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# Stop hazing me! Why workplace hazing hurts work engagement and how to mitigate it

Evidence-based  
HRM: a Global  
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Kian Yeik Koay

*Department of Marketing Strategy and Innovation, Sunway Business School,  
Sunway University, Sunway City, Malaysia*

Weng Marc Lim

*Dean's Office, Sunway Business School, Sunway University, Sunway City, Malaysia;  
School of Business, Law and Entrepreneurship, Swinburne University of Technology,  
Melbourne, Australia;*

*ASU-Cintana Alliance Global Partner Affiliate Faculty, Arizona State University,  
Tempe, Arizona, USA and*

*Global Research Centre, Sungkyunkwan University, Suwon, Republic of Korea*

Wing Tien Wong

*Department of Accounting, Economics and Finance, Sunway Business School,  
Sunway University, Sunway City, Malaysia*

Narishah Mohamed Salleh

*Department of Business Analytics, Sunway Business School, Sunway University,  
Sunway City, Malaysia, and*

Lauren Wong

*Dean's Office, Sunway Business School, Sunway University, Sunway City, Malaysia*

## Abstract

**Purpose** – Workplace hazing refers to coercive or demeaning initiation practices that impose psychological costs on employees, draining personal resources in ways that threaten their work engagement and, if left unchecked, may erode both individual wellbeing and organizational performance. Drawing on conservation of resources theory, this article aims to examine why workplace hazing undermines work engagement and how this harmful organizational behavior can be mitigated.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data from 1,217 young workers across industries in Malaysia were collected via a survey and analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM).

**Findings** – Workplace hazing reduces work engagement (the “what” or main effect) under the influence of emotional exhaustion (the “why” or mediation effect), which, nonetheless, could be mitigated by the fear of negative evaluation (the “how” or moderation effect).

**Originality/value** – This article advances theoretical understanding by specifying an emotional resource-depletion mechanism (emotional exhaustion) and a qualifying boundary condition (fear of negative evaluation), thereby clarifying both the route through which workplace hazing harms work engagement and the circumstances under which that harm is less pronounced (greater fear of negative evaluation), with clear implications for managerial prevention and response.

**Keywords** Conservation of resources theory, Emotional exhaustion, Fear of negative evaluation, Work engagement, Workplace hazing

**Paper type** Research article

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## 1. Introduction

Workplace hazing refers to coercive or demeaning initiation practices imposed on newcomers by more senior employees (Aljaier *et al.*, 2025; Kristensen, 2024; Srivastava and Saxena, 2025; Thomas and Meglich, 2019), practices that may be framed as harmless rituals (Sasso *et al.*, 2024), yet, in reality, inflict psychological stress (Mawritz *et al.*, 2022) that drain personal resources (Aljaier *et al.*, 2025) and undermine wellbeing (Waldron, 2024) while also perpetuating organizational cultures that value hierarchy and dominance over inclusivity and respect (Albashiti *et al.*, 2021). These actions, ranging from humiliation to intimidation (Albashiti *et al.*, 2021), are not isolated or trivial, with research showing that three out of four employees report having encountered hazing at some point in their careers (Thomas *et al.*, 2021)—a prevalence that signals both its pervasiveness and its seriousness as a workplace problem. The consequences are rarely confined to the immediate discomfort of the individual, for workplace hazing, by normalizing the exploitation of vulnerable employees, fosters a toxic climate that may ripple through teams and organizations, compromising not only individual wellbeing but also collective performance (Aljaier *et al.*, 2025; Rasheed *et al.*, 2025).

While prior studies have documented associations between workplace hazing and a host of detrimental outcomes—including heightened turnover intentions (Altaf, 2021; Rasheed *et al.*, 2025), increased organizational deviance (Raza *et al.*, 2024), and avoidance behaviors (Kristensen *et al.*, 2024)—the effect of hazing on work engagement remains underexamined, despite the centrality of engagement to both employee functioning and organizational success (Kristensen *et al.*, 2023; Thomas *et al.*, 2021). Work engagement, defined as “a positive, affective-motivational state of high energy combined with high levels of dedication and a strong focus on work” (Bakker and Albrecht, 2018, p. 4), plays a vital role in driving motivation, productivity, and resilience (De Clercq *et al.*, 2022). Noteworthy, employees who are engaged display energetic, proactive, and future-oriented behaviors, contributing not only through effort but also through initiative, responsibility-taking, and high-quality performance (Juyumaya and Torres, 2023). The importance of engagement in sustaining organizational vitality, therefore, raises a pressing question: why, and under what conditions, does workplace hazing diminish this desirable state?

Drawing on conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll and Wells, 1998), this article addresses that question by proposing emotional exhaustion as the mediating pathway through which workplace hazing erodes work engagement. Conservation of resources theory emphasizes that individuals strive to acquire, retain, and protect finite resources and that stress arises when these resources are threatened or depleted (Hobfoll and Wells, 1998). In this regard, workplace hazing operates as a hindrance stressor that accelerates resource depletion, leaving employees emotionally exhausted—a state of reduced capacity to cope with demands due to prolonged strain (Wright and Cropanzano, 1998). Engagement, however, requires substantial cognitive and emotional investment (Ravhudzulo and Eresia-Eke, 2025), and as exhaustion deepens, newcomers may disengage as a strategy of conservation, withdrawing their energy in order to protect what little remains, in line with conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll and Wells, 1998). This dynamic, in turn, has consequences that extend beyond the individual, since emotionally exhausted employees are less able to sustain contribution, collaboration, or creativity, thereby compromising organizational performance and societal wellbeing (Maslach and Leiter, 2017; Pearsall *et al.*, 2009).

Yet, resource loss does not occur in a vacuum, as it is shaped by individual perceptions and surrounding conditions (Lu *et al.*, 2025). This article, therefore, extends its scope to examine the moderating role of fear of negative evaluation, defined herein as employees’ concern with unfavorable judgments from significant others, particularly senior colleagues or managers. Notably, while newcomers with heightened fear of negative evaluation may be especially vulnerable to exhaustion given their sensitivity to hazing, that very anxiety may, paradoxically, motivate them to increase their engagement as they strive to offset the risk of rejection and to demonstrate their worth to the group (Mawritz *et al.*, 2022). This paradox highlights the importance of examining not only the direct costs of hazing but also the psychological mechanisms and workplace conditions that shape its impact on engagement.

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The rest of this article proceeds as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical background, drawing on conservation of resources theory to develop hypotheses while the sections thereafter describe the sample and measurement design, detail the data analysis procedure, and discuss the results and their implications for management theory and practice prior to concluding with reflections on current research limitations and future research directions.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Conceptual background: workplace hazing

*Workplace hazing* has been defined as “the unofficial, temporary socialization practice of initiating newcomers into workgroups by engaging in degrading behaviors toward the newcomers,” a definition that foregrounds newcomer status, temporariness, and initiation ritual, thereby separating hazing conceptually from other negative interpersonal conduct at work (Mawritz *et al.*, 2022, p. 143). Noteworthy, workplace hazing shares a resemblance with workplace bullying and workplace incivility, yet carries distinctive hallmarks—namely, a *situational trigger* (entry into a group), a *time-bound course* (diminishing once acceptance is achieved), a *justifying narrative* (claimed socialization or cohesion), and a *group-level script* that is often visible and rationalized rather than covert and purely malicious (Kristensen *et al.*, 2023; Mawritz *et al.*, 2022; Thomas *et al.*, 2021). These characteristics matter because they shift what is being predicted and managed, with newcomer trials framed as traditions not representing low-intensity rudeness (like workplace incivility) or prolonged abuse (like workplace bullying) but rather as ritualized gatekeeping that reasserts hierarchy while demanding costly displays from those with the least standing (Mawritz *et al.*, 2022).

Clear conceptual separation also rests on how adjacent concepts are defined (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2024). *Workplace bullying* emphasizes repetition over time and a power imbalance that enables sustained harassment of a specific target, wherein the defining features are domination and persistence, not socialization or rite-of-passage claims (Bartlett and Bartlett, 2011; Nielsen and Einarsen, 2012; Nielsen *et al.*, 2024). Whereas, *workplace incivility* is characterized by ambiguous intent and low intensity, often manifesting as disrespect or rudeness that may appear dismissive or exclusionary without being explicitly intended to harm and generally experienced in scattered episodes that lack a clear target nor tied to entry processes or reinforcement of hierarchical order (Agarwal *et al.*, 2023; Schilpzand *et al.*, 2016). Read against those anchors, *workplace hazing’s* entry-linked, temporarily concentrated, and often normatively rationalized character provides the boundaries that distinguish the concept in conceptualization (definition) and operationalization (measurement).

Against this backdrop, this article argues that workplace hazing differs from closely-related concepts like workplace bullying and workplace incivility, not merely in degree but in kind, because it is temporary and bound to the early stages of organizational entry, because it is enacted by groups against newcomers rather than by individuals against peers, because it is frequently rationalized as a socialization practice rather than acknowledged as hostility, and because it is visible and collectively sanctioned rather than hidden and individualized (Kristensen *et al.*, 2023; Mawritz *et al.*, 2022; Thomas *et al.*, 2021). These distinctions matter because they establish workplace hazing as a unique concept—one that cannot be subsumed under workplace bullying or workplace incivility without losing explanatory precision and one that requires dedicated conceptualization and operationalization to understand its dynamics, consequences, and potential interventions.

### 2.2 Theoretical background: conservation of resource theory

Conservation of resources theory emphasizes that individuals strive to acquire, cultivate, preserve, and safeguard resources that they perceive as essential to their wellbeing (Hobfoll, 1989, Hobfoll and Wells, 1998). These resources can take multiple forms, ranging from

tangible objects (e.g. laptops, smartphones) to external conditions (e.g. financial security, interpersonal relationships), personal characteristics (e.g. personality traits, skills), and energy resources (e.g. mental stamina, self-esteem), and because these resources are difficult to acquire and sustain, their loss exerts a more powerful and enduring psychological effect than their gain, which means that stressors become especially damaging by accelerating depletion while offering little opportunity for replenishment (Hobfoll, 2011). Hence, workplace hazing is conceptualized herein as a stressor that depletes personal resources, thereby inducing emotional exhaustion and undermining the ability to sustain engagement.

The choice of conservation of resources theory over alternative perspectives rests on both conceptual alignment and explanatory power. Job demands-resources theory, for example, foregrounds the balance between job demands and resources in predicting burnout and engagement (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti *et al.*, 2001), yet its structure positions workplace hazing as one of many possible demands without capturing the unique depletion dynamic that workplace hazing entails (Kristensen *et al.*, 2023; Mawritz *et al.*, 2022; Thomas *et al.*, 2021). Social exchange theory, while useful for explaining reciprocal obligations (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005), does not adequately address why newcomers, who have limited power to reciprocate, disengage when subjected to workplace hazing (Kristensen *et al.*, 2023; Mawritz *et al.*, 2022; Thomas *et al.*, 2021). Stress-strain models explain the link between stressors and outcomes (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) but lack the resource-based granularity that conservation of resources theory provides (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011, Hobfoll and Wells, 1998). In contrast, conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011, Hobfoll and Wells, 1998) offers a more precise fit because it captures the resource loss spiral triggered by workplace hazing, thereby clarifying both the mechanism (emotional exhaustion as a depletion outcome) and the consequence (reduced work engagement as a conservation response).

The use of conservation of resources theory herein also aligns with the *IMPACT* framework for theory selection (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2025). From the perspective of *Interestingness*, the analysis challenges assumptions that initiation rituals are benign or bonding, instead framing them as costly depleters of scarce psychological resources, with novel implications for work engagement. Regarding *Matching*, the theory co-infuses cleanly with the studied constructs, because workplace hazing is inherently resource-depleting, emotional exhaustion is an outcome of resource loss, and work engagement requires the resources workplace hazing erodes. With respect to *Parsimony*, conservation of resources theory explains the phenomenon without requiring auxiliary assumptions about exchange reciprocity or job design complexity, thereby offering a concise yet powerful lens. Turning to *Applicability*, the theory clarifies the managerial stakes by identifying resource protection and replenishment as levers for intervention, thereby ensuring that organizational actions are grounded in theory but attuned to practice. Concerning *Conceptual rigor*, conservation of resources theory has been consistently developed and validated across contexts (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018), and its constructs of resource acquisition, depletion, and loss spirals align coherently with workplace hazing, emotional exhaustion, and work engagement. Finally, with regard to *Testability*, the theory has been widely operationalized in organizational research (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018), ensuring that the theoretical predictions can be empirically verified. Hence, conservation of resources theory offers the most compelling theoretical foundation for this study, not only because of its theoretical precision in capturing workplace hazing as a depletion-driven stressor (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011, Hobfoll and Wells, 1998) but also because, when judged against the *IMPACT* criteria (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2025), it provides the strongest basis to generate novel, parsimonious, managerially relevant, rigorous, and testable insight into why workplace hazing erodes engagement and how it could be mitigated.

### 2.3 Hypothesis development

**2.3.1 Workplace hazing and work engagement.** Newcomers' engagement at work is often shaped by the way they are socialized into the organization, because supportive socialization practices provide clarity, guidance, and psychological safety that encourage active

involvement and commitment, whereas harmful practices create uncertainty and strain that erode motivation to engage (Saks and Gruman, 2018). Workplace hazing represents precisely such a harmful practice, because instead of offering support, it exposes newcomers to mistreatment, leading them to view the workplace as hostile, unpredictable, and unrewarding (Mawritz *et al.*, 2022; Thomas *et al.*, 2021). From the perspective of conservation of resources theory, workplace hazing is a direct threat to valuable psychological resources, since it undermines belonging, control, and self-esteem, all of which are arguably central to sustaining work engagement (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011, Hobfoll and Wells, 1998). Notably, resource loss is more psychologically powerful than resource gain (Doane *et al.*, 2012), and thus, when newcomers are deprived of the support they would ordinarily expect and instead encounter humiliation or exclusion, they can be expected to experience resource depletion that drains the energy and dedication required to remain engaged. Indeed, prior evidence reinforces this expectation by showing that employees exposed to mistreatment disengage in order to conserve what resources remain. For example, ostracized employees have been found to reduce work efforts by redirecting time toward cyberloafing (Koay and Lai, 2023) while employees facing verbal abuse or hostility have shown greater withdrawal through counterproductive behaviors such as cyberloafing (Bhattacharjee and Sarkar, 2024; Koay *et al.*, 2022). In a similar vein, workplace bullying has been shown to undermine engagement by exhausting employees' ability and willingness to invest in their roles (Goodboy *et al.*, 2020). Hazing can, therefore, be expected to function in the same way, by eroding the very resources that engagement depends upon, which leads to disengagement as a conservation strategy. Accordingly, this article proposes the following hypothesis.

*H1.* Workplace hazing has a negative impact on work engagement.

#### *2.4 The mediating role of emotional exhaustion*

The impact of workplace hazing on work engagement is posited to be mediated by emotional exhaustion, with the rationale firmly grounded in conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011, Hobfoll and Wells, 1998). Workplace hazing functions as a significant stressor, one that forces newcomers to invest additional psychological effort to cope with mistreatment, which, by extension, accelerates the depletion of resources essential to sustaining engagement (Mawritz *et al.*, 2022). Newcomers subjected to hazing are also often deprived of guidance and support, and instead, experience humiliation and exclusion, which erode confidence, esteem, and mental energy (Cimino *et al.*, 2019; Mawritz *et al.*, 2022). These resources are central to maintaining functional relationships with colleagues and supervisors, and thus, their erosion leaves newcomers psychologically drained (Burton and Hoobler, 2006). Alternative empirical evidence lends further support, with studies consistently showing that employees exposed to negative workplace conditions such as bullying or ostracism experience heightened emotional exhaustion (Koay, 2018; Said and Tanova, 2021). Consequently, workplace hazing is expected to heighten emotional exhaustion, reflecting the cumulative costs of resource loss.

*H2.* Workplace hazing has a positive impact on emotional exhaustion.

Conservation of resources theory also posits that individuals strive to preserve and replenish what resources remain when facing excessive stress (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011, Hobfoll and Wells, 1998). Emotional exhaustion represents precisely such a conservation response, where individuals detach psychologically from work to halt further depletion. Since engagement requires substantial cognitive and emotional investment (Ravhudzulo and Eresia-Eke, 2025), emotionally exhausted employees, and particularly newcomers already vulnerable to depletion, are less likely to commit the energy, focus, and enthusiasm that engagement entails. Recent evidence reinforces this logic, wherein employees who report higher levels of emotional exhaustion are consistently found to be less engaged, as exhaustion undermines their willingness and ability to invest in their roles (López-Cabarcos *et al.*, 2024). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H3. Emotional exhaustion has a negative impact on work engagement.

Bringing these arguments together, this article posits that workplace hazing operates through emotional exhaustion to diminish work engagement. Hazing erodes belonging, control, and self-esteem, forcing newcomers to expend additional resources to endure the experience, which deepens exhaustion and compels them to disengage as a strategy of conservation (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011, Hobfoll and Wells, 1998). In this way, emotional exhaustion serves as the mechanism that translates hazing into disengagement, thereby clarifying why newcomers who experience workplace hazing withdraw rather than contribute or engage. Therefore, this article hypothesizes that.

H4. Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between workplace hazing and work engagement.

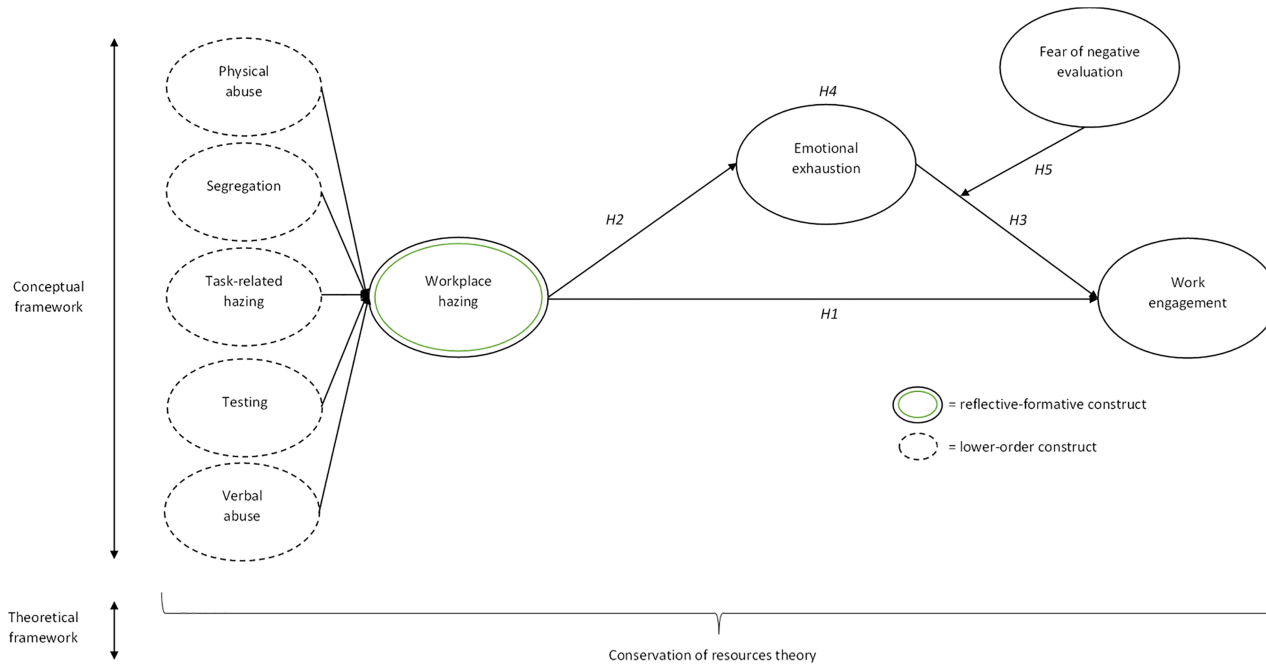
### 2.5 *The moderating role of fear of negative evaluation*

Fear of negative evaluation is posited to moderate the relationship between workplace hazing and work engagement mediated by emotional exhaustion. As discussed earlier, workplace hazing functions as a stressor that erodes psychological resources such as confidence and self-esteem in social interactions (Mehmood *et al.*, 2024), leaving newcomers demoralized and less capable of sustaining engagement. From the perspective of conservation of resources theory, individuals exposed to such stressors conserve their limited energy by disengaging, because work engagement requires the very resources that workplace hazing depletes (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011, Hobfoll and Wells, 1998). However, this mediating effect is unlikely to be uniform across individuals, because the extent to which newcomers persist in work engagement despite depletion depends on how strongly they fear negative evaluation by others.

Fear of negative evaluation reflects the anxiety individuals feel when they believe they may be appraised unfavorably by relevant others, particularly colleagues and supervisors (Syed *et al.*, 2021). Newcomers, who are typically under probationary scrutiny, often face heightened pressure to demonstrate worthiness to secure long-term membership in the group. For those with high fear of negative evaluation, hazing may be endured not simply as mistreatment but as a test of commitment, prompting them to invest effort in engagement even when emotionally exhausted, as a way to secure approval and acceptance (Mawritz *et al.*, 2022). In this sense, fear of negative evaluation can override the natural conservation response predicted by conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011, Hobfoll and Wells, 1998), because individuals willingly deplete remaining resources to guard against reputational loss. Conversely, for newcomers with low fear of negative evaluation, the motivation to demonstrate conformity or preserve reputation is weaker, implying that the conservation logic of resource theory prevails more strongly (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011, Hobfoll and Wells, 1998). These individuals, less concerned with others' appraisals, are unlikely to invest additional energy once depleted, instead disengaging to protect what resources remain. Empirical evidence supports this reasoning, with research showing that employees low in fear of negative evaluation are more likely to disengage or slack when emotionally exhausted, whereas those high in fear of negative evaluation may persist in effort to preserve standing (Koay, 2018; Syed *et al.*, 2021). Thus, the fear of negative evaluation is hypothesized to alter the indirect relationship between workplace hazing and work engagement, such that the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion is more pronounced when fear of negative evaluation is low and dampened when fear of negative evaluation is high.

H5. Fear of negative evaluation moderates the relationship between workplace hazing and work engagement mediated by emotional exhaustion, such that the impact of workplace hazing on work engagement via emotional exhaustion is stronger (weaker) when fear of negative evaluation is low (high).

Figure 1 illustrates the research framework that encapsulates the overarching theory and proposed hypotheses.



**Figure 1.** Research framework. Source: Authors' own illustration

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire was developed based on items validated in prior studies (Appendix). Workplace hazing was operationalized as a reflective-formative construct, using the scale by Mawritz *et al.* (2022), comprising segregation (three items), verbal abuse (three items), task-related hazing (three items), physical abuse (three items), and testing (three items) as lower-order constructs. Work engagement was measured using three items from Schaufeli (2017), emotional exhaustion using three items from Hülsheger *et al.* (2013), and fear of negative evaluation using seven items from Carleton *et al.* (2007). All items employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Common method bias was mitigated through procedural remedies by providing clear instructions and assuring participants that their involvement was voluntary and that there were no right or wrong answers (Lim, 2025).

#### 3.2 Sampling

Given that workplace hazing involves established employees subjecting newcomers to degrading behaviors (Aljaier *et al.*, 2025; Kristensen, 2024; Mawritz *et al.*, 2022; Srivastava and Saxena, 2025; Thomas and Meglich, 2019), the sample targeted recent entrants. Interns were chosen as respondents for two main reasons. First, as newcomers, they are more likely to encounter hazing. Second, they are able to provide fresh and accurate accounts of such experiences, having only recently completed their internships, whereas long-tenured employees may struggle to recall hazing episodes from their early days.

To ensure adequate statistical power, the minimum sample size was calculated using G\*Power, which indicated the need for at least 92 responses. Data were collected from interns studying an AACSB-accredited business school at a Malaysian private university. Surveys were distributed to these interns immediately after completing their mandatory internship. Ethical clearance was granted by both the university's ethics committee and the internship program committee. The questionnaire cover page clarified that participation was voluntary, anonymity would be maintained, and data would be reported only in aggregate form. Implied consent was assumed from survey participation. Out of 1,232 surveys distributed, 1,217 valid responses were retained after removing incomplete submissions and straight-lined responses.

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of respondents. The sample comprised 693 females (56.9%) and 524 males (43.1%). Ethnically, the sample was predominantly Chinese (81.1%),

**Table 1.** Profile of respondents

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	693	56.9%
Male	524	43.1%
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
Chinese	987	81.1%
Indian	84	6.9%
Malay	67	5.5%
Others	78	6.4%
Not specified	1	0.1%
<i>Internet skills</i>		
Very unskilled	1	0.1%
Unskilled	2	0.2%
Moderately skilled	320	26.3%
Skilled	731	60.0%
Very skilled	163	13.4%

**Source(s):** Authors' own illustration

followed by Indians (6.9%), Malays (5.5%), and others (6.4%), with one respondent (0.1%) not specifying ethnicity. In terms of internet skills, most respondents rated themselves as skilled (60.0%) or moderately skilled (26.3%) while a smaller proportion reported being very skilled (13.4%) and only a negligible minority identified as unskilled (0.2%) or very unskilled (0.1%).

### 3.3 Analysis

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to analyze the data. The choice of PLS-SEM over covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) was driven by both theoretical and methodological considerations (Benitez *et al.*, 2020; Hair *et al.*, 2017; Lim, 2025; Sarstedt *et al.*, 2019). First, the exploratory orientation of this study, which examines a complex model involving both mediation and moderation, made PLS-SEM particularly suitable, as this method is widely recognized for its capacity to handle complex structural paths and for its emphasis on prediction and theory development rather than strict model fit. Second, workplace hazing was conceptualized as a reflective–formative construct, requiring an estimation technique that can accommodate formative indicators without imposing the restrictive assumptions associated with CB-SEM, which is primarily designed for reflective measurement models. In this regard, PLS-SEM provides the most appropriate analytical technique as it allows for robust testing of the hypothesized direct, indirect, and conditional effects while also aligning with the study’s objective of extending theoretical understanding.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Measurement model

The evaluation of the measurement model was conducted in two stages due to the presence of a higher-order construct—namely, workplace hazing (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2019).

In the first stage, all constructs were assessed using the criteria for reflective constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2017; Lim, 2024, 2025), wherein (1) all constructs demonstrated *internal consistency* or *reliability*, as no Cronbach’s alpha or composite reliability values were below the minimum threshold of 0.70 (Table 2); (2) all constructs demonstrated *convergent validity*, as their items had loadings above the minimum threshold of 0.708 and average variance extracted values greater than the minimum threshold of 0.50 (Table 2); and (3) all constructs, following the removal of PA2 and TE2, demonstrated *discriminant validity*, as their correlations and heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations were below the maximum threshold of 0.90 (Tables 3 and 4).

In the second stage, the lower-order construct scores of workplace hazing, including physical abuse, segregation, task-related hazing, testing, and verbal abuse, were extracted and modeled as formative indicators to represent workplace hazing. The assessment of formatively measured constructs is different from that of reflectively measured constructs (Benitez *et al.*, 2020; Hair *et al.*, 2018; Lim, 2024, 2025). First, multicollinearity among formative indicators should be avoided. Employing variance inflation factor as a mechanism to detect multicollinearity, we retained only formative indicators with variance inflation factor values below the maximum threshold of 5—namely, physical abuse, segregation, task-related hazing, and verbal abuse, but not testing (Table 2). Second, the significance of formative indicators’ beta weights must be significant, otherwise, their (outer) loadings should be greater than 0.50. Although not all retained formative indicators’ beta weights were significant, their (outer) loadings exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.50, thereby meeting the significance criterion. Finally, we evaluated the reflective constructs in the reflective-formative measurement model in terms of their internal consistency or reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, wherein all thresholds met in the first stage were also met in the second stage of measurement model evaluation.

### 4.2 Structural model

The evaluation of the hypothesized relationships in the structural model enabled the testing of proposed hypotheses (Table 5). The analysis of *main effects* shows that workplace hazing has a

**Table 2.** Measurement model statistics

Construct	Item	Stage 1: Reflective measurement model statistics				Stage 2: Reflective-formative measurement model statistics							
		Convergent validity Loading	Average variance extracted	Internal consistency Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Beta (weight)	<i>p</i> -value	<i>t</i> -value	Variance inflation factor	Convergent validity Loading	Average variance extracted	Internal consistency Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
Emotional exhaustion	EE1	0.918	0.857	0.917	0.947					0.918	0.857	0.917	0.947
	EE2	0.926				0.926							
	EE3	0.934				0.934							
Fear of negative evaluation	FNE1	0.838	0.749	0.948	0.954					0.838	0.749	0.948	0.954
	FNE2	0.897				0.897							
	FNE3	0.900				0.900							
	FNE4	0.905				0.905							
	FNE5	0.855				0.855							
	FNE6	0.839				0.839							
	FNE7	0.820				0.820							
Work engagement	WE1	0.728	0.753	0.841	0.900					0.727	0.753	0.841	0.900
	WE2	0.935				0.935							
	WE3	0.925				0.925							
Workplace hazing: Physical abuse	PA1	0.989	0.976	0.975	0.988								
	PA3	0.987				0.987							
Workplace hazing: Segregation	SE1	0.921	0.855	0.916	0.947								
	SE2	0.940				0.940							
	SE3	0.913				0.913							
Workplace hazing: Task-related hazing	TR1	0.926	0.805	0.879	0.925								
	TR2	0.900				0.900							
	TR3	0.865				0.865							
Workplace hazing: Testing	TE1	0.970	0.938	0.934	0.968								
	TE3	0.967				0.967							

*(continued)*

**Table 2.** Continued

Construct	Item	Stage 1: Reflective measurement model statistics				Stage 2: Reflective-formative measurement model statistics							
		Convergent validity Loading	Average variance extracted	Internal consistency Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Beta (weight)	p-value	t-value	Variance inflation factor	Loading	Average variance extracted	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
Workplace hazing: Verbal abuse	VA1	0.954	0.924	0.959	0.973								
	VA2	0.969											
	VA3	0.962											
Workplace hazing	Physical abuse					-0.126	0.135	1.103	2.408	0.611			
	Segregation					0.238	0.041	1.734	3.208	0.860			
	Task-related hazing					0.735	0.000	7.329	2.656	0.978			
	Verbal abuse					0.189	0.108	1.236	3.611	0.808			

**Note(s):** Items PA2 and TE2 were removed to improve their respective constructs' heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations (discriminant validity). Testing was removed as a formative measure because its variance inflation factor was above the maximum threshold of 5

**Source(s):** Authors' own illustration

**Table 3.** Correlation matrix

Panel A. Correlations for reflective constructs								
Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Emotional exhaustion								
2. Fear of negative evaluation	0.231							
3. Work engagement	-0.167	0.094						
4. Workplace hazing: Physical abuse	0.167	0.045	-0.140					
5. Workplace hazing: Segregation	0.216	0.094	-0.217	0.659				
6. Workplace hazing: Task-related hazing	0.246	0.101	-0.245	0.594	0.760			
7. Workplace hazing: Testing	0.209	0.039	-0.168	0.852	0.671	0.659		
8. Workplace hazing: Verbal abuse	0.231	0.068	-0.174	0.755	0.770	0.721	0.834	

Panel B. Correlations for reflective-formative constructs				
Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Emotional exhaustion				
2. Fear of negative evaluation	0.231			
3. Work engagement	-0.167	0.094		
4. Workplace hazing	0.255	0.104	-0.248	

**Source(s):** Authors' own illustration

**Table 4.** Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations

Panel A. Stage 1 – HTMT ratios including lower-order constructs								
Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Emotional exhaustion								
2. Fear of negative evaluation	0.259							
3. Work engagement	0.163	0.082						
4. Workplace hazing: Physical abuse	0.176	0.056	0.140					
5. Workplace hazing: Segregation	0.234	0.111	0.234	0.694				
6. Workplace hazing: Task-related hazing	0.273	0.120	0.267	0.642	0.849			
7. Workplace hazing: Testing	0.226	0.052	0.179	0.893	0.723	0.728		
8. Workplace hazing: Verbal abuse	0.245	0.079	0.184	0.781	0.818	0.787	0.881	

Panel B. Stage 2 – HTMT ratios excluding lower-order constructs			
Construct	1	2	3
1. Emotional exhaustion			
2. Fear of negative evaluation	0.259		
3. Work engagement	0.163	0.082	

**Source(s):** Authors' own illustration

negative direct effect on work engagement ( $\beta = -0.226, p < 0.001$ ), a positive direct effect on emotional exhaustion ( $\beta = 0.255, p < 0.001$ ), and that emotional exhaustion itself negatively affects work engagement ( $\beta = -0.127, p < 0.001$ ), supporting H1, H2, and H3. The analysis of *mediation effects* further reveals that emotional exhaustion transmits the negative effect of workplace hazing on work engagement ( $\beta = -0.032, p < 0.001$ ), supporting H4. The analysis of moderated-mediation effects supports H5, showing that fear of negative evaluation moderates the indirect pathway from workplace hazing to work engagement through emotional exhaustion (Index = 0.033; CI = 0.017, 0.049). Notably, the conditional indirect

**Table 5.** Structural model statistics

Relationship	Beta	Standard deviation	Confidence interval		p-value	t-value	Remark			
			Lower 5%	Upper 95%						
<i>Panel A. Analysis of main effects</i>										
H1. Workplace hazing → Work engagement	-0.226	0.028	-0.268	-0.176	0.000	8.078	Significant			
H2. Workplace hazing → Emotional exhaustion	0.255	0.026	0.209	0.296	0.000	9.757	Significant			
H3. Emotional exhaustion → Work engagement	-0.127	0.033	-0.181	-0.072	0.000	3.821	Significant			
<i>Panel B. Analysis of mediation effects</i>										
H4. Workplace hazing → Emotional exhaustion → Work engagement	-0.032	0.010	-0.049	-0.018	0.000	3.379	Significant			
<i>Panel C. Post-hoc analysis of moderator</i>										
Fear of negative evaluation → Work engagement	0.147	0.041	0.058	0.180	0.000	3.600	Significant			
Fear of negative evaluation × Emotional exhaustion → Work engagement	0.131	0.036	0.072	0.185	0.000	3.592	Significant			
<i>Panel D. Analysis of moderated-mediation</i>										
H5. Workplace hazing → Emotional exhaustion → Work engagement			Fear of negative evaluation	0.033	0.010	0.017	0.049	Significant		
<i>Panel E. Post-hoc analysis of moderated-mediation</i>										
Workplace hazing → Emotional exhaustion → Work engagement			Fear of negative evaluation: High (+1 standard deviation)	0.001	0.011	-0.017	0.018	0.470	0.076	Not significant
Workplace hazing → Emotional exhaustion → Work engagement			Fear of negative evaluation: Average (Mean)	-0.032	0.010	-0.049	-0.018	0.000	3.379	Significant
Workplace hazing → Emotional exhaustion → Work engagement			Fear of negative evaluation: High (-1 standard deviation)	-0.066	0.016	-0.094	-0.040	0.000	4.041	Significant
<b>Source(s):</b> Authors' own illustration										

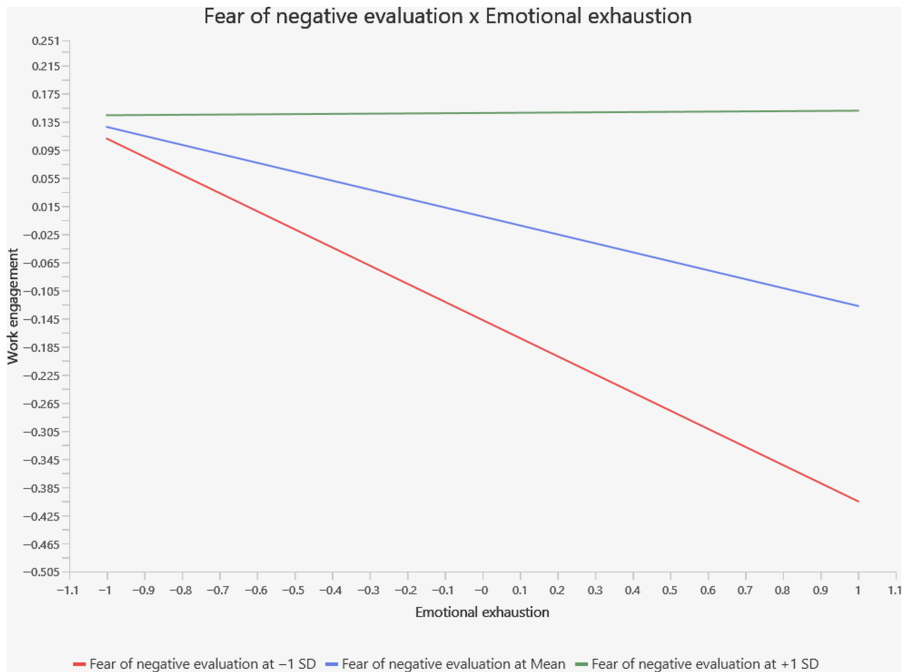
effect is significant at mean ( $SD = 0$ ) and low ( $SD = -1$ ) levels of fear of negative evaluation, but not at high ( $SD = +1$ ) levels. Scrutiny of [Figure 2](#) indicates that the slope for emotional exhaustion is steeply negative under low fear of negative evaluation, moderately negative at the mean, and virtually flat under high fear of negative evaluation, illustrating that only those less concerned with others' appraisals disengage strongly as exhaustion rises.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Theoretical implications

This study provides empirical support for all proposed hypotheses and, in doing so, advances the theoretical understanding of how workplace hazing influences employee outcomes through the lens of conservation of resources theory. Noteworthy, the findings demonstrate that workplace hazing reduces work engagement directly and indirectly through emotional exhaustion, thereby reinforcing the central proposition in conservation of resources theory that resource loss is more salient and damaging than resource gain ([Doane et al., 2012](#); [Hobfoll, 2011](#)). More specifically, workplace hazing deprives newcomers of belonging, control, and self-esteem, all of which are vital psychological resources ([Hobfoll, 1989, 2011, Hobfoll and Wells, 1998](#)), and this study clarifies that the ensuing depletion not only diminishes immediate employee wellbeing but also compromises the energy, focus, and enthusiasm required for work engagement, thus offering a sharper theoretical understanding of why initiation practices, often rationalized as benign traditions ([Mawritz et al., 2022](#)), carry significant organizational costs.

The positioning of emotional exhaustion as a mediating mechanism further advances theory in two important ways. First, this study extends conservation of resources theory by identifying workplace hazing as a specific type of stressor that accelerates resource loss spirals



**Figure 2.** Moderating effect of fear of negative evaluation on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and work engagement. Source: Authors' own illustration

(Hobfoll, 1989, 2011, Hobfoll and Wells, 1998), compelling employees to disengage as a conservation strategy. Second, this study responds to calls for unpacking the “black box” of how negative experiences translate into disengagement (Saraiva and Nogueiro, 2025) by showing that emotional exhaustion is not a peripheral correlate but the central conduit through which workplace hazing undermines work engagement. These insights enrich the resource-based explanation of work engagement and refine understanding of the psychological toll of adverse socialization practices while situating workplace hazing alongside established evidence that links other forms of negative organizational behavior, such as workplace bullying (Said and Tanova, 2021) and workplace ostracism (Koay, 2018), to work (dis)engagement.

The moderated mediation analysis adds a further contribution by identifying fear of negative evaluation as a boundary condition that shapes how conservation of resources dynamics unfold. While resource depletion typically leads to disengagement, individuals with high fear of negative evaluation sustain work engagement despite emotional exhaustion, as they prioritize group acceptance and reputational preservation over conservation of energy. This paradoxical response underscores that conservation of resources processes are not uniform but contingent, with individual dispositions altering how loss spirals manifest. This study, therefore, advances conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011, Hobfoll and Wells, 1998) by integrating fear of negative evaluation as a moderator that qualifies when emotional exhaustion translates into work disengagement, thereby refining the theory’s explanatory power in social contexts where approval and status are highly salient.

These findings collectively contribute to theory by reframing workplace hazing as more than a breach of reciprocity or a social exchange imbalance. Instead, workplace hazing is conceptualized as a resource-depleting stressor that compromises work engagement through emotional exhaustion, with outcomes contingent on individual sensitivity to evaluation. This positioning strengthens the conceptual separation of workplace hazing from adjacent constructs such as workplace bullying (Bartlett and Bartlett, 2011; Nielsen and Einarsen, 2012; Nielsen *et al.*, 2024) and workplace incivility (Agarwal *et al.*, 2023; Schilpzand *et al.*, 2016) while also extending conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011, Hobfoll and Wells, 1998) by shedding light on the mechanisms and contingencies through which socialization practices shape employee resource dynamics, emotional exhaustion, and work engagement.

### 5.2 Managerial implications

The findings of this study carry clear implications for organizational practice. Workplace hazing was operationalized across four dimensions—physical abuse, segregation, task-related hazing, and verbal abuse—and the results show that these degrading practices not only heighten emotional exhaustion but also diminish work engagement. Managers must, therefore, act decisively to prevent workplace hazing, as it depletes the very psychological resources that sustain energy, focus, and enthusiasm at work. The most immediate step is to implement and strictly enforce anti-hazing policies that explicitly identify prohibited behaviors, ranging from exclusion and ridicule to physical intimidation and unnecessary task assignments (Mawritz *et al.*, 2022). These policies must be backed with accessible reporting channels and transparent disciplinary consequences (Vijayakumar and Rajagopal, 2024), ensuring that workplace hazing is neither normalized nor tolerated. Yet, rules alone are insufficient. Regular employee training and workshops should be conducted to educate both newcomers and established employees about the resource-depleting effects of workplace hazing (Aljaier *et al.*, 2025), clarifying that practices often dismissed as harmless traditions carry measurable costs for individuals and organizations alike.

The study also demonstrates that emotional exhaustion is the mechanism through which workplace hazing erodes work engagement. This finding underscores the importance of designing organizational practices that protect newcomers’ psychological resources, since

emotional depletion directly undermines energy, focus, and enthusiasm at work. Managers can counteract this depletion by strengthening onboarding structures, introducing mentorship arrangements, and creating peer support systems that offer guidance, reassurance, and a sense of belonging (Kristensen *et al.*, 2023). Such initiatives help replenish resources like confidence and esteem, enabling newcomers to remain engaged rather than drained. Moreover, leaders should actively monitor task assignments and workloads to ensure that newcomers are not deliberately overburdened with irrelevant or trivial tasks, which the measurement items in this study identify as a form of workplace hazing (Mawritz *et al.*, 2022).

A further implication arises from the finding that fear of negative evaluation moderates the mediating relationship between workplace hazing, emotional exhaustion, and work engagement. Newcomers with high fear of negative evaluation continue to invest in work engagement even when emotionally exhausted, as they prioritize group acceptance and reputational preservation (Carleton *et al.*, 2007). While this may temporarily preserve work engagement, it does so at a hidden cost—the gradual erosion of wellbeing that can lead to burnout or turnover (Aljaier *et al.*, 2025; Rasheed *et al.*, 2025). Managers must, therefore, recognize that newcomers should not feel compelled to endure exclusion or humiliation simply to demonstrate commitment. To address this, organizations must build a culture where concerns can be voiced without the risk of retaliation or reputational damage. Mechanisms such as anonymous reporting systems, periodic employee climate surveys, and open forums for discussion can provide newcomers with safe avenues for raising issues. More importantly, managers must respond promptly and visibly to grievances, signaling that psychological safety is valued as much as performance outcomes.

The collective results herein, therefore, call for managers to view workplace hazing not as a trivial initiation ritual but as a destructive organizational practice that undermines engagement through resource depletion. The actionable steps—namely, clear anti-hazing policies, targeted training, structured onboarding and mentorship, active monitoring of task assignments, and safe reporting systems—should collectively equip organizations to dismantle hazing practices while reinforcing a culture of respect, inclusion, and sustainable engagement.

## 6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how workplace hazing undermines work engagement, with particular attention to the mediating role of emotional exhaustion and the moderating role of fear of negative evaluation, thereby extending the explanatory reach of conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011, Hobfoll and Wells, 1998). The findings confirm that workplace hazing functions as a resource-depleting stressor, which, in turn, heightens emotional exhaustion and reduces work engagement while fear of negative evaluation conditions this pathway by sustaining work engagement in some cases despite depletion. These results have implications for theory, by refining our understanding of how loss spirals unfold, and for practice, by highlighting the need for organizations to protect newcomers' resources and ensure they are not compelled to tolerate harmful behaviors to secure acceptance.

The limitations of this study must also be acknowledged. Using interns as proxies for newcomers is appropriate given their heightened exposure to workplace hazing, yet their temporary status may attenuate the experienced stress, since they know they will soon leave the organization, and incumbents may not perceive them as competitive threats, thereby reducing incentives to haze. Future research should therefore extend the model to newcomers in permanent or longer-term roles, where workplace hazing may exert stronger or more enduring effects, thereby enabling deeper insight into whether resource depletion unfolds differently when individuals are embedded in organizations with higher stakes for their careers. The reliance on cross-sectional data represents a second limitation, constraining causal inference and increasing the risk of common method bias, which future research should address using cross-lagged or multi-wave designs (Lim, 2025). Another limitation arises from

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the single-country sample, which restricts the external validity of the findings. Future studies should test the model across cultural and institutional contexts, since norms surrounding power distance, socialization, and tolerance for mistreatment vary widely (Shao *et al.*, 2013), and such variation may shape both the prevalence of workplace hazing and the ways in which emotional exhaustion translates into engagement outcomes. Finally, while this study focused on the effects of workplace hazing on work engagement, future research could extend the analysis to other outcomes such as knowledge hiding and unethical conduct (Masood *et al.*, 2024), which may represent alternative expressions of resource conservation under stress.

## **Appendix**

### **Measurement items**

#### **Workplace hazing**

When you were a newcomer to your workgroup, did existing members of your workgroup . . .

#### **Segregation**

- (1) SE1. Segregated me from our workgroup
- (2) SE2. Excluded me from our workgroup
- (3) SE3. Refrained from socializing with me

#### **Verbal abuse**

- (1) VA1. Ridiculed me
- (2) VA2. Verbally humiliated me
- (3) VA3. Verbally embarrassed me

#### **Task-related hazing**

- (1) TR1. Directed me to work on tasks that are not relevant to the future work I will do for the workgroup
- (2) TR2. Given me unimportant tasks to complete
- (3) TR3. Withheld useful information from me about how to accomplish tasks

#### **Physical abuse**

- (1) PA1. Physically harmed me
- (2) PA2. Deprived me of food
- (3) PA3. Gotten physically aggressive with me (shoving, slapping, hitting)

#### **Testing**

- (1) TE1. Told me stories that are untrue to see how naive I am
- (2) TE2. Played pranks on me to test my gullibility
- (3) TE3. Told me lies to see if I am a pushover

**Emotional exhaustion**

- (1) EE1. I feel emotionally drained from my work
- (2) EE2. I feel used up at the end of the workday
- (3) EE3. I feel burned out from my work

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**Fear of negative evaluation**

- (1) FNE1. I am afraid that other people will find fault with me
- (2) FNE2. When I am talking to someone, I worry about what they may be thinking about me
- (3) FNE3. I am afraid that others will not approve of me
- (4) FNE4. I am usually worried about what kind of impression I make
- (5) FNE5. I am frequently afraid of other people noticing my shortcomings
- (6) FNE6. I worry about what other people will think of me even when I know it doesn't make any difference
- (7) FNE7. I often worry that I will say or do wrong things

**Work engagement**

- (1) WE1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy
- (2) WE2. I am enthusiastic about my job
- (3) WE3. I am immersed in my work

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**Corresponding author**

Weng Marc Lim can be contacted at: [lim@wengmarc.com](mailto:lim@wengmarc.com)