

Coping with abusive supervision: The alleviating effect of self-efficacy and the perception of authenticity on the negative consequences of abusive supervision

不當督導的因應之道：以自我效能與信賴知覺緩解不當督導的負面效應

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Abstract: Drawing upon the conservation of resources theory, this research examines the linkage between abusive supervision and subordinates' job behavior (e.g., task performance and withdrawal behavior) from a stress perspective and focuses on the moderating role of two different individual resources: self-efficacy and the perception of authenticity. From survey data collected from 238 subordinates and their immediate supervisors in military organizations in Taiwan, the results suggest that abusive supervision negatively relates to the subordinates' task performance and positively relates to their withdrawal behavior. Moreover, the negative consequences of abusive supervision are weaker among subordinates who have higher self-efficacy or perception of authenticity; specifically, the buffering effect of self-efficacy is stronger than the perception of authenticity. Finally, the paper discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the findings.

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摘要：本研究是以資源保存理論(conservation of resources theory; COR)為基礎，探究主管不當督導與部屬工作行為(工作績效及退卻行為)之間的關聯性，並在壓力觀點與焦點因應(stress perspective and focuses)的脈絡下，分別檢視及比較個體的兩種資源(自我效能與信賴知覺)對上述關聯性的調節效果。本研究以國防組織成員為研究對象，採取直屬主管與部屬配對問卷進行資料蒐集，共蒐集有效配對問卷共 238 份。研究結果顯示出，主管不當督導分別對部屬工作績效具有負向影響及對退卻行為具有正向影響；其次，在調節效果方面，也發現個體自我效能與信賴知覺都能有效緩解不當督導對部屬工作行為的不利影響，但是，自我效能的緩解效果顯著優於信賴知覺；最後，本研究亦針對理論與實務意涵及未來研究進行討論。

關鍵詞：不當督導、自我效能、信賴知覺、工作績效、退卻行為

1. Introduction

Many previous studies have focused on positive leadership and explored leaders' behaviors that engender positive employee work attitudes, which affect organizational effectiveness (Yukl, 1998), yet scholars have gradually turned their attention to the dark or destructive side of supervisory behavior - specifically, abusive supervision (Tariq and Ding, 2018). Abusive supervision refers to "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behavior, excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000). Examples of such behaviors include intimidating subordinates with threats of job loss (Mao, Chien, and Hsieh, 2019), withholding necessary information, aggressive eye contact, the silent treatment, and humiliating or ridiculing someone in front of others (Tepper, 2000; Zellars, Tepper, and Duffy, 2002). Empirical evidence demonstrates that abusive supervision leads to employees exhibiting psychological strain, such as anxiety, depression, job strain, and burnout (Tepper, Moss, Lockhart, and Carr, 2007),

which may further result in higher absenteeism and turnover rates (Wang, Du, Yu, Meng, and Wu, 2020), higher medical care costs, and lower productivity at the organizational level (Tepper, Duffy, Henle, and Lambert, 2006). Therefore, exploring abusive supervision and the consequences of it is important for both academic research and managerial practice.

A stream of research has begun to identify the personal and situational factors that moderate the task performance and withdrawal behavior resulting from abusive supervision. Most studies have focused on individuals' perceptions of their resources (e.g., job autonomy) that buffer the strain of abusive supervision (Lin, Wang, and Chen, 2012; Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007). Our research herein responds to the need for greater attention on the broader organizational context in order to understand organizational stress and identify interpersonal interventions (Bacharach and Bamberger, 2007). We therefore propose that informal organizational norms in a work unit - specifically, the extent that colleagues value authentic expression of emotions with each other (e.g., perception of authenticity; Grandey, Foo, Groth, and Goodwin, 2012; Xue, Yingjie, van, De, and Van, 2020) - can alleviate the experience of abusive supervision and help subordinates avoid decreased task performance and increased withdrawal behavior. By conceptualizing abusive supervision as a workplace stressor that causes subordinates to lose valued personal resources, we develop and test our model using the conservation of resources (COR) theory of stress developed by Hobfoll (1989). The COR theory provides an overarching framework for explaining the stress process and its importance in the abusive supervision–subordinates' task performance as well as its link to withdrawal behavior.

To address the problem of insufficient research, this study makes theoretical and practical contributions to the literature on negative supervision as follows. First, we aim to provide a more complete understanding of the dynamics that influence subordinate-leader interaction by testing the main predictive role that the leader's abusive supervision plays on the subordinates' task performance and withdrawal behavior. Second, we extend the COR theory by examining the

moderating roles that self-efficacy (internal resources) and the perception of authenticity (external resources) play in the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' task performance and withdrawal behavior. Third, although abusive supervision is a negative leadership style that is common in all types of organizations, the military's mission characteristics and strict authority structure make it different from general commercial organizations. The leadership style of the army tends to be masculine and command-oriented, and abusive supervision is nearly its universal leadership model (Frone and Blais, 2019). It is thus important and unique to explore the impact of abusive supervision on subordinates' job behavior in a military organization. Fourth, we also examine and compare whether different types of personal resources (self-efficacy vs. perception of authenticity) have different levels of moderating effects on the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' job behavior (task performance vs. withdrawal behavior), respectively. Fifth, this research is empirically conducted by pairing subordinates and their immediate supervisors in actual military organizations, which is different from previous research that has targeted college students and asked students to answer situational questions in a given scenario (Walter, Lam, Van Der Vegt, Huang, and Miao, 2015). Since most students do not have actual experience of being abusively supervised, it is hard to experience real stress. Such research results are difficult to generalize to the actual workplace environment. Sixth, previous studies on similar topics mostly used self-reporting questionnaires (Chi and Liang, 2013). In order to reduce concerns over common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff, 2003), this study adopts a matching questionnaire between subordinates and their immediate supervisors in actual military organizations and overcomes the difficulty of collecting matching samples for military organizations. Based on the above, this research offers a significant contribution to the exploration of abusive supervision issues. Figure 1 presents our research model.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

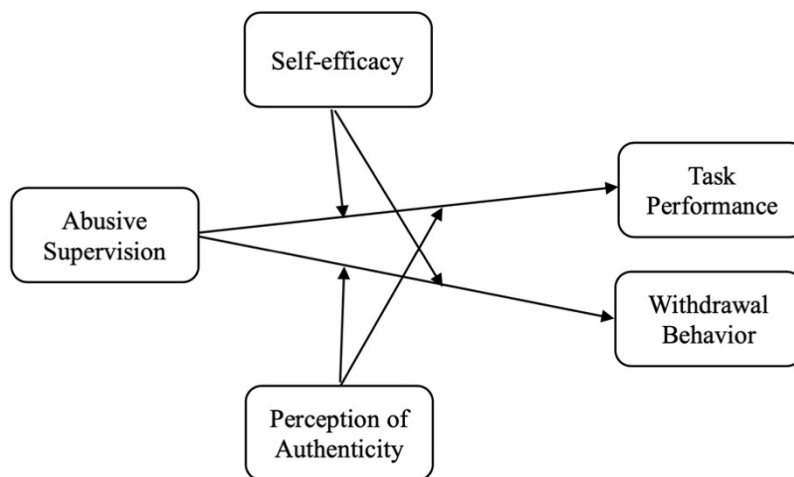


Figure 1
Research framework

2.1 Abusive supervision and subordinates' job behavior

As a resource-based theory of stress, the COR theory provides a theoretical explanation for the effect of an abusive superior on a subordinate's task performance and withdrawal behavior. The basic tenet of the COR theory proposes that people strive to obtain and maintain resources that they value. Hobfoll (1989) defines resources as "objects, personality characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects, personal characteristics, or energies". This suggests that various factors, both objective (e.g., money, a home) and psychological (e.g., self-esteem, social support), could be viewed as personal resources (Grandey *et al.*, 2012). When these primary resources are threatened or actually lost, people generally perceive stress (Lan, Xia, Li, Wu, Hui, and Deng, 2020).

In an organization, interpersonal stressors are among the causes most threatening to resources (Grandey *et al.*, 2012). In contrast to colleagues and customers, employees "tend to see their immediate supervisor as one of their greatest sources of stress at work" (Hogan, Raskin, and Fazzin, 1990) because

they commonly determine employee advancement, compensation, and feedback (Burton and Hoobler, 2006). For employees, after investing their resources (e.g., time, stamina) in meeting job demands, the achievement of positive resource conservation outcomes relies largely on the extent to which they can regain resources from their supervisors (Mathieu, Fabi, Lacoursière, and Raymond, 2016). Nevertheless, “when this relationship is a dysfunctional one, it stands to have particularly salient and devastating consequences for employees” (Burton and Hoobler, 2006). For this reason, abusive supervision might be a key source of resource loss, as abusive supervisors might not only stop offering resources to their subordinates, but also deplete those resources through inappropriate behavior, such as “ridiculing subordinates in front of others, withholding important information, and using disparaging language, threats, and intimidation tactics” (Zellars, Tepper, and Duffy, 2002). Because subordinates cannot regain resources from their supervisors, but rather invest more in dealing with abusive supervision, such behavior may consume their own resources (Kim, Atwater, Zahir, and Dianhan, 2019). There are two ways in which employees might act to restore their resources at work: withdrawing from the workplace and/or reducing performance.

Based on the COR theory, individuals seek to obtain, retain, and protect valued resources, including work resources, and minimize the threat of resource loss (Hobfoll, 2002). Research demonstrates that if the resource cannot be regained from work or the employees gain less than they are investing, then they may not have enough resources to efficiently regulate their job-related behavior and emotions (Vohs and Heatherton, 2000). Abused subordinates not only invest resources in their work, but also deal with abusive supervisors. For instance, simply having an abusive supervisor may require subordinates to spend time and energy “managing upwards” rather than focusing on their core job tasks (Harris, Kacmar, and Zivnuska, 2007). Abusive supervision is harmful enough to weaken any beneficial effectiveness of the positive actions of supervisors and undermine the impact on the positive behaviors of the subordinates (Park, Choi, and Kang, 2020). Hargreaves and Fink (2006) argue that abusive supervision will harm the

health of the workplace environment as well as the work willingness and task performance of subordinates. The imbalance between give and take might affect employees' performance, because performance requires effort, and effort requires resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Based on the COR theory, employees might engage in efforts to protect their remaining resources and avoid further loss. These choices may have an impact on performance (Witt and Carlson, 2006). When resources reach minimally acceptable levels, previous studies have indicated that workers withhold effort to preserve personal resources and accept a decrease in performance that is similar to athletes slowing down when tired or out of breath (Witt and Carlson, 2006). Harris *et al.* (2007) find that abusive supervision negatively relates to job performance. Moreover, Jian, Kwan, Qiu, Liu, and Yim (2012) and Xu Huang, Lam, and Miao (2012) observe similar relationships when examining subordinate ratings of abusive supervision and of subordinate performance - that is, the resource losses that result from abusive supervision might lead to lower performance levels. Therefore, we propose the first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: Abusive supervision negatively relates to subordinates' task performance.

Except for resource impairment, subordinates do not have enough resources to maintain good task performance. Based on the COR theory, employees do not passively wait for resources to be depleted and will strive to protect them; hence, they act to preserve these resources by withdrawing from work (Sliter, Sliter, and Jex, 2012). When abused subordinates have already lost resources, they tend to adopt less-efficient or maladaptive loss-control strategies, such as withdrawal.

Withdrawal behavior refers to "any purposeful behavior by which an employee endeavors to avoid work or a reduction in an employee's sociopsychological attraction to or interest in the work or the organization" (Bluedorn, 1982). Leiter (1991) theorizes that employees use absenteeism as a coping mechanism. In general, people who report lowered resources have been shown to report higher withdrawal from the workplace (Taris, Schreurs, and Van Iersel-Van Silfhout, 2001). After dealing with abusive supervision, subordinates

may replenish or restore resources by engaging in behaviors such as taking long breaks and being absent when not really sick (Boswell and Olson-Buchanan, 2004). Hence, withdrawal behaviors might avoid resource loss and protect against stressors that damage resources. Previous studies have indicated that employees who perceive mistreatments are likely to show higher withdrawal than those who do not perceive them (Boswell and Olson-Buchanan, 2004; Huang, Lin, and Lu, 2020) and also suggested that people reporting lower resources have been shown to experience higher levels of withdrawal from the workplace (Whitman, Halbesleben, and Holmes, 2014). Chi and Liang (2013) also find that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and work withdrawal.

According to the COR theory, supervisors who exhibit abusive supervision are viewed as eroding the subordinates' psychology resources, which continuously deplete subordinates' efforts at a high psychological cost (Tepper, Simon, and Park, 2017). When subordinates must continue to face the supervisor's abusive supervision, it will trigger them to want to escape their current workplace environment, which results in withdrawal behavior. (Huang, *et al.*, 2020). Based on the above, we propose the next hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: Abusive supervision positively relates to subordinates' withdrawal behavior.

2.2 Moderating role of individual resources

As previously discussed, we hypothesize that abusive supervision negatively relates to subordinates' job behavior. However, it is unlikely that abusive supervisory behaviors impact all employees in the same way, which suggests the need to test for boundary conditions (Tepper, 2000; Tepper *et al.*, 2007). In this study we predict that high levels of individual resources alleviate the negative impact of abusive supervision.

According to the COR theory, an individual might find an alternative method for replenishing lost resources. We argue that abused employees could recover from such a loss through individual internal and external resources.

Personal characteristics (such as self-efficacy) could be viewed as individual internal resources in that they affect how people manipulate and cope with the loss of resources (Grandey and Cropanzano, 1999; Hobfoll and Shirom, 2001; Riolli and Savicki, 2003). In line with COR, self-efficacy is part of an individual's psychological capital (Luthans and Youssef, 2007) and is a critical personal resource. Self-efficacy has been a crucial factor in studies on stress and strain, but has been considered secondary in studies on the COR theory (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020). Hence, this research analyzes the role of self-efficacy in this particular theory.

In addition to internal resources, personal resources may also come from external sources. The work environment is an important factor that should be considered when subordinates experience mistreatment from abusive supervision. We argue that the type of behavior valued in the interaction of colleagues provides useful resources for subordinates. In contrast to real support, such as social support, psychological trust in interacting with co-workers is more important. Support is not always positive; sometimes people receive it, because they seem to need it, which may be harmful when it is not provided in situations of need (Hobfoll and London, 1986). Because support may detract from individual resources, and because we specifically explore interpersonal interaction resources in the workplace, we suggest that psychological trust when interacting with co-workers, such as perception of authenticity, might be a better external resource. Grandey *et al.* (2012) suggest that the perception of authenticity is the extent to which people encourage and support authentic emotional expression among group members, and that negative experience is alleviated when employees have perceptive authenticity. Hence, the perception of authenticity could be another individual resource in the workplace.

2.3 Self-efficacy as an individual internal resource for moderating abusive supervision and subordinates' job behavior

Although our earlier discussion suggests that abusive supervision may negatively relate to subordinates' task performance and positively relate to

subordinates' withdrawal behavior, these effects may be less pernicious for individuals who have high self-efficacy - a crucial variable for enhancing all aspects of human performance (Druckman, 2004). Self-efficacy refers to "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986). Previous studies have suggested that it might be one of the key moderators influencing the relationships between stressors and strains (Xie and Schaubroeck, 2001).

In line with the COR theory, this research argues that self-efficacy acts as an important resource for individuals to cope with stressful situations, which in turn relieves unpleasant emotional states. The theory suggests that individuals strive to obtain, retain, protect, and nurture a set of valued resources. Some examples of resources are supervisor support, status, information, social relations, and personal resources such as self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. According to the COR theory, these resources have a crucial role in the workplace. People will use their personal resources to cope with stressful circumstances and exert control over the environment in order to obtain new resources to fulfill their valued needs (Hobfoll, 2002). Subordinates with high self-efficacy who work in an environment with abusive supervision may be able to reduce stressors, because it "may affect stress appraisal and therefore can protect people against stress and reduce strains" (Lu, Chang, and Lai, 2011). Subordinates might help decrease the negative effects by reappraising the mistreatment experience. Additionally, Bandura argues that the "belief that one can relieve unpleasant emotional states, whatever their source, makes them less aversive" (Bandura, 1977). Thus, self-efficacy beliefs nourish intrinsic motivation by enhancing perceptions of self-competence (Bandura, 1986; Deci and Ryan, 1985). Subordinates might further believe they can relieve negative feelings resulting from abusive supervision and improve self-confidence in their performance, thereby reducing the effect of abusive supervision on future performance.

Employees with a high degree of self-efficacy are "more likely to behold the belief of maintaining high levels of job performance in the presence of

challenging job-related stressors” (Lu *et al.*, 2011), and Bandura (1977) suggests that self-efficacy expectations can affect the choice of environment. For example, “a worker with low self-efficacy may elect to call in sick rather than face another day of frustration on a job he or she feels unable to do” (McDonald and Siegall, 1992). Someone with low self-efficacy may attempt to avoid adversity (e.g., withdrawal behavior).

In accordance with the aforementioned information, self-efficacy could be viewed as a great individual resource in the COR theory, helping to replenish the loss of resources when perceiving mistreatment from abusive supervision. Even under supervisors’ checks on employees’ performances, however, subordinates not only work for their supervisors, but also for the organization. For this reason, when abused subordinates are conscious of being able to do their work well without their supervisors, they might not care for the mistreatment. According to the COR theory, when subordinates experience this feeling, it means that abusive supervision cannot heavily threaten their resources. Hence, subordinates with high levels of self-efficacy have enough resources to maintain their performance and would not show withdrawal behavior as a defense strategy to protect their remaining resources (Huang, Guo, Tang, Liu, and Tan, 2019).

According to the conservation of resource theory (Hobfoll, 1989), when employees have higher resources, they are more resistant to the impact of external pressure on their physical and mental health and work behavior (Adekiya, 2018; Robertson, Dionisi, and Barling, 2018). Self-efficacy is a good internal resource that can effectively overcome the pressure from supervisors or colleagues to their work attitude (e.g., withdrawal behavior). In other words, when subordinates face their supervisor’s abusive supervision, self-efficacy will act as a mechanism that can change the environment (Makara-Studzińska, Golonka, and Izydorczyk, 2019) and restrain the effect of a supervisor’s abusive supervision on their work efficiency and task performance (Clauss, Hoppe, Schachler, and Deirdre O’Shea, 2021). As such, we arrive at the next hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3a: Self-efficacy moderates the negative relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates’ task performance, such that the negative

relationship is weaker when subordinates' self-efficacy is higher.

Hypothesis 3b: Self-efficacy moderates the positive relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' withdrawal behavior, such that the positive relationship is weaker when subordinates' self-efficacy is higher.

2.4 Perception of authenticity as an individual external resource for moderating abusive supervision and subordinates' job behavior

Perception of authenticity refers to “the perceived acceptance of, and respect for, unit members expressing felt emotions when interacting with coworkers” (Grandey *et al.*, 2012). For example, subordinates speak negatively about abusive supervision and convey suppressed emotions in the unit. Employees perceive a high level of authenticity value and encourage expressing felt emotions, especially when they are negative, while those who perceive a low level of authenticity are uncomfortable with and discourage such emotional expressions.

The COR theory may provide a theoretical framework to understand the relationships among abusive supervision, task performance, withdrawal behavior, and perception of authenticity. According to the COR theory, individuals tend to replenish resources through “emotional respite” (Hobfoll, 2002). Research has indicated that employees either cope privately with their negative emotions or express them to co-workers (e.g., Lewis, 2005; Martin, Knopoff, and Beckman, 1998), meaning that perception buffers employees from socioemotional work stressors (Drach-Zahavy, 2008, 2010; Le Blanc, Hox, Schaufeli, Taris, and Peeters, 2007). When the work unit does not feel authentic (i.e., if it does not value and encourage self-expression), employees must stifle their impulse to preserve resources and must continue to regulate their emotions around co-workers or else experience additional resource losses due to the social consequences of violating unit norms (Chang, Busser, and Liu, 2020). In these units, the resource loss from coping with abusive supervision may be exacerbated by the continued effort of monitoring and self-regulation among co-workers. In contrast, when subordinates feel higher perception of authenticity,

they will feel safe being themselves - perhaps expressing previously suppressed frustration or sadness about work events around co-workers. In other words, they can take a break from the effort to fully monitor and regulate their self-presentation (Vohs, Baumeister, and Ciarocco, 2005). The perception of authenticity offers abused employees a place to release emotions and to recover, which is one means of emotional respite. When employees perceive lower authenticity, they may stifle their impulse to preserve resources and experience additional resource losses (Grandey *et al.*, 2012).

When individuals perceive higher authenticity, employees exhibit less or no negative emotions and are able to perform the job, because the supervisor is merely one interpersonal resource among many others such as colleagues and customers (Meacham, Cavanagh, Bartram, and Laing, 2019). The loss of trust in a supervisor could be compensated by colleagues or customers. We propose that perception of authenticity is an external resource that offers respite from negative emotions caused by abusive supervision and replenishes resources from their perception of authenticity.

Based on the above, the perception of authenticity brings great emotional resources to subordinates. Subordinates will ignore the negative influence of their supervisor's abusive supervision on their job behavior (e.g., task performance vs. withdrawal behavior). In other words, they not only cherish authenticity among colleagues, but also try to avoid negatively affecting colleagues due to their own inappropriate behavior (e.g., withdrawal behavior) (Kalay, Brender-Ilan, and Kantor, 2020). Furthermore, the perception of authenticity gives subordinates more resources to alleviate the negative impact of their supervisor's abusive supervision on their work engagement and task performance (Feng, Li, Zhang, and Liu, 2018). Based on these arguments, we hypothesize the following.

Hypothesis 4a: The perception of authenticity moderates the negative relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' task performance, such that the negative relationship is weaker when a subordinates' perception of authenticity is higher.

Hypothesis 4b: The perception of authenticity moderates the positive relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' withdrawal behavior, such that the positive relationship is weaker when a subordinates' perception of authenticity is higher.

2.5 The divergence moderating effect of two different individual resources

In addition to examining the moderating effect of personal resources on the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' job behavior (task performance vs. withdrawal behavior) in the previous section. This study also targets to compare whether different types of personal resources (self-efficacy vs. perception of authenticity) have different levels of moderating effects on the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' job behavior (task performance vs. withdrawal behavior), respectively. We believe that self-efficacy is a kind of intrapersonal resource that presents inherent characteristics. According to Bandura's theory (1982), self-efficacy (SE), defined as belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations, is the most central and pervasive influence on the choices that people make and the amount of effort that they apply to a particular task - that is, self-efficacy can effectively improve individual task performance. Therefore, when subordinates face the negative effect of abusive supervision on their job behaviors, self-efficacy (versus perception of authenticity) is better able to buffer the impact of abusive supervision on their task performance (Demerouti, Sanz-Vergel, Petrou, and van den Heuvel, 2016).

Perception of authenticity is, on the other hand, a resource generated from interpersonal interaction. Given that one's authenticity guides how the "self" interacts with others in the external world, perception of authenticity - that is, the extent to which others perceive authenticity - should relate to positive interpersonal outcomes (Brunell *et al.* 2010; Wickham, 2013). Some studies have shown that colleagues' perceived authenticity positively relates to the perceiver's interpersonal trust and relationship satisfaction (Wickham, 2013). In other words,

when individuals feels a colleague's authenticity, they will consider whether their negative behavior (e.g., withdrawal behavior) will hurt their colleagues. Based on the above, this study believes that the individual's perception of authenticity resources (versus self-efficacy) better more able to alleviate the effect of abusive supervision on their withdrawal behavior (Sepeng, Stander, van der Vaart, and Coxen, 2020).

As described earlier, two forms of resources - self-efficacy and perception of authenticity - may differ from each other; the former is an internal resource, and the latter is an external resource. Moderator variables might have a greater effect on the same domain than on others. Furthermore, the effect should be based on the goal valued by the employee, and person-related variances should be moderated by person-related variances. The first is an internal resource of personal character, which is stable and consistent in varying states and difficult to change. The second is an external resource that can be changed and molded depending on the unit. The resources subsequently influence performance in separate ways.

We argue that when the consequences of abusive supervision relate to individuals, and they should be moderated by intrapersonal resources, because task performance is connected to personal achievement, which is dependent on employees. Likewise, the perception of authenticity plays an important role in the relationship between abusive supervision and withdrawal behavior. Frese (1999) suggests that dysfunctional social relationships are more affected by moderated social resources than non-social resources. For example, an employee who reacts to resource loss with withdrawal behavior may show less of this behavior when acquiring social resources (Szkody and McKinney, 2020). Thus, internal resources (e.g., self-efficacy) should function as a buffer more regularly in relation to task performance than to withdrawal behavior. Additionally, an external resource (e.g., the perception of authenticity) should function as a buffer more regularly in relation to withdrawal behavior than to task performance. Based on the above, we propose the next hypotheses.

Hypothesis 5: The moderating effect of self-efficacy on the relationship

between abusive supervision and subordinates' task performance is stronger than the perception of authenticity.

Hypothesis 6: The moderating effect of the perception of authenticity on the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' withdrawal behavior is stronger than self-efficacy.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants and procedure

The participants of this study were employees and their supervisors of a military organization in Taiwan. We used a questionnaire survey to conduct this research. Questionnaires were mailed to 300 employees (who were to fill out all survey items except those concerning subordinates' behavior) and their immediate supervisors (who were to rate the subordinates' task performance and withdrawal behavior). In a cover letter that accompanied the questionnaire, we explained the academic purpose of our research and the voluntary participation nature of the study. We also explained that the responses of the participants would be completely confidential and instructed participants to seal their completed questionnaires in the return envelopes. Of the surveys sent to the employees and their supervisors, 272 were returned to us. After removing incomplete surveys, we had 238 dyads' surveys for this study (79.3% usable response rate). Among the respondents, 79% were male and 50% had a college-level education. The average age was 24.89 years ($SD = 3.96$), and the average organizational tenure was 2.80 years ($SD = 2.92$).

3.2 Measures

Following the translation and back-translation procedure suggested by Brislin (1986), we created Chinese versions of the measures for our variables. All items were assessed on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree.

Abusive supervision. We use Tepper (2000) 15-item scale to measure

subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision. A sample item includes "lies to me." The reliability of this scale is .97.

Self-efficacy. We employ Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) 10-item scale to measure subordinates' self-efficacy. A sample item includes "I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough." The reliability of this scale is .94.

Perception of authenticity. We apply Grandey *et al.* (2012) 7-item scale to measure subordinates' perception of authenticity. A sample item includes "Members of this team are able to discuss how they feel about problems and issues." The reliability for this scale is .72.

Task performance. We use Williams and Anderson (1991) 3-item scale to measure subordinates' task performance. A sample item includes "This subordinate fulfills the responsibilities specified in his/her job description." The reliability of this scale is .90.

Withdrawal behavior. We utilize Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, and Mainous. (1988) 3-item scale to measure subordinates' withdrawal behavior. A sample item includes "This subordinate just does not put much effort into work." The reliability of this scale is .88.

Control variables. Based on the literature on subordinates' reactions to abusive supervision, we control for subordinate gender, age, education, and tenure (Chi and Liang, 2013; Harris *et al.*, 2007; Zellars, Tepper, and Duffy, 2002).

4. Methodology

4.1 Confirmatory factor analysis

Following the recommendations of Anderson and Gerbing (1988) concerning convergent and discriminant validities, we first form a five-factor CFA model (as shown in Table 1). Inspections of the fit indices indicate that although the chi-square is significant, $\chi^2(655) = 1666.46$, $p < 0.05$, other practical-fit indices are within acceptable ranges (RMSEA = .08, CFI = .96, IFI

= .96, NFI = .93, NNFI = .96), suggesting that the model is acceptable. Moreover, the results of the chi-square difference tests indicate that, compared to the four-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 131.10, p < .01$), the three-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(2) = 188.27, p < .01$), two-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(4) = 5733.71, p < .01$), one-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(10) = 7176.42, p < .01$), and the preliminary five-factor model provide the best moderation.

4.2 Descriptive statistics and correlations

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables appear in Table 2. Abusive supervision negatively correlates with task performance ($r = -.28, p < .01$) and positively correlates with withdrawal behavior ($r = .17, p < .01$), indicating that subordinates perceiving supervisors as being engaged in a sustained display of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors produce a greater tendency for decreased task performance and increased withdrawal behavior. These results are consistent with previous hypotheses. Moreover, self-efficacy positively correlates with task performance ($r = .21, p < .01$) and negatively correlates with withdrawal behavior ($r = -.21, p < .01$), indicating that subordinates with higher self-efficacy tend to perform productively and avoid withdrawal behavior.

4.3 Hypotheses' Tests

4.3.1 Relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' behavior

To test our hypotheses, we use hierarchical regression. As shown in Table 3, after controlling for the effects of demographic variables, the regression coefficients in Model 2 ($\beta = -.28, p < .01$) and Model 7 ($\beta = .17, p < .05$) linking abusive supervision to task performance and to withdrawal behavior are both significant and in the hypothesized direction. From the preceding results, we may conclude that the more abusive behavior supervisors display, the lower is the productivity of subordinates and the higher is their withdrawal behavior. Thus, Hypotheses 1 and 2 are supported.

Table 1
Results for confirmatory factor analysis

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	$\Delta\chi^2$	RMSEA	CFI	IFI	NFI	NNFI
Five-factor model	1666.46	655	—	.08	.96	.96	.93	.96
Four-factor model	1797.56	656	131.10**	.09	.95	.95	.92	.95
Three-factor model	1854.73	657	188.27**	.09	.95	.95	.92	.95
Two-factor model	7400.17	659	5733.71**	.21	.86	.86	.83	.85
One-factor model	8842.88	665	7176.42**	.23	.82	.82	.79	.81

Note. $n = 238$. The five-factor model was hypothesized; the four-factor model combined self-efficacy and perception of authenticity; the three-factor model combined self-efficacy, perception of authenticity, task performance, and withdrawal behavior; the two-factor model combined abusive supervision, self-efficacy, perception of authenticity, task performance, and withdrawal behavior; and the one-factor model combined all variables.

** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables

Variables	Mean	<i>SD</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Gender	1.11	.31	—								
2. Age	24.89	3.97	.20**	—							
3. Education	1.96	.98	-.09	.22**	—						
4. Tenure	2.80	2.92	.36**	.83**	-.03	—					
5. Abusive supervision	2.07	.89	-.05	-.08	.03	-.09	(.97)				
6. Self-efficacy	4.12	.86	.08	.10	.01	.15*	-.17**	(.94)			
7. Perception of authenticity	4.07	.71	.01	.05	.02	.12	-.29**	.60**	(.72)		
8. Task performance	4.62	.86	.07	-.02	-.11	.01	-.28**	.21**	.11	(.90)	
9. Withdraw behavior	2.44	.98	-.04	-.04	.06	-.08	.17**	-.21**	-.12	-.70**	(.88)

Note. $n = 238$. Cronbach's alphas appear on the diagonal in parentheses. Gender was coded as 1= male and 2= female; *SD* = standard deviation.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

4.3.2 The moderating effect of individual resources

As shown in Table 3, after controlling for the effects of demographic variables, the regression coefficients of the interaction terms in Model 3 ($\beta = .20$, $p < .01$) and Model 8 ($\beta = -.15$, $p < .05$) are significant. A simple slope test of the moderating effect shows that abusive supervision negatively relates to task performance and positively relates to withdrawal behavior when self-efficacy is low ($\beta = -0.39$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$). When self-efficacy is high, the association between abusive supervision and task performance and withdrawal behavior disappears ($\beta = -0.05$, *ns*; $\beta = -0.02$, *ns*). These results indicate that the higher the self-efficacy of subordinates is, the lower is the possibility of decreased task performance and increased withdrawal behavior caused by abusive supervision. Self-efficacy can effectively inhibit the negative consequences attributed to abusive supervision. Thus, Hypotheses 3a and 3b are supported. Moreover, the regression coefficients of the interaction terms in Model 4 ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$) and Model 9 ($\beta = -.13$, $p < .05$) are significant. A simple slope test of the moderating effect shows that abusive supervision negatively relates to task performance and positively relates to withdrawal behavior when perception of authenticity is low ($\beta = -0.36$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$). When perception of authenticity is high, the association between abusive supervision and task performance and withdrawal behavior disappears ($\beta = -0.09$, *ns*; $\beta = -0.00$, *ns*). These results indicate that the stronger the authenticity perceived by employees is, the lower is the possibility of decreased task performance and increased withdrawal behavior caused by abusive supervision. The perception of authenticity can effectively inhibit the negative consequences attributed to abusive supervision. Thus, Hypotheses 4a and 4b are supported.

Model 5 shows that the weakening effect of self-efficacy ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$) on the relationship between abusive supervision and task performance is stronger than the perception of authenticity ($\beta = .01$, *ns*). However, Model 10 illustrates that both the moderating effect of self-efficacy ($\beta = -.13$, *ns*) and the perception of authenticity ($\beta = -.04$, *ns*) do not significantly weaken the relationship

between abusive supervision and withdrawal behavior. These results indicate that the moderating effect of self-efficacy is only stronger than the perception of authenticity on the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' task performance rather than on withdrawal behavior. Thus, Hypothesis 5 is supported, but Hypothesis 6 is not.

To further explore whether the interaction terms are in the hypothesized direction, following Aiken and West's (1991) procedures, we plot these interaction effects in Figures 2 to 5. The results present that self-efficacy and perception of authenticity play a buffering role in alleviating the negative consequences of abusive supervision on subordinates' behavior (e.g., reducing task performance and increasing withdrawal behavior). When employees exhibit higher self-efficacy or perceive more authenticity, the negative relationship between abusive supervision and task performance weakens, and the positive relationship between abusive supervision and withdrawal behavior also weakens.

5. Discussion

Based on the COR theory, this study investigates the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' job behavior (e.g., task performance and withdrawal behavior) as well as the moderating role of self-efficacy and the perception of authenticity. The results indicate that abusive supervision negatively relates to subordinates' task performance and positively relates to subordinates' withdrawal behavior. The research results are consistent with past research (Martinko, Harvey, Brees, and Mackey, 2013), but unlike previous studies, which mostly discussed them separately, we show both explicit task performance and implicit withdrawal behavior. In addition, self-efficacy and the perception of authenticity exert alleviating effects on the relationship between abusive supervision and task performance as well as withdrawal behavior separately. In other words, self-efficacy and the perception of authenticity effectively inhibit the decrease in task performance and the increase in withdrawal behavior caused by abusive supervision. The research results once again confirm the role of interpersonal resources in helping individuals cope with

Table 3
Results for hypothesis testing

Variables	Task performance					Withdrawal behavior				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10
Control variables										
Gender	.06	.06	.05	.06	.04	.00	.00	.01	-.00	.01
Age	-.00	-.04	-.00	-.02	-.01	.03	.05	.02	.03	.03
Education	-.11	-.10	-.10	-.10	-.10	.05	.04	.04	.05	.04
Tenure	.01	.01	-.07	-.02	-.06	-.13	-.13	-.07	-.10	-.07
Independent variables										
Abusive supervision (AS)		-.28**	-.24***	-.25**	-.25***		.17*	.13*	.13*	.13*
Moderate variables										
Self-efficacy (SE)			.18**		.22**			-.19**		-.20*
Perception of authenticity (PA)				.07	-.07				-.10	.02
Interactions variables										
AS × SE			.20**		.19*			-.15*		-.13
AS × PA				.15*	.01				-.13*	-.04
<i>R</i> ²	.02	.09	.16	.12	.16	.02	.04	.09	.07	.10
<i>Adjusted R</i> ²	.00	.07	.13	.09	.13	-.00	.02	.07	.04	.06
ΔR^2	.02	.08***	.07***	.03*	.04**	.02	.03*	.05**	.03*	.02
<i>F</i> value	.99	4.45**	5.75***	4.08***	4.54***	.89	1.95*	3.20**	2.17*	2.50*

Note. *n* = 238. Standardized betas coefficients are reported in this table. **p* < .05; ***p* < .01; ****p* < .001.

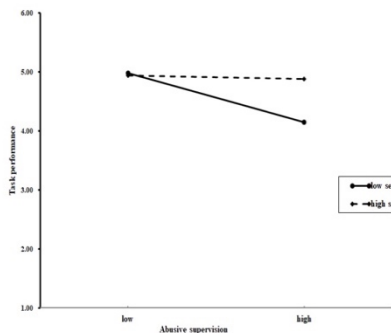


Figure 2
The abusive supervision × self-efficacy interactive effect for task performance

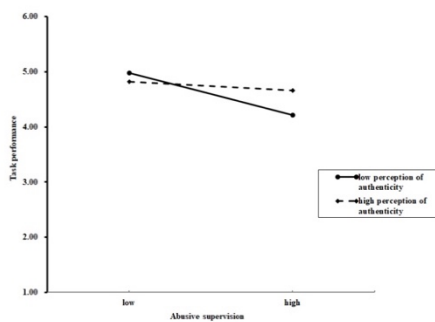


Figure 3
The abusive supervision × perception of authenticity interactive effect for task performance

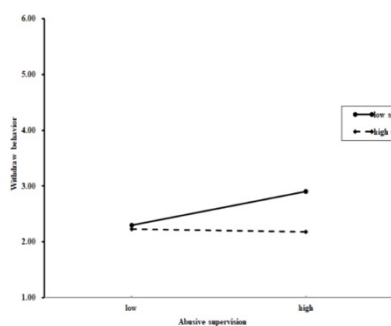


Figure 4
The abusive supervision × self-efficacy interactive effect for withdrawal behavior

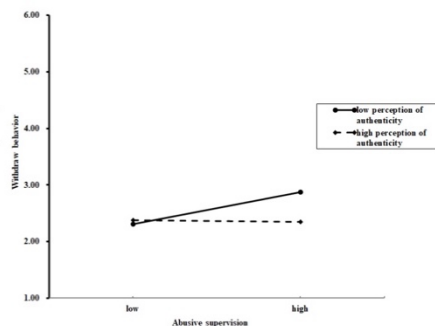


Figure 5
The abusive supervision × perception of authenticity interactive effect for withdrawal behavior

resource loss (e.g., abusive supervision) (Grandey and Cropanzano, 1999; Hobfoll and Shirom, 2001).

Regarding the divergence moderating effect (Hypotheses 5 and 6) analysis, the statistical results support Hypothesis 5. This proves that although both self-efficacy and perception of authenticity are resources, when individuals face the same threat (e.g., abusive supervision), the mitigation effects are quite different. These results further indicate that the moderating effect of self-efficacy is only stronger than the perception of authenticity on the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' task performance rather than on

withdrawal behavior. This analytical concept does not appear in previous research.

Past studies have used self-efficacy (Makara-Studzińska, Golonka, and Izydorzyc, 2019), job crafting (Huang, Lin, and Lu, 2020), co-worker support (Park, Choi, and Kang, 2020), etc. as moderators to examine the relationship between individuals facing abusive supervision and their behaviors and consequences. However, there has never been a study that examines and compares whether different types of personal resources (self-efficacy vs. perception of authenticity) have different levels of moderating effects on the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' job behavior (task performance vs. withdrawal behavior), respectively.

One thing to note is that Hypothesis 6 - the moderating effect of the perception of authenticity on the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' withdrawal behavior is stronger than self-efficacy - is not supported. One possible reason is that self-efficacy is a specific cognitive characteristic that can immediately compensate for the resources lost by abused subordinates. First, when confronted with abusive supervision, subordinates with higher self-efficacy may perceive low stress, because they view abusive behavior as a challenge; this personal trait could protect subordinates against the feeling of stress. Second, compared with self-efficacy, the perception of authenticity is an indirect method of replenishing lost resources for abused subordinates who cannot deal with the negative experience resulting from abusive supervision. When individual resources cannot be conserved by an intrapersonal factor (e.g., self-efficacy), they might be replenished by an interpersonal one (e.g., the perception of authenticity).

The results of this research not only supplement the relevant literature, linking abusive supervision with task performance and withdrawal behavior, but also provide an in-depth analysis of the relationship between these variables. In this way, our study contributes to the theoretical progress of this paper's topic and provides organizations with a starting point for improvement in reducing abusive behavior and its consequences.

5.1 Theoretical implications

The findings of this study contribute to the literature on abusive supervision and subordinates' job behavior in two ways. First, our research explores whether abusive supervision relates to subordinates' task performance and withdrawal behavior. We conceptualize supervisors' abusive behavior as a proximal predictor of subordinates' performance decline and engagement avoidance (Wang, Hsieh, and Wang, 2020). The COR theory suggests that the relationship between negative abusive supervision and subordinates' job behavior may exist, because of the threat that abusive behaviors pose to an employee's resources. To counter such threats, employees may divert time and energy (valued resources) away from their work and refocus them on dealing with abusive supervisory behaviors. Thus, the finding that abusive supervision negatively relates to subordinates' task performance suggests that abusive supervision drains subordinates' personal resources, which may decrease their efforts as a result. Furthermore, to preserve their resources, abused subordinates may use withdrawal behavior as a coping strategy. This discovery suggests how abused subordinates might decrease performance and increase withdrawal.

Second, we extend previous research on the COR theory by investigating whether the strength of the relationship depends on the extent of subordinates' individual resources. These findings suggest that self-efficacy (internal resource) and the perception of authenticity (external resource) play an important role in the relationship between abusive supervision and task performance as well as on withdrawal behavior. When subordinates have higher self-efficacy or stronger perception of authenticity, they do not show less effort in task performance or avoid engaging with their work. This pattern suggests that people might replenish their resources with their internal self-beliefs or external perceptions. Both resources help explain the effects of abusive supervisory behavior on subordinates' productivity and, ultimately, on their reduced efforts to engage with the work.

Third, most of the attention given to possible buffers of such resource losses

has focused on individual internal factors, but recent authors have called for greater emphasis on the broader workplace environment as a buffer of strain (Chi and Liang, 2013). Consistent with the COR theory, we propose that working in a context that encourages a break from resource acquisition among coworkers - a “perception of authenticity” - buffers the negative impacts of abusive supervision during interactions with their supervisor. In doing so, we move the focus from individual internal buffers of abusive supervision to the broader, external social context.

5.2 Practical implications

This study has the following practical implications for managers. The first and most obvious implication is that because abusive supervision relates to subordinates’ decreased job behavior (decreasing task performance and increasing withdrawal behavior), all efforts should be made to reduce the likelihood of abusive supervision occurring. Organizations should adequately train and monitor the behavior of supervisors to ensure that they engage in appropriate management behaviors when working with their subordinates. Additionally, managers at risk of abusive practices, as well as those with a history of such behavior, may benefit from additional training in the areas of emotional intelligence, anger management, and other behavioral tools. Finally, when selecting and promoting managers, organizations should avoid individuals who are personally or historically inclined to take hostile actions and abuse their subordinates.

The second implication of our study relates to subordinates’ self-belief and perception of authenticity with regard to abusive supervisory behavior. Accordingly, organizations should consider the role of subordinates’ self-belief and the climate of the work unit when taking steps to reinforce managers’ awareness of the harmful effects of abusive supervision. In particular, supervisors should be warned that abusive supervision does have more harmful effects on subordinates’ job behavior if subordinates have lower self-efficacy (internal resource). In addition, our study also finds when subordinates perceive

more authenticity (external resource) that they could successfully reduce the predictive effect of abusive supervision on task performance and withdrawal behavior. Thus, organizations should implement training programs that assist employees in improving their self-efficacy and at establishing a climate of authenticity. For instance, they could be taught to overcome adversity and become more trusting in the face of negative events. Finally, organizations should offer an employee grievance system to prevent managers' abusive behavior (Boswell and Olson-Buchanan, 2004).

5.3 Limitations and future research directions

There are some limitations to this study. The first limitation raises concerns about the possibility of reverse causality. The data presented in this study are cross-sectional, and inferences of causality should be made with caution. Although we argue that abusive supervision has negative effects on employees' task performance and positive effects on withdrawal behavior, we cannot completely rule out the possibility that the variables have a reverse or reciprocal causal pattern. However, the directionality of our proposed model and its results are informed by established theory (e.g., COR theory, resource losses, resource acquisition). Moreover, recent longitudinal data have supported this causal flow such that abusive supervision predicts subordinates' subsequent job behavior and not the other way around (Restubog, Scott, and Zagenczyk, 2011; Thau and Mitchell, 2010). Thus, while reciprocal effects are possible, our proposed model is consistent with current theories and evidence. Nevertheless, future research could provide evidence of causation from longitudinal analysis.

The second limitation is the generalizability of our findings. Our sample was collected from the military, but the military is a highly hierarchical organization and respects military discipline - that is, abusive behavior that supervisors show against subordinates may be sanctioned, and subordinates' behavior may be restricted. Thus, it would be valuable to investigate whether the same effects would occur in other companies. Moreover, the majority of the employees in our data are male (79%), which might have influenced the

relationships analyzed in the current study and cannot be generalized or applied across genders. The purpose of future research could then be to study the proposed effects in terms of gender and explore the possible differences dictated by it.

To extend and replicate the findings in this study, we propose a few suggestions for future research. First, the current study chooses task performance and withdrawal behavior as the outcomes of interest. However, because task performance is associated with personal income, the process between abusive supervision and task performance as well as withdrawal behavior should be explored. Thus, future research could extend our model to understand the processes between these relationships.

Second, Fiedler (1967) advocates that leadership style is a manifestation of a leader's personality. This personality trait is a characteristic that is persistent and hard to change. Abusive supervision in this study is one of the leadership styles. The main issue of this study is to explore how to employ personal internal (self-efficacy) and external (perception of authenticity) resources to alleviate the negative impact of abusive supervision on subordinates' job behavior (task performance vs. withdrawal behavior). However, it is undeniable that if it can be cut from the perspective of selection, then it should be able to effectively reduce the adverse effects caused by abusive supervision in the organization (Muhammad, Feng, and Weng, Derek, 2020). We suggest that future studies can examine how to reduce abusive supervision from the perspective of human resource recruitment and selection.

Finally, the military's organizational structure is established in the form of companies, platoons, and squads. However, the leader-member exchange (LMX) atmosphere of insiders and outsiders in the military is quite prevalent. In other words, military supervisors will treat their subordinates who have different ties with them in different ways. Therefore, even if they belong to the same team, each subordinate is aware that the degree of abusive supervision may be different. The subordinate's perception of abusive supervision will be significantly different due to the relationship between the subordinate and his (her) immediate

supervisor. As such, this study feels that it is appropriate to explore the issue of abusive supervision in the military from an individual-level perspective (Duffy *et al.*, 2002; Zellars *et al.*, 2002).

6. Conclusion

Based on the COR theory, the current study extends research on abusive supervision by specifying how self-efficacy (internal resource) and perception of authenticity (external resource) play a moderating role. We find that this theory explains the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' job behavior (e.g., task performance and withdrawal behavior). Our findings highlight intrapersonal resources as being stronger individual characteristics that compensate for the loss caused by abusive supervision. We encourage future studies to continue analyzing the negative consequences of abusive supervision and how to weaken this type of leadership.

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Appendix A: Measures

Abusive Supervision Items

1. Ridicules me.
2. Tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid.
3. Gives me the silent treatment.
4. Puts me down in front of others.
5. Invades my privacy.
6. Reminds me of my past mistakes and failures.
7. Doesn't give me credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort.
8. Blames me to save himself/herself embarrassment.
9. Breaks promises he/she makes.
10. Expresses anger at me when he/she is mad for another reason.
11. Makes negative comments about me to others.
12. Is rude to me.
13. Does not allow me to interact with my coworkers.
14. Tells me I'm incompetent.
15. Lies to me.

Self-efficacy Items

1. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.
2. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.
3. I am certain that I can accomplish my goals.
4. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.
5. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I can handle unforeseen situations.
6. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.
7. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.
8. When I am confronted with a problem, I can find several solutions.
9. If I am in trouble, I can think of a good solution.
10. I can handle whatever comes my way.

Perception of authenticity Items

1. If you show anxiety or distress with this team, it is held against you.
2. Members of this team are able to discuss how they feel about problems and issues.
3. People in this team reject others for showing irritation or frustration in the team (R).
4. It is safe to show how you really feel with this team.
5. It is uncomfortable for team members to show sadness or disappointment with each other (R).
6. No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that disrespects another member's feelings.
7. Working with members of this team, expressions of feelings are respected.

Task performance Items

1. This subordinate fulfills the responsibilities specified in his/her job description.
2. This subordinate performs the tasks that are expected as part of the job.
3. This subordinate meets performance expectations.

Withdrawal behavior Items

1. This subordinate just does not put much effort into work.
2. This subordinate arrives at work late just because he or she really is not in the

mood for work that day.

3. Sometimes when this subordinate does not feel like working, he or she will work slowly or make errors.