Abusive Supervision and Coworkers' Organizational Citizenship Behavior: The Moderating Role of Perceived LMX Differentiation

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Abstract

Purpose **–** The increase in organizational citizenship behavior is important in that it creates a cooperative atmosphere within the organization. Proving how OCB toward coworkers changes in negative leadership situations such as abusive supervision is a new research stream. Therefore, this study examines the main effects of the supervisor's abusive supervision on OCB of subordinates for coworkers, and then attempts to clarify that the perceived LMX differentiation of team members play a moderating role.

Research design, data, and methodology **–** First, we examine the effects of the supervisor's abusive supervision on OCB of subordinates in the team toward colleagues. Second, the degree of perceived LMX differentiation is measured to verify the moderating effect of abusive supervision on OCB toward coworkers.

Result **–** Hypothesis 1 is that abusive supervision has a negative effect on coworkers' OCB. Hypotheses 2-1, 2-2, and 2-3 test the moderating effect of perceived LMX differentiation, and the relationship between abusive supervision and coworkers' OCB will change according to the perceived degree of LMX differentiation.

Conclusion **–** It is significant in that the scope of abusive supervision research has been expanded through the team level moderator of perceived LMX differentiation, away from the research on abusive supervision that was mainly discussed at the level of dyadic relationship (between the supervisor and the one subordinate).

Keywords: Abusive Supervision, Coworkers' Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Perceived LMX Differentiation

JEL Classification Code: M00, M10, D63, D91.

1. Introduction

In terms of the affective disposition of human existence, Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, and Vohs (2001) claim that humans are more sensitive to negative aspects than positive aspects of the surroundings of individuals. This natural tendency of humans leads to a greater impact on individual attitudes and behaviors than on positive events in the working environment.

While references to the behavioral repertoire of antagonistic leaders have been consistently presented throughout history, studies of causes and consequences such as uncontrolled outbursts, inappropriate accusations and public criticisms targeting subordinates have been conducted in recent 20 years. When referring to this type of behavior, researchers used a variety of terms, such as "abusive supervision", "petty tyranny", "supervisor aggression", and "supervisor undermining". The dark side of leadership is increasingly drawing attention and serves as a greater influence on individual attitudes and behaviors than leadership that has positive effects (Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

The most common type of destructive leadership is abusive supervision, which means that a leader uses his superior position to make unreasonable demands or actions on his subordinates, continuing to engage in adversarial verbal and nonverbal expressions (Tepper, 2000). In recent years, abusive supervision has been found to be prevalent within the organization, with a number of studies suggesting that it has a negative impact on subordinates' attitudes, emotions and psychological health (Ashforth, 1997; Duffy, Hoobler, & Enley, 2004; Tepper, 2000; Tepper, 2007; Wufer, 2007).

Studies of abusive supervision have focused primarily on dyadic relationships between leaders and subordinates. However, Tepper et al. (2004) suggested that abusive supervision regulates the relationship between coworkers' organizational citizenship behavior and coworkers' job satisfaction, which is no longer just between the leader and subordinate groups. Furthermore, studies by Priesemuth, Schminke, Ambrose and Folger (2014) have shown that abusive supervision is created in a group-level climate, which acts as a hindrance to group identification, resulting in individuals in groups not engaging in altruistic behaviors such as organizational citizenship behavior. As a result, employees who have been abusively supervised are negatively affected at both the individual and group levels, resulting in no organizational civic action.

According to Heider (1958), the classical theory of balance theory, there can be balance states and imbalances in relationships of individuals, attitudes, and related objects. According to the theory of balance, people tend to feel psychological stability by maintaining consistency between their beliefs and attitudes. Putting this concept into the relationship between one abusive supervisor and two subordinates should create a positive relationship between the two subordinates who have a negative relationship with the supervisor. However, existing studies suggest that organizational citizenship behavior toward colleagues decreases as the degree of abusive supervision worsens.

This study began with a question of the lack of balance theory in the context of abusive supervision, which led to the hypothesis that LMX differentiation could exist between supervisors and team members who perform abusive supervision. While prior studies exist that abusive supervision lowers organizational citizenship behavior at the individual level, none have examined the relationship between these two factors through the team-level moderator (perceived LMX differentiation in this study). Therefore, in this study, we establish a research model that the relationship between abusive supervision and organizational citizenship behavior toward colleagues will be regulated by the perceived degree of LMX differentiation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Abusive Supervision

Abusive supervision is defined as "subordinate perceptions" of the extent to which superiors consistently express adversarial verbal and nonverbal behaviors that exclude physical contact (Tepper, 2000). Examples of abusive directors include humiliating or deriding others, defaming the subject's status, not providing the necessary information, and keeping the subject silent (Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah, 2007; Bies & Tripp, 1998; Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Tepper, 2000). This is one of the most widely studied types of negative leaders.

Previous studies have shown that abusive supervision involves individual attitudes (Tepper, 2000; Tepper, Hoobler, Duffy, & Ensley, 2004), behaviors (Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002), and health-related outcomes (Bamberger & Bacharach, 2006; Tepper, 2000).

The mechanisms by which abusive supervision causes misbehavior of subordinates are as follows. Abusive supervision reduces affective commitment (Tepper et al., 2008), interactional justice (Wang et al., 2012), need satisfaction (Lian et al., 2012), and perceived organizational support (Shoss et al., 2013). On the other hand, through

mediating processes that increase ego depletion (Thau & Mitchell, 2010), hostility (Mayer et al., 2012), and emotional exhaustion (Wheeler et al., 2013), it leads to negative behavior of subordinates.

Tepper (2000) comprehensively looked at the possible consequences of an abusive supervision of a leader at an individual level. It was confirmed that the abusive supervision showed a positive relationship with factors such as low job satisfaction, low productivity, leaving the workplace, and decrease in organizational citizenship behavior of members of the organization. Duffy et al. (2002) also provides similar results. The result was that abusive supervision had a negative effect on the job satisfaction and cooperative behavior of members of the organization, and showed a positive relationship on turnover intention. In addition, the supervisor's abusive supervision not only induces negative behaviors such as resistance behavior toward the leader and attack behavior toward colleagues (Inness et al., 2005). Moreover, it is also a factor that increases deviant behavior targeting the supervisor or organization (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007).

In particular, Tepper et al. (2004) presented the results that abusive supervisors regulate the relationship between coworkers' organizational citizenship behavior and fellow employees' job satisfaction. This suggests that abusive supervision is an important relational factor that affects all individual-within-groups beyond the dyadic relationship between supervisors and subordinates. Individuals under abusive supervision experience a low level of procedural justice and interactional justice (Aryee et al., 2007; Zellars, Tepper & Duffy, 2002). At this time, such individuals reduce the effort expended to work to restore their sense of control (Harris, Kacmar, & Zivnuska, 2007). These results imply that impersonal supervision can lead to a low degree of exchange in the relationship between supervisors and subordinates (Blau, 1964). Abused subordinates put less effort into their supervisors. They maintain the same level of mutual exchange by reducing the input of their efforts to a lower degree of exchange with their supervisors.

A recent study by Priesemuth, Schminke, Ambrose and Folger (2014) revealed that abusive supervision creates a group-level climate, which acts as an obstacle to group identification. In such an atmosphere, the results were that individuals within the group did not engage in altruistic behavior such as organizational citizenship behavior.

2.2. Coworkers' Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Organizational citizenship behavior is accepted as a meaningful concept in that it contributes to organizational effectiveness (Organ, 1988). Moreover, organizational citizenship behavior is important in that it has a favorable effect on the attitudes of fellow employees. Organizational citizenship behavior is an action by which members of the organization give more than their job responsibilities to others, making them feel that the organization is a place where members are considerate of each other and treat each other with kindness. Also, it has a function of implicitly conveying emotions (George & Bettenhausen, 1990; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1997).

However, it is argued that OCB (subsequently referred to as OCB) is used for superficial impression management (Bolino, 1999) or for political purposes (Ferris, Judge, Rowland, & Fitzgibbons, 1994). As a result, it is suggested that the results of OCB are not always positively accepted. This implies that the recipient of OCB may attributable to the motive of OCB differently depending on the environment in which he or she is located.

Studies by Tepper et al. (2004) show that abusive supervision is likely to negatively attribute the motives of OCB performed by colleagues in the team in terms of generalized cynicism and individual distrust. Consequently, even if a colleague acts as an organized citizen, the recipient takes it negatively and adversely affects his or her job satisfaction.

Prior research related to organizational civic behavior suggests that job satisfaction mediates organizational civic behavior (Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983; Van Dyne, Graham, & Dienesch, 1994) and that organizational commitment mediates organizational civic behavior (Bolon, 1997). As such, it is common to see OCB as a factor that occurs when organizational members are satisfied enough from their work and feel committed in the organization. However, in abusive supervision situations, organizational members feel a low level of job satisfaction and reduce collaborative behavior. Therefore, it is believed that OCB targeting colleagues will also be undermined.

2.3. Perceived LMX Differentiation

The leader-member exchange (LMX) theory presupposes an LMX differentiation process, which means that leaders build differential relationships with members of the team (Liden, Erdogan, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2006). Leaders form a limited, low-quality exchange relationship with some subordinates, and a high-quality LMX relationship that transcends contractual obligations with other subordinates (Liden & Garen, 1980). In this high-quality LMX relationship, leaders are rewarded with mentoring (Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994), sponsorships (Sparrowe & Liden, 2005) and empowerment (Chen, Kirkman, Kanfer, Allen, & Rosen, 2007; Liden, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2000) as a reward for their subordinates' high performance and OCB.

Most LMX empirical studies have mainly taken place within a single-level, as we investigate the relationship between individual-level perceptions and outcomes of LMX quality (Schriesheim, Castro, Zhou, & Yammarino, 2001). However, since the LMX model essentially looks at how differentiated treatment of leaders affects multiple subordinates in a group (Danesreau, Graen, & Haga, 1975), existing studies that addressed LMX discussions only at the individual level are also criticized. To overcome this problem, recent LMX researchers have viewed LMX as a group-wide process (Boies & Howell, 2006; Henderson, Wayne, Shore, Bomer, & Tetrick, 2008; Eden et al., 2006; Schyns, 2006) or as an individual in the group (Henderson et al., 2008; Schriesheim, Castro, & Yammarino, 2000; Schriesheim, Neider, & Scandura, 1998).

In this context, the work of Henderson, Liden, Glibkowski and Chaudhry (2009) conceptualizes at the group level the complex LMX relationships that arise between leaders and members within the group by including multiple subordinates in the LMX differentiation process. The authors argue that the theory itself has inherently multilevel characteristics because the LMX model focuses on differentiated exchange relationships within the functional group. In other words, LMX differentiation is formed in a group-wide context unless the group consists of a leader and only one subordinate. Therefore, LMX differentiation results in intra-group variability. This group-level context builds the experience and perception of leaders and group members, who evaluate LMX outputs by comparing the dyad relationship of other people in the group, such as their own dyad relationships (Henderson et al., 2008; Schriesheim et al., 2001). These group-level contexts shape the experiences and perceptions of leaders and group members, and they evaluate LMX outcomes by comparing their dyad relationship with the leader-subordinate relationships of others in the same group (Henderson et al., 2008; Schriesheim et al., 2001).

This study considers LMX differentiation as a group-level variable to be most reasonable, and the dynamically formed and changing LMX variability within the group context is also expected to have a significant impact on OCB targeting colleagues.

3. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

3.1. Research models

Based on the relationship between abusive supervision, coworkers' organizational citizenship behavior, and perceived LMX differentiation, the model of this study is described in <Figure. 1>.
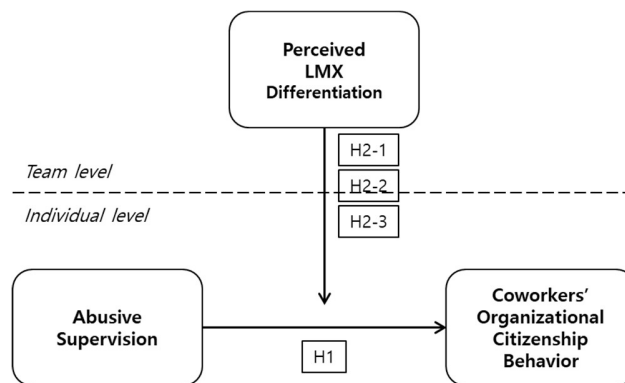

Figure 1: Research Model

As a causal relation between abusive supervision and coworkers' organizational citizenship behavior, perceived LMX differentiation enhances or weakens this relationship. Graen and Cashman (1975) emphasized that individuals are affected by their attitudes and behaviors according to what other people in their group are aware of through social comparison, and some researchers have also suggested the theoretical possibilities to find out perceived LMX differentiation is a moderating factor between abusive supervision and coworkers' organizational citizenship behavior.

3.2. Relationship between abusive supervision and OCB targeting coworkers

Transformative leadership behaviors that provide positive stimuli such as vision presentation or role modeling to subordinates are positively correlated with organizational citizenship behavior (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990), while subordinates under abusive supervision experience a low level of procedural and interactive justice (Aryee et al., 2007; Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002). In other words, subordinates regulate reciprocal relationships based on the degree of supportive leadership behavior of their leaders, providing OCB when they exhibit high supportive leadership behavior, and vice versa.

Abusive supervisors are highly likely to negatively attribute the motive of OCB performed by teammates in terms of including generalized cynicism and individual mistrust. In abusive supervision situations, OCB is likely to be reflected for ostensible impression management or political purposes, which may lack motivation for subordinates to act as organizational citizens not only for their abusive leaders but also for colleagues in the same position.

The work of Priesemuth, Schminke, Ambrose and Folger (2014) concluded that abusive supervision is created in a group-level climate, which acts as a hindrance to group identification, so that individuals in the group do not engage in altruistic behaviors such as OCB.

Based on these prior studies, the following hypothesis was established as it was assumed that employees who were abusively supervised would not act as organizational citizens because they were negatively affected at both individual and group levels.

Hypothesis 1: Abusive supervision will have a negative impact on organizational citizenship behavior toward colleagues.

3.3. The moderating effect of perceived LMX differentiation (between abusive supervision and OCB for coworkers)

Reference group theory is theoretically providing the basis for these studies. At the level within the group, individuals are affected by their attitudes and behaviors according to what other people in their group are aware of through social comparison. The group members perceive the differentiated treatment of the leader (Duchon, Green, & Taber, 1986; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Sias & Jablin, 1995), and this perception is formed or forced through communication between members (Sias, 1996).

According to a study by Sias and Jablin (1995), when a target group member who receives differential treatment from a leader appears unfair, they antagonize that member and take action to exclude him from in-group communication. On the other hand, the same leader is differentiated treatment provided to the target member even if his competence is guaranteed, group members feel it fair. Sias and Jablin's results suggest that high recognition of LMX differentiation does not always result in intragroup conflicts and may be mitigated by the ability of the target member. In contrast, Hooper & Martin (2008) drew preliminary results that group-level LMX differentiation can generally negatively affect relationships among subordinates.

This work seeks to look at two cases of LMX differentiation that can occur in the negative context of abusive supervision. The first refers to when the perceived LMX differentiation of a group is low, with a large number of group members having low or lower relationships with the leader. At this time, members will fail to identify as a group due to abusive leaders, and will not have a unified view as a group. Members will therefore be placed in a situation of continuing their work personally. The low level of group identification leaves members lacking incentives to engage in organized civic action. Consequently, it is determined that the following hypotheses can be presented:

Hypothesis 2-1: The relationship between abusive supervision and organizational citizenship behavior toward colleagues will show the highest correlation when perceived LMX differentiation is low.

The second is when the perceived LMX differentiation of the group is high, with each group member having a different LMX relationship with the leader. In this case, by borrowing the results of Sias and Jablin (1995), even if group members receive differentiated treatment from leaders who conduct abusive supervision, communication between members is expected to be smooth if the competence of the target member is guaranteed. Therefore, the following hypothesis was established.

Hypothesis 2-2: The relationship between abusive supervision and organizational citizenship behavior targeting coworkers will show a lower correlation in the case of high perceived LMX differentiation than in case of low differentiation.

Hypothesis 2-3: The relationship between abusive supervision and organizational citizenship behavior targeting coworkers will show the lowest correlation when the competence of the differentiated member is guaranteed among the cases with high perceived LMX differentiation.

4. Conclusion and Expected Implications

This study is the first to look at abusive supervision, which was discussed only in terms of average leadership style, through the LMX differentiation lens roll. It is meaningful in that it has expanded the scope of abusive supervision research through the team-level moderator called perceived LMX differentiation, away from the abusive supervision research that was mainly discussed at the existing dyadic relationship. In leadership research, multi-level research that encompasses multiple levels is mentioned as very important, but there are only a few studies that suggest a multi-level theoretical framework in actual leadership research. In this study, abusive supervision and coworkers' organizational citizenship behavior correspond to an individual level variable, and perceived LMX differentiation fits to a team level variable. In recent years, multilevel research has been mentioned as an important topic in leadership research, ang this study can be said to be a multilevel study of leadership responding to such demands.

Furthermore, it has been shown by prior studies that abusive supervision negatively affects organizational citizenship behavior of organizational members, however this work suggests that OCB targeting coworkers can be further subdivided by team-level perceived LMX differentiation. This is believed to contribute in terms of presenting a new framework for the existing research trend, which considered abusive supervision and OCB as a simple negative relationship.

This study has some limitations in that it only presents a theoretical framework on the relationship between abusive supervision, coworkers' OCB, and perceived LMX differentiation. Therefore, in future research, it would be ideal if there were additional studies considering the following aspects.

It will be necessary to apply the theoretical framework proposed in this study to the actual field. Existing studies have proven that subordinates' OCB is reduced under abusive supervision, but there are few studies showing that OCB toward coworkers is also reduced under abusive supervision. Therefore, in future research, it is necessary to support empirical research that abusive supervision weakens OCB among peers. In addition, it is necessary to actually check the perceived LMX differentiation presented as a team-level moderator.

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