Learning goal orientation and abusive supervision

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Abstract: *Employee learning for competence development is more salient for today's organizations facing frequent changes from inside and outside, and accordingly, employees' learning goal orientation (LGO) is noteworthy. This study examines how and why employees' LGO relates to leadership effectiveness, i.e., employees' perception of abusive supervision. Competing hypotheses and the mediating mechanisms of a work attitude from LGO, i.e., work enjoyment, and a work behavior from LGO, i.e., compliance behavior, were proposed. In a three-wave panel survey, 304 employees in a variety of occupations completed questionnaires. Results indicate LGO had a negative relationship with abusive supervision and employees with higher LGO had more enjoyment of work, and in turn, less perception of abusive supervision. The positive LGO-abusive supervision relationship was not empirically supported. While employees with higher LGO had less compliance behavior, this reduced compliance did not lead to increased abusive supervision. Hence, the suggestion is that supervisors should let subordinates feel that by performing required tasks, subordinates are learning by doing to facilitate leadership effectiveness. This study uses intrinsic motivation perspective to address an underlying process by which LGO manifests itself in an interpersonal and managerial outcome, abusive supervision. The findings suggest intrinsically motivated actions may mitigate negative perception of supervisors' interactions. Employees' intrinsic motivation at work may be a stance to understand their workplace interactions. Goal orientation is an important factor in leadership. Literature shows leaders' LGO facilitates leadership effectiveness. Corresponding to emerging importance of followers in leadership effectiveness, this study found subordinates' LGO facilitated their perception of leadership effectiveness in terms of reduced perception of supervisory behavior as abuse. In addition, this study enriches abusive supervision literature by corresponding to a call for examining the characteristics of subordinate and the work in concert to complement the limited work on understanding abusive supervision. Suggestions for future study are provided.*

Keywords: *Learning goal orientation, abusive supervision, enjoyment of work, compliance behavior.*

JEL Classification: *M12, M54.*

Introduction

In work organizations, it is essential for employees to attain job performance to survive in the organizations; namely, employees inevitably have a goal orientation of pursuing performance at work. However, there is another goal orientation of pursuing learning at work (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997), which is to acquire knowledge and skills for competence development (Brett & VandeWalle, 1999) and to which employees are differently receptive; some employees feel threatened and resist while some are keen to have learning opportunities (Vandewalle, 1997). Unlike performance goal, learning goal seems not to directly and immediately relate to performance attainment, however, it in the long run affects employees' survival and development in their organizations, and

impinges on organizational performance and competitiveness (Serrat, 2017). The learning goal orientation (LGO) of employees is increasingly noteworthy for employees, managers and organizations because employees' competence development is more salient for today's workplace characterized by the frequent organizational and environmental changes that accompany innovation, technology advancement, consumer-taste changes, competition, complex regulations, globalization, and business growth (Pasmore, 2011).

Goal orientation theory indicates that employees' goal orientations have an influence on how they perceive, interpret, and react to workplace situations (DeShon & Gillespie, 2005). Much research on work goals of employees has investigated LGO outcomes in organizations, including decreased burnout (Hyvönen et al., 2009), increased performance (Brett & VandeWalle, 1999), engagement, occupational well-being, deep learning approach, feedback seeking, and knowledge sharing (Islam et al., 2020; Leenknecht et al., 2019; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). Notably, these outcomes have focused on individual employees' attitude and behavior toward work and seem not to relate to supervisors. This is a neglected perspective, in which this study has an interest. It is possible that employees' LGO relates to their perception of supervisory behavior, because employees with LGO emphasize learning from experience (Brett & VandeWalle, 1999) and thus may pay less attention to the requirement of job performance and of supervisors' directions (Payne et al., 2007). These employees' emphasis and less attention may contradict the orientation of their supervisors, who monitor their job performance (Tomczak et al., 2018) and are usually results-oriented (Jin et al., 2016).

Therefore, this study examines the relationship between employees' LGO and their perception of abusive supervision, which is employees' perceiving supervisory behavior as being abusive and indicates their negative perception of supervisors (Klaussner, 2014). The LGO-abusive supervision relationship will be worthy understanding because organizations usually encourage employee learning at work for competence development (Lang & Wittig-Berman, 2000), especially in today's working environment of constant changes (Pasmore, 2011), and it will be beneficial for supervisors to learn whether their supervising effect is facilitated or deteriorated (namely, subordinates' positive or negative perceptions towards supervisory behavior) so as to put up appropriate managerial approaches for their supervisory effort. This study focuses on negative perceptions towards supervisors because people's responses to negatively perceived contexts are greater than their responses to positively perceived contexts, and thus negative contexts are more influential than positive contexts (Baumeister et al., 2001). Accordingly, employees' negative perception towards supervisors will impact employees more than their positive perception and thereby merit examination.

With respect to employees' negative perception towards supervisors, abusive supervision developed by Tepper (2000) has been the construct most studied in organizational literature and is defined 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). This definition indicates a subjective assessment (Harvey et al., 2014) and the same supervisory behavior may be differently assessed by different subordinates of the supervisor. For example, when subordinates receive critical feedback or less communication from supervisors, some subordinates may interpret the feedback or communication as abusive and some may have such interpretation as opportunities for performance/behavior improvement or no supervisory comments on their performance/behavior. It is possible that supervisors' behavior itself is not abusive but subordinates perceive it in a negative way consistent with Tepper's operationalization of abuse. This study examines whether employees' LGO leads to their perception of abusive supervision.

Abusive supervision is a ubiquitous phenomenon in work organizations (e.g., Harvey et al., 2014; Mackey et al., 2017) and has deleterious consequences for employees and organizations. For example, it decreases customer satisfaction, organizational productivity and profit, lowers employees' performance, satisfaction, commitment, creativity, positive workplace behaviors, and aggravates negative emotion, negative workplace behaviors, and turnover (e.g., Harvey et al., 2014; Mackey et al., 2017; Tepper et al., 2017). With much evidence on the negative effects of abusive supervision, investigating its antecedents is highly valuable

(Camps et al., 2016). However, scientific attention paid to its consequences still largely outweighs that paid to its antecedents (Wang et al., 2015), which can be classified as supervisor-related, subordinate-related and organization/context-related (Mawritz et al., 2014). Relatively less work has been on antecedents of abusive supervision, especially subordinate-related predictors (e.g., Camps et al., 2016; Henle & Gross, 2014) in spite of the evidence that subordinates likely play a role in the process of abusive supervision (e.g., Aquino & Lamertz, 2004). The purpose of the present study is to examine the relationship between subordinates' LGO and abusive supervision to contribute to the literature on abusive supervision antecedents in terms of subordinate-related factors.

Several important gaps in the existing literature are addressed. First, the aim is to contribute to literature on goal orientation theory by investigating how subordinates' LGO, a generally recognized factor (e.g., Islam et al., 2020), predicts abusive supervision. The aim will extend and shift the employee stance of understanding LGO outcomes to the management stance of that understanding. Namely, in the functions/dysfunctions of employee goal orientation, a new direction can be provided for organizational interventions, which are currently orientated toward individual employees' outcomes regarding work. Second, the present study contributes to the literature on leadership by showing that subordinates' LGO constitutes an important background for abusive supervision, which is a deterioration of supervisors' leadership effectiveness (Klaussner, 2014). A call for more research on how followers' characteristics play a role in leadership effectiveness has been issued (Kim et al., 2018) and the present study investigated, with their different characteristics of goal orientations, subordinates' different responses to leader behaviors. In addition, this study complements abusive supervision literature by adding a subordinate-related factor in the work arena, i.e., subordinates' LGO.

Finally, because LGO affects employee attitude and behavior toward work (e.g., Islam et al., 2020; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997), this study identifies the mediating mechanisms of work enjoyment (a resulting work attitude from LGO) and compliance behavior (a resulting work behavior from LGO) in the relationship between LGO and abusive supervision. Because specifying mediation models is essential

to advance particular research domains, it is proposed to be an important issue (Mathieu et al., 2008). Mediating mechanisms advance our theoretical understanding of why supervisory effectiveness is affected by subordinates' differences in LGO and better our offer of recommendations for practitioners who seek the improvement of supervisory effectiveness under the organizational imperative of monitoring subordinates' performance (Tomczak et al., 2018) and encouragement of subordinates' learning for competence development (Lang & Wittig-Berman, 2000). In addition, while work enjoyment and compliance behavior have often been examined as dependent variables, the present study suggests it is worthy to investigate them as mediating factors that are used as proximal consequences of LGO that, in turn, affect abusive supervision.

The following sections present the review of relevant work from the literature on LGO and on abusive supervision and explicate my model concerning the responses to LGO. Then, hypotheses are offered that speak to the relationship between LGO and abusive supervision through the mediating effects of subordinates' work enjoyment and compliance behavior. Finally, the results are reported concerning hypothesis tests in a three-wave field study of employees in various occupations.

1. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

The underlying goals employees pursue in work organizations have been categorized into two broad classes: learning-goal and performance-goal orientations. A learning-goal orientation develops employee competence by new knowledge and skill acquirement, new situation mastering, and experience learning. A performance-goal orientation demonstrates and validates competence adequacy of employees by favorable judgments seeking and negative judgments avoidance regarding employee competence (Brett & VandeWalle, 1999). Learning-goal and performance-goal orientations have been conceptualized as two separate constructs instead of as opposite ends of a single continuum (Brett & VandeWalle, 1999; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). As explicated earlier, LGO is the variable that this study examines.

Goal orientation theory posits that goal orientation can affect how individuals perceive, interpret and react to achievement situations

(DeShon & Gillespie, 2005). Goal orientation has been found to link to motivational processes (e.g., persistence and intrinsic motivation) and performance consequences (Payne et al., 2007; a meta-analysis study). Nonetheless, those findings placed a large focus on intrapersonal factors and ignored the social relevance of most achievement organizations (Sommet et al., 2015), where individuals must work with or against others to surpass in accomplishment or achievement (Poortvliet, 2013). Thus, an interest develops quickly in studying the relationships between goal orientation and interpersonal factors (Poortvliet & Darnon, 2010; Sommet et al.*,* 2015). This study adds to that interest by examining how LGO relates to abusive supervision, an interpersonal factor between employees and their supervisors (Klaussner, 2014).

The present study focuses on how subordinates' LGO relates to their perception of abusive supervision, which refers to their supervisors' negative treatment towards them, in other words, their perception of unfriendliness, discomfort, or hostility in their supervisors' behaviors toward them that are verbal and/or nonverbal, but without physical contact (Tepper, 2007). Although in the workplace physical abuse is possibly more harmful, the events of non-physical abuse are more than those of physical abuse (Wu & Hu, 2009), bring employees chronic psychological suffering (Keashly & Harvey, 2005) and deteriorate their work attitude, performance and, hence, organizational productivity (e.g., Tepper et al., 2017). Thereby, employee perception of abusive supervision is used as this study's dependent variable instead of other related yet distinguishable constructs for the actual behaviors of supervisors, such as negative behavior with physical contact (e.g., supervisor aggression; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2012), with victims other than subordinates (e.g., workplace bullying; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012), or with the intention of specific outcomes (e.g., destructive leadership, petty tyranny, supervisor undermining; Frazier & Bowler, 2015; Kant et al., 2013; Krasikova, 2013).

The intrinsic motivation theory and goal preference theory, both having been linked to goal orientation (Payne et al.*,* 2007; Zhu et al., 2019), uphold different theoretical perspectives regarding the LGO-abusive supervision relationship, and each predicts that relationship differently. It is noted that researchers propose competing hypotheses when they have no a priori expectation with respect to which theory would be supported (Anseel & Lievens, 2007; Dunnette, 1966; Ng & Feldman, 2012). The consideration of alternative hypotheses supplies richer information that researchers can productively integrate into theory (Rousseau, 1995), mutes narrowness in research, and augments the odds of finding some interpretable effects (Twenty et al., 1981). Therefore, the competing hypotheses are proposed as follows, concerning the negative and positive relationships between LGO and abusive supervision.

Goal orientation has been linked to intrinsic motivation (Payne et al.*,* 2007), which refers to the free engagement in, enjoyment of, and interest in an activity for its own sake (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan, 1992). LGO manifests intrinsic motivation because LGO is an autonomous, non-controlled psychological state (Matsuo, 2021) (i.e., a free engagement of employees) and describes the extent to which people strive for and have the enjoyment of and an interest in understanding something new or increasing their competence level in a given activity (Sosik et al., 2004). Employees with a high LGO are intrinsically motivated and eager to acquire new, improved knowledge, skill, and experience for competency development (Dweck & Leggett, 1988), and these employees are self-motivated to make use of these new acquirements (Zacher & Jimmieson, 2013). Self-motivated employees have been found to be more driven by internal factors and hence are less likely influenced by external factors such as their supervisors (Zacher & Jimmieson, 2013). It is also suggested that high LGO of employees enhances self-determination and a self-improvement focus, reducing the likelihood of being influenced by supervisors (Gong et al., 2009). Summarily, LGO tends to diminish employees' attention and sensitivity to supervisors' behavior, i.e., to being abused by supervisors, which thus attenuates employees' perception of abusive supervision. In sum, I propose that:

H1: LGO of employees is negatively associated with their perception of abusive supervision.

I specify below enjoyment of work as a potential mediator of the LGO-abusive supervision relationship; namely, LGO leads to more enjoyment of work, and in turn less perception of abusive supervision. Specifically, the intrinsic motivation of employees manifests itself in

their LGO, as stated earlier. Intrinsic motivation drives employees to engage in work primarily for its own sake due to the enjoyment of and an interest in the work per se (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan, 1992), and intrinsic motivation is a key aspect of the enjoyment of work (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Therefore, I propose that employees' LGO leads to their enjoyment of work, which indicates the degree to which employees work because they find the work intrinsically interesting or pleasurable (Graves et al., 2012). Specifically, employees with LGO are self-motivated to focus on attaining competence and perceive their work settings as a challenge, rather than as a threat. This construal likely engenders excitement, fosters affective and cognitive investment in concentration and task absorption, produces sensitivity to the presence of learning-relevant information, and supports self-determination (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). Thus, employees with higher LGO have more openness to new experiences/situations and optimism (Brett & VandeWalle, 1999), seek and enjoy challenges to provide them with learning opportunities (Gong et al., 2009; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). They are driven by seeking challenge and exploration without clear external reinforcements (e.g., Amabile et al., 1994). In sum, employees with LGO are more likely to find their work intrinsically interesting or pleasurable, i.e., to have the enjoyment of work (Graves et al., 2012).

Enjoyment of work has affective components (i.e., interesting, pleasurable), however, it is specific to the work domain, which is different from general positive affect toward one's job or organization (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment) (Graves et al., 2012). Enjoyment of work may induce specific patterns of cognition, affect, and behavior that influence employees significantly (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Graves et al., 2012; Ng et al., 2007). Therefore, I propose that employees' enjoyment of work may increase positive affect, and coping, enhance resultant work attitudes, and hence attenuate their perception of abusive supervision, as explicated below.

Enjoyment of work has been connected to passionate involvement, fulfillment (Buelens & Poelmans, 2004), and thus more favorable attitudes towards coworkers (Aziz & Zickar, 2006; Burke et al., 2004), including supervisors. Moreover, enjoyment at work has been evidenced to entail positive emotions (e.g., interest, fun), that

lead employees to have better interpersonal relationships at work (Baron, 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), including relationships with supervisors. Additionally, positive affect may induce employees to attend to, store, and recall positive information, which leads them to more positively perceive their coworkers (Baron, 2008), including supervisors. In sum, enjoyment of work leads employees to have more favorable attitudes towards better relationships with and more positive perceptions of their supervisors. Thus, employees with higher enjoyment of work perceive supervisors more positively and will interpret supervisors' behavior more positively because positive and negative perceptions cause positive and negative reactions, respectively (Lee et al., 2017). In other words, these employees have less negative perception of their being under supervisory abuse. Therefore, I propose:

H2: Employees with higher LGO tend to have more enjoyment of work and in turn less perception of abusive supervision.

On the other hand, I argue that employees with high LGO may have a goal preference that is inconsistent with the managerial goal of supervisors, and such inconsistency contribute to abusive supervision. Specifically, goal orientation at work reflects one's goal preferences in work situations (Zhu et al., 2019). The goal preference and the resultant attention focus for high learning orientation individuals are on developing and refining their skills (Brett & VandeWalle, 1999). Learning orientation conduces to more task strategy elaboration (Steele-Johnson et al., 2000), which makes an effort for new schema development to accomplish the job. As stated in another way, employees with higher LGO more likely expend resources on experiments with new ways of task doing. This elaboration or experimentation includes the engagement in new job strategies and the experiences/failures learning to modify job strategies (Fisher & Ford, 1998). In short, while approaching jobs, employees with high LGO intend to develop skills and abilities rather than only to perform well (Phillips & Gully, 1997).

However, supervisors have the managerial goals of maintaining and improving organizational effectiveness and efficiency and need to direct, guide and monitor the effective and efficient performance of subordinates (Jin et al., 2016; Tomczak et al., 2018). With the managerial goals, supervisors are more

results(performance)-oriented and thus are more likely to expect subordinates to expend resources on job performance. Accordingly, the orientation of supervisors likely contradicts that of LGO subordinates, who pay more attention to and expend more resources on learning processes (DeShon et al., 1996). Contradiction deteriorates interpersonal relationships (Harvey et al., 2019), and the contradiction between supervisors and their LGO subordinates deteriorates supervisor-subordinate relationship. Therefore, subordinates with higher LGO are likely to more negatively perceive their supervisors and thus have more perception of abusive supervision. I propose that:

H3: LGO of employees is positively associated with their perception of abusive supervision.

I specify below that LGO decreases compliance behavior at work, which in term leads to more abusive supervision. As stated above, goal preference leads to the contradiction between supervisors and subordinates with LGO; namely, to fulfill the managerial goals, supervisors set directions and rules, guide and monitor subordinates to achieve performance goals assigned by their organizations, while LGO subordinates accentuate experimenting and learning rather than achieving those goals (Payne et al., 2007) and attend more to learning processes (DeShon et al., 1996). Thus, these subordinates likely pay less attention to and less follow directions and rules set by supervisors. Because supervisors can be natural surrogates for organizations (Harvey et al., 2014) and are often seen as legitimate representatives of organizations (Ogunfowora, 2013), it is reasonable to expect that those subordinates tend to have less compliance behavior at work. Compliance is that employees internalize and accept their organizations' procedures and rules, which they adhere to and loyally follow, even when their behavior is not monitored (Podsakoff et al., 2000). Compliance, for example, includes making an effort to work efficiently and not to waste resources (Den Hartog et al., 2007); however, experimentation or developing new schemas for job accomplishment, which employees with higher LGO do more, will expectably hinder job efficiency and/or expend more job resources. Therefore, LGO will decrease compliance behavior at work.

Subordinates' compliance behavior has a positive link with their relationship with supervisors (Chan & Mak, 2012), considering that compliance understandably contributes to less contradiction. Hence, decreased compliance behavior of higher LGO leads to decreased relationship with supervisors and the resultant tendency to more negatively perceive supervisors, more perceiving supervisory behavior as abusive. I propose that:

H4: Employees with higher LGO tend to have less compliance behavior at work, and in turn more perception of abusive supervision.

2. Methodology

This study's concepts (LGO, abusive supervision, enjoyment of work, compliance behavior) and the control variables as follows are perceptual measures that are self-reported by definition (Wong et al., 2007). Thereby, self-reports were necessary. To control for common method biases, one of the two primary ways is procedural design of data collection, including temporal separation of measurement, and anonymity of respondents (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Accordingly, over a seven-week period, I collected data with a three-wave panel survey and respondents completed questionnaire items on the first, fourth, and seventh weeks, which are specified below. On a five-point Likert scale, the responses for all items were scored and ranged from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (5) 'strongly agree'. The higher the total scores, the higher degrees of the variables measured. I guaranteed respondents anonymity and confidentiality in order to attenuate social desirability and leniency biases.

A pretest was held with thirty full-time employees, who attended evening classes at a university in Taiwan and completed the questionnaire. Those employees' comments and suggestions were used to modify the questionnaire presentation. The sample of this study was six hundred and fifty employees who worked full-time in various occupations in Taiwan, were recruited through full-time employees in evening classes at a university in Taiwan, and completed the questionnaires. To raise participation willingness, respondents received a gift when completing the third questionnaire. The three questionnaires were completed by 412 employees, and complete answers were provided by 304 employees. The final response rate was 46.9%. Of the 304 participants, 68% were female, 44% were under age 35, 62.5% held a bachelor's degree, 55.6% had an organizational tenure of less than three years, and 69% had accumulated less

| Tab. 1: | Characteristics of the sample |

Variable		n ($N = 304$)	(%)	Mean	SD
Gender	Male	97	32.0		
	Female	207	68.0		
Age (years)	Under 25	21	6.90	37.20	8.90
	Under 35	113	37.0		
	Under 45	105	34.6		
	45 and over	65	21.5		
Education	High school diploma	16	5.30		
	Junior college	64	21.0		
	College degree	190	62.5		
	Graduate degree	34	11.2		
Organizational tenure	Less than 3 years	169	55.6	5.36	7.01
	Less than 9 years	70	23.0		
	Less than 15 years	23	7.60		
	15 years and over	42	13.8		
Length of time working with the current supervisor	Less than 3 years	210	69.0	3.14	4.05
	Less than 6 years	44	14.5		
	Less than 12 years	33	10.9		
	12 years and over	17	5.60		

Source: own

than 3 year working with their current supervisor (Tab. 1 provides the respondents' profile).

2.1 Time 1 measures

LGO. Brett and VandeWalle's (1999) scale, having five items (shown in Appendix), was used. The factor loadings of the 5 items of LGO ranged from 0.61 to 0.82 and were acceptable (i.e., higher than 0.50). Sample items were "I often look for opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge" and "I am willing to select a challenging work assignment that I can learn a lot from." The 5 items had the internal consistency coefficient of 0.85, and the average value of respondents' LGO was 15.24 (SD = 4.06).

Control variables. Because employees' conscientiousness and emotional stability were evidenced to affect their perception of abusive supervision (Henle & Gross, 2014), both were employed as control variables. Each used 5 items from the International Personality Item Pool (Goldberg et al., 2006) for measurement. Four out of the five items of conscientiousness had factor loadings ranging from 0.57 to 0.85,

and were acceptable (i.e., higher than 0.50). The one item with the factor loading below 0.50 was removed, resulting in a 4-item scale (shown in Appendix). Sample items were "I do things by the book" and "I try to follow the rules." The 4 items had internal consistency coefficient of 0.80 and the average value of conscientiousness of the respondents was 13.78 (SD = 2.76). For the five items of emotional stability, four items had factor loadings ranging from 0.61 to 0.92, and were acceptable (i.e., higher than 0.50). The one item with the factor loading below 0.50 was removed, resulting in a 4-item scale (shown in Appendix). Sample items were „I feel comfortable with myself" and „I am not easily bothered by things." The 4 items had internal consistency coefficient of 0.86 and the respondents' value of emotional stability was an average of 12.95 (SD = 3.38).

2.2 Time 2 measures

Enjoyment of work. McMillan, Brady, O'Driscoll, and Marsh's scale, having seven items, was used (McMillan, 2002). Five of the seven items

had factor loadings ranging from 0.73 to 0.87, and were acceptable (i.e., higher than 0.50). The other two items with the factor loading below 0.50 were removed, resulting in a 5-item scale (shown in Appendix). Sample items were "Most of the time my work is very pleasurable" and "Sometimes when I get up in the morning I can hardly wait to get to work." The 5 items had the internal consistency coefficient of 0.91, and the respondents' value of enjoyment of work was an average of 16.80 (SD = 3.81).

Compliance behavior. Boxall et al.'s (2011) scale, having four items (shown in Appendix), was used. The factor loadings of the four items ranged from 0.65 to 0.96, and were acceptable (i.e., higher than 0.50). Sample items were „I do not take unnecessary breaks" and „I work as quickly and efficiently as possible." The 4 items had the internal consistency coefficient of 0.89 and the respondents' value of compliance behavior was an average of 11.28 (SD = 3.13).

2.3 Time 3 measures

Abusive supervision. Tepper's (2007) scale, having fifteen items (shown in Appendix), was employed to measure respondents' perception of abusive supervision. The factor loadings of the fifteen items ranged from 0.62 to 0.89, and were acceptable (i.e., higher than 0.50). Sample

items were "My supervisor gives me the silent treatment" and "My supervisor reminds me of my past mistakes and failures." The 15 items had the internal consistency coefficient of 0.95, and the average value of abusive supervision was 31.38 (SD = 12.10).

2.4 Data analyses

To control for common method bias, one way is the procedural design of data collection, as stated above, and the other primary way is statistical control (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Harman's one-factor test was used to test the possibility of that bias (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). A principal component factor analysis was used on the items measured, yielding seven factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and accounting for 71.2% of the variance. Rather than one factor, seven factors were identified, and the first factor did not account for a large percentage of the variance (24.9%). Hence, the findings of this study did not appear to suffer serious threat from common method bias. Besides, I used AMOS and completed a confirmatory factor analysis to test the fit of a one-factor model (all items were loaded on a common factor) and a six-factor model (LGO, abusive supervision, enjoyment of work, compliance behavior, conscientiousness, and emotional stability). The data presented a better fit

Tab. 2: Discriminant validity

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Learning goal orientation	(0.85)					
	0.75					
2. Enjoyment of work		(0.91)				
	0.05	0.88				
3. Compliance			(0.89)			
	0.03	0.00	0.84			
4. Emotional stability				(0.87)		
	0.04	0.01	0.02	0.81		
5. Conscientiousness					(0.80)	
	0.03	0.03	0.00	0.03	0.68	
6. Abusive supervision						(0.91)
	0.03	0.22	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.93

Note: Diagonals with parentheses display the composite reliabilities, and diagonals without parentheses display the average variances extracted, while the other matrix entries display the squared correlations.

Source: own

of the six-factor model (X^2/df = 3.18, *PGFI* = 0.66, *PNFI* = 0.73, *PCFI* = 0.78, *RMSEA* = 0.08 [*CI* = 0.081, 0.089]) than the one-factor model (X^2/df = 8.32, *PGFI* = 0.41, *PGFI* = 0.37, *PCFI* = 0.40, *RMSEA* = 0.15 [*CI* = 0.152, 0.159]). This indicated common method problems had a low probability.

As stated above, all items had acceptable factor loadings (higher than 0.5, the acceptable value). The composite reliabilities (shown in Tab. 2) for the scales of LGO, abusive supervision, enjoyment of work, compliance behavior, conscientiousness and emotional stability ranged from 0.80 to 0.91 and were higher than 0.60, the threshold value (Fornell, 1982). For those

scales the average variances extracted (shown in Tab. 2) ranged from 0.68 to 0.93, and were acceptable (i.e., higher than the benchmark of 0.50) (Fornell, 1982). On the whole, the scales used for the measurement of those constructs were deemed to have satisfactory convergence reliability. The squared correlations among constructs (from 0.00 to 0.22) were less than the average variances extracted by the constructs (from 0.68 to 0.93; Tab. 2), indicating the empirical distinction among the constructs measured (Fornell, 1982). Accordingly, the convergent and discriminant validity measures were satisfactory.

Tab. 3: Intercorrelations of study variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Learning goal orientation					
2. Enjoyment of work	0.23**				
3. Compliance	−0.16**	0.00			
4. Emotional stability	−0.19**	−0.10	0.14*		
5. Conscientiousness	0.17**	0.18**	−0.00	−0.16**	
6. Abusive supervision	−0.17**	−0.47**	−0.07	0.08	−0.06

Note: *P < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

Source: own

3. Results

Tab. 3 displays intercorrelations among the variables in this study. It indicates that LGO was related to more enjoyment of work, less compliance behavior, less emotional stability, more conscientiousness, and less abusive supervision. Abusive supervision was related to lower LGO and less enjoyment of work.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypotheses, that is, to assess the model fit of the proposed models from the hypotheses. The indices were the chi-squared test, *TLI*, *CFI*, *PGFI*, *PGFI*, *PCFI*, *RMSEA*, and *SRMR*. An acceptable model fit can be indicated by the chi-squared test less than 5, *TLI* and *CFI* values in the 0.80s and 0.90s or higher, and *PGFI*, *PGFI*, and *PCFI* values in the 0.50s or higher. A reasonable model fit can be indicated by *SRMR* and *RMSEA* having values up to 0.10 (Bollen, 1989; Wu, 2009). A better model fit to the data is indicated by smaller chi-squared goodness-of-fit

values and a lack of model fit is indicated by larger chi-squared goodness-of-fit values (Hillhouse & Adler, 1996).

Because whether enjoyment of work and compliance behavior partially or fully mediate the effect of LGO on abusive supervision was not predicted, two competing models were tested: a fully mediated model (Model 1) and a partially mediated model (Model 2). Model 2 differed from Model 1 in a direct path from LGO to abusive supervision. Both Models had two control variables: conscientiousness and emotional stability. The results showed that Model 2 (X^2[622] = 1901.138; X^2/df = 3.056; *TLI* = 0.829; *CFI* = 0.841; *PGFI* = 0.661; *PGFI* = 0.730; *PCFI* = 0.785; *SRMR* = 0.090; *RMSEA* = 0.082) did not had a better fit, ΔX^2[1] = 2.67, p > 0.05, than Model 1 (X^2[623] = 1903.808; X^2/df = 3.056; *TLI* = 0.829; *CFI* = 0.840; *PGFI* = 0.662; *PGFI* = 0.731; *PCFI* = 0.786; *SRMR* = 0.091; *RMSEA* = 0.082). Accordingly, Model 1, the fully mediated model with control variables

included, was presented and used to examine the hypotheses proposed.

As presented in Fig. 1, the standardized path coefficients from LGO to the enjoyment of work and compliance behavior and from enjoyment of work to abusive supervision were 0.26 ($p < 0.01$), −0.14 ($p < 0.05$), and −0.48 ($p < 0.01$), respectively. The standardized path coefficients from compliance behavior to abusive supervision was not significant (−0.10, $p > 0.05$) and thus was not presented in Fig. 1. Those paths accounted for approximately 24.8% of the observed variance in abusive supervision. The effect of LGO on abusive supervision had statistically significant

coefficients of −0.11 ($p < 0.01$). Therefore, the empirical results reveal that LGO has a negative relationship with abusive supervision and this relationship is mediated by the enjoyment of work, offering support for *H1* and *H2*. Namely, LGO negatively predicts abusive supervision, and employees with higher LGO tend to have more enjoyment of work and in turn less perception of abusive supervision. The empirical results did not offer support for *H3* (a positive relationship between LGO and abusive supervision) and *H4* (the mediating role of compliance behavior in the relationship between LGO and abusive supervision).
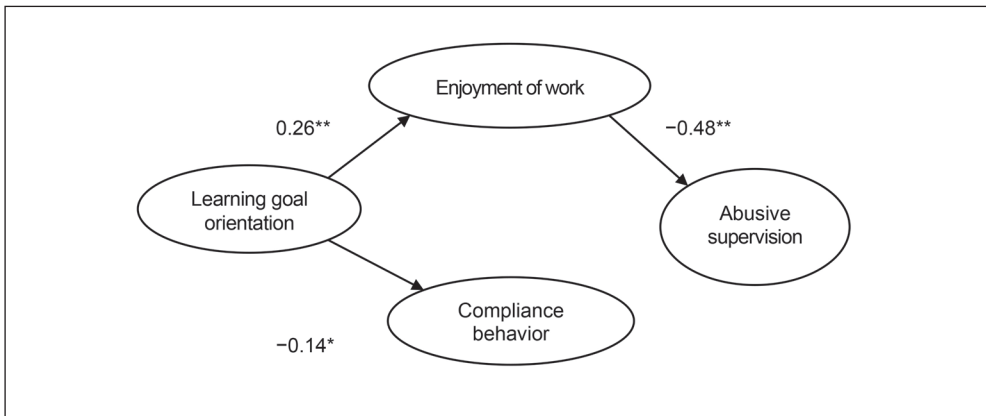

Fig. 1: **Standardized path coefficients for the final model**

Note: The model included two control variables, which were not shown in the figure; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

Source: own

4. Discussion

The results of the present study revealed that higher LGO of employees predicted their less perception of abusive supervision, and this prediction was mediated by the enjoyment of work; namely, employees with higher LGO had more enjoyment of work, and in turn less perception of abusive supervision. Empirical data failed to support the positive prediction of LGO on abusive supervision and the mediating mechanism of compliance behavior.

4.1 Theoretical contributions and future directions

This study uses an intrinsic motivation perspective to address an underlying process by

which LGO manifests itself in an interpersonal and managerial outcome, abusive supervision. The findings of this study suggest that intrinsically motivated actions of employees may mitigate their negative perception of supervisors' interactions. Thus, employees' intrinsic motivation at work may be a stance to understand their workplace interactions. This stance awaits more research to enrich the literature on workplace and manager-subordinate relationships, which have been abundantly examined on the individual, organizational and contextual predictors (Creary et al., 2015; Sias & Perry, 2004).

Goal orientation is an important factor in leadership (Payne et al., 2007). Regarding LGO, it is leaders' LGO that has been evidenced

to facilitate subordinates' perception of leadership effectiveness (Hendricks & Payne, 2007). Corresponding to the emerging importance of followers in leadership effectiveness (Schneider & Littrell, 2003), this study found that subordinates' LGO facilitated subordinates' perception of leadership effectiveness (in terms of reduced perception of supervisory behavior as abuse). Therefore, a future study can examine how an interaction between the goal orientations of followers and leaders determines leadership effectiveness perceived by followers, i.e., how that interaction alters followers' sensitivity to leader/supervisor influence, to amplify the account of leadership effectiveness.

The present study investigated how employees with different degrees of LGO characteristics respond to abusive supervision, which is employees' negative sensitivity to the leadership behavior of supervisors (Klaussner, 2014). The present study enriches the literature on abusive supervision by adding to the limited work examining its predictors (Mawritz et al., 2014). This study's findings correspond to a call for examining the characteristics of subordinates and the work in concert to more completely understand abusive supervision (Henle & Gross, 2014). More generally, the findings of the present study are consistent with the call for more investigations into how followers' characteristics play a role in determining leadership effectiveness (Kim et al., 2018). This study also complements the understanding of how diverse individual differences such as motivation (e.g., a motivational factor of LGO; Payne et al., 2007), alter employee sensitivity to leader influence (Kim et al., 2018). In addition, besides abusive supervision, a future study can investigate more diverse outcomes in managerial and organizational stances (e.g., person-supervisor fit, person-organization fit, and organizational citizenship behavior) to grow the relatively less understood areas (i.e., those two stances) of goal orientation effect.

Previous findings have evidenced that clear goals increase the enjoyment of work (Aleksić et al., 2016), and this seems not to be the case in this study. Employees with higher LGO pursue learning at work (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997), and have the actions of developing competence by developing new schemas for job accomplishment, experimenting with new ways for task completion, and experiences/failures learning to adapt job strategies (e.g., Brett & VandeWalle, 1999). Those actions are understandably hard to be specified exactly and precisely. In other words, the goals of LGO tend to be vague and unclear. The finding that LGO increases the enjoyment of work seems to be inconsistent with the previous finding that clear goals add to the enjoyment of work. However, these two findings may not be as inconsistent as they appear to be. Specifically, the goal in the "clear goals" is given (Aleksić et al., 2016), and LGO is individual discretion. If employees perceive an assigned goal as unclear, they are not aware of exactly what they need in order to accomplish the goal, what the organization/supervisors value, and what they are expected of (Aleksić et al., 2016). On the other hand, LGO is out of employees' own free will, in which employees need not satisfy the expectation criteria and levels of supervisors/organizations. Taken together, the goal in the "clear goals" is an extrinsic motivation, and LGO is an intrinsic motivation. I propose that goals that are given by others/from outside are extrinsic and need to be clear to stimulate enjoyment of work, while goals that are determined by individuals themselves are intrinsic and stimulate enjoyment of work by the goal itself. This proposition awaits future investigation to advance the literature on the effect of goals at work to better refinement.

The empirical results of this study failed to support *H3*, which predicted a positive relationship between LGO and abusive supervision. Nonetheless, the possibility is not excluded that LGO among some employees or in some cases may activate employees negative perception of supervisors and thus more perception of abusive supervision. For example, employees with LGO expend resources at work for learning and may perceive more abusive supervision (i) when supervisors require sole consumption of resources on job accomplishment, (ii) in jobs that have strict standard operation procedures to follow, or (iii) in organizations that accentuate firm-specific resources. Prior findings have suggested that LGO is not always beneficial and can be detrimental in certain circumstances (Kim et al., 2018) and that further examination is needed to identify how work contexts can alter the influence of employees' goal orientations on their work attitude and behavior (Kim et al., 2018). Future investigation is in need to capture a complete picture of LGO effect on abusive supervision perception.

The empirical results of the present study failed to support *H4*: the mediating mechanism

of compliance behavior. Specifically, the data supported the prediction that higher LGO relates to less compliance behavior and, however, did not support the prediction that less compliance behavior relates to more abusive supervision. This empirical un-support may have possible rationale. It is likely that employees are aware that their decreased compliance behavior is a result of their own discretion of LGO, and is not relevant to their supervisors (e.g., their disagreement with supervisors' decisions, goals, requirements, regulations and rules). Therefore, it is reasonable that they tend not to perceive negatively their supervisors and thus their perception of abusive supervision will not increase. Literature on employee compliance has shown that leaders and organizations expect it for effective leadership and productivity (e.g., Chan & Mak, 2012; Hofeditz et al., 2017), and it has influence on employees. For example, employees with less compliance have lower performance (Boxall et al., 2011) and less relationship with supervisors (Chan & Mak, 2012). The rationale proposed above concerning discretion of LGO suggests that the effect of employees' compliance may vary with its antecedents, i.e., employees' own factors per se or the interactions between employees and supervisors/organizations (e.g., employees' challenges, disagreement, or conflict with supervisors'/organizational requirements, goals, rules/regulations, procedures, and policies). This rationale and suggestion await future study for a more fine-grained understanding of the effect of employee compliance.

4.2 Limitations

As Podsakoff et al. (2003) posit, the data collection of the present study was controlled in two ways for common method biases. For procedural control, the predictor and criterion variables were measured on different days for temporal separation of measurement, and anonymity and confidentiality of respondents were guaranteed to weaken social desirability and leniency biases. For statistical control, Harman's one-factor test was employed to test the possibility of common method bias (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). According to Podsakoff et al. (2003), procedural design and statistical control are the two primary ways to control for common method biases. Thus, the procedural and statistical controls employed should be features that make the present study rigorous, although it is

suggested that we cannot entirely rule out that bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Several limitations need to be mentioned in the present study. First, with the acceptable response rate, establishing the representativeness of the sample was not attempted. Second, although the underlying rationale of LGO is reasonable, underlain by LGO characteristics, and well evidenced, direct testing of the rationale was not permitted due to no information. A more explicit examination needs future study. Besides, this study's sample employed only Taiwanese employees. Differences in cultural backgrounds relate to employee perceptions at work (Wu & Xu, 2012). Taiwanese people are inclined to Chinese cultural values (Mao & Hsieh, 2013), which are directed toward strong authority, and tend to respond positively to authoritarianism (Wu & Xu, 2012). This may render employees more easily accepting of supervisors' behavior and less negatively perceptive. Future study can provide a more robust test of the hypotheses by employing samples from other cultures or countries (Wu & Xu, 2012).

4.3 Managerial implication

This study's findings suggest that for employees, LGO leads to the enjoyment of work and, in turn, reduces the perception of abusive supervision. Accordingly, for supervisors, their leadership effectiveness is facilitated by making subordinates feel that they are learning at work and their competence develops at work. Practically, it is noted that many supervisors have quick actions at work, focus on organizationally assigned goals and level of performance, thus results/performance-oriented and tend to be impatient (Lu, 2021). They simply give orders/instructions (i.e., what to do, goals, requirements, and rules/regulations) to subordinates and ask them to follow them. According to this study's findings, I propose that organizations should train supervisors to adjust their ways of giving orders/instructions. Supervisors should train to, on giving orders/instructions, have managerial approaches of specifying, for example, the background of the assigned tasks/goals/requirements, why the tasks/goals/requirements need to do/comply, how significant/beneficial the tasks/goals/requirements are for organizations/employees, what the consequences/outcomes of the tasks/goals/requirements are. Namely, supervisors should be able to let subordinates feel that by performing required tasks, subordinates

are learning by doing, learning from experiences, and/or mastering new situations to develop knowledge and skills. Through those managerial approaches, when receiving orders/instructions from supervisors, subordinates will perceive that they not only invest effort but also develop competence at work. This perception of subordinates will increase their enjoyment of work and facilitate supervisory effectiveness by reducing subordinates' perceiving supervisory behavior/ effort as abusive.

Conclusions

With today's workplace characterized by frequent changes from inside and outside, employee LGO is noteworthy because employee pursuit of learning at work acquires knowledge and skills for competence development, and affects employee survival and development in organizations, and organizational performance and competitiveness. The findings of this study reveal that employees with higher LGO had more enjoyment of work, and in turn less perception of abusive supervision, and contribute to literature on goal theory in area regarding LGO effect. This area has focused on LGO effect on intrapersonal work-related factors of employees and has little concern on interpersonal factors among employees. This study corresponds to the call for complementary understanding of goal orientation effect by examining employees' perception of supervisors' abusive interactions with them. Workplace interactions among employees are an essential way for organizations to advance employees' and organizations' performances, which are damaged by employees' perception of supervisors' abusive interactions with them. This study adds to the understanding of how diverse individual differences such as a motivational factor of LGO alter employee sensitivity to leader influence and play a role in determining leadership effectiveness. This study's findings are important for managerial intervention and approaches to assisting employees in managing the desirable goal of developing competence and to assisting supervisors in relieving supervisory effort/interaction of being undermined by using organizational encouragement of employees' continual development of competence at work.

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Appendix

Construct items

Learning-goal orientation
1. I am willing to select a challenging work assignment that I can learn a lot from.
2. I often look for opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge.
3. I enjoy challenging and difficult tasks at work where I will learn new skills.
4. For me, development of my work ability is important enough to take risks.
5. I prefer to work in situations that require a high level of ability and talent.

Enjoyment of work
1. My job is so interesting that it often does not seem like work.
2. My job is more like fun than work.
3. Most of the time my work is very pleasurable.
4. Sometimes when I get up in the morning I can hardly wait to get to work.
5. I like my work more than most people do.

Compliance behavior
1. I does not take unnecessary breaks at work.
2. I go beyond what is officially required in attendance at work.
3. I work as quickly and efficiently as possible.
4. I always conform to the presentation standards as outlined in the employee handbook.

Abusive supervisor
My supervisor
1. Ridicules me.
2. Tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid.
3. Gives me the silent treatment.
4. Puts me down in front of others.
5. Invades my privacy.
6. Reminds me of my past mistakes and failures.
7. Does not give me credit for job requiring a lot of effort.
8. Blames me to save himself/herself embarrassment.
9. Breaks promises he/she makes.
10. Expresses anger at me when he/she is mad for another reason.
11. Makes negative comments about me to others.
12. Is rude to me.
13. Does not allow me to interact with my coworkers.
14. Tells me I am incompetent.
15. Lies to me.

Emotional stability
1. I am relaxed most of the time.
2. I feel comfortable with myself.
3. I am not easily bothered by things.
4. I take things as they come.

Conscientiousness
1. I do things by the book.
2. I try to follow the rules.
3. I believe laws should be strictly enforced.
4. I like order.