Abusive Supervision and Organizational Citizenship Behavior: Implications for HR Practitioners

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Abstract: The present article aims to shed light on the concept of abusive supervision which is a growing organizational issue across the globe. Therein, the authors have attempted to underline some of the important scholarly findings and what they are suggesting particularly with regard to the effects of abusive supervision towards voluntary efforts for organizational betterment. The article elaborates on the growing concern of impolite, rude and hostile behaviours of supervising authorities towards their subordinates and how they could result critically for organizations aspiring to enhance citizenship behaviours. In parallel, the article also expounds on HRM as a strategic concept whilst unleashing on elements relating to technological primacy. The article aims to serve as a guideline for individuals enthusiastic to learn about the concept of abusive supervision and its consequences on individual citizenship behaviours towards the business. The paper concludes with implications for businesses in general and for HR practitioners in particular for better scholarly understanding of the discussed relationship.

Keywords: Abuse; Abusive supervision; OCB; Citizenship behaviours; Wellbeing

1. Introduction

Globally organizations are working to enhance employees' behaviours and outcomes at the work keeping in view the tough economic situations. The survival in today`s world lies only with the business entities who have people willing to go extra mile in any way possible. Therein, one very important element that has attracted much attention from practitioners and academicians is employees` citizenship behaviour. Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) refers to those behaviors which contribute organizational wellbeing across the time, across the person and in aggregate (Organ, 1988). There have been different explanations forwarded for Organizational Citizenship Behavior for instance, extra-role behavior (VanDyne & Cummings, 1990) and counter role-behavior (Staw & Boetteger, 1990). OCB generally is referred to facilitate towards organizational effectiveness. According to VanDyne, Graham, and Dienesch (1994) that Organizational Citizenship

Behavior has been redefined and so theorists not just view it in the perspective of in-role performance but also in the extra role behaviour and political participation in the organizational affairs. Conclusively, organizations have learned that OCB is a much-needed prospect for them to thrive and sustain in the current competitive market for long. Notably, the current work places are experiencing something on a rise that is very damaging when it comes to enhancing employee behaviours and outcomes like OCB and that is abusive supervision. Research studies have reported that impolite and hostile behaviour of supervising authorities at the workplace can make a severe negative impact on employees` volunteer and compulsory behaviours. However, to what length it is critical for OCB in specific is little vague. The present study therefore has worked to underline the two concepts to urge future scholars for empirical attention.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Organizational Citizenship Behaviour

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) refers to those behaviors which contribute organizational wellbeing across the time, across the person and in aggregate (Organ, 1988).

Organ is popularly known as the father of the OCB concept. Based on the explanations of Katz (1964), Organ (1988) worked on the idea of OCB whereby he referred it as a discretionary based individual behavior that does not result out of any reward of recognitions and potentially results in enhancing the organizational effectiveness. These discretionary efforts are mainly not part of an individual`s job description which at times pushes people to engage in extra role behaviors at work (Mamman, Kamoche, & Bakuwa, 2012).

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According to Koys (2001) that organizational citizenship behavior has a growing significance as a performance prospect as it notably helps in facilitating organizational wider goals and objectives for enhanced effectiveness. The author also proved empirically that organizational citizenship behavior can be enhanced by different employee prospects like job satisfaction. Accordingly, organizational citizenship behavior has been examined whereby researchers have outlined numerous components affecting it such as organizational engagement (Kopperud, Martinsen, & Humborstad, 2014; Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007) organizational monitoring (Niehoff & Moorman, 1993), organizational commitment (Mamman et al., 2012). Organizational citizenship behavior to a larger extent relies on the will of an individual. People at the workplace may choose to exert discretionary willingness towards some extra roles and responsibilities. Individuals with OCB express five behaviors in common which are called Altruism, Courtesy, Sportsmanship, Conscientiousness, and Civic Virtue (Wang, Hinrichs, Prieto, & Howell, 2013). Altruism refers to facilitating and supporting other individuals or showing a desire to help others without any expectation for reward of acknowledgement. People with high OCB generally tend to support other colleagues or office mates during turbulent situations without any expectation for compensation (Podsakoff et al., 1990) in groups such people express willingness to assist and support other employees in their own tasks in order to keep them at ease (Pahi, Shah, Ahmed & Umrani, 2016).

Accordingly, courtesy is explained as polite behavior towards other people. These people may or may not be in close association but generally, in the context of OCB, a courteous behavior of an individual is generally posed towards others working in the same organization. At work, courteous

behavior facilitates colleagues to indulge in positive behaviors such as guiding them towards work, advising them for issues (if any) and so on. Consequently, sportsmanship is referred as a negative behavioral expression when something willingly or unwillingly goes against the plan. Sportsmanship behavior is generally termed as an important component of OCB, especially when it comes to handling aspects of work like arguments and disentitlements (Organ, Podsakoff, & Mackenzie, 2005).

In the similar verge, conscientiousness is expressed as the behavioral component that is concerned with the additional amount or level of self-control which is generally not needed in normal situations. This type of behaviour is expressed when an employee does more than required in aspects like coming to work on time and completing assignments in advance etc. According to (Organ et al., 2005) employees with conscientious behaviour are noticed to be advance planner and goal setters for work tasks. Lastly, literature on organizational citizenship behaviour suggests that civic virtue is another behaviour that such individuals exert. By definition, civic virtue means how appropriately and responsively, the individual represents its organization.

Mover, civic virtue becomes more evident when the individual expresses about the organization out in public. Literatures have suggested that employees with high civic virtue show higher commitment and tend to work in a more productive manner which ultimately enhances performance (Marshall, Moncrief, & Shepherd, 2012). Islam, Ahmad, Ahmed, and Mohammad (2012) in their empirical study on the 5 types of OCB in the banking sector have outlined that organizational citizenship behaviour is very important for the effective bank performance. Additionally, they also suggested that employees need to have citizenship behaviours in order to work with effectiveness and efficiency. Empirically, the study found that altruism, conscientiousness, and civic virtue to be the most significant enhancers of citizenship behaviours. The findings suggested that out of the 5 these three contributed the most in their study on the banking sector of Pakistan. In terms of the impact on organizational citizenship behaviour, study by Chen and Yang (2012) suggests that leadership style and type can have a greater influence on individuals to push them towards doing something that is beyond their conventional job descriptions. The study also outlined that when people perceive that their leaders are supportive and encouraging; they automatically end up developing citizenship traits within themselves.

In the similar fashion, book on organizational citizenship behaviour has outlined that people often team out to work for the betterment of organization in terms of their image, teambuilding, community service and image building. Such individuals are generally the ones who are called high in organizational citizenship behaviour. The book also mentioned that it is important to understand the citizenship behaviour which may vary from one employee to another, but they will certainly be focused on expressing civic citizenship behaviours. Moreover, the authors also suggested that different organizational and individual components influence OCB and hence it becomes important to see what impacts employees more in particular such as leadership style, work climate, fairness, supportive behaviours etc (Organ et al., 2005).

Similarly, recent study by Burns and DiPaola (2014) has suggested that numerous factors can influence organizational citizenship behaviour out of which leadership and supportive environment are the critical ones. More importantly, the paper also suggested that OCB significantly enhances workplace climate through encouraging healthy and contributory to further the organizational effectiveness. Accordingly, study by Bonaparte (2008) that organizational citizenship behaviour is important for organizations particularly in this globally age whereby organizations are struggling to survive and sustain competitively.

Critical review of the explanations on these behaviours suggested that organizational citizenship is a matter of discretionary efforts and hence is voluntary in nature. The review suggest that organizations need to enhance and foster OCB through educating employees on the potential benefits and prospects but above all, create such a working environment that encourage civic behaviours. The review also suggested that there is a strong correlation between organizational effectiveness and OCB practices and behaviours employees with these behaviours contribute responsively towards organizational well-being. It is also important to note that these features on a general scale are also important to examine and evaluate how employees associate themselves with the work and

organization as a whole. OCB practices can also help us to outline employee connection with the organization and its betterment. More importantly, OCB behaviours can considerably help organizations to critically appraise their performance and productivity potential in the competitive global economy (Ahmed, Phulpoto, Umrani & Abbas, 2015). The review has outlined that OCB behaviors are becoming increasingly important and it will not be a surprise if businesses start considering them on serious grounds particularly while evaluating employees` overall performance on a regular basis.

2.2 Abusive Supervision

Prominent studies on the topic have asserted that behaviour of the supervisor can be very tricky especially if it is tyrannical or undermining (Ashforth, 1994). Therein, studies have underlined that supervisors who are not helpful and actively address employees/subordinates with negative entities are dangerous for organizational goals and their effective achievement. In simple business and scholarly terms this is called abusive supervision. This refers to perceptions and views of the subordinates as to what length and measure the supervisor showcases hostile attitude both, verbal and non-verbal (Tepper, 2000). The author has described abusive supervision as a growing issue across the businesses these days. Recent studies have also reported a significant rise and evidences of abusive supervision at work. For example, a very recent study by Ahmed, Khalid, Islam and Abro (2019) underlined rise of abusive supervision in different sectors such as service industry businesses. Therein, the presence of abusive supervision doubles the impact of impact of other depleting elements such as work demands and emotional challenges. Accordingly, another recent study underlined that abusive supervision can have a depleting impact on employees` wellbeing thus resulting in draining their psychological capabilities which ultimately causes employees to showcase poor work behaviors and outcomes (Valle, Kacmar, Zivnuska & Harting, 2019). Abusive supervision is a type of job demand (Ahmed, Shah, Siddiqui, Shah, Dahri & Qureshi, 2017) and it makes the work environment hostile whereby, an employee not giving his/her best can be easily understood. There is a need for also understanding that abusive supervision may a result of pressure and work stress individuals working as supervisors, leaders and/or managers getting in their roles which they exert on their subordinates. Overall, the empirical arguments and results have led us to understand that abusive supervision is very tricky and harmful for business and cannot only consequent in damaging employee behaviors and outcomes and but can also further the effects of other precarious work elements.

One of the prominent studies on the topic (Keashly, 1998) had reported that humiliating treatment of employees by their supervisors and/or immediate bosses results in major negative consequences such as job dissatisfaction; organizational conflict and higher intentions to quit. These evidences have also been supported by some of the recent studies on the topic. For example, study by Yu, Duffy and Tepper (2018) that abusive supervision works as a downward envy whereby, it is also seen by employees as a potential threat to their existence in the organization. This is a critical element based on this study and suggests that abusive supervision may not only result in developing strong negative impulses towards work but may also affect individual sense of security at the workplace. Henceforth, it can be asserted that, abusive supervision has long effects on many elements pertaining to employee behaviors and outcomes. The ideal situation related to individual prospects may be different however, it is essential for businesses to look into these elements to ensure they are addressed for the betterment of organization and its objective goals.

2.3 Abusive Supervision and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour

There have been many antecedents reported pertaining to organizational citizenship behaviour over the past decades wherein, the review of the literature presented above in this paper has also reported some. Therein, there are several elements that can work the other way out of which, abusive supervision is one. Research has in a day indicated towards the risky results of abusive supervision not only towards the individual outcomes but also towards behaviours towards the organizations as

whole (Zellars, Tepper & Duffy, 2002). Scholarly evidence can be traced suggesting that support, help and facilitation from supervisors can boost individual`s willingness for extra role performance prospects such as OCB (see further., Chen & Chiu, 2008; Madrid, Ahmed & Kumar, 2019). Similar assertions and promising role have also been reported by other studies (e.g., Ahmed, Majid, Al-Aali & Mozammel, 2019; Ahmed, Majid & Zin, 2016).

Taking this argument in front, it could be comprehended that the availability of contrary elements including hostility, abuse and impolite behaviour from the supervisors can make a harmful impact vice versa. Talking about studies on the topic, there is little known on the relationship as majority of part studies have emphasized abusive supervision and individual employee behaviours in their studies till date (Ahmed, Umrani, Qureshi & Samad, 2018; Hobbler & Hu, 2013) Hence, the present study indicates towards the potential for looking this relationship to forward robust implications for organizational scholars.

3. Preposition and Conceptual Framework

The literature view presented in the present study has thus led us to the conclusion that abusive supervision can be troublesome for businesses and can result in severe consequences. Based on the critical review of the literature, the present study aims to forward the conceptual framework for future scholars to investigate as follows:
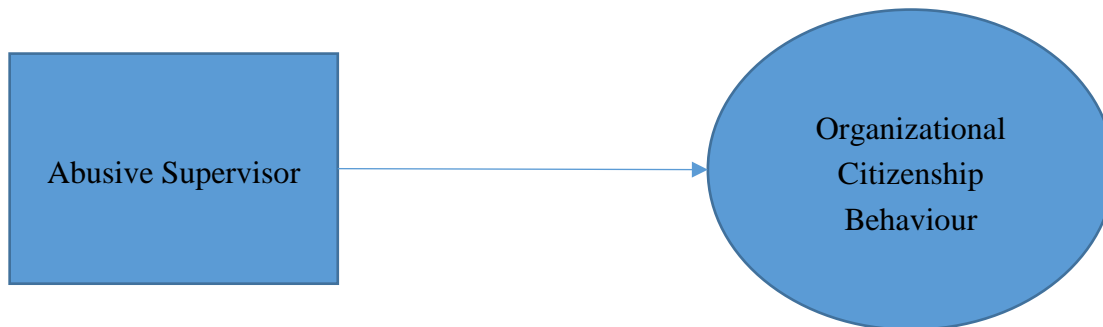

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Based on the above conceptual framework, the present study offers the following preposition:

P1: There will be a negative relationship between abusive supervisor and organizational citizenship behavior.

4. Implications:

4.1 Implication for Business:

Based on the review of the literature, the present study asserts businesses to look into and presence of abusive supervision at the workplace. At times, individuals do not disclose or tend to keep such things to themselves due to fear of loosing the job or position in the company. Therefore, top management can play a role to closely work with employees` across the different departments to ensure such practices does not exist. Accordingly, if found, management can work on ways to address the issue as early as possible. Therein, businesses may also consider working with supervisors and managers responsible for employees to guide them for not showcasing any such behaviours. Behavioural training can be a good option for management to consider particularly for supervisors expressing such odd behaviours.

4.2 Implications for HRM:

The critical review of the literature indicates potential for HR practitioners to address such issues. HR department and personnel professionals can actively work on developing staffing practices that ensure objective hiring. Accordingly, HR also has a major role to play in this regard through making robust policies and practices that not only discourage such abusive treatment but

also protect individuals from experiencing any such issues. In parallel, individuals in the HR may also work on developing strategies that do not provide any room and/or opportunities for managers and/or supervisors to exert such behaviours. This may require restructuring and redesigning of workplaces as well. Towards the end HR professionals also have a major role to ensure there is emphasis on respect and professionality across the entire business.

5. Conclusion

Conclusively, the present study has underlined the severe effects of abusive supervision on employee behaviours and outcomes especially in connection to organization specific extra role behaviours such as OCB. The paper has attempted to indicate towards the paucity of research on this relationship and suggested guidelines for businesses and HR professionals for further consideration in this regard.

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