Coworker Support Exceeding Expectations as a Double-Edged Sword: The Role of Workplace Status

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ABSTRACT

Most prior research has assumed that employees always appreciate coworker support. However, coworker support exceeding expectations can be considered a double-edged sword in the workplace. Drawing on expectation violation theory, this research explores *when* and *how* coworker support exceeding expectations becomes a positive or negative expectation violation that influences employees' interpersonal behavior. We propose that when employees have a lower level of workplace status, coworker support exceeding their expectations is more likely to be a positive expectation violation and, therefore, will be positively related to employee gratitude and interpersonal citizenship behavior. In contrast, when employees have a higher level of workplace status, coworker support exceeding expectations tends to be a negative expectation violation and, in turn, is positively related to employee shame and interpersonal counterproductive work behavior. Two multiwave field surveys with Chinese employees and two scenario-based experiments with Western workers largely support our hypotheses.

Keywords: coworker support exceeding expectations; workplace status; gratitude; shame; interpersonal behavior

Social support has been widely examined in the management field. In particular, a well-established view indicates that social support benefits others (Raineri and Paillé, 2015), manifesting as higher performance, satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intrinsic motivation for the recipients, as well as reduced fatigue and role conflict (Logan and Ganster, 2007; Matusik et al., 2022; Van Yperen and Hagedoorn, 2003; Yang et al., 2015). However, scholars have also noted that social support may fail to produce positive outcomes (Scott et al., 2014). When recipients receive a great deal of support, they may deem it threatening or stressful (Brock and Lawrence, 2014; Yun and Beehr, 2023) and interpret it as a sign of their own incompetence (Beehr et al., 2010) or overdependence on others (Silverstein et al., 1996). This perspective then induces negative experiences and reduces self-efficacy and sense of control (Newsom and Schulz, 1998; Rafaeli and Gleason, 2009). Additionally, receiving excessive support disrupts employees' preferred ways of handling tasks and emotions, interfering with their coping efforts and reducing their sense of autonomy (Brock and Lawrence, 2014; Rafaeli and Gleason, 2009). Too much support also leads to indebtedness (Rafaeli and Gleason, 2009), such that recipients may experience anxiety and stress about having to reciprocate. Thus, social support is not always beneficial, and its paradoxical effects on recipients vary depending on the specific circumstances.

Providing adequate or even excessive social support is a common feature of today's workplace (Maier et al., 2015; Yun and Beehr, 2023). In consequence, organizations face a practical challenge: how to encourage supportive behaviors among employees without

inadvertently triggering recipients' negative reactions. Given the prevalence and complex effects of social support, it is crucial to understand when and why such support may backfire. Clarifying these relationships allows for practical guidance on how organizations can better foster effective (rather than excessive) support among employees. As such, these actionable insights are highly valuable for organizations looking to design effective support dynamics that maximize positive outcomes while minimizing potential negative effects. Our research focuses on coworker support—a classic form of support in the workplace that is conceptualized as coworkers' actions of sharing information and experience as well as showing encouraging and caring toward others in the work context (López and Cooper, 2011).

While prior research has mostly focused on *absolute* levels of support, relying solely on such perspective may overlook important nuances in how support influences employees. Specifically, we need to take recipients' *expectations* of support into consideration (Brock and Lawrence, 2014; Ehrhardt and Ragins, 2019) because employees are not merely passive recipients of coworker support, but rather active agents with particular expectations that determine whether this support is perceived as a violation (Burgoon, 1993). As Brock and Lawrence (2009, p. 181) indicated, "individuals have unique support needs, and more frequent support is not always preferable." Recipients' interpretations of such support should be considered in relative terms (Fisher et al., 1982). Thus, the absolute level of coworker support is not sufficient as an antecedent to explain employee reactions.

This raises the question of how employees respond when coworker support exceeds their expectations. Not all employees need or want the same amount of support. Exploring coworker support exceeding expectations is crucial, as the value of social support at work (Riordan, 2013) may depend on whether recipients experience the "too much of a good thing" effect (Pierce and Aguinis, 2013). Nevertheless, little research has examined recipients' reactions in such cases, and a framework that might explain the mixed outcomes is lacking. Addressing this gap will make a meaningful contribution to the social support literature by introducing a new perspective and providing a more realistic picture of what happens when coworker support exceeds employees' expectations.

Drawing on expectation violation theory (Burgoon, 1993; Burgoon and Hale, 1988; Burgoon and Jones, 1976), we develop a model (Figure 1) that examines the impact of coworker support exceeding expectations, defined as the extent to which coworkers' actual support behavior is goes beyond the levels of support that the focal employees had expected. Expectation violation theory suggests that people use their expectations of behavior to understand and structure their interpersonal interactions with others and that violations of expectations affect their emotional reactions and behavior. Expectation violations occur when a person, group, or organization acts in a manner that deviates from the behavior anticipated by others (Afifi and Metts, 1998). Two types of expectation violations are possible: (1) positive, where unexpected behaviors are considered desirable and have a positive value, inducing favorable interpersonal reactions, and (2) negative, where unexpected behaviors are considered undesirable and have a

negative value, resulting in unfavorable interpersonal reactions. This study explores when and how coworker support exceeding expectations may become a positive or negative expectation violation, influencing employees' emotional responses and interpersonal behavior.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Employees may respond to coworker support in different ways when their expectations are violated (Irving and Montes, 2009). Such a violation could be beneficial or damaging depending on how employees evaluate it. Expectation violation theory highlights the role of the perceivers, with status being a core factor in how violations are interpreted (Burgoon and Hale, 1988). Specifically, different workplace statuses affect the valence of expectation violations—that is, the extent to which violations of expectations are viewed favorably or unfavorably. We focus on employee *workplace status* as a moderator to explain when coworker support exceeding expectations is considered a positive versus negative expectation violation.

Workplace status, defined as an employee's relative rank based on his or her position in the organizational hierarchy, influences how employees explain coworker support exceeding expectations. Employees of different statuses are likely to experience different emotional reactions to expectation violations (Afifi and Metts, 1998), which in turn affect their behavior in varying ways. Emotional reactions can have either an external, other-oriented focus (e.g., gratitude) or an internal, self-oriented focus (e.g., shame) (Spinrad and Eisenberg, 2019). We propose that when employee workplace status is lower, coworker support exceeding expectations will be perceived as a positive expectation violation, as lower-status employees are in more need

of and appreciate coworker support. Thus, those employees will experience enhanced gratitude, a positive emotion of appreciation toward an experience that is beneficial to oneself (McCullough et al., 2002), and engage in interpersonal citizenship behavior (ICB). In contrast, if employee workplace status is higher, coworker support exceeding expectations becomes a negative expectation violation because it makes the focal employees look inadequate. Such employees will experience heightened shame, a painful emotion triggered by a perceived threat to the self (Daniels and Robinson, 2019), and engage in interpersonal counterproductive work behavior (ICWB).

Our study contributes to the literatures on social support and workplace status. First, we address a paradox in social support research by adopting a new perspective—expectation violations. This study shifts the focus from the absolute level of coworker support to its relative level, advancing our knowledge of social support in the workplace. Focusing on workplace status as the boundary condition, we reveal when coworker support exceeding expectations becomes a desirable (versus undesirable) expectation violation, addressing the paradox that arises in relation to coworker support. Expectation violation theory emphasizes that perceivers' characteristics, especially status, affect their evaluations of and reactions to stimulus, though this notion has not been empirically tested in organizations. Our study confirms this idea by demonstrating that workplace status affects employees' reactions to excessive coworker support, which helps us avoid overestimating or underestimating the effects of such support and extends the boundary conditions for its effectiveness in shaping employees' interpersonal behavior.

Second, we unpack the dual-path emotional mechanisms underlying employees' behavioral reactions to coworker support exceeding expectations and rule out alternative mechanisms. This approach clarifies how such support is experienced as a positive or negative expectation violation, affecting interpersonal behavior. Our study underscores that employees experience distinct emotional responses to specific expectation violations. Although the theory indicates that emotions are proximal reactions to violations, most studies have either failed to explore the pertinent mechanisms (Livingston et al., 2016; Stiegert et al., 2021; Wayne et al., 2023) or predominantly focused on cognitive perspectives (Park et al., 2021). Our study advances the current understanding by showing that employees' reactions to expectation violations are deeply emotional and complex. Thus, our research offers stronger evidence for this rationale and sheds light on the nuanced impacts of support on interpersonal dynamics.

Third, our research advances the workplace status literature by identifying the moderating role of status in shaping how individuals respond to coworker support exceeding expectations. As such, our work enriches the nomological network surrounding workplace status and expands its scope. Although individuals may enjoy the privileges that come with higher status, it leads to more negative reactions to coworker support exceeding expectations. This insight aligns with and extends previous research that has explored the potential "dark side" of workplace status (Lee et al., 2020).

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

The Influences of Social Support

Social support has been widely examined, with research confirming the negative effects of too little support (Layous and Nelson-Coffey, 2021). For example, McIlroy et al. (2021) found that unanswered support negatively impacts well-being, performance, and relational outcomes. Kalliath and Beck (2001) found that low supervisory support leads to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and turnover intentions. Thus, the existing literature suggests that when employees perceive inadequate support, they tend to experience negative outcomes and engage in undesirable behaviors.

Although too much social support may sometimes benefit recipients, social psychology scholars have also highlighted its potential dark side (Maier et al., 2015; Seeman et al., 1996; Yun and Beehr, 2023), manifested as increased dependency, indebtedness, a loss of autonomy (Coyne et al., 1988; Rafaeli and Gleason, 2009), and a feeling of being controlled (Rafaeli and Gleason, 2009). In the workplace, excessive instrumental support may harm employees' engagement and performance (Yun and Beehr, 2023). These findings suggest the complex and inconsistent effects of social support, prompting the need for a new framework—expectation violation—to better understand its impact. We next explain how this perspective unfolds and present the hypotheses derived from it.

Coworker Support: Looking through the Expectation Violation Perspective

Coworker support includes both instrumental and emotional support. Coworker instrumental support is task-focused, with the aim of getting work accomplished or resolving work-related issues. In essence, coworkers devote energy and time to helping their colleagues cope with work issues and share knowledge with them (Halbesleben and Wheeler, 2015). Coworker emotional support is person-focused and grounded in friendship and personal concerns (Beehr et al., 2000). It reflects the idea that coworkers provide their colleagues with care and consideration and develop positive relationships with them (Halbesleben and Wheeler, 2015). While research often highlights the positive effects of coworker support on psychological and behavioral outcomes (Duffy et al., 2002; Loi et al., 2014; Tews et al., 2019), some negative outcomes have also been observed, such as increased turnover, workload, negative affect, and work–family conflict (Tews et al., 2013; Trottier and Bentein, 2019).

Prior research has mostly focused on the absolute level of coworker support, but individuals inevitably have their own perceptions and understanding of too much support, which depend on their specific expectations. Acknowledging that more frequent social support is not always beneficial is a crucial step toward clarifying the nature and functional role of support processes (Brock and Lawrence, 2009). Employees are active agents with expectations and preferences that determine whether excessive coworker support is seen as a positive or negative violation (Burgoon, 1993; Burgoon and Hale, 1988). Expectation violation theory highlights that individuals have expectations about others' behaviors, including coworker support behavior. For

example, Burgoon and Hale (1988, p. 59) suggested that "people hold expectations about the nonverbal behaviors of others" and especially, "in interpersonal encounters, interactants develop expectancies and preferences about the nonverbal behaviors of others." Thus, individuals have little difficulty arriving at an expectation of how others behave and recognizing deviations from that pattern.

To provide a more accurate and nuanced explanation of this phenomenon, our study focuses on the perspective of expectation violations to determine when and how coworker support exceeding expectations influences employees' interpersonal behavior.

The Moderating Role of Workplace Status

Support exceeding expectations from coworkers of the same hierarchical rank occurs when the support provided surpasses what the employee expected. As stated earlier, the specific (beneficial or harmful) effects of coworker support on employee outcomes are the subject of debate (Duffy et al., 2002; Loi et al., 2014; Tews et al., 2013; Trottier and Bentein, 2019). Going beyond the absolute level of coworker support and introducing the perspective of expectancy violation, especially unpacking the boundary conditions, helps us address these mixed findings. We argue that employees with lower workplace status may feel grateful when receiving support that exceeds expectations, as this constitutes a positive expectation violation. Gratitude, an other-oriented positive emotion, is relevant here because it reflects appreciation for others' kindness in a positive social exchange process (Liang et al., 2001), and is conceptualized as an emotional response to such kindness (McCullough et al., 2002).

Expectation violation theory suggests that perceivers' own characteristics directly influence how they process and understand others' behaviors (Houston et al., 2018). Workplace status is one such characteristic, which essentially represents an individual's relative standing in the organizational hierarchy. Employees occupying a higher position in this hierarchy are assumed to have higher workplace status, which in turn grants them access to more symbolic and material assets that people typically pursue and value (Aquino, 2000; Aquino and Douglas, 2003; De Klepper et al., 2017; Friesen et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2023; Mohd Rasdi et al., 2012). In contrast, lower-status employees are often seen as more vulnerable because they have more negative liabilities. For instance, lower-status employees tend to be punished more severely for norm violations (Bowles and Gelfand, 2010) and often work in hazardous conditions, receive lower wages, and endure harsh treatment from superiors (Aquino, 2000; Aquino and Douglas, 2003; Riedel et al., 2023). Additionally, these employees have disadvantages in terms of the tangible and intangible assets available to them to manage and respond to such challenges (Anderson and Berdahl, 2002; Keltner et al., 2003; Sherman et al., 2012).

Compared with higher-status employees, lower-status employees may more warmly welcome assistance from, and be more reliant on, their coworkers. When individuals are vulnerable, they focus more on obtaining support to mitigate challenges rather than on showing heightened sensitivity to their own vulnerability (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Kraus & Keltner, 2009). Social support in the workplace makes employees feel valued and central (Yang et al., 2015). For lower-status employees, coworker support exceeding expectations is particularly meaningful as it

helps them overcome challenges and compensates for deficiencies. As a result, they are likely to feel more gratitude toward their coworkers.

Lower-status employees are also less sensitive about showing vulnerability than higher-status employees because they have already categorized as "vulnerable," creating a floor effect in which additional vulnerability is less impactful. In contrast, higher-status employees are more attuned to gratitude, as showing dependence or vulnerability conflicts with their status. This aligns with Schieman's (2002) "disadvantaged status thesis," which suggests that historically disadvantaged groups derive more satisfaction from any rewards they receive rather than focusing on their vulnerability.

Thus, coworker support exceeding expectations makes the workplace more rewarding and pleasant (Van Yperen and Hagedoorn, 2003) for lower-status employees, who will highly value such support and consider it a positive expectation violation. For example, these employees may receive task-related information and knowledge from their coworkers that exceeds their expectations, or much more encouragement and care than they expected. Under this condition, employees will experience an enhanced level of gratitude. If employees receive instrumental and emotional coworker support that falls below their expectations, it is less likely to become a positive violation under the condition of lower workplace status and, therefore, will not evoke a high level of gratitude.

Hypothesis 1: Workplace status moderates the relationship between coworker support (including both instrumental and emotional support) exceeding expectations and

gratitude such that this positive relationship is enhanced when workplace status is lower rather than higher.

We argue that higher workplace status enhances the positive effect of coworker support exceeding expectations on employee shame. Shame reflects a negative self-evaluation and perceived incompetence (Daniels and Robinson, 2019; Tangney and Dearing, 2002). Workplace status closely relates to social position and power (Lenski, 1966). When employees have a higher workplace status, coworker support exceeding expectations may be seen as a negative violation, as it implies that the recipients are not as competent, capable, or successful as their coworkers. Indeed, higher-status employees usually have more power, resources, and flexibility than their lower-status colleagues (Friesen et al., 2014; Magee and Galinsky, 2008), and are expected to perform well (Driskell and Mullen, 1990) and support others (Rhee and Choi, 2017). These expectations and social obligations suggest that higher-status employees are more likely to give assistance than to receive it. Excessive instrumental support, such as job skills, information, and methods, is unnecessary for these employees because they already have access to these resources. Previous research confirms that when people have sufficient resources, their need for additional support decreases; otherwise, they may feel a stronger desire to meet those needs (Ryan and Deci, 2000a, 2000b). Receiving too much instrumental support, however, indicates that coworkers are superior to them, which signals dependency, a lack of competence, and inferiority (Fisher et al., 1982; Tessler and Schwartz, 1972). In essence, coworker support exceeding expectations contradicts these employees' assumptions about their status.

Similarly, higher-status employees have many channels and resources they can utilize to recover from upsetting events (Kraus and Keltner, 2009; Magee and Galinsky, 2008). Receiving excessive emotional support—such as more reassurance, encouragement, or care than expected—may signal to them that others question their emotional self-regulation. These individuals ordinarily assume that they are in control of their lives—an assumption that lower-status individuals rarely make. Receiving an abundance of unexpected emotional support may be incongruent with these higher-status individuals' self-perception of control and competence and, in turn, trigger self-doubt and social-evaluative concerns (Allen et al., 1991). Indeed, excessive comfort and care offered by coworkers might send negative signals to higher-status employees, prompting them to feel as if their coworkers doubt their ability to handle difficult situations. Supporting this view, Coyne et al. (1988) suggest that much emotional involvement leaves recipients feeling uncomfortable or burdened and causes them to question their ability to manage emotional affairs. Rafaeli and Gleason (2009) argue that receiving social support undermines recipients' sense of efficacy by signaling their dependence on the provider for coping with a stressful situation.

Thus, excessive coworker support will make higher-status employees focus more on themselves and develop feelings of incompetence about their ability to finish tasks or regulate emotions. Such support becomes a negative violation, triggering self-criticism, self-doubt, and ultimately shame (Roseman et al., 1994; Shaver et al., 1987). In other words, support exceeding

expectations may remind employees of their lack of control, dependence on others, and diminished self-worth—ultimately threatening their self-view and evoking shame.

Moreover, when they receive coworker support that violates their expectations, higher-status employees tend to perceive that their autonomy has been restricted. Consistent with this rationale, research has indicated that support from others can be perceived as a threat to freedom (Brehm, 1966), with higher-status employees being more prone to perceive excessive support from coworkers as a threat. As a result, negative emotional reactions (i.e., shame) to coworker support exceeding expectations are more likely to occur in employees with higher workplace status because of the negative expectation violation.

> *Hypothesis 2: Workplace status moderates the relationship between coworker support (including both instrumental and emotional support) exceeding expectations and shame such that this positive relationship is enhanced when workplace status is higher rather than lower.*

Gratitude and Interpersonal Citizenship Behavior

Expectation violation theory suggests that individuals' immediate emotional responses to unexpected events can shape their subsequent behavior. Gratitude—a positive emotion felt when receiving intentional benefits from others (McCullough et al., 2001)—often motivates prosocial reciprocity (Nowak & Roch, 2007). Thus, employees who experience gratitude are more likely to engage in reciprocity to be prosocial (Nowak and Roch, 2007), as a basic social exchange response (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). In other words, ICB becomes the most direct reaction to feelings of gratitude. Given that social support provided by coworkers stimulates their own gratitude, employee recipients will tend to engage in more ICB toward coworkers in return. For

instance, they may take the time to listen to coworkers' problems and worries and help those with heavy workloads. Relatedly, the emotion of gratitude will draw the focal employees' attention to those colleagues who gave them support and bind them more closely (Algoe et al., 2013). In this case, employees will engage in more coordinated and positive responses, such as ICB toward coworkers.

Hypothesis 3: Gratitude is positively related to ICB.

Shame and Counterproductive Interpersonal Work Behavior

Shame is a self-conscious emotion that an employee experiences when an event is understood as threatening to their self-concept (Tangney and Dearing, 2002). As a negative emotion, it undermines the basic human need to maintain a positive self-concept. Shame can lead to a negative self-evaluation (Gausel et al., 2012; Hareli et al., 2005), which then promotes self-abasing feelings as "I am a bad person" (Daniels and Robinson, 2019).

As such, feelings of shame may activate a self-defense mechanism (Daniels and Robinson, 2019), in which employees redirect their negative feelings toward others through behaviors such as aggression (Kvåle and Murdoch, 2022; Tangney and Fischer, 1995; Tangney et al., 1996). For example, when shame is triggered by coworker support exceeding expectations, employees may not properly process their feelings of shame and instead demonstrate ICWB toward coworkers (Scheff and Retzinger, 1991). In essence, employees who experience shame redirect their attention from themselves to others and seek to regain control through aggression-

related behavior (Miller, 1985). Given their greater power and lower concerns about retaliation, high-status employees are more likely to exhibit ICWB when they experience shame.

Although shame sometimes generates constructive reactions (Leach and Cidam, 2015), a substantial body of evidence suggests that shame is more likely to induce negative behavioral reactions (Tangney and Fischer, 1995; Tangney et al., 1996). Recent meta-analyses have indicated that shame is related to such negative interpersonal behaviors as obsessive–compulsive disorder (Laving et al., 2023) and substance use disorders (Luoma et al., 2019). Bauer and Spector's (2015) study also showed that employee shame explains a unique variance in most dimensions of CWB, and is closely associated with CWB directed at individuals.

Hypothesis 4: Shame is positively related to ICWB.

An Integrative Model

Building on Hypotheses 1 and 3, we also propose a conditional indirect effect. That is, coworker support exceeding expectations leads to more gratitude and, in turn, greater ICB—particularly when workplace status is lower. Lower-status employees are more likely to need and appreciate support, making such support a positive expectation violation that fosters gratitude. In turn, gratitude will encourage employees to engage in ICB. In contrast, when employee workplace status is higher, the benefits of coworker support exceeding expectations on gratitude will be diminished. Accordingly, employees will be less likely to engage in ICB.

Hypothesis 5: The indirect effect of coworker support (including coworker instrumental and emotional support) exceeding expectations on ICB via gratitude is moderated by workplace status such that this indirect effect is enhanced when workplace status is lower rather than higher.

We also propose a conditional indirect effect based on Hypotheses 2 and 4. When

workplace status is higher, coworker support exceeding expectations is more likely to violate the recipient's self-view, triggering shame, which in turn leads to increased ICWB. In contrast, lower-status employees will experience less shame in response to such support, making them less likely to engage in ICWB.

> *Hypothesis 6: The indirect effect of coworker support (including coworker instrumental and emotional support) exceeding expectations on ICWB via shame is moderated by workplace status such that this indirect effect is enhanced when workplace status is higher rather than lower.*

STUDY 1

Sample and Procedure

In Study 1, the sample consisted of 230 employees from a food processing company in China. This company has multiple ranks, ranging from lower hierarchical ranks—such as front-line employees, group leaders, and team leaders—to middle managers, senior managers, and a general manager. We used a two-wave survey design. At Time 1, we distributed online surveys to 230 employees that asked them to rate coworker support exceeding expectations, gratitude, and shame. In total, 218 finished the survey. We obtained objective data on workplace status from the company. At Time 2 (two weeks after Time 1), employees were asked to assess ICB and ICWB; 210 finished the survey. After matching the data, the responses of 208 employees were retained in the final sample pool, yielding a response rate of 90.43%. Among them, 63.50% were male, the average age was 29.83 years (SD = 5.44), and the average organizational tenure was 1.50 years (SD = 1.12). The majority of participants (61.00%) had obtained a college degree or above.

Measures

Because all measures were developed in Western countries, we followed Brislin's (1986) recommended translation/back-translation procedures. Unless otherwise noted, measures used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Coworker support exceeding expectations.[1] We measured coworker support exceeding expectations (Cronbach's alpha [α] = .99) using two items from Houston et al. (2018): "Coworker support is ___ than I expected" and "Coworkers provide support as expected." Responses used a five-point scale ranging from 1 (much worse) to 5 (much better). The perceptual evaluation of coworker support exceeding expectations has been confirmed in prior research (Houston et al., 2018; Oliver, 1980). This direct perceptual measure essentially captures how much support employees receive and how much they expect in terms of coworker support, because it is only when they compare their expectations and receive support that they can determine the level of coworker support that exceeds expectations. In addition to Cronbach's alpha, we calculated the correlations coefficient as a measure of reliability. The correlation between the two items was high, as expected (r = .97, p < .001).

[1] We focused on coworker support exceeding expectations. A lower level of coworker support exceeding expectations (i.e., values of 1 and 2) means that coworker support is less than expectations, a value of 3 means that coworker support just meets expectations, and higher levels (i.e., values of 4 and 5) mean that coworker support exceeds expectations. This construct captures the complete phenomenon of coworker support. We also conducted a qualitative study to verify whether our understanding of the phenomenon (i.e., excessive coworker support) was valid. Qualitative data from 30 Chinese workers showed that coworker support exceeding expectations is common in the workplace. Representative examples of the interview results can be found at https://osf.io/zewgx/?view_only=23e2d73dd68e4395b62107f1b6bab00c.

Workplace status. We used the objective data on the workplace hierarchy to measure workplace status (1 = front-line employee, 2 = group leader, 3 = team leader, 4 = middle manager).

Gratitude. We adopted the three-item scale from DeSteno et al. (2010) to measure gratitude (α = .98). A sample item is "How grateful/appreciative/positive do you feel toward coworkers?" Responses used a five-point scale ranging from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely).

Shame. Shame (α = .98) was assessed using the four-item scale from Bonner et al. (2017). Sample items are "I feel ashamed" and "I feel dissatisfied with self." Responses used a five-point scale ranging from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely).

Interpersonal citizenship behavior. ICB (α = .98) was assessed using the seven-item scale developed by Williams and Anderson (1991). A sample item is "I help coworkers who have heavy workloads."

Interpersonal counterproductive work behavior. ICWB (α = .99) was assessed using the six-item scale developed by Dalal et al. (2009). A sample item is "I criticize coworkers' opinions or suggestions."

Control variables. We controlled for employee gender, age, education, and organizational tenure to exclude alternative explanations. We controlled for baseline ICB and ICWB to reduce the concern for reversed causality and included prosocial motivation (α = .98;

Grant, 2008) and narcissism (α = .92; Back et al., 2013) measured at Time 1 to rule out alternative explanations.

Analytical Strategy

Due to the nested data structure, we employed the "cluster" and "type = complex" syntaxes in Mplus 8.0 to test the hypotheses (Muthén and Muthén, 1998–2017). The independent variable and moderator constructs were grand-mean centered (Hofmann and Gavin, 1998). To test the moderation effects, we graphed the interaction effects and tested the simple slopes for higher (1 *SD* above the mean) and lower (1 *SD* below the mean) levels of the moderator. To test the conditional indirect effects, we entered coefficient estimates from the regression analyses at higher and lower values of the moderator into the Monte Carlo analysis with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) (20,000 repetitions).

Preliminary Analysis

Table I reports the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables. Given that objective data were used for the workplace status variable, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the discrimination validity of the remaining five constructs. The five-factor model demonstrated a good fit, $\chi^2(199) = 327.18$, RMSEA = .06, CFI = .97, TLI = .96, SRMR = .03. This model also had a significantly better fit than the alternative models, such as the four-factor model (gratitude and shame as a factor), $\chi^2(203) = 1125.36$, RMSEA = .15, CFI = .76, TLI = .72, SRMR = .17.

[Insert Table I about here]

Hypothesis Testing

As shown in Table II, the interaction effect of coworker support exceeding expectations and workplace status on gratitude was significant ($\gamma = -.18$, $SE = .07$, $p = .015$); this result supported Hypothesis 1. The results of simple slope tests (Figure 2) revealed that coworker support exceeding expectations was positively related to employee gratitude when workplace status was lower ($\gamma = .52$, $SE = .09$, $p < .001$), whereas the effect was not significant when workplace status was higher ($\gamma = .22$, $SE = .12$, *n.s.*). The interaction effect of coworker support exceeding expectations and workplace status on shame was also significant ($\gamma = .28$, $SE = .09$, $p = .003$). The simple slope tests (Figure 3) indicated that coworker support exceeding expectations was positively related to employee shame when workplace status was higher ($\gamma = .39$, $SE = .16$, $p = .014$), whereas the effect was not significant when workplace status was lower ($\gamma = -.08$, $SE = .13$, *n.s.*). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

[Insert Table II and Figures 2 and 3 about here]

Consistent with Hypotheses 3 and 4, gratitude was positively related to ICB ($\gamma = .17$, $SE = .08$, $p = .033$) and shame was positively related to ICWB ($\gamma = .19$, $SE = .09$, $p = .040$). The Monte Carlo analysis indicated that the indirect effect on ICB was significant when workplace status was lower (*indirect effect* = .09, 95% CI = [.007, .172]), whereas this effect was weakened when workplace status was higher (*indirect effect* = .04, 95% CI = [.002, .086]). The difference between the indirect effects at higher and lower values of workplace status was significant (*difference* = −.05, 95% CI = [−.114, −.004]). Altogether, these results provide support for

Hypothesis 5. The indirect effect on ICWB was significant when workplace status was higher (*indirect effect* = .07, 95% CI = [.008, .165]), whereas this effect was not significant when workplace status was lower (*indirect effect* = −.01, 95% CI = [−.061, .022]). In addition, the difference between the indirect effects at higher and lower values of workplace status was significant (*difference* = .08, 95% CI = [.010, .196]). Thus, Hypothesis 6 was supported.[2]

STUDY 2

Study 1 used self-reported data, whose use can lead to common method bias, and did not explore the specific dimensions of coworker support exceeding expectations. Although we expected the same pattern to hold for these two dimensions, it was important to confirm it with empirical evidence. Thus, in Study 2, we not only collected multisource data but also measured instrumental and emotional coworker support exceeding expectations using an advanced approach that considered both the expected level of support and the actual received support.

Sample and Procedure

We obtained a sample of 235 employees from a construction company located in China. This construction company has a range of workplace statuses, including junior (front-line employees),

[2] We obtained self-reported data (in addition to the objective data) for employee workplace status in Study 1, which we used to conduct additional analyses. The self-reported workplace status measurements used Djurdjevic et al.'s (2017) five-item scale and a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), and led us to reach a consistent conclusion. The detailed results can be seen via the abovementioned link. Furthermore, we conducted additional analyses by adding the link between gratitude and ICWB and the link between shame and ICB. In Study 1, these analyses showed that gratitude was not significantly related to ICWB ($\gamma = -.15$, $SE = .14$, *n.s.*) and shame was negatively related to ICB ($\gamma = -.13$, $SE = .06$, $p = .026$). In Study 2, gratitude was not significantly related to ICWB ($\gamma = -.12$, $SE = .06$, *n.s.*) and shame was not significantly related to ICB ($\gamma = -.11$, $SE = .06$, *n.s.*). In Study 3a, gratitude was not significantly related to ICWB ($\gamma = -.01$, $SE = .02$, *n.s.*) and shame was not significantly related to ICB ($\gamma = -.07$, $SE = .05$, *n.s.*). In Study 3b, gratitude was not significantly related to ICWB ($\gamma = .03$, $SE = .03$, *n.s.*) and shame was not significantly related to ICB ($\gamma = -.03$, $SE = .05$, *n.s.*).

intermediate (group and team leaders), and superior (middle managers) construction employees, as well as senior managers and the general manager. We used a three-wave survey design with a one-month interval. At Time 1, employees rated the instrumental and emotional coworker support expected and received. In total, 227 employees finished this survey. We obtained objective data on workplace status from the company. At Time 2, employees assessed their gratitude and shame. A total of 217 employees finished this survey. At Time 3, employees rated each coworker's ICB and ICWB based on a round-robin design. A total of 203 employees finished this survey. After matching the data, the responses of 211 employees were retained in the final sample pool (response rate = 89.79%). Of these, 88.20% were male, the average age was 32.96 years (*SD* = 8.15), and the average organizational tenure was 1.93 years (*SD* = 1.33). The majority of participants (82%) had obtained a college degree or above.

Measures

We measured expectations of coworker instrumental support (α = .96; e.g., "To what extent do I expect my coworkers to assist me with heavy workloads?") and coworker instrumental support received (α = .97; "To what extent do my coworkers assist me with heavy workloads?") using five items from Tews et al. (2019) and a five-point scale ranging from 1 (to a small extent) to 5 (to a large extent). We measured expectations of coworker emotional support (α = .94; e.g., "To what extent do I expect my coworkers to take time to listen to my concerns?") and coworker emotional support received (α = .95; "To what extent do my coworkers take time to listen to my concerns?") using six items from Tews et al. (2019) and a five-point scale ranging from 1 (to a

small extent) to 5 (to a large extent). The value of coworker (instrumental/emotional) support exceeding expectations was calculated as the value of coworker (instrumental/emotional) support received minus the value of expectations of coworker (instrumental/emotional) support.

We used the objective data on the workplace hierarchy to measure workplace status (1 = front-line employee, 2 = group leader, 3 = team leader, 4 = middle manager). We adopted the same scales as in Study 1 to measure gratitude (α = .95) and shame (α = .88). We calculated ICB (α = .96) and ICWB (α = .93) by aggregating the ratings from all the other members of the focal individual's team to obtain an average value for that individual. We measured ICB using the three-item scale from Henderson et al. (2020); we measured ICWB using the three items with the highest factor loadings in the scale developed by Bennett and Robinson (2000). We controlled for employee demographics, prosocial motivation (α = .96), and narcissism (α = .86), as we had done in Study 1. We also controlled for agreeableness (α = .93; Donnellan et al., 2006), positive affectivity (α = .84), negative affectivity (α = .92; Thompson, 2007), and the value of coworker (instrumental/emotional) support received. All of these items were measured at Time 1.

Preliminary Analysis

The means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables are reported in Table III. The ratio of the sample size to the total number of items impaired the overall model fit; thus, we parceled expectations of coworker emotional support and coworker emotional support received into two items, respectively, using a random algorithm (Little et al., 2002). The six-factor model (which included self-reported variables; i.e., expectations for coworker

instrumental/emotional support, coworker instrumental/emotional support received, gratitude, and shame) demonstrated a good fit, $\chi^2(174) = 380.08$, RMSEA = .08, CFI = .95, TLI = .94, SRMR = .03. Its fit was significantly better than that for the alternative models, such as the five-factor model (gratitude and shame as a factor), $\chi^2(179) = 783.56$, RMSEA = .13, CFI = .84, TLI = .82, SRMR = .12.

[Insert Table III about here]

Hypothesis Testing

We used the same analytical strategy in Study 2 as in Study 1. As shown in Table IV, the interaction effect of coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations and workplace status on gratitude was significant ($\gamma = -.19$, $SE = .09$, $p = .035$). As shown in Figure 4, coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations was positively related to employee gratitude when workplace status was lower ($\gamma = .21$, $SE = .10$, $p = .042$), but not when workplace status was higher ($\gamma = .01$, $SE = .08$, *n.s.*). The interaction effect of coworker emotional support exceeding expectations and workplace status on gratitude was significant ($\gamma = -.58$, $SE = .22$, $p = .007$). Simple slope tests (Figure 5) indicated that coworker emotional support exceeding expectations was positively related to employee gratitude when workplace status was lower ($\gamma = .25$, $SE = .12$, $p = .032$), but was negatively related when workplace status was higher ($\gamma = -.39$, $SE = .18$, $p = .027$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported. The interaction effect of coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations and workplace status on shame was significant ($\gamma = .13$, $SE = .06$, $p = .028$). As shown in Figure 6, coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations was

positively related to employee shame when workplace status was higher (γ = .18, *SE* = .06, *p* = .006), but not when workplace status was lower (γ = .04, *SE* = .07, *n.s.*). The interaction effect of coworker emotional support exceeding expectations and workplace status on shame was not significant (γ = .02, *SE* = .12, *n.s.*). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was partially supported.

[Insert Table IV, Figures 4, 5, and 6 about here]

Supporting Hypotheses 3 and 4, gratitude was related to ICB (γ = .41, *SE* = .07, $p < .001$) and shame was related to ICWB (γ = .19, *SE* = .07, *p* = .012). The indirect effect (instrumental) on ICB via gratitude was significant when workplace status was lower (*indirect effect* = .09, 95% CI = [.025, .151]), but was not significant when workplace status was higher (*indirect effect* = .00, 95% CI = [−.047, .052]), with a significant difference (*difference* = −.09, 95% CI = [−.141, −.029]). The indirect effect (emotional) on ICB via gratitude was positive when workplace status was lower (*indirect effect* = .10, 95% CI = [.022, .191]), but was negative when workplace status was higher (*indirect effect* = −.16, 95% CI = [−.258, −.070]), with a significant difference (*difference* = −.26, 95% CI = [−.402, −.138]). This suggests that higher-status employees reduce their gratitude under this condition—that is, they do not appreciate too much emotional support. This finding is consistent with our core rationale that too much support might not be a good thing for higher-status employees. Hypothesis 5 was supported.

The indirect effect (instrumental) on ICWB via shame was significant when workplace status was higher (*indirect effect* = .03, 95% CI = [.011, .062]), but was not significant when workplace status was lower (*indirect effect* = .01, 95% CI = [−.016, .031]), with a significant

difference (*difference* = .02, 95% CI = [.005, .054]). The indirect effect (emotional) on ICWB via shame was insignificant when workplace status was higher (*indirect effect* = −.03, 95% CI = [−.071, .003]), but was not significant when workplace status was lower (*indirect effect* = −.01, 95% CI = [−.074, .003]), without a significant difference (*difference* = .02, 95% CI = [−.042, .053]). Thus, Hypothesis 6 was partially supported.

Supplemental Analysis

When we tested whether the effects of expectation violation depend on the absolute level of coworker support, we only found that the absolute level of coworker emotional support moderated the effect of coworker emotional support exceeding expectations on gratitude (γ = .18, *SE* = .08, p = .028). To ensure the uniqueness of our mediators, we controlled for empathic emotions and guilt, and also included them as parallel mediators. In this analysis, we reached a conclusion consistent with that in the main analysis. Detailed results are provided in the online materials (see the aforementioned link).

STUDY 3A

The samples in Studies 1 and 2 consisted of Chinese participants, and we could not establish causality among the variables. To enhance the generalizability of our results and allow for causality conclusions, we conducted Studies 3a and 3b using scenario-based experiments with Western samples. Study 3a manipulated coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations and workplace status. Study 3b manipulated coworker emotional support exceeding expectations and workplace status.

Sample and Procedure

In Study 3a, the sample consisted of 500 participants obtained via the Prolific platform. Participants living in the United States were compensated GBP 0.7 for completing the online experiment. They reported their demographics before the manipulation and were randomly assigned to one of six conditions (i.e., higher/neutral/lower coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations × higher/lower workplace status). After reporting gratitude, shame, ICB, and ICWB, they rated coworker support exceeding expectations and workplace status as manipulation checks. Of the 466 participants who met the study requirements (full-time employees and 18 years or older), 50.4% were male, 65.9% had a bachelor's degree or higher, and 72.7% were White. Their occupations included professional services (13.3%), healthcare (12.2%), and education (10.1%). Participants' average age was 40.05 years (SD = 11.64); they had been employed in their current organization for 7.44 years, on average (SD = 7.08); and their average working tenure was 19.01 years.

Manipulation Materials

The scenarios for the coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations manipulation were developed based on prior research on coworker support (Houston et al., 2018; Tews et al., 2019). Participants were described as experiencing higher, neutral, or lower coworker support exceeding expectations. We developed the scenarios of workplace status manipulation. Participants were asked to read the scenario, which assumed they had either higher or lower workplace status. See the aforementioned link for the instructions and scenarios.

Measures

We measured gratitude (α = .98), shame (α = .96), ICB (α = .90), and ICWB (α = .89) using the same scales as in Study 1.

Manipulation Check

We adapted the two items from Houston et al. (2018) to measure coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations (α = .97): "Coworker instrumental support (e.g., direct assistance and advice) is ___ than I expected" and "Coworkers provide instrumental support (e.g., direct assistance and advice) as expected." Workplace status was measured using a single item: "Based on the scenario, think about your current job and your place in the workplace ladder. Where would you place yourself … in your workplace as a whole?" (1 = lowest rank, 5 = highest rank). The ANOVA test showed a significant difference in coworker instrumental support exceeding expectation, $F(2, 463) = 470.32$, $p < .001$, for the higher coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations condition (N = 154; M = 4.43, SD = .69) compared with the neutral condition (N = 158; M = 3.60, SD = .76) and the lower condition (N = 154; M = 1.65, SD = .97). We found a significant difference in workplace status, $F(1, 464) = 126.24$, $p < .001$, for the higher workplace status condition (N = 233; M = 3.30, SD = .84) compared with the lower workplace status condition (N = 233; M = 2.41, SD = .88).

Hypothesis Testing

Table V shows the means, SDs, and correlations of the research variables. The five-factor (excluding workplace status) model demonstrated a good fit, $\chi^2(199) = 555.46$, RMSEA = .06,

CFI = .97, TLI = .96, SRMR = .04, and had a significantly better fit than the alternative models, such as a four-factor model (gratitude and shame as a factor), $\chi^2(203) = 2939.38$, RMSEA = .17, CFI = .75, TLI = .71, SRMR = .14. The univariate ANOVA showed a significant interaction effect of the coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations conditions and the workplace status conditions on gratitude, $F(2, 460) = 19.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$. Under the higher workplace status condition, there was an insignificant difference in gratitude ($M_{lower} = 2.64$, $SD = 1.28$; $M_{neutral} = 2.81$, $SD = 1.21$; $M_{higher} = 3.00$, $SD = 1.35$), $F(2, 230) = 1.47$, *n.s.*; in contrast, there was a significant difference in gratitude ($M_{lower} = 2.26$, $SD = 1.33$; $M_{neutral} = 3.80$, $SD = .89$; $M_{higher} = 4.11$, $SD = .89$) under the lower workplace status condition, $F(2, 230) = 68.79$, $p < .001$. Hypothesis 1 was supported.

[Insert Table V about here]

Consistent with Hypothesis 2, there was a significant interaction effect of the coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations conditions and the workplace status conditions on shame, $F(2, 460) = 7.65$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Under the higher workplace status condition, there was a significant difference in shame ($M_{lower} = 1.31$, $SD = .51$; $M_{neutral} = 1.47$, $SD = .97$; $M_{higher} = 1.95$, $SD = 1.59$), $F(2, 230) = 6.88$, $p = .001$; in contrast, there was not a significant difference in shame ($M_{lower} = 1.42$, $SD = .67$; $M_{neutral} = 1.25$, $SD = .55$; $M_{higher} = 1.26$, $SD = .58$) under the lower workplace status condition, $F(2, 230) = 1.86$, *n.s.*

Gratitude was positively related to ICB ($B = .11$, $SE = .03$, $p = .001$) and shame was positively related to ICWB ($B = .16$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypotheses 3 and 4. We

tested the conditional indirect effects using the PROCESS macro for SPSS, specifying Model 7 with 5000 resamples (Hayes, 2013). The results indicated that the conditional indirect effect of coworker support exceeding expectations on ICB via gratitude was moderated by workplace status (*B* = −.08, *SE* = .03, 95% CI = [−.155, −.032]). When workplace status was higher, this indirect effect was not significant (*indirect effect* = .02, *SE* = .01, 95% CI = [−.001, .057]). When workplace status was lower, this indirect effect was significant (*indirect effect* = .10, *SE* = .03, 95% CI = [.039, .175]). Hypothesis 5 was supported. The conditional indirect effect of coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations on ICWB via shame was moderated by workplace status (*B* = .06, *SE* = .02, 95% CI = [.025, .122]). When workplace status was higher, this indirect effect was significant (*indirect effect* = .05, *SE* = .02, 95% CI = [.019, .100]). When workplace status was lower, this indirect effect was not significant (*indirect effect* = −.01, *SE* = .01, 95% CI = [−.035, .002]). Hypothesis 6 was supported.

STUDY 3B

Sample and Procedure

Study 3b used the same sampling and procedure as Study 3a, with participants being randomly assigned to one of the six conditions (i.e., higher/neutral/lower coworker emotional support exceeding expectations × higher/lower workplace status). A total of 479 participants fulfilled the requirements. In the final sample, 60.10% of participants were male, 66.00% had obtained a bachelor's degree or above, and 72.40% were White. Their work involved healthcare and social assistance (12.10%), retail trade (10.40%), and finance and insurance (9.80%). Participants'

average age was 41.38 years (*SD* = 11.44); they had been employed in their current organization for 8.13 years, on average (*SD* = 7.19); and their average working tenure was 19.84 years.

Manipulation Materials

The scenarios for the coworker emotional support exceeding expectations manipulation were developed based on based on previous research on coworker support (Houston et al., 2018; Tews et al., 2019). Participants were described as experiencing higher, neutral, or lower coworker emotional support exceeding expectations. The scenarios for the workplace status manipulation were the same as in Study 3a. See the aforementioned link for the instructions and scenarios.

Measures

We measured gratitude (α = .97), shame (α = .94), ICB (α = .88), and ICWB (α = .91) using the same scales as in Study 1.

Manipulation Check

We adapted the two items from Houston et al. (2018) to measure coworker emotional support exceeding expectations (α = .97): "Coworker emotional support (e.g., empathic understanding, listening, and sensitivity) is ___ than I expected" and "Coworkers provide emotional support (e.g., empathic understanding, listening, and sensitivity) as expected" (1 = much worse, 5 = much better). Workplace status was measured using the same single item as in Study 3a.

There was a significant difference in coworker emotional support exceeding expectations [$F(2, 476) = 379.16$, $p < .001$] for the higher coworker emotional support exceeding expectations condition (N = 157; M = 4.50, SD = .65) compared with the neutral condition (N = 164; M =

3.75, *SD* = .81) and the lower condition (*N* = 158; *M* = 1.84, *SD* = 1.13). There was also a significant difference in workplace status [$F(1, 477) = 105.38$, $p < .001$)] under the higher workplace status condition (*N* = 238; *M* = 3.33, *SD* = .85) and the lower workplace status condition (*N* = 241; *M* = 2.50, *SD* = .93).

Hypothesis Testing

Table VI shows the means, *SD*s, and correlations for the research variables. The five-factor (without workplace status) model demonstrated a good fit, $\chi^2(199) = 609.61$, RMSEA = .07, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, SRMR = .05 (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Its fit was significantly better than that for the alternative models, such as a four-factor model (gratitude and shame as a factor), $\chi^2(203) = 2373.09$, RMSEA = .15, CFI = .79, TLI = .76, SRMR = .15. The univariate ANOVA showed a significant interaction effect of the coworker emotional support exceeding expectations conditions and the workplace status conditions on gratitude, $F(2, 473) = 20.26$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$. Under the higher workplace status condition, although there was a significant difference in gratitude ($M_{lower} = 2.57$, $SD = 1.06$; $M_{neutral} = 2.87$, $SD = 1.11$; $M_{higher} = 3.07$, $SD = 1.19$), $F(2, 235) = 3.84$, $p = .023$, the differences were smaller than under the lower workplace status condition ($M_{lower} = 2.31$, $SD = 1.35$; $M_{neutral} = 3.91$, $SD = .82$; $M_{higher} = 4.13$, $SD = .70$), $F(2, 238) = 79.60$, $p < .001$. Hypothesis 1 was supported.

[Insert Table VI about here]

Consistent with Hypothesis 2, the interaction effect of the coworker emotional support exceeding expectations conditions and the workplace status conditions on shame was significant,

$F(2, 473) = 3.42$, $p = .033$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Under the higher workplace status condition, there was a significant difference in shame ($M_{lower} = 1.29$, $SD = .47$; $M_{neutral} = 1.31$, $SD = .71$; $M_{higher} = 1.64$, $SD = 1.19$), $F(2, 235) = 4.31$, $p = .015$, but no significant difference in shame ($M_{lower} = 1.52$, $SD = .68$; $M_{neutral} = 1.45$, $SD = .79$; $M_{higher} = 1.43$, $SD = .69$) was found under the lower workplace status condition, $F(2, 238) = .32$, *n.s*. Gratitude was positively related to ICB ($B = .11$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$) and shame was positively related to ICWB ($B = .25$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypotheses 3 and 4.

The conditional indirect effect of coworker emotional support exceeding expectations on ICB via gratitude was not moderated by workplace status (*effect* = −.07, *SE* = .02, 95% CI = [−.128, −.028]). When workplace status was higher, this indirect effect was significant (*indirect effect* = .03, *SE* = .01, 95% CI = [.007, .060]). When workplace status was lower, it was significant but enhanced (*indirect effect* = .10, *SE* = .03, 95% CI = [.039, .161]). Hypothesis 5 was supported.

The conditional indirect effect of coworker emotional support exceeding expectations on ICWB via shame was moderated by workplace status (*effect* = .05, *SE* = .02, 95% CI = [.015, .109]). When workplace status was higher, this indirect effect was significant (*indirect effect* = .04, *SE* = .02, 95% CI = [.013, .087]). When workplace status was lower, this indirect effect was not significant (*indirect effect* = −.01, *SE* = .01, 95% CI = [−.041, .015]). Hypothesis 6 was supported.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Contributions

This research contributes to the social support literature and research on workplace status in multiple ways. First, we highlight a new perspective on expectation violations that explores the functions of coworker support. Although prior research has confirmed both the benefits and potential negative effects of coworker support (Brock and Lawrence, 2014; Rafaeli and Gleason, 2009; Van Yperen and Hagedoorn, 2003), the understanding is limited because scholars mostly focused on either the light or dark side of the absolute level of coworker support. Our study shifts attention from the absolute level of coworker support to its relative level by considering expectation violations. This approach enriches our understanding of social support in the workplace.

Although receiving coworker support is often seen as a positive outcome, it could be a mixed blessing. Some studies have indicated that it does not consistently enhance recipients' health, engagement, or performance (Gonzalez-Mulé and Yuan, 2022; Yun and Beehr, 2023), whereas others have highlighted its benefits (Halbesleben and Wheeler, 2015). A key reason for these mixed findings may be the overlooked role of support recipients' expectations. Our study introduces expectation violations as a factor that explains when coworker support exceeding expectations leads to positive or negative outcomes. This perspective emphasizes that recipients' and providers' expectations—rather than absolute support levels—shape reactions (Brock and

Lawrence, 2014; Ehrhardt and Ragins, 2019). Thus, our research offers a new lens for examining how coworker support influences recipients.

Notably, our research separates the dimensions of coworker support and tests their influence in our model. Thus, our findings provide more detailed and accurate predictions of coworker support exceeding expectations. More importantly, in Study 2, we controlled for the absolute level of coworker support in the main analysis. This study verified the unique role of coworker support exceeding expectations compared with the absolute level of coworker support. In turn, we conclude that coworker support exceeding expectations has an effect above and beyond that of the absolute level of coworker support.

Our second contribution is documenting when coworker support exceeding expectations becomes a positive versus a negative expectation violation, with workplace status as a key boundary condition. According to expectation violation theory, an employee's status influences how they perceive valence in the violation of expectations, so it should be a key element in the expectation violation process (Burgoon and Hale, 1988). We emphasize the need to consider the recipient's workplace status in understanding the effects of coworker support. Our findings support expectation violation theory, confirming that individuals' status does matter in their evaluations of expectation violations when they receive coworker support. In this way, our investigation sheds light on a crucial boundary condition for coworker support effectiveness in influencing employees' interpersonal behavior.

Third, we clarify how coworker support exceeding expectations may be processed and comprehended by recipients in a differential manner. Focusing on an other-oriented emotion (gratitude) and a self-oriented emotion (shame), we created a theoretical framework that explains how coworker support exceeding expectations can be a positive versus negative expectation violation that induces interpersonal behavior. By depicting gratitude (shame) as a unique intermediary linking positive (negative) expectation violations and interpersonal behavior, our study emphasizes that employees tend to have different emotional reactions to specific expectation violations.

Although the perspective of expectation violations has garnered significant attention in psychology, sociology, and management, little research to date has empirically tested the mechanisms linking expectation violations and individual reactions (Livingston et al., 2016; Stiegert et al., 2021; Wayne et al., 2023), particularly the role of emotional reactions. This is an important limitation because the theory emphasizes that emotions should be an immediate reaction to expectation violations (Afifi and Metts, 1998). Our research extends this line of work by testing two fundamental emotions—gratitude and shame—and demonstrating that support exceeding expectations is a mixed blessing for employees' interpersonal behavior. This work supports expectation violation theory and enriches our understanding of the specific emotions triggered by different types of expectation violations.

Notably, prior research has shown that the absolute level of coworker support may be related to gratitude and shame. Our study, however, takes a new tack by focusing on the level of

coworker support relative to expectations. We largely verified these emotional mechanisms underlying the interaction effect of coworker support exceeding expectations and workplace status. The alternative mechanism (i.e., empathic emotions and guilt) did not play a role in our model, as shown in the supplemental analysis for Study 2. Thus, this investigation adds to our knowledge of the phenomenon of coworker support exceeding expectations.

Lastly, our work deepens the literature on workplace status. This characteristic, despite its broad recognition (Aquino, 2000; Aquino and Douglas, 2003), has not been fully explored in the context of social support. Our findings reveal that the impact of coworker support exceeding expectations depends on employee workplace status, enriching the nomological network of workplace status. Moreover, we found that higher workplace status triggers negative reactions to excessive support, which aligns with previous research highlighting the potential dark side of workplace status (Lee et al., 2020).

Practical Implications

Our findings have several implications for practitioners aiming to maximize the benefits of coworker support while minimizing its potential costs. The impact of coworker support exceeding expectations largely depends on the recipient's workplace status. Although coworker support is generally viewed positively, organizations should recognize that it may not always be beneficial for employees with higher workplace status. Organizations can encourage employees to offer support strategically and to communicate effectively to better determine their peers' needs. Regular team meetings and collaborative tools, such as messaging apps, can facilitate this

process. Training on effective communication, active listening, and empathy can further enhance interpersonal interactions. If necessary, organizations can offer incentives for employees to help their coworkers.

From the focal employee's perspective, clearly expressing expectations for support is crucial. Employees should specify what type and level of support they need, instead of simply saying, "I need help." When employees occupy a lower hierarchical position, coworkers should provide adequate or even more-than-expected support. For example, the organizational culture might emphasize giving support to those in lower positions. This approach is likely to foster gratitude and encourage more ICB among recipients.

Our research aligns with the "too much of a good thing" effect (Grant and Schwartz, 2011; Pierce and Aguinis, 2013), showing that for higher-status employees, coworker support exceeding expectations may lead to shame and increased ICWB. We do not suggest that coworker support is inherently bad or that organizations should discourage support. Rather, we recommend offering subtle, respectful assistance to higher-status employees with appropriate boundaries. Organizations should consider the recipient's status and could implement targeted programs (e.g., employee assistance or high-level mentoring by external consultants) for higher-status employees to prevent excessive coworker support.

Moreover, our results suggest that experiencing gratitude in the workplace is valuable for promoting ICB. Managers can encourage employees to express gratitude to their coworkers, and organizations can introduce training programs for interpersonal interactions that aim to cultivate

employees' gratitude and create a work climate of gratitude. Relatedly, given that shame is linked to ICWB, managers should seek to improve employees' negative self-oriented emotions by providing emotional regulation training courses. Employees are encouraged to actively engage in emotional regulation to avoid such negative emotions.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our research has some limitations that suggest promising avenues for future research. First, our model highlighted the role of workplace status, but future research might explore individual-, interpersonal-, and contextual-related factors as moderators to clarify when support recipients are likely to appreciate or dislike coworker support exceeding expectations. Furthermore, our study focused on employees receiving too much support from coworkers with the same status. A promising direction is to explore whether status differences between support providers and recipients play a role in recipients' reactions to receiving excessive social support.

Second, while our research confirmed the negative influences of shame on interpersonal behaviors, future research could explore its potential positive functions, as this emotional reaction can lead to constructive behaviors in certain contexts (Leach and Cidam, 2015). Additionally, grounded in expectation violation theory, our study validated the dual emotional pathways of gratitude and shame. Although we ruled out empathic emotions and guilt as mediators, other potential mediators, such as vulnerability, may still exist. Future research should explore additional mediators to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how coworker support exceeding expectations impacts recipients' outcomes.

Third, our hypotheses were supported in Studies 1, 3a, and 3b. In Study 2, workplace status did not moderate the effect of coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations on shame—a finding that may result from cultural differences. Westerners view people as independent due to their individualist culture, whereas Asians view people as being connected to others within their collectivist culture (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). This cultural difference suggests that coping via social support may be more common among Asians, who value interconnectedness. Instrumental support, which helps with workplace tasks, is particularly relevant in this context. Chinese employees may not feel shame when receiving excessive instrumental support. In Western cultures, this leads to shame for higher-status employees, as demonstrated in Studies 3a and 3b. Scholars can explore these types of cultural differences and determine whether they shape individuals' reactions to excessive coworker support.

Fourth, our research used a traditional between-person analysis, but a dyadic approach using experience sampling could further examine how employees react to coworker support exceeding expectations. Although Studies 3a and 3b tested causality, the dependent variables were participants' intentions, not their actual behaviors. Future studies should measure actual behaviors using task-related techniques.

Lastly, while we followed Köhler and Cortina's (2021) recommendation to conduct multiple studies as replications, the self-reported data in Studies 1, 3a, and 3b may raise concerns about common method bias. Future research should collect data from multiple sources, as we did in Study 2, to reduce the risk of this bias.

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Table I. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Study Variables in Study 1

Variables	Mean	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Gender	0.37	0.48													
2. Age	29.83	5.44	−.23**												
3. Education	2.61	1.11	.29***	−.08											
4. Organizational tenure	1.50	1.12	.00	.06	.08										
5. Baseline ICB	3.63	0.70	−.16*	−.02	−.03	−.03									
6. Baseline ICWB	1.80	0.85	.05	−.04	−.04	−.02	−.39***								
7. Prosocial motivation	3.73	0.72	−.29***	−.01	−.13	−.09	.66***	−.29***							
8. Narcissism	2.83	0.84	−.17*	−.01	−.09	−.07	.02	.17*	.06						
9. Coworker support exceeding expectations	3.80	0.95	−.10	.03	−.09	−.10	.42***	−.25***	.49***	−.02					
10. Gratitude	3.69	0.82	−.10	−.03	−.03	−.09	.47***	−.26***	.53***	.05	.62***				
11. Shame	2.58	1.15	−.26***	.00	−.22**	−.09	.08	−.17*	.04	.27***	.11	.11			
12. Workplace status	1.99	0.84	−.20**	.00	−.07	−.16*	.23**	.08	.21**	.25***	.23**	.12	.48***		
13. ICB	3.67	0.71	−.12	−.02	−.05	−.11	.28***	−.16*	.34***	.02	.28***	.35***	−.06	.14*	
14. ICWB	2.44	1.18	−.11	−.01	.01	.06	−.06	.21**	−.08	.21**	−.09	−.12	.29***	.21**	−.16*

Note. $N = 208$. Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female. Education: 1 = middle school, 2 = high school, 3 = college, 4 = bachelor's degree.

Organizational tenure was measured in years. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Table II. Hypotheses Testing in Study 1

Variables	Gratitude	Shame	ICB	ICWB
Controls				
Gender	.01 (.09)	−.38* (.15)	−.05 (.11)	−.19 (.17)
Age	−.00 (.01)	−.02 (.01)	−.00 (.01)	−.01 (.01)
Education	.02 (.04)	−.14* (.06)	−.01 (.04)	.08 (.07)
Organizational tenure	−.04 (.04)	.02 (.07)	−.04 (.04)	.10 (.06)
Baseline ICB	.18* (.08)	.11 (.13)	.03 (.11)	.01 (.16)
Baseline ICWB	−.05 (.07)	.19* (.09)	−.04 (.06)	.18 (.10)
Prosocial motivation	.24* (.10)	−.27 (.14)	.16 (.10)	−.09 (.17)
Narcissism	.09 (.07)	.13 (.09)	−.01 (.07)	.16 (.12)
Predictors				
Coworker support exceeding expectations	.37*** (.08)	.16 (.12)	.02 (.07)	−.09 (.10)
Workplace status	−.02 (.06)	.45*** (.09)	.05 (.07)	.16 (.12)
Coworker support exceeding expectations × Workplace status	−.18* (.07)	.28** (.09)	−.01 (.07)	.02 (.11)
Gratitude			.17* (.08)	
Shame				.19* (.09)
Pseudo-R^2	50.22%	35.93%	16.63%	15.80%

Note. $N = 208$. *SE* of the coefficients is shown in parentheses. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Table III. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Study Variables in Study 2

Variables	Mean	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Gender	0.12	0.32																	
2. Age	32.96	8.15	−.21**																
3. Education	5.26	1.13	.15*	−.43***															
4. Organizational tenure	1.93	1.33	.01	.26***	.02														
5. Prosocial motivation	3.96	0.67	−.04	.04	−.00	.06													
6. Narcissism	2.44	0.76	.00	−.05	.08	.00	.06												
7. Agreeableness	3.90	0.62	.05	.03	−.06	.10	.65***	.03											
8. Positive affectivity	3.37	0.66	−.10	.01	−.10	−.08	.49***	.15*	.45***										
9. Negative affectivity	2.43	1.03	.10	−.21**	.05	.03	−.06	.36***	.09	.13									
10. CES	3.53	0.83	.00	−.06	−.07	−.06	.31***	−.06	.45***	.29***	.06								
11. CIS	3.06	1.10	.04	.00	−.09	−.04	.19**	−.00	.34***	.17*	.02	.34***							
12. CESEE	0.24	0.94	.17*	−.10	.10	.03	.07	−.08	.18**	.03	.09	.46***	.05						
13. CISEE	−.02	1.45	.12	−.09	.04	.02	.04	−.05	.14*	.02	−.01	.06	.66***	.00					
14. Gratitude	3.26	0.98	−.07	−.01	−.09	−.12	.08	−.09	.11	.04	.03	.29***	.14*	.09	.09				
15. Shame	1.89	0.76	−.05	−.07	.02	.05	−.08	.10	−.13	−.05	.16*	−.00	−.06	−.14*	.08	.04			
16. Workplace status	1.27	0.55	−.16*	.33***	.21**	.34***	.02	−.05	−.00	−.06	−.07	−.15*	−.18*	−.08	−.22**	−.07	−.04		
17. ICB	3.68	0.71	−.07	.15*	−.10	.04	−.05	.02	−.01	−.10	.01	.03	−.05	.11	−.14*	.48***	−.10	.04	
18. ICWB	1.61	0.56	.05	.03	.10	−.00	.03	.02	−.06	.06	−.01	.07	−.05	−.07	.06	−.16*	.30***	−.01	−.30***

Note. $N = 211$. Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female. Education: 1 = primary school, 2 = middle school, 3 = high school, 4 = college, 5 = bachelor's degree, 6 = master's degree, 7 = Ph.D. Organizational tenure was measured in years. CES: Coworker emotional support. CIS: Coworker instrumental support. CESEE: Coworker emotional support exceeding expectations. CISEE: Coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Table IV. Hypotheses Testing in Study 2

Variables	Gratitude	Shame	ICB	ICWB
Controls				
Gender	−.38 (.23)	−.07 (.18)	.00 (.17)	.18 (.16)
Age	−.00 (.01)	−.00 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Education	−.03 (.07)	−.02 (.06)	−.02 (.05)	.08* (.04)
Organizational tenure	−.02 (.05)	.02 (.04)	.02 (.04)	−.02 (.03)
Prosocial motivation	−.02 (.13)	.07 (.13)	−.03 (.08)	.05 (.08)
Narcissism	−.20 (.12)	.07 (.09)	.11 (.07)	.02 (.05)
Agreeableness	.10 (.16)	−.28 (.14)	.03 (.10)	−.12 (.10)
Positive affectivity	−.06 (.14)	−.08 (.10)	−.11 (.10)	.08 (.07)
Negative affectivity	.06 (.08)	.14* (.06)	−.01 (.06)	−.02 (.04)
Coworker instrumental support	−.03 (.09)	−.17 (.09)	.05 (.05)	−.09 (.06)
Coworker emotional support	.34** (.13)	.23* (.12)	−.16 (.09)	.14 (.08)
Predictors				
Coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations	.11 (.08)	.11 (.06)	−.12* (.05)	.06 (.05)
Coworker emotional support exceeding expectations	−.07 (.09)	−.17* (.07)	.13* (.06)	−.07 (.05)
Workplace status	−.25 (.19)	.11 (.14)	.03 (.11)	−.03 (.07)
Coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations × Workplace status	−.19* (.09)	.13* (.06)	.05 (.06)	−.03 (.06)
Coworker emotional support exceeding expectations × Workplace status	−.58** (.22)	.02 (.12)	.16 (.12)	.16 (.10)
Gratitude			.41*** (.07)	
Shame				.19* (.07)
Pseudo-R^2	24.53%	15.80%	35.43%	18.57%

Note. $N = 211$. *SE* of the coefficients is shown in parentheses. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Table V. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Study Variables in Study 3a

Variables	Mean	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
1. Coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations conditions	1.00	0.81					
2. Workplace status conditions	0.50	0.50	−.01				
3. Gratitude	3.10	1.34	.34***	−.22***			
4. Shame	1.44	0.92	.11*	.14**	−.19***		
5. ICB	3.68	0.87	.01	−.04	.16**	−.08	
6. ICWB	1.42	0.64	.05	−.05	.01	.22***	−.14**

Note. $N = 466$. Coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations conditions: 0 = lower, 1 = neutral, 2 = higher. Workplace status conditions: 0 = lower, 1 = higher. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Table VI. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Study Variables in Study 3b

Variables	Mean	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
1. Coworker instrumental support exceeding expectations conditions	1.00	0.81					
2. Workplace status conditions	0.50	0.50	.03				
3. Gratitude	3.14	1.25	.37***	−.24***			
4. Shame	1.44	0.79	.07	−.03	−.09*		
5. ICB	3.80	0.77	.03	−.01	.16**	−.03	
6. ICWB	1.41	0.64	−.10*	−.07	.03	.30***	−.17***

Note. $N = 479$. Coworker emotional support exceeding expectations conditions: 0 = lower, 1 = neutral, 2 = higher. Workplace status conditions: 0 = lower, 1 = higher. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Figure 1. The Theoretical Model

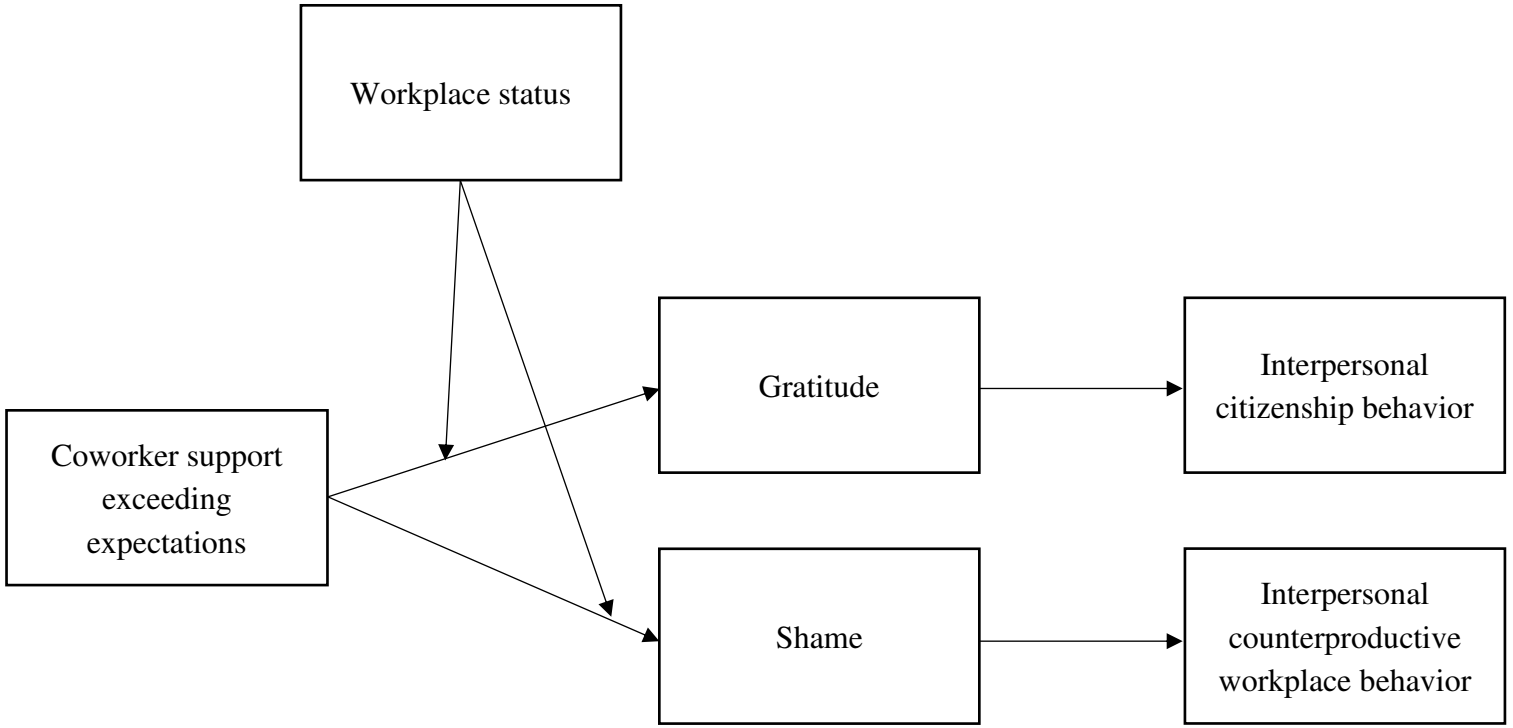

Figure 2. The Moderation Effect of Workplace Status on the Relationship between Coworker Support Exceeding Expectations and Gratitude in Study 1

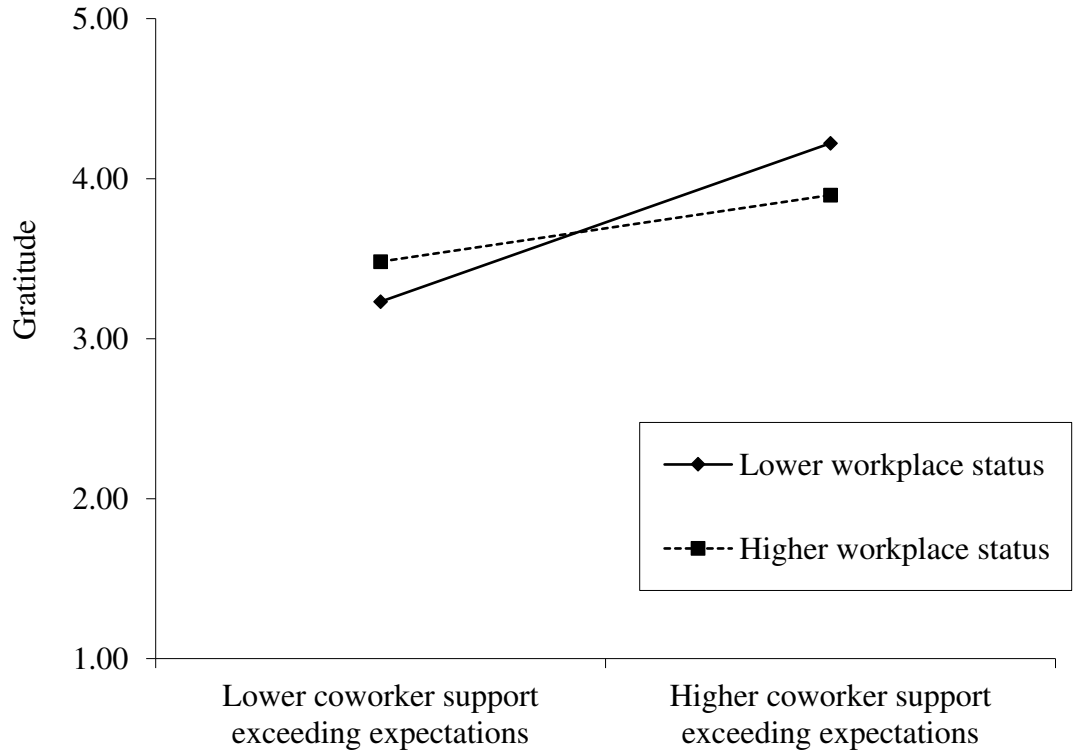

Figure 3. The Moderation Effect of Workplace Status on the Relationship between Coworker Support Exceeding Expectations and Shame in Study 1

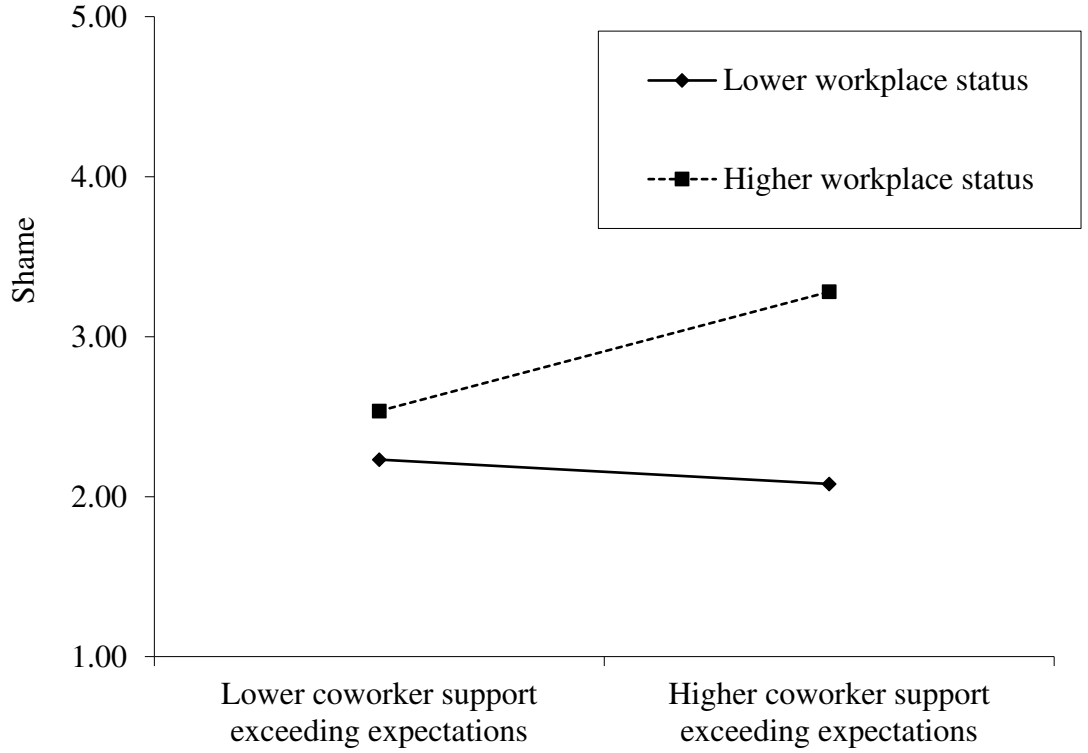

Figure 4. The Moderation Effect of Workplace Status on the Relationship between Coworker Instrumental Support Exceeding Expectations and Gratitude in Study 2

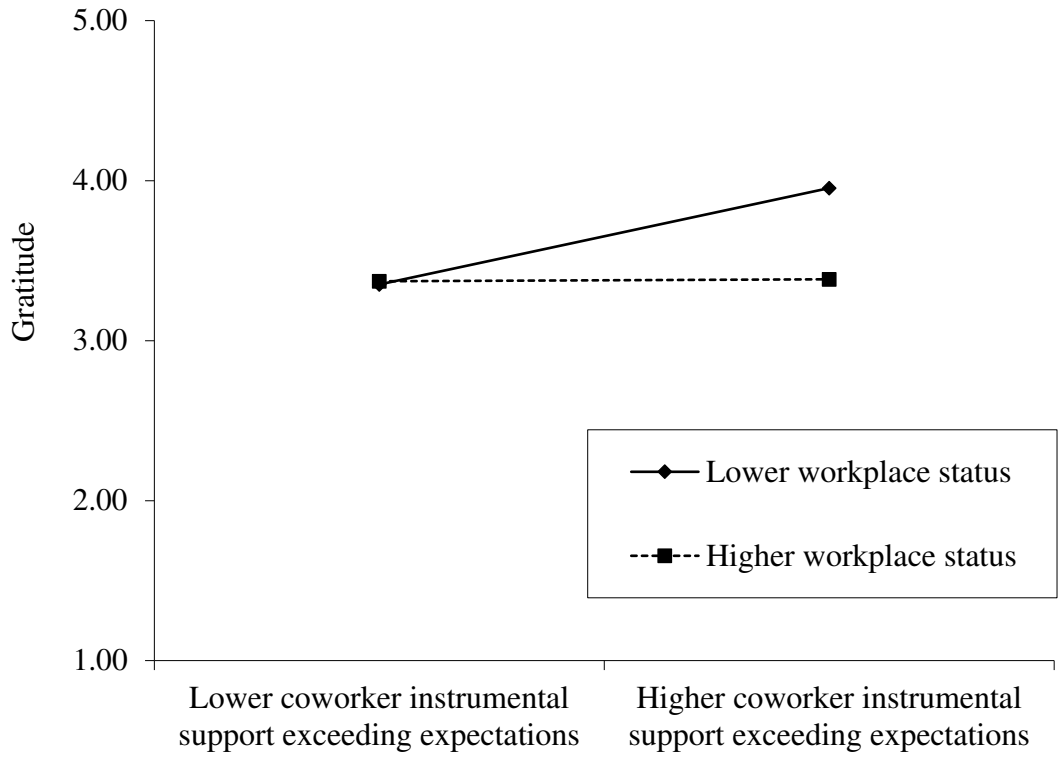

Figure 5. The Moderation Effect of Workplace Status on the Relationship between Coworker Emotional Support Exceeding Expectations and Gratitude in Study 2

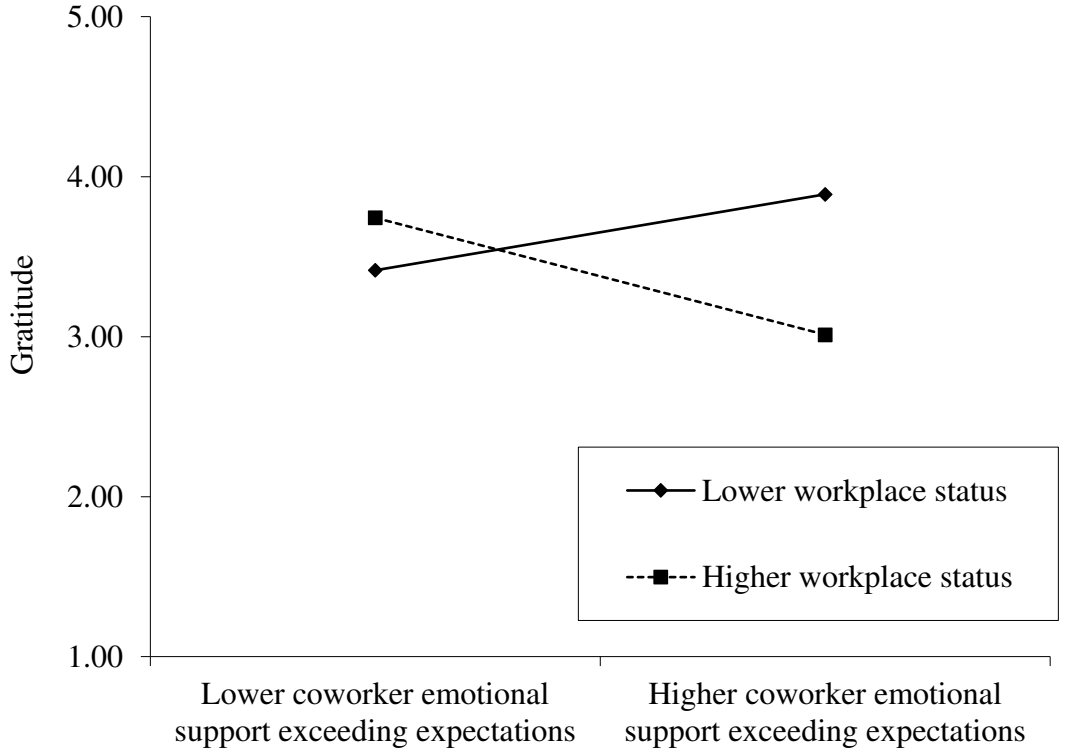

Figure 6. The Moderation Effect of Workplace Status on the Relationship between Coworker Instrumental Support Exceeding Expectations and Shame in Study 2