

An Investigation of Cultural Influence on Perceptions of Abusive Supervision

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of culture on abusive supervision perceptions in the hospitality industry. To set the stage for this investigation, the literature review concentrates on abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000) and culture using Hofstede's constructs (Hofstede, 2001). The proposed methodology for this study will be discussed. The assumption is that culture will influence perceptions of abusive supervision.

Key Words: *abusive supervision, cultural differences, restaurant employees*

Introduction

Relationships between supervisors and subordinates have been investigated numerous times in the literature (Tepper, 2007). Research indicates that supervisors perform behaviors that can be characterized as bullying (Hoel, Rayner, & Cooper, 1999) tyrannical (Ashforth, 1994), abusive (Keashly, Trott, & MacLean, 1994) or undermining (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002). Tepper (2007) states that definitions offered for abusive supervision are subjective. This is due to the fact that supervisors will have personal biases and will consider the circumstance of the occurrence.

Abusive supervision affects an estimated 13.6% of U.S. workers (Tepper, 2007). The estimated cost of abusive supervision is \$23.8 billion annually (Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006). Therefore, abusive supervision should continue to be studied (Tepper, 2007). To this end, the study of cross cultural influences have not been investigated in the current models of abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007)

The main research objectives of this research study are: to establish what hospitality employees' perceptions of abusive supervision are and finally address what influence culture has on perceptions of abusive supervision.

Literature Review

Abusive supervision

Abusive supervision is defined by Tepper (2000) as "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" (p.178) This definition is abstract as it is based on an individuals' impressions, opinions and feelings rather than fact or even consideration of the supervisors intended outcomes. The term sustained in this context refers to abusive supervision as continuous until one of three situations occur: 1. the target terminates the relationship, 2. the agent terminates the relationship or 3. the agent modifies his or her behavior (Sheppard & Campbell, 1992).

Earlier studies of antecedents of abusive supervision (Bushman, Bonacci, Pedersen, Vasquez, & Miller, 2005; Pedersen, Gonzales, & Miller, 2000) yield the same conclusion, displaced hostility and/or aggression is taken out on an innocent subordinate because the supervisor cannot take it out on the direct cause or source of their frustration.

Abusive supervision manifests itself in many different ways. Recent studies depict the more blatant forms, such as sexual harassment, non physical hostility and actual physical violence (Schat, Desmarais, & Kelloway, 2006). According to Keashly, Trott, and MacLean (1994) other forms of abusive supervision exists, such as: public ridiculing, angry outbursts, scapegoating and taking credit for subordinates' successes. Previous research studies have termed abusive supervision in different ways: generalized hierarchical abuse, petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994), victimization, workplace bullying (Aquino, 2000), superior aggression (Schat, et al., 2006), supervisor undermining (Duffy et al., 2002), and negative mentoring (Kellerman, 2004). There is a consensus that there are indeed consequences of abusive supervision. Consequences of which include anxiety (Harris, Kacmar, & Boonathanum, 2005) depression (Tepper, 2000), burnout (Grandley & Kern, 2004), and work-family conflict (Tepper, 2000).

Ashforth (1987;1994) referred to the findings of abusive supervision as petty tyranny and categorized petty tyranny into six parts: 1. arbitrariness and self-aggrandizement, 2. belittling subordinates, 3. lack of consideration, 4. a forcing style of conflict resolution, 5. discouraging initiative, and 6. noncontingent punishment. Previous studies on abusive supervision suggest that organizational climate determines the relationship between abusive supervision and the three forms of retaliation: indirect expressions of hostility, organizational directed deviance, and organizational citizenship behavior (Tepper, 2000; Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002). It is also essential to note that organizations have their own culture which entails its norms, including norms towards hostility and aggression which may have a direct influence on abusive supervision. (Aquino & Douglas, 2003; Glomb & Liao, 2003)

Abusive supervision in the hospitality industry

Abusive behavior is clichéd in commercial kitchens (Bloisi & Hoel,2008). Fine (1996) described the hospitality industry as a stressful industry which possesses little mechanization but is labor intensive. Hospitality industry research has revealed the need for improvement in the current work environment (Rowle & Purcell, 2001). Working conditions within the industry have been described as arduous (Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons, 2007). According to Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons (2007), the fact that a large portion of employees in the industry have immigrant status and are non-native English speakers add to the difficulties already faced in the hospitality workplace.

Culture

Culture can be defined as the way group of persons interpret situation, events and practices in a similar way. Schein (1990) states that any "definable group with a shared history can have a culture, and within one nation or one organization there can be many subcultures" (p.). Hofstede (1994) proposes that cultures differ on four fundamental dimensions: individualism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance and masculinity/femininity.

Individualism refers to a person's view of themselves as having unique characteristics analogous to the group to which he/she belongs (Hofstede, 1984) Masculinity/femininity refers to the way individuals approach interactions with each one another. Masculine cultures are described as cultures that demonstrate competitiveness and aggression as opposed to feminine

cultures (Hofstede, 1984). Uncertainty avoidance is the ambiguity of work expectations (Hofstede, 1984). Power distance, simply construed, refers to the degree to the influential relationship between a superior and his subordinate and vice versa. Meaning, can a superior influence the subordinate and inversely can a subordinate influence the superior (Hofstede, 1984). Hofstede's research (2001) suggests that in countries which display a high power distance and power is disparate abusive supervision occurs more frequently (Hofstede, 2001).

With relation to abusive supervision, Hofstede (2001) noted that the frequency of abusive supervision is higher in countries that display high power distance. Hofstede's (2001) research analyzed the countries Mexico, India and Malaysia. It appears that the topic of abuse has not generated interest for further study (Aryee et al. 2007; Duffy et al., 2002).

Proposed Methodology

A questionnaire divided into three sections will be administered to employees within four units of a national fast casual restaurant chain in the South Florida area. The three section questionnaire will include: firstly, the questions from Tepper's (2000) 15-item instrument scale (2001), secondly five (5) questions from Hofstede's constructs followed by a section collecting demographic information such as gender, age, race, country of birth, job type, years on the job and years in the industry. The questionnaire will be geared to answer the following research questions:

1. What are hospitality employees' perceptions of abusive supervision?
2. What influence does culture have on perceptions of abusive supervision?

Implications

According to Tepper (2007) abusive supervision is a serious problem for both employees and employers There are several costs associated with abusive supervision such as: limited employee citizenship behavior, decreased productivity, heightened anxiety, Subordinate's resistance behavior, subordinates aggressive and deviant behavior, psychological distress and overall job and life dissatisfaction(Tepper, 2010). This study will raise awareness on abusive supervision in the hospitality industry. This will benefit managers in the industry by establishing a preliminary basis by which to understand cultures' influence on abusive supervision.

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