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Impact of Abusive Supervision on Innovative Work Behavior in Turkey: Who Is More Affected?

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have focused on the dark side of managers in recent years, wherein studies discuss the effects of abusive supervision styles on employees and organizations. This research aims to elucidate the influence of abusive supervision on innovative work behaviors of new and former employees. The study focuses on two different employee characteristics. The first group includes the employees with a two-year or less tenure. The second group includes employees with a five-year or more tenure. A simple random sampling technique is used to determine the sample. The research sample includes 345 employees in a manufacturing firm in Istanbul, Turkey. According to regression analysis results, abusive supervision negatively affects innovative work behavior. In addition, abusive supervision affects the innovative work behaviors of new employees more than those of former employees. The findings are consistent with the social exchange theory, conservation of resources theory, and power approach. The research findings are important in demonstrating how destructive abusive supervision affects new employees. In conclusion, suggestions are presented for companies, managers, and researchers.

KEYWORDS

abusive supervision, innovative work behavior, tenure, white-collar, new and former workers

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Introduction

Most firms gain a competitive advantage via innovative contributions of their employees or managers (Khan et al., 2022). Innovation is the application of new knowledge and ideas (Turgut & Beğenirbaş, 2013). Innovative work behaviors (IWB) are defined as initiating or implementing a difference that provides a new idea, process, job role, product, or added value for a firm (Yuan & Woodman, 2010). Many studies have attempted to determine the factors affecting IWB, considering the importance of innovative business behaviors. Some prominent studies found that the approaches of managers/leaders significantly affect employees' IWB (Afşar & Masood, 2018; Hughes et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2022; Li et al., 2019). A series of leader-management studies determined that positive characteristics of top managers increase employees' IWB (Afşar & Masood, 2018; Khalili, 2016), while negative managerial behaviors might have a detrimental effect on IWB (Han et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2013).

In recent years, abusive supervision (AS) has been frequently discussed in the context of negative managerial behaviors. AS refers to managers' nonphysical bad-mannered behavior toward their subordinates. In other words, it is "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000, p. 178).

According to social exchange theory (SET), employees express negative reactions in response to negative behaviors. For example, employees move away from innovative and citizenship behaviors in the face of abusive behaviors. Thus, they balance a manager's response to negative behaviors (Han et al., 2017; Mackey et al., 2017). In addition, negative managerial behaviors may cause employees to feel their resources are at stake. According to the conservation of resources theory (COR), an employee is expected to protect his resources against a perceived threat (Hobfoll, 1989; 2001). Under the guidance of COR and SET, AS in a firm is expected to reduce employee motivation and force the employee to protect himself; as a result, the employee will keep innovative work ideas to himself (Blau, 1964; Khan et al., 2022). However, the individual characteristics of the employees can cause their behavior in an organization to differ. For example, employees' exposure to AS may change since working time is related to an employee's relationships within the organization and the time to gain power (Finkelstein, 1992).

As can be seen in the studies conducted in the organizational behavior literature, features such as working time and experience differentiate employee attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Kavaklı et al., 2009; Pekdemir et al., 2014). Employees with a long working time have more networks and resources than those who work for a short time (Finkelstein, 1992), which can increase the control power of employees over results (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1990). Regarding working time, the relationship level between AS and IWB may differ. However, no research, to our best knowledge, examines how the levels of being affected by AS and how IWB vary, depending on the working time of the employees in a firm. This shortcoming hinders the detailed examination of the harms of destructive management mechanisms.

Employees' reactions to managerial behavior vary depending on the country. The reason for this difference is typically due to culture, which affects how relations between employees and management occur (Hofstede, 1980; Javidan et al., 2006). Positive leader behaviors are often perceived similarly by employees. However, negative behaviors cannot be generalized to all employees (Kernan et al., 2011; Tsui et al., 2007; Vogel et al., 2015). For example, Vogel et al. (2015) investigated how abusive management behaviors are perceived in Anglo and Asian cultures, i.e., employees from Anglo cultures have a higher sensitivity to abuse than those from Asian cultures. According to a similar study, abusive management significantly affects employees in countries with low power distance (Park et al., 2019).

Culture-based research shows that, in countries with high power distance, the impact of abusive management on employees varies. In cultural research, Turkey is considered a country with high power distance (İlhan & Yemişçi, 2020; Terzi, 2000). However, there is no specific study on how abusive management style affects the innovative behavior of employees in Turkey. Therefore, knowledge about how negative manager behaviors will affect the innovative behavior of Turkish employees remains insufficient; there is also insufficient research on how new and old employees are affected by negative/abusive manager behaviors. Considering how countries are structured, the reactions of new or old employees toward abusive management may differ.

Considering the said deficiency in the literature, the aim of this research was determined as detection of the level of influence of innovative work behaviors of new and former employees from abusive management. Research findings are critical in determining in which contexts AS prevents employees from benefiting more from their innovative abilities. In addition, the findings are important for identifying the level of exposure to negative managerial behavior of new employees who do not yet have sufficient power in the company. Consequently, the fact of new employees not knowing the company well enough could become a factor that increases their intention to leave the company in the face of adversity.

The first part of the research presents a literature review of AS's effect on innovative work behaviors and the importance of working time. After the review, the research hypotheses are presented. The next section provides information about the research method, after which, the researcher's findings are presented. The research ends with a conclusion, discussion, and suggestions.

Relations Between Concepts and Development of Hypothesis

Abusive management describes managers demeaning employees, by displaying humiliating behavior and hostile attitudes while not physically intervening (Tepper, 2000; Tepper et al., 2017). An abusive and humiliating work environment reduces the tendency of employees to feel psychologically safe. The belief that the employee does not work in a safe environment can cause them to protect their resources (Tatlı & Öngel, 2023), thus preventing them from presenting innovative ideas that will benefit the company (Khan et al., 2022). In addition, AS can weaken employees' tendency to innovate by revealing negative emotions (Thajil & Al-Abrow, 2023). The effect of AS

on employees' innovative behavior sometimes occurs indirectly. When the employees' emotional intelligence is high, the innovative behaviors of the abusive management are less affected. On the other hand, low emotional intelligence may cause employees' innovative behaviors to be affected more by AS (Hou et al., 2018).

Abusive supervision can reduce employees' IWB by reducing their proactive nature. At the same time, the high dependence of employees on their managers may lead to further decrease in IWB (Rousseau & Aube, 2018). AS destroys employees' perceptions of justice and negatively affects their management perspectives (Khalid et al., 2018; Tziner et al., 2023). At the same time, the employee's perception of AS damages their psychological contract with the firm and the employee tends to withdraw. This negative perspective prevents the employees from presenting the information for the company's benefit (Pradhan et al., 2020). In summary, AS is expected to prevent innovative work behaviors of employees.

Employees' working hours may cause them to establish social networks with a person through their job descriptions. These networks can take place with people inside or outside an organization, which become sources of information. When this information source provides value for the firm, the individual has power (Barry & Asiedu, 2017; Cross & Parker, 2004; Finkelstein, 1992; Horton et al., 2012; Ibarra & Andrews, 1993; Liebowitz, 2007). Notably, when newcomers experience the process of learning an organization's structure, it takes time for them to gain a central place in its social relations. Accordingly, a newcomer's low level of knowledge prevents them from demonstrating strength within the organization (Rollag, 2004). Therefore, new employees will likely be less resilient than older ones. New employees with less power and resistance are expected to be more likely to hide information, protect resources, or not present innovative ideas when faced with managerial abuse than former employees. Based on this inference, the research hypotheses formed are as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H₁): Abusive supervision negatively affects employees' innovative work behavior.

Hypothesis 2 (H₂): The negative impact of abusive supervision on innovative work behaviors is higher in new employees than in former employees.

Method

Data Collection

In this research, a questionnaire was used for data collection, which examines the effect of AS on the IWB of employees and the role of working time. The questionnaire consists of three parts. In the first part, the AS scale consisting of 15 items and one dimension was used. The AS scale was developed by Tepper (2000), the Turkish form was developed by Ülbeği et al. (2014). In the second part of the questionnaire, the IWB scale of six items created by Scott and Bruce (1994) was used. The Turkish form of the scale (four items) was prepared by Çalışkan et al. (2019). Finally, five demographic questions (age, gender, educational status, marital status, and length of employment) were included to determine the participants' descriptive characteristics. Data collection took place from February to March 2023.

Sampling Method

The research sample consists of employees in a production company operating in Istanbul. Questionnaire forms were sent to approximately 1,700 employees in the enterprise. Feedback was received for 352 of the questionnaire forms. However, seven questionnaire forms were not filled out properly, making the sample of the study 345. We determined the number of samples, according to Hair et al. (2009), i.e., 10 samples are required for each item included in the research. Reaching 345 samples for the 19 items in the scales (19 x 10 = 190) was considered sufficient. A simple random sampling technique was used in this study. Attention was paid to the fact that all employees in the sample were not involved in upper management. All employees were white-collar office workers. Particular attention was paid to the fact that the participants worked for two years or less and those who worked for five years or more tenure. According to Kavakli et al. (2009), being a new employee (two years or less tenure) or being a former employee (five years or more tenure) affects their behavior in the workplace. Therefore, the study period was divided into two groups.

There are 149 employees with two years or less tenure: 44.3% of participants are men, and 55.7% are women; 53.7% are single, and 46.3% are married; 47.7% are aged 30 and under, 34.9% are between the ages of 31 and 40, and 17.4% are aged 41 and over; 19.5% are in high school or below, 34.2% are associate degree students, and 46.3% have undergraduate and graduate education.

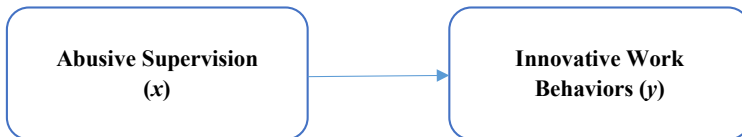
The number of employees who have worked for five years or more is 196: 49.5% of participants are male, and 50.5% are female; 27.6% are single, and 72.4% are married; 7.7% are aged 30 and under, 56.7% are between the ages of 31–40, 29.9% are between the ages of 41–50, and 5.7% are aged 51 and over; 23% are in high school or below, 39.9% have an associate degree, and 37.8% are at undergraduate and graduate levels.

Conceptual Model

The conceptual model of the research is given in Figure 1. The abusive supervision independent (x) and innovative work behaviors represent the dependent variable (y).

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of the Research



Analysis. Factor analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were performed with the IBM SPSS® Statistics software version 25. Principal component analysis was used to determine the factors. The reliability coefficient was determined by Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to determine the relationships. Simple linear regression analysis was used to assess the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

Results

This section discusses the research findings, which examine the effect of AS perception on the IWB of new and former employees. It also presents factor and reliability analysis, correlation and descriptive statistics, and regression analysis results.

Factor Analysis Results

According to Hair et al. (2009), the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) value is 0.60/0.70, the Bartlett sphericity test is $p < .05$, the total variance explained is 60% and above, and the factor loads are 0.40; further, Cronbach's alpha coefficient is .60/.70, which is important to ensure adequate suitability of the measurement tools.

The results of the factor and reliability analyses of the scales of AS and IWB are given in Table 1. The findings proved to be aligned with recommendations of Hair et al. (2009). In addition, there were 15 items in the measurement tool. No items were deleted during factor and reliability analysis.

Table 1

Factor and Reliability Analysis

KMO and Bartlett's Test	Abusive supervision (AS)	Innovation work behavior (IWB)
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	.953	.783
Approx. Chi-Square	4,708.552	1,472.122
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	6.0
Sig (ANOVA)	.000	.000
Variance Explained	65.360%	85.647%
Cronbach's Alpha	.961	.944
Item	15.0	4.0

The finding concerning the IWB scale were also in compliance with recommendations of Hair et al. (2009). There were four items in the IWB measurement tool (Appendix). No items were deleted during factor and reliability analysis.

According to the factor and reliability analysis findings, the AS and IWB scale obtained appropriate values, which can be used in the research. After factor and reliability analysis, findings about correlation analysis and descriptive statistics are included (Table 2).

Correlation Analysis and Descriptive Statistics

Correlation analysis was applied to the relationships between the variables. The following criteria were used in the evaluation of the correlation analysis findings: 0 = *no relationship*; 0.01–0.19 = *very low relationship*; 0.2–0.39 = *low relationship*; 0.4–0.59 = *moderate relationship*; 0.60–0.79 = *high relationship*; 0.80–0.99 = *very high relationship*; 1 = *perfect relationship* (Karahana, 2017; Kocaay et al., 2022). In the evaluation of descriptive statistics, the following criteria were used: 1.00–2.33 = *low*; 2.34–3.66 = *medium*; 3.67–5.00 = *high* (İşcan., 2002). Correlation analysis and descriptive statistics findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Correlation Analysis

	All sample			Two years or less tenure			Five years or more tenure		
	\bar{x}	IWB	AS	\bar{x}	IWB	AS	\bar{x}	IWB	AS
IWB	3.90	1		3.91	1		3.88	1	
AS	1.71	-0.257**	1	1.70	-0.429**	1	1.72	-0.148*	1
	N = 345			N = 149			N = 196		

According to the correlation analysis findings, it was determined that there was a low, negative, and significant relationship at the $p < .05$ level between the AS perceptions of the employees and their IWB. It has been determined that there is a negative and significant relationship at $p < .05$ level between AS perceptions and IWB of employees working in the same company for two years or less tenure. It has been determined that there is a low, negative, and significant relationship at $p < .05$ level between AS perceptions and IWB of those working in the same company for five years or more.

IWB of employees for each category is at a high level, and AS perceptions are at a low level. It is seen that there is no significant difference between the IWB and AS perceptions level of employees with two years or less of tenure and those with five years or more of experience. Although there is no difference between the means, there are significant differences in the relationships between the variables.

Regression Analysis

In the simple regression analysis performed to determine the effect of abusive management perception on IWB of employees, the independent variable (x) is AS, and the dependent variable (y) is IWB. The R^2 value is used for the explanation level, the beta coefficient is used for the explanation coefficient, and the significance level is evaluated at $p < .05$. As a result of the test of the model, the Durbin—Watson value was examined to determine the correlation between the residual values. The fact that the value is less than three indicates no correlation between the residual values (Hair et al., 2009).

Table 3
Regression Analysis

		R^2	Sig (ANOVA)	B	Sig	Durbin–Watson	Hypothesis
All sample	IWB	.066	.000	4.461	0.000	1.73	H ₁ supported
	AS			-0.257	0.000		
Two years or less tenure		R^2	Sig (ANOVA)	B	Sig	Durbin–Watson	
	IWB	.184	.000	4.792	0.000	1.83	H ₂ supported
AS	-0.429			0.000			
Five years or more tenure		R^2	Sig (ANOVA)	B	Sig	Durbin–Watson	
	IWB	.022	.038	4.224	0.000	1.69	
AS	-0.148			0.038			

Table 3 shows the regression analysis results to determine to what extent the IWB of the employees is affected by the AS perception. According to the regression analysis findings, at the level of all participants, the AS approach's level of explaining the IWB of the employees is 6.6%. It was determined that AS negatively affected IWB ($B = -0.257$; $p < .05$). The AS perceptions of the employees working two years or less explain the IWB of the employees at 18.4%.

The explanation coefficient is negative ($B = -0.429$; $p < .05$). The level of explaining IWB of AS perceptions of employees working in the company for five years or more is 2.2%. The explanation coefficient is negative ($B = -0.148$; $p < .05$). According to the findings, H_1 and H_2 are supported.

Conclusion

When the findings are evaluated in general, it is seen that employees are generally negatively affected by AS practices and tend to decrease IWB. New employees (two years or less tenure) are more likely to be affected by AS than old employees (five years or more tenure). That is, when exposed to abusive behaviors, the IWB of new employees decreases at a higher level than that of former employees.

It is possible to state that our research findings are compatible with the assumptions of SET, COR, and power approaches. The theories mentioned above support the decrease in the tendency of new employees to engage in innovative behaviors in return for abusive supervision and the fact that former employees are relatively less affected by abusive supervision. The time they are in the organization strengthens them (Finkelstein, 1992) and makes them more resistant to abusive behaviors (Mackey, 2017; Liang et al., 2022). On the other hand, since new employees have fewer resources and power (Mackey, 2017), they become more vulnerable to abusive behavior. Low-powered employees may avoid IWB because their resources are threatened with depletion and need a positive exchange process with management (Cook et al., 2013; Emerson, 1962; Hobfoll et al., 1990; Hobfoll & Lilly, 1993).

New employees can be considered human resources, providing creativity and innovation energy for companies. However, exposure of new employees to AS will prevent them from using their intention to continue in the workplace and their intellectual capital for the firm. Thus, a negative result will arise, such as companies being unable to sufficiently benefit from their new personnel. The firm's competitive advantage may suffer significantly because human resources are an important element of competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; 2001; Bayraktarođlu et al., 2019; Clarke et al., 2011; Ge, Xu, 2021). In addition, finding and training new employees to replace those who will leave may create a significant cost for companies (Palanski et al., 2014).

More importantly, AS reduces employee well-being (Lin et al., 2013) and increases silence (Morsch et al., 2020). Preventing the damage caused by AS to the psychological integrity of the employees (Bowling & Michel, 2011; Liang et al., 2022) is at least as important as the firm's performance. It is important that problems such as

AS, which are unethical and cause a decrease in employee welfare, are eliminated for all old/new employees.

Considering the harms of AS, abusive supervision behaviors should be minimized in organizations. Since top management usually carries out AS, employees should also know the need to reduce AS. For example, developing social relationships with managers (Jiang et al., 2022) can help keep relationships cordial; thus, AS behaviors may decrease. Another suggestion is about subordinates' sense of humor. The fact that the subordinates' sense of humor is developed reduces the negative behaviors of abusive managers (Huang et al., 2022).

Managers are responsible for reducing AS. Managers' awareness of unethical behaviors and abuse should be developed (Harris et al., 2013) and trained in order to reduce conscious or unconscious abusive behaviors. If the entire management team is not abusive, creating a positive organizational climate that will provide sensitivity and awareness for employees (Feng & Wang, 2019) can reduce AS behaviors. In addition, as a deterrent option, the abused and the eyewitnesses can speak out against abusive behavior (Frey et al., 2009), which may reduce AS behaviors. It is recommended to create 360-degree feedback and zero-tolerance (Decoster et al., 2013; Tepper, 2007) programs so that employees can raise their voices or file a report.

Many studies have demonstrated the effect of AS on the innovation and creativity of employees. Although important results were obtained for some new and former employees in our research, the research should be improved in some respects. For example, this research regarding new and old employees needs to better focus on the kinds of networks available for new employees. New employees may also oppose AS, as social network ties are a source of strength for individuals (Zagenczyk et al., 2015). It is recommended to identify how important social network ties of employees reduce AS, as it may be notable for IWB. Abusive management work is mostly carried out based on the opinions of subordinates. Although the manager's behavior is not abusive, an employee may perceive it as abusive.

For this reason, managers and employees should be examined together. Finally, investigating how AS affects IWB in high power distance societies could reveal important findings. Examining conflicts between managers with high power desire (Lin et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2012) and employees with low power distance desire is recommended. This research was conducted in Turkey with white-collar employees. In the research, Turkey is considered a country with high power distance and that employees have a high tolerance for abusive supervision. Although the high tolerance of former employees to abusive behavior is a result of cultural norms, for future studies, it is recommended to examine the overall effect of culture in this area.

How AS affects employees' IWB has yet to be examined with the new/old employee distinction. In addition, we needed to find clear information in the literature about how new and former employees are affected by AS. Our research is unique, however, in showing how new and former employees respond to AS.

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Appendix

IWB Scale Items

- I generate new ideas about my work.
- I make an effort to implement new ideas regarding my work.
- I always find a better way to do things.
- I create better processes and routines for how my work is done.