

ABSTRACT

Exploring Individual Defensiveness, Psychological Safety and Employee Learning Activities at a University in Jamaica

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The current thesis had four objectives. It aimed to describe three forms of defensiveness - ego defenses, politically defensive behaviours (POLD) and defensive impression management (DEFIM) - and the relationships among them, to propose a unifying theoretical framework that explains individual defensiveness during interactions, to investigate the items and factor structure of the Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ-88) (Bond, 1992) and to explore the relationships among forms of defensiveness, individual learning activities and attitudes towards technological change. A loosely applied mixed methods design was used to address the research questions and hypotheses generated from the review of literature. Study 1 involved collecting data using a survey instrument (on paper) to a randomly selected cross-section of 493 employees at a large university in Jamaica. Study 2 involved conducting and tape-recording structured interviews with 9 purposely selected employees. Average scores were low for maladaptive ego defense style (MAL), DEFIM and POLD and moderate for adaptive ego defense style (AD). There were differences among the age groups on MAL, DEFIM and POLD, among the job categories on MAL and POLD but no gender differences. A two factor model of ego defense styles was confirmed in a CFA. MAL predicted both POLD and DEFIM. POLD predicted desire to share knowledge (DKS) but not innovative role performance (INOVPERF). DEFIM predicted INOVPERF but not DKS. Perceived organizational defensive routines predicted feelings of psychological safety which then predicted desire to share knowledge. Interview data supported the proposed theoretical framework and provided in-depth accounts of respondents' defensive reality and identity negotiation. The thesis concludes by promoting future research on defensiveness in organizations and the direct application of research results.

Keywords: Marina Ramkissoon; individual defensiveness, learning in organizations, psychological safety, university employees; Jamaica