Good Intentions Go Awry: Investigation of Unhelpful Supportive Leadership

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Good Intentions Go Awry: Investigation of Unhelpful Supportive Leadership

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my fiancé, Kevin McElligott, and my parents, Chuck and Laurie Gray. Thank you for believing in me and providing frequent helpful support. Thank you for appreciating the merits of this research and helping me to enhance its potential impact.
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Abstract

In studies of the dark side of leadership, leaders are often depicted as bad people who engage in abusive behaviors. While some leaders have self-serving motives and engage in cruel behaviors, negative leadership outcomes are not limited to abusive supervisors. This research casts light on an understudied form of negative leadership: unhelpful supportive leadership. Unhelpful supportive leadership characterizes leaders who perform supportive acts that the recipient believes were intended to benefit them but are perceived as unhelpful or harmful. Results of two quantitative survey studies (Study 1: \( N = 1,257 \) employees; Study 2: \( N = 161 \) employee-supervisor dyads) demonstrate that unhelpful supportive leadership is associated with some of the same detrimental outcomes linked with stereotypical negative leadership, higher psychological distress and poorer job performance. Support was found for hypotheses based on self-determination theory that unhelpful supportive leaders may fail to fulfill their direct reports’ psychological needs, which may have far-reaching implications on employees’ well-being and organizations’ effectiveness.
Chapter One:

Introduction

While physical workplace conditions have drastically improved over the past 50 years (Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 2020), reports of detrimental leadership behaviors are on the rise (Johnson & Indvik, 2001; Pearson et al., 2000). These trends have been met with increased theoretical and empirical investigation of negative leadership, which captures “leaders who, by treatment of subordinates, discourage and do harm to the subordinate and the organization” (Dinh et al., 2014, p. 19). Although negative leadership literature is vast and growing, the literature generally paints an unflattering image of negative leaders, commonly referring to them as “abusive” (Tepper, 2000, p. 178), “toxic” (Reed, 2004, p. 67), or “despotic” (De Hoogh et al., 2008, p. 297).

The purpose of this research is to highlight an important and largely overlooked form of negative leadership: unhelpful supportive leadership. Drawing from the construct of unhelpful workplace social support (Gray et al., 2020), unhelpful supportive leaders are characterized by engaging in supportive behaviors that the recipient believes are intended to benefit them but are perceived as unhelpful or harmful. For example, a supervisor may complete an employee’s task to help lighten their workload while inadvertently overstepping and leading the employee to feel incompetent (Beehr et al., 2010; Deelstra et al., 2003; Gray et al., 2020). Across two studies, this research aims to demonstrate that unhelpful supportive leadership is a unique form of negative
leadership that is associated with some of the same detrimental outcomes as established negative leadership styles.

This research contributes to the extant literature in three primary ways. First, it expands traditional conceptualizations of negative leadership to include leaders who, by definition, are perceived as trying to help their employee(s). The prototypical, harsh portrayal of negative leaders is inherently limiting and creates disagreement. To illustrate, employees who report that their supervisors engage in abusive behaviors (e.g., yelling at employees) do not always perceive their supervisors as abusive (Bies et al., 2016; Ferris et al., 2007; Tepper et al., 2017). Researchers speculate that employees are more likely to accept the abuse label when organizational leaders perform callous acts that reflect hostile intent or a lack of concern about their well-being (Tepper et al., 2017). If a leader engages in an abusive behavior with ambiguous or constructive motives, employees may be less likely to accept the abuse label. For example, a supervisor may yell at an employee to be motivational, which is commonly accepted in certain contexts, such as the military (Tepper et al., 2017). Unhelpful supportive leadership may be a more accepted and appropriate label to capture leaders who elicit negative outcomes by engaging in supportive behaviors that are perceived as well-intended.

Second, this research answers a lingering question in negative leadership literature: “Must subordinates perceive their supervisors as abusive for injury to be experienced?” (Tepper et al., 2017, p. 129). I take this question a step further by asking: Can employees perceive their supervisors as trying to help them and still experience harm? The role of perceived intentions has been obscured in negative leadership literature by the examination of leadership constructs that are purely behavioral or explicitly ill-intentioned in nature. Research outside the leadership domain suggests that perceived benevolent intentions may not protect against negative outcomes.
For example, Gray et al. (2020) introduced the construct of unhelpful workplace social support as “any action taken by a supervisor and/or colleague that the recipient believes was intended to benefit him or her but is perceived as unhelpful or harmful” (Gray et al., 2020, p. 359). Research demonstrates that some forms of well-intended “help” from coworkers are associated with an array of negative outcomes (Gray et al., 2020). For example, employees who reported receiving more partial support (i.e., incomplete, imprecise, or unclear support) from their coworkers reported more job-related negative affect and lower competence-based self-esteem (Gray et al., 2020). This is the first known research to examine unhelpful workplace social support in the negative leadership domain.

Third, this research adopts a theoretical lens to try to explain outcomes associated with unhelpful supportive leadership. Existing research on unhelpful support from coworkers is primarily exploratory and descriptive in nature (Gray et al., 2020). The current research draws from self-determination theory to propose potential explanations for failures of unhelpful supportive leadership. Self-determination theory is a well-established theory of human motivation that posits individuals have three innate psychological needs driving their well-being and behaviors (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Unhelpful supportive leaders may facilitate negative employee and organizational outcomes by thwarting their employees’ psychological needs.

Finally, this research offers practical implications. Researchers and practitioners have offered interventions to mitigate negative leadership in organizations, with varying degrees of effectiveness (Gonzalez-Morales et al., 2018; McCleskey, 2013). By gaining a better understanding of negative leaders with perceived benevolent intentions, who may be especially motivated to improve their effectiveness, practitioners may be better equipped to mitigate negative leadership in practice.
Negative Leadership

In the broadest sense, negative leadership encompasses all leaders who harm their employees and/or organization through their behaviors with employees (Dinh et al., 2014). Many forms of negative leaders have received research attention, including petty tyrants (Ashforth, 1994), toxic leaders (Lipman-Blumen, 2005), abusive supervisors (Tepper, 2000), destructive leaders (Einarsen et al., 2007; Krasikova et al., 2013; Padilla et al., 2007), aversive leaders (Bligh et al., 2007), and despotic leaders (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). Each form of negative leadership is characterized by hostile behaviors, self-serving or ambiguous motives, and detrimental employee and organizational outcomes.

Petty Tyrants

A petty tyrant is defined as “one who lords his or her power over others” (Ashforth, 1994, p. 755). Petty tyrants in organizational settings have been characterized by six dimensions:

1) arbitrariness and self-aggrandizement (e.g., “uses authority or position for personal gain,” Ashforth, 1994, p. 757)

2) belittling subordinates (e.g., “yells at subordinates,” Ashforth, 1994, p. 757)

3) lack of consideration (e.g., “looks out for the personal welfare of group members” [reverse scored], Ashforth, 1994, p. 757)

4) a forcing style of conflict resolution (e.g., “demands to get his or her way,” Ashforth, 1994, p. 757)

5) discouraging initiative (e.g., “encourages subordinates to participate in important decisions” [reverse scored], Ashforth, 1994, p. 757)

6) noncontingent punishment (e.g., “I am frequently reprimanded by my supervisor without knowing why,” Ashforth, 1994, p. 757).
Organizational petty tyranny is associated with low leader endorsement (Hollander & Julian, 1970; Michener & Lawler, 1975), high frustration (Myers, 1979), high stress (Motowidlo et al., 1986), high helplessness, low self-esteem, poor performance, and poor work unit cohesiveness among employees (Ashforth, 1994).

**Toxic Leadership**

Military researchers introduced the term toxic leadership to capture leaders who: 1) have an apparent lack of concern for the well-being of subordinates; 2) have a personality or interpersonal technique that negatively affects organizational climate; and 3) are motivated by self-interest (Reed, 2004, p. 67). Detailed, quantitatively measured outcomes associated with toxic leadership in the military are not readily available (Reed, 2004). However, an Air Force Major conducted a survey study following a fatal crash at an air force base in 1994. He notes that when toxic leaders are in command “tragic things can happen,” (Reed, 2004, p. 70).

**Abusive Supervision**

Abusive supervision was introduced as, “subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact” (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Examples of hostile acts include telling employees their thoughts or feelings are stupid, putting employees down in front of others, and taking credit for the work of others (Tepper, 2000). Some researchers argue that abusive supervisors may have injurious motives (i.e., desire to cause injury and desire to hurt feelings) or constructive motives (i.e., desire to elicit high performance and to signal mistakes will not be tolerated; (Liu et al., 2012; Tepper, 2007). However, some items in commonly used abusive supervision scales suggest that abusive supervisors have self-serving motives (e.g., “[blaming employees] to save himself/herself embarrassment,” Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Abusive supervision is associated with
lower employee job satisfaction (Tepper, 2007), more intentions to quit (Tepper, 2007), more psychological distress (Tepper, 2007), less employee engagement (Barnes et al., 2015), and more counterproductive work behavior (Lian et al., 2012).

*Aversive Leadership*

Aversive leadership characterizes leaders who engage in a set of relatively mild, yet potentially destructive behaviors that emphasize the use of intimidation and punishment or reprimands (Bligh et al., 2007). In an education setting, teachers’ perceptions of aversive leadership related negatively to their job satisfaction and positively to behavioral resistance (e.g., disregarding the principal, Bligh et al., 2007). Teachers’ perceptions of aversive leadership were also positively associated with their principals’ ratings of teacher complaining and negatively associated with principals’ ratings of teachers’ task performance and citizenship behavior (Bligh et al., 2007).

*Despotic Leadership*

Despotic leadership is based on personal dominance and authoritarian behavior that serves the self-interest of the leader; despotic leaders are self-aggrandizing and exploitative of others (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). They have been characterized as domineering, controlling, and vengeful (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). Despotic leadership has been described as a form of unethical leadership and is negatively correlated with social responsibility (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008).

*Destructive Leadership*

Destructive leadership was introduced as a broad, “all-inclusive” construct to capture a variety of established forms of negative leadership, such as abusive supervision and petty tyrants (Einarsen et al., 2007, p. 208). Destructive leadership is defined as, “the systematic and repeated
behaviour by a leader, supervisor or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organization by undermining and/or sabotaging the organization’s goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of subordinates” (Einarsen et al., 2007, p. 209). Destructive leadership has been further conceptualized along two dimensions: concern for people (behavior directed towards subordinates) and concern for production (behavior directed towards the organization). Leaders may have concern for one interest without concern for the other; for example, a leader who bullies and harasses subordinates (e.g., an abusive supervisor) may still care for and achieve organizational goals (Einarsen et al., 2007).

**Unhelpful Supportive Leadership**

The purpose of this research is to introduce another form of negative leadership: unhelpful supportive leadership. Unlike other negative leaders, unhelpful supportive leaders engage in supportive behaviors. Supportive behaviors can take the form of instrumental support (e.g., completing tasks and providing materials), emotional support (e.g., consoling and understanding), informational support (e.g., instructing and explaining), or appraisal support (e.g., recognizing achievements and providing feedback; House, 1981). Unhelpful supportive leaders also differ from other negative leaders because they have perceived benevolent intent by definition; they perform actions that the recipient believes are intended to benefit them. Gray et al. (2020) developed a taxonomy of seven forms of unhelpful workplace social support based on critical incidents and quantitative analyses. Their research was primarily conducted to examine coworker support, but the same principles may translate to support from organizational leaders.

**Conflicting Support**

Employees can provide well-intended support to a colleague that is not helpful because it conflicts with other advice or instructions (Gray et al., 2020). For example, an employee in a
qualitative study explained that “[…] other employees will often give me confusing and conflicting advice on how to attack problems or approach my boss […]” (Gray et al., 2020, p. 364). Organizational leaders may similarly provide suggestions that are not helpful because they conflict with advice from others at work.

**Critical Support**

Employees may inadvertently provide support that leads the recipient to feel insulted, criticized, or attacked. Gray et al. (2020) captured the experience of an employee who “was given advice on how to perform better. I was already doing the things that were mentioned, and it seemed insulting to be told to do what I was already doing,” (p. 364). A body of research on performance appraisals demonstrates that some forms of developmental feedback may be perceived as too critical to be well-received by employees (Bouskila-Yam & Kluger, 2011; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Organizational leaders may provide critical support during any instance of providing appraisal support, particularly if feedback is not provided tactfully (Aguinis et al., 2012).

**Imposing Support**

Imposing support is provided when employees provide unwanted help or assistance that is forced on the recipient (Gray et al., 2020). In an experimental study, Deelstra et al. (2003) found that administrative workers who received imposing instrumental support from a supposed colleague (confederate) experienced more negative affect, lower self-esteem, higher heart rate, and lower respiratory sinus arrhythmia than those who received no support. In a study of working-age adults, researchers found a positive association between receiving unsolicited job leads and depression (Song & Chen, 2014). Supervisors who provide imposing support may elicit similar negative outcomes.
**Partial Support**

Partial support is help that does not benefit the recipient because it is incomplete, imprecise, or unclear (Gray et al., 2020). For example, vague instructions may leave an employee with more questions than answers.

**Shortsighted Support**

Shortsighted employees take over a task in an attempt to be helpful without teaching the recipient the skills needed to complete the task independently in the future (Gray et al., 2020). A qualitative study reported the experience of an employee who:

> was working, and I could not figure something out [...] Instead of helping me figure it out, someone just took over for me. I didn’t find it helpful because I would have rather learned and figured it out with their help [...] (Gray et al., 2020, p. 364).

Organizational leaders may be at particular risk of providing shortsighted support because training is an important supervisory role (Ballard, 2017).

**Uncomforting Support**

Uncomforting support is emotional support that does not lead the recipient to feel comforted or validated. An employee in a qualitative study said:

> [I receive unhelpful support] whenever my coworker comments on a tough situation, and the comment is annoying and useless to the situation. [He] is just really bad at comforting others, and I feel like I have to give him a pity laugh. Basically, [it’s] more trouble than if he just didn’t say anything (Gray et al., 2020, p. 364).

Providing another example, *Journal of Management Inquiry* published an anonymous open letter about how White male academics can come across as “tone-deaf” when trying to be supportive of female colleagues (Anonymous, 2021). For instance, a male academic may try to empathize
with a female mentee concerned with work-family balance by sharing his woes of having to be home in time for dinner with his family. Such attempts at empathy may only highlight disparities in their experiences and a lack of understanding (Anonymous, 2021).

**Undependable Support**

Organizational leaders may provide undependable support when they promise and/or attempt to complete a colleague’s task, but they do it in an unreliable, delayed, or low-quality manner. In a qualitative study, a restaurant server reported an experience in which:

Another server once greeted my table at work because I was busy […] It was helpful because the table was greeted. However, it turned out the table was of secret shoppers (people evaluating the quality of service). She did not follow the steps of service (having a name tag, introducing herself, suggesting specific django and appetizers, being in uniform, etc.), so I failed the shop (Gray et al., 2020, p. 379).

**Outcomes Associated with Unhelpful Workplace Social Support**

Several studies demonstrate that unhelpful workplace social support is associated with a host of negative recipient outcomes (Beehr et al., 2010; Deelstra et al., 2003; Gray et al., 2020; Song & Chen, 2014). Gray et al. (2020) found that each of the seven types of unhelpful social support from coworkers described above is linked with higher job-related negative affect (e.g., feelings of anxiety or depression associated with their job), lower competence-based self-esteem, lower coworker satisfaction, higher burnout, and more physical symptoms (e.g., headaches, backaches, and nausea). Overall unhelpful support from coworkers (the average of the seven types of unhelpful support) was similarly associated with each of the criteria (Gray et al., 2020). Item reliability analyses and CFA fit indices support examining the seven forms of support separately or unhelpful support as a single construct (Gray et al., 2020). For purposes of
introducing unhelpful supportive leadership, unhelpful supportive leadership will be conceptualized as a single construct in this research.

While negative consequences of unhelpful workplace social support from coworkers have been previously examined, this is the first known research to study unhelpful support in a purely leadership context and integrate unhelpful workplace social support in the negative leadership literature. See Table 1 for a summary of conceptual distinctions between unhelpful supportive leadership and established negative leadership styles.

**Theory and Hypotheses**

Failures of unhelpful supportive leadership may be explained by self-determination theory. Self-determination theory is a well-established, comprehensive theory of human motivation and psychological needs. The theory posits that there are three innate psychological needs driving well-being and self-motivation: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Competence is one’s need to perceive a sense of mastery over the environment and to establish new skills (White, 1959). Autonomy is a person’s need to perceive a sense of ownership of their behavior and to experience freedom of choice (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Relatedness is the need to feel an interpersonal connection with others and to perceive reciprocal love and care with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Theoretical research and meta-analytic evidence suggest that all three needs should be satisfied for employees to achieve optimal well-being and performance (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). An overarching theoretical model of self-determination theory depicting how psychological needs may drive employee outcomes is presented in Figure 1. I will build on this existing theoretical framework to offer potential explanations for negative outcomes associated with unhelpful supportive leadership. Previous research has utilized self-determination theory to
explain outcomes associated with other leadership styles, such as transformational leadership (Sheldon et al., 2003), authentic leadership (Ilies et al., 2005), servant leadership (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016), and abusive supervision (Lian et al., 2012).

**Unhelpful Supportive Leadership and Employees’ Psychological Needs**

An organizational leader may reduce an employee’s perceived competence by engaging in a number of well-intended supportive behaviors. Several studies have found that imposing support from a peer or coworker is associated with lower recipient competence-based self-esteem (Deelstra et al., 2003; Gray et al., 2020; Song et al., 2014). These findings have been explained by the threat-to-self-esteem model, which posits that every supportive action has elements of support and threat (Fisher et al., 1982). Unwanted, imposing support from coworkers may threaten an employee’s perceived competence by implying the recipient is incapable of performing independently without help (Deelstra et al., 2003; Gray et al., 2020). Unhelpful supportive leaders may evoke similar feelings of incompetence in their employees when taking over employees’ tasks without being asked.

Unhelpful supportive leaders may also provide overly critical developmental feedback that leads to feelings of incompetence. Research suggests that organizational leaders frequently provide feedback that excessively focuses on employees’ weaknesses (Aguinis et al., 2012). Furthermore, a supervisor may lower an employee’s competence by accidentally providing poor advice that reduces one’s effectiveness, such as explaining a procedure incorrectly. Alternatively, an employee who repeatedly receives vague advice or shortsighted support from their boss may feel directionless and incompetent.

Hypothesis 1: Unhelpful supportive leadership is negatively correlated with employees’ perceived competence.
Support from a supervisor may also threaten employees’ autonomy. By definition, imposing support involves providing unwanted support that is “forced on the recipient” (Gray et al., 2020, p. 364). Supervisors may strip their employees of their sense of control and freedom if they take over employees’ tasks or impose suggestions. For example, an employee may be unable to perform a desired task because a supervisor stepped in and took over in an attempt to be helpful. Alternatively, an employee may have a plan in place to accomplish a task, but they may feel pressure to go against those plans in order to conform to a supervisor’s well-intended suggestions. Unilateral supportive decisions made by a supervisor may also mitigate employees’ sense of autonomy. Indeed, research shows that support is most effective when recipients are highly involved in the exchange (Schein, 2009); failure to involve recipients may reduce perceptions of autonomy.

Hypothesis 2: Unhelpful supportive leadership is negatively correlated with employees’ perceived autonomy.

A supervisor may reduce an employee’s perceived relatedness through presumably supportive behaviors that demonstrate a disconnection between the supervisor and employee. For example, a supervisor may attempt to comfort and console an employee but instead make the employee feel uncomfortable. Unhelpful support from a supervisor may suggest that they do not fully understand the employee or the employee’s needs, which may harm the employee’s perceived relationship quality. Advice or suggestions with an overly critical component may also thwart employees’ need for relatedness. Critical feedback may suggest that employees are disappointments who are unappreciated and/or disliked.

Hypothesis 3: Unhelpful supportive leadership is negatively correlated with employees’ perceived relatedness.
Unhelpful Supportive Leadership and Employees’ Job-related Negative Affect

According to self-determination theory, the extent to which leaders and organizations fulfill or thwart employees’ basic needs impacts their well-being. Researchers define a basic psychological need as “an energizing state that, if satisfied, conduces toward health and well-being but, if not satisfied, contributes to pathology and ill-being” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 74). Many empirical studies have found support for the relationship between psychological need fulfillment and well-being (e.g., Deci et al., 2001). Meta-analytic findings demonstrate that employees’ perceived competence, autonomy, and relatedness are positively associated with positive affect, general well-being, and life satisfaction while negatively associated with negative affect and burnout (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Because unhelpful supportive leaders may evoke need frustration (i.e., thwarting of need fulfillment; Van den Broeck et al., 2016), employees of unhelpful support leaders may experience more job-related negative affect (i.e., feelings of anxiety, frustration, etc. regarding one’s job).

Hypothesis 4: Unhelpful supportive leadership is positively correlated with employees’ job-related negative affect.

Hypothesis 5: Employees’ perceptions of competence, autonomy, and relatedness mediate the relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and job-related negative affect.

Unhelpful Supportive Leadership and Employees’ Engagement

In addition to job-related negative affect, employee engagement is separately predicted by self-determination theory (Meyer & Gagnè, 2008). As a theory of human motivation, self-determination theory specifies that fulfillment of one’s psychological needs fuels their intrinsic motivation and internalization. Intrinsic motivation occurs when an individual is behaving
because the activities are interesting; internalization occurs when an individual adopts values, attitudes, or regulatory structures, such that an external reward or punishment is not necessary to drive their behavior (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Researchers argue that engagement is the manifestation of intrinsic motivation and internalization (Meyer & Gagnè, 2008). Engagement is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Vigor involves high energy levels and mental resilience, willingness to expend effort at work, and persistence through difficulties. Dedication is described as a sense of significance, enthusiasm, and pride regarding one’s work. Absorption involves being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one’s work.

Given its centrality to self-determination theory, engagement has been measured in over 50 empirical studies of self-determination theory (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). A meta-analysis reported moderate, positive relationships between each of the three psychological needs and work engagement (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Because unhelpful supportive leadership is hypothesized to undermine employees’ need satisfaction, it may also mitigate employees’ work engagement.

Hypothesis 6: Unhelpful supportive leadership is negatively correlated with employees’ work engagement.

Hypothesis 7: Psychological need fulfillment (perceptions of competence, autonomy, and relatedness) mediates the relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and employees’ work engagement.

**Unhelpful Supportive Leadership and Employees’ Task Performance**

Employees’ engagement can manifest in their task performance (performance on technical aspects of the job; Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). Engagement is associated with higher
employee productivity and organizational revenue (Steers et al., 2004). Meta-analytic findings provide support for the notion that the three basic psychological needs are positively associated with employees’ engagement and task performance (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Because unhelpful supportive leaders may drive employees’ need frustration, which may mitigate their engagement, employees of unhelpful supportive leaders may demonstrate poorer task performance.

Hypothesis 8: Unhelpful supportive leadership is negatively correlated with employees’ task performance.

Hypothesis 9: Employees’ engagement mediates the relationship between employees’ psychological need fulfillment (perceptions of competence, autonomy, and relatedness) and task performance.

**Unhelpful Supportive Leadership and Employees’ Organizational Citizenship Behavior**

Ryan and Deci (2000) propose that individuals are naturally inclined to be prosocial when provided with proper nurturing. According to self-determination theory, nurturing is achieved by fulfilling one’s psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). A study of college students found that students whose psychological needs were nurtured in their lives (e.g., “I feel that I can decide for myself how to live my life,” “I really like the people I interact with,” Gagné, 2003, p. 206) engaged in more prosocial activities (e.g., volunteered for a nonprofit organization, voted, engaged in activism, donated blood; Gagné, 2003).

In an organizational setting, prosocial behavior presents as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB; also referred to as contextual performance). Organizational citizenship behavior has been defined as “intentional and voluntary behavior[s] not directly related to the main task
functions but improve the functioning of the organization” (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993, p. 55). An OCB must be discretionary, and it must contribute to an organization’s effectiveness (Organ, 1988; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000). Although some researchers once claimed that OCBs must be extra-role behaviors that are not contractually rewarded by an organization, most researchers have dropped those criteria from the definition (Organ, 1997). Specific examples of OCBs include voluntarily cleaning a coffee machine in a break room, assisting a colleague who is struggling to complete a task, and being enthusiastic during a status update meeting. A meta-analysis reports small to moderate, positive associations between each psychological need and OCB based on findings of eight studies (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Because unhelpful supportive leaders may inadvertently thwart their employees’ psychological need fulfillment, employees of unhelpful supportive leaders may engage in fewer organizational citizenship behaviors.

Hypothesis 10: Unhelpful supportive leadership is negatively correlated with employees’ OCB.

Hypothesis 11: Employees’ psychological need fulfillment (perceptions of competence, autonomy, and relatedness) mediates the relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and OCB.

**Unhelpful Supportive Leadership and Employees’ Counterproductive Work Behavior**

Self-determination theory has been used to explain the relationship between another form of negative leadership, abusive supervision, and employee counterproductive work behavior (Lian et al., 2012). Abusive supervisors may thwart their employees’ psychological need fulfillment by engaging in a number of hostile behaviors (e.g., invading employees’ privacy, reminding employees of their past mistakes and failures; Tepper, 2000). When employees’ basic...
need satisfaction is blocked by an abusive supervisor, they may desire to retaliate by engaging in counterproductive work behaviors (Lian et al., 2012), behaviors that are harmful or intend to harm an organization, its stakeholders, or both (Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Spector & Fox, 2005). Employees may retaliate against their supervisor directly (e.g., ignoring one’s supervisor, snapping at their supervisor), and/or they may retaliate indirectly to avoid confrontation and retribution (e.g., sabotaging equipment, taking breaks; Lian et al., 2012). Employees whose basic needs are thwarted may also be more likely to engage in CWBs because they may have fewer cognitive and emotional resources to regulate their behavior (Lian et al., 2012). Because unhelpful supportive leaders may similarly block their employees’ psychological need fulfillment, unhelpful supportive leadership may also be linked with counterproductive work behaviors.

Hypothesis 12: Unhelpful supportive leadership is positively correlated with employees’ CWB.

Hypothesis 13: Employees’ psychological need fulfillment (perceptions of competence, autonomy, and relatedness) mediates the relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and CWB.

**Integrating Unhelpful Supportive Leadership in the Negative Leadership Domain**

The aforementioned hypotheses predict that unhelpful supportive leadership is associated with some of the same detrimental outcomes as other forms of negative leadership. An important question concerns the relative impact of unhelpful supportive leadership compared to established forms of negative leadership. Abusive supervision has received the most research attention of established forms of negative leadership (Tepper et al., 2017), so it was selected as the starting point for integration and comparison. Intuition likely suggests that abusive supervision should be
more harmful than unhelpful supportive leadership; abusive acts (e.g., yelling at employees, telling employees they are stupid) seem more severe than unhelpful supportive acts (e.g., providing unwanted help, providing confusing advice). However, some research suggests that misguided prosocial behaviors can be more distressing than overt hostile behaviors. For example, research demonstrates that presumably prosocial, sexist behaviors (e.g., over-explaining things, providing unnecessary help) require longer cardiovascular recovery than overt, hostile sexism (e.g., derogatory, sexist remarks; Salomon et al., 2015). Therefore, a research question is posed regarding the relative impacts of unhelpful supportive leadership and abusive supervision.

Research question: How do the relationships between unhelpful supportive leadership and the criterion measures (i.e., competence, autonomy, relatedness, psychological distress, engagement, task performance, OCB, and CWB) compare with the relationships between abusive supervision and the same outcome variables?
Table 1

Summary of negative leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example behaviors</th>
<th>Intent or motive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abusive supervision</td>
<td>“subordinates’ subjective assessments of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact” (Tepper, 2000, p. 178)</td>
<td>“Hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors” (Tepper, 2000, p. 178)</td>
<td>May have injurious motives (e.g., desire to cause injury and desire to hurt feelings) or constructive motives (e.g., desire to elicit high performance and desire to signal mistakes will not be tolerated; Liu et al., 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aversive leadership</td>
<td>“Leadership behaviors that emphasize the use of threats, intimidation, and punishment” (Bligh et al., 2007, p. 530)</td>
<td>“Engaging in intimidation and dispensing reprimands” (Pearce &amp; Sims Jr, 2002, p. 173)</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despotic leadership</td>
<td>“Personal dominance and authoritarian behaviors that serves the self-interest of the leader, is self-aggrandizing and exploitive of others” (De Hoogh &amp; Den Hartog, 2008, p. 298)</td>
<td>“Domineering, controlling and vengeful” (De Hoogh &amp; Den Hartog, 2008, p. 298)</td>
<td>“Serves the self-interest of the leader” (De Hoogh &amp; Den Hartog, 2008, p. 303)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destructive leadership</td>
<td>“the systematic and repeated behavior by a leader, supervisor, or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organisation by undermining and/or sabotaging the organisation's goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of subordinates.” (Einarsen et al., 2007, p. 208)</td>
<td>“Taking credit for the work of others, sexual harassment, or lying about important issues” (Erickson et al., 2015, p. 267)</td>
<td>“Selfish orientation; it is focused more on the leader’s needs than the needs of the larger social group” (Padilla et al., 2007, p. 179)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“It is our position that the definition should not include intent, because what makes leadership destructive has less to do with intentions than with the outcomes of the leaders’ behavior” (Einarsen et al., 2007, p. 210)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 Continued

Summary of negative leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example behaviors</th>
<th>Intent or motive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Petty tyrant</td>
<td>“One who lords his or her power over others” (Ashforth, 1994, p. 755)</td>
<td>“Arbitrariness and self-aggrandizement, belittling others, lack of consideration, a forcing style of conflict resolution, discouraging initiative, and noncontingent punishment” (Ashforth, 1994, p. 755)</td>
<td>“Uses authority or position for personal gain” (Ashforth, 1994, p. 757)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toxic leadership</td>
<td>“Toxic leadership is a combination of self-centered attitudes, motivations, and behaviors that have adverse effects on subordinates, the organization, and mission performance” (Army, 2012, p. 3)</td>
<td>“[...] deceive, intimidate, coerce, or unfairly punish others [...]” (Army, 2012, p. 3)</td>
<td>“[...] to get what they want for themselves” (Army, 2012, p. 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhelpful supportive</td>
<td>Unhelpful supportive leadership characterizes leaders who perform supportive acts that the recipient believes were intended to benefit them but are perceived as unhelpful or harmful</td>
<td>“gets too involved in my work when trying to be helpful [...] provides overly critical feedback when trying to help me improve” (Gray et al., 2020, p. 385)</td>
<td>Intended to benefit employees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. General process model of self-determination theory. Model is drawn from existing models and literature (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Sheldon et al., 2003; Van den Broeck et al., 2016).
Chapter Two:

Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to conduct a preliminary examination of the proposed hypotheses and research question using a cross-sectional survey from the perspective of employees who work under a direct supervisor.

Method

Participants

Employees taking classes at an American university were recruited to participate in the online survey study ($N = 1,610$). Three-hundred and twenty responses were removed because the participants did not finish the survey. For quality control, nine participants’ data were removed for completing the survey in less than three minutes. Based on a careless responding detection approach used by Spector et al. (2021), I then analyzed response patterns on the job performance measure that had two reverse-coded items. I removed responses from 24 employees who responded consistently across the items before reverse-coding (e.g., strongly agree to all of the items). The final sample consisted of 1,257 participants.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 62 ($M = 21.06, SD = 4.23$). Approximately 74 percent of participants were female ($n = 928, 73.83\%$), approximately 26 percent were male ($n = 321; 25.54\%$), and less than one percent were nonbinary ($n = 2$), transgender female ($n = 1$), no gender ($n = 1$), or did not report ($n = 2$). Approximately 59 percent of participants’ immediate supervisors were female ($n = 740; 58.87\%$). approximately 41 percent were male ($n = 511$;
40.65%), and less than one percent were other (n = 3) or not reported (n = 2). Approximately 62 percent of participants were White (n = 776; 61.73%), 25 percent were Hispanic (n = 315, 25.06%), 17 percent were Black or African American (n = 208, 16.55%), 10 percent were Asian (n = 122, 9.71%), and less than one percent were American Indian or Alaska Natives (n = 12, 0.95%) or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (n = 9, 0.72%). Approximately three percent of participants provided an additional race (e.g., Arabic, Iranian; n = 34; 2.70%). Percentages do not sum to 100 because participants could select multiple races. Participants held a wide variety of positions, including grocery clerk, IT support specialist, substitute teacher, restaurant server, and office assistant. Approximately two percent worked less than 10 hours per week (n = 28, 2.23%), 39 percent worked 10 to 19 hours per week (n = 491, 39.06%), 36 percent worked 20 to 29 hours per week (n = 450, 35.80%), 19 percent worked 30 to 40 hours per week (n = 232, 18.46%), four percent worked more than 40 hours per week (n = 54, 4.30%), and less than one percent did not report (n = 2).

**Measures**

**Unhelpful Supportive Leadership.** Employees reported their supervisors’ unhelpful supportive leadership using an 8-item measure, which was adapted from the Unhelpful Workplace Social Support Scale (UWSSS; Gray et al., 2020). An example item is, “My supervisor gets too involved in my work when trying to be helpful.” Participants responded to the items on a six-point scale (1 = never, 6 = very frequently). Internal consistency reliability of the scale was .90. Additional details regarding the scale’s development are provided below, and the full scale is provided in Table 2.

The original UWSSS measures unhelpful support from coworkers, so the UWSSS was slightly modified to reflect unhelpful support from supervisors (i.e., “coworkers” was replaced
with “supervisor”). Additionally, the original UWSSS contains 28 items measuring seven subscales. Because this study examines overall unhelpful supportive leadership, one item from each subscale was included to achieve a balance between efficiency and breadth. Items were selected for the abbreviated measure based on item reliability statistics reported in Gray et al. (2020) as well as the conceptual representativeness of each subdimension. For example, the original UWSSS contains four items to measure shortsighted support. Of the four shortsighted support items, the item with the highest item-total correlation and lowest Cronbach’s alpha with item removed was retained for the abbreviated scale. A similar approach was taken to select one item from the other six subscales. An eighth item was added to capture poorly assigned social support. Gray et al. (2020) define poorly assigned support as “social support in which a supervisor assigns an employee to help the recipient complete a task, but the assignment was untimely, unneeded, and/or low-quality” (p. 30). Poorly assigned support was not included in the original UWSSS because it is not a form of coworker support. The additional item is: “My supervisor tries to help me by involving others who create more issues.” Measures of overall unhelpful support have been used in previous research (Gray et al., 2020; Lacey et al., 2021).

Because the UWSSS was substantially modified, item reliability analyses and factor analyses were conducted on the new scale. Item reliability analyses were conducted in SPSS 24, which indicated that each of the items had item-total correlations above .60 (.61 - .74), and Cronbach’s alpha would not be higher if any of the items were removed. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted in SAS 94 using the CALIS procedure to examine the dimensionality of the scale (“SAS/STAT 13.1 User’s Guide - The CALIS Procedure,” 2003). The scree plot indicated that the items reflect a single underlying factor that accounted for
58.97% of total variance, and the Eigenvalue was only greater than one with a single factor. Thus, the scale appeared to measure a unidimensional construct as intended.

Because no modifications were made to the scale based on the exploratory factor analysis, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was also conducted in SAS 9.4 using CALIS to test the unidimensional measurement model (“SAS/STAT 13.1 User’s Guide - The CALIS Procedure,” 2003). Although the chi-square measure of fit was statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 249.52$, $p < .01$, most of the descriptive measures indicate good fit. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was higher than .95 as recommended by Hu and Bentler (1998; CFI = .954). The standardized root mean residual (SRMR) was lower than the recommended .08 cutoff (SRMR = .038), although the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was higher than the recommended .06 cutoff (RMSEA = .096; Hu & Bentler, 1998).

**Work-related Basic Need Satisfaction.** Employees completed a 15-item measure of work-related basic need satisfaction (Organ, 1997). The scale consists of three subscales: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. An example competence item is “I feel competent at my job.” Autonomy was measured with items such as “I feel free to do my job the way I think it could best be done.” Relatedness was captured with items including “I don’t really feel connected with other people at my job.” For purposes of this study, “other people” was replaced with “my supervisor.” Participants responded on a seven-point scale (1 = Not at all true, 7 = Very true). Cronbach’s alphas of the competence, autonomy, and relatedness measures were .89, .69, and .84, respectively.

Because low reliability of measurement can artificially attenuate variable relationships, the measure of autonomy was examined to determine if any problematic item(s) could be removed to achieve Cronbach’s alpha over .70. Item reliability analyses demonstrated that
deleting one item, “The tasks I have to do at work are in line with that I really want to do,” would increase Cronbach’s alpha above .70. Therefore, the item was excluded from the autonomy measure for this study, and internal consistency reliability was .71.

**Job-related Negative Affect.** Job-related negative affect was measured using the 10-item negative emotion subscale of the Job-related Affective Well-being Scale (Spector, 2007). Employees were asked to indicate the extent to which their job generally makes them feel emotions such as angry, anxious, and frightened. They responded on a five-point scale (1 = never, 5 = extremely often). Internal consistency reliability was .91.

**Work Engagement.** Work engagement was measured with the 9-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli et al., 2002). An example item is, “I am enthusiastic about my job.” Employees responded on a 7-point scale (1 = Never; 7 = Always; Every day). Cronbach’s alpha was .93.

**Task Performance.** Employees completed the 7-item task performance subscale of a job performance questionnaire (Williams & Anderson, 1991). Employees responded to items such as, “I adequately complete assigned duties.” on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Internal consistency reliability was .79.

**Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB).** OCB was assessed with the 10-item OCB Checklist (OCB-C; Spector et al., 2010). Employees self-reported the frequency with which they perform behaviors such as “volunteered for extra work assignments” on a 5-point scale (1 = Never; 5 = Always). Cronbach’s alpha was .89.

**Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB).** Employees completed the 10-item CWB Checklist (CWB-C; Spector et al., 2010) by reporting the frequency with which they perform
behaviors such as “came to work late without permission” on a 5-point scale (1 = Never; 5 = Always). Cronbach’s alpha was .83.

**Abusive Supervision.** Abusive supervision was measured using a 15-item Abusive Supervision scale (Pinder, 1998). Employees were asked to rate the frequency with which their supervisor performs acts such as “ridicules me” and “lies to me.” Participants responded to the items on a five-point scale (1 = I cannot remember him/her using this behavior with me, 5 = He/she uses this behavior very often with me). Internal consistency reliability was .95.

**Results**

Study correlations and descriptive statistics are reported in Table 3. Supporting Hypotheses 1-3, unhelpful supportive leadership was negatively associated with employees’ psychological need fulfillment. Employees who reported that their supervisors engaged in more unhelpful supportive leadership reported lower competence ($r = -0.18, p < .01$), autonomy ($r = -0.53, p < .01$), and relatedness ($r = -0.48, p < .01$). Employees of more unhelpful supportive leaders also reported higher job-related negative affect ($r = 0.49, p < .01$) and lower work engagement ($r = -0.23, p < .01$), which aligns with Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 6. Providing support for Hypothesis 8, unhelpful supportive leadership was negatively correlated with employees’ self-reported task performance ($r = -0.22, p < .01$), but in opposition to Hypothesis 10, unhelpful supportive leadership was positively associated with employees’ self-reported organizational citizenship behavior ($r = 0.12, p < .01$). Supporting Hypothesis 12, unhelpful supportive leadership was positively linked with employees’ self-reported counterproductive work behavior ($r = 0.33, p < .01$).
Proposed Mediating Mechanisms Suggested by Self-determination Theory

To provide a preliminary investigation of the hypothesized path models suggested by self-determination theory, competence, autonomy, and relatedness were individually examined as possible mediators using PROC CAUSALMED in SAS 9.4. The first hypothesized model, which suggests psychological needs mediate the relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and job-related negative affect (hypothesis 5), was generally supported. When examining competence as a potential mediator, the estimated direct effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was .34, and the indirect effect mediated by competence was less than .01. The indirect effect was significant ($p = .04$), but only 2.05 percent of the total effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was mediated by competence. With autonomy as a potential mediator, the estimated direct effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was .18, and the indirect effect mediated by autonomy was .17. The indirect effect was significant ($p < .01$), and 48.14 percent of the total effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was mediated by autonomy. When investigating relatedness as a potential mediator, the estimated direct effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was .26, and the indirect effect mediated by relatedness was .09. The indirect effect was significant ($p < .01$), and 25.37 percent of the total effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was mediated by relatedness. A more complex model involving all three potential mediators together was examined using PROC CALIS in SAS 9.4. The $x^2$ measure of fit was statistically significant [$x^2(1, 1257) = 66.44, p < .01$], indicating that the applied covariance matrix is statistically different from the observed covariance matrix. However, most of the descriptive measures of fit (CFI = .96, SRMR = .04, RMSEA = .23) suggest adequate model fit, and RMSEA can be artificially high with low degrees of freedom (Kenny et al., 2015).
The model with standardized parameter estimates (and corresponding standard errors) is shown in Figure 2.

Hypothesis 7, which suggests psychological needs mediate the relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and engagement, was also generally supported. When examining competence as a potential mediator, the estimated direct effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was -.24, and the indirect effect mediated by competence was -.05. The indirect effect was significant \((p < .01)\), and 17.27 percent of the total effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was mediated by competence. With autonomy as a potential mediator, the estimated direct effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was .05, and the indirect effect mediated by autonomy was -.34. The indirect effect was significant \((p < .01)\), and 100 percent of the total effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was mediated by autonomy. When investigating relatedness as a potential mediator, the estimated direct effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was -.02, and the indirect effect mediated by relatedness was -.27. The indirect effect was significant \((p < .01)\), and 94.58 percent of the total effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was mediated by relatedness. A more complex model involving all three potential mediators together was examined using PROC CALIS in SAS 9.4. Although the \(x^2\) measure of fit was statistically significant \([x^2(1, 1257) = 18.72, p < .01]\), the descriptive measures of fit (CFI = .99, SRMR = .02, RMSEA = .12) generally suggest adequate model fit. The model with standardized parameter estimates (and corresponding standard errors) is shown in Figure 3. The more complex model, in which engagement mediates the relationship between psychological needs and task performance (hypothesis 9), was not supported. The \(x^2\) measure of fit was statistically significant \([x^2(5, 1257) = 301.03, p < .01]\). The descriptive measures of fit (CFI = .84, SRMR = .10, RMSEA = .22) suggest poor model fit. See Figure 4.
Hypothesis 11, which posits psychological needs mediate the relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and OCB, was not examined because unhelpful supportive leadership was positively, rather than negatively, associated with OCB. Thus, hypothesis 11 was not supported. Hypothesis 13, which suggests psychological needs mediate the relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and CWB, was not generally supported either. When examining competence as a potential mediator, the estimated direct effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was .14, and the indirect effect mediated by competence was .01. The indirect effect was significant \((p < .01)\), but only 5.14 percent of the total effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was mediated by competence. With autonomy as a potential mediator, the estimated direct effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was .09, and the indirect effect mediated by autonomy was .05. The indirect effect was significant \((p < .01)\), and 34.19 percent of the total effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was mediated by autonomy. When investigating relatedness as a potential mediator, the estimated direct effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was .13, and the indirect effect mediated by relatedness was .01. The indirect effect was not significant \((p = .07)\), and 8.09 percent of the total effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was mediated by relatedness. A more complex model involving all three potential mediators together was examined using PROC CALIS in SAS 9.4. The \(\chi^2\) measure of fit was statistically significant \([\chi^2(1, 1257) = 48.05, p < .01]\). While the descriptive measures of fit mostly suggest adequate model fit \((CFI = .96, SRMR = .04, RMSEA = .19)\), only one of the three paths from psychological needs to CWB was above .07. Autonomy may mediate the relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and CWB, but competence and relatedness do not appear to account for meaningful variance. The model with standardized parameter estimates (and corresponding standard errors) is shown in Figure 5.
Unhelpful Supportive Leadership Versus Abusive Supervision

Although no hypotheses concerned the correlation between the two types of negative leadership, the moderate to high correlation between unhelpful supportive leadership and abusive supervision is worth noting ($r = .58$, $p < .01$). Given conceptual differences between the types of leadership, the magnitude of the correlation was surprising. To investigate this relationship further, a scatterplot was created as displayed in Figure 6. The scatterplot demonstrates that there is an asymmetric relationship between abusive leadership and unhelpful support. Most leaders who were rated as highly abusive were also rated as highly unhelpful, but the relationship was not demonstrated in reverse (i.e., leaders who were rated as unhelpful were not necessarily also rated as abusive). Perhaps not all unhelpful supportive leaders are abusive, but abusive leaders are generally perceived as unhelpful.

The moderate to high correlation between unhelpful supportive leadership and abusive supervision begged the question of whether unhelpful supportive leadership is associated with negative outcomes because it is linked with supervisor abuse. To examine this possibility, the criteria (i.e., competence, autonomy, relatedness, psychological distress, engagement, task performance, OCB, and CWB) were separately regressed on both unhelpful leadership and abusive supervision. Unhelpful supportive leadership remained a significant predictor of each criterion, suggesting that abusive supervision did not explain the relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and the investigated outcome variables. See Table 4.

As depicted in Table 5, t-tests for dependent correlations were conducted to compare the variable relationships between unhelpful supportive leadership and abusive supervision. Unhelpful supportive leadership was significantly more strongly, negatively related to employees’ perceived competence and autonomy than abusive supervision, $t(1254) = 1.96$, $p <$
.05 and $t(1254) = 4.59, p < 0.01$, respectively. Abusive supervision had significantly stronger relationships with job-related negative affect and counterproductive work behavior than unhelpful supportive leadership, $t(1254) = 3.83, p < 0.01$ and $t(1254) = 6.58, p < 0.01$, respectively. There were no significant differences in the magnitude of relationships between the two leadership styles and relatedness, work engagement, task performance, or organizational citizenship behavior.

Notably, abusive supervision had a non-normal distribution, skewness = 2.35, kurtosis = 5.72. A two-step approach proposed by Templeton (2011) was used to transform the positively skewed distribution to a normal distribution. First, abusive supervision was transformed into a percentile rank, which results in a uniform distribution. Second, an inverse-normal transformation was applied to the results of Step 1 to form a variable consisting of normally distributed z-scores. The new skewness was .72, and the new kurtosis was -.28. Using the normalized variable, the correlation between unhelpful supportive leadership and abusive supervision was .65, $p < .01$. The regressions and t-tests of dependent correlations were re-examined, and the significance of all but one result remained unchanged. When unhelpful supportive leadership and abusive supervision (normalized) were regressed on CWB, unhelpful supportive leadership was no longer significant. See Table 6 and Table 7.

Post-hoc Analyses Examining Gender Differences

Existing research suggests possible gender differences involving unhelpful supportive leadership. Women may be more likely to receive help they do not want or need, a form of benevolent sexism (Salomon et al., 2015). Women may also be more likely to perceive unhelpful supportive leadership. This would align with findings that women are more likely to perceive incivility than men when observing the same behavior (Howard et al., 2021). An independent
samples t-test found that men \( (n = 321, M = 2.71, SD = 1.14) \) actually reported significantly more unhelpful supportive leadership than women \( (n = 928, M = 2.43, SD = 1.15) \), \( t(1247) = 3.85, p < .01 \). While the mean difference of .29 was statically significant, the effect size is quite small, suggesting relatively negligible gender differences.

**Study 1 Conclusion**

Despite perceived benevolent intentions of unhelpful supportive leaders, receiving unhelpful support from one’s supervisor was associated with lower psychological need fulfillment (i.e., lower perceived competence, autonomy, and relatedness), higher job-related negative affect, lower work engagement, weaker task performance, and more counterproductive work behavior. Contrary to hypotheses, employees of more unhelpful supportive leaders reported engaging in more organizational citizenship behavior. Self-determination theory may help to explain the relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and job-related negative affect as well as the relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and engagement. However, self-determination theory did not provide a promising explanation for the link between unhelpful supportive leadership and employee performance. Taken together, the results suggest that negative leadership extends beyond mal-intended leaders. In fact, unhelpful supportive leadership was more strongly, negatively associated with recipients’ perceived competence and autonomy than abusive supervision. This finding is particularly compelling, as it suggests that unhelpful supportive leadership may, in some regards, evoke more harm than an established form of negative leadership.
Table 2

*Item reliability of Unhelpful Supportive Leadership Scale (USLS; N = 1,257)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale item</th>
<th>Item-total Correlation</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha with Item Removed</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Gets too involved in my work when trying to be helpful.</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Provides advice that leaves me with more questions than answers.</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Provides overly critical feedback when trying to help me improve.</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Takes too long to help after promising to complete a task for me.</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Tries to help me by taking over tasks when I wish s/he would teach me how to do the tasks instead.</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Is uncomfornting when trying to make me feel better.</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Offers advice that is unhelpful because it clashes with other advice I have received at work.</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Tries to help me by involving others who create more issues.</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.90</td>
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Table 3

Study 1 descriptive statistics and study correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<td>.48</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note: p < .05 for all correlations; p < .01 for all correlations over .07*
Table 4

*Study 1 criterion variables regressed on unhelpful supportive leadership and abusive supervision*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DV: Competence</th>
<th>DV: Engagement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>β</strong></td>
<td><strong>β</strong></td>
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<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DV: Autonomy</th>
<th>DV: Task performance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>β</strong></td>
<td><strong>β</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.21**</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>β</strong></td>
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<td>.03</td>
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<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DV: Job-related negative affect</th>
<th>DV: CWB</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>β</strong></td>
<td><strong>β</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.08*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abusive supervision</td>
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<td>.43**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.23</td>
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*Note: N = 1257*
Table 5

*Dependent correlations t-tests comparing outcomes associated with unhelpful supportive leadership and abusive supervision*

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<tr>
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<th>Abusive supervision</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
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</thead>
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<td>1.96*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>-.53**</td>
<td>-.43**</td>
<td>4.59**</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatedness</td>
<td>-.48**</td>
<td>-.45**</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job-related negative affect</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>3.83**</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>-.23**</td>
<td>-.23**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task performance</td>
<td>-.22**</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCB</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td>.10**</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWB</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>6.58**</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
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</table>

*Note:* The correlation between unhelpful supportive leadership and abusive supervision is .58.
Table 6

Criterion variables regressed on unhelpful supportive leadership and abusive supervision with normalization transformation

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>β</th>
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<th>β</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DV: Competence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>DV: Engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhelpful supportive leadership</td>
<td>-.16**</td>
<td>Unhelpful supportive leadership</td>
<td>-.10**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive supervision</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>Abusive supervision</td>
<td>-.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
<td>.03</td>
<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DV: Autonomy</strong></td>
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<td><strong>DV: Task performance</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Unhelpful supportive leadership</td>
<td>-.33**</td>
<td>Unhelpful supportive leadership</td>
<td>-.09*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive supervision</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>Abusive supervision</td>
<td>-.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
<td>.28</td>
<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DV: Relatedness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>DV: OCB</strong></td>
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<td>Unhelpful supportive leadership</td>
<td>-.31**</td>
<td>Unhelpful supportive leadership</td>
<td>.11**</td>
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<td>Abusive supervision</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
<td>Abusive supervision</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
<td>.27</td>
<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DV: Job-related negative affect</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>DV: CWB</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unhelpful supportive leadership</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>Unhelpful supportive leadership</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive supervision</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>Abusive supervision</td>
<td>.48**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
<td>.37</td>
<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
<td>.24</td>
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**Table 7**

*Dependent correlations t-tests comparing outcomes associated with unhelpful supportive leadership and abusive supervision with normalization transformation*

<table>
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<th>$t$</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>-0.13**</td>
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<td>0.59**</td>
<td>5.28**</td>
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<td>Engagement</td>
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<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCB</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
<td>0.09**</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>0.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWB</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>0.49**</td>
<td>7.74**</td>
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*Note:* the correlation between unhelpful supportive leadership and abusive supervision is 0.65.
Figure 2. Hypothesized model of USL and job-related negative affect. Model is depicted with standardized parameter estimates (and corresponding standard errors). The disturbances associated competence, autonomy, and relatedness were allowed to covary.
Figure 3. Hypothesized model of USL and engagement. Model is depicted with standardized parameter estimates (and corresponding standard errors). The disturbances associated competence, autonomy, and relatedness were allowed to covary.
Figure 4. Hypothesized model of USL and task performance. Model is depicted with standardized parameter estimates (and corresponding standard errors). The disturbances associated competence, autonomy, and relatedness were allowed to covary.
Figure 5. Hypothesized model of USL and CWB. Model is depicted with standardized parameter estimates (and corresponding standard errors). The disturbances associated competence, autonomy, and relatedness were allowed to covary.
Figure 6. Scatterplot of unhelpful supportive leadership and abusive supervision.
Chapter Three:

Study 2

Study 1 demonstrates that negative leadership may extend beyond mal-intended, abusive leaders. The purpose of Study 2 is to re-examine some of the hypotheses from Study 1 while addressing several limitations and future directions.

First, Study 2 uses a multi-source design. Some researchers have raised concerns about the measurement of other forms of negative leadership that rely on employees’ perceptions of their leaders’ behaviors (Tepper et al., 2017). For example, critics have called attention to the fact that an overwhelming majority of research on abusive supervision captures “employee appraised abusive supervision” rather than objective indications of abusive supervisor behavior (Chan & McAllister, 2014, p. 58; Tepper et al., 2017). Proponents of abusive supervision literature argue that abusive supervision was introduced as, “subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact,” (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Thus, the construct is inherently perceptual and appropriately measured by asking employees to report the frequency with which their leaders engage in hostile behaviors. Aligning with abusive supervision, unhelpful supportive leadership is perceptual by definition; employee reports of their leaders’ behaviors are appropriate for measurement. Still, it would be advantageous to understand drivers of employees’ reports (e.g., individual differences, supervisor behaviors). If employees’ perceptions are purely idiosyncratic, approaches to mitigate unhelpful supportive leadership should focus on
followers rather than leaders’ behaviors. A multi-source design can begin examining such possibilities; if employees’ and supervisors’ perceptions of unhelpful supportive behaviors converge, Study 2 would provide initial support that employees’ ratings reflect some degree of “objectivity.”

A multi-source design also helps to address another commonly discussed measurement issue, the merits of self-reported performance. Research demonstrates that self-ratings of performance tend to be inflated relative to others’ ratings, which may reflect a self-serving bias (Hoffman & Dilchert, 2012). Granted, different raters may attend to different behaviors, have different rating schema, and evaluate some types of performance better than others (Borman, 1997; Conway et al., 2001; B. Hoffman et al., 2010; Lievens et al., 2008). Thus, inflated self-reports of performance relative to others may reflect a self-serving bias, but they may also reflect relevant insider knowledge. In Study 2, supervisors report their employees’ task performance, OCB, and CWB to provide alternative measures from the self-reports in Study 1. If findings that unhelpful supportive leadership is significantly associated with employees’ performance are replicated using other-reports, researchers will have greater confidence in the stability and generalizability of the findings.

Second, because little support was found for self-determination theory as an explanation for performance outcomes associated with unhelpful supportive leadership in Study 1, Study 2 draws from alternative theoretical frameworks. Specifically, I propose that unhelpful supportive leaders serve as an organizational constraint that drives worse employee task performance and more CWBs (Peters & O’Connor, 1980). Unhelpful supportive leaders may simultaneously elicit more employee OCBs as proposed by social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005);
employees may feel compelled to reciprocate supportive behaviors, even if the support they received was not helpful.

Finally, Study 2 relies on a new, dissimilar sample to examine the generalizability of findings. Some researchers have called into question research that relies on employed student samples (Guide for Authors, 2014; Highhouse & Gillespie, 2008). Other researchers refute such positions, claiming that “any currently or potentially employed person falls within the population of interest to most I-O psychologists.” (Landers & Behrend, 2015, p. 3). Still, research conducted with different employee samples would be helpful to examine the replicability and generalizability of findings. For Study 2, full-time university support staff were recruited for participation. University staff have a clear hierarchical organizational structure, and university staff communicate with their supervisors on a regular basis.

Taken together, Study 2 aims to re-examine relationships between unhelpful supportive leadership and employee performance while offering three advantages: 1) utilizing a multi-source design, 2) drawing from alternative theoretical frameworks, and 3) relying on a new, dissimilar sample.

**Literature Review and Hypothesis Development**

**Self Versus Other Reports of Unhelpful Supportive Leadership Behaviors**

Study 2 can provide insights into the relationship between employee reports of unhelpful supportive leadership and supervisor self-reports of unhelpful supportive leadership behaviors. Previous research demonstrates that self-reports of performance are often more favorable than other-reports of performance, possibly reflecting a self-serving bias (Hoffman & Dilchert, 2012; Hoffman et al., 2010). Aligning with such findings, supervisors’ self-reports of unhelpful supportive leadership behaviors may be lower than their employees’ reports of unhelpful
supportive leadership. Furthermore, supervisors may be unaware of many instances in which their well-intended behaviors are unhelpful. Social psychology experiments demonstrate that many individuals, including young children, conceal negative reactions after receiving a disappointing gift, presumably to avoid hurting the feelings of the gifter (Dunn et al., 2008). Inclinations to project positivity and gratitude may be heightened when dealing with a supervisor who has power over employees’ rewards and career outcomes (Deng et al., 2020).

Hypotheses 14: Supervisors’ self-reports of unhelpful supportive leadership will be lower than their employees’ reports of unhelpful supportive leadership.

While supervisors and employees are not hypothesized to report equivalent levels of unhelpful supportive leadership behaviors, the measures should be positively correlated. Within the multi-trait, multimethod framework of examining convergent and discriminant validity (Campbell & Fiske, 1959), the association between supervisor and employee reports of unhelpful supportive leader behaviors is a monotrait-heteromethod correlation (i.e., same construct measured with different methods), which should be positive to demonstrate convergence. Furthermore, research on gift-gifting demonstrates that gift givers have some level of awareness of receivers’ satisfaction. While givers of bad gifts generally believe the receiver is more satisfied than they are, givers of bad gifts estimate satisfaction levels lower than givers of good gifts (Zhang & Epley, 2012).

A meta-analysis of self and other reports of leaders’ relation-oriented behavior (e.g., consideration, servant behaviors) found that the uncorrected correlation between supervisors’ and subordinates’ ratings was 0.24 ($\rho = .28$; Lee & Carpenter, 2018). The magnitude of agreement may be similar when evaluating convergence between supervisors’ and employees’
ratings of unhelpful supportive leadership. While a large effect size is not anticipated, an effect size on par with previous research would suggest employees’ ratings are not purely idiosyncratic.

Hypothesis 15: Supervisors’ self-reports of unhelpful supportive leadership have a positive correlation of at least .24 with employees’ reports of unhelpful supportive leadership.

**Unhelpful Supportive Leadership Behaviors and Employee Performance**

In Study 1, findings supported a hypothesized negative relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and task performance. However, the results generally did not support the hypothesized path model proposed by self-determination theory. In lieu of self-determination theory, organizational constraints may help to explain the negative association between unhelpful supportive leadership and employees’ task performance. Organizational constraints are tangible and intangible barriers that make it difficult or impossible to translate one’s ability and effort into performance (Peters & O’Connor, 1980). Some examples of organizational constraints include poor equipment or supplies, organizational rules and procedures, and conflicting job demands (Spector & Jex, 1998).

Unhelpful supportive leaders may engage in behaviors that are perceived as organizational constraints and inhibit employees’ task performance (i.e., leader engages in behavior -> employee perceives organizational constraint -> employee performs poorly). For example, an employee may be responsible for preparing a deliverable for a client. The employee may prepare a draft and send it to their supervisor for feedback and approval. In an attempt to be especially helpful, the supervisor may provide a large quantity of suggestions aimed at making the deliverable the best it can be (i.e., leader behavior). Upon reviewing the feedback, the employee may perceive that the quantity of feedback will be difficult or impossible to address in
a timely manner (i.e., perceived constraint). The employee may dedicate extra time to addressing the feedback, and the client may be dissatisfied with the employee’s untimely deliverable (i.e., worse performance).

The idea that a supervisor may make it difficult or impossible for employees to do their job is not new. A commonly used measure of organizational constraints asks, “How often do you find it difficult or impossible to do your job because of your supervisor?” (Spector & Jex, 1998). The behaviors of unhelpful supportive leaders (e.g., getting too involved in an employee’s work when trying to be helpful, taking over an employee’s task to be helpful, providing unclear advice) may inadvertently block employees from doing their jobs.

Notably, organizational constraints have some conceptual overlap with competence, which was a proposed mechanism explaining failures of unhelpful supportive leadership in the Study 1. Employees who are frequently blocked from accomplishing their work goals may perceive that they are less competent at their jobs (Freedman & Phillips, 1985). However, the constructs are not interchangeable (Freedman & Phillips, 1985). Rather than attributing their inability to demonstrate high performance to their own competence, employees who experience organizational constraints may attribute their performance to external factors. Thus, organizational constraints offer an alternative proposed mechanism explaining the link between unhelpful supportive leadership and employee task performance.

Hypothesis 16: Unhelpful supportive leadership is negatively correlated with employees’ task performance.

Hypothesis 17: Organizational constraints mediate the relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and task performance.
According to Fox, Spector, and Miles (2001), organizational constraints may drive counterproductive work behavior (CWB). Specifically, Fox et al. (2001) propose a job stressor/emotion/CWB model. Job stressors are situations or conditions at work that require an adaptive response on behalf of an employee (Jex & Beehr, 1991). When encountering a job stressor, such as organizational constraints, employees experience negative emotions (e.g., anger, frustration, anxiety). These negative emotions can manifest in CWBs, such as withdrawal behavior and sabotage (Fox et al., 2001). Fox et al. (2001) found empirical support for their proposed model; job stressors, including organizational constraints, were positively associated with CWB. Negative emotions at least partially mediated stressor-CWB relationships. In addition, coping with stressors, such as organizational constraints, may deplete one’s cognitive resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Schumm, 2002; Zhang et al., 2019). The depletion of cognitive resources can impair one’s ability to inhibit undesirable behaviors, such as CWBs (Hobfoll, 1989; Zhang et al., 2019). Because unhelpful supportive leaders engage in behaviors (e.g., getting too involved in an employee’s work, providing critical feedback) that may inadvertently block employees’ performance, unhelpful supportive leadership may be positively associated with CWB.

Hypothesis 18: Unhelpful supportive leadership is positively correlated with employees’ CWB.

Hypothesis 19: Organizational constraints mediate the relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and employees’ CWB.

Study 1 failed to support the hypothesized negative relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and organizational citizenship behavior; rather, a positive relationship was observed. While the finding does not align with self-determination theory, it
does align with social exchange theory. Social exchange theory posits that individuals feel an obligation to reciprocate support from others (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). While reciprocity may not be demanded or explicitly requested, individuals often expect their support to be returned (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). These expectations, referred to as reciprocity rules, are shaped by societal norms (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Early literature on social exchange theory suggests that individuals exchange six types of resources: money, goods, status, love, information, and services (Foa & Foa, 1980). When unhelpful supportive leaders provide such “resources” (i.e., support), employees may feel an obligation to reciprocate their supervisor’s well-intended support, even if it was not helpful.

Hypothesis 20: Unhelpful supportive leadership is positively correlated with employees’ organizational citizenship behavior.

Method

Participants

One-hundred sixty-eight full-time university staff and their direct supervisors were recruited for Study 2. Contact information of employee-supervisor dyads was obtained through two American university human resource departments, and employee-supervisor pairs were invited to participate via email. Data were collected as part of a larger study. Data from 11 employee-supervisor pairs were removed due to missing values, resulting in a final sample of 157 employee-supervisor dyads.

Approximately 87 percent of employees were women ($n = 136; 86.62\%$), approximately 13 percent were men ($n = 20; 12.74\%$), and less than one percent were another gender ($n = 1; 0.64\%$). The employees ranged in age from 22 to 76 ($M = 43.58, SD = 13.61$). Approximately 69 percent of employees’ supervisors were women ($n = 108; 68.79\%$), approximately 30 percent
were men \((n = 47, 29.94\%)\), and approximately one percent were another gender \((n = 2; 1.27\%)\). The supervisors ranged in age from 26 to 74 \((M = 49.09, SD = 12.07)\). Approximately nine percent of employee-supervisor pairs had been working together less than one year \((n = 14, 8.92\%)\), approximately 68 percent had been working together between one and five years \((n = 107, 68.15\%)\), approximately 14 percent had been working together between six and 10 years \((n = 22; 14.01\%)\), approximately five percent had been working together between 11 and 15 years \((n = 8, 5.10\%)\), and approximately four percent had been working together over 15 years \((n = 6, 3.82\%)\). Additional demographics were not collected to protect employees’ anonymity.

**Measures**

**Employee Measures.** Employees rated their supervisor’s leadership using the unhelpful supportive leadership measure and abusive supervision scale from Study 1. Cronbach’s alpha of the unhelpful supportive leadership measure was .91, and Cronbach’s alpha of the abusive supervision scale was .89. Because the unhelpful supportive leadership measure has only been used in this research, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test the unidimensional measurement model in SAS using PROC CALIS version 10.2. Results were as follows: \(x^2(20, 157) = 62.04, p < .01, CFI = .94, \text{RMSEA} = .12, \text{SRMR} = .05\) (SAS/STAT 13.1 User’s Guide – The CALIS Procedure, 2013). Employees also completed the 11-item organizational constraints scale (OCS; Spector & Jex, 1998). Participants were asked how often they find it difficult or impossible to do their job because of “your supervisor,” “inadequate help from others,” “incorrect instructions,” etc. on a 5-point scale \((1 = \text{very inaccurate}; 5 = \text{very accurate})\). Internal consistency reliability of the OCS was .86.

**Supervisor Measures.** Supervisors completed the unhelpful supportive leadership scale from Study 1. The scale was adapted for self-report. For example, “My supervisor gets too
involved in my work when trying to be helpful” was reworded as “I get too involved in my employee’s work when trying to be helpful.” Cronbach’s alpha of the measure was .79. Because the unhelpful supportive leadership measure had not previously been used for supervisor self-report, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test the unidimensional measurement model in SAS using PROC CALIS version 10.2. Results were as follows: $\chi^2(20, 157) = 97.86, p < .01$, CFI = .77, RMSEA = .16, SRMR = .09 (SAS/STAT 13.1 User’s Guide – The CALIS Procedure, 2013). Supervisors also completed measures of their employee’s task performance, OCB, and CWB using the same measures from Study 1 without adaptation for self-report. Cronbach’s alphas were .87, .89, and .68, respectively. Because low reliability of measurement can artificially attenuate variable relationships, the measure of CWB was examined to determine if any problematic item(s) could be removed to achieve Cronbach’s alpha over .70. Item reliability analyses demonstrated that removing any item(s) would only further decrease Cronbach’s alpha, so the measure was left unchanged.

**Demographic Measures.** Employees and supervisors provided their sex, age, job tenure, and tenure working together.

**Results**

Descriptive statistics and study correlations are displayed in Table 8. A paired-samples t-test was conducted to test the hypothesis that supervisors would self-report engaging in less unhelpful supportive leadership behaviors than their employees would report receiving. Contrary to hypothesis 14, supervisors self-reported providing significantly more unhelpful support ($M = 2.28, SD = .68$) than their employees reported receiving ($M = 1.67, SD = .79$), $t(156) = -8.57, p < .01$. Providing support for some convergence between employee and supervisor reports of unhelpful supportive leadership (hypothesis 15), a small, positive correlation was observed
between employee and supervisor reports of unhelpful supportive leadership, $r = .28, p < .01$.

Providing further support that employee ratings of unhelpful supportive leadership reflect some degree of “objectivity,” supervisor ratings of unhelpful supportive leadership had similar patterns of relationships to employee ratings. Unhelpful supportive leadership, as rated by supervisors and employees, was positively correlated with abusive supervision, organizational constraints, and CWBs.

Employee ratings of unhelpful supportive leadership were not significantly associated with supervisors’ ratings of employees’ task performance, $r = -.05, p > .05$, or OCB, $r = -.03, p > .05$, failing to support hypotheses 16 and 20. Because unhelpful supportive leadership was not significantly associated with employee task performance, organizational constraints were not examined as a potential mediator, failing to support hypothesis 17. Employee ratings of unhelpful supportive leadership were positively associated with supervisors’ ratings of employees’ CWB, $r = .31, p < .01$, which aligns with hypothesis 18. PROC CAUSALMED in SAS 9.4 (SAS, 2017) was used to examine if organizational constraints may mediate the relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and CWB (hypothesis 19). The estimated direct effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was .08, and the indirect effect mediated by organizational constraints was less than .01. The indirect effect was nonsignificant ($p = .90$); only 2.35 percent of the total effect of unhelpful supportive leadership was mediated by organizational constraints.

**Study 2 Conclusion**

Study 2 demonstrates that employee and supervisor ratings of unhelpful supportive leadership are positively correlated, which provides support for the proposition that employee ratings of unhelpful supportive leadership reflect some degree of “objectivity.” Unhelpful
supportive leadership, as rated by both employees and supervisors, was positively associated with organizational constraints and employee CWBs. Although organizational constraints significantly related to both measures of unhelpful support, it failed to provide a promising explanation for the link between unhelpful supportive leadership and employee CWBs. Findings involving multi-source data provide further support for unhelpful supportive leadership as a meaningful stressor associated with negative outcomes.
Table 8  
*Study 2 descriptive statistics and study correlations*

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<tr>
<td>1. Unhelpful supportive leadership&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>.79</td>
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<td>2. Abusive supervision&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>.28</td>
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<td>3. Organizational constraints&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.61**</td>
<td>.40**</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Unhelpful supportive leadership&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.22**</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Employee task performance&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>6.43</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.03</td>
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<td>6. Employee OCB&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.26**</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Employee CWB&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.20*</td>
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<td>-.18*</td>
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*Note:* <sup>1</sup>employee reported  <sup>2</sup>supervisor reported
Chapter Four:

General Discussion

This research expands the domain of negative leadership to include an important, under-examined form of leadership: unhelpful supportive leadership. Unhelpful supportive leaders differ from traditional negative leaders because they engage in supportive behaviors, and they are perceived as well-intended by their employees. By studying unhelpful supportive leadership, this research answered a lingering question in the negative leadership domain: “Must subordinates perceive their supervisors as abusive for injury to be experienced?” (Tepper, 2017, p. 129).

According to this research, negative outcomes can occur despite perceived benevolent intentions. In Study 1, unhelpful supportive leadership was associated with lower employee psychological need fulfillment (i.e., lower perceived competence, autonomy, and relatedness), higher job-related negative affect, lower work engagement, weaker task performance, and more counterproductive work behavior. In Study 2, unhelpful supportive leadership, rated by both employees and their supervisors, was associated with more organizational constraints and employee counterproductive work behavior.

Not only was unhelpful supportive leadership associated with negative outcomes, but unhelpful supportive leadership was also linked with lower employee perceptions of autonomy and competence than abusive supervision. Because unhelpful supportive leaders can be unhelpful by being overbearing (e.g., “My supervisor gets too involved in my work when trying to be helpful”), the link with reduced autonomy is unsurprising. Abusive behaviors are more hostile
than unhelpful supportive behaviors, but they are not necessarily more controlling. The relative associations between the two negative leadership styles and competence are perhaps more counterintuitive. Unhelpful supportive leaders engage in a number of behaviors that could threaten one’s perceived competence (e.g., providing developmental feedback that is perceived as critical), but abusive supervisors do so in a more direct manner (e.g., tells employees they are incompetent). Perhaps employees take threats to their perceived competence more personally when they come from a leader who is perceived as well-intended; if an abusive supervisor threatens one’s self-efficacy, employees may be more likely to attribute the threat to their abusive supervisor than to themself. More research is needed to investigate theoretical explanations, but it is compelling that unhelpful supportive leadership had stronger, negative associations with autonomy and competence than abusive supervision.

**Theoretical Implications**

Study 1 investigated self-determination theory as a potential explanation for negative outcomes associated with unhelpful supportive leadership. Unhelpful supportive leadership was associated with less of all three basic psychological needs proposed by self-determination theory: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. According to self-determination theory, a host of negative outcomes can occur when employees’ basic psychological needs are not met (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Thwarted psychological needs may help explain the positive relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and job-related negative affect as well as the negative relationship between unhelpful supportive leadership and employee engagement. Across all criteria, the strongest potential mediator was autonomy, followed by relatedness and competence. This finding aligns with a vast literature on the importance of perceived control (e.g., Job-Demand-Control Theory; Karasek, 1979; Karasek & Theorell, 1990).
Given substantial limitations of using cross-sectional data to test mediation using path modeling (see limitations section), future research using more rigorous study designs would be beneficial to further examine the extent to which self-determination theory explains outcomes of unhelpful supportive leadership.

Study 2 drew from organizational constraints literature to attempt to explain negative performance outcomes associated with unhelpful supportive leadership. Organizational constraints did not explain leadership-performance relationships. However, unhelpful supportive leadership, as rated by employees and supervisors, was positively associated with organizational constraints. Thus, unhelpful supportive leadership behaviors may inadvertently make it difficult for employees to do their jobs, which may have other implications. For example, Fox et al. (2001) propose that organizational constraints elicit negative employee emotions. Future research could examine if unhelpful supportive leaders elicit job-related negative affect in part because they engage in behaviors that inadvertently block employees’ performance.

Perhaps more nuanced theoretical explanations could further explain associations between unhelpful supportive leadership and negative outcomes. While item reliability analyses and confirmatory factor analyses generally supported examining unhelpful supportive leadership as a single construct, some previous research has broken unhelpful support into multiple categories (Gray et al., 2020). Different types of unhelpful support may elicit negative outcomes for different reasons. For example, critical support from an organizational leader may elicit negative outcomes because it lowers employees’ perceived competence while undependable support may elicit negative outcomes because it serves as an organizational constraint. Further research could examine different theoretical mechanisms associated with each type of unhelpful support.
Practical Implications

This is the first known research in negative leadership literature to highlight negative outcomes associated with leaders who are perceived as well-intended. Compared to other forms of negative leadership, such as abusive supervision, unhelpful supportive leadership may be especially actionable because well-intended leaders may be more interested in and devoted to improvement. Interventions could be investigated that focus on improving the quality of support organizational leaders provide to their employees. Specific suggestions to combat unhelpful supportive leadership are below. The suggestions are primarily speculative, and research is needed to rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of such approaches.

Conflicting Support

Organizational leaders may benefit from creating unified policies that are widely distributed to mitigate the likelihood employees will receive conflicting advice or instructions at work. If an employee reports receiving conflicting support from an organizational leader, the leader may benefit from directly communicating with the source of conflict to develop a unified stance for the future. If the sources of conflicting support cannot agree, they may benefit from increased awareness of each other’s positions and agree to disagree.

Critical Support

Rather than telling employees that what they are doing is wrong, which can be perceived as criticism, organizational leaders may benefit from making warm requests for what they want from their employees. For example, suppose an employee has great ideas but rarely shares them in team meetings. Rather than telling the employee they are being too quiet, a supervisor could say, “You have such great ideas. I would love for you to share more of them in team meetings. I think the team would benefit from your insights.” This approach aligns with findings that
organizational leaders may benefit from refocusing their feedback from a weakness-based approach to a strengths-based approach (Aguinis et al., 2012).

**Imposing Support**

To mitigate the likelihood of providing support that employees do not want, organizational leaders may ask if support is wanted before providing support. Furthermore, supervisors may benefit from asking what type of support employees want rather than assuming they know what type of support will be perceived as helpful.

**Partial Support**

Partial support may be mitigated by asking employees if they have any follow-up questions or if they would like other assistance after providing support. Fostering a strong psychological safety climate may also be important so that employees’ feel comfortable expressing when they have follow-up questions or would benefit from additional support.

**Shortsighted Support**

When time permits, organizational leaders may benefit from teaching employees skills to complete tasks rather than taking over tasks when employees ask for help. If time does not permit training, supervisors may explain the time constraint to their employee and offer to teach the employee at another time. Avoiding shortsighted support may be especially prudent when tasks are likely to recur.

**Uncomforting Support**

When someone expresses distress, phrases such as “look on the bright side,” “let me tell you about my related experience,” and “well, it could be worse” can be perceived as unhelpful. Imago Relationship Therapy, developed by Hendrix and Hunt in 1980, provides a three-step approach to comforting others (Hendrix, 2007). The first step is mirroring, in which the support
provider simply repeats the recipient’s experience aloud to show they listened and understand the experience. For example, if an employee expresses feeling upset because their pet is sick, a supervisor could say, “I am so sorry to hear your pet is sick.” The second step involves validating any emotions the support recipient expressed. In the above example, a supervisor could say, “It’s totally understandable that you’re feeling upset.” The final step involves putting oneself in the others’ shoes and conveying empathy. For example, “I imagine if I were in your shoes, I would also be feeling anxious. Is that how you’re feeling?” The support recipient can then continue to explain how they are feeling if they want the opportunity to constructively vent about their situation while feeling understood and supported.

**Undependable Support**

Organizational leaders may benefit from being honest about what they know and do not know to avoid giving poor advice or incorrect instructions. Leaders can also provide a clear timeline for when support will be provided if asked for help to avoid ambiguity. Organizational leaders can also work on under-promising and over-delivering to avoid falling short of support expectations.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Methodological limitations of this research are important to highlight. Employee-supervisor pairs were emailed to voluntarily participate in Study 2, and it is possible those who volunteered to participate were systematically different from those who declined to participate. This possibility is suggested by the descriptive statistics. Mean levels of unhelpful supportive leadership and abusive supervision reported by employees in Study 2 were lower than those reported in Study 1 and existing research (Gray et al., 2020). The possible sampling bias may also explain the counter-intuitive finding that supervisors self-reported engaging in more
unhelpful supportive leadership than their employees reported. Meta-analyses of leadership studies that find supervisors’ evaluations of their relation-oriented leadership behaviors (e.g., consideration, servant behaviors) are generally more favorable than others’ reports (Lee & Carpenter, 2018). Perhaps supervisors who agreed to participate in this research are especially helpful and humble. Increased strategizing to acquire a more representative sample of employee-supervisor dyads may be beneficial for future research.

Future research could also extend the benefits of a multi-source design by acquiring peer ratings of employees’ performance in addition to supervisors’ ratings. Doing so may provide a more holistic and accurate understanding of employees’ performance. Different raters may attend to different behaviors, have different rating schema, and evaluate some types of performance better than others (Borman, 1997; Conway et al., 2001; B. Hoffman et al., 2010; Lievens et al., 2008). Acquiring additional rating sources would also allow for the computation of inter-rater reliability to better evaluate the reliability of performance ratings.

On the topic of samples, some researchers have called into question research that relies on employed student samples, such as the sample in Study 1 (Elsevier, 2014, Introduction section, para. 6; Highhouse, 2009). However, this research sought to investigate a phenomenon that can apply to all employees who work under a direct supervisor. Employees who work while taking classes at a university are no less relevant than any sample of employees who work under a direct supervisor. Other researchers have expressed a similar view; “any currently or potentially employed person falls within the population of interest to most I-O psychologists,” (Landers & Behrend, 2015, p. 3). While the use employed student samples is merited, future research conducted with a variety of employee samples would be helpful to examine the generalizability of findings.
Perhaps the greatest limitation of this research is the use of cross-sectional data to analyze mediation with path modeling. Importantly, “causality is an assumption of covariance structure modeling and not a consequence” (Brannick, 1995, p. 203). Thus, the path models in this research that demonstrated strong fit provide only initial support for the hypotheses. Follow-up studies involving experimental designs are necessary to examine causal hypotheses (Spector, 2020). For the mediating models that demonstrated poor fit in this research, the next step may be to instead consider alternative theoretical explanations. Limitations of cross-sectional data to examine path models in this research may have been further exacerbated by similar items across theoretically distinct measures. For example, an item used to measure unhelpful supportive leadership was “My supervisor provides advice that leaves me with more questions than answers.” An item used to measure organizational constraints was “How often do you find it difficult or impossible to do your job because of lack of necessary information about what to do or how to do it.” Future research may benefit from carefully avoiding item overlap to mitigate artificially high variable relationships.

**Conclusion**

Two studies using dissimilar samples and methods demonstrate that unhelpful supportive leadership is associated with some of the same detrimental outcomes associated with abusive supervision. Because unhelpful supportive leaders are perceived as well-intended, a heightened understanding of unhelpful supportive leadership may especially lend itself to informing beneficial change in organizations.
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Appendix A:

IRB Approval Letter

9/24/2018

Cheryl Gray
Psychology
14406 Caribbean Breeze Dr
Tampa, FL 33613

RE: Exempt Certification
IRB#: Pro00036200
Title: Unhelpful Workplace Leadership

Dear C. Gray:

On 9/22/2018, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined that your research meets criteria for exemption from the federal regulations as outlined by 45CFR46.101(b):

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

As the principal investigator for this study, it is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted as outlined in your application and consistent with the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report and with USF HRPP policies and procedures.

Please note, as per USF HRPP Policy, once the Exempt determination is made, the application is closed in ARC. Any proposed or anticipated changes to the study design that was previously
declared exempt from IRB review must be submitted to the IRB as a new study prior to initiation of the change. However, administrative changes, including changes in research personnel, do not warrant an amendment or new application.

Given the determination of exemption, this application is being closed in ARC. This does not limit your ability to conduct your research project.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

Mark Ruiz, PhD, Vice Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board