
Relationship Between Abusive Supervision and Performance: The Role of Gender

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Abstract:

Purpose: The study is to explain the relation between abusive supervision and employee's performance.

Methodology/Approach: The study presents a systematic review of journals indexed in Scopus, dedicated to abusive supervision, gender and performance.

Findings: In this study, gender is conceptualized as a variable that can influence the pattern of relationship between abusive supervision and employee's performance in short and long term.

Practical Implications: Abusive supervision is potential to give positive impact on the employee's performance when it is applied on the masculine gender in short term. However, in long term, high level abusive supervision can lead to lower performance with employees masculine gender.

Originality/Value: The results of the study is expected to provide a new insight in the relation between abusive supervision and employee's performance.

Keyword: Abusive supervision, gender, employee's performance.

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1. Introduction

Abusive supervision is a phenomenon-based research on leadership that is interesting to study. This is indicated by the increased results of research on abusive supervision in the last two decades. Previous studies have revealed a correlation between abusive supervision and employee performance. However, there are still inconsistent research results. Such inconsistency is shown by the majority of previous researches that found a negative correlation between abusive supervision and employee performance (Aryee *et al.*, 2007; 2008; Harris *et al.*, 2007; Jian *et al.*, 2012; Tepper *et al.*, 2011; Walter *et al.*, 2015; Zhou, 2016).

On the other hand, there are previous studies indicating that abusive supervision can be used as a strategy of a leader to improve employee performance (Ferris *et al.*, 2007; Krasikova *et al.*, 2013; Yu *et al.*, 2014). In other words, abusive supervision can be used as a political strategy by the leader within an organization in order to give a message to subordinates that an error cannot be tolerated, so that it is expected that employees can work optimally (Ferris *et al.*, 2007).

This inconsistent correlation is probably due to differences in characteristics of employees. This is supported by the results of previous research which indicate that not all employees react equally to abusive supervision (Chi and Liang, 2013; Decoster *et al.*, 2013). Employees respond to abusive supervision with their own perceptions. This is highly dependent on the individual characteristics of the employee (Martinko *et al.*, 2012).

Therefore, in this research, gender is proposed as a variable that is expected to clarify the correlation between abusive supervision and employee performance. Although previous studies have revealed gender as a factor that can distinguish individual performance levels (Bauer and Baltes, 2002; Beyer, 1990; Hyde, 2008), they are still relatively limited that they reveals gender as a moderator of the correlation between abusive supervision and employee performance.

Previous studies indicate that gender is an important variable to be taken into consideration in explaining the correlation between abusive supervision and its impact (Chi and Liang, 2013). The reason is that gender differences will have a different impact on employee performance when facing abusive supervision (Burton and Hoobler, 2006; Ouyang *et al.*, 2015). In this research, gender is defined as one's perspective on the role that is inherent in the individual, and is divided into two perspectives, namely masculine and feminine (Bem, 1981).

A masculine employee has more regard for work stressors as a motivation or enthusiasm in doing a job than a feminine employee. Previous studies indicate that a masculine person thinks that a motivating job is a challenging job, so that an employee who feels mistreated by a superior will be motivated to perform better than a feminine one (Beyer, 1990; Hyde *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, masculine

employees have a tendency to be able to reduce negative effects resulted from abusive supervision on employee performance rather than feminine ones.

The research is aimed at proposing gender as a variable that can explain the correlation between abusive supervision and employee performance in the short and long term. The reason is that abusive supervision is likely to have a different effect on employee performance in the short and long term. Previous studies indicate that abusive supervision can be used as a strategy to improve employee's performance in the short term if applied under appropriate conditions. However, abusive supervision can have negative impacts in the long term.

2. Role of Gender between Abusive Supervision and Performance in the Short Term

Abusive supervision is defined as the subordinator's perception toward how far a supervisor is involved in the continuously unpleasant verbal and non-verbal behaviour, excluding physical contact. The unpleasant behaviour is expressed through scorn, rude words, anger, and other indigent behaviours from a supervisor to his subordinators (Tepper, 2000). This research employed the theory of Conservation of Resources (COR) to explain that abusive supervision is a job stressor that can have negative impacts on employee performance (Chi and Liang, 2013).

Although previous studies have indicated that abusive supervision has negative correlation with employee performance (Harris *et al.*, 2007; Tepper, 2007), other studies have found that abusive supervision potentially has positive impacts on employee performance in the short term (Ferris *et al.*, 2007; Krasikova *et al.*, 2013). The reason is that abusive supervision can be used as a political strategy by a leader or supervisor to improve individual employee performance in the short term. Such positive correlation can potentially occur when abusive supervision is applied under an appropriate situation (Ferris *et al.*, 2007; Lee *et al.*, 2013). This depends on gender differences that employees have.

In order to explain the correlation between abusive supervision and employee performance, it is important to take the employee's gender into consideration to produce a detailed explanation of such correlation. The reason is that employees will react differently to abusive supervision that is regarded as a job stressor depending on their gender perspective. A person with a masculine perspective will tend to be stronger and may even regard a job stressor as a challenge to be faced in working compared to a person with a feminine perspective. Therefore, gender will differentiate employee performance when they are facing a job stressor.

Previous studies have indicated that gender has been conceptualized as a moderator variable of the correlation between abusive supervision and employees' proactive behavior, and it is found that gender can moderate such correlation (Ouyang *et al.*,

2015). However, in those studies gender is proxied as sex, not as a perspective. Meanwhile, in this study, gender is conceptualized as a perspective of role that is inherent in a person. This is such an important issue because a man may not necessarily have a masculine, but a feminine perspective, and vice versa a woman may not necessarily have a feminine, but masculine perspective.

Based on the aforementioned theoretical explanation, the proposition proposed in this study is as follows:

Proposition 1: In the short term, high abusive supervision leads to higher performance in masculine employees than that in feminine employees.

3. Role of Gender between Abusive Supervision and Performance in the Long-Term

Theoretically, it is difficult to accept that abusive supervision has positive impacts on employee performance in the long term. Previous studies indicate that abusive supervision potentially has positive impacts on employee performance in the short term, but it does not last in the long term (Ferris *et al.*, 2007; Krasikova *et al.*, 2013). Individuals who receive continuous job stressors will try to cope with the work stressors experienced, so that they will have less desire to display maximum performance, which may decrease the performance of an employee.

Based on the perspective of situational leadership theory (Hersey and Blanchard, 1982), subordinate characteristics are an important situational factor that can determine the success of a leader's leadership style in making good performance. In this study, although gender is conceptualized as a situational variable expected to weaken the negative impacts caused by abusive supervision on employee performance, such correlation only takes place in the short term.

In the long term, an employee who receives an abusive supervision will tend to try to cope with the job stressors, so that the employee's performance will decrease. Although an employee with masculine characteristics tend to be stronger in facing abusive supervision than those with feminine characteristics, the employee performance will tend to decline if the abusive supervision felt by employees in the long term.

Based on the aforementioned theoretical explanation, the proposition proposed in this study is as follows:

Proposition 2: In the long term, high abusive supervision leads to lower performance even in masculine employees.

4. Conclusions, Implications and Future Research

This study proposes a theoretical model to provide a detailed explanation concerning the correlation between abusive supervision and employee performance in the short and long term. The theoretical model proposed in this study is that in the short term abusive supervision potentially has positive impacts on employee performance when applied in appropriate situation. This can occur when abusive supervision is given on masculine employees.

Although abusive supervision can potentially have positive impacts on employee performance, such impact only takes place in the short term. In the long term, abusive supervision will have negative impacts on employee performance. Although abusive supervision is given to masculine employees, it will have negative impacts on employee performance.

Theoretically, this study can contribute to the development of theory related to the concept of abusive supervision. This study provides a theoretical explanation of the role of gender in its correlation between abusive supervision and employee performance in the short term and in the long term. It is expected that the conceptual model proposed in this study can be used as a source of reference for academicians in conducting research on abusive supervision.

In addition to the theoretical contribution, this study also makes a practical contribution. It is expected that the conceptual model proposed in this study can offer insight to practitioners in the field of human resource management, especially leadership on providing treatment or stimulus of abusive supervision to employees within the organization.

In order to give treatment or stimulus to employees to produce high performance, it is expected that practitioners can use the conceptual model proposed in this study. Abusive supervision can be used as a strategy to improve employee performance in performing tasks by taking employee's gender into consideration. Otherwise, it is feared this will have negative impacts on employee performance.

However, if gender is properly taken into consideration, positive results on employee performance can potentially take place. Although such positive impact does not last in the long term, this strategy can be implemented to produce performance as expected in the short term to finish important works or tasks.

It is expected that future research test the conceptual model and propositions as proposed in this empirical research. It is strongly recommended that empirical research with either experimental or longitudinal design follow up the propositions proposed in this study. This is important to see the pattern of causal correlation between abusive supervision and employee performance in the short and long term and to see fluctuations in changes in dependent variables as a result of the treatment or manipulation of independent variables. This is very important for the development of science, especially in the field of leadership.

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