

# Islamic Work Ethics as a Moderator between Abusive Supervision and Employees' Self-Efficacy: A Review

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## Abstract

This paper reviews the existing literature on the effect of abusive supervision on employee's self-efficacy as moderated by Islamic Work Ethics. The paper focuses on the negative consequences of abusive supervision on employee's self-efficacy. The two constructs have been discussed under Interpersonal Justice Theory and Social Cognitive Theory. Findings from literature reviews indicate the positive moderating effect of Islamic work ethics on the relationship between abusive supervision and employee's self-efficacy. The paper concludes that if an employee adopts and follows Islamic Work Ethics, his self-efficacy will not be declined dramatically by abusive supervisors who constantly practice bullying and aggressive behaviour toward subordinates.

**Keywords:** *Abusive Supervision, Interpersonal Justice Theory, Employee's Self-Efficacy, Social Cognitive Theory, Islamic Work Ethics.*

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## Introduction

Recent attention has been given to understand the causes and consequences of abusive supervision. Abusive supervision "refers to subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000). Recently, organizational researches have been increasingly focused on the "dark side of Supervision," e.g., (Lee, Yun, & Srivastava, 2013; Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012). A substantial justification for such consideration is due to the growing frequency of abusive supervision manner in the workplace (Lee *et al.*, 2013), and their massive impact on organizational and individual outcomes (Tepper, 2007).

Although abusive supervision has its detrimental consequences for employees and organizations (Farh & Chen, 2014), the focus of prior researches about abusive supervision's effect has been predominantly centred on its negative side (Jian, Kwan, Qiu, Liu, & Yim, 2012; Liu *et al.*, 2012). Employees abused by their managers or supervisor may doubt whether they are competent enough to accomplish the supervisors' expectations.

Moreover, several researchers have revealed that abusive supervision has a negative impact and undesirable outcomes (Decoster, Camps, Stouten, Vandevyvere, & Tripp, 2013; Tepper *et al.*, 2009). Further, (Tepper, 2000) added that abusive supervisors remind employees of their previous mistakes and failures, while they should be affirming their subordinates for acting in accord with creative beliefs. Therefore, following the notion of "creativity under the gun" (Amabile, Hadley, & Kramer, 2002), when the supervisor uses severe, unethical, and hostile verbal and nonverbal attacks, pressure, or embarrassment to bully employees, employee's self-efficacy also ends up getting killed.

This paper points to a phenomenon of abusive supervision from supervisors toward their subordinate employees in Saudi Arabia. Abusive supervisions may come in deferent forms and lead to different negative consequences on employees and organizations. One of the negative consequences is the effect on employee's self-efficacy, which is one of the major elements affected by abusive supervision. This paper also proposes that Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) as a construct to moderator the relationship between abusive supervision and employee's self-efficacy.

## Problem Statement

Abusive supervision, is one of the most annoying realities in offices, work area, factories, It promotes unhealthily and bad working relationship, and has a harmful outcome on a worker's function and emotional growth (Giorgi, Mancuso, *et al.*, 2016; Giorgi, Perminiené, *et al.*, 2016). Tepper (2000) gave the operational definition of abusive behaviour as managers who are embroiled in continuous acts and deeds of unethical verbal and nonverbal conducts towards their subordinates. Moreover, abusive supervision and petty tyranny (Humphrey & Ashforth, 1994) account for the negative attitudes or the negative behaviours of supervisors toward subordinates, and these negative attitudes and negative behaviours often lead to discomfort for the subordinate.

Additionally, nonphysical abuse happens more often than physical violence, and employees who experience more nonphysical abuse have lower job satisfaction (Keashly, Trott, & MacLean, 1994). Moreover, abusive behaviours in the workplace can be realized as a complex system phenomenon, which leads to critical unethical and complicated consequences and is believed to be one of the major causes of job-related death (Jiang, Gu, & Tang, 2017b).



Due to abusive supervision, significant increases in absenteeism, health care costs, and productivity declination are noted which lead to an approximate loss of around 23 billion US dollars annually (Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006). Also, another negative impact of abusive supervision is psychological distress in the form of emotional exhaustion (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002; Tepper, 2000). (Piccolo, Greenbaum, Hartog, & Folger, 2010) found that abusive supervisors do not enable employees' views to be used in organizational decisions, or use rewards to encourage their ethical behaviour.

Abused employees suffer from abusive behaviour and develop a distressing psychological state (Duffy *et al.*, 2002) and if they cannot have little chance of developing positive, emotive, and affective reactions amenable to strong efficacy beliefs, then their creative self-efficacy declines substantially (Jiang, Gu, & Tang, 2017a) and they lose confidence in their expertise, motivations and creative-thinking skills (Amabile, 1998).

Recently, in Saudi Arabia, some studies have been done on workplace concerning abusive attitude and violence targeting schools, healthcare workers, including employees in different industries. Findings from studies done in the other countries including Taiwan, Iran, Jordan, and Turkey show a lower occurrence of violence at work than in Saudi Arabia (Albashtawy, 2013; Ergün & Karadakovan, 2005; Esmailpour, Salsali, & Ahmadi, 2011). Further, (Algwaiz & Alghanim, 2012; El-Gilany, El-Wehady, & Amr, 2010) also found in other Saudi Arabian studies, that male employees are exposed to supervisors' abuse in the workplace remarkably. Furthermore, (Alharthy *et al.*, 2017) found in his research concerning violence in Saudi Arabia at work that (61%) of the total of 370 respondents are suffering from abusive behaviour.

## Literature Review

### Abusive Supervision

Tepper and his colleges (Hu, Zheng, Tepper, & Yu, 2018) in their study (the influences of abusive supervision) have defined the abusive behaviour of supervisors. Many other scholars have defined and focused attention on abusive supervision besides Tepper (Tepper, 2000; Tepper, Duffy, Hoobler, & Ensley, 2004; Tepper, Duffy, & Shaw, 2001; Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002). (Tepper, 2000) defined abusive supervision as the "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which their supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical contact".

Moreover, (Rai & Agarwal, 2017) state that the term abusive behaviour (bullying) or workplace violence which has become synonymous with inappropriate workplace behaviours (Jenkins, Winefield, & Sarris, 2011) relates to repetitive and deliberate negative acts directed towards an employee that are primarily of psychological nature (Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996). Also, (AlBuhairan *et al.*, 2017) describe the abusive behaviour and bullying as a repeated aggressive behaviour, involving a power imbalance between the abusive supervisors and the victim (Nansel *et al.*, 2001).

Further, (Spagnoli, Balducci, & Fraccaroli, 2017) define abusive behavior and workplace bullying as repeated behaviors that occur over a period of time which harass, offend, socially exclude and/or adversely affect the work of an employee e.g. (Einarsen, Hoel, & Cooper, 2003; Moayed, Daraiseh, Shell, & Salem, 2006). Numerous studies showed that abusive supervision strongly influences employee's behaviours (for reviews, see (Mackey, Frieder, Brees, & Martinko, 2017; Martinko, Harvey, Brees, & Mackey, 2013; Tepper, 2007; Y. Zhang & Liao, 2015). Accordingly, abusive supervision can be embodied in different forms and may lead to complex results.

Zhang and Liu (2018) explain that abusive behaviours can be in the form of covert behaviours (e.g., rude looks, ignoring someone, taking undue credit for what subordinates have done, withholding information from employees) that are subtle in nature from overt behaviours (e.g., yelling, public punishment) that are less subtle and more observable to

others. Although, in Tepper's explanation (Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017), that only supervisor's taunts and mocking (verbal behaviours) or rude gestures (nonverbal behaviours) are categorized as abusive supervision, (Bartlett, 2016).

Boyle and Wallis pointed out that abusive supervision and bullying at the workplace can include physically intimidating behaviours in extreme cases (Boyle & Wallis, 2016). Abusive supervision toward individuals would be categorized in terms of verbal attack (Spector, Zhou, & Che, 2014), isolation or social exclusion (Scott, Zagenczyk, Schippers, Purvis, & Cruz, 2014), emotional abuse (Pilch & Turska, 2015) and humiliation, which may involve attacks on self-esteem (Loerbroks *et al.*, 2015).

Furthermore, (Loerbroks *et al.*, 2015) reported that perpetrators of this type of bullying do not return communications such as phone calls, memos, and emails, further isolating individuals. Additional methods of personal related bullying involve spreading gossips, lies, false accusations, and undermining an employee (Reknes, Einarsen, Knardahl, & Lau, 2014). Moreover, they concluded that if supervisors were the only ones bullying in an organization, then bullying tactics such as social isolation, attack on the private sphere, and spreading of rumours would occur less frequently.

### Interpersonal Justice Theory

Employees experience high levels of interpersonal justice when organizational representatives, especially those of higher status, treat them with respect, honesty, and are sensitive to their personal needs (R. Bies & Moag, 1986). Experiencing unfair treatment at the interpersonal level, such as supervisory abuse, can cause frustration and threaten employees' self- and social images (Greenberg, 1990). Interpersonal justice refers to treating people with dignity and respect. People believe that they deserve to be treated well and feel that things are unfair when they are not treated well (Colquitt, Greenberg, & Zapata-Phelan, 2005). Furthermore, interpersonal justice relates to the interpersonal dimension of fairness and is particularly important in understanding the consequences of supervisor abuse.

According to justice theory, individuals' evaluative assessments of fairness draw on perceptions of distributive justice (fairness of outcome allocation), procedural justice (fairness of the procedures used to make allocation decisions), and interactional justice (fairness of the interpersonal treatment individuals receive during the enactment of procedures). Perceived injustices due to abusive supervision are likely to translate into a dislike for one's job (Tepper, 2000). Thus, we would expect to see a negative effect on several job attitudes, such as job satisfaction and job involvement. Research also indicates that recurrent perception of injustice at work is positively associated with subordinates' psychological distress (Tepper, 2000; Zellars *et al.*, 2002).

Interactional justice reflects the interpersonal dimension of fairness (Bies, 2000). According to (Bies & Moag, 1986), individuals experience interactional injustice when organizational representatives fail to treat them with respect, honesty, propriety, and sensitivity to their personal needs. Contextual factors influence whether or not subordinates experience unfairness when they are the targets of behaviours that fit the present definition of abusive supervision; as Bies and Moag stated, "A person may hold a criterion such as personal respect inviolable. However, if rudeness is seen as an expected part of the procedure itself, as in a stress interview, then it may not be perceived as unfair because there is an instrumental purpose to its occurrence" (Bies & Moag, 1986).

Indeed, researchers often refer to abusive supervisors as "managerial bullies" (Ashforth, 1997; Humphrey & Ashforth, 1994; Namie & Namie, 2000; Salin, 2003). Interpersonal mistreatment is a central component of abusive supervision, and research indicates that employees perceive supervisors as a dominant source of interpersonal mistreatment (Bies, 2000). Supervisors are reported to be the most prominent source of bullying at work (Neuman & Baron, 2003).



Moreover, abusive supervision denotes employees' perceptions of persistent verbal and non-verbal abuse by supervisors (Tepper, 2000). Abusive supervisors use their authority negatively to oppress and brutalize subordinates and staff (Ashforth, 1997). They yell and scream, intimidate, ridicule, and humiliate their employees (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). Therefore, abusive supervision represents employees' perceptions of what they believe are purposeful and unfair supervisor mistreatment (Tepper, 2007).

In the context of abusive supervision where subordinates feel mistreated by supervisors, subordinates must expend a great deal of psychological effort to handle the interpersonal stressor. As one would expect, verified proofs suggest that abusive supervision results in psychological inconvenience. For example, subordinates' perceptions of mistreatment may induce unfavourable psychological consequences such as hostility, anxiety, or depression (Humphrey & Ashforth, 1994; Richman, Flaherty, Rospenda, & Christensen, 1992) found that negative comments from a supervisor are related to the subordinate's frustration and resistance. (Tepper, 2000) indicated that as subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision increase, so too do subordinate psychological discomforts such as depression, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion.

### Self-Efficacy

The concept of Self-Efficacy was a key component of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Social Learning Theory to account for an individual's decision/ability to act in specific situations (Bandura, 1986, 1997). It was mainly founded on Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Self-Efficacy is defined as an individual's belief that they 'can successfully execute the behaviour required' (Bandura, 1977) in order to achieve expected outcomes. An individual's perceived self-confidence determines the tasks they are prepared to attempt and depends on the demands of the task (e.g. complexity, difficulty).

Moreover, high levels of self-confidence enable individuals to attempt more complex work and be resilient when outcomes are not successful. In contrast, those with low self-confidence are conservative in the problems they address and lose confidence when problems arise. However, self-confidence alone in the ability to act will not 'produce desired performance if the component capabilities are lacking . . . (or individuals) have no incentives' (Bandura, 1977).

Additionally, self-efficacy, an effective factor (Magogwe & Oliver, 2007), is defined as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1997). Additionally, Self-Efficacy refers to peoples' beliefs about what they can do or how certain they are that they can execute specific actions (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Thus, it refers to mastery expectations and may be seen as the answer to such questions as "Can I do it?" or "How well can I do it?" (Skaalvik, 1997). Self-Efficacy should be distinguished from academic self-concept, which refers to questions like "Am I good at it?" Following (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007), (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017) defined the Self-Efficacy of an employee work as a teacher as "individuals' beliefs in their own ability to plan, organize, and continue to perform activities which are required to achieve given educational goals.

### Social Cognitive Theory

As per Social Cognitive Theory, human functioning is a dynamic system comprising reciprocal relationships among three categories of determinants: behaviour, cognition, and performance environment (Bandura, 1986). In theory, the "social" part acknowledges the environmental origins of human thought and action. Also, the "cognitive" portion identifies the influential contribution of cognitive processes to human action and motivation. The principle thought behind the social cognitive perspective is that thinking, motivation, and behaviour of an individual can be self-regulated instead of giving an undesirable response to the external situations (McCormick, 2001).

Individuals will positively respond to the external environment by self-regulating their psychological, cognitive factor (e.g. self-efficacy), which eventually affects the employee's behaviours. This finding suggests that through a particular psychological cognitive process, any individuals can initiate creativity by themselves.

The Social Cognitive Theory represents a break from the behaviourist approach, which posits that the environment causes behaviour. Behaviourists ignore human functioning because they assume that external stimuli cause it. Bandura suggested that not only does the environment cause behaviour, but behaviour also helps shape the environment, in a process that he called "reciprocal determinism" (Bandura, 1986). Bandura later added his third factor, a person's psychological processes, or cognition, to the other two factors (environment and behaviour) that reciprocally determine human action. Three aspects of the theory are particularly relevant for organizations: the development of people's (1) cognitive, social, and behavioural competencies through modelling; (2) beliefs about their capabilities so that they will use their knowledge, skills, and abilities effectively; and (3) motivation through goal systems (Bandura, 1988).

Moreover, there is a difference between possessing skills and being able to use them. Successfully using skills requires a strong belief in one's capabilities to exert control over events in order to accomplish desired goals. Two people with the same level of skill may perform differently if their self-beliefs of efficacy enhance or impair their motivation to perform. Additionally, people's self-efficacy beliefs can influence their lives in many ways (Bandura, 1988). For example, self-efficacy beliefs are themselves critical determinants of how well people seek out and acquire new skills and abilities. Further, people with high self-efficacy end to focus on (visualize) how to master tasks, whereas those with low self-efficacy tend to focus on what can go wrong.

Further, people's self-efficacy beliefs determine how much effort they will exert and for how long they will exert it toward overcoming obstacles and accomplishing behaviours. The stronger their beliefs, the greater and more persistent their efforts will be. People who evaluate themselves highly tend to have higher levels of self-esteem compared to those who evaluate themselves poorly. Additionally, the social cognitive theory is one of the most influential theories in understanding individuals' behaviours in specific social contexts (Bandura, 1997). It argues that self-efficacy is changeable and malleable in various social contexts such as a workplace, which in turn plays a key role in shaping individuals' behaviours, especially when those individuals are performing tasks imbued with uncertainty (Bandura, 1997). Moreover, the social cognitive theory suggests that individuals seek opportunities and resources in the social environment to succeed in their endeavours (Bandura, 1986).

Supervisors shape employee's efficacy beliefs and provide positive impacts on creative self-efficacy. Some examples may include transformational leadership and leader creativity expectations (Gong, Huang, & Farh, 2009; Tierney & Farmer, 2011). Drawing from the social cognitive perspective, employees closely align social cognitions with that of their supervisors' (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), which will guide the interpretation of expectations and behaviours. Social cues from supervisors make specific aspects of the job more salient to employees and shape their perceptions of the organization's orientation toward creativity (O'Reilly & Caldwell, 1985).

Furthermore, even if supervisors do not directly abuse employees, peer abusive supervision makes them feel that supervisors lend less support to and patience for the employee. Therefore, these negative feelings (pressure and fear) associated with abusive supervisors undermine employee ingenuity. Furthermore, Individuals will positively respond to the external environment by self-regulating their psychological cognitive factor (e.g. self-efficacy), which eventually affects the employee's behaviours. Furthermore, few studies have found that self-efficacy, which represents an individual's beliefs on their capacity of doing something, is the fundamental cognitive mechanisms driving creativity (Gong *et al.*, 2009). (Choi, 2004)



pointed out that the two most important psychological cognitive factors driving the creativity are the individual's confidence in creative abilities and willingness to do innovative work.

Additionally, positive social information enhances employee feelings of competence, self-efficacy (Gist & Mitchell, 1992), and performance expectations. Specifically, perceived leader creativity expectation may promote employees' assessments of their own ability to succeed in creating and subsequent attributions to creativity efficacy beliefs (Jiang *et al.*, 2017b; Tierney & Farmer, 2011). Nevertheless, reminding employees of previous mistakes and failures, withholding credit for positive performance, and expressing beliefs of employee incompetence (Tepper, 2000) and low trust in subordinates (Liu *et al.*, 2012; Priesemuth, Schminke, Ambrose, & Folger, 2014) lead to a weakened creative self-efficacy, as a consequence (Tierney & Farmer, 2004).

### Islamic Work Ethics

Crucially managers must consider ethical principles when dealing with employees, and (Brown & Treviño, 2006) claim that ethical leaders achieve this by setting obvious and clear ethical values and practices, implementing proactive models of ethical behaviour. However, the link between ethics and religion is yet to receive adequate consideration in academic research (Vitell, 2009). Moreover, some researchers tie ethics to morality (Lau, 2010; Wurthmann, 2013), highlighting how different religions embrace features prescribing moral and ethical codes (Atran, 2004).

Islam is the sole legitimate source of morality, and the teachings of the Quran firmly emphasize loyalty and obedience to one's leader. Thus, the methods adopted to exercise managerial practices and the application of business ethics in the Islamic context differ from the traditional understanding of management practices, which is rooted in Western contexts. According to (Turner & Nasir, 2016), Islam brought about the success of the urban dwellers over desert inhabitants. Both the Holy Quran and the Sunnah, provide particular direction in many areas of business practices. The Holy Qur'an states, "Be fair and honest and do not depart from justice in all human affairs including business transactions" (Qur'an 5:8; 3:161, Al-Bukhari 3: Hadith No 328). Consequently, all Muslims are required to practice their business based on Islamic ethical codes and without deviating from the principles of Islam (Mababaya, 2002).

### Islamic Work Ethics in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's social, political, corporate, and legal systems are founded on Islamic instructions and values. Theoretical debates in the domain of business ethics and values in Islamic contexts and Saudi Arabia, in particular, recognize Islam as setting out important principles that guide individuals' fundamental judgments and behaviour. The associated values impose a social understanding and cognition that informs individuals' adaption to their environment, also raising implications regarding their attitudes and behaviour.

Previous studies have neglected to research the impact of Islamic philosophy on ethical practices in business contexts. Moreover, Islam encourages Muslims to be self-regulating in terms of their observance of Islamic values and Quranic principles, and the guidance of the Prophet Mohammed PBUH. These values and principles continue to be upheld in Saudi society today.

According to Islamic sharia, business practices ought to be reported and formalized, and all parts of the transactions should respect the agreements. As (Kalliny, Cruthirds, & Minor, 2006) state, Arab traders are probably unlikely to break an agreement since it is documented because this action is prohibited and consider as a sin in Islam. As indicated by the Qur'an, it is a religious commitment for a Muslim to keep his word; in Arabic culture also, it is unacceptable for someone not to do what was promised (Kalliny *et al.*, 2006).

In Saudi society, individuals act and behave according to Islamic moral codes, although arguably, conservative individuals with a higher

level of religiosity do not always strive to meet high ethical standards (Parboteeah, Hoegl, & Cullen, 2008). Typically, in order to gain insight and an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, it is necessary to explore its context (Bryman, 2016; King, Cassell, & Symon, 1994). In this paper, the context is Saudi Arabia, a setting which is significantly impacted by Islam, as religious belief informs how individuals in Saudi Arabia act. By understanding the culture of Saudi Arabia as an Islamic society, this paper seeks to propose a factor such as Islamic Work Ethics that may be considered as an effective element in Saudi culture that strengthens the Saudi employees' faith and confidence in their abilities and encourage them to confront any abusive supervision that affect their belief in themselves and their self-efficacy.

### Findings

This paper refers to the negative effect of abusive supervision on the employee's self-efficacy in the workplace. It commences the review by exploring definitions of abusive supervision, its general impacts, and consequences. Findings conceptualize abusive supervision under Interpersonal Justice Theory. Based on the Interpersonal Justice Theory, this paper suggests that abusive supervision harm subordinates' psychological well-being. After that present the correlation between Abusive supervisions and Interpersonal Justice Theory. From the literature reviews, it is predictable that employees with high Islamic Work Ethics may demonstrate a high level of self-efficacy that buffer the negative attitude of the abusive supervisions from supervisors in the workplace than those with low Islamic work ethics.

Literature reviews bring to surface the importance of the direct effect of abusive supervision on employee self-efficacy and how Islamic Work Ethics might moderate the relationship between abusive supervision and employee's self-efficacy. Hence, it is predictable that if an employee adopts Islamic work ethics, then he might not be affected by abusive supervision dramatically. The paper advocates the use of Islamic Work Ethics to enhance employee's self-efficacy against the continuing abusive attitudes by supervisors toward their subordinates.

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