



Research Article

Impact of aversive leadership on followers' moral disengagement

Muhammad Bilal Kayani^{1*}, Maryam Ali², Saba Idrees³

^{1,2,3}Management Sciences Department, National University of Modern Languages, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author email: bilal.kayani@numl.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of aversive leadership in the teaching staff of private schools on the subordinates' moral engagement with the and moderation of proactive personality. Convenient sampling was used and data were collected cross-sectionally using the quantitative technique. A total of 350 samples is undertaken in the study with a response rate of 71%. The study found aversive leadership to be positively affecting subordinates' moral disengagement as they might consider their leaders' aversive behavior as an excuse for their immorality. However, moderation of proactive personalities was found to be insignificant as proactive might need a conducive environment or proper training to show up with their proactive behavior. Also, proactive employees are whistleblowers. They might lose their job or put their job in danger of being proactive.

Keywords: Aversive Leadership, Moral Disengagement; Proactive Personality.

1. INTRODUCTION

The leadership phenomenon has gained quite much attention in the last few years due to its effects on overall organizational performance. Leaders are the directors and motivators of their subordinates or their following. Due to this reason, their behavior holds quite much importance regarding organizational psychology. Employees produce and perform to achieve organizational goals. For this purpose, employees are led by bosses or managers that can show them the appropriate path to follow. A leaders' behavior might influence the path their subordinates choose depending on both the type of personality leading and the type of personality following. Ultimately, the path would lead to a certain destination, thus, defining the level of productivity and performance of that employee or team. Most researchers in past have focused much of their attention on the charismatic and bright side of leadership (Arnulf et al., 2016; Karakitapoğlu-Aygün & Gumusluoglu, 2013; Schmid et al., 2018) neglecting the darker aspect. But from past few years, bad leadership is an important topic of discussion for researchers (Bligh et al., 2007; Pearce & Sims Jr, 2002; Skogstad et al., 2017; Spain et al., 2016) due to the associated costs and consequences with it.

Bad leaders are also known as dark leaders are a quite big threat to organizations' well-being imposing negative impacts on employees and decreasing their overall performance and productivity. Impacts can be less or no effect can be a case if a super-

positive personality encounters such a leader. Instead of reacting and responding to the same bad or dark behavior, they prefer to respond positively by coping with the situation (bad leaders' behavior). When employees perceive a negative behavior from their leaders, they are likely to move towards negative emotion development which could be moral disengagement, and thus react negatively to the employee work performance. COR theory proposed by Hobfoll (1989) supports the notion. That when employees perceive negative behavior, they experience loss of resources and increased stress leading to moral disengagement and reduced individual performance.

The lack of investigation on destructive leadership styles mainly aversive leadership attracts more studies to recognize and investigate this significant yet ignored concept (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Through provision as of COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), we are replying to the recurrent demand for research on aversive leadership and moral disengagement by connecting aversive leadership to moral disengagement. This study has also anticipated that personality and work natures impact the mode subordinates respond to aversive leadership. Particularly, we recommend that employees with proactive personalities and with Islamic work ethics are less probable to react negatively in the shadow of an aversive leader because of their resources.

Aversive leadership is the one that rests merely on humiliating and threatening their subordinates to pressurize them (Fatima et al., 2018). It creates a stressful situation for the followers working under aversive leadership. Previously aversive leadership has been discussed by few authors in terms of its outcomes in organizational settings. In the last five years, only three researches have been conducted in regards to aversive leadership which still leaves a huge gap for future researchers to fill (Fatima et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2018; Saeed, 2017). Likewise, this paper will discuss another psychological impact of aversive leaders upon followers i.e., moral disengagement.

The idea of moral disengagement emerged from Bandura's (1986, 1991, 1999) research, which has been differently named social cognitive theory of moral idea and activity, social cognitive theory of moral office, or socio-psychological self-hypothesis. In their reasonable work, Johnson and Buckley (2015) contend that moral disengagement is an innately relational marvel. They contend that attributable to high levels of relational closeness between individuals inside a gathering, when one gathering part morally disengages, others in the gathering are likewise liable to morally disengage because of social contagion measures. Specifically, they contend that Leaders are probably going to influence moral disengagement in gatherings and associations, given the power they apply in the gathering or hierarchical pecking order. Additionally, Ashforth and Anand (2003) contend that bad (untrustworthy) conduct and the defense belief systems (moral disengagement instruments) related with it become standardized in firms inferable from a tolerant moral environment worked with through leadership and hierarchical designs and cycles. Such contentions are predictable with Moore's (2008) contentions that debasement becomes standardized inside associations through social contagion processes.

Personalities both ruling and both following are important to understand a relationship and the outcome of that relationship. In organizational settings, leader-follower relation is held to maintain good terms to produce out of them to max contribute in organizational goals. However, a negative personality can ruin the entire thing by producing and practicing negative vibes and negativity. However, researchers claim a positive personality in a two-way relationship may be helpful to encounter and deal with the negative personality. For this purpose, this paper considers proactive personalities as moderators in reducing the effect of aversive leadership on moral disengagement.

Proactive personalities have become researchers' point of focus in the last decade. Jiang (2017) cites a proactive personality as a somewhat generous propensity, which gives them uplifting tones to gather spryness to impact the climate. All proactive personalities start choices and guarantee receptiveness to bring novel thoughts and imagination. A proactive personality spurs individuals to perform additional jobs and empowers them to go past their work obligations (Xiong & King, 2018). Z. Zhang et al., (2012) presume that worker with proactive personality has been attractive for business-related results, for example, task execution. Interestingly, individuals with proactive personalities perform better because they are happier with their work and life. They shape the circumstance and the climate with the goal that they can perform well (Fuller Jr & Marler, 2009). A proactive personality is considered an empowering agent for proactive conduct. A proactive disposition accepts changes, creates assets purposely to decide on better freedoms for the future and the cycle continues endlessly (Yildiz et al., 2017).

Yang et al., (2020) likewise showed a positive connection between proactive personality and workers' performance. Proactive personalities effectively respond against the occasion and if about positive occasions they deal with it like a gift for them; as they generally look for promising circumstances and make ideal results. In a new report R. Zhang et al., (2021) uncovered that proactive individuals establish a difficult workplace to seek after the necessary execution. A proactive individual has the inherent ability to manage vulnerability, endeavor toward objective accomplishment, will in general act innovatively in the working environment which might build execution (Li, et al., 2020). Hsiao and Wang (2020) showed that proactive personalities are far superior to others, they follow an alternate way to accomplish results (Jaffery & Abid, 2020). proactive individuals impact the climate that is the reason the idea has acquired specialist consideration (Crant, 1995; Tisu et al., 2020). Writing has proof that a proactive personality delivers a more prominent degree of individual execution (Crant & Bateman, 2000; Zhou & George, 2001).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 AVERSIVE LEADERSHIP AND MORAL DISENGAGEMENT

Aversive leadership is accused of showing up with negative traits that rest and rely on threatening and intimidating followers. According to G. Tummers and Den Dulk (2013) under aversive leadership, subordinates are likely to be disappointed and not perform their obligations towards the organization and they feel fail to show up with their actual

personality potential. This leads employees under aversive leadership to greater disappointment as not only do they feel humiliated under threatening and intimidation but also find no growth opportunities that can raise their economic aspect of life. Aversive leaders humiliate both by their verbal actions or by their psychological attack by ignoring and overlooking subordinates (Khan et al., 2018). Russell et al., (2012) states that under such circumstances imposed by aversive leaders, subordinates bear psychological burdens in form of stress.

Blanco et al., (2020) mentioned in their research that when individuals face extreme violent behavior, they are likely to retaliate by becoming morally disengaged. Likewise, when employees bear the stress and pressure from their aversive leaders in form of threatening and intimidation, they are likely to retaliate against this extreme violence by becoming morally disengaged. Moreover, Alessandri et al. (2020) in their study added that generalized social trust is important to reduce the chances of moral disengagement within individuals. In presence of aversive leadership, due to their threatening approach, employees may lose this bond of social trust and thus incline more towards moral disengagement. Thus, the literature supports the positive impact of aversive leadership on moral disengagement.

Utilizing COR theory, we contend that aversive initiative is a distressing circumstance the followers experience with and they sense the deficiency of resources as their moral disengagement from their work. All the more explicitly because of undermining and rebuffing conduct of leader's conduct, they sense no influence over their conduct and enjoy into a condition of frailty. At the point when they are taken steps to play out specific errands, they don't sense any seriousness in their positions and they get separated and stay away from self-articulation. Every one of these states shows moral disinterment. Forming the first hypothesis:

H1: Aversive Leadership has a significant positive impact on Moral Disengagement.

2.2. MODERATING ROLE OF PROACTIVE PERSONALITY

Proactive personality refers to the tendency of individuals to trigger environmental fluctuations (Bateman & Crant, 1993). A large body of studies has shown that proactive personality can be a unique and progressive predictor of job performance beyond the five personality traits (Thomas et al., 2010). Motivated people especially take the opportunity to formulate behaviors that can advance the change agenda (Watkins, 2009). The resulting positive behaviors are "self-directed and future-oriented behaviors aimed at changing and improving one's condition" (Parker et al., 2006: 636), including workflow in the internal organizational environment. These behaviors are determined by the proactive personality of the individual, and these personalities are not affected by the force of the situation but are affected by environmental changes (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Interestingly, people with a very aggressive personality will not only respond to the environment but will also "look for opportunities, show initiative, act and persevere until they achieve closure through change" (Bateman & Crant, 1993).

When such personalities face coercion and mistreatment by their leaders they tend to not indulge in moral disengagement. According to Bateman and Crant (1993), such individuals have an extra pack of resources which they use to deal with such negative environmental stressors. These individuals instead of being morally disengaged in response to their leaders threatening and intimidating behavior they will try to cope with this situation leading to steady job performance and attitude instead of moral disengagement (Thomas et al., 2010). According to Fatima et al. (2018), aversive leaders practice yelling, shouting, and sometimes abusing their subordinates. This could lead subordinates to get dissatisfied and get morally engaged. But proactive personalities will either try to report or face such leaders with a thoughtful strategy instead of indulging in morally disengaged behavior. As Parker et al., (2006) states that proactivists have a future oriented approach and are self-directed and find opportunities in changing environment. It leads to the second hypothesis:

H2: Proactive personality moderates the relationship between Aversive Leadership and Moral Disengagement.

2.3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

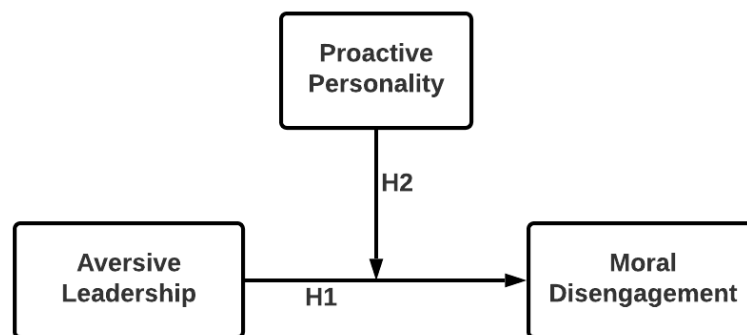


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

3. METHODOLOGY

4.1. PROCEDURE AND SAMPLE

The study is rather causal and focused to explore the impact of aversive leadership on employee's moral disengagement. The moderating role of employee proactive personality is tested between the relationship of aversive leadership and moral disengagement. For this purpose, the teaching sector of Pakistan has been focused to get the required data importantly to get accurate results. The data were collected in one span of time; therefore, the study is a cross-sectional and single field. Initially, 350 questionnaires were set as a target but 251 genuine responses were collected with a 71% response rate. The sample that was selected for this study is assumed to represent the entire teaching sector organization's employees of Pakistan.

This research follows a deductive research method based on determinism. Previous research and existing theories have been used to test and support our hypothesis, and then we perform an empirical test of the hypothesis to verify the proposed hypothesis.

General quantitative methods have been used that are of great value and can be integrated into a wide range of population sizes. Therefore, the data were analyzed quantitatively. Quantitative technique refers to empirically or numerically measuring something (Bryman, 2016). As per Rasinger (2013), this technique refers to how much of something or how many or to what limit.

The advantage to using this technique for the current research is that it quantifies the problem being researched in form of empirically represented items called variables. The technique is also useful in generalizing the results for sample data on the entire population making the results truth-worthy (Powers D. and Powers A., 2015). Moreover, this technique is less time-consuming in comparison to qualitative and can easily be analyzed using statistical software (Connolly, 2007) like SMART PLS.

4.2. INSTRUMENTS

All constructs are measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree at 1, Neutrality at 3 to Strongly Agree at 5.

Table 1. Instruments

Variable Type	Variable Name	Reference	No. of Items	Reliability (α)
Independent Variable	Aversive Leadership	Pearce and Sims (2002)	6	0.79
Dependent Variable	Moral Disengagement	Moore et al. (2012)	8	0.791
Moderator	Proactive Personality	Seibert, Carnt and Kraimer (1999)	10	0.86

4. RESULTS

The data was analyzed using SMART PLS software. Both measurement and structural models are discussed in the forthcoming section. Variables that are not observable can easily be measured with help of structural equation modeling with indicators. There are both types of variables formative and reflective which are described by their respective indicators within the formulated model (Henseler et al., 2009). There exist covariance and variance-based techniques. SMART PLS is a variance-based model (Sander & Teh, 2014). The premise for a model is a hypothesis and theory. The factors with their indicators and the arrows make the ways in the model. These ways and hypotheses are essential for the theory and it clarifies the causal component. (Sander & Teh, 2014) The upside of the model is to investigate the build noticeably and to streamline the research so researchers can gauge the connection among constructs and factors to test the hypothesis (Urban & Mayerl, 2013). The threat is that the model misrepresents and the deliberate information also, the truth is excessively unique. That diminishes the worth of the model (Sander & Teh, 2014).

Table 2. Reliability and Validity

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
AL	0.606	0.89	0.755	0.521
MD	0.768	0.834	0.866	0.687
PP	0.840	0.900	0.891	0.631

In the initial section, measurement model results are shown. In Table 2 measurement model is represented, the items for each construct have adequate values. In the measurement model of Aversive leadership (AL), all three remaining items have values greater than 0.6 and are significant with a p-value less than 0.05. Therefore, all six items are included in the measurement of aversive leadership (AL). Moral disengagement (MD) with and Proactive Personality (PP) are measured with remaining items three and five respectively, with a value greater than 0.6 and a p-value less than 0.05.

5.1. DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (Fornell Lacker)

Constructs	AL	MD	PP
AL	0.722		
MD	0.815	0.829	
PP	-0.555	-0.642	0.794

Table 4. Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Constructs	AL	MD	PP
AL			
MD	0.904		
PP	0.625	0.76	

Table 3 depicts discriminant validity with the Fornell-lacker approach, whereas, table 4 depicts discriminant validity by the HTMT approach. Discriminant validity for all the constructs is sufficient by both measures Fornell-Lacker and HTMT. The referenced cross-loadings for all the constructs' validity are being shown in table 5. Gold et al., (2001) marked 0.9 as the threshold value for the discriminant validity. Fornell and Lacker's standard and the appraisal of the Cross-Loadings are insufficiently delicate to distinguish Discriminant Validity when contrasted and Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) basis (Ab Hamid et al., 2017). Accordingly, the utilization of the HTMT standard ought to be received for this reason with the goal that the translation of the causal impact in the demonstrating investigation isn't deceiving. HTMT model has high affectability and explicitness in recognizing discriminant validity issues (Ab Hamid et al., 2017).

Table 5. Structural Model

Constructs	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
AL -> MD	0.596	0.594	0.040	14.862	0
Moderating Effect PP -> MD	-0.043	-0.036	0.036	1.201	0.230
PP -> MD	-0.211	-0.221	0.055	3.828	0

The above-mentioned table 5 shows the results for direct effects in regression analysis of the sample data under examination. Aversive Leadership (AL) is found to have a significant and positive impact upon Moral Disengagement (MD) with a p-value greater than 0.05 and a t-value lesser than 1.96, thus accepting the first hypothesis. The moderating effect of Proactive Personality (PP) was found to be insignificant in moderating the relationship of Aversive Leadership (AL) with Moral Disengagement (MD)

with a p-value greater than 0.05 and t value lesser than 1.96. The results reject the second hypothesis formulated under this study.

5. DISCUSSION

The results support the first hypothesis. Blanco et al. (2020) mentioned in their research that when individuals face extreme violent behavior, they are likely to retaliate by becoming morally disengaged. Likewise, when employees bear the stress and pressure from their aversive leaders in form of threatening and intimidation, they are likely to retaliate against this extreme violence by becoming morally disengaged. Moreover, Alessandri et al., (2020) in their study added that generalized social trust is important to reduce the chances of moral disengagement within individuals. In presence of aversive leadership, due to their threatening approach, employees may lose this bond of social trust and thus incline more towards moral disengagement. Thus, the literature supports the positive impact of aversive leadership on moral disengagement.

Moreover, by utilizing COR theory, it is contended that aversive initiative is a distressing circumstance the followers experience with and they sense the deficiency of resources as their moral disengagement from their work. All the more explicitly because of undermining and rebuffing conduct of leader's conduct, they sense no influence over their conduct and enjoy into a condition of frailty. At the point when they are taken steps to play out specific errands, they don't sense any seriousness in their positions and they get separated and stay away from self-articulation. Every one of these states shows moral disinterment.

The results for proactive personality aren't supportive of the hypothesis proactive personality moderates the relation between aversive leadership and moral disengagement such that it weakens it. Proactive personalities are efficient in modifying their surroundings with the help of their proactive behavior (Fuller Jr & Marler, 2009). A person with no or few proactive traits is more likely to get affected by his/her surroundings and or flow with the environment (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Whereas, individuals with more proactive traits will direct their behaviors in altering the situation they are facing in the best possible way. Proactive behavior is more enthusiastic, sensible, and target-oriented (Parker et al., 2010). Proactive individuals have a long-term approach in contrast to reactive individuals. They are always looking for new opportunities with the best information search they can perform (Frese & Fay, 2001; Thomas et al., 2010).

But sometimes all these proactive traits may not help individuals to get rid of the negativity they are receiving from their environment in the form of aversive leadership. The literature supports too much such reason as to why proactive individuals do not always show up with their proactivity. Proactive personalities are known to be whistleblowers whenever they see negative actions being practiced around within the organization (KUSUMA et al., 2018). In the current case, proactive teachers were expected to raise voice against aversive leaders and act as whistleblowers. But whistleblowers are not easily reemployed at other organizations or they put their job security in danger by being proactive that may lead them to lose their job (Qusqas et al., 2001). As per a survey

of 233 employees (whistleblowers) stated by Arifin (2005) in his study 90% lost their job in response to the whistleblowing act. For this reason, the proactivity of teachers might not show up in the presence of aversive leadership.

Proactive individuals are overly qualified. To show up with their proactiveness, proactive individuals might also need a proper conducive environment according to Simon et al., (2019). Insufficient training programs for teachers might also hinder their proactiveness to be shown in their schools (Simon et al., 2019). Aversive leaders rely on threatening and intimidating subordinates (Fatima et al., 2018). Such behaviors of leaders lead to retaliation by followers in form of moral disengagement. As employees feel a loss of their resources. Proactive personalities even possessing an extra pack of resources were however found to be not moderating their relation due to the above-stated reasons.

6. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study firstly adds to the literature on destructive leadership. Previously many destructive leadership styles are studied by the researchers including abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), narcissistic leadership (Brunell et al., 2008), supervisor undermining (Duffy et al., 2002), despotic leadership (Aronson, 2001), and petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994; Wong et al., 2017). Aversive leadership is however very rarely studied in past researches. This paper adds to the literature by researching the aversive style of leadership. Moreover, the few studies which studied aversive leadership have studied its outcomes in an organizational context. This paper fills up the gap by studying another new outcome concerning aversive leadership.

Workers get direction from the bosses' conduct and begin feeling that moralities don't make any difference when they are getting any advantages. The ethical mentality of specialists changes over the long haul when they see that minor accommodation is satisfactory, become morally disengage. The second vital hypothetical commitment is the job of proactive personality utilized as a moderator between aversive leadership and moral disengagement. Proactive personalities have a significant impact on the association. For instance, if any worker has a proactive personality, they will oversee adverse practices.

7. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This research provides better clarity of human psychology concepts in particular to the leader-follower relationship. The current study aids in consideration of the outcomes of aversiveness by the leadership in the education sector of Pakistan. The discovery of the present research recommends that educational organizations may choose employing employees high in proactivity may not help in dealing with negative vibes within the organization. This research is similarly significant for the leader as aversive behaviors to be overcome either through training programs or through strict check and balance by higher authorities. Because of the above-stated reasons, firms are putting up with the elevated charges and it leads employees to more towards quitting their jobs.

8. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This research provides better clarity of human psychology concepts in particular to the leader-follower relationship. The better the concept is understood the better the employees can be protected from being morally disengaged at work maintaining the ethical practices with their fellows in the organization and in their personal lives as well. Moral disengagement may have a spillover effect on employees' personal lives as well.

9. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is only conducted on the teaching staff of private school teachers. Moreover, the population for the study was the private teaching staff of schools in only Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Moreover, only one sector i.e., the education sector is taken into account in the current study. The same model can be studied in other sectors as well like the manufacturing or healthcare sector. This study is a cross-sectional study and is conducted in only a one-time frame. The present study is being conducted with quantitative research techniques. The quantitative technique lacks the interpretation points as are present in the qualitative study but is more empirically stronger than the qualitative ones. A qualitative study can be conducted for the same model. Moreover, this study encompasses only one style of destructive leadership i.e., aversive leadership with moral disengagement. Only one outcome of aversive leadership i.e., moral disengagement is being studied in the current research. Only one moderator is being studied under the current model between aversive leadership and moral disengagement i.e., proactive personality. Future Researchers can look for other moderators as well like training & development etc.

10. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of aversive leadership in the teaching staff of private schools on the subordinates' moral engagement with the and moderation of proactive personality. The study found aversive leadership to be positively affecting subordinates' moral disengagement as they might consider their leaders' aversive behavior as an excuse for their immorality. However, moderation of proactive personalities was found to be insignificant as proactive might need a conducive environment or proper training to show up with their proactive behavior. Also, proactive employees are whistleblowers. They might lose their job or put their job in danger of being proactive.

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