Article

Exploring Influence Mechanism of Abusive Supervision on Subordinates' Work Incivility: A Proposed Framework

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Abstract

The prevalence of abusive supervision in the organisations and severe consequences associated with it has compelled researchers to explore the various dynamics of this phenomenon. This study exemplifies the conditions under which subordinates respond to abusive behaviours of their supervisors. Based on the existing literature and theoretical lenses, we postulate the detrimental effects of abusive supervision combined with the perception of injustice and politics in an organisation on deviance behaviours of the subordinates. The proposed framework suggests abusive supervision triggers work incivility among subordinates via the creation of an unjust and politically charged work environment. Besides, we find work incivility to be contingent on the political skill; subordinates with high political skill do not resort to work incivility as a response to abusive supervision of managers, rather, they rely on their political skills to survive in a toxic work environment. The proposed framework is primarily based on two theoretical foundations—social exchange theory and uncertainty management theory.

Keywords

Abusive supervision, perception of organisational politics, organisational injustice, work incivility, social exchange theory, uncertainty management theory.

Leadership is defined as the ability to persuade a group of individuals towards the achievement of a shared goal (Yukl, 2010). A plethora of research has been done examining the effect of leadership on fostering positive employee work attitudes and behaviours that enhance organisational effectiveness (Bass, 1990; Yukl, 2010). However, considerable numbers of studies have suggested the exhibition of misbehaviour by leaders towards their subordinates, and, in recent time, this phenomenon has garnered the attention of both researchers and practitioners.

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Today's workplace can be characterised as taxing and harsh, with abusive supervision and employees engaging in deceitful and deviant work behaviour (Fisher, 2005). A major concern about aggressive behaviour is its negative impact on organisations and employees. For instance, prior studies have shown a negative influence of workplace aggression on employee morale, psychological health and productive behaviour (Cortina et al., 2001; Tepper, 2000). These behaviours erode the organisational capital and production, and increases cost to the company by increasing injury compensation (Detert & Burris, 2007). Given the destructive consequences of abusive supervision and aggressive behaviour on organisations and employees, in the past two decades, studies exploring the 'dark or destructive side of leadership' (Griffin & O'Leary-Kelly, 2004) especially abusive supervision has gained the momentum (Tepper, 2000, 2007).

Abusive supervision has been defined as 'subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviours, excluding physical contact' (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Abusive behaviours include terrorising by use of threats of job loss, hiding needed information, aggressive eye contact, silent treatment and humiliating or ridiculing someone in front of others (Tepper, 2000).

The focus of our study is on the effect of abusive supervision on work incivility, which has been studied by a significant number of researchers and still intriguing (Cortina et al., 2001; Griffin & O'Leary-Kelly, 2004). Incivility refers to 'milder deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect' (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 457). Work incivility is associated with many negative consequences such as psychological distress, damaged physical health, low job satisfaction, reduced task performance and decreased intention to stay with an organisation (Cortina et al., 2001).

Although researchers have suggested that both leadership and organisational politics are important antecedents of various organisational outcomes (e.g., formal and informal performance, organisational citizenship behaviours, affective commitment turnover intension etc.), hardly any study has integrated abusive supervision and perception of organisational politics (POP) in a model to examine the mechanism through which abusive supervision and organisational politics influence work incivility of followers.

Review of Literature

Abusive Supervision

The notion of abusive supervision is derived from the tyrannical boss whose demeanour is full of contempt and who constantly asserts his or her power over those reporting to him or her (Ashforth, 1994). Enough anecdotal and research evidence suggests abusive supervision is pervasive and has implications for subordinates' performance and well-being (see Mackey et al., 2017; Tepper et al., 2017, for reviews). When referring to such extreme subordinate targeted behaviour as public humiliation and uncontrolled rage, researchers have used several terms in the last 20 years, including petty tyranny social undermining, strategic bullying or despotic leadership (Tepper et al., 2017).

The key elements of Tepper's (2000) definition of abusive supervision are as follows: (a) It is subjective; it is based on the perception of an employee, of being abused by the supervisor; hence, each employee will perceive supervisor differently; (b) the supervisor's hostile behaviour towards targets is a sustained feature of his or her repertoire; and (c) it is a purposeful exhibition of mistreatment; the supervisor indulges in wilful malevolent behaviour to accomplish a certain objective (Tepper, 2007).

The manifestation of abusive supervision in cultures with high power distance and collectivism is ordinary (Zhang & Liao, 2015). It is often seen as a necessary evil, where leaders appeal to abrasive behaviours, but with constructive purposes, such as improvising employee skills or attaining a specific performance level (Margolis & Molinsky, 2008). Such behaviour is often subject to being seen as 'tough love' than supervisory abuse (Tepper et al., 2017). This distinction of abusive supervision behaviour as being malicious and cruel or tough love reiterates the subjectivity associated with perceptions of supervisory abusiveness: 'The same individual could view a supervisor's behaviour as abusive in one context and as non-abusive in another context, and two subordinates could differ in their evaluations of the same supervisor's behaviour' (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Integrating both the origins of abusive supervision construct and a recent multitude of theories and conceptualisations, abusive supervision originates as perceptions of supervisory discrimination, evolving to incorporate subjective meanings and social exchange processes shared by subordinates and supervisors overtime (Mackey et al., 2017).

Antecedents of Abusive Supervision

A substantial literature on antecedents of abusive supervision includes studies examining supervisor-level factors, such as supervisors' own experience of abusive supervision from their higher-level managers (Mawritz et al., 2014), supervisors' perception of injustice (Aryee et al., 2007), workplace stress (Burton et al., 2012), history of family undermining (Kiewitz et al., 2012) and perceived deep-level dissimilarity with subordinates (Tepper et al., 2011). Also, the literature does not exclude the probability of reverse causation and reciprocal relationship (Zhang & Liao, 2015). Theoretically and statistically, there is every possibility that abusive supervision is caused by callous employee behaviour (Lian et al., 2014). The subject's vast applicability and vivid influences over subordinate–supervisor relationship and organisations in general make this topic intriguing enough to garner much attention.

Another stream of studies exploring the antecedents of abusive supervision focused on subordinate-level factors. Martinko et al. (2012) observed that the perception of abusive supervision was the result of hostile attribution styles of subordinates. Thus, subordinates with tendencies to blame others for their failures rated their supervisors as abusive. These studies confirmed the impact of individual difference on the perception of abusive supervision. Tepper et al. (2011) argued perceived deep-level dissimilarity in terms of attitudes, values and personality and relational conflict with subordinates resulted in abusive behaviour from supervisors. The relationship was moderated by supervisor perception of subordinate's performance. Supervisors display abusive behaviour against subordinates who are perceived as a poor performer and are different from the supervisor at deep levels of values and personality.

Consequences of Abusive Supervision

Experiences of abusive supervision have been linked with a broad range of dysfunctional outcomes at multilevel, be it organisational, team or individual (Tepper et al., 2017). Of the majority of the research done on examining the effects of abusive supervision on various aspects of the organisational outcome, some of them are psychological distress (Restubog et al., 2011; Tepper, 2000, 2007), job performance (Neves, 2014), followers' creativity (Liu et al., 2012), job frustration and deviant behaviour (Avey et al., 2015; Mawritz et al., 2014), psychological withdrawal (Mawritz et al., 2014), feedback avoidance (Whitman et al., 2009), aggression (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2012), turnover intention (Greenbaum et al., 2013) and workplace deviance (Lian et al., 2014).

Bleak evidence, on the contrary, also exists, embracing the idea of abusive supervision being productive when balanced adequately (Tepper, 2016). However, seldom empirical evidence exists suggesting an improvement in outcome with an increase in abusive supervision (Zhang & Liu, 2018). A rare study in the Asian context proves an inverted U-shaped relationship between employee creativity

and abusive supervision, claiming creativity is at a maximum when abusive supervision is moderate, neither too low nor too high (Lee et al., 2013). The authors explain that supervisors often engage in despotic leadership or tough love in a performance-oriented work environment to boost performance. Employees' attributions of supervisor's motive for fair/unfair treatment influences their trust and positive affect towards the supervisor, which has shown significant positive effects in attaining specific goals and improving job performance (Matta et al., 2020). However, in the long run, excessive abusive supervision will lead to emotional exhaustion and harm creativity and success of the organisation (Lee et al., 2013).

In the long run, abusive supervision results in a reduction in job and life satisfaction, organisational commitment, organisational citizenship behaviour and job performance (Tepper, 2000). Abusive supervision classifies as a work stressor and accords with workplace victimisation (Nandkeolyar et al., 2014). As a chronic source of stress (Nandkeolyar et al., 2014), abusive supervision not only impacts employees' well-being drastically, causing insomnia (Rafferty et al., 2010), depression (Tepper et al., 2006), alcoholism and other unhealthy symptoms, but also creates a 'socially noxious environment' (Zhang & Liao, 2015, p. 963).

Work Incivility

Workplace incivility is a low-intensity behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm others, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviour includes rude, discourteous, disrespect behaviour for others (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Workplace incivility is characterised by disrespect, condescension, degradation and so forth. Work incivility is different from the other forms of counterproductive behaviours and interpersonal aggression that refers to behaviours committed to harm others with unambiguous intent (Neuman & Baron, 2005). Workplace incivility is milder than bullying or deviant behaviour (Pearson et al., 2000). Uncivil behaviour includes verbal (e.g., gossiping about a co-worker and supervisor) or non-verbal (e.g., ignoring supervisor and co-workers) and active (e.g., theft) or passive (e.g., failing to inform a co-worker about an important meeting) behaviours (Martin & Hine, 2005).

Incivility is defined as a low-intensity deviant behaviour; still, it violates the norms of the organisations, which are meant to facilitate cooperative and productive interactions among employees (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Many rules that facilitate such interactions among employees are unwritten (Pearson et al., 2000). Pearson et al. (2000) indicated that work incivility is a potential spiral effect that occurs in response to negative treatment from one party that is reciprocated by another party, resulting into a 'tit-for-tat' exchange of increasingly uncivil actions.

Though incivility is a mild form of deviant behaviour, it has the potential of snowballing into a huge problem for the organisation (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). If workplace incivility is not managed appropriately, it will encourage employees to ruminate about and devote more cognitive resources to negative emotions, which triggers violent thoughts that culminate in workplace violence (Spector et al., 2006) and damage individual psychosomatic functioning (Cortina et al., 2001).

Work incivility has many negative consequences, such as psychological strain, reduced job satisfaction (Cortina et al., 2001), job-related strain (Fox et al., 2001), decreased commitment (Pearson et al., 2000), sexual aggression and feeling of victimisation (Lim & Cortina, 2005), decreased citizenship behaviour (Porath & Erez, 2007), as well as increased absenteeism, laziness (Everton et al., 2007), turnover intention (Lim & Teo, 2009) and deviance (Everton et al., 2007; Porath & Erez, 2007).

We further explain work incivility when triggered by abusive behaviours of the supervisor in an unjust and politically charged work environment.

Theoretical Background and Proposition Development

In this study, we have explored the mechanism of influence of abusive supervision on work incivility of the subordinates. Based on the existing literature of abusive supervision, work incivility, organisational justice, POP and theoretical frameworks of social exchange theory (SET) and uncertainty management theory (UMT), we have proposed a conceptual framework. We include POP and organisations injustice (procedural, distributive and interactional) as mediators explaining the effect of abusive supervision on work incivility of subordinates.

Abusive Supervision and Subordinates' Perception of Organisational Justice

In this study, we build on the stream of literature focusing on the influence of abusive supervision on the subordinates 'perception of organisational justice' (distributive, interactional and procedural justice) (Aryee et al., 2007; Tepper et al., 2006). Injustice has been considered as an important stressor or work-related environmental factor that influences the health and well-being of individuals at the workplace (Hurrell et al., 1998). Unfair treatment represents a threat to continued well-being (Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 2011).

Drawing on Greenberg's (1990, 1993) and Colquitt's (2001) conceptual work on organisational justice, differentiating four types of justice has gained academic support. Distributive justice is related to the perceived fairness of the outcome received by an individual from a social exchange relationship (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). The individual assesses the output (outcomes) and input (their contributions) and then compares it with other person or referent standard to determine the fairness of outcome; most individuals and organisations attempt to activate the use of allocation rules to ensure fairness in distribution (Colquitt et al., 2001). Procedural justice refers to fairness related to the process used to arrive at the outcome (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). Interactional justice is divided into two sub-dimensions—interpersonal and informational justice, referring to the quality of the interpersonal treatment people receive when procedures are implemented (Colquitt, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001; Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). While interpersonal justice refers to the politeness, dignity and respect in communication, informational justice is the honesty and truthfulness in explanation of actions and aspects of processes (Colquitt et al., 2001). Any injustice on account of distributive, procedural, interpersonal or informational is associated with individual and organisational deviance (Khattak et al., 2020; Rice et al., 2020).

In alignment with the recent trends in justice literature (Colquitt, 2012), we first integrate interpersonal and informational justice to their higher dimension of interactional justice (Khattak et al., 2020). We also view 'organisational justice' as a higher-order construct, where each of the three dimensions (distributive, interactional and procedural) serve as different manifestations or realisations of the overall organisational justice construct. Consistent with the latent construct, conceptualisation of organisational justice is the 'fairness heuristic', where newcomers in an organisation interpret the first encountered justice-relevant information to form general fairness impressions (Lind, 2001). The fairness heuristic is merely a manifestation of judgements of distributive, interpersonal, informational or procedural justice, further informing cooperation or deviance of the newcomer (Colquitt, 2012; Lind, 2001). Therefore, we have aggregated these types of justices (distributive, procedural and interactional) and yet acknowledge their differential manifestations in our model.

Invoking SET and organisational justice (Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 2011), we suggest individuals respond to an unfair relationship with negative emotional states that are eliminated once they

restore equity. Therefore, any ill-treatment provokes a negative affective response (rudeness, discourteous behaviours) among individuals, and they are motivated to adopt such behaviours that will help them in restoring justice (Greenberg, 1990). Abusive supervision initiates an unfair relationship, and therefore, we expect a positive relationship between abusive supervision and subordinate perception of injustice.

Hoobler and Hu (2013) found interactional injustice leads to supervisors' negative affect (subjective distress and aversive mood), which in turn instigates abusive supervision. They further confirmed abusive supervision resulted in subordinate's negative affect, which in turn resulted in work–family conflict. The trickle-down model argues abusive supervision does not occur in a vacuum. The supervisor who experiences injustice responds to organisational events or norms in 'kick-the-dog' (Restubog et al., 2011) or trickle-down fashion. They transfer the aggression on those whom they have power in the organisation—their subordinates—which leads to further increase in subordinate's perceived interactional, procedural (Aryee et al., 2007) and distributive injustice (Khattak et al., 2020).

Abusive Supervision, Subordinates' Perception of Organisational Injustice and Organisational Politics

Building on the extant literature examining the negative consequences associated with organisational injustice and drawing on UMT, we attempt to connect the un-researched relationship between organisational injustice and POP when triggered by abusive supervision.

Distributed justice is grounded in Adam's (1965) equity theory, which suggests individual subordinates assess distributive justice by comparing his/her perceived input–output ratio with that of referent other. The presence of any inequity results in a feeling of unfairness experienced by both the parties. This feeling of unfairness motivates individuals to react behaviourally or psychologically (Greenberg, 1990). Therefore, distribute injustice was related to many work-related outcomes, such as lower pay satisfaction, job satisfaction, organisational commitment and trust in the organisation (see Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001, for review).

Procedural injustices result in a desire to retaliate against the one who is responsible for the procedural unjust (or unfavourable situation) (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001; Greenberg, 2011). Previous studies have shown that negative emotional states emerging from procedural injustice may be vented against convenient targets (Fitness, 2000). Injustice has been connected to reduced self-efficacy and depression (Tepper et al., 2001). Feeling of depression is associated with powerlessness that can motivate deviant and aggressive behaviour (Bennett, 1998). Tepper et al. (2001) confirmed the mediating role of supervisor depression between procedural injustice and abusive behaviour. Therefore, it can be construed that injustice results in negative emotional states that are associated with powerlessness, which further triggers deviant behaviours in order to gain equity.

Interactional justice refers to the degree to which employees perceive that they are treated with respect and dignity (Colquitt et al., 2001). Employees experiencing supervisor's hostility and disrespect feel unwelcomed, and this exclusionary experience ultimately reduces organisational citizenship behaviour and increases turnover intentions (Rice et al., 2020). Drawing on SET, prior studies have indicated that interaction injustice is associated with supervisor-directed workplace aggression (Khattak et al., 2020; Neuman & Baron, 2005). Moreover, employees experiencing aggression and disrespect will be motivated to resolve this injustice.

The UMT (Lind & van den Bos, 2002) enlightens the underlying motive of employees to retaliate in an attempt to gain equity. The theory suggests coping with uncertainties in a social relationship is the biggest challenge for any individual, as uncertainties reduce the sense of self (van Knippenberg & Hogg,

2003). In these uncertainties, one must either manage it cognitively (van den Bos & Lind, 2002) or tolerate it. In a work environment where individuals feel a loss of self-control due to interactional, distributive and procedural injustice, high levels of perceived uncertainty exist. These uncertainties motivate individuals to behave negatively against the organisation (Lind & van den Bos, 2002).

Uncertainty is a major antecedent of POP (Ferris et al., 2007). These uncertainties in the work environment hint at pervasive politics in the organisation. POP is an individual's subjective evaluation of the degree to which the work environment is characterised as self-serving of various individuals and groups, or inimical or at the expense of individuals or group (Harrell-Cook et al., 1999). In other words, organisational members' perception regarding the level of politics prevalent in their organisations further leads to stress, burnout, counterproductive work behaviours and even turnover intentions (Chang et al., 2009; Meisler et al., 2019). Ferris and Kacmar (1992) argued perception about a work environment is influenced by individuals own cognitive evaluation of the environment. The work environment will be viewed as influenced by politics when the decision-making process is unjust, and negligence of formal rules and regulations prevails (Kacmar et al., 2013).

In such a case, of organisational injustice coupled with abusive supervision, work environment is perceived as politically charged. Abusive behaviours of the supervisor signals absence of fairness and justice in treatment in the organisation and subordinates perceive work environment as unjust (Colquitt et al., 2001) and politically charged (Khattak et al., 2020). Leaders who might have been rewarded in the past for abusive and political behaviour (non-sanctioned actions) or have witnessed others being rewarded consider aggressive, unjust and political behaviours as acceptable and reinforce those behaviours at the workplace by creating a political work environment. At times, they use it strategically, that is, using their hostility and political skill in situations where it is deemed appropriate and at other times they can be impulsive and neurotic (Rice et al., 2020). Both leaders and subordinates learn political tactics to further their self-serving interests, either directly or vicariously in an environment that promotes hostility and politics (Bandura & Walters, 1977).

We have already discussed the mediating role of organisational injustice between abusive supervision and various organisational outcomes (Aryee et al., 2007; Rafferty et al., 2010; Tepper et al., 2006). The existing literature suggests abusive supervision leads to subordinates' perception of organisational injustice, and organisational injustice is associated with negative emotional states, such as anxiety, stress, deviant behaviours, aggression against the supervisor. Drawing on UMT and existing studies, we expect a positive relationship between all three types of injustice and POP. In conclusion, the UMT suggests uncertainty (emerging from injustice) coupled with mistreatment like abusive supervision motivates employees to respond negatively against the organisations (van den Bos & Lind, 2002), which help them in gaining control of the situation. Uncertainty arising from injustice and abusive supervision signals the existence of politics in the workplace. Absence of justice and fairness in the organisation and existence of politics helps the individuals in learning unsanctioned procedures to get their work done. Therefore, we expect a positive relationship between abusive supervision and POP mediated by organisational injustice:

> *Proposition 1: Subordinate perception of organisational injustice (distributive, interactional and procedural) mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and POP.*

Work Incivility

In this study, we have focused on work incivility as a response to abusive supervision and POP by subordinates. Our arguments for explaining this relationship are based on SET; an employee repays an abusive supervisor by engaging in work incivility. Existing empirical studies have confirmed that

individuals retaliate against perceived injustices (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), a threat to identity (Aquino & Douglas, 2003) and violation of trust (Bies & Tripp, 1996).

Employees treated with dignity and respect feel satisfied and believe they are valued (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Social exchange theory suggests people reciprocate the benefits they receive in the workplace and vice versa (Bandura & Walters, 1977). However, SET also asserts that individuals are more likely to reciprocate negative reactions against individual or organisations perceived as harmful for them. Prior studies have shown that employees retaliate against supervisors after being perceived as abused by the supervisors (Tepper, 2000).

Several studies on workplace victimisation have indicated victims of abusive supervision consider revenge as an acceptable means of bringing mistreatment to an end and hence abused employees retaliate or aggress against their supervisors responsible for the abuse or mistreatment (Dionisi et al., 2012; Khattak et al., 2020). Tepper (2007) found some covert behaviour exhibited by the subordinates against supervisors, such as ignoring the supervisor's request, putting less effort on assigned tasks or withholding citizenship behaviours that might benefit the supervisor. These findings are related to studies of work incivility that demonstrate that less powerful employees prefer to revenge against more powerful employees in subtle ways, such as deteriorating perpetrator's reputation or reducing their productivity (Pearson et al., 2000) or sometimes acquiescent silence based on deeply held resignation (Lam & Xu, 2019).

POP and Work Incivility

Organisational politics is pervasive in organisations and is the unsanctioned influence attempts that seek to further self-interest at the cost of organisational goals (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). Greenberg and Cropanzano (2001) argued people are more likely to adopt a competitive and self-serving behaviour, and they may band together to fulfil their aspirations without regards for the needs of others in a politically charged work environment. In such an environment, an employee cannot be certain that his or her efforts will be recognised, resulting in a feeling of inequity (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992) or a sense of a violation of the 'social contract' (Greenberg & Cropanzano, 2001)**.** Uncertainty is a prominent antecedent of POP (Ferris et al., 2007).

 Pearson et al. (2000) confirmed that POP is related to uncivil and violent behaviours against other organisations members, especially those perceived as perpetrators or beneficiaries of political behaviours. To reciprocate the negative outcomes (in terms of stress, uncertainty, injustice), the employees may exhibit uncivil behaviours towards perpetrators or beneficiaries of such political behaviours (Khattak et al., 2020; Neuman & Baron, 2005). The feeling of injustice instigates the feelings of dissatisfaction and resentment (Adams, 1965), making employees to reciprocate by engaging in various forms of uncivil behaviours that include rudeness, discourteousness and disrespectful behaviours towards others (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

SET (Blau, 1964) suggests that after getting positive treatment from the supervisor, subordinates feel indebted and obliged to repay organisation and its representative (i.e., supervisors and leaders) in kind over time (Avolio et al., 2009). However, POP is characterised by uncertainty and unfairness triggering hostility (Meisler et al., 2019). Individuals feel cheated by the organisation when they find an absence of formal or authentic rules or procedures to assess their performance, rules for resource allocation, vivid code for the conduct and so on, and they feel discouraged and helpless. Uncertainty leads to powerlessness and erosion of self-control. Individuals perceive their efforts are not being reciprocated appropriately, so they start displaying uncivil behaviours (Meisler et al., 2019). Several studies have confirmed the deviant behaviour of employees arising from injustices at the workplace (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001; Greenberg, 1990; Khattak et al., 2020). We expect POP will lead to uncivil behaviours and also argue a positive relationship between organisational injustice and POP; therefore, we hypothesise:

Proposition 2*: POP is positively related to work incivility.*

Proposition 3*: POP mediates the relationship between subordinates' perceived organisational injustice and work incivility.*

Moderating Role of Political Skills of Subordinates

UMT suggests, in an uncertain environment, individuals attempt to get control through various negative behaviours. Political behaviour helps them in reducing uncertainties and gaining self-control. UMT asserts that individuals try to reduce the uncertainty, deal with the discomfort, and/or manage it effectively (Thau et al., 2009). Studies confirm that political skill moderates the relationship between perceived stressors and strain over extended periods of time (Hochwarter et al., 2007).

Control and understanding are the most frequently used moderators (Ferris et al., 2007) in POP–outcome relationships. Control is defined as a degree of influence over an environment (Ganster & Fusilier, 1989). Control over work environment converts stressors into opportunities or threats (Lian et al., 2014). Harrell-Cook et al. (1999) argued the absence of or little perceived control over a process leads to the existence of organisational politics, which is a stressor and could be construed as a threat resulting in negative outcomes. Among other moderators, understanding is another moderator that has been used by many researchers. Understanding means knowledge about the antecedents of important/significant events that happened in the workplace (Sutton & Kahn., 1987). This understanding will reduce the subjectivity of experienced stress and environmental uncertainty and detrimental effects of POP.

Political skill is a robust moderator as it captures both functions of control and understanding. Politically skilled people are able to understand others at work and use such skill to influence others to fulfil one's personal and/or organisational objectives (Perrewé et al., 2000). Politically skilled individuals are able to utilise opportunities to further their own interest (Griffiths, 1986), and are able to get work done. These individuals are socially aware, socially connected, can understand situations and are able to adapt their behaviours appropriately in the workplace (Kolodinsky et al., 2004). Therefore, a political skill can be considered as a robust moderator between POP–work-related outcomes.
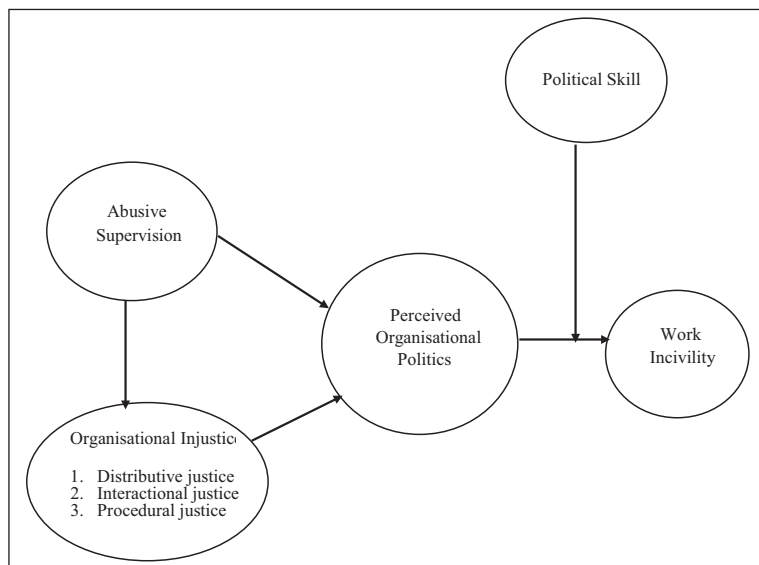

Figure 1. Influence Mechanism of Abusive Supervision on Work Incivility: Proposed Framework
Source: Developed by authors.

UMT suggests, people feel uncomfortable in an uncertain environment and tend to predict the consequences of it (Lind & van den Bos, 2002). This uncertainty affects the perception and feelings of individuals and threatens their sense of self (Thau et al., 2009). Based on UMT, we argue individuals use political skills to reduce uncertainty and to gain control overwork situation. Individuals high on political skills can understand the work environment better than others and get his work done easily, so they do not exhibit uncivil behaviour as they do not perceive organisational politics as stressor or obstacle in their path of growth. We hypothesise:

> *Proposition* 4: *Political skills of subordinate moderate the relationship between POP and work incivility such that the positive relationship between POP and work incivility will be weaker under the condition of high political skills* (see Figure 1)*.*

Implications for Theory and Practice and Future Directions for Research

Our study contributes to the abusive supervision, organisational justice and POP literature. It makes a substantial contribution by examining the effect of abusive supervision on employees' incivility, simultaneously looking at two adverse circumstances—the perception of organisational injustice and POP. The study further builds a boundary condition of the impacted individual's political skill in response to abusive supervision with incivility. Further, this model is empirically untested and opens an arena for empirical validation. A recent study (Khattak et al., 2020) has tested the impact of organisational injustice on deviant behaviours towards organisation and individual mediated by POP. However, our model takes it a step further by adding political skill as a moderator, making incivility (deviance) contingent on how an abused employee chooses to respond in such a politically charged environment.

As discussed above, abusive supervision and POP have many detrimental effects on various aspects of organisational outcomes as well as on the psychological health of employees. Negative consequences such as psychological health, turnover intention, reduced commitment level, poor performance, erosion of trust, feeling of injustice deviant and counterproductive behaviour associated with abusive supervision, POP and work incivility have significant direct and indirect costs for individuals and organisations. Financial costs associated with these negative attitudinal and behavioural consequences are significant, calling organisations' attention to the emerging issues of the dark side of leadership. Organisations have to give more attention to the prevention and effective management of political behaviour and abusive behaviour.

Political behaviour and abusive behaviour once perceived make the environment socially noxious, and their detrimental effects can seldom be reversed or concealed, making any attempt at window dressing by emulating best practices redundant. However, these ill effects can be prevented by ensuring fairness and transparency in pay, appraisal, promotion and transfer and other human resource–related policies and practices and by communicating these clearly to the employee. Kolodinsky et al. (2004) further suggested the development of political and other interpersonal skills (through training) might help individuals to work effectively and positively in a politically charged work environment. Based on our findings of the study, we recommend the formulation of an effective communication channel, development of interpersonal skills and enhancement of leader–member exchange to reduce the negative consequences associated with abusive supervision in a politically charged work environment.

Keeping with the current (COVID-19) times, most of the work has moved online with virtual teams. Reduced face-to-face interaction, lack of non-verbal communication and interpersonal connect can

further lead to reduced trust, feeling of injustice and exclusion and abusive supervision (varying intensity in different contexts). As every day becomes more uncertain and critical, with no one being able to predict the future course of work arrangement (like work from home), human resource managers and line managers need to understand the dynamics of abusive supervision in such an uncertain and surreptitious environment. We suspect an increase in abusive supervision as the manager attempts to manage a virtual team where both management and employees are untrained for virtual work; combined with job insecurity, pay cuts, uncertain career progression and new performance criteria may increase workplace incivility. Therefore, we urge practitioners to be wary of supervision, development of trust and building a favourable social exchange relationship in current times for a healthy work environment.

As already mentioned, empirical validation of the conceptual model is crucial. A multilevel approach becomes imperative in such a study where the experimental units are nested in a hierarchy example, such as the leadership data from subordinates selected from various operation teams reporting to different managers according to teams and in different departments. One also needs to take into account individual-level error in estimating team-level coefficients, that is, controlling for the individual-level variables (age, gender, educational level, tenure with the organisation and tenure with the particular supervisor) and to estimate the variance in the individualised outcome (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). Impact of organisational level variables such as culture (performance culture, power distance, collective versus individualistic) and organisational values (respect, care vs competitive) can also be tested. Further sectoral differences between different industries such as sales, hospitality, police or health care may be accounted for the manifestation of abusive supervision in employees' uncivil behaviour.

Conclusion

This article highlights the conceptual process of influence of abusive supervision on work incivility of the employees. The proposed model suggests abusive supervision creates a perception of organisational injustice and politics, which further influences the attitudes and behaviour of the employees, triggering non-desired behaviour at the workplace. Undoubtedly, non-desirous behaviour such as work incivility, counterproductive work behaviour and deviant behaviour not only affects the productivity of the employees but also harms the reputational capital of the organisation. In extreme cases, it weakens the organisational culture and threatens the social fabric of the organisation. Existing studies hint at the diverse response to abusive supervision by different individuals, based on demographic and idiosyncratic differences, organisational factors and leadership (see Mackey et al., 2017, for review). In the study, we propose that employees with political skill will successfully sail through this politically charged environment created by abusive supervision and perceived organisational injustice rather than displaying workplace incivility. In other words, the study proposes political skill as the boundary condition that influences the impact of abusive supervision on work incivility behaviour of employees.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

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