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Abusive supervision in organizations: Power, dependency and employee voice in labour relations

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Introduction

The issue of power in organizations has a long tradition in sociological theory, as well as in industrial relations and management science. The analysis of organizations through the lenses of power and domination made it possible to explore the processes through which elite social groups gain and retain their advantages both within and outside organizations as well as the mechanisms of allocation and distribution of valued resources. While industrial and organizational sociology has been focused more on how power relations shape social structures and contribute to wider societal processes, especially social and economic inequality and discrimination, management science has been more driven by the business logic of ensuring a firm's efficiency and effectiveness. Despite some differences in the sociological and management domains, both rely on the importance of understanding power in organizations and its social and economic effects.

While power can be located in or outside organizations (for a detailed review of the interconnected sites of organizational power, see Fleming and Spicer 2014), sociology has a strong tradition of focusing on the external environments, that is, the social, political and cultural contexts within which organizations reside. The question of power inside organizations – including the struggles within formal organizational boundaries for resources, the systems of control, and the manner of supervising and exercising power and domination over the employees – is most often raised in the framework of the managerial approach. To date,

a good deal of literature that stems from the ideas of control over sources of uncertainty and valuable resources proposed by Crozier (1964) and by Pfeffer and Salanick (1974) has focused on power relations between organizational units. Another stream of research refers to employer–employee conflict, primarily focusing on trade unions and other forms of employee collective representation. Finally, a number of studies focus on interpersonal power between individuals. This micro level of analysing power at work, embodied in individual behaviour and attitudinal and emotional reactions, is now highly influenced by psychological approaches. Under these lenses, firstly, the understanding of 'power' is often excessively wide, understood as an actor's general ability to influence another's behaviour. Secondly, psychological approaches focus primarily on personality traits or individual positions in social networks as the main antecedents of power advantages.

To address these two gaps, this chapter goes beyond 'psychological' explanations of power relations in organizations and adopts a sociological perspective on the micro level, or the level of individual behaviour in work roles. My study is based on the Weberian understanding of power, which implies real or potential conflicts of interest and the use of some form of coercion, thus excluding voluntary actions under the processes of social influence.

The micro level of organizational analysis reveals several important features of the ambivalent nature of power. Firstly, power is a necessary condition for achieving organizational goals, mobilizing resources and enhancing performance. It helps to provide regular, predictable and coordinated social interactions, ensures rule compliance and prevents conflicts and anarchy. At the same time, there is also a 'dark side' to interpersonal power which is destructive for organizations. The present study focuses on a phenomenon which embodies the negative aspects of managerial power – 'abusive supervision' (AS), understood here as a 'sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact' (Tepper 2000, 178). Abusive supervision leads to a broad range of dysfunctional outcomes – at the individual (e.g., psychological distress, emotional burnout, withdrawal behaviours), team (decline in performance) and organizational (climate of hostility and distrust, low morale among employees) levels (Starratt and Grandy 2010; Tepper et al. 2017). In this way, AS may be considered as an example of the motivational ambivalence of power (Ledeneva 2018): although declared as a means of maintaining order in the workplace and performance enhancement, AS, in fact, is often actually used to strengthen the personal power of managers and/or to camouflage the lack of skills for effective leadership.

Secondly, exercising managerial functions requires administrative and economic resources to foster desirable behaviour on the part of employees. The power to hire and fire and to implement incentives and penalties is often seen as the most important condition for managing people. However, managers' resource advantages create socio-economic dependency on the part of employees and thus may lead to the misuse or abuse of the superiors' power. I turn to the arguments of social exchange theory (SET) (Emerson 1962; 1976), according to which power advantages stem from having valued and deficient resources that other social actors cannot do without and are not able to gain from an alternative source. The SET conception of gaining power seems to be very relevant for the analysis of employment relations. Since the elasticity of demand for labour force is normally associated with the inelasticity of capital and wages supply, employers have power advantages over employees (Poggi 2001). This is especially relevant for the analysis of employment relations in Russia, considering the fact that employees have become increasingly dependent on employers in recent years, thereby tilting the balance of power in the latter's favour (Tikhonova and Karavay 2018). Thus, I address another type of ambivalence (Ledeneva 2018), namely, functional ambivalence of power advantages at the disposal of supervisors. These advantages may provide both positive and negative results; they can be a tool for both increasing and decreasing subordinates' motivation and performance.

Thirdly, AS, being a form of socio-psychological violence, normally assigns the subordinate the role of a passive victim. Managers' abuse of power claims absolute control over employees and demands their unquestioning obedience. Indeed, extant research shows that AS leads to subordinates' emotional burnout and lower levels of self-esteem, thus implying the exercising of predominantly externally driven behaviours of employees. Nevertheless, the latter still have opportunities to oppose the abusive power of their employers and supervisors. Among the resources available to them are their highly valued professional skills, unique expertise (Crozier 1964), social networking and the fact that they have alternatives to their current employers. Moreover, individual employees can restore the balance of power by engaging in proactive 'political behaviour' aimed at accessing valuable organizational resources. Many academics share the idea that organizations are inherently 'political arenas' (Mintzberg 1985), since they are sites for the continuous contestation of employer and employee interests, and the struggle for resources is inevitable in every formal organization. Hence, there is another face of functional ambivalence: although power abuse by managers implies loyalty and obedience from subordinates, the latter

may react in a quite opposite way by employing active coping strategies, including, for example, voice behaviour.

To sum up, AS can be seen as embodying the functional and motivational ambivalence of power in organizations in three ways: (1) the ambivalence of the 'positive' and 'negative' sides of managerial power; (2) the ambivalence of the outcomes of managerial power advantages; and (3) the ambivalence of employee reactions to managerial abuses of power.

In recent decades, research on AS has been conducted mainly in the United States and Western Europe. To date, there have been no studies on AS in Russia, except a small-scale exploratory study (Balabanova et al. 2018a). Extant research also focuses primarily on individual-level antecedents of AS, such as the personality traits of supervisors and subordinates and the quality of their relationships, without paying much attention to the socio-economic bases of 'negative' managerial power. Finally, there is still little empirical evidence to suggest that employees subjected to AS do not simply behave as passive victims but try to restore the balance of power through proactive efforts (Wee et al. 2017).

My analysis is based on a sample of 1,100 non-supervisory respondents across 10 industries and nine geographical regions in Russia. It adds to the literature in three ways. Firstly, it sheds light on manifestations of AS as a form of power abuse in the underexplored cultural context of Russia. Secondly, in line with SET propositions, I test the importance of employee economic dependency in predicting AS. Thirdly, my study examines employee voice strategies as proactive reactions to AS aimed at restoring the balance of subordinate–supervisor power relations.

Ambivalence of power in organizations: abusive supervision as a manifestation of 'negative' power

Power is an essential attribute of organizations, a condition for the consistency of interactions and the achievement of organizational goals. Understood as 'the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance' (Weber 1968, 53), power is often necessary for the implementation of managerial functions. Over the last two decades, several studies have examined manager–worker power relations. Among these, Radaev (1994; 2009) examined managers' strategies of establishing and legitimizing authority in the Russian context. Being constructed in the intersection of the two axes – the rigidity/flexibility of the administrative hierarchy and the formality/

informality of labour relations – these strategies were described in terms of *bureaucratism*, *paternalism*, *partnership* and *fraternalism*. All four strategies refer to 'positive' power as the ability to achieve organizational goals. Likewise, the qualitative study by Balabanova et al. (2018b) described four managerial styles of owners and CEOs in privately owned Russian business organizations (the *wild capitalist*, *rationalist*, *passive* and *statist* styles). Although three of the four styles were found to be highly authoritarian and exploitative, all of them were aimed at increasing business profitability in the high power distance context of Russia.

However, a high degree of formal authority and economic resources obtained by managers/supervisors may give rise to the abuse of power. In this case, this produces 'negative power' (Rus 1980; Simon and Oakes 2006), focused on furthering one's personal interests instead of pursuing organizational goals. The negative aspects of managerial power are manifested in the phenomenon of AS (Tepper et al. 2009; 2017; Lian et al. 2012), which is close to other less frequently used terms such as petty tyranny, supervisor aggression, supervisor undermining (Tepper et al. 2017) or bullying (Rainey and Melzer 2021).

The most widely recognized definition of AS – 'sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact' – was suggested by Tepper (2000, 178). This understanding implies that AS is a behavioural phenomenon, which includes the discrete, observed actions of a supervisor towards her/his subordinates. Tepper's (2000) AS indicators refer both to overt emotional aggression towards subordinates and to hostility, displayed as psychological pressure, unethical behaviours and rhetoric that might be insulting for subordinates – uncontrolled outbursts, violating promises, refusal of requests, public ridicule or 'sabotage' towards employees.

However, AS is not limited to 'psychological' phenomena which reflect supervisors' poor impulse control. The abuse of power also includes subordinate-targeted behaviours that violate employees' interests related to their day-to-day work activities, material rewards or professional development. Among these are, for example, assigning unachievable tasks, obstructionism, depriving employees of important resources, violating employees' interests, inappropriately blaming employees for others' mistakes, and ignoring or taking credit for achievements. These adverse work-related practices are perceived as offensive and may have the same, if not stronger, damaging effects on employees as 'emotional blowouts' by their supervisors.

Speaking more broadly, this idea behind the classification of AS into two types relates to the understanding that employment relations

comprise two main aspects: economic (material, financial) and social (relational, emotional). This division underlies, for example, the well-known classification of psychological contracts (PCs) into transactional and relational (Rousseau 1995). Transactional PCs emphasize transparent obligations associated with monetary rewards, whereas relational PCs include broad, socio-emotional obligations such as support, trust and respect. Following this recognized classification, we propose that AS may also be divided into 'transactional' and 'relational' aspects. However, to date, AS is interpreted mainly from a socio-emotional perspective, without considering the economic ('transactional') aspects of subordinate–supervisor interactions.

To address this gap, I developed indicators of AS which refer to work-related adverse events and day-to-day managerial practices associated with economic resources, which will be presented below.

Ambivalence of administrative and economic resources as sources of managerial power: a condition for management and the basis for the abuse of power

Previous research on AS has been based mainly on psychological, individual-level, theoretical explanations such as social learning theory and workplace role models (Mawritz et al. 2012), conservation of resources theory (Mackey et al. 2013), affective events theory (Eissa and Lester 2017) or leader–member exchange theory (Kim et al. 2019). In line with these approaches, AS is associated with the personality traits or demographic characteristics of the supervisor and/or subordinates. Among these are employees' negative affectivity, low conscientiousness and high neuroticism, young age and short tenure (Tepper et al. 2001; Starratt and Grandy 2010; Zhang and Bednall 2016), and supervisors' Machiavellianism or low emotional intelligence (Wisse and Sleebos 2016; Zhang and Bednall 2016). Other studies focus on other micro-level antecedents of AS, such as perceived supervisor–subordinate dissimilarity and relationship conflict (Tepper et al. 2011).

The general gap in the above-mentioned perspectives is that organizational practices and resources at the disposal of managers receive little attention as antecedents of AS (for exceptions see Mawritz et al. 2014; Zhang and Bednall 2016). These resources are important for implementing core managerial functions such as coordination, motivation and control. At the same time, managers' administrative and economic advantages put subordinates into a vulnerable position, making them

dependent on the valued resources which they receive through their interactions with supervisors. In turn, this dependency may become fertile ground for the abuse of superiors' power. As Cook and Rice (2002, 712) explain, 'extreme dependence often invites the abuse of power in social relations, since the power disadvantaged view themselves as having few alternatives'. That is why current research should be complemented by sociological explanations of the nature of AS. For this purpose, SET (Blau 1964; Emerson 1976; Molm 1991) seems to be the most relevant approach, although it is under-regarded at this time.

SET assumes that all social interactions constitute processes of exchange of resources and favours that create mutual obligations (Homans 1958; Emerson 1962; Blau 1964). The balance (perceived equivalency) of these exchanges is the basic condition for the continuation of the interactions. This idea is widely used in research on employee–organization relationships, especially in studies on psychological contracts (e.g., Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005; Coyle-Shapiro and Shore 2007).

If exchanges occur between the owners of unequal resources, the balance is restored through power-dependence relations (Emerson 1962; Gargiulo and Ertug 2014). A 'provider', who controls deficit resources that other people crucially need and cannot get from an alternative source, achieves power over them. 'Providers' are able to impose conditions for delivering resources, to compel those who depend upon them to engage in certain actions, to manipulate by rewards and sanctions, and to convert economic dependency into moral obligations.

Since all formal organizations can be seen as hierarchical social structures characterized by unbalanced employee–employer power relationships, SET can explain many aspects of supervisor–subordinate interactions. The more valuable and indispensable resources a supervisor obtains and the fewer alternative sources there are for a subordinate to acquire these resources, the more personal power a supervisor has over her/his subordinate. These resources may include, for example, basic payments or bonuses, performance appraisals, access to equipment or information, and opportunities for professional training or career promotions. The more personal control a supervisor has over these resources, the more personally dependent a subordinate is. In cases where subordinates do not meet their supervisors' expectations and requirements or where they demonstrate some form of disloyalty, supervisors can cut off subordinates' access to those resources.

Perspectives of power-dependence analysis are mentioned in the literature on aggressive behaviour in organizations. Among these, there is evidence that employees who are mistreated by their supervisors are often

powerless because of their resource dependency on their aggressors (Einarsen and Skogstad 1996; Tepper et al. 2009; Sharma 2018). A number of studies examined power asymmetry between managers and their subordinates that derive from fewer resources at the subordinates' disposal. Following Thau et al. (2004), I consider the lack of attractive job alternatives as one of the most reliable indicators of employee dependence. I expect that those with no alternatives at the moment of hiring are more dependent and thus vulnerable to AS. Thus, I formulate the first hypothesis suggesting that low-resource employees are more likely to be subjected to AS.

H1: 'Zero-option' employment positively predicts AS.

'Zero-option' employment is closely connected to job insecurity – a 'perceived threat to the continuity and stability of employment as it is currently experienced' (Shoss 2017, 1914). Since job insecurity increases employee vulnerability, one can expect that employees with high perceived job insecurity are more dependent on their supervisors and this dependency results in supervisors abusing their power. Thus, I propose:

H2: Perceived job insecurity positively predicts AS.

According to previous research, employee dependency is negatively associated with perceived employability, or an employee's perception that they have attractive job alternatives to their current employers (Thau et al. 2004). Indeed, from the SET perspective, it is crucially important that AS is more often experienced by workers scoring low on employability (Tepper 2000). Later, Tepper et al. (2009) associated employee independence with intentions to quit, implying that employees who have concrete plans to leave their organization are less reliant on their current supervisor. Specifically, I hypothesize:

H3: Perceived employability negatively predicts AS.

The next two hypotheses refer to organizational practices that create resource-based employee dependency and power asymmetry between managers and their subordinates. As Martinko et al. (2013) noted, organizational antecedents of AS have still received little direct study. Specifically, to date, there are no studies examining the direct effects of organizational practices such as reward systems on AS.

The literature on meritocracy, defined as a principle that prescribes that only the most deserving are rewarded, gives some idea about how

organizational practices are linked with power asymmetry and employee dependency. The opposition between 'meritocratic' and 'anti-meritocratic' principles of social organization in their ability to predict AS could be expected in the area of reward systems (Pfeffer and Fong 2005; Castilla and Benard 2010). Merit- or performance-based criteria of rewards are usually defined at the highest levels of the organizational hierarchy. These criteria imply depersonalized 'rules of the game' and thus give little personal power to a discrete line manager. Contrary to this, if rewards depend upon the subjective evaluations of immediate supervisors, one can expect that the latter will obtain considerable power, since they control an important resource. This informality refers to 'chaotic workplaces' within which managers and workers do not have clear understandings of their work roles or clear procedures for social interactions. The informal, unclear or contradictory expectations and responsibilities facilitate 'laissez-faire' leadership, which is associated with supervisory hostile behaviour as a mechanism to regain power over the labour process (Hodson et al. 2006; Skogstad et al. 2007; Roscigno et al. 2009; Rainey and Melzer 2021). Hence, subordinates' material well-being will depend on their bosses' will, whereby the latter may be tempted to abuse their power. Based on the above, I expect that meritocratic criteria of rewards are negative predictors of AS, while subjective and 'relationship-based' criteria breed AS in organizations:

H4. Performance-based payment negatively predicts AS.

H5. Reward systems based on supervisors' subjective evaluations and supervisor–subordinate personal relations positively predict AS.

Ambivalence of employee responses to abusive supervision: falling victim or breaking the 'spiral of abuse'?

The common narrative in the current literature is that AS, creating detrimental psychological working conditions, is counterproductive for organizations. The overwhelming majority of studies suggest that AS is associated with affective, cognitive and behavioural injury and focus on passive employee reactions to AS such as psychological distress, withdrawal and detachment, emotional burnout, alcohol use or leaving the organization (Bamberger and Bacharach 2006; Tepper et al. 2009;

2017). In general, scholars tend to consider employees subjected to AS helpless victims whose behavioural reactions normally fall within the *exit/loyalty/neglect* options, according to the EVLN (exit-voice-loyalty-neglect) scheme, which was developed by Hirschman (1970) and later by Farrell (1983).

What about the 'political' option from the EVLN scheme, namely, *voice*, defined as 'any attempt … to change rather than to escape from an objectionable state of affairs' (Hirschman 1970, 30)? In recent decades, voice behaviour has received considerable attention in organizational studies, being understood as employees' proactive upward verbal behaviour, the expression of ideas, information or opinions focused on affecting organizational functional change in the work context and speaking up on important issues and problems in organizations. Notably, this is *upward* communication, that is, it is directed to someone in a higher organizational position (Van Dyne et al. 2003; Maynes and Podsakoff 2014; Morrison 2014).

Existing research suggests different types of employee voice, of which the most important is the distinction between a 'supportive' and a 'challenging' voice (Burris 2012). The first one 'is intended to stabilize or preserve existing organizational policies or practices' (Burris 2012, 853). A supportive voice can be exercised through employee involvement in decision-making processes or discretionary speaking up in response to a threat to the status quo. In contrast, a challenging (or change-oriented) voice 'involves speaking up in ways intended to alter, modify, or destabilize generally accepted sets of practices, policies, or strategic directions that make up the status quo' in organizations (Burris 2012, 852). The latter is riskier for employees since managers often perceive challenging messages as threatening and thus react negatively.

Can we expect voice behaviour from employees faced with AS? Some authors argue that employees who are subjected to AS are less likely to use their voices (Burris et al. 2008; Farh and Chen 2014; Chamberlin et al. 2017) because a psychologically safe environment is a key condition for employees to voice organizational concerns (Detert and Burris, 2007). However, there is an opposite, counter-intuitive assumption that, instead of withdrawal behaviours, employees faced with AS will increase their voice. The arguments for this assumption are as follows. Firstly, employees using a supportive voice may expect their managers to regard them as loyal and thus become more accepting of them (Burris 2012) or, at least, less hostile. Secondly, upward communication may be an active positive coping strategy in response to a stressful environment, specifically aimed at managing the psychological distress caused by AS (Carver et al. 1989), in order to prevent

future AS. Thirdly, messages, even challenging ones, may be valuable for an organization, hence voice behaviour can have positive image effects for employees (Burris et al. 2013; Grant 2013). Fourthly, challenging voice behaviour refers to 'political actions' as self-interested behaviour aimed at achieving an actor's objectives (Ferris et al. 2019) and thus may be considered as a way to protect employee interests.

To sum up these arguments in terms of SET, voice behaviour may be a coping strategy which restores the balance of power between managers and subordinates. Voice behaviour may be a way of breaking the 'spiral of abuse' by increasing employees' instrumental value to their supervisors (Wee et al. 2017). 'Value enhancement' may reduce employees' dependency on supervisors and thus restore the balance of power. This is especially important considering that supervisors' power advantage over subordinates is not stable and may change over time; power may shift from one party to another in a workplace (Sturm and Antonakis 2015). When the level of supervisor dependence on the subordinate is higher, the supervisor is more likely to withdraw her/his abusive behaviour towards the subordinate. Thus, we can consider the 'negative' power of managers embodied in AS in terms of functional ambivalence (Ledeneva 2018). Contrary to the expectation of employees' loyalty and obedience, AS may give rise to a counter-intuitive and paradoxical reaction – employee voice as a means to restore employee–employer power symmetry.

From what is known about voice behaviour as a means of restoring the manager–employee power balance, it is reasonable to hypothesize:

H6: AS positively predicts employee voice behaviour.

Method

Sample and procedure

The sampling procedure was based on official data from the Russian Federal State Statistics Service about the population of eight Russian federal districts plus Moscow and the proportions of employees in different industries. Based on these, 10 industries were selected with a prevalence of privately owned industrial and service organizations. The data collection, using standardized face-to-face interviews, occurred in September–November 2018 and was administered by one of the leading Russian polling firms specializing in opinion polls and marketing research.

The obtained sample included 1,100 non-supervisory respondents having completed higher education across 10 industries and nine geographical regions. Respondents were engineers (47 per cent), accountants and other specialists in finance and insurance (23 per cent), non-supervisory managers and administrative staff (17 per cent) and IT specialists (13 per cent). Fifty-five per cent of the participants were men. The average age was 38.6 years old and the average tenure was 6.4 years.

Measures

Abusive supervision

Five 'psychological' indicators of AS were adopted from a shortened version of Tepper's (2000) AS measure (Mitchell and Ambrose 2007). Respondents used a five-point response scale from 1 = 'Never' to 5 = 'Very often'. These widely acknowledged measures have been extended by additional items which refer to the above-mentioned 'transactional', economic-based AS. To validate these measures I conducted a factor analysis. The test returned a two-factor solution which fully corresponded to my theoretical arguments (see Table 7.1). Both factors had satisfactory loadings (above 0.7) with no significant cross-loadings, and the total variance accounted for was 73 per cent.

Antecedents of AS: employee dependency

'Zero-option' employment was measured with a one-item variable. Respondents marked the extent to which they agreed with the statement relating to how they got their current job: 'It was almost the only option of employment for me.'

Perceived job insecurity was measured with one item on a five-point Likert-type scale, asking employees: 'What do you think is the likelihood that you lose your current job?' ('1' stood for 'It is quite unlikely' and '5' stood for 'It is highly possible').

Perceived employability was measured with a three-item measure on a five-point Likert-type scale, asking employees: 'If you lose your current job, how confident are you that you can find another job that would be good enough for you in terms of (1) wage amount, (2) job content, (3) working conditions?'

Performance-based payments were measured with three items on a five-point Likert-type scale, asking employees: 'How much do you think your wage depends upon …?' The items include (1) 'The amount of work you have done'; (2) 'The quality of your work'; and (3) 'Specific outcomes of your work, achieving concrete results'. The Cronbach's α was 0.72.

Table 7.1 Factor analysis results and percentages of respondents faced with AS

Original variables	Two-factor solution: 73% of total variance explained		% of positive answers ('4' plus '5')
	1 'Transactional' AS	2 'Relational' AS	
Violates my interests while distributing work assignments	.822		14
Ignores my merits, achievements and work results	.798		12
Violates my interests while distributing material rewards	.784		15
Hinders my career promotion and professional development in this organization	.758		9
Ignores my proposals and initiatives	.711		11
Puts me down in front of others*		.855	8
Makes negative comments about me to others*		.829	6
Tells me I'm incompetent*		.822	7
Ridicules me*		.740	6
Tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid*		.720	6
Cronbach's α	.913	.894	

Source: Adapted from Mitchell and Ambrose (2007)

A reward system, based on the supervisor's subjective evaluations and supervisor–subordinate personal relations, was measured with one item on a five-point Likert-type scale, asking respondents: 'How much do you think your wage depends upon your personal relations with your supervisor?' where '1' stood for 'Not at all' and '5' stood for 'Strongly depends'.

Consequences of AS: employee voice behaviour

Seven indicators of employee voice were divided into 'supportive' and 'challenge-oriented' types. Respondents were asked: 'Over the last 12 months, have you done the following *voluntarily, without being forced by your supervisors*?' and used a five-point response scale from 1 = 'Definitely no' to 5 = 'Definitely yes' (see Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 Reliability analysis results and percentage of respondents engaged in voice behaviours

'Over the last 12 months, have you done the following *voluntarily, without being forced by your supervisors*?'	Cronbach's α	% of positive answers ('4' plus '5')
Supportive Voice		
Helping your supervisor, proposing solutions for problems that were articulated by the supervisor	0.857	38
Making proposals and taking the initiative in your personal work-related issues		44
Making proposals and taking the initiative in work-related issues in your work unit		31
Making proposals and taking the initiative in work-related issues at company level		28
Challenge-Oriented Voice		
Drawing superiors' attention to the wrongs and problems in your work unit or in the company	0.870	27
Speaking up about your critical concerns on work-related issues		22
Arguing with your superiors, upholding your personal opinions on work-related issues		21

Control variables. I explored the viability of four control variables that could provide alternative explanations for the hypothesized relationships among the constructs. *Subordinates'* and *supervisors' gender* were measured as binary variables (0 = female, 1 = male). *Employee age* and *tenure* were measured in years.

Table 7.3 presents the means, standard deviations and Pearson correlations of the variables in the study.

Analysis and results

Descriptive analysis

The results presented in Table 7.1 suggest, firstly, that AS has two faces – 'transactional' (economic-based, referring to the violation of employees' material interests) and 'relational' (socio-emotional). Secondly, the percentages of respondents indicating '4' or '5' on the scales were interpreted as positive answers and point to the conclusion that Russian professionals are being subjected to AS mainly in its 'transactional' form, while AS as it is traditionally understood, as emotional violence, is experienced by less than 10 per cent of respondents.

Table 7.2 presents an overview of the items used to measure the categories of employee voice and shows that between 28 and 44 per cent of respondents exhibit some forms of supportive voice behaviour, while challenge-oriented voice behaviour is reported less often – by between 21 and 27 per cent of respondents. This is in line with the idea that challenging voice behaviour is less safe and may entail considerable costs for employees.

Table 7.3 shows some important preliminary findings. Firstly, the two types of AS – work-related and socio-emotional – are significantly correlated. We can suppose that if supervisors are engaged in abusive relations with their subordinates, they typically perform both types of AS. Secondly, the two types of voice behaviour – supportive and challenge-oriented – are also highly correlated. Thirdly, interestingly, only one control variable – employee tenure – demonstrates significant bivariate correlations with transactional AS, while the others (subordinate age, subordinate and supervisor gender) do not. Contrary to this, a number of work-related variables significantly relate to AS. Fourthly, none of the three measures of perceived employability shows a significant direct relationship to AS. Thus, Hypothesis 3 – '*Perceived employability negatively predicts AS*' – was not supported.

Table 7.3 Means, standard deviations and correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Employee gender (1 = male)	.55	.48	1														
2. Age	38.65	10.88	-,035	1													
3. Tenure	6.402	4.92	-,014	,543**	1												
4. Supervisor gender (1 = male)	.77	.421	,253**	,075*	,044	1											
5. 'Zero-option' employment	2,58	1,27	-,024	,028	,046	,008	1										
6. Job insecurity	2.63	1.06	-,058	,109**	,028	-,078**	,146**	1									
7. Employability –wage	3,41	1,07	-,018	-,152**	-,125**	-,012	-,164**	-,223**	1								
8. Employability –work content	3,56	1,04	,009	-,151**	-,126**	-,044	-,188**	-,203**	,640**	1							
9. Employability –working conditions	3,48	1,06	,004	-,115**	-,087**	-,064*	-,151**	-,220**	,563**	,682**	1						
10. Performance-based payment (factor score)	0	1	,077*	-,020	-,042	,039	-,082**	-,137**	,087**	,111**	,116**	1					
11. Wage depends upon personal relations with a supervisor	3.07	1.31	,020	-,021	-,005	,004	,050	-,122**	,079**	,078**	,068*	,090**	1				
12. 'Transactional' AS	2.09	.92	,026	,046	,067*	-,024	,166**	,073*	,019	-,039	-,025	-,318**	,212**	1			
13. 'Relational' AS	1.67	.84	,020	,022	,057	-,038	,217**	,033	,041	-,010	,017	-,255**	,204**	,689**	1		
14. Supportive voice	2,88	1,04	,082**	,064*	,027	,121**	-,035	-,204**	,165**	,119**	,062*	,010	,397**	,278**	,243**	1	
15. Challenge-oriented voice	2,52	1,12	,058	,063*	,045	,110**	,055	-,121**	,114**	,075*	,048	-,067*	,354**	,338**	,341**	,702**	1

Note: *, ** Correlations are significant at the 0.05 and 0.01 levels, respectively (two-tailed).

Regression analysis

To test the hypotheses, I performed two separate multiple regression analyses – for transactional and relational AS as dependent variables (Table 7.4). Only those variables which showed significant bivariate correlations with at least one type of AS were included as predictors into the regression models.

In line with H1, 'zero-option' employment is positively related to both types of AS. Perceived job insecurity, although correlated with transactional AS, lost its significance in the regression model, thus not supporting H2. H4, which states that performance-based payment negatively relates to AS, was strongly supported for both types of AS. H5, which states that a reward system based on supervisors' subjective evaluations and supervisor–subordinate personal relations positively relates to AS, was also supported for both types of AS.

To test the hypothesis on the relationship between AS and employee voice behaviour, four multiple regressions were used (Table 7.5). Since the two types of AS are strongly correlated to each other ($r = 0.689$, $p <$ .001), they were tested as predictors in separate models in order to avoid the problem of multicollinearity. Only those variables which showed significant bivariate correlations with at least one type of voice behaviour were included as predictors in the regression models.

As indicated in Table 7.5, control variables of employees' gender and age lost their significance in regression models. However, interestingly, there is a persistent significance of the supervisor's gender in all regression models, reflecting the fact that subordinates of male

Table 7.4 Regression analysis results for abusive supervision

Predictors	Transactional AS	Relational AS
Tenure	,048	,039
'Zero-option' employment	,120***	,184***
Job insecurity	,039	-,003
Performance-based payment	-,322***	-,259***
Wage depends upon personal relations with a supervisor	,240***	,218***
Adjusted R²	0.175	0.149
F	48.14	39.71

Notes: ***p < 0.001.

Table 7.5 Regression analysis results for employee voice behaviour

Predictors	Supportive Voice		Challenge-oriented Voice	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Employee gender (1 = male)	,048	,050	,023	,024
Age	,044	,052	,040	,047
Supervisor gender (1 = male)	,112***	,113***	,109***	,113***
'Transactional' AS	,278***		,338***	
'Relational' AS		,246***		,344***
Adjusted R²	.094	.077	.127	.131
F	29.81	24.29	41.34	42.82

Notes: ***$p < 0.001$.

supervisors are more inclined to speak up. The most important result of the analysis is that, in line with H6, both types of AS positively predict employee voice behaviour. This relationship is stronger for challenge-oriented than for supportive voice behaviour.

Table 7.6 summarizes the key findings of this study.

Table 7.6 Results of testing the hypotheses

H1	'Zero-option' employment positively predicts AS	Supported
H2	Perceived job insecurity positively predicts AS	Not supported
H3	Perceived employability negatively predicts AS	Not supported
H4	Performance-based payment negatively predicts AS	Supported
H5	Reward systems based on supervisors' subjective evaluations and supervisor–subordinate personal relations positively predicts AS	Supported
H6	AS positively predicts employee voice	Supported

Discussion

The current study examined the antecedents and the outcomes of abusive supervision, which embodies the functional and motivational ambivalence of power in organizations: (1) the ambivalence of 'bright' and 'dark' sides of managerial power; (2) the ambivalence of administrative and economic resources as sources of managerial power; and (3) the ambivalence of employee reactions to managerial abuses of power.

My results support one of the key assumptions of SET, namely, that control over valued resources creates unbalanced power relations, thus constituting fertile soil for the perpetration of abusive behaviour. In turn, employees subjected to AS try to restore the balance of power by means of voice strategies, thus supporting Mintzberg's (1985) metaphor of organizations as 'political arenas'. This study addresses several gaps in the literature.

Firstly, the main contribution of the study to the previous literature is that it reveals the leading role of managerial practices in predicting AS in organizations, thus responding to the call to consider the direct organizational antecedents of AS (Martinko et al. 2013). In so doing, I contribute to integrating both sociological and organizational studies perspectives in the analysis of AS. I go beyond individual-level explanations and focus on the institutional conditions of labour, which are objectified in day-to-day work practices. In contrast to the majority of previous studies, I found that the individual characteristics of employees or their bosses do not significantly relate to AS. I reveal that systems of rewards that lack universal performance-based criteria provide fertile ground for AS. When the conditions of payments are left to the informal personal judgements of direct supervisors, work units become a 'preserve', or a 'patrimony', of their heads, thus creating feudal-like relationships, with employees becoming personally dependent upon their supervisors. The ability to control the most valued resource – the size of the salary – promotes the abuse of managers' power. In general, I may conclude that AS is greater under the conditions of anti-meritocratic systems of remuneration, when payments are not performance-based but depend upon subordinates' personal relationships with their superiors. Thus, I employ the ideas of meritocracy in organizations (Petersen et al. 2000; Castilla and Benard 2010), which have not been used in studies on AS at this time.

Secondly, regression models revealed that one more indicator of employee dependency – 'zero-option' employment – also predicts AS. This is in line with the SET propositions (Emerson 1962; Gargiulo and Ertug

2014) that actor A's dependence on actor B is inversely proportional to A's ability to get resources that are critical to A outside of the A–B relationship.

These two findings reveal the motivational and functional ambivalence of power in organizations. As Smelser (1998, 8) proposed, 'dependent situations breed ambivalence'. When speaking about employment relations, we can conclude that supervisors' power advantages provide both positive (performance-enhancing) and negative outcomes, and the latter are embodied in the phenomenon of AS.

Thirdly, the findings lend empirical support to the idea that employees subjected to AS do not always remain passive victims. Rather, they try to restore the balance of power by engaging in proactive voice behaviour. In so doing, they implement two possible strategies. The first one (supportive voice behaviour) is a form of 'active loyalty'. Faced with AS, employees try to demonstrate their conformity to the 'rules of the game' and gain a more positive image, thus expecting more favourable attitudes from their supervisors. The second strategy (challenging voice behaviour) demonstrates employees' readiness to challenge the existing routines. These two strategies, as the analysis revealed, are not opposite but complementary. Both are aimed at employees' *value enhancement*: while still dependent on their supervisors, employees restore the balance of social exchange by making the supervisors more dependent on their skills, opinions and ideas. Moreover, an employee who engages in voice behaviour will be more likely to attract others' attention and, in turn, will increase the likelihood of others viewing the person as competent and group-oriented (Weiss and Morrison 2019). In such a way, voice behaviour may become a strategy of status attainment (Ridgeway and Berger 1986), or an efficient coping strategy in response to AS. Altogether, both voice strategies may lead to breaking the 'spiral of abuse'. That is, employee reactions to AS provide an important though underexplored case of functional ambivalence of power in formal hierarchical organizations. Instead of expected employee victimization and strengthening the personal power of managers, employee voice comes to the fore as a means to create a more symmetrical situation in which the damaging and 'productive' effects of AS coexist. In contrast to most previous studies, I highlight a more balanced view of power relations in organizations, stressing both possible passive and active employee coping strategies in response to AS.

Limitations and future research directions

As with every study, the current one has a number of limitations. Firstly, the data collected in this study are cross-sectional. To fully address this limitation, future research should consider utilizing various research designs (for example, experimental or longitudinal), which could provide further support for the predictive validity of the current study. Secondly, the sample, although it includes 10 industries and nine geographical regions, may not be totally representative of the Russian population. Only non-supervisory respondents who completed higher education and were employed in private-sector organizations were surveyed. Future research should examine the antecedents of AS and employee response strategies among other professional groups, for example, blue-collar workers or public-sector employees.

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