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**Service Employee Burnout and Engagement:  
The Moderating Role of Power Distance Orientation**

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## **Service Employee Burnout and Engagement: The Moderating Role of Power Distance Orientation**

### **Abstract**

Studies show that service employees are among the most disengaged in the workforce. To better understand service employees' job engagement, this study broadens the scope of the job demands-resources (JD-R) model to include power distance orientation (PDO). The inclusion of PDO enriches the JD-R model by providing a key piece of information that has been missing in prior JD-R models: employees' perceptions of the source of job demands (i.e., supervisors) or employees' views of power and hierarchy within the organization. Study 1 uses a survey-based field study to show that employees with a high (compared to low) PDO feel more burnout due to supervisors when they are closely monitored by their supervisors. Study 1 further supports the finding that employees with high (compared to low) PDO feel less disengagement despite burnout due to supervisors. Study 2, using a lab experiment, and Study 3, relying on a survey-based field study, unveil why these effects were observed. Stress and job satisfaction emerge as mediators that explain the findings from Study 1. Implications of the role of PDO are discussed to improve the current understanding of how job engagement can improve customer service performance.

Keywords: job demands-resources model, supervisor close monitoring, power distance orientation, burnout due to supervisor, job engagement, supervisor customer service feedback

In service organizations, employees are regarded as brand builders, or so-called brand ambassadors, who deliver brand promise to customers (Morhart, Herzog, and Tomczak 2009). Service providers are well aware that delivering exceptional customer service performance is a top priority and managing service employee burnout and engagement is a critical step toward that goal (Singh, Goolsby, and Rhoads 1994; Singh 2000). Being on the forefront and at the point of intersection between the firm and customers, service employees can make or break customer relationships that are sticky and enduring. Indisputable as this may sound, however, it is only true to the extent that service employees are engaged. Research by Accenture Consulting highlights that, from a strategic perspective, one of the most compelling reasons for having “devoted or plugged in” employees is because of the positive contagious effect (i.e., carryover effect) employee engagement has on customer engagement (Brodie et al. 2011; Craig and DeSimone 2011). Practitioners and academics alike agree that firms with engaged employees enjoy performance-driven perks such as higher customer satisfaction, productivity, profitability, and earnings per share along with lower turnover, absenteeism, and service failure rates (e.g., Gallup 2013; Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes 2002; Salanova, Agut, and Peiró 2005).

Notwithstanding the promising picture that employee engagement paints, recent statistics reveal that in the U.S. from 2010 to 2012, service employees in general and frontline employees in particular were the only workers to experience a decline in engagement, while employees from every other sector in the economy realized an increase (Gallup 2013). Research involving 25 million employees across 189 countries has revealed that a critical impediment to employee engagement is supervisor–employee interaction quality (Gallup 2013). For example, lack of supervisor coaching, effective leadership, and supervisor developmental feedback are prime causes of employee disengagement (e.g., Bakker and Demerouti 2007; Crawford, LePine, and

Rich 2010). From a strategic perspective, disengaged service employees can be detrimental to customer service performance by being less helpful, accessible, and attentive to customers' problems. Given the mounting evidence regarding the importance of supervisor behavior on employee (dis)engagement, the literature stands to benefit from studies that address how supportive (and unsupportive) supervisor behaviors enhance (and cripple) employee engagement. For this purpose, we turn to the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, a framework that explains employee wellbeing and productivity based on the demands (e.g., supervisor close monitoring behavior) and resources (e.g., supervisor feedback on ways to improve customer service) employees encounter in their jobs (Bakker and Demerouti 2007).

The JD-R model has been applied in various marketing contexts, for example, to explain sales control (Miao and Evans 2013), salespeople's management of customer and organizational complexity (Schmitz and Ganesan 2014), frontline employee performance (e.g., Singh 2000), customer service under stress (e.g., Chan and Wan 2012), and customer orientation (Zablah et al. 2012). While the framework has served its purpose effectively, studies in marketing have mainly focused on applying the model to different marketing contexts, which has often led to criticism of its overly simplistic framework (e.g., demand promotes burnout and disengagement while resource promotes engagement) (Crawford et al. 2010). Furthermore, as Appendix A indicates, despite a considerable number of studies in marketing that have investigated the drivers and outcomes of burnout, few studies have (1) considered an overarching theory, such as the JD-R framework, that binds the drivers of burnout, (2) investigated resources (i.e., personal and job) and job demands together in the same model, and (3) empirically investigated engagement as a proximal outcome of burnout. That is, little emphasis has been placed on expanding the boundaries of the JD-R model, a gap this study attempts to fill.

The boundary-spanning employee literature finds that role stressors play a critical role in explaining employee job satisfaction, commitment, and performance (e.g., Singh 2000; Teas 1983). The literature also suggests that coping resources that are supervisor related, such as boss support (Singh 2000), supervisor consideration (Teas 1983), and close supervision (Behrman and Perreault 1984; Churchill, Ford, and Walker 1976), can influence employee perceptions of role stressors. However, a noticeable gap in the boundary-spanning literature that has received sparse attention is how employees' views of authority and hierarchy in organizations can have a diverse influence on employee perceptions of stressors and change the effect of stressors on burnout and engagement.

This study serves to address two important aspects of the JD-R model that have received scant attention by broadening the scope of the JD-R framework and the burnout and stress literature in the service employee context. First, one of the key shortcomings of the JD-R framework has been that the moderators that have received attention have been limited to personal resources (e.g., Big Five Personalities, self-efficacy, optimism, self-esteem) that focus on the employee characteristics rather than employee attitudes toward the source of the job demand. To this end, we expand the scope of the JD-R framework by drawing on power distance orientation (PDO) as a key moderator. We define individual-level PDO as “the extent to which an individual accepts the unequal distribution of power in institutions and organizations” (Clugston, Howell, and Dorfman 2000, p. 9, emphasis added). By capturing PDO as a moderator in the JD-R model, we develop an understanding of the intricate relationships between job demands, resources, and attitudes when employees have different levels of PDO. When the origin of job demands is supervisor related (e.g., close monitoring), employees, depending on how they view power, status, and hierarchy within the organization, may be more or less

receptive toward the demands. Accordingly, the same job demand can result in different levels of burnout and engagement contingent on the level of PDO and may ultimately affect customer service performance differently.

Second, the JD-R literature does not clearly explicate the underlying process of how job demands and resources are related to job attitudes and engagement. In a recent meta-analysis, Crawford et al. (2010) were not able to identify the underlying mechanism that links job resources and demands to burnout and engagement. In fact, they acknowledged that “[f]uture research could address this issue by considering the intervening theoretical processes” (p. 844). We respond to this call by showing that stress mediates the close monitoring–burnout relationship, while job satisfaction plays a mediating role between burnout and engagement.

In the sections to follow, we discuss how our study is able to expand extant knowledge on service employee burnout, engagement, and customer service performance through an extension of the JD-R framework. We then derive and test hypotheses across three studies. Study 1 measures job demands and resources, along with PDO, from service employees working in 58 bank branches. Then, using Study 2, a controlled lab experiment and Study 3, a field study, we capture the intervening process and unpack the relationships observed in Study 1. We conclude with discussions on the theoretical and practical implications of our research.

## **Theoretical background**

Despite awareness of the effects of supervisor behavior on employee engagement, an assumption that academics and practitioners hold is that employees possess similar opinions toward authority and hierarchy within an organization. This presumption, though, does not seem to reflect contemporary organizational dynamics in that even within the same culture and organization, the

degree to which individuals are likely to accept unequal distribution of power varies across individuals (Clugston et al. 2000; Kirkman, Lowe, and Gibson 2006). Some employees will be more tolerant of unsupportive supervisor behavior and will accordingly be more submissive than others; therefore, it is important to investigate the ways in which the engagement and burnout of employees with different orientations toward power are affected by unsupportive supervisor behavior within the company.

The theoretical framework we draw on to develop our model and test our hypotheses is the job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Bakker and Demerouti 2007; Demerouti et al. 2001). The model posits that the extent to which an employee experiences burnout and engagement is driven by a dual processing mechanism outlined as health impairing and motivational. The health impairment process is characterized by job demands that are defined as “those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs” (Bakker and Demerouti 2007, p. 312). Examples of job demands are role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload (e.g., Hartline and Ferrell 1996; Singh et al. 1994), and the emotional labor felt as a result of dealing with customer complaints (Chan and Wan 2012; Grandey 2003). Job demands can lead to strain and disengagement because employees have finite resources that they can use to cope with increasing demands. The job demand we investigate in our study is supervisor close monitoring (close monitoring, henceforth), which we define as the degree to which supervisors keep close tabs on employees to ensure that employees do exactly what they are told, carry out tasks in expected ways, and refrain from doing things that cause supervisor disapproval (Zhou 2003).

In contrast, the motivational process is explicated by job resources, which are defined as



“those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that help to either achieve work goals, reduce job demand and the associated physiological and psychological cost or stimulate personal growth and development” (Bakker and Demerouti 2007, p. 312). Job resources range from organizational and social to task oriented, and include career opportunities, supervisor and coworker support, autonomy, feedback, and role clarity (Chan and Wan 2012; Demerouti et al. 2001). Job resources boost engagement by elevating motivation through the conservation and replenishment of resources (Hobfoll 2001). The job resource we examine in our study is supervisor developmental customer service feedback (customer service feedback, henceforth), which we define as the degree to which supervisors provide employees with valuable information that facilitates employee growth and learning, and the development of better customer service skills (Jaworski and Kohli 1991; Zhou 2003).

To date, the scope of the JD-R model has been broadened in the following two ways. First, research has found that job demands can have differential effects on engagement depending on whether the demands are challenging (i.e., demands that are appraised as promoting personal growth, mastery, and future gains) or are a hindrance (i.e., demands that are appraised as hindering learning, personal development and growth, and goal achievement) (Crawford et al. 2010). A key finding of Crawford et al.’s (2010) meta-analysis is that while job hindrance demands (e.g., role ambiguity, role conflict) thwart employee engagement, job challenge demands (e.g., high job responsibility) enhance engagement. By using what they labeled the differentiated JD-R model, the authors were able to discern a more precise relationship between job demands and engagement that had been masked in prior research that did not differentiate between challenging and hindering job demands.

The second stream of studies extends the JD-R model by including personal resources,

which are defined as positive self-evaluations that are linked to resiliency and refer to individuals' sense of their ability to control and impact their environments successfully (Hobfoll et al. 2003). The key difference between personal and job resources lies in the origin of the resources. Whereas job resources emanate from the organization or supervisors, personal resources are assets that employees bring to the table. Personal resources have also been used as moderators to alleviate the strain that job demands exert on employees.

Despite these efforts, results have been inconsistent and conflicting, with some studies finding that personal resources mitigate the negative effect of job demands (e.g., Pierce and Gardner 2004; Van Yperen and Snijders 2000) and others showing no moderating effect (e.g., Xanthopoulou et al. 2007). We posit that one of the main reasons for observing these mixed effects has to do with the lack of specificity associated with the type of personal resources investigated in the literature. General personal resources such as self-efficacy, organizational based self-esteem, and optimism that have been employed in prior studies (Xanthopoulou et al. 2007) may not be specific enough to attenuate the deleterious effect of job demands.

Our study aligns the source of the job demand (i.e., supervisor) with the target of PDO (i.e., supervisor) and is able to capture a more nuanced relationship between close monitoring and employee burnout at different levels of PDO. Further, the focus of this study's moderator shifts from personal resources that have been limited to employee characteristics (e.g., Big Five personality traits) to employee attitudes toward the source of the job demand.

### **Conceptual model and hypotheses development**

Our conceptual model (Figure 1) is grounded in the boundary-spanning and role stress literatures (e.g., Babakus, Yavas, and Ashill 2009; Behrman and Perreault 1984; Hartline and Ferrell 1996; Singh 2000) to capture how managers can improve service employees' customer service

performance by enhancing engagement and preventing burnout. The model describes the interplay between a demand such as close monitoring and a resource such as customer service feedback and the consequences of this interaction (Singh 2000; Teas 1983). We include PDO (Studies 1 and 3) and submissiveness (Study 2) as an overlooked moderator, and stress (Study 2) and job satisfaction (Study 3) as mediators in the JD-R framework to expand the scope of when and how service employees feel more or less burnout and engagement. A distinguishing element of our model compared to those studied in the past is the inclusion of PDO when the demand and resource originate from the supervisor.<sup>1</sup>

[Insert Figure 1 here]

### **Moderating role of customer service feedback**

We conceptualize customer service feedback as a resource and a type of supervisor support (Babin and Boles 1996). When employees receive sufficient feedback, they have accurate guidance on how to serve customers more effectively (Jaworski and Kohli 1991). Customer service feedback is expected to boost intrinsic motivation because employees sense that supervisors care about the ways in which they can help employees provide higher quality service to customers. In contrast, when supervisors closely monitor employees, employees feel watched, controlled, and pressured to conform to prescribed behaviors. Close monitoring has been shown to stifle creativity by suppressing intrinsic motivation (George and Zhou 2001).

Building on the early work of Freudenberger (1974), who first coined the term burnout, we define burnout as a state of mental and physical exhaustion characterized by emotional exhaustion and depersonalization resulting from supervisor behavior or treatment. Although

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<sup>1</sup> We do not hypothesize the direct effects of job demands (e.g., close monitoring) and job resources (e.g., customer service feedback) as these main effects based on the JD-R model have already been extensively examined in the literature. Instead, we focus on the various interaction hypotheses.

Maslach and Jackson (1981) constructed a three dimensional definition of burnout using emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, marketing studies (Singh 2000) with frontline employees have shown that reduced personal accomplishment correlates poorly with the other two dimensions; this leads us to focus on the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization dimensions of burnout.

According to the JD-R model, burnout occurs when employees experience stressors (i.e., job demands) that exceed their available resources for coping (Bakker and Demerouti 2007; Singh et al. 1994). In line with conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll 2001), unless job resources are replenished, employees will feel the strain of being emotionally exhausted due to job demands. Consistent with the JD-R model, we predict an interaction between demands and resources wherein resources play a “buffering role” by dampening burnout resulting from excessive job demands (e.g., Bakker and Demerouti 2007). We maintain that when employees receive customer service feedback, they feel less burnout despite being closely monitored by supervisors because employees can use the feedback as a motivation to develop, learn, and grow.

In this light, we propose an interaction effect of close monitoring and customer service feedback in line with the prediction of the JD-R model, except that our situation involves demands and resources that originate from the same source, namely, supervisors. In this respect, our demand x resource interaction is unique because our hypothesis focuses on how burnout is affected when the source of the strain and the resource for dealing with that strain are the same. Based on the prior reasoning, we propose the following:

H1: Customer service feedback weakens the positive effect of close monitoring on burnout.

### **Moderating role of power distance orientation**

As one of Hofstede's (1980) four cultural value dimensions, power distance has garnered significant interest from numerous scholars across a wide spectrum of disciplines that have advanced our understanding of how cultural values differ across societies and countries at the macro level.<sup>2</sup> However, one of the key shortcomings of this view toward power distance has been its tendency to neglect cultural and organizational heterogeneity at the micro-individual level (Sivakumar and Nakata 2001). Kirkman et al. (2006) have advocated that more studies should use PDO at the individual level as a moderator. We define individual-level PDO as the degree to which individuals differ in their view of unequal power distribution reflected in their perceptions of authority, leaders, status, and hierarchy within organizations.<sup>2</sup>

**Characteristics of high PDO** Studies have shown that employees who have higher PDO are less antagonistic and more receptive to top-down, one-way direction from their leaders than are their lower PDO counterparts (e.g., Javidan et al. 2006). Further, employees with higher PDO accept more role-constrained interactions with supervisors, and these social interactions reflect an employee-supervisor relationship that is more regimented. Research has also shown that employees with higher PDO are more tolerant of supervisor abusive behavior and less sensitive to interpersonal injustice perceptions (Lian, Ferris, and Brown 2012). Employees with higher PDO are more affectively committed and perform better despite receiving less perceived organizational support (Farh, Hackett, and Liang 2007). Collectively, these results imply that the energy and resources of employees with higher PDO are less likely to be drained despite high job demands because in the eyes of high PDO employees, job demands will be perceived as less

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<sup>2</sup> See also <http://geert-hofstede.com/cultural-survey.html>.

taxing. This suggests that higher PDO enables employees to be more receptive toward unequal power distribution and to perceive less disagreement and conflict with management.

**Moderating role of PDO on close monitoring–burnout relationship** The reasoning behind the moderating effect of PDO on the relationship between close monitoring and burnout is consistent with the relational model of authority (Tyler and Lind 1992). This model informs us that the level of PDO affects employees' evaluations of their supervisors differently based on how employees are treated by supervisors. More specifically, the model predicts that low PDO employees are more sensitive to how they are treated by supervisors because they have a more personal and social connection with their boss (Tyler and Lind 1992). High PDO employees have a more role-constrained relationship that acts as a buffer in limiting the effects unfair or unreasonable treatment may have on their evaluation of supervisors (Tyler and Lind 1992). Previous research has also suggested that high PDO employees are more loyal and obedient, and that PDO mitigates any negative supervisor behavior effects on employee attitudes toward supervisors (Tyler, Lind, and Huo 2000).

Based on the above, we posit that employees will feel less burnout despite being closely monitored when employees have higher levels of PDO. High PDO employees may view close monitoring as less of a job hindrance and nuisance. Because high compared to low PDO employees are more comfortable with a wider band of acceptable supervisor behaviors, close supervision will be perceived as less annoying and irritating. Consequently, employees with high PDO will not have to expend their resources as much to cope with these job demands compared to those with low PDO, and thus will experience less burnout. More formally, we propose:

H2: Employees will feel less burnout despite being closely monitored by supervisors when employees have high (vs. low) levels of PDO.

**Moderating role of PDO on burnout–engagement relationship** Engagement is a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al. 2002, p. 74). Vigor refers to a willingness and determination to exert energy and effort in work, and resilience when confronted with obstacles. Dedication refers to finding meaning, purpose, enthusiasm, and inspiration in work. Absorption refers to being totally immersed in and content with work such that time passes quickly and it is difficult to detach oneself from work (Salanova et al. 2005). Therefore, an employee who is engaged can be characterized as enthusiastic, energetic, motivated, and passionate about work, whereas a disengaged worker is apathetic, robotic, depersonalized, estranged, and withdrawn from the job (Salanova et al. 2005).

As outlined earlier, because employees with higher PDO will have a less negative opinion of supervisors despite being treated unfairly or harshly, these employees will be less disengaged by burnout. From a normative perspective, high PDO employees perceive negative supervisor behaviors as less damaging and are more receptive to legitimizing this behavior (Lian et al. 2012). Therefore, we conclude that high PDO will buffer and mitigate the negative influence burnout has on engagement because employees with high PDO will assume that strain is a natural part of the work routine and thus, it affects their work attitude and engagement to lesser degrees. Based on the previous arguments, we propose:

H3: Employees will feel less disengaged as a result of burnout when employees have high (vs. low) levels of PDO.

**Moderating role of PDO on customer service feedback–burnout relationship** Early research has indicated that supervisor feedback has a stronger positive impact on employee performance in low PDO (US) versus high PDO (UK) employees (Earley and Stubblebine 1989). Again, in line with the relational model of authority (Tyler and Lind 1992), when supervisors treat employees with dignity and fairness, this leads to more positive evaluations of the supervisor for low (vs. high) PDO employees because low PDO employees expect and appreciate a personalized and horizontal relationship where social bonding is important (de Luque and Sommer 2000).

Studies have shown that when frontline employees such as salespeople and customer service representatives receive social support from their supervisors, they feel less job burnout (e.g., Sand and Miyazaki 2000; Singh 2000). However, the boundary conditions of the supervisor social support–burnout relationship have received limited attention. Drawing on the above arguments and in accordance with social exchange theory (Blau 1964) and norms of reciprocity (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002), we maintain that customer service feedback will be more effective in diminishing burnout for low (vs. high) PDO employees based on the reasoning that low PDO employees expect supervisors to reciprocate in kind through customer service feedback in exchange for work fulfillment. Based on the prior arguments, we propose:

H4: Customer service feedback will result in less burnout for low (vs. high) PDO employees.

## **Study 1**

### **Research design and procedure**

**Sample and data collection** The data used in this study come from a large project conducted in 58 private banking branches of a bank in Taiwan. We targeted service employees who were



offering banking, investments, accounts management, and other financial services for both individual and business clients. We approached the bank through a contact person in order to receive permission to collect data. After permission was granted, we sent survey packages to this contact person who arranged the delivery of the surveys to the branches. Each package contained a survey, an introductory letter, a consent form, and a return envelope. For the purpose of data analysis, each survey was coded to identify the bank branch. The introductory letter explained the purpose of the study and informed respondents about the confidentiality of their responses and the voluntary nature of their participation in the survey. Service employees completed the survey during business hours and returned it to the contact person in a sealed envelope. We received 485 usable surveys (response rate of 78.2%) from 58 branches. The number of responses from each branch ranged from 4 to 12, with a response rate ranging from 66.7% to 100%. Sample characteristics were as follows: female (66.4%), average age (36 years), university graduate (78.1%), average experience with the branch (5.3 years), average experience with the bank (12.6 years), and average experience with the current supervisor (2.3 years).

**Survey and measures** We designed our survey in English by drawing on previously developed and well-established scales available in the literature. The English version of the survey was translated into Chinese using the translation/back translation technique (Brislin, Lonner, and Thorndike 1973). All measures, except customer service performance, were measured with a five-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree) (see Appendix B).

Burnout due to supervisor was measured with a four-item scale (Singh et al. 1994) and supervisor close monitoring with a five-item scale (George and Zhou 2001). Supervisor customer service feedback was measured with a three-item scale (Zhou 2003). We measured job

engagement as a higher-order construct that captured three dimensions, namely vigor (6 items), dedication (5 items), and absorption (6 items) (Salanova et al. 2005). Power distance orientation was measured with a four-item scale (Chan, Yim, and Lam 2010), and customer service performance was measured with a seven-item, five-point Likert scale (1-needs improvement; 5-excellent) (Liao and Chuang 2007). We included experience with supervisor (in years) in our model as a control variable.<sup>3</sup>

### **Measure validation and common method bias check**

**Measure validation** We checked the psychometric properties of this study's measures by performing a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The CFA revealed a good fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 1543.2$ ,  $df = 751$ ,  $GFI = .89$ ,  $TLI = .95$ ,  $CFI = .95$ ,  $RMSEA = .05$ ). All factor loadings were statistically significant (Anderson and Gerbing 1988), and the average variance extracted (AVE) values were greater than .50 (Bagozzi and Yi 1988). These findings support the convergent validity of the scales. We also found statistical support for discriminant validity. First, no confidence intervals of the correlations between any of the constructs included 1.0 ( $p < .05$ ). Second, for all pairs of constructs, the AVE estimates were greater than the squared intercorrelations between these constructs (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

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<sup>3</sup>Control variables should be employed to rule out alternative explanations while testing a model under consideration; however, they must be carefully chosen based on their theoretical relevance and significant zero-order correlations with the main constructs of the model, otherwise these variables might not only reduce the statistical power of the model but also cause a suppression effect (Carlson and Wu 2012; Spector and Brannick 2011). In our study, there was no other demographic variable that was theoretically relevant to and significantly correlated with the core constructs of our model.

**Common method bias** Using cross-sectional, single respondent data may cause common method bias (CMB), which can inflate direct effects.<sup>4</sup> We assessed the extent of CMB in our model's hypothesized direct effects by using the marker variable technique (Lindell and Whitney 2001). We employed political ties of top managers as a marker variable.<sup>5</sup> Malhotra, Kim, and Patil (2006, p. 1874) suggest that " $r_M$  is expected to be approximately .10 or less, and thus in practical application, its value is unlikely to be as much as .20, let alone .30." The correlation adjustment for ( $r = .10$ ) revealed that only one of 14 initially significant correlations (7 percent) became insignificant (Table 1). Although CMB is negligible, we control for a marker variable in our model so that we may partial out its unique variance (e.g., Ye, Marinova, and Singh 2007).

[Insert Table 1 here]

### **Hypotheses testing**

**Analytical approach** Although our proposed model depicts relationships hypothesized at the individual level, the data used in this study are nested (i.e., service employees are nested in branches) and, accordingly, employee responses are not independent. This means that ordinary least-based techniques yield biased estimations (e.g., Raudenbush et al. 2011). Therefore, a random coefficients procedure is necessary to control for variation at the branch level and to estimate individual-level relationships and their respective standard errors more precisely (e.g., Raudenbush et al. 2011). Hence, we employ a multilevel path analysis in Mplus 7.0 (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2010) to estimate the model's relationships simultaneously.

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<sup>4</sup>Siemsen, Roth, and Oliveira (2010, p. 456) conclude that common method bias suppresses significant interaction effects and, therefore, significant interaction effects may not be an artifact of common method bias.

<sup>5</sup> Political ties of top managers was measured with a three-item, five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree): (1) Top managers of this bank ensure good relationships with influential government officials; (2) Top managers of this bank have invested a lot of resources in building relationships with government officials; (3) Top managers of this bank value their personal relationships with government officials (Sheng, Zhou, and Li 2011). This particular scale satisfies the two criteria of a marker variable (Lindell and Whitney 2001). First, it is not theoretically related to the study's core variables. Second, the scale has good reliability (mean = 3.29, standard deviation = 1.02, Cronbach's alpha = .70).

We centered all variables on their grand mean in line with the conventional procedure in multilevel analyses (Hofmann and Gavin 1998). We also used the grand mean centered values of close monitoring, customer service feedback, burnout, and PDO in creating the four interaction terms. We took a hierarchical approach in testing our model (e.g., Preacher, Zhang, and Zyphur 2011). First, we estimated the direct-effects only model. Second, we added the interaction effects to the direct-effects model to estimate the hypothesized model. A comparison of Akaike's information criterion (AIC) and the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) confirm that the hypothesized model is a better fit than the direct-effects model (lower AIC and BIC values). The hypothesized model explains 50%, 13%, and 37% of the variance in burnout, engagement, and customer service performance, respectively. Table 2 reports the results.

[Insert Table 2 here]

**Direct effects** Close monitoring is positively related ( $\gamma = .603, p < .01$ ), while customer service feedback is negatively ( $\gamma = -.406, p < .01$ ) related to burnout. Further, burnout is related negatively to engagement ( $\gamma = -.242, p < .01$ ), and engagement is positively related to customer service performance ( $\gamma = .537, p < .01$ ). These findings collectively support the basic tenant of the JD-R model.

**Interaction effects** The interaction effect of close monitoring and customer service feedback is related negatively and significantly to burnout ( $\gamma = -.165, p < .01$ ). Simple slope tests show that the close monitoring–burnout relationship is more positive at low levels of customer service feedback ( $\gamma = .722, p < .01$ ) than at high levels of customer service feedback ( $\gamma = .484, p < .01$ ). This relationship is statistically different between high and low levels of customer service feedback ( $t = 2.777, p < .01$ ). Hence, H1 is supported. Figure 2 shows the interaction effect.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

Next, we found that the interaction effect of close monitoring and PDO is related positively and significantly to burnout ( $\gamma = .159, p < .01$ ). Simple slope tests (Aiken and West 1991) show that the close monitoring–burnout relationship is more positive at high levels of PDO ( $\gamma = .734, p < .01$ ) than at low levels of PDO ( $\gamma = .472, p < .01$ ) (Figure 3). We also found that this relationship is statistically different between high and low levels of PDO ( $t = 3.335, p < .01$ ). These findings are opposite to what we predicted and, therefore, H2 is not supported. The interaction effect between burnout and PDO is related positively and significantly to engagement ( $\gamma = .122, p < .01$ ). Simple slope tests show that the burnout–engagement relationship is more negative at low levels of PDO ( $\gamma = -.342, p < .01$ ) than at high levels of PDO ( $\gamma = -.141, p < .01$ ). This relationship is statistically different between high and low levels of PDO ( $t = 3.413, p < .01$ ). These findings support H3. Figure 4 shows the moderating role of PDO on the burnout–engagement relationship. Finally, the interaction effect between customer service feedback and PDO is not related to burnout ( $\gamma = .002, ns$ ). Therefore, H4 is not supported. Figures 3 and 4 show the interaction effects.

[Insert Figures 3 and 4 here]

**Post-hoc analysis (mediation effects)** Although it was not part of the formal hypotheses, we employed MacKinnon, Lockwood, and Williams’s (2004) bootstrapping-based test to explore mediation following Zhao, Lynch, and Chen’s (2010) recommendations.<sup>6</sup> We computed the estimate and confidence interval (CI) for the indirect effects of close monitoring and customer

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<sup>6</sup> Zhao et al. (2010, p. 205) suggest the following: First, there is no need for the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable to be statistically significant for a mediation test. The only requirement for mediation is that the indirect effect be significant. Second, because the indirect effect is the product of two parameters (from the independent variable to the mediator and from the mediator to the dependent variable), the sampling distribution of the indirect effect is not normal. Since Sobel’s test assumes a normal distribution, it produces a biased estimate of the indirect effect; therefore, the indirect effect must be computed using a more rigorous and powerful bootstrap test.

service feedback on engagement through burnout (close monitoring:  $\gamma = -.146$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95% bootstrap CI [-.193, -.102]; customer service feedback  $\gamma = .098$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95% bootstrap CI [.066, .135]). We also tested the direct effects of close monitoring ( $\gamma = .015$ , ns) and customer service feedback ( $\gamma = .307$ ,  $p < .01$ ) on engagement. These findings together provide statistical evidence for an indirect-only mediation for the relationship between close monitoring and engagement, and a complementary mediation for the relationship between customer service feedback and engagement (Zhao et al. 2010). Overall, burnout mediates the (indirect) relationship between close monitoring, customer service feedback, and engagement.

## **Summary**

While we did find general support for our conceptual model, not all hypotheses received support. Although not hypothesized, the direct effects of close monitoring and customer service feedback on burnout were significant and in the expected direction, which supports the fundamental premise of the JD-R model. We also observed that when employees were engaged in their jobs, they showed higher customer service performance; this lends credibility to the return on engagement movement that is prevalent in academia and industry (e.g., Gallup 2013; Harter et al. 2002).

However, the focal interest in our extended JD-R model rests on the interaction hypotheses involving the moderating role of PDO. Service employees were less engaged as burnout increased when employees had low (vs. high) PDO. Surprisingly, though, the effect of the interaction between close monitoring and PDO on burnout was opposite to what we had expected. It turned out that close monitoring led to more burnout when PDO was high (vs. low).

In order to further understand the process (i.e., mediation) behind how close monitoring interacts with power distance to influence burnout, we replicated our extended JD-R model from Study 1 in a controlled lab experiment. We accomplished this by manipulating the demand, resource, and moderator to unpack the mediating mechanism underlying the effect close monitoring by power distance interaction has on burnout. This effort responds to calls asking for studies that test the JD-R model in ways that (1) reveal the underlying processes and (2) use experiments to draw stronger conclusions about causality (Crawford et al. 2010). These dual objectives are achieved in Study 2.

Finally, although this study focuses on Taiwanese bankers, we do not view generalizability as an issue since we believe that there will be individual differences in PDO regardless of which culture or firm is investigated. We submit that just as there was variation in PDO among Taiwanese bankers, it is likely that similar differences in PDO are present in Western firms. Kirkman et al.'s (2009) cross-cultural study between China and the U.S. supports our reasoning that country does not have any impact on the role of PDO in this context.

## **Study 2**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of Study 2 is to probe deeper into the unexpected finding regarding the moderating role of PDO on the close monitoring–burnout relationship (H 2). We accomplish this by examining the mediating process between the close monitoring by submissiveness<sup>7</sup> interaction and burnout. A secondary objective of Study 2 is to extend H1 and explicate the

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<sup>7</sup> In Study 2, we use the term submissiveness as opposed to PDO, which was used in Study 1. The reason for changing the label is that PDO is an individual difference variable that has trait-like features, making it less appropriate for manipulation. Therefore, we use submissiveness instead to capture similar content to PDO except that now the degree to which employees are receptive to hierarchy and power varies according to the work environment.

mediating process between the close monitoring by customer service feedback interaction and burnout.

A robust finding in the literature has shown that role stressors are antecedents to employee burnout (Singh 2000). When one or more of these role stressors are present, employees expend resources to overcome the adversities. Unless those resources used to cope with stress are replenished, employees will feel emotionally exhausted. Therefore, in Study 2, we address the extent to which stress mediates the close monitoring by submissiveness interaction and burnout. We explore whether stress will mediate the effect of close monitoring on burnout under different levels of submissive work conditions.

### **Research design and procedure**

Seventy MBA students enrolled in a marketing class at a southwestern university in the U.S. participated for class credit. Participants were told that they were taking part in a study on retail management's efforts to understand retail employees' attitudes in various retail environments. Subjects were introduced to a scenario that described an employee named Nancy who was working at an apparel store. They were informed that the employee's primary responsibility at the store is to answer any questions customers may have regarding the various lines of clothing, address any complaints or issues customers may have, and engage in merchandise stocking and display to better serve customers. To assess the level of burnout based on the random assignment of subjects, subjects were told to imagine that they had recently been hired to work at the same retail store.

We employed a 2 (close monitoring: low vs. high) x 2 (customer service feedback: low vs. high) x 2 (submissiveness: low vs. high) between subjects ANCOVA with nationality (East



vs. West) as a covariate. We included nationality as a covariate to control for any confounding effect that culture may have on power distance. We manipulated close monitoring by varying the degree to which the supervisor (1) monitors every step of how employees talk and interact with customers, (2) insists that there is an “exact way” to serve customers, and (3) keeps track of employees’ performance on a daily basis. Customer service feedback was manipulated by varying the extent to which the supervisor (1) provides advice on how to become a more competent employee and (2) supports employees by offering tips on “what to do” and “what not to do” to improve customer satisfaction. We manipulated submissiveness by varying the degree to which employees can challenge the supervisor on operational and customer-related matters.

The average work experience of the respondents was 4.7 years, the average age was 27.4 years, and 73% were male; 51% of the subjects came from the West (e.g., U.S., Canada, and Western Europe), while 49% came from the East (e.g., China, Taiwan, India, Korea, and Japan).

### **Manipulation check**

We performed manipulation checks on close monitoring, customer service feedback, and submissiveness. All measures used a five-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree). Close monitoring was manipulated successfully as subjects rated more agreement with the statement “Employees at this store are monitored by the store manager” in the high close monitoring condition than in the low close monitoring condition ( $M= 4.50$  vs.  $M= 2.79$ ,  $t(68)= 6.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ). For customer service feedback, successful manipulation was confirmed as subjects rated more agreement with the statement “Employees are able to learn from the store manager on how to better serve customers” in the high customer service feedback condition than in the low customer service feedback condition ( $M= 3.82$  vs.  $M= 1.78$ ,  $t(68)= 8.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Finally, submissiveness was manipulated successfully by observing that subjects expressed more agreement with the statement “Employees are expected to acknowledge that people in different organizational levels have different levels of authority” in the high submissiveness condition than in the low submissiveness condition ( $M= 4.46$  vs.  $M= 2.76$ ,  $t(68)= 7.37$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

## **Measures**

We used the same four items to measure burnout as we did in Study 1 (Singh et al. 1994). The Cronbach’s alpha was .75, which indicates adequate reliability of the measure. We measured stress using three items (House and Rizzo 1972): (1) “I would feel nervous before attending meetings at this store,” (2) “My job would directly affect my health,” and (3) “I would feel nervous because of my job.” The Cronbach’s alpha was .84.

## **Mediation Test**

We observed the same pattern of interaction effects between close monitoring and submissiveness on burnout as we did in Study 1. More specifically, we found a marginally significant close monitoring by submissiveness interaction effect ( $F_{(1, 65)} = 2.86$ ,  $p < .10$ ). We detected a simple effect of close monitoring on burnout at high submissiveness ( $F_{(1, 65)} = 9.74$ ,  $p < .01$ ) but not at low submissiveness ( $F_{(1, 65)} = .26$ , ns).

To test the mediating process of the interaction effect between close monitoring and submissiveness on burnout via stress, we used the parametric bootstrapping method (Preacher and Hayes 2008; Zhao et al. 2010). We tested the indirect effect of close monitoring on burnout via stress under high versus low submissiveness. When submissiveness was high, close monitoring had a significant indirect effect on burnout through stress ( $b = .32$ ; 95% bias-

corrected bootstrap (CI) [.057, .781]). Conversely, when submissiveness was low, the indirect effect was not significant ( $b = .10$ ; 95% bias-corrected bootstrap (CI) [-.069, .497]).

Further, the results also supported a close monitoring x customer service feedback interaction ( $F_{(1, 65)}=4.36$ ,  $p < .05$ ), closely mirroring the results observed in Study 1. We found a simple effect for close monitoring at low customer service feedback ( $F_{(1, 65)}=8.77$ ,  $p < .01$ ) but not at high customer service feedback ( $F_{(1, 65)}=.54$ , ns). When customer service feedback was low, the indirect effect of close monitoring on burnout via stress was positive and significant ( $b = .34$ ; 95% bias-corrected bootstrap (CI) [.064, .807]). However, when customer service feedback was high, the indirect effect of close monitoring on burnout via stress was not significant ( $b = .16$ ; 95% bias-corrected bootstrap (CI) [-.053, .539]).

## **Summary**

Study 2 confirms that stress mediates (1) the interactive effect between close monitoring and submissiveness on burnout but only for respondents in a high submissive work environment and (2) the interactive relationship between close monitoring and customer service feedback on burnout but only for respondents who received low customer service feedback. This implies that individuals in a high (but not low) submissive work context perceive more stress from close monitoring; therefore, stress functions as a mediator in the high but not low submissive condition. Similarly, when employees receive little customer service feedback, close monitoring results in greater burnout because of elevated stress.

## **Study 3**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of Study 3 is to improve our understanding of the underlying process of how burnout affects engagement at different levels of PDO. That is, our objective was to detail the mediating mechanism supported in H3 wherein we found that burnout led to less disengagement for employees with a high PDO compared to a low PDO.

Singh et al. (1994) have shown that burnout leads to diminished workplace attitudes such as job satisfaction, while Rich, LePine, and Crawford (2010) have empirically validated that job engagement mediates the effect of perceived organizational support on job performance even when job satisfaction, job involvement, and intrinsic motivation are included as mediators. These authors acknowledge that there may be a causal order between engagement and job satisfaction because job satisfaction may be a more distal predictor of performance while engagement is a more proximal antecedent. They also state that although both job satisfaction and engagement may be mediators, employees may be engaged due to job satisfaction, which suggests a serial mediation process with engagement following job satisfaction.

We posit that job satisfaction mediates the interactive effect between burnout and PDO on engagement differently because burnout affects job satisfaction to different degrees for low PDO employees compared to high PDO employees (Singh et al. 1994). Based on the relational model of authority (Tyler and Lind 1992), we maintain that employees with low PDO will be more dissatisfied with their jobs as a result of burnout and accordingly be more disengaged. This is a result of these individuals preferring a personalized social bonding relationship with their boss; thus, when they experience otherwise, they feel more job dissatisfaction. In contrast, high PDO individuals understand that it is not possible to challenge and change the views of authority and, therefore, they unquestioningly accept the nature of their work environment. Consequently,

for high PDO individuals, job satisfaction will not be as affected by burnout as for low PDO individuals. In summary, we propose that:

H5: The interactive effect of burnout and PDO on engagement is mediated via job satisfaction, but only for low PDO employees.

## **Research design and procedure**

We tested H5 with data collected from service employees employed at the headquarters of a bank in China. We obtained consent from the HR division to collect data from service employees who worked in various divisions such as financial planning, insurance, investment banking, private equity, mortgages, and credit cards. We collected data across three phases to minimize concerns with causality and common method bias (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Similar to previous studies in the field (e.g., de Jong, de Ruyter, and Lemmink 2004), we kept a three-month lag between each phase.<sup>8</sup> We measured burnout due to supervisor and PDO at Phase 1, job satisfaction at Phase 2, and job engagement at Phase 3. We followed exactly the same procedure for each phase of data collection as we did in Study 1. After the third phase was completed, we received 132 usable surveys (response rate of 65.7%). Sample characteristics were as follows: female (53.1%), average age (31 years), university graduate (71.1%), average experience with the bank (4.2 years), and average experience with the current supervisor (2.1 years).

## **Measures and validation**

We prepared the surveys in English and then translated them into Chinese using the

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<sup>8</sup> Podsakoff et al. (2003, p. 888) point out that “although time lags may help reduce common method biases because they reduce the salience of the predictor variable or its accessibility in memory, if the lag is inordinately long for the theoretical relationship under examination, then it could mask a relationship that really exists.”

translation/back translation technique (Brislin, Lonner, and Thorndike 1973). We measured job engagement, PDO, and burnout using the same scales as we did in Study 1. Job satisfaction was measured with a three-item scale (1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree) borrowed from Speier and Venkatesh (2002) (see Appendix B). We also controlled for experience with supervisor (in years) in our model.

The CFA for multi-item scales showed a good fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 569.2$ ,  $df = 335$ ,  $GFI = .88$ ,  $TLI = .92$ ,  $CFI = .93$ ,  $RMSEA = .06$ ). Statistically significant factor loadings (Anderson and Gerbing 1988) and AVE values greater than .50 (Bagozzi and Yi 1988) supported the convergent validity of the scales. In addition, the AVE estimates were greater than the squared intercorrelations between these constructs for all pairs of constructs (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Therefore, discriminant validity of the scales was also supported.

### **Mediation test**

Consistent with results found in Study 1, we found a significant interaction between burnout and PDO on engagement ( $b = .149$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Further, this interaction was qualified by a simple effect of burnout on engagement at low PDO ( $b = -.442$ ,  $p < .01$ ) but not at high PDO ( $b = -.122$ , ns), which suggests that burnout results in less engagement but only when PDO is low.

To further understand the nature of the underlying process behind the interaction between burnout and PDO on engagement, H5 advanced that burnout has an indirect effect on engagement via job satisfaction because satisfaction is negatively affected only when PDO is low. We used the bootstrapping method to test this prediction (Preacher and Hayes 2008; Zhao et al. 2010). When PDO was low, burnout had an indirect and negative effect on engagement via job satisfaction ( $b = -.314$ ; 95% bias-corrected bootstrap (CI) [-.636, -.131]). In contrast, when

PDO was high, the indirect effect of burnout on engagement via job satisfaction was not significant ( $b = -.070$ ; 95% bias-corrected bootstrap (CI)  $[-.222, .105]$ ). Consequently, H5 was supported.

## **Summary**

Study 3 reveals the mediating process by which the interaction between burnout and PDO affects engagement. Results show that the effect of burnout on engagement is transmitted through job satisfaction, but only when PDO is low. Burnout negatively affects engagement when PDO is low due to lower job satisfaction. Conversely, when PDO is high, burnout has no impact on job satisfaction, thereby discounting the mediating role of job satisfaction on the burnout–engagement relationship.

## **General discussion**

With service employees reporting the most dramatic decline in engagement among employees of all sectors, the goal of this study was to broaden the scope of the JD-R model in order to obtain a deeper understanding of service employee burnout and engagement. Across three separate studies, we provide a more nuanced look into the JD-R model by explaining when and how service employees feel more or less burnout and engagement.

In expanding the boundaries of JD-R theory, an important strength of our paper lies in the three separate studies we employ, wherein Studies 2 and 3 (lab experiment and field study using surveys, respectively) not only produce remarkably similar results to Study 1 (field study using surveys) but also address its limitations. The research design of many studies that rely on the JD-R model is cross sectional in nature, which challenges the validity of the causal ordering of the

constructs that make up the model. To this end, Crawford et al. (2010, p. 844) maintain, “[s]trong inferences regarding causality require experimental research in which the theoretical antecedents—the resources and demands—can be manipulated.” Therefore, based on the converging results of our three studies, we are able to minimize the possibility of reverse causality, thereby lending greater confidence to our more nuanced theoretical framework. We now discuss how our results contribute to theory and practice.

### **Theoretical implications**

The theoretical contribution of our study is threefold. The first is the inclusion of PDO (Studies 1 and 3) and submissiveness (Study 2) in the JD-R model, critical components that have been missing from the literature. The second is the identification of the mediating process by which the interactions involving PDO/submissiveness affect burnout and engagement. The third is the establishment of causality among the constructs and control of common method bias through the manipulation of demands and resources (Study 2) and longitudinal study design (Study 3).

**Addition of PDO at the individual level** The significance of studying PDO within the context of the JD-R model is that it captures the reality of the workplace where many demands and resources come from supervisors. Service employees have numerous interactions with supervisors, and their workplace attitude is influenced, to a large extent, by the demands and resources that originate from supervisors. Given this, the scope of the JD-R model has been overly restricted and narrow, as it has not considered employees’ attitudes toward authority and hierarchy, both of which can shape how employees view demands and resources originating



from supervisors. Because PDO reflects subordinates' values and opinions about how they view authority, employees' reactions to demands and resources from supervisors may not be identical. As a result, when the different responses employees have regarding demands and resources from supervisors are absent from the JD-R model, this renders the model incomplete. Our refined and extended model fills this gap in the literature with the inclusion of PDO in Studies 1 and 3 and with submissiveness in Study 2.

Contrary to predictions, our results indicate that close monitoring, in particular, can intensify burnout for employees with high PDO or for employees that work in a high submissive environment. Although this was unexpected, a possible reason may rest with the dependent variable under examination. The bulk of the literature on PDO has focused on how low versus high PDO employees differ in their perceptions of the supervisor (e.g., loyalty toward supervisor) when the supervisor engages in deviant or unfair interpersonal treatment (e.g., Lian et al. 2012). However, our emphasis was on how an employee (as opposed to a supervisor) feels based on an experience with the supervisor (i.e., burnout). That is, the key distinction lies in whether the focus is on how the employee feels about the supervisor or about him/herself after experiencing job demands. Herein lies why our study may have found a different effect than is typically seen in the literature. High PDO employees may be less critical of unsupportive supervision but instead may be more critical of their own feelings due to such supervision.

The different effect of close monitoring on burnout between low and high PDO employees suggests that supervisors need to have a segmented and targeted approach if and when they intend to closely monitor employees. By not considering PDO, supervisors risk jeopardizing supervisor-subordinate relationships, but this can be avoided if supervisors fully understand their subordinates' responses to hierarchy and authority. These findings also have

significant implications for extending leader–member exchange (LMX) theory through a consideration of PDO when attempting to redefine the boundary conditions of the leader–subordinate relationship (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995).

Past studies have focused on personal resources as moderators in the JD-R model rather than perceptions directed toward the source of job demands (e.g., supervisor), which may limit the transferability of an employee’s generic views to the specific task, supervisor, or organizational demands. To address this, we introduced PDO as a moderator when the source of the demand (i.e., supervisor) and the opinion of the target (i.e., supervisor) are aligned.

**Mediating process** The second contribution of our study comes from illuminating the underlying process of how the interaction effects work in our model. To this end, in Study 2, we observed a mediated moderation effect where the interactions affected burnout through stress, an important link missing from the current body of studies in the JD-R literature.

The interactive combination between close monitoring and submissiveness impacted burnout through stress but only in the conditions of high submissiveness. The results suggest that in a high submissiveness work condition, close monitoring increases burnout because of greater stress. Conversely, this was not the case under a low submissiveness work condition where stress did not function as a mediator between close monitoring and burnout. To corroborate our findings, our data confirmed that while close monitoring had a positive and significant effect on stress in the high submissiveness work condition, there was no observable effect in the low submissiveness work condition.

We also found that close monitoring resulted in greater burnout when customer service feedback was low because of elevated stress. That is, when close monitoring increases without

commensurate feedback on how to better serve customers, stress increases as well, which in turn results in more burnout. Similarly, when customer service feedback was low, close monitoring had a positive and significant effect on stress; however, this effect was absent when customer service feedback was high. It is noteworthy to mention that in our model, both close monitoring and customer service feedback came from supervisors. That is, supervisors created the demand but at the same time provided resources. Our results underscore the importance of supervisors providing resources such as customer service feedback if they intend to engage in close monitoring because without sufficient resources, stress will increase and lead to greater employee burnout. Our correlation matrix (Table 1) shows that close monitoring and engagement are indeed negatively correlated, which supports our argument of close monitoring as a job hindrance demand. Our research shows that close monitoring leads to more burnout when submissiveness is high and customer service feedback is low as a result of increased stress.

In Study 3, we found that burnout had an indirect effect on engagement through job satisfaction, but only for low PDO employees. Again our results show that burnout diminishes job satisfaction, but only for those with low PDO. Job satisfaction was not affected by burnout for those with a high PDO. These findings collectively suggest that when an employee has high PDO, job satisfaction is minimally affected despite close monitoring by the supervisor. In contrast, for low PDO employees, job satisfaction becomes sensitive to how closely supervisors monitor employees because employees may believe that job satisfaction can be influenced by the extent to which different views between the two parties can be resolved.

**Improving causality through manipulation of demands and resources** The last contribution and strength of our study comes from the consistent results across studies that not only measured

but also manipulated job demands (i.e., close monitoring) and job resources (i.e., customer service feedback). Studies 1 and 3 used a survey within a single country and still found enough variance in PDO within individuals, while Study 2 used MBA students from different countries and manipulated demands and resources including submissiveness. We were able to replicate Study 1's findings using lab experiments after controlling for nationalities to ensure that submissiveness was not confounded by different cultural views toward authority and hierarchy.

By manipulating demands and resources, we (1) strengthen the causal ordering of the constructs in the JD-R model, (2) rule out alternative explanations including reverse causality, and (3) minimize common method bias. By manipulating demands and resources, our study shows that close monitoring and customer service feedback lead to burnout and not the other way around. Further, our approach is consistent with what Crawford et al. (2010, p. 844) posited, namely that “strong inferences regarding causality require experimental research in which the theoretical antecedents—the resources and demands—can be manipulated.”

### **Managerial implications**

Our study provides insights for managers in service firms who are committed to keeping employees engaged and improving customer service performance. In order to reverse the trend of declining employee engagement, our study informs managers what they can do under which conditions to reduce the likelihood of burnout from supervisors and disengagement. Close monitoring needs to be used carefully as it increases burnout, while customer service feedback should be encouraged because it reduces burnout. However, when both are used and originate from the same source (i.e., supervisors), the total effect of close monitoring on engagement is  $-.138$  ( $p < .01$ ), while the total effect of customer service feedback on engagement is  $.096$  ( $p <$

.01). The total net effect is a decrease in engagement, which suggests that although customer service feedback boosts engagement, the deleterious impact of close monitoring on engagement still dominates.

We caution supervisors that a micro-management approach such as close monitoring can be more detrimental and lead to feelings of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization for employees with high PDO or employees working in a high submissive environment. This is because high PDO employees and those in a high submissive work context perceive more stress when exposed to close monitoring. Therefore, unless stress coping mechanisms such as social support, retraining, or feedback are offered, high PDO employees or those who work in a high submissive environment will feel more burnout when being closely monitored. Our results do, however, provide an avenue through which the effect of close monitoring on burnout can be mitigated. When employees receive much-needed feedback on ways to improve customer service, burnout is diminished despite close monitoring as employees have the necessary resources to cope with and manage stress.

Last but not least, employees who have high PDO are less disengaged despite burnout because, as our data reveal, job satisfaction does not seem to be affected as much by burnout. That is, high PDO employees' experience of less disengagement despite more burnout may offset the results that employees with high PDO feel more burnout from close monitoring. We found this to be the case as, for high PDO employees, the effect of close monitoring on burnout was .754 ( $p < .01$ ), while the same effect for low PDO employees was .472 ( $p < .01$ ). However, for high PDO employees, the effect of burnout on engagement was less negative at -.141 ( $p < .01$ ), while that same effect for low PDO employees was -.342 ( $p < .01$ ). Collectively, the total effect of close monitoring on engagement for high PDO employees is -.106 ( $p < .01$ ), whereas

for low PDO employees, it is  $-.161$  ( $p < .01$ ). These results inform managers that although close monitoring has a negative effect on engagement (which confirms close monitoring as a hindrance demand), close monitoring is less detrimental to high PDO than to low PDO employees.

### **Limitations and future research directions**

This study is not without limitations, but these provide avenues for future research. We included only one supervisor-related demand (close monitoring) and resource (customer service feedback) along with one moderator (PDO and submissiveness). Future studies should expand the JD-R model by including both job challenge and hindrance demands. Our model only included a job hindrance demand (i.e., close monitoring), but future studies should explore how PDO moderates both types of demands.

Because PDO is an individual-level construct that has shown variation across employees within a firm and culture, we do not expect the results from Studies 1 and 3 to be limited to Taiwanese and Chinese firms (East). Future studies could still bolster generalizability by testing our model for a firm in the West. Caution should also be exercised in drawing conclusions from Study 2 as students were employed as respondents. Although these students had an average work experience of over 4.5 years, their limited (or lack of) experience in the retail industry may prevent them from fully understanding what it takes to work in such an environment. While students may be suitable for theory testing, which was the purpose of Study 2, students pose shortcomings that limit generalization and external validity of the findings. To address these limitations, we urge future studies to recruit respondents that have experience in the particular industry of investigation.

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**Table 1** Intercorrelations and descriptive statistics (Study 1)

<b>Variables</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
1. Experience with supervisor		-.030	-.109*	.018	-.117*	-.064	-.109*	
2. Close monitoring	.073		-.254**	.520**	-.229**	.277**	-.150**	
3. Developmental feedback	.002	-.129**		-.568**	.351**	-.366**	.259**	
4. Burnout	.116*	.568**	-.411**		-.439**	.348**	-.323**	
5. Job engagement	-.005	-.106*	.416**	-.295**		-.221**	.559**	
6. Power distance orientation	.042	.349**	-.229**	.413**	-.099*		-.076	
7. Service performance	.002	-.035	.333**	-.191**	.603**	-.032		
8. Marker variable	-.001	.114*	.007	.047	.107*	.124**	.153**	
Mean	2.29	2.74	3.59	2.32	3.62	2.48	3.99	3.29
SD	2.00	.76	.72	.94	.67	.83	.60	1.02

Correlations after common method adjustment with ( $r = .10$ ) are reported above the diagonal.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$  (two-tailed test)

**Table 2** Results (Study 1)

		Direct effects model	Hypothesized model
<b>Direct effects</b>			
Close monitoring → Burnout		.639**	.603**
Customer service feedback → Burnout		-.448**	-.406**
Burnout → Job engagement		-.216**	-.242**
Job engagement → Customer service performance		.537**	.537**
Power distance orientation → Burnout		-	.192**
Power distance orientation → Job engagement		-	.015
<b>Interaction effects</b>			
Close Monitoring x Customer service feedback → Burnout	H1(-)	-	-.165**
Close Monitoring x Power distance → Burnout	H2(-)	-	.159**
Burnout x Power distance → Job engagement	H3(+)	-	.122**
Customer service feedback x Power distance → Burnout	H4(+)	-	.002
<b>Controls</b>			
Experience with supervisor → Burnout		.076*	.057
Experience with supervisor → Job engagement		.021	.014
Experience with supervisor → Customer service performance		.003	.003
Common method variable → Burnout		-.008	-.014
Common method variable → Job engagement		.079**	.077**
Common method variable → Customer service performance		.053*	.053*
	Deviance	7207.9	6578.4
	AIC	7335.9	6624.4
	BIC	7603.7	6720.6
	Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> -Burnout	.445	.502
	Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> -Job engagement	.102	.134
	Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> -Customer service performance	.371	.372

Unstandardized coefficients are reported.

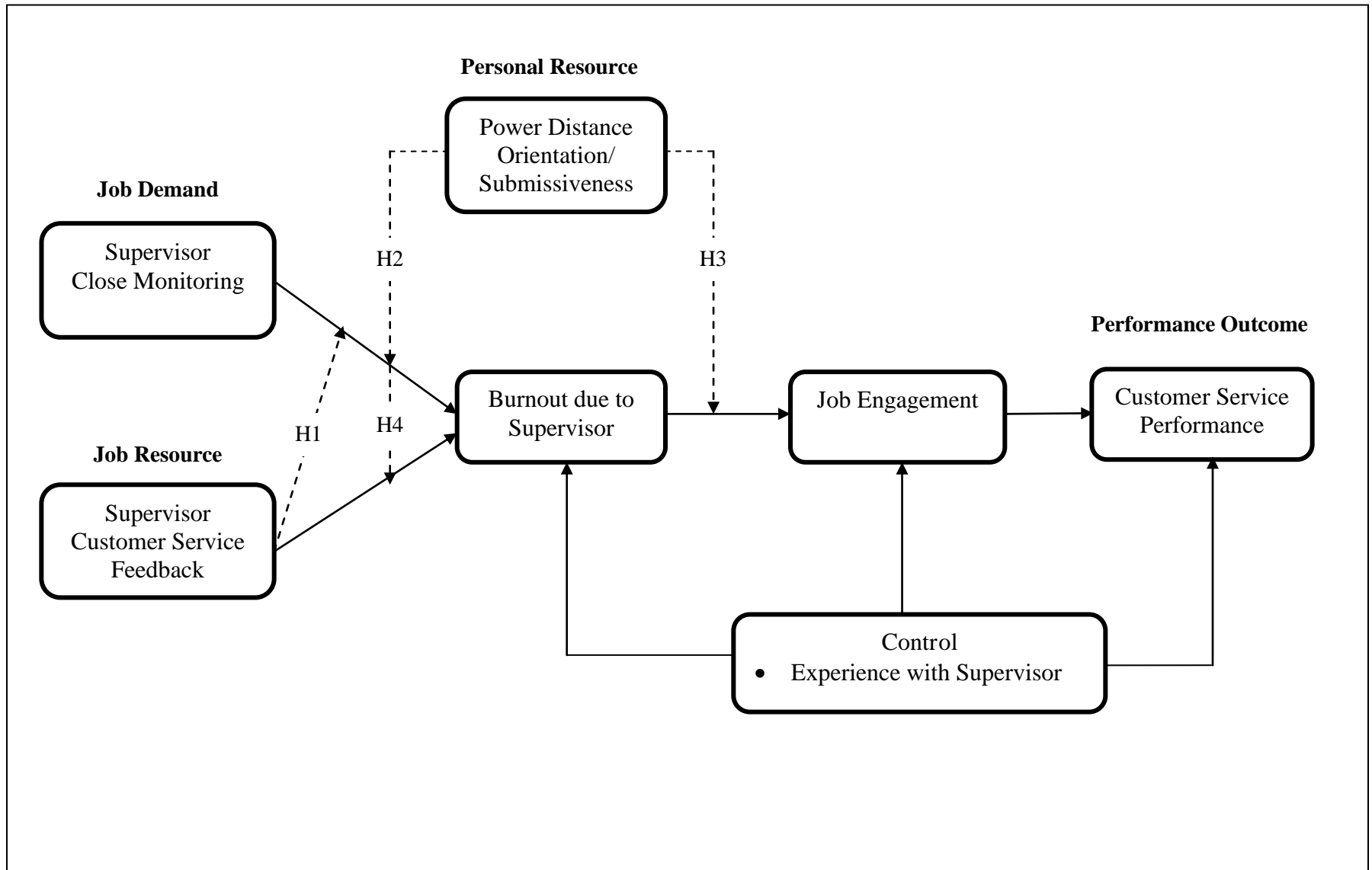
\*p < .05; \*\*p < .01 (two-tailed test)

**Table 3** Intercorrelations and descriptive statistics (Study 3)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	
1. Experience with supervisor						
2. Burnout	.016					
3. Power distance orientation	-.008	.429*				
4. Job satisfaction	-.014	-.332*	-.115			
5. Job engagement	.041	-.431*	-.257*	.372*		
	Mean	8.35	2.13	2.22	3.64	3.60
	SD	7.20	.93	.92	1.00	.79

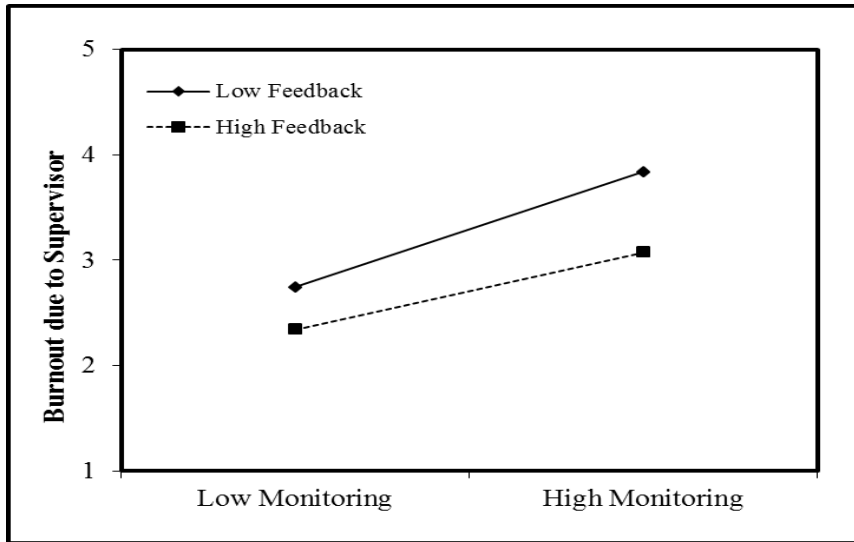
\*p < .01 (two-tailed test)

**Fig. 1 Model**

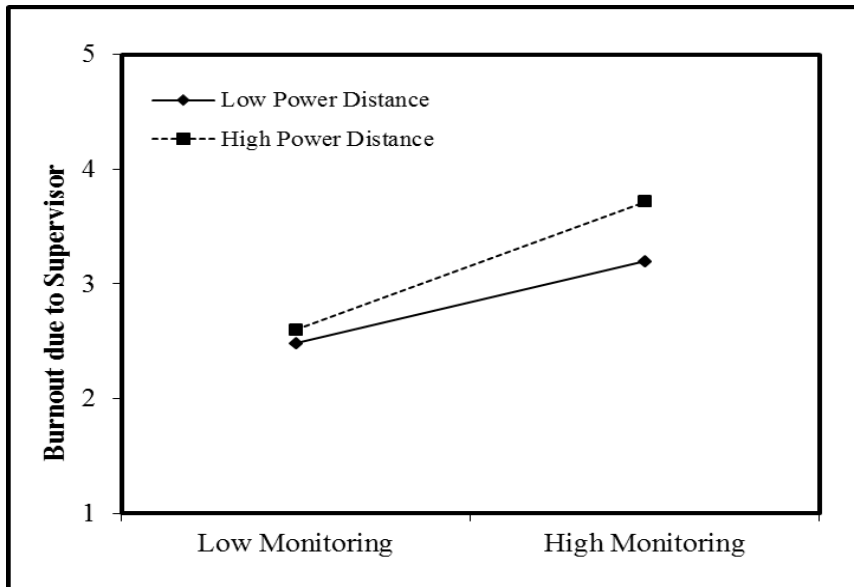




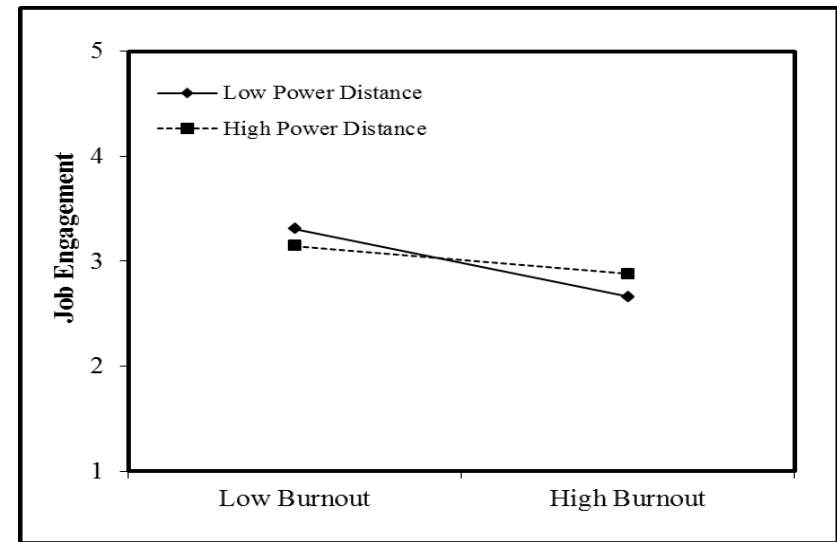
**Fig. 2** The moderating role of customer service feedback on the close monitoring–burnout relationship (Study 1, Hypothesis 1)



**Fig. 3** The moderating role of power distance orientation on the close monitoring–burnout relationship (Study 1, Hypothesis 2)



**Fig. 4** The moderating role of power distance orientation on the burnout–job engagement relationship (Study 1, Hypothesis 3)



**Appendix A** Review of literature on the drivers and outcomes of burnout

Study	Sample	Job demands-resources framework	Drivers of Burnout			Engagement as proximal outcome	Dependent variables
			Personal resource(s)	Job resource(s)	Job demands		
Singh, Goolsby, and Rhoads (1994)	377 customer service reps	No			Role conflict Role ambiguity Role overload	Not examined	Performance Organizational commitment Job satisfaction Turnover intention
Babakus et al. (1999)	203 salespeople of a large international service organization	No			Role conflict Role ambiguity	Not examined	Job performance Turnover intentions Organizational commitment Job satisfaction
Singh (2000)	306 frontline service employees of a financial company	Yes	Task control	Manager support	Role conflict Role ambiguity	Not examined	Performance (productivity and quality) Organizational commitment Turnover intention
Crosno et al. (2009)	209 customer service reps of a medium-sized company	No	Optimism		Role conflict Role ambiguity	Not examined	Job satisfaction Sales performance
Babakus, Yavas, and Ashill (2009)	530 frontline bank employees in New Zealand	Yes	Customer orientation	Training Rewards Supervisory support Service	Role conflict Role ambiguity Role overload	Not examined	Job performance Turnover intentions

				Technology and support			
Suh et al. (2011)	3999 service employees of health care system	No				Employee mission engagement	Affective commitment Turnover intentions
Lages and Piercy (2012)	740 frontline catering employees	No		Perceived organizational support		Not examined	Idea generation Organizational commitment Job satisfaction
Schmitz and Ganesan (2014)	221 salespeople of a German B2B company	Yes	Sales self-efficacy	Transactional leadership	Customer complexity Organizational complexity	Not examined	Behavioral responses (Effort) Psychological responses (Role conflict and role ambiguity) Job satisfaction Sales performance
McFarland, Rode, and Shervani (2015)	151 salespeople from a Fortune 500 transportation company	No	Emotional intelligence		Role conflict Role ambiguity	Not examined	Customer orientation Sales performance

Note: This literature review is limited to those studies that have been published in Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of Retailing, and Journal of Service Research between 1990-2015.

## Appendix B Measures and CFA results

	Factor loadings	
	Study 1	Study 3
<b>Job satisfaction (Study 3: <math>\alpha = .94</math>; CR = .96; AVE = .90)</b>		
Overall, I am satisfied with my job		.958
I would prefer another, more ideal job (reverse scored)		.934
I am satisfied with the important aspects of my job		.946
<b>Job engagement</b>		
<b>Vigor (Study 1: <math>\alpha = .87</math>; CR = .88; AVE = .56, Study 3: <math>\alpha = .88</math>; CR = .91; AVE = .62)</b>		
At work, I feel full of energy	.861	.891
In my job, I feel strong and vigorous	.853	.870
When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	.718	.772
I can continue working for very long periods at a time	.789	.738
In my job, I am mentally very resilient	.610	.829
At work, I always persevere, even when things do not go well	.632	.597
<b>Dedication (Study 1: <math>\alpha = .91</math>; CR = .91; AVE = .67, Study 3: <math>\alpha = .93</math>; CR = .95; AVE = .79)</b>		
I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose	.855	.892
I am enthusiastic about my job	.881	.916
My job inspires me	.852	.909
I am proud of the work I do	.837	.926
I find my job challenging	.644	.797
<b>Absorption (Study 1: <math>\alpha = .85</math>; CR = .85; AVE = .50, Study 3: <math>\alpha = .84</math>; CR = .87; AVE = .58)</b>		
Time flies when I am working	.580	.671
When I am working, I forget everything else around me	.682	.786
I feel happy when I am working intensely	.811	.745
I am immersed in my work	.836	.772
I get carried away when I am working	.697	.820
It is difficult to detach myself from my job	.594	.671
<b>Power distance orientation (Study 1: <math>\alpha = .78</math>; CR = .81; AVE = .51, Study 3: <math>\alpha = .87</math>; CR = .89; AVE = .66)</b>		
People in higher positions should make most decisions without consulting people in lower positions	.751	.838
People in higher positions should not ask the opinions of people in lower positions too frequently	.653	.709
People in higher positions should avoid social interaction with people in lower positions	.727	.821
People in lower positions should not disagree with decisions by people in higher positions	.732	.872
<b>Burnout due to supervisor (Study 1: <math>\alpha = .89</math>; CR = .90; AVE = .68, Study 3: <math>\alpha = .87</math>; CR = .90; AVE = .69)</b>		
I feel a lack of personal concern for my manager	.725	.755
I feel I'm becoming more hardened toward my manager	.784	.861

Working with my manager directly puts too much stress on me	.866	.799
I feel emotionally drained by the pressure my manager puts on me	.918	.894
<b>Supervisor close monitoring (Study 1: <math>\alpha = .87</math>; CR = .88; AVE = .54)</b>		
It sometimes feels like my manager is always looking over my shoulder	.847	
I am careful not to do things that my manager might disapprove of	.572	
My manager keeps pretty close tabs on me	.819	
It is clear to me that to get ahead in this bank I need to do exactly what I am told by my manager	.589	
My manager likes to see things done in a certain way	.770	
My work is constantly being evaluated	.778	
<b>Supervisor customer service feedback (Study 1: <math>\alpha = .78</math>; CR = .79; AVE = .57)</b>		
While giving me feedback, my manager focuses on helping me to learn and improve customer service	.852	
My manager never gives me developmental feedback on my service to customers	.529	
My manager provides me with useful information on how to improve my customer service	.843	
<b>Customer service performance (Study 1: <math>\alpha = .91</math>; CR = .92; AVE = .61)</b>		
Being friendly and helpful to customers	.593	
Approaching customers quickly	.784	
Asking good questions and listening to find out what a customer wants	.753	
Being able to help customers when needed	.815	
Pointing out and relating item features to a customer's needs	.843	
Suggesting items customers might like but did not think of	.799	
Explaining an item's features and benefits to overcome a customer's objections	.840	

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$\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha; CR = Composite reliability; AVE = Average variance extracted