

Micromanagement Behavior: A Qualitative Empirical Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

An increasing number of employees complain of experiencing tension and stress while at work do to controlling managers (Chambers, 2004). Subsequently, Chambers (2004), states that nobody wants to be micromanaged and certainly no one wants to be a micromanager; however, everyone knows micromanagement is bad, but they cannot actually define it. They just “know it” when it is happening to them. Leadership styles dramatically affect employee morale within organizations that demonstrate increased micromanagement behavior and oftentimes these leaders and individuals are often described as “micromanagers.” This study will bring to light the thoughts and experiences of employees that are dealing with micromanagement within the workplace.

Keywords: Micromanagement; Leadership Style; Leadership Behavior; Qualitative Methodology

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Problem and Opportunity Statement

Micromanagement contributes to fear, stress, low morale, and lower job satisfaction (Chambers, 2004). The behavioral characteristics of these managers consist of someone who oversees their workers too closely and spends an excessive amount of time supervising a particular project, and telling people exactly what to do and how to do it (White, 2010), leaving little to no autonomy for subordinates. The proposed research will identify the factors contributing to micromanagement behaviors through lived experiences.

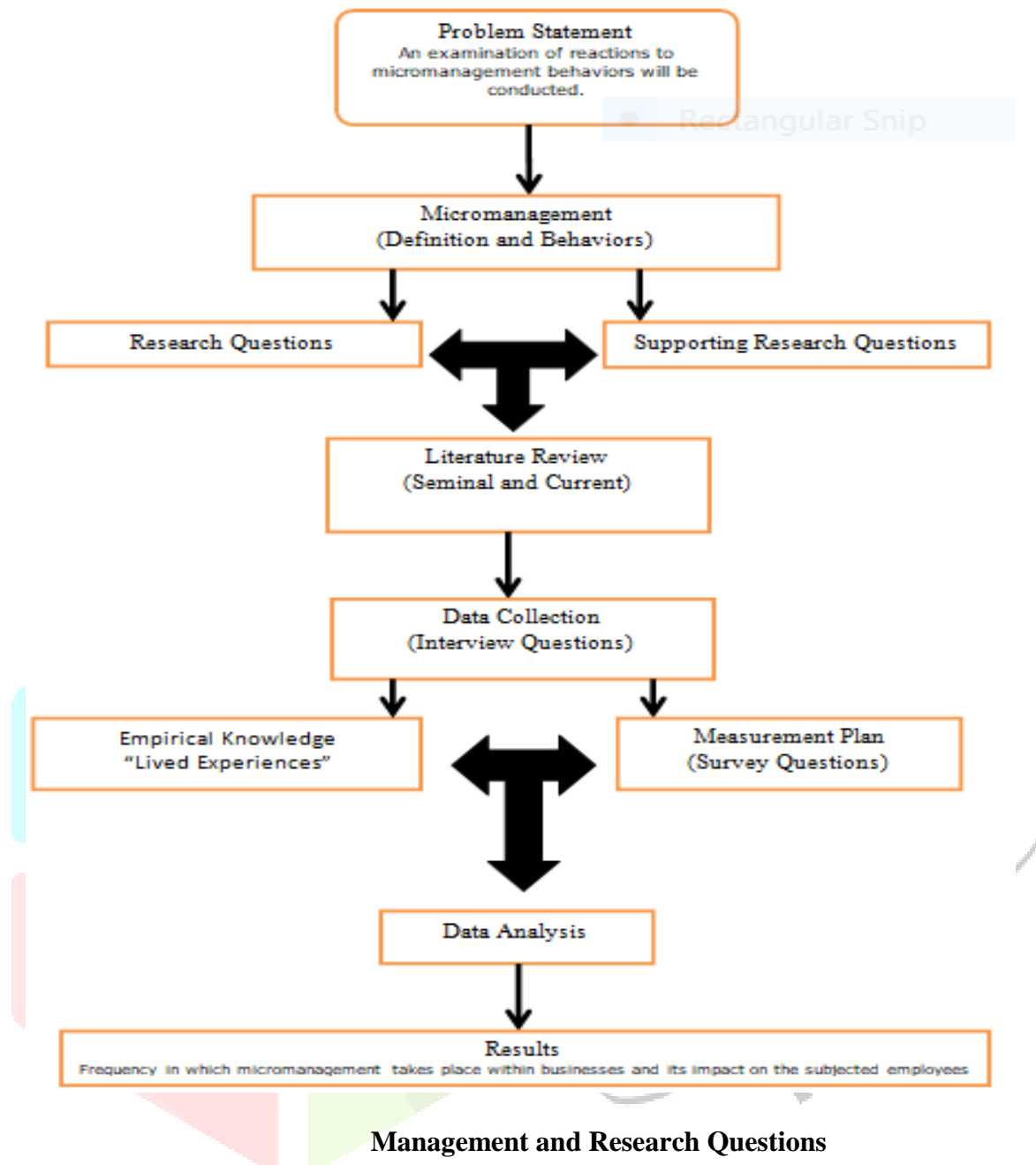
Purpose Statement

For the purpose of this study, an examination of the reactions to micromanagement behaviors was conducted. The following important specifics of micromanagement were addressed; a description of micromanagement, micromanagement behavior characteristics, and its participant’s reactions to micromanagement were addressed to determine the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon as lived by those participating in the study.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

According to Croasdell, Freeman, and Urbaczewski (2003) concept mapping theory and research indicate concept maps (1) are appropriate tools to assist with communication, (2) are easy to use, and (3) are seen as beneficial by their users. This concept map was a great tool to assist the researcher in communicating the process that would be followed in the study.

Conceptual Framework



Throughout this study data was noted in the findings as they contributed to the scope of the study.

The research questions were focused to express the lived experiences of employee's reactions to micromanagement characteristics. The research questions were developed using phenomenological rooted questions "that give a direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awakening further interest and concern, and account for our passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced" (Moustakas, 2004, p. 59). The researcher applied research questions that assumed two forms: a central question and associated sub-questions:

The researcher began with a central research question:

1. What is the nature of the lived experiences of employees who have been exposed to micromanagement leadership styles?

The supporting research questions were:

2. How did the behavior (micromanagement) experienced influence their ability to perform your job functions in the workplace at the time it occurred?
3. How, if at all, has interactions with micromanagers influenced your self-esteem and morale throughout your professional tenure?

In order to explore the participants' experiences the study focused on the individual lived experiences relying on these in-depth interviews. These interviews were semi structured interviews that were conducted over the telephone and in conjunction with an online medium. Kvale (1996) describes qualitative interviews as "a construction site of knowledge" (p.2), where two (or more) individuals discuss a "theme of mutual interest" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.2). Through these types of mediums the researcher was able to observe nonverbal signals and listen to verbal expressions (Salmons, 2010). In this case the online interviews offered both the researcher and her participants the feeling of being together and communicating to achieve meaningful interactions, establishing and maintaining relations, and creating a productive social system within an online environment (Salmons, 2010).

The overall goal with interviewing participants that have experienced micromanagement was to depict "a rigorous description of human life as it is lived and reflected upon in all of its first-person concreteness, urgency, and ambiguity" (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997, p. 5). The interviews were recorded then transcribed and analyzed to deliver the overall essence of micromanagement through themes, word repetition, and similarities and differences. Through these data analysis techniques the researcher was able to (1) discover themes and subthemes; (2) describe the core and peripheral elements of themes;(3) build hierarchies of themes; (4) apply and attach themes to actual text; and (5) Link themes into theoretical models (Bernard & Ryan, 2010) all of which demonstrated the impact of micromanagement.

Literature Review and Current Understanding of the Phenomena

The literature review consisted of both seminal work dated back to the late 60s and early 70s and current work. Most of which is focused on management, leadership, and psychology. The seminal works

reviewed for the purpose of this study encompass the early works of Alderfer (1969), Burgoon (1978), Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975), McGregor (1960), and Murray (1938). These seminal works have made important contributions in the management field which have shaped subsequent work on theory development, research and key practices in the management field by incorporating original theories in today's business world; the methodological paradigm(s) that have guided these early works are focused on management/organizational structures and behavior. In addition, the seminal works provide the core foundations and theories to both the psychological and management perspective of the micromanagement subject matter. These methodological approaches have greatly influenced subsequent research and theory in the field of management, as they have facilitated the development of the roles each member plays, and how one goes about their roles and responsibilities as a manager and or subordinate.

Subsequently, when understanding the phenomena in a phenomenological research, the researcher identifies the "essence" of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study. Understanding the "lived experiences" marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). In this process, the researcher "brackets" his or her own experiences in order to understand those of the participants in the study (Nieswiadomy, 1993).

Methodological Approach and Research Design

The nature of the research was an empirical phenomenological research which referred to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions of events lived. These descriptions then provided the basis for an insightful structural analysis which represents the essence of the experience. At this time the population parameters are set determining participants inclusion or exclusion criteria for participating in the study (Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological investigation was set forth to identify human experiences that are not approachable through quantitative approaches and to obtain descriptions of experience through first-person accounts in informal and formal conversations and interviews.

Sources of Information and Measurement Plan

Appropriate methodology to convey the researchers study was used to capture, understand, and represent the participants' perceptions and meanings through and in their own words (Swanson & Holton,

2005). For this study the measurement was expressed through qualitative descriptions based on the responses to the survey questions asked in each interview.

Data Collection Plan

In descriptive phenomenological research, the ability to collect data from a sample group with maximum variation in which participants have a common experience, but who vary on as wide a variety of demographic characteristics as possible (Langdridge, 2007, p. 87), provided the strongest data set. Additionally, as the purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of a past, lived experience, a concrete description was the most appropriate for descriptive phenomenology (Langdridge, 2007). In addition to the research questions, this study supplied the selected sample population with both closed and open-ended questions. Participants were asked to reflect on their micromanagement interactions and to share experiences throughout their careers.

Data Analysis Plan

The research design consisted of semi-structured questions that utilized a descriptive phenomenological analysis (Giorgi, 1985; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Each respondent's answers then received individual textural, structural and textural-structural descriptions to provide insight into the "what" of the phenomenon and the "how" regarding the phenomenon experience. Trochim (2006) states that a high degree of organization and categorization is required, both of which often lead to making generalizations complex and difficult to identify generalized themes. This was crucial to ensure accuracy in the transfer from data collection to data analysis in the qualitative research study.

Significance and Potential Contributions

Research regarding micromanagement leadership in businesses has a significant impact on any industry, affecting job satisfaction, stress, and employee fear and employee morale. Understanding the significance of this problem was imperative for building a well-developed, highly productive and satisfied employee workforce (Kaila, 2004). However, there has not been a study that has examined the employees' perception and reactions to working with micromanagers.

Ethical Considerations

It was crucial for the researcher to anticipate any ethical issues that may arise during the course of the study. This research focused on the sensitive issue related to micromanagement. In this study, the

researcher was aware of the possibility of her participants demonstrating uncomfortable reactions, and ensured that the participants are aware that they can discontinue the interview process at any time. Fowler (2009) explained that to help minimize the risk to a participant, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) was established to protect human subjects participating in research projects. The IRB review would determine whether the study puts any human subjects in harm's way and will explore any potential risk to participants and researcher (Creswell, 2003).

Expected Outcome

This study was intended to point out the frequency in which micromanagement takes place within businesses and its impact on the subjected employees.

Setting, Population, Sample

The theoretical and conceptual setting of the study illustrated the positive and negative characteristics of micromanagement in the workforce among employees that are not aware that they are being limited to the advantages of establishing and nurturing workplace relationships, motivation, and positive communications (Jorfi, Fauzy, and Md Shah, 2012).

Accordingly, the population for this study consisted of 30 individuals throughout various industries and working ages whom have experienced micromanagement within an organizational environment. The intent of the study was to examine the impact of micromanagement on employees regardless of their gender, age, and industry of employment. The recruitment method chosen was an online recruitment medium. The use of e-mail communications and the creation of a website and blog in an immersive environment (Salmons, 2010) were used to recruit potential participants.

The sample frame for the study was open to any industry in which employs a non-managerial hierarchy in the greater Los Angeles, California area. For the sake of this study the industry was not of considerable importance, as the researcher's intention was to use a Heterogeneous typology which encompasses different experiences of the phenomena of interest (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The data collection was conducted by the researcher. The role of the researcher, as data collection instrument consisted of various key factors: establishing rapport with her participants, focusing on context, applying active listening communication skills; developing a dialogue, engaging in reflection; asking

questions, and fostering trust. Through a qualitative study, the researcher as the instrument was allowed to enter into the phenomenological reduction right away (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2009). Furthermore, the sole data collection method for this study occurred through interviews. The interview questions were set forth in a logical manner extracted from framework envisioned by the researcher for the purpose of this study, which included the research problem, questions, and the literature reviewed.

The preferred method of data analysis for this study ensued through the use of Giorgi's Phenomenological research method which has been categorized as "empirical phenomenological research in psychology" (Hein & Austin, 2001, p. 31). With the use of Giorgi's analysis model the data (audiotapes and transcripts) were synthesized into characteristic themes, where ample "reading between the lines" took place to go beyond explicit meanings. Each participants answers received individual textural, structural, and textural-structural descriptions to provide insight into the "what" of the phenomenon and the "how" regarding the phenomenon experience. By categorizing the themes the researcher was able to analyze the perceptions and experiences of the studied subjects (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Materials and Instruments

The material and instruments used were audiotapes and the NVivo 12 software. NVivo 12 is software that supports qualitative research by allowing the researcher to collect, organize, and analyze interview content. The following steps were taken to ensure proper handling of data and analysis. The first step consisted of labeling of each interview audiotape as it occurred. The second step involved reviewing and transcribed the audiotapes by the researcher. The third step entailed that each transcription be reviewed a second time and compared with the audiotapes for accuracy, and last the themes were analyzed and compared to find commonalities through the use of NVivo 12. Consequently, these steps allowed the researcher to follow a strict method of data collection and data analysis, which was essential in obtaining thorough, reliable, and unbiased information from participants (Ehrich, 2005).

Findings

This study was intended to discover the experiences, factors, and characteristics of micromanagement in the workplace. Current literature discusses and defines micromanagement as how managers and leaders control their employees' within the workplace. Through this study the researcher aimed to convey the employees' experience with micromanagement. The study looked at the following

factors: thoughts, feelings, and ideas used when communicating with managerial workers. In addition, the characteristics of micromanagement afforded the researcher with the opportunity to note the most common micromanagement traits used by managers and leaders.

There were 30 participants in the study; the questions answered by these participants focused on expressing their lived experiences and reactions to micromanagement and the role that micromanagement plays in the workforce. The researcher applied research questions that assumed two forms: a central question and associated supporting questions.

The researcher began with a central research question:

1. What is the nature of the lived experiences of employees who have been exposed to micromanagement leadership styles?

This question was fundamental, because many participants had similar responses when describing the nature of their experiences and exposure to micromanagement. The overall consensus was that micromanagement is directly linked to positions where employees are engaged in direct (person-to-person) and indirect (telephone) customer service positions. The general understanding among the participants is that micromanagement occurs most often in this type of work environment; because, this affords managers with more control over how business should be conducted in their minds, not so much that expected by the organization. This question appeared to be the most complex; as participants appeared to hesitate before answering the question. Most of the participants paused in a moment of thought before answering whether they have in fact been exposed to micromanagement. 89% of the participants believed to have experienced micromanagement in their professional lives; much of the experience being non-positive and limited.

The supporting research questions were:

2. How did the behavior (micromanagement) experienced influence their ability to perform your job functions in the workplace at the time it occurred?

This question focused on establishing the participants' thoughts and experience with micromanagement as it relates to its effect on their ability to perform their job functions in the workplace at the time it occurred. 90% of the participants expressed that they were distressed and

felt uncomfortable being “controlled” and “watched.” They conveyed that they felt pressured and very uncomfortable, as no autonomy was given. 65% of the participant’s stated that at some time during their work tenure they had to take sick leave and 20% even filed complaints and Worker’s Compensation due to severe stress.

3. How, if at all, has interactions with micromanagers influenced your self-esteem and morale throughout your professional tenure?

All the participants articulated that their self-esteem, morale, and motivation within the workforce were negatively affected. 40% of the participants stated that they left the organization; meanwhile, 30% left to different departments, and 30% retired.

Conclusion

Throughout the study data was noted in the findings as they contributed to the scope of the study. The research questions were focused to express the lived experiences of the employee’s reactions to micromanagement and the role micromanagement plays in the workplace. The research questions were developed using phenomenological rooted questions “that give a direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awakening further interest and concern, and account for our passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced” (Moustakas, 2004, p. 59). It was evident in the findings that employees believe that their micromanagers should trade in micromanagement for a healthier and more productive leadership style, one that affords employees’ with constructive feedback as opposed to control, because micromanaging is bad for employees and bad for organizational productivity.

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