The Effects of Abusive Leadership and Creativity: A Moderated Mediation Model

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Abstract: Based on social exchange theory, we examined the relationship between abusive leadership and employee creativity and explored the effects of affective commitment and performance promotion attribution on this connection. The results presented when performance promotion attribution at high level, the negative effect of abusive leadership on affective commitment will be alleviated and the possibility of employee creativity will not be suppressed.

Keywords: Abusive leadership; Affective commitment; Employee creativity; Performance promotion attribution

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1. Introduction

Employee creativity refers to the process of generating, refining and applying creative thinking, which can propose effective solutions for the product, service, and procedure (George & Zhou, 2007). In the process, it would be accompanied by risks, conflicts, difficulties, failure, and moral dilemma. Therefore, it is important to find out the antecedents of creativity. Sweetman and his colleagues (2011) believed that creativity requires not only the capacities of breaking conservative thinking but also the courage in risk-taking. Willingness is a key in employee creativity, it would be less happened if there is no intrinsic driven. Previous research showed leadership plays a vital role in promoting or inhibiting employee creativity (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). Baumeister (2001) believed individual has stronger reactions in a negative stimulator than positive.
Thus, the exploration on the relationship between abusive leadership and employee creativity from the perspective of social exchange theory will further enrich the current findings in a certain extent. Abusive leadership refers to the leaders’ behaviors with sustained, non-physical, hostile verbal or non-verbal toward subordinates (Tepper, 2000). Based on the social exchange theory, employees would like to decrease affective commitment to compensate the emotional states when their psychological contract with organization was violated, in this case, the willingness of risk-taking and investments will be suppressed. Abusive leadership is a subjective evaluation of employees to their authorities (Tepper, 2007). Accordingly, employees would regard abusive leadership is legitimate and reasonable if they believed the purposes of the treatments are promoting their performance rather than hurting their feelings deliberately. Given that, we propose performance promotion attribution is a boundary condition of the perception of abusive leadership.

2. Hypotheses Development Abusive Leadership and Employee Creativity

Depending upon social exchange theory, abusive leadership is likely to make subordinates feel disgracing, despised and ruined reputation, in doing so, employees would be doubtful to their contributions being respected or not and perceive unfairness of interpersonal relationship, thereby they are unlikely to exhibit creativity for improving organizational performance. In previous research, scholars have found that abusive supervision causes psychological distresses to employees (Restubog, Scott, & Zagenczyk, 2011), while constantly psychological punishments will damage subordinates’ self-esteem and restrain their creative behaviors. Therefore, we propose: H1: Abusive leadership is negatively related to employee creativity.

3. The Mediation Role of Affective Commitment

Based on social exchange theory, employees prefer to concern the organization neither values their efforts nor cares about their needs after being treated unfairly; in turn, the quality of the superior-subordinate relationship will be declined, and the commitments and identification will be decreased or even disappeared in workplace. Further, the intrinsic motivators will be suppressed, and employee creativity would be inhibited.
by less willingness and courage. Affective commitment describes a sense of the relationship between employees and organization, a psychological state of an employee desires to maintain the connection with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991), and the employee’s psychological attachment and their identification with the organization. However, previous studies found that abusive leadership triggers the perception of unfairness to employees, damages self-values, and evokes psychological distresses. Further, it also undermines the quality of leader-follower relationship and weaken affective commitment to the organization. In order to compensate the lower emotional state, employees tend to “re-sign” a latest, maybe lower-quality, psychological agreement with the organization, and declining trustworthy and affective commitment to agent of organizations. As a result, individual enthusiasm and interest for work will be decreased, and he or she would less deploy time and energy on work, such that, employee creativity is unlikely to expose in workplace. Therefore, we propose: H2: Abusive leadership is negatively related to employee creativity via affective commitment.

4. The Moderated Role of Performance Promotion Attribution

Performance promotion attribution means that the purpose of abusive supervision is to improve individual performance rather than hurt his or her feelings in workplace (Tepper, 2007). Based on the attribution theory, a subordinate will increase the identification and trust in leaders if he or she believes that the purpose of the leadership behaviors is consistent with his or her own interests, thus further affective commitment would be produced and promoted. Accordingly, the perceptions of abusive leadership or not depending on individual evaluates this supervision on promoting or injuring. As previous discussed, the relationship between abusive leadership and employee creativity can be further expressed as a moderated mediation model. When performance promotion attribution is at a higher level, abusive leadership is more likely to be interpreted as conforming to the long-term interests of employees and reaching the psychological agreements established with organizations. Therefore, affective commitment will not get easily affected, thus employees are less likely to restrain their creative ideas and innovative behaviors in workplace. Therefore, we propose: H3: Performance promotion attribution moderates the relationship of abusive leadership and employee creativity through affective commitment. When the performance promotion attribution is higher, the mediating
effect of affective commitment on abusive leadership association with employee creativity will be weakened; On the contrary, when the performance promotion attribution is lower, the mediating effect of affective commitment on abusive leadership association with employee creativity will be strengthened.

5. Methodology

We collected data from four firms of service industry in the south of China. In this survey, 395 pairs are available which corresponds to a response rate of 87.78%. For the employee respondents, the average age was 36.75 years (SD = 5.372); 50.5% were male; 82% had achieved at least an under graduated degree; the average tenure with their immediate supervisor was 6.08 years (SD = 4.267). All scales were measured by 7-point Likert scale, rating was “1 = totally disagree” to “7 = totally agree”.

Abusive leadership was used in 15-item scale developed by Tepper (2000). We obtained values of 0.877 for CR, and with value of 0.505 for AVE.

Affective commitment was used in 8-item scale developed by Meyer and Allen (1997). The construct of affective commitment obtained a CR value was 0.809, while the AVE value of 0.591.

We used Liu, Liao, and Loi’s (2012) 5-item scales to measure performance promotion attribution. We obtained a CR of 0.911 and the AVE of 0.744.

We measured employee creativity with 13-item scales, which developed by Zhou and George (2001). We earned CR value of 0.868 and AVE of 0.627.

In previous research, we controlled some demographic variables to investigate the robustness of the assumptions.

6. Results

We used the goodness of fit index to examine discriminant validity between all latent variables. The results showed that the four-factor model ($\chi^2/df = 2.56$, RMSEA=0.063, CFI/TLI=0.945/0.935) has better goodness of fit than the single-factor model ($\chi^2/df = 14.345$, RMSEA=0.184, CFI/TLI=0.507/0.442), such that, all latent variables are revealed significantly discriminant validities.
7. Main Effect

Table 1 with unstandardized beta coefficients. Model 5 shows abusive leadership is negatively related to employee creativity. Therefore, hypothesis 1 was supported. Model 7 shows that affective commitment has a mediating effect on the relationship between abusive leadership and employee creativity. However, abusive leadership turn into non-significant in this model, such that, affective commitment plays a totally mediating role in this model. Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Table 1. The Results of SEM for Theoretical Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>AC</th>
<th>EC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Var.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ten.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PPA</td>
<td>0.398***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AL×PPA</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>∆R2</td>
<td>0.105**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=395. Gen = gender, Edu = Educational Level, Ten = Tenure with supervisor, AL = Abusive Leadership, PPA = Performance Promotion Attribution, AC = Affective Commitment, EC = Employee Creativity. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, †p < .1, two-tailed. Bootstrap = 5000

8. Moderated Effect

Model 8 exposes that the relationship between abusive leadership and employee creativity has a moderated mediation effect, when we introduced performance promotion attribution into mediation model, the interaction of abusive leadership and performance promotion attribution has a negative effect on affective commitment. Hypothesis 3 was supported.
9. Total Effect, Mediation and Moderated Mediation Effect

We employed Bootstrap to examine the significance of total effect and mediating effect. The results show that the total effect of abusive leadership on employee creativity is negative significantly ($\beta=-0.182$, $p < 0.05$) and not including 0 in confident interval 95% [-0.354, -0.039]. Therefore, hypothesis 1 was supported further. Affective commitment has an indirect effect on the relationship between abusive leadership and employee creativity ($\beta=-0.058$, $p < 0.05$), and no 0 in confident interval 95% [-0.123, -0.014], however, the direct effect of abusive leadership on employee creativity is insignificant after affective commitment plays a mediating role in this relationship ($\beta=-0.124$, ns). Consequently, affective commitment is regarded as a totally mediating role effects on the relationship of abusive leadership and employee creativity. Hypothesis 2 was supported further.

According to the suggestions of Preacher, Rucker and Hayes (2007), we examined the moderated effect of performance promotion attribution on the relationship abusive leadership and employee creativity via affective commitment, while under three different moderating levels (mean, mean increase and decrease of one standard deviation). From the results shown that the indirect effect of abusive leadership on employee creativity through affective commitment is significant under the higher performance promotion attribution ($\beta=-0.051$, $p < 0.05$), and it also does not contain 0 [-0.102, 0.00] in 95% confidence interval. However, if performance promotion attribution is at a medium and lower level, the effect of abusive leadership on employee creativity via affective commitment is insignificant ($\beta=-0.026$, ns; $\beta=-0.002$, ns). Hypothesis 3 was supported further.

10. Discussion

The findings in this study shown that abusive supervision reduces affective commitment with organization and employee creativity would less be happened. It shows that employees are more likely to expose creative behaviors if they are less treated by abusive management. Second, organizations can pay more attention to enhance employees’ affective commitment, supervisors can improve psychological contract with followers to evoke their creative behaviors. Finally, we found that supervisors need to make sure subordinates perceive leaders’ behaviors are consistent with their own interests.
11. Conclusion

First, we cannot guarantee the findings are generalizable to other industries. In future research, scholars need to investigate the assumptions in other industries. Second, the accuracy of our data may have a little bit deviant in this survey. Therefore, researchers need to improve the accuracy and applicability of data through expanding sources and multiple time. Third, the model still has a room to improvement. In future studies, scholars need to put other commitments or positive management variables into the model and explore their comparisons.

Abusive leadership reduces the possibilities of employee creativity by weakening their affective commitment. If those subordinates perceive the intention of leaders’ behaviors to promote performance, thus, such destructive management will be weakened on affective commitment.

Works Cited


