

The Hidden Cost of Abusive Supervision & AI in Healthcare Settings: Implications for Knowledge Sharing and Team Performance

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ABSTRACT

Abusive supervision within healthcare and biomedical research settings poses a critical threat to organizational health, effective communication, and team performance. This literature review explores how hostile and demeaning leadership behaviors impact knowledge sharing, collaboration, and overall team efficiency in clinical and biomedical environments. Special attention is given to the growing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in healthcare management systems, examining how algorithmic oversight and performance monitoring can unintentionally reinforce supervisory pressure and perceived abuse. By synthesizing empirical studies from organizational behavior, healthcare administration, and biomedical team dynamics, this paper investigates the mechanisms through which abusive supervision disrupts psychological safety, inhibits innovation, and reduces team cohesion among healthcare professionals. Furthermore, it examines individual coping strategies and leadership responses that may mitigate these effects. The novelty of this review lies in its interdisciplinary approach, connecting psychological constructs with biomedical team performance and highlighting the influence of emerging AI technologies on supervisory behaviors.

The study underscores the urgent need for trust-based leadership models and psychologically safe environments within healthcare institutions to optimize knowledge sharing and patient-centered outcomes.

Keywords

Abusive supervision, Knowledge sharing, Team performance, Leadership behavior, Organizational dynamics.

Introduction

Abusive supervision has increasingly drawn attention in organizational studies due to its profound negative consequences on employee morale, mental health, and workplace productivity [1]. Characterized by recurring verbal and non-verbal hostility that stops short of physical aggression, such behavior damages trust, undermines psychological safety, and lowers job satisfaction [2]. Its roots often lie not in isolated personal flaws but in broader systemic issues, including social modeling, perceived threats to authority, and impaired emotional regulation among supervisors

[3]. Employee reactions to this abuse are shaped by key factors such as intrinsic motivation, mental wellbeing, and perceived reciprocity in the workplace, as explained by Social Exchange Theory [4]. These dynamics illustrate that abusive supervision not only harms individuals but also deteriorates team cohesion and organizational effectiveness [5]. Addressing the issue requires more than individual corrections—it calls for systemic reforms that promote respectful leadership and emotionally safe work environments.

In healthcare and biomedical research environments, team performance is significantly shaped by leadership behavior, which influences how clinical or interdisciplinary teams think, feel, stay motivated, and coordinate their actions [6]. Leaders

who provide clear direction, foster shared understanding, and promote open communication contribute to a psychologically safe and productive healthcare setting [7]. However, when supervision becomes abusive—characterized by hostility, neglect, or inconsistent behavior—it can erode trust, lower morale, and disrupt professional collaboration in high-stakes clinical and biomedical contexts [8]. Such toxic leadership undermines team cohesion, increases emotional stress among health professionals, and jeopardizes both staff retention and the quality of patient care or research outcomes [9]. This paper examines the detrimental effects of abusive supervision on team performance within healthcare and biomedical settings, emphasizing the critical mediating role of knowledge sharing and underscoring the need for supportive, participative leadership models to sustain team resilience, innovation, and organizational well-being.

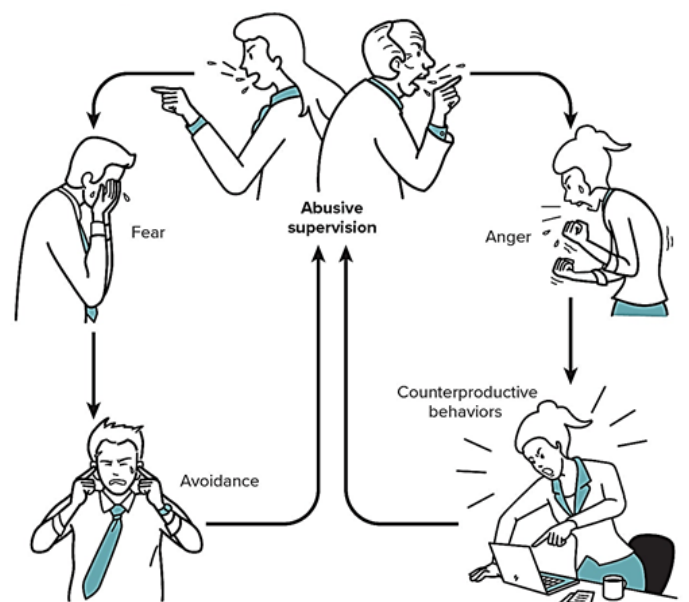
Knowledge sharing is a fundamental component of effective team performance, enabling collaboration, innovation, and problem-solving through the exchange of both explicit and tacit knowledge [10]. In team settings, this process is supported by trust, reciprocity, and psychological safety—conditions that are often disrupted by abusive supervision [11]. Toxic leadership behaviors, such as hostility and unpredictability, undermine open communication and discourage knowledge sharing, leading to reduced morale, fragmented teamwork, and lower productivity [12]. Although some individuals may demonstrate resilience or even increased performance under abusive conditions, these outcomes are inconsistent and ethically problematic [13]. Supportive and adaptive leadership, by contrast, fosters trust and mutual respect, creating a healthy environment for knowledge sharing and team growth [14]. This paper explores the impact of abusive supervision on team performance, emphasizing the critical mediating role of knowledge sharing and the need for leadership behaviors that prioritize psychological safety and collaboration.

AI-demand abusive supervision—coercive enforcement of AI use—leads to employee silence and deviant behavior [7]. In high power-distance cultures, silence worsens outcomes by suppressing feedback. However, AI knowledge buffers these effects, promoting resilience and reducing perceived abuse [13]. Building AI literacy and open communication is essential for healthy digital leadership. The issue of abusive supervision continues to undermine organizational dynamics, particularly affecting team performance and knowledge sharing [15]. This literature review aims to explore the complex relationship between abusive leadership and its detrimental effects on team performance, with a particular focus on knowledge sharing behaviors. By synthesizing existing research, this paper investigates how toxic leadership disrupts the flow of information, reduces trust, and hampers collaboration. The methodology involves a comprehensive analysis of peer-reviewed studies, theoretical frameworks, and empirical findings to understand the mechanisms by which abusive supervision influences team outcomes. The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, highlighting the mediating role of knowledge sharing in mitigating the impact of abusive supervision and

offering insights into how organizations can foster healthier team environments despite the challenges of toxic leadership. Through this review, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the behavioral and psychological underpinnings of abusive supervision in team settings.

Abusive Supervision

Over the past two decades, abusive supervision has emerged as a critical concern in organizational research due to its far-reaching negative impacts on employee wellbeing and organizational performance [16]. It involves the consistent exhibition of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors by supervisors that fall short of physical violence [17]. These include actions such as demeaning comments, public shaming, unwarranted blame, and aggressive communication. Although some may rationalize these actions as firm management practices, substantial research reveals their detrimental effects on the psychological health of employees (Figure 1) [18]. These behaviors create a persistent stress environment, breaking down psychological safety and trust in leadership [19]. Employees subjected to such treatment often report emotional fatigue, lower job satisfaction, poor work-life integration, and intensified mental health issues [20]. Over time, these conditions contribute to rising turnover rates, counterproductive behaviors, and a culture of disengagement [21]. On a larger scale, allowing such behavior to go unchecked can tarnish an organization's image, stifle talent retention, and severely impact productivity.



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Figure 1: Concept of Abusive Supervision [16-18].

The dynamics of abusive supervision are influenced by a blend of personal and organizational variables, resulting in varied expressions and impacts across different contexts [22]. Leaders do not always act consistently; they may alternate between supportive and hostile behaviors, creating unpredictability that fosters stress

among team members [23]. Moreover, the broader organizational structure, including hierarchical and cultural factors, significantly affects how such behaviors are perceived and addressed [24]. In some cultural or institutional environments, what is considered abusive elsewhere may be normalized or tolerated. Employees' individual differences—such as resilience, prior experiences, or personality—also influence how they cope with abusive treatment [25]. Despite these contextual nuances, extensive research confirms that abusive supervision invariably leads to the erosion of trust and the psychological contract between employer and employee [26]. Addressing this issue necessitates comprehensive organizational reforms, including training programs, ethical leadership models, and clear reporting mechanisms to ensure accountability and foster a safe, respectful work environment.

Table 1: Precursors of Abusive Supervisions [31-33].

Core Factor	Reframed Description
Behavioral Modeling	Leaders may unconsciously adopt abusive behaviors they've witnessed in influential figures, especially when those behaviors go unchallenged or are rewarded. Repeated exposure to toxic conduct in formative environments or competitive workplaces normalizes aggression as a leadership tool.
Perceived Status Threat	When leaders sense their position is undermined—due to a subordinate's exceptional performance or perceived criticism—they may resort to aggressive tactics to reestablish dominance. This defensive reaction often stems from insecurity or rigid hierarchical mindsets.
Emotional Dysregulation	Chronic stress, mental exhaustion, or lack of emotional resilience can erode a supervisor's ability to control harmful impulses. In such states, hostility may surface as an automatic reaction, especially when emotional intelligence or support systems are lacking.

Precursor Factors Contributing to Abusive Supervision

The roots of abusive supervision are diverse and interconnected, necessitating interventions at both organizational and psychological levels (Table 1). Social learning highlights how leadership behaviors are transferred across hierarchies; abusive conduct becomes normalized when witnessed in higher-ups and reinforced through a culture that rewards assertiveness without accountability [27]. Identity threat underscores how internal and external challenges to a supervisor's self-image can prompt defensive aggression, particularly when status or authority is perceived to be under siege [28]. Self-regulation impairment emphasizes how overwhelming stress and fatigue can erode even well-meaning leaders' capacity to manage their emotions and behaviors [29]. These antecedents show that abusive supervision is rarely a product of individual failings alone; instead, it emerges from a blend of personal vulnerabilities and structural deficiencies [30]. Addressing these causes requires proactive training in emotional regulation, the creation of transparent organizational norms, and the promotion of a culture that values respectful, supportive leadership.

Intrinsic Motivation as a Mediator

Intrinsic motivation is defined as the internal enthusiasm that drives individuals to perform tasks out of interest, satisfaction, or

enjoyment, without reliance on external rewards. It plays a pivotal role in enhancing workplace creativity, persistence, and problem-solving [34]. Employees with strong intrinsic motivation are more committed and capable of tackling challenges innovatively. However, abusive supervision significantly undermines the key psychological needs that foster intrinsic motivation—namely, autonomy, competence, and connectedness [35]. When supervisors engage in controlling or demeaning behaviors, such as public scolding or persistent micromanagement, employees may feel powerless and undervalued [36]. This diminishes their internal drive, pushing them from being proactive contributors to disengaged and anxious workers. The loss of intrinsic motivation not only affects individual productivity but also compromises mental health, job satisfaction, and long-term organizational commitment, particularly in roles demanding creativity and emotional labor [37].

Beyond its direct impact, intrinsic motivation acts as a mediator that explains how abusive supervision leads to psychological distress and turnover intentions. Employees with diminished intrinsic motivation often lose their sense of ownership over their roles, leading to disengagement and a heightened desire to leave the organization [38]. This mediating function reveals that when abuse diminishes employees' enjoyment and satisfaction in their work, their willingness to exert discretionary effort drops sharply [39]. Organizations can counter these effects by promoting a positive motivational climate—offering employees autonomy, meaningful feedback, and a supportive work culture [40]. Leadership development focused on empathetic communication and recognition can also help sustain motivation. Recognizing intrinsic motivation as both a critical resource and a protective buffer highlights the need for managerial practices that nurture, rather than undermine, employees' internal drive [41].

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides a lens through which employee responses to supervisory behavior—positive or negative—can be understood. At its core, SET is based on the idea that relationships are built on reciprocal exchanges of value [42]. When supervisors treat employees with respect and fairness, employees reciprocate with loyalty, extra effort, and constructive behaviors. Conversely, when they face disrespect or hostility, employees may feel justified in withdrawing effort, withholding cooperation, or engaging in retaliatory actions [43]. Abusive supervision constitutes a serious breach in this exchange, disrupting the balance of give-and-take in the supervisor-subordinate relationship. Such breaches lead to emotional dissonance and mistrust, reducing organizational citizenship behaviors and damaging team cohesion [44]. The breakdown in reciprocal expectations also contributes to cynicism and disengagement among employees.

SET also helps explain why some employees respond passively to abuse while others retaliate or disengage. The extent of their response often depends on perceived power, job alternatives, and tolerance thresholds [45]. Employees who lack the security or

opportunity to retaliate may resort to psychological withdrawal, which silently erodes morale and performance. The theory also introduces the concept of psychological contract violation—where the unspoken agreement of mutual respect and fairness is perceived as broken [46]. These perceptions can be deeply demoralizing, especially in environments lacking transparency or recourse mechanisms. To address this, organizations must foster trust-based relationships, ensure fairness in treatment and evaluation, and create systems that allow grievances to be addressed without fear of reprisal [47]. Ultimately, SET reminds organizations that maintaining ethical, respectful leadership is not just morally important—it is fundamental to sustaining positive, productive workplace relationships.

Psychological Wellbeing and Abusive Supervision in Healthcare and Biomedical Settings

Psychological wellbeing—defined as an individual’s emotional resilience, sense of purpose, and ability to maintain positive interpersonal relationships—is critical for the optimal performance of healthcare professionals and biomedical researchers. It is strongly associated with improved outcomes in clinical and research environments, such as enhanced productivity, innovation, patient safety, and interdisciplinary teamwork [48]. However, abusive supervision in these high-pressure settings severely undermines psychological wellbeing by contributing to chronic stress, anxiety, and a diminished sense of autonomy. Repeated exposure to verbal aggression, public humiliation, and unreasonable expectations creates an emotionally hazardous work environment [49]. This emotional distress impairs cognitive performance, professional confidence, and the capacity to engage meaningfully in patient care or scientific inquiry. Over time, the psychological burden can lead to burnout, absenteeism, and even clinical mental health conditions [50]. The cumulative consequences of such toxic leadership behaviors can disrupt individual functioning and compromise the effectiveness of entire healthcare teams, making psychological wellbeing a vital component of sustainable clinical and organizational health.

The broader implications of compromised wellbeing extend beyond individual suffering. Abusive supervision alters the fabric of healthcare culture by replacing open communication, collaboration, and trust with fear, withdrawal, and emotional detachment [51]. When healthcare professionals feel psychologically unsafe, they may refrain from raising concerns, contributing ideas, or participating fully in collaborative decision-making—ultimately impairing innovation and slowing the resolution of complex health challenges [52]. These dysfunctional patterns can damage institutional credibility, reduce staff retention, and compromise patient safety. Addressing such issues demands more than surface-level interventions. Healthcare organizations must adopt structured support systems such as confidential reporting mechanisms, employee assistance programs (EAPs), access to mental health counseling, and visible leadership commitment to psychological welfare [53]. Cultivating psychological safety—where healthcare workers feel free to express concerns without fear of retribution—

is essential for maintaining both staff wellbeing and high standards of patient care. By embedding mental wellness into organizational policies and leadership practices, healthcare systems can safeguard their workforce and enhance long-term institutional resilience and performance [54].

Role of Supervisory Abuse in Shaping Turnover Intentions

Turnover intention—an employee’s conscious consideration of leaving their current job—is a powerful predictor of actual resignation and a key indicator of organizational instability [55]. A strong correlation exists between abusive supervision and turnover intention, as repeated mistreatment by supervisors often breeds resentment, emotional exhaustion, and a sense of betrayal [56]. These emotional responses contribute to a detachment process, where employees begin to disengage from organizational goals and explore external opportunities [57]. When expectations of fair and respectful treatment are consistently violated, employees reevaluate their loyalty and start planning their exit [58]. The financial and operational burden of turnover—including recruitment costs, training gaps, and knowledge loss—makes it a pressing concern for management.

The psychological process driving turnover intentions involves more than just dissatisfaction—it reflects a deeper breakdown in the employee-employer relationship [59]. Many employees experiencing abuse perceive a violation of their psychological contract, where the mutual respect and trust expected in the workplace are disrupted [60]. Even before they resign, such employees may mentally “check out,” resulting in lower engagement, absenteeism, and reduced collaboration [61]. Furthermore, turnover intentions can spread within teams, as one employee’s dissatisfaction influences others. Early detection of abusive supervisory behaviors is critical to curbing this trend. Organizations can mitigate turnover by instituting 360-degree feedback systems, providing leadership coaching, and enforcing zero-tolerance policies for workplace abuse [62]. By actively addressing the root causes of supervisory misconduct, organizations not only reduce turnover but also promote a culture of respect and inclusivity essential for long-term success.

Team Performance

Team performance is shaped by various factors, including leadership behavior, cognitive, motivational, affective, and coordination processes [63]. Leadership plays a key role in guiding these processes, ensuring that team members work together efficiently and harmoniously. Leaders who cultivate an environment that promotes shared mental models, metacognitive reflection, and collective information processing enhance the team's capacity to adapt to complex situations [64]. Effective leadership also ensures that knowledge is organized, roles are clear, and goals are communicated, providing structure and direction. This clarity enables teams to perform at a higher level, showing improved problem-solving skills and resilience when faced with challenges [65].

However, when leadership is marked by abuse, unpredictability, or neglect, it can undermine team performance and foster dysfunction. Abusive supervision disrupts team cohesion and coordination, creating confusion, miscommunication, and stifled innovation [66]. The negative emotional climate resulting from such leadership can lower morale, reduce motivation, and erode trust within the team. Leaders who fail to offer clear guidance and constructive feedback hinder the team's growth, leading to emotional exhaustion, interpersonal conflict, and higher turnover [67]. In contrast, empathetic, strategic, and inclusive leadership helps to build a positive affective climate, which is essential for promoting resilience and sustaining long-term team performance.

Significance of Leadership Behavior

Effective leadership behavior is crucial for fostering high-performing teams, particularly in environments vulnerable to the negative effects of abusive supervision. The functional leadership model emphasizes that leaders should not be defined by a set of rigid behaviors but by their ability to diagnose team issues, generate solutions, and implement them effectively [68]. Leaders who fail to fulfill these roles—especially through abusive or hostile supervision—disrupt team morale and coordination. Leadership behaviors that support information structuring, personnel management, and performance feedback are vital for creating shared mental models, enhancing collective efficacy, and motivating team members [69]. In contrast, unpredictable, aggressive, or neglectful leadership breeds psychological insecurity, miscommunication, and a toxic environment. Abusive leaders hinder the development of trust and reduce psychological safety, stifling innovation and hindering open communication [70]. Therefore, leadership behavior significantly influences the emotional climate of the team, determining whether a group becomes resilient or dysfunctional when faced with challenges.

Furthermore, transformational and participative leadership styles foster team adaptability and resilience—qualities that stand in stark contrast to the negative impact of abusive supervision [71]. Leaders who provide clear role definitions, structure, and constructive feedback minimize emotional contagion and help maintain a healthy affective climate within teams [72]. Effective leaders also serve as boundary spanners, connecting teams with external resources and providing a coherent strategic direction. These processes of external sense-making and internal coordination are absent in abusive leadership, where fear and ambiguity dominate [73]. Additionally, the reciprocal nature of leadership and team dynamics highlights that leader behavior not only shapes outcomes but is also influenced by team composition and interactions [74]. Leaders who promote metacognitive reflection, pre-task briefings, and post-task reviews enable teams to self-reflect and improve—an approach that contrasts sharply with environments driven by blame and psychological abuse [75]. In conclusion, leadership characterized by empathy, clarity, and inclusivity is essential for fostering both team effectiveness and psychological well-being.

Table 2: Elements Affecting Team Performance [76-85].

Category	Key Elements
Cognitive Dynamics	Alignment in team thinking (shared cognition), reflective group thinking (team metacognition), and the leader’s ability to interpret and respond to complex situations (sense-making).
Motivational Drivers	Team’s collective belief in its competence (collective efficacy), clarity in objectives (goal alignment), strong interpersonal bonds (team cohesion), and inspiring leadership that fosters engagement (transformational leadership).
Emotional Influences	Overall emotional atmosphere within the team (emotional climate), presence and management of interpersonal tensions (affective conflict), and regulation of emotional spread within the team (control of emotional contagion).
Coordination Mechanisms	Clear understanding of individual roles (role clarity), efficient distribution and use of resources (resource management), alignment in task execution timing (temporal synchronization), and unified responses to team challenges (coordinated actions).
Leadership Functions	Accurate identification of team issues (diagnostic insight), shared decision-making (participative leadership), and delivery of supportive and actionable guidance (constructive feedback).
Contextual & Structural Support	Mechanisms to cope with stress (stress buffering), readiness to adapt during transitions (change adaptability), and capability to manage diverse or demanding tasks (complexity management).

Multifactorial Drivers of Team Performance Outcomes

Team performance is a complex result of various cognitive, motivational, affective, and coordination factors, all of which are shaped by leadership behavior (Table 2). The document highlights that effective teams rely on the integration of individual members' skills and contributions through synchronized efforts [76]. Key factors such as shared mental models, collective information processing, and metacognitive reflection form the foundation of this integration [77]. Leadership that fosters these elements enables teams to adapt better to complex and ever-changing environments [78]. On the other hand, abusive supervision leads to a breakdown in these processes, replacing shared understanding with confusion and stifling open communication through fear of ridicule or retaliation [79]. Leaders who actively promote team cognition by organizing knowledge, clarifying roles, and communicating goals strengthen team synergy, while those who fail to provide psychological safety create environments rife with misinformation, ambiguity, and conflict [80].

Motivation and the affective climate are also crucial to team performance. High levels of collective efficacy, goal clarity, and task cohesion, where team members are emotionally invested in shared goals, enhance problem-solving and adaptability [81]. Leaders who model effective performance strategies and promote mutual respect help to reinforce these factors. Abusive supervision, on the other hand, erodes motivation and interpersonal cohesion, leading to emotional exhaustion, disengagement, and ultimately, turnover [82]. Coordination of actions, including timing, role assignments, and resource management, is also impaired under

poor leadership [83]. Teams led by individuals who fail to manage conflict constructively or provide clarity on roles are more prone to dysfunction [84]. The document also emphasizes that leadership must actively shape regulatory mechanisms such as norms, communication protocols, and feedback systems to ensure alignment within the team [85]. Therefore, effective team performance arises from both technical coordination and the socio-emotional environment established by the leader.

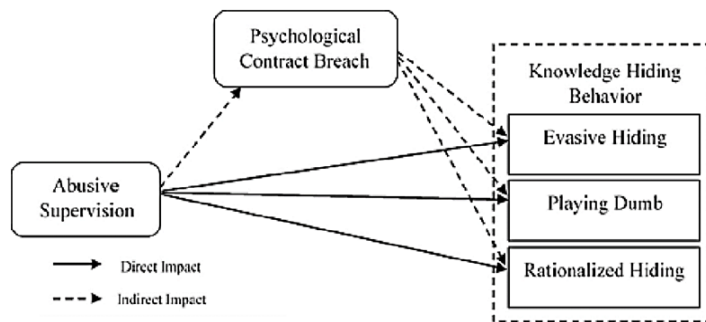


Figure 2: Impact of Abusive Supervision on Knowledge Sharing [91].

Facilitating Knowledge Exchange Within Teams

Knowledge sharing refers to the intentional exchange of information, expertise, and insights among team members to promote collaboration, problem-solving, and innovation [86]. This process goes beyond simply transferring data; it includes tacit knowledge—experiential insights and contextual know-how—that are vital for the success of a team [87]. In team settings, knowledge sharing can occur through formal systems, such as knowledge management systems (KMS), and informal interactions, like mentorship or spontaneous discussions [88]. The distinction between explicit knowledge (easily shared and codified) and tacit knowledge (context-dependent and harder to articulate) highlights the complexity of fostering effective sharing practices [89]. Theoretical frameworks emphasize the importance of reciprocity, trust, and relational networks in facilitating knowledge flows, especially in environments where psychological safety is prioritized. Knowledge sharing is essential for teams as it helps align goals, reduce redundancies, and utilize diverse expertise. For example, cross-functional teams depend on members' willingness to bridge disciplinary gaps, leading to comprehensive solutions to complex problems [90]. However, toxic leadership, characterized by hostile behaviors from leaders, can disrupt this process. Leaders who create a climate of fear and distrust prevent employees from openly sharing knowledge, as they perceive the risk of criticism or exploitation (Figure 2) [91]. This creates a paradox: while teams need open communication to thrive, abusive leadership undermines the psychological safety necessary for knowledge exchange [92]. Trust and management support are crucial for fostering knowledge sharing, but abusive supervision compromises these elements [93], making even well-structured teams ineffective at leveraging collective intelligence.

Leadership Influence on Team Performance

Knowledge sharing plays a direct role in enhancing team performance by accelerating problem-solving, reducing errors, and driving innovation. Research has shown that teams engaging in knowledge sharing experience outcomes such as faster project completion, cost savings, and improved adaptability [94]. In high-performing teams, shared knowledge helps members anticipate challenges, align strategies, and capitalize on each other's strengths [95]. Teams with strong knowledge-sharing practices often have higher cohesion, as members feel valued and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives [96]. Furthermore, knowledge sharing helps mediate the impact of team characteristics—such as diversity and communication styles—on performance, making it a key driver of collective efficacy.

However, abusive supervision creates significant barriers to these benefits. Leaders who engage in demeaning or controlling behaviors damage team morale, leading to knowledge hoarding and fragmented communication [97]. Employees working under abusive leaders may withhold valuable insights to avoid scrutiny or protect their own standing within the team [98]. This aligns with the power dynamics where knowledge becomes a source of individual authority rather than a shared resource. Such environments hinder innovation, as team members prioritize self-preservation over collaboration [99]. In contrast, supportive leadership that is fair and encouraging fosters trust and reciprocity, which in turn strengthens knowledge-sharing behaviors [100]. The review highlights that practices like cooperative reward systems and inclusive cultures can mitigate these challenges, but abusive supervision undermines these efforts, perpetuating cycles of underperformance. Therefore, while knowledge sharing is crucial for team success, its effectiveness depends heavily on leadership that fosters psychological safety and mutual respect.

AI in Leadership: Transforming Workplace Behavior

The growing implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) in organizational settings has significantly influenced leadership styles, particularly giving rise to a concept known as AI-demand abusive supervision (Figure 3), which poses critical implications for follower behavior [101]. As digital transformation reshapes organizational structures, leaders often push for rapid adaptation to AI technologies. While digital transformational leadership can encourage creativity and innovation, coercive leadership that demands AI adoption without proper support may be perceived as hostile [102]. This results in what is termed AI-demand abusive supervision—when employees believe their supervisors are exhibiting intentionally hostile, nonphysical behaviors to enforce AI use [103]. Drawing on social exchange theory, employees tend to respond to such negativity with similarly adverse actions, such as organizational and interpersonal deviance [104]. Workplace deviant behaviors may include stealing company property, intentionally ignoring work duties, or undermining colleagues, typically arising from emotional responses like frustration or resentment [105]. These behaviors represent a deliberate breach of workplace norms and are often used as coping mechanisms

by employees seeking psychological balance in the face of perceived injustice. Research supports that abusive supervision directly contributes to deviant and counterproductive behaviors among employees [106]. When workers cannot challenge their supervisors openly due to fear or hierarchical constraints, they may retaliate indirectly by harming the organization or its culture [107]. Consequently, AI-demand abusive supervision is not only damaging in terms of employee morale but also organizational performance. Therefore, understanding how such leadership styles trigger deviant workplace behavior is essential for developing healthier, more adaptive management practices in the era of AI integration.

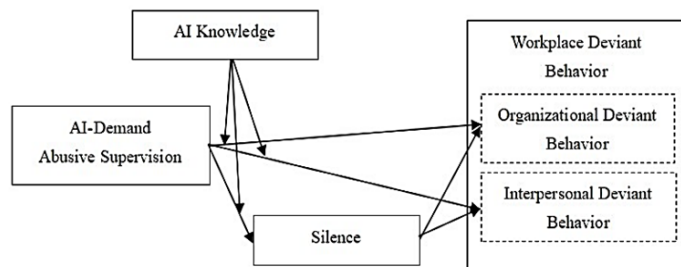


Figure 3: AI the key player of Abusive Supervision [107].

The concept of employee silence plays a critical mediating role in the relationship between AI-demand abusive supervision and workplace deviant behaviors, especially in cultures and organizations where hierarchical power distance is high [108]. Silence, in this context, refers to the intentional withholding of ideas, feedback, or concerns by employees who perceive that expressing themselves could lead to negative repercussions [109]. When supervisors exhibit abusive behavior—particularly coercing AI use without proper training or support—employees may internalize their dissatisfaction and suppress their voice, resulting in psychological trauma [110]. This emotional repression does not dissolve negative feelings but rather accumulates them, eventually manifesting as organizational or interpersonal deviance. Studies suggest that when employees remain silent, organizations miss early warning signs of dysfunction, allowing toxic leadership practices to persist and deteriorate the organizational climate [111]. Particularly in environments like China, where power distance is culturally accepted, employees often choose silence over confrontation, even in abusive situations. This creates a destructive cycle where unresolved emotions escalate and are redirected in harmful ways [112]. Employees might sabotage projects, avoid responsibilities, or create interpersonal tensions as a form of non-verbal resistance [113]. Silence, therefore, acts as a psychological bottleneck—preventing emotional release and organizational feedback—thereby reinforcing the very deviance it was meant to avoid. Leaders who fail to recognize or address employee silence risk facing increased dissatisfaction, disengagement, and covert retaliation from their teams [114]. Thus, the role of silence as a mediator highlights the importance of open communication and psychological safety in mitigating the harmful effects of AI-demand abusive supervision on organizational and interpersonal behavior.

In the complex dynamics of AI-demand abusive supervision and its effects, AI knowledge among followers emerges as a vital moderating factor that can significantly alter behavioral outcomes. AI knowledge refers to the employee's familiarity with, and understanding of, artificial intelligence technologies—including their functionalities, advantages, and limitations [115]. Employees with high AI literacy are more confident in navigating digital transformations and are less likely to perceive supervisory demands as threatening or abusive [116]. Instead, they may interpret such demands as opportunities for growth, innovation, and performance enhancement. On the other hand, those with limited AI knowledge often feel overwhelmed, unsupported, and even coerced, leading to silence and deviant behavior as coping mechanisms [117]. High AI knowledge thus provides a psychological buffer, promoting resilience and reducing sensitivity to managerial pressure [118]. This knowledge also enhances employees' self-evaluation and sense of control, enabling them to handle AI-related tasks with optimism and confidence. Consequently, these individuals are less likely to respond negatively to leadership behaviors, even if they verge on being coercive [119]. Importantly, AI knowledge not only weakens the direct impact of AI-demand abusive supervision on silence and deviance but also moderates the indirect effect through silence, forming a moderated-mediation framework [120]. In this framework, the presence of AI knowledge reduces the pathway from abusive supervision to silence and then to deviance, serving both as a shield and a corrective lens through which employees interpret workplace pressures [121]. Therefore, cultivating AI knowledge in employees is not only a strategic investment in their skill development but also a crucial mechanism for safeguarding organizational harmony in the face of evolving digital leadership challenges.

Understanding the Mechanisms of Abusive Supervision

Although abusive supervision is traditionally seen as a damaging leadership style that harms employee morale, motivation, and mental health, recent research has revealed that under certain conditions, it may yield unexpectedly positive outcomes [122]. These outcomes often depend on how individuals perceive and respond to the abuse. Some employees, particularly those with a lower sensitivity to environmental threats, may interpret harsh supervisory behavior as a challenge rather than a threat, prompting them to improve their performance to gain approval or avoid negative consequences [123]. Additionally, personal traits such as resilience, worldview, and self-efficacy play a critical role in shaping how individuals react. Employees with a strong sense of organizational identity may remain loyal and committed even in the face of mistreatment, reducing their likelihood to engage in negative behaviors like gossip or withdrawal [124]. This perspective highlights the complexity of abusive supervision, showing that it may not always result in uniformly negative outcomes. When filtered through strong personal values or a supportive organizational environment, such behavior can sometimes encourage goal alignment or competitive drive, though it remains ethically questionable [125]. Understanding these dynamics allows organizations to better recognize individual differences and develop support systems that reduce vulnerability

and foster positive behavioral adjustments without tolerating toxic leadership.

In addition to individual responses, the focus of current research has shifted towards understanding effective coping strategies that can help mitigate the impact of abusive supervision. Employees often employ tactics such as ingratiation—seeking to gain favor through flattery or conformity—which, when paired with a positive mindset, can minimize emotional harm and maintain professional relationships [126]. Others adopt a more proactive approach by speaking up or offering feedback, helping them regain control and reduce burnout. Certain personal characteristics, like strong resource management abilities and a tendency to take initiative, have also been shown to reduce the negative emotional impact of such experiences [127]. From a leadership standpoint, one major contributor to abusive supervision is poor communication adaptability. Leaders who are unable to adjust their style to fit various situations often resort to aggressive or unconstructive communication [128]. Enhancing downward communication flexibility and emotional regulation in supervisors is essential to preventing such behavior. Furthermore, personality traits like neuroticism, conscientiousness, and agreeableness influence how both leaders and employees experience stress and respond to interpersonal challenges [129]. These findings emphasize the need for targeted training programs focused on emotional intelligence, communication, and conflict management. While abusive supervision should never be normalized, understanding and implementing effective coping mechanisms and leadership reforms can help create a more resilient and adaptive workplace environment.

Conclusions

Abusive supervision poses a serious challenge to the effectiveness of healthcare teams and biomedical research environments, where collaboration, trust, and open communication are essential for delivering high-quality care and scientific innovation. The evidence reviewed in this paper highlights the detrimental impact of toxic leadership on team performance, particularly through its disruption of knowledge sharing among clinical professionals and researchers. Abusive supervision fosters an atmosphere of fear and psychological insecurity, discouraging team members from exchanging critical insights and expertise. This breakdown in communication undermines diagnostic accuracy, delays decision-making, and compromises both patient outcomes and research productivity.

The findings further underscore that knowledge sharing is a vital determinant of success in interdisciplinary medical and biomedical teams. Leaders who demonstrate empathy, fairness, and transparency foster psychological safety—an environment where individuals feel empowered to share information, report concerns, and contribute to collective problem-solving. In contrast, emotionally toxic leadership styles erode morale, reduce motivation, and fragment team cohesion, posing risks to patient care and institutional integrity.

Of growing concern is the emergence of AI-driven supervisory systems in healthcare and research institutions. While AI tools can enhance efficiency, their misapplication or rigid implementation may contribute to perceived abusive oversight, particularly in high power-distance or hierarchical clinical cultures. Such systems can inadvertently silence staff voices, increase stress, and reinforce deviant coping behaviors. However, this risk can be mitigated by promoting AI literacy among healthcare workers, encouraging participatory feedback mechanisms, and ensuring AI technologies are used to support—rather than replace—compassionate leadership.

Although individual resilience and coping strategies may buffer some of the psychological impacts of abusive supervision, systemic change is imperative. Healthcare institutions must implement leadership development programs that emphasize emotional intelligence, ethical conduct, and effective communication. Structured interventions such as mental health support, peer feedback systems, and institutional policies to identify and address abusive behavior are essential for fostering healthy team dynamics.

Protecting psychological wellbeing, encouraging knowledge sharing, and promoting inclusive leadership are critical to enhancing team performance in healthcare and biomedical research environments. Future research should further explore how digital transformation and supervisory models interact with team culture and individual well-being, particularly in high-stress, patient-centered contexts. By addressing these complex dynamics, institutions can better safeguard their workforce and achieve sustainable organizational excellence.

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