**Introduction**

Research indicates that approximately 50% of employees consider their supervisors to be abusive (Namie and Namie 2000; Tepper, Moss, and Duffy 2011). Abusive supervisory behavior is conceptualized as verbal and non-verbal hostile behaviors that supervisors exhibit to employees (Tepper 2000). This hostility includes silent treatment, ridiculing subordinates in public, outrightly expressing anger, or being rude. Due to the intensity of abusive supervisory behaviour, scholars have found that it affects employee creativity. However, a handful of studies exploring the link between perceived abusive supervisory behavior and employee creativity have produced inconsistent findings. Some studies tentatively suggest a curvilinear relationship (Lee, Yun, and Srivastava 2013), while others demonstrate a negative relationship (Rauniyar, Ding, and Rauniyar 2017; Zheng and Liu 2017). Such perplexing empirical evidence indicates that fundamental questions remain unanswered. For instance, research has not examined why and how perceived abusive supervisory behavior influences creativity.

The current study aims to answer these fundamental questions while using Emotions As a Social Information (EASI; Van Kleef 2017; 2016) as the theoretical backdrop. EASI model indicates that inconsistent supervisor behaviors and emotional expressions impact employee work-related perceptions through the altered social cognition and emotions (Van Kleef 2017). Based on this notion, we argue that employees may consider abusive supervision as a negative emotional expression and utilize it as a cue to interpret their work-related abilities such as creative self-efficacy, which will consequently impact their creativity. Using a multi-component approach, we conceptualize creativity as the employee’s ability and willingness to engages in various processes of creating paradigm shifts by challenging the existing knowledge and understanding (Amabile 1983; Simonton 1997; Sternberg 1985). In this work, we focused on the cognitive mechanism of the EASI model as previous studies demonstrated that affective reactions might converge with cognitions (Wang et al. 2017).

The EASI model, also mentions that the expresser’s characteristics may change how observers interpret and react towards other’s actions and emotions (Van Kleef 2017; Deng, Walter, and Guan 2020). Drawing on this idea, we argue that the supervisor dispositional awe predicts employee’s evaluation of one’s creative self-efficacy and creativity. Shiota, Keltner, and John (2006) conceptualized dispositional awe as the individual differences in the perception of awe-related experiences. Several studies have revealed that awe elicited from leaders promotes creativity (Duffour et al. 2017). In the organizational context, dispositional awe can be elicited from supervisors who are experts in their field and offer quality (Keltner and Haidt 2003; Gordon et al. 2017; Pastor, Meindl, and Mayo 2002). Supervisors high in dispositional awe possess high intellectual character strengths related to creativity (Güsewell and Ruch 2012), higher tolerance to uncertainty (Li et al. 2019). They can persuade others (Griskevicius, Shiota, and Neufeld, 2010). These characteristics in supervisors are likely to promote employee openness to experience new ideas (Shiota, Keltner, and John 2006), promote convergent creativity -a willingness to challenge the mental structures and existing associations between the weak exemplars and categories (Baas, De Dreu, and Nijstad 2008; De Dreu and Van Lange 1995; Isen, Daubman, and Nowicki 1987). In sum, the supervisor dispositional awe influences employee creative self-efficacy and creativity.

Research has shown that leadership is crucial in enhancing organization-based outcomes (Ford 1996; Yong Zhang et al. 2015; Li et al. 2017) such as employee performance. Previous research has explored how abusive (Liu et al. 2016), transformational (Li, Zhao, and Begley 2015; Tung 2016), visionary (Zhou et al. 2018), servant (Yang, Liu, and Gu 2017), and authoritarian (Gu et al. 2018) leaders affect employee creativity in China. The piqued interest in leadership behavior (e.g., Liu, Liao, and Loi 2012) emphasizes the need to further our understanding of why and how certain leadership behaviors (e.g., abusive supervision) affect the targets. The detrimental effects of abusive supervisory behavior on employee creativity has been predominantly explored (e.g., Jiang, Gu, and Tang 2016; Hussain and Sia 2017). However, recent findings by Fiset and colleagues (2019) have challenged the notion that inconsistent leadership behaviors cannot coincide with influencing employee perceptions. Their results indicate that leaders can simultaneously demonstrate both abusive supervisory behavior and leadership vision to influence task performance (Fiset et al. 2019). The objective of this study is to explore other conflicting leader behaviors that influence employee creative self-efficacy and employee creativity.

First, the current study offers alternative theoretical explanations that may allow perceived abusive supervisory behavior to influence employees' attitudes and performance positively. The current study examines the interactive effects of perceived supervisor abusive effects and dispositional awe on employee creativity (Vogel and Mitchell 2017; Tepper, Moss, and Duffy 2011; Namie and Namie 2000) and employee well-being (Oh and Farh 2017; Vogel and Mitchell 2017). Previous research has examined supervisors who are often celebrated in corporate circles, but whose behaviors have been evaluated as abusive (Oh and Farh 2017). For instance, some employees initially regarded themselves as victims of supervisory abuse (Isaacson 2012) but later alluded that they now regarded their supervisors positively. Previous research has examined abusive supervisory behaviors as predictors of employee creative self-efficacy (e.g., Rauniyar, Ding, and Rauniyar 2017). However, to our knowledge, this is the first study that examines the mediating effect of creative self-efficacy on the relationship between supervisor dispositional awe and employee creativity. To build on this body of research and this study draws on Emotion as Social Information Model (Van Kleef 2017; 2009) as the theoretical framework to explain how perceived abusive supervisory behavior and perceived supervisor dispositional awe predict employee creative self-efficacy. EASI model (Van Kleef 2017; 2009) has been previously used to explain how emotional expressions can influence target’s attributions (Hillebrandt and Barclay 2017) and motivation (Wang et al. 2017). This study answers the call to examine the effects of the inferential processes associated with source emotional expressions and target responses (Hillebrandt and Barclay 2017).

Finally, the current study contributes to the literature on positive psychology by exploring dispositional awe as a predictor and moderator (Gordon et al. 2017; Hentrup, Bastardoz, and Menges 2019). Previous research has focused on factors that enhance employee creative self-efficacy and creativity such as promotion focus (Yunshu et al. 2019), and cross-cultural influences (Farmer, Tierney, and Kung-Mcintyre 2003). The more consistent and stable predictor has been trait and state-based emotions such as awe (Li et al. 2017). To answer the call to explore the influences of specific emotion upon social cognitions (Shiota, Keltner, and John 2006), we test the hypothesis that dispositional awe boosts employee creative self-efficacy and promotes employee creativity.

Secondly, to investigate these relationships, the current study aims to examine employee creative self-efficacy as the mediating mechanism connecting perceived supervisor abusive behavior and subordinates’ creativity. The study has been structured into seven sections. First of all, the paper discusses perceived abusive supervisory behavior and perceived supervisor dispositional awe as predictors of employee creative self-efficacy in China. This part is followed by the hypothesis development for the moderating mechanisms, moderation-mediated model, research design, results, and discussion.