



An investigation of the impact of abusive supervision on technology end-users



Kenneth J. Harris^{a,*}, Kent Marett^b, Ranida B. Harris^a

^aIndiana University Southeast, 4201 Grant Line Road, New Albany, IN 47150, United States

^bMississippi State University, 75 B. S. Hood Rd. Mississippi State, MS 39762, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 28 June 2013

Keywords:

Abusive supervision
Knowledge workers
Job strain
Turnover intentions
Frustration

ABSTRACT

Although they are likely to occur in many organizations, few research efforts have examined the impact of negative supervisor behaviors on technology end-users. In this study we investigate abusive supervision, and the effects it has on perceptions about the work and psychological, attitudinal, and behavioral intention outcomes. Our sample consisted of 225 technology end-users from a large variety of organizations. Results revealed that abusive supervision has a positive impact on perceived pressure to produce, time pressure, and work overload, and a negative impact on liking computer work, and ultimately these variables impact job strain, frustration, turnover intentions, and job satisfaction.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Employees in all business functional areas, including information systems, have experienced a supervisor giving his or her subordinates the silent treatment, publicly ridiculing them or being rude towards them, expressing anger at them when they are not the source of the anger, or making negative comments about them to others. Unsurprisingly, these abusive behaviors are likely to have considerable negative effects for the subordinates experiencing them (Tepper, 2007). Making these behaviors all the more detrimental is the fact that supervisors are often viewed as one of, if not the most important relationships an employee has in the workplace (Manzoni & Barsoux, 2002). Extant research in the management information systems arena has highlighted the importance of supervisors and supervisor–subordinate relationships in a number of areas including technology adoption (Magni & Pennarola, 2008), information systems success, career satisfaction for information systems employees (Jiang & Klein, 1999), managing project expectations (Iacovou, Thompson, & Smith, 2009), communication within departments (Keil, Tiwana, Sainsbury, & Sneha, 2010), and overall career satisfaction (Major et al., 2007). However, this research has focused almost exclusively on positive supervisor behaviors. Attention has started being given toward understanding the impacts of negative exchanges and the overall “dark side” of managerial behavior in organizations. In this study we focus on one type of negative behavior, abusive supervision, a topic that has received increased attention of late (Tepper, 2007) but, to

our knowledge, has not yet been examined in the management information systems field.

Abusive supervision refers to “subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact” (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Some examples of abusive supervision are those behaviors (i.e., public ridiculing, the silent treatment) mentioned in our opening sentence (question). Though many of the factors explored in this study can be easily applied to workers in other fields, we believe they have additional bearing on employees who are the end-users of technology. Previous surveys of managers and meta-analyses of turnover for technology end-users have indicated that attracting, developing, and retaining competent workers is a high priority and a constant source of concern (Joseph, Ng, Koh, & Ang, 2007; Luftman & McLean, 2004). Given that, any additional insight concerning employees’ attitudes, turnover rates, and how best to maintain a satisfied staff of technology end-users can be of value for managers (McMurtrey, Grover, Teng, & Lightner, 2002). To our knowledge, the influence of an abusive supervisor on end-users has yet to be investigated.

In terms of its effects, abusive supervision is likely to manifest itself in a number of different ways that are unique to employees who complete the majority of their work on computers. Based on multiple conceptual frameworks including the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) and the transactional model of stress and coping (Kinicki & Vecchio, 1994), we believe that, for technology end-users, abusive supervision is likely to lead to increased pressure to produce, time pressure, and perceptions of work overload, as well as a decrease in liking the computer work that they perform. Then, these four reactions to abusive supervision will be

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: harriskj@ius.edu (K.J. Harris).

associated with increased negative psychological, attitudinal, and behavioral-intention outcomes. In this study, we specifically examine the individual level outcomes of job strains and frustration (psychological consequences), job satisfaction (an attitude), and turnover intentions (an intended behavior).

This research effort makes a contribution to the existing research by extending the work of Ferratt et al. (1988, 1993) by investigating abusive supervision, a negative relationship behavior, and its impact on end-users of technology. In particular, this study (a) examines abusive supervision in the MIS field, something that has not yet happened, (b) expands the nomological network related to abusive supervision by probing its impact on end-users, and (c) shows both immediate and ultimate consequences that are influenced from abusive supervision. The immediate outcomes of increased pressure to produce, time pressure, and perceptions of work overload, and decreased liking computer work are outcomes that are expected to be particularly relevant to technology end-users. These immediate outcomes are different from those examined in other research on abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007), with some of the variables (i.e., time pressure and liking computer work) being specifically focused on technology for these technology end-users. We examined these research questions in a sample of 225 employees, all of whom worked at least 25 h per week on a computer, with their work ranging from information system development and implementation to the primary system users. These individuals came from a wide range of industries and organizations, which helps in our confidence concerning the generalizability of our results. Practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research are offered.

1.1. Abusive supervision

As already mentioned, abusive supervision refers to subordinate perceptions of sustained displays of supervisor hostile nonverbal and verbal behaviors, excluding physical contact. A few aspects of abusive supervision should be mentioned in more detail. First, abusive supervision is based on subordinate perceptions, so one employee's view of his/her supervisor's behaviors might be very different from another. Second, abusive supervision refers to a sustained display of these kinds of behaviors. Thus, if a supervisor merely lashes out at employees during a bad day, it would not be considered abuse as the behavior would need to be more prolonged and repeated over time. Third, abusive supervision refers to hostile nonverbal and verbal behaviors. Accordingly, abusive supervisors are different from demanding, tough, controlling, or "all-business, no-play" bosses.

Abusive supervision is also likely to be associated with negative consequences because of a few unique aspects or dynamics of this type of behavior. As abusive supervision refers to negative supervisor behaviors that exclude physical contact, it is likely to continue and have more long-lasting, insidious effects. More specifically, if a supervisor physically struck an employee, that type of behavior would likely be addressed immediately. However, with abusive supervision, it is less likely than a subordinate will tell human resources or a supervisor's superior about being treated rudely or given the silent treatment. Thus, abusive supervision often continues unaddressed at the workplace. Another reason this form of abuse is especially problematic is due to the inherent power differences of a supervisor and a subordinate (Tepper, 2000, 2007). Research has suggested that one of the primary motivations underlying the abuse is the supervisor's need to display his or her power over subordinates by reducing their control over their own work processes and the job environment (Ashforth, 1994). Considering that supervisors primarily control rewards, roles, and work assignments for their subordinates (Yukl, 1989), there is ample opportunity to single out individual employees, or even entire work groups and

departments, for abuse. We believe this motivation will be particularly relevant to the relationships explored in this study. The power difference between a supervisor and subordinates also has consequences for reporting any abuse to organizational outlets (e.g., human resources). Although subordinates do not enjoy abusive supervision, it is often difficult to tell someone about it. Instead, subordinates may hesitate to tell people because of the supervisor's status in the company, they may think that no one will believe their story, and/or they may be economically dependent on that job and do not want to risk their job to report a supervisor being rude to them. For these reasons and others, abusive supervision is likely to be long-lasting and has been linked to a number of dysfunctional consequences including decreased in-role and extra-role performance, and increased stress and workplace deviance (Aryee, Sun, Chen, & Debrah, 2007; Harris, Kacmar, & Zivnuska, 2007; Tepper, 2000; Tepper, 2007; Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002).

While the influence of abusive supervision has not been specifically explored, previous research has demonstrated the importance of the supervisor for technology end-users. Much of what we know about supervisor-subordinate relationships in the technology area originates with the work of Ferratt and colleagues. Much like non-computer workers, technology end-users appreciate a work-unit climate in which managers and supervisors are trustworthy and attend to their interpersonal relationships with subordinates in a supportive manner (Ferratt & Short, 1988). When later determining supervisor behaviors associated with attending to relationships with subordinates, Ferratt, Short, and Agarwal (1993) identified behaviors such as effectively disseminating information, allowing for upward communication, setting a positive example in the workplace, and providing recognition and praise, among others. Subsequent work indicates that supervisory satisfaction can serve as a source of intrinsic motivation for computer workers, influencing employees' feelings related to task processes and performance to the point that the work can become the most important job-related factor for workers (Thatcher, Liu, Stepina, Goodman, & Treadway, 2006). More recently, studies of technology end-users have found that a supportive supervisor can help encourage liking of computer work, even among workers who did not particularly care for computer work beforehand and decrease turnover intentions (Harris & Marett, 2009). Finally, there is evidence that the computer work itself is a significant hygiene factor that challenges and stimulates workers, further increasing the chances for positive outcomes like job satisfaction, involvement, and organizational commitment (Couger, 1988; Igbaria & Siegel, 1992; Wynkoop & Walz, 2000). In short, the computer worker-related benefits stemming from supportive supervision is thus well-established, but as mentioned earlier, the consequences of abusive supervision has not been. This leads to the general research question investigated by this study related to how abusive supervision impacts immediate outcomes (perceived pressure and work overload) as well as ultimate outcomes (job strain, frustration, turnover intentions, and job satisfaction).

2. Theory

To help inform our predictions on the influence that abusive supervision has on the job perceptions of computer workers, we draw from two theoretical bases: Conservation of Resources (CORs) theory and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. First, COR theory proposes that individuals have a finite amount of valued job resources that they seek to conserve and protect from job-related stress (Hobfoll, 1989). These job resources can be classified as work resources (e.g., status or seniority at work), personal resources (e.g., feelings of achievement or optimism), material resources (e.g., financial stability), energy resources (e.g., time and effort),

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/350842>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/350842>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)