

Heir of abusive supervision and toxic leadership: a phenomenological approach

Deepika Swain, Tony John, Arpita Jena, Sanjeet Singh

¹ & ² Doctoral scholar, ³ Compliance and Liasoning officer, ⁴ Professor
^{1,2,3} School of Human Resource Management, XIM University, Bhubaneswar, India
⁴ Chandigarh University

Abstract - Workplace bullying, abusive supervision, toxic leadership, and ulterior intentions are some of the hotcakes in research that share close nexus with crunched business productivity. Subjectivity and jealousy, a fatal combination, become deadly when befriended with power. The current phenomenological study on 23 professionals (12 from corporate and 11 from academics) highlights dipping workplace engagement, employee silence, incremental turnover intention, compromised citizenship behaviour, and higher knowledge-hiding intentions as the results of abusive supervision and toxic leadership (ASTL). It suggests three organisational implications to be incorporated, which will initiate the expected socio-cultural changes, finally contributing to the theoretical implications.

Index Terms - Abusive Supervision, Toxic Leadership, Employee Silence, Knowledge Hiding, Organisational Productivity

I. INTRODUCTION

Workplace bullying, abusive supervision, toxic leadership, and ulterior intentions are some of the hotcakes in research that share close nexus with crunched business productivity. Subjectivity and jealousy, a fatal combination, become deadly when befriended with power (Bikos, 2023). Under the aegis of chauvinism and inequality, gender bias clouds top-notch positions in organisations, increasing the influence of abusive supervision and toxic leadership (ASTL), which stands to be the study's focus. However, despite displaying their aptness and allyship to bear the responsibilities: direct and extended, towards others, it becomes reportedly destructive, abusive and toxic (Panigrahi, 2022). As per Women in the Workplace Statistics 101 (2022), 27.1% of women are managers and leaders. Contemporary research emphasizes the unignorable impact of ASTL on employees' mental and emotional health (Bikos, 2023), with a comparatively higher impact on female employees (Farghaly and Zeid, 2023). Different studies claim abusive leadership to be gender indifferent (Liang et al., 2021; Stempel and Rigotti, 2018); however, the claim to counter it is more potent (Farghaly and Zeid, 2023; Shipl et al., 2022). Hence, research attention to this concern becomes incrementally pertinent.

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

The concern of ASTL is backed by previous research. Abusive supervision and workplace bullying are inverse to employee performance (Economic Times, 2019), and workplace pleasure leads to work perfection (Pace et al., 2022). The close connection between higher education institutions and corporate is evident as the quality of future managers depends on the integrity of the person who is presently a student. ASTL creates barriers to teaching innovations, interfering in the natural making of a high-integrity future manager. The nuisance goes further, demoralising and corrupting academic scholars, the future teachers, causing drop-outs from Ph. D. programs (Skopek et al., 2022) or never joining academia (Skakni et al., 2022), adding to the concern.

The gradual dilution of quality as a result of the display of ASTL by a few is evinced to rushing many towards a dark future. Post-covid, the world stood testimony to the importance of life, empathy, and togetherness. Recently regained stability may soon get extinct if we do not forge happiness and productivity. Employees who are offered freedom to choose their binge time are found to be more productive vis-à-vis an un-intervened group (Segal, 2022).

III. METHODOLOGY

The proposed methodology for understanding the impact of ASTL is a phenomenological study, as we have observed it in groups of higher education institutes of rich NIRF ranking and academic repute in Eastern India. The study was conducted on 23 professionals, 12 from corporate and 11 from academics, from five different organizations (three corporate organisations and two academic institutions) of repute. The verbatim statements, field notes, and observation cues were collected from them by conducting respondent-paced semi-structured interviews. Prior consent was taken to record the interview, start-to-end, in the video, audio-only, or personal notes. Of the 23, only one agreed to the video recording, 11 agreed to audio-only recording, and 11 gave their consonance only to become part of this study. Despite the subject's privacy commitment, we could get around 50% of participants' interviews recorded. The collected information was divided into quotes by analysing their statements. Field notes and observation cues were incorporated to analyze the content and identify themes.

The next part of the study will narrate the findings (the derived themes), discussions (highlighting the theoretical, organisational, and socio-cultural implications), limitations, the future scope of the research study, and a comprehensive conclusion.

IV. FINDINGS

The phenomenon of ASTL is observed in several organisational set-ups (Panigrahi, 2022). Consequently, a vicious cycle grows incrementally detrimental with the completion of each iteration, where abusive supervision of leaders creates knowledge-hiding intentions (Swain and Jena, 2022), vindictive employees aiding over-protection and added intensity to the abusive supervision. The counter-productive cycle continues with slow yet subtle changes establishing a focus shift from a healthy collaboration to unhealthy competition.

The concern is not limited to a particular sector or geographical coordinate; it is a general occurrence across sectors, fields, organisations, and locations. Managers often blindfold to the phenomenon partly due to a lack of interest and also due to the absence of pieces of

evidence. The quotes implicitly discussed dipping workplace engagement, employee silence, incremental turnover intention, compromised citizenship behaviour, and higher knowledge hiding intentions. The thematic analysis revealed an interesting observation on the role of open communication and work flexibility. The theme is connected to prior research (Marks, 2022; Segal, 2022).

V. DISCUSSION

We wish to join the harbingers in belling the cat, ASTL, to prepare to promote gender-unbiased righteous leaders. Its applicability can be ensured by taking measures like, firstly, high empathy at the top-level management members; secondly, identifying transformational leaders; thirdly, ensuring their righteousness through 360-degree feedback; and finally, empowering the chosen lot. Power corrupts and powerlessness puppets; hence power in righteous control is crucial and desirable. The saying, “if idiots surround you, you will die early”, has evolved with time, where an organization will face premature death if selfish and incompetent leaders surround it. The dip in organizational citizenship behaviour, loyalty, trust, brand image, and resultant dubious sustainability is an infinitesimally small part of the exhaustive list of consequences.

The central focus of the discussion is on the organisational implication, which is expected to make sociocultural changes, and finally contribute to the theoretical implications.

VI. LIMITATION

The current study has three limitations. Firstly, it is conducted in a country believing in collectivism, which may need to be more relevant in an ambience of an individualistic school of thought. Secondly, the phenomenological study was conducted on corporates and academics. However, each of the two can be further fragmented, meaningfully increasing the scope of the study. Lastly, the study span of the phenomena was shorter (8 months).

VI. SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The scope of research can be described as follows. Future researchers may conduct a longitudinal phenomenological study to improve the understanding and expand the applicability of its findings. Respondent selection from a cross-country pool will add to the study's rigour. Finally, the qualitative analysis can be validated quantitatively, increasing the organisational ease in incorporating the suggestions to their respective systems.

VII. CONCLUSION

ASTL is a negative attribute often found in organisations. However, research also supports the hyped ASTL and organisational productivity relationship (Asim et al., 2023). Consideration of the countering evidence and alignment of personal, professional, and societal goals requires a dynamic arrangement. The nexus of ASTL with knowledge-hiding behavior may worsen the condition highlighted in the findings of the study, with the latter's potential individually impacting organisational productivity negatively (Swain and Jena, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2022).

VII. REFERENCES

- [1] Asim, M., Liu, Z., Nadeem, M.A., Ghani, U., Khalid, J., & Xu, Y. (2023) Relationship of abusive supervision and employees' helping behaviors: moderated-mediation perspective, *International Journal of Conflict Management*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCM-11-2021-0185>
- [2] Bikos, L. J. (2023) “When they hand you your uniform, they forget to say, ‘Hand me your soul’”: Incidents and Impacts of Institutional Betrayal in Canadian Police Services, *Social Problems*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spac062>
- [3] Economic Times (2019) Bullying bosses negatively impact employee performance, behavior: Study, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/jobs/bullying-bosses-negatively-impact-employee-performance-behaviour-study/articleshow/68343605.cms>
- [4] Farghaly A. & Zeid, A. (2023) The relationship between toxic leadership and organizational performance: the mediating effect of nurses' silence, *BMC Nursing*, 22(4), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-022-01167-8>
- [5] Marks, A. (2022) Envoy Return to the Workplace Report reveals work flexibility is the new employee benefit, Hybrid works, <https://envoy.com/blog/envoy-return-to-workplace-report-reveals-work-flexibility-is-new-hr-benefit/>
- [6] Nguyen, T., Malik, A., & Budhwar, P. (2022) Knowledge hiding in organizational crisis: The moderating role of leadership, *Journal of Business Research*, 139, 161-172, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.09.026>.
- [7] Pace, F., Sciotto, G., & Russo, L. (2022) Meaningful work, pleasure in working, and the moderating effects of deep acting and COVID - 19 on nurses' work, *Nursing Forum*, 57(6), <https://doi.org/10.1111/nuf.12787>
- [8] Panigrahi, S. (2022) Analysis of destructive leadership behaviour from real time results: Evidence from an Indian University, *Public Integrity*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2022.2054572>
- [9] Segal, E. (2022) Flexibility is the most empowering benefit for employees: New Poll, *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/edwardsegal/2022/02/04/flexibility-is-the-most-empowering-benefit-for-employees-new-poll/?sh=23a88de28b19>
- [10] Shen, W., Liang, L. H., Brown, D. J., Ni, D., & Zheng, X. (2021). Subordinate poor performance as a stressor on leader well-being: The mediating role of abusive supervision and the moderating role of motives for abuse. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 26(6), pp. 491–506. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000307>
- [11] Shipl, A. M. A. E. F., Nabawy, Z. M., & Ashour, H. M. A. (2022) The relationship between toxic leadership and nurses' followership effectiveness, *Central European Journal of Nursing and Midwifery*, 13(4), pp. 730-740, <https://doi.org/10.15452/cejnm.2022.13.0003>
- [12] Skakni, I., Inouye, K., & McAlpine, L. (2022) PhD holders entering non-academic workplaces: organisational culture shock, *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(6), pp. 1271-1283, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2021.187665>
- [13] Skopek, J., Triventi, M., & Blossfeld, H. P. (2022) How do institutional factors shape PhD completion rates? An analysis of long-term changes in a European doctoral program, *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(2), pp. 318-337, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1744125>
- [14] Swain, D. & Jena, L. K. (2022) Redefining knowledge hiding in the workplace: an in-depth qualitative study, *Development and Learning in Organizations*, <https://doi.org/10.1108/DLO-06-2022-0106>

