

Abusive Supervision, Person Organization Fit and Thriving at Work

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Abstract

The core aim of the current study was to investigate the link between abusive supervisor behaviors on thriving at work in presence of mediation of person organization fit. The study is carried out on the sample of employees working in public and private organizations. In total, 300 questionnaires were distributed in both the types of organizations while only 199 useful responses were received back and used for analysis purposes. The findings revealed that abusive supervision reduces thriving of employees while the relationship is mediated by the person-organization fit. The findings offer some useful insights for both researchers and managers.

Key words: Abusive supervision, Person-Organization Fit, thriving at work, Pakistan

Introduction

Managers' role has always been important for a workplace and they may display different behaviors at different times including positive and negative reactions towards various workplace happenings. The outcomes are different associated with these varying behaviors. Often positive supervisory behaviors are denoted as the positive leadership styles, for instance, authentic (Javed et al., 2019) and transformational leaderships (Bass, 1999). The flip side of leadership, on the other hand, is frequently referred to as the negative aspect of leadership and might involve abusive supervision as the primary leadership style. Abusive supervision, according to Tapper (2000), is the manifestation of hostile (verbal and nonverbal) behaviours towards the followers. Such a leadership style negatively influences the organization and its processes, including reduction in productivity (Rafferty & Restubog, 2011), reduces creativity (Liu et al., 2020), leading to performance (Priesmuth et al., 2014), increase in deviance (Javed et al., 2019) and turnover (Raza et al., 2017; Tapper, 2000; Tariq & Weng, 2018).

The literature has highlighted that abusive supervision leads to negative outcomes, but how this happens is an area that still requires attention (Javed et al., 2019; Raza et al., 2017). This study proposes that thriving could be an aspect that may lead to such outcomes. But an investigation of literature highlights that how thriving is influenced by abusive supervision also requires attention. As a result, the initial goal of the present study is to suggest and explore the connection between abusive supervision and thriving at workplace.

In addition to that it has also been proposed that the thriving and abusive supervision relationship is mediated by personal organization fit perceptions. The researcher assumes that when there is abusive supervision at workplace employees create negative feelings about the organization (Raza et al., 2017), while one of such feelings could be the fit perceptions with the organization. Employees feel stressed in such a working environment and create negative feelings about work and finally feel loss of energy at work. Literature has highlighted that personal environment fit perceptions influence the employee workplace behaviors (Kakkar et al., 2019; Tremblay et al., 2017).

By concentrating on the connection between abusive supervision and employee thriving at work through mediation of person organization fit, this study makes some significant literary contributions. The said relationship has largely been under-investigated in the past literature. It also provided empirical evidence from a developing country i.e. Pakistan by providing empirical evidence.

Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

Abusive supervision and Thriving at work

According to prior research, employee thriving has been influenced by numerous factors including personal traits (Cross et al., 2015), relational traits (e.g. working environment, Frazier & Tupper, 2016). Often it is observed that satisfied employees thrive more at work (Marchiondo et al., 2018). Employees who are more concerned with the workplace environments feel more thrived when they have supportive environment at work. Such environment ensure high quality relationships at work which motivates those (Heaphy & Dutton, 2006).

On the other hand, abusive supervision (a form of negative supervisory behavior) influences employees negatively and they tend to feel absence of support. According to Kernis et al., (1989) individuals feel degraded and humiliated which ultimately impairs their ability to learn new things. But how abusive supervision influences employee thriving is an area that has not gained researchers attention. As employees devote high level of energies at workplace, it is important to study the factors that influence their energies. Abusive supervisors, on the other hand, work on the practices that are translated as negative acts and may influence the working environment in a way that such practices prevail over there. In wake of such environment employees may feel negative at work and lose their energies level. This can also be explained with the fact that such behaviors will influence the psychological outcomes and employees may feel distressed at work. In such environment employee would thrive less, which is proposed below:

H1: Abusive supervision is negatively related with thriving at work

Mediating Role of Person-Organization Fit

This study also proposes that person-organization fit (PO fit) mediates the relationship of abusive supervision and employee thriving at workplace. Past studies highlight that fit perceptions are influenced by the job, organization, and personal factors while the working environment is one of the strongest determinant (Vogel & Feldman, 2009). It has been observed that individuals who feel fit at the workplace feel more energized, feel more involved and happy (Kooij & Boon, 2018). When employees do not face a positive working environment (e.g. in presence of abusive supervision), they may not feel positive about the working environment. This environment reduces the perception of fit with the organization which reduces employees' energy level.

According to Shipp and Jansen (2011), such an environment may reduce one's expectations of fit with the organization and they may not respond positively towards

organization. The abusive supervision creates a hostile environment where employees do not feel that they are treated fairly and response they may indulge in acts that are not favorable for the organization (e.g. turnover, low performance) (Raza et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2015). This may be attributed to the fact that they do not perceive themselves fit with the organization. In response the choices of low positive work involvement shows lack of energy at the part of employees. As thriving requires high energy level, it is expected that abusive supervision would lead to negative feelings about fit with the organization and shall reduce one's energy utilization in the firm. Therefore, the following assertion is being made:

H2: Abusive supervision and thriving relationship is mediated by the person organization fit perceptions.

Research Methodology

The data for the current study was collected from the employees of public and private sector organizations. In order to elicit their responses online survey using Google Forms was carried out. This is a widely used approach and has been accepted by researchers across the globe. It has been accepted against the paper-pencil approach and can create equally reliable data (Church et al., 2001). This was also considered useful for being cost effective and less time consuming approach of data collection. As this approach can either used when the exact number of respondents are in access or it can be used when the snowball is created. In the current study, I approached managers of various organizations and after getting the consent of management forwarded the questionnaire links to the managers. They forwarded that link to the employees. All in all 210 filled questionnaire were received back, but 11 of them were carelessly filled so removed from final analysis. Therefore, only 199 useful responses were available for analysis purpose. The measures for the study were adopted from existing literature. For instance, 15 items scale of Tepper (2000) was used to measure abusive supervision. The PO fit scale was taken from the work of Netemeyer et al. (1997), it had four items in it. The thriving scale was operationalized using the measure of Porth et al., (2012) which had 10 items in it. The data was analyzed using SPSS software.

Data analysis and results

Majority of the respondents were male (67%), with age between 20-30 years (80%), having university degree (bachelors & masters, 93%), having experience of up to five years (83%), from the private sector (93%) and manufacturing firms (74%). Data was normally distributed (the values were within threshold limits of ± 1 & ± 1). The measures were also reliable as the values were above the threshold of 0.70 (0.771 – 0.897).

After preliminary analysis the data was carried out for correlation analysis and regression for hypothesis testing. The correlation results are shown in table 1. Where it is evident that abusive supervision is negatively related with the employee thriving ($r = -0.25$, $p < 0.001$) but it is not related with the person organization fit ($r = 0.04$, $p > 0.05$). In addition to that, personal organization fit is positively related to thriving ($r = 0.40$, $p < 0.05$). These results prove that the assumed relationship exists and therefore the author may proceed with the hypotheses testing.

Table 1

Reliability and correlation analysis

	AS	POF	ET	Reliability
Abusive supervision	--			0.771
Person organization fit	0.04	--		0.715
Employee thriving	-0.25**	0.40*	--	0.879

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$

Table 2 reveals the results of hypotheses testing and includes both direct and indirect relationships. It is evident from the table that abusive supervision negatively predicts employee thriving ($\beta = -0.34$, $p < 0.05$), but it does not predict the person organization fit ($\beta = -0.09$, $p > 0.05$). Furthermore, the indirection relationship is also not significant ($\beta = -0.03$, $p > 0.05$). Based on these results it is concluded that H1 is supported while H2 is not supported.

Table 2

Hypotheses testing outcomes

Relationships	B	SE	t-value	Bootstraps @ 95%		P
				LLCI	ULCI	
AS \rightarrow ET	-0.34	0.027	5.428	0.338	0.521	0.021
AS \rightarrow POF	-0.08	0.042	4.328	0.245	0.428	0.079
POF \rightarrow ET	0.42	0.035	3.412	0.301	0.352	0.004
Indirect effects						
AS \rightarrow POF \rightarrow ET	-0.03	0.042	3.105	0.352	0.421	0.120

Discussion of Results

The core aim of the study was to propose and empirically test the relationship of abusive supervision and employee thriving through mediation of person organization fit. These relationships have been assumed through two hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 assumes that abusive supervision and thriving are negatively related, which was supported by the empirical findings. These results support our assumption that abusive supervision leads to negative outcomes. These results are in line with the past studies,

e.g. according to Heaphy and Dutton (2006), having positive relationships at work gives employees energy, while abusive supervision is contrary to that.

Further analysis reveals that personal organization fit is not related with the predictor (abusive supervision) and mediation is also not supported. These results are against the findings of Vogel and Feldman, (2009) who observed that individuals with high fit perceptions are better performers and stay happy at work. Similarly, According to Kooij and Boon's (2018) research, an individual who fits with the company exhibits positive behavior's at work. Shipp and Jansen (2011) highlighted that abusive supervisors create negative feelings about the working environment and employees have a reduced level of bond with the organization. Raza et al., (2017) also depicted that due to abusive supervisors' employees tend to display negative behaviors. But we propose that the supervisor alone may not be a determinant of one's feelings of fit with the organization rather some other organizational and workplace related factors may influence such perceptions.

Implication of the study

This research has aimed at finding the outcomes of abusive supervision at work in the form of a person organization fit and thriving. The findings reveal that thriving is reduced by the abusive supervision while personal organization fit is not influenced by such workplace negative factors. These findings highlight that there could be some other work-related factors that may have bearing on the employee outcomes. In addition to that, the study highlights some important aspects of management related to the workplace in Pakistani context. The findings highlight that the organizational culture is depicted by the behaviors of supervisors, but there could be some coping mechanisms present at work that may reduce the impact of negative supervisory behaviors. The management may therefore focus on both supervisory behaviors and employee outcomes in order to find the mechanisms that may increase or reduce the impact of such negative workplace factors.

This study also adds value in the domain of research on abusive leadership and individual outcomes. past literature highlights the abusive supervisors become cause of reduction in creativity of employees (Liu et al., 2020), reduction in performance (Priesmuth et al.,2014), increase in knowledge hiding (Bashir et al.,2019), increased deviance (Rawwas et al., 2018). This study offers a novel thriving outcome i.e. at the workplace which was proposed and empirically supported.

Limitations and Future Directions

The exploration of the link between abusive supervision and flourishing at work is one of the primary limitations of this research. The data was self-reported which may lead to some biased responses. The study was also cross sectional which may

hamper the generalization of results. Future researchers can carry out longitudinal and daily method studies. Furthermore, some other explanatory mechanism may be investigated e.g. emotional exhaustion, and leader member exchange. In addition, some coping mechanisms can reduce the impact of abusive supervision on employees. It may include the personality aspects (e.g. neuroticism), similarity with the leader, other organizational factors (e.g. peer support), or absence of job alternatives.

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