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ABUSIVE SUPERVISION AND INDIVIDUAL CREATIVITY: THE ROLES OF TRUST IN SUPERVISOR AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT BREACH

Abstract

Purpose: In this research, drawing on social exchange theory, we presented and evaluated a moderated mediation model, investigating trust in supervisor (TIS) as a mediator and psychological contract breach (PCB) as a moderator in the correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity.

Methodology: Data were collected from 275 employees employed in 11 private banks located in a city in Eastern Turkey.

Results: The results revealed that TIS mediated the correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity. Moreover, analyses of moderated mediation demonstrated that PCB moderated the indirect correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity via TIS.

Conclusion: This study enhances the abusive supervision literature by incorporating research on TIS and PCB.

Keywords: Abusive supervision, individual creativity, trust in supervisor, psychological contract breach

1. Introduction

Academic research has increasingly focused on the "dark side of leadership" in recent years (e.g., Khan et al., 2021; Mackey et al., 2021). The main reasons for the current interest are the rise in the number of destructive supervisory behaviors in the workplace and their significant impact on organizational and employee outcomes (Lee et al., 2013). One of the destructive supervisor behaviors, abusive supervision, refers to "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which their supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Previous research (e.g., Park et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2020) revealed that abusive su-

pervision has negative effects on many work outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational commitment). One of the negative effects of abusive supervision is that it reduces individual creativity, which is defined as "an individual employee effort in producing new things, useful ideas, or problem solutions" (Amabile et al., 2005, p. 368). Although there have been number of studies (e.g., Akram et al., 2021) investigating the relationship between leadership and creativity in recent years, the impacts of abusive supervision on individual creativity lack a comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms and limiting factors. In this study, we broaden prior investigations by examining PCB as a moderator in the mediated connection between abusive supervision and individual creativity through TIS.

Previous studies (e.g., Walter et al., 2015) have investigated that trust plays a key role as a mechanism between abusive supervision and employees' work outcomes (e.g., job performance, citizenship behaviors). Thus, we investigated TIS as a mediator in the correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity. According to social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964), "the social exchange process" commences when a supervisor interacts with a subordinate in a positive or negative manner. A subordinate tends to respond to the supervisor's positive actions by displaying good behaviors and to their negative actions by showing bad behaviors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Cropanzano et al., 2017). In this context, employees can react to the supervisor's abusive actions by increasing their bad behaviors and decreasing their good behaviors. Due to unfavorable interactions with an abusive supervisor, employees' TIS (as good behavior) can erode over time, sometimes leading to distrust of him or her (Tepper, 2007; Legood et al., 2021). Moreover, employees attempt to "harmonize" the equation in their interaction with an abusive leader by either underperforming or, more frequently, engaging in explicit or covert acts of workplace misbehavior (Han et al., 2017). That is, abusively supervised employees may respond to this treatment by not showing creativity in their jobs (Eva et al., 2019).

As mentioned earlier, we posit PCB as a limiting factor in the mediating effects of TIS concerning the correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity. PCB was chosen as a boundary condition because PCB is another form of bad supervisory action that negatively influences employees' attitudes and behaviors. PCB is a subjective experience based on the employees' belief that the organization or its representatives, such as supervisors, fail to fulfill the promises made to them (Robinson, 1996). Empirical research has demonstrated that PCB is related to numerous undesirable employee behaviors and attitudes, such as less job satisfaction, performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and commitment, as well as more workplace deviant behaviors, turnover intention, and job burnout (Ghani et al., 2020). One of the negative consequences of PCB is a decline in the creativity of employees (Srivastava & Yun, 2018). Nevertheless, given the ever-changing global marketplace, promoting individual creativity is crucial for organizational survival and growth (Amabile et al., 2004). Organizations need their employees to think creatively to offer a different service to their customers and create added value (Liu et al., 2016). However, this seems possible by keeping some of the promises they made to their employees during the recruitment process, thus gaining their trust.

In this study, drawing on SET, we aimed to examine (a) the possible correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity, (b) the mediating role of TIS in the abusive supervision and individual creativity linkage, and (c) the moderating role of PCB in the indirect correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity via TIS. This study will contribute to the literature in several ways. First, we tested TIS as a mediator in the correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity. It should be noted that TIS has been independently related to both abusive supervision (Chen & Wang, 2017; Kwon et al., 2020; Azizah, 2022) and individual creativity (Liu et al., 2016; Han et al., 2017), but it has not been investigated as a mediating mechanism in the correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity. Second, we suggest that PCB interacts with TIS to predict individual creativity. By incorporating PCB into the model as a moderator, we broaden previous studies by proposing that the mediated correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity, through TIS, depends on employees' varying perceptions of PCBs.

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1 The mediating role of TIS

Individual creativity pertains to generating novel and valuable ideas, processes, products, or procedures (Amabile, 1988; Zhou & George, 2001). Individuals' perceptions related to organizational support, resource sufficiency, and supervisory be-

haviors all have an impact on individual creativity (Amabile, 1997). Leaders resorting to abusive behaviors, encompassing accusations, criticism, indifference, and a low tolerance for errors, can undermine employees' work engagement, restrict their motivation for innovative involvement, and ultimately obstruct individual creativity (Zhang et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2021a). Moreover, innovative ideas improve with supervisory support and feedback. If supervisors are not tolerant of employees with creative thoughts, these employees perceive that they cannot receive enough support (Wang et al., 2021b) and thus may hesitate to express their ideas. Also, within the framework of SET (Blau, 1964), abusively supervised employees can try to "balance". Facing an abusive leader, employees may respond by either delivering subpar performance or, more commonly, involving themselves in overt or covert acts of workplace misconduct (Han et al., 2017). In this context, they can respond to this treatment by not showing creativity in their jobs.

As part of this research, it is considered that abusive supervision impacts individual creativity indirectly by affecting employees' TIS. Abusive supervision represents an adverse manifestation of leadership behavior, resulting in strained leader-subordinate relationships and diminished trust in leaders among subordinates (Chen & Wang, 2017). According to SET, due to unfavorable interactions with a supervisor, employees' TIS can erode over time, sometimes leading to distrust of him or her (Tepper, 2007; Legood et al., 2021). If leaders engage in abusive behavior, they stray away from the values like reliability, integrity, and honesty that play a significant role in the constitution of trust (Hua, 2008), and thus employees' TIS can decrease (Xiaqi et al., 2012). Previous studies also confirm this relationship. For instance, Chen and Wang (2017) identified that supervisory trust plays a mediating role in the correlation between abusive supervision and job performance, with abusive supervision exerting a negative impact on supervisory trust. Similarly, Kwon et al. (2020) established that abusive supervision detrimentally influences both affective trust and cognitive TIS. Azizah's (2022) research revealed a negative association between abusive supervision and employees' TIS.

In this study, we propose that TIS may mediate the correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity. Rousseau (1995, p. 395) defined trust as "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another". Conversely, TIS, a facet of interpersonal trust, reflects a subordinate's readiness to expose themselves to the actions of a supervisor whose behavior or actions they cannot regulate (Tan & Tan, 2000). That is, although employees cannot control the actions of their supervisor, they are voluntarily vulnerable to these actions (Mayer et al., 1995). In a supportive work environment, employees focus more on their tasks, produce high-quality work, and feel safe to try new ideas and engage in creative activities without fear of being unfairly punished (Mayer et al., 1995; Edmondson, 1999; Mayer & Gavin, 2005). On the contrary, due to the insecure environment that comes with abusive supervision, employees are hesitant to produce new ideas, cannot pay attention to their work (Mayer & Gavin, 2005), and thus behave less creatively (Madjar & Ortiz-Walters, 2009). According to SET, leaders who care about their followers' well-being instill in them a favorable psychological state, which is reciprocated by them in the form of enhanced trust and creativity (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017). Conversely, employees who are constantly criticized and blamed by their abusive leaders respond by reducing their trust in them and their abusive supervision. In the literature, Bhattarai (2015) found that the supervisor's supportive behavior and supervisory trust are significantly and positively correlated with subordinates' creativity. Khalifa (2019) revealed that supervisor trust has a positive influence on employees' innovative work behaviors. In this context, the following hypothesis was created:

Hypothesis 1: TIS mediates the correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity.

2.2 The moderating role of PCB

Rousseau (1989, p. 128) defined PCB as a "failure of organizations or other parties to respond to an employee's contribution in ways the individual believes they are obligated to do". Robinson (1996) further stated that PCB is a personal experience stemming from an individual's perception that another party has not upheld their commitments which has an impact on their attitudes and behavior. When a psychological contract is violated, the employee believes that supervisors have not fulfilled their commitments. PCB is an unpleasant occurrence for employees and frequently has negative consequences for their work-related attitudes or behaviors (Guo, 2015).

PCB is a subjective experience based on the employees' belief that the organization or its representatives,

such as supervisors, fail to fulfill the promises made, which has an impact on their attitudes and behavior (Robinson, 1996). Research findings indicate that PCB is linked to a range of unfavorable employee behaviors and attitudes. These include diminished job satisfaction, performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and commitment as well as more workplace deviant behaviors, turnover intention, and job burnout (Ghani et al., 2020). Also, one of the consequences of PCB is low individual creativity. As for SET, when employees perceive that the organization or supervisor has not fulfilled contractual obligations, their attachment to the relationship weakens, reducing their willingness to contribute (Robinson & Morrison, 1995). Unfulfilled promises may lead to negative attitudes, fostering beliefs that organizations and managers are deceptive. These negative attitudes can hinder employees from displaying creative behaviors that would otherwise benefit their organizations. In other words, employees concentrate solely on completing the tasks outlined in their work contract, reducing innovative activity that benefits the supervisor and organization (Eva et al., 2019). Several studies in the literature also showed that PCB diminishes creativity and innovative work behaviors (e.g., Lehner et al., 2014; Srivastava & Yun, 2018; Eva et al., 2019).

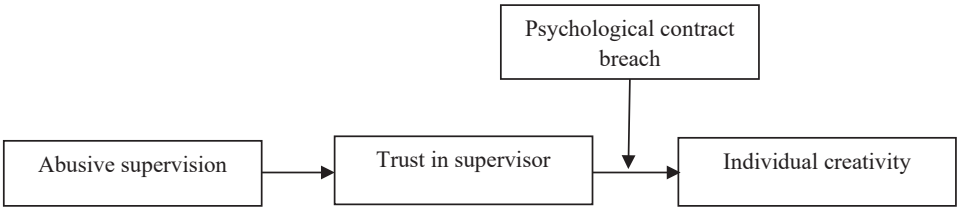
In this context, it is considered that when employees with trust in their supervisor have a low PCB perception in the workplace, TIS leads to a further increase in employees' creativity. On the other hand, when employees with trust in their supervisors have a high PCB perception, the positive correlation between TIS and individual creativity declines. In other words, the correlation between TIS and individual creativity is stronger when PCB perception is low and weaker when it is high. Thus, the following hypothesis was formed:

Hypothesis 2: There is a correlation between TIS and individual creativity, and this correlation is stronger for employees with low PCB.

We also tested if PCB would conditionally impact the magnitude of the mediated effect of abusive supervision on individual creativity through TIS. Aligned with Hypotheses 1 and 2, we posit that the mediated correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity (via TIS) will exhibit greater strength among employees with elevated levels of PCB. Conversely, this mediated correlation is anticipated to be diminished for employees with lower levels of PCB. Thus, the ensuing hypothesis has been formulated:

Hypothesis 3: There is an indirect correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity, and this indirect correlation is stronger for employees with higher PCB.

Figure 1 Hypothesized theoretical model



Source: Authors

3. Method

3.1 Sample and procedure

We collected the sample data from employees of 11 private banks located in a city in East Turkey. With the assistance of each bank's human resources manager, survey questionnaires were hand-delivered and collected by the first author with a statement guaranteeing their confidentiality to the participants. Of the 275 bank employees, 60% were male, with an average age of 35. In terms of tenure with a supervisor, 20.6% had worked with a supervisor for one to five years, 31.4% for six to ten years, 37.1% for 11 to 20 years, and 10.9% for 21 years and above.

3.2 Measures

All scales were translated from English into Turkish using the "translation–back-translation procedure"

(Brislin, 1970). The participants answered the items on the scales using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Abusive supervision: We used Tepper's (2000) 15-item scale to assess participants' abusive supervision perceptions. A sample item is: "My supervisor tells me that my thoughts or feelings are stupid." Cronbach's coefficient α was 0.82.

TIS: We measured TIS using McAllister's (1995) 11-item scale. The sample item is: "I can freely share my ideas, feelings, and hopes with my supervisor." Cronbach's coefficient α was 0.87.

PCB: We used Robinson and Morrison's (2000) five-item scale to measure perceptions of employees' PCB. A sample item is: "Almost all the promises made by my employer during recruitment have been kept so far." Cronbach's coefficient α was 0.84.

Individual creativity: To assess employees' creativity, Zhou and George's (2001) 13-item scale was used. A sample item is: "Suggests new ways to achieve goals or objectives." Cronbach's coefficient α was 0.92.

Control variables: In the current study, gender, age, and tenure with supervisor were controlled for potential effects on their creativity (Binnewies et al., 2013; Matud et al., 2007). Gender was codded as a dummy variable (0 = female, 1 = male), while other variables (age and tenure with the supervisor) were measured in years.

4. Results

4.1 Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

In our study, we performed CFA using AMOS 23.0 to test the discriminant validity of the variables. In these analyses, we compared the four-factor measurement model of the research (abusive supervision, PCB, TIS, and individual creativity) with four alternative models. The results revealed that the measurement model had a better fit than the alternative models (X^2 (81) = 313, TLI = 0.94, CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.07).

4.2 Descriptive statistics and correlations

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are given in Table 1. Consistent with our expectations, abusive supervision was negatively correlated with TIS (r = -0.54, p < 0.01) and individual creativity (r = -0.49, p < 0.01). In addition, TIS was positively correlated with individual creativity (r = 0.48, p < 0.01).

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	1.60	0.49	-						
2. Age	35.00	0.78	0.27**	-					
3. Tenure with sup.	2.38	0.93	0.29**	0.61**	-				
4. AS	2.46	1.20	-0.24**	-0.42**	-0.17*	(0.82)			
5. TIS	3.77	0.96	0.13	0.31**	0.07	-0.54**	(0.87)		
6. PCB	3.27	0.59	0.16*	0.41**	0.37**	-0.54**	0.50**	(0.84)	
7. IC	3.73	1.03	0.16*	0.31**	0.08	-0.49**	0.48**	0.46**	(0.92)

Note: N = 275. Abusive supervision = AS; trust in supervisor = TIS; psychological contract breach = PCB; individual creativity = IC.
*p < 0.01; **p < 0.001
Source: Authors

4.3 Hypothesis testing

We tested the research hypotheses in two interrelated steps. First, we tested the first hypothesis of the study (Hypothesis 1) using regression analysis. Second, we tested our moderation hypothesis (Hypothesis 2) and moderated mediation hypothesis (Hypothesis 3) by including the moderator variable (PCB) in the model.

4.3.1 Mediation tests

The results of Hypothesis 1 are given in Table 2. We tested the significance of the mediation hypothesis using the Sobel test and the bootstrapping method

in line with the Hayes PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013). The results showed that the indirect correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity was significant (β = –0.35, SE = 0.08, Sobel Z = –6.14, p <0.01). Also, bootstrap results confirmed the Sobel test (see Table 2), with a bootstrapped 95% bias-corrected CI around the indirect correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity not containing zero (-0.51-0.22). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Table 2 Regression results for mediation effect

	IC			
	B	**SE**	**T**	**P**
Gender	0.11	0.08	1.36	0.18
Age	0.05	0.07	0.73	0.47
Job tenure	-0.02	0.05	-0.35	0.72
Direct effect of AS	0.01	0.04	0.17	0.87
TIS	0.93	0.05	20.16	0.00
Total effect of AS	-0.36	0.06	-5.63	0.00
	Effect	**BootSE**	**LLCI%95**	**ULCI%95**
Indirect effect of AS	-0.35	0.08	-0.51	-0.22

Note: N=275. Bootstrap sample size = 5.000. LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit; abusive supervision = AS; trust in supervisor = TIS.
Source: Authors

4.3.2 Moderation test

To test the moderation hypotheses (Hypotheses 2 and 3), we conducted a moderated regression analysis using Hayes PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013). Prior to the analyses, all continuous variables were mean centralized to reduce multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991).

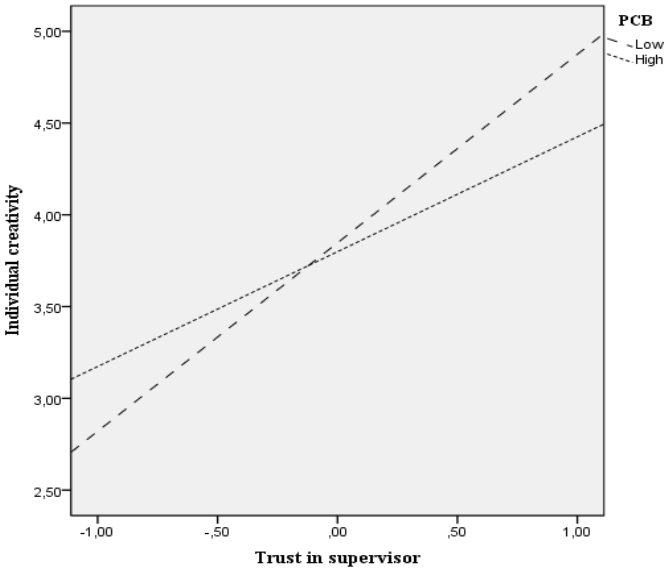
The results of Hypothesis 2 are given in Table 3. Hypothesis 2 predicted that a positive correlation between TIS and individual creativity would be stronger for employees with low PCB. The results showed that the interaction term between TIS and PCB was significantly related to individual creativity (β = -0.34, p < 0.01). For Hypothesis 2 to be said to be fully supported, this interaction must conform to the assumed model. Therefore, we plotted simple slopes to investigate this interaction effect at one standard deviation above and below the mean of PCB (see Figure 2). The slope of the correlation between TIS and individual creativity was stronger for employees with low PCB (simple slope = 0.84, p < 0.01), whereas the slope was weaker for employees with high PCB (simple slope = 0.52, p < 0.01). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Table 3 Regression results for moderated mediation

	IC			
	B	**SE**	**T**	**P**
Gender	0.17	0.08	2.29	0.02
Age	-0.01	0.06	-0.06	0.94
Job tenure	0.02	0.05	0.36	0.72
AS	-0.03	0.04	-0.84	0.40
TIS	-0.83	0.05	17.29	0.00
TIS x PCB	-0.34	0.06	-5.36	0.00

Note: N = 275. SD = standard deviation; SE = standard error. Bootstrap sample size = 5.000. LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit, AS = abusive supervision; TIS = trust in supervisor; PCB = psychological contract breach.
Source: Authors

Figure 2 Interaction effect of TIS and PCB on IC



Source: Authors

The results of Hypothesis 3 are given in Table 4. Hypothesis 3 predicted that the indirect correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity through TIS would be stronger for employees with high PCB. Therefore, we investigated the conditional indirect correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity through TIS at two levels of PCB (one standard deviation above the mean and one standard deviation below the mean). As indicated in Table 4, the results revealed that the conditional indirect correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity via TIS was stronger for employees with high PCB (conditional indirect effect = –0.40, boot SE = 0.08, 95% bootstrap CIs from –0.55 to –0.25). These results supported Hypothesis 3.

Table 4 Results for the conditional indirect effect of abusive supervision on individual creativity through TIS

Conditional indirect effect of AS on IC				
PCB	**Boot indirect effect**	**BootSE**	**BootLLCI**	**BootULCI**
Low (-1 *SD*)	-0.25	0.07	-0.41	-0.12
High (+1 *SD*)	-0.40	0.08	-0.55	-0.25
Index of conditional indirect effects	0.13	0.04	0.06	0.21

Note: N = 275. SD = standard deviation; SE = standard error. Bootstrap sample size = 5.000. LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit.
Source: Authors

5. Discussion

The finding of this study indicated that TIS mediated the correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity. Furthermore, the correlation between TIS and individual creativity varied across different levels of PBC. The correlation between TIS and individual creativity is stronger for employees with low PBC. The results also indicated that the indirect correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity is stronger for employees with

high PBC. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed in the following.

5.1 Theoretical and practical implications

Our findings contribute to the literature in three ways. First, the mediating role of TIS implies a social exchange mechanism in explaining the correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity. Accordingly, if supervisors engage in abusive behavior, they stray away from values like reliability, integrity, and honesty, which play a significant role in trust (Hua, 2008). Furthermore, within the framework of SET, employees who interact unpleasantly with their abusive managers respond to them by lowering their trust (Tepper, 2007; Legood et al., 2021). Furthermore, because of the insecure environment that comes with abusive supervision, employees are hesitant to produce new ideas, cannot pay attention to their work (Mayer & Gavin, 2005), and thus behave less creatively (Madjar & Ortiz-Walters, 2009). In other words, employees reciprocate abusive behavior in the form of decreased trust and creativity. This finding complies with studies that previously identified a positive correlation between abusive supervision and TIS (Chen and Wang, 2017; Kwon et al., 2020; Azizah, 2022), and between TIS and individual creativity (Bhattarai, 2015; Khalifa, 2019).

The second finding illustrated that the correlation between TIS and individual creativity varied across the level of PBC. That is, the correlation between TIS and individual creativity is stronger for employees with low PCB, and the correlation is weaker for employees with high PCB. When employees encounter PCB, they form negative attitudes towards their organizations and managers, believing that they have been deceived. In response to PCB, these employees concentrate solely on completing the tasks outlined in their work contract, reducing creative activities that benefit the supervisor and the organization. (Eva et al., 2019). As a result, if employees who trust their managers also have a low PCB perception, the positive impact of TIS on individual creativity will increase. Conversely, if these employees have a high PCB perception, the positive impact of TIS on individual creativity will diminish.

The last finding indicated that PCB has a moderating role in the indirect correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity. Accordingly, the indirect correlation between abusive supervision and individual creativity (through TIS) is stronger for employees with high PCB. On the other hand, this indirect correlation is weaker for employees with low PCB. As a result of this study, the following conclusion was reached: abusive supervision reduces employees' creativity by decreasing their trust in their supervisor. If employees whose TIS declines with abusive treatment also have a high PCB perception, their creativity is more negatively affected by AS. Conversely, if these employees have a low PCB perception, their creativity is less negatively affected.

In today's high-risk competitive environment, practitioners have found that innovation is critical and essential to survival, especially in industries where creativity is vital. From practitioners' perspectives, the results suggest that supervisors should realize the importance of trust. Practitioners should apply some trust-enhancing strategies (Zhu & Akhtar, 2014). For example, they should inform their current supervisors about the detrimental impacts of abusive supervisors' behaviors and give them training and seminars on both this issue and good leadership practices. On the other hand, the results revealed that managers should develop positive relationships with their employees, value their opinions, allow them to express their creative ideas without hesitation, involve them in decision-making mechanisms, and give them autonomy in their work. Thus, supervisors earn the trust of their employees. In a supportive work environment, employees who trust their supervisors focus more on their jobs, deliver high-quality work, feel safe when presenting their new ideas, and engage in more creative activities (Mayer et al., 1995; Edmondson, 1999).

Finally, managers can use some strategies for stimulating employees' creativity based on PCB. As such, organizations and supervisors should avoid PCB and deliver what they promised their employees during the recruitment process. Otherwise, employees may feel that their organization and managers are deceiving them, leading them to stop working and acting in their best interest (Lehner et al., 2014).

5.2 Limitations

Although our study has the theoretical and practical contributions mentioned above, it also has some limitations. First, because of the cross-sectional nature of the study, we could not confirm the direction of causality. For example, employees with low

TIS may decrease scores on the abusive supervisor scale. Therefore, future research should use longitudinal research designs. Second, we collected data on variables (abusive supervision, individual creativity, TIS, and PCB) at a single point in time, which may cause common-method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Common-method variance is accepted as one of the main causes of systematic measurement error. Common-method bias can have a serious impact on empirical research results, with potentially misleading results. This systematic error prevents the emergence of relationships between variables and can increase or decrease the strength of the relationship excessively (Chang et al., 2010). Future research may collect data for abusive supervision, TIS, and individual creativity from different points in time to reduce common-method variance.

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