

All stressors are not bad: An affect-based model of role overload—the supervisor-level antecedent of abusive supervision

Abstract

Purpose: Expanding on the research of the antecedents of abusive supervision, this study aims to explore supervisor role overload as a supervisor-level predictor of abusive supervision. Based on transactional stress theory, we investigate role overload that is appraised as a challenge or a hindrance stressor by supervisors, leading to pleasant or unpleasant feelings, respectively. We propose that, based on their appraisal, these feelings of supervisors act as a mediating mechanism that can facilitate or inhibit their abusive behaviour at work. Additionally, we posit emotional intelligence (EI) as a key moderator in helping supervisors manage the negative feelings arising from perceiving role overload as a hindrance and preventing them from demonstrating abusive supervision.

Design/methodology/approach: To test our moderated mediation model, we collected two-wave data from middle-level supervisors or managers from several organisations located in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia ($N = 990$).

Findings: The results largely support the hypothesised relationships and show that depending on supervisor appraisal, role overload can generate pleasant or unpleasant feelings in supervisors and, consequently, impede or facilitate abusive supervision. They also shed light on the moderating effect of EI, in that supervisors scoring high on EI are better equipped to deal with unpleasant feelings arising from role overload and effectively manage their workplace behaviour, that is, to avoid abusive behaviours.

Originality/value: Role overload can have different impacts on employees: on the one hand, there is a potential for growth, which entails drive and enthusiasm; on the other hand, it could feel like an unsurmountable mountain for employees, leading to different forms of anxiety. Since what we feel is what we project onto others, supervisors experiencing unpleasant feelings cannot be the best leader they can be; even worse, they can become a source of negativity by displaying destructive behaviours such as abusive supervision. The corollary of something as minor as an interaction with a leader experiencing unpleasant feelings could have a ripple effect and lead to adverse outcomes for organisations and their employees. Our study explores the different perceptions of role overload and the subsequent feelings coming from those perceptions as supervisor-level predictors of abusive supervision. While it is not possible to objectively put a

different lens inside the minds of supervisors when they face stressors at work, to feel pleasant or unpleasant, they can be trained to manage their negative feelings and keep their behaviours in check. Particularly, training managers to be more emotionally intelligent can help them not only achieve growth by overcoming challenges at work but also acknowledge and adapt their feelings to keep their behaviours in the workplace positive. In practical terms, this research can provide organisations with the knowledge required to nip the problem of abusive supervision in the bud, as prevention is always better than cure.

***Keywords:** role overload; pleasant feeling; unpleasant feeling; emotional intelligence; abusive supervision*

All stressors aren't bad: An affect-based model of role overload – the supervisor-level antecedent of abusive supervision

Introduction

In the current business world, many employees can recall with ease a time when they perceived that their managers or supervisors were ridiculing them, lying to them, expressing anger towards them, or making undesirable comments about them to others; in other words, their supervisors were engaging in the well-known destructive leadership behaviour called abusive supervision. Abusive supervision is defined as “the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical content” (Tepper, 2000, p.178). The negative consequences of abusive supervision have prompted practitioners and organisational scholars to focus on the question, “What happens to employees who work for abusive leaders?” (Eissa and Lester, 2017, p.307). Nevertheless, the dynamics of organisational behaviour research in the domain of abusive supervision have shifted in the past decade from investigating the victims of abusive supervision to answering “when and why abusive supervision happens” (e.g. see Khan *et al.*, 2018; Shillamkwese *et al.*, 2020; Tariq *et al.*, 2021). It is more desirable for organisations to cut this destructive behaviour at the root rather than deal with victims. Accordingly, by understanding the causes behind the occurrence of abusive supervision, organisations will not only minimise such events but also reduce the costs associated with them (Ahmad *et al.*, 2019; Tariq and Ding, 2018; Tariq and Weng, 2018).

The literature on abusive supervision has generally investigated the behaviour or characteristics of subordinates (e.g., low/high performance, hostile attribution style, and core self-evaluations) (Khan *et al.*, 2018; Tariq *et al.*, 2021; Walter *et al.*, 2015), organisational injustice, organisational aggressive norms, and managers' exceedingly difficult goals to answer “when and why abusive supervision happens.” These research directions are indeed valuable, but they ignore an important facet of abusive supervision, i.e., supervisor-level predictors of abusive supervision (e.g., Barnes *et al.*, 2015; Courtright *et al.*, 2016; Eissa and Lester, 2017). As abusive supervision is initiated at the supervisor level, an exploration of its predictors associated with the emotions, attitudes, and behaviours of supervisors may aid practitioners and organisations in reducing such behaviours before they lead to negative consequences. The existing literature includes a recent study by Eissa and Lester (2017) who used the framework of affective events theory (AET; events → emotions → behaviours) to introduce supervisor role overload as a

supervisor-level predictor of abusive supervision. Eissa and Lester (2017) explored and found that supervisor role overload triggers frustration in supervisors, which ultimately translates into abusive behaviours (events, i.e., supervisor job overload → emotion, i.e., supervisor frustration → behaviour, i.e., abusive supervision). While this explanation provides support for supervisor role overload as a crucial supervisor level predictor within the workplace that can be a potential cause of supervisor abusive behaviour, it could be argued that such events could lead to a broad range of supervisor affective experiences. It could be beneficial for supervisors' personal growth to take on new work-related challenges; therefore, the view that all events of supervisor work overload will lead to negative effects and subsequent negative behaviours is limited.

Supervisor role overload refers to the condition in which the supervisor has “the subjective feeling of having too many role demands given the resources available to meet them” (Montani and Dagenais-Desmarais, 2018, p.757). Previous research has suggested that job demands can be appraised as a challenge or a hindrance (Gilboa *et al.*, 2008; Lin and Ling, 2018). As a challenge, it is associated with more work challenges and increased responsibilities and, thus, can positively influence behaviours (LePine *et al.*, 2005). In contrast, as a hindrance, it is associated with uncertainties about the potential risk of depleting the value of work-related resources (e.g., energy and time) and, thus, can negatively influence behaviours (Eatough *et al.*, 2011). The perception of role overload could lead to positive or negative feelings in supervisors, and these positive and negative feelings can, in turn, influence their workplace behaviours. Thus, the theoretical explanation of the sequence of relationships (i.e., supervisor job overload → supervisor frustration → abusive supervision) based on the AET framework in literature is quite limited, and further investigation by drawing on other well-documented theories is warranted to obtain a better understanding of the association between supervisor role overload and abusive supervision (Eissa and Lester, 2017). This study aims to contribute to the literature on supervisor-level predictors of abusive supervision by considering the perspective of transactional stress theory to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between supervisor role overload and abusive supervision.

According to the transactional stress theory, stressful job demands, with both challenging and hindering aspects, could lead to a broad range of supervisor affective experiences, including positive feelings and negative feelings. This research develops an affect-based model of

supervisor role overload that uniquely depicts supervisor affective experiences (i.e., pleasant feelings vs unpleasant feelings) as an underlying mediating mechanism through which supervisor role overload is related to abusive supervision, but with opposite outcomes. In particular, from the perspective of transactional stress theory, we suggest that supervisor role overload, appraised as challenge and hindrance stressors in organisations, could be the source of supervisors' pleasant and unpleasant affective experiences, respectively. These varying experiences subsequently promote or inhibit abusive supervision. To resolve the negative effect of unpleasant feelings and increase the positive effect of pleasant feelings, we introduce a second-stage moderator – supervisor emotional intelligence (EI). EI is defined as the “ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (Salovey and Mayer, 1990, p.189). Accordingly, we predict that the EI of supervisors reduces the occurrence of abusive supervision as it helps them identify, understand, and regulate their unpleasant feelings stemming from role overload.

Integrating the literature on role overload, affect, and EI based on transactional stress theory as the theoretical framework, this study extends the abusive supervision literature in three ways. First, this study extends the work of Eissa and Lester (2017) by introducing a broader range of supervisor affective experiences, including both pleasant feelings and unpleasant feelings as an underlying mediating mechanism, to better understand when and how supervisor role overload leads to abusive supervision. Second, based on supervisors' affective experiences, this study not only explains how supervisor role overload is related to abusive supervision but also provides a balanced perspective of different affective experiences, which can promote or inhibit abusive supervision. Third, the moderated mediation model of this study depicts EI as an important affective characteristic of supervisors in offsetting the impacts of unpleasant feelings by enabling supervisors to detect, understand, and regulate these feelings triggered by role overload (see Figure 1). Overall, this study aims to increase our understanding of supervisor-level predictors that must be considered carefully, as they may be perceived as challenges, with subsequent positive events, or hindrances, with subsequent negative events.

>insert Figure 1, about here<

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Transactional Stress Theory

Although different organisational theories have been used to investigate the effects of workplace stressors on employee behaviours, organisational scholars have consistently converged on the usefulness of transactional stress theory (Dong *et al.*, 2014; Montani and Dagenais-Desmarais, 2018) in recognising the effects of workplace stressors in this regard. Transactional stress theory (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) assesses the attributes of workplace stressors and categorises them into two broad dimensions: challenge stressors and hindrance stressors (Cavanaugh *et al.*, 2000). A challenge stressor refers to a stressful situation where work demands provide an employee with the opportunity to achieve mastery, growth, or future achievements. Conversely, hindrance stressors are stressful situations employees face wherein work demands could potentially lead to loss, harm, or hindrance to their goal attainment and personal growth.

The tenets of transactional stress theory indicate that an individual can make a clear distinction between challenge and hindrance stressors (i.e., they could appraise a stressful situation as a challenge or a hindrance) concerning their anticipated well-being (Dong *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, this theory suggests that individuals may respond differently under these conditions “because of the different ways in which each individual processes affective information” (Dong *et al.*, 2014, p.1057). Accordingly, individuals may evaluate a stressful workplace event as a “challenge” or “threat.” These differing evaluations can then lead to a broad range of affective experiences, including positive (e.g., excitement and enthusiasm) and negative (e.g., fear, frustration, and anxiety) feelings. These feelings instigated by individuals’ appraisal of a stressful situation as a challenge or threat influence how individuals cope and their behaviours in the workplace (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

In addition to providing broad dimensions of stressors and resulting appraisals, transactional stress theory suggests that a stressful situation appraised as a challenge and that appraised as a hindrance are not on the opposite ends of a continuum but rather they are two sides of the same coin (Dong *et al.*, 2014; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Stressful situations at the workplace are not inherently a challenge or a hindrance; instead, they are characterised by the perceptions of employees facing them. Whichever side of the stressor coin the employee is looking at becomes their appraisal. For instance, supervisor role overload is a workplace stressor that leads to an increased number of work challenges and responsibilities (appraised as a challenge stressor; Lepine *et al.*, 2005) and often an inherent loss or a level of uncertainty

(appraised as a hindrance stressor; Eatough *et al.*, 2011) because of the extent to which individuals may or may not be able to accomplish their work using the limited available resources (e.g. energy and time; Crawford *et al.*, 2010). A stressor is the same; when a supervisor is overloaded with job responsibilities, an employee may see the challenge side of the coin, while another may look at the hindrance side. Therefore, at the aggregate level (i.e., across time in a given job and across situations), a high level of supervisor role overload is likely to be appraised as either a challenge stressor or a hindrance stressor (i.e., two sides of the same coin).

Consistent with the propositions discussed above, supervisor role overload, depending on its appraisal as a challenge or hindrance, could be the source of supervisors' pleasant or unpleasant affective experiences, respectively. These varying experiences then lead to different behaviours of supervisors in the workplace, in that pleasant affective experiences could lead to positive behaviours and inhibit negative behaviours (e.g., abusive supervision), while negative affective experiences could lead to negative behaviours and promote destructive or aggressive behaviours. This study applies the principles of transactional stress theory to the abusive supervision literature to explore when and how supervisor role overload (appraised as a challenge stressor or a hindrance stressor) could lead to two border range of affective experiences (i.e., unpleasant feelings and pleasant feelings), which consequently promote and/or inhibit abusive supervision, respectively. In other words, our research is built on the foundation of transactional stress theory to explain the linkage among supervisor role overload, affect, and abusive supervision.

Supervisor Role Overload and Pleasant and Unpleasant Feelings

To maintain their bottom line and remain competitive in the marketplace, organisations frequently assign additional responsibilities and workloads to their employees (Brown *et al.*, 2005). While such practices provide higher efficiency measures to organisations through cost-cutting, employees, on the receiving end of these measures, are often overwhelmed and overloaded with work (Eissa and Lester, 2017). The American Psychological Association (APA) (2015) highlighted role overload as one of the prominent stressors in the workplace that may have significant effects on managers' and supervisors' workplace experiences and a strong impact on their behaviours. Eissa and Lester (2017), a recent study that explored the effects of role overload using the AET (events → emotions → behaviours), found that role overload is a supervisor-level predictor of abusive supervision. The results of their study demonstrated that

supervisor role overload triggers frustration in supervisors, which ultimately manifests as abusive behaviours (event, i.e., supervisor job overload → emotion, i.e., supervisor frustration → behaviour, i.e., abusive supervision). While role overload can have detrimental outcomes in terms of destructive leadership behaviours, it could also inspire managers and supervisors to push through their limits and achieve growth in their particular roles. To explore this idea, this study extends the work of Eissa and Lester (2017) by answering their call to draw upon other well-documented theories to get a deeper understanding of the relationship between supervisor role overload and abusive supervision.

Existing literature defines supervisor role overload as a condition in which a supervisor has “the subjective feeling of having too many role demands given the resources available to meet them” (Montani and Dagenais-Desmarais, 2018, p.757). Supervisor role overload albeit stressful has a complex relationship with supervisor-level outcomes. Organisational scholars have argued that such job demands may be evaluated as a challenge stressor or a hindrance stressor (Vandenberghe *et al.*, 2011), as supervisors adopt different perspectives to view their work. As a challenge stressor, the job demand is associated with more work challenges and increased responsibilities (Lepine *et al.*, 2005). In this case, role overload is perceived to consist of stressful but manageable obligations (Wincent and Örtqvist, 2011), which supervisors can overcome and achieve growth (Wallace *et al.*, 2009). In contrast, as a hindrance stressor, role overload entails a threat of incurring losses due to task-related difficulties and uncertainties (Eatough *et al.*, 2011; Montani and Dagenais-Desmarais, 2018). From this perspective, the same role overload and associated stressful requirements and obligations are perceived as experiencing losses because of inherent difficulties and uncertainties related to additional job demands (Crawford *et al.*, 2010). These arguments are consistent with the assumptions of transactional stress theory discussed earlier; proposing that the same supervisor role overload stressor can be viewed as either a challenge stressor or a hindrance stressor depending on the appraisal of the supervisor (Dong *et al.*, 2014; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). In this manner, rather than regarding role overload as inherently negative, a more appropriate view would be to see it through the eyes of the supervisor experiencing it. The appraisal of the manager or supervisor is what makes the reality of role overload different and creates varying affective experiences that influence an individual’s behaviour.

The workplace environment influences the affective experiences of employees at work (e.g., Dong *et al.*, 2014; Montani and Dagenais-Desmarais, 2018; Lin and Ling, 2018; Wallace *et al.*, 2009). While some instances will instigate positive feelings, others may instigate negative ones. These two broad ranges of affective experiences characterise the most basic but distinctive dimensions of an individual's core effect, summarising how an individual experiences and/or feels appetitive or aversive, good or bad, and positive or negative about their workplace environment (Dong *et al.*, 2014; Russell, 2003; Russell and Barrett, 1999). Applying this conception to role overload through the lens of transactional stress theory, it could be argued that the work environment when appraised as a challenge stressor could potentially prompt positive feelings and when appraised as a hindrance stressor might trigger negative feelings (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Consistent with this, this study proposes that supervisor role overload appraised as a challenge stressor could elicit a supervisor's positive feelings (e.g., enthusiasm, excitement, and enjoyment). This is because the supervisor may perceive greater prospects from role overload in the form of future benefits such as achievements, mastery, and personal growth. In contrast, when appraised as a hindrance stressor, role overload could trigger supervisors' negative feelings (e.g., fatigue, frustration, tension, and anxiety) because they may associate their work environment with substantial performance failure, uncertainties, losses, and risks that are beyond their control. Therefore, appraisal of role overload and the subsequent feelings will lead to different behavioural outcomes at the supervisor level.

The assumptions of transactional stress theory corroborate that the affective experiences instigated from the appraisals of stressors impact how an employee handles the situation and subsequently performs tasks at work (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Moreover, a large, growing body of literature has provided evidence of cognitive and behavioural consequences of employees' affective experiences based on the evaluation of their work environments as challenges or hindrances (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2003; Dong *et al.*, 2014; Eissa and Lester, 2017; Russell, 2003; Seo *et al.*, 2004). Unpleasant feelings such as fatigue, frustration, tension, and anxiety are likely "to create the discernment that the situation is difficult to handle and may be detrimental for goal attainment" (Eissa and Lester, 2017, p.311) and lead to undesirable behaviour. Existing literature on emotion-aggression resonates with this proposition and suggests that an individual is often motivated to dispose of unpleasant feelings by engaging in counter-productive or aggressive workplace behaviours (Dong *et al.*, 2014; Eissa and Lester, 2017; Fox

et al., 2001; Harvey and Harris, 2010; Spector and Fox, 2005). Conversely, pleasant feelings motivate engagement that allows an individual to successfully meet challenging workplace demands (Cacioppo and Gardner, 1999; Dong *et al.*, 2014; Watson *et al.*, 1999). These pleasant feelings implicate confidence and eagerness that is likely to result in constructive workplace behaviours (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Wallace *et al.*, 2009) and condense the counterproductive or aggressive behaviours (Dong *et al.*, 2014; Eissa and Lester, 2017). In line with these arguments, it could be speculated that affective experiences prompted by a supervisor's evaluation of role overload as a challenge or a threat to their well-being could promote or inhibit destructive leadership behaviours such as abusive supervision.

Condensing these arguments, we propose that supervisor role overload, appraised as a hindrance stressor, triggers unpleasant feelings that consequently translate into abusive supervision. Conversely, when appraised as a challenge stressor, role overload sets off pleasant feelings that consequently inhibit the occurrence of abusive supervision. The following hypotheses are, thus, proposed:

“Hypothesis 1: Supervisor role overload as a hindrance stressor has a positive indirect effect on abusive supervision via supervisor unpleasant feelings.”

“Hypothesis 2: Supervisor role overload as a challenge stressor has a negative indirect effect on abusive supervision via supervisor pleasant feelings.”

Moderating Role of Supervisor Emotional Intelligence (EI)

We further expand our model and investigate a key supervisor-level moderator, that is EI, to assist in alleviating unpleasant feelings and, subsequently, prevent abusive supervision. EI has been conceptualised in various ways; for example, mixed EI models conceptualise it as a combination of abilities and personality traits (Joseph and Newman, 2010). Related literature has demonstrated that in terms of affective experiences, EI is the ability of an individual to respond effectively, and such interpretations explain the response above and beyond the effects of personality traits and cognitive abilities (Joseph and Newman, 2010). Owing to the relevance of this study, we emphasise the ability-based model of EI, which conceptualises EI as “a set of mental abilities that are rooted in the individual's underlying intelligence concerning emotions” (Dong *et al.*, 2014, p.1062). The ability-based model identifies four dimensions of EI: (a) “perceiving emotions,” (i.e. the ability to identify and detect one's own and others' emotions) (b) “using emotions to facilitate thinking,” (i.e. the ability to prioritise and direct one's thinking

using the emotional information) (c) “understanding emotions,” (i.e. the ability to understand the relationships among emotions), and (d) “managing emotions” (i.e. the ability to control and/or regulate one’s own and others’ emotions) (Mayer and Salovey, 1997). Following prior work by Dong *et al.* (2014), we consider the holistic nature of the ability-based EI model and utilise all four dimensions to explain the hypothesised moderating effects.

Prior EI research suggests that individuals who are high in EI can deal better with the ramifications of distressing affective experiences (Dong *et al.*, 2014; Mayer and Salovey, 1997). Employees who score high on EI have an advantage over others, as they can precisely perceive their own emotions, thereby allowing them to not only understand and make sense of but also effectively respond to those feelings (Joseph and Newman, 2010). EI allows employees to analyse their affective experiences thoughtfully to equally understand the precursors and implications of the effect and, consequently, influence their emotion-driven judgments, actions, and behaviours (Seo and Barrett, 2007). Furthermore, high-EI employees make active efforts to lessen the ramifications of their distressing affective feelings (Barrett and Gross, 2001). Therefore, developing EI could be useful in dealing with the overwhelmingly negative feelings that supervisors experience when role overload is appraised as a hindrance. Organisations do not have mind-reading abilities to understand how a particular stressor is viewed by a supervisor, but they can equip their employees with the right tools to deal with the potential detrimental effects of negative feelings arising from the perceptions of workplace demands. Once high EI is achieved, supervisors can (a) accurately perceive their emotions, (b) effectively analyse emotional information, (c) understand emotions, and (d) control or regulate their own emotions as well as those of others. This tendency could potentially allow high-EI supervisors to attenuate their unpleasant feelings and avoid displaying adverse behaviours such as abusive supervision.

This study explores the moderating effect of unpleasant feelings because, as compared to positive events, negative events have an asymmetrically stronger impact on an individual’s responses, actions, and behaviours (Taylor, 1991; Dong *et al.*, 2014). Although the adaptive measures to sense one’s emotions accurately, respond to them, and effectively regulate them exist for both positive (Ilies *et al.*, 2020) and negative effects (Eissa *et al.*, 2020), the emphasis is far greater on the latter (Dong *et al.*, 2014; Seo and Barrett, 2007). We, therefore, focus only on testing the effects of EI on the relationship between unpleasant feelings and abusive supervision, as individuals exercise their EI ability more in adverse events.

In line with the above arguments, the following hypothesis has been proposed:

“Hypothesis 3a: Supervisor EI moderates the direct relationship between supervisor unpleasant feelings and abusive supervision, such that the direct relationship is weaker (stronger) when supervisor EI is high (low).”

The moderated mediation model

We further expand our mediation (Hypothesis 1) and moderation (Hypothesis 3a) relationships to moderated mediation relationships by considering the possible role of supervisor EI in attenuating the effects of supervisor role overload on abusive supervision via supervisor unpleasant feelings. High-EI supervisors are more likely to recognise that aggressive behaviour incited by unpleasant emotions would only worsen an already adverse situation (Eissa and Lester, 2017). They are also more inclined to break the negative coping cycles (i.e., engaging in abusive supervision) by putting more conscious efforts (e.g., diverting from unpleasant feelings, avoiding their aggressive intentions, and engaging in positive interactions and activities) towards role overload to achieve mastery, growth, and goals. Dong *et al.* (2014) argued and found support for the notion that “high-EI employees outperform their low-EI counterparts by demonstrating greater leadership potential and fewer negative job attitudes” (p.1062). Along this line, we claim that while experiencing unpleasant feelings induced by role overload, high-EI supervisors actively monitor and thoughtfully analyse the set of circumstances and make adjustments to avoid the display of inappropriate or aggressive behaviours. This reasoning is consistent with the research of Salovey and Mayer (1990) who suggested that high-EI employees are likely to effectively monitor and analyse unwanted situations and their possible aversive outcomes, thereby enabling them to demonstrate desirable leadership behaviours (e.g., adaptability). Through the regulation of unpleasant feelings, high-EI employees enable themselves to effectively manage their feelings and prevent themselves from displaying undesirable behaviours that subside learning fulfilment and negatively affect others at the workplace.

In summation, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 3a together propose a moderated mediation model, implying that supervisor EI attenuates the relationship between supervisor role overload and abusive supervision via supervisor unpleasant feelings. The following hypothesis is thus proposed:

“Hypothesis 3b: Supervisor EI moderates the relationship between supervisor role overload and abusive supervision via supervisor unpleasant feelings, in that the mediated relationship is weaker (stronger) when supervisor EI is high (low).”

Methods

Sample and Procedure

We collected single-source and multi-wave data from supervisors of several organisations located in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia in various industries, including information technology, education, human services, health care, public safety, and finance. Specifically, we hired business students enrolled in the Master of Human Resource Management program and requested them to serve as organisational contacts in exchange for extra credit. The hired business students helped us formally contact supervisors from their respective organisations, communicate to them the purpose of our study, and invite them to participate in this study. Our participants were middle-level supervisors/managers who work for at least 24 hours a week.

We designed two different questionnaires to collect participant ratings of the latent variables of our study. At Time 1 (T1), we asked participants to respond to the demographic variables and the level of role overload they experienced. At time 2 (T2), we asked those participants who had completed the T1 questionnaire to provide their ratings in the T2 questionnaire of variables, including pleasant feelings, unpleasant feelings, EI, and abusive supervision. The T1 and T2 questionnaires were both conducted in a paper-and-pencil format.

To ensure the anonymity and accuracy of the responses, following previous studies (e.g., Ahmed *et al.*, 2021; Butt *et al.*, 2019; Popelnukha *et al.*, 2021; Weng *et al.*, 2020; Weng *et al.*, 2020), we took several important steps. For example, (1) we emphasised the importance of integrity in the invitation letter to the participants, and in line with this, we guaranteed confidentiality of their responses to the participants; (2) we offered small incentives (e.g. coffee coupons, movie coupons) to the participants to boost study participation; and (3) we asked participants to also provide their unique information (e.g. the last two digits of their date and year of birth and the last three digits of their employee ID) so that we could the T1 and T2 questionnaires.

In total, we invited 1789 supervisors to participate in our study. Nearly 1366 supervisors showed interest and were provided with the questionnaires. At T1, we successfully received completed responses from 1187 supervisors. Out of the 1187 supervisors, 1007 completed the T2

questionnaire. Ultimately, the responses of 990 supervisors were included in the final sample. In total, 17 responses were excluded, as they did not meet one of the following inclusion criteria: participants should (1) be a mid-level supervisor/manager in their respective industry, (2) work at least 24 hours a week, and (3) have a unique identification code to match their T1 and T2 responses.

Measures

Role overload

To measure supervisor role overload, we adopted three items from Bacharach *et al.* (1990) and five items from Peterson *et al.* (1995), following Lin and Ling (2018). Therefore, in our study, we measured supervisor role overload using the eight-item scale developed by Lin and Ling (2018). For example, our sample item “My workload is too heavy” was measured using a five-point rating system (from 1 = “Strongly disagree” to 5 = “Strongly agree”).

Pleasant and unpleasant feelings

To measure supervisors’ pleasant and unpleasant feelings, we used 12 affect-related adjectives to represent supervisors’ affective experiences (positive and negative) at work, following Dong *et al.* (2014). For instance, the participants were asked to rate “the extent to which they experienced each adjective at the workplace” using a five-point rating system (from 1 = “Never” to 5 = “Every time”). Six affect-related adjectives demonstrated supervisors’ pleasant feelings (“happy,” “excited,” “enthusiastic,” “calm,” “relaxed,” and “satisfied”), while the remaining six demonstrated their unpleasant feelings (“angry,” “nervous,” “tired,” “unhappy,” “depressed,” and “disappointed”).

Abusive supervision

Following Mitchell and Ambrose (2007), we used a five-item scale, which was adopted from the 15-item original scale of abusive supervision developed by Tepper (2000), to measure abusive supervision. For instance, the participants responded to the item “how often they performed the behaviour described in each item” using a five-point rating system (from 1 = “Never” to 5 = “Every time”). The items include “I ridicule others,” “I tell others that their thoughts and feelings are stupid,” “I put others down in front of everyone,” “I make negative comments about others,” and “I tell others that they aren’t capable.”

Emotional intelligence

Following Wong and Law (2002), we used their WLEIS questionnaire (16-item scale) to measure supervisor EI. The participants provided their ratings of the items representing their level of EI using a five-point rating system (1 = “Never” to 5 = “Every time”). The 16-item scale of supervisor EI has four dimensions, with each dimension containing four items. The self-emotion appraisal (SEA) dimension includes “I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time,” “I have a good understanding of my own emotions,” “I really understand what I feel,” and “I always know whether or not I am happy.” The others’ emotion appraisal (OEA) dimension includes “I always know my friends’ emotions from their behaviour,” “I am a good observer of others’ emotions,” “I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others,” and “I have a good understanding of the emotions of people around me.” The use of emotion (UOE) dimension includes “I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them,” “I always tell myself I am a competent person,” “I am a self-motivated person,” and “I would always encourage myself to try my best.” Finally, the regulation of emotion (ROE) dimension includes “I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally,” “I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions,” “I can always calm down quickly when I am very angry,” and “I have good control of my own emotions.”

Control variables

Following recent studies (e.g., Tariq *et al.*, 2020; Tariq *et al.*, 2022; Waqas *et al.*, 2020), we controlled for supervisor gender (1 = Female, 2 = Male), age (1 = less than 25 years, 2 = 26–33 years, 3 = 34–41 years, 4 = 42–49 years, 5 = more than 49 years), and tenure with his/her manager (1 = less than 1 year, 2 = 1–2 years, 3 = 3–4 years, 4 = more than 4 years) to moderate any biases related to demographic differences. In our analysis, we controlled supervisor gender because gender differences (e.g., men and women) may differ in terms of their affect (e.g., Hoobler and Hu, 2013), and male supervisors are more likely to engage in hostile and aggressive behaviors (e.g., abusive supervision; Tepper *et al.*, 2006). Supervisor age was also controlled because negative affect decreases with age (e.g., Charles *et al.*, 2001). Finally, supervisor job tenure was controlled as it has potential to influence the affective processes and behaviors (e.g., Tariq and Ding, 2018; Tariq and Weng, 2018).

Results

Analytical Approach

Ordinary least squares regression models were used to test the proposed relationships in this study (i.e., the formal mediation relationships and the formal moderated mediation relationships). Hayes's (2013) PROCESS macro for SPSS, the extension of the SPSS macro, was used to test the study's hypotheses. More specifically, SPSS PROCESS macro-Model 4 and Model 14 were used to test the hypotheses. SPSS PROCESS macro uses "an ordinary least squares regression-based path analytic framework to estimate direct and indirect effects and allows for the estimation of moderated mediation (conditional indirect effect) models" (Demsky *et al.*, 2018, p.6). It also produces statistics that are useful for testing mediation (i.e., indirect effects) and moderated mediation (i.e., conditional indirect effects at the high, mean, and low values of the moderator). In line with this, PROCESS macro also generates the 'index of the moderated mediation', which requires a combination of parameters across multiple equations and is useful in determining the moderation mediation (Hayes *et al.*, 2017).

The PROCESS macro-Model 4 was used to test Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 (the formal mediation relationships), whereas the PROCESS macro-Model 14 was used to test Hypothesis 3a and Hypothesis 3b (the formal moderated mediation relationships). The PROCESS macro-Model 14 generates conditional indirect effects at the high, mean, and low values of the moderator at the b-path. Additionally, the index of the moderated mediation provides an additional significant tool to examine the conditional indirect effects (Weng *et al.*, 2020; Weng *et al.*, 2020). A significant "index of moderated mediation" reveals that "any two conditional indirect effects estimated at different values of the moderator are significantly different from one another" (Hayes, 2015, p.2). Finally, we modelled our study's analytical approach based on previous studies (e.g., Eissa and Lester, 2017; Tariq and Ding, 2018; Tariq and Weng, 2018) in addition to following the suggestions and guidelines of Hayes (2013).

Descriptive Statistics

The intercorrelations, descriptive statistics, and estimated reliabilities among variables are presented in Table I.

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Formal Mediation Results

The SPSS PROCESS macro-Model 4 was used to test the indirect effects of supervisor role overload on abusive supervision via supervisor unpleasant feelings (Hypothesis 1) and supervisor pleasant feelings (Hypothesis 2). The significance of the indirect effects of supervisor

role overload on abusive supervision via supervisor unpleasant feelings and supervisor pleasant feelings were determined via bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals using 20,000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals. Table II shows the results of mediation analysis (i.e., direct, indirect, and total effects of supervisor role overload on abusive supervision via supervisor unpleasant feelings and supervisor pleasant feelings). In line with Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2, supervisor role overload was positively and significantly associated with supervisor unpleasant feelings ($Effect = 0.83, SE = 0.04, t = 22.37, LLCI = 0.75, ULCI = 0.90$) and supervisor pleasant feelings ($Effect = 0.60, SE = 0.02, t = 31.22, LLCI = 0.56, ULCI = 0.64$). Supervisor unpleasant feelings were positively and significantly associated with abusive supervision ($Effect = 0.39, SE = 0.03, t = 13.41, LLCI = 0.34, ULCI = 0.45$), whereas supervisor pleasant feelings were negatively and significantly associated with abusive supervision ($Effect = -0.30, SE = 0.06, t = -5.26, LLCI = -0.41, ULCI = -0.19$).

The direct effect of supervisor role overload on abusive supervision was positive but insignificant ($Effect = 0.39, SE = 0.05, t = 7.18, LLCI = 0.28, ULCI = 0.49$). The indirect effect of supervisor role overload on abusive supervision via supervisor unpleasant feelings was positive and significant ($Effect = 0.33, SE = 0.03, LLCI = 0.26, ULCI = 0.39$). The indirect effect of supervisor role overload on abusive supervision via supervisor pleasant feelings was negative and significant ($Effect = -0.18, SE = 0.03, LLCI = -0.24, ULCI = -0.12$). The total effect of supervisor role overload on abusive supervision was positive and significant ($Effect = 0.53, SE = 0.04, t = 14.29, LLCI = 0.46, ULCI = 0.61$). Therefore, the results of direct, indirect, and total effects supported Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2.

>insert Table II, about here<

Formal Moderated Mediation Results

The SPSS PROCESS macro-Model 14 was used to test the moderation effects of supervisor EI on the relationship between supervisor unpleasant feelings and abusive supervision (Hypothesis 3a) and the indirect effects of supervisor role overload on abusive supervision via supervisor unpleasant feelings at high vs low values of supervisor EI (Hypothesis 3b). Tables III and IV show the results of moderated mediation analysis. In line with Hypothesis 3a, supervisor unpleasant feelings were positively and significantly associated with abusive supervision ($Effect = 0.24, SE = 0.04, t = 5.43, LLCI = 0.15, ULCI = 0.33$). The interaction term of supervisor unpleasant feelings and supervisor EI on abusive supervision was negative and significant ($Effect$

= -0.18, $SE = 0.04$, $t = -4.10$, $LLCI = -0.27$, $ULCI = -0.09$). In line with this, the SPSS PROCESS macro-Model 14 was used for analysing the conditional direct effects of supervisor unpleasant feelings on abusive supervision at the high vs low values of supervisor EI (i.e., +1 SD , *Mean*, and -1 SD ; see Table IV). The direct effects of supervisor unpleasant feelings on abusive supervision at a high (+1 SD) value of supervisor EI was weaker and significant ($Effect = 0.13$, $SE = 0.06$, $LLCI = 0.02$, $ULCI = 0.25$). Conversely, the direct effects of supervisor unpleasant feelings on abusive supervision at a low (-1 SD) value of supervisor EI was stronger and significant ($Effect = 0.35$, $SE = 0.04$, $LLCI = 0.26$, $ULCI = 0.44$). Therefore, we found support for Hypothesis 3a.

Additionally, following Cohen *et al.* (2003), we performed a simple slope test and plot the interaction term of supervisor unpleasant feelings and supervisor emotional intelligence on abusive supervision to obtain further evidence of the moderation effects. As presented in Figure 2, the slope of the association between supervisor unpleasant feelings and abusive supervision was weaker for supervisors with higher EI ($Effect = 0.06$, $t = 9.49$, $p < 0.001$) but stronger for those with lower EI ($Effect = 0.24$, $t = 75.90$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, these results again provide support for Hypothesis 3a.

>insert Table III and Figure 2, about here<

Hypothesis 3b was tested by the SPSS PROCESS macro-Model 14 using 20,000 bias-corrected bootstrapped samples. Hypothesis 3b proposed a conditional indirect effect model that examines whether the indirect effects of supervisor role overload on abusive supervision via supervisor unpleasant feelings would be weaker (stronger) for supervisors who experience higher (lower) levels of emotional intelligence. Table IV presents the conditional indirect effects of supervisor role overload on abusive supervision via supervisor unpleasant feelings at the high vs. low (i.e. +1 SD , *Mean*, and -1 SD) values of supervisor EI and the index of the moderation mediation model. The indirect effect of supervisor role overload on abusive supervision via supervisor unpleasant feelings at the high (+1 SD) value of supervisor emotional intelligence was weaker and significant ($Effect = 0.11$, $SE = 0.05$, $LLCI = 0.01$, $ULCI = 0.21$). Conversely, the indirect effect of supervisor role overload on abusive supervision via supervisor unpleasant feelings at the low (-1 SD) value of supervisor EI was stronger and more significant ($Effect = 0.29$, $SE = 0.05$, $LLCI = 0.20$, $ULCI = 0.38$). Additionally, the SPSS PROCESS macro-Model 14 also generated the index of the moderated mediation model (i.e., $Effect = -0.15$, $SE = 0.04$, $LLCI$

= -0.22, *ULCI* = -0.08) to provide support for the moderating role of supervisor EI on the relationship between supervisor role overload and abusive supervision via supervisor unpleasant feelings. Therefore, these findings supported Hypothesis 3b.

>insert Table IV, about here<

Discussion

The findings of this study extend our understanding of supervisor-level predictors of abusive supervision. Using transactional stress theory as a framework, we found that role overload that supervisors face at work could incite varying affective responses in them, i.e., pleasant or unpleasant feelings, which lead to different workplace behaviours. We argued that when role overload is viewed as a challenge stressor, it promotes pleasant feelings, and when the same overload is appraised as a hindrance stressor, it incites unpleasant feelings. The results provide support to the proposition that, as a hindrance stressor, role overload has a positive indirect effect on abusive supervision via unpleasant feelings, while as a challenge stressor, role overload has a negative indirect effect via pleasant feelings. We also found support for the moderating effect of EI on the relationship between unpleasant feelings and abusive supervision, in that the relationship is weaker when the supervisor scores high on EI. Finally, the findings revealed that EI also moderates the indirect effect of role overload on abusive supervision via unpleasant feelings. This indicates that even if role overload is viewed as a hindrance stressor and causes unpleasant feelings, these effects can be alleviated with high EI and prevent the occurrence of abusive supervision providing, support to our moderated mediation model.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to and extends the literature on antecedents of abusive supervision by using transactional stress theory and providing evidence from the literature on role overload, affect, and EI. First, existing scholarship on abusive supervision largely focuses on subordinates or organisational factors, which are external to supervisors, while an in-depth investigation of what happens within supervisors that provokes abusive supervision is lacking (e.g., Barnes *et al.*, 2015; Courtright *et al.*, 2016; Eissa and Lester, 2017). We broadened the view of the predictors of this destructive leadership behaviour by providing support to the view that how supervisors feel as a result of workplace experiences can provide valuable insights into understanding when and how abusive supervision occurs. Particularly, this study revealed the conditions under which tasks assigned to supervisors could be a source of abusive supervision. We provide support to

Eissa and Lester's (2017) research by showing that role overload as a stressor creates unpleasant feelings, leading to abusive supervision, and extend their work by demonstrating that the same overload can create pleasant feelings and prevent the occurrence of negative behaviours. Our findings suggest that role overload can also lead to pleasant feelings that avert supervisors from being abusive. Hence, we initiate a new research direction relating to the role workplace stressors can play in preventing negative behaviours in the workplace and their significance as antecedents for preventing rather than promoting negative consequences of abusive supervision.

Second, we integrate the principles of transactional stress theory (Dong *et al.*, 2014; Montani and Dagenais-Desmarais, 2018) to explain the underlying mechanism of the relationship among supervisor role overload, affect, and abusive supervision. We further extend abusive supervision literature and provide evidence that feelings resulting from a supervisor's appraisal of role overload can explain when a workplace stressor causes or inhibits abusive supervision. This theoretical foundation provides a unique perspective and uncovers the key role of appraisals and the resulting feelings in explaining supervisors' behaviour in face of stressors at work (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Instead of focusing on eliminating stressors by labelling them inherently negative, the cause of unpleasant feelings and negative behaviours (Eissa and Lester, 2017), the focus should be shifted to the role that feelings resulting from appraisals of workplace stressors play in enabling negative behaviours such as abusive supervision. In line with this, our study provides support for the notion that not all individuals appraise a stressor in one standard way (Dong *et al.*, 2014) and that a broader range of supervisor affective experiences that may result from appraising a stressor as a challenge or a hindrance must be considered. Thus, this study proposes a direction where the role of appraisals and resulting pleasant and unpleasant feelings, rather than just the role of workplace factors, is crucial in determining what can facilitate the reduction of destructive behaviour occurrences in the workplace.

Lastly, we integrate the construct of EI in our proposed model and explain that while not all workplace stressors can always be avoided, managers can be equipped with the right tools to internally deal with negative feelings arising from stressors. The results lend support to the beneficial outcomes of EI as this ability has been proven to offset the corollaries of stressors in the workplace (Dong *et al.*, 2014; Mayer and Salovey, 1997). Existing research informs us that high EI allows individuals to understand and respond to emotions effectively (Joseph and

Newman, 2010). This is consistent with our supportive findings that when experiencing unpleasant feelings, supervisors with high EI are less likely to display abusive supervision. Hence, this study contributes to the EI literature and highlights its importance in mitigating negative workplace behaviours such as abusive supervision.

Practical Implications

The study findings have valuable managerial implications, in that they can help practitioners design, allocate, and manage additional assignments for employees in a way that can be efficient for organisations while avoiding potential undesirable outcomes. First, since role overload can be appraised as a hindrance stressor and result in negative feelings for some supervisors, managerial training and practices should be introduced to provide adequate assistance and support for supervisors undertaking such assignments. Stressful assignments have an inherent tendency of incurring losses due to associated difficulties and uncertainties (Crawford *et al.*, 2010). Appropriate training programs can, therefore, immunise supervisors against negative perceptions arising from the overload of assignments and/or help them perceive things positively (e.g., learning orientation and openness), as well as protect them from experiencing unpleasant feelings. Organisations must also aspire to create a supportive environment that allows acceptance of errors and risk-taking. By doing so, the perceptions of risks, difficulties, and uncertainties in supervisors can be regulated. Such a supportive climate will also allow supervisors to control their frustration, fear, and/or tension that may arise from the overload of assignments. Additionally, peer support (e.g., professional, psychological, and/or social support) may also ease the completion of role overload assignments; as such, support is positively associated with pleasant feelings and negatively associated with unpleasant feelings (Dong *et al.*, 2014).

Second, our mediation findings suggest that supervisor role overload as a challenge stressor may generate pleasant feelings and, consequently, reduce the likelihood of abusive supervision. Based on these findings, managers and practitioners should understand that additional assignments could be allotted to supervisors in a way that helps them experience more pleasant and fewer unpleasant feelings. For example, managers and decision-makers must monitor the allocation of additional assignments among all supervisors in a reasonable and unbiased manner. By developing transparent systems (e.g., clear communication, fair allocation of role overload assignments, etc.), organisations may succeed in gaining the trust of supervisors

by making them feel that they are being treated fairly (Eissa and Lester, 2017) and that assignments are for their benefit. This will result in fewer unpleasant feelings and prevent supervisors from displaying behaviours that are perceived as aggressive and abusive and help them become a source of positivity for their direct reports.

Our moderated mediation findings suggest that supervisors with high EI are better equipped to understand and tackle their unpleasant feelings incited by role overload, which reduces the chances of abusive supervision. These findings provide valuable insights into recruitment and selection practitioners, as organisations can identify and select individuals with high EI for managerial positions in which role overload is more likely to occur. Furthermore, organisations can strategically develop the EI of existing supervisors by providing training programs that educate them on how to (a) perceive their own and others' emotions, (b) understand them, (c) use them, and (d) most importantly, regulate them. This will ultimately allow organisations to develop productive workplace interactions and minimise the chances of abusive supervision instigated by the unpleasant feelings of role overload assignments.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has several theoretical and methodological limitations. First, the theoretical foundation of this study is only transactional stress theory, which was used to explain the proposed relationship (i.e., supervisor role overload → supervisor unpleasant and pleasant feelings → abusive supervision). Although the study findings provide meaningful insights into different ways role overload can be detrimental or beneficial, we ignored the likelihood of changes in role overload assignments over time (i.e., supervisor role overload assignments may change on a monthly, weekly, or even daily basis), which could change supervisor unpleasant or pleasant feelings (Dong *et al.*, 2014). Instead of a constant, role overload could be considered as an event occurring temporarily or at regular intervals. Moreover, it is well-proven that abusive supervisory behaviour has a momentary feature similar to other day-to-day behaviours (Barnes *et al.*, 2015; Johnson *et al.*, 2012). Hence, it could be argued that supervisor role overload, pleasant and unpleasant feelings, and abusive supervision could fluctuate over time and, therefore, be approached in a dynamic rather than a static manner. We believe that further exploration of the hypothesised moderated mediation relationships using other well-documented theoretical explanations is warranted. Thus, we call for future studies to conduct a daily diary study to look into the momentary approach of supervisor role overload and subsequent abusive supervision.

For example, future studies could focus on affective events theory (i.e., daily workplace events → daily emotions → daily workplace behaviours) to explore and investigate the daily aspect of supervisor role overload and abusive supervision.

Second, this study proposed and found support for the notion that a supervisor affective characteristic (i.e., supervisor EI) can attenuate the effects of supervisor role overload on abusive supervision via supervisor unpleasant feelings. However, there could be other possible factors that can moderate how the affective processes of supervisors influence their workplace behaviour. For example, stress literature (Schaubroeck *et al.*, 2000) suggests that an individual's self-efficacy (SE) could play a significant role in shaping the effects of challenge and/or hindrance stressors. Supervisors high in SE tend to trust their abilities in exercising control over demanding, threatening, and challenging work assignments. Furthermore, high-SE supervisors are drawn towards challenging work assignments (Rodell and Judge, 2009). Thus, we call for future studies to explore other possible individual and situational factors that have a significant moderating role in counteracting the undesirable consequences of a negative appraisal of role overload. Additionally, this study considered supervisor EI as a second-stage moderator (i.e., EI mitigates the effects of supervisor role overload on abusive supervision via supervisor unpleasant feelings); however, we also believe that it could moderate the proposed relationships as a first-stage moderator. Supervisors with high EI might appraise a stressor as a challenge rather than a hindrance and would perhaps feel less unpleasant emotions. This methodological limitation of this study did not allow us to explore supervisor EI as a first moderator. Future studies could extend our study and design a methodology to investigate supervisor EI as a first-stage as well as second-stage moderator to obtain a comprehensive understanding of supervisor EI's role in the proposed relationships.

Third, although we collected data from supervisors in organisations of diverse industries, our sample focused on only mid-level supervisors. Given that senior-level managers are usually selected because of extensive experience, skills, and expertise, they might be more inherently equipped to deal with and respond positively to role overload demands. Future studies should, therefore, go beyond a single managerial level and consider other hierarchical levels (e.g., first-line, middle-line, and top-line managers) and career stages (e.g. early-career and senior-level managers) to increase the generalisability of the findings.

Fourth, although “it is worth noting that the use of self-report data is generally considered to be the most valid approach when assessing perceptual outcomes and internal states, such as abusive supervision, feelings [pleasant and unpleasant feelings], and self-control [emotional intelligence]” (Lian *et al.*, 2014, p.133), the single-source study is one the major limitations of our study. In line with this, we have collected a multi-wave data from supervisors of several organisations to limit the likelihood of common method variance (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). To fully address the limitations of the single-source study, future research should consider utilizing various research designs (e.g., multi-source, temporal, or longitudinal designs), which could provide further support for the predictive validity of the current study.

Conclusion

In an ever-competitive world, companies frequently find themselves at a crossroads in making decisions to promote efficiency. At times, that may mean making the most of the available human capital and resources cost-effective, which often results in additional tasks and responsibilities for employees. This is relevant now more than ever as organisations are recovering from the impact of COVID-19 and are facing the challenges of layoffs during the pandemic. In the face of challenges due to human capital shortage, the only option is to make the most of what is available, which means that employees are being overloaded with work. However, such role overload can have different impacts on employees: on the one hand, there is a potential for growth, which entails drive and enthusiasm; on the other hand, it could feel like an unsurmountable mountain for employees, leading to different forms of anxiety. Since what we feel is what we project onto others, supervisors experiencing unpleasant feelings cannot be the best leader they can be; even worse, they can become a source of negativity by displaying destructive behaviours such as abusive supervision. The corollary of something as minor as an interaction with a leader experiencing unpleasant feelings could have a ripple effect and lead to adverse outcomes for organisations and their employees. Our study explores the different perceptions of role overload and the subsequent feelings coming from those perceptions as supervisor-level predictors of abusive supervision. While it is not possible to objectively put a different lens inside the minds of supervisors when they face stressors at work, to feel pleasant or unpleasant, they can be trained to manage their negative feelings and keep their behaviours in check. Particularly, training managers to be more emotionally intelligent can help them not only achieve growth by overcoming challenges at work but also acknowledge and adapt their feelings

to keep their behaviours in the workplace positive. In practical terms, this research can provide organisations with the knowledge required to nip the problem of abusive supervision in the bud, as prevention is always better than cure.

Data availability: The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest: The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Studies Involving Animal Subjects: No animal studies are presented in this manuscript.

Studies Involving Human Subjects: No human studies are presented in this manuscript.

Inclusion of Identifiable Human Data: No potentially identifiable human images or data is presented in this study.

Consent to Participate and Publish: This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the Authors.

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Table I

Intercorrelations, Descriptive Statistics, and Estimated Reliabilities among Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Supervisor Gender	1.50	0.50	(--)							
2. Supervisor Age	3.01	1.40	-0.01	(--)						
3. Supervisor Tenure with His/Her Manager	2.96	1.43	-0.03	0.01	(--)					
4. Supervisor Role Overload	2.92	0.70	0.06*	-0.01	-0.06	(0.73)				
5. Supervisor Unpleasant Feelings	2.43	1.00	0.05	-0.02	-0.03	0.58**	(0.88)			
6. Supervisor Pleasant Feelings	2.21	0.60	0.05	0.01	-0.05	0.70**	0.40**	(0.72)		
7. Abusive Supervision	1.83	0.90	0.01	-0.06	-0.01	0.41**	0.53**	0.19**	(0.82)	
8. Supervisor Emotional Intelligence	3.46	0.58	-0.06*	0.01	0.06	-0.92**	-0.75**	-0.77**	-0.50**	(0.82)

Notes: $N = 990$; Significance at: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; the figures in parentheses are alpha internal consistency reliabilities.

Supervisor gender was coded as 1 = Female, 2 = Male.

Supervisor age was coded as 1 = less than 25 years, 2 = 26–33 years, 3 = 34–41 years, 4 = 42–49 years, 5 = more than 49 years.

Supervisor tenure with his/her manager was coded as 1 = less than 1 year, 2 = 1–2 years, 3 = 3–4 years, 4 = more than 4 years.

Table II

Results of Mediation Analysis (Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Supervisor Role Overload on Abusive Supervision)

Variable	B	SE	t values	LLCI	ULCI	R²
Outcome Variable: Supervisor Unpleasant Feelings						0.34***
<i>Constant</i>	-0.03	0.16	-0.16	-0.33	0.28	
Supervisor Role Overload	0.83	0.04	22.37***	0.75	0.90	
Supervisor Gender	0.03	0.05	0.60	-0.07	0.13	
Supervisor Age	-0.01	0.02	-0.46	-0.04	0.03	
Supervisor Tenure with His/Her Manager	0.01	0.02	0.46	-0.03	0.04	
Outcome Variable: Supervisor Pleasant Feelings						0.50***
<i>Constant</i>	0.44	0.08	5.41***	0.28	0.60	
Supervisor Role Overload	0.60	0.02	31.22***	0.56	0.64	
Supervisor Gender	0.01	0.03	0.34	-0.04	0.06	
Supervisor Age	0.01	0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.02	
Supervisor Tenure with His/Her Manager	0.01	0.01	0.01	-0.02	0.01	
Outcome Variable: Abusive Supervision						0.32***
<i>Constant</i>	0.55	0.15	3.79***	0.27	0.84	
Supervisor Role Overload	0.39	0.05	7.18***	0.28	0.49	
Supervisor Unpleasant Feelings	0.39	0.03	13.41***	0.34	0.45	
Supervisor Pleasant Feelings	-0.30	0.06	-5.26***	-0.41	-0.19	
Supervisor Gender	-0.06	0.05	0.25	-0.15	0.04	
Supervisor Age	-0.03	0.02	0.07	-0.06	0.00	
Supervisor Tenure with His/Her Manager	0.01	0.02	0.66	-0.03	0.04	
Total Effects Model						
Outcome Variable: Abusive Supervision						0.17***
<i>Constant</i>	0.41	0.16	2.61*	0.10	0.72	
Supervisor Role Overload	0.53	0.04	14.29***	0.46	0.61	
Supervisor Gender	-0.05	0.05	-0.87	-0.15	0.06	

Supervisor Age	-0.04	0.02	-1.94	-0.07	0.00
Supervisor Tenure with His/Her Manager	0.01	0.02	0.65	-0.02	0.05

Total, indirect, and direct effects of supervisor role overload on abusive supervision

<i>Total Effect of Supervisor Role Overload on Abusive Supervision</i>	0.53	0.04	14.29***	0.46	0.61
<i>Direct Effect of Supervisor Role Overload on Abusive Supervision</i>	0.39	0.05	7.18***	0.28	0.49
<i>Indirect Effect of Supervisor Role Overload on Abusive Supervision</i>					
Supervisor Unpleasant Feelings	0.33	0.03	--	0.26	0.39
Supervisor Pleasant Feelings	-0.18	0.03	--	-0.24	-0.12

Notes: $N = 990$; Unstandardised regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 20,000; LLCI = Lower level of the 95% confidence interval; ULCI = Upper level of 95% confidence interval; Significance at $*p < 0.05$; $***p < 0.001$. The significance of conditional indirect effects was determined by examining the bias-corrected confidence intervals obtained from bootstrapping with 20,000 repeated samples.

Table III

Results of Moderated Mediation Analysis

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> values	LLCI	ULCI	<i>R</i> ²
Outcome Variable: Supervisor Unpleasant Feelings						0.34***
<i>Constant</i>	-2.46	0.16	-15.74***	-2.76	-2.15	
Supervisor Role Overload	0.83	0.04	22.37***	0.75	0.90	
Supervisor Gender	0.03	0.05	0.60	-0.07	0.13	
Supervisor Age	-0.01	0.02	-0.46	-0.04	0.03	
Supervisor Tenure with His/Her Manager	0.01	0.02	0.46	-0.03	0.04	
Outcome Variable: Abusive Supervision						0.32***
<i>Constant</i>	2.63	0.33	7.86***	1.97	3.28	
Supervisor Role Overload	-0.25	0.11	-2.28*	-0.47	-0.04	
Supervisor Unpleasant Feelings	0.24	0.04	5.43***	0.15	0.33	
Supervisor Emotional Intelligence	-0.76	0.17	-4.51***	-1.09	-0.43	
Supervisor Unpleasant Feelings × Supervisor Emotional Intelligence	-0.18	0.04	-4.10***	-0.27	-0.09	
Supervisor Gender	-0.05	0.05	-1.01	-0.14	0.05	
Supervisor Age	-0.03	0.02	-2.01	-0.07	0.00	
Supervisor Tenure with His/Her Manager	0.01	0.02	0.73	-0.02	0.05	

Notes: *N* = 990; Unstandardised regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 20,000; LLCI = Lower level of the 95% confidence interval; ULCI = Upper level of 95% confidence interval; significance at **p* < 0.05; ****p* < 0.001

Table IV

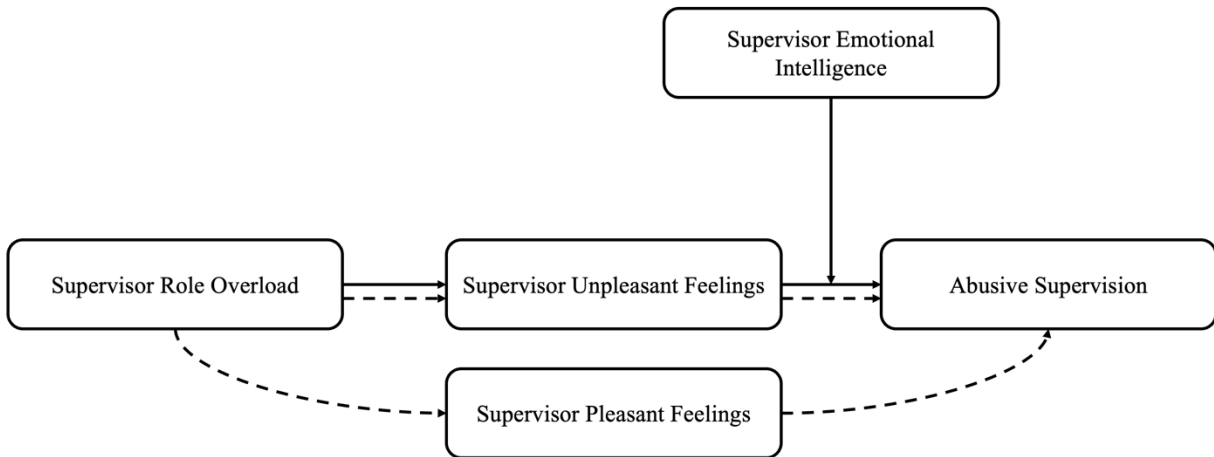
Results of Moderation Mediation Analysis (Conditional Direct and Indirect Effects at the Values of Supervisor Emotional Intelligence)

Predictor	Moderator	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
	Supervisor Emotional Intelligence				
Index of Moderated Mediation	--	-0.15	0.04	-0.22	-0.08
Direct Effect					
Supervisor Role Overload on Abusive Supervision	--	-0.25	0.11	-0.47	-0.04
Conditional Direct Effect					
Supervisor Unpleasant Feelings on Abusive Supervision	<i>-1 SD</i>	0.35	0.04	0.26	0.44
Supervisor Unpleasant Feelings on Abusive Supervision	<i>Mean</i>	0.24	0.04	0.15	0.33
Supervisor Unpleasant Feelings on Abusive Supervision	<i>+1 SD</i>	0.13	0.06	0.02	0.25
Conditional Indirect Effect					
Supervisor Role Overload on Abusive Supervision via Supervisor Unpleasant Feelings	<i>-1 SD</i>	0.29	0.05	0.20	0.38
Supervisor Role Overload on Abusive Supervision via Supervisor Unpleasant Feelings	<i>Mean</i>	0.20	0.05	0.11	0.29
Supervisor Role Overload on Abusive Supervision via Supervisor Unpleasant Feelings	<i>+1 SD</i>	0.11	0.05	0.01	0.21

Notes: $N = 990$; Unstandardised regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 20,000; LLCI = Lower level of the 95% confidence interval; ULCI = Upper level of 95% confidence interval. The significance of conditional indirect effects was determined by examining the bias-corrected confidence intervals obtained from bootstrapping with 20,000 repeated sample.

Figure 1

The Proposed Moderated Mediation Model



Note: The dotted lines demonstrates the formal mediation hypotheses. Whereas, the solid lines demonstrate the moderated mediation model of supervisor role overload and abusive supervision through supervisor unpleasant feelings at the high vs. low values of supervisor emotional intelligence.

Figure 2

The Interaction Term of Supervisor Unpleasant Feelings and Supervisor Emotional Intelligence on Abusive Supervision

