



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Is someone looking over my shoulder? An investigation into supervisor monitoring variability, Subordinates' daily felt trust, and well-being

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Summary

Remote working has become the new norm in organizations. However, little is known about how supervisors' monitoring affects their relationships with subordinates in remote work settings. Our research aims to enhance the understanding of the daily dynamics of monitoring and trust between supervisors and subordinates. Based on self-determination theory, we propose a multilevel theoretical model predicting that supervisors' daily monitoring affects the extent to which subordinates feel trusted by their manager ("felt trust") and their subsequent daily exhaustion and vigor. Further, we develop the novel concept of supervisor monitoring variability and test its role in these relationships. We conducted two experience sampling method (ESM) studies ($N = 191$, 1,417 data points for Study 1; $N = 257$, 2,244 data points for Study 2) in different hybrid work contexts. Multilevel analysis findings confirmed that daily monitoring was negatively associated with daily felt trust, which in turn had a negative impact on subordinates' daily well-being in both contexts. Furthermore, we found that monitoring variability intensified the negative relationship between daily supervisor monitoring and subordinates' daily felt trust in the newly introduced remote working context, although not in a more stable context. We discuss the theoretical implications of our findings and derive a research agenda to study the daily dynamics of monitoring and its implications for organizations.

KEYWORDS

felt trust, monitoring variability, self-determination theory, supervisor monitoring, well-being

1 | INTRODUCTION

Exciting new working arrangements are emerging in post-pandemic workplaces, namely remote and hybrid work (Robinson, 2021). Employees appear to prefer remote or flexible work over traditional working arrangements, with benefits for productivity, quality of life,

and cost of living (Pelta, 2021). Interestingly, recent survey results also indicate that subordinates do not necessarily feel a need for daily contact with their supervisors (Pelta, 2021). However, prior research suggests that gathering information about subordinate performance and productivity (i.e., monitoring) is an essential supervisory responsibility (Komaki, 1986; Komaki et al., 1989; Mishra & Ghosh, 2020;

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Zhou, 2003). In fact, from the supervisory perspective, monitoring may seem even more important when subordinates work remotely. When supervisors and subordinates no longer work in the same physical spaces, supervisors might tend to monitor their subordinates because of a perceived lack of control (Claggett & Karahanna, 2018; Khazanchi et al., 2018; Pearson & Saunders, 2001; Rockmann & Pratt, 2015). Hence, remote working arrangements¹ create a possible tension between subordinate autonomy and the supervisory need to monitor, particularly when monitoring is introduced suddenly and without explanation, compared to when it has become established over time or planned as an organizational development. We believe that a deeper understanding of how supervisor monitoring influences subordinates in remote working arrangements can contribute not only to an advanced theoretical understanding of supervisor monitoring but also offer important implications for organizations aiming to introduce remote working arrangements.

Supervisor monitoring implies that supervisors gather information about their subordinates, especially about how they progress in their work and whether they achieve set targets (Liao & Chun, 2016). When supervisors monitor their subordinates, they also look for deviations from the norm to ensure that subordinates perform their tasks as expected (Zhou, 2003). These elements of supervisor monitoring can lead to subordinates feeling like they are being controlled and granted less autonomy to do their work (Long & Sitkin, 2018). In line with the most recent view that supervisory behaviors are highly dynamic (McClean et al., 2019) and even vary over short periods of time, such as from day to day (Kelemen et al., 2020; McCormick et al., 2020), we take a dynamic approach to investigating supervisors' daily monitoring and its impact on subordinates' daily outcomes in remote working arrangements.

Drawing on self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Gagné & Deci, 2005), we specifically maintain that supervisor daily monitoring has a negative impact on subordinates' daily felt trust, which in turn affects subordinates' daily well-being. Although monitoring has been described as an efficient way for supervisors to gather information about the performance and productivity of their subordinates (Komaki, 1986; Komaki et al., 1989; Mishra & Ghosh, 2020; Zhou, 2003), in practice, supervisor monitoring can make subordinates feel that their supervisors are “look[ing] over their shoulders” (Liao & Chun, 2016, p. 169). According to SDT, such feelings are likely to impede subordinates' autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2012), which can reduce their feeling of being trusted (i.e., felt trust) on a given day. In line with previous research (e.g., Baer et al., 2015; Haesevoets et al., 2021; Lau et al., 2014; Nerstad et al., 2018), we define subordinate felt trust as the extent to which subordinates—in their role as trustees—feel that their supervisors are willing to be vulnerable to them. Feeling trusted on a given day is a sign of empowerment and a self-determined feeling of having influence over one's work (Baer et al., 2015). In contrast, feeling that one lacks the felt trust of others puts subordinates' perceived safety at risk and can contribute to a

culture of fear (Haesevoets et al., 2021). Accordingly, felt trust is an essential aspect of subordinates' sense of self-determination as it captures feelings of autonomy (Langfred, 2004). According to SDT, feeling autonomous positively predicts well-being. Hence, we assume that experiencing felt trust while working will affect subordinates' well-being in the sense of reducing exhaustion (i.e., “a consequence of intensive physical, affective and cognitive strain,” Demerouti et al., 2010, p. 210) and increased vigor (i.e., the feeling of possessing “physical strength, emotional energy, and cognitive liveliness,” Shraga & Shirom, 2009, p. 272) after work.

Supervisors are likely to monitor their subordinates more on some days than others since the situational contexts in which they interact, including work tasks, situations, and aims, change over time. This is particularly true when new (e.g., remote) working arrangements are introduced, which likely require both supervisors and subordinates to develop new forms of interacting with each other (Wang et al., 2021). Therefore, in addition to the daily level of supervisor monitoring, we maintain that its variability matters for subordinates' felt trust, which we argue moderates the relationship between daily supervisor monitoring and daily felt trust. Integrating uncertainty management theory (UMT) (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002) with the theory of dynamic leader behavior (McClean et al., 2019), we define *supervisor monitoring variability* as the between-person differences in the variability of supervisors' monitoring behavior of subordinates over multiple days. High variability means that supervisor monitoring is high on some days and low on others. When supervisor monitoring variability is high, subordinates will experience uncertainty as they are unable to predict when and to what extent their supervisors will monitor them. In contrast, low variability means that supervisor monitoring remains relatively stable across time and thus easier for subordinates to predict (i.e., either consistently high or low on most days). According to UMT, uncertainty activates people's fairness judgments (e.g., under uncertainty salience; van den Bos, 2001; van den Bos et al., 2005), such that subordinates might perceive supervisor monitoring variability as an injustice. Building on previous research (Johnson et al., 2012; Matta et al., 2017, 2020; Scott et al., 2012), we further argue that the predictive uncertainty of supervisor monitoring variability affects the extent to which monitored subordinates feel that their supervisors do not trust them. When supervisor monitoring variability is low (i.e., stable across days), daily monitoring will be less detrimental to subordinates' daily felt trust and their well-being as it represents a predictable experience. However, when supervisor monitoring variability is high, subordinates will feel that their supervisors may be looking over their shoulder at any point in time. Therefore, supervisor monitoring becomes an even stronger signal of supervisors' lack of trust in them, which could be detrimental to subordinates' daily well-being. In other words, supervisor monitoring variability exacerbates the risks that supervisor monitoring poses to subordinates' well-being. Figure 1 shows our theoretical model.

Drawing on SDT and UMT, the purpose of our work is to investigate how daily supervisor monitoring and monitoring variability interact to influence subordinates' daily felt trust and well-being. With this work, we seek to make several contributions. First, we adopt a within-

¹In this paper, we use the term “remote work arrangements” to also include hybrid work settings where employees work part of the time remotely and part of the time at their workplace.

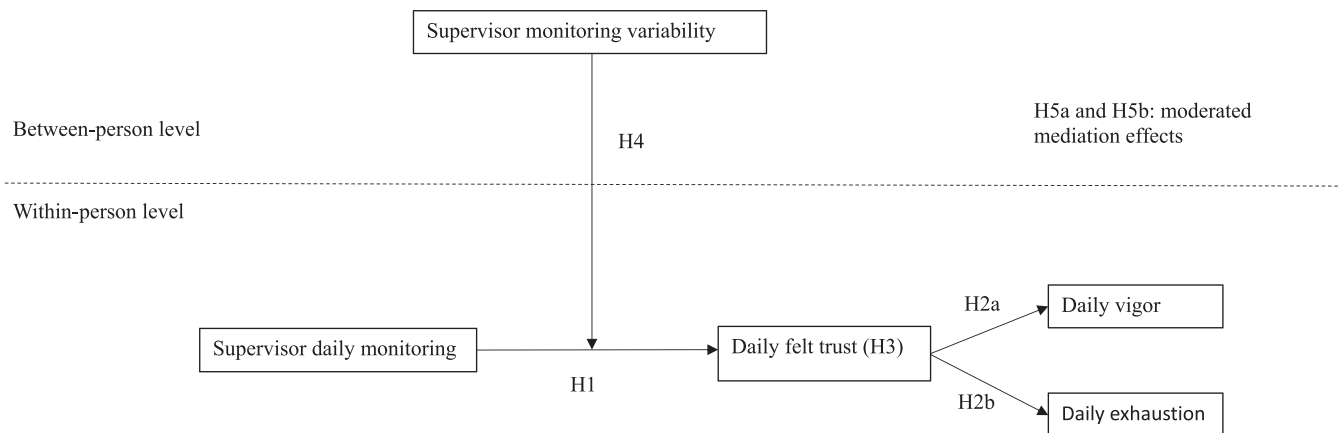


FIGURE 1 Theoretical model.

person perspective to “enhance temporal precision” (McCormick et al., 2020, p. 324) and thereby provide novel insights into the dynamics of supervisor–subordinate relationships. This approach aligns with recent calls for enhanced temporal theorizing and process perspectives in organizational research (Fischer et al., 2017; Kelemen et al., 2020; McClean et al., 2019). The within-person approach enables us to introduce the novel concept of supervisor monitoring variability as a boundary condition with the potential to exacerbate the negative impact of supervisor daily monitoring. Subordinates are sensitive, not only to the extent to which supervisors display negative behaviors but also to the consistency of supervisor behaviors (Johnson et al., 2012). We therefore contribute to the wider literature of supervisor monitoring (e.g., Ogunfowora, 2013; Thau et al., 2009) and leader behavioral dynamics (McClean et al., 2019) by explaining why inconsistency (as opposed to consistency) of negative behaviors is more harmful to subordinates (Schilling et al., 2022).

Second, we examine the role of supervisor monitoring variability in two different contexts. Johns (2006) suggests that context is “a shaper of meaning” (p. 388), and we maintain that context matters for the subordinate's perceptions of supervisor monitoring. Our Study 1 took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, when subordinates and supervisors were forced to suddenly and without planning or preparation, change their work arrangements to work remotely. Remote working was new for supervisors and subordinates alike. In Study 2, we tested the same relationships when both supervisors and subordinates had settled into a context of familiar remote working arrangements. In this way, we emphasize the importance of organizational research on context and how contexts shape supervisor–subordinate interactions (Johns, 2006, 2017, 2018).

Third, studying felt trust inverts the lens of prior research on the links between monitoring and trust (e.g., Long & Sitkin, 2006; Weibel, 2007; Weibel et al., 2016). Felt trust assigns agency to trustees and their perceptions of the trust relationship, here, between subordinates and their supervisors. Previous research has adopted a largely supervisor-centric approach when studying how supervisors monitor their subordinates while maintaining trust (see Long &

Sitkin, 2018). These studies regard the subordinate as the trustor in the relationship. Instead, feeling trusted is a self-determined feeling of having influence over one's work (Baer et al., 2015), and we study it as a mediator (i.e., a sign of autonomy vs. control) from the perspective of SDT.

2 | DEFINING SUPERVISOR MONITORING VARIABILITY

We integrate UMT (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002) with dynamic leader behavior theory (McClean et al., 2019) to develop and test the concept of supervisor monitoring variability. Following our definition above, it reflects the magnitude of fluctuations in subordinates' daily experiences of supervisor monitoring.

According to UMT, people in organizations look for ways to cope with uncertainty in their daily lives, and they do so through fairness signals, a key coping mechanism. Uncertainty is stressful because it elicits feelings of reduced control over one's life (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002). Our conceptualization of supervisor monitoring variability suggests that uncertainty is inherent not only in the context (e.g., work uncertainty; Colquitt et al., 2012) or the self (i.e., self-uncertainty; De Cremer & Sedikides, 2005), but in the supervisor–subordinate relationship as well. Supervisor monitoring variability introduces uncertainty to the extent that supervisor monitoring varies from day to day, which can be perceived as a justice violation. This conceptualization aligns with dynamic leader behavior theory, which refers to the variability or “ebb and flow” in leader behavior over time (McClean et al., 2019). The person-level standard deviation indicates the degree of inconsistency in a leader's behavior (McClean et al., 2019).

When subordinates encounter leader behavior that is unexpected, ambiguous, and/or confusing, a sensemaking process is set in motion to explain the behavior (for a novel conceptual perspective, see Schilling et al., 2022). Subordinates' conclusions about the extent to which their supervisor is willing to be vulnerable to them (i.e., felt

trust) can be one important outcome of this sensemaking process, with downstream implications for subordinates' well-being. That is, although two subordinates may report the same level of “average” supervisor monitoring across workdays, their experiences can vary substantively, depending on the level of (in)consistency in their supervisor's monitoring.

We extend prior research by looking at supervisor monitoring inconsistency (i.e., supervisor monitoring variability) and its implications for leader–follower relationships (i.e., felt trust) and well-being (i.e., vigor and exhaustion) from a day-to-day perspective. We maintain that inconsistency inhibits desirable outcomes (i.e., trusting relationships and well-being) because it fuels the degree to which subordinates feel uncertain about their relationship with the supervisor in that they feel less trusted on a given day. In fact, trust in organizational relationships represents a counterpoint to uncertainty according to Kramer (2001), who argued that social uncertainty (i.e., a lack of subjective confidence and ambiguity as to where one stands in the social order of an organization) can disrupt trusting supervisory and coworker relationships. Thus, applying our new conceptualization of supervisor monitoring variability, we examine not only whether daily supervisor monitoring is negatively associated with subordinates' daily felt trust from the perspective of SDT but also whether the between-person variability of monitoring further increases the strength of the daily relationship between supervisor monitoring and felt trust, as well as downstream implications for daily well-being (i.e., vigor and exhaustion after work) from the perspective of UMT.

3 | HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

3.1 | SDT and subordinates' felt trust

Subordinates' felt trust refers to the perception that supervisors are willing to be vulnerable to their actions by taking risks, for example, delegating an important task to them (Lau et al., 2014; Mayer et al., 1995). Subordinates who feel trusted experience influence over and autonomy in doing their work (Brower et al., 2008). They feel empowered (Gill et al., 2019) and that they have a voice in the organization (Nerstad et al., 2018). SDT highlights the importance of feeling autonomous (i.e., “acting with a sense of volition and having the experience of choice”) versus feeling controlled (i.e., “acting with a sense of pressure, a sense of having to engage in actions”), the former of which is essential for well-being (Gagné & Deci, 2005, p. 334; Deci & Ryan, 2012). Going beyond previous approaches in which felt trust is described as a process of social exchange (Baer et al., 2015; Zheng et al., 2019) or empowerment (Gill et al., 2019), we conceptualize felt trust as an aspect of subordinates' self-determination, capturing feelings of autonomy (i.e., the ability to initiate and regulate actions at work). As trust perceptions are momentary and episodic (Baer et al., 2018, 2022), we argue that felt trust varies over short periods of time and can be put at risk momentarily when supervisors monitor their subordinates on a given day.

3.2 | Supervisors' daily monitoring and subordinates' daily felt trust

We expect that supervisor daily monitoring negatively affects subordinates' daily felt trust because it undermines their feeling that their supervisors trust them to do their current work well. Monitoring signals to subordinates that their supervisors “want to limit their autonomy” (Long & Sitkin, 2018, p. 733). For example, a series of experiments demonstrated that including supervisors in cc in email exchanges between coworkers indicates supervisory monitoring and control, in turn resulting in low levels of subordinate felt trust (Haesevoets et al., 2021). Moreover, supervisor monitoring restricts subordinates so that they work with limited flexibility and little ability to act on their own initiative (George & Zhou, 2001). Supervisor monitoring can be seen as a manifestation of micromanagement that “takes away the decisions” from subordinates (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003, p. 973), which has been found to be associated with counterproductive subordinate behaviors (Holtz & Harold, 2013). Finally, in line with UMT, subordinates may feel that being monitored by their supervisors is a justice violation. Research maintains that electronic monitoring affects subordinates' procedural justice perceptions negatively when they are monitored upon request of their supervisors rather than due to a general organizational policy; Zweig & Scott, 2007). In sum, supervisor monitoring puts subordinates' felt trust at risk. Therefore, we argue that daily monitoring by supervisors is negatively related to felt trust on the same day.

Hypothesis 1. Supervisors' daily monitoring is negatively related to subordinates' daily felt trust.

3.3 | Subordinates' daily felt trust and daily well-being

Based on SDT, we argue that daily felt trust (i.e., being autonomous at work) benefits subordinates' well-being because it allows them to complete their tasks on a given day with a sense of enjoyment and drive (Deci et al., 1994; Deci & Ryan, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, feeling trusted can result in feeling energetic and lively at the end of the working day, which is captured in the concept of vigor (Shraga & Shirom, 2009). In contrast, when daily felt trust is low (i.e., subordinates feel controlled), subordinates act out of a sense of duty or even of fear of being punished if they do not comply with supervisory expectations (Deci et al., 1994). Feelings of being controlled and a sense of duty cause stress and exhaustion (Fernet et al., 2004). Prior research reveals that daily mistrust from coworkers results in exhaustion and subsequent withdrawal from work (Lanaj et al., 2018). Our arguments are also supported by prior research which demonstrates that positive relationships at work, which are in part characterized by trust between the supervisor and the subordinate (Settoon et al., 1996), facilitate the vigor (Shirom, 2007) and diminish the exhaustion that subordinates feel due to their work

(Schermuly & Meyer, 2016). In sum, when subordinates feel trusted, they are more likely to feel vigorous and less likely to feel exhausted after work.

Hypothesis 2. Subordinates' daily felt trust is (a) positively related to daily vigor and (b) negatively related to daily exhaustion.

Integrating the above arguments, we expect that daily monitoring by supervisors is negatively related to subordinates' daily vigor and positively related to their daily exhaustion via subordinates' daily felt trust.

Hypothesis 3. Subordinates' daily felt trust mediates the relationships between supervisor daily monitoring and subordinates' daily (a) vigor and (b) exhaustion.

3.4 | UMT and supervisor monitoring variability

Supervisor monitoring variability captures the extent to which supervisor monitoring varies from day to day. When supervisor monitoring varies greatly, subordinates have few means to predict whether or not their supervisor is going to monitor them on any given day, which is likely to elicit feelings of uncertainty. Research in line with UMT shows that feelings of uncertainty are often experienced as aversive (Van den Bos, 2009): people typically seek to reduce feelings of uncertainty about themselves and their social environments (e.g., social uncertainty; Kramer, 2001). Fairness judgments are one key response to experiencing uncertainty (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002). Thus, one reason why variability perhaps fuels the negative downstream consequences of daily supervisor monitoring behavior may be because subordinates feel unfairly treated.

Integrating UMT with SDT, we argue that supervisor monitoring variability strengthens the negative relationship between supervisors' monitoring behavior and subordinates' felt trust on a day-to-day basis because it elicits momentary feelings of uncertainty and impedes autonomy (i.e., how subordinates go about their workday). Variability makes the daily supervisor monitoring less predictable, creating uncertainty in the supervisor-subordinate relationship (i.e., not knowing whether and if so when one's supervisor will "check in").

Specifically, when subordinates can only "act with a sense of volition" (Gagné & Deci, 2005, p. 334) on some days but not on other days, they are less likely to feel autonomous. In addition, feeling controlled on some days but not on other days can strengthen subordinates' "acting with a sense of pressure" (Gagné & Deci, 2005, p. 334) because they may fear their supervisor will monitor them at any point in time. This experience chimes in with novel theories of inconsistent leader behavior (Schilling et al., 2022). When subordinates encounter leader behavior that is unexpected, ambiguous, and/or confusing, they try to make sense of it and in the case of supervisor monitoring, may conclude that their supervisor lacks trust in them, especially when monitoring occurs unpredictably.

Our reasoning thus aligns with the assumption that "uncertainty makes unpleasant events more unpleasant" (Bar-Anan et al., 2009, p. 123). Prior research indicates that negative supervisor treatment in uncertain situations has a stronger negative impact on subordinates. For example, Thau et al. (2009) found that the impact of abusive supervision on subordinates' workplace deviance was stronger when subordinates' uncertainty perceptions were high than when they were low. Similarly, in an experimental study, Tangirala and Alge (2006) found that individuals perceive unfair events to be more harmful amidst uncertainty than certainty. While these studies focus on uncertainty as inherent in the context (e.g., work uncertainty; Colquitt et al., 2012) or the self (i.e., self-uncertainty; De Cremer & Sedikides, 2005), our conceptualization of supervisor monitoring variability implies that uncertainty is inherent in the supervisor-subordinate relationship. Daily supervisor monitoring is typically considered a negative and unpleasant event (Morgeson et al., 2015). Moreover, when supervisor monitoring is less predictable because of high variability across days, subordinates are likely to experience daily monitoring as a stronger threat to their autonomy, putting their felt trust at risk. In contrast, when supervisors monitor but do so similarly on most days, their subordinates are better able to predict and cope with daily experiences of monitoring.

Hence, we suggest that higher levels of supervisor monitoring variability will further strengthen the extent to which daily monitoring affects subordinates felt trust.

Hypothesis 4. Supervisor monitoring variability moderates the relationship between supervisors' daily monitoring and subordinates' daily felt trust, such that the negative relationship will be stronger when the variability is high than when it is low.

In sum, we expect that monitoring variability moderates the indirect effect of supervisor daily monitoring on subordinates' well-being. That is, when supervisor monitoring variability is high, supervisor daily monitoring has a stronger impact on subordinates' vigor (negative) and exhaustion (positive) through their daily felt trust.

Hypothesis 5. Supervisor monitoring variability moderates the indirect effect of supervisor daily monitoring on subordinates' (a) vigor and (b) exhaustion via felt trust, so that the indirect effect will be stronger when the variability is high than when it is low.

4 | OVERVIEW OF THE STUDIES

We conducted two studies using experience sampling method (ESM) to examine our theoretical model in two contexts. Study 1 was conducted during the first outbreak of COVID-19 and the first lockdown in the United Kingdom (UK) in May 2020, when the majority of employees were required by law to change their working arrangements to remote work. The legal requirement to work from home

meant a sudden change in their working environments, and many employees were new to remote or hybrid working arrangements. Working from home increases the spatial distance between subordinates and supervisors, reduces their face-to-face contact, and opportunities for informal information exchanges, all of which contribute to trust (Khazanchi et al., 2018). At the same time, working from home can increase supervisors' need to control their subordinates. Study 2 was conducted almost 2 years later in February 2022, when all lockdown measures had been lifted in the UK. At this time, organizations and their employees were no longer new to remote work arrangements. Therefore, compared to the context of Study 1, Study 2 provided a context in which supervisors and subordinates still experienced remote work, but in a more stable setting. Therefore, the purpose of Study 2 was to examine whether our hypothesized relationships would be replicated in a context in which both supervisors and subordinates experienced increased stability.

5 | STUDY 1

5.1 | Method

5.1.1 | Participants and procedure

We collected experience sampling data from employees via the Prolific professional online platform (Palan & Schitter, 2018; Peer et al., 2017). We selected Prolific's designated COVID-19 sample to include participants who were working at least part-time from home due to the pandemic. In addition, the participants included in the study also needed to (1) be employed for a minimum of 20 h a week and (2) interact with their supervisors several times a week. Data collection took place over 3 weeks, comprising an initial baseline survey in week one, and daily surveys in weeks two and three. The baseline survey (approximately 10 min) assessed between-person differences in our study variables (i.e., perceived supervisor monitoring, felt trust, exhaustion, and vigor), control variables, and socio-demographics. The daily surveys (approximately 2–3 min) assessed subordinates' daily perceptions of supervisor monitoring, their daily felt trust, and their vigor and exhaustion at the end of the working day. The daily surveys were sent from Monday to Friday at 5 PM and were to be completed before 2 AM the next day. The period of 10 working days was chosen based on ESM research standards (Fisher & To, 2012; Gabriel et al., 2020; Ohly et al., 2010). We reimbursed the participants separately for each survey (£2/\$2.50 for the baseline survey, £0.50/\$0.60 for each daily survey) and gave an additional bonus of £2 (\$2.50) to participants who completed a minimum of eight daily surveys.

Of the 200 participants that completed the baseline survey, 196 participants (1,838 data points with a daily response rate of 91.8%) answered the daily surveys. We excluded participants with missing data on two or more consecutive working days in order to assess changes from the previous day in our endogenous variables (Beal, 2015; Gabriel et al., 2020). This resulted in a final sample of 191 participants with 1,417 daily surveys.

The participants in our sample worked in various industries (e.g., healthcare, education, finance, government, and retail), 55% were female, and their average age was 36.9 years ($SD = 10.10$ years; 10 missing). In terms of education, 26.7% had obtained postgraduate degrees, 49.7% had bachelor's degrees, 18.8% had A levels, and 4.7% had GCSEs. The average organizational tenure was 7.21 years ($SD = 6.54$), and the average relational tenure with the supervisor was 3.88 years ($SD = 4.01$ years). The participants indicated that since the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown, they had worked from home for 90.48% ($SD = 18.76$) of their working time. They interacted with their supervisors (before vs. after the lockdown) multiple times every day (57.1% vs. 27.7%), once a day (15.2% vs. 28.3%), or 2–4 times a week (22.5% vs. 30.9%). They indicated that they typically communicated with their supervisors via the following means: videoconferencing (64.4%), phone (60.2%), messenger services (e.g., WhatsApp, 51.3%), and messenger boards (e.g., Microsoft Teams, 35.6%).

5.1.2 | Measurement

We followed recommendations (Fisher & To, 2012; Gabriel et al., 2018; Ohly et al., 2010) and prior research (e.g., Koopman et al., 2016) to employ appropriate measures for two to four items in our daily assessments. We selected items from existing scales based on three criteria: coverage of the construct domain, appropriateness for daily assessment, and original factor loadings. The full-length scales in the baseline survey had good reliabilities (supervisor monitoring: $\alpha = .80$, felt trust: $\alpha = .88$, exhaustion: $\alpha = .85$, vigor: $\alpha = .94$) and were highly correlated with their shortened versions for the daily surveys (monitoring: $r = .85$; felt trust: $r = .90$; exhaustion: $r = .87$; vigor: $r = .84$; all $p < .001$), which supported the validity of our daily measures. We further calculated Cronbach's alpha and Spearman–Brown coefficients (for two-item measures; Eisinga et al., 2013) to estimate the reliability for each individual day and averaged over all the days. Unless otherwise stated, the participants provided their ratings on seven-point Likert scales, ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree*.

Supervisor monitoring

We assessed subordinates' daily perceptions of supervisor monitoring using two items from the close monitoring scale in George and Zhou (2001). The items were adapted to the day level: “Today, I felt like my manager was looking over my shoulder” and “Today, my manager kept pretty close tabs on me.” The average Spearman–Brown coefficient was .87, ranging from .79 to .93.

Supervisor monitoring variability

We operationalized supervisor monitoring variability by computing the standard deviation of each subordinate's daily perceptions of supervisor monitoring over a period of 10 working days (Johnson et al., 2012; Matta et al., 2017, 2020). High standard deviation indicates that supervisors showed a high degree of variability in their monitoring, while low standard deviation indicates that supervisors showed a similar degree of monitoring over the 10-working-day period.

Felt trust

We measured subordinates' daily felt trust using four items from previous studies (Mayer & Davis, 1999; Scott et al., 2013; Zaheer et al., 1998), which we adapted to the day level: "I feel that my manager trusted me today," "Today, my manager let me have significant influence over how I do my job," "Today, my manager did not count on me (reversed)," and "I feel that my manager did not trust me today (reversed)." The average Cronbach's alpha was .83, ranging from .75 to .86 between days.

Exhaustion

We measured subordinates' exhaustion after work using two items from Demerouti et al. (2010): "Right now after work, I feel emotionally drained" and "Right now after work, I feel worn out and weary." The average Spearman–Brown coefficient was .89, ranging from .85 to .92 between days.

Vigor

We measured subordinates' vigor after work using two items from Shirom (2007): "Right now, after work, I feel full of vigor" and "Right now, after work, I feel full of energy." The average Spearman–Brown coefficient was .92, ranging from .91 to .94 between days.

Control variables

We introduced theoretically derived control variables to reduce reverse-causality concerns and the likelihood of alternative explanations and also assess changes from day to day (Lanaj et al., 2021). At the within-person level, we controlled for (a) spurious effects due to time via the study day (i.e., Day 1 to Day 10; Beal & Weiss, 2003; Gabriel et al., 2019), (b) effects of supervisor-driven contact frequency on feelings of being trusted (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002; Heide & Miner, 1992) via the number of times participants were contacted by their supervisors (i.e., "Today, how many times did your manager contact you?"), and (c) the previous day's assessment of our mediator (felt trust) and dependent variables (vigor and exhaustion).²

At the between-person level, we controlled for differences between the participants in our mediator and dependent variables. These differences were assessed via the full scales in the baseline survey: subordinate felt trust ($\alpha = .88$, six items from Mayer & Davis, 1999; Scott et al., 2013), vigor ($\alpha = .94$, 14 items from Shirom, 2007) and exhaustion ($\alpha = .85$, eight items from Demerouti et al., 2010). To rule out influences that were unrelated to supervisor monitoring but may have affected participants' felt trust and well-being during the pandemic, we controlled for the perceived impact of COVID-19 ($\alpha = .86$; 3 items: impact on the organization, on the work group, and on the participant, rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *no impact at all* to (5) *very high impact*).

²We calculated an alternative model without the assessments of the endogenous variables (i.e., daily felt trust and daily exhaustion and vigor) for the previous days, but the pattern of the results remained unchanged.

Analytical strategy

Prior to testing our hypotheses by specifying a two-level path model in Mplus 8.6 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2021), we conducted a multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with the MLR estimator to ensure the distinctiveness of our focal variables at day level. We person-mean centered our daily variable items (i.e., supervisor monitoring, felt trust, vigor, and exhaustion) and modeled them as four distinct factors with the items loading on their respective factors. The results for this model indicated an acceptable fit ($\chi^2 [29, 191] = 69.68, p < .001, CFI = .99, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .03, SRMR_{within} = .03$) and a better fit compared to a three-factor model in which we combined vigor and exhaustion (reverse-coded) into one factor ($\chi^2 (32, 191) = 236.50, p < .001, CFI = .92, TLI = .88, RMSEA = .07, SRMR_{within} = .04, \chi^2_{diff}(3) = 264.75, p < .001$).

For our multilevel modeling, we centered the Level 1 (L1, i.e., day level) predictors and control variables at the person mean (group-mean centering) and Level 2 (L2, i.e., person level) variables at the grand mean (Gabriel et al., 2019; Hofmann et al., 2000; Ohly et al., 2010) to eliminate between-person confounds and increase the interpretation of the parameters. We did not mean-center the mediator or dependent variables. We modeled all the within-person effects with random slopes, and the control variables with fixed slopes to reduce model complexity (Lanaj et al., 2021). To examine the cross-level interaction effects proposed in Hypotheses 4 and 5, we regressed the L1 random slopes of daily supervisor monitoring and daily felt trust items on the L2 moderator supervisor monitoring variability, while controlling for the L2 person-mean of supervisor monitoring (Zhang et al., 2009). We tested the significance of the indirect effects using a Monte Carlo bootstrap simulation with 20,000 replications and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) around the conditional indirect effects at high and low levels (± 1 SD) of the moderator in R (Preacher & Selig, 2012).

6 | RESULTS

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlations. We examined the proportion of within-person variance of the daily variables by partitioning the total variance into components at the within- and between-person levels (ICCs). All the study variables varied considerably from day to day (the amount of variance attributed to within-person differences: 60% for supervisor monitoring, 44% for felt trust, 56% for vigor, and 57% for exhaustion).

Table 2 reports the results of our multilevel path analysis, and Table 3 reports the findings for the indirect and conditional indirect effects.

Hypothesis 1 predicted daily supervisor monitoring to be negatively related to the subordinates' daily felt trust. In line with this hypothesis, our findings showed that on days when subordinates experienced more monitoring by their supervisors, they felt less trusted ($\gamma = -.23, p < .001$).

TABLE 1 Means, standard deviations, and correlations of variables in Study 1.

	M	SD (between)	SD (within)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Between-person measures														
1	4.17	0.81	(.86)											
2	4.24	0.72	(.88)	-.06										
3	2.78	0.75	(.85)	.17*	-.40**									
4	3.08	0.75	(.94)	-.01	.35**	-.69**								
5	0.79	0.59		.13	-.33**	.21**	-.09							
Within-person measures														
6	5.98	0.68	2.74	.14	-.01	.02	-.05	.13	—	-.06*	.01	.03	-.06*	.07**
7	1.00	0.64	1.01	.08	-.08	.03	-.05	.14*	.07	—	.30**	.00	.12**	-.10**
8	2.02	0.92	1.31	.06	-.51**	.25**	-.21**	.67**	.08	.30**	(.87)	-.58**	.31**	-.18**
9	5.90	0.85	1.08	.01	.63**	-.32**	.33**	-.46**	-.01	-.07	-.71**	(.83)	-.28**	.20**
10	3.41	1.21	1.67	.17*	-.32**	.57**	-.42**	.26**	.02	.15*	.34**	-.33**	(.89)	-.76**
11	3.86	1.11	1.52	-.09	.24**	-.46**	.45**	-.13	.01	-.16*	-.21**	.23**	-.80**	(.92)

Notes: Level 1 $n = 1,417$; Level 2 $n = 191$. Correlations are based on raw scores. Correlations at the between-person level are reported below the diagonal; correlations at the within-person level are reported above the diagonal. For the reported between-person level correlations of our within-person measures we aggregated the scores to the person level. Supervisors' contact behavior is coded as 0 = not at all, 1 = once, 2 = twice, 3 = three times, and 4 = more than three times. Reliabilities are indicated in the diagonal in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$;

** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

TABLE 2 Non-standardized coefficients in the multilevel path analysis in Study 1

	Felt trust		Exhaustion		Vigor	
	γ	SE	γ	SE	γ	SE
Constant	5.81***	.06	5.09***	.43	2.73***	0.39
Within-person variables						
Study day (1 to 10)	.01 [†]	.01	-.04*	.01	0.04**	0.01
Prior day felt trust ($t - 1$)	-.03	.04				
Prior day exhaustion ($t - 1$)			-.03	.03		
Prior day vigor ($t - 1$)					-0.02	0.03
Supervisor's daily contact behavior	.20***	.03	.04	.05	-0.03	0.04
Supervisor's daily monitoring	-.23***	.04	.23***	.05	-0.11*	0.04
Daily felt trust			-.25***	.07	0.15*	0.06
Between-person variables						
COVID-19 impact	.06	.05	.15	.09	-0.11	0.10
Felt trust	.44***	.09				
Exhaustion			.62***	.09		
Vigor					0.50***	0.08
Supervisor monitoring mean across days	-.49***	.09				
Supervisor monitoring variability	.00	.11				
Cross-level interactions						
Supervisor daily monitoring (L1) \times monitoring mean (L2)	.04	.05				
Supervisor daily monitoring (L1) \times monitoring variability (L2)	-.21**	.07				
Residual variances within	.32***	.03	1.42***	.09	1.24***	0.07
Residual variances between	.25***	.05	1.15	.78	0.60***	0.07

Note: The sample size for the multilevel path analysis is $N = 191$ (1,417 data points).

*** $p < 0.001$;

** $p < 0.01$;

* $p < 0.05$;

[†] $p < 0.10$.

TABLE 3 Study 1 indirect and Total effects and conditional indirect and total effects

	Indirect			Total		
	Estimate	SE	95% CI	Estimate	SE	95% CI
Supervisor monitoring \rightarrow felt trust \rightarrow exhaustion	.05	.02	[.0075, .1020]	.28	.04	[.1756, .3883]
Low monitoring variability	.02	.02	[-.0201, .0668]	.25	.05	[.1454, .3544]
High monitoring variability	.08	.03	[.0246, .1504]	.31	.05	[.1997, .4275]
Supervisor monitoring \rightarrow felt trust \rightarrow vigor	-.03	.02	[-.0730, .0071]	-.14	.04	[-.2330, -.0472]
Low monitoring variability	-.01	.02	[-.0484, .0192]	-.12	.04	[-.2100, -.0307]
High monitoring variability	-.05	.02	[-.1063, -.0001]	-.16	.04	[-.2586, -.0595]

Note: Bias-corrected indirect effects and conditional indirect effects. CIs are calculated based on a Monte Carlo bootstrap simulation with 20,000 replications.

Abbreviation: CI, confidence interval.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that daily felt trust would be (H2a) positively related to vigor and (H2b) negatively to exhaustion. Our findings showed that the more subordinates felt trusted on a given day, the more vigorous ($\gamma = .15$, $p < .05$) and less exhausted

($\gamma = -.25$, $p < .01$) they felt at the end of the day. Thus, the findings supported Hypotheses 2a and 2b.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the relationship between daily supervisor monitoring and subordinate (H3a) vigor and (H3b)

exhaustion would be mediated by subordinate felt trust. Contrary to our expectations, the findings showed that subordinate felt trust did not mediate the relationship between daily supervisor monitoring and vigor (estimate = $-.03$, 95% CI [$-.0730$, $.0071$]). However, in line with Hypothesis 3b, felt trust mediated the relationship between daily supervisor monitoring and exhaustion (estimate = $.05$, 95% CI [$.0075$, $.1020$]). Therefore, the results supported Hypothesis 3b but not Hypothesis 3a.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that supervisor monitoring variability would moderate the relationship between daily monitoring and felt trust so that there would be a stronger negative relationship when supervisor monitoring variability is higher (vs. lower). In support of Hypothesis 4, we found a significant cross-level moderation effect ($\gamma = -.21$, $p < .01$) in the proposed direction (Figure 2). When monitoring variability was higher (+1 SD, simple slope = $-.36$, $p < .001$), a negative relationship between supervisor daily monitoring and subordinate daily felt trust was present but not when it was lower (-1 SD, simple slope = $-.11$, $p = .13$, difference estimate = $-.25$, $p < .01$). Therefore, our findings supported Hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that supervisor monitoring variability would moderate the indirect effect of daily monitoring via felt trust on (a) vigor and (b) exhaustion, so that for supervisors with higher (vs. lower) monitoring variability, the indirect relationships would be stronger. Table 3 presents the results. Our findings only confirmed that when supervisor monitoring variability was higher (+1 SD: $-.05$, 95%CI [$-.1063$, $-.0001$]), there was a negative indirect effect of daily monitoring on vigor via felt trust but not when supervisor monitoring variability was lower (-1 SD: $-.01$, 95%CI [$-.0484$, $.0192$]). The difference between these indirect effects was significant (estimate = $-.038$, 95%CI [$-.0837$, $-.0051$]). Similarly, the positive indirect effect of daily monitoring on exhaustion via felt trust was stronger when supervisor monitoring variability was higher (+1 SD: $.08$, 95% CI [$.0246$, $.1504$]) than when it was lower (-1 SD: $.02$, 95% CI [$-.0201$, $.0668$]). The difference between these indirect effects was significant (estimate = $.06$, 95%CI [$.0181$, $.1239$]). Therefore, the results supported both Hypotheses 5a and 5b.

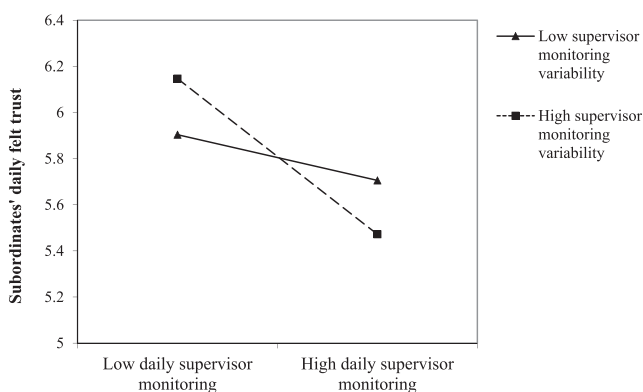


FIGURE 2 Cross-level moderating effect of variability in supervisor monitoring on the relationship between daily supervisor monitoring and subordinate daily felt trust.

7 | STUDY 2

7.1 | Method

The data collection for Study 2 took place in February and March 2022. We collected data from employees in the UK via Prolific Academic and applied the same inclusion criteria as in Study 1 (a minimum of 20 working hours/week, working remotely at least part-time, and interaction with the supervisor several times a week). The main difference between our two study samples was that in Study 1, remote working due to COVID-19 was a novel situation for employees. In Study 2, though the employees still worked remotely part of the time, the condition was no longer legally enforced and had become part of the regular work pattern.

7.1.1 | Participants and procedure

We followed the same procedure as in Study 1, except that we collected data over 4 weeks rather than 3 in order to collect more data points. The baseline survey (approximately 10 min) assessed the same measures as in Study 1, plus additional ones to compare the effect of supervisor monitoring variability on established uncertainty measures (i.e., work uncertainty, management uncertainty). The daily surveys assessed the same variables as in Study 1 and were again sent out at 5 PM, Monday to Friday, to be completed by 2 AM the next day. The participants were separately reimbursed for each survey (£2/\$2.50 for the baseline survey, £0.50/\$0.60 for each daily survey) and earned an additional bonus of £2 (\$2.50) when they completed a minimum of eight daily surveys.

The 275 participants (3,211 data points, a daily response rate of 76.2%) completed our baseline survey and answered our daily surveys. We excluded a total of 41 data points in which the participants indicated that they or their supervisors were absent from work (e.g., due to annual leave or sickness). In our analysis, we included participants with a minimum of two completed consecutive working days as a precondition to include prior day assessments in our analyses. This resulted in a final sample of 257 participants with 2,244 data points.

The participants in our final sample were 52.5% male (47.5% female) and came from various industries (e.g., healthcare, higher education, and government). Regarding education, 25.8% had obtained postgraduate degrees, 42.1% had bachelor's degrees, 25.8% had A levels, and 10% had GCSEs. The participants had worked for their organizations on average for 6.95 years ($SD = 6.40$) and with their supervisors for 3.61 years ($SD = 3.89$ years). The participants generally interacted with their supervisors several times a day (48.6%), once a day (18.3%), two to four times a week (30%), once a week (2.7%), or less than once a week (0.4%). The participants indicated communicating with their supervisors by email (64.4%), face to face (59.1%), videoconferencing (47.9%), messenger services (e.g., WhatsApp, 42%), phone (41.2%), and messenger boards (e.g., Microsoft Teams, 41.2%). The participants stated that

prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, on average, they worked remotely 13.81% ($SD = 28.56$) of their working time; during the lockdown periods, they worked remotely 65.91% ($SD = 43.17$) of their working time; and at the time of the study, they spent 46% ($SD = 40.70$) of their working time working remotely.

7.2 | Measurement and analysis

We used the same measures and control variables as in Study 1. For our daily study variables, the average reliabilities based on the Spearman-Brown formula were .91 (.85 to .97) for supervisor monitoring, .86 (.82 to .90) for exhaustion, and .90 (.84 to .93) for vigor. The average Cronbach's alpha for daily felt trust was .80 (.74 to .84). The control variables at the within-person level were study day (coded 1 to 15), frequency of contact with the supervisor, the previous day's assessment of our mediator, and dependent variables. The control variables at the between-person level were: the subordinates' general levels of felt trust ($\alpha = .80$), vigor ($\alpha = .92$), exhaustion ($\alpha = .83$), and perception of the impact of COVID-19 ($\alpha = .89$). As in Study 1, supervisor monitoring variability was calculated using the standard deviation of each subordinate's person-level daily perceptions of supervisor monitoring over the 15-day working period.³

We followed the same analytical approach as in Study 1. The results of our multilevel CFA with four distinct factors at the daily level (i.e., supervisor monitoring, felt trust, vigor, and exhaustion) indicated a good fit: $\chi^2(29, 257) = 260.21, p < .001, CFI = .94, TLI = .90, RMSEA = .06, SRMR_{within} = .04$; they indicated a significantly better fit compared to a three-factor solution in which we combined daily vigor and exhaustion (reverse-scored) into one factor: $\chi^2(32, 257) = 388.66, p < .001, CFI = .90, TLI = .87, RMSEA = .07, SRMR_{within} = .04, \chi^2_{diff}(3) = 140.27, p < .001$.

7.3 | Results

We present the descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlations in Table 4.

ICCs indicated a high amount of variance in all daily variables due to within-person differences: 72.6% in supervisor monitoring, 51.1% in felt trust, 63.7% in vigor, and 61.4% in exhaustion.

Our results supported Hypothesis 1 by showing that on days when subordinates perceived higher supervisor monitoring, they felt less trusted ($\gamma = -.31, p < .001$). The findings further supported Hypotheses 2a and 2b by showing that the more subordinates felt

trusted on a given day, the more vigorous ($\gamma = .09, p < .05$) and less exhausted ($\gamma = -.14, p < .01$) they felt at the end of the working day. Regarding the proposed mediators (Hypotheses 3a and 3b), we found that felt trust mediated the relationship between daily supervisor monitoring and exhaustion (estimate = .05, 95% CI [.0034, .0955]) and the relationship between daily supervisor monitoring and vigor (estimate = -.04, 95% CI [-.0749, -.0005]). Therefore, the findings supported Hypotheses 3a and 3b.

Our results did not support the proposed cross-level moderation (Hypothesis 4) of supervisor monitoring variability in the relationship between daily supervisor monitoring and subordinate daily felt trust ($\gamma = -.04, p = .53$) or the moderated indirect effects (Hypothesis 5). There was no significant difference in the indirect effects of daily supervisor monitoring on vigor (+1 SD: -.04, 95% CI [-.0801, -.0009]; -1 SD: -.04, 95% CI [-.0728, .0001]; difference: .00, 95% CI [-.0211, .0093]) or exhaustion (+1 SD: .05, 95% CI [.0044, .1015]; -1 SD: .05, 95% CI [.0015, .0922]; difference: .00, 95% CI [-.0132, .0285]) via felt trust for higher versus lower supervisor monitoring variability. Tables 5 and 6 present the results of our multilevel path analysis and conditional indirect effects.

8 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Remote work has become a strong trend in the post-pandemic era but it is not without difficulties. Our research employed SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Gagné & Deci, 2005) and UMT (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002) to delineate the new concept of supervisor monitoring variability and determine the extent to which daily dynamics of supervisor monitoring can put subordinates' well-being at risk. We conducted two studies to investigate daily monitoring and felt trust dynamics between supervisors and subordinates and their implications for subordinates' well-being in different contexts: a) an early-pandemic sample of employees new to remote work due to the lockdown requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic (Study 1) and b) a post-pandemic employee sample that still worked remotely to a certain extent but not due to the immediate impact of the pandemic (Study 2). In both studies, we found that on each given day, subordinates who felt monitored also felt less trusted, which increased exhaustion and reduced vigor. Going beyond prior research on the role that a lack of felt trust plays in well-being in organizations (Lanaj et al., 2018) and the risk that supervisor monitoring poses to subordinates' felt trust (Haesevoets et al., 2021), our findings provide new evidence that supervisor monitoring can harm subordinates' felt trust and subsequently puts their well-being at risk on a day-to-day basis. We also developed and tested a novel concept that represents a further exacerbating factor: the extent to which supervisor monitoring varied across days further amplified the negative impact of daily monitoring on subordinate felt trust. However, this effect was only supported in Study 1, where the participants had experienced a change to new remote working arrangements but not in Study 2, where these working arrangements had become familiar for employees.

³Following advice from an anonymous reviewer to compare the effect of supervisor monitoring variability on established uncertainty measurements, we assessed the participants' perceptions of management style uncertainty ($\alpha = .76$; three items from Thau et al., 2009) and general work uncertainty ($\alpha = .90$; four items from Colquitt et al., 2012) at between-person level. These uncertainty-related variables at work were unrelated to supervisor monitoring variability (management style uncertainty: $r = -.09, p = .13$; work uncertainty: $r = -.11, p = .07$), providing evidence for supervisor monitoring variability being unique. Including these two variables either as covariates or additional moderators (adding them in the same model or considering them in two separate models) did not change the conclusions we drew from our findings.

TABLE 4 Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations in Study 2

	M	SD (between)	SD (within)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Between-person measures														
1 COVID-19 impact	3.63	1.00	(.89)											
2 Felt trust	4.31	0.55	(.80)	.00										
3 Exhaustion	2.95	0.69	(.83)	.23**	-.28**									
4 Vigor	2.98	0.69	(.92)	.00	.32**	-.63**								
5 Monitoring variability	0.90	0.57		.07**	-.31**	.13**	.00							
Within-person measures														
6 Study day	8.40	1.10	4.26	.03	.04	-.05*	.04	-.02	—	.00	.02	.02	.02	.00
7 Supervisor contact behavior	1.10	0.75	1.20	.08**	.01	-.04	.09**	.22**	.02	—	.33**	.04*	.05*	-.04
8 Supervisor monitoring	1.88	0.74	1.26	.12**	-.40**	.16**	-.01**	.75**	-.03	.24**	(.91)	-.48**	.20**	-.14**
9 Felt trust	5.78	0.81	1.09	-.07**	.54**	-.26**	.21**	-.48**	.07**	.07**	-.61**	(.80)	-.19**	.17**
10 Exhaustion	3.76	1.07	1.59	.10**	-.14**	.56**	-.40**	.12**	.03	-.03	.17**	-.24**	(.86)	-.74**
11 Vigor	3.71	0.97	1.47	-.02	.17**	-.50**	.50**	-.01	-.05*	.09**	-.04	.20**	-.78**	(.90)

Note: Level 1 $n = 2,244$; Level 2 $n = 257$. Correlations are based on raw scores. Correlations at the between-person level are reported below the diagonal, and correlations at the within-person level are reported above the diagonal. For the reported between-person level correlations of our within-person measures, we aggregated the scores to the person level. Supervisors' contact behavior is coded as 0 = not at all, 1 = once, 2 = twice, 3 = three times, and 4 = more than three times. Reliabilities are indicated in the diagonal in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$;

** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

TABLE 5 Study 2 non-standardized coefficients in the multilevel path analysis

	Felt trust		Exhaustion		Vigor	
	γ	SE	γ	SE	γ	SE
Constant	5.73***	.05	4.49***	.31	3.17***	.27
Within-person variables						
Study day (1 to 15)	.00	.00	.01	.01	.00	.01
Prior day felt trust ($t - 1$)	.01	.03				
Prior day exhaustion ($t - 1$)			.04 [†]	.03		
Prior day vigor ($t - 1$)					.05	.03
Supervisor daily contact behavior	.14***	.02	.07*	.03	-.08*	.01
Supervisor daily monitoring	-.31***	.03	.17***	.04	-.15***	.04
Daily felt trust			-.14**	.05	.09*	.05
Between-person variables						
COVID-19 impact	-.01	.04	-.01	.06	-.00	.05
Felt trust	.51***	.08				
Exhaustion			.57***	.09		
Vigor					.51***	.08
Supervisor monitoring variability	-.01	.11				
Supervisor monitoring mean across days	-.50***	.08				
Cross-level interaction						
Supervisor daily monitoring (L1) \times monitoring mean (L2)	.03	.04				
Supervisor daily monitoring (L1) \times monitoring variability (L2)	-.04	.06				
Residual variances within	.43***	.03	1.42***	.07	1.25***	0.06
Residual variances between	.30***	.03	2.3**	.84	1.81*	0.75

Note: The sample size for the path analysis is $N = 257$ (2,244 data points).

*** $p < 0.001$;

** $p < 0.01$;

* $p < 0.05$;

[†] $p < 0.10$.

TABLE 6 Study 2 indirect and Total effects and conditional indirect and total effects

	Indirect			Total		
	Estimate	SE	95% CI	Estimate	SE	95% CI
Supervisor monitoring \rightarrow felt trust \rightarrow exhaustion	.05	.02	[.0034, .0955]	.22	.04	[.1280, 3.161]
Low monitoring variability	.05	.02	[.0015, .0922]	.22	.04	[.1254, .3127]
High monitoring variability	.05	.03	[.0044, .1015]	.23	.04	[.1300, .3200]
Supervisor monitoring \rightarrow felt trust \rightarrow vigor	-.04	.02	[-.0749, -.0005]	-.18	.03	[-.2681, -.0981]
Low monitoring variability	-.04	.02	[-.0728, .0001]	-.18	.03	[-.2658, -.0956]
High monitoring variability	-.04	.02	[-.0801, -.0009]	-.19	.03	[-.2714, -.0993]

Note: Bias-corrected indirect effects and conditional indirect effects. CIs are calculated based on a Monte Carlo bootstrap simulation with 20,000 replications.

Abbreviation: CI, confidence interval.

8.1 | Theoretical implications

First, in both studies, we investigated the impact of supervisor monitoring on subordinates on a daily basis, thereby extending the

theoretical understanding of supervisor monitoring as a dynamic construct. We found supporting evidence for the validity of our dynamic approach to supervisor monitoring: day-to-day variation (60% of the variance was attributed to within-person differences in Study 1 and

72% in Study 2) had an effect on subordinates' felt trust and, subsequently, on their daily well-being in both studies. This finding complements previous studies that regarded supervisor monitoring as a stable construct and investigated subordinates' general feelings of being monitored without considering the dynamic nature of supervisor behavior. Considering that most research phenomena “are in reality within-person questions” (Dalal et al., 2014, p. 1399; Kelemen et al., 2020; McClean et al., 2019; McCormick et al., 2020), we show that supervisors who monitor their subordinates on a day-to-day basis are likely to be detrimental to well-being in organizations. We therefore call for future research to pay attention to the daily variance in supervisor monitoring and its impact on subordinates. For example, studying how subordinates attribute (e.g., Johnson et al., 2012) differences in supervisor monitoring between days (e.g., to their supervisor as a person, to the quality of the relationship, or to the organizational environment; Schilling et al., 2022) may further advance our understanding of the temporal dynamics of supervisor monitoring. Arguably knowing why supervisor monitoring happens on any given day can help followers' sensemaking process and reduce the negative effects on their well-being.

In both studies, we found that felt trust mediated the relationship between daily monitoring and daily exhaustion. However, the indirect relationship between monitoring and vigor via felt trust was significant in Study 2 but not in Study 1. Simply not monitoring does not mean that subordinates who feel more trusted also experience vigor after work. This finding opens interesting new avenues for future studies of monitoring and vigor, which may unravel alternative mechanisms that link the two variables. For example, looking at the different contexts of our studies, it is possible that in times of environmental uncertainty due to a crisis or maybe a major restructuring event, not monitoring is sufficient for buffering exhaustion but not for enhancing vigor. Possibly in such contexts, more active supervisor behavior is needed to foster vigor via felt trust. Future research could examine supervisor support instead of (low) monitoring. Further, the negative relationship between subordinates' daily felt trust and daily exhaustion was stronger in Study 1 than in Study 2, suggesting that felt trust was a more influential factor in reducing exhaustion in a context in which remote work was introduced suddenly and without preparation.

Second, we integrated UMT (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002) with dynamic leader behavior theory (McClean et al., 2019) to develop and test the novel concept of supervisor monitoring variability. We argued that variable supervisor monitoring made daily monitoring more harmful to subordinate felt trust. Our theorization is in line with recent developments in the trust literature that certainty can amplify the effect of trust perceptions (i.e., trustworthiness) on trust outcomes (Holtz et al., 2020). We found the expected effect in Study 1, where subordinates and supervisors had experienced sudden and largely uncontrollable changes in their working arrangements but not in Study 2, where the context was more familiar. Importantly, in Study 1, daily monitoring was still negatively related to subordinate felt trust, but inconsistent monitoring (i.e., high supervisor monitoring variability) fueled this detrimental relationship. In line with prior research

(e.g., Johns, 2006), these differences indicate that the effects of supervisor monitoring variability must be interpreted in context and warrant future research. For example, when a new working structure is introduced, both supervisors and subordinates need to get used to new ways of working, which is likely to a) stimulate supervisors to find new ways of monitoring to make sure their subordinates are working toward the intended goals and b) make monitoring more salient, as anything new is likely to draw attention. Once supervisors and subordinates have settled into a context, monitoring may be less necessary and less salient. Thus, future research should examine whether changes in the way supervisors monitor their followers affect felt trust and exhaustion via monitoring salience. Because UMT proposes that fairness judgments are a key response to experiencing uncertainty, especially in the context of authority relationships, future research could examine supervisors monitoring as a justice violation and the conditions underlining this perception.

We position supervisor monitoring variability as a different form of uncertainty rooted in the supervisor–subordinate relationship, complementary to general perceptions of management style uncertainty (Thau et al., 2009) and work uncertainty (Colquitt et al., 2012).

In Study 2, we conducted additional analyses with these alternative uncertainty measures as covariates, as well as separate and alternative moderators. However, our analyses did not support this notion.⁴ Future studies might examine individual level variables that influence subordinates' uncertainty experiences (e.g., tolerance for ambiguity and neuroticism, see Schilling et al., 2022).

For Study 1, we also found that the negative indirect relationship between daily monitoring and daily vigor via daily felt trust became significant and stronger when supervisor monitoring variability was high. A possible explanation could be drawn from the conservation of resource theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), which argues that resource loss is more salient than resource gain and that resource loss makes future resource loss more likely. That is, where subordinates are already drained from having to adapt to new working regimes (e.g., during COVID-19), uncertainty in their relationship with the supervisor (created by supervisor monitoring variability) is likely to have a stronger effect on their well-being. That is, when remote work was new to most subordinates and the general situation was particularly stressful due to the COVID-19 pandemic, supervisors behaving inconsistently may have further aggravated the already difficult circumstances. Future research could examine the reverse effects of exhaustion on the perception of supervisor monitoring variability and its further effects on exhaustion in terms of a loss spiral (Hobfoll, 2001; Halbesleben et al., 2014).

Similarly, the uncertainty intensification hypothesis (e.g., Bar-Anan et al., 2009) suggests that uncertainty can amplify the detrimental impact of negative events. Our research shows that in the context of a sudden new working regime (due to COVID-19), unpredictability resulted from supervisor monitoring variability and amplified the detrimental consequences of daily supervisor monitoring on subordinates' felt trust and well-being. To further understand how

⁴Results are available from the corresponding author upon request.

supervisor monitoring variability operates, future research could consider different types of uncertainty, namely, state (i.e., unpredictability of the environment or a specific component of the environment), effect (i.e., inability to predict the effect of environmental events or changes), and response (i.e., inability to predict the likely consequences of a response choice) uncertainty (cf. Lian et al., 2022; Milliken, 1987). This differentiation might help to better understand the specific type of uncertainty involved in the effects of supervisor monitoring variability on subordinates.

Finally, we reversed the supervisor-centric lens of prior research by studying the role of supervisor monitoring from the subordinate's perspective, that is, as a predictor of felt trust rather than trust in the supervisor (Brower et al., 2009; Zheng et al., 2019). Our findings—demonstrating that subordinates who are monitored feel less trusted—are essential because subordinate felt trust has been found to be more closely connected to self-evaluation and performance than trust in supervisors (Lau et al., 2014). In line with our predictions derived from SDT, supervisors' efforts to monitor their subordinates not only harm the subordinates' trust in them but also reduce how subordinates experience themselves as autonomous and influential at work. Feeling that others lack trust in them can put subordinates' feelings of empowerment (Gill et al., 2019), constructive voice (Hao et al., 2021), performance, or satisfaction at risk (e.g., Zheng et al., 2019). Therefore, future research could examine other processes involved in these relationships that are more closely determined by SDT predictions, such as how autonomy and empowerment mediate the relationship between supervisor monitoring and felt trust.

8.2 | Managerial implications

Our research is relevant to organizational practice as it provides timely suggestions to organizations seeking to restructure their working arrangements from traditional office-based ones to modern (e.g., remote or hybrid) setups. Our findings can also help supervisors reflect on how to best conduct monitoring. They show that supervisors must be particularly careful about how often and how regularly they “check in” with their subordinates because it can lead to negative outcomes with subordinates feeling less trusted and more exhausted. An effective way to improve subordinate well-being is to give subordinates “discretion over aspects of their work environments” (Long & Sitkin, 2018, p. 736). For example, supervisors should carefully reflect on opportunities to delegate tasks and responsibilities in order to explicitly show their trust (Lau et al., 2014).

In addition, our findings show that supervisor monitoring is more harmful when it fluctuates in unpredictable ways, particularly in stressful new environments (e.g., when subordinates are new to remote or hybrid work arrangements, which may have been externally imposed rather than deliberately selected). We suggest that supervisors should clarify how and when they will contact their subordinates or expect to receive information from them. Supervisors and subordinates may jointly agree to check in with each other on specific days during the work week rather than on an ad hoc basis. This would

buffer against subordinates feeling controlled, further facilitating their sense of being trusted to do their work. At the same time, to reduce uncertainty, supervisors could also explain why and under which circumstances they would increase or decrease their monitoring behavior.

Importantly, given that trust can “trickle up” through organizational hierarchies, not only direct supervisors but also top management needs to understand trust-building and the risks of monitoring (Fulmer & Ostroff, 2017). As remote work arrangements become the new norm, top management must rise to the occasion, provide guidelines, and help create social norms that help supervisors and subordinates interact with each other in remote work. Designing virtual training on how to develop trust, providing feedback about working practices, and exchanging experiences are essential to help supervisors create trusting relationships in the virtual world (Breuer et al., 2016).

Our findings also have important implications for the gig economy, in which independent workers are more loosely connected to organizations' short-term projects than in traditional contractual relationships. Independent workers maintain a high level of autonomy and self-control (Petriglieri et al., 2019; Vallas & Schor, 2020). Our findings, therefore, suggest that organizations working with independent workers should reflect on general monitoring practices and behavioral inconsistency. Otherwise, felt trust, which is the key to maintaining good relationships with independent workers, may be put at risk.

8.3 | Limitations and future research

Our study has several limitations that future research needs to address. First, we used panel data collected in a specific cultural context (the UK) and once a day. We acknowledge that this design precludes causal conclusions. However, we applied statistical methods to strengthen the validity of our conclusions. By controlling for previous-day assessments, study days, and a priori defined covariates (e.g., Lanaj et al., 2018, 2021), we provided empirical support for the theoretically predicted temporal ordering of variables in our hypothesized model. We encourage longitudinal research to examine control–trust dynamics over longer periods of time (or at different stages in manager–subordinate relationships). It would be particularly interesting to see whether after the introduction of a new working regime, the effect of supervisor monitoring variability “calmed down,” so that (combining Studies 1 and 2 into one longer study) the effect would disappear when the new working regime became normal.

Second, as our theoretical model focused on subordinates' experiences of monitoring, our data were collected from the same source (i.e., subordinates). Although research has shown that, compared to direct and mediated effects, interaction effects are less likely to be artifacts of common method variance (Siemsen et al., 2010), future research can benefit from collecting data from both supervisors and subordinates to investigate their mutual experiences of monitoring in

the dyadic relationship (Jones & Shah, 2016). For example, it would be insightful to include managerial perceptions of the subordinate (e.g., subordinate goodwill and competence) to predict subordinate monitoring perceptions (Long & Sitkin, 2018). Arguably, where supervisors' perceptions vary, so too should those of subordinates, which could lead to a downward spiral of lost mutual trust.

Third, although the conceptualization and measurement of supervisor monitoring in our study are the most widely used in monitoring–trust research and best fit our research context, supervisor monitoring

has been recently refined into (a) observational monitoring (i.e., “gathering of subordinate work progress and outcome information without direct input from the subordinate”) and (b) interactional monitoring (i.e., “gathering of subordinate work progress or outcome information that involves the solicitation of information directly from subordinates,” Liao & Chun, 2016, p. 170). Interestingly, initial studies have found that interactive monitoring is positively related to trust in the supervisor. However, we have little knowledge of how these two different forms of supervisor monitoring affect subordinate felt trust.

TABLE 7 Summary of future research questions

Research question	Explanation and relevance	References
1. How do subordinates attribute differences in supervisor monitoring between days (e.g., to themselves, their supervisor as a person, to the quality of the relationship, or to the organizational environment)?	Understanding why supervisors monitor can support subordinates' sensemaking. The type of attribution is likely to influence how the subordinate reacts. For example, if the behavior is explainable by the situation (vs. the person), outcomes for the trust relationship between supervisor and subordinate should be less negative.	Johnson et al., 2012 Schilling et al., 2022
2. Which supervisor behaviors can increase vigor in highly uncertain contexts?	Simply not monitoring might buffer exhaustion but not increase vigor. Supervisor support as a more active approach to increasing vigor might be necessary.	Carmeli & Gittell, 2009; Paterson et al., 2014
3. Is there a point in time when new working contexts become routine and supervisor monitoring variability is less influential?	Differences in our two studies hint that when working regimes become routine, supervisor monitoring might be less influential. A longitudinal study can shed light on this by following up on newly introduced working regimes.	Yuan et al., 2021
4. Does supervisor monitoring variability add to resource loss and create a loss spiral in uncertain contexts?	Reverse and interactive effects between supervisor monitoring variability and uncertain context can lead to a downward spiral on subordinate exhaustion. If shown, recommendations on how to break this spiral can be derived. This spiral could include supervisor perception of subordinate trustworthiness (e.g., goodwill and competence).	Halbesleben et al., 2014 Hakimi et al., 2010
5. Can different types of uncertainty explain the effects of supervisor monitoring variability?	State (i.e., perceived environmental uncertainty), effect (i.e., uncertainty about the effect of the environment on the organization), and response (i.e., uncertainty about the consequences of a response choice) uncertainty can potentially explain how supervisor monitoring variability affects well-being.	Milliken, 1987
6. Is supervisor monitoring variability more salient in new working contexts (e.g., remote working) compared to more stable/familiar working regimes?	In new working contexts, subordinates might look for more indicators in terms of their relationship with their supervisor than in stable contexts, making supervisor monitoring variability more salient and thus more impactful.	Raghuram et al., 2001
7. How do different types of monitoring impact on felt trust?	A recent differentiation into (a) observational monitoring and (b) interactional monitoring has shown that not all aspects of monitoring have a negative impact on subordinates. Interactional monitoring is likely to have less detrimental effects on subordinate well-being.	Liao & Chun, 2016

We would assume that an interactive approach to monitoring might lead to less uncertainty in supervisor–subordinate relationships, which could subsequently influence felt trust. We therefore encourage future research to explore these relationships.

Table 7 summarizes our recommendation for future research both from the theoretical implications and limitations sections.

9 | CONCLUSION

Our research advances the theoretical and empirical understanding of the dynamics of monitoring and trust on a day-to-day basis. We suggest that supervisor monitoring, especially when it varies considerably from day to day, can pose a significant risk to subordinates' well-being at work. These daily dynamics should be at the top of the list when organizations seek to establish positive relationships between supervisors and subordinates. We aim to inspire future research that tackles these important issues and seeks to understand the nuances of monitoring dynamics.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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