

Transformational Leadership as a Buffer Against Abusive Supervision's Influence...

Transformational Leadership as a Buffer Against Abusive Supervision's Influence on Deviant Workplace Behavior in Pakistan

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Abstract

This research delved into the influence of AS (AS) on deviant workplace behavior (DWB) within Pakistani public sector organizations, while also examining the moderating impact of transformational leadership (TL) between AS and DWB. The research data collected from 270 employees through a questionnaire survey. The findings unveiled a significant and direct positive association between AS and DWB, confirming the hypothesized relationship and current research find support for the idea that TL acts as a moderator between AS and DWB. This study also introduces novel perspectives by sparking discussions about the potential role of TL in managing DWB within the public sector.

Keywords: Deviant Workplace Behavior, Abusive Supervision, Transformational Leadership, Leader

Introduction

Pakistan, a developing nation, has grappled with the enduring issue of DWB within its government organizations since gaining independence (Bashir et al., 2012). Despite seven decades of autonomy, these public organizations have largely retained the practices inherited from the colonial system of the 18th century, failing to establish indigenous approaches for effectively managing the nation's human and resource assets (Nadeem et al., 2015).

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Corruption pervades the public sector, from its highest echelons to the lowest ranks (Li et al., 2020; Ashraf et al., 2023).

Moreover, contemporary times have witnessed the emergence of unethical and DWB as a pressing issue within these organizations (Iqbal et al., 2023), with the problem being widespread across many Pakistani institutions (Fatima et al., 2012). Notably, this issue has remained largely unexplored (Bashir et al., 2012). The major cause of the DWB in Public sector organization of Pakistan is AS at workplace (Iqbal et al., 2023). In these organizations, there is acute shortage of ethical leadership or TL which creates needs to investigate the problem to get it solution. AS encompasses several critical elements, such as a demeaning attitude, mistreatment in the workplace, the threat of job termination, and withholding essential information. Examples of AS include attributing blame to employees for the mistakes of others, dishonesty, undermining, sarcasm, and verbal berating, among other behaviors. This phenomenon, AS, has gained prominence as a significant issue plaguing contemporary organizations due to its detrimental effects on subordinates, supervisors, and the overall work environment. It falls within the intersection of various research domains, including workplace mistreatment, destructive leadership, and unethical supervision (Ashraf et al., 2023).

It is crucial to recognize the adverse consequences of AS for every employee, as this recognition can help mitigate the various costs associated with this problem. The implications of AS extend beyond the supervisor-subordinate relationship; they can also potentially harm other employees in the workplace and foster DWB. To transform AS into ethical leadership, organizations can leverage TL to improve the behavior of supervisors, encouraging a more ethical approach to leadership.

Literature Review and Framework

Deviant Workplace Behavior (DWB)

In the literature, the concept of DWB has been examined and denoted by different terms. These terms encompass retaliation, dysfunctional conduct, and organizational misbehavior (Fox et al., 2001). DWB exhibited by employees can have direct adverse effects on the organization itself or on other individuals within the organization (Spector et al., 2006). These behaviors can encompass a wide spectrum, ranging from relatively minor infractions to significantly more severe misconduct, as indicated by Kanten and Ülker in 2013.

DWB encompasses various negative acts by individuals in the workplace, including abuse, misuse of time and resources and corruption (Ahmad et al., 2023). Bullying refers to acts of mistreatment and violence towards coworkers and other members of the organization (Kohut, 2007). It involves harmful behaviors exhibited by an employee, and "bullying" in the workplace often leads to abusive behavior (Monks et al., 2009).

Misuse of working hours and resources within organizations is second dimension of DWB. This behavior involves public employees engaging in personal activities during official working hours, such as conducting personal business, taking extended lunch or prayer breaks, and using unauthorized organization resources (Spector et al., 2006).

In the contemporary era, technological advancements have brought about significant changes, driven by rapid developments in information technologies and internet accessibility. These advancements have opened the door to various forms of deviant behavior

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within organizations (Brkic & Aleksic, 2016). One such example is cyber loafing, which serves as a prime illustration of the misuse of time and resources.

Corruption and kickbacks have become deeply ingrained in the fabric of Pakistan, rendering institutions and organizations highly inefficient (Abbasi, 2011). This widespread corruption has given rise to a prevailing sentiment that corruption has escalated over time, with diminishing evidence of individuals feeling guilty about engaging in corrupt practices (Javed et al., 2014).

Abusive Supervision

Abusive supervision is defined as "the extent to which subordinates perceive their supervisors engaging in a sustained display of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" (Ashraf et al., 2023). Researchers have used various terms interchangeably with AS, such as victimization, workplace bullying. The primary focus of the present study is to investigate the role of TL in mitigating DWB. Leadership plays a pivotal part in handling and curbing employees' deviant behavior in the workplace and the absence of ethical leadership within an organization can contribute to unethical behavior among employees (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Abusive Supervision and Deviant Workplace Behaviour

In a workplace, employees typically have designated roles outlined in their job descriptions. However, employees may occasionally exhibit deviant behavior, which can be categorized into two distinct dimensions. Firstly, there is "positive deviance," which refers to behaviors that are not explicitly specified in an employee's job description and are not directly rewarded. On the other hand, there is "negative deviance," characterized by behaviors that harm either fellow employees or the organization itself. This harm can result from actions such as harassment or the mismanagement of organizational resources (Hershcovis et al., 2012)

In the workplace, employees not only perform their designated job tasks but also experience interpersonal interactions with their supervisors (Lleo et al. in 2016) It is suggested that employees tend to reciprocate the treatment they receive in their work environment. This phenomenon is explained by social exchange theory, which was proposed by Blau in 1964. According to this theory, when employees are treated fairly and positively by their supervisors, they respond in kind with positive behaviors. Conversely, when they experience mistreatment, they react negatively.

Whether it stems from displaced or provoked aggression, AS is associated with a range of negative consequences. These include assistants holding negative attitudes toward their job and the organization (Duffy et al., 2002), engaging in resistance behavior (Bamberger & Bacharach, 2006), displaying violent and DWB (Duffy et al., 2002), making minor performance contributions (Tepper, 2007).

. H1: *Abusive supervision has significantly positively associated with deviant workplace behaviour*

Transformational Leadership

TL is a distinctive leadership style that sets it apart from other styles, such as transactional

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leadership. It is characterized by ethical principles and the noble intentions of leaders (Pradhan & Pradhan, 2014). What sets TL apart, particularly from transactional leadership, is its emphasis on moral influence over followers. It elevates the levels of morality and values not only in the leader but also in the supporters (Pradhan & Pradhan, 2014). In past study by Bass (1985) affirmed that TL is not a mere abstract concept but a tangible reality. In this study, TL was described in terms of its significant influence on followers.

Moderation Effect TL between AS and DWB

The association between TL and DWB is posited as follows: the independent variable, transformational leadership, is assumed to influence certain individuals' propensity to engage in DWB. These Divergent behaviors are likely to be influenced by TL because this leadership style comprises predictors of deviance. This study investigates TL as well as the presumed moderator variable of TL among individual and organizational factors in relation to deviant behavior in the workplace. TL play an important part in moderating the relationship between these factors and DWB (Pradhan & Pradhan, 2014).

The study anticipates that TL can help modify the relationship between moral disengagement (as a form of DWB) in various contexts (Hystad, Mearns, & Eid, 2014). This visionary aspect of TL motivates employees (Iqbal et al., 2023). In this process of TL pay attention to their subordinates and try to understand their values and needs (Bass et al., 2003). TL style consistently aims to shield their followers from deviant behaviors and toxicity in the workplace. As Pradhan and Pradhan (2014) state, "It is generally accepted among research scholars that the quality and type of leadership can play a vital role in either boosting or diminishing negative behaviors." TL fosters a positive organizational culture, and based on the above discussion, the hypothesis is proposed as follows:

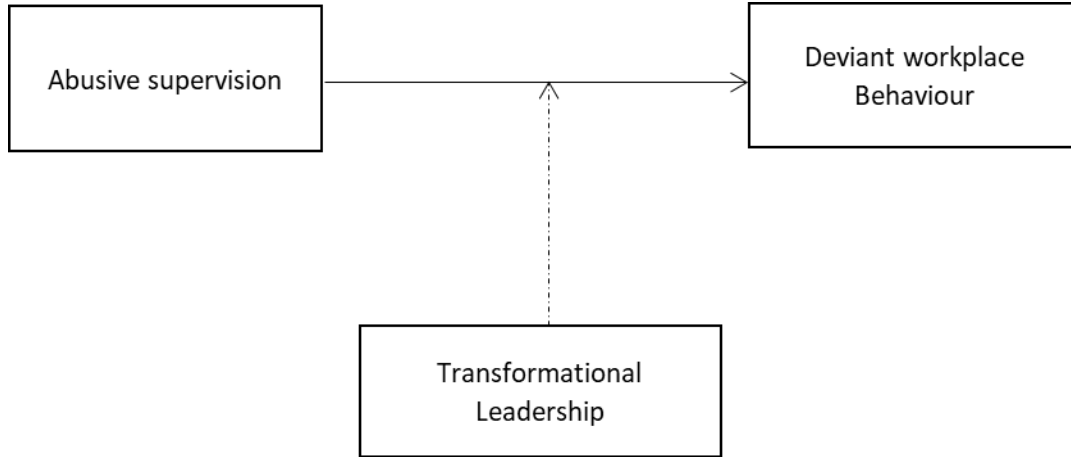
H2: *There is significant moderating relationship between TL and AS with DWB*

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

The framework exploring the impact of TL on the relationship between AS and DWB finds support in the theoretical foundation of SET. According to this theory, social behavior results from an exchange of physical or non-physical rewards, such as appreciation and respect. Individuals engaged in social behavior expect equivalent value in return from the other party. As Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) explain, SET helps in understanding an employee's emotions and how they evaluate various work events. According to this theory, employees maintain mutual relationships based on a either party expect something in response from the other (Ahmad et al., 2023). This framework, with the influence of transformational leadership, provides valuable insights into the dynamics between AS and DWB within the context of SET.

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Theoretical framework



Methodology

The primary aim of this study is to examine the influence of AS on the DWB of employees within Pakistani public organizations. This research employs an explanatory research design, which seeks to explore the impact of changes in existing phenomena and specifically focuses on a particular issue to elucidate the relationships among various variables, including independent, dependent, and moderating variables. The data collection method chosen for this study is a cross-sectional survey conducted through the use of a questionnaire.

Given that the study's objective is to examine the impact of AS on DWB and the moderating role of among employees in public organizations, the target population comprises 20 public organizations in the Pakistan. Sekaran (2003) suggests that stratified sampling is more efficient for heterogeneous populations, and the study employs a stratified sampling design for meeting its objectives.

Measures

A self-administered questionnaire was chosen as the research instrument, and it employed a closed-ended format. Respondents were instructed to select answers from a scale ranging from 1 to 5, where they could simply tick the option that best represented their response. The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from the previous work of well-established researchers in the field. AS behavior exhibited by leaders using a scale developed by Mitchell and Ambrose in 2007. This scale consisted of five items. To measure DWB, Twelve items scale used which was developed by Bennett and Robinson (2000). To gauge transformational leadership, a set of 20 items was employed, with these items being derived (Bass & Avolio, 1995).

Results and Discussion

To conduct data analysis in the fields of social and behavioral sciences, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is commonly employed. SEM is widely used in these domains to explore the causal relationships within intricate and multifaceted datasets, often involving complex

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measures of proposed constructs (Hair et al., 2013). The utilization of SEM in social science has significantly grown due to the availability of various software packages designed for SEM analysis (Hair et al., 2013). SEM primarily focuses on theoretical constructs when examining data.

In current study researcher calculated values of mean, standard deviations and Cronbach alpha for each variable before running the SEM through a procedure told by Anderson & Gerbing (1988). These all values has been shown in *Table 1* of Descriptive statistics. The values of mean are between 3.0060 to 3.3972 while the values of standard deviation are between 1.12498 to 1.39214. These value show that mostly responses were from “Agree” (4) to “Strongly Agree” (5) on a Likert scale. In our study, Cronbach alpha has been checked for the purpose to identify internal consistency and reliability in between each variables’ items. Such a value must be greater or equal to “0.7”(Cronbach, 1951). In our *Table 1*, all the values of Cronbach alpha are meeting this criteria which shows the reliability and mean as well as standard deviations of our collected data as favorable. For checking the convergent and discriminant validity we draw our all variables in AMOS by linking all the constructs relating to each variable and covariance with each other is allowed. Fit indices values area then measured in measurement model and our calculated values were under the acceptance criteria. Values of fit indices which shows that CMIN/DF must be less than 3 and non-significant. This depicts that values of our measurement model are fit and can be relied and now we can move further for reliability check of scale along with validity. There exist three steps to check convergent validity of an instrument, the first step tells that the values of factor loadings should be >0.7 of each construct and must be significant. Second step tells that the value of composite reliability must be >0.8 and third step tells that value of Average Variance

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

Variable	No. of Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's α value
Deviant Workplace Behavior	76	3.3972	1.19641	0.971
Abusive Supervision	15	3.0060	1.39214	0.954
Transformational Leadership	20	3.2122	1.25812	0.977

Composite reliabilities (CR) have been shown in *table 2* and all the values are more than 0.7 and AVE values are also more than 0.5 which are acceptable. It proves the correctness of convergent validity of scale and it is explaining that all items are loading in their own variables. (*Table 2*). We also calculated Discriminant validity. Fornell and Larcker (1981) told that AVE square root value must be greater than correlation values of other variables. In *table 2*, we have shown values of square root of AVE in bold form. All of these values are acceptable as they are greater than correlations and it shows that our scale items load in their variables rather than others. All these tests proved convergent as well as discriminant validity, so, now we can further run SEM for hypotheses testing and our proposed model.

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Table 2: Psychometric Properties

	CR	AVE	DWB	AS	TL
DWB	0.955	0.914	0.956		
AS	0.977	0.739	0.444**	0.860	
TL	0.971	0.752	-0.420**	-0.653**	0.867

AS has shown positive and significant effect on DWB (Unstandardized β =0.433, Standardized β =0.433, $P < 0.001$). While TL has shown the moderation of 13% in the relationship between AS and DWB. Both of these relationships are significant too so the hypotheses have been accepted.

Table3: Regression Weights

Relationships	Unstandardized β	Standardized β	S.E.	C.R.	P
AS → DWB	0.433	0.433	0.048	9.026	***
Interaction Term	0.136	0.116	0.053	8.257	***

Table 4: Hypotheses Testing - I

Hypotheses	Result
H1: AS → DWB	Accepted
H2: Moderating Role of Transformational leadership	Accepted

In Table no 4 indicates Hypothesis H1, which posits a relationship between AS and DWB, has been supported by the data and analysis conducted in your study. In other words, there is evidence to suggest that AS has a significant impact on deviant workplace behavior, and this relationship is statistically significant based on your study's findings.

Secondly Hypothesis H2 suggests that there is a moderating role of TL in the association between AS and DWB. The results indicates that current study's findings support the presence of this moderating effect. In other words, TL seems to play a role in influencing or moderating the association between AS and DWB, as indicated by your research results.

In summary, the table provides a concise summary of the hypotheses tested in your study and the outcomes of those tests. Both H1 and H2 have been accepted based on the data and analysis, meaning that there is support for the relationships and moderating effects they propose.

Future Directions

While the present study has offered support for several hypothesized relationships among the exogenous, endogenous, and intervening variables, it is crucial to interpret the results while considering some of the study's limitations: Current research employed a cross-sectional research design. To check the findings of the present study, future research should

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consider employing a longitudinal research design. Secondly In the current study, focused on public sector only and future study in private sector to generalize the findings. Future researchers might explore other strategies, such as interviews, case studies, etc., to measure DWB in public sector organizations more comprehensively and accurately.

Conclusion

The present research has made a valuable contribution to the expanding body of knowledge concerning the impact of TL on DWB. While numerous studies have explored the underlying experiences and causes of DWB, this study fills a theoretical gap by introducing TL as an independent variable for controlling DWB.

Moreover, the findings of this study also carry practical implications for institutional leaders, managers, and organizations. Despite some limitations, the study provides guidelines and procedures for future research. It offers insights that can help leaders and organizations better understand and manage DWB, emphasizing the potential role of TL in fostering positive workplace environments.

In conclusion, this study enhances our understanding of the interaction between TL and DWB, shedding light on both theoretical and practical aspects of this important issue.

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