Does Leadership Go Wrong? Investigating The Effect Of Abusive Leadership On Project Success? The Mediating Role Of Workplace Deviance

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Abstract

Purpose: Abusive leadership is seen as the dark sideways of management that negatively impacts both the company and its personnel. The present work theorized the mediating function of workplace deviation in the association among abusive supervision and the success of a project in the Pakistani setting grounded on the conservation of resource theory.

Design/methodology/approach: 254 workers from Pakistani project-based governmental organizations took part. To investigate the direct and indirect relationships between abusive supervision and project success, simple random sampling was utilized.

Findings: The findings showed a negative relationship amid abusive leadership and the success of a project. Additionally, it demonstrates how workplace deviation mediates the link among abusive leadership and the success of a project.

Practical implications: Managers can avoid abusive leadership to discourage workplace deviance and increase project success.

Originality/value: Research related to abusive leadership in the project management area is scarce. Correspondingly, the current study revealed that workplace deviance works as an underlying mechanism in the association between abusive control and the success of a project.

Keywords: Abusive leadership; Workplace deviance; Project Success; Project-based organizations; Pakistan.

Introduction:

Abusive leadership is regarded as bad or "dark leadership" inside the project (Mehraein, Visintin, & Pittino, 2023). According to Mehraein, Visintin, and Pittino (2023), abusive leadership is referred to as "dark leadership" within the project. According to Tepper (2000), abusive leadership is a style of management in which the boss verbally and nonverbally abuses the workers without ever coming into physical touch with them. nowadays, due to its pervasiveness in the workplace, abusive leadership has drawn the curiosity and focus of several scholars (Cai, Sun, & Li, 2023). Because it has a negative effect on workers and the working environment, a specific type of workplace abuse known as abusive supervision is a serious and expanding problem that plagues today's firms (Wang & Xiao, 2022).

Prior research focused on abusive supervision but still noted certain restrictions. The mainstream research has engrossed abusive leadership behavior, which includes nonverbal gestures including leader hostility, claiming credit for employee achievement, dejection, cynicism, invasion of secrecy, the blame for others' faults, and contumacious conduct (Perry, 2019). In turn, this has an impact on employee attitudes such as work incivility, extra-role behavior, creative behavior, psychological distress, job satisfaction, and intention to leave the company (Ali et al. 2022; Parent-Lamarche, Fernet, & Austin, 2022; Lee, Kang, & Choi, 2022; Saleem et al. 2021; Wang et al. 2022; Hussain et al. 2022). Even so, a few studies focused on the link between abusive leadership and outcomes, particularly in terms of project success in an Asian setting. Because of this, the current study concentrates on the all-encompassing model that establishes a connection between abusive leadership and the success of a project.

Second, fewer academics have looked at the underlying processes that link abusive supervision to project success. Researchers have determined the effects of dysfunctional leadership and workplace abuse during the previous ten years. Employee workplace deviance has been cited by academics as the most significant and harmful effect of unfair treatment at work (Lyu et al. 2023). Workplace deviant behavior that violates organizational standards and jeopardizes the interests of the organization and its workers is referred to as workplace deviance (Abbasi et al. 2020). According to Dunlop and Lee (2004), these workplace deviations have a negative psychological and financial impact on the organization. Previous research has identified antecedents of employee deviance, including workplace discontent, employee unfairness, self-threats, personality, and culture (Nainovi Braje, Aleksi, & Rai Jelavi, 2020). According to Mackey et al. (2017), employees who are subjected to abusive supervision may experience sentiments of frustration, powerlessness, and serious violations of organizational standards, which may lead them to engage in workplace deviance (Jiang et al. 2017; Wang et al. 2012).

According to Chauvet, Collier, and Fuster (2017), supportive leaders and a favorable work environment improve employees' performance. The achievement of project objectives is the responsibility of project leaders (Pohl & Galletta, 2017), who also direct the workers on the project. The function of the leader may be either good or detrimental in a project-based organization, with abusive leadership serving as an example of the latter (Hwang & Cameron, 2008). According to Gang, Wang, Peter, and Jeremy (2015), Asian nations are more likely than Western nations to have abusive leadership. The goal of the current study is to investigate how abusive leadership affects project performance when there is workplace deviance in an Asian context.

The current study adds a number of new perspectives to the literature on project management and leadership. First, while project management literature on abusive leadership is scarce (Haar et al. 2016), abusive supervision has received considerable attention in the HR field. By experimentally examining the influence of abusive leadership on the success of projects in Pakistani contexts, this research also fills a vacuum in the project management literature. Therefore, the current study will serve to show that abusive supervision, or destructive leadership, prevented the project from succeeding. Third, the current research examines the role of workplace deviation as a mediator in the relationship between abusive leadership and the effective completion of projects in project-based organizations. The study's conclusions will be useful to organizations since they show that abusive supervision causes employees to behave abnormally at work, which puts the organization at risk of project failure.

Literature Review

Abusive Leadership and Project Success

Since there is no universally agreed-upon definition of project success, it is crucial for project-based organizations to achieve it (Arnold & Matthijs, 2010). According to Podgórska and Pichlak (2019), the control of the project supervisor determines whether the project succeeds or fails. Numerous criteria that evaluate the project's results make it successful (Ika, 2009). According to Gallagher, Mazur, and Ashkanasy (2015), abusive leadership has a direct impact on employee outcomes and project success. According to Rafique et al. (2023), abusive leadership is associated with poor project results, which might seriously harm the success of the project. According to Pradhan and Jena (2017), workers who work under abusive leadership have less interaction with the leader and are less motivated to achieve the organization's goals. This evidence further reinforced the idea that abusive control has a major negative influence on project success. The likelihood that the project will succeed is reduced as a result of such incidents (Kacmar, Whitman, & Harris, 2013). Furthermore, abusive leadership decreases employee commitment to the company and increases the likelihood of high staff turnover, according to Haar, De Fluiter, and Brougham (2016), who also highlighted that abusive management causes projects to fail. According to Lin, Wang, and Chen (2013), project team members are encouraged to stray from their tasks by abusive leadership. As a result, when they stray from their task, they exhibit less attention, which causes outcomes to be delayed. The COR hypothesis offers complete evidence for the claim that abusive control has a negative influence on workers, who then perform their tasks poorly and jeopardize project success. As a result, this study put forth the following hypothesis,

H1: Abusive leadership negatively impact project success.

Impact of Abusive Leadership on Workplace Deviance:

Project managers have a direct impact on the well-being of their team members through their actions and attitudes. As a result, scholars have uncovered the negative impacts of abusive management that relate to how much leaders act aggressively toward subordinates without making physical contact (Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017). Abusive leadership manifests as yelling, claiming unfair credit for work, intimidating colleagues, using foul language, violating their secrecy, and disheartening them (Wu, 2008). Underneath abusive control, workers behave morally erratically and go against company policies (Valle et al. 2019). Employees who experience abusive leadership exhibit unfavorable attitudes and behaviors at work (Yang et al. 2020); as a result, they become more antagonistic towards groups, leaders, and coworkers (Lyu et al. 2016; Mullen, Fiset, & Rhéaume 2018).

Deviant behavior in the workplace is one of the most troublesome reactions the organization encounters (Lyu et al. 2023). According to Robinson and Bennett (1995), workplace deviance is defined as a volunteer action that compromises the welfare of firms and personnel. The main effect of abusive leadership is deviant behavior at work. According to Michel, Newness, and Duniewicz (2016). Workers who encounter unfairness, aggression, bullying, and harassment at work exhibit abnormal behaviors there (Wang, Mao, Wu, & Liu, 2012). The workplace comes with costs that an organization must face both financially and emotionally. According to recent studies (Mullen, Fiset, & Rhéaume, 2018; Hussain & Sia, 2017), abusive leadership is positively correlated with deviant behavior.

The COR hypothesis, which asserts that abusive leadership is a stress factor in the workplace that causes workers to carry out their tasks ineffectively and inefficiently and engage in deviant behavior, provides more support for the supposition. In light of the foregoing discussion, the study suggests the following conclusion:

H2: Abusive leadership positively affects workplace deviance.

Impact of Workplace Deviance on Project Success:

Deviant workplace conduct that violates organizational principles is unwelcome to the firm and harmful to its operations (Whiteside & Barclay, 2013). It entails theft, vandalism of company property, tardiness, unlawful breaks, willful disregard of management counsel, and manager humiliation (Ferris et al. 2012). Employees display animosity, theft, fail to complete given tasks or carry out tasks incorrectly as a result of workplace misconduct (Chirumbolo, 2015). Workplace deviation comprises both individual and organizational deviation, and the costs incurred are too high for the organizations (Marasi et al. 2018). Deviance has an adverse effect on project teams' emotional integration, teamwork, and information sharing, which negatively affects the project's success.

According to research, managers have trouble managing projects owing to the participation of numerous risks, such as rejection, which is marked by tension among workers as a result of the scrutiny and credentials of hazards (Mubarak & Mumtaz, 2018). Due to these participations, project managers often fail to see potential hazards that might have an adverse effect on project outcomes (Ika, 2009). Because expectations from stakeholders may have a significant impact on how successful a project is perceived, project managers should focus on managing expectations while managing complex projects (Jugdev & Miller, 2005). According to

Udechukwu, Eric, and David (2018), the success criterion can vary from project to project and be divided into two categories: project performance and progress advantages.

This presumption can be further confirmed by the COR theory, which states that as workers are the true source of results, excessive levels of workplace deviance by subordinates ultimately result in project failure. Therefore, our investigation suggested the subsequent hypothesis grounded on the discussion overhead:

H3: Workplace Deviance negatively effects Project Success.

Mediating Role of Workplace Deviance:

In the workplace, leaders serve as mentors, motivators, and assessors. Leaders keep an eye on how their team members are performing in their everyday work (Albino, 2018). Researchers have long been interested in different leadership philosophies, according to Li et al. (2016), since each style of leadership has both favorable and unfavorable consequences on workers and organizations. According to recent research in management studies (Fischer et al., 2021; Cheng, Choi, & Park, 2023; Santos et al., 2023), hostile bosses abuse their staff more frequently. In the present corporate climate, leaders may adopt certain behaviors that might have an impact on their interpersonal interactions. According to Mitchell and Ambrose (2007), abusive behaviors by leaders include yelling, screaming, having furious outbursts, acting disrespectfully, intimidating people, using threats to get their way, hiding crucial information, and making fun of their subordinates in public. Employee aberrant behavior may therefore occur at work and negatively impact outcomes (Baharom, Sharfuddin, & Iqbal, 2017; Faldetta, 2020).

Interpersonal deviance may cause stress and demotivation, which reduces employee contribution (Creasy & Carnes, 2017). The victim

is gradually less engaged in the job as a result of the victim's demoralization and alienation, which causes the project to fail (Mubarak & Mumtaz, 2018). By raising employee confidence, an organization's production level rises, which in turn improves project performance (Blaskovics, 2016). The current study has also shown that abusive leadership undermines employee confidence and demotivates them, which ultimately results in project failure (Khumalo, 2021; Xia, Zhang, & Li, 2019). Therefore, it might be claimed that abusive leadership results in unfavorable worker results, such as aberrant office conduct, which can additional lower the likelihood of project success.

H4: Workplace deviance mediates the relationship between abusive leadership and project success

Figure 1: Theoretical Model
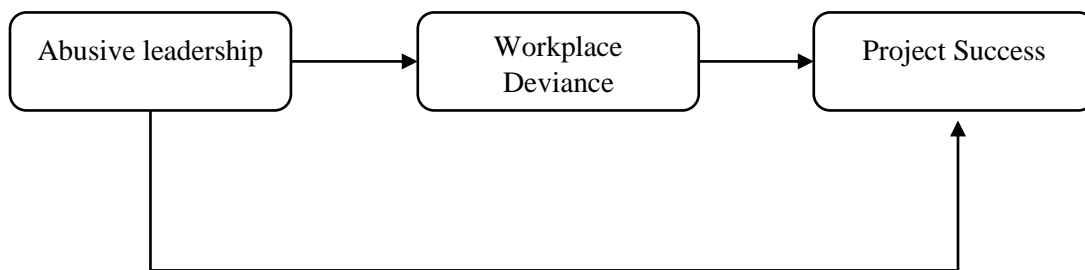
Methodology

Participants and procedure

The sample of this study consists of employees in project-based organizations. The study is cross-sectional in nature, and employees from project-based organizations were requested to participate. A simple random sampling technique has been used for the data collection. The data was collected with the help of well-designed questionnaires. Keeping in view the importance of genuine data collection, all the participants were fully briefed about the nature and purpose of the research. Initially, 350 questionnaires were provided to participants, with 254 correctly completed surveys returned for a 72.5% response rate.

Research Instrument

Abusive Leadership

Tepper (2000) established a 15-item scale of abusive leadership that was used to assess abusive leadership. It's a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. Sample items included: "My boss ridicules me", "My boss tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid", and "My boss invades my privacy.

Workplace Deviance

Bennett and Robinson's (2000) 19-items scale was used to measure workplace deviance. It's a 5-point Likert scale with choices from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The sample items for organization deviance include. "I take things\items from the workplace without permission", "I spent too much time fantasizing or daydreaming instead of working", and "I falsified a receipt to get reimbursed for more money than I can spend on my business expenses".

Project Success:

a 14-item scale designed by Aga, Noorderhaven, and Vallejo (2016) was used to assess the project's success. it's a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. Sample items include "The project was completed according to the budget allocated", "The outcomes of the project were used by its intended end-users", and "The outcomes of the project were likely to be sustained".

Result

Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations. According to the findings, abusive leadership is negatively correlated to project success (r = -.217**, p< 0.01) and positively correlated with workplace deviance (r = .373 *'*, p< 0.01). Workplace deviance has a negative correlation to project success (r = -.249**, p< 0.01).

Table 1: Correlation Analysis

Sr. No.	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1	Abusive Leadership	3.03	.989	(.88)		
2	Project success	3.02	.669	-.217**	(.89)	
3	Workplace Deviance	3.23	.661	.373**	-.249**	(.85)

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Values in diagonal shows reliability

Hypothesis Testing

Table 2 shows the results of the direct and indirect effects of abusive leadership on project success. Preacher and Haye's (2005) model 4 has been used to test the hypotheses. H1 states that abusive control is negatively connected by project success. The results confirm the assumption that abusive leadership is negatively related to project success ($\beta = -0.134, P < 0.05$), indicating acceptance of H1. The second hypothesis states that abusive leadership is positively associated with workplace deviance ($\beta = 0.25, P < 0.001$), indicating acceptance of H2. The third hypothesis states that workplace deviance is negatively connected to success of a project. The results also indicate that workplace deviance negatively relates to project success ($\beta = -0.271, P < 0.01$),

indicating acceptance of H3. The fourth hypothesis states that workplace deviance mediates the relationship between abusive leadership and project success. The postulation of the mediation was fulfilled, abusive leadership showed a significantly positive effect on workplace deviance ($\beta = 0.250, P < 0.001$), while workplace deviance exhibited a significantly negative effect on Project success ($\beta = -0.271, P < 0.01$). The indirect effect of abusive leadership on project success through the mediation of workplace deviance with bootstrapping outcomes exposed a significantly negative effect (indirect effect $= -0.06$, 95% LLCI $= -0.11$, 95% ULCI $= -0.02$). Hence, the results indicate that abusive leadership induces deviant behavior in employees, which badly affects project success.

Table 2: Direct and Indirect effect

Direct Effect	B	SE	t	
Abusive Leadership ⟶ Project Success	-.134*	.0607	-2.208	
Abusive Leadership ⟶ Workplace Deviance	.250***	.0391	6.39	
Workplace Deviance ⟶ Project Success	-.271**	.0908	-2.989	
Indirect Effect			LLCI	ULCI
Abusive Leadership ⟶ Workplace Deviance ⟶ Project Success	-.0678	.0246	-.1199	-.0228

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < .001; N=254

Discussion:

The purpose of this research was to look at the relationship between abusive leadership and project success. The study also looked at the role of workplace deviance as a moderator in project-based organizations. The study's key finding is that abusive management has a detrimental influence on the success of a project. The association among abusive management and the success of a project is mediated by workplace deviance. The findings validated the H1 hypothesis, which proposed a negative link between abusive leadership and the success of a project. When a boss abuses their subordinates verbally or nonverbally, it is referred to as abusive leadership. Negative workplace behaviors are a result of abusive leadership. The leader's abusive behavior will hinder the project's success since it will discourage and demoralize the team, both of which are detrimental to the project's success. The earlier literature serves as a foundation for the results and serves to validate them (Ju et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2022). We can also explain the relation among abusive leadership and the success of a project using the Theory of Resource Conservation (COR). A stressor that drains an employee's psychological resources by causing annoyance and frustration is abusive leadership.

Employees are under pressure from abusive leadership due to stress, which can result in a lack of responsibility fulfillment, poor job performance, and the collapse of the project. Therefore, these arguments offer convincing support for accepting Hypothesis 1, which holds that abusive management has a negative and significant impact on the project's success.

The argument H2, that an abusive management style has a considerable positive connection with workplace deviance, was accepted. The theory's results indicate a substantial positive relationship between two abusive bosses and workplace deviance. When a worker in a project-based organisation believes that his or her boss are abusive towards him or her, it is common for that person to develop more unproductive work habits directed at his or her superiors, such as purposefully delaying tasks, acting erratically, and disobeying their orders. Prior literature and research support these conclusions on their own (Faldetta, 2021; Wang, 2012; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). The acceptance of Hypothesis 2 that abusive management is positively and significantly connected to workplace deviance, is confirmed.

Argument H3, according to which workplace deviance has a considerable negative correlation with project success, was approved. The hypothesis's findings demonstrate a significant negative connection among workplace deviance and the success of a project. Robinson and Bennett (1995) describe workplace deviance as an intentional breach of an employee's behavior that violates the organization's standards and expectations. Unintentional workplace deviation happens when employees lack the motivation to follow social context norms and expectations or are forced to do so. As a result, the anomalous behavior has an influence on the overall performance of the project. The previous literature and investigations strongly support our findings (Chen et al. 2020; Liu et al. 2020). Employees that feel emotional distress, according to COR theory, are more prone to participate in workplace deviance, such as lack of transparency, inferior work output, and damaged project assets, which will result in project failure.

Concerning the mediation hypothesis, workplace deviance serves as an underlying mediatory mechanism in the link among abusive leadership and the success of a project. The positive outcomes of the recent study accepted and confirmed the hypothesis. The findings indicated that workers who work in a bad environment with an abusive leadership style are more likely to engage in deviant workplace behavior. As a result, project success decreases. The findings strongly corroborate previous study assumptions (Liu, Wang, & Xia, 2016; Wang et al. 2012). The discovery adds the employee's perspective to COR theory and supports the notion that intense emotional suffering encourages workplace deviance, which in turn promotes a lack of transparency, subpar work product, and resource mismanagement, all of which result in project failure. As a result, the current study asserts, supported by empirical data, that the connection among abusive leadership and the success of a project is mediated by workplace deviation.

Research Implications:

The current work significantly advances both theory and practice in the field of literature. First, the link between abusive leadership and the success of a project was researched in terms of theoretical contribution. The majority of the research that are now available focused on organizational and personnel performance. Second, our work has proposed and assessed a new underlying mediatory mechanism. By highlighting the fact that an abusive leader's behavior leads to the followers adopting reciprocal behavior, the findings can add to the body of existing research and increase the likelihood that a project will fail.

As far as the research's practical applications go, both public and private project-based organizations and their management can benefit from it. The project environment is extremely complicated and dynamic. Project completion must occur within a specified timeframe due to various resource and time restrictions. Projects cannot afford the workplace misconduct of project personnel because they are time-bound. Corrective measures may be taken by organizations to stop this behavior and foster a productive workplace. Second, it emphasizes how crucial it is to keep tabs on the management. Because if the leaders are aware that the management is in charge of them, this misuse of leadership will be reduced.

Limitations and future directions:

There are certain limitations to the current study as well. First, information was only gathered from Islamabad and Rawalpindi project-based organizations due to time and resource limitations. Other cities and notable project-based organizations might also be the focus of future academics. Second, only one mediator was evaluated due to time restrictions. Future studies

can examine further underlying mechanisms, such as social undermining, moral disengagement, etc., in the link between abusive leadership and the success of a project. Thirdly, the study was carried out in Pakistan because of the country's high power distance and prevalence of abusive leadership. Future studies should investigate abusive leadership in low power distance and how it affects people since people there could react differently to this sort of leadership. Last but not least, the next studies might focus on moderating factors like culture, personality, etc. People with various personalities and cultural backgrounds react to various phenomena in various ways.

Conclusion

In project-based organizations in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, the study investigated the link between abusive leadership and the success of a project. The findings showed a link among abusive leaders and unsuccessful project outcomes. Further research revealed that abusive leadership causes workplace deviance among workers, which might result in project failure. Therefore, it is possible to say that workplace deviation mediates the link between abusive leadership and the success of project success.

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