The Relationship between Abusive Supervision and Job Performance: The Mediating Role of Interpersonal Justice

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the consequences of abusive supervision. Abusive supervision was found to influence job performance through the mechanism of subordinates’ perceptions of interpersonal justice. Data was collected from 190 cadets from the Air Force Institute of Technology in Taiwan. Findings were consistent with proposed hypotheses. On a practical level, abusive supervision may also lead to interpersonal conflicts. Moreover, in the longer term, cadets may develop distrust perceptions toward the organization due to the injustice perception, and might not be willing to follow the rules with diminished royalty. Strength, limitations, and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords Abusive Supervision; Interpersonal Justice; Job Performance.
INTRODUCTION

The issue of abusive supervision (AS) has been discussed recently, and it has been much more important nowadays. The research emphasize on the role of the dark side of the interaction between leaders and employees, and how this interaction influences work performance and royalty (Carstens & Barnes, 2006). Moreover, such an interaction might influence employees’ physical health and job satisfaction (Jimmy & Andy, 2009). That is the reason why we need to look into this issue.

In short, the issue of AS might bring out many negative behaviors, such as stress, emotional exhaustion, poor job performance (Klaussner, 2014). As a result, most researchers then keep focusing on the attitudes, performance, psychological distress, family well-being, and resistance as outcomes of AS, trying to figure out how it influences our life. For example, employees who believe that they are victims of AS, it will definitely lower their will to have a positive attitude for work, and there is no doubt that they may have a poor job performance (Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006). Moreover, people who had been suffering from AS might have problems to get alone with others in the future as well (Podsakoff et al., 2000). When one is not able to get satisfaction as feedback on their job and do have normal interaction with others, there’s a high probability that they may bring the negative emotion home (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002; Tepper, 2000; Tepper et al., 2006; Tepper, Duffy,
Hoobler, & Ensley, 2004; Tepper, Duffy, & Shaw, 2001; Tepper, Henle, Lambert, & Giacalone, 2008; Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002). In other words, they would feel tense or give their family a high pressure to their family members. As one has such dark emotion not only at workplace but also home, it is quite possible for them to lose hope easily and resist things around them (Hobman, Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2009).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Abusive supervision

In society, it is for sure that there would have conflicts and misunderstandings between human beings and lead to inverse (Hoobler & Hu, 2013). There’s no exception in the enterprise organization, if supervisors exhibit the behavior of abusive supervision to their employees, it’ll always end up with lots of negative psychological reactions, and emotional exhaustion plays an important role of it. The AS we discuss here is that the employees can directly feel that the supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors, excluding physical contact (Tepper, 2000). AS will be appeared in many different ways, for example, criticized or denounced one in public, cynicism, indifference, the supervisor loses his temper in front of the employees, and threatening employees. However, in case to be classified into AS, supervisors must have this kind of hostile behavior which makes the employees feel their supervisors’ dissatisfaction for a long time. In contrast, if the supervisor bursts his anger only occasionally, it cannot be regarded as an AS. This interaction would only
increase the employees’ pressure, and lead to job exhaustion (Mackey, Ellen, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2013).

**Interpersonal justice**

Interpersonal justice originated from organizational justice (Wang, Mao, Wu, & Liu, 2012). Organizational justice includes procedural justice and distributive justice. Briefly speaking, procedural justice is that the employees’ justice perception to the decision-making process of how the organization allocate the result. As for distributive justice, it’s the justice perception of the allocated result itself. In an organization, if the supervisor deals everything with equity, no matter the results ends up with nice or worse, employees would devote themselves to it. On the contrary, if employees feel that their supervisors treat them unfairly, it might cause the employees uncooperative, steal, or damage as the feedback to the organization (Colquitt et al., 2006; Thau et al., 2007). Except for the equity of the process and the result, the employees will also think of the quality of interpersonal exchange in the process. Bies and Moag (1986) firstly separate interactional justice from procedural justice, interactional justice not only focused on the relationship of interpersonal interact but also emphasized on the interact in the organization, especially the interaction and the communication between the supervisors and the employees. The concept of interactive justice started from it, it emphasized on the progress of the organization be respect to the employees with empathy, and accept the
employees’ suggestions, so as to increase the quality of interpersonal interaction.,

interactional justice also be separated into interpersonal justice and informational justice,

interpersonal justice focus on the interaction between human beings. As long as the decision
makers respect others, the interpersonal justice will increase. On the other hand, informational
justice means that whether the supervisors can clearly point out the award in the organization
and let the employees surly understand it without any doubt (Colquitt, 2001; Lambert et al.,
2007) Overall, when employees surrounded by the distributive justice, procedural justice, and
interactive justice, it can not only increase the job satisfaction, but also elevate their will of
organizational citizenship behavior. What’s more, the employees will have higher job
performance as feedback to the organization (Andrews, Baker, & Hunt, 2008; Masterson et al.,

Job performance

Job performance is defined as the extent of members’ achievement of the desired role
demands from the organization (Campbell, 1990). Job performance is determined by the
performance of the quantity, and the extent of the work of the best components (Porter &
Lawler, 1968). Job performance evaluates by the contribution of the assessment performance
or specific tasks after a certain period of time in the past to make sure the adaptability for the
work in the future. Salary and promotion would be adjusted with awards. According to the
definitions above, the standards of job performance which set by the organization, and the interaction with others, employees try their best to achieve the goal together for the organization.

**The relationship between abusive supervision and interpersonal justice**

According to the concept of justice theory, subordinates’ justice perception is negatively associated with abusive supervision, in turn, affect job-related attitudes of the employees (Tepper, 2000). If the employees’ recognition of organization justice to the organization is higher, their loyalty and enthusiasm will no doubt increase as well, and the employees will definitely have higher job performance to feedback the organization for sure (Tepper, 2011).

Interpersonal justice is what others feel how much the respect they have from others and then effect on their job performance (Burton & Hoobler, 2011). A favorable interact surrounding will make one feel that he has be respect by others. When one have the feeling or being respect, it will have advantages on the job performance. The higher the one being respect, it’ll also make the one gain more self-confidence. When one has the self-confidence, he will have stronger working ability. Having a great source of self-confidence is extremely important, which makes one’s job performance much higher. Being picked by the supervisors, it’s pretty easy making the employees feeling uncomfortable, and losing the confidence and enthusiasm
of the job gradually.

Furthermore, we can also use the social information processing theory to inference the relationship between AS and interpersonal justice (Salanck & Pheffer, 1987). Social information processing theory indicates that individuals will take the background of the society and the working environment as information to proof what they have experienced. It also mentioned through this kind of processing method will brainstorming out brand new ideas by exchanging opinions together. Under the circumstance of the employees’ AS, for example, shouted in front of others without a reason, or being treated indifference, these are clear information to employees, so as to become a recognition of working environment, considered it as not being respect and does not fulfil the basic tenets of interpersonal treatment, such as justification, truthfulness, respect, and propriety (Colquitt, 2001).

Hypothesis 1. Abusive supervision will be negatively related to interpersonal justice.

The relationship between abusive supervision and job performance

AS by the supervisors sometimes might likely bring to ripple effect, it provides with infusibility, not only directly influence the employees’ psychological feelings and pressure, but also influence the employees’ service performance to customers, the interaction and
cooperation between coworkers (Harris, Harvey, & Kacmar, 2011). Meanwhile, it’ll decrease
the working satisfaction and enthusiasm, and results in the declining job performance.

It is normal to have different degree of AS in the workplace, take Services as an example, they
not only offer favorable services but also have the ability to offer customers’ great consume
experience (Meglich & Eesley, 2011). Therefore, they must always being optimistic, even to
make a joyful atmosphere, just for making a satisfied smile for their customers. However, if
the employees feel the negative psychological pressure and lose the enthusiasm of the service
because of the behavior of AS by the supervisors, it’ll lead the employees lose their optimistic
and sincere smile. When customers feel dissatisfied, it’ll bring out the decreased job
performance.

Hypothesis 2. Abusive supervision will be negatively related to job performance.

The mediating role of interpersonal justice

From the theory of interpersonal justice above we can understand that the interpersonal justice
is one’s job performance is influenced by the way how others respect him. When the
employees feel there’s more abusive supervision from their supervisors, the employees needs
to spend more time in response to their negative emotions (Folger, 1993). However, the
exhaustion may be much higher, and directly influence the will of devoting in working. Like the students at school, they may depend on the way of request or treat them and have different learning attitude, which would also influence the effect of how they learn in lessons or the ability of solving problems. From this study, if the seniors treat students with the positive way or encouragement, students will have the faith not only in their teachers, officials but also peers. What’s more, they will trust in themselves. With this kind of attitude for every lesson or problem solving, everything would become easier. On the contrary, if teachers lecture with gabbling and ridiculing, students will feel self-abased. Then, students will feel lose and burnout, and there’s no doubt that the performance at school would be influenced by the negative emotion. In short, interpersonal justice mediates the abusive supervision and job performance, which tells the relationships between justice perceptions.

Hypothesis 3. Interpersonal justice will mediate the relationship between abusive supervision and job performance.

METHOD

Sample and procedure

This study takes samples from class 103 and 104 of Air Force Institute of Technology as objects. They divided into two-year high college, two-year junior high college, and five

The survey is closed in two months before graduation, however, the end of the semester is approaching, there had some problems like the class changing, and other activities which is held at school or other factors, the result wouldn’t be that exact right. There are 200 questionnaires for this study, recycled 2 undone questionnaires, and excluding the incomplete questionnaires, there are 190 useable questionnaires left. The effective rate of this study was 95%. Men accounted for 81.1% as the effective sample, and 18.9% for female. The age distributes with 19 years old, which accounts for 56.9%, with the average of age 19.48 (SD = 2.53). The education is distributed with high schools, which accounts for 39.4%. Aviation Logistics Management is the main department for the survey, which accounts for 40.1%.

Measures

Abusive supervision

This study referenced Tepper (2000) abusive supervision scale, and let the subjects respond with a five-point Likert five point scale (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=don’t know; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree). This scale have 15 questions, for example, it makes me feel my thought or feelings is stupid when my captain talks to me. The value of reliability is .96.
**Interpersonal justice**

The measure of interpersonal justice, this study referenced Colquitt (2001) organizational justice scale, and it also let the subjects filling the form by Likert five point scale (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=don’t know; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree). There are 4 questions, for example, the captain makes us feel that we are dignity. The value of reliability is .89.

**Job performance**

The study of performance referenced Schmitt, Cortina, Ingerick, and Wiechmann’s (2003) scale, there are 6 questions, the subjects also filling the form by Likert five point scale (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=don’t know; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree). The value of the reliability of this scale is .82, for example, I’m good at dealing with the mission which the officers ordered temporarily.

**Control variables**

According to the studies in the past, we control three variables which might influence the population, age, department, and education. In the part of age, we ask the subjects filling the exact age. In department, we separated into 1=Aviation Logistics Management, 2=Aero-Electronics Engineering, 3=Aviation Communication Electronics, 4= Military Meteorology. The part of education, we divided into 1=senior industrial, 2=senior high,
RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

In narrative statistic, Table 1 is the average, standard deviation, reliable, and the variables of every study. From the form we can see that the age, departments, education, and the performance are not related. Next, although AS and job performance is negatively related, it doesn’t reach the standard ($r = -.02, p > .05$). Besides, AS and interpersonal justice is obvious negatively related ($r = -.37, p < .01$). Thus, H1 gain the preliminary support. Additionally, our mediate variables and performance is positively related ($r = .21, p < .01$).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age</td>
<td>19.48</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Department</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Education</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Abusive supervision</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>(.96)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Interpersonal justice</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.37**</td>
<td>(.89)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Job performance</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>(.82)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 190; Numbers in parentheses are coefficient alphas. 
* $p < .05$;  ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).
Hypothesis testing

The hypothesis model of this study is mediate model, we adopt hierarchical regression analyses, through the control layer by layer to understand the prediction individually. First, we referenced Baron and Kenny’s (1986) procedure, examining whether direct and indirect effect would be found, and then place the mediate variables to see if changes, last but not least, examining interaction plays the moderate role in this mediate relationship.

From the verification of Table 2, we can realize that after placing control variables, the relationship between AS and interpersonal justice is negatively related ($\beta = -.31$, $p < .001$), so the hypothesis gain some support. In the part of direct effect, from model 2-2 find nothing special ($\beta = -.03$, $p > .05$). Thus, hypothesis 2 doesn’t gain any support. However, after placing interpersonal justice, the relationship between AS and performance becomes positively related. Though it’s not obvious, and interpersonal justice to performance does reach the standard ($\beta = .17$, $p < .01$), the result shows that the relationship between interpersonal justice and AS is just the effect of mediate. So hypothesis 3 gain the support. To sum up, hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 3 gain the support.
### Table 2: Hierarchical regression analysis results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Interpersonal Justice</th>
<th>Job Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M1-1</td>
<td>M1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department</td>
<td>.27***</td>
<td>.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive supervision</td>
<td>-.31***</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mediator</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal justice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$-value</td>
<td>6.41***</td>
<td>10.15***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta F$</td>
<td>19.47***</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSION

Being respected is an important factor. It’s easy for employees losing their confidence if they have been abused by supervisors. Worst of all, if employees couldn’t feel the warmth from their peers, they would stuck in such a terrible condition. On the contrary, if supervisors and peers can give the praise and encouragement timely, it’ll make employees having the faith to the organization, and it not only elevate the atmosphere while working but also bring in more chances to produce the added value for the organization.

In short, employees and peers could encourage each other when the issue of abusive supervision happening, so that employees who had been suffered from abusive supervision by their supervisors would feel ease afterwards as well. It’s also important for us paying attention about when, where, or to whom it would easily have the problem of abusive supervision, so that it could make ourselves avoid from the case.
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