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Managing Abusive Supervision: How Subordinate Characteristics and Human Resource Management Practices Protect Against Abusive Supervision

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Declaration

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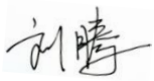
Signed: 

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Managing Abusive Supervision: How Subordinate Characteristics and Human Resource Management Practices Protect Against Abusive Supervision

Teng Liu

Abstract

With the rise of research on dark-side leadership, abusive supervision has attracted substantial scholarly attention. However, practical soloutions for mitigating its detrimental effects remain limited, particularly from the perspectives of subordinates and human resource management practices. To address the void, this thesis examines why leaders engage in abusive behaviours, and how their negative consequences may be alleviated once such behaviours occur. Grounded on the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) framework and Conservation of Resource (COR) theory, the present thesis carries out three empirical studies to address these questions, each informed by different theoretical perspectives. Study 1 combines social influence theory and moral exclusion theory to investigate the effects of subordinate political skill on perceptions of abusive supervision via improving in-role performance (i.e., task performance) and extra-role performance (i.e., organisational citizenship behaviours). Study 2 integrates attribution theory and abusive supervision research to explore the moderating roles of follower perceptions of performance-promotion and injury-initiation attributions in the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinate emotional exhaustion. Study 3 applies the stressor-detachment model to integrate abusive supervision, high performance work systems (HPWS), subordinates' psychological detachment, and strain. Specifically, Study 3 examines both the mediating and moderating roles of psychological detachment in the relationship between abusive supervision and strain. In addition, the role of HPWS is investigated as a contextual factor that moderates the nature of the relationship between abusive supervision and strain via psychological detachment. As the data is not independent (employees nested within supervisors), the proposed hypotheses are tested using multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM) within Mplus. Study 1 and 2 are carried out based on time lagged data collected from China among 224 individuals nested in 37 teams in a transportation Chinese

state-owned enterprise. Study 3 involves a large sample collected from a state-owned energy enterprise in China among 894 individuals nested in 67 teams and 7 company branches (cross-sectional design).

Overall, the present study underscores the critical role of subordinate-related factors in both the occurrence and the alleviation of abusive supervision, as well as the role of human resource management (i.e., high-performance work systems) in mitigating its detrimental effects on subordinates. Specifically, the empirical findings suggest that subordinate political skill restricts abusive supervision behaviour via organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB), yet the mediating effect of task performance in the relationship is not significant (Study 1). Contrary to the expectations, subordinate performance-promotion attribution exacerbates, rather than mitigates, the positive influence of abusive supervision on subordinate emotional exhaustion, while the expected exacerbating effect of injury-initiation attribution between abusive supervision and subordinate emotional exhaustion is nonsignificant (Study 2). In addition, high-performance work systems (HPWS) alleviates the negative influence of abusive supervision on subordinates' psychological detachment and in turn their strain (Study 3). While psychological detachment mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and strain, the expected buffering effect of psychological detachment in the relationship is not supported (Study 3). Taken together, the findings make significant contributions to the existing literature by extending the nomological network of abusive supervision regarding how subordinates' characteristics and human resource management practices influence both the occurrence and impacts of abusive supervision. Anchored in the JD–R framework, this thesis integrates complementary theoretical perspectives to unpack the nuanced dynamics surrounding abusive supervision, thereby enriching the existing theoretical foundations of abusive supervision. Finally, the conclusions provide feasible recommendations for coping strategies against abusive supervision in practice and delineate promising avenues for future research.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

After years of exploring the merits and virtues of positive leadership styles, such as transformational leadership (Bass, 1985), transactional leadership (Bass, 1990), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970) and authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005) among others, the significance of the malicious side of leaders' has also surfaced in the literature (e.g., De Hoogh et al., 2008; Tepper et al., 2000). The proliferation of negative leadership studies may be occurring on the basis of the psychological phenomenon that subordinates' psychological reactions towards negative stimuli is more sensitive and volatile (Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001), thereby possibly generating profound negative effects on organisational efficiency. Contemporary meta-analytic and longitudinal evidence showed that supervisory negative behaviours consistently produce negative outcomes such as lowering subordinate well-being, commitment, and performance while increasing withdrawal and deviance (Li et al., 2024). Indeed, studies on the dark facets of leaders can advance our understanding of organisational behaviour and particularly enable us to understand how such destructive leadership behaviours surface and how they can be restrained for good (e.g., Krasikova et al., 2013; Li et al., 2024; Tepper, 2000). Since the 21st century, a novel trend of research on detrimental supervisory behaviours has experienced a meteoric rise, with a focus on various leadership styles such as despotic leadership (De Hoogh et al., 2008), authoritarian leadership (Cheng et al., 2004), self-serving leadership (Peng et al., 2019), leader narcissism (Grijalva et al., 2015), and exploitative leadership

(Schmid et al., 2019). Among diverse negative supervisory behaviours, the prevalence and detriments of abusive supervision are overarching in the current business world (Tepper, 2000) and has been the dominant form of destructive leadership form examined in organisational research (e.g., Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Mackey et al., 2017).

Abusive supervision is commonly defined as "the sustained display of hostile, verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000, p.178) and includes but is not limited to supervisory deviance including taking credit from subordinates' performance, humiliating subordinates in front of others, making groundless accusations, and giving subordinates the silent treatment. With the inception of the terminology *abusive supervision* (Tepper, 2000), more than two decades of research have substantially explored its nomological network, encompassing antecedents, consequences, and underlying mechanisms (for reviews, see Fischer et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2024; Tepper et al., 2017). Prior studies have broadly demonstrated that abusive supervision leads to severe negative impacts on the subordinates' well-being including reactions such as higher level of stress, anger, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion (e.g., Aryee et al., 2008; Martinko et al., 2013; Mawritz et al., 2014). These outcomes of impaired well-being, in turn, damage subordinates' daily performance and could cause various forms of workplace deviance (e.g. retaliation and counterproductive work behaviour; Chi et al., 2013; Ford et al., 2011; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007) and negative effects on life outcomes such as work-family conflicts (Carlson et al., 2012).

Substantial empirical evidence has highlighted the tangible costs of abusive supervision on organisations in practice. Data showed that abusive supervision influenced more than 13% of all the United States (U.S) workforce and led to the enormous costs of up

to 23.8 billion annually in U.S. firms, resulting from subordinates' absenteeism, health-care cost, lost productivity, and high levels of turnover (Schat et al., 2006; Tepper et al., 2006). Based on meta-analytic studies (Mackey et al., 2017; Zhang & Liao, 2015), abusive supervision leads to sizable distal organisational costs, such as higher withdrawal, deviance, and lower task performance/OCB. Moreover, abusive supervision is acknowledged to be particularly rampant in high-power-distance Asian contexts such as China, Philippine, Korea, and Taiwan (Liang et al., 2016; Mackey et al., 2017). Evidence revealed that more than half of Chinese employees have experienced abusive supervision in varying degrees, such as intimidation, cold violence, rude words, and overload assignments (Liang et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2020). Therefore, the above evidence underscores an urgent need to clarify the antecedents and mechanisms of abusive supervision and to translate this knowledge into actionable interventions that can constrain its prevalence and attenuate its downstream harm in such context (Fischer et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2024; Tepper et al., 2017).

Although supervisory abusive behaviours are widespread in contemporary workplaces and extensively investigated, evidence-based coping strategies remain insufficient to date (Fischer et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2024; Tepper et al., 2017). Alarmingly, due to power asymmetry (e.g., fear of retaliation), covert episodic abuse, ambiguous intent, normative tolerance, and cultural variability in what counts as 'abuse', identifying effective management practices to retrain abusive supervision is regarded as a pressing challenge for both scholars and practitioners (Fischer et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2024; Park et al., 2019). This may account for the impracticality of many current recommendations aimed at restraining abusive supervision (Fishcer et al., 2021; Tepper et al., 2017). Thus, advancing this line of inquiry is essential for increasing the practical relevance of abusive supervision

research, because current literature remains merely descriptive somewhat falling short of offering actionable guidance.

1.1.1 Subordinate Characteristics Restrain Abusive Supervision

To reduce abusive supervision, scholars evolved with a greater emphasis on the etiology of abusive supervision principally focusing on supervisor-related and organisation-related antecedents. Organisational elements including high power distance, organisational injustice, and some certain leaders' factors (e.g., stress and negative experiences) have been regarded as critical triggers of abusive supervision (for a review, see Zhang & Bednall, 2016). Due to the inherently unethical nature of abusive behaviours, it is rational to investigate actionable strategies to restrict leaders from engaging in abusive behaviours in the first place. However, to effectively curb and mitigate abusive supervision in organisations, it might be myopic to merely concentrate on the perpetrators and organisations alone (Fischer et al., 2021; Hannah et al., 2013; Pradhan, & Jena, 2017).

Unbeknownst to many, the victims of abusive supervision themselves can play a critical role in perceiving abusive supervision, because the phenomenon of abusive supervision is, in essence, an interactional and potentially reciprocal process involving two parties (i.e., conductor and recipient (e.g., Harvey et al., 2014; Lian et al., 2014; Mawritz et al., 2017; Walter et al., 2015). Without further inquiry into subordinate-related antecedents, academic discourse risks compromising objectivity and overlooking essential insights, which are needed to deepen our understanding of abusive supervision (e.g., Cullen et al., 2014; Fischer et al., 2021; Harvey et al., 2014). There are two primary reasons accounting for this phenomenon: firstly, subordinates' characteristics could be significant factors in incurring or preventing abusive behaviours from their leaders (e.g., Walter et al., 2015; Tepper et al.,

2011). This can also be interpreted on the practical basis that subordinates with certain characteristics and behaviours are often regarded as so-called "easy targets" for abusive supervision. Secondly, individuals have discretionary thoughts on whether certain supervisory behaviours are considered as abusive or severe or trivial (e.g., Fischer et al., 2021; Harvey et al., 2014; Martinko et al., 2011). Specifically, the cognitive process could, in turn, influence the extent of and seriousness of supervisory abusive behaviours, as well as its potential influence on key outcomes.

Hence, subordinates may vary substantially in how they perceive and are affected by abusive supervision, even when exposed to the same leader or identical supervisory behaviours, largely depending on their individual characteristics (e.g., personality traits, social skills, attributional tendencies, and family status). This kind of phenomenon is also frequently witnessed in everyday organisational life. For instance, within a work team, a leader may treat subordinates differently depending on their dispositions and their levels of performance, while team members may interpret the leader's behaviour as either abusive or fair or unimportant. Existing research on subordinates' characteristics influencing abusive supervision has already commenced, with a general focus on examining factors like their innate personalities, such as psychological entitlement and hostile attribution styles (e.g., Harvey *et al*., 2014; Martinko *et al.*, 2011). However, the nature of these subordinates' dispositions are resistant to change, constraining the development of practical solutions and understanding other malleable subordinates' characteristics has been suggested as an important area of research to advance (Fischer et al., 2021; Zhang & Bednall, 2016). To address this void, the thesis introduces individual political skill as an instrumental resource

to restrain abusive supervision via improving task performance and organisational citizenship behaviours.

1.1.2 The Boundary Conditions of Abusive Supervision

Another promising strand of research has posited that the influence of abusive supervision might not always be negative or severe (e.g., Liu et al., 2012; Offergelt & Venz, 2023; Zhang & Liu, 2018). As previously mentioned, subordinates exposed to identical abusive supervisory behaviours could arrive at different interpretations and affective reactions (Fischer et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2024). For instance, individual mindfulness could attenuate the influence of abusive supervision on subordinates, weakening its negative impact on key outcomes including self-efficacy, creativity, and performance (De Clercq et al., 2022; Zheng & Liu, 2017). Additionally, empirical research based on high power-distance organisation in South Korea found that subordinates could be more creative when they perceived moderate-levels of abusive supervision compared with low-levels (Lee et al., 2013). Indeed, a variety of factors may buffer or exacerbate the impacts of abusive supervision on subordinates (Oh & Farh, 2017), as reflected by the substantial variability in reported associations between abusive supervision and subordinate deviance, ranging from as low as -.15 to as high as .74 (for a review, see Fischer et al., 2021). In this regard, the influence of abusive supervision is conditional rather than universal. According to COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), subordinates' psychological and behavioural responses to abusive supervision may depend heavily on the personal and job resources at their disposal, rather than leaders' abusive behaviours per ce (Tepper et al., 2017). Therefore, it is worthwhile to delineate individual and contextual factors that can attenuate the detriments of abusive supervision. While prior studies have made extensive efforts to explore relevance and mechanisms, there remains a paucity of

actionable and effective buffers for abusive supervision (Liang et al., 2024; Tepper et al., 2017). Understanding effective coping strategies and resources mitigating the negative influence of abusive supervision is of significant importance since it may be idealistic to assume that supervisory abusive behaviours in the workplace can be fully eradicated in practice (De Clercq et al., 2022; Hannah et al., 2013; Pradhan, & Jena, 2017). Advancing relevant knowledge can enable practitioners to deploy appropriate managerial interventions to remediate abusive supervision after it occurs. Building on this research stream, the present thesis advances the extant theory by examining key boundary conditions of abusive supervision, including individual attributions, psychological detachment, and human resource management practices.

Taken together, these mechanisms make a compelling case to emphasise the theoretical and practical significance of subordinate-related antecedents, as well as potential buffers that attenuate the harms of abusive supervision (Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper et al., 2017; Zhang & Bednall, 2016). Because subordinates are not passive recipients: their characteristics, attributions, and coping repertoires can both precipitate and protect against abusive supervision (Fischer et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2024; Zhang & Bednall, 2016). Moreover, stable traits (e.g., neuroticism, dominance, and hostility), negative exchanges with leaders, and negative performance-related information (e.g., poor performance episodes or norm-violating behaviour) may inadvertently invite controlling responses, whereas emotion regulation and self-control reduce provocation and escalation of the negative experience (e.g., Harvey et al., 2014; Lian et al., 2014; Sheng et al., 2025). Meanwhile, personal resources (e.g., political skill and off-work recovery experiences) and job resources (e.g., human resource management, organisational support, and empowerment) can also potentially shape

subordinates' appraisals of abusive supervision, dampen threat, and interrupt harmful cycles (e.g., Glomb et al., 2011; Offergelt & Venz, 2023; Reb et al., 2014). By centering on these reframing factors in practice, rather than relying solely on leader selection, training, or sanctions, practitioners can establish complementary channels (e.g., building subordinates' capabilities and implementing human resource management strategies) to protect the well-being and job performance of subordinates who may be exposed to abusive supervision. Therefore, the present thesis advances the exploration of abusive supervision along two main complementary routes: (1) explaining the emergence of abusive supervision by specifying subordinate antecedents (i.e., political skill, organisational citizenship behaviour, and task performance), and (2) identifying buffers of abusive supervision influence with focus on individual attributions, individual recovery experience, and human resource management.

1.1.3 Aims and Objectives

This thesis comprises three separate empirical studies. By focusisng on precise subordinate characteristics and human resource management (high performance work systems i.e., HPWS), these studies seek to identify and examine coping strategies that could attenuate subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision and buffer its detrimental effects (Fischer et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2024; Tepper et al., 2017). First, extant studies have primarily examined and demonstrated how supervisor-related and organisation-related antecedents rstrain abusive supervision, leaving the subordinate-related antecedents underexplored, especially the malleable and trainable subordinates' characteristics (Fischer et al., 2021; Zhang & bednall, 2016). Drawing on social influence theory (Levy et al., 1998) and moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990), Study 1 addresses this gap by examining whether and how subordinate political skill reduces abusive supervision via improving task performance and

organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB). On the other hand, to effectively limit the detrimental effects of prevalent abusive supervision, it is important to implement remedial measures after abusive supervision occurs. The present thesis explores the buffering strategies focusing on subordinate characteristics and human resource management, an area that remains underexplored in the literature (Leroy et al., 2018; Tepper et al., 2017). Based on attribution theory (Heider, 1958) and COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), Study 2 explores how subordinates' attributions of abusive supervision (i.e., performance promotion and injury initiation) shape the influence of abusive supervision on emotional exhaustion. In addition, addressing the practical gap of solutions to abusive supervision (Liang et al., 2024; Tepper et al., 2017) and the theoretical void of interactive impacts between human resource management and dark-side leadership (Leroy et al., 2018), Study 3 applies the stressor–detachment model (Sonnentag et al., 2015) to test whether high-performance work systems (HPWS) buffer the adverse association between abusive supervision and subordinates' psychological detachment, and in turn strain. Simultaneously, Study 3 further investigates the potential buffering effect of psychological detachment between abusive supervision and strain. Based on these three empirical studies, the findings of the thesis aim to effectively extend the current understanding of how to cope with abusive supervision, and thereby protect subordinates' well-being and improve their overall working experience in practice.

1.1.4 Thesis Outline

Grounded in the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) and COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), the thesis positions abusive supervision as a primary and potent job demand and explores how the various proposed job and personal resources operate to restrain and mitigate against abusive supervision. Although the JD-R model and COR theory provide a broad demand and

resource-based foundation, they do not fully delineate the specific mechanisms linking all the focal constructs explored in this thesis. To address this theoratical void, each of the three empirical studies draws on niche targeting and domain-specific theories in order to explicate the underlying mechanisms and contingency factors underlying the focal hypothesised relationships, thereby answering the overarching research questions (e.g., coping strategies against abusive supervision).

In Study 1, prior studies have underscored the significance of subordinate-related antecedents, yet there remains a paucity of research on specific malleable subordinate characteristics that can effectively restrain abusive supervision. In this manner, social influence theory (Levy et al., 1998) and moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990) are combined to advance a model which predicts that subordinates' political skill can decrease their perception of abusive supervision via improving work performance (i.e., task performance and OCB). The study delves into whether and why subordinates' political skill shapes leaders' moral inclusion of them, thereby influencing subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision. Based on a 3-wave data collection design with analysis carried out using Bayesian Structural Equation Modeling (BSEM), the study investigates the linkage between subordinates' political skill and their perception of abusive supervision via task performance and OCB (OCB-O and OCB-I).

In Study 2, while scholars have identified the buffering effect of performance-promotion attribution and the exacerbating effect of injury-initiation attribution on the effects of abusive supervision on subordinates' performance outcomes, little is known about how these attributions shape the effects of abusive supervision on subordinate well-being. Accordingly, attribution theory (Heider, 1958) is applied to investigate whether, and in what

ways, subordinates' individual attributions of abusive supervision (performance-promotion and injury-initiation attributions) may function either as personal resources that buffer the association between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion (as an indicator of well-being) or as additional demands that exacerbate the relationship between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion. Using time-lagged data and tested with multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM) in Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017), Study 2 aims to identify potential attribution-based strategies that help subordinates attenuate the negative effects of abusive supervision on their well-being (i.e., emotional exhaustion).

Finally, although mainstream studies, drawing on the JD-R model, have identified HR practices as instrumental job resources that could buffer the effects of demands e.g., abusive supervision, there remains a clear gap in research explicating how dark-side leadership interacts with HR practices to influence subordinates outcomes. In Study 3, the stressor–detachment model (Sonnentag et al., 2015) is combined with Leroy et al.'s (2018) conceptual framework to investigate how abusive supervision relates to strain through psychological detachment, and whether HPWS represents a contextual condition in this indirect pathway. This study extends existing knowledge by integrating literature across the domains of organisational behaviour (abusive supervision), strategic HRM (HPWS), and occupational health psychology (recovery experiences i.e., psychological detachment). Study 3 contained a field sample of 894 full-time employees from a large state-owned energy firm in Southwest China.

Although the thesis draws on organisational behaviour and occupational health psychology frameworks that were largely developed within Western research traditions, these frameworks have been widely applied across cultural contexts, including China and the

broader Asian context (e.g., Liang et al., 2016; Mackey et al., 2017). They provide a robust resource-based theoretical lens for the thesis by explaining how resource losses and gains relate to strain, well-being, and coping. In addition, the measures of the focal constructs employed were also initially developed in Western context and have been adopted and validated in China (e.g., Liang et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2020; Yu & Duffy, 2021). Focusing on the subordinate perspective, the thesis aims to advance our understanding of the coping strategies for subordinates experiencing abusive supervision. Due to the prevalence of the abusive supervision phenomenon in China and the broader Asian context (Liang et al., 2016; Mackey et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2020), our samples collected from two Chinese companies in traditional industries are particularly insightful to explore abusive supervision and how it could be minimised in the workplace (Liang et al., 2016; Mackey et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2020). Moreover, examining these relationships in a Chinese organisational setting offers a valuable test of the extent to which these Western-developed frameworks generalise across cultural contexts (Brough et al., 2013).

1.1.5 Research Contributions

The thesis contributes to the literature on abusive supervision, human resource management, and occupational health psychology in several ways. While the nomological network of abusive supervision has been broadly empirically studied, there are challenges that remain in practice for how to restrain supervisory abusive behaviours and alleviate the consequential negative impacts in the workplace, especially in terms of feasible strategies from the subordinate side (Fischer et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2024; Tepper et al., 2017). In Study 1, applying social influence theory (Levy et al., 1998) and moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990) within the broader framework of the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001), The

findings identify subordinates' political skill as a potent personal resource that enhances subordinate performance and protects them from abusive supervision. Specifically, OCB-I (i.e., organisational citizenship behaviour directed toward helping coworkers) mediates the association between political skill and abusive supervision. By employing a three-wave design, the study provides a time-lagged assessment of the proposed sequence, reducing concerns about simultaneity and offering evidence that is more consistent with the notion that subordinate capabilities and behaviours precede perceived abusive supervision. Carrying out this study contributes to the dearth of research on what followers can do in order to circumvent abusive supervision in the first place, an area which has been controversial to explore, given the connotations associated with blaming the victims of abusive supervision rather than the culprits (Martinko et al., 2013; Tepper, 2007; Walter et al., 2015).

In Study 2, existing literature has evidenced that construing abusive supervision on the basis of distinct attributions (i.e., performance promotion and injury initiation) can buffer or exacerbate the negative impacts of abusive supervision on subordinates' outcome performance such as creativity (Liu et al., 2012), task performance (Yang et al., 2020), and OCB (Yu & Duffy, 2021). However, it remains unclear whether similar moderating patterns could extend to subordinates' well-being. This issue is critical, because maintained performance does not necessarily reflect secured well-being (Van de Voorde et al., 2012) nor does it result in sustainable subordinate working performance (Guest, 2017). Based on COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and attribution theory (Heider, 1958), The study addresses this void by examining the moderating effects of subordinates attributions (i.e., performance promotion and injury initiation) of abusive supervision on the relationship between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion. The findings advance the existing literature by

deciphering whether the beneficial aspects of performance-promotion attribution and the detrimental aspects of injury-initiation attribution, which have been supported for performance-related outcomes, materialise for subordinate well-being outcomes. In doing so, the study articulates whether positive and negative attributions subordinates make regarding abusive supervision result in subordinates' genuine well-being improvement or concealed emotional resource depletion.

In Study 3, the recent conceptual framework of Leroy et al. (2018) posited that leadership behaviours and human resource management are mutually interdependent forces, highlighting different patterns of the interactive relationship (e.g., reinforcement, counteraction, and independence). To articulate the relationship between dark-side leadership and human resource practice, Study 3 employs the stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag et al., 2015) to explore how the combined presence of abusive supervision and HPWS influences subordinates' psychological detachment and in turn their levels of strain. By incorporating abusive supervision and HPWS into the stressor–detachment model, the study aim to advance knowledge of why and when some subordinates can achieve better psychological detachment and maintain their well-being, even when they confronted with abusive supervision. In doing so, Study 3 articulates the competing roles of HPWS (optimistic and pessimistic perspectives), providing empirical evidence on whether HPWS alleviates or exacerbates the detrimental effects of abusive supervision on subordinates' health related outcomes (e.g., Godard, 2004, 2010; Jensen et al., 2013; Kroon et al., 2009). At the same time, following the rationale of stressor-detachment model, Study 3 further extends Iser-Potempa et al.'s (2024) investigation by introducing psychological detachment as both a mediator and a moderator between abusive supervision and strain, thereby

advancing the understanding of the mechanisms and boundary conditions linking abusive supervision to strain. The findings provide theoretical and practical implications for potential coping strategies of abusive supervision. Altogether, Study 3 makes a substantial contribution by integrating the literature across the domains of organisational behaviour (leadership), human resource management (HPWS), and occupational health (recovery experience).

In conclusion, the thesis aims to shed light on coping strategies against abusive supervision in the workplace, highlighting several ways to safeguard individual well-being, and improve subordinates' work experiences in Chinese organisational contexts, where abusive supervision is relatively prevalent (e.g., China, broader Asia; Liang et al., 2016; Mackey et al., 2017). Particularly, the thesis underscores and elaborate the influence of subordinate' characteristics and human resource management (HRM) by a set of critical constructs, including political skill, task performance, organisational citizenship behaviour, performance-promotion attribution, injury-initiation attribution, high-performance work system, and psychological detachment. Accordingly, the findings and conclusions offer valuable insights and actionable guidance for organisational management practice.

1.2 Research Questions and Conceptual Model

The thesis addresses these issues by focusing on the following research questions (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Research Question List

Core Research Questions	Research Area
To what extent are subordinate characteristics relevant in shaping perceptions of abusive supervision?	Antecedents of abusive supervision
How do subordinate' characteristics shape perceptions of abusive supervision?	The theoretical background of subordinate-related antecedents of abusive supervision
To what extent is the impact of abusive supervision dependent on the context?	Potential buffering strategies against abusive supervision
How do subordinates' characteristics and human resource management buffer or exacerbate the influence of abusive supervision?	The theoretical background of buffers from the perspective of subordinates and human resource management

1.2.1 Q1: To what extent are subordinate characteristics relevant in shaping perceptions of abusive supervision?

Drawing on a meta-analytic review of abusive supervision antecedents, Zhang and Bednall (2016) developed a four-category typology of abusive supervision antecedents: 1) supervisor-related, 2) organisation-related, 3) subordinate-related, and 4) demographic factors. Given that abusive supervision essentially reflects abusive behaviours conducted by leaders, intervention efforts to date have primarily focused on the first two mechanisms, such as reducing supervisors' strain, cultivating ethical leadership, strengthening organisational

justice, and discouraging high power-distance climates (Brown et al., 2005; Tepper et al., 2017; Zhang & Bednall, 2016). These efforts are necessary, yet an exclusive focus on perpetrators risks diagnostic myopia (Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper, 2000; Tepper et al., 2011). As previously mentioned, scholars have raised the concern that subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision could be volatile and subjective (e.g., Harvey et al., 2014; Martinko et al., 2011). Meta-analytic and narrative reviews indicate that abusive supervision arises from multiple determinants and is shaped by contextual factors, necessitating coordinated and multilevel approaches rather than interventions focused solely on leaders (Fischer et al., 2021; Mackey et al., 2017; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Zhang & Bednall, 2016).

Perhaps controversially, some research has stated that subordinates' dispositions and behaviours could determine whether they receive abusive treatment (Fischer et al., 2021; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Walter et al., 2015), while others more strongly argued that subordinates might be responsible for abusive supervision (Harvey et al., 2014; Lian et al., 2014; Sheng et al., 2025). Just like teachers often favor good-grade students, high-performing subordinates are valuable for organisational efficiency, and generally more favored by their leaders, whereas subordinates who display negative attitudes and poor performance may be more likely to receive abrasive treatment. Empirical work documents a pernicious cycle in which underperformance and deviance elicits negative supervisory responses, which in turn further undermines subordinate functioning (e.g., Harvey et al., 2014; Lian et al., 2014; Walter et al., 2015). In today's intensely competitive and high-pressure business environment, attributing supervisory harsh words and aggressive actions solely to leaders is overly reductive, because contemporary leaders operate under stringent performance targets and tight time constraints (Fischer *et al*., 2021; Lian et al., 2014). These

tough requirements should not be treated as justifications for conducting abusive behaviours but rather as contextual conditions that must be addressed to manage abusive supervision in a comprehensive way. Thus, a balanced account should integrate leader behaviour, organisational systems, and follower characteristics to explain when and why abusive supervision is enacted and perceived.

To start with, Tepper (2000; 2007) posited that leaders' abusive behaviours might be conducted for the purpose of warning subordinates for malpractice, inaccurate behaviours, and poor outcome performance (also see, e.g., Lian et al., 2014; Mawritz et al., 2017; Sheng et al., 2025). Following this research stream, longitudinal evidence indicates that subordinate deviance can precede and predict later reports of abusive supervision (Lian et al., 2014). Additionally, Perceptual biases matter as well. Cynicism increases the likelihood of interpreting ambiguous acts as abusive (Tepper et al., 2006), while entitlement is associated with heightened perceptions of abusive supervision and, in turn, stronger counterproductive reactions (Harvey et al., 2014). Personality such as narcissism and neuroticism likewise sensitise subordinates to social interactions, elevating perceived abusive behaviours (Zhang & Bednall, 2016). The above empirical evidence motivates a forward-looking agenda: to identify and cultivate subordinate capabilities that lower the propensity to perceive abusive supervision and get rid of the negative abusive cycles (i.e., negative behaviour-abusive supervision-negative behaviour). However, many prior studies have examined relevant subordinate factors that are often regarded as relatively stable dispositional tendencies, and thus less readily malleable through organisational intervention (e.g., hostile attribution, agreeableness, neuroticism, and entitlement), constraining the development of effective and scalable solutions in practice (Tepper et al., 2017). Therefore, identifying other potentially

malleable subordinate-related antecedents represents a fruitful line of investigation, which would enrich both theory and practice on the topic of abusive supervision (Fischer et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2024; Tepper et al., 2017). To fill this void, the present thesis introduces individual political skill, task performance, and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB, operationalised by OCB-O and OCB-I) as important personal resources that could attenuate perceptions of abusive supervision. The corresponding hypotheses are summarised in Table 1.2 and empirically tested in Study 1.

1.2.2 Q2: How do subordinate characteristics shape perceptions of abusive supervision?

To extend the understanding of subordinate-related antecedents, existing literature has approached how subordinate characteristics shape their likelihood of receiving and perceiving abusive supervision through multiple theoretical lenses. First, *social exchange theory* indicates that social behaviour arises from reciprocal exchanges of valued resources, governed by perceived costs and benefits, expectations of reciprocity, and the gradual development of trust and obligation (Blau, 1964). This theory provides a critical rationale for explaining how signals of contribution or breach trigger positive or negative reciprocity between leaders and subordinates. Specifically, subordinate characteristics and behaviours act as signals within an implicit exchange contract with leaders (Lian et al., 2014). Individual factors such as conscientiousness, creativity, humility, and visible organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) communicate positive reciprocity and build high-quality leader-member exchange, which could elicit supportive rather than negative responses (e.g., Liu & Kilroy., 2025; Walter et al., 2015). By contrast, malpractice, demotivation, entitlement, cynicism, deviance, and low self-control often manifest as underperformance and hostility, which leaders interpret as breach of exchange obligations or negative reciprocity (Lian et al., 2014;

Mawritz et al., 2017; Sheng et al., 2025). In such cases, supervisors may reciprocate with coercive monitoring, severe warning, verbal hostility, or social undermining, especially when perceived alternatives (coaching, sanctioning) seem costly or ineffective (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Sheng et al., 2025). Over time, such interaction patterns can escalate into negative exchange spirals: subordinate underperformance and deviance invite leader negative reciprocity (i.e., imbalance of exchange), thereby resulting in further leader negative responses, such as harsh words, silence, and retaliations (e.g., abusive supervision).

Additionally, prior studies have converged on the notion that ego depletion theory and self-control theory could be effective lenses to investigate the etiology of abusive supervision (Lian et al., 2014; Sheng et al., 2025). According to ego depletion theory (Baumeister et al., 1998), individuals possess a finite pool of psychological resources (i.e., often described as willpower) that must be are expanded in self-regulation and self-control processes including inhibiting impulses, regulating emotions, and making complex decisions. Applying the rationale to abusive supervision, subordinates' negative characteristics and behaviours could impose heavy self-regulatory demands on supervisors, precipitating leader ego depletion and, in turn, abusive behaviours (Mawritz et al., 2017; Sheng et al., 2025). In practice, organisational norms, social ethics, potential legal repercussions, and personal reputation could prohibit an immediate emotional outburst. To remain "professional", leaders may quell anger, curb harsh language, and critically continue to monitor subsequent performance to judge whether the lapse is an aberration or a trend. Moreover, because leaders are typically held accountable for group or organisational performance, they might suppress their impulse and consider how to achieve subordinate performance restoration. These actc of emotional restraint, cognitive appraisal, and behavioural shaping draws from a very finite

pool of self-control resources (e.g., willpower), leaving the pool temporarily exhausted. Persistent exposure to subordinates' skill deficits (e.g., poor emotion regulation and low social skills), adverse characteristics (e.g., neuroticism, entitlement, and hostility) which manifest in affective displays, resistance, and miscommunication, and behaviours such as delays, counterproductive work behaviour, and confrontational voice can significantly magnify the willpower depletion, ultimately leading to ego depletion and abusive behaviours (e.g., Lian et al., 2014; Mawritz et al., 2017; Sheng et al., 2025). Building on this dynamic, it is conceivable that follower negative characteristics and behaviours that tax supervisors' self-regulatory capacity can heighten leaders' aggressive responses. The process is recursive: subordinate deviance → supervisory regulatory load → leader ego depletion → abusive behaviour → heightened subordinate strain/deviance → further supervisory regulatory load.

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and self-regulation/ego depletion theory (Baumeister et al., 1998) provide foundational lenses to articulate the mechanism through which subordinate-related antecedents of abusive supervision in the existing literature, yet they do not fully specify the more fine-grained pathways and contingencies that link particular subordinate and other contextual factors to abusive supervision. To address this theoretical gap, research has increasingly drawn on more targeted, domain-specific theories to explicate these delicate relationships.

First, the thesis introduces social influence theory (Levy et al., 1998) and moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990) to elaborate how subordinate-related factors may influence abusive supervision. Social influence theory holds that individuals strategically use norms, persuasion, authority, and impression management to shape others' attitudes and behaviour to secure their desired outcomes (Levy et al., 1998). Applied to leader-member interactions,

subordinates' social skills, reputations, impression-management tactics, and social networks (e.g., guanxi) can shape leaders' behavioural patterns and the perceived acceptability of aggressive behaviours. Particularly, subordinates' social capabilities facilitate effective interactions and heighten their social awareness, thereby enabling them to influence leaders' opinions, decision-making processes, and behavioural tendencies, which can shape the likelihood of exposure to abusive supervision (Ferris et al., 2005; Liu & Kilroy, 2025; Munyon et al., 2015). Moreover, subordinates with high social capabilities can deploy influence tactics (rational persuasion, empathy, and exemplification) that signal respect and competence, protect leader reputation, and elevate trust or LMX, thus receiving more positive responses and supportive behaviours from leaders (e.g., Cullen et al., 2014; Liu & Kilroy, 2025). In contrast, low skill or overtly self-serving impression management may invite attributions of manipulation, insufficient effort, and disrespect, which erode trust and increase the perceived need for punitive oversight, especially when leaders are under challenging goals and time pressure. In this manner, social influence theory (Levy et al., 1998) implies that developing individual social capabilities could reduce perceptions of abusive supervision. Based on the rationale, the present thesis porposes that subordinates' political skill as a potent personal resource that could alleviate their perceptions of abusive supervision.

Furthermore, moral exclusion theory indicates that when individuals are placed outside one's "scope of justice," moral rules and fairness are withheld from them, legitimating neglect or mistreatment (Opotow, 1990). From this perspective, subordinates' characteristics that mark them as norm violators or "low-value ones" (e.g., inefficiency, low effort, chronic deviance, and high entitlement) increase the risk that supervisors position

them outside their moral consideration (e.g., Tepper et al., 2011; Walter et al., 2015). Once morally excluded, subordinates are seen as less deserving of dignity, justice, and fair treatment. In this manner, supervisory harsh words and aggressive behaviours could be legitimated and acted as "necessary performance management" (i.e., performance-promotion intent; Liu et al., 2012; Tepper, 2007). Conversely, signals of high performance, shared identity, prosociality, and cooperative intent pull subordinates inside the moral standards, reducing perceptions of abusive supervision (Liu & Kilroy, 2025; Walter et al., 2015). Thus, behavioural and trait cues could shift moral boundaries and furnish leaders with perceived justification for potential abusive behaviours. Drawing on social influence theory and moral exclusion theory, the present thesis enriches the JD-R perspective on subordinate-related antecedents of abusive supervision by specifying how subordinate political skill could mitigate abusive supervision through enhanced task performance and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB). The corresponding hypotheses are summarised in Table 1.2 and empirically tested in Study 1.

1.2.3 Q3: To what extent is the impacts of abusive supervision dependent on the context?

Another promising strand of research suggests that abusive supervision may not be universally detrimental across all contexts (e.g., Liang et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2012; Zhang & Liu, 2018). For instance, empirical research based on high power-distance organisation in South Korea found that subordinates may be more creative when they perceived moderate levels of abusive supervision compared with low-levels (Lee et al., 2013). Crucially, from the JD-R perspective, subordinates' instrumental job resources and personal resources enable more effective coping, thereby attenuating the impact of abusive supervision. For example, perceived organisational support and organisational justice signal a fair and supportive

climate, thereby curbing subordinates' retaliatory responses and mitigating performance declines under abusive supervision (Lee et al., 2018; Shoss et al., 2013). In addition, personal resources such as mindfulness and emotion-regulation skill could reduce threat appraisal and promote adaptive coping, limiting the negative influence of abusive supervision (Yu et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2017). Indeed, a range of factors could either prevent or perpetuate the effects of the destructive supervisory behaviours on victims (Fischer et al., 2021). Literature reviews have demonstrated that the associations between abusive supervision and subordinate deviance in studies could be dramatically different, as low as -.15 (Sungu et al., 2020) or as high as .74 (Tröster & Van Quaquebeke, 2021). Although the conflicting evidence on the effects of abusive supervision may appear contradictory and counterintuitive, this pattern implies that the consequences of leaders' abusive behaviours are not uniformly detrimental and and may be negligible or even neutral under certain conditions. To deal with abusive supervision, it is worthwhile to specify the boundary factors that can attenuate the serious detriments of abusive supervision into trivial or null effects. From this standpoint, the present study delineates key contextual factors (potential resources and demands) from subordinate-based and HRM-based perspectives that may alter when and for whom abusive supervision is more or less harmful.

Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory (Demerouti et al., 2001) and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) provide a resource–demand fit (buffering) angle, indicating that resource gains (e.g., organisational support, recovery, and social capability) help individuals counteract high demands and thereby lessen strain, whereas resource deficits (workload, time pressure, and coworker conflict) amplify loss spirals by making the same demands more costly. In this manner, individuals strive to acquire, maintain, and protect

valued resources, and strain occurs when such resources are threatened, lost, or insufficient to meet environmental demands (Hobfoll et al., 2018). According to this rationale, existing literature has underscored the significance of a resource-based perspective for extending our understanding of why and how the effects of abusive supervision could vary (Hobfoll, 2011; Whitman et al., 2014; Zhang & Liu, 2018). Following studies have indicated that subordinates' psychological responses to abusive supervision may depend heavily on the personal and job resources at their disposal (Liang et al., 2024; Tepper et al., 2017).

Empirical studies evidenced that the detrimental influence of leaders' abusive behaviours can be substantially mitigated when subordinates possess strong personal resources (Tepper et al., 2017). For example, psychological resilience and self-efficacy provide subordinates with a sense of control and confidence, thereby protecting them from resource loss spirals commonly triggered by abusive supervision (Luthans et al., 2007; Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Similarly, individual mindfulness enhances subordinates' self-regulatory capacity and emotional stability, enabling them to process abusive supervisory behaviours with less defensiveness and to avoid overidentifying with negative emotions (Glomb et al., 2011; Reb et al., 2014). Thus, personal resources allow subordinates to reinterpret or buffer against the experience of abusive supervision, thus reducing the adverse impact on attitudes and performance. On the other hand, job resources such as perceived organisational support and organisational justice can also play a complementary buffering role. These contextual signals of fairness and support offer subordinates alternative reservoirs of resources, which can offset the resource depletion caused by supervisory abusive behaviours (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2001; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Lee et al., 2018). Accordingly, subordinates may exhibit markedly different levels of well-being and

performance in response to identical supervisory behaviours, largely depending on the personal and job resources available to them. In summary, the demands-and-resources perspective underscores that personal and contextual resources constitute key boundary conditions accounting for heterogeneity in subordinates' exposure to the harms of abusive supervision. However, JD–R model is less explicit about how such tresstresources (or demands) operate to produce weaker versus stronger harm arising from abusive supervision. To address this gap, the present thesis incorporates transactional process theory of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), attribution theory (Heider, 1958), and the stressor–detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) in order to elaborate on the process through which certain boundary factors moderate subordinates' adverse reactions.

1.2.3.1 The Buffering Effect of Subordinates' Recovery Experience

Transactional process theory of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) offers a complementary lens on abusive supervision by conceptualising stress as a dynamic person–environment transaction in which subordinates' appraisals and coping efforts shape their emotional and behavioural responses. The theory foregrounds iterative appraisal–coping cycles: subordinates interpret supervisory conduct and evaluate coping options (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Martinko et al., 2013). In primary appraisal, behaviour is evaluated as harmful, threatening, or challenging. in secondary appraisal, subordinates assess controllability and available coping strategies (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). Consequently, strain and performance decrements depend less on abusive acts and more on how they are construed and managed (Mackey et al., 2017). When abusive words or actions are appraised as challenges and viable avenues for remediation are perceived, motivation and task focus may be sustained. Adaptive coping (e.g., problem-focused action, constructive reappraisal, support seeking) can

attenuate negative affect and interrupt rumination-driven loss spirals, whereas maladaptive coping (e.g., avoidance, venting, perseverative rumination) may exacerbate exhaustion and disrupt performance (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Thus, threat-versus-challenge appraisals and coping repertoires function as proximal boundary conditions shaping downstream outcomes under abusive supervision.

Drawing on COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the transactional process theory of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Sonnentag and Fritz (2015) developed the stressor–detachment model, which offers a recovery-based perspective on why some subordinates can maintain well-being and performance despite abusive supervision by highlighting the role of off-work psychological detachment, rather than focusing solely on what occurs at work. The model posits that *recovery experience*, especially *psychological detachment* (i.e., mentally switching off from work when at home) can cut off the negative experience (e.g., worry and rumination of job stressors), thereby attenuating the carryover of negative affects into strain and next-day functioning (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Psychological detachment is a prototypical dimension of the broad recovery experience set (i.e., psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery, and control), each of which contributes to replenishing self-regulatory resources and restoring affective balance (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Prior studies have evidenced that subordinates who psychologically detach from the job-related activities and thoughts in the leisure time report lower negative affect and fatigue the next day and show better task focus and proactive behaviour, even following stressful workdays (Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005; Sonnentag et al., 2008). Meta-analytic evidence further links higher detachment with reduced strain and protected well-being across studies (Wendsche & Lohmann-Haislah, 2017). Likewise, *mastery experiences* broaden skill and efficacy beliefs**,** *relaxation* down-

regulates physiological arousal, and *control* over leisure time fosters autonomy can enhance individual well-being and the capacity to return to work with restored energy and concentration (Park et al., 2011; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007).

Applying the stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) to abusive supervision research, when subordinates routinely achieve an adequate recovery experience (e.g., particularly psychological detachment), the linkage from abusive supervision to impaired well-being and outcome performance may be effectively buffered. Iser-Potempa et al.'s (2024) recent research bridged the association between abusive supervision and psychological detachment by rumination via anger and rumination, yet the joint spillover effects of abusive supervision and impaired psychological detachment on subordinates' well-being remain largely underexplored. Based on stressor–detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) and COR theory, the current thesis extends Iser-Potempa et al.'s (2024) study by proposing and examining both the mediating effect and the moderating effect of psychological detachment between abusive supervision and subordinate strain. The corresponding hypotheses are summarised in Table 1.2 and empirically tested in Study 3.

1.2.3.2 The Buffering Effect of Subordinates' Attributions

On the other hand, a nascent research line underscores the value of an attributional perspective for explaining the heterogeneity in subordinates' experiences of abusive supervision (Liu et al., 2012; Martinko et al., 2011; Yang et al., 2020; Yu & Duffy, 2021). According to attribution theory (Heider, 1958), people attach diverse feelings to social stimuli, thereby causing different attitudinal and behavioural responses based on how they process these stimuli. Therefore, subordinates' psychological responses to abusive supervision may strongly depend on how they attribute such behaviours (Liu et al., 2012).

Indeed, although abusive supervision is commonly considered under the default assumption of supervisors' deleterious motives (e.g., threatening or harming subordinates), its measurement captures neither leaders' motives nor subordinates' attributions (Fischer et al., 2021).

Past literature indicates that the negative influence of leaders' abusive behaviours may be substantially attenuated when such behaviours are not perceived as intentionally harmful (Tepper, 2007). Liu et al. (2012) introduced the notion that supervisors may engage in abusive behaviours for the purposes of (1) *performance promotion* or (2) *injury initiation*. Subsequent studies have evidenced that subordinate's attributions of abusive supervision could alter its impact, such that people who attribute abusive supervision to performance promotion could effectively subdue the negative influence of abusive supervision, while the negative impact for those who perceive injury-initiation attributions, could be amplified (e.g., Liu et al., 2012; Yang et al., 2020; Yu & Duffy, 2021). While extant studies have discovered that individual attributions can either alleviate or exacerbate the negative effects of abusive supervision on subordinates' outcome performance including creativity (Liu et al., 2012), job performance (Yang et al., 2020), and OCBs (Yu & Duffy, 2021), whether similar moderating effects extend to subordinate well-being remains underexplored. Based on COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and attribution theory (Heider, 1958), the present study seeks to address the void by examining the moderating effect of subordinates' attributions (i.e., performance promotion and injury initiation) between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion. In doing so, the study deciphers whether the beneficial aspect of performance-promotion attribution (e.g., job resource) and the negative aspect of injury-initiation attribution (e.g., job demand) that have been supported for performance-related outcomes

also materialises for subordinate well-being under abusive supervision. The corresponding hypotheses are summarised in Table 1.2 and empirically tested in Study 2.

1.2.3.3 The Interplay between Abusive Supervision and Human Resource Management

In addition to personal resources, organisational safeguards have been documented to have effective buffering effects against abusive supervision, such as justice perceptions and perceived organisational support (e.g., Lee et al., 2018; Shoss et al., 2013). Nevertheless, scholarship exploring how human resource management (HRM) affects the incidence and downstream outcomes of abusive supervision remains scarce. Notably, both supervisory behaviours and HRM can exert a considerable influence on employees' experiences in their work and life (e.g., Bass, 1985, 1990; Jensen et al., 2013; Leroy et al. 2018; Tepper, 2000). Building on Leroy et al.'s (2018) HRM-leadership fit framework, the relationships between leadership and HRM could be considered as mutually interdependent forces that can operate independently (independent fit), reinforce each other (supplementary fit), or compensate for one another (complementary fit). In practice, supervisory behaviours are embedded in the broader HR system, and HRM may condition how subordinates interpret supervisory conduct (Leroy et al., 2018; Tepper et al., 2017). Accordingly, subordinate outcomes (e.g., strain, recovery experiences, engagement, and task performance) are shaped not only by supervisory behaviours or HRM in isolation, but by the joint signals they convey as construed by employees. Accordingly, the present study positions abusive leadership and high performance work systems (HPWS) as two intertwined levers of people management that shape subordinates' well-being outcomes.

Drawing on the optimistic and pessimistic perspectives of HPWS for the present study (e.g., Godard, 2004, 2010; Jensen et al., 2013), there is a possibility that HPWS might

serve as a double-edged sword in the context of abusive supervision. Particularly, the mainstream view of HPWS research has identified HPWS as potent job resources that counteract job demands and reduce strain by providing autonomy, incentive-based compensation, training development initiatives, ensuring fair evaluation, and encouraging participation in decision-making (for reviews, see Jiang et al., 2012; Subramony et al., 2009). For example, HPWS endows employees with the potent resources of high autonomy and participation, spurring their own problem-solving ability (Jiang et al., 2012). In this regard, such increased empowerment could make employees more independent in the workplace, reducing their reliance on leaders and the impact from supervisory behaviours. Therefore, HPWS can function as instrumental job resources that can buffer the detriments of abusive supervision, sustaining subordinates' well-being, working engagement, and performance (e.g., Bartram et al., 2012; Huselid, 1995; Kilroy et al., 2016).

On the other hand, embedded within HPWS are tight performance targets, rigorous monitoring, and stringent performance requirements, which may function as job demands that heighten work pressure and vigilance (e.g., Jensen et al., 2013; Kroon et al., 2009; Xu et al., 2009). Under an abusive supervisory context, such demands might amplify employees' appraisal of stress and exacerbate the negative influence of abusive supervision. For instance, under progressive practices that emphasise involvement, communication, and rigorous performance metrics (i.e., HPWS; Huselid, 1995), subordinates confronted with abusive supervision may find it more difficult to avoid interactions with abusive leaders or disengage from work-related issues, particularly when they are already physically and psychologically exhausted (e.g., Jensen et al., 2013; Xu et al., 2020). Though HPWS initially aims to foster high performance, the stringent requirements, demands of dedication to work, and extra-

effort investment that HPWS necessitates might further amplify the detrimental effects of abusive supervision on well-being outcomes.

Based on these contradictory perspectives that permeate the existing literature, the present thesis deemed it important to propose competing hypotheses with respect to the moderating role of HPWS in the proposed negative influence of abusive supervision on subordinates. Precisely, integrating Leroy et al.'s (2018) HRM–leadership fit framework with the stressor–detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015), the present study aims to investigate this relationship by exploring how the combined presence of abusive supervision and HPWS influences subordinates' psychological detachment, and in turn their levels of strain. In doing so, it investigates whether HPWS buffers or exacerbates the harmful effects of abusive supervision on subordinates' well-being (e.g., strain level). Eventually, doing so aims to bridge several important voids by integrating the literature across the domains of organisational behaviour (leadership), strategic HRM (HPWS), and occupational health (recovery experience). The corresponding hypotheses are summarised in Table 1.2 and empirically tested in Study 3. After discussing the core research questions, the entire conceptual model of thesis exploring abusive supervision is presented in Figure 1.1. This is presented in order to demonstrate the linkage between the three studied conducted.

Figure 1.1 Overall Hypothesised Model of the Thesis

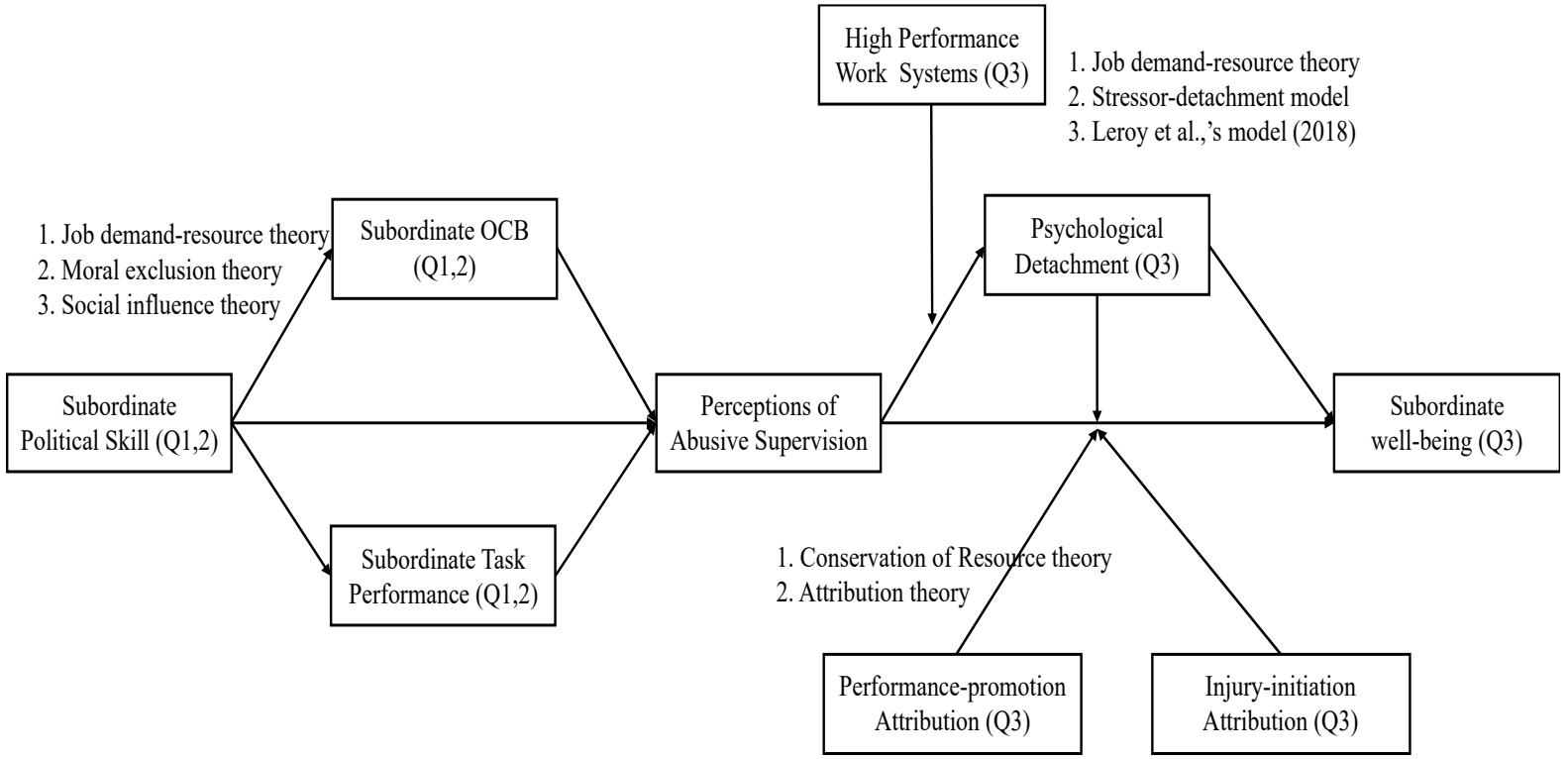

Table 1.2 Summary of Core Research Propositions and Hypotheses

Proposition/Hypothesis	**Study**
Subordinate political skill is negatively related to abusive supervision	**1**
Subordinate task performance is negatively related to abusive supervision	**1**
Subordinate organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) is negatively related to abusive supervision	**1**
Task Performance mediates the relationship between political skill and abusive supervision.	**1**
Organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) mediates the relationship between political skill and abusive supervision.	**1**
Abusive supervision will be negative related to subordinates' health-related outcomes (i.e., emotional exhaustion and strain).	**2, 3**
Performance-promotion attribution of abusive supervision moderates the positive relationship between abusive supervision and individual emotional exhaustion, such that the relationship is weaker when performance-promotion attribution is higher (vs lower).	**2**
Injury-initiation attribution of abusive supervision moderates the positive relationship between abusive supervision and individual emotional exhaustion, such that the relationship is stronger when injury-initiation attribution is higher (vs lower).	**2**
Abusive supervision is negative related to subordinates' recovery experience in the form of psychological detachment.	**3**

Subordinate psychological detachment mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and strain.	**3**
Subordinate psychological detachment buffers the positive relationship between abusive supervision and strain, such that the relationship is weaker when psychological detachment is higher (vs lower).	**3**
High Performance work systems (HPWS) alleviates the negative effect of abusive supervision on psychological detachment.	**3**
High Performance work systems (HPWS) enhances the negative effect of abusive supervision on psychological detachment.	**3**
High Performance work systems (HPWS) alleviates the indirect effect of abusive supervision on strain via psychological detachment.	**3**
High Performance work systems (HPWS) enhances the indirect effect of abusive supervision on strain via psychological detachment.	**3**

1.3 Research Context

This thesis examined abusive supervision and subordinate functioning based on the data collected from two state-owned companies (SOEs) in China. The empirical context spanned two traditional industries: transportation/construction (highways and railways) and hydroelectric power generation. Importantly, this setting was not treated as a culturally "neutral" backdrop for the study. Rather, it was selected because its authority relations and

organisational structure are theoretically relevant to the salience, appraisal, and consequences of supervisory behaviour (Liang et al., 2016; Mackey et al., 2017).

More specifically, evidence has shown that the Chinese context is characterised by centralised leadership, high power distance, high working pressure, and relatively fixed management structure, which may largely normalize harsh supervisory conduct, potentially influencing subordinates' perception of abusive supervision and exacerbating its consequential effects (e.g., Liang et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2020). In Chinese state-owned organisations, formal hierarchy and relatively stable reporting lines are the norm, which can make supervisory abusive behaviours particularly salient in employees' day-to-day experiences, essentially making it more difficult for them to distance themselves from negative interactions. In many Asian contexts which are marked by high power distance and centralisation, organisational hierarchies can widen the discretion for negative supervisory tendencies (Hofstede et al., 2010; House et al., 2004), consistent with evidence linking such structures to abusive supervision dynamics (Liang et al., 2016; Mackey et al., 2017). Therefore, examining abusive supervision in the Chinese context is theoretically interesting and practically important because supervisory behaviours may be interpreted differently than in lower power-distance settings. For instance, employees may appraise the identical supervisory behaviours as "tough love," "strict management," or bullying/abuse, which can shape whether the behaviour is labelled as abusive in the first place and how strongly it affects their well-being. Moreover, because coping resources and organisational supports

operate within these centralised structures, the downstream strain and coping processes (e.g., political skill, psychological detachment, and HRM interventions) may function differently and vary in effectiveness in such contexts.

In addition, traditional industries are characterised by standardised procedures, tight safety, and time-bound project cycles (Far & Cheng, 2000; Hofstede et al., 2010), all of which could intensify the impact of supervisory behaviour on subordinates. Specifically, safety-sensitive operations and deadline-driven project cycles can increase employees' reliance on supervisors for coordination, information, and performance evaluation, which may amplify the consequences of negative supervisory behaviour for their daily functioning and well-being. At the same time, this context provides a substantive strength because it offers a stringent and practically consequential test of abusive supervision dynamics in settings where hierarchical authority is salient and supervisory discretion is likely to matter, thereby extending insights beyond commonly used Western corporate samples. Taken together, the specific dynamics in the traditional industries in China makes the present thesis of theoretical and practical significance to investigate the etiology of abusive supervision and how its detrimental effect could be mitigated.

Across two companies, work is organised into teams embedded within different departments including general office, marketing department, hydropower operational department, engineering department, maintenance department, grid management department, community work department, asset management department, IT service department,

renewable energy department, safety and environmental protection office, discipline inspection office, accounting department, operational innovation center, public relations department, and human resource management departments. Each team is typically led by an immediate supervisor overseeing several direct reports, thereby creating a natural nesting structure for multilevel inquiry and generating meaningful between-team variance in supervisory behaviours and team members' functioning. This nested design enabled subtle observation and analysis of abusive supervision. Importantly, the relatively stable team structures and formal reporting lines in this setting likely reduced ambiguity in identifying the immediate supervisor and helped participants anchor their responses in ongoing supervisory interactions.

Participant access was facilitated through HR gatekeepers. To minimise any perceived risk and common method bias associated with reporting on supervisory behaviours and well-being, the study adopted a set of procedural safeguards designed to enhance respondents' sense of confidentiality and encourage candid participation. The study employed validated scales to measure the focal variables (e.g., Ferris et al., 2005; Jensen et al., 2013; Maslach et al., 1996; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007; Tepper, 2000; See the Appendix B, Appendix C, Appendix D) and conducted back-translation procedures from English to Chinese (Brislin, 1980). Additionally, all data collections for the various studies were preceded by pilot tests with researchers, HR managers, and subordinates in order to ensure clarity, cultural fit, linguistic accuracy, and answering load. Surveys were administered

primarily via WeChat (the most widely used social platform in China), as well as through internal e-mail systems to maximise the participation rate of the whole population. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. No directly identifying information (e.g., names) was requested in the survey. Raw responses were accessible only to the principal researcher, and the data was collected and used only for research purposes. Participants were informed that their individual responses would not be shared with their supervisors or organisations, and that the research team, rather than line managers, would handle the data. The cover page of the survey informed participants about the confidentiality of their responses, the right to withdraw at any time, and the estimated completion time of the survey to minimise respondent burden. The cover page also emphasised that there were no "right or wrong" answers and encouraged participants to respond based on their true experiences in order to encourage them to provide honest answers and minimize the threat of common method bias. The entire data collection procedure was granted ethical approval from Trinity Business School (See the Appendix A). The procedures for data collection for each of the studies in the thesis is illustrated in detail in the following three chapters respectively.

With respect to the timing of data collection, the multi-time point data collection carried out for study 1 and 2 reduced concerns associated with common method bias by introducing temporal separation i.e., enabled separation of predictors, mediators, and outcomes across different time points. Doing so reduced the likelihood that single-occasion mood states or immediate contextual cues would inflate observed associations, allowing for

more defensible inferences regarding the temporal ordering (N=224; Group=37; Cole & Maxwell, 2003; Mackinnon, 2009). Additionally, multi-time surveys attenuate same-source and same-time measurement artefacts, because respondents are less able and motivated to align their answers across variables within a single sitting (Podsakoff et al., 2003). As a result, Study 1 and Study 2 achieved both breadth and rigor, producing findings that are robust, temporally sensitive, and less vulnerable to common method and single-source measurement artefacts. On the other hand, Study 3 relied on a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships in a large sample of employees (N = 894) drawn from 71 groups across seven company branches. Although this design does not permit strong temporal inferences, the large and multi-unit sample offered important advantages in terms of statistical power, precision of estimation, and contextual breadth. Larger samples generally provide more stable parameter estimates and narrower confidence intervals, thereby allowing for more reliable estimates of associations among constructs (Biau et al., 2008; Faber & Fonseca, 2014). In this respect, the data collection of Study 3 contributes to the thesis by offering a broad and well-powered test. Coupled with the sectoral demands, hierarchical team structures, and formalised HR routines of the organisational context investigated, the adopted research design provides a rigorous and meaningful contextual setting in which to investigate individual-level processes linking supervisory behaviour, subordinate resources, appraisals, and work outcomes under real operating constraints.

1.4 Data Analysis

The various studies hypotheses were tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in Mplus 8.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017), which was well suited for estimating complex models including multiple relationships (i.e., hypotheses) simultaneously and relationships which are multilevel in nature (Preacher et al., 2010), as well as robustly testing mediating and moderating effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Particularly, multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (MCFA) with latent variables, structural equation modeling (SEM), multi-level SEM (MSEM), Bayesian SEM (BSEM), and Monte Carlo analysis were applied across the different studies. Additionally, the studies employed the MLR estimator in Mplus, as it provides robust standard errors and is suitable for handling non-normality in the datasets (Muthén & Muthén, 2017).

1.4.1 Preliminary Analysis

Prior to the hypothesis tests, rigorous measurement models were conducted via confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for all multi-item constructs for the hypothesis models. Specifically, multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (MCFA) was applied given the non-independent nature of the data. The models demonstrating the best fit indices (e.g., CFI, TLI, RMSEA, SRMR) were retained as the final measurement model. Given the sample size of one dataset (N =224) with large-scale measures (15-item abusive supervision, 18-item political skill),

Study 1 followed Little *et al.'s* (2002) suggestions to employ the parceling method in multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (MCFA) to reduce the number of parameters and improve the indicator reliability. Likewise, Study 2 employed two-item parcels for abusive supervision according to odd and even items (Little et al., 2002), while other variables (performance-promotion attribution, injury-initiation attribution, emotional exhaustion) were represented by the original latent items. In terms to another dataset (N = 894), Study 3 conducted multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (MCFA) using latent variables. In addition to CFA, the preliminary tests also checked the factor loadings of items in the focal variables e.g., all above .60; Kline, 2023), and the Cronbach's alphas to verify the internal consistency of all the scales e.g., all above .80 (George & Mallery, 2024). Furthermore, due to the hierarchical structure of the datasets (employees nested within teams and companies), it is necessary to compute intraclass correlation coefficients including ICC(1), ICC(2), as well as within-group agreement (e.g., RWG) in order to determine whether aggregation decisions are needed and whether the focal constructs can be treated at the team level of analysis (Bliese, 2000). In terms of dealing with the missing data, maximum likelihood under robust estimation (MLR) can effectively retain available information under missing-at-random assumptions, thereby producing unbiased parameter estimates and standard errors without the need for listwise deletion or imputation. This approach is particularly advantageous in survey-based and time-lagged designs, where partial nonresponse is common and preserving statistical power is crucial (Muthén & Muthén, 2017).

1.4.2 Multilevel Structural Equation Modeling (MSEM) with Path Analysis

After preliminary analysis, hypothesis tests were conducted using MSEM in Mplus focusing on the individual level of analysis, while explicitly controlling for group-level variance, because the major literature discussion and relationships in the thesis are at the individual level (Preacher et al., 2010; Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Models were specified with TYPE = TWOLEVEL and a cluster identifier. All individual-level variables were group-mean centered (CENTER = GROUPMEAN). In this manner, within-level coefficients reflected intra-group associations, whereas random intercepts capture between-group differences (Preacher et al., 2010). Between-level paths were not the research focus and were left unparameterized beyond intercepts, thereby absorbing contextual variance without conflating it with individual-level effects (Muthén & Asparouhov, 2009; Muthén & Muthén, 2017). This disaggregation yielded unbiased within-level estimates and avoided mistaken results that might happen when group-level effects are mixed up with individual-level effects (Hox et al., 2017). Model fit of the hypothesis models were evaluated via χ^2, RMSEA, CFI/TLI, and SRMR. For mediation test, indirect effects (path X→M times path M→Y) were computed at the individual level using MODEL CONSTRAINT (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Following Preacher and Hayes (2008), current examinations of mediation no longer require a significant direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable, instead emphasizing the significance of the indirect effect of the independent variables on the dependent variables via the mediator. Thus, the mediation examination was determined

whether zero was contained in the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect (also see, e.g., Mackinnon et al., 2007). For testing moderation at the individual level, interaction terms were created using centred predictors in the DEFINE command and specified as within-level variables. Then, simple slope and conditional effect analyses in MODEL CONSTRAINT were applied to examine interactions (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). According to the tests, moderating slopes were plotted. When the theory suggested that the strength of effects might differ across groups, the analysis allowed slopes to vary randomly between groups, while still focusing on individual-level relationships.

1.4.3 Bayesian Structural Equation Modeling (BSEM)

Compared with frequentist approaches (e.g., multilevel SEM), Bayesian Structural Equation Modeling (BSEM) offers several advantages. By using Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC), BSEM yields full posterior distributions and 95% credible intervals that remain well-behaved with modest numbers and uneven sizes of groups. By contrast, frequentist standard errors and fit indices can become unstable under similar conditions (Kaplan & Depaoli, 2012; Muthén & Asparouhov, 2012). Weakly informative priors introduce mild regularization that reduces bias, suppresses boundary solutions (e.g., variances at zero; correlations at ±1), and stabilises estimates when clusters are unbalanced. Bayesian estimation also provides transparent convergence and fit assessment through diagnostics including potential scale

reduction (PSR), posterior predictive checks (PPP), and trace/density/autocorrelation plots that evaluate fit in the data-generating space (Muthén & Asparouhov, 2012). In addition, BSEM handles mediation naturally, estimating the indirect effect based on the product of the X→M and M→Y paths at each MCMC draw, yielding a full posterior and highest posterior density (HPD) intervals without relying on asymptotic normality or bootstrap resampling (Yuan & MacKinnon, 2009). For moderation, Bayesian analysis yields posterior distributions for simple slopes and conditional effects, fully propagating measurement error and parameter uncertainty (Lee, 2007). Given our modest number of groups and uneven clusters, BSEM offers critical advantages in these settings, making it an effective estimator of choice for hypothesis tests

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter broadly outlined the theoretical background of abusive supervision and highlighted the gap concerning how subordinate characteristics and human resource management practices protect against abusive supervision. It also presented the overall research aims and specific research questions to be addressed by the following three empirical studies, along with the theoretical frameworks to be employed. In addition, the general research design was explained, including the data collection methods, organisational context, and methodological approach. Drawing on multiple theoretical perspectives, the

subsequent three studies will explore the antecedents of abusive supervision and the buffering strategies from different angles. Following these three studies, the overall discussion chapter will integrate the findings and contributions in relation to the research questions outlined above. At last, research limitations, directions for future research, and recommendations for management practice will also be provided.

Chapter Two Are you morally included? The mediating effect of subordinates' task performance and organizational citizenship behavior between political skill and abusive supervision

Based on:

Liu, T., & Kilroy, S. (2025). Political Skill and Abusive Supervision: The Mediating Effects of OCB and Task Performance. In Academy of Management Proceedings (Vol. 2025, No. 1, p. 15614). Valhalla, NY 10595: Academy of Management. (Best Paper Nomination in the 85th AOM Conference, Copenhagen)

Liu, T., & Kilroy, S. (2025) Are you morally included? The mediating effect of subordinates' task performance and OCBs between political skill and abusive supervision. Journal of Managerial Psychology. (under second-round review)

Abstract

Purpose - This study investigates whether and how subordinates' political skill influences abusive supervision via task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB-O and OCB-I).

Design/Methodology/Approach - A three-wave survey of 224 employees was conducted at a Chinese transportation firm and the hypotheses were tested with multilevel Bayesian Structural Equation Modeling (BSEM) in Mplus.

Findings - The findings reveal that individual political skill is not directly associated with abusive supervision but indirectly relates to employees' perceptions of abusive supervision through increased OCB-O only.

Originality - Grounded in the JD-R model, this study integrates social influence theory and moral exclusion theory to chart the underlying mechanisms linking political skill to abusive supervision. While subordinates' performance is typically considered as an outcome of abusive supervision, this study positions it as a key mediator linking political skill to abusive supervision.

Keywords: Abusive supervision, Political skill, Organizational citizenship behavior, Task performance

Paper Type: Research paper

2.1 Introduction

Abusive supervision is defined as "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000: 178). Despite extensive research advancing our understanding of abusive supervision, a critical challenge for scholars and practitioners that remains is how to effectively restrain such ubiquitous demands in the modern workplace (Fischer *et al*., 2021; Tepper *et al*., 2017). To address this gap, research has expanded into previously underexplored domains concerning the origins of abusive supervision (Tepper *et al*., 2017). Zhang and Bednall (2016) developed a categorization representing four possible antecedents of abusive supervision: 1) supervisor-related, 2) organization-related, 3) subordinate-related, and 4) demographic factors. Studies investigating the etiology of abusive supervision have principally focused on supervisor-related and organization-related antecedents such as supervisors' stress or low levels of procedural justice (see Zhang and Bednall, 2016, for a review). This line of research largely aims to restrain the playing space for supervisors to engage in abusive supervision. However, to effectively eradicate abusive supervision, it might be myopic to merely concentrate on the perpetrators (Fischer *et al*., 2021). Indeed, subsequent research underscored the significance of exploring antecedents related to subordinates themselves (e.g., Harvey *et al*., 2014; Walter *et al*., 2015).

Given that the definition of abusive supervision captures "subordinates' perceptions" (Tepper, 2000: 178), subordinates' characteristics could play a critical role in the intensity and frequency with which they perceive abusive supervision (Fischer *et al*., 2021). Empirical evidence has shown that individual characteristics could shape the likelihood that supervisory mistreatment emerges and persists (Harvey *et al*., 2014; Lian *et al.,* 2014). This

phenomenon can also be interpreted on the basis that subordinates with certain characteristics and behaviors can be regarded as so-called “easy targets” for abusive supervision. Hence, subordinates' divergent perceptions of abusive supervision under the same leader highlight the importance of subordinate-related antecedents when designing interventions to mitigate abusive supervision.

It is natural to scrutinize the perpetrators of abusive behaviors, as reflected by the dominant focus on supervisor-related antecedents in the existing research (Tepper *et al.*, 2017). However, this research trend leaves a critical gap in our understanding of the subordinate perspective (Fischer *et al*., 2021). Fundamentally, the phenomenon of abusive supervision inherently involves both leaders and subordinates as central actors (Zhang and Bednall, 2016). Indeed, it is ultimately subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision that determine how these behaviors are interpreted and dealt with, which can potentially offer additional insights. Existing research on subordinate-related antecedents has already commenced, with a general focus on examining factors like their innate personalities (Harvey *et al*., 2014). However, the nature of these dispositions is relatively inherent and deep-seated, thus somewhat constraining the development of practical solutions. In this regard, scholars have highlighted the importance of understanding other malleable subordinate-related antecedents to advance insights on practical solutions (Fischer *et al*., 2021).

To address this issue, our study introduces political skill as a critical individual antecedent of abusive supervision. Political skill refers to individual capabilities to adeptly understand and influence others and facilitate cooperation to achieve desired objectives (Ferris *et al*., 2005). Based on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti *et al*., 2001), existing studies have identified political skill as an instrumental resource to counteract

working demands and improve one's overall working experience and performance (see Munyon *et al*., 2015, for a review). With abusive supervision widely regarded as a job demand, political skill might serve as a potent remedy (Offergelt and Venz, 2023). Drawing on JD-R model together with social influence theory (Levy *et al*., 1998), this study investigates whether employees with higher levels of political skill are directly less susceptible to abusive behaviors.

While the JD–R model provides a broad resource-based foundation for why political skill should matter, it is less explicit about *how* political skill might translate into the behaviors and performance of subordinates and *why* they would in turn alter supervisory behavioral patterns. Therefore, we integrate social influence theory and moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990) to unravel why political skill shapes abusive supervision. Specifically, we advance that politically skilled employees convert their social acumen and advantages into superior task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) directed towards the organization (OCB-O) and towards other individuals (OCBI-I), thereby positioning themselves within their leaders' "moral inclusion" zone and, consequently, experience less abusive supervision.

The study contributes to the existing literature in the following ways. First, while prior research investigated the buffering role of political skill in mitigating the detrimental effects of abusive supervision (Offergelt and Venz, 2023), we advance an alternative perspective whereby political skill is positioned as an important resource related antecedent that can directly restrain abusive supervision. Second, integrating social influence theory together with moral exclusion theory, we advance novel mediating mechanisms (i.e., task performance, OCB-O, and OCB-I) linking political skill to abusive supervision. This

exploration complements previous research findings that link subordinates' underperformance to the emergence of abusive supervision (Lian *et al*., 2014; Walter *et al*., 2015) and we identify an important antecedent that can prevent this process from unfolding. Third, by employing a three-wave design, we examine time-lagged associations between the constructs which are consistent with the theorized temporal sequence. Moreover, our study is conducted within the Chinese context, where centralized and destructive forms of leadership are pervasive and posing many issues for organizations (Liang *et al*., 2016).

2.2 Literature Development

2.2.1 Subordinate-related Antecedents and Coping Strategies of Abusive Supervision

The relative lack of attention to subordinate-related antecedents is somewhat understandable, as scholars may have been overly cautious about appearing to blame the victims for the occurrence of abusive supervision (Fischer *et al*., 2021). However, it is possible that the academic overlook on this prevents a more comprehensive understanding of other possible antecedents that may be important (Harvey *et al*., 2014; Walter *et al*., 2015). The victims themselves may play a critical role in perceiving abusive supervision, because the phenomenon of abusive supervision is, in essence, an interactional process involving two parties. Accordingly, scholars have raised the concern that subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision could be volatile and subjective (Fischer *et al*., 2021). Namely, individual differences are critical factors influencing subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision, or put differently, triggering abusive supervision (Zhang and Bednall, 2016). As one may expect, empirical evidence suggested that subordinates with negative attitudes and

poor performance might experience more abusive supervision, and vice versa (e.g., Harvey *et al*., 2014; Lian *et al.*, 2014).

Initially, Tepper (2000) posited that abusive supervision might be conducted for the purpose of warning subordinates of malpractice and inaccurate behaviors. Lian *et al*. (2014) analyzed 20-month lagged data and discovered that subordinates' organizational deviance led to abusive supervision, rather than the reverse. Additionally, using paired data from employees and their coworkers who shared the same supervisor, Harvey *et al*. (2014) found that psychologically entitled employees rated their supervisor as more abusive than did their coworkers, and these perceptions were associated with greater organizational deviance. Therefore, subordinates may recognize leaders as abusive or non-abusive based on their own dispositions and performance, thereby affecting their daily working experience. Hence, it is of critical importance to extend the knowledge of individual characteristics which can potentially restrain abusive supervision, subduing the sequential negative influence.

2.2.2 Political Skill and Abusive Supervision

To cope with social demands, political skill has emerged in the literature as a relevant resource related protective factor. Political skill is defined as "the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ferris *et al*., 2005: 127). Ferris *et al*. (2005) conceptualized political skill into the four dimensions of social astuteness (i.e., strong awareness of social context), interpersonal influence (i.e., capability to influence others), networking ability (i.e., superior support of the extensive network), and apparent sincerity (i.e., genuine social image in the social fabric). Based on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti *et al*., 2001), which posits that individuals work

characteristics can be categorized into demands and resources influencing employee outcomes, previous research has regarded political skill as a critical personal resource to cope with a broad range of organizational demands and endow individuals with competencies in the workplace (Munyon *et al*., 2015).

Individuals with political skill are better equipped to address social conflicts and foster positive relationships, thereby reducing the likelihood of negative interactions turning into severe stressors (Cullen *et al*., 2014). Additionally, politically skilled individuals often possess higher emotional intelligence, enabling them to respond to social demands in ways that minimize friction (Munyon *et al*., 2015). Therefore, by helping individuals navigate complex social environments with tact and diplomacy, political skill could directly inhibit individual social stressors, such as abusive supervision. Empirical evidence has suggested that political skill plays a buffering role in the relationship between abusive supervision and knowledge hiding behaviors (Offergelt and Venz, 2023). However, the potential role of political skill as an antecedent of abusive supervision and the underlying mechanisms involved, are underexplored.

According to social influence theory (Levy *et al*., 1998), individuals tend to use social influencing capabilities to derive positive responses from others and achieve desired outcomes. Applying this rationale, Cullen *et al*. (2014) found that political skill reduced interpersonal mistreatment (e.g., workplace ostracism and interpersonal conflict), which is conceptually similar to abusive supervision, as leaders' abusive behaviors can be viewed as another form of mistreatment. Drawing on social influence theory, leader-member interaction is an inevitable social process, which offers subordinates opportunities to leverage political skill to achieve desired outcomes. Politically skilled subordinates have a

"subtle and convincing personal style" that could allow them to have influential power with their leaders (Ferris *et al*., 2005: 129). Consequently, they are more versed in calibrating their behaviors to persuade leaders, securing favorable treatment. Political skill allows subordinates to appear more genuine and reliable (Cullen *et al*., 2014), thereby increasing the credibility of their words and strengthening their social influencing power on leaders (Munyon *et al*., 2015). Furthermore, since politically skilled subordinates have a keen sense of others' needs (Ferris *et al*., 2005), they can respond promptly to leaders' specific demands and cultivate harmonious interactions (Munyon *et al*., 2015). Taken together, integrating the JD–R model and social influence theory, we suggest that political skill represents an important personal resource which enables employees to receive less abusive supervision. Thus, we predict the following hypothesis:

H1. Political skill is negatively related to abusive supervision.

2.2.3 Political Skill, Performance, and Abusive Supervision

In contemporary organizations, the focus on increasing performance is critical, which is often institutionalized through performance management systems that tie leaders' success to subordinates' outputs (Aguilera *et al*., 2024). In such performance-oriented environments, supervisors attend closely to cues of subordinates' actual performance (Aguilera *et al*., 2024), making performance a key proximal basis for understanding variability in supervisory treatment (Lian *et al*., 2014). Accordingly, when leaders construe subordinate performance as inadequate or as threatening goal attainment, they may be more likely to respond with abusive supervision (Walter *et al*., 2015). Against this backdrop, political skill has been identified as a consequential personal resource that helps employees navigate workplace demands and translate social effectiveness into tangible work outcomes, including higher

performance (Ferris *et al*., 2005). Building on these studies, this study examines whether performance-related processes influence abusive supervision. Due to the current hypercompetitive business environment, whereby organizational survival and prosperity increasingly depends on employees not only completing their prescribed role responsibilities and tasks but also undertaking discretionary extra-role contributions (Podsakoff *et al*., 2000), we focus on both task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Doing so enables a comprehensive assessment of individual performance, capturing both in-role and extra-role dimensions.

Task performance concerns employees' effectiveness of fulfilling their responsibilities and duties as expected in their job descriptions (Williams and Anderson,1991). Based on the JD-R model, political skill has been widely conceptualized as a valuable personal resource that is positively associated with task performance (Munyon *et al*., 2015). Although recent work suggests this association may vary in strength across contexts depending on specific conditions (e.g., political will; Frieder *et al*., 2024), prior theorizing and meta-analytic evidence indicate a positive association on average (Ferris *et al.,* 2005; Munyon *et al.,* 2015). Accordingly, we treat the linkage between political skill and task performance as a baseline expectation. Specifically, consistent with social influence theory, political skill reflects subordinates' capacity to exert interpersonal influence, enabling them to build and leverage workplace networks to access instrumental resources (e.g., job-relevant information and coworkers' assistance) that help them deploy their efforts and capabilities to meet task requirements (Ferris *et al.,* 2005; Frieder *et al.,* 2024). Additionally, social astuteness vests subordinates with a sharp understanding of the job complexity and performance assessments, allowing them to diagnose and prioritize working responsibilities based on their significance

and urgency, and thus accomplish tasks more efficiently (Munyon *et al*., 2015). Therefore, we predict the following hypothesis:

H2. Political skill is positively related to task performance.

Beyond in-role performance, scholars have emphasized the important role of political skill in promoting extra-role performance (Munyon *et al*., 2015). OCB refers to discretionary actions that improve organizational effectiveness but are neither part of employees in-role responsibility nor are they rewarded for them (Organ, 1997). OCB consist of two core categories. The first is OCB towards individuals (OCB-I) which points to citizenship behavior that benefit peers, such as altruistically helping other coworkers. The second is OCB towards the organization (OCB-O) which directly contributes to the organization, such as providing useful suggestions for improving organizational administration and development.

Prior studies have identified political skill as an important personal resource that strengthens employees' capabilities of engaging in OCB (De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2022; Munyon *et al*., 2015). Specifically, political skill enhances awareness of coworkers' needs and organizational requirements, enabling politically skilled subordinates to undertake more effective actions in supporting their peers and benefiting their organizations (Munyon *et al*., 2015). Specifically, with sharp awareness of people's needs, politically skilled employees can tailor their behaviors, providing more meaningful and niche-targeting assistance to their peers, enhancing their OCB-I. Analogously, this capability helps subordinates read organizational demands and choose high-payoff discretionary behaviors, thus underpinning their OCB-O (De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2022). Moreover, by virtue of social awareness and impression-management capability, politically skilled

employees can better discern which specific types of OCB are most appropriate and impactful, as well as when to enact them (Ferris *et al*., 2005; Munyon *et al*., 2015). In this sense, political skill contains an image-management component, and politically skilled employees may strategically engage in discretionary behaviors that are more visible and likely to be recognized by leaders, thereby cultivating a favorable reputation. Meanwhile, akin to improving task performance, the social influencing power and the network resources help employees attain intended objectives more effectively (Ferris *et al*., 2005). Thus, when employees intend to assist coworkers or contribute to organizational development, political skill may streamline OCB enactment and enhance its effectiveness. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

H3. Political skill is positively related to OCB-O.

H4. Political skill is positively related to OCB-I.

While contentious, prior empirical research and managerial accounts suggest that subordinates' enacted behaviors and work-related conduct could elicit abusive responses from leaders, and, importantly, this behavior-to-abuse temporal sequence appears not uncommon (e.g., Lian *et al.,* 2014; Walter *et al.,* 2015). Moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990) provides a compelling lens for understanding this phenomenon by indicating the psychological process through which certain individuals are perceived as falling outside the boundaries of moral concern, often leading to dehumanization, marginalization, and exclusion from the ethical standards (Opotow, 1990). Consequently, this perception is believed to justify negative and harmful treatments toward excluded individuals (e.g., neglection, discrimination, or indignity). In contrast, those who are morally included are viewed as deserving of care, justice, and empathy, resulting in substantially better treatment.

Accordingly, Walter *et al*. (2015) found that when subordinates had lower levels of task performance that seriously threatened leaders' goal attainments, they were likely to be morally excluded and perceive more abusive supervision.

Practically, moral exclusion in the workplace is often compounded by leaders' performance pressures, whereby performance metrics dominate evaluations of worth (Aguilera *et al*., 2024). Accordingly, leaders tend to justify their abusive behaviors under the guise of 'necessary measures' or 'performance promotion' (Liu *et al*., 2012). Specifically, task underperformance could predispose subordinates to moral exclusion, rendering those subordinates vulnerable targets for abusive supervision, because they are perceived as expendable or as obstacles to leader's goal attainments and overall organizational benefit (Walter *et al*., 2015). Therefore, the difference in the evaluation of task performance can reinforce the divide between subordinates considered worthy of moral standards and those excluded from such consideration. On the other hand, subordinates' extra-role performance can also potentially determine their positions within the leader's moral scope. Although OCB is not formally assessed within the organizational evaluation system, leaders often notice subordinates' extra-role contributions to advancing organizational goals (OCB-O) and become aware of supportive helping behaviors to others (OCB-I) through daily workplace interactions. For instance, subordinates known for constructive, helpful, and altruistic behaviors are generally viewed more favorably by leaders, increasing their likelihood of gaining leaders' goodwill (i.e., moral inclusion) and reducing their risk of abusive supervision. To enrich prior research linking subordinates' performance to abusive supervision (Walter *et al*., 2015), we propose the following hypotheses:

H5. Task performance is negatively related to abusive supervision.

H6. OCB-O is negatively related to abusive supervision.

H7. OCB-I is negatively related to abusive supervision

2.2.4 The Mediating Role of Task Performance and OCB

In line with the above hypotheses, it is reasonable to expect that political skill enables employees to achieve better task performance and OCB (OCB-O and OCB-I), thereby reducing their likelihood of experiencing abusive supervision. As previously mentioned, the JD-R model provides a broad resource-based foundation for why political skill can be conceptualized as a personal resource, whereas task performance and OCB represent performance-based social resources of subordinates to counteract or avert abusive supervision. However, JD-R model is less explicit about how political skill might translate into performance behaviors and why such performance cues would shape leaders' behavioral patterns. To explicate these proximal mechanisms, we integrate social influence theory and moral exclusion theory. Through the lens of social influence theory, politically skilled subordinates tend to leverage their social competence to enhance their performance and avoid abusive supervision. Furthermore, moral exclusion theory provides a theoretical foundation for explaining why higher levels of performance signal worthiness and contribution, thereby increasing the likelihood that subordinates are morally included and, in turn, treated with greater respect and care. Taken together, enhanced task performance and OCB (OCB-O, and OCB-I) could constitute key underlying mechanisms through which political skill restrains abusive supervision (See Figure 2.1). Hence, we predict the following hypotheses:

H8. Task Performance mediates the relationship between political skill and abusive supervision.

H9. OCB-O mediates the relationship between political skill and abusive supervision.

H10. OCB-I mediates the relationship between political skill and abusive supervision.

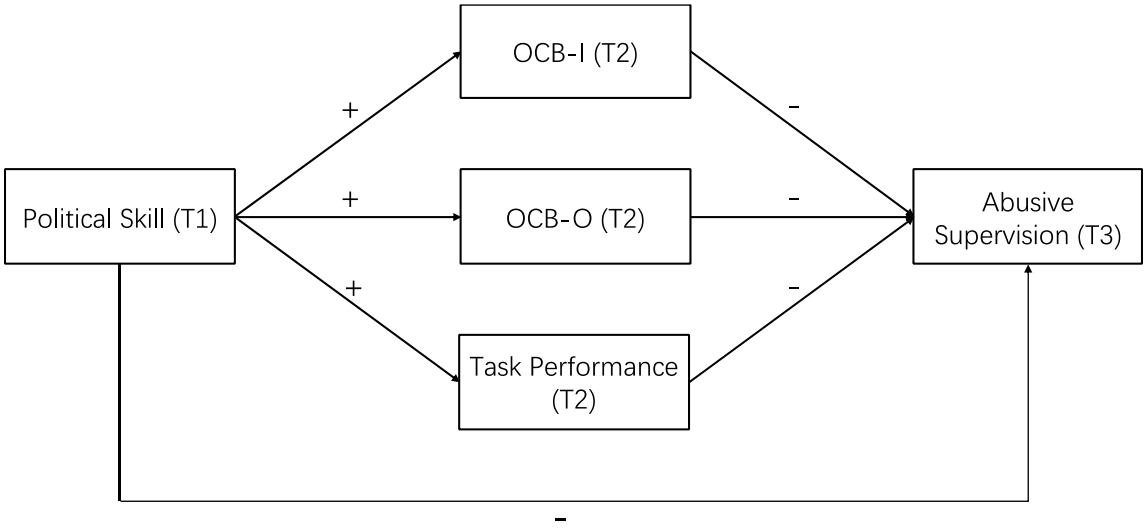

Figure 2.1 Hypothesized Model

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 Sample and Procedure

Surveys across all departments of the organization were carried out. Each department or workgroup is headed by a single leader and includes several members who report directly to that leader. Before commencing data collection, we performed a pilot test with two HR managers and several employees to ensure the understandability and accuracy of the survey. Employee ratings were used because the focal behaviors are discretionary and not fully observable to supervisors, and prior evidence supports the validity of self-reported performance measures (Heidemeier and Moser, 2009). The surveys were distributed through

WeChat, the most widely used social media platform in China. The survey cover page stated that participation was voluntary and responses obtained were strictly confidential.

At Time 1, employees rated political skill and demographic information. At Time 2 (two weeks later), employees rated task performance and OCB. At time 3 (two weeks after Time 2), employees rated the perception of abusive supervision. A total of 280 staff members were invited to participate. At Time 1, 258 subordinates participated (response rate of 92.14%). At Time 2, 252 participated (response rate of 89.64%). At Time 3, 248 participated (response rate of 94.87%). Following procedures to identify careless responders (Meade and Craig, 2012), 11 participants were excluded according to the careless check items (e.g., uniformly choosing "5"). By matching the multi-time surveys, the final sample contains 224 participants nested within 37 groups, leading to a response rate of 80.0%. Among the participants, 155 (69.2%) were males and 69 (30.8%) were females; their average age was 42.93 years (SD = 8.97); the mean organizational tenure was 19.07 years (SD = 9.64); and the mean time working with the current supervisor was 9.98 years (SD = 8.62).

2.3.2 Measures

Political skill. Ferris *et al.*'s (2005) 18-item scale was used to measure political skill. Participants answered a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (totally agree). A sample item is "I have good intuition or savvy about how to present myself to others." The Cronbach's alpha was .93.

Task performance. Task performance was measured using the 4-item scale from Williams and Anderson (1991). Items were measured on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). A sample item is "I fulfill the responsibilities specified in my job description." The Cronbach's alpha was .90.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB-O and OCB-I). OCB-O and OCB-I were each measured with 3 items from Farh *et al*.'s (1997) 6-item scale. Items were measured on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Sample items include "I actively raise suggestions to improve work procedures or processes" (OCB-O) and "I initiate assistance to co-workers who have a heavy workload" (OCB-I). Cronbach's alphas were .88 and .80 respectively.

Abusive supervision. Tepper's (2000) 15-item scale was used to measure abusive supervision. Employees answered items on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (never happens to me) to 5 (he/she always does this to me). A sample item is "My supervisor gives me silent treatment". The Cronbach's alpha was .96.

Demographic and Control Variables. To eliminate spurious relationships, gender, age, tenure, time working with supervisor, and educational level were included as control variables, as previous research suggests they could be associated with abusive supervision. (Zhang and Bednall, 2016).

2.3.2 Analytic Strategy

Due to the modest sample size (N = 224) and the nested nature of the data, we tested the hyothesized model using multilevel Bayesian structural equation modelling (BSEM) in Mplus 8. Compared with conventional approaches (e.g., multilevel SEM), BSEM provides MCMC estimation which generates posterior distributions and 95% credible intervals that are more stable in small or uneven group samples (Muthén and Asparouhov, 2012). Furthermore, Bayesian analysis enables convergence diagnostics and model-fit evaluation while providing direct estimates of indirect effects (Muthén and Asparouhov, 2012).

2.4 Results

2.4.1 Preliminary Test

Table 2.1 presents the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations of the focal variables, which are consistent with initial predictions.

To assess the degree of non-independence of the data due to containing employees from 37 groups, the intra-correlation coefficients (ICCs) were examined to evaluate the group-level variance. The results revealed that the ICC(1) of the dependent variables ranged from 0.02 to 0.12, suggesting nonsignificant between-group variance (James, 1982). The ICC(2) values ranged from 0.11 to 0.45, reflecting poor reliability of group means (James, 1982), suggesting group-level aggregation was not warranted. Accordingly, all variables were specified at the individual level and team-level nesting was accounted for using a two-level specification with random intercepts in Mplus.

Table 2.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*
1. Political Skill††	4.25	0.83	(.93)									
2. Abusive Supervision††	1.55	0.77	.05	(.96)								
3. Task Performance†	4.90	0.84	.18**	.16*	(.90)							
4. OCB-I†	4.97	0.73	.27**	-.17*	.50**	(.80)						
5. OCB-O†	5.00	0.79	.29**	-.21**	.55**	.72**	(.88)					
6. Gender†	1.31	0.46	-.18**	-.16*	.02	-.04	-.10	1				
7. Age†††	42.03	8.97	.03	-.10	-.11	.04	.01	-.23**	1			
8. Edu†	4.55	0.70	.03	-.15*	.18**	-.03	.07	.15*	-.43**	1		
9. Tenure †††	19.07	9.64	.06	.11	-.08	.08	.04	-.18**	.85**	-.37**	1	
10. Time with Supervisor†††	9.98	8.62	.07	-.16**	.04	.08	.04	-.16*	.48**	-.32**	.52**	1

Note: N = 224 participants; †1-10 scale, ††10-20 scale, ††† years.
***p<0.01; *p<0.05.*

2.4.2 Model Measurement

Given the sample size (N =224) with large-scale measures (15-item abusive supervision, 18-item political skill), we followed Little *et al.'s* (2002) suggestions to employ the parceling method in confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to reduce the number of parameters and improve the indicator reliability. Specifically, we used domain-representative parceling (Cullen *et al.*, 2014) to create 4 parcels of political skill (i.e., networking ability, interpersonal influence, social astuteness, and apparent sincerity), while we created 2 parcels for abusive supervision according to odd and even items (Little *et al.*, 2002), leaving task performance (4-item), OCBO (3-item), and OCBI (3-item) represented by their original items. The CFA test showed all parcel-based observed indicator factor loadings were significant ranging from .63 to .93 with an average of .83. The indices of our hypothesized five-factor model yielded a good fit to the data (χ^2 = 192.66, df =94, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.06) and outperformed a wide range of more parsimonious models. These results support the convergent and discriminant validity of the proposed measurement model.

2.4.3 Tests of Hypotheses

The proposed structural model was tested using Bayesian Structural Equation Modeling (BSEM). Following recommended standards for BSEM (Muthén and Asparouhov, 2012), we applied 200,000 Markov-chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) iterations with 100,000 iterations serving as a burn-in with 4 parallel chains. Based on the different evaluation criteria, the hypothesized model demonstrated a good fit to the data: Posterior predictive p-value (PPP) was .46, and the 95% posterior predictive checking (PPC) confidence interval included zero [-24.79; 24.44] for the chi-square (Muthén and Asparouhov, 2012). The potential scale reduction (PSR) decreased rapidly, falling below the cut-off of 1.05 after 2,500 iterations.

Additionally, the inspections of the trace plots illustrated the typical pattern of MCMC, supporting the MCMC convergence. The results are reported in Table 2.2.

Contrary to Hypothesis 1, political skill was not directly related to abusive supervision (B = 0.09; 95%CI [-0.05, 0.24]). Political skill was positively related to task performance (B = 0.38; 95%CI [0.23, 0.54]), OCB-O (B = 0.32; 95%CI [0.20, 0.44]), and OCB-I (B = 0.28; 95%CI [0.16, 0.41]) thereby supporting hypotheses 2, 3, and 4. Additionally, task performance was not related to abusive supervision (B = -0.01; 95%CI [-0.12, 0.13]). OCB-I was not related to abusive supervision (B = 0.04; 95%CI [-0.21, 0.28]). OCB-O was negatively related to abusive supervision (B = -0.30; 95%CI [-0.54, -0.05]). Thus, hypotheses 5 and 7 were rejected but hypothesis 6 was supported.

Moreover, the mediating effect of task performance (B = 0.01; 95%CI [-0.05, 0.05]) and OCB-I (B = 0.01; 95%CI [-0.06, 0.08]) were found to be non-significant between political skill and abusive supervision. Hypotheses 8 and 10 were therefore not supported. The mediating effect of OCB-O (B = -0.09; 95%CI [-0.19, -0.02]) was found to be significant thereby supporting hypothesis 9.

Regarding the demographic control variables, none of them were significantly related to the focal dependent variables in the analyses. To understand the potential role of contextual factors that could influence the proposed model, we conducted supplementary moderation analysis as part of a robustness check. Overall, these exploratory tests provided no robust evidence of meaningful moderating effects among the theoretically plausible moderators available in the data.[1]

[1] As part of a supplementary exploratory robustness check, we examined several potential boundary factors i.e., moderators, in our overall model. These included time working with the supervisor, tenure, education, gender, age, power distance, and perceived organizational support. Overall, the results did not indicate any meaningful moderating effects between the variables investigated. Given the exploratory nature of these tests and the lack of strong theoretical justification for these moderators, we do not interpret these effects further. The results are available upon request.

Table 2.2 Tests of Hypothesized model (BSEM)

Model Path - Individual Level		B	Posterior SD	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Political Skill	→Task Performance	0.38**	0.80	0.23	0.54
Political Skill	→OCB-O	0.32**	0.06	0.20	0.44
Political Skill	→OCB-I	0.28**	0.06	0.16	0.41
Political Skill	→Abusive Supervision	0.09	0.07	-0.05	0.24
Task Performance	→Abusive Supervision	0.01	0.06	-0.12	0.13
OCB-O	→Abusive Supervision	-0.30**	0.13	-0.54	-0.05
OCB-I	→Abusive Supervision	0.04	0.12	-0.21	0.28
Gender	→Political Skill	-0.30**	0.12	-0.53	-0.08
Indirect_TP		0.01	0.03	-0.05	0.05
Indirect_OCB-O		-0.09**	0.04	-0.19	-0.02
Indirect_OCB-I		0.01	0.04	-0.06	0.08

Note. Unstandardized model coefficients are presented; Indirect_TP, Indirect_OCB-O, and Indirect_OCB-I refer to the mediating effects of task performance, OCB-O and OCB-I.
* 90%-CI excludes zero, ** 95%-CI excludes zero

2.5 Discussion

The present study investigated whether task performance and OCB (OCB-O, and OCB-I) mediate the relationship between political skill and abusive supervision. The results indicate that political skill is positively associated with task performance and the OCB dimensions of OCB-O and OCB-I, but the main effect of political skill on abusive supervision is

nonsignificant. Additionally, OCB-O is negatively associated with abusive supervision. However, task performance and OCB-I show nonsignificant associations with abusive supervision. The results of the mediation test suggests that the relationship between political skill and abusive supervision is mediated by OCB-O, but not task performance or OCB-I. We discuss the theoretical and practical contributions of these findings below.

2.5.1 Theoretical Implications

Prior studies have evidenced that political skill plays a buffering role with respect to alleviating the detrimental effects of abusive supervision on knowledge hiding behaviors (Offergelt and Venz, 2023). However, until now, the direct relationship between political skill and abusive supervision, and the underlying mechanisms explaining this relationship have not yet been subject to empirical investigation. The study addresses this void by combining the JD-R model and social influence theory to advance political skill as a core individual resource that directly counteracts abusive supervision. However, no direct relationship between political skill and abusive supervision was substantiated. Political skill may equip individuals with the ability to navigate organizational dynamics and build effective relationships, but it might still not immediately alter supervisors' abusive behavioral patterns. Rather, the results indeed indicate that the influence of political skill on abusive supervision appears to be indirect, operating through the mechanism of OCB-I.

While the results suggest that political skill is conducive to both OCB-O and OCB-I, only OCB-O mediates the relationship between political skill and abusive supervision. This highlights the prominent role of OCB-O as an underlying mechanism through which politically skilled subordinates encounter less abusive supervision. As politically skilled employees are better able to read situational cues and discern what “counts” in different

environments (Ferris *et al.,* 2005), they can enact niche-targeted and high-impact behaviors that advance the unit's and organization's goals (Munyon *et al.,* 2015). Their social astuteness and interpersonal influence further enable them to deliver such contributions efficiently and at the right moments (Ferris *et al.,* 2005). From the leaders' perspective, OCB-O is typically more instrumental to goal attainment, more visible, and more readily attributable to the focal subordinate (e.g., voicing suggestions for improvement), thereby signaling both value and alignment with leaders' objectives (Walter *et al*., 2015). In turn, moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990) suggests that leaders are more likely to morally include subordinates who are perceived as valuable contributors and high performers, extending greater moral consideration to them.

By contrast, OCB-I may be less consistently linked to leaders' behaviors because it primarily benefits coworkers, which is less tied to leaders' immediate performance metrics and is often enacted outside the leaders' observation. Consequently, leaders may under-detect OCB-I or dismiss it as routine collegiality. They might even view frequent helping as time-consuming and less relevant to unit deliverables, which reduces its signaling value for moral inclusion and protection from abusive supervision. Therefore, the present findings highlight a meaningful distinction between OCB dimensions. That is, extra-role behaviors that visibly advance organizational objectives (OCB-O) appear more consequential for reducing exposure to abusive supervision than helping behaviors that benefit individuals (OCB-I).

Apart from OCB, the findings do not support a direct association between task performance and abusive supervision nor the mediating role of task performance. This implies that improving task performance did not protect subordinates from abusive

supervision. Unlike OCB, differences in subordinates' task performance are limited and practically indistinguishable due to the standardized and routine nature of performance evaluation (Williams and Anderson, 1991). Accordingly, leaders may be less attuned to the variation. Although political skill enables employees to effectively complete prescribed tasks, the disparity alone is unlikely to determine whether they are viewed as worthy of moral inclusion or exclusion. In fact, task performance is often considered as a baseline expectation, while leaders may place greater emphasis on discretionary factors. Overall, the findings complement existing literature by showing that different performance outcomes and targets differentially relate to subordinates' experiences of abusive supervision (e.g., in-role vs extra-role and OCB-O vs OCB-I).

2.5.2 Practical Implications

In the contemporary workplace, where competition is intense and survival is often performance-contingent, differential (i.e., "selective") treatment has become normalized. Due to performance assessments, limited budgets, and scarce resources, leaders' behaviors may function as a strategic allocation of resources that supports their own effectiveness and survival, yet it can simultaneously create relational asymmetries that allow abusive supervision to emerge and persist. In such performance-oriented cultures, it is difficult to deny that individual self-improvement can be a no-nonsense strategy to avert abusive supervision, because high-performing subordinates often show upward-mobility, better working experiences, and favorable treatment. Importantly, political skill is a developable and malleable characteristic rather than being fixed. Our findings recommend employing training programs for employees focusing on accurately reading social cues, communication skill with supervisors, building task-relevant networks, and image management, which can

help them navigate daily social demands (e.g., abusive supervision) more effectively while sustaining performance. This is especially relevant in contexts like the present one, where abusive supervision is pervasive and systemic. However, political-skill training should not be framed as shifting the responsibility to employees to avoid mistreatment. Organizations' primary responsibility is still to prevent supervisory abusive behaviors through managerial safeguards, such as clear supervisory behavioral standards and accessible reporting channels. Accordingly, a dual approach, developing employees' political skill while strengthening managerial accountability, may offer a comprehensive actionable route to reducing abusive supervision and improving performance.

2.5.3 Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations with this study. First, it does not fully consider how broader contextual and personal factors may affect our model. One particularly relevant variable is political will, as the effects of political skill may depend on individuals' motivation to deploy it (Frieder et al., 2024). Furthermore, political skill may operate more strongly in Chinese context (e.g., high power distance and relationism), as employees who can read hierarchical cues and maintain relationship quality may be better positioned to perform well and secure supervisor support. By contrast, in more egalitarian and individualistic Western contexts, the benefits of political skill may be weaker or more contingent. Additionally, given the older and longer-tenured nature of our sample, the observed patterns may partly reflect the values of stable and bureaucratic settings, where interpersonal harmony and extra-role contributions may be especially salient in supervisory evaluations. In younger sectors (e.g., technology startups), task performance may carry greater weight, potentially altering supervisory behavioral patterns. Accordingly, future research is encouraged to integrate cultural

orientations and individual dispositions as boundary conditions and to replicate the model across industries with different organizational structures.

Second, the nonsignificant direct effect between political skill and abusive supervision might imply that the relationship is more nuanced than a single-channel explanation (i.e., OCB-O). Importantly, because OCB-O is discretionary and often reputation-relevant, it may reflect not only substantive citizenship contributions but also the extent to which such behaviors are visible and recognized. Without direct measures of impression management or performance visibility, we cannot fully determine whether political skill increases OCB-O itself or merely enhances its observability. Future research could incorporate explicit impression-management/visibility measures alongside multi-source or objective indicators to more cleanly partition these pathways. Consistent with Tepper et al.'s (2017) recommendation, future research could examine additional mediating pathways, such as impression management and workplace popularity, to clarify the overall pattern of effects.

2.6 Conclusion

This study provides evidence that subordinates' political skill can reduce the perceptions of abusive supervision through increasing extra-role performance (i.e., OCB-O). In the real-world context where employees' perceptions, reactions, and coping strategies are paramount, the study foregrounds the victim-side dynamics of abusive supervision which underscores the importance of subordinate-related antecedents in shaping how abusive supervision is experienced. While the findings do not justify employees' receiving fair treatment on the basis of their superior performance, they do highlight practical ways in which subordinates may reduce the risk of abusive supervision.

Chapter Three Does intent regarding abusive supervision really matter? The moderating effect of performance-promotion and injury-initiation attributions between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion

Based on: Liu, T., Kilroy, S., & Zhang, Y. (2026). Does Intent Regarding Abusive Supervision Really Matter? The Moderating Effect of Performance-Promotion and Injury-Initiation Attributions Between Abusive Supervision and Emotional Exhaustion. *Behavioral Sciences, 16*(3), 444. (Special Issue: *The Dark Side of Leadership: Research at Team- or Cross-Level of Analysis*; APC waived).

Abstract

While prior research shows that subordinates' attributions can amplify or buffer the negative effects of abusive supervision on outcome performance, it remains unclear whether similar moderating effects extend to subordinate well-being. Drawing on attribution theory and conservation of resources (COR) theory, this study investigates whether performance-promotion and injury-initiation attributions moderate the relationship between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion. Applying a time-lagged research design, we surveyed full-time employees (N=224) nested in 37 work groups within a single Chinese transportation company and tested the proposed hypotheses using structural equation modeling (SEM). Contrary to the expectations and prior evidence, the moderating effect of injury-initiation attribution between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion is nonsignificant. Moreover, performance-promotion attribution significantly moderates this relationship, in the opposite direction to the expectations: it exacerbates (rather than buffers) the positive association between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion. These findings complicate the assumption that performance-promotion attributions are protective whereas injury-initiation attributions are destructive, instead suggesting a different pattern of attributional effects. The study advances the understanding of abusive supervision attributions and provides implications for management practice.

Keywords: Abusive supervision; Performance-promotion attribution; Injury-initiation attribution; Emotional exhaustion; Attribution theory; Conservation of resources theory

3.1 Introduction

Tepper (2000, p.178) defined abusive supervision as employee perceptions of "the sustained display of hostile, verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" from their supervisors. A substantial body of literature has shown that abusive supervision can lead to subordinates' psychological harm (e.g., stress, anger, alienation, and emotional exhaustion) and deviant behaviors, such as retaliation and counterproductive work behaviors (For reviews, see Tepper et al., 2017; Fischer et al., 2021). While prior studies have extended our understanding of the negative consequences of abusive supervision and what may cause it, there remains a lacuna of research on potent coping strategies to grapple with the detrimental effects of abusive supervision (Tepper et al., 2017). Understanding how to restrain the influence of abusive supervision is critical since it may be myopic to believe that supervisory abusive behaviors in the workplace can be fully eradicated (Fischer et al., 2021).

Drawing on attribution theory (Heider, 1958), the influence of abusive supervision is conditional (Liang et al., 2024; Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper et al., 2017) and highly dependent on subordinates' attributions (e.g., Liu et al., 2012; Yu & Duffy, 2021). Liu et al. (2012) conceptualized two distinct motives underlying leaders' abusive behaviors: *performance promotion,* reflecting an intent to enhance subordinates' performance, and *injury initiation,* reflecting an intent to deliberately harm subordinates. Subsequent evidence has highlighted that the moderating effects of subordinate attributions, such that abused subordinates who attribute abusive supervision to performance promotion could effectively subdue the negative influence of abusive supervision, while the negative impact for those who perceive injury-initiation attributions, could be amplified (Huh & Lee, 2022; Kim et al., 2019; Yu & Duffy, 2021). While extant studies have discovered that individual attributions can either

alleviate or exacerbate the negative effects of abusive supervision on subordinates' outcome performance including creativity (Liu et al., 2012), job performance (Yang et al., 2020), and OCBs (Yu & Duffy, 2021), whether similar moderating effects extend to subordinate well-being remains underexplored. Addressing this void is crucial because, without protecting well-being, the maintained performance and efficiency would be short-lived and cannot realize organizational sustainability.

Based on conservation of resource (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and prior empirical evidence (e.g., e.g., Huh & Lee, 2022; Kim et al., 2019; Yu & Duffy, 2021), construing abusive supervision as performance-promotion provides an instrumental cognitive resource that preserves valued goal-related meaning and facilitates coping, thereby offsetting resource loss and mitigating emotional exhaustion. However, the beneficial aspects of positive attribution (or low negative attribution) on abused subordinates' outcome performance might not necessarily reflect on their well-being. Studies have suggested that performance improvements sometimes stem from subordinates' intensified effort, increased work investment, and cost of well-being (Hunter & Thatcher, 2007; LePine et al., 2005). Importantly, sustainable performance is more likely when employees' well-being is protected, rather than when performance is maintained through continuous resource depletion (Yang et al., 2020; Yu & Duffy, 2021). Thus, the present study aims to examine whether abused subordinates with performance-promotion attribution also experience lower levels of emotional exhaustion, or in the opposite way.

Likewise, it is meaningful to delve into the moderating effect of injury-initiation attribution on the relationship between abusive supervision and individual well-being. Drawing on attribution theory (Heider, 1958), perceiving abusive supervision as

intentionally harmful (e.g., poisonous leader) may significantly amplify psychological distress, leading to severe emotional exhaustion. Past literature also documented the exacerbating effects of injury-initiation attribution on the influence of abusive supervision (Liu et al., 2012; Yu & Duffy, 2021). However, there is dearth of empirical evidence to support that such exacerbating effects extend to well-being outcomes. Importantly, another perspective of attribution theory implies this moderation may be less pronounced than expected, because perceiving abusive supervision negatively may be intrinsic to abusive encounters and thus exert minimal incremental influence beyond the main effect (Kelley, 1973). In this regard, the moderating effect of injury-initiation attribution between abusive supervision and well-being might be suspectable. To articulate the relationship, the present study employs attribution theory (Heider, 1958) and conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) to investigate whether and how performance-promotion and injury-initiation attributions moderate the association between abusive supervision and subordinates' emotional exhaustion (see Figure 3.1).

The study offers two primary contributions. First, although performance-promotion attribution enables subordinates to sustain outcome performance (e.g., Huh & Lee, 2022; Kim et al., 2019; Yu & Duffy, 2021), its protective value for well-being among abused subordinates remains uncertain. Based on COR theory and Attribution theory, the present study seeks to address the void by examining whether the beneficial aspect of performance-promotion attribution also materializes for employee well-being (i.e., emotional exhaustion). In doing so, the study articulates whether positive effects of performance-promotion attribution reflect subordinates' genuine well-being improvement. In the same vein, scholars have discovered that injury-initiation attribution can exacerbate the negative impact of

abusive supervision on subordinates' work performance (Liu et al., 2012; Yu & Duffy, 2021). However, the empirical evidence remains sparce regarding whether this exacerbating effect extends to well-being outcomes. our study addresses this void by examining whether injury-initiation attribution moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' emotional exhaustion. Secondly, due to the prevalence of the abusive supervision phenomenon in China and the broader Asian context (Mackey et al., 2017; Liang et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2020), our study represents an important contribution by testing our proposed model using multi-time and nested data collected in a single company in China where coping strategies against abusive leaders are urgently needed. (Mackey et al., 2017; Liang et al., 2016). The findings provide reliable recommendations for management practice in a context in which abusive supervisio is unlikely to dissipate any time soon.

3.2 Literature Development

Substantial evidence demonstrates that abusive supervision is associated with a range of adverse outcomes and considerable organizational costs, such as greater subordinates' absenteeism, increased health-care cost, lost productivity, and high turnover (Schat et al., 2006). Abusive supervision is acknowledged to be particularly prevalent in high-power-distance Asian contexts such as China, Philippines, and Taiwan where supervisory abusive behaviors could be less criticized and punished (Mackey et al., 2017). Evidence has shown more than 50% Chinese employees experience supervisory abuse and cold violence (Liang et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2020). Though understanding coping strategies against abusive supervision is urgently needed, there is a lacuna of knowledge regarding how to restrain the detriments of abusive supervision (Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper, 2017).

One research stream has suggested that the negative impact of abusive supervision on organizational outcomes is not inevitable (Fischer et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2024; Zhang & Liu, 2018). In practice, abusive supervision could stimulate subordinates' performance via a performance enhancement pathway, including attention, desire to avoid further hostility, and prove the supervisor wrong (Tepper, 2007; Tepper et al., 2017). Moreover, a variety of factors may prevent or perpetuate the impact of this leadership style on employees, as reflected by the substantial variability in reported associations between abusive supervision and employee deviance, ranging from as low as -.15 to as high as .74 (Fischer et al., 2021). In this regard, it is worthwhile to articulate the boundary factors which may alter the serious detriments of abusive supervision into trivial effects. Based on this knowledge, practitioners will be better equipped to introduce pertinent management strategies to grapple with abusive supervision in practice.

3.2.1 Abusive Supervision and Attribution Theory

A promising strand of research underscores the value of an attributional perspective for deepening the contemporary understanding of why the effects of abusive supervision could vary (Liu et al., 2012; Martinko et al., 2011). According to Attribution theory (Heider, 1958), people construct causal explanations for social stimuli, which in turn influence their emotions and guide their attitudinal and behavioral reactions (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Heider, 1958). Applying the rationale to the abusive supervision research, employees' psychological response to abusive supervision may highly depend on how they attribute supervisory abusive behaviors (Liu et al., 2012). Indeed, although abusive supervision is commonly considered under a default expectation of supervisors' deleterious motives (e.g., threatening

or hurting subordinates), the measurement of abusive supervision captures neither leaders' motives nor subordinates' attributions of abusive behaviors (Fischer et al., 2021).

Initially, Tepper (2000) posited that leaders' abusive behaviors could be enacted as part of a strategic management approach, for instance, to signal that mistakes or slackness would not be tolerated. Extending this perspective, Tepper (2007) further suggested that abusive supervision might be constructive when such aggressive behaviors were not perceived as intentionally harmful. Following this research line, Liu et al. (2012) introduced the notion that supervisors could exercise abusive behaviors for the purposes of 1) *performance promotion* or 2) *injury initiation*. Their empirical study revealed that the attributions could effectively buffer the negative relationship between abusive supervision and creativity (Liu et al., 2012). Based on Liu et al's study (2012), Yang et al. (2020) found abusive supervision was positively associated with job performance via performance-promotion attribution. In addition, Yu and Duffy (2021) discovered that viewing abusive supervision as performance-promotion intent elicited guilt, increasing OCB, whereas injury-initiation attribution elicited anger, increasing deviance. Furthermore, Huh and Lee (2022) found that when employees made positive causal attributions, the detrimental effect of abusive supervision on work engagement became less harmful and could even appear beneficial. While these studies have identified managing attributions as effective aspects to alleviate the detriments of abusive supervision on their working performance, it remains unclear whether similar moderating patterns extend to subordinates' well-being. addressing this void is important, because performance maintenance led by high-level performance-promotion attribution or low-level injury-initiation attribution could reflect genuine well-being and working experience

improvement, but also might potentially rely on emotional regulation and resource depletion i.e., impaired well-being (Hunter & Thatcher, 2007; LePine et al., 2005).

3.2.2 Abusive Supervision, Attributions, and Emotional Exhaustion

Conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) indicates that individuals strive to protect their current resources and pursue new resources, and stress occurs when they experience a threat or actual loss of resources (e.g., excessive demands). In accordance with COR theory, abusive supervision has been regarded as a critical job demand, which drains subordinates' resources, resulting in poor well-being (e.g., Aryee et al., 2008, Liang et al., 2018; Wu & Hu, 2009). In the present study, we focus on emotional exhaustion as one of the most recognized psychological symptoms associated with abusive supervision. According to the World Health Organization's (WHO) International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) description of burnout, which is based on the definition and measure developed by Maslach and colleagues (Maslach et al., 1996) i.e., the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), burnout is defined as an occupational phenomenon resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed (World Health Organization, 2019). Emotional exhaustion represents the core component of burnout, referring to a state of physical and mental exhaustion caused by excessive stress (Maslach et al., 1996). Emotional exhaustion is detrimental psychological status and jeopardizes individual capacity to perform (Cropanzano et al., 2003).

Meta-analytic evidence from more than 100 samples showed a moderate-to-strong positive association between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion (Mackey et al., 2017). Additionally, longitudinal field research revealed that exposure to abusive supervision

predicted subsequent elevated exhaustion after controlling for the possibility of reverse causality (Liang et al., 2018). These findings are in accordance with the central tents of COR theory, whereby abusive supervision can persistently erode subordinate mental health and drain their emotional and physical resources, essentially resulting in emotional exhaustion. (Wu & Hu, 2009). Based on this coherent theoretical perspective and empirical evidence, we expect:

H1: *Abusive supervision will be positively related to subordinates' individual emotional exhaustion.*

3.2.3 The Moderating Effect of Performance-Promotion Attribution

In practice, leaders' abusive behaviors might be conducive to subordinates' performance via performance-enhancement pathways (Tepper, 2007). For instance, leaders may sometimes resort to harsh language or aggressive gestures to correct or halt clearly inappropriate behaviors. Thus, aggressive words and deeds might be occasionally conducted to stimulate better performance rather than in the quest to cause harm (Liu et al., 2012; Yang et al., 2020; Yu & Duffy, 2021). As the purpose is aligned with their own benefit, subordinates could perceive leaders' aggressive behaviors as a form of "tough love" containing information as corrections and high expectations (Liu et al., 2012). Additionally, this meaning-making may be particularly plausible in certain workplaces (e.g., eastern Asia), which are often characterized by relatively high-power distance and hierarchical role norms that legitimize supervisory authority (House et al., 2004). In such a cultural backdrop, subordinates may be more likely to construe harsh supervision as discipline or performance management (rather than interpersonal hostility), making performance-promotion attribution especially salient

for subsequent appraisals and coping. Based on existing evidence (Liu et al., 2012; Yu & Duffy, 2021), the legitimization of leaders' aggressiveness generally positions performance-promotion attribution as an individual resource, encouraging subordinates to prevent further resource losses and maintain their performance (e.g., commit significant errors and receive any resulting penalties).

However, from a competing perspective, performance-promotion attribution may simultaneously legitimize harsh treatment as "necessary for results," which can heighten performance pressure, internalized self-blame, and persistence under demands (Hunter & Thatcher, 2007; LePine et al., 2005). Drawing on COR theory, performance-promotion attribution may trigger continued resource investment (e.g., sustained self-regulation and vigilance) to enhance performance, thereby potentially accelerating resource depletion and exacerbating strain. Accordingly, performance-promotion attribution could either attenuate or intensify the harmful impact of abusive supervision, depending on which process dominates. Aligning with prior evidence (e.g., Huh & Lee, 2022; Liu et al., 2012; Yu & Duffy, 2021), the buffering pathway is expected to dominate overall because performance-promotion attribution generally reframes leaders' aggressiveness as performance-oriented "tough love", which is associated with less downstream harm.

Specifically, when subordinates interpret leaders' abusive behaviors as performance-promotion, three COR-relevant mechanisms could unfold. First, the primary appraisal shifts from a pure threat to a combination of warning and encouragement (Liu et al., 2012). Although the tone is harsh, the ultimate goal of improving one's performance implies a potential resource gain (e.g., future mastery, recognition, or rewards). COR theory holds that

the prospect of resource acquisition can offset current resource loss, thereby preventing the emotional exhaustion (Hobfoll, 1989). Second, the stress caused by abusive supervision could be alleviated when subordinates reinterpret the supervisor's intent from malevolent to constructive. Drawing on attribution theory (Heider, 1958), destructive intent elicits anger and moral outrage, thereby taxing self-regulatory resources and accelerating exhaustion (Yu & Duffy, 2021). In contrast, an instrumental intent tends to evoke concern for self-improvement. More importantly, abused subordinates could realize that the leader's initial intent behind abusive behaviors is highly related to their shortcomings, consistent with their career development, and ultimately intended to benefit them (Yu & Duffy, 2021). Though these abusive behaviors are unethical and uncomfortable, they motivate constructive copings and positive performance, which is less energetically costly than anger-fueled rumination or covert retaliation (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Third, performance-promotion attribution preserves the social resource of leader legitimacy. Believing that the supervisor's harshness serves a developmental purpose sustains a baseline of trust and respect in the leader-member relationship, which can keep open channels for support and guidance that would otherwise be severed. This continuity mitigates the social isolation and identity threat that drive resource loss under abusive supervision.

In conclusion, performance-promotion attribution could buffer the relationship between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion, because it potentially (1) introduces anticipated resource gains in the future, (2) substitutes positive essence for the damaging behaviors, and (3) safeguards relational resources with leaders. Taken together, even though abused subordinates endure the same abusive acts and often invest extra effort and resources to enhance their performance, these processes help conserve personal resources and shield

them from elevated emotional exhaustion. Following previous research underscoring the buffering role of performance-promotion attribution in the negative influence of abusive supervision (e.g., Huh & Lee, 2022; Kim et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2020), we advance the following hypothesis:

H2: *Performance-promotion attribution moderates the positive relationship between abusive supervision and individual emotional exhaustion, such that the relationship is weaker when performance-promotion attribution is higher (vs lower).*

3.2.4 The Moderating Effect of Injury-Initiation Attribution

On the contrary, when subordinates construe the same leaders' abusive behaviors as injury-initiation, the appraisal pivots from a performance enhancement to an unambiguous threat (Liu et al., 2012). Prior evidence has shown injury-initiation attribution can exacerbate the detrimental impact of abusive supervision, diminishing employees' creativity (Liu et al., 2012) and heightening supervisor-directed deviance (Yu & Duffy, 2021). According to COR theory, this hostile attribution could undermine possible developmental value of positive attributions and is likely to precipitate further resource loss, exacerbating emotional exhaustion.

Drawing on Attribution theory (Heider, 1958), when subordinates attribute abusive supervision as injury-initiation, the primary appraisal tends to become threat and harm with little compensatory gain prospects. Perceiving malicious intent precludes construing abusive supervisory behaviors as instrumentally motivated (e.g., performance orientation), leading employees to code them as intentional harm. (Liu et al., 2012). Unlike challenge appraisals, which can convert some resource expenditure into future returns or performance

improvement, a pure-threat schema offers little offsetting gain and thus accelerates resource depletion. In addition, the malevolence of injury-initiation attribution elicits negative emotions including anger, moral outrage, and desires for retribution (Yu & Duffy, 2021), all of which are physically and psychologically taxing. Based on COR theory, the energy devoted to managing anger, plotting retaliation, or suppressing public hostility may lead to serious resource loss, resulting in emotional exhaustion (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Moreover, injury-initiation attribution could damage the relationship between leaders and subordinates, making abusive leaders' credibility collapse, along with expectation of future support, mentorship, and fair treatment (Liu et al., 2012). In this manner, abused subordinates suffer further social resources depletion over time. Therefore, viewing abusive supervision through an injury-initiation lens could seriously intensify emotional exhaustion. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the strength of this exacerbating effect might not necessarily be uniform across situations, because the salience and mechanisms of injury-initiation intent can vary across contexts and relationships. Particularly, the incremental role of injury-initiation attribution may be constrained in settings where the leader's negative intent is already a default inference, which could limit the incremental strength of its moderating effect even if the direction remains exacerbating. Consistent with the predominant evidence that injury-initiation attributions intensify detrimental reactions (Liu et al., 2012; Yu & Duffy, 2021), we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: *Injury-initiation attribution moderates the positive relationship between abusive supervision and individual emotional exhaustion, such that the relationship is stronger when injury-initiation attribution is higher (vs lower).*

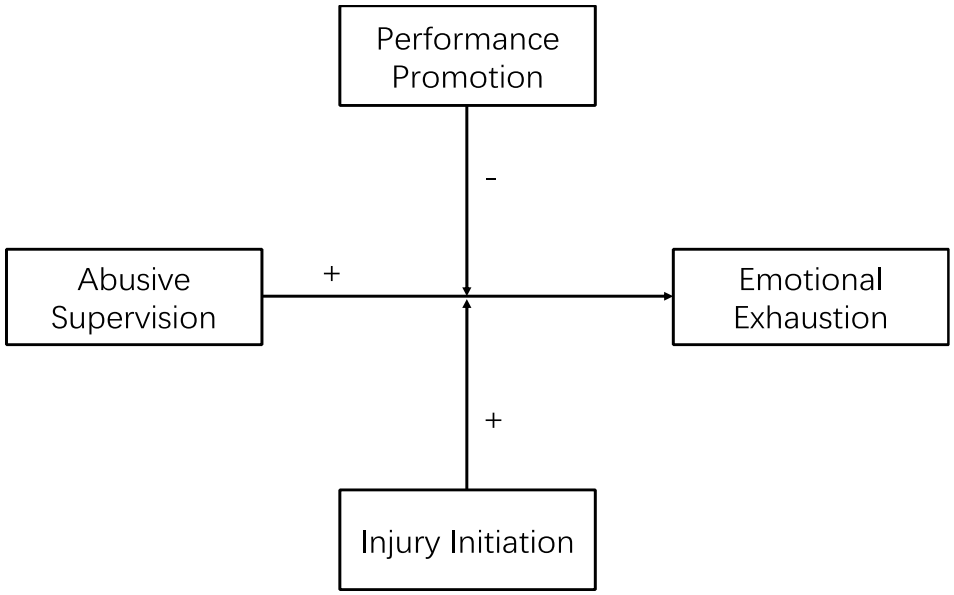

Figure 3.1 *Conceptual Framework.*

3.3 Methods

3.3.1 Sample and Procedure

We collected survey data across two waves from a large transportation company in Southwest China. The organization's core business involves highway and railway construction and road-related services. With support from the HR department, surveys were distributed to all full-time and on-payroll employees across major departments (e.g., marketing, maintenance engineering, operational safety, and accounting). Restricting the sampling frame to formally employed staff helps ensure that participants have relatively stable job roles and sustained interaction with their immediate supervisors, which is important for reliably assessing supervisory behaviors and psychological states (attributions and emotional exhaustion). All participants had an identifiable direct supervisor. Prior to the main study, we conducted a pilot test to ensure item clarity and readability. Following this, HR managers helped to distribute the survey links via WeChat (the most popular social media

platform in China). The cover page of two-wave survey stated that participation was voluntary, and that confidentiality was strictly maintained.

This design represents a single-organization, census-based, and multi-wave sampling approach (i.e., surveying all eligible employees) enabled by organizational access. Collecting data within one organization helps minimize heterogeneity arising from external contextual differences (e.g., HR systems and industry/regional practices), which is especially important for multilevel modeling because it reduces the influence of exogenous between-organization variance. In addition, the two-wave design, with predictors and outcomes measured at different time points, helps reduce concerns about common method bias and provides a more conservative test of the hypothesized relationships.

At Time 1, employees rated abusive supervision, performance-promotion and injury-initiation attributions, and demographic information. At Time 2 (two weeks later), employees rated emotional exhaustion. A total of 280 staff members were eligible to participate in the survey. At Time 1, 258 subordinates participated (response rate of 92.14%). At Time 2, 252 participated (response rate of 89.64%). Following procedures to identify careless responders (Meade & Craig, 2012), 11 participants were excluded according to the careless check items (e.g., uniformly choosing "5" and repeating "123456"). By matching the multi-time surveys, the final multi-level sample was 224 from 37 groups (average group size = 6.05), leading to a response rate of 80%. Among the participants, 155 (69.2%) were males and 69 (30.8%) were females; their average age was 42.93 years (SD = 8.97); the mean tenure was 9.98 years (SD = 8.62).

3.3.2 Measurement

Following Brislin's (1980) procedures of back translation, we translated the surveys from English into Chinese and adjusted the items according to the firm context.

Abusive supervision. Tepper's (2000) 15-item scale was used to measure abusive supervision. Employees answered items on a 5-point Likert-scale, ranging from 1 (never happens to me) to 5 (he/she always does this to me). A sample item is "My supervisor gives me silent treatment". The Cronbach's alpha was .97.

Performance-promotion attribution. Performance-promotion attribution was measured using five items representing the performance-promotion dimension of Liu et al.'s (2012) 10-item abusive supervision attribution scale. Before responding, participants were presented with the definition of abusive supervision and then rated each item on a 6-point Likert scale indicating the extent to which they agreed that each statement reflected the reason/intent underlying their supervisor's abusive behaviors. A sample item is "Desire to elicit high performance from me". The Cronbach's alpha was .89.

Injury-initiation attribution. Injury-initiation attribution was measured using five items representing the injury-initiation dimension of Liu et al.'s (2012) 10-item abusive supervision attribution scale. Before responding, participants were presented with the definition of abusive supervision and then rated each item on a 6-point Likert scale indicating the extent to which they agreed that each statement reflected the reason/intent underlying their supervisor's abusive behaviors. A sample item is "Desire to cause injury to me". Cronbach's alpha was .91.

Emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion was measured with the 5 items that capture this dimension from Maslach et al.'s (1996) burnout scale. Participants answered a 6-point

frequency scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (every day) A sample items is "I feel emotionally drained from my work". The Cronbach's alpha was .93.

Demographic and Control Variables. Following Zhang and Benall's (2016) study**,** we controlled for gender (1 = male, 2 = female), age (years), and the time working with the supervisor (years), as meta-analytic evidence suggests that demographic characteristics may show small but systematic associations with perceptions of abusive supervision. Prior literature has highlighted that leaders' behavioral patterns might vary based on subordinates' gender and age, as well as the time working with the supervisor (See Zhang & Bednall, 2016, for a review). By controlling for these individual demographic variables, the analysis can isolate the unique influence of abusive supervision and its attributions on the focal outcome variables of interest and reduce the risk of confounding effects.

3.3.3 Preliminary Test

3.3.3.1 Convergent and Discriminant Validity

We employed structural equation modeling (SEM) in Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017) to test the hypotheses. Specifically, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was executed to assess the validity of the focal variables and path analysis to test the overall structural model. We conducted CFA on proposed four-factor model in order to evaluate the convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model. Since we had a relatively small sample size and a large scale for the measure of abusive supervision (15 items), we created two-item parcels for abusive supervision according to odd and even items (Little et al., 2002). Other variables (performance-promotion attribution, injury-initiation attribution, emotional exhaustion) were represented by the original items. The hypothesized four-factor model

yielded a good fit to the data (χ^2 = 250.37, df = 113, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.05). Next, we compared the hypothesized four-factor model with a series of alternative more parsimonious models. The fit indices of these alternative models are significantly worse than our hypothesized four-factor model (See Table 3.1). Therefore, these results showcase the discriminant and convergent validity of the measurement model.

Table 3.1 *Measurement models and fit indices.*

	X^2	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Hypothesized four-factor model	188.88	113	0.97	0.96	0.06	0.04
Three-factor model (combining abusive supervision and injury-initiation attribution)	551.98	116	0.80	0.77	0.13	0.07
Three-factor model (combining performance-promotion and injury-initiation attributions)	648.72	116	0.76	0.72	0.14	0.16
Two-factor model (combining abusive supervision and attributions)	995.14	118	0.60	0.54	0.18	0.17
One-factor model	1539.82	123	0.36	0.30	0.23	0.27

Note. N = 224, CFI = comparative fit index, TLI = Tucker- Lewis index, RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation, SRMR = standardized root mean square residual.

3.3.3.2 Aggregation

Due to the potential multilevel facets of abusive supervision (Priesemuth et al., 2014), it is important to justify the individual nature of the study on abusive supervision. As employees were nested within workgroups led by the same supervisor, abusive supervision perceptions could plausibly show shared and group-level clustering. Therefore, we examined whether there was potential between-group variance and reliable group means to justify aggregating

to the group-level of analysis. Referring to the aggregation indices for the focal variables, it indicates how much variance can be explained by group-level factors reflected by the ICC(1), and the reliability of aggregation reflected by the ICC(2). The ICC(1) of the focal variables ranged from 0.03 to 0.09. According to LeBreton and Senter (2008), an ICC(1) ranging from 0.01 to 0.10 represents a tiny amount of variance which is attributed to a group-level effect. The ICC(2) which ranged from 0.16 to 0.37 were also much below the recommended cutoff values of 0.5, indicating that the group means were not sufficiently reliable to support aggregation (LeBreton & Senter, 2008). Accordingly, we treated the constructs as individual-level variables and did not aggregate them to the group level (Please see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 *Aggregation and within-group agreement dices.*

Focal Variables	**ICC(1)**	**ICC(2)**
Abusive supervision	0.09	0.37
Promotion attribution	0.09	0.37
Injury initiation	0.03	0.16
Emotional exhaustion	0.08	0.34

The average group size = 6.05

3.3.3.3 Correlations and Control Variables

Table 3.3 presents the means, standard deviations (SD), and correlation coefficients of the variables, as well as their internal consistency reliability. Abusive supervision is positively correlated with both performance-promotion and injury-initiation attributions. In addition, emotional exhaustion is also positively associated with all focal variables including abusive

supervision, performance-promotion attribution, and injury-initiation attribution. Contrary to earlier findings (Zhang & Bednall, 2016), we detected no associations between gender, age, or time working with the supervisor and the study's focal constructs, aside from a modest negative link between gender and performance-promotion attribution. We further assessed multicollinearity among all predictors. Specifically, we conducted collinearity diagnostics based on the full regression specification including the main effects, both interaction terms (abusive supervision * performance-promotion attribution and abusive supervision * injury-initiation attribution), and all control variables. The results indicated low multicollinearity: VIFs ranged from 1.14 to 2.70 (all below 5), and tolerance values ranged from 0.38 to 0.93 (all above .20), suggesting that multicollinearity is unlikely to materially bias the regression estimates.

3.3.3.4 Analytic Strategy of the Hypothesis Tests

With the time-lagged and individual nature of the data, we employed path analyses to test the proposed hypotheses using Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Due to the small sample size (N=224) nested in 37 work groups and the use of large scales (e.g., 15-item abusive supervision), path analysis which focuses on mean scores of variables is more suitable than modeling latent variables (Little, 2002). As the focal relationships were conceptualized at the individual level and preliminary analyses suggested limited between-group variance, we estimated the proposed model using single-level structural equation modeling (SEM). Based on the two-moderator model, stepwise SEM was adopted to systematically test our hypotheses and evaluate the moderating effects of the attributions. To test the moderating effects, abusive supervision, performance-promotion attribution, and injury-initiation attribution were mean-centered prior to creating the interaction terms (i.e., abusive

supervision*performance-promotion attribution and abusive supervision*injury-initiation attribution). Specifically, model 1 included abusive supervision, emotional exhaustion, and control variables as the baseline model for the main effect. Model 2 further included performance-promotion attribution and injury-initiation attribution. Model 3 was the full model including all focal variables and the two interaction terms. The strategy allows us to (1) verify the consistency of the main effect across models, (2) determine the unique contribution of each moderator, and (3) detect potential suppression or collinearity effects when both moderators are included.

Table 3.3 *Bivariate Correlations*

Variable	Mean	Std Deviation	***1***	***2***	***3***	***4***	***5***	***6***	***7***
1. AS††	1.54	0.81	(.97)						
2. Promotion†	3.95	1.22	.14*	(.89)					
3. Injury†	1.70	1.16	.64**	.13	(.91)				
4. Exhaustion†	3.06	1.13	.45**	.20**	.40**	(.92)			
5. Gender†	1.31	0.46	-.08	-.22**	-.10	-.05	(1)		
6. Age†††	42.93	8.97	.16*	.01	.16*	.03	-.22*	(1)	
7. Time with Supervisor †††	9.98	8.62	.13*	.06	.10	.04	-.16*	.48**	(1)

Note: N = 225 members at individual level; N=37 groups at group level; AS = abusive supervision; Promotion = performance-promotion attribution. Reliabilities are in parentheses on the diagonal

†1-5 scale, ††1-15 scale, †††years;

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.(all tests are two-tailed).

Table 3.4 *The Main and Interactive Effects of Abusive Supervision and Attributions on Subordinate Emotional Exhaustion*

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	b	***SE***	***b***	***SE***	***b***	***SE***
Independent						
Abusive supervision	.56***	.08	.42***	.12	-.27	.18
Performance promotion			.11	.06	-.09	.11
Injury initiation			.13	.10	.12	.12
Abusive supervision * performance promotion					.14**	.05
Abusive supervision * injury initiation					.02	.06
Demographic (Control)						
Gender	-.08	.15	-.01	.15	.01	.14
Age	-.01	.01	-.01	.01	-.01	.02
Time with supervisor	-.01	.01	-.01	.01	-.01	.02

Note. N = 224 subordinates. Unstandardized model coefficients are presented. All significance tests are two-tailed.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

3.4 Results

The results of all the proposed hypotheses are presented in Table 3.4. Our analysis involved all the control variables of gender, age, and time working with supervisors in the main models. The results demonstrate no significant impacts of control variables on the outcomes. Thus, the hypothesized relationships account for the primary variance observed.

H1 predicts abusive supervision is positively associated with emotional exhaustion. The results of model 1 showed a significant positive relationship between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion ($b = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$; 95%CI [0.40, 0.71]). This result remained unchanged ($b = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$; 95%CI [0.22, 0.62]) in Model 2. Neither performance-promotion attribution nor injury-initiation attribution was significantly associated with emotional exhaustion, indicating that the effect of abusive supervision on emotional exhaustion was robust. Thus, the H1 is supported.

H2 predicts the buffering effect of performance-promotion attribution. The results of model 3 revealed a positive and significant interaction ($b = 0.14$; $p < 0.01$; 95%CI [0.05, 0.22]), whereas the main effect of abusive supervision became non-significant. Accordingly, the significant interaction indicated that association between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion depended on the level of performance-promotion attribution. Contrary to H2, the positive interaction suggested an exacerbating rather than buffering effect. Thus, H2 is not supported yet the exacerbating effect of performance-promotion attribution is supported.

To further probe this interaction, we conducted a simple slope analysis at three levels of performance-promotion attribution: low (-1 SD), mean, and high (+1 SD). The conditional effect of abusive supervision on emotional exhaustion increased as performance-promotion attribution increased, with slope estimates of $b = 0.09$ ($p = .64$)

at one standard deviation below the mean, b = 0.25 (p = .27) at the mean, and b = 0.42 (p = .13) at one standard deviation above the mean. Although none of these conditional effects reached statistical significance, the increasing slope estimates and decreasing p values were descriptively consistent with the positive interaction effect (b = 0.14; p < 0.01; 95%CI [0.05, 0.22]) observed in Model 3. According to the results, the interaction pattern is depicted in Figure 3.2.

H3 predicts the moderating effect of injury-initiation attribution. The results of model 3 revealed a non-significant interaction (b = 0.02, p = 0.79; 95%CI [-0.08, 0.11]). Thus, H3 is not supported.

Due to the nested nature of the data, we conducted an additional robustness check using multilevel SEM. Specifically, we re-estimated the full model using a random-intercept two-level specification that accounted for between-group clustering while retaining the focal relationships at the individual level (Preacher et al., 2010). The pattern of results was unchanged (e.g., the moderating effect is significant b = 0.14, p < 0.01, 95% CI [0.06, 0.22]), indicating that the results were robust.

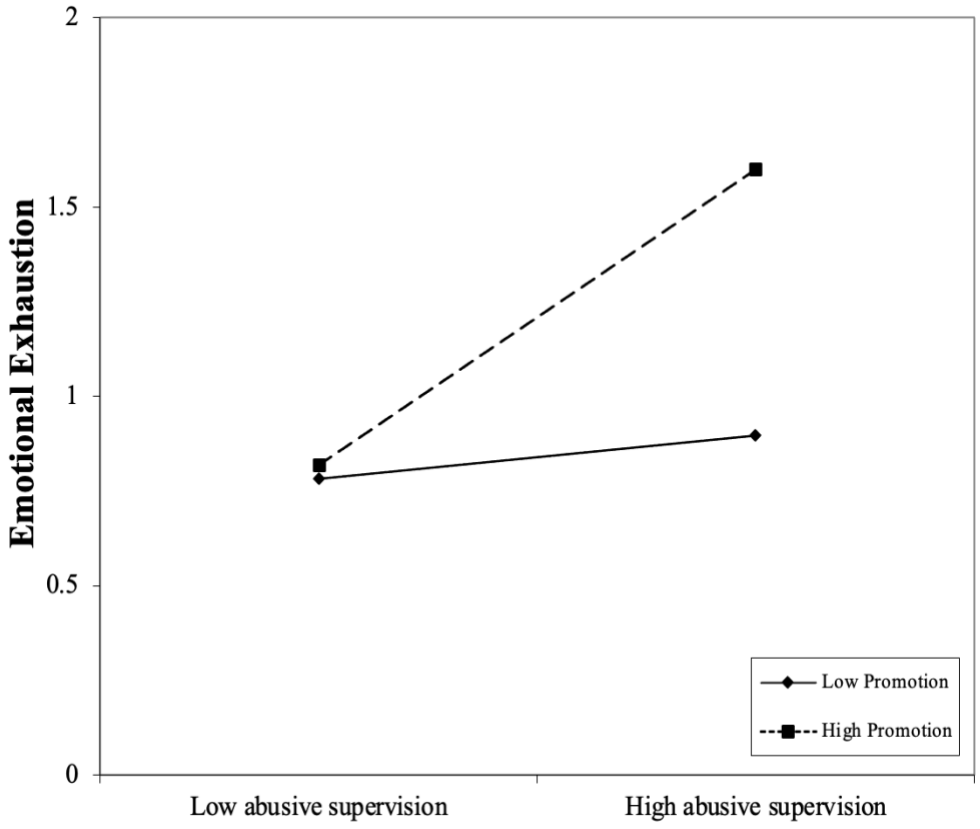

Figure 3.2 The moderating effect of performance promotion on the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinate emotional exhaustion.

3.5 Discussion

The present study investigated the moderating role of performance-promotion and injury-initiation attributions in the relationship between supervision and emotional exhaustion. The findings affirm that abusive supervision is positively associated with emotional exhaustion. However, contrary to the expectations, the results indicate that the moderating effect of injury-initiation attribution is not significant. Furthermore, performance-promotion attribution exacerbates, rather than buffers, the positive association between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion. The following sections elaborate on the theoretical implications of these findings and outline their practical relevance.

3.5.1 Theoretical Implication

Prior studies found an interactive influence between abusive supervision and performance-promotion attribution on employee performance outcomes such as creativity (Liu et al., 2012), supervisor-rated OCB (Yu & Duffy, 2021), and work engagement (Huh & Lee, 2022). Nevertheless, how these attributions moderate the relationship between abusive supervision and employees' well-being is not empirically tested. To address the void, this empirical study represents an important contribution by examining whether similar moderating effects of the attributions extend to subordinate emotional exhaustion under abusive supervision. Aligning with past literature (Aryee et al., 2008), the findings support the main effect of abusive supervision on emotional exhaustion, reaffirming the detrimental effect of abusive supervision on well-being.

Contrary to the expectations, the findings reveal that performance-promotion attribution amplifies, rather than buffers, the influence of abusive supervision on emotional exhaustion. Drawing on COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), existing studies identified performance-promotion attribution as a potential individual resource that buffer the negative influence of abusive supervision on the performance outcomes of creativity (Liu et al., 2012), task performance (Yang et al., 2020), and OCB (Yu & Duffy, 2021). However, when it comes to the employee well-being outcome, the present study reveals a converse perspective, That is, performance-promotion attribution exacerbates the positive relationship between abusive supervision on employees emotional exhaustion. This effect likely arises probably because performance-promotion attribution obliges individuals to interpret abusive supervision as a justifiable spur toward higher performance standards, thereby emanating working pressure and emotional burden. In this regard, while performance-promotion attribution can help sustain subordinate performance (Huh & Lee, 2022; Kim et al., 2019; Yu & Duffy, 2021), it might expose a

"double edge" when individual well-being is taken into account (Hunter & Thatcher, 2007; LePine et al., 2005).

Specifically, performance-promotion attribution is an instrumental resource, motivating subordinates to improve performance, but it simultaneously functions as job demands imposing higher performance requirements on subordinates. To preserve self-worth and avoid further criticism, subordinates tend to invest additional resource to close presumed performance gaps, monitor their output more vigilantly, and display visible improvement to signal compliance. Each of these self-regulatory acts further consumes individual resources including energetic, affective, and temporal resources while possibly leaving the original source of demands unchanged (i.e., perception of leaders' abusive behaviors). Consistent with COR perspective, this logic implies a boundary condition within which the exacerbating effect may manifest or be stronger when employees have limited replenishing resources (e.g., high workload and time pressure) or when performance demands are chronic/highly salient, because sustained self-regulatory investment is more likely to outstrip available resources and trigger loss spirals. Performance-promotion attribution thus transforms abusive supervision from a finite stressor into an open-ended resource drain. In this regard, the "positive" attribution might compel abused subordinates to invest continuous and substantial resources in enhancing their performance (Liu et al., 2012; Yang et al., 2020; Yu & Duffy, 2021), potentially causing elevated emotional exhaustion as the side-effect of improving performance.

Based on COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), the findings indicate that seemingly "benign" and "motive" attributions (e.g., correction, warning, and motivation) may also operate as a job demand, undermining individual well-being, particularly when the heightened performance expectations and effort requirements they impose surpass employees' replenishing resources available. Though performance-promotion attribution may

alleviate the demands of abusive supervision by framing it as performance-oriented and helping subordinates make sense of harsh treatment as goal-directed feedback, its instrumental value often comes at the cost of consuming subordinates' emotional and physical resources. Therefore, performance-promotion attribution may not constitute a personal resource as previously suggested (Liu et al., 2012; Yang et al., 2020; Yu & Duffy, 2021), given that safeguarding employee well-being is a core outcome of organizational relevance, and when compromised, could ultimately undermine sustainable performance and organizational benefits. Indeed, although positive attributions may stimulate performance enhancement in the short term, their benefits are likely to be transient once the potential demands to heightened emotional exhaustion is taken into account.

On the other hand, the study suggested that the moderating effect of injury-initiation attribution is nonsignificant, a result that diverges from the trend of extant evidence (Liu et al., 2012; Yu &. Duffy, 2021), and suggests an alternative possibility regarding negative attributions of abusive supervision. Drawing on attribution theory (Heider, 1958), a plausible explanation is that the effect of negative attributions may be trivial because abusive supervision already carries a default presumption of malevolent intent (i.e., it is widely viewed as unethical and harmful). In this manner, labelling abusive supervision explicitly as injury-initiation intent could add little incremental variance to an appraisal structure that is close to a threat ceiling. Unlike performance-promotion attribution, which may provide subordinates with a psychologically functional rationale that activates sensemaking process rather than resignation, preserves goal-related meaning, and sustains effort despite mistreatment, subordinates who endorse injury-initiation attributions may view abusive supervision as an expected feature of authority rather than a diagnostically informative signal about intent. Therefore, as subordinates have already coded the leaders' abusive behaviors as gratuitous harm, additional negative

attribution is not likely to intensify the demands on well-being outcomes (i.e., emotional exhaustion). This saturation effect aligns with attribution theory's principle of discounting: when one highly plausible cause (i.e., malice of abusive supervision) explains an event, alternative causes contribute negligible explanatory power (Kelley, 1973). The perspective suggests that attribution valence operates on a threshold rather than a linear scale (Kelley, 1973). Thus, once a subordinate cross the threshold into certainty of malevolent intent, further nuance becomes psychologically moot.

These findings make meaningful contribution to existing abusive supervision attribution research (Liu et al., 2012; Yu &. Duffy, 2021) by indicating that injury-initiation attribution might offer limited incremental explanatory value in some contexts, because the malevolent intents of such behaviors are often presumed and directly exert negative influence. Combined with the research context, Chinese traditional industries such as transportation, characterized by high power distance and stronger norms of hierarchical control, may further normalize harsh supervisory conduct, and constrain employees' discretion to reinterpret or contest it. As a result, injury-initiation sensemaking may be relatively uniform (i.e., "already assumed"), leaving little variance for injury-initiation attributions to function as an influential boundary condition. Drawing on attribution theory, this further implies a theoretically derived boundary condition within which injury-initiation attribution should be more likely to operate as a meaningful moderator when abusive intent is more ambiguous and socially contestable (e.g., lower power distance and weaker hierarchical control norms), because such contexts generate greater variance in negative sensemaking and intensify resource-loss appraisals.

In sum, the findings advance the abusive supervision literature by complementing existing theorizing on both performance-promotion and injury-initiation attributions (Kim et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2012; Yu & Duffy, 2021) with more nuanced understanding.

Drawing on attribution theory (Heider, 1958) and COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), the empirical findings suggest that performance-promotion attribution may exacerbate, rather than buffer, the association between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion, whereas injury-initiation attribution did not show reliable evidence of moderation in this sample and context.

3.5.2 Practical Implications

Scholars and practitioners emphasized the intents behind leaders' aggressive behaviors, such as promoting performance and halting obvious mistakes, which might potentially justify these negative supervisory behaviors (Liu et al., 2012; Tepper, 2000; 2007). However, the present study suggests being cautious about endorsing these so-called "tough-love" rationales and focusing on eliminating abusive behaviors or developing other effective coping strategies to mitigate harm to subordinates. The reason is that performance-promotion attribution, may not buffer, but rather exacerbate, the negative impact of abusive supervision on individual well-being. Despite evidence that positive attributions for abusive supervision may help employees maintain task performance (Yang et al., 2020; Yu & Duffy, 2021), encouraging employees to reinterpret abusive leader behaviors as developmental remains difficult to sustain and raises concerns about humanity and ethical acceptability. It is highly recommended to equip leaders and managers with evidence-based feedback techniques that combine supervisory behavioral norms and subordinates' psychological safety. Leadership-development curricula can integrate role-play scenarios demonstrating how ostensibly motivational criticism and aggressiveness drain subordinates' emotional resources when unaccompanied by tangible support (e.g., communication, coaching time, and autonomy). By foregrounding behavioral change and resource replenishment, rather than cognitive reframing, organizations can reduce the likelihood that "performance-promotion" narratives mask

and magnify the harm of leaders' aggressive behaviors. Meanwhile, implementation of stringent regulations is also necessary to compel leaders to adhere to ethical standards and behavioral norms, thereby achieving active and passive reduction of abusive supervision in the workplace.

3.5.3 Limitations and Future Directions

The study contains several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, although our time-lagged and nested data from a Chinese company has strengths (Liang et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2020), some shortcomings remain. Our conceptual model includes multiple hypotheses and several multi-item constructs, yet is tested with a relatively small sample size (N = 224) nested within 37 groups from a single organization. While the analytic procedures are appropriate and justified for the data at hand, a larger sample size would allow a comprehensive test of the model (e.g., full SEM with latent variables). In addition, another limitation is that all focal variables were collected from employees. Although the time-lagged design helps to mitigate this concern and the focal variables are internal perceptions that are well suited to self-report surveys, common method bias cannot be entirely ruled out. Future research should therefore employ multi-source designs (e.g., supervisor and peer ratings and archival performance indicators) and, where feasible, experimental or longitudinal field designs to address common method bias more rigorously.

Second, the research was conducted in a single Chinese company, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other organizational and cultural contexts. Environmental factors can shape employees' reactions to abusive supervision and its attributions (Tepper, 2007; Tepper et al., 2017). Importantly, as noted above, organizational, industrial, and national characteristics might significantly shape the strength of moderating effects of attributions (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018). For

example, some employees are desensitized to supervisory behaviors and perceived harmful intents, while others may experience stronger cognitive and emotional reactions. A frequently cited case is military settings, where harsh treatment may coexist with high effectiveness. Future research should therefore draw on cross-cultural and multi-organization samples to enhance external validity and assess the robustness of these findings across different cultural and occupational contexts.

Third, although our findings raise a notion that abusive supervision attributions might not function as the presumed patterns (Liu et al., 2012), this line of inquiry remains nascent, as mentioned in single Chinese company. Based on our best knowledge, the counterintuitive amplification effect of performance-promotion attribution has been documented only for emotional exhaustion. It is unclear whether the same pattern can duplicate across other critical outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, or turnover intentions. Future research should therefore adopt a multi-criterion lens to test whether performance-promotion attribution consistently exacerbates (or perhaps mitigates) a broader array of attitudinal and behavioral consequences. The similar line of inquiry is also warranted for injury-initiation attribution. Such evidence would further clarify the functions of these attributions. In addition, prior work has focused primarily on abusive supervision attributions as moderators yet overlooking the antecedents that cultivate these cognitive frames (Liu et al., 2012; Yu & Duffy, 2021). It shall be promising to examine whether organizational factors such as leader credibility, organizational justice climates, or individual dispositions can predispose subordinates toward performance-promotion or injury-initiation attributions. Identifying these drivers would move the literature beyond “whether” attributions matter to “why” they emerge, thereby opening actionable avenues for prevention and strengthening employees’ sense of control.

3.6 Conclusions

Attributions may be crucial to understanding abusive supervision because they represent a key interpretive mechanism that structures how subordinates make sense of the behavior and respond to it. The present study articulates the role of individual attributions in the relationship between abusive supervision and individual well-being. Given the fundamentally harmful nature of abusive supervision, its detrimental effects on well-being are likely to remain dominant, leaving limited scope for attributions to mitigate them. We advocate inhibiting abusive supervision, and meanwhile providing effective coping solutions by achieving a comprehensive understanding of abusive supervision.

Chapter Four Applying the stressor-detachment model to abusive supervision: The moderating effect of high-performance work systems

Based on:

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ABSTRACT

Existing research underscores the importance of employees' recovery experiences for fostering overall work-related well-being. However, the interplay between negative supervisory behaviors and human resource (HR) practices in shaping these recovery processes is not yet clear. In the present study, we apply stressor-detachment model to investigate the roles of abusive supervision and high-performance work systems (HPWS) on employees' perceptions of psychological detachment and, in turn, strain. The present study proposes that psychological detachment simultaneously mediates and moderates the association between abusive supervision and strain. Moreover, based on contradictory literature, we devise two competing hypotheses pertaining to the potential moderating role of HPWS on the relationship between abusive supervision and strain via psychological detachment. Using field data from 894 employees nested within 74 workgroups in a large Chinese state-owned enterprise, we tested the proposed individual level model by using Bayesian multilevel SEM (BSEM) within Mplus. The findings suggest that abusive supervision indirectly increases employee strain by eroding their levels of psychological detachment. However, the moderating effect of psychological detachment on the association between abusive supervision and strain is not significant. Importantly, HPWS are found to buffer the direct relationship between abusive supervision and psychological detachment as well as the indirect relationship between abusive supervision and strain via psychological detachment i.e., supporting the overall moderation model. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: Abusive supervision, High-performance working system (HPWS), Psychological detachment, Stressor-detachment model, Competing theory, Strain

4.1 Introduction

Employees routinely encounter diverse job-related stressors that elicit strain and further erode their daily work experience (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Lesener et al., 2019). To effectively cope with these stressors, researchers have argued that it is not sufficient to only improve the employee's working experience during office hours, such as improving their job autonomy, targeted training, and facilitating communications but highlight what happens after work is also of significant importance (Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005). Accordingly, applied psychologists have identified recovery experiences in off-work hours as a crucial mechanism to replenish employees' energy resources day by day and maintain attitudinal and behavioral performance (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007).

Recovery experiences are defined as "unwinding and restoration processes during which a person's strain level that has increased as a reaction to a stressor or any other demand returns to its prestressed level" (Sonnentag et al. 2017, p. 366). Among the various recovery experiences (psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery, and control over leisure time; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007), psychological detachment is regarded as the prototypical recovery experience and has been evidenced to demonstrate the strongest association with employees' well-being and performance improvement (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Psychological detachment refers to physically and mentally disengaging from work-related issues during non-working hours, allowing for true rest (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Despite considerable progress in understanding the antecedents of psychological detachment, such as task-related stressors and role stressors (Sonnentag et al., 2022), research on how different forms of leadership and human resource (HR) practices impact psychological detachment remains scarce (Kilroy et al., 2020; Leroy et al., 2018; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015).

Notably, both supervisory behaviors and HR practices can exert a considerable influence on employees' experiences in their work and leisure time (e.g., Jensen et al., 2013; Tepper, 2000). A very recent investigation by Iser-Potempa et al. (2024) revealed that abusive supervision impaired psychological detachment via the mediating mechanisms of anger and rumination. However, in the context of this finding and following the stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015), the subsequent role that damaged psychological detachment (as a result of abusive supervision) has on strain is not clear. Anchored in the stressor–detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015), the study proposes that abusive supervision undermines employees' capacity to psychologically detach from work (Iser-Potempa et al., 2024), thereby elevating strain. Also, in accordance with the stressor-detachment model propositions, we test psychological detachment as a **(**simultaneous) moderator between the abusive supervision and strain, thereby estimating its potential buffering effect within the same model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015).

Additionally, the stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) further highlights that contextual factors (e.g., job resources and attentional processes) might enhance or alleviate the impact of job stressors on psychological detachment. Thus, uncovering under what conditions the experience of abusive supervision can be circumvented or exacerbated is of particular importance, an area of research which to date has been severely underexplored (Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper et al., 2017). Therefore, combining insights from the stressor-detachment model together with the framework of Leroy et al. (2018) which posits that leadership behaviors and HR practice can be mutually interdependent forces (which can either reinforce or undermine one another), the study investigates the moderating role of high-performance work systems (HPWS) within the stressor-detachment model. Based on competing perspectives which have

emerged in the HRM literature (i.e., optimistic-pessimistic HRM debate), HPWS could serve as a double-edged sword in the context of abusive supervision. That is, HPWS provides valuable job resources, which potentially buffer the negative influence of abusive leaders (e.g., Bartram et al., 2012; Kilroy et al., 2016), while stringent requirements and work intensification imposed by HPWS could also serve as a form of job demands, thereby exacerbating the negative effects of abusive supervision (e.g., Jensen et al., 2013; Kroon et al., 2009; Xu et al., 2009). On this basis, we develop competing hypotheses concerning HPWS as a moderator of the association between abusive supervision and psychological detachment, as well as the indirect association between abusive supervision and strain via psychological detachment.

By testing the proposed model, as depited in Figure 4.1, the study aims to contribute to the existing literature in the following ways. First, the study expands the stressor-detachment model by testing HPWS as a novel moderator representing the 'resource and attentional processes' part of the model. In this manner, it explores how the combined presence of abusive supervision and HPWS influences employees' psychological detachment and strain. By incorporating HPWS into the stressor–detachment model, we aim to advance knowledge of why and when some employees can achieve better psychological detachment in their leisure time, even when confronting abusive supervision. At the same time, testing the competing role of HPWS offers insight into whether HPWS yields positive or negative consequences for employees' health and well-being in the context of abusive supervision (Peccei & Van de Voorde, 2019). Second, we empirically test the assertions of Leroy and colleagues (2018) to unravel what interactive influence between HRM (HPWS) and leadership (abusive supervision) on employee outcomes. Establishing the relationship according to complementary-fit mechanism (Leroy et al., 2018), the hypothesis model raises that distal and system-level HPWS could

offset the detrimental impacts of supervisory negative behaviors on employees. Altogether, the findings could make a substantial contribution by integrating the literature across the domains of organizational behavior (leadership), strategic HRM (HPWS), and occupational health (recovery experience).

Third, in empirically testing the stressor-detachment model in the context of abusive supervision (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015), our study extends Iser-Potempa et al.'s (2024) investigation by introducing psychological detachment as both a mediator and a moderator between abusive supervision and strain. Specifically, the hypothesis model includes the dual role of psychological detachment and the pertinent outcome of strain to test the stressor-detachment model more comprehensively, thereby expanding the nomological network of the crucial social stressor of abusive supervision. The refined understanding of the mechanisms linking abusive supervision, psychological detachment, and strain is valuable and practical for designing responses to negative supervisory behaviors and enhancing employees' well-being and work experiences (Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper et al., 2017). Given the documented prevalence of abusive supervision in the modern workplace, particularly in Asia, this study's focus on the Chinese organizational context offers culturally grounded and practice-oriented insights in this problematic region (Liang et al., 2016; Mackey et al., 2017).

4.2 Literature Review and Hypotheses

4.2.1 Psychological Detachment

Due to the demanding nature of the modern business world involving heavy workloads, job insecurity, and organizational uncertainty, scholars and practitioners have increasingly highlighted the pivotal role of employees' recovery experiences in determining their well-being and subsequent working performance (Sonnentag & Bayer,

2005; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). As a core recovery experience, psychological detachment refers to the ability to mentally disengage from work-related thoughts and obligations during off-work hours and is widely recognized as an essential mechanism for preventing prolonged strain and promoting employee well-being (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Drawing on the job demands-resources model (JD-R; Demerouti et al., 2001) and the stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015), studies have emphasized that sufficient psychological detachment is a vital job resource for enabling employees to recover from job demands and mitigate their levels of strain. By mentally "switching off" from work, individuals can conserve and replenish their psychological and emotional resources, ultimately contributing to sustained health and productivity (Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005). For instance, employees who achieve adequate psychological detachment during nonwork time show higher levels of vitality, enhanced work engagement, positive affect, and job performance, consistent with their replenished mental energy upon returning to work (Sonnentag et al., 2022). However, the stressor–detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) suggests that employees may struggle to achieve psychological detachment under persistent work demands, thereby accumulating strain, a notion supported by recent evidence linking abusive supervision to reduced psychological detachment (Iser-Potempa et al., 2024).

In examining the antecedents of psychological detachment, research has consistently highlighted the role of various work-related, individual, and organizational factors (for a review, see, Sonnentag et al., 2022). Work-related antecedents in the form of job demands like workload, time pressure, and emotional labor could significantly hinder psychological detachment, especially when accompanied by low autonomy or control (Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005). Employees often have trouble disengaging due to rumination over unresolved tasks or emotional interactions, resulting in exacerbating stress

(Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Individual traits, such as neuroticism and a propensity for rumination, could further complicate the psychological detachment process, causing employees to remain cognitively engaged (e.g., Weigelt et al., 2019; Wendsche & Lohmann-Haislah, 2017). In contrast, higher emotional stability or mindfulness could enable employees to compartmentalize work and nonwork domains, thereby facilitating psychological detachment (e.g., Haun et al., 2018; Weigelt et al., 2019). Additionally, organizational factors also play a significant role in fostering psychological detachment, with clear work-life boundaries and policies that prioritize recovery time being crucial determinants (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006). For instance, autonomy in workload management and organizational cultures that discourage after-hours connectivity can enhance employees' ability to mentally disengage and unwind (Sonnentag et al., 2022). Despite the advancements in the understanding of psychological detachment, studies on how supervisory behaviors and human resource management (HR) practices impact psychological detachment remains scarce (Kilroy et al., 2020; Leroy et al., 2018; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015).

4.2.2 The Stressor-Detachment Model: Abusive Supervision, Psychological Detachment and Strain

Since it is inevitable for employees to have regular contact with their supervisors, the potentially negative interaction with supervisors is widely regarded as a critical social stressor in the workplace, which substantially influences employees' attitudes and behaviors (for a review, see Tepper, 2000; Tepper et al., 2017). The most common label for destructive leaders' behaviors is abusive supervision, which refers to "the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000: 178). A very recent study conducted by Iser-Potempa et al. (2024) revealed that employees exposed to abusive supervision are less capable to disengage from work-

related stressors, as negative supervisory encounters fuel continued rumination during nonwork time. While the association between negative supervisory behaviors and recovery experience is established, until now, how impaired recovery arising from abusive supervision translates into diminished well-being, along with the boundary conditions that shape this linkage, has yet to be thoroughly explored. Advancing this understanding is significant to yield actionable guidance on coping strategies towards abusive supervision, as well as the interventions to enhance employees' recovery and well-being.

The stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) offers a compelling lens to delve into the relationship between abusive supervision and psychological detachment. In accordance with this model, stressors can induce cognitive and emotional strain by preventing employees from psychologically detaching from work during their leisure time. Moreover, the model also proposes that the degree to which these stressors result in strain is dependent on employees' ability to psychologically detach from work during their leisure time (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). The model therefore depicts psychological detachment as a mediator linking job stressors to strain and, simultaneously, as a moderator that could buffer the negative impact of job stressors on strain. Indeed, job stressors hinder employees' psychological detachment, leading to higher levels of strain (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Meanwhile, the damaged psychological detachment can act as a moderator by intensifying the association between job stressors and strain (e.g., Moreno-Jiménez et al., 2009; Sonnentag et al., 2010). Applying the rationale of the stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag & Frtiz, 2015) to abusive supervision, when individuals experience abusive supervision, they may become mentally preoccupied with the negative interactions with their leaders, carrying the emotional burden of these experiences even outside of work, thereby leading to elevated strain (Iser-Potempa et al.,

2024). Furthermore, impaired psychological detachment may exacerbate the detrimental effects of abusive supervision on individual well-being, as insufficient off-job recovery is associated with accumulative strain over time.

4.2.3 The Mediating Role of Psychological Detachment

The detrimental effects of abusive supervision often extend beyond the workplace, undermining employees' off-work life (Tepper et al., 2007). Specifically, abusive supervision intensifies employees' negative emotional experiences, leading them to fixate on work-related stressors outside the workplace, even though the leader's abusive behaviors are not being further enacted (Tepper et al., 2007). Consequently, it is increasingly difficult for abused employees to psychologically disengage from these negative experiences, resulting in the inability to unwind (Iser-Potempa et al., 2024). In addition, the experience of being abused may even persist over an extended period, resulting in chronic stress (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Compared with the acute negative reaction, the chronic activation of abusive supervision makes it more difficult for employees to mentally break away from this work related state, despite being physically far away from the workplace (Ilies et al., 2010). Given that low psychological detachment disrupts mental restoration processes, individuals could experience deeper resource depletion, exacerbating elvated strain (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Building upon the empirical evidence of Iser-Potempa et al. (2024), and aiming to further elucidate the association between abusive supervision and strain via psychological detachment, we advance the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Employee's psychological detachment mediates the positive relationship between employee's perception of abusive supervision and strain.

4.2.4 The Moderating Effect of Psychological Detachment

As previously mentioned, the stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) simultaneously positions psychological detachment as a mediator and moderator between stressors and strain. Studies have evidenced the moderating role of psychological detachment in alleviating the cognitive and emotional burdens imposed by work-related demands (Sonnentag et al., 2022). Specifically, adequate psychological detachment allows employees to recover from the pressures of the workday by distancing themselves from work-related thoughts, thus preventing the accumulation of strain (Sonnentag et al., 2007). For instance, Sonnentag et al. (2010) found that employees who can mentally disengage in their off-work time remain healthier (i.e., lower emotional exhaustion), even when facing high workloads, time pressure, and emotionally draining situations. Additionally, Moreno-Jiménez et al. (2009) found that psychological detachment can effectively mitigate the harmful effects of work-family conflict on employees' well-being. Furthermore, Sonnentag et al. (2013) revealed that psychological detachment weakened the positive relationship between employees' workplace conflict and strain. Based on this developing empirical evidence, employees who succeed in "switching off" from job-related matters could terminate the time-lagged effect of abusive supervision and alleviate their subsequent strain reactions. Hence, employees' psychological detachment could act as a potent antidote to buffer the negative effects of abusive supervision on their strain. Building on these prior studies and testing a core proposition of the stressor-detachment model in the context of the social stressor of abusive supervision, we advance the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Employee's psychological detachment moderates the relationship between employee's perception of abusive supervision and strain such that the relationship is weaker when employees perceive higher levels of psychological detachment (vs lower).

4.2.5 Abusive Supervision, HPWS, and Psychological Detachment

Importantly, the stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) further emphasizes that the indirect relationship between stressors and strain via damaged psychological detachment is conditional on the resources and attentional processes of those affected. Sonnentag et al. (2022) stresses that the inability to psychologically detach from work-related stressors is not solely determined by the presence of stressors (in this case abusive supervision) but is shaped by a combination of personal and social factors. According to this rationale, the association between abusive supervision and psychological detachment could be complex and influenced by a plethora of contextual factors. Drawing on transactional process theory of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987), Sonnentag and Fritz (2015) extrapolated that the resources employees can leverage to deal with stressors could buffer the negative impact of job-related stressors on psychological detachment, thereby protecting well-being. Mellner (2016) evidenced boundary control attenuated the detrimental effects of after-hours availability expectations and work-related smartphone use on detachment. Likewise, studies in leadership and human resource management (HRM) have highlighted that supervisory behaviors do not operate in a vacuum but rather manifest within a broader HR system, where its impact is amplified or constrained by the system (e.g., Bartram et al., 2012; Tepper, 2007; Xu et al., 2020). Leroy et al. (2018) further underscored the critical synergy between leaders' behaviors and HR practices in fostering organizational effectiveness and employee well-being. These studies converge on the notion that HR practices might effectively circumvent or exacerbate the impact of abusive supervision. Integrating the propositions of the stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz., 2015) and the HRM-leadership fit framework of Leroy and colleagues (2018), the present study aims to bridge

the void in the existing literature by advancing that HPWS could play a moderating role in the relationship between abusive supervision and psychological detachment.

As the most extensively studied HRM practices, high-performance work systems (HPWS) encompass an array of progressive human resource management initiatives that comprise comprehensive recruitment, incentive-based compensation, performance management, extensive employee involvement, and training development initiatives (Huselid, 1995). The mainstream view of HRM has identified HPWS as potent job resources that counteract job demands and reduce strain by providing a supportive environment, ensuring fair evaluation and compensation, and encouraging participation in decision-making (for the review see, Jiang et al., 2012; Subramony et al., 2009). As a result, HPWS can effectively enhance employees' working experience and promote behavioral performance (Jiang et al., 2012). Nonetheless, emerging literature critiques the "rhetoric versus reality" of HPWS, highlighting the potential "dark side" of HPWS in terms of their impact on employee well-being (Jensen et al., 2013). Indeed, critical management scholars advance that HPWS can amplify work intensity for employees and thereby can be seen to be exploitative in nature (Godard, 2004; Ramsay et al., 2000). This critical stream of literature suggests that the competitive advantages organizations derive from HPWS come at the expense of employees well-being since they foster increased job demands (e.g., Godard, 2004, 2010; Kroon et al., 2009; Ramsay et al., 2000). Particularly, rigorous performance management can escalate workload for employees whereas autonomy can increase employees' responsibilities in tasks, which can be stressful (Wood et al., 2012). Supporting this, Ogbonnaya et al. (2017) discovered that HPWS were positively associated with work intensification, leading to poorer employee health and well-being. The existing literature presents competing arguments implying both positive and negative moderating effects of HPWS on the influence of abusive supervision, yet

the empirical research in this area remains sparse. Thus, further studies are needed to adjudicate these effects, particularly concerning association between abusive supervision and employees' health-related outcomes.

4.2.6 The Buffering Role of HPWS in the Stressor-Detachment Model

On one hand, since they are considered as potent job resources, HPWS can effectively temper the detrimental effects of abusive supervision and help employees to recover (i.e., psychological detachment). Specifically, HPWS endows employees with the potent resources of high autonomy and participation, spurring their problem-solving ability (Jiang et al., 2012). Accordingly, such increased empowerment could make employees more independent in the workplace, reducing their reliance on leaders. The sense of control and agency in the work can make employees less susceptible to leaders' abusive behaviors and allow them, to some extent, to psychologically detach from the relevant negative interactions. Second, in conjunction with such involvement/empowerment, HPWS emphasizes the practice of teamwork, which fosters collaboration, and open information sharing. Within such a supportive, resource-rich environment, employees gain timely access to information and team-based assistance from coworkers experience (Bartram et al., 2012; Kilroy et al., 2016), which alleviates the demands and isolation incurred by abusive supervision, thereby allowing them to achieve psychological detachment. Third, another key element of HPWS is the reward systems which are linked to performance and encompass bonuses, promotions, and other forms of recognition (Huselid, 1995). Systems of this nature can help mitigate the negative effects of abusive supervision by fostering a meritocratic environment in which individuals are rewarded and recognized based on their capabilities and contributions rather than their leaders' actions or opinions. By weakening the role leaders play in the evaluation of employee performance, HPWS can decrease leaders' centralization and mitigate employees'

concerns about supervisory behaviors, making employees less vulnerable to potential abusive supervision and fostering their psychological detachment, ultimately buffering the strain. Fourth, HPWS that foregrounds training and development enhances task competence and self-regulatory coping (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Kilroy et al., 2016), reducing dependence on supervisors and vigilance to their behavior, which make psychological detachment more attainable under abusive supervision. Meanwhile, bottom-up information/voice mechanisms (e.g., open reporting channels and feedback loops) improve perceived control and procedural justice (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004), lowering uncertainty and fear of retaliation, and thus attenuates the influence of abusive supervision.

In conclusion, grounded on stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015), HPWS could function as a contextual resource, buffering the detrimental impacts of abusive supervision on psychological detachment, and in turn strain. Hence, we propose:

Hypothesis 3. HPWS moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and psychological detachment, such that the relationship is weakened when HPWS is higher (vs lower).

Hypothesis 4. HPWS moderates the indirect relationship between abusive supervision and strain via psychological detachment, such that the indirect relationship is weakened when HPWS is higher (vs lower).

4.2.7 The Exacerbating Role of HPWS in the Stressor-Detachment Model

From an alternative perspective, HPWS can function as work intensification and trading firm gains for employee well-being (Godard, 2004; Jensen et al., 2013; Ramsay et al., 2000). As mentioned previously, rigorous performance management and active

involvement/training could largely increase scrutiny and workload, while greater autonomy shifts responsibility and decision load to employees, together heightening strain (Godard, 2010; Kroon et al., 2009; Wood et al., 2012). With the simultaneous presence of abusive supervision and HPWS, employees might experience considerable inconsistency between substantial support/requirements from the provision of the organizations HRM system and the malicious behaviors of their leaders, which is likely to result in increased strain. Under progressive practices that emphasize involvement, communications, and rigorous performance metrics and assessment (i.e., HPWS; Huselid, 1995), employees who confront abusive supervision might actually find it more difficult to avoid interactions with abusive leaders or disengage from job-related issues, even when they are exhausted (see, e.g., Xu et al., 2020). Though HPWS initially aims to foster high performance, the stringent requirements, demands of dedication to work, and extra-effort investment that HPWS necessitates might further amplify the detrimental effects of abusive supervision on psychological detachment, thereby causing increased strain.

Specifically, HPWS establishes high-performance standards and rigorous evaluations (Combs et al., 2006), which might compel employees to meet their job requirements despite experiencing abusive supervision. This often entails investing additional effort and stressful resilience in their off-work time in order to attain their working goals, resulting in a greater depletion of their individual resources (Godard, 2004, 2010; Jensen et al., 2013). Consequently, employees might find it increasingly difficult to disconnect from the working issues and recuperate during their leisure time, thereby experiencing more strain. On this occasion, HPWS could serve, rather than a job resource, as a core job demand on top of the demands imposed by abusive supervision, thereby exacerbating the impaired psychological detachment and well-being. Namely, employees who expose to HPWS are expected to perform at high levels, and any leaders' actions

that can undermine their confidence or exacerbate stress can trigger further exhaustion, ultimately damaging their well-being (also see, e.g., Xu et al., 2020). Conversely, in the absence of effective performance evaluations and high working involvement (i.e., HPWS), employees might disengage or conserve individual energy and resources (e.g., through malpractice, playing dumb, and counterproductive working behaviors) under abusive supervision (Tepper et al., 2017), thus achieving psychological detachment and sustained mental health.

In addition, HPWS are associated with higher (affective) organizational commitment (Kehoe & Wright, 2013). This stronger emotional bond to organizations in HPWS makes it more difficult for employees to psychologically detach from their job-related experience like negative interactions with their leaders (Xu et al., 2020). Due to the high commitment fostered by HPWS, employees might place considerable value on their career within organizations (Kehoe & Wright, 2013). As such, belittling behaviors or harsh words from their leaders might generate a cascading effect on employees, resulting in worse psychological detachment and increased strain. In contrast, without HPWS, employees who feel less connected to their organizations may be more indifferent to their leaders' abusive behaviors and may find it easier to psychologically disengage from job-related issues in their off-work hours. Altogether, while HPWS generally serve as a potent resource in various instances (e.g., autonomy, involvement, and training), it might also inadvertently exacerbate the negative impact of abusive supervision on employees' psychological detachment, ultimately contributing to acumulated strain (See Figure 4.1). Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 5. HPWS moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and psychological detachment, such that the relationship is stronger when HPWS is higher (vs lower).

Hypothesis 6. HPWS moderates the indirect relationship between abusive supervision and strain via psychological detachment, such that the indirect relationship is stronger when HPWS is higher (vs lower).

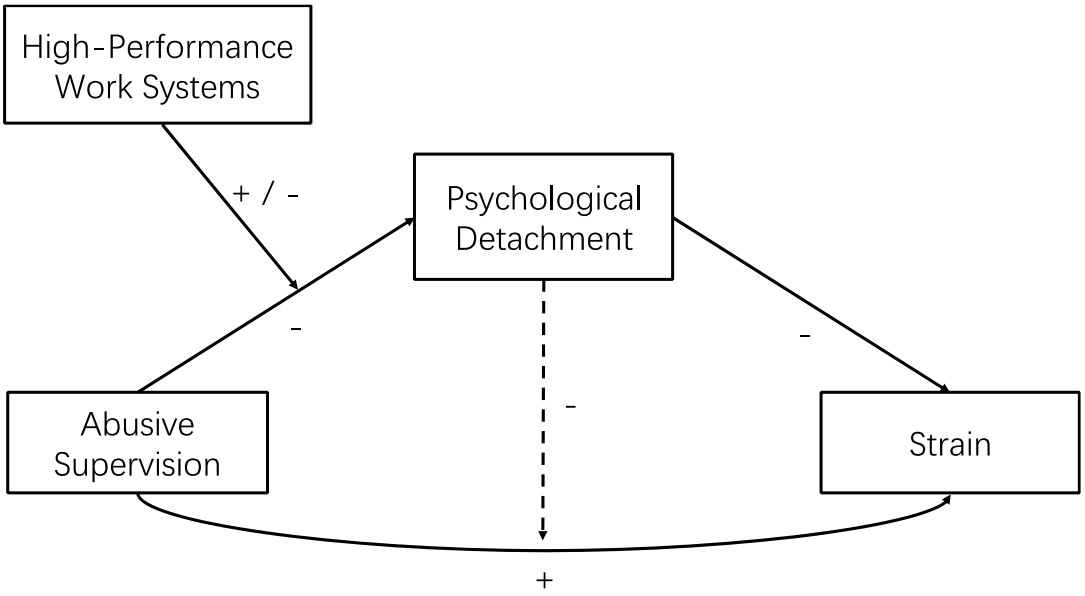

Figure 4.1 Hypothesis Model based on Stressor-detachment Model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015)

4.3 Methodology

4.3.1 Sample and Procedure

This study adopts a between-person research approach by conducting a field study in a tate-owned firm in China. The main business of the company is to provide hydroelectric power and relevant services about providing power. Online surveys were carried out

across all departments, including the general office, marketing department, hydropower operational department, engineering department, maintenance department, grid management department, community work department, asset management department, IT service department, renewable energy department, safety and environmental protection office, discipline inspection office, accounting department, operational innovation center, operational safety departments, public relations department, and human resource management departments. All the eligible full-time employees in the company were invited in order to ensure the generalizability of the sample. Due to the relatively high working intensity and the prevalence of aggressive supervisory behaviors in China and broader Asian countries (Liang et al., 2016; Mackey et al., 2017), this environment provides a relevant research context to address the research questions (i.e., supervisory abusive behaviors and employee well-being). Thus, the background of traditional industries in China represents a relevant and important context to explore abusive leadership and how its influence could be minimized (Liang et al., 2016).

A pilot test was conducted by the researchers and several employees in advance to ensure understandability and fluency of all questions. Following this, HR managers distributed the survey links via both WeChat (the most popular social media platform in China) and internal emails in order to maximise the response rate. The cover pages of the surveys specified that participation was voluntary and anonymous whereby confidentiality was assured. Due to the individual nature of the focal variables (e.g., abusive supervision, psychological detachment, and strain levels), employees self-rated

the surveys including the demographic information, abusive supervision, perceptions of HPWS, psychological detachment, the levels of strain. The answering duration was controlled within 10 minutes to guarantee the comfortability of answering. Following procedures to identify careless responders (Meade & Craig, 2012), 33 participants were excluded according to the careless check items (e.g., uniformly choosing "5" and repeating "123456"). The final sample comprised 894 employees nested within 67 groups (based on departments and working groups; average group size = 13.34), reaching an overall response rate of 70.95%. Among the participants, 347 (38.8%) were males and 547 (61.2%) were females; their average age was 41.06 years (SD = 10.19); the mean tenure was 12.26 years (SD = 10.48); 54.6% held a college degree or higher, 33.9% had a junior college or vocational diploma, and 11.5% had a secondary school qualification.

4.3.2 Measures

All measurements are frequently used scales, which are validated in other studies and demonstrate good psychometric properties. Following Brislin's (1980) procedures of back translation, we translated the surveys from English into Chinese and adjusted each item according to the company context.

Abusive supervision. Tepper's (2000) 15-item scale was used to measure abusive supervision. Participants answered items on a 5-point Likert-scale, ranging from 1 (never happens to me) to 5 (he/she always does this to me). A sample item is "My supervisor gives me silent treatment". The Cronbach's alpha was .96.

High-performance work systems (HPWS). HPWS were captured by Jensen et al.'s (2013) 15-item HPWS scale. Participants answered a 7-point Likert-scale ranging from

1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree). A sample item is “Management involve people when they make decisions that affect them”. The Cronbach’s alpha was .94.

Psychological detachment. Psychological detachment was measured using four items from Sonnentag and Fritz’s (2007) 12-item recovery experience scale, which specifically focus on psychological detachment. Participants answered a 7-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree). A sample item is “I distance myself from my work”. The Cronbach’s alpha was .81

Strain. Employees’ strain was measured by 8 items from Mohr et al.’s (2006) scale, focusing on strain level. Participants answered a 7-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (totally agree). A sample item is “From time to time I feel like a bundle of nerves”. The Cronbach’s alpha was .92.

Demographic and Control Variables. In line with previous research on abusive supervision and well-being, we included several control variables that might confound relationships among abusive supervision, HPWS, and well-being outcome variables. Empirically, employee age could moderate the reactions to abusive supervision such that older workers show weaker deviant reactions, because they retaliate less and regulate affect better (Peng et al., 2018), so the paths from abusive supervision to psychological detachment and to strain might be attenuated with age. On the other hand, organizational tenure functions as a proxy for accumulated resources **i**ncluding greater role clarity**,** informal support networks, and perceived job fit (Mitchell et al., 2001; Bauer et al., 2007), which might help employees to cope with supervisory stressors and to sustain recovery and well-being.

4.3.3 Analytical Strategy

The study conducted Bayesian analysis with multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM) using maximum-likelihood estimation with robust standard errors (MLR) in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Comparing with other frequent approaches (e.g., Multilevel SEM), Beyesian structural equation modeling BSEM has two core advantages for the present data. First, because abusive supervision scores in the data are highly skewed with floor effects (Mean = 1.70), BSEM framework modeled Likert indicators as ordered categorical (threshold–probit), relaxing multivariate normality (Muthén & Asparouhov, 2012). Second, with unequal cluster sizes and a relatively small number of clusters, BSEM generates MCMC-based credible intervals, providing more reliable coverage, and weakly informative priors reduce boundary estimates and instability (Muthén & Asparouhov, 2012). Meanwhile, BSEM provides comprehensive analysis of model convergence and evaluation of model fit (e.g., different trace plots). Focusing on the relationship within individuals, we tested the proposed hypotheses with a 1-1-1 moderated mediation model, specifying the mediating and moderating effects on the WITHIN level while controlling the group-level variance on the BETWEEN level (Preacher et al., 2010). In addition, contemporary examinations of mediation research no longer require a significant direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. instead, scholars have emphasized the significance of the indirect effect of the independent variables on the dependent variables via the mediator (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Therefore, we used the indirect command (a*b) within Mplus to test mediating effect. Following Preacher and Hayes (2008), we assess the mediating effect by examining whether zero falls within the 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals, a procedure regarded as a more robust and statistically powerful approach for moderated mediation effects.

4.4 Results

4.4.1 Preliminary Test

Table 4.1 summarizes means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among the focal variables, together with internal consistency indices. these results are consistent with expectations.

Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	***Mean***	***Standard Deviation***	***1***	***2***	***3***	***4***	***5***	***6***	***7***	***8***
1. Abusive Supervision††	1.70	0.86	(.96)							
2. HPWS††	4.67	0.99	-.38**	(.94)						
3. Psychological Detachment†	4.68	1.12	-.27**	.53**	(.81)					
4. Strain††	3.00	1.25	.42**	-.29**	-.25**	(.92)				
5. Gender†	1.61	0.49	-.10**	.70*	.08*	-.02	(1)			
6. Age†††	41.06	10.19	.11**	-.04	-.09**	.22**	.02	(1)		
7. Tenure†††	12.26	10.48	.05	-.03	-.01	.08*	.01	.67**	(1)	
8. Education†	3.47	0.82	-.07*	-.09**	.01	-.16**	-.07*	-.22**	-.01	(1)

Note: N = 894 participants; HPWS = High-performance work system.
†1-10 scale, ††10-20 scale, ††† years.
***p<0.01; *p<0.05.*

Measurement Model

Due to the nested data structure (employees nested within workgroups), we conducted multilevel confirmatory factor analyses (MCFAs) to assess convergent and discriminant validity of the hypothesis model. Each focal construct (i.e., psychological detachment, abusive supervision, HPWS, and strain) was modeled as a latent variable in CFA, using multiple indicators. This is the recommended practice because latent-variable CFA explicitly accounts for measurement error and yields more accurate and comparable parameter estimates for hypothesis model (Kline, 2023). The indices of our hypothesized four-factor model yielded a good fit to the data (χ^2 = 2911.18, df =773, CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.05). The study further tested an alternative model in which HPWS and psychological detachment were loaded onto a single factor. The model fit was significantly poorer than the hypothesized model (χ^2 = 3809.21, df =776, CFI = 0.86, TLI = 0.85, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.06), as well as the fit of other alternative and more parsimonious models (See Table 4.2). These results support the convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model.

Table 4.2. Multilevel Confirmatory Factor Analysis (MCFA) with Latent Variables

	X^2	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Hypothesized four-factor model	2911.18	773	0.91	0.90	0.05	0.05
Three-factor model (Combining HPWS and psychological detachment)	3809.21	776	0.86	0.85	0.07	0.06
Two-factor model (Combining abusive supervision and strain)	5586.05	776	0.79	0.77	0.08	0.09
Two-factor model (Combining HPWS and psychological detachment; Combining abusive supervision and strain	6462.18	778	0.75	0.73	0.09	0.10
One-factor model	8779.27	779	0.63	0.61	0.13	0.16

Note: N = 894, CFI = comparative fit index, TLI = Tucker-Lewis index, RMSEA = root mean. square error of approximation, SRMR = standardized root mean square residual.

4.4.2 Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses were tested using Bayesian Structural Equation Modeling (BSEM). Following Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2, the study initially specified psychological detachment as both a mediator and a moderator in the hypothesis model. The interaction term was not statistically significant (B = 0.05, 95% CI [−0.02, 0.10]), rejecting Hypothesis 2. Guided by theory and the principles of parsimony in SEM (Kline, 2023; Marsh et al., 2004), we estimated a trimmed model that excluded the non-significant interactive term, which exhibited much better model fit in BSEM (also see, e.g., Walker et al., 2015). Consistent with best-practice recommendations for theory-driven model trimming (Kline, 2023) and appropriate Bayesian comparison metrics (Muthén & Asparouhov, 2012; Vehtari et al., 2017), we therefore base all subsequent inferences on the trimmed model. Employees' age

and education were included as control variables since they were shown to be correlated to the focal variables in the bivariate correlation (See Table 4.2). Following recommended standards for BSEM to ensure sufficient posterior sampling and reliable convergence diagnostics (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2010), we applied 200,000 Markov-chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) iterations with 100,000 iterations serving as a burn-in with 4 parallel chains. The different evaluation criteria demonstrated a good model fit for the overall hypothesized model: Posterior predictive p-value (PPP) = 0.41, and the 95% posterior predictive checking (PPC) confidence interval included zero [-15.48; 22.76] for the chi-square (Muthén & Asparouhov, 2012). The potential scale reduction (PSR) decreased rapidly, falling below the cut-off of 1.05 after 1000 iterations. In addition, the inspections of the trace plots illustrated the typical pattern of MCMC, with no discrepancies between independent chains, thereby supporting the MCMC convergence. The results of BSEM is illustrated in Figure 4.2.

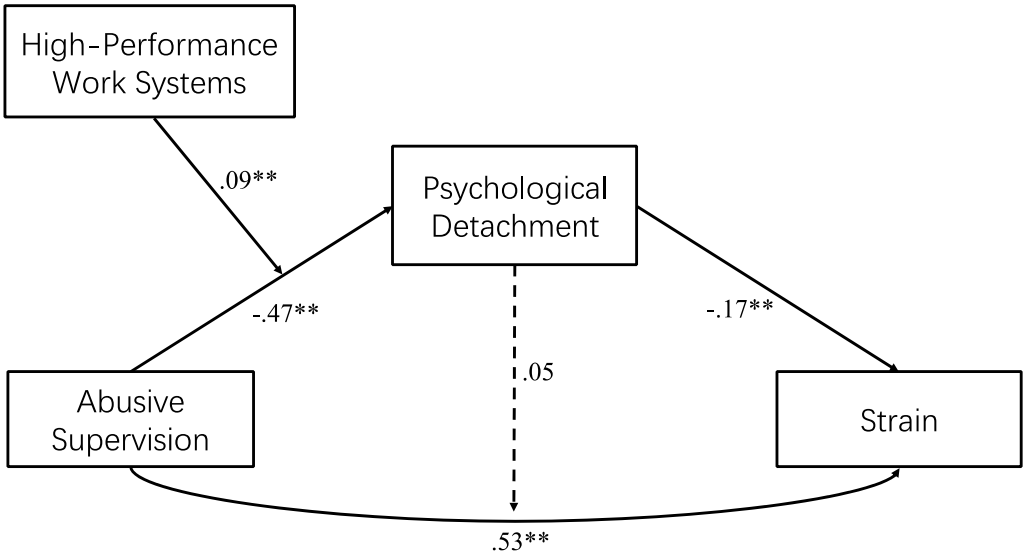

Figure 4.2 The result of Bayesian Structural Equation Modeling (BSEM)

Consistent with the existing literature, abusive supervision was significantly associated with psychological detachment (B = -0.47; 95%CI [-0.63, -0.31]) and strain (B = 0.53; 95%CI [0.44, 0.63]), while psychological detachment is negatively associated with strain (-0.17; 95%CI [-0.24, -0.09]). For Hypothesis 1, following Preacher and Hayes (2008), the mediation relation ship is assess by the 95% confidence interval where the mediating effect is supported when this interval does not include zero. Thus, the mediating effect of psychological detachment between abusive supervision and strain was found to be significant (B = 0.08; 95%CI [0.14, 0.03]) thereby supporting Hypothesis 1. However, the moderating effect of psychological detachment between abusive supervision and strain was found to be non-significant (B = 0.05; 95%CI [-0.02, 0.10]) thereby rejecting Hypothesis 2.

For hypothesis 3 and hypothesis 5, HPWS were found to be positively associated with psychological detachment (B = 0.31; 95%CI [0.21, 0.40]). Furthermore, the interactive term of abusive supervision and HPWS was positively associated with psychological detachment (B = 0.09; 95%CI [0.06, 0.12]), supporting the buffering effect of HPWS between abusive supervision and psychological detachment. Thus hypothesis 3 was supported yet hypothesis 5 was rejected. To further probe the moderation, simple slope analysis was conducted based on 3 levels of HPWS (-1 SD, mean, and +1 SD). The results showed that the negative relationship between abusive supervision and psychological detachment was significant (B = -0.56; 95%CI [-0.75, -0.37]), when HPWS was low. This negative relationship became weaker (B = -0.47; 95%CI [-0.63, -0.31]), when HPWS was at moderate levels. This negative relationship was further weakened (B = -0.38; 95%CI [-0.51, -0.25), when HPWS was high. The interaction plot is depicted in Figure 4.3. Building on the support for Hypotheses 1 and 3, the analysis further tested moderated mediation (i.e., Hypotheses 4 and 6). The results

indicated a significant positive moderated mediation effect (B = 0.06, 95% CI [0.03, 0.10]). Accordingly, Hypothesis 4 was supported, whereas the competing Hypothesis 6 was rejected.

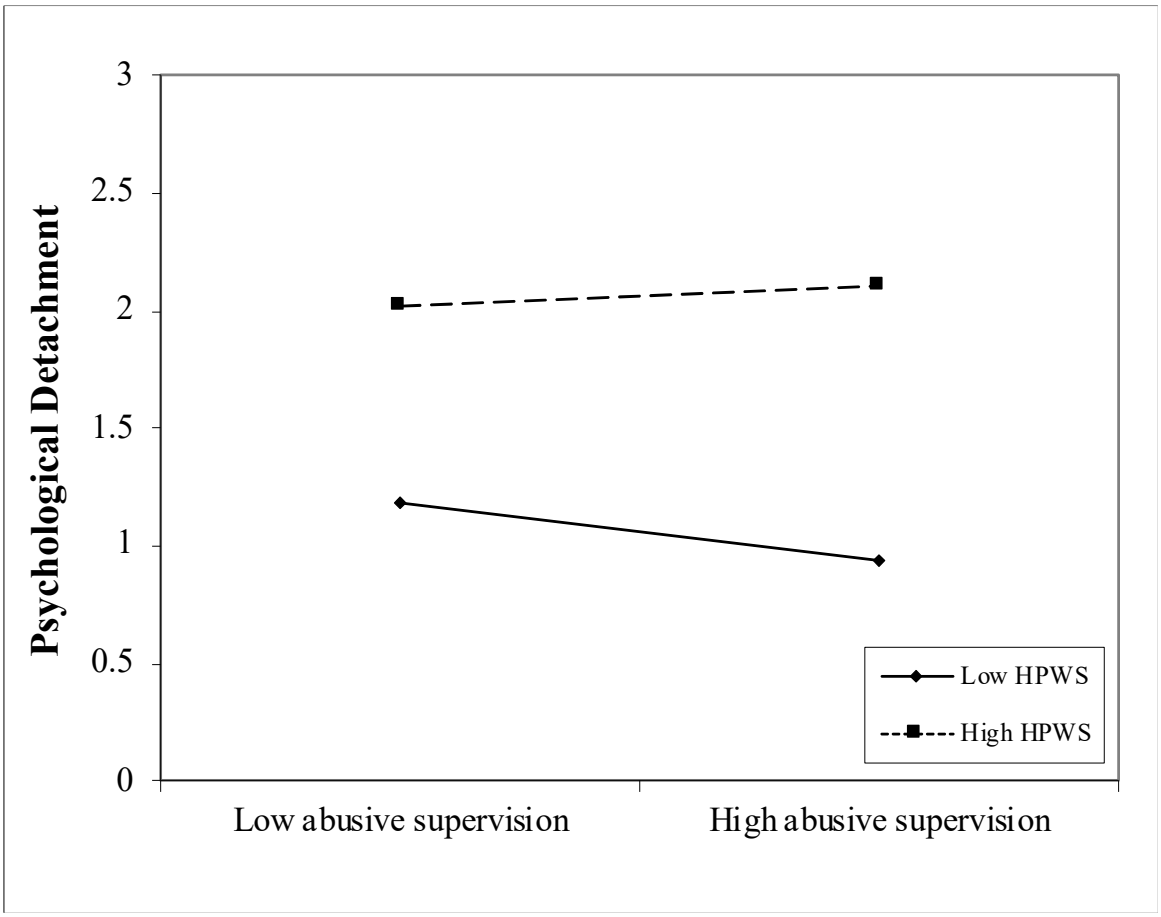

Figure 4.3 *The moderating effect of HPWS on the relationship between abusive supervision and employee psychological detachment*

Regarding the control variables, age showed a slight positive association with strain (B = 0.02, 95% CI [0.01, 0.03]), whereas education demonstrated a negative association with

strain (B = –0.15, 95% CI [–0.24, –0.05]) which is aligned with prior evidence that lower educated groups were

often exposure to high-strain jobs (Clougherty et al., 2010). The results of hypothesis tests are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Tests of Hypothesized model (BSEM)

Model Path		B	Posterior SD	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Abusive Supervision	→ Detachment	-0.47**	0.08	-0.63	-0.31
HPWS	→ Detachment	0.31**	0.05	0.21	0.40
Abusive Supervision * HPWS	→ Detachment	0.09**	0.02	0.06	0.12
Abusive Supervision	→ Strain	0.53**	0.05	0.44	0.63
Detachment	→ Strain	-0.17**	0.04	-0.24	-0.09
Abusive Supervision * Detachment	→ Strain	0.05	0.03	-0.02	0.10
Indirect_Detachment	→ Strain	0.08**	0.02	0.04	0.13
Moderating Indirect		0.06**	0.02	0.03	0.10
Employee Age	→ Strain	0.02**	0.01	0.01	0.03
Employee Education	→ Strain	-0.15**	0.05	-0.24	-0.05

Note. Unstandardized model coefficients are presented; Detachment = Psychological Detachment; Indirect_Detachment refers to the mediating effect of psychological detachment; Moderating Indirect refers to the moderated mediation effect.
* 95%-CI excludes zero, **99%-CI excludes zero

4.5 Discussion

The present study investigated if high-performance work systems (HPWS) moderates the indirect effect of abusive supervision on strain via psychological detachment (as well as the moderating role of psychological detachment in the relationship between abusive supervision and strain). The findings reveal that abusive supervision is negatively associated with employees' psychological detachment and in turn, increases their levels of strain. The moderating effect of psychological detachment in the relationship between abusive supervision and strain was not supported. Regarding the moderating role of HPWS, the findings suggest that HPWS buffer against the relationship between between abusive supervision and strain via psychological detachment. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings.

4.5.1 Theoretical Implications

The present research provides important insights to the existing literature. Prior studies have underscored the theoretical significance of studying the interplay between leadership and HR practices in organizations, indicating that supervisory behaviors do not function in a vacuum but rather manifest within a broader HR system (e.g., Kilroy et al., 2023; Leroy et al., 2018; Tepper, 2007). However, research exploring the synergy between dark-side leadership and HR practices is scarce. Advancing understanding on this issue is of critical importance because the coexistence of detrimental supervisory behaviors and organizational HR practices could create complex and paradoxical dynamics that shape employees' attitudes and performance, while neglecting this intersection risks overlooking how HR practices may inadvertently reinforce, buffer, or even legitimize toxic leadership behavior in organizations

(e.g., Jensen et al., 2013; Xu et al., 2020). Drawing on stressor–detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) and Leroy et al.'s conceptual model (2018), the present study addresses this theoretical void by positioning HPWS as a contextual factor that operates concurrently with abusive supervision in predicting emplpyees recovery (psychological detachment), and in turn, their strain. Likewise, while former research has largely examined abusive supervision as a standalone stressor (e.g., Iser-Potempa et al., 2024; Tepper et al., 2017), the investigation also provides evidence that the relationship between abusive supervision and psychological detachment is not invariant to organizational elements (e.g., HPWS). The overall findings reveal that HPWS buffers the erosion of employees' psychological detachment caused by abusive supervision, thereby mitigating their levels of strain. Interpreted through Leroy et al.'s (2018) classification of leadership-HR interdependence, this pattern is best understood as a complementary-fit mechanism: distal and system-level HR practices offset the impacts of proximal toxic supervisory behaviors by supporting employees' off-job recovery experiences in the form of psychological detachment. From a theoretical standpoint, this finding offers a compelling resolution to two critical questions that pervade the existing literature.

First, to address the optimistic–pessimistic HRM debate, the findings adjudicate between a resource provision view (HPWS as enabling autonomy, development, and support; e.g., Jiang et al., 2012; Kilroy et al., 2016; Subramony et al., 2009) and a demand intensification view (HPWS as exacerbating workload, exploitation, and coercing; Godard, 2004, 2010; Jensen et al., 2013; Kroon et al., 2009) of HPWS. Consistent with the resource-provision perspective, our results reveal that HPWS significantly buffer the adverse association between abusive supervision and psychological detachment and, in turn, reduce

strain. Drawing on the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001), the findings implies that HPWS serves as a potent job resource to counteract the detriments of abusive supervision on employees, rather than the reverse. By conferring genuine autonomy and discretion, HPWS expands employees' boundary control and opens influence and support channels (e.g., Jiang et al., 2012; Subramony et al., 2009), which are beyond the supervisory dyad, making psychological detachment from abusive supervision more attainable and, in turn, alleviates strain (see also Kilroy et al., 2016 on well-being effects). Additionally, extensive training and developmental appraisal could cultivate employees' individual work capabilities and self-efficacy (Arthur et al., 2003; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Kilroy et al., 2016), enhancing instrumental personal resources to counteract the demands of abusive supervision. Moreover, with open information sharing, performance management, and performance-based rewards, HPWS can effectively reduce the organizational uncertainty and job insecurity (Kilroy et al., 2016), as well as the dependence on leaders, establishing a predictable and supportive atmosphere to weaken the carryover of abusive supervision and facilitate psychological detachment and improved well-being. Notwithstanding critical accounts that portray HPWS as potentially demand-intensifying and harmful to well-being (e.g., Godard, 2004, 2010; Jensen et al., 2013; Kroon et al., 2009; Ramsay et al., 2000), our evidence does not indicate such negative functioning particularly for coping with abusive supervision and well-being. Meanwhile, building on prior research that examined the joint effects of HR practices and psychological detachment (Kilroy et al., 2020), the study extends this nomological network by testing the links among abusive supervision, HPWS, psychological detachment, and strain.

Second, in terms of the stressor–detachment model (Sonnentag et al., 2015) and solutions for abusive supervision (Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper et al., 2017), the findings

extend the model by including abusive supervision as the stressor predicting psychological detachment and strain. More importantly, by positioning HPWS as a boundary condition shaping employees recovery processes under abusive supervision, the finding provide valuable insights for potential coping strategies against supervisory abusive behaviors. In light of the limited practical remedies for abusive supervision (Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper et al., 2017), these findings offer actionable guidance on implementing HPWS to build system-level organizational resources that help abused employees maintain recovery experiences and well-being. In doing so, the present study makes significant contributions by integrating literature across the domains of organizational behavior (dark-side leadership e.g., abusive supervision), strategic HRM (e.g., HPWS), and occupational health (e.g., recovery experience and well-being).

On the other hand, Iser-Potempa et al.'s (2024) very recent research bridged the association between abusive supervision and psychological detachment via anger and rumination, yet how abusive supervision together with the impaired recovery experience spillover into employees' well-being is underexplored. Employing the rationale of stressor–detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015), the current study investigates both the mediating effect and the moderating effect of psychological detachment between abusive supervision and employee strain. The results supported the mediating relationship, while the moderating effect is not supported. Aligning with Iser-Potempa et al.'s (2024) findings, the results reconfirmed a carryover process: employees' perception of abusive supervision at work could heighten negative affect and ruminative thought, which in turn makes it difficult for employees to "switch off" in the off-work hours (Iser-Potempa et al., 2024; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). As consequence, the sustaining of psychological and cognitive activation

eventually results in elevated strain for abused employees. In doing so, our study extends this emerging research line that has mapped abusive supervision as a critical antecedent of psychological detachment by highlighting its subsesequent transmission to health the pertinent health related outcome of strain (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). It further enriches the literature of recovery experience by articulating that impaired psychological detachment during evenings and leisure time functions as a post-exposure regulatory mechanism through which daytime supervisory abusive behaviors undermines employees' well-being.

Contrary to the expectations and stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015), psychological detachment does not moderate the association between abusive supervision and strain. This might seem counterintuitive, as one might expect successful off-job disengagement to sever the impact of negative daytime working experiences, because it is consistent with the temporal literature regarding psychological detachment as a post-exposure recovery mechanism (Sonnentag et al., 2015). In practice, psychological detachment can replenish individual energy and resource in employees off-work time, but it may not immunize employees against renewed exposure to the same supervisory stressors and work demands which consistently happen (e.g., in working hours or the next workdays). For instance, employees need to address the job demands or social conflicts in the workplace irrespective of whether they engage in adequate psychological detachment after work. Consequently, repeated re-exposure to job demands (e.g., abusive supervision) can swiftly reinstate strain even among those who demonstrate strong psychological detachment. In this regard, psychological detachment functions more as a mechanistic conduit (i.e., explaining how abusive supervision translates into strain) than as a concurrent shield that changes the slope of this linkage. Moreover, this interpretation also fits with the possibility that abusive

supervision itself erodes employees' capacity of psychological detachment, leaving very limited variance for a buffering interaction to surface. The findings extend the knowledge of the stressor–detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) by critically reconsidering the presumed benefits of psychological detachment in buffering the adverse effects of job stressors (Sonnentag et al., 2007; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) and challenging several prior studies (Moreno-Jiménez et al., 2009; Sonnentag et al., 2010; Sonnentag et al., 2013). That is, psychological detachment could yield short-term recovery, yet the buffering effects on stressor could be finite and even practically tirvial when the exposure to stressors is substantial and recurrent.

4.5.2 Practical Implications

The results speak to a pragmatic reframing for HR practice. Importantly, high-performance work system (HPWS) is not inherently harmful (e.g., Bartram et al., 2012; Jiang et al., 2012; Kilroy et al., 2016). Under the JD–R framework (Demerouti et al., 2001), the implementation of HPWS with an employee-oriented intent can function as a potent resource shield that protects employees' ability to psychologically detach and, in turn, their well-being, even under abusive supervision. HPWS might be criticized in practice, due to its possible essence to set up strict performance evaluation, high job requirements, intensive working activities, and potentially exploitative nature (e.g., Jensen et al., 2013; Kroon et al., 2009; Xu et al., 2020). However, the field findings suggest HPWS is generally a positive and beneficial management strategy for employees in the real working context, enhancing employees' recovery experience and well-being, and potentially sustaining their working experience under negative leadership (e.g., Bartram et al., 2012; Jiang et al., 2012; Kilroy et al., 2016). Concretely, to limit potential detriments of negative supervisory behaviors in practice, we

recommend to design and enact specific HR practices, focusing on allowing employees' autonomy, setting clear working goals, effective evaluation system, fair reward policies, and encouraging information sharing. When configured this way, HPWS can interrupt the damage chain of abusive supervision, limiting its negative influence and supporting an ethically sound route to maintain employee well-being and working experience simultaneously.

On the other hand, the pathway from abusive supervision to strain via impaired psychological detachment is a red flag for employees' occupational health management. Indeed, abusive supervision erodes employees' ability to "switch off" in the off-work hours, allowing work rumination to spill into non-work time (Iser-Potempa et al., 2024) and accelerate strain. The practical implication is to treat supervisory abusive behaviors as definitely preventable hazards, rather than soft skills deficits. It is recommended to establish a multilayer series of preventions. First, primary prevention should be implemented, including zero-tolerance policies with behaviourally ethical standards to regulate leaders' words and deeds (Iser-Potempa et al., 2024). Meanwhile, selections and training programs of leadership that screen out aggression tendencies are recommended. Second, early detection is advisable, such as through regular surveys evaluating leader behaviors, employees' recovery experiences, and well-being. It is also essential to develop secure and trustworthy reporting channels with clear anti-retaliation safeguards, as well as rapid investigation procedures, preventing the situation from escalating. Third, recovery-oriented job design should be implemented. Specifically, the daily routine working life should include "right-to-disconnect" norms and feasible rota planning of management that limit repeated exposure to the same leaders. It is also instrumental to equip supervisors with micro-

behaviors, which can foster employees' recovery experience (e.g., clear end-of-day handoffs, next-day planning to close loops, and no after-hours pinging) and form train teams or courses in boundary management.

Additionally, the non-buffering effect of psychological detachment on the linkage between abusive supervision and strain reflects a hard lesson for practice: off-job recovery experience could be commonly beneficial for individual well-being (Sonnentag et al., 2007; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015), but might not effectively neutralize ongoing supervisory detrimental behaviors or broader job stressors. In other words, personal resources such as recovery experience which could be enhanced by mindfulness, resilience workshops, or vacation days, are at best, secondary supports, but they might not effectively address the problems while the strong demanding source persists, such as abusive leaders. While it could be crèche, the only reliable and validate solution is source control including preventing, curbing, or removing abusive supervisory behaviors, which align with practical implications in the former discussion.

In summary, the study recommends prioritizing the enhancement of leaders' ethical standards and the protection of employees' recovery experiences as strategic imperatives. Furthermore, Managers can redesign strategic HR management (e.g., HPWS) to help employees cope with potential abusive supervision and strengthen nonwork recovery, thereby safeguarding well-being. With the effective elimination of supervisory abuse at the source and fortify job resources through HRM, managers can realize an actionable route to protect employees' well-being and working experience.

4.5.3 Limitation and Future Research Directions

The study contains several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, the nested data with a decent sample size (N=894) from a single Chinese company has its strengths, some defects remain. The cross-sectional nature of the data collection does not distinguish the temporal cause-effect order between variables, limiting the ability to make strong causal inferences (Maxwell & Cole, 2007). It would have been preferable to employ longitudinal data or daily diary study, which could provide a more robust examination of the causal relationships and capture the dynamic processes underlying abusive supervision and employee health outcomes over time (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010). Moreover, the study was conducted within a single Chinese company, which limits generalizability to other institutional and cultural contexts, particularly those characterized by low power distance, individualism, and gender-egalitarian norms (e.g., many organizations in Northern Europe and the United States; House et al., 2004). Macro-contextual conditions and corporate cultures shape employees' perceptions of, and reactions to abusive supervision (Tepper et al., 2017) and the implementation of HR practices (Jackson et al., 2014), so effects observed in the present study may differ elsewhere. Future research should adopt cross-cultural samples and examine measurement invariance across cultures, as well as apply longitudinal designs to enhance external validity and support stronger causal inferences.

Second, although our findings demonstrate a notion that HPWS can effectively alleviate the negative impacts of abusive supervision on employees' outcomes, this research stream remains nascent. Based on our best knowledge, the buffering role of HPWS on abusive supervision has only been documented only for psychological detachment and strain, and this is also very first study introduces HPWS as a potent remedy for abusive supervision. It

is uncertain whether the comparable patterns generalize to other critical outcomes such as organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors, or creativity, and, importantly, whether the interplay between dark-side supervisory behaviors and HR practices is stable. Future research should adopt a multi-outcome perspective, assessing a broader array of attitudinal and behavioral outcomes in parallel to determine whether HPWS reliably buffer the consequences of abusive supervision, while also probing potential reversals, which consistent with the competing evidence (e.g., Xu et al., 2020) and the literature we raised.

In addition, beyond moderating relationship, future work should delve into causal links between abusive supervision and HRM. For instance, HPWS may alter leaders' stress, discretion, power, and accountability, thereby increasing or reducing supervisory abusive behaviors. Conversely, sustained abusive supervision may erode the implementation fidelity of HR practices (e.g., participation, voice, and fair appraisal). Following Leroy et al. (2018), the nexus between leadership and HRM can be theorized as different patterns. For instance, in *substitution*, formalized HR practices (e.g., structured appraisals, due-process discipline, civility codes) narrow leader discretion and monitoring slack, thereby reducing variance in abusive behaviors and dampening its downstream effects. While, under a *synergy* pattern, coherent HR signals including selecting for interpersonal competence, tying rewards to respectful conduct, and training that models civil influence, can foster a dignity climate that lowers the incidence of abusive supervision and enhance employees' coping resources when exposure occurs. Framing the nexus on abusive supervision and HRM could open novel actionable avenues for future research line.

4.6 Conclusion

The study demonstrated the buffering effect of HPWS on the detrimental impact of abusive supervision on psychological detachment and, in turn, well-being. Meanwhile, it further articulated the role of psychological detachment between abusive supervision and strain. Due to the prevalence of abusive supervision in the current workplace, the findings introduce well-designed human resource practices (e.g., HPWS) as effective system-level coping strategies against abusive supervision and underscore the significance of protecting employees' off-job recovery experience for their well-being. As research on the interplay between abusive supervision and HRM remains in its early stages, future studies that extend this research stream could be promising. Given the malevolent nature of abusive supervision, prevention of supervisory abusive behaviors should be prioritized. Furthermore, effort should also be made to develop a more comprehensive understanding of abusive supervision to help inhibit its negative influence after it occurs.

Chapter Five Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The primary objective of the thesis was to explore (a) how subordinate characteristics could directly reduce perceptions of abusive supervision and (b) when and why abusive supervision is more or less damaging, including whether subordinate characteristics and high performance work systems (HPWS) buffer or exacerbate its effects (Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper et al., 2017). The investigation was carried out in China, where abusive supervision is considered relatively prevalent and where high power distance and centralised leadership may heighten the salience and impact of supervisory behaviours, thereby potentially intensifying the detrimental implications for subordinates' well-being and daily work experience (Lian et al., 2015; Mackey et al., 2017). To develop coping strategies that can help restrain abusive supervision and mitigate its negative consequences, the preceding chapters outlined key research questions and tested the proposed hypotheses across three empirical studies. Taken together, the thesis advances a resource-based account of abusive supervision that foregrounds subordinates' capabilities and appraisals, while also recognising the enabling or constraining role of organisational systems. This chapter integrates the findings across the three studies and articulates the thesis' core contributions, highlighting how the combined theoretical lenses refine understanding of subordinate-related antecedents, attribution-based boundary conditions, recovery-based boundary conditions, and HRM–leadership interplay in shaping strain and coping. Eventually, the chapter acknowledges the limitations of the thesis and outlines directions for future research.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

This thesis makes an integrative theoretical contribution by demonstrating how three distinct theoretical lenses jointly extend the overarching JD–R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) and COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) in explaining abusive supervision. While JD-R and COR theories provide a valuable theoretical framework for conceptualising abusive supervision as a potent job demand and for identifying the personal and job resources relevant to its occurrence and consequences, the three empirical studies further reveal that these broad frameworks alone are insufficient for explaining the more fine-grained mechanisms and contingencies through which abusive supervision is restrained, interpreted, and mitigated. Specifically, Study 1 draws on social influence theory (Levy et al., 1998) and moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990) to explain why a malleable subordinate characteristic, namely political skill, may reduce perceived abusive supervision through performance-related pathways. Study 2 extends this resource-based perspective by using attribution theory (Heider, 1958) to show that the effects of abusive supervision also depend on how subordinates cognitively interpret supervisory behaviour, thereby clarifying when abusive supervision is more or less damaging for well-being. Study 3 further complements these insights by integrating the stressor–detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) with Leroy et al.'s (2018) value fit framework to explain how abusive supervision translates into strain through impaired recovery and how this process is conditioned by the broader HRM context.

Through the integration of multiple theoretical perspectives, the three studies collectively provide a more comprehensive understanding of abusive supervision than any single theoretical perspective could offer in isolation. By doing so, the thesis advances knowledge by moving beyond a predominantly supervisor-centric or demand-focused

account and showing that abusive supervision is shaped by an interconnected system of subordinate resources, interpretive processes, and contextual job resources. In this manner, the thesis contributes a more integrated theoretical framework with a process-oriented explanation of abusive supervision, which explains not only whether abusive supervision is harmful, but also why it emerges, when its effects intensify or weaken, and how individuals and organisations may intervene to restrain its occurrence and mitigate its consequences.

5.2.1 The Exploration of Subordinate-related Antecedents of Abusive Supervision

Tepper (2000) initially posited that supervisory abusive behaviours might sometimes be conducted as a form of "performance management", such as warning low performance and halting obvious errors, which opens the possibility that abusive supervision could, in part, be elicited by subordinates' improper behaviours (e.g., Tepper 2000, 2007). Building on this stream of research, Zhang and Bednall's (2016) meta-analytic review identified subordinate-related antecedent as one of four major antecedent clusters of abusive supervision, in parallel with supervisor-related, organisation-related, and demographic antecedents. Extending this line of research, empirical evidence demonstrated that subordinate organisational deviance and incompetent performance prospectively could predict higher abusive supervision, consistent with dyadic escalation dynamics between leaders and subordinates (e.g., Lian et al., 2014; Mawritz et al., 2017; Walter et al., 2015).

Beyond subordinates' working deviance or low performance, previous literature has further documented how relatively stable subordinate dispositions can shape dyadic sense-making and intensify leader–member conflict. For instance, psychological entitlement has been linked to heightened perceptions of abusive supervision and escalatory counterproductive reactions under the same leader (Harvey et al., 2014). In addition, studies

found that cynicism could bias intent attributions, making employees more likely to read ambiguous supervisory behaviours as hostile and abusive, thereby increasing the perceptions of abusive supervision (Sun et al., 2022; Tepper et al., 2006). Related traits such as hostile attributional style, negative affectivity, and neuroticism could further bias interpretations toward abusive supervision (Mackey et al., 2017; Martinko et al., 2011). From a JD–R perspective, these subordinate factors can be understood as personal demands or resources that shape how supervisory behaviours are appraised and coped with, and thus help explain variability in perceived abusiveness and downstream strain. However, despite the advancing understanding in subordinate-related antecedents, there remains a clear lacuna regarding malleable and trainable subordinate factors (e.g., specific skills, coping repertoires, and appraisal tendencies) that may protect subordinates from abusive supervision (Liu & Steven, 2025). This is perhaps because such inquiry risks sliding into the conclusion of blaming victims and must be pursued with "too" careful attention to contextual accountability and ethics.

Organisational studies have recognised abusive supervision as, in essence, an interactional phenomenon that inevitably involves two parties (i.e., conductor and recipient), with subordinates playing an active role in perceiving and interpreting supervisory behaviour (Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper et al., 2017; Zhang & Bednall, 2016). In practice, leaders occasionally engage in negative behaviours and some may show a strong propensity toward abuse, which should be unequivocally condemned and constrained (Tepper, 2000). At the same time, a growing body of evidence and research indicate that subordinates' characteristics and actions can shape leader behavioural patterns, potentially triggering and escalating supervisory abusive behaviours (e.g., Lian et al., 2014; Mawritz et al., 2017;

Walter et al., 2015). Consistent with JD–R and COR perspectives, this implies that subordinates' personal resources (e.g., skills and appraisal tendencies) can influence both exposure to abusive supervision and the extent to which it translates into strain. Therefore, focusing exclusively on perpetrators may be short-sighted, as abusive supervision is better understood as a reciprocal process shaped by both supervisors and subordinates (Fischer et al., 2021). In contemporary performance-driven workplaces, this does not imply a "law of the jungle" or 'survival of the fittest' logic, but rather highlights the value of resource-building interventions that strengthen employees' capacity to navigate demanding interpersonal environments (Mawritz et al., 2017; Sheng et al., 2025; Walter et al., 2015). In this regard, subordinate individual development can be a no-nonsense solution to reduce their perceptions of abusive supervision in the modern workplace.

Consistent with the empirical findings showing that political skill is associated with lower perceived abusive supervision through enhanced organisational citizenship behaviours benefiting the organisation (particularly OCB-O), the present thesis highlights subordinates' individual potential to help restrain abusive supervision from occurring in the first instance (e.g., Mawritz et al., 2017; Walter et al., 2015). Drawing on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001), the results suggest that political skill serves as a potent personal resource that helps subordinates cope with and potentially offset the job demand of abusive supervision. Specifically, through greater social astuteness and interpersonal influence (Ferris et al., 2005), politically skilled employees can take more context-sensitive and impactful actions, thereby enacting more visible and valued OCB-O (Muyon et al., 2015). As a result, subordinates who exhibit such high-level OCB-O are likely to be seen as more valuable contributors and aligning more closely with the leaders'

objectives (Tepper, 2007; Walter et al., 2015). From a moral exclusion theory perspective, such signals may increase supervisors' moral inclusion of the subordinate (i.e., bring them within the "scope of justice"), thereby strengthening moral consideration and reducing tolerance for mistreatment (Opotow, 1990). Taken together, moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990) and social influence theory (Levy et al., 1998) help specify a subordinate-centred pathway through which malleable capabilities (political skill) and extra-role performance (e.g., OCB-O) may reduce perceived abusive supervision, thereby extending the broad resource based logic of the JD-R model with a more fine-grained interpersonal explanatory mechanism. More broaly, these findings will stimulate future research to examine other trainable and malleable personal resources that may similarly protect against abusive supervision. For example, mindfulness might be a potential individual skill in this regard. By lowering automatic defensiveness and improving non-reactive attention, subordinates' mindfulness could effectively reduce escalation cues that often provoke supervisory aggressive or hostile responses (Hülsheger et al., 2013; Long & Christian, 2015).

However, the empirical findings do not support the mediating role of task performance or OCB-I (organizational citizenship behaviour directed toward coworkers) between political skill and abusive supervision, nor a direct association between task performance and abusive supervision. This suggests that, in the present setting, task performance and OCB-I did not operate as a salient pathway through which political skill translates into lower perceived abusive supervision, in contrast to the role of OCB-O. It probably because the gap between subordinates' task performance is limited and practically undistinguishable due to the standardised and routine nature of task performance evaluation (Williams & Anderson, 1991). Accordingly, leaders may be less sensitive to incremental

differences in task performance or may treat task completion as a baseline requirement rather than a differentiating signal. Although political skill enabling employees to complete prescribed tasks more effectively (Muyon *et al*., 2015), the disparity of task performance alone is unlikely to determine them as moral inclusion or exclusion for leaders. In terms of OCB-I, such behaviours may be less directly relevant to leaders' immediate goals or interests, and they may also be less visible to leaders because they often occur in coworker interactions rather than in exchanges with the supervisor. From a moral exclusion perspective, it is the more discretionary, relational, and leader-relevant cues, such as visible extra-role contributions that benefit the organization and signal cooperative intent, that are more likely to trigger moral inclusion and reduce tolerance for mistreatment (Opotow, 1990). Indeed, task performance is often considered as a baseline expectation (Williams & Anderson, 1991) and OCB-I could be less likely to attract supervisors' attention because it is directed toward coworkers rather than the supervisor. By contrast, supervisors may put greater emphasis on and be impressed by exceptional and discretionary behaviours that are closely aligned with their own interests when responding to subordinates. Thus, integrating JD–R model with moral exclusion theory, these findings refine the thesis model by suggesting that different "performance" dimensions carry different social-moral signals to supervisors, and may therefore differentially shape subordinates' experiences of abusive supervision.

Moreover, by integrating JD–R's resource logic with complementary interpersonal theories, the thesis delineates broader pathways through which subordinates, through their own agency, may reduce the likelihood of experiencing and/or perceiving abusive supervision (Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper et al., 2011; Zhang & Bednall, 2016). First, social influence theory (Levy et al., 1998) indicates that subordinates strategically use norms,

persuasion, authority, and impression management to shape leaders' attitudes and behaviour, reducing escalation and the risk of abusive interactions. Second, according to moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990), subordinate characteristics that signal norm violation or low value (e.g., inefficiency, low effort, chronic deviance, and high entitlement) increase the likelihood that supervisors place them outside the scope of moral concern, incurring abusive supervision (e.g., Tepper et al., 2011; Walter et al., 2015). Conversely, cues of norm alignment and value (e.g., diligence, prosociality, modest claims, and cooperative intent) may foster moral inclusion and, in turn, more respectful treatment. Within a JD–R framework, these theories complement the thesis model by explaining how personal resources and behavioural signals operate in interpersonal exchange: they shape supervisors' appraisals of the subordinate and the interaction climate, thereby influencing whether abusive supervision emerges and whether it translates into strain. Finally, although not all relevant theories were directly tested in the empirical models, the thesis synthesises prior work to map a set of theoretically grounded routes linking subordinate characteristics to abusive supervision perceptions. With the literature discussion and empirical research under multiple theories, the present thesis provides additional theoretical perspectives that scholars can employ to approach how subordinate-related characteristics directly or indirectly influence the perceptions of abusive supervision, highlighting the reciprocity in abusive supervision phenomenon in organisations.

5.2.2 Buffering Mechanisms of Abusive Supervision

The thesis further investigates remediation approaches that mitigate the detrimental effects of abusive supervision after it occurs. Given both the prevalence of abusive supervision and the limits of prevention-focused approaches, assuming that abusive supervision can be

eradicated in the short term is unrealistic and strategically short-sighted (De Clercq et al., 2022; Fischer et al., 2021; Hannah et al., 2013; Pradhan & Jena, 2017). Accordingly, another core concern for scholars and practitioners is how to contain its harm when it does arise. Consistent with JD–R and COR perspectives, abusive supervision can be understood as a potent job demand that threatens valued resources and can trigger loss spirals, while the magnitude of harm depends on the resources available to cope and recover. Prior evidence showed that the association between abusive supervision and subordinate deviance varies substantially (e.g., from −.15 to .74), indicating that its effects could be highly contingent. However, actionable managerial strategies that reliably buffer these harms remain relatively scarce (Fischer et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2024; Tepper et al., 2017). Although approaches such as leader selection, ethics training, and sanctions are valuable, they are often difficult to implement consistently (Krasikova et al., 2013; Liang et al., 2024; Tepper et al., 2017), partly because organisational culture and leadership are not easily changed in practice (Schein, 2010; Schepker et al., 2017). In contrast, subordinate development and HR practice may offer more feasible and scalable routes for mitigation, because they can be implemented through direct HR policies and individual resource-building, without relying on changes in the immediate supervisor or the whole organisational structure (Fischer et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2024). Building on this logic, the present thesis advances subordinate-centred and HRM-based coping approaches and makes several contributions to this emerging research line based on the empirical findings.

5.2.2.1 The Exploration of Subordinate-Related Buffering Factors of Abusive Supervision

The stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) offers a compelling lens to delve into how subordinates' psychological detachment might relate to or interact with abusive supervision. According to the model, stressors can induce cognitive and emotional strain by preventing employees from psychologically detaching from work during their leisure time. Moreover, the model also proposes that the degree to which these stressors result in strain is dependent on employees' ability to psychologically detach from work during their leisure time (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). The model therefore depicts psychological detachment as a mediator linking job stressors to strain and, simultaneously, as a moderator that could buffer the negative impact of job stressors on strain. Employing the rationale of the stressor–detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015), Study 3 investigates both the mediating effect and the moderating effect of psychological detachment between abusive supervision and employee strain. Extending the recent study of Iser-Potempa et al. (2024) which linked abusive supervision to psychological detachment, this thesis results highlight support for the relationship between abusive supervision and strain through the mediating role of psychological detachment. However, the buffering effect of psychological detachment in the relationship was not supported.

This pattern may appear counterintuitive, as psychological detachment is often theorised to "switch off" the carryover of negative work experiences into nonwork time, thereby facilitating recovery (Sonnentag et al., 2015). However, psychological detachment may restore energy and resources during non-work time, yet it does not immunise employees against renewed exposure to recurring supervisory stressors and demands during subsequent

work periods. Employees must still confront job demands and social conflicts (e.g., interactions with leaders) regardless of off-job detachment. Consequently, repeated re-exposure (e.g., to abusive supervision) can rapidly reinstate strain even among those who realise strong psychological detachment. In this manner, psychological detachment could operate only as a mechanistic conduit, explaining how abusive supervision translates into strain, rather than as a concurrent shield that buffers its detrimental effects. Meanwhile, abusive supervision may also erode detachment capacity, leaving limited variance for buffering to emerge. With the findings of mediation pathway from abusive supervision to strain via psychological detachment, it is of significance to look at organisational interventions aimed at altering attentional processes to mitigate the impact of abusive supervision on psychological detachment, such as high-performance work systems (HPWS; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Furthermore, these findings may also suggest a need to further explore the stressor–detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) with respect to the construct of abusive supervision, especially the presumed buffering benefits of psychological detachment (Sonnentag et al., 2007; Sonnentag et al., 2010; Sonnentag et al., 2013).

Another nascent stream of research has highlighted that subordinates' attributions of abusive supervision could effectively moderate the influence of abusive supervision on performance outcomes such as creativity (Liu et al., 2012) and supervisor-rated OCB (Yu & Duffy, 2021). Nevertheless, whether and how these attributions (performance-promotion and injury-initiation attributions) interact in the relationship between abusive supervision and employees' well-being has not yet been empirically investigated. This issue is of concern because abused subordinates who make performance-promotion attribution might still experience exhaustion (impaired well-being), despite the prior evidence highlighting their

sustained working performance (Liao et al., 2021; Yu & Duffy, 2021). Indeed, from a JD–R and COR perspective, these attributional meanings can be understood as either personal resources or personal demands. Thus, it is conceivable that high performance-promotion attribution and low injury-initiation attribution might contribute to short-lived performance maintenance or enhancement but may not support sustainable performance if well-being is eroded. To address the void, Study 2 represents an important contribution to the existing literature by exploring the buffering effect of performance-promotion attribution and the exacerbating effect of injury-initiation attribution on the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' emotional exhaustion.

Once again, the empirical findings from this study are inconsistent with the trend of prior studies when the investigated outcome was performance (e.g., task performance and OCB): 1) performance-promotion attribution amplifies, rather than buffers, the influence of abusive supervision on emotional exhaustion. 2) The moderating effect of injury-initiation attribution is nonsignificant. An explanation for these findings may be due to the malevolent nature of abusive supervision, whereby attribution-based buffering mechanisms could be operating weakly, or even not at all, throughout the process of abusive supervision. This saturation effect aligns with attribution theory's principle of discounting: when one highly plausible cause (i.e., malice of abusive supervision) explains an event, alternative causes contribute negligible explanatory power (Kelley, 1973). Worse still, performance-promotion attribution could help abused subordinates sustain work efficiency while simultaneously damaging individual well-being. Although prior studies identified the positive aspect of performance-promotion attribution regarding subordinates' outcome performance under abusive supervision (Liu et al., 2012; Yang et al., 2020; Yu & Duffy, 2021), the findings

indicate that seemingly "benign" and "motive" attributions (e.g., correction, warning, and motivation) can backfire concerning individual well-being. The maintained performance attributed to performance-promotion attribution may, in fact, hinge on the exploitative depletion of subordinates' emotional resources. The findings really highlight trade-offs in the positive attribution i.e., it works well for performance but works terribly for well-being. Therefore, performance-promotion attribution may not be an asset as initially conceived given that ensuring employee well-being (lower emotional exhaustion) is also an essential outcome of relevance for organisations, and when put in jeopardy, could in the long term, undermine sustainable performance. These findings nonetheless enrich the abusive supervision literature by challenging both the presumed benefits of performance-promotion attribution and the expected harms of injury-initiation attribution (Liu et al., 2012; Yang et al., 2020; Yu & Duffy, 2021), providing a more subtle and comprehensive understanding in the relationship among abusive supervision, attributions, and well-being.

In summary, the empirical findings offer limited evidence that subordinate-level factors reliably buffer the negative influence of abusive supervision on well-being once abuse has occurred. In addition to the three main empirical studies, a supplementary analysis was conducted to examine the buffering effect of political skill on the relationship between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion. However, the results still indicated that political skill did not significantly moderate this relationship. Taken together, these results suggest that post-incident coping with abusive supervision is difficult to achieve through subordinate (i.e., target) characteristics alone, underscoring the inherent complexity of the relationships.

Several factors may explain this pattern. First, subordinate coping capabilities are unevenly distributed and highly context dependent. Individual effective responses dealing with abusive supervision such as constructive voice, positive coping, or formal reporting, depend on personal and contextual resources (e.g., social skills, conflict-management competence, emotion regulation, perceived psychological safety, and risk tolerance) that vary across individuals and settings, which limits their general effectiveness (Ferris et al., 2005; Gross & John, 2003; Morrison et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 2001). Since these capacities are unevenly distributed and context dependent, viable options often narrow in practice. Second, under abusive supervision, instrumental personal and job resources are likely to erode, diminishing their capacity to help. Specifically, abusive supervision itself depletes these subordinate resources, like self-regulatory capacity, psychological safety, and self-esteem as well as off-work resources (e.g., recovery experiences and sleep quality), thereby dramatically reducing the potential buffering effects. In practice, the very resources required to cope with abusive supervision are those most impaired, producing loss spirals (e.g., Aryee et al., 2008; Martinko et al., 2013; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). Third, the current organisational structure constraints subordinates' "self-rescue". Power asymmetries, dependence on the supervisor for evaluations, limited opportunities, and fear of retaliation, opaque and slow reporting mechanisms, and inconsistent sanctions, enhance the toleration of incivility, raise the costs of action, and lower expected returns (Morrison, 2014; Williams et al., 1999). Consequently, post-incident strategies from the subordinate side tend to yield only limited and often short-lived mitigation but rarely achieve durable reductions in the harms of abusive supervision.

5.2.2.2 Exploring the Interaction between Abusive Supervision and High Performance Work Systems

As previously mentioned, existing studies have found various organisational factors might alleviate the effects of abusive supervision, yet practical management strategies have yet sufficiently proposed due to many realistic limitations (Fischer et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2024; Tepper et al., 2017). The present thesis proposed that high performance work systems (HPWS) could be a potential solution to deal with abusive supervision in practice. Prior work shows that leadership and human resource management are interdependent in nature, indicating that supervisory behaviours do not operate in a vacuum but manifest within a broader HPWS (e.g., Bartram et al., 2012; Leroy et al., 2018; Tepper, 2007). However, research on how dark-side leadership interacts with HPWS remains void (Leroy et al. 2018). This gap matters because the coexistence of detrimental supervisory behaviour and formal HPWS can generate complex and even paradoxical effects on employee attitudes and performance, while overlooking this intersection obscures how HPWS may inadvertently reinforce, buffer, or even legitimise harmful leadership (Xu et al., 2020). The issue also likewise reflects the optimistic–pessimistic debate surrounding HPWS, which holds that HPWS can either function as a resource-providing system via practices such as autonomy, individual development, and career support (e.g., Jiang et al., 2012; Kilroy et al., 2016; Subramony et al., 2009), or as a demand-intensifying system that elevates workload and exploitation risk (Godard, 2004, 2010; Jensen et al., 2013; Kilroy et al., 2024). Drawing on the stressor–detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015), Leroy et al.'s (2018) leadership–HR fit framework, and the JD–R perspective (Demerouti et al., 2001), the thesis positions HPWS as an organisation-level contextual factor that shapes the resource environment in which abusive supervision unfolds, thereby influencing subordinates' psychological

detachment, and, in turn, their strain. Empirically, the findings indicate that HPWS attenuates the erosion of psychological detachment associated with abusive supervision, thereby reducing strain.

The findings imply that HPWS serves as a potent job resource to counteract the detriments of abusive supervision on employees, rather than the reverse. By explicitly modelling the joint presence of abusive supervision and HPWS, the findings make a important contribution to optimistic–pessimistic HPWS debate by revealing that HPWS significantly buffers the negative association between abusive supervision and psychological detachment and, in turn, reduces strain, a pattern that aligns with the resource-provision perspective. By conferring genuine autonomy and discretion, HPWS expands subordinates' boundary control, and opens alternative influence and support channels outside the supervisory dyad (e.g., Jiang et al., 2012; Kilroy et al., 2016), making psychological detachment from abusive supervision more attainable, which eventually improves subordinates' well-being. Additionally, extensive training and developmental as well as effective performance appraisals could cultivate subordinates' individual work capabilities and efficacy (Aguins & Kraiger, 2009; Arthur et al., 2003), enhancing instrumental personal resources to counteract the demands of abusive supervision. Moreover, with open information sharing, performance management, and fair reward systems, HPWS can effectively reduces the levels of organisational uncertainty experienced and ones perceived job insecurity (e.g., Kilroy et al., 2016; Pfeffer, 1995, 1998), as well as the dependence on leaders (Ehrnrooth et al., 2021), establishing a predictable and supportive atmosphere to weaken the carryover of abusive supervision and facilitate psychological detachment and improved well-being (e.g., emotional exhaustion). By identifying this recovery-based

buffering mechanism, the thesis integrates dark-side leadership (abusive supervision), strategic HRM (HPWS), and occupational health (recovery and strain) into a more coherent explanatory account.

Furthermore, addressing the thesis' core question of how to cope with abusive supervision**,** the results show that HPWS could be an effective way to mitigate the harm of abusive supervision on psychological detachment and well-being (e.g., emotional exhaustion). The findings introduce HPWS as the wider context in which abusive supervision is experienced. Rather than treating abusive supervision as an isolated dyadic phenomenon, the results position HPWS as the broader organisational context that shapes how abusive supervision is experienced and whether it spills over into impaired recovery. Practices such as clearer job design and workload limits, more autonomy and flexible scheduling, fair and transparent procedures, development and voice channels, and access to support resources might help employees switch off after work and alleviate strain, even when they confront abusive leaders. Empirical evidence in the present thesis indicates the benefits of HPWS on employees who confront abusive supervision, particularly regarding their psychological detachment and well-being (e.g., emotional exhaustion).

Compared with the subordinate-focused coping strategies investgiated in the present thesis (e.g., political skill, psychological detachment, performance-promotion attribution, and injury-initiation attribution), organisational-level interventions seem to be more effective. As previously highlighted, this is because employees typically have limited discretion to act under power asymmetries and dependence on supervisors for evaluations and opportunities, and opaque reporting and inconsistent sanctions raise the personal costs of resistance

(Morrison, 2014; Williams et al., 1999). In contrast, HPWS adjust the organisational rules and routines that permit mistreatment, offering a feasible, codifiable route to action that reduces reliance on individual coping (e.g., Jiang et al., 2012; Kilroy et al., 2016). Organisation-wide practices (e.g., HPWS) can be implemented consistently across units, demonstrate leadership resolve, curb retaliation risks, and normalise respectful conduct (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Most importantly, once these policies are deemed mature and empirically validated, they can be implemented directly and at scale. Though flat management is highly regarded all over the world, contemporary organisations in different regions remain predominantly top-down rather than flat (Rajan & Wulf, 2006). Thus, effective control of abusive supervision is likewise most viable through top-down levers (i.e., roganisational level intervenes), such as policy design, formal accountability, monitoring, and leader evaluation criteria, because organisation-level changes alter structural incentives, formal norms, and leader selection/evaluation processes, they are more likely to address root causes and to cascade through routines and symbols in ways that durably shape organisational culture. Therefore, managing abusive supervision is best treated as a system-level responsibility that is enacted from the organisation downward.

In conclusion, subordinates may, to some extent, reduce their initial exposure to abusive supervision, for example, by clarifying expectations, signalling competence, deploying social skills, or enhancing performance that lower the likelihood of becoming a target and thereby receiving better treatment. However, once abuse has occurred, placing the onus on individual coping is both inequitable and ineffective. Power asymmetries, evaluative dependence, and the personal costs of reporting mean individual post-incident tactics seldom safeguard subordinates' well-being or performance in the face of supervisory abuse in

practice. On the other hand, the emphasis should shift to organisational-level interventions, notably HPWS, that codify clear conduct standards, ensure due process, protect against retaliation, and embed monitoring and leader evaluation criteria aligned with respectful management. Such system-level levers are implementable at scale, deliver consistent enforcement across units, and provide resources (e.g., confidential reporting channels and empowerment) that reduce reliance on victims' self-protection. In short, subordinates may help shape the likelihood that supervisory abusive behaviours arise, but mitigating the consequences of abusive supervision requires more organisation-wide design.

5.3 Practical Implication

5.3.1 Subordinate Self-development Secures Better Treatment

It might be contentious to suggest that high performers (e.g., politically skilled employees or those showing outstanding talents and extra-role performance) can avert supervisory abusive behaviours, because such malicious behaviours are inhumane and unacceptable. Ideally, leaders are supposed to offer guidance, patience, and emotional support, thus ensuring justice and equity. In practice, however, complex leadership dynamics and realistic constraints including leaders' performance pressures (e.g., goal assessment), limited budgets, and scarce opportunities often preclude perfectly equitable treatment and ethical leadership. Importantly, in performance-oriented organisational culture, employees who invest in targeted and learnable capabilities tend to receive more constructive supervisory responses and fewer hostile interactions (e.g., broadly better treatment). Beyond political skill and OCB-O, subordinates may further reduce escalation risk by strengthening a small set of core, developable capabilities, such as clear boundary-setting communication, conflict de-

escalation and problem-solving skills, and emotion regulation under pressure, all of which can help stabilise leader–member exchanges and surface concerns earlier. In this manner, equipping employees with such capabilities shifts coping from ad hoc reactions to proactive prevention. Crucially, many of these capabilities is not fixed traits (e.g., political skill), but developable and malleable. Training programs focusing on emotional intelligence, communication skill, and image management can enhance one's political acumen, which is highly recommended in practice. The study suggests cultivating subordinates' individual social capabilities to prevent them from abusive supervision, thus improving workplace effectiveness and overall job satisfaction.

Furthermore, given the empirical findings that subordinate characteristics can reduce abusive supervision, it is advisable to cultivate capabilities suited to contemporary workplaces to enhance employees' work experiences (e.g., Liu & Kilroy, 2025; Walter et al., 2015; Tepper et al., 2011). At its core, abusive supervision is an interactional phenomenon that unfolds within supervisor–subordinate exchanges, shaped by reciprocal behaviours. In practice, brief and practice-intensive interventions that emphasise behavioural rehearsal over didactic delivery should be instrumental. Specifically, through targeted role-plays around high-risk exchanges, anticipatory plans for known triggers, and structured peer-coaching to embed skills, subordinates are better able to forestall and de-escalate negative interaction with leaders, reducing the likelihood of abusive supervision. Additionally, embedding microlearning prompts into daily workflows can further consolidate social skill acquisition, such as interaction journals (documenting requests, talking patterns, and supervisory responses). Moreover, aligning behaviours with supervisors' core criteria (e.g.,

responsiveness, reliability, and solution focus) and auditing them using brief checklists can significantly increases cue consistency and reduces ambiguity in leader–member interactions.

That said, such development should be viewed as a complementary prevention-oriented approach rather than a substitute for leader accountability and system-level safeguards. Instead, the findings suggest equipping subordinates to navigate resource constraints and interactional asymmetries, thereby increasing the likelihood of respectful and decent treatment in practice, echoing the adage *"we cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails"*.

5.3.2 Individual Skills are Insufficient once Abusive Supervision is Present.

Abusive supervision is often veiled by "tough-love" on many occasions in the contemporary workplace. However, based on the empirical findings in the thesis, once abuse is occurring, individual traits and skills rarely suffice. "Tough-love" rationales or "performance-promotion intent" reframing should not constitute primary responses (Tepper, 2000, 2007), as such behaviour is predominantly destructive for both individuals and organisations (Liu et al., 2012; Yu & Duffy, 2021). Likewise, off-job recovery is broadly beneficial for individual well-being, but still cannot neutralise an ongoing hostile source of abusive supervision (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). It implies that, contrary to theoretical discussion, the detrimental effect of abusive supervision is overarching and resistant to remediation in real-world settings, particularly from the perspective of abused subordinates themselves. Prior studies suggested that different individual buffers such as mindfulness, emotion-regulation, and recovery routines could effectively reduce the negative influence of abusive supervision (e.g., Hülsheger et al., 2013; Glomb et al., 2011; Reb et al., 2014; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015), but the effectiveness of these strategies might be conditional and largely constrained once

abusive supervision is ongoing in practice. It is probably because extended exposure to abusive leaders rapidly reinstates strain, power asymmetries limit employees' ability to deploy skills in the moment, and fear of retaliation dampens feedback-seeking or boundary setting. Therefore, it might be beneficial to cultivate these capabilities, for example, through brief and high-repetition mindfulness sessions alongside focused emotion-regulation drills that emphasise real-world application, but treat them as only secondary safeguards that mitigate harm at the margins rather than as primary remedies. Effective remediation requires source control and system supports (e.g., confidential reporting with anti-retaliation guarantees, time-bound fact-finding, and leader accountability in performance systems). In conclusion, while the literature repertoire theoretically supports individual buffers, the practical effects might be really bounded under the real-world constraints.

5.3.3 Configure Human Resource Management to Counteract Abusive Supervision

When implemented with an employee-oriented intent, high-performance work systems (HPWS) can function as a resource-based buffer that mitigates the detrimental influence of abusive supervision on subordinates' ability to psychologically detach from work and, consequently, their well-being (also see, e.g., Bartram et al., 2012; Jiang et al., 2012; Kilroy et al., 2016). Certain human resource management strategies have been criticised in practice, owing to their tendency to impose stricter performance evaluations, higher job demands, intensive work routines, and potentially exploitative strategies (e.g., Godard, 2004, 2010; Jensen et al., 2013; Xu et al., 2020). However, the field evidence of the present thesis indicates that HPWS is, overall, associated with beneficial outcomes, enhancing individual recovery experience and well-being and potentially helping sustain their working experience even under abusive leadership (e.g., Bartram et al., 2012; Xu et al., 2020).

Concretely, to limit potential detriments of negative supervisory behaviours in practice, it is recommended to design and enact specific HPWS, particularly focusing on allowing subordinates' autonomy, setting clear work goals, effective performance appraisal system, fair reward policies, targeted training, and encouraging information sharing. Comparing with individual post-incident coping efforts, system-level interventions could be more effective in buffering harms of abusive supervision because they alter the structures and incentives of the organisational system and atmosphere that initially enable abuse. Such management strategies against supervisory abusive behaviours should be more effective due to the prevalence of top-down management across different regions. This also makes them more feasible to launch and monitor at scale, enabling consistent implementation across units and clearer accountability. When configured this way, HPWS can interrupt the downstream consequences of abusive supervision, limiting its negative influence and supporting an ethically grounded route to maintain subordinate well-being and working experience simultaneously. Therefore, organisations are advised to design and implement targeted HPWS at the organisational level to prevent and remediate potential supervisory abusive behaviours.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although the present thesis utilised two decent nested datasets including one time-lagged field data (e.g., 3 waves) and one cross-sectional large field data from two large Chinese state-owned companies, the design does not permit strong causal inference (Maxwell & Cole, 2007). However, while the temporal separation across three collection points reduces common method bias and the large sample enhances statistical power and precision, such

designs cannot capture the dynamic and reciprocal processes that likely characterise the process of abusive supervision (e.g., Lian et al., 2014; Mawritz et al., 2014; Tepper et al., 2011). Therefore, more fine-grained approaches, such as experience sampling or daily diary methods would allow future studies to examine within-person fluctuations and short-term recovery patterns that are obscured in survey-based field designs (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013; Ohly et al., 2010). Likewise, stronger longitudinal or panel data would facilitate testing causal ordering and feedback loops, for example, helping to disentangle whether abusive supervision precipitates strain or whether already strained subordinates are more likely to perceive their leaders as abusive (Hamaker et al., 2015). Thus, future research should adopt more rigorous longitudinal and multi-source designs to consolidate causal claims.

In addition, the research was conducted within organisations in China, which both strengthens ecological validity and constrains external validity. Embedded in China and more specifically in traditional and hierarchical work systems (e.g., state-owned enterprises and traditional industries), this context is theoretically informative because stronger authority norms, hierarchical control, and higher power distance may dramatically shape the prevalence, enactment, and tolerance of abusive supervision, as well as employees' discretion to voice concerns, resist, or contest supervisory treatment (Aycan et al., 2000; Farh et al., 2007; House et al., 2004). Moreover, the thesis primarily draws on organisational behaviour and occupational health psychology frameworks that are largely developed in the context of Western research traditions. While these theories are widely applied internationally including in China (e.g., Liang et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2020; Yu & Duffy, 2021), their underlying assumptions (e.g., Western culture and norms) warrant explicit consideration when interpreting the findings in the Eastern organisational context. As

abusive supervision appears comparatively prevalent in some Chinese workplace contexts (Liang et al., 2016; Mackey et al., 2017), this particular setting offers a valuable lens for understanding how abuse supevision unfolds under strong structural constraints, implying that effective post hoc mitigation may depend less on individual-level coping and more on system-level safeguards (e.g., reporting channels and protection against retaliation; Tepper et al., 2017).

However, culture, industry, and governance are intertwined here, so the magnitude and sometimes even the direction of effects may not generalize to lower power distance or more decentralized Western context. For instance, in high power distance contexts where harsh supervision and malevolent intent may be more readily presumed, injury-initiation attribution may offer limited incremental explanatory value (e.g., Study 2) because intent-related sensemaking is relatively uniform (Liu et al., 2012; Yu & Duffy, 2021). By contrast, in lower power-distance contexts, abusive intent may be more ambiguous and socially contestable, potentially increasing variance in injury-initiation sensemaking and thus making such attributions more likely to operate as meaningful moderators (e.g., Liu et al., 2012; Yu & Duffy, 2021). Accordingly, future research would benefit from replicating the models tested in the present thesis across multiple regions and cultures, and from explicitly testing culturally patterned value orientations (e.g., power distance, egalitarianism, and confucianism) and emic relational constructs (e.g., face/reputation, harmony, and relational obligations) as potential boundary conditions (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; House et al., 2004; Hwang, 1987).

Another limitation concerns the measurement, which might be general and sharp methodological issue regarding abusive supervision research. For the current empirical studies, the reliance on single-source evaluations of the focal variables, as well as the measurement of abusive supervision might be subjective and bias (Fischer et al., 2021). As with much research in this domain, the focal construct was assessed exclusively through subordinates' perceptions. Though this approach aligns with the theoretical argument that abusive supervision is inherently a subjective experience defined by employees' perception of hostile supervisory behaviour, it raises concerns about potential inaccuracy and common method variance in the measurement (Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper, 2000). For example, subordinates may interpret supervisory actions differently based on personality traits, mood states, or prior experiences, which may inflate or distort observed relationships. Moreover, reliance on subordinates' perceptions alone may obscure discrepancies between leaders' intentions, abusive behaviours per ce, and targets' experiences, thereby invalidating conclusions about the nature and impact of supervisory abusive behaviour (e.g., Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper et al., 2017). Broader approaches to evaluation, such as incorporating leader self-reports, coworker ratings, or third-party observations would help triangulate perspectives and address concerns about perceptual subjectivity. Likewise, experimental or observational methods could capture the behavioural manifestations of supervisory hostility more directly and purely (Antonakis et al., 2010). Future research could therefore move beyond single-source measurement to multi-informant or mixed-method designs, enhancing construct validity and yielding a more comprehensive understanding of abusive supervision. Moreover, this remains a substantial challenge in the study of abusive supervision because scholars try to approach and address supervisory abusive behaviours according to the

perceptions of subordinates, causing not only bias but distortions. Future research should continue developing and validating multi-informant and behavioural measures, and simultaneously consider the innovation of the overall methodology of abusive supervision research.

Last but not least, a further limitation concerns the gap between theorised coping strategies and their real-world effectiveness (Fischer et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2024; Tepper et al., 2017). Many individual-focused tactics (e.g., mindfulness, cognitive reappraisal, recovery experience, and boundary management) show promise in theory and short studies, yet their impact in ongoing abusive relationships might be modest, fragile, or short-lived. Practical issues including implementation barriers (time and training demands), power asymmetries, fear of retaliation, and hierarchical norms can blunt benefits and risk inadvertent victim-blaming by shifting responsibility to targets rather than addressing the source (e.g., abusive leaders). In this regard, research on developing coping strategies must be anchored in real work settings and evaluated for feasibility, rather than just theoretical efficacy. Future studies should carefully combine theory with pragmatic designs. For instance, field experiments or stepped-wedge trials embedded in organisations and diary-based or micro-interventions that can track day-to-day dynamics are encouraged. To ensure relevance and validity of coping strategies, scholars and practitioners should not only assess implementation outcomes but also feasibility, acceptability, fidelity, and cost. Furthermore, beyond self-reported outcomes and information, it is important to account for contextual constraints (anti-retaliation safeguards, workload, power relations) alongside objective indicators (turnover, absence, health-service use). For instance, collaborating with organisations to evaluate integrated configurations that combine individual tactics with

system-level safeguards (e.g., confidential reporting, no-contact directives, leader monitoring) can reveal which strategies are practical and sustainable in real-world settings.

5.5 Conclusion

This thesis, integrating three empirical studies with the cutting-edge extant literature, shows that subordinate characteristics can directly attenuate the perception of abusive supervision in the first place, but offer scant efficacy once abuse is underway. Furthermore, well-designed human resource practices (e.g., HPWS) could function as system-level and post incident safeguards that curb the downstream harms of abusive supervision, which could be a promising research stream in the future. From the perspective of subordinates, post-incident and individual "self-rescue" strategies are unlikely to suffice to deal with supervisory abusive behaviours in the modern workplace. While it is ethically contentious to tether fair treatment to subordinates' superior performance and skills, the evidence indeed reflects the pragmatic realities of contemporary organisations, as well as the prevailing logics of social life. The overarching implication is clear: prevention of abusive supervision must take primacy by any possible means, and organisations should cultivate a comprehensive understanding of abusive supervision to design and deploy mechanisms that inhibit its effects when it occurs.

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Appendix A: Ethical Approval for Research

Title: Data Collection in a company for Social Science Learning

REAMs No: 4447

Dear Teng Liu,

Your application has been reviewed by the relevant Research Ethics Committee (REC) and we are pleased to inform you that the above project has been approved.

Please note that any documents submitted for GDPR purposes in association with your ethics application are approved by the REC from an ethical perspective only (GDPR compliance is assumed, as per your uploaded letter of approval from the DPO if applicable).

It is the responsibility of the researcher/research team to ensure that, if applicable, all aspects of the study are executed in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Health Research Regulations, Data Protection Act 2018, particularly regarding the storage and destruction of data arising from the research, and adhere to any relevant Health & Safety regulations.

Please note the reporting requirements outlined, in particular the need for:

- An immediate report of any serious or unexpected adverse event should be sent immediately to your REC via email. The Procedures for Reporting Adverse Events are outlined in the application. The Adverse Event form are available here.
- Any other unforeseen events should also be reported using this form and sent to your REC via email. The Adverse Event form are available here.
- An end of project report is due one year from the end of project date. The form is available here. This should be sent to your REC via email.
- If the data collection period is longer than 1 year, an annual report should be submitted. The form is available here. This should be sent to your REC via email.

You, and your research team (where applicable), are responsible for conducting the research strictly in the manner outlined in your application and supporting documentation, and in compliance with it. Proposed changes or amendments to the approved study must be submitted to the REC for approval in advance of any changes or amendments being implemented. In the event that the changes or amendments are significant, the REC may require a new submission. This ethical approval expires with the end dates of the project as stated in the application.

If you have any queries regarding this decision, please contact the Chair of your REC.

We wish you all the very best with your research project.

Kind Regards,

The REC

NB. If your study is to be conducted outside TCD, e.g. in a hospital site, please note that Trinity College REC approval does not of itself entitle you to conduct research in an external site. In this regard, the onus is upon you - the researcher, to ensure that all permissions have been obtained, and that any other requirements of the study site have been satisfied

NB. If your study involves a trial of medicinal products or medical devices, apps on humans you must provide a copy of your Clinical Trial Sponsorship from TCD - indicating that you have the appropriate trial insurance and sponsor oversight".

Appendix B: Sample Questionnaire of Study 1

Variable Name: Political Skill (18 items)

Source (full reference):

Ferris, G. R., Treadway, D. C., Kolodinsky, R. W., Hochwarter, W. A., Kacmar, C. J., Douglas, C., & Frink, D. D. (2005). Development and validation of the political skill inventory. Journal of management, 31(1), 126-152

Instructions:

Using the following 6 point-scale, please place the number on the blank be for each item that best Instructions: describes how much you agree with each statement about yourself.

1 = strongly disagree,

2 = disagree,

3 = slightly disagree,

4 = slightly agree,

5 = agree,

6 = strongly agree.

#	Item	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	I spend a lot of time and effort at work networking with others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	I am good at building relationships with influential people at work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	I have developed a large network of colleagues and associates at work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	whom I can call on for support when I really need to get things done.						
4	At work, I know a lot of important people and am well connected.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	I spend a lot of time at work developing connections with others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	I am good at using my connections and network to make things happen at work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	I understand people very well.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	I have good intuition or savvy about how to present myself to others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	I always seem to instinctively know the right things to say or do to influence others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	I pay close attention to people's facial expressions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	When communicating with others, I try to be genuine in what I say and do.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13	It is important that people believe I am sincere in what I say and do.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14	I try to show a genuine interest in other people.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15	I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16	I am able to communicate easily and effectively with others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17	It is easy for me to develop good rapport with most people.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18	I am good at getting people to like me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Variable Name: Task Peformance (In-role Performance, 4 items)

Source (full reference):

Williams, L. J., & Anderson, S. E. (1991). Job satisfaction and organizational commitment as predictors of organizational citizenship and in-role behaviors. *Journal of Management, 17*(3), 601–617. https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639101700305

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

1 = strongly disagree

2 = disagree

3 = slightly disagree

4 = slightly agree

5 = agree

6 = strongly agree

#	**Item**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
1	I fulfill the responsibilities specified in his/her job description.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	I perform the tasks that are expected as part of the job.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	I meets performance expectations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	I adequately completes responsibilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Variable Name: OCBs (extra-role performance, 6 items)

Source (full reference):

Farh, J. L., Earley, P. C., & Lin, S. C. (1997). Impetus for action: A cultural analysis of justice and organizational citizenship behavior in Chinese society. Administrative science quarterly, 421-444.

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

1 = strongly disagree

2 = disagree

3 = slightly disagree

4 = slightly agree

5 = agree

6 = strongly agree

#	**Item**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
1	I initiate assistance to co-workers who have a heavy workload.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	I help new employees adapt to their work environment.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	I am willing to offer assistance to co-workers to solve work-related problems.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	I actively raise suggestions to improve work procedures or processes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	I actively bring forward suggestions that may help the organization run more efficiently or effectively.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	I am willing to stand up to protect the reputation of the company.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Variable Name: Abusive Supervision (15 items)

Source (full reference): Tepper, B. J. (2000). Consequences of abusive supervision. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(2), 178-190.

The items were prefaced with the statement, "Direct supervisor…" (who you directly report to). Respondents used a five-point response scale where

1 was "I cannot remember him/her ever using this behaviour with me,"

2 was "He/she very seldom uses this behaviour with me",

3 was "He/she occasionally uses this behaviour with me,"

4 was "He/she uses this behaviour moderately often with me,"

5 was “He/she uses this behaviour very often with me.”

#	Item	1	2	3	4	5
1	My supervisor ridicules me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	My supervisor tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	My supervisor gives me the silent treatment.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	My supervisor puts me down in front of others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	My supervisor invades my privacy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	My supervisor reminds me of my past mistakes and failures.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	My supervisor doesn't give me credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	My supervisor blames me to save themselves from embarrassment.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	My supervisor breaks promises they make.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	My supervisor expresses anger at me when angry for another reason.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	My supervisor makes negative comments about me to others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	My supervisor is rude to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13	My supervisor does not allow me to interact with my coworkers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14	My supervisor tells me I’m incompetent.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15	My supervisor lies to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix C: Sample Questionnaire of Study 2

Variable Name: Abusive Supervision (15 items)

Source (full reference): Tepper, B. J. (2000). Consequences of abusive supervision. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(2), 178-190.

The items were prefaced with the statement, "Direct supervisor…" (who you directly report to). Respondents used a five-point response scale where

1 was "I cannot remember him/her ever using this behaviour with me,"

2 was "He/she very seldom uses this behaviour with me",

3 was "He/she occasionally uses this behaviour with me,"

4 was "He/she uses this behaviour moderately often with me,"

5 was "He/she uses this behaviour very often with me."

#	**Item**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1	My supervisor ridicules me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	My supervisor tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	My supervisor gives me the silent treatment.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	My supervisor puts me down in front of others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	My supervisor invades my privacy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	My supervisor reminds me of my past mistakes and failures.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	My supervisor doesn't give me credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	My supervisor blames me to save themselves from embarrassment.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	My supervisor breaks promises they make.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	My supervisor expresses anger at me when angry for another reason.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	My supervisor makes negative comments about me to others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

12	My supervisor is rude to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13	My supervisor does not allow me to interact with my coworkers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14	My supervisor tells me I'm incompetent.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15	My supervisor lies to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Variable Name: Attributions of Abusive Supervision

(Performance promotion & Injury Initiation; 10 items)

Source (full reference):

Liu, D., Liao, H., & Loi, R. (2012). The dark side of leadership: A three-level investigation of the cascading effect of abusive supervision on employee creativity. *Academy of management journal, 55*(5), 1187-1212.

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

1 = strongly disagree

2 = disagree

3 = slightly disagree

4 = slightly agree

5 = agree

6 = strongly agree

Survey Items:

The survey read as follows: "Abusive supervision means the sustained display of hostile, verbal and non- verbal behaviors, excluding physical contact. To what extent, do you agree that the following may be the reason for or cause of your supervisor's behaviors toward you, which could be considered abusive?"

#	Item	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Desire to elicit high performance from me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Desire to send me messages that mistakes will not be tolerated.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Desire to alert me of my mistakes and problems.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Desire to push me to work harder.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	Desire to stimulate me to meet my performance goals.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

#	Item	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Desire to cause injury to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Desire to hurt my feelings.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Desire to harm my reputation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Desire to make me feel bad about myself.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	Desire to sabotage me at work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Variable Name: Burnout (Emotional Exhaustion & Depersonalization, 10 items)

Source (full reference):

Schaufeli W.B., Leiter M.P., Maslach C., Jackson S.E. (1996) The Maslach Burnout

Maslach, C., Jackson, S. E., & Leiter, M. P. (1996). Maslach burnout inventory manual: MBI. *Consulting Psychologists Press.*

According to your situation, please indicate the frequency you experience the following.

0 = Never
1 = a few times past months or less
2 = once a month or less
3 = a few times a month
4 = once a week
5 = a few times a week
6 = every day

#	**Item**	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
1	I feel emotionally drained from my work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	I feel used up at the end of the workday	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	I feel tired when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Working all day is really a strain for me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	I feel burned out from my work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	I just want to do my job and not be bothered	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	I have become less interested in my work since I started this job	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	I have become less enthusiastic about my work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	I have become more cynical about whether my work contributes anything	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	I doubt the significance of my work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix D: Sample Questionnaire of Study 3

Variable Name: High-Performance Working Systems (HPWS, 15 items)

Source (full reference): Jensen, J. M., Patel, P. C., & Messersmith, J. G. (2013). High-performance work systems and job control: Consequences for anxiety, role overload, and turnover intentions. *Journal of Management*, 39(6), 1699-1724.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your company? (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree)

1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = neither agree nor disagree
4 = agree
5 = strongly agree

#	Item	1	2	3	4	5
1	I am provided with sufficient opportunities for training and development.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	I receive the training I need to do my job.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	This company keeps me informed about business issues and about how well it's doing.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	There is a clear status difference between management and staff in this company.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	Team working is strongly encouraged in our company.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	A rigorous selection process is used to select new recruits.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	Management involve people when they make decisions that affect them.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	Communication within this company is good.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	Communication between departments in my company is good.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	I feel my job is secure.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

11	The rewards I receive are directly related to my performance at work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	Career management is given a high priority in this company	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13	I have the opportunities I want to be promoted.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14	The appraisal system provides me with an accurate assessment of my strengths and weaknesses.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15	I am given meaningful feedback regarding my performance at least once a year.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Variable Name: Abusive Supervision (15 items)

Source (full reference): Tepper, B. J. (2000). Consequences of abusive supervision. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(2), 178-190.

The items were prefaced with the statement, "Direct supervisor…" (who you directly report to). Respondents used a five-point response scale where

1 was "I cannot remember him/her ever using this behaviour with me,"
2 was "He/she very seldom uses this behaviour with me",
3 was "He/she occasionally uses this behaviour with me,"
4 was "He/she uses this behaviour moderately often with me,"
5 was "He/she uses this behaviour very often with me."

#	**Item**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1	My supervisor ridicules me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	My supervisor tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	My supervisor gives me the silent treatment.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4	My supervisor puts me down in front of others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	My supervisor invades my privacy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	My supervisor reminds me of my past mistakes and failures.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	My supervisor doesn't give me credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	My supervisor blames me to save themselves from embarrassment.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	My supervisor breaks promises they make.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	My supervisor expresses anger at me when angry for another reason.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	My supervisor makes negative comments about me to others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	My supervisor is rude to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13	My supervisor does not allow me to interact with my coworkers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14	My supervisor tells me I’m incompetent.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15	My supervisor lies to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Variable Name: Strain (8 items)

Source (full reference): Mohr, G., Müller, A., Rigotti, T., Aycan, Z., & Tschan, F. (2006). *The assessment of psychological strain in work contexts. European Journal of Psychological Assessment, 22(3), 198-206.*

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = neither agree nor disagree
4 = agree
5 = strongly agree

#	Item	1	2	3	4	5
1	I have difficulty relaxing after work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Even at home I often think of my problems at work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	I get grumpy when others approach me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Even on my vacations I think about my problems at work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	From time to time I feel like a bundle of nerves.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	I anger quickly.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	I get irritated easily, although I don't want this to happen.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	When I come home tired after work, I feel rather irritable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Variable Name: Psychological Detachment (4 items)

Source (full reference): Sonnentag, S., & Fritz, C. (2007). The Recovery Experience Questionnaire: development and validation of a measure for assessing recuperation and unwinding from work. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *12*(3), 204.

Please fill in the following items with respect to your free evenings after work

1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = neither agree nor disagree
4 = agree
5 = strongly agree

#	**Item**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1	During time after work, I forget about work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	During time after work, I don't think about work at all.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	During time after work, I distance myself from my work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	During time after work, I get a break from the demands of work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐