Micromanagement: An Employee's Adversary

Rajkumar M[1*]   Ajay Venkataraman[2]   Gayathri M[2]
1.Assistant Professor, Faculty of Management Studies, PES University, Bangalore, India
2.Student, Bachelor of Business Administration, PES University, Bangalore, India

Abstract
Leadership is the ability of an individual to initiate guidance and influence a group or an organization in order to maximize its performance. Micromanagement leadership is one such form, where the managers closely monitor and direct their subordinates. Although a select few managers and employees could benefit from such a practice, micromanagement, as a leadership style has relatively more negative implications on an employee's behavior and his engagement towards the work at hand. This creates a sense of perceived stress leading him to behave in a counterproductive manner. In this article, we have intended to develop a theoretical framework by investigating from an employee's perspective. Thus, highlighting the various implications of micromanaging. Interrelating the concepts of employee disengagement, perceived stress and deviant behavior, our study provides several implications for organizations and managers alike apart from a theoretical literature base for further study.
Keywords: Micromanagement, Employee Disengagement, Perceived Stress, Leadership

1. Introduction

An organization today operates in a highly competitive and dynamic environment. In such a situation, a company would look for an individual to lead its employees. Therefore, the concept of leadership attracts the limelight. Some managers, however, like to direct and control every move/task performed by their subordinates. This creates a sense of insecurity and disengagement among the employees. This form of leadership has been widely termed as micromanagement. It often includes planning of minor details and making the employees feel that they are being observed (DeCaro et al.2011) . Micromanaging may be beneficial for organizations where the interference of managers may be necessary to improve productivity. This may be due to the fact that the employees may be inexperienced or technically incapable of performing the particular task.

However, in the present corporate world, such situations are highly unlikely. Therefore, such a leadership style could be in fact a hindrance to the progress of the organization as a whole. It also affects the employees by disengaging them from their work and pressurizing them. To probe this form of leadership and understand it better we have correlated it with the concepts of employee disengagement, perceived stress and deviant behavior to establish a cause and effect relationship.

The article hereafter is organized into sections, namely the review of literature which will provide the basis of our research proposal, the hypothesis and the research proposition with the help of the model and finally the discussion encompassing the arguments supporting the model and the implications for both theory and practice.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Micromanagement Leadership

Micromanagement is observing every move or activity performed by the employees and making them feel that they are being watched. Excess contemplation, planning of minor details and tracking the time employees are engaged at work or when they are found away from their desk, are also related to micromanagement. The work of observing, planning, etc. may be assumed as a job of work managers, but they do not play a role here and these behaviors may have an adverse effect on the organization. When the employees are made to feel that, they are excessively watched, their performance level is reduced (DeCaro et al.2011).

There is a huge distinction between micromanagement and monitoring, monitoring is necessary for securing performance of a critical job (Heimer, 1994), however, Micromanagement is established when the duties are not clearly understood by the managers. Employees are ambiguous about carrying out their duties and do not know the parameters under which they are being judged due to lack of guidance (Hymowitz, 2003). Micromanagers follow the principle of time; they create deadlines for establishing the targets and are extremely demanding for irrelevant status details or descriptions (Heimer, 1994). Leader- Member exchange theory (LMX) researchers concluded that those managers who are hesitant to delegate the task to their subordinates often become micromanagers as they lacked confidence in their subordinate's skill and knowledge, they also consider it to be highly technical and hence, doubt the capability of the employees (Leana, 1987).

Micromanagement may take place for numerous reasons. For example, in the view to finding a solution the board may interfere with the functioning of other organizational elements in order to enforce management decisions (Hildy Gottlieb, 2009). To mitigate this form of leadership the board must engage in vibrant and constant discussions, formulate standards of performance and remain accountable to the entire organization

(Betz and Eadie).

2.2. Employee Disengagement

The harmonious relation between employees and their duties is the highlight of the employee engagement concept (Kahn, 1990). The notion of engagement can be correlated to the already present concept of task/job involvement (Brown, 1996). Creating involvement in the job is of ubiquitous importance to managers. Since, negatives such as dissatisfaction and low morale/commitment arise due to the disengagement of staff from their duties (Aktouf, 1992). A task without much substance or significance usually results in its disconnection from the staff performing it. Moreover, it can lead to an indifferent and lethargic approach by the employee (Thomas et al. 1990).Disengagement at a personal level comprises of the concurrent retraction and shielding of oneself in an environment that advocates physical and emotional imbalance leading to substandard or inferior performance (Kahn, 1990).

Disengaged workers can be characterized by their absence of concern about their organization, the ambiguity surrounding the function they carry out in its framework and the unsatisfactory relationship that they share with their colleagues (Wellins & Concelman, 2005). Such employees often experience depression and are apprehensive in nature (Robinson et al. 1997). In addition, they are mentally frazzled and extremely cynical (Maslach et al. 2001). This lack of commitment leads to absenteeism and initiates an intention to abandon the company (Saks, 2006). At the preliminary stages of disengagement, employees exhibit traits of absenteeism, being dilatory and increasing withdrawal at the workplace (Branham, 2005). Other symptoms include repeated mistakes, low energy levels and lack of enthusiasm (Pech & Slade, 2006). Apart from experiencing health problems themselves, such employees tend to spread and influence the negativity to the immediate environment around them (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

2.3. Perceived Stress

Stress refers to a reaction that a person exhibits when there is a sense of incapability to cope with the pressures at hand (Health and Safety Executive, Raymond 2000). It is usually a consequence of inadequacy of resources to meet the requirements (Lazarus & Folkman, Stress, 1984). Moreover, all factors in the workplace which result in an individual perceiving anxiety or burden can be termed as occupational stress/work stress (Rohany, 2003). It can also be described as the mismatch between the prerequisite for a job and the employee's capability of performing it (NIOSH, 1999). Perceived stress can be conceived as a combination of work stressors – impositions that employees may discern to be a threat, for example, specifications of a task/job to be performed, and work strains – unfavorable results due to the inadequacy of resources in coping with occupational stress (Koslowsky, 1998). Therefore, it can be implied that work strain is the element balancing a firm's inefficiency and work stressors (Darr & Johns, 2008).

Work stress could have numerous sources and its impact is subjective to each individual. The inability of an organization to change and lengthy working hours contribute to stress in the workplace (Davey et al. 2001). Frequent conflict and non-supportive supervisors/managers add to the pressure perceived by an employee (Leka, Griffiths, & Cox, 2003). Ambiguity about the task (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003) and lack of authority (Pawar & Rathod, 2007) are among the other factors.

The outcomes of ungoverned stress could lead to disharmony among workers, increase the remuneration paid and decline of rapport between the organization and its customers in terms of sub-standard customer services being rendered (Kahn & Byosiere, 1992). Furthermore, these pressures lead to frequent errors causing mishaps and reducing productivity, in due course of time they contribute towards absenteeism and demotivation of workers (Pflanz & Ogle, 2006).

2.4. Deviant Behaviour

A type of voluntary behaviour which endangers the prosperity of an organization and its staff by disrupting/disregarding the operational framework within which it functions (S.P. Robbins and T.A. Judge, 2007). The ramification of such behaviour is quite severe since it has its influence on various aspects such as framing of policies and a firm's efficiency (Appelbaum et al.2007).

This negative attitude usually arises from certain provocations assumed by the employee (Hollinger & Clark, 1982). These provocations emerge due to an imbalance between a person's present state and an optimal state where the need, wants and desires of the person are fulfilled. Therefore, results in a sense of failure and dissatisfaction (Robinson et al.1997). Often identified as a retaliation to stress perceived, deviance can imply its negative effect on the overall working aspects of an organization (Robinson et al. 1997). The study of workplace deviance gains enormous priority as all companies act as a home ground for authority and defiance to change (Krackhardt & Mintzberg, 1985).

An atmosphere where morally sound behaviour is not promoted, there is a presence of an antagonistic working condition and a bleak fortune for career success would certainly result in occupational dissonance

leading to dissatisfaction at work (Koh & Boo, 2001). On the other hand, job satisfaction is seldom linked with unethical and unlawful acts (Appelbaum et al.2006). This type of behaviour usually arises in an organization where the employees are primarily involved in activities to promote their self-interests (Appelbaum et al.2006).

3. Research Proposition and Theoretical Model

3.1. Micromanagement and Employee Disengagement

Micromanagement mainly thrives on the exorbitant attention to detail and ensuring that employees notice they are being closely observed. This kind of leadership has often proven to be unfavourable since it decreases the performance of employees (DeCaro et al.2011). The fundamental concept of employee engagement emphasizes the need for a balanced relation between staff and their duties (Kahn, 1990). Micromanaging has often resulted in disconnecting the employees from their tasks. Therefore, it can be inferred that employee disengagement arises as a consequence of micromanagement.

Micromanagers often hesitate to delegate duties, assuming that their subordinates are incapable of performing them (Leana, 1987). Thus, diluting the work given to the employees and reducing their morale. Furthermore, work without substance and a fair set of challenges have frequently lead to disengagement (Thomas et al. 1990) and lack of commitment has been proven to be an aftereffect of the same (Aktouf, 1992). In accordance with the statements, our proposition:

Hypothesis 1 (H₁): There exists a positive relation between the concepts of Micromanagement and employee disengagement

3.2. Micromanagement and Perceived Stress

The harmful responses which can be physically or emotionally stimulated due to the disparity between an employee's capability and the job at hand can be interpreted as work stress / perceived stress (NIOSH, 1999). Micromanagers often plan insignificant details to the minute (DeCaro et al.2011) and demand continual status reports (Heimer, 1994). Thus, resulting in the creation of pressure, which is perceived by the employees.

Perceived stress can also be an outcome of inadequate support from the supervisors / managers (Leka et al., 2003). This arises due to the practice of micromanagement. In this form leadership, there is an absence of a harmonious superior-subordinate relation since, micromanagers do not trust their staff with carrying out any task (Leana, 1987). Managers directly impose pressure on employees by their behaviour towards them and their work (Tepper, 2000). It has repeatedly been established that employees feel demotivated and stressed when their superiors adopt the micromanagement leadership style. Hence, Micromanagement is directly involved in invoking a sense of pressure in the employees and more a manager micromanages higher is the stress perceived by the employee. Conforming with these above, we propose:

Hypothesis 2 (H₂): A positive relation exists between the concepts of Micromanagement and Perceived stress.

3.3. Employee Disengagement and Deviant Behaviour

Disengagement can be understood from two aspects; the **Organizational aspect:** Where workers are identified by their lack of concern towards their workplace and a strained relation with their co-workers (Wellins and Concelman, 2005) and the **Personal aspect:** Retraction and shielding of oneself resulting in unsatisfactory performance (Kahn, 1990).

Disengaged workers are increasingly absent and have the intention to abandon the company (Saks, 2006). It is at such a stage that they indulge in counterproductive activities such as workplace deviance. Deviant behavior is a type of voluntary behavior which jeopardizes the growth of an organization (S.P. Robbins and T.A. Judge, 2007). Moreover, a presence of an antagonistic working condition and increasing occupational dissonance are key aspects leading to such behaviour (Koh & Boo, 2001). Furthermore, it is vital to know that these symptoms arise due to the consequences of unchecked disengagement of employees.

Therefore, we can say that Employee disengagement impacts workplace deviance directly and the Degree of workplace deviance is determined by the disengagement level of an employee. In accordance with these inferences, we propose:

Hypothesis 3 (H₃): There exists a positive relation between the concepts of employee disengagement and deviant behaviour

3.4. Perceived stress and Deviant Behaviour

The willful act of an employee in obstructing the progress of an organization by indulging in practices that disrupt its functional framework can be termed as deviant behaviour (Robbins and Judge, 2007). This kind of behaviour can be analyzed as a reaction to stress perceived (Robinson et al. 1997). Therefore, it can be implied that perceived stress influences workplace deviance.

Stress is subjective to every individual and could have numerous sources (Davey et al., 2001). But, it more often than not leads eventually to a negative consequence. When unrestrained, pressure on employees

begins to show in the form of disharmony among workers and a strained relation between the organization and its customers (Kahn & Byosiere, 1992). These occurrences derail the prosperous future of the company, thus, coinciding with the main motive of deviant behavior.

From the above statements the following facts emerge; Perceived stress directly impacts the nature of workplace deviance and, the degree of deviance is determined by the pressure the employees are exposed to. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): There is a positive relation which exists between stress perceived and workplace deviance.

3.5. Perceived stress and Employee Disengagement

An employee is expected to be stressed, when pressure perceived exceeds the ability to cope with the demand (Cooper & Palmer, Conquer Your Stress, 2000). Stress may be physically and emotionally experienced when the employee's capability, demand, and ability do not match the job requirement (National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, 1999). This gradually separates the employee from the job. Thus, it can be said that stress perceived has an impact on disengagement of an employee.

Employees with decreased engagement towards the job suffer from nervousness and distress (Robinson et al. 1997). Certainly noticeable signs include absenteeism, disengagement, and tardiness (Branham, 2005). Stress perceived also diminishes the productivity, increases faults in the workplace, discourages the attendance at work, increases unhealthy relation with others in the workplace causing problems and brings about a negative attitude in an employee (Pflanz & Ogle, 2006). It has constantly been established that the employees' engagement towards their job may be inferred from the stress level they perceive. Therefore, we can infer that; Perceived stress directly influences employee disengagement and that higher the stress perceived higher is the level of employee disengagement. In light of these facts, we propose:

Hypothesis 5 (H5): There exists a positive relation between stress perceived and employee disengagement.

### 3.6. Micromanagement and Deviant Behaviour

Micromanagement occurs when managers track and record every move of the employees to make them conscious while at work. This often reduces their performance (DeCaro et al.2011). On the other hand, counterproductive work behaviour can be termed as any attempt to obstruct the progress of an organization and limit the growth of the employees that work within its framework (Robbins and Judge, 2007).

To understand the correlation, we consider the previously elaborated concepts **- With respect to Employee Disengagement;** Disengagement is a consequence of micromanaging employees and Deviant Behaviour is the aftereffect of unrestrained employee disengagement. On the other hand, **with respect to perceived stress;** Micromanaging eventually leads to perceived stress and furthermore, Stress perceived retaliates to form counterproductive work behaviour.

Therefore, micromanagement causes both stress perceived and disengagement, Deviant Behaviour arises as a consequence of the same concepts. Thus, we can infer that Deviant Behaviour and Micromanagement share an indirect relation and that more micromanaging results in higher workplace deviance. In view of these statements, we propose:

Hypothesis 6 (H6): There exists a positive, but an indirect relation between the concepts of micromanagement and deviant Behaviour.

3.7. Theoretical Model
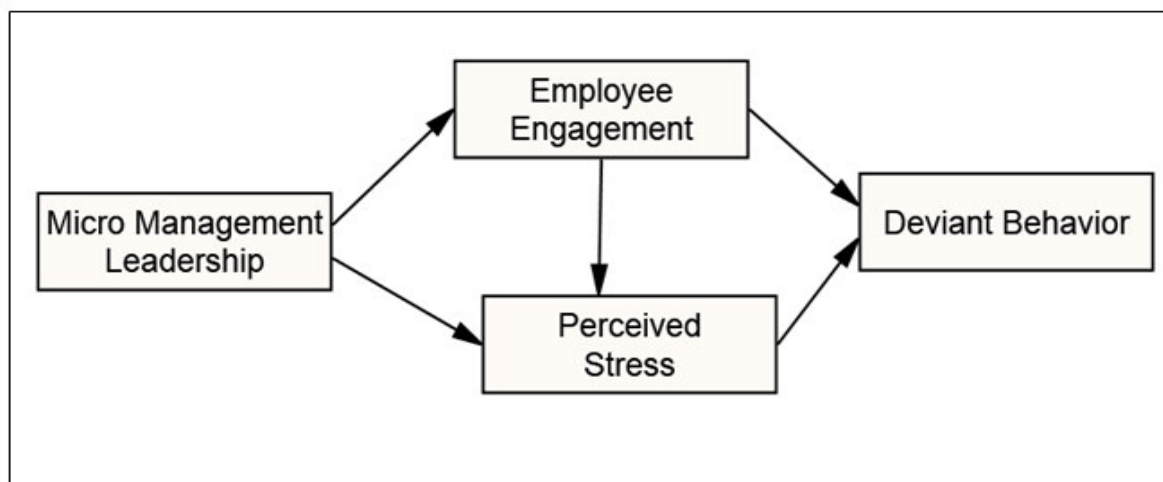
(Source: Model framed by researchers)

4. Discussion and Implications

We have intended to formulate a theoretical framework elucidating the effects of Micromanagement Leadership from the employee's perspective. Our hypothesis that micromanagement is positively and indirectly the source for workplace deviance can be substantiated since both disengagements, as well as work stress, arise as a consequence of micromanaging. Moreover, the unrestrained effects of both these concepts are the primary sources leading to the counterproductive behaviour of an employee. The degree of influence of these concepts on deviance, however, is subjective to an employee's attitude, personality and performance. Similarly, the degree of impact of disengagement on work stress is debatable in all respects. We have also argued that even the presence of either consequence, i.e. disengagement/perceived stress can be the predecessor to workplace deviance.

As per our knowledge of this concept, micromanagement, and its implications have not been highlighted in a broad spectrum. Although, the concepts of Micromanagement Leadership, Employee Disengagement, Perceived Stress and Workplace Deviance have their own literature bases, there has been no specific study attempting to establish the relationships among these topics. Hence, the theoretical need of this article arises, justifying its implications in the field of management literature.

It is of ubiquitous importance for both a manager and the management to check and reduce the influence of workplace deviance among their employees. This can be achieved by understanding and tackling the combined derived consequences of micromanaging. Employees too can avoid this form of leadership by depleting the need for its implementation, i.e. by performing in accordance with the standards with negligible deviation. This would reduce the interference of managers in the duties of the staff ultimately reducing micromanagement. If empirically valued by future researchers this article could have major practical implications apart from the ones already stated.

5. Limitations

Even though we attempt to elucidate and substantiate our work, it is not without limitations. Firstly, this article has been written keeping all other relevant concepts constant (citrus Paribas), therefore, a presence of a change in the static environment could endanger the functioning of the model stated. Secondly, the model highlights mainly the negative aspects of micromanaging based on a prejudged notion of its ill effects. Lastly, the model is intended from the employees' perspective, not considering the other elements in the organization.

6. Conclusion

In the course of our article, we have highlighted the concept of Micromanagement and its negative effects on the overall functioning of the organization. Through our research proposition, we have attempted to probe this concept which is relatively new to the field of management. Arguing from an employee's perspective, we have formulated a theoretical model. With this understanding of micromanagement, managers must adopt it with caution by assessing the extent of pressure an employee can handle and the level of support he/she requires to perform well.

References

Aktouf, O. (1992). "Management and theories of organizations in the 1990s: Toward a critical radical humanism?" *Academy of Management Review*, *17*(3), 407–431.

Appelbaum, S. H., Iaconi, G. D., & Matousek, A. (2007). "Positive and negative deviant workplace behaviors: Causes, impacts, and solutions". *Corporate Governance*, *7*(5), 586–598.

Appelbaum, S. H., Shapiro, B. T., & Molson, J. (2006). "Diagnosis and remedies for deviant workplace behaviors". *Journal of American Academy of Business*, *9*(2), 14–20.

Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2008). "Towards a model of work engagement". *Career Development International*, *13*(3), 209–223.

Branham, L. (2005). *The 7 hidden reasons employees leave: how to recognize the subtle signs and act before it"s too late*. (S. Lake, Ed.). New york, USA: AMACOM.

Brown, P. (1996). "OLDLIST: A database of maximum tree ages". *Tree Rings, Environment, and Humanity*, 727–731. Retrieved from http://www.rmtrr.org/data/OldList_1996.pdf

Darr, W., & Johns, G. (2008). "Work strain, health, and absenteeism: a meta-analysis". *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *13*(4), 293–318.

Davey, J. D., Obst, P. L., & Sheehan, M. C. (2001). "Demographic and workplace characteristics which add to the prediction of stress and job satisfaction within the police workplace". *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, *16*(1), 29–39.

DeCaro, M. S., Thomas, R. D., Albert, N. B., & Beilock, S. L. (2011). "Choking under pressure: Multiple routes to skill failure". *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, *140*(3), 390–406.

Fairbrother, K., & Warn, J. (2003). "Workplace dimensions, stress and job satisfaction". *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *18*(1), 8–21.

Heimer, C. H. (1994). "How can I get my boss to do her job, not mine?". *Executive Female (0199-2880)*, *17*(2), 67.

Hollinger, R. C., & Clark, J. P. (1982). "Formal and Informal Social Controls of Employee Deviance". *The Sociological Quarterly*, *23*(3), 333–343.

Hymowitz, C. (2003). "The Confident Boss Doesn't Micromanage Or Delegate Too Much". *Wall Street Journal - Eastern Edition*, B1.

Kahn, W. A. (1990). "Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work". *Academy of Management Journal; Dec Academy of Management Journal*, *33*(334), 692–724.

Koh, H. C., & Boo, E. H. Y. (2001). "The link between organizational ethics and job satisfaction: A study of managers in Singapore". *Journal of Business Ethics*, *29*(4), 309–324.

Krackhardt, D., & Mintzberg, H. (1985). "Power in and around Organizations". *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *30*, 597.

Leana, C. R. (1987). "Power Relinquishment Versus Power Sharing: Theoretical Clarification and Empirical Comparison of Delegation and Participation". *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *72*(2), 228–233.

Leka, S., Griffiths, A., & Cox, T. (2003). "Work organisation and stress: systematic problem approaches for employers, managers and trade union". *Protecting Workers' Health Series No. 3*, 1–27.

Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2001). "Job burnout". *Annual Review of Psychology*, *52*(1), 397–422.

Pech, R., & Slade, B. (2006). "Employee disengagement: is there evidence of a growing problem?". *Handbook of Business Strategy*, *7*(1), 21–25.

Pflanz, S. E., & Ogle, A. D. (2006). "Job stress, depression, work performance, and perceptions of supervisors in military personnel". *Military Medicine*.

Saks (2006). "Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement:. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*.

Tepper, B. J. (2000). "Consequences of abusive supervision". *Academy of Management Journal*, *43*(2), 178–190.

Thomas, K. W., & Velthouse, B. A. (1990). "Cognitive Elements of Empowerment: An ''Interpretive'' Model of Intrinsic Task Motivation". *The Academy of Management Review*, *15*(4), 666–681.

Wellins, R., & Concelman, J. (2005). Creating a culture for engagement.