Forced shift to teleworking: how abusive supervision promotes counterproductive work behavior when employees experience COVID-19 corporate social responsibility

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Abstract

Purpose – The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated teleworking, which inadvertently led to an impaired communication between supervisors and employees, resulting in abusive supervision. Drawing on the conservation of resources (COR) theory and the social identity theory, this study aims to address this negative association by examining the mediating role of state mindfulness and the moderating role of COVID-19 corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the relationship between abusive supervision and counterproductive work behaviors.

Design/methodology/approach – This research employs both qualitative and quantitative research designs. Data collection involved an experimental design with 117 participants (Study 1), a cross-sectional survey with 243 participants (Study 2) and semi-structured interviews with 24 full-time employees (Study 3).

Findings – The results reveal that state mindfulness acts as a mediator in the positive relationship between abusive supervision and counterproductive work behaviors (CWB). Furthermore, COVID-19 CSR mitigates the relationship between abusive supervision and CWB within the organization, but not with the supervisor. Additionally, COVID-19 CSR moderates the impact of abusive supervision on state mindfulness.

Practical implications – The results emphasize the crucial role of CSR when employees encounter abusive supervision during the COVID-19 pandemic. Organizations and managers should adopt appropriate strategies to enhance employees’ perception of CSR. Prioritizing the cultivation of state mindfulness is also recommended, and organizations can provide short-term mindfulness training to improve employees’ state mindfulness.

Originality/value – This research contributes to the understanding of abusive supervision and CWB in the context of forced teleworking.

Keywords Abusive supervision, State mindfulness, Counterproductive work behavior, COVID-19 corporate social responsibility, Remote work

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has compelled a significant number of employees worldwide to teleworking (Becker et al., 2022; Kähkönen, 2023; Kohn et al., 2023; Mockaitis et al., 2022). This shift in the work model has resulted in ambiguous and inadequate communication, particularly the loss of common face-to-face interactions between supervisors and employees.
Consequently, work barriers have emerged, leaving managers uncertain about employees’ productivity and engagement (Heidt et al., 2022; Lewis et al., 2023; McPhail et al., 2023). This new reality has triggered destructive behavior among leaders (Wang et al., 2022; Simard and Parent-Lamarche, 2021), leading to the development of abusive supervision. Abusive supervision refers to “subordinates’ perception of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact” (Tepper, 2000, p. 178).

In response to the uneven and severe treatment by their leaders, employees may engage in counterproductive work behaviors (CWB), which involve actions that deviate from organizational norms and harm either fellow employees or the organization itself (Dalal et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2019). CWB refers to the behaviors that lack compliance with organizational norms and harm other employees or the organization, reflecting employees’ voluntary behaviors that behave at work to violate organizations’ normal principles and objectively threaten the well-being of organizations or its members. Moreover, abusive supervision can deplete resources and hinder employees’ cognitive capabilities, which are crucial for self-regulation and self-control (Hobfoll et al., 2018). However, little research has explored the potential mechanisms linking abusive supervision arising from forced teleworking conditions with CWB as well as the boundary factors that may alleviate these negative effects.

Previous studies have explored various mediating factors such as affectivity, justice perceptions and job satisfaction (Mackey et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2019) that mostly focused on work attitudes and cognitions. However, these studies have often overlooked the significant role of mindfulness, an essential personal resource (Du et al., 2019; Orazi et al., 2021). During the COVID-19 period, mindfulness has emerged as a crucial tool for managing negative emotions and depression (Alo et al., 2023; Lam et al., 2022). State mindfulness, in particular, is characterized by non-judgmental metacognitive monitoring in the present moment, free from attachment to the past or future. It is a state-like and context-dependent concept (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Waelde et al., 2017). In the context of forced teleworking, which represents a distinct and unique working model (Waelde et al., 2017), state mindfulness aligns with its dynamic nature, susceptible to changes over time and conditions (Brown and Ryan, 2003). Drawing on the conservation of resources (COR) theory, abusive supervision is known to deplete personal resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018) and decrease state mindfulness. Consequently, employees lacking sufficient energy and self-regulatory capabilities are more likely to engage in harmful behaviors, particularly in uncertain and ambiguous environments such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Carpenter et al., 2021). Despite this, there is a notable dearth of quantitative research investigating the mediating role of state mindfulness between abusive supervision and CWB.

In order to address the negative consequences of abusive supervision, organizations and managers must implement effective measures. According to the social identity theory (Ashforth et al., 2008), employees are prone to categorize themselves as members of esteemed and valuable organizations, which in turn influences their subsequent behaviors through in-group preference and identification with the organization (Ashforth et al., 2008; Raza et al., 2021). Previous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of micro-corporate social responsibility (CSR) in managing various disaster conditions, such as the 9/11 incident and the Great Sichuan Earthquake (Muller and Whiteman, 2008; Ong et al., 2018). However, it is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic represents a distinct and long-term global crisis, lasting nearly three years, unlike the short-term nature of other examined disasters like earthquakes and tornadoes. In light of this and building on the works of Turker (2008) and Hur et al. (2021), we define the COVID-19 CSR as the extent to which employees perceive organizations voluntarily making efforts and contributions to society and other institutions to address the challenges posed by COVID-19. However, there is limited research exploring the effects of COVID-19-related CSR on employees’ behaviors (Aleksić et al., 2023; Stella et al., 2023).
Therefore, it is important to investigate whether the COVID-19 CSR can play a similar role in mitigating the negative relationship between abusive supervision and CWB.

In this study, we aim to examine the impact of abusive supervision on CWB through the mediating role of state mindfulness as well as the moderating role of COVID-19 CSR. Our theoretical research model is depicted in Figure 1. By integrating the COR theory and social identity theory, we contribute to the existing literature in several significant ways. Firstly, drawing on the COR, our research extends the understanding of abusive supervision in the context of forced teleworking. We shed light on how abusive supervision, resulting from the shift to teleworking, influences employees’ CWB in both the organization and supervisor dimensions. By exploring the effects of abusive supervision under forced teleworking, our findings not only contribute to the literature on abusive supervision but also provide insights into its impact on different dimensions of counterproductive work behaviors. Secondly, we expand the literature on state mindfulness by examining its antecedents and outcomes. While previous research has primarily focused on trait mindfulness, we offer a fresh perspective by emphasizing the significance of state mindfulness as a crucial resource for employees during forced teleworking and the COVID-19 pandemic. Our study highlights the role of state mindfulness in mediating the relationship between abusive supervision and CWB, further enriching the understanding of mindfulness in organizational settings. Thirdly, we identify the relevance of micro-CSR as a response to abusive supervision and demonstrate its buffering effects. By investigating the perception of organizations’ voluntary efforts and contributions to society in addressing the challenges posed by COVID-19, we provide a nuanced picture of the negative effects of abusive supervision under forced teleworking. Furthermore, our research offers timely suggestions for organizations to alleviate subordinates’ negative perceptions of abusive supervision by emphasizing the importance of micro-CSR.

**Literature review and hypotheses development**

Abusive supervision has garnered significant attention, especially in the context of forced teleworking, where employees are particularly vulnerable to its negative effects (Li et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022; Simard and Parent-Lamarche, 2021). In light of the COR theory (Hobfoll, 2011), individuals make no effort to obtain, retain, foster and protect centrally valued resources to cope with stressors. However, abusive supervision hinders employees from investing their resources, impeding their performance improvement. The COR theory also emphasizes that
individuals exposed to prolonged periods of stress are likely to experience resource depletion due to negative emotions, which subsequently influences their subsequent reactions (Hobfoll, 2011). Employees subjected to sustained interpersonal hostility and deliberate neglect find their cognitive and emotional resources depleted, which are crucial for maintaining proactive behaviors and work engagement (Chen et al., 2020; Yu and Duffy, 2021). Furthermore, abusive treatment diminishes not only current essential resources but also potential resources, such as future promotion opportunities. In the face of abusive treatment, employees may lack the necessary resources to resist CWB and are more likely to respond deviant behaviors due to perceived injustice (Chen et al., 2020; Yu and Duffy, 2021; Zhang et al., 2019). Considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations have swiftly transitioned employees into full-time remote work, exacerbating the phenomenon of abusive supervision. The double-blind communication characteristic of remote work further depletes employees’ already limited resources, leading to intentional deviant behaviors stemming from insufficient self-regulation (Jain et al., 2021) and self-control (Yuan et al., 2020).

Abusive supervision and state mindfulness
The COR theory emphasizes that negative work environmental factors, such as job stressors, have the potential to deplete individuals’ personal resources (Hobfoll, 2011, 2018). Abusive supervision, as a prominent job stressor, undoubtedly depletes employees’ resources, subsequently impairing their cognitive capabilities (Bayighomog et al., 2021; Jain et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2023). Previous research has demonstrated that state mindfulness not only correlates positively with positive emotions, organizational citizenship behaviors and work engagement (Donald et al., 2018) but also negatively associates with negative cognition, emotional exhaustion and psychological stress (Bayighomog et al., 2021). Du et al. (2019) have emphasized that state mindfulness (T1) can predict state mindfulness (T2) through the upward spiral process, whereby increased positive emotions contribute to this progression (Bayighomog et al., 2021). In the context of a virtual workplace where supervisors employ abusive tactics, the employees may find themselves lacking the necessary resources to cope with the stressful conditions (Zhang et al., 2019). Furthermore, abusive supervision during forced teleworking heightens employees’ ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding COVID-19 (Wang et al., 2022), which in turn triggers anxiety and insecurity, hindering employees’ ability to remain present in the moment (Alo et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2022). Consequently, employees experience resource depletion due to abusive supervision in the context of COVID-19. Taken together, we hypothesize that:

H1. Abusive supervision is negatively related to state mindfulness under forced teleworking.

The mediating role of state mindfulness
Existing research posits that state mindfulness can decrease negative effects and enhance positive effects, enabling them to cope with the daily demands of their jobs and stressful conditions (Bayighomog et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2020). Yu et al. (2023) have demonstrated a negative relationship between employees’ mindfulness and abusive supervision. Furthermore, mindfulness plays a significant role in promoting individuals’ resourcefulness, which refers to their perceived state of having abundant resources (Orazi et al., 2021). This can partially compensate for the depletion of personal resources resulting from abusive conditions. This can partially compensate for the depletion of personal resources resulting from abusive conditions. Zheng et al. (2022) have found a negative relationship between daily mindfulness and daily ego depletion, which, in turn, negatively influences daily CWB across multiple levels. Drawing on the COR theory, state mindfulness
was an important resource (Orazi et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2023) for employees to cope with abusive experiences in an open-minded way (Van Dam et al., 2018). To summarize, forced teleworking hampered information delivery which led to abusive supervision (Nyberg et al., 2021). When experiencing abusive treatment employees’ capabilities to adopt a non-judgmental approach were depleted which, subsequently, influences their engagement in CWB. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H2. Abusive supervision is indirectly positively related with CWB-supervisor (a) and CWB-organization (b) via state mindfulness during COVID-19 under forced teleworking.

The moderating role of COVID-19 corporate social responsibility
In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations can demonstrate their social responsibility by engaging in activities such as making donations and addressing urgent societal needs (Aleksić et al., 2023; He and Harris, 2020; Poursoleyman et al., 2023). The social identity theory suggests that individuals have an inherent tendency to categorize themselves and establish their identities within the social context, particularly in the face of significant global disasters (Ashforth et al., 2008). People are inclined to associate themselves with positive organizations that are admired by society (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Hu et al. (2020) state that CSR can enhance a positive organizational reputation, thereby fostering a sense of organizational pride and a positive self-image among employees (Raza et al., 2023); moreover, Aleksić et al. (2023) indicated that CSR can buffer the relationship between COVID-19 frustration and work meaningfulness, which is an essential factor influencing organizational citizenship behaviors. The practice of COVID-19 CSR serves as a positive signal for organizations, nurturing positive emotions among subordinates (Rupp and Mallory, 2015) and enhancing organizational commitment (Lu et al., 2020) and employee engagement (Raza et al., 2021). Then, these positive consequences will decrease employees’ negative outcomes (Aleksić et al., 2023; Rupp et al., 2013).

CSR has been found to help employees preserve job resources (Kim et al., 2018; Poursoleyman et al., 2023; Rupp and Mallory, 2015). Abusive behaviors from leaders often lead to deviant outcomes among employees (Zhang et al., 2019). However, the presence of COVID-19 CSR can partially alleviate the negative effects of abusive supervision, partly due to the in-group preference and identification that it fosters (Rupp and Mallory, 2015). Furthermore, voluntary CSR initiatives enable organizations to cultivate a socially responsible image (Raza et al., 2021), which provides employees with psychological resources that can help reduce the depletion of state mindfulness. That is, when employees perceive that their organization is actively taking responsibility for addressing the challenges posed by COVID-19, they are motivated by a sense of organizational pride and alignment with organizational values (Raza et al., 2021). To sum up, we hypothesize that:

H3. COVID-19 CSR moderates the negative relationship between abusive supervision and state mindfulness, such that the relationship is weaker when COVID-19 CSR is high than when it is low.

H4. COVID-19 CSR moderates the positive relationship between abusive supervision and CWB-supervisor (a) and CWB-organization (b), such that the relationship is weaker when COVID-19 CSR is high than when it is low.

H5. The indirect effects between abusive supervision and CWB-supervisor (a), CWB-organization (b) through state mindfulness are less negative when COVID-19 CSR is higher (vs lower) than it is lower (vs higher).
Overviews of studies
We conducted three studies to examine the proposed hypotheses. In Study 1, we adopted a single-factor between-subject design to explore the effect of abusive supervision on state mindfulness and CWB by manipulating abusive supervision in the condition of forced teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Study 2, we employed a cross-sectional survey involving 243 employees from diverse industries who were forced to telework, aiming to examine the moderated mediation model. In Study 3, a semi-structured interview with 24 full-time employees was conducted to enrich our understanding of the psychological mechanism between abusive supervision and CWB.

Study 1
Method
Sample and procedure. The purpose of Study 1 was to examine the relationship between abusive supervision and CWB through state mindfulness by taking an experimental design. This study aimed to provide causal evidence for the relationship between abusive supervision and state mindfulness and enhance the internal validity of the findings. G*Power was employed to determine an appropriate sample size, indicating that a sample of 110 participants would yield a medium effect size with a power of 0.80 and \( \alpha \) of 0.05. We collected data in Spring 2021 from MBA students enrolled in several universities from Shandong and Heilongjiang in China, predominantly majoring in finance, accounting, audit and engineering. All participants received an announcement describing the study and volunteered for this online experimental study. The data collection procedure involved several steps. At first, participants completed a demographic survey. Then, they were randomly assigned to one of two scenarios: high abusive supervision (\( N = 58 \)) or low abusive supervision (\( N = 59 \)). Each participant was provided with scenario materials adapted from Farh and Chen (2014), which depicted a situation where they were information technology industry employees who were forced to telework during the COVID-19 pandemic and collaborate with colleagues to complete projects. To establish a sense of realism, participants were instructed to imagine themselves in the given scenario. Next, participants were given three minutes to read the descriptions of their assigned conditions and assess their perceived level of abusive supervision, thereby confirming the effectiveness of the abusive supervision manipulation. Finally, participants were instructed to imagine that they were really in the current condition and to report the extent to which they would tend to engage in state mindfulness and CWB in the described environment. In total, 117 MBA students (53.85% males and 46.15% females) participated in the study. The average age of the participants was 25.03 years old (\( SD = 4.78 \)), with an average tenure of 2.54 years (\( SD = 1.18 \)). The majority of participants (89%) had completed tertiary education.

Manipulation. The manipulation of abusive supervision followed the procedure outlined in Farh and Chen (2014). In the high abuse condition, participants received an email from their leader containing negative comments and complaints regarding the progress of a project under the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the project’s lack of success. The communication from the leader in this condition was characterized by strict criticism. In contrast, participants in the low abuse condition received an email that described their slow progress of the project in a neutral and gentle tone, without any explicit criticism. The communication in this condition did not involve harsh or negative remarks.

Research variable measurement
State mindfulness. We assessed state mindfulness with a shortened five-item scale from Brown and Ryan (2003). Participants rated the extent to which they agreed with survey questions (e.g. I get so focused on the Goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I am doing right now to get
there, R) based on their present feelings. All items were rated on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.91.

Counterproductive work behavior. CWB was measured using Dalal et al.’s (2009) scale (e.g. “Tried to avoid interacting with my supervisor”). We added the sentence, “Under the surroundings pandemic, what behaviors you tend to do”, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.95.

Control variables. Given that perception of COVID-19 event strength could affect employees’ deviant behaviors; we used the COVID-19 event strength scale developed by Li et al. (2021) to measure employees COVID-19 event perceptions. Additionally, we measured COVID-19 work-related use of ICTs after hours through three-items adapted from Xie et al. (2018). Finally, we also control age, gender and education, as they are also related to unethical behaviors.

Results
Manipulation checks. To confirm the effectiveness of our manipulation, we asked participants to assess the extent to which they perceived their supervisors to be abusive, using five-items developed by Mitchell and Ambrose (2007), ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Results of independent sample T-test demonstrate that abusive manipulation ($M_{high} = 2.64, SD_{high} = 1.14, M_{low} = 1.88, SD_{low} = 0.74, t (15) = 10.72, p < 0.001$ and Cohen’s $d = 0.70$) was effective in Study 1.

Analyses and results. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics and correlations among all variables. Mplus 8.0 was used in the following analysis. We first examined confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Results demonstrate that our four-factor model fit data well ($\chi^2 (df = 146) = 361.58, \chi^2/df = 2.48, p < 0.001$, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.90, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.90, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.10 and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.07) that better than (a) three-factor that combined CWB-supervisor and CWB-organization into one factor ($\chi^2 (df = 149) = 401.70, \chi^2/df = 2.70, p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.89, TLI = 0.87, RMSEA = 0.12 and SRMR = 0.07) and (b) one-factor model which combined all variables ($\chi^2 (df = 152) = 1053.57, \chi^2/df = 6.93, p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.60, TLI = 0.55, RMSEA = 0.21 and SRMR = 0.11). The difference of state mindfulness and CWB was significant in two conditions (Table 2). To examine mediation model, bootstrapping is conducted with abusive supervision (1 = low; 2 = high) as independent factor. Results (Table 3) indicate that abusive supervision is negatively related to state mindfulness ($B = -1.13, SE = 0.37, p < 0.01$), supporting hypothesis 1. State mindfulness is negatively related to CWB-supervisor ($B = -0.29, SE = 0.06, p < 0.001$) and CWB-organization ($B = -0.41, SE = 0.05, p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis 2.

Discussion
Study 1 provided causal evidence that state mindfulness mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and CWB. Interestingly, the obstructed effect was stronger between abusive supervision and CWB-organization competed to CWB-supervisor. One possible reason for the findings is that the perception of actively hostile treatment made employees directly show reciprocal feedback to supervisors rather than to organizations (Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007). It is important to acknowledge that the external validity of the study is limited due to the experimental manipulation employed (Loi et al., 2021). While the experimental design enhances internal validity by establishing causal relationships, the artificial nature of the experiment may restrict the generalizability of the findings to real-world organizational settings.

Study 2
Method
Sample and procedure. The purpose of Study 2 is a twofold: to replicate the findings of Study 1 using a different method and to investigate the moderating role of COVID-19 CSR in the
Table 1. Means, standard deviations and correlations among variables

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<td>6 Abusive supervision</td>
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<td>7 State mindfulness</td>
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<td>-0.29***</td>
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<td>8 CWB-supervisor</td>
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**Note(s):** N = 117. Abusive supervision (1 = low, 2 = high). CWB means counterproductive work behavior. The diagonals are the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each factor. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01 and ***p < 0.001 (two-tailed)

**Source(s):** Prepared by the authors
proposed moderated mediation model. To address the limitations of the experimental design in Study 1, we conducted a cross-sectional survey to enhance the external validity of the findings. Data collection for Study 2 took place in Spring 2021 using the widely utilized online survey platform Wenjuan.com in China. Participants were incentivized with CNY5 (approximately US$0.78) upon completing the questionnaires and passing a validity check. Initially, we collected 269 data from Shandong, Hebei and Heilongjiang. After deleting invalid data (i.e., employees who are not teleworking or failed in attention check), a total of 243 employees completed the survey were remained for the following analysis. Among them, 40.3% were males; 58.8% were married or living with a partner and their average age was 28.01 years ($SD = 6.30$).

Research variable measurement. Consistent with research goal, we add the sentence “Under remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic period...” before each item.

Abusive supervision. The same scale used in Study 1. The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.96.

State mindfulness. The same scale used in Study 1. The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.89.

Counterproductive work behavior. The same scale used in study 1. The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.88 (CWB-supervisor) and 0.92 (CWB-organization).

COVID-19 corporate social responsibility. COVID-19 CSR is measured with three questions ($\alpha = 0.93$) from CSR developed by Turker (2008) and Lu et al. (2020). All items are adapted to fit the context of COVID-19 (e.g., our company supports non-governmental organizations working in problematic areas during the COVID-19 pandemic).

### Table 2. Anova analysis

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<td>State mindfulness</td>
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<td>F</td>
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<td>109 = 8.76***</td>
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Note(s): N = 117. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01 and ***p < 0.001 (two-tailed)

Table 3. Testing the mediated model on CWB
Control variables. The same with Study 2.

Analyses and results. We checked the discriminant validity through CFA using Mplus Version 8.0 (Muthén and Muthén, 2017). Table 4 shows the initial correlations and descriptive statistics. The first one factor only accounted for 30.02% (<40%) of the variance. All variables were transformed into Z-scores before statistical analysis.

In Table 5, abusive supervision is negatively related to state mindfulness ($\beta = -0.44, p < 0.001$), which support hypothesis 1. State mindfulness is both negatively correlated to CWB-supervisor ($\beta = -0.17, p < 0.001$) and CWB-organization ($\beta = -0.50, p < 0.001$). The indirect effect of abusive supervision and CWB-supervisor is 0.09, with a 95% CI = [0.05, 0.13] not including zero, supporting hypothesis 2a. Meanwhile, the indirect effect of abusive supervision and CWB-organization is 0.20, with a 95% CI = [0.14, 0.26] not including zero, supporting Hypothesis 2b.

Next, we examine the moderated mediation model using COVID-19 CSR as a moderator. The results are presented in Table 6. The interactive effect between COVID-19 CSR and abusive supervision on state mindfulness is significant ($\beta = 0.19, p < 0.05$). Also, the interactive effect between COVID-19 CSR and abusive supervision on CWB-organization is significant ($\beta = -0.18, p < 0.01$) while not significant on CWB-supervisor ($\beta = -0.05, p > 0.05$). Therefore, Hypothesis 4b is supported while not 4a. To further explore how COVID-19 CSR affects state mindfulness and CWB, we adopt Mplus 8.0 to generate indirect effects of abusive supervision and CWB at different values of the moderator. Results (Table 7) demonstrate that the conditional indirect effect between abusive supervision and CWB supporting Hypotheses 5a and 5b.

For a better analysis, we plotted a simple slope for interaction effect that showed low ($-1 SD$) and high ($+1 SD$) levels of COVID-19 CSR. In Figures 2 and 3, we plot simple slopes analysis for low and high degree of COVID-19 CSR. Figure 2 demonstrate that the relationship between abusive supervision and state mindfulness is negative and significant ($\beta = -0.50, p < 0.001$) when COVID-19 CSR is low but not significant when COVID-19 CSR is high ($\beta = -0.13, p > 0.05$), supporting hypothesis 3. Figure 3 indicate that the relationship between abusive supervision and CWB-organization is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.44, p < 0.001$) when COVID-19 CSR is low but not significant when COVID-19 CSR is high ($\beta = 0.08, p > 0.05$).

Discussion
Results in Study 2 demonstrated that state mindfulness mediated the relationship between abusive supervision and CWB. Moreover, COVID-19 CSR moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and CWB-organization while not CWB-supervisor, which demonstrated that employees’ perception of CSR during COVID-19 can decrease willingness to destruct organizations due to social identity but is unable to compensate for emotional exhaustion and ego depletion caused by leaders itself. Although findings of Study 2 compensate the shortcomings of Study 1 that enhance the external validity, we want to further enrich the potential mechanism between abusive supervision and CWB under teleworking condition during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Study 3
Sample and procedure
Mixed methods can generate opportunities to enrich our knowledge of the behavioral and psychological processes that constitute mechanisms (Jia et al., 2023). While Study 1 and Study 2 provided quantitative evidence through an online experiment and a cross-sectional survey, respectively, they were unable to directly uncover the underlying mechanisms. To address
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
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<th>10</th>
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<td>–</td>
<td>–0.15*</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td>–0.21***</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–0.13*</td>
<td>–0.15*</td>
<td>–0.21***</td>
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<td>–</td>
<td>–0.15*</td>
<td>–0.15*</td>
<td>–0.21***</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–0.13*</td>
<td>–0.15*</td>
<td>–0.21***</td>
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<td>–0.15*</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.58***</td>
<td>–0.20***</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–0.13*</td>
<td>–0.15*</td>
<td>–0.21***</td>
<td>–0.20***</td>
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<td>0.58***</td>
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<td>–</td>
<td>–0.13*</td>
<td>–0.15*</td>
<td>–0.21***</td>
<td>–0.20***</td>
<td>–0.13*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abusive supervision</td>
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<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>–0.08</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>–0.04</td>
<td>–0.08</td>
<td>–0.05</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td></td>
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<td>State mindfulness</td>
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<td>–0.16*</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td>–0.39***</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CWB-supervisor</td>
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<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>–0.01</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>–0.04</td>
<td>–0.13*</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.74***</td>
<td>–0.49***</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWB-organization</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td>–0.04</td>
<td>–0.10</td>
<td>–0.16*</td>
<td>0.51***</td>
<td>–0.67***</td>
<td>0.69***</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 CSR</td>
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<td>1.26</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>–0.16*</td>
<td>–0.10</td>
<td>–0.15*</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>–0.08</td>
<td>–0.09</td>
<td>0.17***</td>
<td>–0.15*</td>
<td>–0.19*</td>
<td>0.90</td>
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<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.62</td>
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Note(s): N = 243. * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01 and *** p < 0.001 (two-tailed)
The diagonals are the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each factor

Source(s): Prepared by the authors
## Table 5.
Testing the mediation model on CWB

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
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<td>0.41</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>−0.17</td>
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<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>−0.03***</td>
<td>0.02*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 ES</td>
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<td>0.11</td>
<td>−0.29***</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 W ICTs</td>
<td>0.14***</td>
<td>0.27***</td>
<td>−0.21***</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive supervision</td>
<td>0.77***</td>
<td>0.54***</td>
<td>−0.44***</td>
<td>0.70***</td>
<td>0.32***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State mindfulness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Marriage</td>
<td>−0.17*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
<td>−0.10*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>COVID-19 CSR</td>
<td>0.17***</td>
<td>−0.06</td>
<td>0.26***</td>
<td>−0.50***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State mindfulness</td>
<td>−0.32***</td>
<td>0.62***</td>
<td>−0.22***</td>
<td>0.29***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS × COVID-19 CSR</td>
<td>0.19*</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
<td>−0.18*</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note(s): N = 243. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01 and ***p < 0.001 (two-tailed)
Source(s): Prepared by the authors

## Table 6.
Testing the moderated mediation model on CWB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>M1 (state mindfulness)</th>
<th>M2 (CWB-supervisor)</th>
<th>M3 (CWB-organization)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>−0.21</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>−0.09</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>−0.17*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.02*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 ES</td>
<td>−0.27**</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 W ICTs</td>
<td>−0.21**</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 CSR</td>
<td>0.17***</td>
<td>−0.06</td>
<td>−0.10*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State mindfulness</td>
<td>−0.32***</td>
<td>0.62***</td>
<td>−0.22***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS × COVID-19 CSR</td>
<td>0.19*</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
<td>−0.18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>F (8,233) = 8.30***</td>
<td>F (10,231) = 35.01***</td>
<td>F (10,231) = 27.54***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note(s): N = 243; COVID-19 CSR refers to COVID-19 corporate social responsibility. AS refers to abusive supervision. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01 and ***p < 0.001 (two-tailed)
Source(s): Prepared by authors

## Table 7.
Conditional direct and indirect effects between abusive supervision and CWB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>CWB-supervisor Effect</th>
<th>Boot 95%</th>
<th>Boot 95%</th>
<th>CWB-organization Effect</th>
<th>Boot 95%</th>
<th>Boot 95%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct effect</td>
<td>$M - 1SD$</td>
<td>0.86***</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.50***</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect effect</td>
<td>$M + 1SD$</td>
<td>0.47***</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>−0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional indirect effect</td>
<td>$M - 1SD$</td>
<td>0.09*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M + 1SD$</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note(s): Indirect effect was significant if the confidence interval did not contain zero
Source(s): Prepared by the authors
this gap, we conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews to enrich our understanding of the potential mechanisms (Bhaskar et al., 2022). Respondents were selected through contacts in participants from Shandong and Heilongjiang, using a snowball sampling technique. These interviews aimed to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employees who were forced to transition teleworking within Chinese organizations.

A total of 24 semi-structured interviews participated interviews during July 2023. Of these, 75% were females, and were aged between 25 and 50 years, with a tenure in their current job of between 1 and 25 years. Most of them (85%) got the bachelor’s degree. All the participants were employed by their organizations during the pandemic and were forced to adopt teleworking, who match our research aim appropriately.

Each interview lasted between 30 and 40 min, utilizing the Zoom platform. During the interviews, we encouraged interviewers to talk freely about their experiences, short stories and examples and discuss their real emotions and attitudes as much as possible. The interviews comprised five open-ended questions, starting with the sentence “Please recall your experience during the COVID-19 pandemic”. All these questions aim to explore how leadership changes, due to forced teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic, impact employees’ behaviors (Aleksić et al., 2023; AlMazrouei, 2023; Becker et al., 2022). The sample questions like “Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed your working model? If yes, how and if

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**Figure 2.**
Slope plot for moderation analysis between abusive supervision and state mindfulness.

**Figure 3.**
Slope plot for moderation analysis between abusive supervision and CWB-organization.

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not, why not?” “How has forced teleworking affected your managers’ leadership? Please describe it as much as possible” “Has the forced teleworking influenced your personal resource? If yes, what are the important resources, if not, why not?” “Has the forced teleworking impacted your work behaviors or performance, if yes, please describe it as much as possible, if not, why not?” “Have your organizations done several behaviors during COVID-19 that pride you? If yes, please describe it as much as possible, if not, why not?”

Subsequently, we followed grounded theory because it provides “greater explanatory and predictive power” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In detail, we adopted the procedure of the proceduralised grounded theory, that is, open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Strauss, 1987). To ensure appropriate coding and decrease potential bias, an external coder independently reviewed the coding scheme and wherever the agreement was more than 75% we retained the codes (Bhaskar et al., 2022; Gabriel et al., 2023; Strauss and Corbin, 1994). Three stages were taken in our quantitative analysis (Bhaskar et al., 2022; Jia et al., 2023; Strauss and Corbin, 1994). In the first stage, we conducted open coding to generate common themes as the first-order codes and allocated tentative categories. For example, first-order codes captured employees who acknowledged that their company undertakes social responsibility, expressing emotions, perceptions and behaviors during COVID-19 in the context of forced teleworking. As the data analysis, some of the categories were persevered, and others were abandoned. For example, these categories unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic and far from our topic were abandoned (Jia et al., 2023; Bhaskar et al., 2022). Importantly, answers repeated by different participants were only recorded once. Once collected, the responses were aggregated and then classified under themes (AlMazrouei, 2023). In the second stage, we consolidated the first-order codes into second-order theoretical categories and concentrated on connections and differences among these categories (Gioia et al., 2012). For instance, (1) some employees complained about supervisors’ attitudes and unfair treatment, which further increased their working stress and insecurity. Meanwhile, they present their helplessness, anger, anxiety, worries and emotional exhaustion caused by abusive treatment; (2) employees presented that their company had donated funds for society and their emotions included pride and excitement. Finally, we generated aggregated theoretical dimensions based on the second-order theoretical categories (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). To further address the reliability of our aggregate themes, we enlisted the help of two independent professors who were expert in qualitative analysis research. We provided them the codebook. Then, using the coding comparison feature in NVivo, they independently coded the data. From this, we calculated an average agreement rate of 87%, with a weighted Cohen’s κ of 0.78.

Findings
Our analysis was guided by two essential theories, the COR theory and the social identity theory that may help us find answers to our research question and our participants encountered challenges and changes while trying to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, such as forced teleworking. This study explored employees’ perceptions and emotions of changes in working conditions during COVID-19. Four themes were identified: (1) Communication changes between leaders and employees; (2) Personal resources and personal demands; (3) Negative work performance and behavior and (4) Organizational contributions to society during COVID-19.

Findings 1: communication changes between leaders and employees. The shift to teleworking due to the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on employees, introducing a new working model that significantly affects their communication with coworkers and leaders. Participants in the study expressed their challenges and frustrations related to this unexpected working condition. For instance, a 29-year-old female employee
shared her experience, stating, “... I used to have face-to-face communication with my boss regarding the project, allowing me to discuss and modify its contents directly. However, with forced teleworking, this direct method is impeded, and I am now required to create PowerPoint presentations and other materials to explain my work, which can be quite monotonous. (#4)” Furthermore, an English teacher at a high school highlighted the difficulties faced in the transition to online teaching, stating, “... Online teaching may appear easy, but it actually involves a lot of work. However, leaders often perceive that you’re not fulfilling your responsibilities and question your dedication to the job... ... (#6)”

**Findings 2: personal resources and personal demands.** The uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic have had a substantial impact on employees’ psychological and mental resources, as revealed by participants in the study. One employee expressed their concerns, stating, “I find myself constantly worrying about my work and feeling anxious and fearful about the ongoing development of the COVID-19 situation. These worries sometimes make it difficult for me to concentrate, and I am constantly preoccupied with concerns about the future” (#1). Another employee highlighted the challenges they faced in demonstrating their value to the company in the context of remote work, stating, “... I often feel depleted of energy when dealing with work difficulties because I lack a clear method to demonstrate the significance of my contributions to the company ... ...” (#10), these responses shed light on the psychological and emotional toll experienced by employees due to the uncertainty and unpredictability brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Findings 3: negative work performance and behavior.** The absence of self-regulation and self-control capabilities among employees has been observed to contribute to the occurrence of destructive behaviors and decreased productivity. Several employees interviewed in this study (>10) admitted to engaging in harmful actions targeting their supervisors or organizations. For example, a male employee, aged 26, shared his experience, stating, “Sometimes, I intentionally neglect WeChat messages sent from my supervisor. In any way, she does not understand what I’m doing, maybe I’m playing game ...” (#9). These accounts highlight the detrimental consequences that can arise when employees feel a lack of accountability and struggle with self-discipline.

**Findings 4: organizational contributions to society during COVID-19.** Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous organizations have demonstrated their commitment to supporting society and overcoming challenges together. An interviewee, a 27-year-old female educational worker, expressed her appreciation by stating, “... Our company has opened up free access to video courses for primary and secondary schools... I am immensely proud of this initiative, and it has brought joy to my children as well” (#20). Additionally, a financial worker mentioned their company’s donation of 1 m, further illustrating the collective efforts made by corporates to contribute to the greater good.

**Discussion**
The results of Study 3 provide additional evidence for the results of Studies 1 and 2. The semi-structured interview has enriched our knowledge of the potential mechanism between abusive supervision and CWB and the moderating role of CSR. Also, the analysis of the interviewees’ statement compensates for the limitations of quantitative methods.

**General discussion**
Based on the COR theory and the social identity theory, this study explored how and when abusive supervision triggered CWB during forced teleworking amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Results from Study 1 showed that state mindfulness mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and CWB. Besides, Study 2 delved into the potential
moderating role of COVID-19 CSR. By examining individuals’ perceptions of COVID-19 CSR, we sought to explore whether it could alleviate the link between abusive supervision and CWB, providing valuable insights for future crisis situations. While previous research has primarily focused on micro-CSR in ordinary contexts (Raza et al., 2021; Van Dam et al., 2018), this study delves into the specific micro-CSR practices adopted by organizations to effectively navigate the challenges posed by COVID-19. Results show that the role of COVID-19 CSR can only impede employees’ rebellious behaviors toward organizations. Even if organization undertakes social responsibility, the direct unfair thoughts caused by abusive supervision cannot be reduced. Overall, we find that state mindfulness mediated the effect of abusive supervision on both CWB-supervisor and CWB-organization. The indirect effect between abusive supervision and CWB towards the organization is weaker when COVID-19 CSR is perceived as high. However, the reduction in effects is not significant when it comes to CWB toward supervisors. To validate the robustness of the earlier findings, Study 3 was conducted, providing further supports and reinforcing the outcomes obtained in Studies 1 and 2. By employing a mixed methods approach, incorporating experimental designs, cross-sectional surveys and semi-structured interviews, this study offers comprehensive insights into the relationship between abusive supervision, state mindfulness, COVID-19 CSR and CWB.

Theoretical implications
First and foremost, it is essential and valuable to explore what leadership changes impact employees’ following behaviors when experiencing forced teleworking due to major crisis (e.g. COVID-19). It is worth noting that our study contributes to the existing body of knowledge as one of the pioneering empirical studies investigating how abusive supervision impacted CWB in the context of forced teleworking. Regarding workplace changes, forced teleworking decreased effective face-to-face communication between leaders and employees, triggering invisible barriers contributing to abusive treatment. According to the COR theory, we shed light on how abusive supervision influenced CWB both in organization and supervisor dimensions and identified the conditions under which this negative relationship can be mitigated. These findings not only deepen our understanding of abusive supervision during the COVID-19 pandemic but also offer a fresh perspective on the potential mechanisms underlying the link between abusive supervision and CWB.

Secondly, we bridge the gap in research on mindfulness in the workplace by introducing state mindfulness as an essential resource that abusive experiences can deplete. Previous research mainly concentrated on the mediating role of injustice and work stress in the relationship between abusive supervision and CWB (Mackey et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the unique circumstances of abusive supervision during the COVID-19 pandemic, characterized by forced teleworking, make it challenging for employees to maintain present moment awareness. According to the COR theory, valued resources are important for employees facing major crises (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Regarding the perniciousness and specificity of COVID-19, state mindfulness plays an essential mediating role between abusive treatment and deviant behaviors. Therefore, this study not only enhances the understanding of state mindfulness but also highlights its positive impacts on individuals’ psychological and mental well-being.

Thirdly, our research identifies the buffering role of CSR in society and communities to cope with the challenges posed by COVID-19, indicating its potential effect to mitigate the adverse effects of abusive supervision on CWB. The above description highlights the contingency conditions under the COVID-19 pandemic, forced teleworking and abusive supervision, which can trigger destructive behaviors among employees. Although our results
suggest that COVID-19 CSR is effective in coping with abusive supervision-CWB, the perception may not be able to mitigate the harmful effects of abusive supervision on CWB-supervisor. These findings not only extend the application of micro-CSR to the COVID-19 context, where employees tend to amplify the positive outcomes of organizations’ contributions to society due to in-group preference (Ashforth et al., 2008; He and Harris, 2020; Hur et al., 2021) but also enrich the literature on CSR in the context of societal crises (Aleksić et al., 2023).

Practical implications
This research has critical practical implications that can guide managers in addressing the challenges associated with abusive supervision and forced teleworking, particularly in major crises like COVID-19. First, it suggests managers should minimize abusive treatment when experiencing uncertain and severe disasters. To address this issue, organizations and managers should prioritize enhancing the transparency of work-related information and promote effective communication between supervisors and employees (Wang et al., 2022), which can reduce workplace ambiguity and conflicts.

Second, managers should take improving employees’ state mindfulness into consideration. According to Yu et al. (2023), state mindfulness is valuable in helping employees cope with stressors. Hence, several strategies that can help employees enhance state mindfulness worth trying. Initially, organizations should introduce the concept of workplace mindfulness to their employees, which can strengthen their understanding of mindfulness. Then, managers can combine mindfulness exercises (e.g. yoga and 21-day meditation programs) and mindfulness classes, which is more beneficial for employees’ degree of mindfulness. In addition to regular exercises, organizations can leverage work breaks or designate specific periods for mindfulness classes or interventions. Also, with teleworking becoming widespread, organizations can take online training that assists employees in nonwork time.

Third, companies should pay more attention to facilitating CSR communication to enhance employees’ perception of CSR related to society and communities. Organizations can leverage various social media platforms such as BiliBili, Twitter, Instagram as well as incorporate CSR discussions into employees’ daily meetings (Hur et al., 2021; Raza et al., 2021). As CSR activities effectively enhance employees’ perception of a firm’s CSR direction, it is essential for organizations to encourage subordinates to participate in voluntary actions during the COVID-19 period. Notably, COVID-19 CSR initiatives can foster a sense of pride and in-group preference towards the organization among employees, as they contribute to the organization’s social reputation and foster a sense of identification, particularly in the face of unexpected and ambiguous conditions.

Limitation and future research
This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the findings may be impacted by common method bias because all measures were self-reported (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Therefore, we suggest future research can take multi-source data (i.e. supervisors and coworkers) to further validate our findings. Second, the cross-sectional survey design employed in this study limits the ability to establish causal relationships (Jia et al., 2023), particularly regarding the mitigating role of CSR. It is better to adopt experimental and longitudinal designs in future research. Thirdly, we examined the positive role of CSR for society and communities that are outside the companies. Future research can further explore the role of CSR for employees, stakeholders and customers (Hu et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2023).
Conclusion

Drawing on the COR theory and the social identity theory, we tested our conceptual model through three studies both in quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings indicated that state mindfulness mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and CWB. Furthermore, we found that COVID-19 CSR has a significant impact on reducing employees’ rebellious behaviors toward organizations, although it may not mitigate the negative effects on CWB directed at supervisors. On the one hand, we expand the literature on abusive supervision and state mindfulness in the condition of COVID-19 and forced teleworking and integrated two theories to explain how and when abusive supervision impact CWB. On the other hand, we suggest that organizations and managers should take regulated training practices to enhance employees’ state manfulness. Also, it is important for organizations to take voluntary activities when facing disasters so that CSR would be increased.

References


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