse reactions such as criticism or retaliation, which can reinforce their decision to remain silent (Welsh, Outlaw, Newton & Baer, 2022; Deb Biswas & Sengupta, 2025). Employee silence or burnout tendencies within an organisation erode the foundation of organisational structures. As a result, the harmful behaviours exhibited by staff hinder the organisation's growth and limit its ability to compete in the market (Benli & Cerev, 2017). In this context, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H₂: Employee silence has a mediation effect between toxic leadership and emotional exhaustion.

Employee well-being

Today, individuals encounter various stress factors that significantly affect their psychological well-being. Many of these stress factors arise in professional environments where individuals spend a significant amount of time and effort (Soomro et al., 2024). Employee well-being catalyses organisational success, reduces the risk of reduced productivity, and reduces the financial burden associated with health insurance expenditures (Rasool et al., 2021; Hasyim & Bakri, 2025). Employee silence may result in a bad attitude toward their companies, a diminished emphasis on well-being, and elevated stress levels, claim Knoll and von Dick (2013). Employee silence can negatively impact well-being by reducing job satisfaction and commitment to the organisation. When employees remain silent, their likelihood of feeling committed to their work decreases, which in turn increases their likelihood of experiencing stress and dissatisfaction (Wang et al., 2020). Employee silence acts as a bridge between harmful leadership, reduced organisational effectiveness, and the endangerment of employee well-being (Wang et al., 2020; Farghaly Abdelallem & Abou Zeid, 2023). Adverse well-being conditions in the workplace often stem from toxic leadership and can lead to increased silence as employees withdraw to protect themselves (Sridadi et al., 2022). In this context, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H₃: Employee silence has a mediation effect between toxic leadership and employee well-being.

Methodology

Sample and data collection

The research universe comprises five-star hotel businesses operating in Turkey, which are licensed tourism establishments. According to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, there are a total of 800 five-star hotel businesses in Turkey. These establishments have 249,675 rooms and 528,985 beds (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2023). Since the number of employees in these establishments is currently unavailable, the number of employees per bed was calculated using the calculation formula. According to this formula, the number of employees per bed in five-star hotel establishments in Turkey is 0,59 (Keleş, 2014: 82). Considering the total bed capacity of five-star hotels in Turkey (528,985) and the number of employees per bed in five-star hotels in Turkey (0.59), it can be said that $528,985 \times 0,59 = 311,520$ employees work in Turkey. The sample size was calculated based on this number. According to Kozak (2014), a sample of 384 participants is sufficient for the research at a 95% confidence level, assuming that the population is heterogeneously distributed. Since it was difficult to reach the

population, data were collected using the convenience sampling method. This study was conducted online between 17/05/2025 and 30/05/2025 among hotel employees. Hence, it can be affirmed that the 414 surveys gathered from the participants are more than adequate to encapsulate the entire universe.

Table 1: Demographic Information

	N (number of people)	%
Gender		
Male	199	48
Female	215	52
Marital Status		
Single	252	61
Married	162	39
Age		
18-24 years old	120	29
25-34 years old	173	42
35-44 years old	98	24
45-54 years old	18	4
55 years old and above	5	1
Education Level		
Primary education	28	7
High school	99	24
Bachelor's degree	208	50
Master's degree	79	19
Monthly Income		
Minimum wage	135	32
22105-30000 TL	158	38
30001-50000 TL	82	20
50001-70000 TL	21	5
70001 TL and above	18	5
Work Experience		
Less than 2 years	166	40
2-5 years	136	33
6-10 years	52	12
More than 10 years	60	15

As can be seen in Table 1, the percentage of female participants (52%) is higher than that of male participants (48%). The majority of participants (61%) are single. The majority of participants (42%) are between the ages of 25 and 34, while 29% are between the ages of 18 and 24, and 24% are between the ages of 35 and 44. Upon examining the participants' educational backgrounds, it is evident that half (50%) are university graduates, 19% are postgraduate graduates, and 23% are high school graduates. In this context, it can be said that the participants' educational level is high.

Measures

The measuring scales of five constructs were taken or modified from previous research to guarantee the questionnaire's validity and reliability. The scales were translated from English to Turkish using the standard back-translation process (Brislin, 1986). All constructs were evaluated utilising a five-point Likert scale, encompassing responses from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The specific items associated with each construct are delineated in the Appendix. Seven items of toxic leadership and five items of employee well-being were adapted by Rasool et al. (2021). Five items of employee silence were developed by Zaman et al. (2023). Seven items of behavioural cynicism were developed by

Aboramadan, Turkmenoglu, Dahleez & Cicek (2020). Lastly, four items of emotional exhaustion were developed by Maslach et al. (2001).

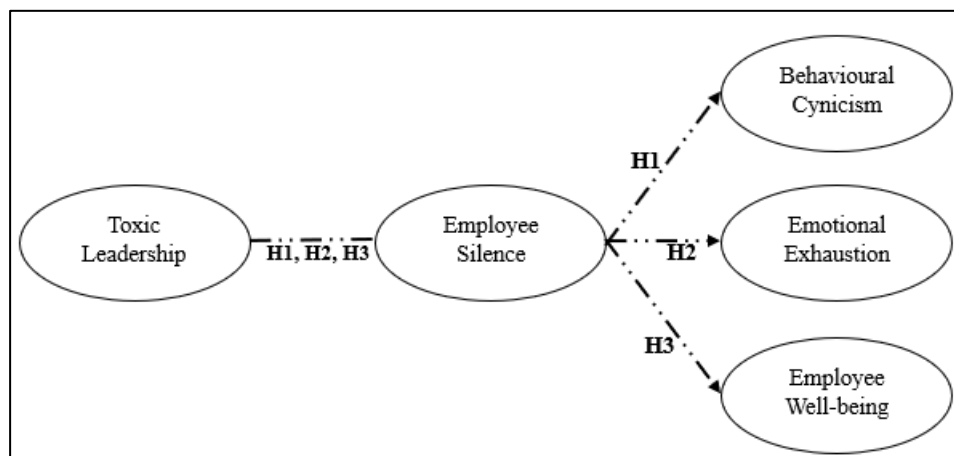


Figure 1: Research Model

Five variables were used in the study. Of these variables, Toxic Leadership (TL) was defined as exogenous, while Employee Silence (ES), Behavioural Cynicism (BC), Emotional Exhaustion (EE), and Employee Well-being (EW) were defined as endogenous variables. In addition, the mediation role of Employee Silence was examined in the research model. Since all direct and indirect effects must be examined to interpret the results of mediation effects, no hypotheses were formulated regarding direct effects. In the study, to prevent Common Method Bias (CMB), the anonymity of the participants was protected, and the risk of systematic error was minimised by randomly ordering the variables in the questionnaire. The obtained data were analysed using Jamovi (2.6.26) software, and the eigenvalues were examined using Principal Component Analysis. The analysis revealed that a single-factor structure explained less than 50% of the total variance. According to Harman's Single Factor Test, if a single factor explains more than 50% of the total variance, there is no risk of CMB. Podsakoff and Organ (1986) stated that this test is appropriate for assessing standard method bias.

Results

Initially, it is crucial to evaluate the trustworthiness and accuracy of the measurement tools used in the research. In pursuit of this goal, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was utilised through the Jamovi software. After determining that the scales were valid and reliable, mediation analyses were performed using the same program, and the findings were reported. Jamovi is a free, R-based software program widely used in structural equation modelling (SEM) analyses and factor analyses, alongside programs such as AMOS, LISREL, and SmartPLS.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

First of all, it is necessary to evaluate the reliability and validity of the scales used in the study. Accordingly, CFA was applied in the Jamovi program (Figure 2). Jamovi is an R-based, free software widely used in structural equation modelling (SEM) analyses and factor analyses, similar to AMOS, LISREL, and SmartPLS. After determining that the scales were valid and reliable, mediation analyses were conducted using the same program, and the findings were reported.

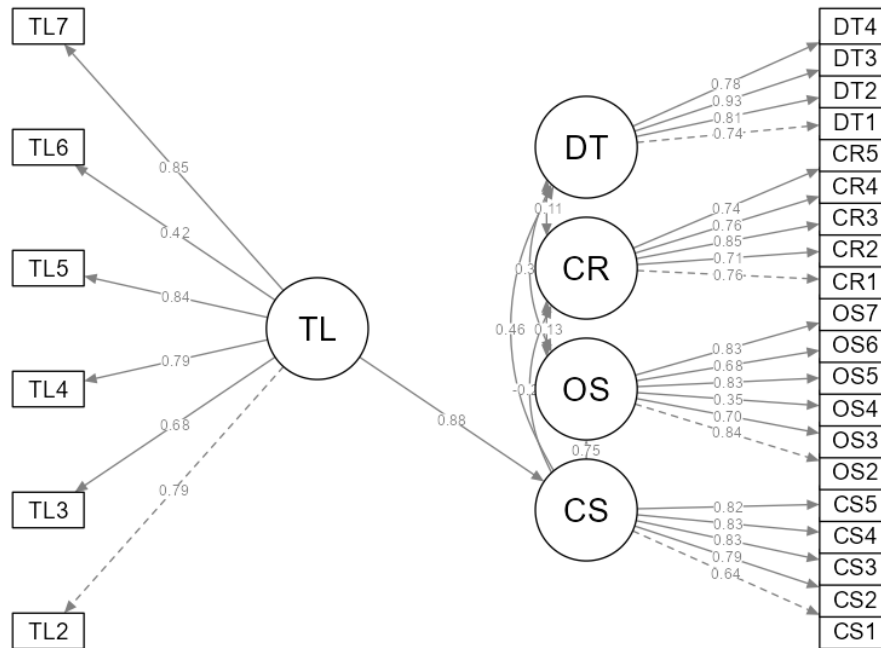


Figure 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Note: TL: Toxic Leadership, CS: Employee Silence, OS: Behavioural Cynicism, CR: Employee Well-being, DT: Emotional Exhaustion

As a result of CFA, one item (TL1) in the toxic leadership variable and one item (BC1) in the behavioural cynicism variable did not show appropriate factor loadings and were excluded from the analysis. The factor loadings of these items are below 0.40. The obtained outer loading values, confidence intervals of the loadings, z and p values are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Factor Loadings, Confidence Intervals, Z and P values

		β	Confidence Interval 95%		Z	P
	Items		Lower	Upper		
TL	TL2	0.786	0.759	0.813		
	TL3	0.677	0.647	0.706	35.4	< 0.001
	TL4	0.789	0.761	0.817	39.2	< 0.001
	TL5	0.844	0.816	0.872	39.8	< 0.001
	TL6	0.418	0.385	0.451	22.9	< 0.001
	TL7	0.850	0.823	0.877	40.7	< 0.001
ES	ES1	0.637	0.608	0.665		
	ES2	0.786	0.762	0.811	34.9	< 0.001
	ES3	0.830	0.806	0.855	36.7	< 0.001
	ES4	0.828	0.804	0.852	36.6	< 0.001
	ES5	0.822	0.798	0.846	36.7	< 0.001
BC	BC2	0.843	0.815	0.870		
	BC3	0.703	0.674	0.732	36.3	< 0.001
	BC4	0.351	0.319	0.384	19.9	< 0.001
	BC5	0.830	0.804	0.857	41.7	< 0.001
	BC6	0.676	0.647	0.705	36.4	< 0.001
	BC7	0.832	0.805	0.859	41.4	< 0.001
EE	EE1	0.738	0.704	0.773		
	EE2	0.810	0.776	0.843	29.5	< 0.001
	EE3	0.927	0.892	0.963	31.7	< 0.001
	EE4	0.777	0.744	0.811	29.0	< 0.001
EW	EW1	0.761	0.721	0.801		
	EW2	0.705	0.666	0.744	24.3	< 0.001
	EW3	0.848	0.809	0.886	26.6	< 0.001
	EW4	0.755	0.717	0.794	25.7	< 0.001
	EW5	0.741	0.703	0.779	25.6	< 0.001

Table 2 shows the load values of the variables. According to this, the expression load weights in the TL variable are (0.385-0.877), in the ES variable (0.608-0.855), in the BC variable (0.647-0.870), in the EE variable (0.704-0.963), and in the EW variable (0.666-0.886). All Z values are greater than 2.58, the two-tailed test value at the 0.01 significance level, and therefore all p-values are less than 0.01. The obtained values were also found to be significant at the 0.001 significance level (All p-values < 0.001).

Table 3: Fit Indices

Indices	Value	Indices	Value
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.979	Hoelter Critical N (CN), $\alpha=0.05$	124.068
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.976	Hoelter Critical N (CN), $\alpha=0.01$	130.829
Bentler-Bonett Non-normed Fit Index (NNFI)	0.976	Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	0.978
Relative Noncentrality Index (RNI)	0.979	Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	0.968
Bentler-Bonett Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0.971	Standardised Root Mean Square Residual	0.077

The fit index values shown in Table 3 are presented below. CFI, TLI, NNFI, RNI, NFI, GFI, and AGFI values above 0.95 indicate that the model shows excellent fit (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003). For an ideal model, SRMR should be 0.08 or lower (Kline, 2015). Additionally, Hoelter's Critical N (CN) value is a statistic used to assess the effect of sample size on model fit. A value exceeding 200 indicates that the model has a good fit.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity and Reliability Indices

	Fornell-Larcker Criterion					HTMT Ratio				Reliability Indices	
	TL	ES	BS	EE	EW	TL	ES	BS	EE	α	AVE
TL	<u>0.74</u>									0.820	0.551
ES	0.67*	<u>0.78</u>				0.83				0.855	0.615
BS	0.51*	0.54*	<u>0.72</u>			0.69	0.69			0.832	0.528
EE	0.31*	0.38*	0.46*	<u>0.81</u>		0.28	0.45	0.56		0.856	0.666
EW	-0.12*	-0.17*	0.00	-0.02	<u>0.76</u>	0.38	0.24	0.22	0.07	0.836	0.583

Table 4 presents the results of the Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion for discriminant validity analysis, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio, and reliability indicators such as Alpha and Average Explained Variance (AVE) values. Alpha (α) and AVE were evaluated as reliability indices. According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the values underlined and highlighted in bold in the table are the square roots of AVE and should have the highest value in their row and column. The numbers below the underlined values indicate the correlation coefficients. HTMT values are similar to correlation coefficients, and a value below 0.85 indicates that convergent validity is achieved. An AVE value above 0.50 indicates that the variables have sufficient reliability. An AVE of 0.5 or greater confirms convergent validity (Shrestha, 2021). Based on these findings, the scale can be considered reliable and valid.

Table 5: Parameter Estimates

Predictor→Dependent	β	Confidence Interval		Z	P	Decision
		Lower	Upper			
TL→ES	0.876	0.852	0.900	30.2	<0.001	
ES→BC	0.752	0.730	0.775	32.4	0.002	
ES→EW	-0.286	-0.309	-0.264	-19.3	<0.001	
ES→EE	0.465	0.439	0.490	23.5	<0.001	
H1: TL→ES→BC	0.659	0.635	0.682	33.093	0.002	Supported
H2: TL→ES→EE	0.407	0.383	0.431	23.886	<0.001	Supported
H3: TL→ES→EW	-0.251	-0.271	-0.231	-19.418	0.003	Supported

In this context, all hypotheses have been supported. After this stage, the Mediation Estimates and Estimate Plot values in Tables 6, 7, and 8 were examined to determine the extent of the mediation effect. Mediation effect analyses were performed using the Jamovi program.

Table 6: Mediation Estimates and Estimate Plot

Mediation Estimates (TL→ES→BC)

Effect	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Indirect	0.242	0.0379	6.39	<.001
Direct	0.265	0.0529	5.00	<.001
Total	0.507	0.0413	12.27	<.001

Estimate Plot

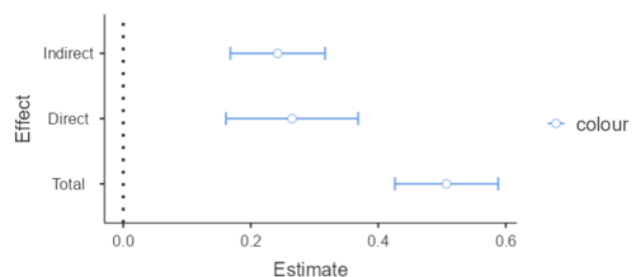


Table 6, Mediation Estimates, examines the mediating role of employee silence between toxic leadership and behavioural cynicism. According to the results of the mediation analysis, both the direct and

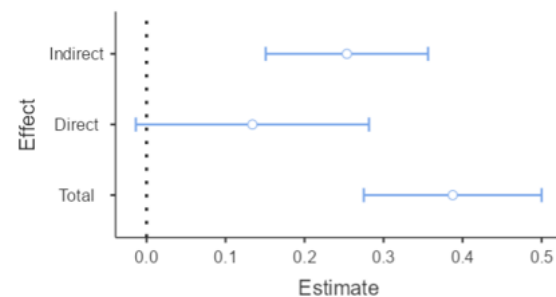
indirect effects of toxic leadership on organisational cynicism are statistically significant. The indirect effect coefficient is 0.242, and this effect is substantial ($Z = 6.39$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that employee silence plays a crucial mediating role in the impact of toxic leadership and behavioural cynicism. Additionally, the direct effect coefficient is 0.265, and this effect is also statistically significant ($Z = 5.00$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that toxic leadership affects organisational cynicism directly, in addition to through employee silence. The total effect is high and significant at 0.507 ($Z = 12.27$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, when examining the Estimate Plot in Table 6, the total effect of toxic leadership on behavioural cynicism is found to be significant ($\beta = -0.12830$, $p = 0.014$), supporting H1. However, it is observed that this effect is primarily mediated. The indirect impact yields a statistically significant outcome ($\beta = -0.11909$, $p = 0.012$), indicating that employee silence acts as a crucial intermediary in the dynamic interplay between the independent and dependent variables. Conversely, the direct impact did not reach statistical significance ($\beta = -0.00921$, $p = 0.895$), suggesting that the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable is entirely navigated through the mediator variable. These findings reveal partial mediation in the model. In other words, employee silence explains part of the effect of the toxic leadership variable, but the direct effect of the toxic leadership variable also persists.

Table 7: Mediation Estimates and Estimate Plot

Mediation Estimates (TL→ES→EE)

Effect	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Indirect	0.254	0.0524	4.84	<.001
Direct	0.134	0.0753	1.78	0.075
Total	0.388	0.0574	6.75	<.001

Estimate Plot



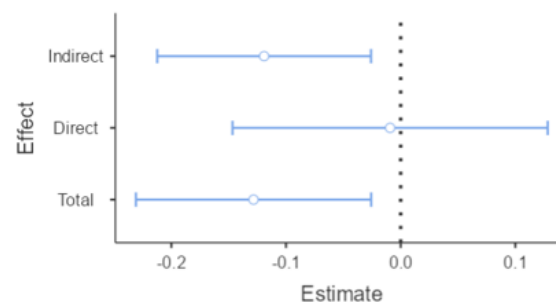
When examining the Mediation Estimates in Table 7, the indirect effect of toxic leadership on emotional exhaustion is 0.254, which is considered highly significant ($Z = 4.84$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that employee silence plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between toxic leadership and emotional exhaustion. The direct effect was calculated as 0.134 and was found to be at the threshold of significance ($Z = 1.78$, $p = 0.075$). The total effect was 0.388 and was statistically significant ($Z = 6.75$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. Thus, while employee silence explains a substantial portion of the effect of toxic leadership, the direct effect of the independent variable persists. Additionally, when examining the Estimate Plot in Table 7, the total effect of toxic leadership on emotional exhaustion is found to be significant ($\beta = 0.38$). This suggests that toxic leadership typically has a negative impact on emotional exhaustion. However, it is observed that a substantial portion of this total effect occurs through indirect channels. The indirect effect is statistically significant ($\beta = 0.22$); the confidence interval remains outside zero. This finding suggests that employee silence plays a significant role in the relationship between toxic leadership and emotional exhaustion. While the confidence intervals for the total and indirect effects are outside zero, the confidence interval for the direct effect is close to zero or includes it. These findings reveal a partial mediation relationship in the model.

Table 8: Mediation Estimates and Estimate Plot

Mediation Estimates (TL→ES→EW)

Effect	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Indirect	-0.11909	0.0476	-2.504	0.012
Direct	-0.00921	0.0701	-0.131	0.895
Total	-0.12830	0.0523	-2.452	0.014

Estimate Plot



When examining the Mediation Estimates in Table 8, the total effect of toxic leadership on employee well-being was found to be significant ($\beta = -0.12830$, $p = 0.014$). This finding indicates that the overall impact of toxic leadership on employee well-being is statistically significant. However, it appears that this total effect is primarily mediated. The indirect impact is statistically significant ($\beta = -0.11909$, $p = 0.012$). This suggests that employee silence plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between toxic leadership and employee well-being. In contrast, the direct effect is not significant ($\beta = -0.00921$, $p = 0.895$). Additionally, when examining the Estimate Plot in Table 8, the total impact of toxic leadership on employee well-being was found to be significant ($\beta = -0.12830$, $p = 0.014$), supporting H3. However, it is observed that this effect is mediated mainly through indirect pathways. The indirect impact holds statistical significance ($\beta = -0.11909$, $p = 0.012$), suggesting that employee silence serves as a crucial bridge in the connection between the toxic leadership and employee well-being. Conversely, the direct impact lacked statistical significance ($\beta = -0.00921$, $p = 0.895$). This suggests that the effect of toxic leadership on employee well-being is entirely mediated through the mediator variable. These findings indicate complete mediation in the model.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine how toxic leadership impacts behavioural cynicism, emotional exhaustion, and employee well-being through the mediating role of employee silence. The findings confirm that employee silence is a significant mechanism explaining these relationships, thus addressing the core research problem of how negative leadership dynamics influence employee outcomes in the hospitality sector. Based on data collected from 414 hotel employees in Turkey, the findings revealed that employee silence plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between toxic leadership and behavioural cynicism, emotional exhaustion, and employee well-being. Specifically, the results showed that employee silence partially mediates the relationship between toxic leadership and both behavioural cynicism (H1) and emotional exhaustion (H2). On the other hand, employee silence serves as a full mediator in the relationship between toxic leadership and employee well-being (H3). These findings demonstrate that silence amplifies the negative effects of toxic leadership, leading to adverse psychological, emotional, and behavioural consequences among employees.

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the literature in several important ways by examining the mediating role of employee silence in the relationship between toxic leadership and three primary organisational outcomes: behavioural cynicism, emotional exhaustion, and employee well-being. First, the study advances toxic leadership theory by empirically confirming its indirect effects through mediating mechanisms. While previous research has primarily focused on the direct outcomes of toxic leadership, such as turnover intention (Yalçınsoy & Işık, 2018) and job dissatisfaction (Eriş & Arun, 2020), this study provides evidence that toxic leadership exerts a more complex influence by fostering a silent work environment, which in turn leads to negative employee attitudes and experiences. This supports the conceptualisation of toxic leadership as a multidimensional and cascading phenomenon (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Second, the study contributes to the literature on employee silence by positioning silence as a critical mechanism that amplifies the adverse effects of toxic leadership. Although silence has been previously associated with destructive leadership (Wang et al., 2020), its mediating role has received limited empirical attention. The findings suggest that silence is not merely a passive response but an active mediator that connects leadership behaviour with employee outcomes such as cynicism and well-being (Milliken et al., 2003). Third, this research highlights the importance of organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion as distinct but interrelated outcomes of toxic leadership. By confirming partial mediation for these outcomes, the study supports theoretical models that link unethical or abusive leadership to psychological withdrawal mechanisms (Morris, 2019; Farghaly Abdelaliam & Abou Zeid, 2023). These findings align with the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which posits that individuals under stress (e.g., from toxic leaders) tend to conserve emotional energy by disengaging, thus expressing cynicism or avoiding confrontation through silence.

Mediation analyses conducted within the scope of the study revealed that employee silence is a significant mediating variable between toxic leadership and behavioural cynicism and emotional exhaustion. This finding shows that organisational silence, which is often overlooked in tourism literature, plays a central role in shaping employee behaviour. Furthermore, the fact that the effect of toxic leadership on employee well-being is entirely mediated by employee silence indicates a complete mediation situation. It provides strong evidence that this relationship operates through an indirect mechanism rather than a direct one. The effect of toxic leadership behaviours on employee silence emerges as a phenomenon that requires more visible and in-depth analysis when combined with the characteristic structure of the tourism sector. Employees in the tourism sector are mostly low-security,

shift-based, and seasonal workers. This situation makes employees reluctant to express their opinions within the organisation and fosters a culture of silence.

Practical implications

The research results offer practical implications for managers, human resources professionals, and organisational development consultants. Considering the harmful effects of toxic leadership behaviour at the individual and organisational levels, businesses must be more careful in their leadership selection and training processes. In particular, the managerial competencies of leadership candidates, such as emotional intelligence, empathetic communication, and ethical decision-making, should be emphasised (Goleman, 1998; Treviño et al., 2000). Furthermore, it is necessary to recognise that employee silence is not only a communication problem within the organisation but also a trust issue. In this regard, managers should create safe spaces where employees can openly share their ideas. Ensuring psychological safety has a positive impact on individual well-being, innovation, problem-solving, and team interaction (Edmondson, 1999). Furthermore, early warning systems should be established in organisations to monitor employee well-being. For example, employees' emotional states and levels of organisational commitment can be tracked through anonymous feedback tools, regular climate surveys, or open-door policies. This allows the adverse effects of silence to be proactively managed.

However, the adverse effects of toxic leadership behaviour on employee silence, cynicism, and burnout make leadership development programmes mandatory for tourism businesses. Middle managers in high-stress units such as the front office, kitchen, and housekeeping should receive training in empathetic leadership, emotional intelligence, and stress management. Safe and anonymous feedback systems should be established to allow employees to express their opinions freely. Due to the intense work pace in tourism, employees often prefer not to report issues. This culture of silence ultimately leads to reduced service quality and increased employee turnover in the long term for hotel businesses. Feedback boxes, digital suggestion systems, or an open-door policy are practical tools for gathering feedback. Managers' performance evaluations should include financial or operational success, as well as factors such as team communication quality, employee satisfaction, and ethical behaviour. Periodic assessment of managerial behaviour by employees is essential for the early detection of toxic tendencies.

Limitations and recommendations

This research has some limitations. First, this study is limited to hotel employees in Turkey. The tourism sector's unique working conditions and hierarchical structure may make it difficult to generalise the results directly to other industries. Therefore, conducting similar studies in different sectors (e.g., healthcare, education, public sector) could reveal how the relationship between toxic leadership and employee silence varies across sectoral contexts. Second, this study only considered employee silence as a mediator variable. However, other factors such as organisational support, psychological safety, individual resilience, and emotional intelligence may also play a mediating or moderating role in the relationship between toxic leadership and employee outcomes. In future research, including such variables in the model will provide a more comprehensive explanatory power. Third, cultural differences were not taken into account in this study. However, perceptions of leadership and silent behaviour may vary depending on the cultural context. Therefore, cross-cultural comparative studies should be conducted to analyse the effects of toxic leadership behaviour in different cultural environments. Future research could extend this study by exploring moderating variables such as organisational culture or leadership styles across various service sectors. Longitudinal designs are also recommended to examine causal relationships over time and to gain a deeper understanding of how toxic leadership evolves and affects employees' psychological states.

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