



Abusive supervision and employee reactions: The moderating roles of high-performing employees



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Dates:

Received: 16 Jan. 2025

Accepted: 02 Apr. 2025

Published: 06 June 2025

How to cite this article:

Mensah, P., & Okeke-Uzodike, O.E. (2025). Abusive supervision and employee reactions: The moderating roles of high-performing employees. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur*, 23(0), a2966. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v23i0.2966>

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Orientation: Prior research has identified several moderators that can mitigate the effects of abusive supervision on employee outcomes; however, the role of high-performing employees (HPEs) has been virtually overlooked.

Research purpose: Drawing on social exchange theory (SET), this study explores the effects of abusive supervision on employee silence and employee alienation, as well as the moderating role of HPEs in the indigenous banking sector in Ghana.

Motivation for the study: Supervisors, as key facilitators of employee performance and commitment, often face immense pressure to achieve departmental and organisational goals. While effective leadership promotes collaboration, commitment and performance, some supervisors resort to dysfunctional behaviours, such as abusive supervision, to drive results.

Research approach/design and method: The study adopted a cross-sectional survey to collect data from 227 employees from indigenous banks in Ghana using cluster sampling. Four hypotheses were tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM).

Main findings: Abusive supervision significantly and positively affects employee silence and employee alienation. However, HPEs significantly reduced these effects.

Practical/managerial implications: This study covered only the indigenous banking sector in Ghana, limiting generalisability. The results provide useful information for managers seeking to address abusive supervision and its outcomes.

Contribution/value-add: This study contributes novel insights into the moderating effects of HPEs in mitigating the adverse effects of abusive supervision on employee silence and employee alienation in Ghana's indigenous banking sector.

Keywords: abusive supervision; employee silence; employee alienation; high-performing employees; social exchange theory.

Introduction

Organisational success depends on employee performance and commitment (Webster et al., 2022). Supervisors, responsible for these outcomes, often face immense pressure to achieve organisational goals (Nanjundeswaraswamy, 2023; Nwosu et al., 2021; Sayyadi, 2019; Strand & Skogseid, 2013). While effective leadership fosters collaboration, commitment and performance (Nanjundeswaraswamy, 2023; Sayyadi, 2019; Strand & Skogseid, 2013), some supervisors engage in abusive supervision to drive results.

Abusive supervision, defined as 'subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical contact' (Tepper, 2000, p. 178), is a pervasive organisational challenge. Since its conceptualisation, abusive supervision has been linked to detrimental outcomes for both individuals and organisations, such as reduced job satisfaction, higher burnout, and greater intention to quit (Salton Meyer & Ein-Dor 2021). Less yet critical outcomes include employee silence and alienation.

Employee silence, the withholding of work-related ideas or concerns (Dyne et al., 2003) and employee alienation, the disconnection from one's professional life (Hirschfeld & Field, 2000), are non-confrontational strategies employees use to cope with abusive supervision (Al-Hawari et al., 2020; Sarwar et al., 2022). These reactions harm both individual well-being and organisational growth, impeding innovation, collaboration and morale. Despite increasing global research on

these outcomes (Du et al., 2022; Osei et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2020; Zia & Ahmed, 2024), studies on their dynamics in Africa, particularly in Ghana's indigenous banking sector, are scarce.

Prior research identified several moderators that mitigate the effects of abusive supervision on employee outcomes (Bayhan Karapinar et al., 2024; Du et al., 2022). However, the role of high-performing employees (HPEs) has been overlooked. Regarded as organisational stars, HPEs possess exceptional skills, promote teamwork and drive organisational success (De Waal & Oudshoorn, 2015; Kehoe et al., 2018). Their ability to create supportive work environments may mitigate the adverse effects of abusive supervision, offering a new way to address toxic behaviours.

This study applies social exchange theory (SET) to examine how abusive supervision affects employee silence and alienation, considering the moderating role of HPEs. Firstly, it examines how abusive supervision influences employee silence and alienation. The SET posits that workplace relationships involve reciprocal actions, where behaviours elicit corresponding responses (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano et al., 2017). Social exchange theory has been used to examine the impacts of abusive supervision on employee outcomes, such as organisational citizenship behaviour (Liu et al., 2024), counterproductive work behaviours (Maqbool et al., 2024) and knowledge hiding (Koay & Lim, 2023). In line with these studies, this study posits that employees facing abusive supervision may respond with non-confrontational behaviours such as withholding ideas (silence) or emotionally disconnecting from their work (alienation). These reactions serve as psychological retaliation, with employees withdrawing valuable resources (Cropanzano et al., 2017), such as effort, engagement or creativity.

Secondly, the study examines whether HPEs, known for promoting supportive and collaborative environments, can moderate employee silence and alienation by offsetting abusive leadership. This study assesses how SET influences perceived support (Blau, 1964; Ladd & Henry, 2000). Social exchange theory emphasises reciprocal workplace exchanges, where negative behaviours often disrupt the balance (Cropanzano et al., 2017). High-performing employees help to restore the balance by fostering psychological safety, open communication and adaptive coping. From the SET perspective, HPEs transform negative interactions into opportunities for engagement and resilience. By applying SET, this research provides a nuanced understanding of the relationship between leadership behaviour, employee responses and the mitigating role of workplace stars.

This study contributes to theory and practice. Theoretically, it extends the application of SET by showing how abusive supervision triggers employee silence and alienation as psychological retaliation. It also introduces HPEs as an essential but underexplored moderator, highlighting their role in mitigating the effects of toxic leadership. Studying

Ghana's indigenous banking sector, the study enriches the understanding of these dynamics in a collectivist, high-power distance cultural context (Hofstede, 2001), addressing a key research gap. Practically, the findings guide organisations to address abusive supervision and its consequences. The findings highlight HPEs as buffers against dysfunctional leadership and stress need for targeted leadership training and employee support programmes to create healthier and more productive workplaces.

Subsequent sections focus on hypotheses development, methodology and interpretations of results. Furthermore, the sections present the discussions of the findings, theoretical and practical implications, limitations, future research directions and conclusions.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Abusive supervision

According to Tepper (2000, p. 178), abusive supervision is subordinates' perception of the degree to which supervisors consistently exhibit aggressive verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical harm. This definition indicates that subordinates' evaluations are subjective and shaped by personal characteristics and context. For instance, a supervisor's behaviour may seem offensive in one context but not in another, and subordinates may interpret the same conduct differently. Another aspect of the definition is that nonphysical hostility persists until either the targeted individual or the perpetrator ends the relationship or the perpetrator alters their behaviour (Tepper, 2000, 2007). Furthermore, the definition indicates that abusive leaders act intentionally for specific purposes, such as to incentivise subordinates to excel or to implement a zero-tolerance policy for failure (Tepper, 2007). Finally, Teppers' (2000) definition includes behaviours such as yelling, using derogatory language, swearing, threatening intimidation, exhibiting aggressive eye contact, administering the 'silent treatment' and subjecting someone to public humiliation (Wang et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2023).

Abusive supervision and employee reactions

Employee reactions at the workplace have interested researchers for many decades. Bhal et al. (2009, p. 605) define employee reaction as 'how employees think, feel, and act' to issues at work. The literature outlines categories of employee reactions, including supportive or resistant, active or passive, overt or covert, positive or negative, strong or weak, and favourable or unfavourable behaviour (Aldossari et al., 2023). This study focuses on employee silence and employee alienation.

Pinder and Harlos (2001) define employee silence:

[A]s the withholding of any form of genuine expression about the individual's behavioural, cognitive and/or affective evaluations of his or her organisational circumstances to persons who are perceived to be capable of effecting change or redress. (p. 334)

Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008) contend that employees remain silent regarding work-related concerns, withhold ideas for improvement, conceal work-related issues, withhold information that could avert incidents and avoid asking questions to obtain further information about their tasks.

Scholars have identified different predictors of employee silence. In a meta-analysis, Hao et al. (2022) categorised the antecedents into individual dispositions, job perceptions and beliefs, and leader-related factors, which included abusive supervision and authoritarian leadership. Substantial empirical studies have confirmed abusive supervision as an antecedent of employee silence (Lee et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2020). For instance, a study by Bayhan Karapinar et al. (2024) in Türkiye revealed that abusive supervision has a harsh influence on employee's preparedness to voice opinions. Similarly, Zia and Ahmed (2024) confirmed the same correlation in Pakistan. In line with these findings, this study proposes the following:

H1: There is a positive relationship between abusive supervision and employee silence.

According to Hirschfeld and Field (2000, p. 790), alienation refers to the extent to which an individual experiences a disconnection from their professional life. Jiang et al. (2019) also define it as a condition in which employees see a diminishment of control over the work process and a restriction on their ability to express themselves in the workplace. Nair and Vohra (2009) conceptualise employee alienation as a unidimensional phenomenon characterised by a lack of enjoyment in work, perception of daily tasks as tedious and burdensome, feelings of estrangement from oneself, a desire for alternative pursuits, disillusionment regarding work, minimal effort exerted in job responsibilities, and a lack of connection to workplace events.

Research shows employee alienation often results from abusive or dysfunctional supervision (Du et al., 2022; Sarwar et al., 2022). For example, in investigating the mediating role of work alienation on the relationship between abusive supervision and service sabotage in Egypt, El-Gazar et al. (2024) discovered a strong correlation between abusive supervision and work alienation. Therefore, this study proposes:

H2: There is a positive relationship between abusive supervision and employee alienation.

Moderating role of high-performing employees

Scholars view abusive supervision as a workplace stressor that heightens situational demands on employees and results in negative outcomes (Qu et al., 2023). To cope with this stressor, subordinates need esteem support, informational support, social companionship and instrumental support, as outlined by He, Jiang, Zhu and Hu (2023). A better choice to provide this support both officially and unofficially, is HPEs, sometimes referred to as stars (Morris et al., 2021). De Waal and Oudshoorn (2015, p. 572) define HPE as an individual who 'performs better than an average

employee and, therefore, contributes above average to the overall performance of an organisation'. High-performing employees are skilled in teamwork, creativity, mentoring, collaboration, sponsorship and technology, and possess broad knowledge and competencies (De Waal & Oudshoorn, 2015; Kehoe et al., 2018).

Scholars emphasise the advantages of HPEs for other employees. Kehoe et al. (2018) assert that employees collaborating with HPEs benefit from formal and informal cooperation, mentorship, sponsorship and support, enabling them to adopt successful work outcomes and leverage higher performers' expertise to improve their own performance. Conversely, HPEs also need support from other colleagues such as information, ideas, views and participation to thrive. A study by Kehoe and Bentley (2021) demonstrated that the presence of a star co-manager diminishes employers' attributions of positive or negative performance to a primary non-star manager, owing to assumptions regarding the star's excessive impact on collaborative decisions. Another study by Oh et al. (2021) in South Korea found that more high-performing surgeons correlate with a rise in surgical patients and a decrease in postoperative length of stay. Based on these studies, this study proposes:

H3: High-performing employees moderate the positive relationship between abusive supervision and employee silence.

H4: High-performing employees moderate the positive relationship between abusive supervision and employee alienation.

Methodology

Study design and procedure

This study followed a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design, targeting employees in the indigenous banking sector in Ghana's Western Region. A multistage cluster sampling accounted for the geographical distribution of the branches. Three banks with 32 branches were selected and all full-time employees ($N = 227$) were invited to participate.

Data were collected in two phases. In the first phase, respondents completed an online questionnaire covering demographic information, employee silence and employee

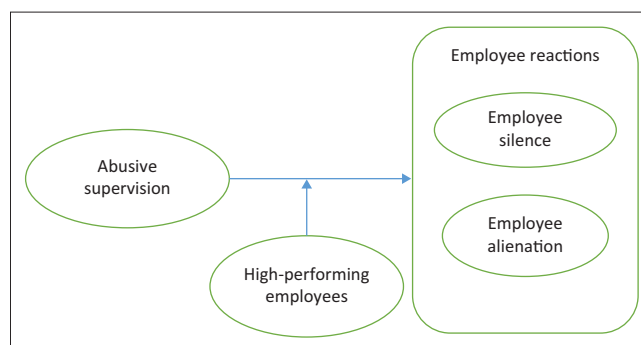


FIGURE 1: Conceptual framework.

alienation. A total of 205 responses were received (90.3% response rate). Seven weeks later, the second phase collected data on supervisory behaviours and HPEs, with 183 participants (89.7% of first-phase respondents) completing this stage. After matching responses, data from 183 participants (80.6% of the total sample) were included in the final analysis.

The online questionnaire was administered through a secure online platform, with hyperlinks shared through the HR and supervisors. For each phase, designated contacts were sent reminders to encourage timely participation. Efforts to reduce response biases included assuring participants of anonymity and confidentiality, emphasising voluntary participation, refining questionnaire items to be clear and concise, and collecting the data in two phases (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

The data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The respondents' demographic profile showed that 57.49% were female, with 49% aged 30–39 years. In addition, 51% were junior staff, and 42.11% had up to 5 years of employment. Further demographic details are presented in Table 1-A1.

Measures

The constructs were measured using validated items from the literature (Table 1-A2). Items were adapted to fit the context of the indigenous banking sector in Ghana.

Abusive supervision was assessed using a 15-item scale adapted from Tepper's (2000) measures of abusive supervision. The only modification was to the item, 'My boss puts me down in front of others,' which was reworded as 'My boss disgraces me in front of others'. All other items were used in their original form. An example of one such item is, 'My boss ridicules me'. Respondents rated each item on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 'I cannot remember him or her ever using this behaviour with me' to 'He/she uses this behaviour very often with me'.

Employee Silence was measured using five items adapted from Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008), which assessed the tendency to withhold work-related ideas, concerns or information. An example of an item is, 'I chose to remain silent when I had concerns about my work'. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ('Never' to 'Always').

Employee Alienation was measured using an eight-item scale developed by Nair and Vohra (2009). Items reflected feelings of disconnection from the work environment, such as 'I do not enjoy work; I just put in my time to get paid,' and 'Facing my daily tasks is a painful and boring experience'. Respondents indicated their responses on a five-point Likert scale ('Definitely false' to 'Definitely true').

High-Performing Employees were measured using a 10-item scale adapted from Williams and Anderson's (1991)

framework. Items reflect behaviours such as 'I adequately complete assigned duties' and 'I help others who have heavy workloads'. A five-point Likert scale ('Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree') was used.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Durban University of Technology-Institutional Research Ethics Committee (No. IREC 103/22). The participants had to click YES to the consent statement to access the questionnaire. Those who clicked NO could not proceed.

Results

Measurement model assessment

The measurement model assessed reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity (Table 1). Appendix 2 (TABLE 1-A2) presents the number of items used to measure abusive supervision, employee silence, employee alienation and HPEs. Five of the abusive supervision items and three of the items measuring employee silence, employee alienation and HPEs loaded well and were retained. Table 1 shows that all retained items had factor loadings above 0.70. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (rho_c). All constructs, except HPEs, exceeded the 0.70 threshold for Cronbach's alpha (Hair et al., 2020). Similarly, composite reliability (rho_c) for all constructs was above 0.70, as shown in Table 1. Cronbach's alpha may underestimate internal consistency reliability, making composite reliability (rho_c) a more appropriate measure (Hair et al., 2021). Thus, all constructs met internal consistency reliability (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015).

Convergent validity was established using the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct. The AVE values surpassed the threshold of 0.50, indicating that the constructs explained a significant proportion of the variance in their indicators (Hair et al., 2021).

We tested discriminant validity tested using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT)

TABLE 1: Reliability and validity.

Constructs	Item	Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extract
Abusive Supervision	AS4	0.85	0.87	0.87	0.91	0.66
	AS6	0.79				
	AS11	0.83				
	AS14	0.85				
	AS15	0.72				
Employee Silence	ES2	0.81	0.75	0.75	0.86	0.67
	ES3	0.82				
	ES5	0.83				
Employee Alienation	EA5	0.81	0.83	0.83	0.90	0.74
	EA6	0.89				
	EA8	0.88				
HPEs	HPE1	0.80	0.64	0.64	0.80	0.58
	HPE2	0.76				
	HPE6	0.72				

AS, abusive supervision; ES, employee silence; EA, employee alienation; HPE, high-performing employee.

TABLE 2: Discriminant validity.

Constructs	1	2	3	4
Heterotrait-monotrait ratio				
Employee alienation (1)	-	-	-	-
Employee silence (2)	0.58	-	-	-
HPEs (3)	0.17	0.18	-	-
Abusive supervision (4)	0.54	0.53	0.08	-
Fornell-Larcker criterion				
Employee alienation (1)	0.86	-	-	-
Employee silence (2)	0.46	0.82	-	-
HPEs (3)	-0.14	-0.12	0.76	-
Abusive supervision (4)	0.46	0.43	-0.18	0.81

Note: The bold values signify constructs which are below threshold.
HPE, high-performing employee.

TABLE 3: Model's goodness of fit, collinearity and explanatory power assessment.

Construct	VIF	R ²	Adjusted R ²	f ²	Q ²
AS	1.09 (ES) 1.37 (EA)	-	-	0.26 (ES) 0.14 (EA)	-
HPEs*AS	1.07 (ES) 1.10 (EA)	-	-	0.03 (ES) 0.03 (EA)	-
ES	-	0.23	0.21	-	0.01
EA	-	0.32	0.30	-	0.01
SRMR = 0.07	-	-	-	-	-

VIF, variance inflation factor; AS, abusive supervision; HPEs, high-performing employees; ES, employee silence; EA, employee alienation; SRMR, standardised root means square residual.

ratio (Table 2). The Fornell-Larcker analysis showed that each construct's AVE square root exceeded its correlations with other constructs. Additionally, HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.85, confirming that the constructs were distinct (Hair et al., 2021).

Structural model assessment

The structural model was assessed using established guidelines for robustness and validity (Hair et al., 2020). Key evaluations included multicollinearity, path coefficients, explanatory power, effect size, predictive relevance and model fit. Multicollinearity was checked using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) (Table 3), with all values below 3.0, confirming the absence of multicollinearity among the exogenous constructs (Sarstedt et al., 2021).

Bootstrapping (5000 resamples) was used to analyse path coefficients. H1 and H2 examined the effects of abusive supervision on employee silence and alienation. Table 4 shows abusive supervision positively affected employee silence ($\beta = 0.468, t = 6.786, p < 0.001$) and employee alienation ($\beta = 0.363, t = 4.228, p < 0.001$), supporting H1 and H2. Furthermore, H3 and H4 tested whether HPEs moderated these effects. Results confirmed that HPEs weakened the relationships between abusive supervision and employee silence ($\beta = 0.161, t = 2.076, p = 0.038$) and employee alienation ($\beta = 0.158, t = 2.295, p = 0.022$), supporting H3 and H4.

R² values were used to assess explanatory power. Abusive supervision and HPEs explained 23.4% of the variance in employee silence and 31.9% in employee alienation, exceeding the 0.10 threshold, indicating adequate explanatory

TABLE 4: Summary of the model path results.

Constructs	β	M	SD	T	p	Decision
AS → ES	0.47	0.47	0.07	6.79	0.001	H1 = Supported
AS → EA	0.36	0.36	0.09	4.23	0.001	H2 = Supported
The moderating effects						
HPEs × AS → ES	0.16	0.14	0.08	2.08	0.038	H5 = Supported
HPEs × AS → EA	0.16	0.14	0.07	2.29	0.022	H6 = Supported

β , original sample; M, sample mean; SD, standard deviation; T, T-Statistics; AS, abusive supervision; ES, employee silence; EA, employee alienation; HPEs, high-performing employees.

power (Sarstedt et al., 2021). Effect size (f^2) measured each predictor's contribution, with abusive supervision showing medium effect on employee silence ($f^2 = 0.263$) and a small effect on employee alienation ($f^2 = 0.141$). The HPEs interacting terms had small effect on employee silence ($f^2 = 0.029$) and employee alienation ($f^2 = 0.031$). Predictive relevance $Q^2 = 0.012$ for employee silence, 0.011 for employee alienation, was above zero, supporting model validity (Hair et al., 2019). Finally, Standardised root means square residual (SRMR) value (0.067) met < 0.08 threshold, indicating model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Discussions of results and implications

The study evaluated the moderating effect of HPEs on the relationship between abusive supervision and employee reactions in Ghana's indigenous banking sector. It examined how abusive supervision influences employee silence and alienation, as well as the moderating roles of HPEs. Using the SET and social support theory, four hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, H4) were developed and tested.

The findings confirm a positive relationship between abusive supervision and employee silence, supporting H1. This aligns with the SET and previous studies showing that employees experiencing abuse often remain silent to avoid conflict or retaliation (Lee et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2020). Abusive supervision erodes trust and psychological safety, creating an environment where employees prioritise self-preservation over engagement. In Ghana's collectivist, high-power distance culture, respect for authority reinforces this silence, discouraging employees from challenging supervisors. These results highlight the need for interventions that enhance psychological safety and encourage open workplace dialogue.

The findings validate H2 by showing a significant positive relationship between abusive supervision and employee alienation. Consistent with prior research, abusive supervision increases disconnection and emotional withdrawal (Du et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2019). Employees experiencing such behaviours often view work as burdensome and meaningless, disengaging to protect themselves from hostility (Sarwar et al., 2022). In high-power distance culture, this effect is amplified, as employees feel powerless to challenge authority, deepening their isolation. These findings emphasise the detrimental effect of abusive supervision on employee well-being and organisational cohesion, underscoring the need for leadership development and supportive workplace practices.

The findings confirm H3, indicating that HPEs moderate the relationship between abusive supervision and employee silence. The HPEs foster psychological safety, encourage open communication and reduce the fear-driven withdrawal typically linked to abusive supervision (Kehoe et al., 2018; Kenworthy et al., 2023). This finding supports research on workplace stars promoting team cohesion and empowering colleagues to speak up (Call et al., 2021; Kehoe et al., 2018). In Ghana's collectivist culture, where hierarchical difference often discourages expression, HPEs play a crucial role in mitigating the silencing effects of dysfunctional leadership.

Similarly, the results support H4, showing that HPEs also buffer the relationship between abusive supervision and employee alienation. Employees with high-performing colleagues feel more included and purposeful, reducing emotional withdrawal. By promoting teamwork and providing informal support, HPEs counteract isolation and sustain engagement. This aligns with studies highlighting the morale-boosting and stress-buffering capacities of workplace stars (Kehoe & Bentley, 2021; Oh et al., 2021). In rigid hierarchical cultures with limited recourse, empowering high-performers can enhance workplace dynamics and mitigate negative impacts of abusive leadership.

Theoretical implications

The application of the SET in this study offers new insights into these phenomena. While previous research often relied on resource-based theories such as conservation of resources (COR) and framed silence and alienation as defensive strategies to conserve personal resources (Bayhan Karapinar et al., 2024; Sarwar et al., 2022), this study emphasises their relational nature, presenting them as active, reciprocal responses to perceived mistreatment. This distinction is crucial for understanding employee motivations, where positive or negative behaviours elicit corresponding responses ultimately disrupting workplace reciprocity. This study also underscores the role of abusive leadership in destabilising exchanges dynamics, reinforcing SET's value in explaining the relational processes underlying employee reactions.

By examining both employee silence and alienation within a single framework, this research enhances understanding of how these distinct yet interconnected responses emerge under dysfunctional leadership. Situating the study in Ghana's organisational context broadens theoretical perspectives on the impact of abusive supervision on employee reactions across diverse settings.

Furthermore, the study identifies HPEs as key moderators in the relationship between abusive supervision and negative employee outcomes. Prior research primarily focused on moderators such as organisational support, locus of control, psychological contract fulfilment; relational attachment, organisational tenure and organisational

citizenship behaviours (Bayhan Karapinar et al., 2024; Bhattacharjee & Sarkar, 2024; Fischer et al., 2021; Hanu et al., 2024). However, the role of HPEs in shaping these relationships remained unexplored, particularly in collectivist, high-power distance culture where hierarchical deference amplifies the negative consequences of abusive supervision. This study addresses this gap by demonstrating that HPEs significantly reduce the impact of abusive supervision on both employee silence and alienation. Star employees provide support, collaboration and a social safety net that mitigates the harmful effects of abusive supervision (Kehoe & Tzabbar, 2015; Kehoe et al., 2018). These findings highlight high-performers not only as key contributors to organisational success but also as buffers against dysfunctional leadership.

Practical implications

This study offers recommendations for reducing the effects of abusive supervision. Firstly, the findings on abusive supervision require leadership development programmes that emphasise respect, accountability and open communication. Organisations should conduct regular assessments, coaching sessions and feedback mechanisms to identify and correct abusive behaviours before they escalate.

Secondly, the discovery of the buffering role of HPEs in work teams with abusive supervisors emphasises there is the need for management to actively assess and nurture HPEs. This can be carried out through structured recruitment and training programmes that enhance resilience, teamwork and leadership skills. Providing mentorship and career development opportunities ensures that HPEs can effectively counterbalance toxic leadership.

Finally, organisations should position HPEs in teams where they can serve as role models to enhance collaboration and serve as psychological safety. Moreover, HPEs should be encouraged to mentor colleagues and provide support systems that buffer employees from the negative effects of abusive supervision. These strategies enhance employee well-being, reduce silence and alienation, and drive organisational success.

Limitation and recommendation for future research

This study focused on Ghana's indigenous banking sector, limiting generalisability to other industries or cultures. Future research could examine similar relationships in other sectors and regions to test consistency across contexts.

The cross-sectional design, although effective for studying relationships at a specific point in time, limits causal inference. Longitudinal studies could offer deeper insights into the temporal effects of abusive supervision and the evolving role of HPEs.

The study used self-reported data, which may introduce common method or social desirability bias, despite efforts to mitigate these issues. Future research could address this limitation by incorporating multi-source data, such as peer and supervisor ratings for more robust assessment. Furthermore, alternative questionnaire could be used to measure HPE's behaviour and enhance reliability.

Finally, while the study applied SET, integrating additional frameworks, such as the conservation of resources theory or the emotional regulation theory, could provide a fuller understanding of employee silence and alienation. Future studies could also examine moderators such as organisational climate, peer support, organisational justice or team dynamics to identify factors that mitigate the effects of abusive supervision.

Conclusion

Drawing on social exchange and social support theories, this study examined the impact of abusive supervision on employee silence and alienation, along with the moderating role of HPEs. The findings show that abusive supervision significantly increases both outcomes, while HPEs weaken this effect. These results offer strategies to mitigate employees' negative reactions to abusive supervision in Ghana's indigenous banking sector.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge the management of Durban University of Technology (DUT) and Takoradi Technical University (TTU) for collaborating to make this research possible. This article is partially based on the author, P.M.'s PhD thesis entitled, 'Supervision processes and employee reactions: a study of selected indigenous banks in the Western Region of Ghana', towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Management Sciences in Business Administration in the Faculty of Management Science, Durban University of Technology, South Africa, with supervisor Obianuju E. Okeke-Uzodike, received May 2025.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

P.M. conceptualised the research study. The study was supervised and reviewed by O.E.O.-U.

Funding information

The authors disclosed receipt of funding from the Durban University of Technology's GOOT project. The grant number is P02S8GT074. The author has disclosed those interests fully and has implemented an approved plan for managing any potential conflicts arising from their involvement. The terms

of these funding arrangements have been reviewed and approved by the affiliated University in accordance with its policy on objectivity in research.

Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available and can be requested from the corresponding author, P.M. upon reasonable request.

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Appendices starts on the next page →

Appendix 1

TABLE 1-A1: Respondents demographic profile.

Variable	Items	Frequency (N = 227)	%
Gender	Male	105	42.51
	Female	142	57.49
Age groups (years)	20–29	63	25.91
	30–39	121	48.99
	40–49	50	20.24
	50 and above	12	4.86
Academic qualification	GCE Advance level	5	2.02
	SSCE/WASSCE	31	12.55
	Diploma/HND	61	24.70
	First degree	118	47.77
	Master degree	31	12.55
	Others	1	0.41
Category of staff	Junior	126	51.01
	Senior	103	41.70
	Management	18	7.29
Departments/section/unit	Finance	1	0.40
	Asset control	3	1.21
	Microfinance	13	5.26
	Credit	38	15.38
	Customer service	7	2.83
	Direct sales	3	1.23
	Operations	137	55.47
	Cashier	45	18.22
Long service (years)	0–5	104	42.11
	6–10	89	36.03
	11–15	35	14.17
	16–20	12	4.86
	21 and above	7	2.83

Appendix 2

TABLE 1-A2: Measurement items.

Construct	Item abbreviation	Items	Sources
Abusive supervision	AS1	My boss ridicules me.	Tepper (2000)
	AS2	My boss tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid.	
	AS3	My boss ignores me	
	AS4	My boss disgraces me in front of others.	
	AS5	My boss invades my privacy.	
	AS6	My boss reminds me of my past mistakes and failures.	
	AS7	My boss doesn't give me credit for jobs I put in more effort	
	AS8	My boss blames me to save himself/herself embarrassment.	
	AS9	My boss breaks promises he/she makes.	
	AS10	My boss expresses anger at me when he/she is mad for another reason.	
	AS11	My boss makes negative comments about me to others.	
	AS12	My boss is rude to me.	
	AS13	My boss does not allow me to interact with my co-workers.	
	AS14	My boss tells me I am incompetent.	
	AS15	My boss lies to me.	
Employee silence	ES1	I chose to remain silent when I had concerns about my work.	Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008)
	ES2	Although I had ideas for improving my work, I did not speak up.	
	ES3	I said nothing to others about potential work problems I noticed.	
	ES4	I remained silent when I had information that might have helped prevent an incident in my work	
	ES5	I kept quiet instead of asking questions when I wanted to get more information about my work in my unit.	
Employee alienation	EA1	I do not enjoy work; I just put in my time to get paid.	Nair and Vohra (2009)
	EA2	Facing my daily tasks is a painful and boring experience.	
	EA3	Work to me is more like a chore or a burden.	
	EA4	I feel disconnected from myself.	
	EA5	I often wish I am doing something else.	
	EA6	Over the years I have become disillusioned about my work.	
	EA7	I do not feel like putting my best effort at work.	
	EA8	I do not feel connected to the events in my workplace.	
High-performing employees	HPE1	I adequately complete assigned duties	Williams and Anderson (1991)
	HPE2	I fulfil responsibilities specified in job description	
	HPE3	I help others who have been absent	
	HPE4	I help others who have heavy workloads	
	HPE5	I assist supervisor with her/his work (when not asked)	
	HPE6	I take time to listen to co-workers' problems and worries	
	HPE7	My attendance at work is above the norm	
	HPE8	I give advance notice when unable to come to work	
	HPE9	I conserve and protect organisational property	
	HPE10	I do not take underserved work breaks	

Note: Please see the full reference list of this article, Mensah, P., & Okeke-Uzodike, O.E. (2025). Abusive supervision and employee reactions: The moderating roles of high-performing employees. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur*, 23(0), a2966. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v23i0.2966> for more information.