

Impact of Abusive Supervision on Breach of Psychological Contract and Knowledge Hiding Behavior: Does Spirituality Curtails this Relationship at the Workplace?

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: This research analyzes the impact of abusive supervision on breach of psychological contract and knowledge hiding behavior with the moderating role of spirituality of employees working in project-based organizations.

Methodology: Project based organizations are selected as employees are hired based on the required projects till completion of projects. It is pertinent to study that how they face abusive supervision and in the result of this they develop knowledge hiding behavior. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to 200 employees of project-based organizations, however, 189 individual responded.

Findings: The result shows that abusive supervision positively impacts the breach of psychological contract and knowledge hiding behavior. The results also reveals that individual spirituality reduce the impact of BPC on knowledge hiding behavior.

Conclusion: The study depicted that the abusive supervision impact the knowledge hiding behavior among the employees, therefore, strategies should be design at organizational level in order to overcome such issues in such organizations which requires timely completion of projects.

Keywords: Abusive Supervision, Breach of Psychological Contract, Knowledge Hiding Behavior, Spirituality.

Introduction

From the last 15 years, research paves more attention towards the mistreatment behavior at workplace (Hershcovis, 2011) like bullying, workplace aggression, incivility and abusive supervision (Rayner, 1997; Neuman & Baron, 1998; Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Tepper, 2000). Abusive supervision involves the aggressive and humiliating behavior of the supervisor towards his/her subordinates that tends to make

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them feel belittle and incapable (Tepper, 2000). It is known to be as a personal evaluation of the employee regarding towards supervisor's behavior (Hoobler & Brass, 2006). Previous researches recommended to explore the abusive supervision in detail along with its dimensions and also study its effects in different cultures (Mackey, Frieder, Brees & Martinko, 2017) so this research will be a beneficial contribution towards the literature of abusive supervision that is the destructive leadership style. It is also suggested to analyze the measure of abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000) across different cultures (Mackey, Frieder, Brees & Martinko, 2017; Martinko, Harvey, Brees & Mackey, 2013) as it will benefit the future researchers by providing the evidence that how individuals from different cultural backgrounds perceive the abusive behavior of the leaders. Also there is inadequacy of research that incorporates the cultural differences, whereas, employees perception about certain phenomena varies due to the values practiced in a specific culture (Shao, Rupp, Skarlicki, & Jones, 2013).

The devaluation due to abusive supervision puts the employee in the worthless position that becomes very challenging for the employee (Restubog et al. 2008; Shoss et al., 2013). A plethora of research shows that abusive supervision results in unfavorable employee outcomes (Tepper, Duffy, Henle & Lambert, 2006; Lian, Ferris & Brown, 2012; Tepper, 2000; Tepper et al., 2009). It has been proven that such mistreatment forces the employees to respond negatively towards the organization (Amdrose, Seabright & Schminke, 2002; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Abusive supervision shows alarming consequences for both organization and their employees (Aryee, Chen, Sun & Debrah, 2007; Thau & Mitchell, 2010) like anxiety, dwindling self-esteem and job performance (Ashforth, 1997), decreasing job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior (Tepper, 2007), lowering commitment level and increasing psychological distress (Tepper, 2000), breach of psychological contract (Ahmed & Muchiri, 2014) and displaying deviant work behaviors (Restubog, Scott, & Zagenczyk, 2011). Previous studies also show that abusive supervision is one of significant factor in causing the negative outcomes among employees (Ai-Hua, Yang & Guo-Tao, 2018; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). The project based organizations required timely completion of projects, but abusive supervision can create breach of psychological contract and knowledge hiding behavior as an aggression shown by the employees. It requires further investigation that for the completion and success of projects the dark side of leadership such as abusive leadership can act as a hindrance. However, spirituality in employee can act as a buffer to diminish such behavior for the success of organization. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to study impact of abusive supervision on breach of psychological contract and knowledge hiding behavior with the moderating role of spirituality of employees working in project-based organizations.

Literature Review

Abusive supervision, Breach of Psychological Contract and Knowledge hiding behavior

The social exchange theory (Homans, 1958; Emerson, 1976) can explain this phenomenon of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) that the employees will respond according to the behavior displayed by the supervisors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Skarlicki & Folger, 2004). So if the supervisor shows abusive behavior in order to reciprocate and start indulging in deviant work behaviors (Bordia, Restubog & Tang, 2008) in order to show retaliation towards the organization (Ahmed, Bordia & Restubog, 2007). So it will also result in knowledge hiding behavior among the employees.

In literature very little attention was paid towards the association between abusive supervision and knowledge hiding behavior although studies depicted that abusive supervision has a notable influence in enhancing such negative and dysfunctional behaviors at workplace. (Khalid, Bashir, Khan & Abbas, 2018).

Various studies analyzes the association between abusive supervision and knowledge hiding behavior and found that abusive supervision is positively linked with employee reluctance towards sharing the knowledge with their colleagues (Aryee, Chen, Sun & Debrah, 2007; Erdogan, Bauer, Truxillo, & Mansfield, 2012). So from these findings it can be suggested that employees who experiences abusive

supervision at workplace become involved in knowledge hiding behavior in order to protect themselves and show the retaliations towards their immediate supervisors.

H₁: There is a significant positive association between abusive supervision and knowledge hiding behavior.

Researchers are very interested to analyze the effect of abusive supervision on breach of psychological contract (Restubog, Scott & Zagenczyk, 2011). Psychological contract are the unwritten promises made by the employer that develops a sort of expectation among the employees and vice versa (Conway & Briner, 2005; Rousseau, 1989; Rosseau, 1995) failing to fulfill these unwritten promises results in breach of psychological contract (Morrison & Robinson, 1997) in which the employees starts distrusting their organizations (Deery, Iverson & Walsh, 2006) that affects employee attitude and behavior negatively (Conway & Briner, 2005)

H₂: There is a significant positive association between abusive supervision and breach of psychological contract.

Previous studies reflects that breach of psychological contract lead towards the feeling of resentment that provoke the employees to engage in behaviors that not only protect them but also shows the retaliation or reprisal against the organization.(Rousseau,1995). Studies shows that breach of psychological contract leads towards the knowledge hiding behavior as onset of BPC employees become reluctant in sharing the knowledge (Bal, Chiaburu, & Jansen, 2019; Connelly, Černe, Dysvik, Škerlavaj, & Klehe, 2012).

H₃: There is a significant positive association between breach of psychological contract and knowledge hiding behavior.

H₄: Breach of psychological contract mediates between the relationship of abusive supervision and knowledge hiding behavior.

Moderating Role of Spirituality

Spirituality with the time emerged as a significant area of research at workplace that how it affects the behaviors of employees. As BPC is the violation of the unwritten expectations that exists between the employees and their organizations that lead towards the different negative behaviors, however it is projected that spirituality minimizes the aftermath of breach of psychological contracts.

Several studies shows that spirituality exhibits as a coping mechanism when employees encountered with BPC like Ashmos and Duchon (2000) states that spirituality at workplace emphasize in providing individuals a sense of purpose and resilience in face of difficult situations. As spirituality is positively associated with coping strategies like searching the meaning or purpose in difficult situations (Milliman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2003).

Another feature of spirituality is forgiveness so when individual are high in spirituality they tend to forgive so in context of breach of psychological contract ,forgiveness helps the individual to move beyond the feeling of anger and resentment caused due to breach of psychological contract (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). So it has been seen in previous studies that spirituality lessen the negative behaviors at workplace (Sulaiman & Bhatti, 2013 ; Weitz, Vardi, & Setter, 2012) that can act as a buffer in minimizing the effect of breach of psychological contract so that employees may not engage in knowledge hiding behaviors.

H₅: Spirituality moderates between the relationship of breach of psychological contract and knowledge hiding behavior such that when spirituality is high it weakens the relationship between BPC and knowledge hiding behavior.

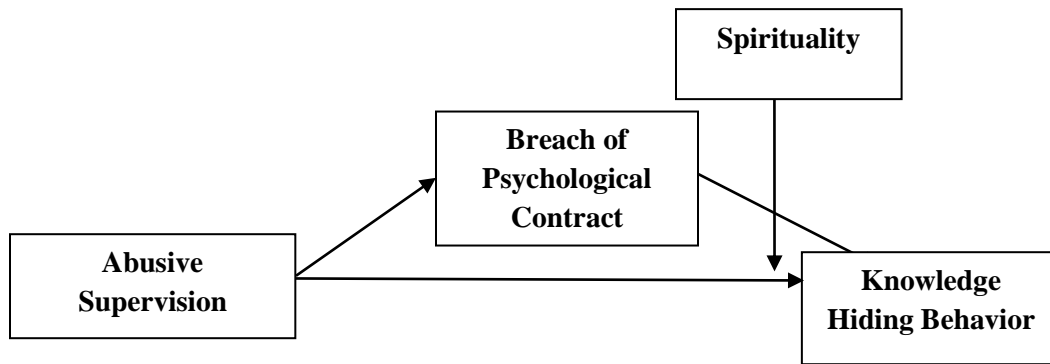


Figure 1: *Theoretical Framework*

Research Methodology

Population and Sample

The data of this research investigation was taken from the project based organization situated in Islamabad/Rawalpindi. Convenient sampling technique was used in this study. Self-administered questionnaire was used to fetch the responses with the clearly stated instructions and assured the respondents about their confidentiality. 200 questionnaires were distributed and 189 employees responded with complete responses.

Table 1: Demographic Analysis of the Study Sample

		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	124	62%
	Female	65	38%
Age	20-25	76	38%
	26-30	60	30%
	More than 30 years	53	27%
Education	Bachelors	44	22%
	Masters	120	60%
	Others	25	13%

Sources of Research Instrument

This research survey was divided in two section sections. In first section demographic information was given and in second sections scales information was recorded on a five point Likert scale of 1 to 5 ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Abusive Supervision: This scale was developed by Tepper (2000), however, Mitchell & Ambrose, (2007) 5-item version was used in this study. The Cronbach's Alpha of current research is 0.851 as presented in Table 2.

Breach of Psychological Contract: 5-item scale was adopted to measure BPC developed by Robinson and Morrison (2000). The Cronbach's Alpha value of this scale in this study is 0.793, which is reported in table 2.

Spirituality: 11-items scale developed by Braghetta et al. (2021) was used to assess spirituality and in this research the Cronbach's Alpha value of Spirituality is 0.796

Knowledge Hiding Behavior: Individual knowledge hiding was assessed by 12-item scale developed by Connelly, Zweig, Webster and Trougakos (2012). The Cronbach's Alpha value reported in current

study for Knowledge Hiding Behavior is 0.795.

Table 2: *Reliability Analysis of Study Variables*

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Abusive Supervision	5	0.851
Breach of Psychological Contract	5	0.793
Spirituality	11	0.796
Knowledge Hiding Behavior	12	0.795

n=189

Study Results

Table 3: *Descriptive & Correlation Analysis*

	Mean	Std. dev.	1	2	3	4
1. Abusive supervision	3.71	.8451	1			
2. Breach of Psychological Contract	3.86	.8474	.756**	1		
3. Spirituality	3.82	.7868	.662**	.802**	1	
4. Knowledge Hiding Behavior	3.68	.8485	.789**	.805**	.778**	1

n=189, ** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level

Table 3 shows that the correlation between breach of abusive supervision and knowledge hiding behavior is 0.789 which is significant at 0.01 level. The correlation value between abusive supervision and breach of psychological contract is .756**. The correlation between breach of psychological contract and knowledge hiding is .805 which is significant at 0.01 level. Hence, all variables are strongly correlated.

Table 4: *Mediation Regression Analysis*

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	R-sq	F
Outcome variable= (BPC)								
Abusive Supervision	.6298	.0326	10.4482	.0000	.4847	.6475	.3336	64.016
Outcome= Knowledge Hiding Behavior								
BPC	.3364	.0357	4.1734	.0000	.24365	.1968		
Abusive supervision	.1302	.0339	2.8864	.0016	.2561	.4166		
TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS								
Total effect of X on Y	.4709	.0240	8.9066	.0000	.2040	.3377		
Direct effect of X on Y	.2302	.0439	2.186	.0016	.5610	.1166		
Indirect effect of X on Y								
BPC	.1341	.0188			.0831	.1964		

n=189, BPC=Breach of Psychological Contract

Table 4 shows direct and the mediation analysis in which abusive supervision and knowledge hiding behavior have a significant positive relationship, it is significant at the coefficient value of .1302, $t > 1.96$ and the p-value < 0.01 . Hence, the Hypothesis 1 is accepted. Similarly, abusive supervision and BPC have a significant positive relationship, the relationship is significant with the coefficient value of .6298, $t > 1.96$ and the p-value < 0.001 . Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is also accepted. The result of testing Hypothesis 3 shows that the relationship is significant as the coefficient value is .3364, with the p-value < 0.001 . As a result, hypothesis 3 is likewise accepted. The outcome of testing hypothesis 4, shows that mediating role of breach of psychological contract has a significant role between the relationship of abusive supervision and knowledge hiding behavior (Coeff=.1341, LLCI=.0831 and ULCI=.1964). Hence, Hypothesis 4 is also accepted.

Table 5: *Moderation Regression Analysis*

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	R-sq	F
Outcome=Knowledge Hiding Behavior								
Spirituality	-.6865	.2426	2.5660	.0531	.2096	1.5644		
BPC	1.4276	.3372	4.2333	.0000	.5612	2.4950		
BPC x Spirituality	-.3372	.0891	-2.8436	.0273	-.3319	-.0508	.5981	19.1371
Conditional effect of internalized stigma on Psychological distress at values of the Resilience:								
Spirituality	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI		
2.6617	.7426	.0812	8.4136	.0000	.6924	.7735		
3.5164	.6516	.0414	8.5176	.0000	.5043	.6374		
3.9473	.5284	.0613	4.4718	.0000	.3416	.5543		

n=189, BPC=Breach of Psychological Contract,

Table 5 displays the moderation analysis findings, it shows that spirituality moderates the relationship in between breach of psychological contract and knowledge hiding such that lowers the effect of BPC on knowledge hiding behavior with the coefficient value of $-.3372$, $T > -1.96$ and $p\text{-value} < 0.05$. Hence, Hypothesis 5 is accepted.

Discussion

The findings of this research amplify that abusive supervision leads towards the knowledge hiding behavior among the employees of the project based organizations as they perceive the work environment hostile or unsafe. In such situations, individuals may consider self-preservation more important over collective goals that leads to the decline in collaboration and information sharing. Moreover, the connection between abusive supervision and knowledge hiding behavior is likely to be mediated by various factors related to individual or contextual base. One of is breach of psychological contact that can alleviate the destructive effects of abusive supervision on knowledge sharing. Knowledge hiding behavior not only influence the individual performance but it also compromise the organization effectiveness and innovation.

Results also shows that spirituality curtails the relationship between breach of psychological contract and knowledge hiding behavior as individuals high in spirituality radiates resilience and have the tendency to apply coping strategies when encounter with adverse and uncertain situations. They have the courage to forgive the people so when such feels anger, mistrust or hostility caused by breach of psychological contract, the chances are that they forgive and stand on their values of character and does not show the reluctance towards sharing the knowledge. As their focus is on the bigger picture of purpose and meaning in life so they will not engage in behaviors that are destructive for organization.

Conclusion

This study is providing a valuable insight in the abusive supervision literature and its linkage with knowledge hiding behavior. The association between abusive supervision, breach of psychological contract, and knowledge hiding behavior provides an opportunity to assess this knowledge hiding issue from the aspect of leadership that negative leadership styles can results in negative work outcomes for the organizations. Therefore, organization should work on the strategies that can assess the leadership styles and make the timely intervention in such situations. Another important point of this study is to promote the culture of transparency and collaboration that can enhance the knowledge sharing and innovation in the organization. The study has certain limitations. One of the limitation of this study is that cross sectional data is used, however, for future research longitudinal data can be used study. This study is covering the project based organization working in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Therefore, the knowledge hiding behavior should be assessed with other dark leadership styles in other industry sectors too. The project based organizations hire employees on contract basis based on the duration of projects to be

completed. The organizations where regular employees are working can also cater to draw a comparison between contractual and regular employees whether they face abusive supervision in the same manner or a vice versa. In conclusion, this research is providing valuable insight for the researchers to incorporate other leadership styles which are leading towards knowledge hiding behavior of employees.

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Conflict of Interest


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