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The Research on the Effects of Abusive Supervision on Counter-Productive Work Behavior: The Moderating Effects of Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

This empirical research built the theoretical model through the integration of existing literature, and then we explored the impact of abusive supervision on employees' counter-productive work behavior and tested the moderating effects of emotional intelligence. After the statistical analysis of 181 valid data by using correlation analysis and hierarchical regression method, we drew conclusions that: (a) abusive supervision could have a significant positive correlation with employees' counter-productive work behavior; (b) emotional intelligence could play a regulatory role on employees' counter-productive work behavior. On the basis of the conclusion of the study, we proposed some management controls to the organizations those could be involved in the facts of abusive supervision, which would help to relieve the contradictions of labor and create a healthy workplace atmosphere.

Key words: Abusive supervision; Employees' counter-productive work behavior; Emotional intelligence; Moderating effects

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INTRODUCTION

With the development of management practices, increasing attention has been paid to recessive workplace

violence, especially the abusive supervision. This trend presents the desire to protect the rights and interests of employees and to remove hazards of labor disputes.

Abusive supervision is a typical representation of negative leadership behavior which is very destructive. Though it seems that abusive supervision act on some employees only, broader damage might happen and would do harm to the organization and its stakeholders, or even brought work-to-family spillover effects, if the employee who has been hurt by abusive supervision becomes a transmitter of this bad behavior.

This study explored the impact of abusive supervision on employees' counter-productive work behavior. And on the basis of the literature logical deduction, we selected emotional intelligence as a Moderator, so that we could reveal the internal mechanisms and the relationship between abusive supervision and employees' counter-productive work behavior. On the basis of the conclusion of this study, we might give some advice to control both negative leadership behavior and negative staff behavior so that we could build good industrial relations and create a pleasant atmosphere in the workplace. Furthermore, this research is a crossover study of Management, Sociology and Social psychology. Above is the theoretical and practical value of this study.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL ASSUMPTION

1.1 Literature Review

Tepper (2000) defined abusive supervision as the "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which their supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" (Zhu, Duan, & Ling, 2009). The above definition distinguishes abusive supervision from other types of

negative leadership behavior with four crucial points: Abusive supervision is a subjective perception; abusive supervision is a sustainable behavior; abusive supervision only contains hostile verbal and nonverbal behavior, excluding body contact; abusive supervision is the behavior itself, rather than the intention or motivation. The manifestation of abusive supervision mainly includes: The ignorance of subordinates; fail to deliver the commitment to subordinates; treat subordinates rudely; criticize subordinates in public; use insulting title; intimidate and contempt subordinates, and so on (Tepper et al., 2006; Tepper, 2000).

The research of counter-productive work behavior originates from Kaplan's (1975) study of employees' deviant behavior. He thought counter-productive work behavior is a serious infringement for collective interests generated by individuals spontaneously (Mangione & Quinn, 1975). Other researchers defined counter-productive work behavior from different perspectives but all of them emphasize the deliberateness and destructiveness of this behavior.

The concept of emotional intelligence was proposed by Barbara Leuner (1966) initially and developed by John D. Mayer and Peter Salovey (1990). They divided emotional intelligence into four dimensions: the evaluation and expression of self emotion, the evaluation and recognition of others' emotions, the control of self emotional and the use of their emotion (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The main purpose of their research was to explore how to control emotion, how to use emotion to trigger motivation to plan and accomplish tasks.

1.2 Theoretical Assumption

1.2.1 Direct Effect: The Impact of Abusive Supervision on Employees' Counter-Productive Work Behavior

Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) suggested that individual may has his or her revenge if he or she has a perception of being treated unfairly. Therefore, the employee who suffered abusive supervision extremely might take aggressive behavior toward the manager who abused him or her, and they will take a more gentle action to avoid triggering more aggressive and hostile behavior from manager (Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002). On the basis of the above deduction, we believe abusive supervision will be associated with employees' counter-productive work behavior.

Hypothesis 1: Abusive supervision will be positively related to employees' counter-productive work behavior.

1.2.2 The Moderating Effects of Emotional Intelligence

The present researches indicate that emotional intelligence plays the intermediary role between abusive supervision and employees' counter-productive work behavior by changing individual's interpretation, cognition and emotion. The employees who have a higher emotional intelligence can have a better perception, analysis and

control of their own emotion. Also, they have a more positive cognition of their value and a more optimistic expectation of their own development in the organization. Therefore, this kind of employees is much less likely to have organizational-orientated counter-productive work behavior when they suffered abusive supervision (Liu, Zhang, & Peng, 2012). In addition, the employees who have a higher emotional intelligence can have a better cognition of others' emotions and have a higher sense of empathy, they are more willing to help and take care of others. So the negative effect of abusive supervision on interpersonal-orientated counter-productive work behavior is weakened.

Hypothesis 2: Emotional intelligence is a moderator between abusive supervision and employees' counter-productive work behavior.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 The Sample Selection and Data Collection

The participants of this empirical study were employees who have been worked above 6 months in Tianjin, Liaoning province, Shandong province and other places in China. We received 181 valid questionnaires out of 194 in total and the efficiency was 93.3%.

2.2 Measures

This study used SPSS 18.0 statistical software to analyze data, to test reliability and validity of the questionnaire, and to verify the relationship between the variables.

The questionnaire contained two main parts. The first part was the basic personal information, including the gender, age, education, work seniority, position, work properties and industry of the participants. The second part included three independent scales to measure the three main variables in this research: abusive supervision, emotional intelligence and employees' counter-productive work behavior respectively.

2.2.1 Demography Characteristics

According to statistics, the demographic characteristics of the 181 samples are just as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Demography Characteristic of the 181 Samples

Item	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	97	53.60%
	Female	84	46.40%
Age	20-29	135	74.60%
	30-39	29	16.00%
	40-49	8	4.40%
	50-59	9	5.00%
	College degree or below	27	14.90%
Education	Bachelor degree	95	52.50%
	Master degree or above	59	32.60%

To be continued

Continued

Item	Category	Number	Percentage
W o r k Seniority	1 year or below	80	44.20%
	1-4 years	50	27.60%
	5-9 years	19	10.50%
	10 years or above	32	17.70%
Position	Laborial staff	120	66.30%
	First-line manager	42	23.30%
	Middle-level manager	17	9.40%
	Top manager	2	1.10%
W o r k Properties	State-owned enterprise	16	8.80%
	Public institution	41	22.70%
	Private enterprise	56	30.90%
	Foreign/joint-venture Enterprise	46	25.40%
	Others	22	12.20%
Industry	About 38 categories		

2.2.2 The Scale of Abusive Supervision

This study used Tepper's Abusive Supervision Scale with 15 items. In addition, we adopted fuzzy measurement in order to ensure the answers close to the truth. The measures used Likert five-point scoring method and the validity test suggested that this scale was a Single dimensional and it had a high reliability.

2.2.3 The Scale of Emotional Intelligence

We used a 16-item WLELS scale developed by Wong and Law. 16 items could be divided into four-dimensional structure, namely "perception of own emotions", "perception of others' emotions", "emotions exploitation" and "emotions adjustment".

2.2.4 The Scale of Counter-Productive Work Behavior

We used the 23-item CWB scale developed by Yang and Diefendorff not only because of its suitability for Chinese workplace but also because of its moderate quantity (Yang & Diefendorff, 2009). 23 items could be divided into two-dimension: organizational-orientated and interpersonal-orientated counter-productive work behavior. Besides, we adopted fuzzy measurement to ensure the reliability of the answers.

3. MAIN RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Reliability Test

Table 2 shows the results of reliability test for the four scales.

Table 2
Reliability Test

Scales	Cronbach's Alpha
Abusive supervision	0.926
Emotional intelligence	0.886
Employees' counter-productive work behavior	0.916

3.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 3 shows the person correlation coefficients between the four variables.

Table 3
The Person Correlation Between Variables (N=181)

	1	2	3
1. Abusive supervision	1	-.091*	.313**
2. Emotional intelligence		1	-.479**
3. Employees' counter-productive work behavior			1

Note. N=181, *: $p < 0.01$, **: $p < 0.05$.

We can draw the following conclusions that abusive supervision has a significant positive correlation with employees' counter-productive work behavior ($r = .313$, $p < 0.01$).

In order to reveal the internal mechanisms and the relationship between abusive supervision and employees' counter-productive work behaviors and examine the moderating effect of emotional intelligence, a further regression analysis is needed.

3.3 Regression Analysis

3.3.1 Regression Analysis Between Abusive Supervision and Employees' Counter-Productive Work Behaviors

We adopted hierarchical regression analysis to explore the impact of abusive supervision on employees' counter-productive work behaviors. When carrying out the regression analysis, we put the demographic variables into the first layer since they may also have correlations with employees' counter-productive work behaviors. Then, we put the variable abusive supervision into the regression equation. Table 4 presents the results.

Table 4
The Hierarchical Regression Analysis Between Abusive Supervision and Employees' Counter-Productive Work Behaviors

Variable	Employees' counter-productive work behavior	
	M1	M2
Gender	-.068	-.067
Age	-.125	-.167
Education	.118	.139
Work seniority	.014	.049
Position	-.210	-.170
Work properties	-.014	.026
Abusive supervision		.091
R^2	.092	.181
Adj. R^2	.055	.142
ΔR^2	.092	.089
F	2.478	18.560

Note. $p < 0.05$, $n = 181$.

From the above table, we could see clearly that in Model 1, the regression of control variables on employees' counter-productive work behaviors is insignificant ($F = 2.478$, $p = .019$), the control variables explained 9.2% of the variation. While in Model 2, the explanation is

significantly increased than Model 1 ($\beta=.000, p<.05, \Delta R^2=.089$), with the addition of the variable abusive supervision. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 has been verified.

3.3.2 The Moderating Effects of Emotional Intelligence

Firstly, we put the demographic variables into the first layer and then put the centralized abusive supervision and emotional intelligence into the second layer. Finally, we put the centralized interaction item in the third layer.

Table 5
The Test of Moderating Effects of Emotional Intelligence

Variable	Employees' counter-productive work behavior		
	M1	M2	M3
Gender	-.068	-.074	-.064
Age	-.126	-.062	-.077
Education	.120	.006	.001
Work seniority	.015	.003	.011
Position	-.208	-.146	-.132
Work properties	-.014	.053	.051
Abusive supervision		.082	.059
Emotional intelligence		-.389	-.420
Abusive supervision×emotional intelligence			.034
R^2	.091	.343	.362
Adj. R^2	.060	.312	.328
ΔR^2	0.91	.251	.019
F	2.898	32.708	5.074

Note. $p<0.05, n=181$

As Table 5 presents, we got determination coefficient $R^2_1=0.343$ in Model 2 and got determination coefficient $R^2_2=0.362, R^2_2>R^2_1$, so we could draw a conclusion that emotional intelligence could play a significant regulatory role between abusive supervision and employees' counter-productive work behaviors. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 has been verified.

4. ADVICES FOR MANAGEMENT CONTROL

This empirical research verified that abusive supervision has a significant positive correlation with employees' counter-productive work behavior. This means that when the subordinates have the perception of abusive supervision, they would take aggressive behavior spontaneously in revenge, and then the employees' counter-productive work behavior occurs. However, individuals vary in the intendency of having counter-productive work behavior when they suffered from same level abusive supervision because of the difference in emotional intelligence. Just as the conclusions we

got in this research, emotional intelligence plays a regulatory role on employees' counter-productive work behavior. Employees who have higher level of emotional intelligence can have a better cognition of others' emotions and a better control of their own negative emotion. So the negative effect of abusive supervision on interpersonal-orientated counter-productive work behavior is weakened.

In conclusion, we would give some suggestions to enterprises' management practices. On the one hand, the enterprises should put emphasis on the recognition of the managers who have the tendency of abusive supervision, and take corresponding interventions to avoid its occurrence. On the other hand, if the enterprises have confronted with this phenomenon, it's necessary for them to take some remedial measures. This study has verified the significant role of emotional intelligence, so we could find solutions from this segment: The employees should improve the level of their emotional intelligence and learn how to control and use their emotions to minimize the negative effects of the abusive supervision they suffered.

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