



Perceptions of Ethical Leadership as a Mediator of the Relationship between Abusive Supervision and Work Behaviors

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Abstract

In this study, the authors examine the impact of perceptions of ethical leadership as a mediator of the relationships between abusive supervision and the work-related outcomes of task performance and task-focused organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) after one year. Using hierarchical linear modeling analyses and a time-lagged sample of 121 matched pairs suggested that abusive supervision had a direct effect on perceptions of ethical leadership one year after the abuse occurred. Moreover, results showed that perceptions of ethical leadership fully mediated the relations between abusive supervision and task-focused OCB rated by leaders after one year, but not task performance.

Keywords: abusive supervision, ethical leadership, task performance, task-focused OCB

Introduction

The recent financial crisis has reignited the debate within academic and mainstream discussions surrounding the importance of ethical leadership. The global catastrophe that resulted in the collapse of banks, markets, and jobs revealed the widespread culture of corporate scandals, unrestrained greed, and unethical behavior (Donaldson, 2012). Consequently, the crisis served as a reminder of the vast power and responsibility that leaders hold and the need for strong ethical leadership to not only overcome the crisis, but to prevent such a catastrophe from reoccurring. Thus, it is important to continue to explore the guiding principles for ethical leadership (Bligh, Kohles, Pearce, Justin, & Stovall, 2007; Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka, 2009).

Ethical leadership refers to “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005). Ethical leaders model appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships such that they appear credible, trustworthy, honest, and fair in their decision-making (Brown et al., 2005; Trevino, Hartman, & Brown, 2000). Ethical leaders also openly promote ethical behavior and attempt to influence followers’ actions through rewards and punishments (Bandura, 1977; Davis & Rothstein, 2006; Brown et al., 2005; Falkenberg & Herremans, 1995; Trevino et al., 2000).

Much of the research on ethical leadership to date has focused on examining the impact that such leaders have on the perceptions and behaviors of followers (Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2011). Not surprisingly, ethical leadership has been linked to a host of valued individual and organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, helping behaviors, positive perceptions of the leader, and organizational commitment to name a few (Brown et al., 2005; Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009; Neubert, Carlson, Kacmar, Roberts, & Chonko, 2009). Although far less attention has been paid to exploring the drivers of ethical leadership, recent studies have found a positive relationship with conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotional stability (Kalshoven et al., 2011), moral reasoning, locus of control (Brown & Trevino, 2006), moral development (Jordan, Brown, Trevino, & Finkelstein, 2011), moral identity symbolization, and internalization (Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2012). As a means of bridging the gap between the study of antecedents and consequences of ethical leadership, we offer a model that positions perceptions of ethical leadership as a mediating variable.

One unique aspect of the current study is the antecedent selection. Specifically, we focus on abusive supervision. Abusive supervision refers to followers’ “perceptions of the extent to which their leaders engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact” (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Previous findings indicate that abusive supervision can have long lasting and notable effects that result in negative organizational consequences (Aryee et al., 2007; Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Burton & Hoobler, 2006; Detert, Trevino, Burris, & Andiappan, 2007; Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002; Ito, Larsen, Smith, & Cacioppo, 1998; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Tepper, 2000, 2007; Tepper, Duffy, & Shaw, 2001; Tepper, Henle, Lambert, Giacalone, & Duffy, 2008; Thau et al., 2009; Yagil, 2006; Zellars et al., 2002).

Researchers have argued that leaders who exhibit positive leadership styles, one of which is ethical leadership, can be perceived by their followers as acting unethically (Bass, 1985, 1998; House & Aditya, 1997). However, the reverse – inappropriate leader behaviors being viewed as ethical by their followers – also may be true. To empirically examine this possibility, our study explores the enduring impact of abusive supervision on followers’ perceptions of ethical

leadership and subsequent actions and reactions of the abused followers. More specifically, the present study, examines whether followers' perceptions of ethical leadership mediate the relationships between past abusive leader behaviors and the subsequent individual outcomes of in-role and extra-role performance.

We draw on social exchange theory (SET) to explain the influence that abusive supervision has on perceptions of ethical leadership and subsequent follower behaviors (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). SET predicts that when leaders engage in valued behaviors targeted toward followers these behaviors will create feelings of obligation to reciprocate valued behaviors in the future (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). However, when leaders engage in unwanted or inappropriate abusive behaviors, rather than experiencing feelings of indebtedness and obligation, abused followers may instead respond in a retaliatory, or "an eye for an eye" (Gouldner, 1960) manner. In addition, we submit that abusive behavior may negatively impact the followers' perceptions of their leader's ethicality.

The current study makes a number of contributions. First, by examining the impact that a leader's abusive behavior may have on followers' perceptions of ethical leadership, we further enhance our understanding of how leader behaviors may influence followers' perceptions of leader ethicality. By doing so through a social exchange theory lens, we gain a greater understanding of how abusive supervision may generate negative exchanges. The second objective of the study is to explore the long-term effect of abusive leader behavior on follower perceptions of ethical leadership and subsequent follower behaviors. Researchers have empirically shown that events with a negative valence, such as abusive supervision, have a greater impact on individuals than do those with a positive valence, and that negative events also have more lasting effects (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Ito, Larsen, Smith, & Cacioppo, 1998; Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Such findings highlight the importance of examining phenomena, especially negative ones, over time in order to fully understand them (Mitchell & James, 2001). The impact that abusive leader behavior has on followers' may dissipate slowly and play a major role in the impressions created of the leader. Ito et al. (1998) offer support for our line of reasoning when they note that "negative information more strongly influences people's evaluations than comparably extreme positive information" and contend "impression formation is one area in which this is especially evident" (p. 887). The negative impressions formed about their abusive supervisor may influence followers' behaviors over time, resulting in enduring negative consequences for organizations.

Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

In the present study, we propose and test the mediated model shown in Figure 1. This model illustrates how perceptions of leader ethicality become a mechanism through which abusive leader behaviors are translated into negative follower behaviors. The model shows how the perceptions of a leader's abusive behavior impacts a follower's beliefs about his/her leader's ethicality and proceeds to affect aspects of the follower's work environment such as job performance or behaviors that may contribute to effective functioning of the group or organization. We propose that abusive supervisory behaviors will have long lasting effects on followers and will lead to followers' negative evaluations of the leader's ethicality long after the initial abuse. These negative evaluations of a leader's ethicality will lead to reduced levels of job performance and task-focused organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB).

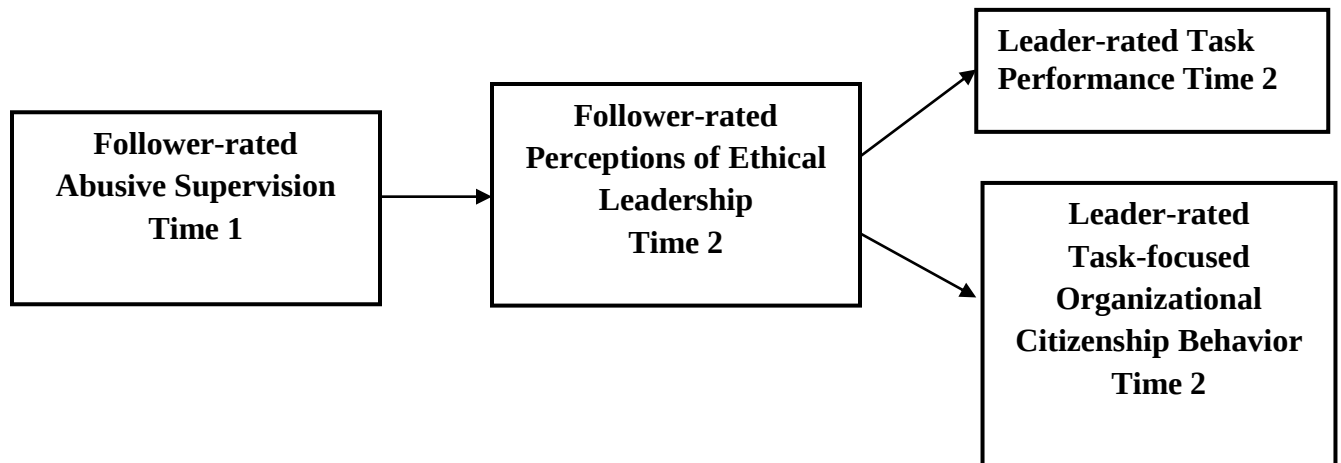


Figure 1. Mediating effect of perceptions of ethical leadership on the relationship between abusive supervision and in-role and extra-role behaviors.

Social Exchange Theory

Social behavior is rooted in exchanges (Homans, 1961). The associations we develop with others are based on exchanges of resources, courtesies, and ideas that can be tangible or intangible. These exchanges form the basis for interpersonal relationships (Blau, 1964). Despite the different views of social exchange, theorists seem to agree that the exchange process is premised by two central characteristics: self-interest and interdependence (Lawler & Thye, 1999). Social exchanges are voluntary actions by self-interested actors who have something valued by others and transact with others based on the expected rewards that the exchange will bring (Blau, 1964; Lawler & Thye, 1999). The exchange process, therefore, requires a bidirectional transaction in which one party gives something of value and the other returns something of value (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

An individual's tendency to reciprocate, however, is contingent upon his or her perception of rewards and costs. Individuals engage in the exchange process in order to maximize benefits and minimize costs; the greater the perceived outcome benefits (rewards and resources), the more likely the individual is to reciprocate and subsequently develop a stronger relationship. Thus, transactions that result in a reciprocated advantage will be sustained while those that lack reciprocity and one party no longer draws personal advantages from the relationship will likely be discontinued. Unlike economic exchange where value equivalencies of each party's obligation are clear, social exchanges are often unspecified and "lack a standard of value against which" benefits can be measured (Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997, p. 79). Due to its ambiguity, exchange balances are not negotiated; that is, the balance of the exchange is left to the discretion of the individual who makes it (Blau, 1964). Despite the difficulty in quantifying benefits, social exchanges generate feelings of personal obligation (Liden et al., 1997). The obligation to reciprocate a benefit in kind "merely reinforces and stabilizes tendencies inherent in the character of social exchange itself" (Blau, 1964, p. 92). Self-interested individuals will reciprocate their obligations in order to continue receiving benefits (Blau, 1964). Despite the lack of formal contracts guiding social exchanges, theorists contend that individuals will honor their social obligations (Blau, 1964).

Social exchanges, however, do not always consist of *positive* quid pro quo transactions. Exchanges consist of various dimensions that span a continuum (Sahlins, 1972). At one end of the scale we find generalized exchanges in line with Blau's (1964) notion of positive mutual obligation ("I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine"). Generalized transactions are characterized by low exchange equivalency, little concern surrounding the immediacy in which the transaction is completed, and a genuine concern for the other party. Thus, generalized reciprocity involves exchanges that are altruistic in nature. At the opposite end of the continuum, negative exchanges are characterized by extreme exchange equivalence, expectations of immediate reciprocity, and self-interest and often transpire in the exchange of violent or aggressive acts intended to hurt the other individual (Liden et al., 1997). Actors who adopt a negative reciprocity orientation may feel that adverse actions or the mistreatment by others warrants like actions to be returned (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Eisenberger, Lynch, Aselage, & Rohdieck, 2004; Gallucci & Perugini, 2003; Perugini, Gallucci, Presaghi, & Ercolani, 2003).

Abusive Supervision and Perceptions of Ethical Leadership

Abusive supervision is a low-base rate phenomenon reflected by behaviors such as undermining, demeaning, and belittling of the followers (Tepper, 2000). Interestingly, perceptions of abuse are contextual and specific to the individual. Thus, abuse, like other negative workplace perceptions (Cropanzano, Howes, Grandy, & Toth, 1997; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992), is in the eye of the beholder. As such, the same behavior may be viewed as abusive by one individual and completely ignored by another.

Abusive supervision has been conceptualized as a subjective assessment about a leader's behavior toward an employee over time. While it has been said, time heals all wounds, research suggests that followers who are the targets of abusive behaviors are likely to be attuned to the negative interactions with their leaders and recall these exchanges with greater affect than positive interactions (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2003). In addition, the negative information that is derived from abusive supervision will receive more mental reflection by followers than positive information and will play an integral role in forming impressions of the leader over time (Baumeister et al., 2001; Tepper, Moss, Lockhart, & Carr, 2007). Given that followers expect their leaders to treat them humanely, these abusive acts may violate social and situational pressures and norms that are the foundation of the exchange rules, and likely will result in followers making negative inferences about their leaders (Baumeister et al., 2001). One possible negative inference is that the behaviors of the leader lack integrity creating the perception of an unethical leader. It is likely that followers' impressions will be guided more by negative than positive events and that these negative events will remain prominent in the minds of the followers, even as time continues to elapse (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989; Wright, 1991). Therefore, followers may perceive leaders who engage in these sustained acts of abusive behaviors as unethical. Formally stated we predict that:

Hypothesis 1: Abusive supervision at time 1 will be negatively related to perceptions of ethical leadership at time 2 after controlling for abusive supervision at time 2.

The Mediating Effect of Perceived Ethical Leadership

Leaders who are perceived as ethical by their followers create a valued environment through sustained collegial interactions (Brown et al., 2005; Trevino, Brown, & Hartman, 2003; Brown & Trevino, 2006). According to SET (Blau, 1964), followers who are the beneficiaries of these respectful interactions with their ethical leaders will garner stronger feelings of belonging and indebtedness. Because the followers feel a sense of obligation to reciprocate in a like manner to a leader they perceive to be ethical and recognize the relationship as one of a valued social exchange, they will be more likely to produce valuable organizational outcomes as compared to their counterparts who report to a leader they perceive to be unethical (Brown et al., 2005).

Considered a critical outcome, performance is one of the most widely studied employee behaviors in the management literature (Bommer, Johnson, Rich, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 1995). Performance has been studied from a multidimensional perspective to include in-role and extra-role performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993; Motowidlo, 2003). In-role or task performance is related to the idea of productivity and includes the technical tasks completed by individuals in the workplace as identified by the job description (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993; Motowidlo, 2003). In addition to performing tasks required by the job, employees also can engage in discretionary behaviors that are not required by formal job descriptions. These types of behaviors have been referred to as OCB (Ilies, Scott, & Judge, 2006; Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006). One form of OCB is task-focused (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002). These behaviors involve the unsolicited exchange of work-related resources such as providing advice or assistance in solving work-related problems. Applying the tenets of SET, we submit that followers who perceive their leaders to be ethical may reciprocate the ethical treatment they receive by increasing their work efforts through both task performance and task-focused OCB (Morrison, 1994).

The preceding ideas are predicated on the affirming nature of the perceptions of ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005). However, abusive supervision would suggest that leaders in organizations are not limited to only demonstrating supportive behaviors. When a leader engages in abusive behaviors, the follower considers a series of responses to these unwanted behaviors. Utilizing the tenets of social exchange (Blau, 1964), the follower may consider the actions of the leader as a violation of expected norms and thus feel that the actions s/he returns should be like those received. In other words, as the abuse continues over time, the follower may feel a reduced obligation to engage in behaviors that are in the best interest of the leader and the organization the leader represents.

Further acknowledging the role of social exchange, as this relationship continues to formulate, followers will not have a desire to provide positive resources to a leader they perceive to be unethical. Thus, those who have formed such impressions will begin to reduce the resources exchanged, including changes in performance as the follower will not feel an obligation to engage in behaviors that would provide satisfaction for a leader they perceive to be unethical. Furthermore, the behaviors of the leader causing the perceptions of ethicality produce large, consistent, and lasting effects that lead to harmful consequences. In particular, because the negative effects of abuse will slowly disappear, the leader engaged in the exchange relationship will ultimately recognize the change in behaviors of the followers over an extended period of time. The preceding arguments combine to form a mediated relationship and suggest the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: Perceptions of ethical leadership mediate the relationships between abusive supervision at time 1 and the outcomes at time 2 of (a) task performance and (b) task-focused organizational citizenship behavior after controlling for abusive supervision at time 2.

Method

Procedure and Sample

Data were collected from employees at two points in time as well as from their immediate supervisors at time 2. All respondents were employees of a state agency in a southern state that focused on family related health issues such as teenage pregnancy and parental education. Data collection procedures were approved by both the state's and the authors' university's Institutional Review Boards (IRB). The first step in data collection was an introductory email sent to all employees by the division director. The introductory email included a description of the study, how the information would be gathered and reported, assurances of respondents' confidentiality, how the results of the survey would be used, and a request for their voluntary participation in the study.

Next, each employee received a personalized email from the researchers. The second email contained a hotlink to an electronic survey and a request to complete the survey within a 3-week window. In order to match the data supplied by the leaders to the data supplied by the followers, the name of the followers' immediate leader was included on the follower survey. Twelve months after the follower data collection efforts we asked the leaders to rate each of their direct reports' task related job performance and task-focused OCB. Our one year time lapse was selected to match the twelve-month review process used by the agency.

Eliminating surveys with missing data, those that could not be matched to a leader, and followers who did not complete surveys at both times produced a sample of 121 (58% response rate) responses. The follower sample was 72% female and 64% Caucasian with an average age of 46.23 years ($sd = 7.35$) and an average organizational tenure of 10.16 years ($sd = 6.24$). Thirty-four leaders rated the 121 followers, resulting in an average of 3.56 ratings per leader. The leaders were 65% female and 70% Caucasian with an average age of 47.22 years ($sd = 5.95$). They had worked for the organization an average of 14.53 years ($sd = 8.38$) and in their current leadership role 5.46 years ($sd = 4.62$).

Measures

Unless otherwise noted, all items on the survey were responded to on a 5-point Likert scale. The anchors for the scale were strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The items in the scales were averaged to create an overall mean for each variable. The items were coded such that high values represent high levels of the constructs. Items used in this study to measure abusive supervision were from Tepper (2000) and are as follows: My boss makes negative comments about me to others, My boss gives me the silent treatment, My boss expresses anger at me when he/she is mad for another reason, My boss is rude to me, My boss breaks promises he/she makes, My boss puts me down in front of others.

Time 1 Measure from Followers: Abusive supervision. Followers rated the level of abusive supervision they experienced using six items from Tepper's (2000) measure of abusive supervision ($\alpha = .95$). The items were chosen by experts in the area to make sure that they appropriately tapped the full abusive supervision construct. To confirm that the reduced scale adequately tapped the construct of interest we correlated our scale using data with a 15-item version of the measure. Results ($r = .96$) suggested that the reduced version is a close approximation to the full scale.¹ The six items that we used are provided in the Appendix.

Time 2 Measures from Followers

Perceptions of ethical leadership. Brown et al. (2005) developed and validated the 10-item ($\alpha = .91$) ethical leadership scale used by the followers in this study. An example item is, "My supervisor makes fair and balanced decisions."

Abusive supervision. Followers rated their perceived level of abusive supervision using the same six items from Tepper's (2000) measure of abusive supervision ($\alpha = .93$).

Time 2 Measures from Leaders

Task performance. We assessed the task dimension of job performance using concurrent leader ratings. To accomplish this we utilized the 5-item scale ($\alpha = .85$) developed by Podsakoff and MacKenzie (1989). A sample item included "This worker always completes the duties specified in his/her job description."

Task-focused organization citizenship behavior. Leaders also rated the followers' task-focused citizenship behavior using a 5-item scale ($\alpha = .94$) developed by Settoon and Mossholder (2002). The original Settoon and Mossholder task-focused citizenship behavior scale included six items, but we dropped the item that double loaded in their initial analyses. A sample item is "This subordinate takes on extra responsibilities in order to help coworkers when things get demanding at work."

Control Variables

Based on the extant literature and due to their established relationships with variables of interest in the study (e.g., Liden, Erdogan, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2006; Sturman, 2003), we controlled for job tenure, organizational tenure, age, and sex. All of these values were provided by the followers at time 1. In addition, to explicitly explore the lingering effect of abusive supervision, we controlled for follower rated abusive supervision at time 2.

Results

Check for Non-independence of Our Data

The participants in this study were from the same organization, with many reporting to the same leaders. Thus, there is the potential that our data are not independent and need to be analyzed at two levels (the individual level and the leader level). To determine the appropriate

level of analysis we estimated a null model with no predictors for our dependent variables. The results of these analyses showed that there was between-leader variation in performance ($\chi^2=145.97, p<.001, ICC = .49$) and task-focused OCB ratings ($\chi^2=104.90, p<.001, ICC = .39$). Based on these results, we analyzed our data using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) (Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, Congdon, & du Toit, 2004). We also estimated a null model for both measures of abusive supervision as the leader the followers rated varied. Once again, the analyses were significant (abusive supervision time 1 $\chi^2=53.73, p<.01, ICC = .16$ and abusive supervision time 2 $\chi^2=76.47, p<.01, ICC = .28$). Given these results we fixed the variance components for the demographic control variables, but treated all other variables as random.

Our HLM analyses used grand mean centering and followed the mediation procedure outlined by MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, and Sheets (2002). In step 1, the independent variable should be significantly related to the mediator variable. In the second step, the mediating variable should be related to the dependent variable with the independent variable included in the equation. If the independent variable remains significant, but the gamma value drops when the mediator is included, partial mediation is present. However, if the gamma value for the independent variable becomes nonsignificant when the mediator is included, complete mediation is present. This series of analyses was conducted two times, once for each dependent variable. We included the control variables on every step. We used Snijders and Bosker's (1999) pseudo R^2 formula for calculating the R^2 values we report.

Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations

Table 1 provides the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among the study's variables. As expected, the levels of abusive supervision reported were relatively low (mean = 1.45 at time 1 and 1.46 at time 2) and positively skewed. However, abusive supervision was significantly related to both dependent variables in our study suggesting that despite the low levels, our study would be able to sufficiently detect our hypothesized relationships. Additionally, the low levels of abusive supervision are similar to those found in previous studies where mean levels of abusive supervision have ranged from lows of 1.26 (sample 1 in Tepper, Duffy, Hoobler, & Ensley, 2004) and 1.38 (Tepper, 2000) to highs of 1.70 (Thau, Bennett, Mitchell, & Marrs, 2009; Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002) and 1.87 (Aryee, Sun, Chen, & Debrah, 2008).

As some of the correlations among variables reported by the same respondents exceeded .60, we followed the procedure outlined by Fornell and Larcker (1981) to test the discriminant validity of our scales. Specifically, we calculated the square root of the average variance explained for all variables in our study. To demonstrate discriminant validity, this value (presented on the diagonal in Table 1) must exceed the corresponding latent variable correlations in the same row and column. If this condition is met, then there is evidence that the variance shared between any two constructs represented by the correlation is less than the average variance explained by the items within the scale. As shown in Table 1, this condition is met for all variables in our study.



Table 1

Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Subordinate Values										
1. Abusive Supervision (T1)	1.45	0.60	.80							
2. Perceptions of Ethical Leadership (T2)	3.96	0.71	-0.59***	.80						
3. Abusive Supervision (T2)	1.46	0.69	0.47***	-0.72***	.83					
4. Job Tenure	4.79	2.95	-0.07	0.15	-0.01					
5. Organizational Tenure	10.16	6.24	0.00	0.02	0.07	0.32***				
6. Age	46.23	7.35	0.04	-0.09	0.12	0.21*	0.22*			
7. Sex	1.28	0.36	0.24**	-0.18*	0.10	0.13*	0.21*	0.18*		
Supervisor Values										
8. Job Performance (T2)	4.38	0.64	-0.24**	0.38***	-0.32***	-0.06	-0.02	-0.10	.84	
9. Task-focused OCB (T2)	3.99	0.75	-0.24**	0.41***	-0.29***	-0.03	-0.05	-0.02	0.52***	.88

Note. N = 121. Values on the diagonal are the square root of the average variance explained which must be larger than all zero-order correlations in the row and column in which they appear to demonstrate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). OCB = Organizational Citizenship Behaviors. T1 = Time 1. T2 = Time 2.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2

Results of Confirmatory Factor Analyses of the Focal Constructs

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
Hypothesized Model (5-factor)	601	395	--	--	.96	.90	.077
4-Factor Model 1 (combining Perceptions of Ethical Leadership and Abusive Supervision)	964	399	243*	4	.92	.87	.126
3-Factor Model 2 (combining dependent variables)	1027	402	426*	7	.91	.85	.132
1-Factor Model 3	2777	405	2176*	10	.74	.88	.257

Note. N = 121. CFI = Comparative Fit Index; NFI = Normed Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

* $p < .05$.

Finally, we used a covariance matrix as input and a maximum likelihood estimation via LISREL 8.80 to estimate a 5-factor measurement model as well as 3 alternative nested models that combined highly correlated scales into one factor. A description of the models and their results are shown in Table 2. Supporting the independence of the five focal constructs, results indicated that the hypothesized 5-factor model fit the data better than any of the alternative models.

Hierarchical Linear Modeling Results

The results of our mediation analyses are presented in Table 3. As this table demonstrates, step 1 was satisfied as followers' abusive supervision ratings at time 1 were a significant predictor of followers' perceptions of ethical leadership ratings at time 2 after controlling for followers' abusive supervision ratings at time 2. This finding demonstrates support for hypothesis 1 as well as for the notion that abusive supervision has a lingering effect.

Table 3

Hierarchical Linear Modeling Results

Variable	Step 1 IV → MED		Step 2 IV/MED → DV Job Performance(T2)		Step 2 IV/MED → DV Task-focused OCB (T2)	
	γ	SE	γ	SE	γ	SE
Controls						
Sex	-0.20	0.16	-0.06	0.14	-0.12	0.16
Job Tenure	0.02*	0.02	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00
Organizational Tenure	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00
Age	0.00	0.01	-0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01
Abusive Supervision (T2)	-0.62***	0.08	-0.07	0.09	0.08	0.11
Independent Variable						
Abusive Supervision (T1)	-0.33**		-0.13*	0.07	-0.04	0.07
	0.12					
Mediator						
Perceptions of Ethical Leadership (T2)			0.08	0.10	0.36**	0.12
ΔR ²	.61		.00		.03	

Note. N = 121. IV = Independent Variable; DV = Dependent Variable; MED = Mediator; OCB = Organizational Citizenship Behavior; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2. R² values calculated with Snijders and Bosker's (1999) formula.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Step 2 in the mediation analysis tests, shown in Table 3, included both the mediator and the independent variable in the analyses. Full mediation was found for task-focused OCB as the gamma for abusive supervision at time 1 became insignificant while the gamma for the mediator, perceptions of ethical leadership at time 2, remained significant. The additional percentage of variance explained in task-focused OCB by perceptions of ethical leadership over and above that explained by abusive supervision at time 1 and time 2 was 3%. Results for task performance did not support mediation, but rather a main effect for abusive supervision. Thus, Hypothesis 2a was not supported.

To confirm our interpretation that perceptions of ethical leadership fully mediated the association between abusive supervision and task-focused OCB we employed Sobel tests to assess the significance of indirect effects (MacKinnon et al., 2002; Sobel, 1982). Sobel tests involve calculating the magnitude of the unstandardized indirect effect and its accompanying standard error. The ratio of the indirect effect over its standard error, referred to as the Sobel statistic, is then compared to a z-distribution to determine the statistical significance of the indirect effect. Results from the Sobel tests indicated that the indirect effect of abusive supervision through perceptions of ethical leadership on task-focused OCBs ($z = -1.97, p < .05$) was statistically significant. Based on these results, Hypotheses 2b was supported.

Discussion

Given the recent wave of corporate scandals and the crisis that ensued as a result, the need to further explore the influence of strong ethical leadership and develop guiding principles for leaders is mounting. The extant literature on ethical leadership has focused largely on examining the impact that such leaders have on the perceptions and behaviors of followers while only a few have explored predictors of ethical leadership perceptions. The present study sought to fill this gap by examining how abusive supervision influences followers' perceptions of their leader's ethicality. Moreover, we explore the lasting effects of abusive supervision behaviors on ethical leadership perceptions and follower behaviors.

Findings indicated that followers' perceptions of abusive supervision were significantly and negatively related to their perceptions of ethical leadership one year later. This finding highlights not only the importance of leader behaviors in perceptions of being ethical, but also the long-term negative effects of leader abuse and suggests that even if leaders improve their behaviors and stop abusing followers, their past behaviors leave long lasting scars.

Our study also investigated whether perceptions of ethical leadership mediated the relationships between abusive supervision and follower behaviors one year later. Many researchers have discussed and empirically shown the negative effects of abusive supervision (e.g., Aryee et al., 2008; Harris, Kacmar, & Zivnuska, 2007; Harvey, Stoner, Hochwarter, & Kacmar, 2007; Tepper, 2000, 2007; Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006; Tepper, Duffy, & Shaw, 2001; Tepper et al., 2004; Zellars et al., 2002), but less is known about the explanatory processes that ultimately translate leader abuse into performance. Further, the mediators that have been examined have primarily been justice related (e.g., Tepper, 2000) or employee consequence related (e.g., emotional exhaustion - Aryee et al., 2008). Thus, our study contributes to the extant research in the area by identifying followers' ethical leadership perceptions as a mechanism linking previous abusive supervision to task-focused OCB. Following SET,

followers may be more inclined to withhold discretionary behaviors as a means of retaliating against an abusive leader they perceive to be unethical. Followers may be less likely to decrease their performance since it is not discretionary, rather part of the job. Using performance as a means of retaliation may eventually harm the follower (e.g. poor performance evaluation rating, loss of rewards for high performance, termination, etc.), thus we suspect employees will refrain from doing so. This study also contributes to the growing literature highlighting the importance of ethical behaviors, and in particular, ethical leadership (Trevino, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006).

Strengths, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research

The design of our study created several strengths. First, we collected data on abusive supervision at two points in time. This allowed us to explore the lingering effect of the abusive leader behaviors. Finding an effect for abuse that occurred a year prior, even after controlling for abuse collected concurrently with the outcome measures, demonstrates that wounds inflicted through abusive supervision are slow to heal. Another strength emanating from our design is the ability to combat the potential threat of common method variance by using multiple sources of data. Collecting the dependent and independent variables from different sources provides more confidence that the relationships observed represent substantive rather than artifactual effects.

In addition to the strengths noted, there are limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the sample was relatively small. The use of small sample sizes limits the study's generalizability and raises the question of whether the study has sufficient statistical power to detect the hypothesized effects. However, it appears that our sample size was sufficient as the predicted relationships were significant. Another methodological concern involves the operationalization of abusive supervision. Consistent with previous studies, we measured abusive supervision using self-reports of followers (e.g., Tepper, 2000; Tepper et al., 2004; Zellars et al., 2002). Our reliance on followers' perceptions, as opposed to actually tracking abusive behaviors, assumes that there is agreement between self-reported abuse and the actual exposure to such behaviors. Our approach is appropriate given that our underlying belief is that abuse is in the eye of the beholder, if individuals perceive that they are the victims of abuse, they will respond to the perceived abuse.

Finally, there is the potential that in between our data collection times, the leader might have modified his/her behavior. Similarly, although there were no major events at the division as reported to us by our division contact, there are likely small things that normally take place over time that might have influenced our results. However, we feel that the benefits gained by examining these research questions over time outweigh these potential limitations.

Due to the aforementioned limitations as well as unanswered questions raised by our study, we see a number of directions for future research. First, it would be interesting to design a study that had multiple data collections over time. Results from such a study could help pinpoint when (if ever) the impact of abusive supervision no longer had an impact. Determining the "shelf-life" of abuse would be helpful in developing useful predictions for managers. A second avenue for future research would be to extend our study by adding additional explanatory mechanisms between abuse and potential outcomes. These mechanisms could be other forms of leadership, such as LMX or charismatic leadership, which could tell us whether certain leaders can engage in abusive behaviors without negative outcomes occurring. Finally, another way to extend our study would be to explore additional outcome variables. While performance is obviously important to organizations, other constructs also impact the bottom line. For example,

absenteeism, stress, or work-family conflict can be costly to organizations. Studies that shed light on ways to decrease their occurrences should be of interest to managers.

Managerial Implications

Our study has several implications for managers. First, managers and organizations can use the results of this study to design specific interventions aimed at reducing the frequency of abusive supervision. Organizations may consider developing training programs that include anger management as a possible method of combating abuse. Another important insight for managers is that behaviors may be viewed by employees in different ways and thus understanding that employees are individuals and a one size fits all approach to leading may not be appropriate. Leaders must be cognizant of the nature of their communication and interaction with followers given the impact that perceptions of unethical leadership have on followers' behaviors. Given that followers expect that leaders will treat them in an ethical manner, it is important to ensure that they are viewed this way. Thus, managers may need to conduct ethics audits on regular intervals to insure that ethical lapses that may be occurring in the workplace are captured and addressed.

Conclusions

The present study extends our understanding of the enduring consequences of abusive supervision on followers' perceptions of ethical leadership and, specifically, the process by which such impressions influence followers' performance. Tackling the processes through which abusive supervision influence follower outcomes is not new; however, past research has often examined it through a justice lens. It is our belief that there are other processes that can be used to explore and understand these relationships. Our study contributes to the literature by confirming an empirical link between abusive supervision and followers' perceptions of ethical leadership over time. Moreover, we suggest that perceptions of ethical leadership mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and task-focused organizational citizenship behaviors. We are hopeful that our results will encourage future researches to explore additional potential processes and further expand the research domain of both ethical leadership and abusive supervision.

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