

Supervisor Agreeableness and Subordinate Counterproductive Work Behavior: A Daily Diary Study Examining Relationship Conflict as a Moderator and Abusive Supervision as a Mediator

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Abstract

Given the detrimental consequences of abusive supervision, the present research investigates whether supervisor agreeableness (HEXACO) predicts daily abuse and whether this relation is moderated by relationship conflict. Additionally, it examines whether abusive supervision mediates the relationship between supervisor agreeableness and subordinate counterproductive work behavior (CWB). A daily diary design was used, with 102 supervisor-subordinate dyads completing questionnaires over ten workdays. Results from multilevel modelling showed that supervisor agreeableness was not significantly related to abusive supervision, and relationship conflict did not moderate this relation. Daily abusive supervision, however, was positively and significantly related to subordinate CWB. The indirect effect and moderated mediation were both non-significant. Theoretically, these findings suggest that the workplace may be a strong situation that suppresses the expression of low agreeableness and because traits reflect long-term, stable behavioral tendencies, they may fail to show up in response to daily triggers. Practically, relying on agreeableness-based screening and conflict-management alone to prevent abusive supervision may be insufficient. Instead, organizations should focus on enforcing zero-tolerance policies, as well as creating secure reporting channels for employees. Future research should examine alternative boundary conditions and HEXACO traits that may interact with other situational triggers.

Keywords: abusive supervision, agreeableness, HEXACO, relationship conflict, CWB, trait activation theory, DIAMONDS, social exchange theory

Introduction

Destructive leadership behaviors carry significant consequences in the workplace, with one such being abusive supervision. This construct refers to an employee's subjective evaluation of the degree to which their supervisor displays and engages in sustained belligerent verbal and nonverbal behaviors, with the exclusion of physical aggression (Tepper, 2000). Because it is a perception-based construct, subordinates can differ in their opinion on whether a supervisor's behavior is abusive. Numerous studies show that abusive supervision is positively related to subordinate organizational deviance, job dissatisfaction, turnover intentions, psychological distress, and impaired family well-being (Zhang & Liao, 2015; Tepper, 2007). In the United States alone, the "conservative" annual estimated cost of abuse in the workplace is roughly \$23.8 billion USD (Tepper et al., 2006). Despite this, less is known about what drives supervisors to behave abusively in the first place. Consequently, identifying the antecedents that trigger these behaviors could help mitigate the economic, health-related, and human costs associated with them.

There is an increasing focus on organizational literature examining personality traits as potential predictors of certain leadership behaviors (Blake et al., 2022; de Vries, 2018). For instance, Breevaart and de Vries (2017) examined HEXACO personality traits as predictors of abusive supervision and found that supervisors scoring lower on agreeableness were perceived as more abusive by their subordinates. Additionally, abusive supervision is positively related to counterproductive work behavior (CWB; Mackey et al., 2017). However, given the correlational nature of much of the research linking abusive supervision to CWB, establishing causal order is difficult (Mackey et al., 2017). Examining stable supervisor personality traits as antecedents of abusive supervision can establish a path: traits precede supervisor behavior, which in turn

influence subordinate outcomes, as personality traits are relatively stable and unlikely to change in response to leadership behaviors. This is supported by clear theoretical logic where the sequence is unlikely to act in reverse, as a subordinate's CWB is unlikely to cause a supervisor's stable personality trait as personality precedes behavior. In this way, this study strengthens the proposed causal sequence and thus, limitations of previous cross-sectional studies on the topic.

Although personality traits have been linked to abusive supervision, it remains unclear under which conditions these traits are expressed. Breevaart and Schyns (2025) highlight the importance for future studies to examine how situational factors may activate supervisor traits and influence day-to-day abusive behaviors. Accordingly, the present study focuses on relationship conflict as one such situational factor.

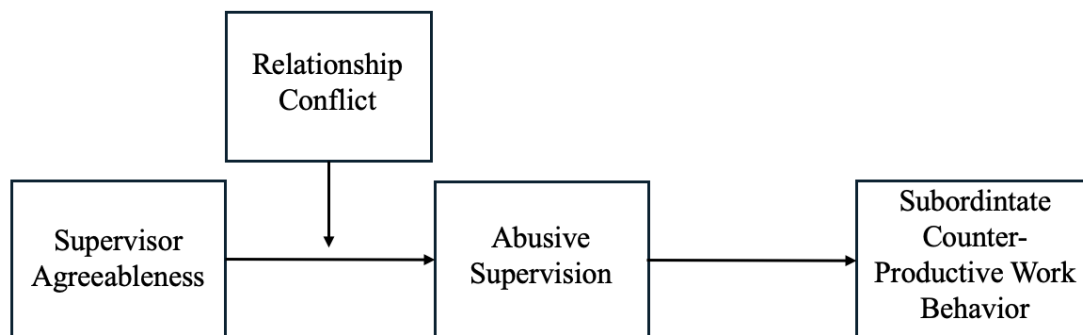
Building on this trait-based causal framework and drawing on trait activation theory and the DIAMONDS framework (Tett et al., 2021; Rauthmann et al., 2014), this study integrates the HEXACO model of personality to examine how stable supervisor traits interact with daily stressors to predict abusive supervision and potential downstream effects on subordinate CWB. Specifically, it examines whether relationship conflict creates conditions under which supervisors' personality traits are more likely to influence their daily behaviors (see Figure 1). In doing so, it adds to the literature by clarifying conditions under which supervisor traits are expressed in workplace interactions. To capture these within-person fluctuations, a daily diary design is more appropriate than a single-measurement design (Bolger et al., 2003) and is especially relevant given that relationship conflict can vary from day to day.

From a practical perspective, the present study can provide valuable insights for organizations seeking to minimize abusive supervision and its harmful effects. By identifying dispositional traits that are more susceptible to activation in a hindering way, organizations can

plan their selection, promotion, and leadership development accordingly. Understanding whether low agreeableness interacts with relationship conflict to predict abusive supervision and in turn subordinate CWB, can lead to the implementation of targeted interventions for supervisors lower on the trait to learn to manage relational conflicts and daily situational pressures.

Figure 1

Moderated-Mediation Model



Supervisor Agreeableness and Abusive Supervision

Personality is generally defined as a set of stable and individual tendencies to think, behave, and feel consistently across time and contexts (Lee & Ashton, 2018). The HEXACO model showcases six personality dimensions; honesty-humility, extraversion, emotionality, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness (Lee & Ashton, 2018). Currently, the Big Five model is the predominant framework in personality research, and much of the literature has focused on it (Thielmann et al., 2022). The most notable difference between the HEXACO and the Big Five is the addition of the honesty-humility trait which is decoupled from agreeableness as both demonstrate distinctive predictive validity (Thielmann et al., 2022). Additionally, the content associated with anger in the HEXACO model is moved from under neuroticism in the Big Five to coincide with low agreeableness (de Vries, 2018). Within the HEXACO model, high agreeableness encompasses tendencies such as forgiveness, patience, and gentleness, whereas

tendencies towards hostility or aggression, especially in adverse situations can be characterized by low agreeableness (de Vries et al., 2016). Because low agreeableness reflects tendencies toward hostility and conflict, it captures personality variance that is particularly predictive of abusive supervision.

Because traits serve as distal antecedents to behavioral expression, supervisor agreeableness can serve as a dispositional predictor of interpersonal leadership behaviors. Agreeable supervisors are more likely to emerge as effective supervisors (Blake et al., 2022) and naturally exhibit behaviors related to servant leadership (Sun & Shang, 2019). Additionally, de Vries (2018) notes that high supervisor agreeableness strongly predicts supervisor supportiveness while supervisors scoring lower are more likely to behave in line with abusive supervision. This link can be explained by the “reactive aggression” inherent in individuals with low agreeableness in the HEXACO model (de Vries, 2018). Because supervisors low in agreeableness lack interpersonal tendencies such as gentility, leniency, and forgiveness (Blake et al., 2022), it may give subordinates the impression that supervisors are deliberately attempting to undermine and demean them, consistent with Tepper’s (2000) definition. This is supported empirically by Breevaart and de Vries (2017), who found that supervisors scoring lower on HEXACO agreeableness were perceived as more abusive by their subordinates. Therefore, a link can be drawn between supervisors low in agreeableness and the extent to which they engage in abusive supervision. This can infer that supervisors who score low on agreeableness are more likely to be perceived as abusive towards subordinates.

Hypothesis 1: Supervisor agreeableness is negatively related to daily abusive supervision.

Relationship Conflict as a Moderator

Trait activation theory (TAT) suggests that traits can remain latent until activated by differing situational cues (Tett et al., 2021). Specifically, the theory posits that the strength of expression of a trait as a behavior depends on the degree to which the situation is relevant to that trait (Tett & Burnett, 2003). Additionally, the DIAMONDS framework provides a taxonomy of such relevant situational characteristics that are trait-activating (duty, intellect, adversity, mating, positivity, negativity, deception, sociality; Rauthmann et al., 2014). The situational dimension of adversity (the extent to which individuals feel threatened in some way by conflict, criticism, problems, etc....) can act as a primary trigger for supervisor agreeableness (Rauthmann et al., 2014).

Relationship conflict, composed of affective components, characterized by an awareness of interpersonal differences and personal disagreements (Jehn & Mannix, 2001), represents this type of situational cue as it introduces mutual dislike and frustration amongst the parties involved. It is distinct from task conflict, which is cognitive in nature and is defined by differing viewpoints and opinions about a task directly (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). It is therefore likely that relationship conflict specifically can activate trait-relevant responses.

Not all supervisors will respond to adversarial situational cues the same way and individual differences in personality essentially determine how much situational pressure is needed to activate a trait (Tett & Burnett, 2003). This is directly in line with the situational threshold of activation which refers to the minimum intensity required to trigger the behavioral expression of a trait (Tett et al., 2021). Given the reactive aggression inherent in low agreeableness (de Vries, 2018), the same mechanism that predicts abusive supervision, individuals low in this trait may have a lower situational threshold of activation for adversarial

cues, meaning even mild conflict can trigger reactivity. On days where interpersonal disagreements and conflict is low, the supervisor low in agreeableness may be able to remain calm and maintain composure, however, on days where it is high, the supervisor's threshold is lower, and reactivity is more likely to surface. Supervisors lower in agreeableness may be more likely to regulate poorly during interpersonal conflict and react in hostile, abusive ways.

Hypothesis 2: Daily relationship conflict moderates the relationship between supervisor agreeableness and daily abusive supervision, such that the relationship is stronger when conflict is high, compared to low.

Abusive Supervision and CWB

Abusive supervision can lead to subordinate outcomes with one such outcome being CWB. Fox and Spector (2005) note that CWB is intentionally, organizationally harmful behaviors that employees engage in; including theft, absence, tardiness, or even verbal or physical aggression. Social exchange theory posits that there are certain rules or norms of a bidirectional transaction between individuals where harmful experiences to one pushes the other to balance the exchange by reciprocating negatively (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Workplaces are not exempt; abusive supervision represents a clear violation of the exchange norm, and CWB serves as a means for a subordinate to rebalance it. When supervisors are continuously abusive, subordinates may choose to engage in CWB as a way to retaliate or cope with feelings of helplessness or resentment (Li & Xu, 2025). In their meta-analysis, Mackey et al. (2017) found a strong, positive correlation of $r = .37$ between abusive supervision and CWB. Therefore, a positive relationship is hypothesized.

Hypothesis 3: Daily abusive supervision is positively related to daily subordinate CWB.

Abusive Supervision as a Mediator

While supervisor personality, such as agreeableness, and subordinate outcomes, such as CWB, are linked, the mechanism by which supervisor personality results in certain subordinate outcomes may not be direct. Traits are internal to the supervisor and CWB is externally expressed by the subordinate. Therefore, the influence of low agreeableness would likely need to be expressed through supervisor behavior to affect subordinate outcomes. This indirect logic between supervisor trait and subordinate behavior is supported by Cai et al. (2023) who empirically demonstrated that perceived abusive supervision significantly mediated the relationship between a stable supervisor trait (Machiavellianism) and subordinate CWB with an indirect effect of 0.373.

Tepper's (2000) definition of abusive supervision as subjective reinforces the notion that subordinate reactions are driven by perceived supervisor behaviors rather than by underlying supervisor traits directly. Therefore, abusive supervision becomes the mechanism by which the supervisor's latent trait is translated into a behavioral perception by the subordinate and in turn, into a subordinate's response (CWB). This may suggest that a supervisor's low agreeableness is only relevant insofar as it is expressed through observable behaviors. Building on the relations hypothesized in H1 and H3, the present study posits that abusive supervision serves as that conduit between supervisor agreeableness and CWB.

Hypothesis 4: Daily abusive supervision mediates the indirect relation between supervisor agreeableness and daily subordinate CWB.

Moderated Mediation

The present study proposes that the entire indirect pathway between supervisor agreeableness and CWB, mediated by abusive supervision is dependent on the level of

situational adversity. TAT posits that the personality to behavior link is strongest when a situational activator is present (Tett et al., 2021). Therefore, the indirect effect should be strongest when relationship conflict is higher.

Hypothesis 5: The indirect relation between supervisor agreeableness and subordinate CWB via abusive supervision is moderated by supervisor's relationship conflict, in such a way that this relation is stronger at high, compared to low, levels of supervisor's relationship conflict.

Method

Participants and Procedure

To determine a suitable sample size for this study, an a priori power analysis was conducted using ShinyApps based on Schoemann et al. (2017). Breevaart and de Vries (2017) found a moderate negative association between agreeableness and abusive supervision ($r = -.25$). Additionally, a meta-analysis by Mackey et al. (2017) found a moderate positive association between abusive supervision and CWB ($r = .37$). Based on these effect sizes, the guidelines by Schoemann et al. (2017) indicate that a minimum sample size of approximately $N = 118$ is required to detect a mediated effect with a statistical power of .80 and an alpha of .05.

The participants for this study were recruited by Master students at Erasmus University via convenience sampling. Unique supervisor-subordinate dyads were required, with the only inclusion criteria being that both members of the dyad must have been employed throughout the entirety of the study. The data collection lasted ten workdays and invitations to complete the daily survey on the research platform, Qualtrics, were sent via E-mail. To capture daily fluctuations accurately, participants were sent surveys at 3:00 PM local time each workday. To ensure responses reflected that specific workday, the survey was no longer open after 12:00 AM

that same day. After receiving ethical approval, supervisors and subordinates were sent a survey including baseline and the first daily survey on day one. On days two through ten, supervisors and subordinates received their respective daily survey. All participants provided informed consent upon receiving the first survey.

Following data collection and the initial merging of matched supervisor-subordinate surveys from previous years and this year, an initial tracking pool of 196 unique dyads with 1,274 observations was established. To account for the dynamic nature of daily diary designs and ensure sufficient data for multilevel modeling, data-compliance screening was then applied to these pairs. A total of 58 dyads were excluded because they interacted for less than two days over the 10-day data collection window. Additionally, 36 dyads were excluded due to insufficient matched daily survey completions across their tracked days. This final screening step resulted in the inclusion of 102 dyads with 522 valid daily observations. Within the final subordinate sample, 42.6% identified as male and 57.4% as female, with ages ranging from 18 to 62 years ($M = 34.61$, $SD = 12.73$). In the subordinate sample, the majority of the followers held a university degree (63.4%), with 28.7% holding a bachelor's degree, 31.7% a master's degree, and 3.0% a doctorate degree. Within the final supervisor sample, 58.4% identified as male and 41.6% as female, with ages ranging from 21 to 73 years ($M = 41.53$, $SD = 12.45$). Among the supervisor sample, the majority held a university degree (78.3%), with 30.7% holding a bachelor's degree, 44.6% a master's degree, and 3.0% a doctorate degree.

Materials

HEXACO-60

Supervisor agreeableness was measured using the HEXACO-60 personality questionnaire (Lee & Ashton, 2018). The entire questionnaire consisting of 60 items to measure the six

personality dimensions (honesty-humility, extraversion, emotionality, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness) was administered. Agreeableness is the only trait analyzed in this study. Supervisors were asked to rate items like “I am usually quite flexible in my opinions when people disagree with me” on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The present research found a reliability of $\alpha = .63$.

Daily Abusive Supervision

Abusive supervision was measured using the abusive supervision scale by Tepper (2000) adapted by Mitchell and Ambrose (2007), and then further adapted to the daily context. Subordinates were asked to rate five items like “Today, my supervisor told me I was incompetent” on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Because this was a daily measure, Cronbach’s alpha was calculated for each of the ten days of data collection. The average reliability alpha across the data collection days was $\alpha = .78$.

Daily Relationship Conflict

Relationship conflict was measured using a 4-item scale by Venz and Nesher Shoshan (2022) and adapted from Giebels and Janssen (2005) with “coworker” changed to “subordinate.” Supervisors were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with statements like “Today, there were controversies between me and my subordinate” on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Average reliability across days for this scale was $\alpha = .92$.

Daily CWB

Subordinate CWB was measured using a 4-item scale based on Bennett and Robinson (2000) and adapted by Bormann (2017). Subordinates were asked to rate their own behavior with items like “Today, I acted rudely toward someone at work.” and “Today, I put little effort into my work.” All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly

agree). Given the daily nature of the study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each collection day. Average reliability across days for this scale was $\alpha = .69$.

Results

The data were analyzed using SPSS with the MLMED macro (Hayes & Rockwood, 2020). Descriptive statistics and correlations are displayed in Table 1.

Given the multilevel structure of the data, with daily observations (Level 1) nested within supervisor-subordinate dyads (Level 2), multilevel modeling (MLM) was used to test all hypotheses. Level 1 predictors were person-mean centered to isolate within-person variance and Level 2 predictors were grand-mean centered, in line with recommendations for daily diary research (Enders & Tofghi, 2007). This ensures that within-person effects reflect day-to-day fluctuations around each individual's mean, whilst between-person effects reflect differences across dyads.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that supervisor agreeableness is negatively related to abusive supervision. The between-person effect of supervisor agreeableness on abusive supervision was not significant, $b = 0.03$, $SE = .05$, $p = .583$, 95% $CI [-0.072, 0.128]$, not supporting Hypothesis 1. Regarding Hypothesis 2, predicting that daily relationship conflict moderates the relationship between supervisor agreeableness and abusive supervision such that the relationship is stronger on days with higher conflict, was not supported. As shown in Table 2, which displays the main and interaction effects on daily abusive supervision, the within-person interaction did not reach significance, $b = 0.18$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .069$, 95% $CI [-0.014, 0.372]$. Similarly, Hypothesis 2 was not supported as the between-person interaction was not significant, $b = -0.12$, $SE = 0.14$, $p = .399$, 95% $CI [-0.388, 0.156]$. Hypothesis 3 predicted that daily abusive supervision is positively related to daily subordinate CWB. Abusive supervision was positively and significantly related

to CWB at both the within-person level $b = 0.15$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.045, 0.231], and the between-person level $b = 0.70$, $SE = .12$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.423, 0.942], supporting Hypothesis 3.

Hypotheses 4 and 5 concerning mediation and moderated mediation were tested using the MLMED macro (Hayes & Rockwood, 2020). Regarding Hypothesis 4, the indirect effect of supervisor agreeableness on subordinate CWB through abusive supervision was not significant, $b = 0.02$, $SE = .04$, $Z = .54$, $p = .589$, 95% CI [-0.052, 0.091]. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was not supported. Regarding Hypothesis 5, the index of moderated mediation was not significant at either the within-person level, index = .025, 95% CI [-0.002, 0.063], or the between-person level, index = -.079, 95% CI [-0.279, 0.105]. With both confidence intervals including zero, Hypothesis 5 was not supported.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics, Bivariate Correlations and Reliability Coefficients

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>ICC</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Agreeableness	3.13	.53	—	(.63)							
2. Abusive Supervision	1.11	.42	.22	.02	(.78)						
3. Relationship Conflict	1.34	.69	.34	-.04	.23**	(.92)					
4. Follower CWB	1.23	.48	.37	.06	.32**	.16**	(.69)				
5. Subordinate Age	34.61	12.73	—	-.01	-.14**	-.19**	-.17**	—			
6. Subordinate Gender	1.58	.49	—	-.08*	.00	-.11**	-.01	.02	—		
7. Supervisor Age	41.53	12.45	—	-.16**	-.07	-.15**	-.17**	.44**	.07*	—	
8. Supervisor Gender	1.42	.49	—	.07	-.07	-.13**	-.13**	-.01	.17**	.10**	—

Note. Person-level variables reflect $N = 102$. Daily-level variables reflect 522 observations nested within those dyads. Cronbach's alpha is indicated in parentheses on the diagonal. Gender was coded as 1 = male and 2 = female; ICC = Intraclass Correlation Coefficient; em-dashes (—) indicate non-applicable daily nested variance for level-2 variables; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 2*Multilevel Regression Analysis Predicting Daily Abusive Supervision*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI LL	95% CI UL
Intercept	1.11	.04	<.001	1.028	1.192
Within-Person (Level 1 effects)					
Daily Relationship Conflict	0.23	.06	<.001	0.112	0.348
Daily Relationship Conflict x Supervisor Agreeableness	0.18	.10	.069	-0.014	0.372
Between-Person (Level 2 effects)					
Supervisor Agreeableness	0.03	.05	.583	-0.072	0.128
Mean Relationship Conflict	0.15	.07	.035	0.012	0.288
Between-Person Interaction	-0.12	.14	.399	-0.388	0.156

Note. *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UP = upper limit. × denotes the interaction term.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether supervisor agreeableness is related to abusive supervision and whether this relationship is moderated by daily relationship conflict. Additionally, it examined whether abusive supervision mediates the relationship between supervisor agreeableness and subordinate CWB. Trait activation theory and the DIAMONDS framework were used to theoretically explain the assumed relationships.

Theoretical Implications

Contrary to the findings in the cross-sectional study by de Vries (2018) and Breevaart and de Vries (2017), no relationship between supervisor agreeableness and abusive supervision was found in the present, daily-diary study, nor did daily relationship conflict moderate this relation. Several factors may explain this lack of significance. As noted by Meyer et al., (2010), the workplace may represent a highly constricting environment where social norms rather than

supervisor traits, drive supervisory behavior. Firstly, organizations generally provide high clarity through ways of working and well-communicated procedures about what is acceptable, which can restrict trait expression because they are clear about expected behaviors (Meyer et al., 2010). Secondly, high consistency ensures that company policies and work norms reinforce these expectations over time, dictating the appropriateness of any behavior expressed (Meyer et al., 2010). Lastly, structural constraints, such as policies and monitoring can limit a supervisor's freedom of action which can prevent them from exercising personal traits regardless of their disposition (Meyer et al., 2010). Thus, the work environment itself may be too strong of a situation to allow the behavioral expression of low agreeableness. This contrasts with cross-sectional studies like Cai et al. (2023), who found a strong indirect effect linking supervisor traits to subordinate CWB through abusive supervision. This difference may highlight how traditional cross-sectional designs can capture retrospective or one-off impressions, whereas a daily-diary design captures immediate, day-to-day experiences that happen within organizational constraints. Therefore, dispositional tendencies may not always translate into observable behaviors. This explains the absence of an indirect effect through abusive supervision; if low agreeableness never manifested into abusive behavior in the first place, the mechanism through which supervisor traits could influence subordinate CWB could not be triggered.

Aside from situational strength, these findings can be explained through Fleenon's (2001) view of personality where he explains that personality traits are merely a person's long-term average behavior, not necessarily how they act every day. Daily behavior fluctuates a lot. A supervisor who is generally very agreeable on average may still have days where they act harsh or disagreeable because of immediate stress, meaning the baseline trait may not be able to account for these daily shifts. Fleenon (2001) argued that because these traits are by definition

stable constructs (with regards to the Big Five), the argument stands (even within the HEXACO context) that traits like supervisor agreeableness may explain broad evaluations of supervisory styles but not capture the specific daily triggers that cause a supervisor to express abusive behaviors on a given day as within-person variability can be high. Additionally, drawing on TAT and DIAMONDS framework (Rauthmann et al., 2014), relationship conflict was hypothesized as a form of situational adversity to lower a supervisor's situational threshold. In the present study, within-person daily fluctuations accounted for 78% of the total variance in abusive supervision (with the remaining 22% residing between-person; $ICC = .22$), demonstrating that supervisor behavior can be highly variable across days. However, day-to-day conflict failed to bring out these underlying traits. A reason for this could be the very low levels of abusive supervision observed in this sample, with a mean of only 1.11. Because this mean sits towards the bottom of the scale, there was very little actual variance to work with. Based on trait activation theory, traits need a certain level of situational pressure to show up as a behavior. Since both daily relationship conflict ($M = 1.34$) and abusive supervision ($M = 1.11$) were low, the daily triggers were likely too weak to cross the supervisor's threshold and activate the behavioral expression of low agreeableness.

Daily abusive supervision, on the other hand, was positively and significantly related to daily subordinate CWB, which directly supports research by Mackey et al. (2017). Measuring abuse and CWB on the same day captures immediate retaliatory responses that other traditional cross-sectional designs could even miss. This daily finding is especially meaningful given the high variance in abusive supervision happening at the within-person level. Because supervisor abuse shifts so much from day to day, capturing these variables daily shows that subordinates may respond to these short-term behavioral changes as they happen. This finding aligns with

social exchange theory as noted by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), where a hostile environment violates the exchange norm, resulting in abusive supervision which the subordinate then reciprocates through CWB.

These findings do not necessarily invalidate TAT, instead they highlight boundary conditions. TAT predicts that traits are expressed when situationally relevant cues are present and sufficiently intense (Tett et al., 2021), however, as this study may demonstrate, strong organizational situations and low situational adversity can prevent this activation from occurring. Thus, even when a trait is relevant, supervisors may not express it if workplace norms and expectations limit how they can behave.

Practical Implications

This study has several implications for organizations. While the present study could not establish a full causal chain from supervisor agreeableness to CWB through abusive supervision, the strong within- and between-person relationship between abusive supervision and subordinate CWB highlights its damaging impact regardless of antecedents.

The absence of a significant relationship between supervisor agreeableness and abusive supervision, combined with the non-significant moderating role of relationship conflict, suggests that personality-based selection and conflict management training alone are insufficient to counteract daily abuse. Although conflict can be viewed as a situational trigger, it did not significantly amplify the relationship between supervisor agreeableness and abusive supervision in this study, suggesting that daily conflict alone may not be sufficient to activate abusive behavioral tendencies.

Therefore, instead, organizations may need to focus on building a healthier organizational culture, team norms, enforcement of policies on abuse, and leadership accountability, rather than

assuming certain traits or situations will consistently lead to abusive behaviors. This can include more top-down leadership accountability, a zero-tolerance organizational culture, and enforcing anti-harassment policies (Pradhan & Jena, 2018). By increasing the situational strength of the workplace, organizations can actively restrict harmful behavioral expressions regardless of a supervisor's natural disposition or daily conflict. Organizations should also prioritize intervention strategies aimed directly at identifying and preventing abusive supervision as it happens and before it becomes ingrained over time (Chan & McAllister, 2014). This can include regular anonymous pulse surveys that bypass the manager, as Cortina and Magley (2003) argue that expression of discontent is constructive and can alert the organization to hidden mistreatment which enables early identification before abusive patterns escalate.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study provided insights that should be viewed in conjunction with limitations when interpreting the findings. Firstly, only complete supervisor-subordinate dyads were used in the analysis, this means that if a supervisor or subordinate did not respond on a given day, the data for that day was excluded. Some supervisors or subordinates may have valid reasons for not completing the daily surveys; however, the data collection relied on convenience sampling by Master students who tapped into their own networks, which introduces the risk of self-selection bias. Subordinates with highly abusive managers or relatively poor relationships likely self-selected out of participation due to discomfort given the sensitive nature of the study, leading to a sample that is dominated by dyads with little conflict and low levels of abuse, restricting the range of the data. This is further evidenced by the sample mean for abusive supervision, which falls near the scale minimum at 1.11, suggesting limited variance in supervisory abuse. Relatedly, it is likely that no strong situational triggers or major provocations occurred during the

data collection window to activate less agreeable tendencies. TAT dictates that latent personality traits require relevant situational cues to manifest into overt behaviors. Relationship conflict within this study was low ($M = 1.34$, $SD = 0.69$), meaning that supervisors rarely faced the necessary conflict that may have been required to trigger an abusive response.

Beyond sampling constraints, certain measurement characteristics may have impacted the results. Specifically, the agreeableness scale demonstrated relatively low reliability ($\alpha = .63$), which may have reduced the likelihood of detecting significant effects. Furthermore, relationship conflict was only rated by supervisors and reflected their perception of whether or not they had conflict with their subordinate that day, meaning it lacked the subordinate's perspective on the interaction.

Additionally, the final sample included 102 valid and complete dyads, falling short of the dyads required to reach the targeted statistical power of .80. To combat these limitations, future research could increase the number of days of the study to increase the chances of conflict occurring, measuring relationship conflict from the subordinate's perspective as well, and should aim to achieve the required sample size to determine if any of the hypothesized effects could be detected. Furthermore, researchers could also attempt to collect data from within large organizations, with senior leadership buy-in, encouraging all employees to complete daily surveys and a bigger sample to pool from. This would also increase the likelihood of capturing higher levels of relationship conflict, which may be what is necessary to breach the situational threshold required to activate less agreeable tendencies.

Finally, future research could restructure and explore different pathways within this model to gain more insights. Given, the lack of an indirect effect from agreeableness to CWB through abusive supervision in this study, suggests that researchers should consider

reconfiguring these relationships. Namely, where the present study conceptualized relationship conflict as an amplifier of supervisor behavior, future research should investigate whether daily relationship conflict moderates the relationship between supervisor agreeableness and daily subordinate CWB directly, bypassing supervisor behavior.

Aside from this, future research should also investigate abusive supervision as a mediator between the other two "nightmare" personality traits; honesty-humility and conscientiousness, and their links to CWB (de Vries, 2018), in a daily context. The framework (Rauthmann et al., 2014) also suggests other situational dimensions, such as duty or deception, which could interact with these alternative HEXACO traits. For example, the dimension of deception (situations where integrity could be tested or an opportunity exists to blame a subordinate for a mistake), could activate supervisor low Honesty-Humility. Additionally, other boundary conditions may amplify or buffer the effect of abusive supervision on CWB and should be studied. For instance, Joo et al. (2025) found that goal-focused leadership worsened rather than buffered the impact of abusive supervision on CWB.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that abusive supervision acts as a dynamic, within-person stressor and stable between-person predictor of subordinate CWB. While the hypotheses regarding the mediation of supervisor agreeableness and the link between agreeableness and abusive supervision were not supported, the study does demonstrate that abusive supervision is a behavior that manifests daily with consequences such as subordinate performance. Notably, the low observed levels of abusive supervision, relationship conflict, and even CWB in this sample may also reflect a genuinely healthy working context for many of the dyads studied. This may partly signal that, in this sample, supervisors were largely not abusive,

subordinates were largely not acting counterproductively and neither had severe conflict with one another. Ultimately, this study suggests that organizations should focus on the direct prevention of abusive supervision through strict, formalized policies that may constrain the expression of abuse. Future research should continue to explore other situational factors that may trigger abusive behaviors to ensure that both the well-being of employees and financial costs to organizations are proactively addressed.

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Appendix

GENAI Usage: Language editing support (grammar, asking about sentence clarity, as well as academic phrasing suggestions, including synonyms for colloquial expressions). All suggestions were incorporated in my own words to ensure the final thesis is fully my own understanding, argumentation, conclusions, and writing style.