

IMPACT OF ABUSIVE SUPERVISION ON EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY: THROUGH EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION AND MODERATING ROLE OF MINDFULNESS

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ABSTRACT

In the present study, we have examined the process through which abusive supervision impacts employee creativity. Specifically, we have tested whether abusive supervision is associated with lower levels of employee creativity and if this effect is mediated by emotional exhaustion. Moreover we have tested whether mindfulness helps to decrease the effect of abusive supervision on employee creativity. To address the purpose, data was collected from 150 staff members and supervisors of telecommunication sector. Then data was analyzed by using correlation and regression analysis. The analysis indicates that abusive supervision had a direct negative relationship with employee creativity and also led to emotional exhaustion, and mindfulness has a direct positive relationship with employee creativity. These findings contribute to a better understanding of the negative effects of abusive supervision on employee creativity and the processes by which they occur, along with the knowledge of how to cope with it.

KEYWORDS: Abusive Supervision, Emotional Exhaustion, Mindfulness, Employee Creativity.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, scholars have paid much more attention to the study of tyrannical and abusive managerial behaviors and the potential negative consequences of such behaviors in organizations.[20] Abusive supervision refers to an employee perception about the supervisor's continuous aggressive non-physical abuse.[39] Behaviors that fall under the umbrella of abusive supervision, such as sabotaging, yelling at, or ignoring subordinates, have been linked to an array of negative consequences.[40] Harris, Kacmar and Boonthanum, [21] found that experiencing abusive supervision often leads to

increased work family conflict, psychological distress, exhaustion, turnover, job strain and adverse health outcomes. Halbesleben et al., [22] found that the stress from the ongoing threat created by an abusive work relationship can come to exhaust social and psychological resources. Such dysfunctional behavior has strong implications for workplace behaviors and outcomes. As expected, research has suggested that abuse significantly impacts employee behaviors and performance and thus has strong implications for organizational outcomes.[39]

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Existing researches give many findings which show that job stress is associated with negative outcomes such as deviant and counterproductive behaviors.[31] Along with job stress, burnout can be defined as a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that results from long-term involvement in work situations that drain the employees emotionally [15], as it had been predicted earlier that emotional exhaustion is the most important component of burnout and stress.[9] Ford (1990) found that stress produces routine behavioral patterns and generally interferes with novel or creative responses. The most common outcome of stressed employees is leaving a job, and when employees choose to exit, their potential to be creative and improve the focal organization is removed.[23]

During the last two decades, a group intervention program known as mindfulness based stress reduction has been proposed as an approach.[12] This program is used among patients who have chronic illness and among groups of fairly healthy individuals who have hoped to improve their abilities to cope with the normal but often significant stresses of daily life.[17] Mindfulness improves people's cognitive, emotional and interpersonal functioning.[8] In the previous studies, it has been found that mindfulness improves the ability to concentrate, decreases the fear of being judged and reduces aversive self conscious experience.[2,38] Shapiro, Carlson, Austin and Freedman found that mindfulness helps to deal with thoughts and feelings.[35] High level of self reported mindfulness is linked with the processes important to creativity.[3] Practicing mindfulness also reduces the fear of judgment which is conducive to creativity (Carson & Langer, 2006; Bass et al., 2008).

Based on the conservation of resource theory by Hobfall (1989), which is everybody looks to preserve resources like objects and energy. Stress happens when resources lose, which leads to job dissatisfaction and one consider quitting a job", we believe that emotional exhaustion is a

possible mediator of the abusive supervision and employee creativity. As past literature has proved that the threat created by an abusive work relationship can exhaust social and psychological resources. Hence in accordance with that, the resources which can be used in exploratory behaviors such as creativity become limited.

Previously the studies on abusive supervision and creativity were comparatively limited. Particularly in the Pakistani context, there is still no such study in which abusive supervision is tested on the creativity of the employee. The first contribution in this article is to increase understanding of the complex relationship between abusive supervision and employee creativity through an examination of the role of mediator which is emotional exhaustion with the help of conservation of resource theory. Secondly we have used mindfulness as a moderator which according to the past researches will help to reduce the effect of emotional exhaustion (stress) among employees. Mindfulness is defined as "awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment and non judgmental to the unfolding of experience by moment".[30] The aim of this research is to enhance the creativity of an employee which is affected by abusive supervision in the companies of Pakistan with the help of mindfulness therapy among employees.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

ABUSIVE SUPERVISION AND EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY

Abusive supervision is defined as "subordinate's perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact".[39] Tepper's abusive supervision is similar to the concept of emotional abuse which was originally proposed by Keashly et al., [28] i.e., "emotional abuse refers to hostile verbal and

nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact, directed by one or more persons to another". According to Keashly and Harvey [29], in the workplace, an individual may face continuous contemptuous attitudes from certain coworkers or supervisors. Although these verbal and nonverbal behaviors are not physical attacks, they can constantly torture the individual psychologically when these behaviors become constant in the workplace. Most of the previous literature shows that abusive supervision points to unjust perceptions and anger reactions.[34] Abusive supervision is characterized by three elements: an employee's subjective evaluation of his/her supervisor's behavior; the continued demonstration of hostility; and by the fact that the behavior is deliberate.[24] These more proximal outcomes make sense in the context of reactance and social exchange theory. That is, in the face of abuse, at least some employees will attempt to "fight back" against threats to the self or try to restore justice (Vogel & Mitchell 2015; Wang et al., 2014). This problem has received a great deal of recent attention from organizational scholars exploring the ways in which managers impact the performance and well-being of their followers.[32,37] Curiously, an alternative explanation for lower performance is conservation of resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989), and it is rarely explored in the abusive supervision literature.

This lack of resources can be an important obstacle of the creative process. As many scholars have noted, to move beyond simply having creative ideas, an individual must be able to secure both material and social resources.[43,45] Having an abusive supervisor is likely to indicate that the employee does not have sufficient standing to engage in investigative behaviors and will not be provided with material resources or support even if they have a novel idea.[18] Abusive supervision could also be considered as a particularly toxic form which creates conflict between the relationships, which

prior research has found to be harmful to the creative process (Bai et al., 2000). Finally, Amabile has argued that there are three most vital components of creativity and these are expertise, critical thinking, and motivation.[1] Although expertise is not impacted by the experience of abuse, it is likely that the creative process will be negatively impacted by abusive supervision as motivation is exhausted and critical reasoning is reserved as a result of the resource depletion associated with the increased cognitive load of the stressful situation. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis.

HYPOTHESIS 1: ABUSIVE SUPERVISION WILL BE NEGATIVELY RELATED TO EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION BETWEEN ABUSIVE SUPERVISION AND EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY

Emotional exhaustion is a chronic state of physical and emotional depletion that results from excessive job and/or personal demands and continuous stress. It describes a feeling of being emotionally over extended and exhausted by one's work.[36,44] It has been argued that emotional exhaustion is the most important component of burnout and stress.[9] As noted earlier, conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) may help to explain the impact of abusive supervision on employee's emotional exhaustion. According to conservation of resources theory, individuals are driven to security and maintain resources that assist them in accomplishing their goals. These resources may include "objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as a means for achievement of these objects" (Hobfoll, 1989). When facing a loss of resources, they are likely to experience distress (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Hobfoll, 2001). A significant amount of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) research has indicated that supervisory

support may be seen as an important resource for employees.[5] When supervisors provide emotional support, employees are less likely to feel anxiety or burnout (Cropanzano et al., 1997). On the other hand, if employees do not have an encouraging relationship with the supervisors, and fail to get any support from the supervisors when needed, they are likely to experience stress.[26] This effect can be expected to be puffed up if the supervisor is actively causing stress through personal attacks. Thus it is reasonable to expect that there will be a positive relationship between abusive supervision and employee's feelings of emotional exhaustion.[19]

Moreover, as emotional exhaustion represents a fairly direct assessment of feelings of resource reduction, we would expect it to be associated with a diminished capacity to perform well. For example, evidence suggests that emotional exhaustion is associated with both impaired psychical and mental health outcomes, poor job performance and more incidents of organizational deviance behavior.[10] It has been argued that there is a significant construct overlap between aspects of burnout and employee engagement.[10] Consequently, we would expect that the high level of emotional exhaustion would cause decrease in the creativity of the employee.

HYPOTHESIS 2: EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION WILL MEDIATE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ABUSIVE SUPERVISION AND EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY

MODERATING ROLE OF MINDFULNESS BETWEEN ABUSIVE SUPERVISION AND EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY

Mindfulness is a state of non-judgmental, sustained and alert awareness from living in the

moment.[6] It is a complex phenomenon composed of a set of different skills, the ability to pay attention to several stimuli, the ability to focus with full awareness, the ability to give a non evaluative verbal description of the observed phenomenon and the ability to avoid immediate evaluation,[7] which improves emotional, cognitive and interpersonal performance of people [8] and positively affects the self efficacy and stress regulation. In the previous studies, authors have found that mindfulness also improves the ability to concentrate [38], decreases the fear of being judged by the boss and also decreases self conscious experience.[2] Mindfulness helps to deal with thoughts and feelings.[35] High level of self reported mindfulness has previously been linked to processes important to creativity.[3] Creativity is understood as the ability to produce ideas that are both novel and appropriate (Amabile, 1996).

A number of abilities which are associated with trait mindfulness or facilitated by mindfulness training are also linked with creativity (Dreu et al., 2012). For example, mindfulness is linked with the increase in ability to switch perspectives[8], while mindfulness training leads to the improvement of working memory [11], as well as increase in the ability to respond in a non-habitual fashion (Moor & Malinowski, 2009). Practicing mindfulness also reduces the fear of judgment [8] which is conducive to creativity (Bass et al., 2008).

However, the findings of several studies support the positive link between mindfulness and creativity.[33] Consequently, mindfulness may be both directly and indirectly related to creative thinking (Davis, 2009; Dreu, Bass & Nijstad, 2008). So looking at the past literature, it seems that mindfulness will buffer the relationship between abusive supervision and employee creativity. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis.

HYPOTHESIS 3: MINDFULNESS WILL MODERATE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ABUSIVE SUPERVISION AND EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY

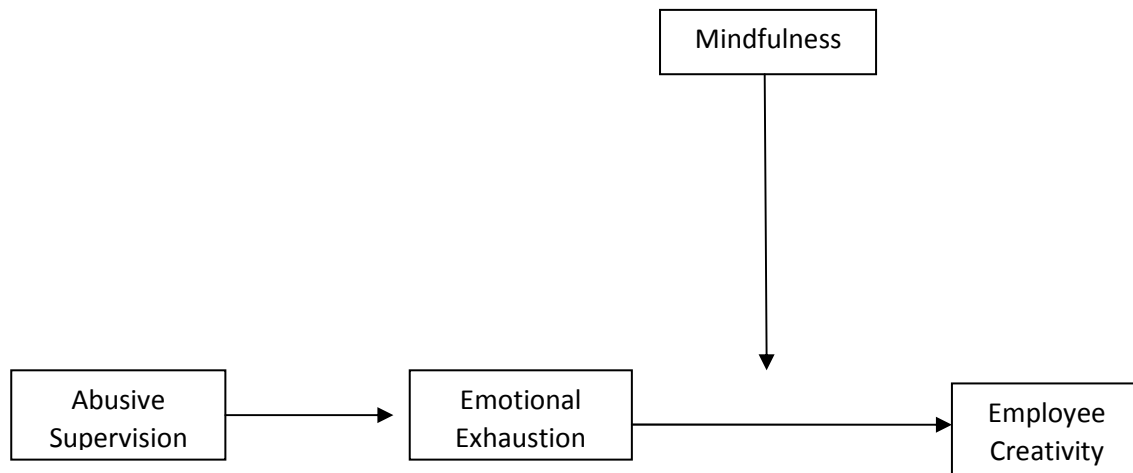


Figure 1. Relationship between Mindfulness, Abusive Supervision and Employee Creativity

METHOD

SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE

The participants for this study were selected from four telecommunication companies (Ufone, Zong, Mobilink and Warid) through personal contacts in Rawalpindi & Islamabad. For any kind of firm, creativity is considered as a core job function for the employee. Although employees in almost any occupation have the ability to demonstrate creativity in some way but to eliminate the biasness, supervisors were asked to evaluate the creativity of the selected staff members and staff members reported their perception about supervisors in terms of abusive supervision, as well as their own level of emotional exhaustion and mindfulness. Questionnaires were distributed among the supervisors and staff members and were returned at the spot. Respondents were assured that their provided information will remain confidential.

Across four companies, 250 questionnaires were distributed and 125 staff members and 25 supervisors responded. The respondents have been classified into four categories in context to gender, age, qualification and experience. Among

the respondents, 75% were male and 25% were female. After collecting the questionnaires, these questionnaires were punched into SPSS sheet for further correlation, regression analysis and also to determine the reliability of data.

MEASURES

The scale for all the variables were adopted, and were measured using a five point Likert scale from one to five, 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

ABUSIVE SUPERVISION

Abusive supervision is measured by using Tepper B. [39]. Total fifteen items were used. Example items are "My Boss gives me the silent treatment", "My Boss is rude to me". Value of the Cronbach's alpha is 0.791.

EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION

Emotional exhaustion is measured by using Maslach and Jackson (1981). Total seven items were used. Example items are "I feel emotionally drained from my work", "I feel used up at the end of the workday". Value of the Cronbach's alpha is 0.791.

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is measured by using MAAS.[6] Total fifteen items were used. Example items are “I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until sometime later”. Value of the Cronbach’s alpha is 0.791.

EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY

Employee creativity was measured using Zhou and George (2001). 13 items of employee creativity were used. A sample item is “The employee suggests new ways to achieve goals or objectives”. Cronbach alpha was 0.70.

RESULTS

Table 1.Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations

	Variables	M	S.D.	1	2	3	4
1.	AS	3.78	0.55	1			
2.	EE	3.82	0.67	0.497**	1		
3.	EC	3.66	0.57	0.234**	-0.372**	1	
4.	MF	2.96	0.45	0.425**	0.208**	0.154*	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 presents correlation among the model variables. There was significant positive relationship between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion (r=0.49). There was significant negative relationship between abusive

supervision and employee creativity (r=0.37). There was significant positive relationship between mindfulness and employee creativity (r=0.15).

Table 2.Results of Regression Analysis

Predictor	Emotional Exhaustion			Employee Creativity		
	β	R ²	ΔR	β	R ²	ΔR^2
Abusive Supervision						
Step 1:						
Control Variables		0.01			0.06	
Step 2:						
Abusive Supervision	0.08**	0.01**	0.02**	- 0.43**	0.12**	0.06**
Emotional Exhaustion						
Step 1:						
Control Variables					0.06	
Step 2:						
Emotional Exhaustion				-0.43**	0.30**	0.23**

** p<0.01 (two tailed); p<0.05 (two tailed).

According to Hypothesis 1, abusive supervision will be negatively related to employee creativity, and Table 2 indicates that abusive supervision is negatively and significantly related to employee creativity with $\beta=-0.43$, so on the basis of this strong support, Hypothesis 1 is accepted. There is

a positive significant relationship between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion ($\beta=0.08$) and there is negative and significant relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee creativity ($\beta=-0.43$).

Table 3. Results of Mediated Regression Analysis

Predictor	Employee Creativity		
	β	R ²	ΔR^2
<i>Abusive Supervision</i>			
Step 1:			
Control Variables		0.06	
Step 2:			
Emotional Exhaustion	-0.43**	0.30**	0.25**
Step 3:			
Abusive Supervision	0.40**	0.35**	0.30**

p<0.001 (two tailed); ** p< 0.01 (two tailed); p<0.05 (two tailed).

Table 3 shows that emotional exhaustion is partially mediate between the relationship of abusive supervision and employee creativity ($\beta=-0.43$). The reason of partial mediation is that there is a negative significant relation between abusive supervision and employee creativity

directly and also via emotional exhaustion. Hence because of this the second hypothesis is accepted which states that emotional exhaustion will mediate the relationship between abusive supervision and employee creativity.

Table 4. Results of Moderated Regression Analysis

Predictor	Employee Creativity		
	β	R ²	ΔR^2
Emotional Exhaustion			
Step 1:			
Control Variable		0.06	
Step 2:			
Emotional Exhaustion	0.47		
Mindfulness	0.87**	0.78	0.71**
Step 3:			
Emotional Exhaustion × Mindfulness	-0.20*	0.79	0.46

p<0.001 (two tailed); ** p< 0.01 (two tailed); * p<0.05 (two tailed).

Table 4 shows the result of the moderating test, so according to the table, mindfulness moderates the negative relationship between abusive supervision and employee creativity in such a way that high mindfulness shall weaken the relationship because the value of $\beta=-0.20$. Thus the third hypothesis is accepted which states that mindfulness moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and employee creativity so that it weakens the relationship and increases the creativity of the employees.

existing models of abusive supervision in order to gain a better understanding of the process by which destructive leadership, and abusive supervision in particular, may impact employee outcomes. Specifically, on the basis of conservation of resources theory, abusive supervisors would create such a hostile work environment that they would deplete the emotional and social resources of their employees. Further, this resource depletion would manifest itself in employee reports of sleep deprivation and emotional exhaustion and that these, in turn, would be associated with lower levels of creative performance.

DISCUSSION

Drawing upon a number of theoretical perspectives, the current study aimed to expand

Evidence of significant positive relationships between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion were found. Moreover, evidence of a significant indirect relationship between abusive supervision and creative performance through the mediator (emotion exhaustion) was also found but it was a negative relation. Thus, the present study is consistent with the limited evidence linking abusive supervision to creativity (Lee et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2012). The moderator which is mindfulness has been found to have a positive effect on employee creativity.

This article also helps to expand the previous contribution about the relationship of abusive supervision and employee creativity. We have shown that abusive supervision can negatively predict employee creativity. This relation is also supported by the previous researches that abusive supervision is an important antecedent of employee job performance (Mayer et al., 2009). Tu and Lu (2012) established that abusive supervision is negatively associated to employee creativity. The results of this study also show that ethical leadership is significantly and negatively related to employee creativity through the mediator of emotional exhaustion.

Theoretical and Practical Implication

A notable theoretical contribution of the current study was to investigate abusive supervision through the lens of conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989). The theory suggests that abusive supervision does not need to be considered as an opportunity for confrontation, revenge, or the restoration of justice. Instead, it may just be that some people resign themselves to their situation and their energy, their well-being, and their performance suffers as a result. Even among the “fighters,” it is likely that some experience exhaustion or sleepless nights as a result of conflict with their nightmare bosses.

The finding of this study has important implication for organizational managers. As

emotional exhaustion is partially mediating the relationship between abusive supervision and employee creativity, so managers should focus on their own leadership style and should try to become ethical and reduce emotional exhaustion in the employees. Moreover leaders in organizations should become a role model for employees according to high moral standards. Another main finding of this study is that mindfulness is positively related to employee creativity so the leaders of organization should organize mindfulness therapy among employees to enhance the creativity of an employee, which is affected by the abusive supervision in the telecommunication sector of Pakistan. Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) is a psychological therapy designed to aid in preventing the relapse of depression, specifically in individuals with major depressive disorder (MDD).

LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations in this study. First the sample size was very small as compared to other studies; a large sample size may provide more accurate results. Secondly the data was self reported; accept from the creativity scale so common method bias may be a concern. Therefore the ideal scenario for future research should be that the predictor should be from different sources. Thirdly, researchers could examine these relationships from a team perspective.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the process by which abusive supervision could impact employee creativity. In doing so, we established that emotional exhaustion is a potential mediator for this effect. Further, the study demonstrated the utility of conservation of resources theory for understanding the reactions of employees to abusive supervision. Moreover mindfulness plays a positive role for decreasing the effect of

abusive supervision among employees. We believe that the current results not only once again demonstrate the importance of good leader–follower relationships, but also indicate that the employees who have high mindfulness will result in a low emotional exhaustion, stress and anxiety.

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