

Supervisors Narcissism as an Antecedent of Abusive Supervision: A Mediating Role of Superiority Competitiveness

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Abstract

Narcissist personalities tend to be more authoritative and desire to be powerful. Present study was conducted to find out mediating role of superiority competitiveness between the Supervisor's Narcissism and abusiveness. Data was collected from four organizations and total sample size was N=185. Data collection was done with supervisors and their subordinates, who perceive their abusiveness. Abusive Supervision scale (Tepper, 2000) was used measure the perceived abused supervision. Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Ames, Daniel, Rose & Anderson, 2006) was used to measure uni-dimensional grandiose narcissism. Furthermore, superiority competitiveness was assessed through Hyper competitiveness Attitude Scale (HAS; Ryckman et al., 1990). Results indicate the partial mediating role of superiority competitiveness between supervisor's narcissism and abusiveness. Present study has its implication for improving the hiring and selection criteria of supervisors and their subordinates which ultimate help the organization for better output.

Keywords: *Narcissism, Superiority Competitiveness, Supervisor Abusiveness.*

Introduction

Leadership can be deemed as a mutual connection between a leader and his followers. Effective leaders exercise their social power to encourage subordinates to reserve their own pursuits in order to achieve organizational targets (Hogan& Kaiser, 2005). Literature in management significantly comprises with the studies exploring the different dimensions of managerial leadership. Recent studies on organizational behavior have observed an emergent curiosity in dark leadership, mounting the need to explore the various facets of abusive supervision. In recent studies, the spotlight has shifted towards learning the attributes, grounds and effects of the darker side of leadership especially after the exposure of corporate calamities and unethical leadership like Enron and WorldCom (Naseer et al., 2016).

Abusive supervision can be described as the perception of consistent aggressive behavior (verbal and non-verbal) projected by a supervision towards subordinates in any setting (it does not include physical contact) but this is an intense observable fact in the organizations (Tepper et al., 2006). The key component of abusive behavior is that the occurrence of a particular behavior are sustained in a persistent manner. Literature suggests that little research has been done that very few researches scrutinizes the antecedents of abusive supervision. (Mathieu, Babiak, 2016). Most studies focused on the negative penalties, overlooking antecedents of abusive supervision (Breevaart & DeVries, 2017).

It has been practically proven that the destructive outcomes of abusive supervision have significantly risen which is harmful not only for the workers but for the organization as well. Workers who experienced or witnessed abusive supervision may face lower job performance and satisfaction, poor health issues, and increased job stress (Martinko at al., 2013). Employees facing abusive supervision avoid reporting or protesting against it because they often perceived that their boss holds the authority regarding their continued employment and future opportunities. (Xu et al., 2015). It is of great importance for organization to know how to prevent abusive supervision from happening thus, minimizing the affects of its negative outcomes. It is vital to scrutinize the causes of abusive supervision as it not only negatively impacts the subordinates but also negatively affects the growth of organization (Martinko et al., 2013).

Narcissism is defined as an individual with an extreme sense of self-entitlement, someone who considers others as beneath them, or someone who overstates themselves, and belittles others for their skill set. Narcissists usually exploit others to ensure they get attention as they are likely to become despondent

when not receiving the prevential treatment (Miller et al., 2007). Individuals who exhibit narcissist traits often have manipulative behavior that grant them power and authority to satisfy their grandiose feelings (McHoskey, 1995). The present study seeks to build the literature around the personality traits of a narcissist supervisor, a key driver of abusive supervision. This research looks into the personality traits (narcissism and superiority competitiveness) as predictive of abusive supervision. As mentioned earlier, limited studies have focused on supervisors' personalities (Kiazad et al., 2010). Therefore suggest that supervisors' Machiavellianism is predictive of abusive supervision.

This study also attempts to investigate the empirical links between narcissism and superiority competitiveness and their effects on abusive supervision. Many studies found that competitiveness is highly positively correlated with narcissism (Kayhan, 2003). Although, there have been many proven theoretical associations between the two personality attributes, a very little research is present that directly investigate the connection between competitiveness and narcissism (Ohmann & Burgmer2016).

Theoretical background

Supervisor Narcissism and Abusive supervision

There are presently a small number of studies that have found that abusive supervisorial behavior can be partially accounted for supervisor's past and present context, for example workplace stress (Burton et al., 2011), low performance levels of their subordinates (Tepper et al., 2011), mistreatment by the supervisor's own manager (Mawritz et al., 2012) or the supervisors' treatment by parents during their childhood (Kiewitz et al., 2012). Majority of the research conducted has been adopting the reactive approach, which is targeted at the effects and consequences of abusive supervision, rather than the proactive approach, which is investigating the causes of it to prevent it (Tepper, 2007).

Although these studies have enhanced the understanding of how various factors, such as situational or personal relations, can induce abusive supervision, the impact of intrapersonal features, (e.g. personality), are yet to be dwelled upon. One of the limited investigations on the impact of personality, Kiazad et al. (2010) recommends that Machiavellianism of a supervisor can be accountable for abusive supervision. However, there are many other supervisorial traits that have not yet been observed, such as narcissism which may have a strong impact on presence of abusive supervision for the supervisor to maintain their power.

Narcissism has a long association with aggression in social psychology literature (Burton & Hoobler, 2011). Narcissist personalities tend to be more authoritative and desire to be in power. Many studies have concluded that power leads the power-holding individuals to engage in actions that result in harm to the less powerful and encourages negative perceptions and exploitation of others (Inesi et al., 2014). Narcissists are observed to be emotionally isolated and highly distrustful, and their anger and hostility can be provoked when they encounter potential threats to their position. Researchers have hypothesized that individuals with narcissistic traits tend to act in a self-centered and prevailing manner which incline them to act in abusive or disparaging ways as leaders (Krasikova et al., 2013). Thus, as a result of these studies, it was hypothesized that supervisors that possess narcissistic traits have a tendency to engage in abusive supervision.

Narcissism consists of multiple facets that work in conjunction with giving the individual in question an exaggerated sense of self. This is displayed through feelings of superiority and power thus they want to be noticed and appreciated all the time (Bogart et al. 2004). Competitiveness is a variable that has several features related to narcissism. Researchers have studied multiple dimensions of both narcissism and competitiveness that include both useful and destructive sides of social behaviors (Houston et al. 2002).

Supervisor' Narcissism and Abusive Behavior: Superiority Competitiveness as a Mediator

Narcissists appear to be energized by others, to perceive the interpersonal situation competitively, and to expect others to cater to them. They then take advantage of others and become hostile when the script does not go as planned. Previous studies have found that narcissists are habitual of doing social comparisons, and these are usually with the ones perceived as inferior (Bogart et al., 2004). As it allows the narcissists to view themselves as superior to others when they compare their performance with to others. Krizan and Bushman (2011) theorized that narcissists tend to engage in downward comparisons even with regard to close relations. They asserted that such comparisons allow narcissists to preserve their inflated sense of self.

Furthermore, research has revealed that the direction of comparison shapes narcissists' attitudes and reactions: downward comparisons have a more positive effect on the narcissists while upward comparisons encounter a more hostile reaction (Bogart, Benotsch & Pavlovic, 2004). Resultantly, the narcissistic individual's distance themselves from the outperforming individual by having a negative perception of them in an ego-relevant task (Nicholls & Stukas, 2011).

Thus, it was conceptualizing that supervisor narcissist personality trait as an antecedent of abusive supervision mediated by superiority competitiveness.

Hypothesis: There is a relationship between supervisor narcissism and subordinate perceived abusive supervision mediated by supervisor superiority competitiveness

Method

Sample

For this study, a cross sectional research design was employed. Convenient sampling technique (non-probability sampling technique) was used for the selection of sample. For the selection of relevant Banking, education, Media and Manufacturing sectors were chosen. A total sample of N=300 were approached. However, final data collection comprised N=239 Participants (n=54 supervisors and n= 185 employees). Only those supervisors were included whose subordinates were participating. Participants with any mental or physical illness were excluded.

Measures

Abusive Supervision. The protocols taken for measuring the abused supervision is 15 –item scale developed by Tepper (2000). The respondents are asked how often their supervisor indulged in the behavior mentioned in the question on a 5-point scale. Respondents used a five-point response scale where 1 was “I cannot remember him/her ever using this behavior with me,” 2 was “He/she very seldom uses this behavior with me,” 3 was “He/she occasionally uses this behavior with me,” 4 was “He/she uses this behavior moderately often with me,” and 5 was “He/she uses this behavior very often with me.”. Reliability in current study was good (i.e. .87).

Narcissism. The 16-item short version Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) developed by Ames, Daniel, Rose and Anderson (2006), was used to measure uni-dimensional grandiose narcissism. The scale showed good internal consistency and reliability in literature. In this study reliability turned out to be excellent (i.e .90).

Superiority Competitiveness. The extent to which respondents exhibit traits of superiority competitiveness are assessed by using the Hyper competitiveness Attitude Scale (HAS; Ryckman et al., 1997). This scale has demonstrated adequate reliability and construct validity (Ryckman, Thornton &

Butler, 1994). In this study the reliability came out to be .85. the questionnaire consisted of 17 items in which respondents were asked to rate themselves using a 5-point Likert scale with 1 being the lowest value (never true of me) and 5 representing the highest value (always true of me). Superiority competitiveness is a personality disposition reflecting a drive to beat others at all costs. This dimension of competitiveness is contingent upon comparing oneself to others so that a person relies on external factors to determine his or her self-worth.

Result

According to the recommendations of Preacher and Hayes (2008), researcher applied bias corrected boot strapping of indirect effects to test 3rd hypotheses which stated there is a relationship between supervisor narcissism and subordinate perceived abusive supervision mediated by supervisor superiority competitiveness. To test the model, Hayes process model 4 was used. Results are reported in Table 1.

Table 1.

Meditating effect of superiority competitiveness between narcissism and abusiveness behavior

	Consequents						
	M1(supvg)			Y(abavg)			
Antecedent	B	SE	P		B	SE	p
Naravg	.56	.05	<.000	c'	-.24	.10	=.02
M(supvg)	-	-	-	b	.55	.11	<.000
Constant	.97	.18	<.000	iY	1.38	.29	<.000
	R ² =.35				R ² =.11		
	F(1,183)=100.00, p=.000				F(2,182)=12.25, p=.000		

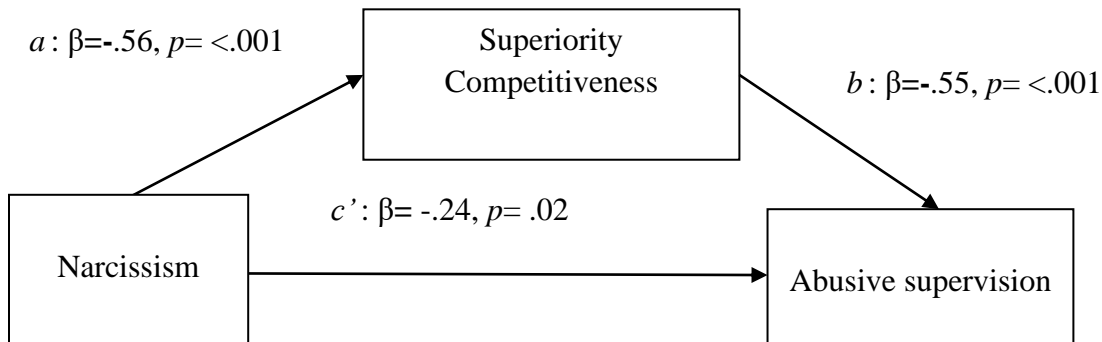
Note. Naravg = supervisor Narcissism (predictor), supvg = superiority competitiveness (mediator), abavg=abusive supervision, c' = direct effect, β = standard coefficient, SE= Standard error.

Table 1 indicates that supervisor narcissism predicts supervisor superiority competitiveness (β =-.56, p=.05). This model accounts for only 35% variances in superiority competitiveness. On the other hand, the significant negative prediction was shown of supervisor narcissism (β =-.10, p=.02) and supervisor competitiveness (β =-.55, p=<.001)predict for the abusive supervision. This model accounted for an overall 11% variance. This inferred that supervisor superiority competitiveness partially mediated the relationship between supervisor narcissism and

abusive supervision although the total direct effect was less compared to the indirect effect as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1

Emerged Mediation Model with abusiveness behavior as outcome variable.



Direct effect of X on Y = $c' = -.24, p = .00$

Indirect effect of supervisor's narcissism on supervisor aggressive behavior, $\beta = .31$, 95% CI [.19, .46]

Discussion

During the past 15 years, since the research in this area began, studies have shown various forms of dark leadership such as sexual harassment, physical violence, and nonphysical hostility, with the latter being the most common. Few studies have found that abusive supervisory behavior can be partially accounted by the supervisor's past and present context, with examples involving workplace stress (Burton et al., 2011), low performance levels of their subordinates (Tepper et al., 2011), or mistreatment by the supervisor's own manager (Mawritz et al., 2012) or parents during childhood (Kiewitz et al., 2012).

Employees facing abusive supervision avoid reporting or protesting against it because they often perceive that the boss holds all the authority regarding their continued employment and future opportunities (Xu et al., 2015). Thus, employees usually let the hitch intervene in the organization, preventing to tackle it down. Usually, they deal mutely with the abusive situation or may convey the real issue if they quit their job. Therefore, the best alternative to deal with abusive behavior is to perform proactively. It is essential to take primary prevention approach (Quick, 1999), thwarting abusive behavior before it happens, rather than responding to the destructive outcomes of abusive behavior (Xu et al., 2015). It is of great importance for an organization to know how to prevent

abusive supervision from happening thus, minimizing the effects of its negative outcomes. It is vital to scrutinize the causes of abusive supervision as it not only impairs the subordinates but also negatively affects the growth of organization (Martinko et al., 2013).

The present study seeks to contribute to the literature by providing sagacity about personality traits of a supervisor, a key driver of abusive supervision. The research looks into the personality traits (narcissism and superiority competitiveness) as predictive of abusive supervision. The objective of the study was to explore that narcissistic personality trait is an antecedent of abusive supervision, while superiority competitiveness as a mediator.

It was hypothesized that supervisor superiority competitiveness will mediate the relationship between supervisor's narcissism and subordinate perceived abusive supervision. The result confirmed this assumption and showed that superiority competitiveness partially mediates the relationship between supervisor's Narcissism personality trait and abusiveness. The findings are consistent with the research findings of Bogart et al., (2004) who revealed that the direction of comparison shapes narcissists' attitudes and reactions: downward comparisons have a more positive effect on the narcissists while upward comparisons encounter a more hostile reaction

Narcissists appear to be energized by others, to perceive the interpersonal situation competitively, to expect others to cater to them. They, take advantage of others and become hostile when the script does not go as planned. Previous studies have found that narcissists' are habitual of doing social comparisons, and these are usually with the ones who are inferior (Bogart et al., 2004), as it allows the narcissists to view themselves as superior to others when they compare their performance with others. Krizan and Bushman (2011) investigated that narcissists tend to engage in downward comparisons even with regard to close relations—assert that such comparisons allow for the narcissists to preserve their inflated sense of self. Narcissists appear to be energized by others, to perceive the interpersonal situation competitively they then, take advantage of others and become hostile when the script does not go as planned. They heartlessly pursue the path of self-worth enhancement, even if it costs demeaning others and relations with others. So it was concluded that individuals who have a superior and competitive tendency feel the need to outperform others and be superior to them as means to reaffirm their self-worth. Due to this need, winning and success become the hidden motives of the individuals and they will strive for success no matter what the cost. It may be disrespecting others or something else.

For narcissistic individual winning is their ultimate goal, hypercompetitive narcissistic individuals may adopt unethical behaviors and attitudes if they feel their position is under threat. Tepper et al., (2011) observed that at times it might be possible in some situations that elevated performance of the subordinates that may trigger their victimization by the supervisors. Supervisor's desire to maintain their higher position of authority. Therefore, high performing subordinates make them appear capable of challenging the supervisor's authority, thus the supervisor might perceive them as being a threat to the supervisor's position in the organizational hierarchy (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994). As a result, the supervisor might oppress well performers to sustain his dominance and to minimize the risk to their position.

Study has several limitations as well, as the data was collected from employees during their working hours so the employees had slight psychological pressure and they were unable to comment candidly about their supervisor which may have hindered the results. Furthermore, data was only collected from four sectors, limiting the generalizability of this study. Hence, it is suggested to research in other sectors as well like government sectors to increase generalizability.

The study does have strong implications as well. It will help in identifying supervisors who have narcissist personalities and consider their subordinates as beneath them and use harsh words towards them. Consequently, the study has implications for improving the hiring and selection criteria behavior for supervisors and their subordinates. Similarly, Positive understanding of both supervisor's and subordinates' behavior may in turn help to achieve the goals of organization in better way.

Conclusion

This paper found partially the mediating role of superiority competitiveness between the narcissism and perception of supervisor's abusiveness behavior concluding that a supervisor's personality does have a strong impact not only on their own behavior but on their employee's perception as well.

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