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Personnel Psychology

WILEY

PERSONNEL PSYCHOLOGY

ORIGINAL ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Under Pressure: Employee Work Stress, Supervisory Mentoring Support, and Employee Career Success

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Received: 18 November 2022 | **Revised:** 5 September 2024 | **Accepted:** 10 September 2024

Keywords: career success | stress | supervisory mentoring support | work engagement

ABSTRACT

Despite consistent findings that stressed employees benefit from social support, these employees do not always have access to such support. We propose and test a conceptual model suggesting employee work stress will negatively affect supervisory career and psychosocial mentoring support. Drawing from social exchange theory, we predict this will indirectly affect employee career success (lower career satisfaction and promotability ratings, fewer promotions), and that the relationship between employee work stress and lower supervisory mentoring support can be explained by lower levels of work engagement experienced by, and attributed to, stressed employees. We tested our model across three studies. In Study 1, we collected four waves of multisource field data (254 employees, 127 managers, and company records) at a large postal organization in the United Kingdom (UK). Employee work stress was negatively related to supervisor career and psychosocial mentoring support, and indirectly affected career satisfaction and manager promotability ratings of employees via supervisor career mentoring support. Cross-lagged panel analyses in a supplemental study additionally supported the proposed directionality of relationships. Study 2 included data across three waves from employees in Hong Kong ($n = 137$) and showed that employee work stress had indirect effects on supervisor career and psychosocial mentoring via lower employee engagement. In Study 3, using data from supervisors in the UK ($n = 240$) we showed that supervisor perceived employee stress had indirect effects on their provision of supervisor career and psychosocial mentoring support via lower perceived employee engagement.

1 | Introduction

Stress is a global phenomenon, with estimated annual costs exceeding $300 billion in the United States alone due to missed days, health care expenditures, and diminished productivity (The American Institute of Stress 2024). Similarly, in the United Kingdom (UK), stress-related conditions are estimated to cost upwards of £100 billion each year (McDaid 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic served to accelerate these trends. For example, according to a Gallup poll, 52% of US and Canadian workers reported feeling stressed on a daily basis (Gallup 2023). Stress, defined as a negative emotional experience accompanied by physiological, behavioral, and biochemical changes (Baum 1990), arises from a cognitive assessment of stressors, and is a highly subjective process (Bliese, Edwards, and Sonnentag 2017). The harmful effects of stress, including reduced levels of health and performance, have been well-documented (e.g., Bliese, Edwards, and Sonnentag 2017; Gilboa et al. 2008).

The social support received from interpersonal relationships, and particularly from one's supervisor, has long been established as a key resource in combating stress (e.g., Lee and Ashforth 1996; Nielsen et al. 2017). In fact, in the popular press (Wilkie 2020), as well as the scientific literature (e.g., Blanch and Aluja 2012; Drummond et al. 2017), the support received from supervisors is often considered an "antidote" to stress. A particularly important form of support that supervisors can provide is supervisory mentoring support (Kram 1988). Regardless of whether an employee is in a mentoring relationship with a supervisor or not, supervisors are a critical resource for employees as they have the potential to provide varying levels of career mentoring support (behaviors that facilitate learning the ropes and advancement in the organization, skill development, provision of networking opportunities, and access to intellectually challenging assignments), as well as psychosocial mentoring support (behaviors that involve friendship and social acceptance). This is meaningful, as meta-analytic research has found that mentoring support behaviors are negatively related with strain outcomes such as depressed mood, burnout, and distress (Eby et al. 2013). Further, the amount of supervisory mentoring support received has implications for career outcomes, such as subjective career success (Ng and Feldman 2014) and objective career success (Wayne et al. 1999).

To date, research has tended to focus on the stress-reducing benefits of supervisory support, focusing on support received from supervisors as a precursor to lower experienced stress or as a moderator of the stress process (e.g., Rudolph et al. 2020). This focus on the beneficial effects of supervisory support for stress has come at the expense of research examining the role that stress plays in determining the level of supervisory support actually received. This is an important omission, because, paradoxically, there is reason to expect that individuals who experience high levels of stress may actually receive *less* supervisory mentoring support, which has both short- and long-term implications for employee success. While unfortunate, this seems plausible as social exchange theory (Homans 1958; Thibaut and Kelley 1959) would suggest that supervisors are less likely to provide support to others when doing so is costly. Stressed employees are those who are depleted with respect to their emotional and mental resources (Hobfoll 1989). As such, providing support to stressed employees may be regarded as a drain on the supervisors' own resources, diminishing the amount of support accessible to employees experiencing work stress.

In the current study, we draw from social exchange theory (Homans 1958) and stress theories (e.g., Hobfoll 1989) to develop and test a model linking employee work stress to the level of supervisory mentoring support (see Figure 1). We propose that stressed employees, who could benefit from mentoring support the most, may be at a disadvantage in accessing this support. This is because stress depletes individuals' resources, reducing their capacity and willingness to be attentive to their job, and resulting in lower levels of job engagement (Nahrgang et al. 2011; Sonnentag, Tay, and Nesher Shoshan 2023). Given the discretionary nature of supervisory mentoring support (Eby et al. 2015; Tepper and Taylor 2003), employees who show signs of low work engagement are less likely to be able to cultivate and attract support from their managers. According to social exchange theory, relationships are based on principles of give and take and contributing more to the relationship than what one receives in return is problematic (Emerson 1981; Homans 1974). Due to their ongoing stress at work, and the resulting resource drain they experience, we predict that stressed employees are less likely to be targeted for career mentoring and psychosocial mentoring support. For the supervisor, providing support to employees who are perceived to be lacking in work engagement will be less likely. Thus, while those experiencing the most stress at work might well be the same employees who would benefit most from supervisory support, we predict that individuals experiencing stress will receive lower levels of mentoring support from their supervisors. In turn, receiving lower support should result in negative effects on one's career success, in the form of lower career satisfaction, promotability ratings, and actual promotions.

Across three studies, we examine the interpersonal implications of employee work stress on supervisory career and psychosocial mentoring support. We propose that employee work stress predicts supervisory mentoring support, and that employee work stress has indirect effects on career outcomes via lower levels of supervisory mentoring support. We also elucidate the link between employee work stress and supervisory mentoring support by positioning employee engagement as the mechanism linking work stress and supervisory mentoring support. Taken together, we offer a rigorous and multi-perspective test of our prediction that experienced work stress affects career outcomes via lower levels of supervisory mentoring support, and that the lower engagement levels experienced by and ascribed to stressed employees contribute to the negative effects of stress on supervisory mentoring support.

Collectively, our goal is to make three specific contributions to the literature. First, our research is some of the first to examine the *interpersonal* implications of work stress. Drawing from social exchange theory (Homans 1958), we develop a conceptual framework that focuses on the extent to which supervisory career and psychosocial mentoring support operate as mechanisms underlying the relation between employees' levels of work stress and their career success. Our interpersonal perspective provides an invaluable contribution to the stress literature, which to date has tended to focus on individual outcomes of stress such as job performance (Gilboa et al. 2008) and health (Kivimäki et al. 2006), with interpersonal implications receiving rare research attention (cf. Kalish et al. 2015; McCarthy, Erdogan, and Bauer 2019; Rodell et al. 2024). Therefore, understanding the actual observed connection between work stress and supervisory mentoring support has theoretical and practical implications.

Second, we contribute to the literature on supervisory mentoring support by investigating experienced work stress as a predictor. While much is known about the outcomes of supervisory mentoring support (Kraimer et al. 2011; Lapointe and Vandenberghe 2017), studies examining predictors of supervisor mentoring support are limited (see Laschober, Eby, and Kinkade 2013; Richard et al. 2009 for exceptions). Our contention is that experienced work stress may negatively affect supervisors' likelihood of providing mentoring support to the individual. Focusing on employee work stress as an antecedent is notable, as researchers typically treat social support and supportive relationships as a precursor to (lower) stress, neglecting the possibility that experienced stress may actually serve the opposite function of reducing the likelihood of receiving such support. In

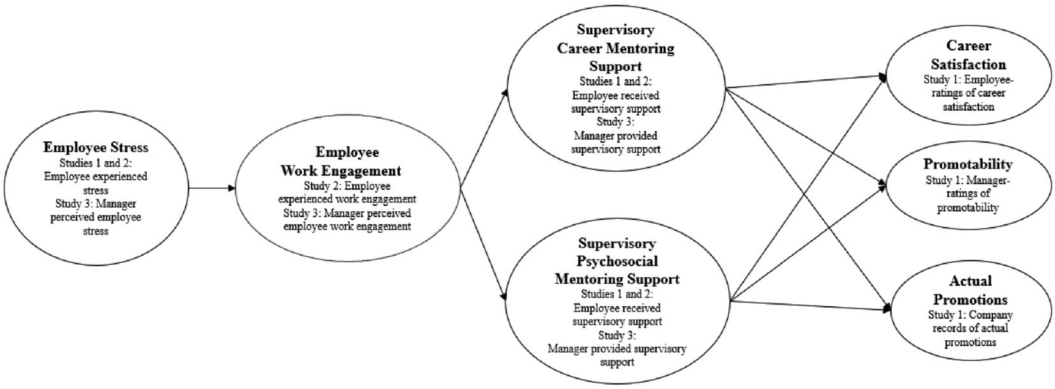

FIGURE 1 | Hypothesized model: Tested in Studies 1–3.

the current context, stress levels of the employee may act as a deterrent to providing mentoring support to the employee due to lower work engagement of this individual. Thus, our study adds to the literature on *why* individuals receive different levels of supervisory mentoring support and identifies work stress and the resulting lower levels of engagement as the factors that contribute to lower levels of supervisory mentoring support.

Finally, we offer methodological triangulation by conducting studies exploring employee and supervisor perspectives. Specifically, in Studies 1 and 2, we assess the employees' perspective: how their work stress relates to supervisory mentoring support *received* (and career outcomes in Study 1). In Study 3, we examine how perceived work stress of the employee affects supervisory mentoring support that supervisors believe they *provided*. This dual focus on received and provided support is important, because supervisors may inflate the amount of support they provide to stressed employees due to self-serving bias, and a one-on-one match may not occur. For example, supervisors may see themselves as providing high levels of support to stressed employees, even though this perception may not be shared by the stressed employee. Examining both the employee and managerial perspectives sheds light on the interpersonal focus of our research, and in doing so provides a valuable extension to past work in the realm of workplace stress.

2 | Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

2.1 | Supervisory Mentoring Support

Research shows that mentors provide two distinct forms of support to protégés: career mentoring and psychosocial mentoring (Allen et al. 2004; Allen et al. 2017; Eby et al. 2013). *Career mentoring* refers to a mentor's provision of developmental assignments, advancement opportunities, exposure, and sponsorship; and *psychosocial mentoring* involves providing psychological counseling and support, friendship, and acceptance (Allen et al. 2004; Kammeyer-Mueller and Judge 2008).

As Eby et al. (2015) note, supervisors are uniquely positioned to provide mentoring support given their increased opportunities to interact with employees and their hierarchical role that gives them access to resources employees may need. Indeed, within mentoring relationships, supervisory mentors provide greater career mentoring support relative to nonsupervisory mentors (Ragins and Cotton 1999). Tepper and Taylor (2003) distinguished supervisory mentoring behaviors from mentoring relationships, and contended that while mentoring relationships are intense, enduring, and involve emotional commitment, supervisory mentoring support is related to important attitudinal and behavioral outcomes for employees even when such mentoring support behaviors are displayed outside of a mentoring relationship. Therefore, in this study, our focus is on *supervisory* mentoring behaviors, or the degree to which supervisors engage in career and psychosocial mentoring support behaviors to their employees. Researchers have conceptualized supervisory mentoring support as a form of citizenship behavior (Eby et al. 2015; Tepper and Taylor 2003), emphasizing the discretionary nature of these behaviors for managers. Notably, studies of supervisory mentoring support have shown that receiving such support is beneficial with respect to outcomes such as promotability assessments and career satisfaction (Byrne, Dik, and Chiaburu 2008; Sun, Pan, and Chow 2014), and is associated with favorable attitudes such as organizational commitment (Baranik, Roling, and Eby 2010; Richard et al. 2009), lower work-family conflict (Laschober, Eby, and Kinkade 2013), and higher citizenship (Eby et al. 2015).

2.2 | Experienced Stress and Supervisor Mentoring Support

Employee experienced stress reflects one's reaction to stressors, and stressed employees often report feeling incapable of coping with the demands they face (Baum 1990; Hobfoll et al. 1990). Stress theories typically focus on *intrapersonal* outcomes, such as individual employee physical and mental health (e.g., Bliese, Edwards, and Sonnentag 2017). Recently, however, increasing recognition that stress has *interpersonal* implications for how individuals treat others, as well as how they are treated by others (e.g., McCarthy, Erdogan, and Bauer 2019; Rosen et al. 2021; Sajjadiani, Daniels, and Huang 2024) has emerged. The role of social support for coping with stress is well established. For example, social support broadens the pool of available resources by promoting positive coping skills (Dunahoo et al. 1998; Hobfoll 1988). Thus, supervisory social support is a valuable resource for employees who experience high levels of stress. The key question

is the degree to which such support is available to employees who experience stress.

While it is intuitively appealing to believe that stressed individuals *should* be given, and therefore *will be* given greater support, paradoxically, there is no empirical support for this expectation. In fact, the evidence points to less support being given instead. For example, a meta-analysis of the stress and social support literature shows a negative relationship between stress and support received, rather than a positive one (Viswesvaran, Sanchez, and Fisher 1999). The authors of this meta-analysis noted that "the negative sign of this correlation, however, appears to run counter to the claim that social support is mobilized when strains are encountered or that social support is elicited/provided to individuals when they are perceived to be experiencing strain" (327). Similarly, Eby et al. (2013) meta-analysis of the mentoring support literature found a significant negative relationship with stress. Finally, Rosen et al. (2021) showed that at a daily level, venting to one's supervisor resulted in negative emotions on the part of the supervisor and yielded greater interpersonal mistreatment, offering indirect evidence that supervisors do not necessarily offer greater understanding or support to stressed employees.

Scholars investigating factors contributing to the receipt of mentoring support have long suggested that a social exchange theory lens is useful (Homans 1958). From the support giver's perspective, providing support entails time and energy investments in a relationship which may not pay off, and sponsoring an employee who may derail or fail to live up to their potential may be a poor investment of resources (Bono et al. 2017; Ivey and Dupré 2022). Therefore, consistent with social exchange theory (Homans 1958; Thibaut and Kelley 1959), a mentoring support investment is more likely to occur when such investment is expected to be mutually beneficial (Allen, Poteet, and Burroughs 1997; Ragins and Scandura 1999). For example, research has shown that mentors expressed willingness to support individuals who are higher in ability, commitment (Green and Bauer 1995), and willingness to learn (Allen 2004). Mentors have been found to be more likely to select protégés based on their abilities and potential, as opposed to their needs (Allen, Poteet, and Russell 2000). Similarly, supervisors were more likely to provide mentoring support to higher performing employees (Lapierre, Naidoo, and Bonaccio 2012; Wang et al. 2022).

Employee work stress is likely to affect supervisors' mental calculus regarding whether they would be a desirable target for supervisors' investment of mentoring support. Kalish et al. (2015) termed stressed employees as "resource thirsty" because these employees are, by definition, missing resources to cope effectively with the daily demands of their jobs and are less able to bring their full energy and be engaged in jobs. Supervisors are likely to react to behavioral manifestations of this deficiency by regarding these employees as less enthusiastic and focused, and therefore are less likely to invest time and effort into supporting employees. The idea of employee work stress negatively affecting supervisory mentoring support is also consistent with stress theories (Hobfoll 1989), in which resource preservation is a key motive guiding individual behavior. For example, research on intimate partners of those experiencing traumatic stress has shown that intimate partners had lower levels of empathy toward individuals experiencing stress, and the expectations to provide support to the stressed person was a depleting burden on them, resulting in provision of less support (Wang et al. 2022). Given that supervisors have limited time and energy, they are likely to be motivated to preserve personal resources by limiting their investment in employees considered to need greater investment and offering lower returns.

Supervisors are unlikely to terminate a relationship with a subordinate altogether in reaction to the employee's experienced work stress, as supervisors' job descriptions necessitate that they maintain work-related communication with the employee. However, because the level and provision of supervisory mentoring support is discretionary (Eby et al. 2015; Tepper and Taylor 2003), stressed employees are less likely to be the targets of supervisory mentoring support. Thus, based on social exchange theory, we posit that supervisors are unlikely to invest extra time and effort to prepare highly stressed employees for future roles by providing career mentoring support, or behave in ways that will deepen their relationship by providing psychosocial mentoring support.

Hypothesis 1. *Employee work stress is negatively related to (a) supervisor career mentoring support and (b) supervisor psychosocial mentoring support.*

2.3 | Supervisor Mentoring Support and Career Success

We further predict that the amount of supervisory mentoring support will have implications for career success. We focus on three frequently used indicators of success: career satisfaction, which is a marker for subjective career success (Spurk et al. 2022), employee promotability ratings (De Pater et al. 2009), and actual promotions (Peltokorpi 2023). Career satisfaction captures the degree to which the employee is satisfied with their advancement toward their career goals (Judge et al. 1995). Promotability ratings are assessments regarding the likelihood of advancement of an employee within the organization (De Pater et al. 2009). Finally, promotion to a higher level is an indicator of objective career success (Epitropaki et al. 2021).

The relationship between supervisor mentoring support and career success is well-established (Eby et al. 2008). Therefore, career success constitutes a salient outcome in our model. In fact, career mentoring support from supervisors is shown to have a much stronger relation to subjective career success relative to career and psychosocial mentoring support from other sources (Ng and Feldman 2014). Supervisory psychosocial mentoring is thought to be important to career success because it facilitates the development of employee confidence, whereas career mentoring support provides employees with challenging assignments and learning opportunities (Van Vianen et al. 2018). For example, Pan, Sun, and Chow (2011) showed that supervisory mentoring was positively related to career satisfaction because it was associated with personal learning. Sun, Pan, and Chow (2014) showed that supervisory mentoring support was related to promotability ratings, because such mentoring support was associated with higher levels of empowerment and organization-based self esteem. Finally, Zacher (2016) showed that supervisor career mentoring support received on a daily basis was positively related to manifestations of career adaptability, such as higher curiosity

and lower concern. Supervisory career mentoring support is likely to provide employees with tangible resources such as access to learning opportunities, whereas supervisory psychosocial mentoring is likely to contribute to emotional wellbeing, both of which should have implications for career success.

Hypothesis 2. *Supervisor career mentoring support is positively related to (a) employee career satisfaction, (b) promotability ratings, and (c) promotion to a higher level.*

Hypothesis 3. *Supervisor psychosocial mentoring support is positively related to (a) employee career satisfaction, (b) promotability ratings, and (c) promotion to a higher level.*

Finally, bringing these hypotheses together, we predict that supervisory mentoring support will act as the pathway through which employee work stress affects career outcomes. In other words, we expect indirect effects of experienced work stress on outcomes via supervisory career and psychosocial mentoring support.

Hypothesis 4. *There is a negative indirect effect of employee work stress on (a) employee career satisfaction, (b) promotability ratings, and (c) promotion to a higher level, via supervisor career mentoring support.*

Hypothesis 5. *There is a negative indirect effect of employee work stress on (a) employee career satisfaction, (b) promotability ratings, and (c) promotion to a higher level, via supervisor psychosocial mentoring support.*

2.4 | Work Engagement as a Mediator of Work Stress and Supervisor Mentoring Support

Our implicit assumption is that stressed employees experience and show lower levels of engagement at work, and that managers react to low employee engagement by making less support available. In order to test this contention directly, we posit that employee work engagement is a mechanism underlying the employee work stress–supervisor mentoring support relationship.

Work engagement is characterized by vigorous attention and dedication as well as high levels of energy and enthusiasm directed toward one's job (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004). Prominent theories of stress, such as conservation of resources theory (COR; Hobfoll 1989) and the transactional model of stress (Lazarus and Folkman 1984) converge on the idea that high levels of stress deplete an individual's psychological and physiological resources, consequently diminishing their ability to effectively engage with their work. This is because stress consumes valuable cognitive and emotional resources, leaving individuals fatigued and less capable of meeting the demands of the job. As a result, they have a reduced capacity and willingness to invest adequate effort into tasks and responsibilities—resulting in lower levels of engagement. Applied to work contexts, these theories suggest that stress diminishes employee resources, making them likely to be less attentive, less energetic, and more detached from their jobs. Considerable support for these theories has been found. For example, research has shown that employees were less engaged on days they experienced greater levels of hindrance stressors (Breevaart and Bakker 2018). Furthermore, recovering from stress has been associated with greater engagement at work (Sonnentag et al. 2012).

Drawing from the principles of social exchange theory (Homans 1958), we propose that lower employee engagement will be related to lower levels of supervisory mentoring support, as managers tend to rely on engaged employees for team success and exhibit greater confidence in their managerial capabilities in the presence of highly engaged employees (Luthans and Peterson 2002). Therefore, managers will be less likely to invest time and effort mentoring employees who are less engaged given that their investment of resources is less likely to yield a significant return on the supervisor's investment of time and effort. Combined, we hypothesize that work stress will contribute to lower levels of engagement at work, and employees who experience lower levels of engagement will in turn receive lower levels of supervisory mentoring support.

Hypothesis 6. *Employee work engagement mediates the relationship between employee work stress and (a) supervisory career mentoring support, and (b) supervisory psychosocial mentoring support.*

3 | Overview of Studies

We used multiple studies to test our model. Hypotheses 1–5 were tested in a multi-wave, multi-source field study. We used this study to establish the relation between employee experienced work stress, employee receipt of supervisory mentoring support, and career outcomes. Further, in a supplemental study, we investigated the directionality of the relationship between employee work stress and supervisory mentoring support. In Study 2 and 3, our goal was to unpack the relationship between employee work stress and supervisory mentoring support. In Study 2, we tested Hypothesis 6 in a time-lagged design for a sample of employees from various jobs and industries. In Study 3, we tested Hypothesis 6 from the perspective of managers, in a time-lagged design for a sample of managers from various industries.

4 | Study 1

4.1 | Sample and Procedures

Study 1 was conducted in a large postal services and courier company in the UK across four time points. This organization provides services under four product groups: the delivery of postal mail, financial services, government services, and telecommunications. Our sample consisted of employees who held middle management positions and their direct supervisors, all of whom worked in branches and served various business functions, such as sales, supply chain, finance, and human resource management. We used online surveys and company records as sources of data. Employees received three online surveys (separated by 1 month each), and their supervisors received one online survey. The organization's human resources department provided the list of reporting relationships, as well as the demographics and promotion records. The study was con-

ducted in 2016 (IRB: Kingston University, UK, protocol number: FREC-16-11). The study was not preregistered. We conducted a raffle for participants, offering 130 vouchers from a UK retailer at £15 each.

We distributed our online surveys to all 565 employees who held middle management positions in this organization at three different time points. At Time 1 (T1), we measured employee work stress and demographic variables. At Time 2 (T2; 1 month later), participants completed a survey that measured career and psychosocial mentoring support from their supervisor. At Time 3 (T3; 2 months after T1), employees completed a survey measuring career satisfaction. Also at T3, 185 supervisors received a survey asking them to provide promotability ratings for their direct reports. Finally, at Time 4 (T4; 9 months after T1), we obtained actual promotion records from the organization.

We received completed surveys from 254 employees at T1 (50.8% male; average age = 47.4 years; average organizational tenure = 17.5 years; 45% response rate); 219 employees at T2 (39% response rate); 196 employees (35% response rate) and 127 supervisors (70% male; average age = 47.9 years; average organizational tenure = 19.9 years; 69% response rate) providing ratings for 187 employees at T3.

4.2 | Study 1 Measures

Unless otherwise noted, we used a Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). For each variable, we denoted measurement time and source in parentheses, with E, S, and Co representing employee, supervisor, and company records respectively.

4.2.1 | Employee Work Stress (T1E)

Employees reported their degree of work stress using the seven-item scale by House and Rizzo (1972). A sample item is "I have felt fidgety or nervous as a result of my job" ($\alpha = 0.89$).

4.2.2 | Supervisor Career and Psychosocial Mentoring Support (T2E)

Employees reported the extent of mentoring support from their direct supervisors by completing five-item scales for each type of mentoring by Scandura and Ragins (1993). Sample items for career mentoring and psychosocial mentoring support are respectively: "My manager takes a personal interest in my career" and "I exchange confidences with my manager" ($\alpha = 0.92$ for career mentoring; $\alpha = 0.89$ for psychosocial mentoring).

4.2.3 | Career Satisfaction (T3E)

Employees reported their degree of agreement with each item on the five-item career satisfaction scale (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley 1990). A sample item is "I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career" ($\alpha = 0.93$).

4.2.4 | Promotability Ratings (T3S)

Supervisors rated the promotability of their direct reports by completing the three-item scale by Hoobler, Wayne, and Lemmon (2009). A sample item is "If I had to select a successor for my position, it would be this subordinate" ($\alpha = 0.88$).

4.2.5 | Actual Promotions (T4Co)

Data regarding actual promotions were gathered from company records 9 months after the first survey (0 = not promoted, 1 = promoted). Of the employees who participated in this study at T1, 20 (8%) had been promoted to a higher level.

4.2.6 | Control Variables

We gathered data on organizational tenure and employee competence so that they could be considered as control variables in our analyses. Research has shown that *organizational tenure* has an influence over career outcomes such as salary (Ng et al. 2005), and in our study it was significantly correlated with supervisor career mentoring support, promotability ratings, and actual promotions. *Employee competence* (T2E) may shape employees' stress appraisals (e.g., Jimmieson, Terry, and Callan 2004) and supervisors' supportive behaviors (Wu and Parker 2017). As a result, we measured and controlled for employee competence using the three-item scale by Spreitzer (1995), which captures the perceived efficacy of the employee with respect to their job. A sample item is "I am confident about my ability to do my job" ($\alpha = 0.89$). We added paths from both control variables to the mediator and outcome variables in the model to ensure that control variables account for potential confounding effects across the model (Kline 2023). When we ran supplementary analyses to test the conceptual model without control variables, we found no changes in the significance levels or direction of the results reported.

4.3 | Study 1 Analytic Approach

The company's organizational framework involved the allocation of employees under various supervisors, leading to a nested data structure. Prior to hypotheses testing, we calculated the intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC; Bliese 2000) for our variables to determine the possible group-level effects. The ICC1 values were as follows: employee experienced workplace stress ICC1 = 0.15; supervisor career mentoring support ICC1 = 0.22; supervisor psychosocial mentoring support ICC1 = 0.20; career satisfaction ICC1 = 0.20; promotability ratings ICC1 = 0.18. We also examined cluster sizes to establish how many employees were reporting to each supervisor. Supervisors in our sample had 1–8 employees, with 72 supervisors with one employee only, and an average cluster size of 2.0. The ICC1 values, the highly nonhomogeneous cluster sizes, and the non-independence of manager ratings indicated the necessity of considering nestedness. Despite the positive ICC1 values, the very small average cluster size and the abundance of single-observation clusters led us to use a sandwich estimator in Mplus (TYPE = COMPLEX; see McNeish, Stapleton, and Silverman 2017; Tang et al. 2023; and Wayne

et al. 2023 for recent examples). We obtained the estimates by using MPlus v.7.4 (Muthén and Muthén 1998-2017) to test Study 1 hypotheses. The confidence intervals to test indirect effects are derived through an open-source interactive tool that utilizes Monte Carlo simulation based on 20,000 repetitions and creates an R code for this calculation (https://www.quantpsy.org; Selig and Preacher 2008). To facilitate interpretation of the findings, experienced workplace stress and control variables were grand-mean centered. We used the default full information maximum likelihood (FIML) approach in this and the remainder of the studies.

Next, to establish discriminant validity of study variables, we conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) in Mplus 7.4 (Muthén and Muthén 1998-2017) using a sandwich estimator. For our measurement model, the sample size to parameter ratio was 2.57. Guidelines on the ratio of sample size to number of free parameters vary, but Bentler and Chou (1987) note that 5-to-1 is a reasonable minimum (91), which our measurement model violates. As such, we applied parceling by creating composites (averages) of indicators for latent variables in our model (Landis, Beal, and Tesluk 2000; Takeuchi, Yun, and Tesluk 2002). We identified the appropriate parcels by running exploratory factor analyses for each latent variable with more than three indicators and pairing the items with the highest factor loading with the lowest factor loading to form the first composite. We then paired the item with the second highest factor loading with the item with the second lowest factor loading to create the second composite. We did this until each item was paired. Any single leftover item was modeled independently. For transparency, the results for the non-parceled CFAs are presented in Table A1 in Online Supplement A.

For all scale-measured study variables, we tested a hypothesized six-factor model in which we specified employee experienced work stress, supervisor career mentoring support, supervisor psychosocial mentoring support, career satisfaction, promotability ratings, and employee competence to load on their respective factors. This model achieved good fit to the data (Satorra-Bentler scaled $\chi^2(137) = 219.59$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.97; TLI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.05; SRMR = 0.05). We compared the hypothesized six-factor model to a series of five-factor models in which two variables at a time were specified to load on a single factor while all other items were loaded on their respective factors. The hypothesized six-factor measurement model showed significantly better fit as compared to all alternative five-factor measurement models, as well as the one-factor model. We present these results in Table A2 in the Online Supplement A.

4.4 | Study 1 Results

The means, standard deviations, correlations among study variables, and Cronbach's alpha reliabilities are presented in Table 1. The correlation between supervisor career mentoring and psychosocial mentoring support was 0.68 ($p < 0.001$) which is similar to past findings (e.g., Green and Bauer 1995). Supervisor ratings of promotability were correlated with actual promotions ($r = 0.15$, $p = 0.042$), indicating that supervisors' assessments of employees' potential for advancement were predictive of their future career progression within the organization. To examine whether there were systematic differences between those who participated in all three waves (respondents) and those with at least one wave missing (nonrespondents), we conducted a series of *t* tests. There were no statistically significant differences in study variables between the respondents and nonrespondents.

The results of the path analysis are presented in Table 2 and in Figure 2. Our path model demonstrated good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 6.41$, $df = 5$, $p = 0.27$; CFI = 0.99; TLI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.03). The first set of hypotheses proposed that employee experienced work stress is negatively related to supervisor career (Hypothesis 1a) and psychosocial (Hypothesis 1b) mentoring support. Supporting these hypotheses, employee experienced work stress was negatively related to supervisor career mentoring ($b = -0.39$, $p < 0.001$) and psychosocial mentoring ($b = -0.27$, $p < 0.001$).

Hypothesis 2 proposed significant positive relationships between supervisor career mentoring support and (a) career satisfaction, (b) promotability ratings, and (c) actual promotions. Consistent with Hypothesis 2a and 2b, supervisor career mentoring support was positively related to career satisfaction ($b = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$) and promotability ratings ($b = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$), but not to actual promotions ($b = 0.14$, $p = 0.23$), contrary to our prediction in Hypothesis 2c.

Hypothesis 3 was not supported, as supervisor psychosocial mentoring support did not have any significant effects on career satisfaction ($b = 0.00$, $p = 1.00$), promotability ratings ($b = 0.08$, $p = 0.41$), or actual promotions ($b = -0.19$, $p = 0.11$).

Hypotheses 4 and 5 predicted negative indirect effects of employee experienced work stress on the outcome variables via the two types of supervisor mentoring support. Partially supporting Hypothesis 4, employee experienced work stress had a significant negative indirect effect on career satisfaction ($b = -0.14$, 95% CI [−0.25, −0.06]), promotability ratings ($b = -0.14$, *95%* CI [−0.25, −0.05]), but not actual promotions ($b = -0.05$, 95% CI [−0.15, 0.03]) via supervisor career mentoring support. In contrast, employee experienced work stress did not have a significant indirect effect on career satisfaction ($b = 0.00$, 95% CI [−0.04, 0.04]), promotability ratings ($b = -0.02$, 95% CI [−0.08, 0.03]), and actual promotions ($b = 0.05$, 95% CI [−0.01, 0.14]) via supervisor psychosocial mentoring support. Thus, Hypothesis 5 was not supported.

4.5 | Supplemental Study

In Study 1, we used a time-lagged design consistent with our proposed model. Due to time constraints for employees, we were asked by the organization to keep the survey length to a minimum. In order to further examine the directionality of the stress–supervisor mentoring support relationship, we conducted a supplemental study. We recruited full-time employees using the Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) platform at three time points each, separated by 2-week intervals. We stipulated that participants be at least 18 years old, employed full-time, have a supervisor, and residing in the United States. We also required that they had an MTurk approval rating of over 90%. This study was conducted in 2022 (IRB: Henley Business School, UK, protocol number SREC-HBS-20220521-SEKU8683). The study

TABLE 1 | Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities (Study 1).

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Organizational tenure T1Co	17.53	12.27	—						
2. Employee competence T2E	5.90	0.96	−0.15*	(0.89)					
3. Employee work stress T1E	4.53	1.40	0.18**	−0.20**	(0.89)				
4. Supervisor career mentoring support T2E	4.36	1.47	−0.15*	0.23**	−0.37**	(0.92)			
5. Supervisor psychosocial mentoring support T2E	3.52	1.55	−0.07	0.22**	−0.25**	0.68**	(0.89)		
6. Career satisfaction T3E	4.69	1.32	0.05	0.17*	−0.17*	0.40**	0.29**	(0.93)	
7. Promotability ratings T3S	4.45	1.55	−0.17*	0.19*	−0.17*	0.42**	0.33**	0.28**	(0.88)
8. Actual promotions T4Co	0.08	0.27	−0.18**	0.07	−0.04	0.02	−0.06	−0.14*	0.15*

Note: $n = 254$ for correlations among T1 variables and T1E–T4co; $n = 219$ for correlations among T2E variables, T1E–T2E, and T2E–T4co; $n = 196$ for correlations between T1E and T3E, and T3E and T4co; $n = 195$ for correlations between T2E and T3E; $n = 187$ for correlations between T1E and T3S and T3S and T4co; $n = 166$ for correlations between T2E and T3S; and $n = 153$ for the T3E–T3S correlation. Cronbach alpha reliabilities are reported on the diagonal. Organizational tenure was measured in years. Promotions were coded as 0 = not promoted, 1 = promoted.

Abbreviations: Co = company records; E = employee-rated; S = supervisor-rated; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2 (1 month after T1); T3 = Time 3 (2 months after T1); and T4 = Time 4 (9 months after T1).

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

TABLE 2 | Study 1 – Unstandardized path estimates for experienced stress, supervisor mentoring support, and outcomes (H1 to H3).

Independent variables	Supervisor career mentoring support	Supervisor psychosocial mentoring support	Career satisfaction	Promotability ratings	Actual promotions
	Coefficient (SE)	Coefficient (SE)	Coefficient (SE)	Coefficient (SE)	Coefficient (SE)
Organizational tenure	−0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (0.00)	−0.001 (0.00)	−0.003* (0.00)
Employee competence	0.25** (.09)	0.29* (.11)	0.10 (0.09)	0.10 (0.13)	0.14 (0.12)
Employee work stress	−0.39** (.08)	−0.27** (.08)			
Supervisor career mentoring support			0.36** (.09)	0.36** (.11)	0.14 (.12)
Supervisor psychosocial mentoring support			0.00 (.07)	0.08 (.09)	−0.19 (.12)
R^2	0.18**	0.10**	0.18**	0.20**	0.18*

Note: $n = 254$ employees and 127 supervisors. All independent variables were grand-mean centered. Path analysis with the command to employ sandwich estimator. R^2 for actual promotion refers to the explained variance proportion in the continuous latent response underlying this binary dependent variable.

Abbreviation: SE = standard error.

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

was not preregistered. We paid each participant $5 for their participation.

We received completed surveys from 299 employees at T1 (54.8% male; average age = 40.2 years; average organizational tenure = 7.2 years), 273 at T2 (response rate = 93%), and 251 at T3 (response rate = 84%). The sample was 78.6% White, 8.7% Asian, 5.7% African American, and 4.7% Hispanic, with the remaining 2.3% distributed across other categories. The sample was representative of over 20 different industries, of which the highest percentages were information technology (15%), banking and finance (13%), and healthcare and social work (11%). To ensure data quality and to rule out careless responding, we deleted responses of those who completed the survey very quickly (one case each in T1 and T2; three cases in T3) using the decision criteria of responding in less than 2 seconds per item (Bowling et al. 2023; Huang et al. 2012), and of those whose supervisors had changed during the study period (nine cases at T2; 10 cases at T3). The final sample size available to test our model was 275. We used the same scales as in Study 1 to measure employee work stress and supervisory mentoring support at all three time periods.

The means, standard deviations, correlations among study variables, and Cronbach's alpha reliabilities are presented in Table 3. In order to examine the directionality of the employee work stress–supervisor mentoring support relationship, we conducted a cross-lagged panel analysis. We first established configural and metric invariance (see Table A3 in Online Supplement A), then utilized time-lagged panel data to examine the direction of the relationships between employee work stress and supervisor

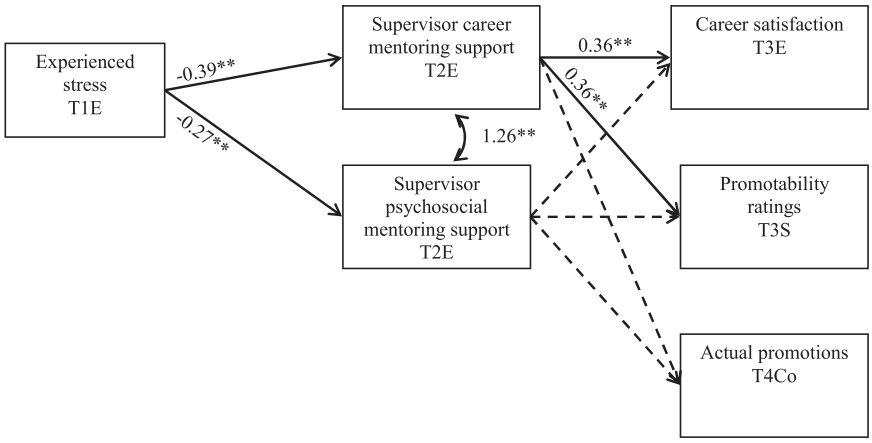

FIGURE 2 | Study 1 – Results of the mediated path model. $n = 254$ employees and 127 managers. Unstandardized coefficients reported. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2 (1 month after T1); T3 = Time 3 (2 months after T1); and T4 = Time 4 (9 months after T1). E = employee-rated, S = Supervisor-rated, Co = company records. Nonsignificant paths are depicted as dashed lines. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

TABLE 3 | Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities (Supplemental study).

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Experienced stress T1	3.23	1.56	(0.93)								
2. Experienced stress T2	3.24	1.55	0.87**	(0.93)							
3. Experienced stress T3	3.26	1.58	0.87**	0.91**	(0.93)						
4. Sup. career mentoring T1	4.87	1.53	−0.31**	−0.31**	−0.35**	(0.94)					
5. Sup. career mentoring T2	4.82	1.52	−0.33**	−0.34**	−0.37**	0.88**	(0.93)				
6. Sup. career mentoring T3	4.85	1.53	−0.40**	−0.42**	−0.41**	0.85**	0.91**	(0.94)			
7. Sup. psych. mentoring T1	3.76	1.71	−0.28**	−0.29**	−0.30**	0.72**	0.69**	0.64**	(0.94)		
8. Sup. psych. mentoring T2	3.63	1.64	−0.31**	−0.33**	−0.33**	0.64**	0.71**	0.64**	0.87**	(0.93)	
9. Sup. psych. mentoring T3	3.58	1.60	−0.36**	−0.36**	−0.37**	0.61**	0.68**	0.67**	0.86**	0.90**	(0.93)

Note: $n = 275$ for correlations among T1 variables; $n = 249$ for the correlations between T1 and T2 variables, and for the correlations among T2 variables; $n = 227$ for the correlations when one of the variables is a T3 variable. Cronbach alpha reliabilities are reported on the diagonal.
Abbreviations: psych. = psychosocial; Sup. = supervisor; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2 (2 weeks after T1); T3 = Time 3 (1 month after T1).
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

mentoring support. The cross-lagged panel model provided good fit to the data ($\chi^2(13) = 101.23$, $p < 0.001$; SRMR = 0.03; CFI = 0.96; AIC = 5949.38).

As shown in Figure 3, controlling for the stability effects of study variables across T1 and T2, findings show that T1 employee work stress was a significant predictor of T2 supervisory psychosocial mentoring ($B = -0.08$, $p = 0.026$) and was not significant for T2 supervisory career mentoring support ($B = -0.05$, $p = 0.08$). T2 employee work stress was a significant predictor of both T3 supervisory psychosocial ($B = -0.07$, $p = 0.025$) and career mentoring support ($B = -0.09$, $p = 0.004$). Further, T1 and T2 supervisory mentoring support variables did not significantly predict the subsequent T2 and T3 employee work stress, respectively. Combined, these results offer support regarding the directionality of the relationships being as they are proposed in our hypothesized model with employee work stress leading to mentoring support rather than the other way around.

4.6 | Study 1 Discussion

Study 1 provided support for our hypotheses by demonstrating that employee work stress was negatively related to supervisory career and psychosocial mentoring support. Further, employee work stress had negative indirect effects on employee career satisfaction and managers' promotability assessments via the degree to which employees received supervisory career mentoring support. The effects on career outcomes were solely via supervisor career mentoring support; we did not find effects of supervisor psychosocial mentoring support on any of the career outcomes. Further, the supplemental study offered greater confidence that it is appropriate to treat employee work stress as a predictor of supervisory mentoring support.

An important limitation of Study 1 was that it did not examine the mechanism linking higher employee work stress to reduced supervisory mentoring support received. Therefore, we conducted Study 2 and Study 3 to test the effects of employee

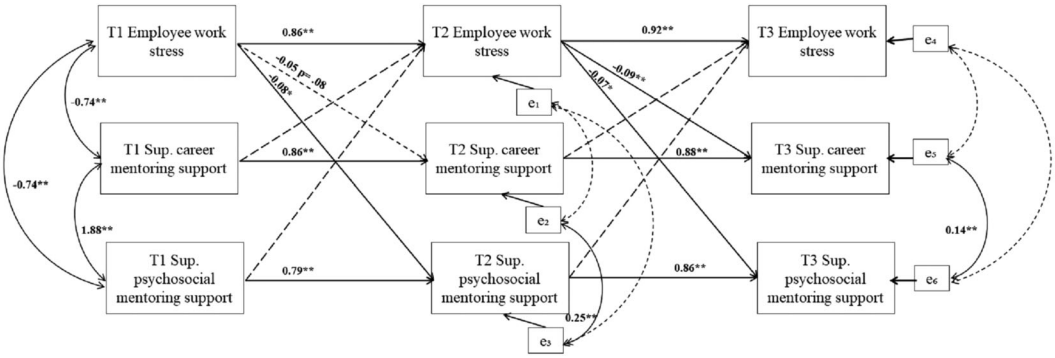

FIGURE 3 | Study 1 supplemental study—Cross-lagged panel model. $n = 275$. e = error disturbance for the study variables; Sup. = supervisory. Unstandardized coefficients reported. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2 (2 weeks after T1); T3 = Time 3 (1 month after T1). Nonsignificant paths are depicted as dashed lines. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

engagement as the mediator of the employee work stress–supervisory mentoring support relationship (Hypothesis 6). Study 2 tested this relationship from the employees' perspective, whereas Study 3 tested the same relationship from the managers' perspective.

5 | Study 2

5.1 | Sample and Procedure

We recruited full-time employees through graduate students in a Hong Kong university as part of a larger study. Students were asked to provide the contact information of at least two full-time workers in exchange for course credit. We used responses from three surveys (T1, T2, T3), each 1 week apart. We applied two data quality requirements. First, we eliminated participants who took two or fewer seconds per item (Bowling et al. 2023; Huang et al. 2012). Second, we eliminated participants who did not complete all three surveys. The original sample was 233. Of these, 55 respondents were dropped because they took less than 2 seconds per item, on average, for the surveys, and 41 respondents were dropped because they did not respond to later surveys. As a result, the final sample was 137. Of the participants who reported demographic data, 51.24% were women with an average age of 34.11 (SD = 9.34). Most participants either had a bachelor's degree (46.28%) or a master's degree (48.93%). The study was conducted in 2023. (IRB: The University of Hong Kong, protocol number EA230062). The study was not preregistered. As incentive for participation, employees received 100 HKD (approximately $12 USD) for completing all surveys.

5.2 | Study 2 Measures

Participants were prompted to reflect on their behavior in the past week when answering all items. We used the same scales used in Study 1 to measure employee work stress (T1 [$\alpha = 0.88$] and T3 [$\alpha = 0.87$]) and supervisory career and psychosocial mentoring (T1 [$\alpha_{career} = 0.89$, $\alpha_{psychosocial} = 0.93$] and T3 [$\alpha_{career} = 0.92$, $\alpha_{psychosocial} = 0.91$]).

5.2.1 | Employee Work Engagement (T2)

We captured engagement using UWES-9, which is the short form of the Utrecht work engagement scale (Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova 2006). This scale captures vigor, dedication, and absorption of the employee. Sample items include "At my work, I felt bursting with energy" and "My job inspired me." This measure was captured on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*) ($\alpha = .96$).

5.2.2 | Control Variables

At T2, we also measured employee proactivity, performance, and withdrawal as potential alternative mechanisms that could explain the link between employee experienced work stress and supervisor mentoring support.[1] *Employee proactivity* was measured using Frese et al.'s (1997) seven-item scale. Sample items included "I took initiative immediately even when others didn't." This measure was captured on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*) ($\alpha = 0.93$). *Employee performance* was measured using Williams and Anderson's (1991) seven-item scale. A sample item is, "I met formal performance requirements of the job." This measure was captured on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) ($\alpha = 0.92$). *Employee withdrawal* was measured using Chong, Huang, and Chang's (2020) four-item scale. A sample item is, "I joined online call / meetings late without permission." This measure was captured on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*) ($\alpha = 0.86$).

Finally, to use in post-hoc analyses, we measured whether employees perceived the supervisor as their mentor (T1). It is plausible that the presence of a regular and ongoing mentoring relationship between the employee and supervisor may buffer the degree to which employees receive lower levels of support following the experience of higher levels of stress. We first presented participants with a definition of "mentor" following the description and methodology used by Ragins et al. (2017), then asked them whether they considered their supervisor as their mentor (1 = yes, 0 = no). We labeled this variable as *mentor status of supervisor.*

5.3 | Study 2 Analytic Approach

We tested Hypothesis 6 using path analysis to estimate the direct, indirect, and total indirect effects in Mplus v. 8 (Muthén and Muthén 1998-2017). We estimated the confidence intervals in R using a Monte Carlo simulation based on 20,000 repetitions using an open-source R-code generator (https://www.quantpsy.org; Selig and Preacher 2008). All models were run using the maximum likelihood estimator.

We conducted a series of CFAs to evaluate the distinctiveness of the measures for hypothesis testing. We first tested the potential mediators together (four-factor). The data fit the four-factor model (proactivity, performance, withdrawal, and engagement) poorly ($\chi^2(318) = 926.608$; RMSEA = 0.12; CFI = 0.84; TLI = 0.82; SRMR = 0.06). We believe the primary cause of this poor model fit is sample size ($n = 137$), given the large number of parameters we aimed to estimate. For our model differentiating potential parameters, we had a sample size to free parameter ratio of 1.57:1, which violates Bentler and Chou's (1987) recommended 5:1. As such, we applied parceling in line with our approach in Study 1. This reduced the number of free parameters from 87 to 50, creating a ratio of 2.74:1, which still violates the recommendations, but less severely. Nevertheless, as expected, this notably improved model fit ($\chi^2(85) = 197.502$; RMSEA = 0.10; CFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.94; SRMR = 0.04, χ^2_{diff} (209) = 729.11, $p < 0.001$) (for completeness, CFA results without parceling are reported in Table B1 in Online Supplement B). We tested competing models and found that the four-factor model fit the data better than the alternative models: a three-factor model where engagement and proactivity were loaded on a single factor ($\chi^2(88) = 380.878$; RMSEA = 0.16; CFI = 0.88; TLI = 0.85; SRMR = 0.0; $\chi_{diff}^2(3) = 183.376$, $p < 0.001$); a three-factor model where engagement and performance were loaded on a single factor ($\chi^2(88) = 476.553$; RMSEA = 0.18; CFI = 0.83; TLI = 0.80; SRMR = 0.09; $\chi_{diff}^2(3) = 279.051$, $p < 0.001$); and a single-factor model ($\chi^2(90) = 799.989$; RMSEA = 0.24; CFI = 0.70; TLI = 0.65; SRMR = 0.11; $\chi_{diff}^2(5) = 602.487$, $p < 0.001$).[2]

Because the four possible mediators (proactivity, performance, withdrawal, and engagement) were highly correlated, we examined whether the alternative mediators (proactivity, performance, and withdrawal) served as mediators when entered as the only mediator of the employee work stress–supervisory mentoring support relationship. Of the three, none had significant indirect effects between stress and supervisor career and psychosocial mentoring support (see Online Supplement Table B2). Therefore, they were omitted from further analyses (for completeness, the CFAs for the seven-factor model and alternatives are reported in Table B3 in Online Supplement B).

Finally, we performed a CFA using the variables included in our hypothesized four-factor model using parceling due to the sample size to free parameters ratio issue. The hypothesized model included stress, engagement, career support, and psychosocial support. The four-factor model fit the data well ($\chi^2(84) = 139.493$; RMSEA = 0.07; CFI = 0.97; TLI = 0.96; SRMR = 0.05). We tested two competing models: a three-factor model where career and psychosocial support were loaded on a single factor ($\chi^2(87) = 228.168$; RMSEA = 0.11; CFI = 0.92; TLI = 0.91; SRMR = 0.07; $\chi^2_{diff} = 88.675$, $p < 0.001$); and a single-factor mode ($\chi^2(90) = 933.649$; RMSEA = 0.26; CFI = 0.54; TLI = 0.47; SRMR = 0.22; $\chi^2_{diff} = 794.156$, $p < .001$).[3] The four-factor model fit the data best.

5.4 | Study 2 Results

Descriptive statistics for Study 2 appear in Table 4. First, we analyzed the directionality between employee work stress and supervisor mentoring support using a cross-lagged panel model similar to the supplemental study in Study 1. We first established partial configural and partial metric invariance (see Table B4 in Online Supplement B). Because we were estimating every path in the model, by design, our model was fully saturated. We found support for our proposed direction (see Figure 4). In support of Hypothesis 1, employee experienced work stress at T1 was negatively related to supervisor career mentoring support ($b = -0.18$, $p = 0.011$) as well as supervisor psychosocial mentoring support ($b = -0.15$, $p = 0.04$) at T3. We found neither supervisor career mentoring support ($b = -0.02$, $p = 0.84$) nor supervisor psychosocial mentoring support ($b = -0.03$, $p = 0.74$) measured at T1 related to employee experienced work stress at T3. Therefore, we have additional support for the theorized directionality of relationships.

Second, we tested Hypothesis 6 which proposed that employee work engagement would mediate the relationships between employee experienced work stress and supervisor mentoring support. The results are presented in Table 5. We found that work engagement mediated the relationship between employee work stress and supervisor career mentoring support ($b = -0.09$, 95% CI [−0.173, −0.031]) and also the relationship between employee work stress and supervisor psychosocial mentoring support ($b = -0.06$, 95% CI [−0.137, −0.011]). As such, Hypothesis 6 was supported.

5.5 | Study 2 Post-Hoc Analysis

We conceptualized supervisor mentoring support as a behavior that supervisors can demonstrate to all their employees. However, given that the relationships found in these studies could differ depending on whether the employee and the supervisor are part of a mentoring relationship, the presence of a mentoring relationship may modify the relationships we expected. Specifically, employees may receive greater support, or lower reductions in the support received from their manager if they have a relationship with their supervisor that involves receiving guidance, direction and help on a regular basis. Therefore, we tested the mentor status of supervisor as a moderator in a post-hoc analysis. Our analyses showed that the supervisor's mentor status did not moderate the relationship between employee work stress and career mentoring support ($b = 0.28$, $p = 0.16$) or psychosocial mentoring support ($b = 0.38$, $p = 0.10$).

5.6 | Study 2 Discussion

Study 2 allowed us to further explore the directionality of the employee work stress–supervisor mentoring support relationship

TABLE 4 | Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities (Study 2).

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Employee work stress (T1)	2.90	0.81	(0.88)										
2. Mentor status of supervisor (T1)	0.24	0.43	−0.06	—									
3. Supervisor career mentoring (T1)	3.61	0.76	−0.16	0.09	(0.89)								
4. Supervisor psychosocial mentoring (T1)	3.42	0.96	−0.10	0.07	0.73**	(0.93)							
5. Employee proactivity (T2)	3.98	0.65	−0.16	−0.12	0.30**	0.16	(0.93)						
6. Employee performance (T2)	4.13	0.60	−0.17	−0.12	0.13	0.01	0.69**	(0.92)					
7. Employee work withdrawal (T2)	1.55	0.72	0.30**	0.06	0.12	0.10	−0.15	−0.24**	(0.86)				
8. Employee work engagement (T2)	3.71	0.86	−0.26**	−0.16	0.35**	0.22**	0.78**	0.68**	−0.08	(0.96)			
9. Employee work stress (T3)	2.86	0.83	0.57**	−0.04	−0.14	−0.10	−0.17*	−0.17*	0.09	−0.29**	(0.87)		
10. Supervisor career mentoring (T3)	3.61	0.78	−0.27**	0.10	0.51**	0.34**	0.38**	0.34**	−0.14	0.42**	−0.25**	(0.92)	
11. Supervisor psychosocial mentoring (T3)	3.38	0.89	−0.20*	0.03	0.48**	0.61**	0.22**	0.20*	−0.06	0.26**	−0.19*	0.71**	(0.91)

Note: $n = 137$; Mentor status of supervisor is measured as 1 = "My manager is my mentor" and 0 = not. Cronbach alpha reliabilities are listed along the diagonal in parentheses.

Abbreviations: T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2 (1 week after T1); T3 = Time 3 (2 weeks after T1).

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$.

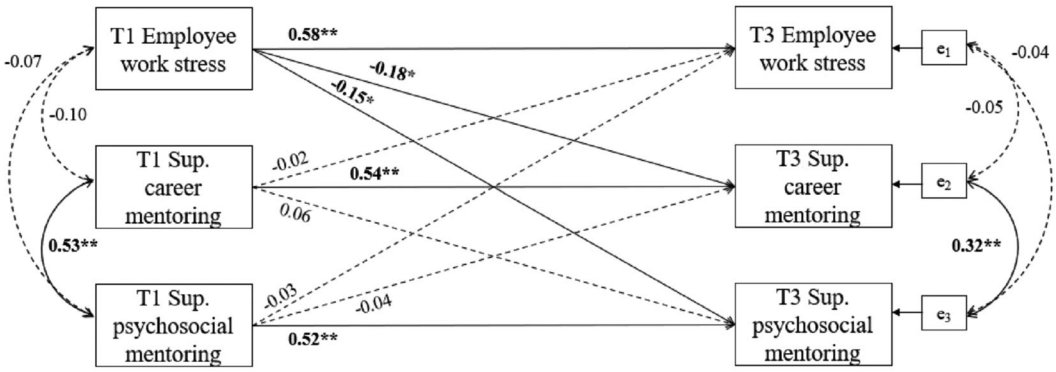

FIGURE 4 | Study 2—Cross lagged model. $n = 137$. e = error disturbance for the study variables; Sup. = supervisory. Unstandardized coefficients reported. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2 (2 weeks after T1). Nonsignificant paths are depicted as dashed lines.

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

and provided additional evidence that employee work stress predicted supervisor support, and not vice versa. Further, this study offered the opportunity to examine *why* experienced work stress would be associated with lower levels of supervisor mentoring support. As predicted, employees who experienced stress reported lower levels of work engagement, which contributed to lower levels of both supervisor career mentoring and psychosocial mentoring support received. The nature of the employee work stress–engagement and employee work stress–supervisor mentoring relationship did not depend on whether the supervisor and the employee were part of a mentoring relationship.

TABLE 5 | Mediation analyses for Study 2.

	Mediator	Dependent variables	
	Work engagement	Supervisor career mentoring support	Supervisor psychosocial mentoring support
Variables	**Coefficient (SE), 95% CI [LL, UL]**	**Coefficient (SE), 95% CI [LL, UL]**	**Coefficient (SE), 95% CI [LL, UL]**
Intercept	4.49** (0.26)	2.80** (0.39)	2.98** (0.48)
Direct path			
Employee work stress	−0.27** (0.09)	−0.16* (.08)	−0.16 (0.09)
Work engagement		0.35** (0.07)	0.23** (0.09)
Indirect path			
Stress → Engagement → Mentoring		−0.09* (0.04), [−0.173, −0.031]	−0.06* (0.04), [−0.137, −0.011]
R^2	0.07 (0.04)	0.21** (0.06)	0.09 (0.05)

Note: $n = 137$. Unstandardized regression coefficients reported.
Abbreviation: LL = lower level; UL = upper level, SE = standard error.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

Combined, Study 1 and Study 2 demonstrated the effects of employee experienced work stress on supervisor mentoring support employees reported that they received. However, these studies did not permit us to explore how employee work stress affects mentoring support supervisors *believe* they provide, and the mechanism explaining this relationship. Therefore, we conducted Study 3 to test Hypothesis 6 from the supervisors' perspective. Specifically, we expected that *perceiving* an employee as stressed would result in the observation that the employee is distracted, less energetic, and less dedicated to work. Further, even though work engagement is an internal state, research has shown in diverse contexts that individual engagement is observable to others through cues and signals such as enthusiasm at work, behaviors at meetings, the degree to which they are contributing to a positive environment, participation in discretionary activities, staying focused on tasks, as well as their body language (Dewan, Murshed, and Lin 2019; Frank et al. 2016). As a result, we predicted that supervisor perceived employee work stress will be associated with the provision of lower levels of support via lower levels of perceived employee engagement.

6 | Study 3

6.1 | Sample and Procedure

We recruited full-time managers who supervised at least two employees based in the UK using Prolific, which has been used by organizational scholars to study a range of work-related phenomena (e.g., Liao et al. 2023). Participants responded to three surveys, each 2 weeks apart. In line with Study 2, we applied two data quality requirements. We eliminated participants who took two or fewer seconds per item (Bowling et al. 2023; Huang et al. 2012). Second, we eliminated participants who did not complete all three surveys. The original sample was 298 respondents at T1. After applying these data quality rules, the final sample was 240 (80.54%). Of these, 46.67% were women with an average age of 40.24 (SD = 10.16). The racial distribution was typical for panel data sets with 90% White, 5.42% Asian, 2.08% Black or African American, 2.08% reported more than one race, and 0.83% preferred to self-describe. Of the respondents, 38.75% had a bachelor's degree, 17.50% had a master's degree, and 4.58% had a doctorate degree, with the remainder holding a professional training program certification (9.58%), high school diploma (22.92%), 4.17% an associate's degree, and 2.5% with no degree. The study was conducted in 2023 (IRB: Henley Business School, UK, protocol number SREC-HBS-20230327-SEKU8955). The study was not preregistered. Participants received $3.25 for each of the three available surveys.

Participants were first asked to name up to 10 of their employees directly reporting to them (M = 6.63, SD = 2.91). To reduce the likelihood that participants would respond to our survey questions with reference to a preferred employee, we programmed the survey to randomly select one of the listed employees. Participants were then presented with the randomly selected employee's name and asked to respond to items about that specific employee across all three surveys. To ensure that participants would be able to recall the name of the employee they rated in T1, in subsequent surveys we included a link to a website where participants could query the name of the employee they rated by entering their Prolific ID.

6.2 | Study 3 Measures

Participants were prompted to reflect on their employee's behavior in the past 2 weeks. We captured supervisor perceptions of employee work stress (T1) ($\alpha = 0.87$), perceived employee engagement (T2) ($\alpha = 0.94$), and supervisor mentoring support provided (T3) ($\alpha_{career} = 0.86$, $\alpha_{psychosocial} = 0.80$) using the same scales used in Study 1 and 2, adapted for use from the supervisors' perspective.

6.2.1 | Control Variables

Similar to our methodology in Study 2, we first provided participants with a description of mentor (Ragins et al. 2017) and asked them two questions—whether they considered this employee to be a protégé (1 = yes, 0 = no) and whether they believe the employee considers them to be a mentor (1 = yes, 0 = no). We labeled these variables as *protégé status* of the employee and *mentor status* of supervisor respectively. At T1, we measured supervisors' mentor status for use in post-hoc analyses. Consistent with Study 2, we measured employee proactivity ($\alpha = 0.94$), performance ($\alpha = 0.93$), and withdrawal ($\alpha = 0.83$) as potential alternative mediators, using the same scales used in Study 2, with adaptations for measurement from the supervisors' perspective. These variables were measured at T2.

6.3 | Study 3 Analytic Approach

We analyzed our hypotheses using path analysis. We used Mplus v.8 (Muthén and Muthén 1998-2017) to estimate the direct, indirect, and total indirect effects in our model . We followed the same approach as Study 2 for estimation of confidence intervals by using a Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 repetitions (https://www.quantpsy.org; Selig and Preacher 2008). Consistent with Study 2, all models were run using the maximum likelihood estimator.

Like Study 2, the four mediators were highly correlated, therefore, we first tested the individual mediating effects of proactivity, performance, and withdrawal. Each of these variables significantly mediated the relationships between employee work stress and supervisor career and psychosocial mentoring support (see Online Supplement C). Based on these results, we included all three alternate mediators along with employee engagement in our hypothesis testing (to be consistent with CFA reporting in Study 2, we also report the mediators-only model, and the hypothesized model using parceled items in Table C1 of Online Supplement C).

Prior to hypothesis testing, we conducted CFAs to evaluate the distinctiveness of the measures. We ran these using parcels because the sample size to parameter ratio violated Bentler and Chou's (1987) recommended 5-to-1 at 240 participants and 153 parameters (1.57). We followed the same parceling procedure as Studies 1 and 2 (for completeness, CFA results without parceling are reported in Table C2 in Online Supplement C). The data fit the seven-factor model (perceived employee work stress, proactivity, performance, withdrawal, engagement, supervisor career mentoring support, and supervisor psychosocial mentoring support) adequately ($\chi^2(254) = 428.623$; RMSEA = 0.05; CFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.96; SRMR = 0.05). We tested competing models and found that the seven-factor model fit the data better than other models: a six-factor model where engagement and proactivity were loaded on a single factor ($\chi^2(260) = 616.248$; RMSEA = 0.08; CFI = 0.93; TLI = 0.92; SRMR = 0.06; $\chi_{diff}^2 = 187.625$, $p < 0.001$); a six-factor model where engagement and performance were loaded on a single factor ($\chi^2(260) = 987.214$; RMSEA = 0.11; CFI = 0.85; TLI = 0.83; SRMR = 0.08; $\chi_{diff}^2 = 558.591$, $p < 0.001$); a six-factor model where career and psychosocial mentoring support were loaded on a single factor ($\chi^2(260) = 585.854$; RMSEA = 0.07; CFI = 0.93; TLI = 0.92; SRMR = 0.06; $\chi_{diff}^2 = 157.231$, $p < 0.001$); and a single-factor model ($\chi^2(275) = 2403.075$; RMSEA = 0.18; CFI = 0.57; TLI = 0.53; SRMR = 0.15; $\chi_{diff}^2 = 1974.452$, $p < 0.001$).

6.4 | Study 3 Results

Descriptive statistics and reliabilities for Study 3 are in Table 6. Path model results for Hypothesis 6 are in Table 7. Because we were estimating every path in the model, our model was fully saturated by design. Controlling for the mediating relationships of proactivity, performance, and withdrawal, we found that perceived employee engagement mediated the relationship between perceived employee work stress and career mentoring support provided ($b = -0.07$, 95% CI [−0.142, −0.014]), as well as the relationship between perceived employee work stress and psychosocial mentoring support provided ($b = -0.05$, 95% CI [−0.120, −0.001]). As such, both Hypothesis 6a and Hypothesis 6b were supported. At the same time, the results also revealed an unexpected positive direct effect of perceived employee work stress on both forms of supervisory mentoring support, suggesting that supervisors believed that they were providing greater levels of support to employees they perceived as stressed, despite the presence of indirect negative effects.

6.5 | Study 3 Post Hoc Analysis

In post hoc analyses, we further tested whether the protégé status of employee and mentor status of supervisor variables moderated the relationship between perceived employee work stress and supervisor career and psychosocial mentorship provided. We found that whether the supervisors considered the employee to be a protégé did not moderate the relationship between perceived employee work stress and career mentoring support provided ($b = 0.18$, $p = 0.25$) or between perceived employee work stress and psychosocial mentoring support provided ($b = -0.07$, $p = 0.65$). We also found that whether the supervisors believed the employee considered them to be a mentor did not moderate the relationship between perceived employee work stress and career mentoring support provided ($b = -0.06$, $p = 0.69$) or between perceived employee work stress and psychosocial mentoring support provided ($b = 0.21$, $p = 0.16$).

6.6 | Study 3 Discussion

Findings of Study 3 highlighted the complexity of the relationship between perceived employee work stress and mentoring support provided. First, diverging from Study 1 and Study 2, there were direct and positive effects of perceived employee work stress on the level of reported career and psychosocial mentoring support provided to the employee. In other words, supervisors believed that they were actually providing support to stressed employees. At the same time, we observed an indirect relation between supervisor perceived employee work stress and supervisor provision of mentoring support. Specifically, stress had indirect negative effects on supervisor career mentoring support via perceived work engagement. These effects were not moderated by whether the employee and the supervisor were part of a mentoring relationship. Combined, these results suggest that

TABLE 6 | Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities (Study 3).

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Perceived employee work stress (T1)	2.02	0.77	(0.87)								
2. Protégé status (T1)	0.32	0.47	−0.14*	—							
3. Mentor status (T1)	0.57	0.50	0.00	0.56**	—						
4. Employee proactivity (T2)	3.44	0.88	−0.16*	0.31**	0.25**	(.94)					
5. Employee performance (T2)	4.23	0.60	−0.23**	0.22**	0.20**	0.64**	(0.93)				
6. Employee work withdrawal (T2)	1.39	0.66	0.22**	−0.14*	−0.11	−0.52**	−0.57**	(0.83)			
7. Employee work engagement (T2)	3.25	0.84	−0.20**	0.34**	0.28**	0.82**	0.58**	−0.51**	(0.94)		
8. Supervisor career mentoring (T3)	3.20	0.86	0.06	0.27**	0.34**	0.34**	0.23**	−0.14*	0.37**	(0.86)	
9. Supervisor psychosocial mentoring (T3)	2.76	0.90	0.20**	0.26**	0.28**	0.27**	0.21**	−0.03	0.27**	0.53**	(0.80)

Note: $n = 240$. Protégé status measured as 1 = "I think of my employee as a protégé" and 0 = not; Mentor status measured as 1 = "My employee thinks of me as a mentor" and 0 = not. Cronbach alpha reliabilities are listed along the diagonal in parentheses.
Abbreviations: T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2 (2 weeks after T1); T3 = Time 3 (1 month after T1).
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$.

from the supervisors' perspective, seeing the employee as less engaged explained why these employees received lower career support.[4]

7 | Discussion

To date, stress researchers have treated the support received from one's supervisor as a key resource that employees may draw upon when coping with stress (e.g., Lee and Ashforth 1996; Nielsen et al. 2017). However, our findings suggest that obtaining this support may be more difficult than expected. Based on social exchange theory (Homans 1958), and consistent with stress theories (e.g., Hobfoll 1989), we predicted that employees who experience work stress may be at a disadvantage in receiving mentoring support from their supervisors. This is because stress depletes resources, reducing the capacity and willingness to be attentive to one's job, resulting in lower levels of work engagement. Low engagement, in turn, affects the level of career and psychosocial mentoring support provided to, and received by stressed employees.

Our findings supported these predictions. Specifically, we showed that experienced work stress was negatively related to the amount of both career and psychosocial mentoring support received from one's supervisor. Further, the level of supervisory career mentoring support received was related to career satisfaction and manager ratings of employee promotability. We did not find significant effects on actual promotions, but the positive correlation between promotability ratings and actual promotions measured 7 months later (Study 1) offers evidence that the effects of stress on promotability ratings may have important implications for the employee's advancement. We conducted two follow-up studies to further explore these findings, and demonstrated that the relationship between employee perceptions of work stress and employee reported supervisory career and mentoring support received were mediated by employee work engagement, and that the same pattern of relations was observed between manager perceived employee work stress, and manager reported career and psychosocial mentoring support provided.

An unexpected finding in Study 1 was that the indirect effects of stress on career outcomes occurred only via supervisory career mentoring support. The two types of supervisor mentoring support were highly correlated ($r = 0.68$), with supervisory career mentoring support emerging as a stronger correlate of outcomes. Our results are consistent with mentoring research suggesting a predominant role for career mentoring support with respect to career outcomes (Ghosh and Reio 2013). At the same time, employees place great value on psychosocial mentoring, and such support is related to outcomes such as mentor satisfaction (Mullen 2010). With outcomes such as wellbeing and health, the results could have been different.

Finally, when examining the stress to supervisor mentoring relationships from the managers' perspective, we observed an unexpected positive relationship between manager perceived employee work stress and manager reports of career and psychosocial mentoring provided. When supervisors reported that an employee was stressed in an earlier measurement period, they reported that they provided higher levels of support to them in the next measurement period. At the same time, we identified significant negative indirect effects between supervisor-reported employee work stress and mentoring support provided, with supervisor perceived work engagement of the employee as the mediator. In other words, while managers were reducing the amount of support provided to the stressed employees because they were regarding these employees as low in work engagement, they continued to see themselves as being supportive toward stressed employees, as evidenced by the direct relation between manager perceived stress and the level of support they reported providing. This complex dynamic suggests that managers may maintain a sense of supportiveness despite adjusting their mentoring behavior in response to employee work stress levels. It also underscores the importance of understanding both the direct

TABLE 7 | Mediation analyses for Study 3.

	Control mediators			Test mediator	Dependent variables	
Variables	**Employee proactivity** **Coefficient (SE)**	**Employee performance** **Coefficient (SE)**	**Employee withdrawal** **Coefficient (SE)**	**Employee engagement** **Coefficient (SE)**	**Supervisor career mentoring support** **Coefficient (SE)**	**Supervisor psychosocial mentoring support** **Coefficient (SE)**
Intercept	3.82** (.16)	4.60** (.11)	1.00** (.12)	3.69** (.15)	0.99 (0.57)	−0.46 (0.59)
Direct paths						
Control mediators						
Employee proactivity					0.12 (0.11)	0.11 (0.11)
Employee performance					0.08 (.12)	0.27* (.13)
Employee withdrawal					0.10 (.10)	0.24* (.10)
Predictors						
Perceived employee work stress	−0.18* (0.07)	−0.18** (0.05)	0.19**(0.05)	−0.22** (.07)	0.16* (.07)	0.31** (.07)
Employee work engagement					0.31** (.11)	0.23* (.11)
Indirect paths					Coefficient (SE), 95% CI [LL, UL]	Coefficient (SE), 95% CI [LL, UL]
Stress → Engagement → Mentoring					−0.07* (0.03) [−0.1416, −0.0141]	−0.05* (0.02) [−0.1198, −0.0013]
R^2	0.03 (0.02)	0.05(0.03)	0.05 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)	0.12* (0.05)	0.16** (0.05)

Note: $n = 240$. Unstandardized regression coefficients reported; 95% confidence intervals estimated using a Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 repetitions (Selig and Preacher 2008). The reported model included employee proactivity, performance, and withdrawal as mediators. The indirect effects via alternate mediators are reported in Online Supplement C.

Abbreviation: SE = standard error.

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

and indirect influences of employee work stress on supervisor mentoring relationships.

7.1 | Theoretical Implications

This research makes several theoretical contributions. A notable contribution to the stress literature is that going beyond studies that conceptualized supervisory support either as a precursor to, or a moderator of employee stress (Hammer et al. 2019; Lee et al. 2023), we developed a model where we examined the possibility that work stress affects the mobilization of support from one's supervisor. As such, we add to the perspective that experienced stress has interpersonal implications (Kalish et al. 2015). Specifically, instead of treating supervisors as benevolent individuals who are likely to react to stressed employees with the right amount and type of support, we drew from social exchange theory (Homans 1958) to consider that the provision of and employee access to supervisory resources will be affected by the level of stress experienced by employees. Specifically, the depleting effects of stress on employees (Hobfoll 1989) will result in a tendency to disengage from one's job, and the managers' perceptions that the employee is lacking in work engagement will affect how much mentoring support they provide to the employee. Our series of studies suggests that highly stressed employees may be at a disadvantage as recipients of mentoring support, and that the absence of career mentoring has significant implications for their career success. Combined, these findings indicate that the stress literature would benefit from more nuanced investigations of how support providers react to and are affected by the stress of employees, and how stressed employees' own actions and others' perceptions about them will affect the level of support provided to and are accessible by them.

Our results also have important implications for the supervisory mentoring support literature. One of the implications of our findings is that perceived stress may be regarded as a predictor of supervisory mentoring support. Our studies show that employees who report higher work stress received lower levels of supervisory mentoring support. This is consistent with social exchange theory, as supervisors may be cautious about their provision of mentoring support to these employees. The results are also consistent with the emerging results in the support literature that positive interactions are a precursor to the provision of support to others (e.g., Fasbender, Burmeister, and Wang 2020; Rosen et al. 2021). Our results suggest that while supervisory mentoring support has positive implications for employees, experiencing stress may paradoxically result in receiving lower levels of such support.

The results across three studies are also informative regarding the similarities and differences between supervisory career and psychosocial mentoring support. Past research has often aggregated the two forms of supervisory support (e.g., Eby et al. 2015). Across three studies, we found that the two forms of supervisory support were highly correlated. At the same time, in Study 1, only supervisory career mentoring support predicted the outcomes of career satisfaction and promotability ratings. Further, in Studies 2 and 3, the correlations of work engagement and alternate mediators with the two supervisory mentoring support variables were larger for career mentoring support as opposed to psychosocial mentoring support. In Studies 2 and 3, the indirect effect of stress on mentoring support through engagement was stronger (in the negative direction) for career mentoring support than psychosocial. Theoretically, career support may require a greater investment in an employee than psychosocial support, potentially leading to the more strategic offering of this kind of support. Whereas psychosocial support includes listening to employee concerns and providing emotional support, career support requires time, effort, and even reputational capital to help the employees advance in their careers. As such, employee work stress may be a stronger repellant of supervisor career support than of psychosocial support. We would encourage future researchers to continue to differentiate between the two types of mentoring support, and pair them with outcomes that are more theoretically salient for each type, such as employee wellbeing for psychosocial mentoring support.

Finally, our results indicate the importance of examining mentoring support receipt and mentoring support provision from both the employee and supervisors' perspective. The two perspectives diverged such that employees who reported higher work stress also reported lower subsequent support received, whereas for supervisors, there was a positive relation between the two. At the same time, the indirect effects via work engagement were observed in both the employee and manager sample. Combined, these results indicate that even when supervisors may see themselves as providing career mentoring by being caring and supportive toward stressed employees, their perception that these employees are low in work engagement seems to be holding them back when it comes to the actual provision of mentoring support to these employees. Future research would benefit from examining the degree to which supervisors can accurately assess the amount of actual support they provide to employees and the role of self-serving bias in their reports of support given. There is substantial research demonstrating that managers are not always self-aware regarding their leadership behaviors and capabilities (Day and Dragoni 2015), and may overestimate the amount of discretionary behaviors they display (Allen et al. 2000). Further, examining the degree to which support provided by managers is actually received by employees is an important area of research. Factors such as offering the wrong kind of support, offering the right kind of support at the wrong time, or offering the wrong amount of support may result in discrepancies between manager provision and employee perception of receipt of support.

7.2 | Practical Implications

Our research also has implications for practice. We know that supervisory career mentoring support involves a number of managerial actions, such as the leader providing coaching and sponsoring for the employee, making them aware of promotion opportunities, giving them public credit for their work, and placing them on visible assignments. In fact, supervisors play a critical role for employee health and wellbeing and how they cope with stress (Allen and French 2023). Employees who work under a great deal of stress are less likely to be regarded as support targets, given that they are likely to have reduced energy, enthusiasm, and dedication to their work. We would like to caution managers to avoid blaming the victim. We do not suggest that the lower level of mentoring support is acceptable

or tolerable. Instead, our results suggest that when employees are stressed, their managers' inclination may not necessarily be to offer greater levels of support, and such assumptions and expectations may be misguided. Instead, stress is associated with lower work engagement (as reported by employees and perceived by managers), resulting in a deficiency in mentoring support provided. In fact, managers who are working with stressed employees may be experiencing subjective ambivalence, which is a psychological state of conflict where individuals hold positive and negative thoughts about an object or person concurrently (Guarana, Rothman, and Melwani 2023). The competing priorities of managers to support employees who need it while also working under pressure to meet organizational goals may result in such deficiencies. In turn, such deficiency in supervisory mentoring support has implications for the career success of these individuals, resulting in both lower levels of satisfaction with their careers, and lower rankings in terms of promotability.

We would encourage managers to be aware of this tendency and work actively to counteract it. Further, organizations need to consider ways to incentivize supervisors to provide such support, or provide mentoring support in a more systematic way, given that supervisors may shy away from investing in employees who experience higher stress. Organizations would be well advised to view these findings as a warning sign, and design training programs to help supervisors be more supportive of all employees, but particularly those with high levels of stress. For example, managers can conduct more frequent one-on-one check ins with employees that are focused more on understanding the pressures employees are under. Our results from Study 3 indicated that when supervisors are asked, they reported that they provide support to stressed employees—indicating their intention to support stressed employees. Developing an organizational culture that prioritizes employee wellbeing and instilling in managers the importance of offering support to employees would be valuable. For example, supporting stressed employees could be modeled by higher management, and communicated as an expectation to line managers.

In addition, organizational decision makers would be astute to recognize that while supervisors should provide resources to their employees to manage stress, supervisors similarly require resources. Offering support can be a depleting task (Gosnell and Gable 2017), and managers may be affected by the resource consuming nature of being a supportive manager. Therefore, another practical implication of our study is to cultivate a culture of support through multiple pathways for employees and supervisors. Along the same lines, supervisory mentoring support is only one source of support available to employees, and organizations may invest in provisions of support that require less discretion on the part of managers. Employee assistance programs, peer mentors, mentoring programs that connect employees to diverse sources of support, and ties to professional associations can all be useful avenues through which stressed employees can gain access to the support they need.

7.3 | Limitations and Future Research Directions

As in any study, our study has several potential limitations. First, examining the work stress and supervisor mentoring support relationship over different frames of time would add to our understanding. It is important to examine whether and how stressed employees can cultivate the support they need from their supervisors and others. Early on, stress may be a subtle influence over managers' behaviors, and while managers may be interested in offering support to stressed employees, they may be discouraged by the signs of low work engagement. Over time, the effects of work stress on manager behaviors may be shaped by how the employee responded to stress and whether they were able to utilize the support provided to them in the previous round. Further, whether work stress is perceived as temporary or more permanent may also play a role. Work stress is likely to peak and wane during certain situations or contexts that will differ based on industry (e.g., accounting or financial services have certain periods that are more stressful), individual differences (e.g., newer generations in their first jobs versus veterans of an organization), and whether their work load is aligned with their expectations (Fu et al. 2024). Whether supervisors are more or less likely to provide support during stressful versus relaxed periods will be consequential to employees experiencing stress. Finally, examining stress in an episodic manner, and exploring how managers react to each stress episode using experience sampling methodology may offer unique insights. Examining these research questions would necessitate utilizing longitudinal research designs as well as within-person designs focusing on daily experiences of stress.

Further, while we examined the role of the presence of a mentoring relationship between the manager and employee as a moderator, considering the manager as one's mentor did not alleviate the negative relation between stress and supervisor mentoring support. Understanding factors under the employee or manager's control that can interrupt this process has theoretical and practical implications. Given the positive implications of supervisory mentoring support in general, investigating how employees, managers, and organizations can break this cycle and cultivate the support they need is important. For example, having a supportive organizational culture that prioritizes employee wellbeing, personal characteristics of the manager such as empathy, and the degree to which managers themselves are working under pressure are among the moderators that warrant investigation in future research.

While we were fortunate to be able to collect data on both promotability ratings from supervisors and to obtain actual promotions from company records in our first study, our findings did not reveal any implications of mentoring on actual promotions. Specifically, there were no direct or indirect effects of stress on actual promotions via mentoring, nor did mentoring have an effect on actual promotions. We obtained actual promotion data from the company records 7 months following the conclusion of our study. As a result, only 20 employees were promoted during the study window, and this relatively low base rate may have attenuated our observed effects. Widening the study window could increase the power of our analyses.

In our series of studies, we examined both employee and supervisor perceptions of employee work stress and supervisor mentoring support received (as perceived by employees) and provided (as perceived by supervisors) in separate studies. In future research, combining both perspectives in one study should provide additional insights. For example, under what conditions

do supervisors detect that employees are experiencing higher work stress? What cues communicate low employee engagement to managers? How does supervisor provision of career and psychosocial mentoring support relate to the level of support employees believe that they receive? Examining these questions could extend our work in meaningful ways and increase our understanding of how work stress and supervisor mentoring support are interconnected.

8 | Conclusion

Work stress has the potential to negatively influence career satisfaction and promotability ratings because such stress is related to lower levels of career mentoring from one's supervisor. This tendency is explainable by the lower levels of employee work engagement displayed by, and perceived by supervisors. Our results suggest that despite the positive implications of supervisory career and psychosocial support, stress may be preventing employees from having access to such support, with important implications for career success.

Acknowledgments

This manuscript has been made open access through support provided by Portland State University Library. We would like to thank Yaxian (Stephanie) Zhou for her help collecting data for Study 2.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Endnotes

[1] We would like to thank the review team for their suggestion to include and test these mediators in a new study.

[2] Two starting value runs did not converge in the single-factor model, so results should be interpreted cautiously.

[3] Five starting value runs did not converge in the single-factor model, so results should be interpreted cautiously.

[4] In the original version of the manuscript submitted to the journal, we also posited that extraversion would be a moderator of the relationship between stress and supervisory mentoring support. We wanted to explore this relationship further, but did not find support for it in Study 2 or Study 3. Given the tentativeness of these findings, we removed them from the manuscript. However, we included these results in the Online Supplement D for interested readers.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.