

DESTRUCTIVE
LEADERSHIP
and
MANAGEMENT
HYPOCRISY

Advances in Theory and Practice



Edited by

SELIN METIN CAMGÖZ
ÖZGE TAYFUR EKMEKCI

Destructive Leadership and Management Hypocrisy

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*To our families and children-Idil Camgöz, Nil Camgöz and
Alper Ekmekci-who made our lives special during precious time together.*

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Preface

A bad leader lacks talent and skill. A destructive leader lacks character.

–Frank Sonnenberg.

A leader behaving in a way that is exceedingly self-interested and exploitative of others is a recurring notion in destructive leadership, but also an unexplored aspect that warrants further scrutiny (p. 1401).

–Schmid, Pircher Verdorfer, & Peus (2019)

The readers of this book would appreciate that today's competitive business environment and management of the modern workforce require a decent understanding of leadership to advance in productivity, quality of work-life and social welfare. On that account, for more than nine decades, a vast number of academic journals and books have been devoted to leaders and the leadership process. Beyond that, the popular media has generated remarkable stories about historical, political, and organizational leaders and their effects on their followers and society. While a strong interest in leadership is evident, the focus seems to be predominantly on identifying the paths to constructive and effective styles. On the other side of the coin, there exist the destructive and ineffective aspects of leadership, which have been relatively underrated until lately. Destructive leadership, a recent but appealing notion in the leadership literature, now stands as a stream that seeks further attention with its prevalence (Aasland, Skogstad, Notelaers, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2010) and its diagnosed unpleasant consequences (Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

Considering this increasing attention, this edited book initially aims to provide important insights into the theory pertaining to the dark and harmful sides of leadership. Such an endeavor is important since the destructive leadership literature is relatively in its early stages, lacks the integration of the diverse concepts, and as a result, problems regarding the inconsistencies of the terminology prevail (Tepper, 2007). Therefore, one of the objectives of the book is to provide a systematic review of existing research on destructive leadership focusing on the conceptualizations of this construct, its similarities with related constructs, as well as empirical studies. With such a design, we aim to provide a comprehensive

theoretical basis and guidance for future research, contributing to advance the research area, in general. Accordingly, we believe that the current book will be a useful source for those embarking on the dark leadership research for the first time by providing a comprehensive picture capturing conceptualizations, plausible antecedents, and consequences of the dark side of leadership on followers and organizations together with measurement issues.

The current book will not only provide a state-of-the-art overview of our knowledge on destructive leadership but also contribute to both academic and practitioner sides of the area. From the practical perspective, the identification of the leaders who can effectively lead and show constructive behaviours in various organizational settings (i.e., private, government organizations, small businesses, etc) across a variety of cultures has been the focus of many practitioners. Nevertheless, the identification of destructive leadership behaviors in organizations could be also valuable for managing and hopefully eradicating those unconstructive behaviors. Upon reading this book, we hope that human resource practitioners would be more careful, sensitive, and equipped with the selection of people in leadership and managerial positions.

The structure of the book has been designed to create a future focus as well as to provide a comprehensive view regarding the dark side of leadership. In particular, the book aims to highlight the current state of inquiry pertaining to destructive leadership, and discuss what we already know, what we do not know, yet should know, and what the possible interesting areas of inquiry to pursue in future research are. The chapters in the book will tackle several aspects of destructive leadership and search answers for the queries of:

- Is there a mutually agreed upon conceptualization of destructive leadership?
- How can destructive leadership be conceptualized from a holistic/macro perspective? Dynamic, cocreational approaches among leaders, followers, and environments.
- How can we systematize destructive and ineffective leadership?
- Which dispositional characteristics of the leaders can be pathologically destructive and abusive? What are the individual, follower, and situational antecedents of destructive leadership?
- How corporate psychopaths act and influence decisions in organizations?
- What are the possible effects of leader hypocrisy in organizations?
- What are the individual and organizational consequences of destructive leadership?
- How downward mobbing as a special type of dark leadership could affect an employee's stress-related growth?
- How Toxic Illusio manifests itself in the global value chain?
- How to measure destructive leadership?
- What are the cognitive biases of destructive leadership styles?
- What are the public myths related to heroic and demonic leadership?
- Is there convergence or divergence among destructive leadership behaviors across cultures?
- What are the causes and outcomes of nonprofit leadership?

In answering those aforementioned inquiries, *Destructive Leadership and Management Hypocrisy: Advances in Theory and Practice* is organized into three parts that provide comprehensive coverage of key topics. The first part focuses on the conceptualization of the dark side of leadership and introduces seemingly controversial constructs (e.g., abusive supervision, petty tyranny, derailed leadership, toxic leadership, pseudotransformational leadership) discussed around the concept of destructive leadership. The second part focuses on the individual and organizational consequences of destructive leader and management hypocrisy. Finally, the third part scrutinizes the emerging issues in destructive leadership including the remedies of how to deal with it. The brief descriptions regarding the contents of the chapters in each part are provided below.

Part 1: Definitional Issues and Conceptual Clarifications in Destructive Leadership

The first section of the book starts with *Christian Thoroughgood's* Chapter 1 taking the reader on a historical journey regarding a holistic view of the dark side of leadership over the 25-year. The chapter provides a critique of the destructive leadership literature and highlights gaps in understanding of leaders, followers, and environments in contributing to destructive leadership processes. The author discusses strategies for examining destructive leadership in a broader, more holistic fashion.

In Chapter 2, *Jan Schilling* and *Birgit Schyns* focus on two prominent types of negative leadership, representing two opposite ends of the continuum. The authors argue that though both affecting the perception of followers, abusive and laissez-faire leadership styles representing active and passive forms of destructive leadership are associated with different employee outcomes. Schilling and Schyns propose a meta-model of leadership, which allows for a more refined categorization of leadership and suggest four plausible areas of inquiry for research that could be useful for systematizing future research and acknowledging the different forms of destructive and negative leadership.

Ash Göncü-Köse, *Başak Ok*, and *Yonca Toker-Gültaş* as the authors of Chapter 3 aim to provide a summary of the definitions of the interrelated constructs (e.g. paternalistic leadership, pseudotransformational leadership) to outline the commonalities with and differences from the construct of “destructive leadership” as well as their differential effects on personal, group, and organization-level outcomes.

In Chapter 4, *Wallace Burns* explores compares the differences and similarities of three destructive leadership styles: pseudo-transformational, laissez-faire, and unethical leadership. This destructive leadership typology focuses on the predictors and causal factors of each style based on a thorough review of the literature.

Clive R. Boddy as the author of Chapter 5 sheds light on corporate psychopaths and psychopathic leadership outlining its importance. Building on the notion that the success or failure of organizations largely depends on the

personality of the leader, Boddy scrutinizes the influence of psychopaths and their presence as managers in corporations. The author also acknowledges the presence of “double jeopardy” effect that provokes when corporate psychopaths work together as managers and employees, and, thus, magnifies their destructiveness and results in a workplace environment marked by many adverse outcomes such as fake corporate social responsibility, greater *schadenfreude*, poor financial decision-making, and employee confusion.

This section of the book ends with Chapter 6, written by *Johannes Arendt, Erica Bettac, Josef Gammel, and John Rauthmann*. This chapter provides a comprehensive literature review of dispositional supervisor characteristics, individual-level antecedents, and correlates of destructive leadership together with boundary conditions. The chapter also proposes an integrated process model of abusive supervision and suggestions for future research.

Part 2: The Outcomes of Destructive Leadership and Leader Hypocrisy

The second section of the book starts with a discussion of the consequences of destructive leadership. The chapters aim to provide an integrated theoretical framework for the interaction process between leaders and followers. In particular, Chapter 7, authored by *Irem Metin-Orta*, focuses on the relationship between destructive leadership and its outcomes on followers’ psychological well-being. It provides insight into the research concerning the impact of destructive leadership on followers’ mental health including experiences of anxiety, depression, frustration, hostility, fatigue, loss of concentration, emotional exhaustion, affectivity, stress, and burnout.

Likewise, Chapter 8 addresses the detrimental effects of destructive leadership on organizational outcomes. The author *Serdar Karabatı* mentions both the direct and indirect outcomes of dark leadership, especially focusing on employees’ well-being and performance. The author ends his chapter with a brief evaluation of the individual and contextual factors that might shape and intensify the effect of destructive leadership.

In Chapter 9, *Arzu İlsev and Eren Miski Aydın* introduce the concept of leader hypocrisy that refers to the inconsistencies between the leaders’ words, promises, and their attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral actions with the deliberate intention of deceiving others. By conceptualizing the leader’s hypocrisy and differentiating it from leader integrity, the authors also outline the detrimental consequences of leader hypocrisy on the employees and organizations.

In Chapter 10, *Zeynep Aycan and Didar Zeytun* provide empirical research exploring the effect of downward mobbing on employees’ stress-related growth with both qualitative and quantitative study design. The authors provide comprehensive literature evidence regarding the destructive effects of downward mobbing and also discuss the mediator role of burnout, the moderator role of

organizational trust, personality hardiness, and support on the relationship between downward mobbing and stress-related growth.

In Chapter 11, the authors of *Mustafa Özbilgin and Aybike Mergen* apply the use of the destructive and toxic leadership theoretical framework into a global value chain perspective. Drawing on the netnography of toxic leadership cases in a global firm, the authors demonstrate how this global organization can avoid criticism and create the illusion of success while perpetuating toxicity and exploitation across its complex operations and value chain internationally.

Part 3: Emerging Issues in Destructive Leadership: A Special Concern to Measures and Remedies of How to Deal with It

The third and the final section of the book details and highlights the emerging issues in destructive leadership. This part begins with Chapter 12, in which the discussion turns out into conceptual and practical concerns regarding the measurement of destructive leadership. The authors *Pinar Bayhan Karapınar and Selin Metin Camgoz* consider the range of scales and instruments available for assessing the dark sides of leadership. This chapter outlines important methodological issues for the assessment of destructive leadership and concludes with recommendations for future research areas.

In Chapter 13, *Yonca Toker-Gültaş, Başak Ok, and Savaş Ceylan* outline an approach, in which they introduce the available literature on cognitive biases and justification mechanisms concerning destructive and toxic leadership and then offer a qualitative analysis of similar or additional biases of Machiavellian leaders.

Fran Myers, in Chapter 14, addresses public myths of heroic and demonic leadership by providing examples from the financial crisis of 2008–09 in the United Kingdom. The chapter examines the press coverage generated around the negative leadership stories and how villainy, illegitimacy, demonization, and ruined reputations in those coverages contributed to the shared myths of the crisis.

The emerging issues section continues with Chapter 15 in which *Özge Tayfur Ekmekci* and *Semra Güney* explore destructive leadership from a cross-cultural perspective. Drawing on the notion of the prevalence of destructive leadership in every society and context, there remains a paucity of research that examines such leadership in countries other than the West. Thus, this chapter provides valuable insight into the differences and similarities concerning the conceptualization of destructive leadership in Western and non-Western societies.

In chapter 16, *Pinar Bayhan Karapınar, Azize Ergeneli, and Anıl Boz Semerci* seek to contribute to the extant literature by revealing gender's effects on destructive leadership. The authors assume that the gender of the followers (i.e., subordinates) affects the perceptions of male and female managers and make empirical research about gender-destructive leadership. This exploratory research provides insights about: (1) overall evaluations of individuals about the destructive leadership behaviors of their managers, (2) male and female subordinates' perceptions about the female and male managers' destructive leadership behavior, and (3) evaluations of

the dimensional structure of destructive leadership in terms of the gender of both the participant subordinates and the leaders themselves.

Last but not the least, it is essential to examine the destructive leadership phenomenon in organizations aiming to serve communities and societies given that destructive leadership is observed not only in profit-based organizations but also in nonprofit organizations. *Marco Tavanti*, in Chapter 17, reviews several real cases of nonprofit organizations and nonprofit professionals who failed to articulate their mission and resulted in illegal, unethical and harmful practices. Besides addressing the main ethical challenges of nonprofit organizations, the author provides recommendations for nonprofit organizations and their leaders to avoid destructive and unethical behaviors and recenter on positive behaviors coherent to the nonprofit's social and public good mission.

In a nutshell, with a cast of distinguished academics from international contexts, *Destructive Leadership and Management Hypocrisy: Advances in Theory and Practice* book aims to contribute to the ongoing research stream of destructive leadership and to serve as a reference guide for the potential future research. Therefore, the potential audience of the book does not only include academics in the early stages of their career but also includes the researchers, practitioners, HR experts, and government executives currently working in the area. Readers will be able to evaluate destructive leadership notion from a wide perspective to critique its impacts on the individual, organization, and society.

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Part 1
Definitional Issues and Conceptual
Clarifications in Destructive
Leadership

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Chapter 1

Destructive Leadership: Explaining, Critiquing, and Moving Beyond Leader-Centric Perspectives

Christian Thoroughgood

Abstract

The term “destructive leadership” has been utilized as an overarching expression to refer to various “bad” leader behaviors thought to be associated with damaging outcomes for followers and organizations. Yet, there is a recognition in the broader leadership literature that *leadership* involves much more than the behaviors of *leaders*. It is a dynamic, cocreational process that unfolds between leaders, followers, and environments, the product of which results in group outcomes. In this chapter, I argue that in order to achieve a more balanced view on destructive leadership, it is vital to develop more integrative approaches that are grounded in the contemporary leadership discourse and that recognize flawed or toxic leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments as interdependent elements of a broader destructive leadership process. To this end, I provide a critique of the extant literature, propose a broader definition of destructive leadership, and discuss strategies to examine destructive leadership in a broader, holistic manner.

Keywords: Destructive leadership; toxic leadership; the toxic triangle; destructive leaders; susceptible followers; conducive environments

Introduction

When destructive leadership occurs, teams lose, armies are defeated, organizations fail, and societies suffer. The bankruptcies of Enron and WorldCom, the tragic events at Jonestown in 1978 and Waco, Texas, in 1993, and the widespread destitution in Germany after the fall of Hitler all underscore the destructive potential of leadership on organizations of various forms (Thoroughgood, Sawyer, Padilla, & Lunsford, 2018). However, when these destructive leadership episodes occur, we

tend to focus on the role of leaders, rather than the group processes and the broader historical, institutional, and societal factors that also influence the outcomes.

Even leadership scholars have not been impervious to this leader-centric bias. Indeed, the term “destructive leadership” has increasingly been used as an umbrella term for various “bad” *leader* behaviors (e.g., abuse, theft, corruption) believed to be associated with negative outcomes for followers and/or the organization (e.g., Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007; Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). However, a more balanced understanding of destructive *leadership* necessitates recognition that leadership processes and their outcomes are seldom the product of a single factor or person. Indeed, there is a general appreciation in the broader leadership literature that the term “leadership” has been defined too narrowly, and that it represents a dynamic, cocreational process between leaders, followers, and environments (e.g., Avolio, 2007; Collinson, 2020; Howell & Shamir, 2005; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007; Vroom & Jago, 2007). Over time, the confluence of these factors contribute to group, organizational, and societal outcomes that vary in their constructiveness or destructiveness.

This chapter focuses on destructive leadership processes and the damaging consequences they have for organizations and their constituents.¹ First, I critique leader-centric perspectives on destructive leadership. I argue that, despite scholars’ recognition of a broader leadership process, leader-centric definitions of destructive leadership still focus too much on “bad” leader behaviors. Second, I discuss a new, broader definition of destructive leadership that is grounded in the current leadership discourse. Although it is not my intention to diminish the role of “bad” leaders and their actions, I argue future research will profit from a more holistic lens that better reflects organizational realities. Third, I discuss several ways to examine destructive leadership in a more holistic manner.

Leader-Centrism and Destructive Leadership

Leadership research has primarily been leader-centric (Collinson, 2020), focusing on traits and behaviors related to *leader emergence* (“Does this person look like a leader?”) and *perceived effectiveness* (“Is this person doing a good job?”) (Kaiser, Hogan, & Craig, 2008). A smaller body of work examines how leaders influence *group processes* (“How did the team play?”) and *group outcomes* (“Did the team win or lose?”). Given the overarching belief that leadership is a group process involving social influence to achieve group goals, the literature tells us more about how *leaders* are regarded than about whether their *groups* perform well and achieve their goals (Kaiser et al., 2008). This focus on perceptions of leaders overlooks that leaders who are positively regarded may be associated with poor performing teams and organizational decline (“bad” leadership outcomes), while leaders who are negatively regarded may be associated with productive teams and organizational success (“good” leadership outcomes). Moreover, even when *group processes* and *group outcomes* are acknowledged, the roles of *followers*, *environments*, and *time* are often overlooked. Despite recent developments, followers are typically regarded

as passive recipients of leaders' influence, while the environment is typically treated as a moderator of the effects of leaders on followers. Most studies also neglect the role of time, masking time-related changes in leadership processes (Shamir, 2011). As such, despite claiming to appreciate such factors, we often fail to integrate them into our definitions and studies of leadership phenomena.

Existing perspectives on destructive leadership are also largely leader-centric, focusing on traits and behaviors believed to create "destructive" outcomes for followers and organizations. Traits comprise, among others, narcissism and a personalized need for power (cf., House & Howell, 1992). Behaviors fall under various follower-directed constructs, including *abusive supervision* (Tepper, 2000), and organization-related constructs, such as *toxic leadership* (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). While the former includes perceptions of abuse, coercion, and arbitrariness, the latter include reports of corruption, sabotage, and theft. While leader traits and behaviors matter, they alone do not reflect the whole "story" of destructive leadership nor do they ensure destructive leadership outcomes will occur.

Why do we tend to focus on *leaders* in destructive *leadership* episodes and often neglect the roles of *followers* and *environments*? First, we are often intrigued by leadership outcomes, especially disastrous ones. Ruthless dictators, unscrupulous politicians, and unethical CEOs, for example, invite us to ponder what "dark" traits underlie destructive leadership outcomes when they occur. As such, we often fail to ask, "What factors, in addition to the leader, contributed to the outcomes?". Second, research on the "romance of leadership" confirms a popular view of leadership that looks to leaders for answers to group and organizational problems; that is, people tend to ascribe disproportionate weight to leaders' influence on group outcomes, positive and negative (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985). This leader-centric bias is even more pervasive in individualistic societies where people are socialized into defining others as individual units (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). Third, much of the leadership literature reflects psychologists' traditional focus on traits and behaviors (House & Aditya, 1997), rather than higher macro-level processes. Finally, the concurrent analysis of leaders, followers, and environments is difficult. It is much easier to use surveys that assess perceptions of leaders (Hunt & Dodge, 2001).

Problems with Leader-Centric Definitions

There are two general difficulties with leader-centric definitions of destructive leadership. First, they assume that certain *leader* behaviors are adequate for destructive *leadership* outcomes to occur, despite whether they lead to any significant harm to the group or not. This neglects the potential that sufficient checks and balances (e.g., internal oversight, external regulatory bodies) may remove a leader before they can seriously damage the group or organization; that followers may resist such leaders and thwart long-term damage to the organization and its stakeholders; or that some "bad" leader behaviors (e.g., aggression, unilateral decision-making) may even benefit some organizations and their members in some contexts. For instance, current definitions would suggest that leadership under former National

Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) basketball coach, Bobby Knight, was “destructive” due to his combative style. Yet, Knight led the Indiana Hoosiers to three National and 11 Big Ten championships, won 661 games, boasted a player graduation rate of 98.0%, and is admired by most of his players for the life lessons he imbued in them (Feinstein, 2012). Likewise, Steve Jobs was a key driver behind Apple’s tremendous success while he was CEO (1997–2011), despite his brusqueness. Thus, it is difficult to connect “bad” leader behaviors clearly with destructive leadership outcomes across all contexts.

Second, leader-centric definitions do not integrate the roles of followers and environments. They do not address why certain followers are susceptible to toxic leaders, how they influence their leaders’ motives and behaviors, or why other types of followers actively contribute to destructive leadership processes. They also do not address how environments influence and are influenced by “bad” leaders and toxic leader–follower relationships. Regarding the impact of environments on “bad” leaders, Tourish (2020), for example, provides an insightful analysis regarding how certain industries, such as finance and banking, often involve “interactions, transactions, and events [that] create a power and status saturated world” which “produces, rewards, and institutionalizes hubristic behaviors” on the part of leaders (p. 92). Taken together, leader-centric definitions do not consider how followers and environments contribute to the emergence of destructive leadership processes or why they persist long enough to create destructive outcomes for organizations and their constituents.

A More Holistic Definition

Drawing on the underlying tenets of systems, institutional, and ecological theories, as well as more integrative approaches in the broader leadership literature, I argue that more a complete definition of destructive leadership should explicitly incorporate followers, environments, and time. Although a detailed discussion of these theories is not possible due to page limits (cf., Thoroughgood et al., 2018), each theory underscores the need for a broader understanding of leadership processes and their outcomes, one that not only considers leaders but also the environments they operate in over time. With respect to destructive leadership, systems and institutional theories would assert that “bad” leader behaviors, and their outcomes cannot be examined in isolation from the environments in which such behaviors are shaped and reinforced over time. From a macro view, ecological theories suggest that even well-intentioned leaders can be associated with organizational “destruction” due to the constraints that uncertain environments place on leaders to enact changes fast enough to meet changing demands.

Integrating these perspectives, I argue that destructive leadership reflects a special case of more general leadership situations, with the key difference being the extent to which the behaviors of flawed, toxic, or ineffective leaders (i.e., individuals with certain traits and characteristics) interact, over time, with followers and environments that are susceptible or conducive, resulting in aggregate destructive outcomes for groups and organizations. Specifically, I define destructive leadership

as a complex process of influence between flawed, toxic, or ineffective leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments – which unfolds over time and, on balance, culminates in destructive group or organizational outcomes which compromise the quality of life for internal and external constituents and detract from their group-focused goals or purposes. This definition applies to most, if not all, leadership contexts and integrates three key features: *group processes*, *group outcomes*, and a *dynamic time frame*. These features are depicted in Fig. 1.1.

First, this definition does not define destructive leadership as a “bad” leader or as behavior targeted at followers (e.g., aggression) or the organization (e.g., theft). Rather, it defines destructive leadership as a *group process* that entails interactions between flawed, toxic, or ineffective leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments. Leader actions (or inactions) are a part of, but not these processes alone. Thus, this definition departs from those that conceptualize destructive leadership only in terms of behaviors (Einarsen et al., 2007; Krasikova et al., 2013; Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

Second, given leadership is a group process, it entails *group outcomes* (Kaiser et al., 2008). Thus, the concept of destructive leadership should be grounded in a similar perspective. Leadership processes are destructive to the extent that they, on balance, harm the welfare of the group they are supposed to serve, not whether certain leader behaviors are perceived negatively by certain followers. Accordingly, destructive leadership involves negative group outcomes, with certain processes between leaders, followers, and environments being more likely to culminate in these outcomes than others.

Third, this definition includes a *dynamic time frame*. Destructive leadership is usually not a stable phenomenon that can be examined using cross-sectional surveys of leader behaviors. The trajectories of leadership processes change over time based on the evolving interactions between leaders, followers, and the environment. As such, they are rarely wholly “constructive” or “destructive”; they involve outcomes that fall along a constructive–destructive spectrum. Evaluating whether a leadership process is destructive requires examining whether it lead to results that, by and large, harmed the group once it has run its course. I discuss these definitional features more below.

A Group Process

Avolio (2007) noted that understanding leadership

...requires an examination that considers the relevant actors, context (immediate, direct, indirect), time, history, and how all of these interact with each other to create what is eventually labeled leadership. (p. 25)

Similarly, other writers have argued that leader behaviors and leadership are not the same (e.g., Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Vroom & Jago, 2007). These contemporary views on leadership align with systems and institutional theories, which

Feature 1: Group Processes involving Flawed, Toxic, or Ineffective Leaders and Susceptible Followers interacting within Conducive Environments

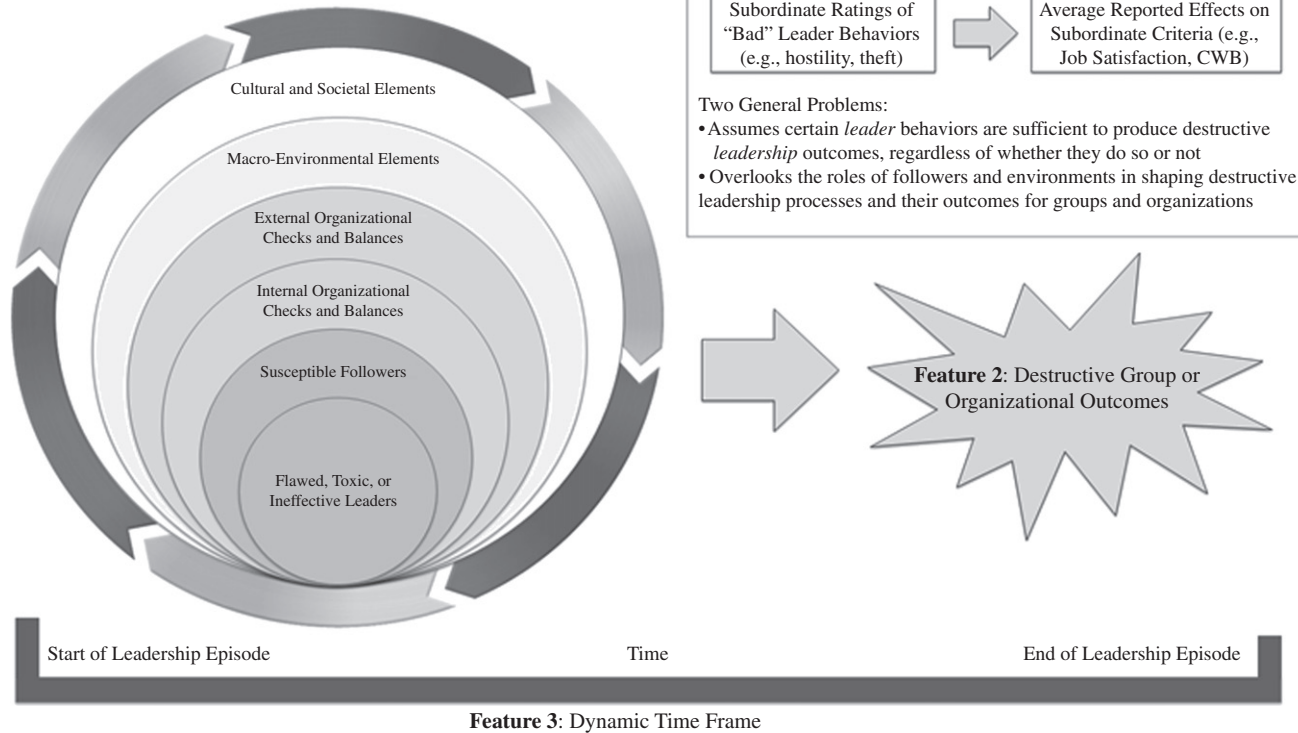


Fig. 1.1. A More Holistic Conceptualization of Destructive Leadership Processes.

Source: [Thoroughgood et al. \(2018\)](#).

again focus on interactions among a system's parts rather than on one part alone. Thus, these theoretical traditions posit that organizational phenomena represent dynamic social processes. The concept of "destructive leadership" should be grounded in a similar understanding. Indeed, despite the ubiquity of leader-centrism, broader views on leadership are not new. Contingency theories (e.g., [Fiedler, 1964](#); [House, 1971](#)), for instance, attempted to determine how characteristics of followers and environments shape a leader's influence on followers. However, these theories focused primarily on leaders' impacts on followers, rather than on the complex interactions between leaders, followers, and environments that define leadership processes and that influence their outcomes over time.

More recently, there has been an increasing shift toward more holistic approaches that do not view leadership in terms of leader behaviors. For instance, complexity theory ([Uhl-Bien et al., 2007](#)) distinguishes leaders from leadership, asserting that the latter represents an interactive process involving networks of interdependent agents embedded within context (e.g., political, historical, organizational). In fact, [Uhl-Bien et al. \(2007\)](#) stated that, "Leadership is too complex to be described as only the act of an individual or individuals...it is a complex interplay of many interacting forces" (p. 314). Shared and distributed theories of leadership (e.g., [Gronn, 2002](#); [Pearce & Conger, 2002](#)) also conceptualize leadership as a process, rather than a set of leader behaviors. These more integrative, "postheroic" approaches shift the "analytical lens from the individual to the collective"; they "examine the socially constructed nature of leadership, and in the process highlight the importance of followers" as well as the context ([Collinson, 2020](#), p. 3). These approaches also point to the multilevel nature of leadership. As [Yammarino and Dansereau \(2011\)](#) noted, failing to integrate micro- and macrolevels leads to an incomplete understanding of leadership.

Understanding destructive leadership necessitates a similar, more integrative lens. Defining destructive leadership in terms of "bad" leader behaviors illuminates the leader element. However, as systems, institutional, and ecological theories would argue, it does not capture other key elements of these processes, such as followers' responses to "bad" leader behaviors, the development of toxic leader-follower relationships, or the embeddedness of these relationships in the broader organizational, industry, cultural, and historical context. Consider [Krasikova et al.'s \(2013\)](#) definition of destructive leadership:

Volitional behavior by a leader that can harm or intends to harm a leader's organization and/or followers by (a) encouraging followers to pursue goals that contravene the legitimate interests of the organization and/or (b) employing a leadership style that involves the use of harmful methods of influence with followers, regardless of justifications for such behavior. (p. 1310)

Under this definition, these leader behaviors are sufficient to create destructive leadership. Yet, what if people: (1) refuse to follow, or actively resist, the leader's directives and/or (2) are unmoved by the leader's influence tactics? By focusing only on the leader's behavior and overlooking followers' reactions over time, this

definition makes it difficult to identify: (1) who is being “led” and (2) what is being “destroyed.” Moreover, what if: (1) checks and balances, internal or external to the organization, remove the leader before serious harm to the long-term performance of the organization and the welfare of its members occur, or if (2) the organizational, industry, or cultural context is one in which certain “bad” leader behaviors (e.g., aggression, autocratic decision-making) are expected and/or necessary for the organization’s performance and survival (e.g., military groups, unstable industries, high power distance cultures)? By neglecting the context, this definition implies that some leader behaviors will ultimately lead to “destructive” results for all organizations and their constituents, regardless of whether they do or not. Below, I elaborate on these key points.

Given the limitations of a leader-centric lens and consistent with the increasing trend toward more integrative perspectives on leadership, I argue that destructive leadership is not just a set of “bad” leader behaviors. Rather, it entails complex interactions between flawed, toxic, or ineffective leaders and vulnerable followers, which unfold within multiple layers of context over time. From this perspective, followers’ passive conformity to or active collusion with “bad” leaders are a part of destructive leadership processes, as are broader organizational (e.g., lack of adequate checks and balances), macroenvironmental (e.g., crises, uncertainty), and cultural factors (e.g., power distance) that influence, reinforce, and permit toxic leader–follower relationships to occur over time, thereby producing serious damage to the long-term performance of the group and the welfare of its constituents. This broader lens does not minimize “bad” leader behaviors. In contrast, it highlights a broader set of processes that occur between “bad” leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environmental conditions that, together, may ultimately be termed *destructive leadership*.

By embracing a broader view, we can gain insight into the dynamics underlying real-world instances of destructive leadership. For instance, whether we analyze destructive leadership episodes in political dictatorships (e.g., Stalin’s Russia, Pol Pot’s Cambodia), religious cults (e.g., The People’s Temple, Branch Davidians), or for-profit corporations (e.g., Enron, WorldCom), what is clear is that these episodes involved followers who conformed, looked the other way, or actively conspired with “bad” leaders, as well as conducive environments that permitted such leaders to secure and maintain power over time. For instance, under Idi Amin – the “Butcher of Uganda” – 300,000 individuals were murdered in a campaign of genocide and extermination of Amin’s rivals (Thoroughgood et al., 2018). During his brutal reign, military officers carried out his orders for public executions, while secret police tortured and killed thousands of alleged dissenters. Critically, Amin’s reign cannot be analyzed without considering the environmental factors that brought his regime to power and which allowed it to persist for so long. While Uganda was still a British colony and despite his proclivity for brutality as a soldier, Amin was elevated to Afande, the most powerful position that a black African could hold in the colonial army. This provided him the opportunity to secure power in a military coup in 1971. Amin’s ability to seize power was also enhanced by the public’s fascination with his charismatic persona and their trust that the military government would remain only until elections could be held.

Eight years later, Uganda was riddled by ethnic oppression, human rights violations, and widespread economic mismanagement. This example highlights the process by which a toxic leader, working in combination with vulnerable followers and an environment with deficient institutions, can have devastating outcomes even for entire nations.

Destructive Group or Organizational Outcomes

Defining destructive leadership further necessitates a consideration of outcomes. Similar to other leadership concepts, destructive leadership has often been defined and measured in terms of the average reported effects of specific “bad” leader behaviors on subordinate criteria (e.g., job satisfaction, turnover intentions, well-being). Yet, few studies examine group or organizational outcomes. This is not surprising. [Kaiser et al. \(2008\)](#) found in a review of 10 meta-analyses that only about 18% of leadership studies examined group or organizational outcomes. They noted the key distinction between how leaders and their behaviors are viewed (i.e., the extent to which a leader is approved of) and how their groups actually perform. Although examining how leaders are perceived offers insights about individual leaders, it yields little information about the outcomes of leadership processes (i.e., whether the group eventually achieved its goals and was better off due to a leadership episode), which are a product of more than leaders. In this view, it is not how a leader is perceived by certain followers that matters when evaluating leadership; it is how their groups perform over time. As [Hogan and Kaiser \(2005\)](#) noted,

Leadership is about the performance of teams, groups, and organizations; good leadership promotes effective team and group performance, which enhances the well-being of incumbents...bad leadership degrades the quality of life for everyone associated with it. [Given] leadership is a collective phenomenon, it follows that leadership should be evaluated in terms of the performance of the group over time. (p. 169–172)

Thus, leadership can be viewed as a functional tool for group performance; it entails social influence in pursuit of collective enterprises, which has important ramifications for a group’s long-term performance and the welfare of its constituents.

In the case of destructive leadership, it is important to mention first that the proceeding discussion is not meant to minimize the importance of examining subordinates’ reports of “bad” leader behaviors, such as their perceptions of hostility, and the associated effects of such behaviors on their job-related attitudes, well-being, and behavior. Yet, as underscored above, surveys of “bad” leader behaviors tell us more about an individual leader than they do about whether a leadership process, on balanced, damaged a group’s capacity to accomplish its objectives and left it worse off than before. Although Steve Jobs

alienated many people as CEO, Apple thrived due to his creative vision, as well as many talented engineers and a company culture that required excellence. This is not to write off reports of abuse from some who worked for him. Yet, given leadership outcomes are also a result of followers and contexts, as well as functional acts of leaders that often co-occur with “bad” behaviors, just because some followers report “bad” leader behaviors does not guarantee “bad” leadership outcomes will ensue.

Accordingly, destructive leadership is more about whether certain leaders, in combination with certain followers and environments, actually harm a group’s long-term performance and, in turn, the collective well-being of its constituents. Through this lens, Jobs and Knight presided over leadership processes that were mostly constructive for their groups, despite their challenges in interacting with certain subordinates. Conversely, Enron, for instance, was a case of destructive leadership given unethical leaders, with the aid of conforming and colluding followers, a lack of internal and external checks and balances, and a corporate culture of greed, contributed to its bankruptcy, harming the quality of life for employees and investors alike. As such, existing concepts involving perceptions of “bad” leader behavior, such as “abusive supervision” and “petty tyranny,” may very well be a part of destructive leadership processes. Yet, they do not capture the expansiveness of these processes.

Several additional points should be noted to further underscore the utility of focusing on group outcomes. First, by defining and measuring destructive leadership in terms of “bad” leader behaviors, it is implied that they are, by nature, harmful to all followers (and ostensibly all groups and organizations). Yet, leader–follower dynamics are rarely as straightforward as implied by many analyses. Indeed, perceptions of and reactions to these behaviors vary considerably across people. Expressions of anger, for instance, are a part of measures of “tyrannical” (Ashforth, 1994) and “abusive” (Tepper, 2000) leader behavior. Yet, subordinates low on agreeableness may actually respond *positively* to leader displays of anger, since such individuals tend to expect less civility and are less sensitive to rude behavior (Van Kleef, Homan, Beersma, & van Knippenberg, 2010). As such, they may accept a leader’s displays of anger given social conflict is less distracting and more motivating to them. Additionally, some underreport leader hostility, while others, such as those with negative effect or a hostile attribution bias, may overstate their exposure (Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006). As Chan and McAllister (2014) noted:

Empirical findings have often been interpreted as evidence concerning abusive treatment of a more objective and independently verifiable sort. However, employee responses are shaped by the mind-states of followers as well as the behavior of supervisors. Indeed, deliberative and attribution processes internal to employees have important roles to play in determining not only whether and to what extent supervisory action and inaction are interpreted and understood as being abusive, but also the nature of employee affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses. (p. 44)

This suggests that one individual's definition of "abusive" behavior may differ considerably from another person's, making it difficult to conclude that such behaviors will equally influence all subordinates in the same manner. Furthermore, one individual's toxic leader may be another person's idol, depending on followers' needs and their unique relationships with a leader (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). For instance, some admire charismatic leaders despite mistreatment given such leaders can fulfill their needs for stability, purpose, and group membership (Thoroughgood, Padilla, Hunter, & Tate, 2012). Moreover, those with a high leader-member exchange (LMX) relationship with their manager, which reflects the quality of the relationship that develops between a leader and a subordinate (Gerstner & Day, 1997), have reported some "toxic" acts (e.g., yelling related to missed deadlines) as less demoralizing and emotionally upsetting (Pelletier, 2012).

Second, assuming that these actions lead to damaging effects across all contexts is also problematic. Indeed, how such behaviors are perceived, understood, and responded to vary across social, cultural, and organizational contexts. For instance, behaviors that tend to be viewed as "abusive" in low power distance cultures are less impactful and perceived as less unfair in high power distance cultures where autocratic influence is more socially normative (Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012). GLOBE results suggest that autocratic leaders may even be preferred in countries high on power distance, collectivism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance (Javidan, Dorfman, de Luque, & House, 2006). Thus, what many Westerners perceive as "bad" leader behavior may be preferred or necessary for group performance in other cultures. As Muczyk stated:

Unqualified support for democratic [leaders] and individual autonomy has been the cultural norm of U.S. society since the end of World War I. Most of the post WWII leadership literature has been generated by American scholars. Consequently, the democratic predispositions found in the U.S. culture were assimilated into the leadership literature. The predilection toward democracy is strengthened by the tendency for certain words, such as "autocratic" and "directive," to take on a pejorative connotation irrespective of their denotation (Muczyk & Adler, 2002, p. 3). Yet, when the entire corpus of leadership research is examined objectively, the unqualified acceptance of democratic [leaders] is largely a leap of faith as opposed to a conclusion based on empirical research, or for that matter, on logic and experience. (Muczyk & Steel, 1998, p. 40).

In noting the paradoxical nature of "managerial tyranny," Ma, Karri, and Chittipeddi (2004) similarly stated:

Any analysis or discussion of "tyrannical" management styles gets mixed up with idealistic considerations. To most Americans, the governance style of many East Asian countries is clearly inimical and antithetical to American ideals. But the fact remains that it is

precisely those governance styles that have transformed those countries into economic juggernauts. Seemingly, the vast majority of the populations in those countries are comfortable with the trade-offs between economic prosperity and personal freedoms. The experience of these countries illustrates that there are certain contexts in which tyrannical styles of management produce needed results. Thus, the tyrannical behavior of the most celebrated leaders is paradoxical in nature and motivates us to develop a deeper understanding.

Reactions to these leader behaviors may also depend on organizational norms and conditions. For instance, leader “abuse” may be defined very differently in the military, hospital emergency rooms (ERs), blue-collar industries, professional sports teams, and other high-stakes environments requiring safety and quick decision-making. In these contexts, leader displays of aggression may build a “thick skin” in subordinates, promote a chain of command, foster conformity to safety guidelines, and create a shared identity among group members. This may mean the difference between achieving group objectives or not in stressful, turbulent environments. More generally, during crises, people often look to autocratic leaders to make hard decisions and restore order (Janis & Mann, 1977). Beer and Nohria’s (2000) description of “Theory E” change initiatives stresses the unpleasant reality that autocratic leaders are sometimes necessary for corporate turnarounds requiring bold, time-sensitive decisions. Of note, this tension between two things we value and always want together, effectiveness and kindness, has been debated for centuries. As Machiavelli noted 500 years ago (Machiavelli, 1513/2008), leaders must often sacrifice kindness and disregard some constituents’ feelings to foster the greater good. That is, a leader’s use of force and manipulation is, at times, an inevitable cost of dealing with the world as it *is*, not how we feel it *should* be.

Taken together, it is vital to recognize that: (1) not all subordinates within the same context or across different contexts will necessarily report or respond in the same ways to such actions and that (2) “bad” leader behaviors, whether objectively real or subjectively perceived, do not ensure “bad” leadership outcomes for the group. As such, destructive leadership is a matter of group results, not whether certain leader behaviors are perceived unfavorably by some followers. This is not to imply leader behaviors are not a part of destructive leadership; they clearly are. But also, given leadership is a collective process involving followers and the context, group results must be carefully considered.

Dynamic Time Frame

Although leadership processes unfold dynamically over time, most leadership studies assume that observed relationships are not time-dependent. Shamir (2011) noted that the dominant paradigm within leadership research, which suggests certain leader behaviors influence more proximal subordinate criteria (e.g., motivation), is atemporal and neglects that these leader inputs and their outcomes

likely change over time. As an example, a coach's "tough love" may be demotivating to players initially. Over time, however, they may come to appreciate the coach's style and become motivated as a result. Yet, by overlooking the impact of time, these effects on players and the team's long-term performance are masked. Consistent with systems and institutional theories, this issue of time is exacerbated by the fact that leadership episodes do not entail one-way influence but rather dynamic interactions between leaders and followers over time. These interactions, in turn, shape the long-term outcomes of leadership processes for groups and organizations. As such, because leadership processes change trajectories based on the evolving interactions between leaders, followers, and the environment, their aggregate outcomes may not be apparent for quite some time.

To understand destructive leadership, a dynamic time frame is also necessary. As noted earlier, evaluating whether a leadership episode is "destructive" requires an evaluation of whether the process, in its entirety, damaged a group or organization's long-term performance and, in turn, the quality of life of its constituents. Without a dynamic view, it is difficult to determine the "destructiveness" or "constructiveness" of most leadership episodes given their cumulative outcomes take time to develop and typically fall along a spectrum, from undeniably terrible to absolutely great, with most falling somewhere in the middle. Indeed, research and practical observation demonstrate that leaders can produce both "good" and "bad" effects in the short term (Aasland, Skogstad, Notelaers, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2010; Rayner & Cooper, 2003). Under the widely revered Roberto Goizueta, Coca-Cola became a top US company. Yet, Goizueta's time as CEO is also associated with the disastrous "New Coke" debacle that cost the firm millions. Conversely, destructive leadership processes often involve some positive gains, at least in the short term. Under Mussolini, Italy experienced devastation to its military, economy, and architectural jewels due to its alignment with the Third Reich in WWII. However, early in the regime, Italians benefitted from expanded public transportation, public works development, and job opportunities, providing national pride and respite from the economic and political crises of the time.

These points highlight the harsh reality that even highly constructive leadership episodes often create hardship for some followers and costly short-term setbacks for the group, while largely destructive leadership episodes may produce benefits for certain followers and short-term gains for the group. Thus, defining a leadership process as destructive requires assessing whether the process resulted in outcomes that, on balance, harmed the group and the collective goals and well-being of its constituents. If destructive leadership is evaluated in terms of outcomes that, in totality, are destructive to the group, this allows for "good" leaders to create "bad" outcomes and "bad" leaders to produce "good" outcomes in the short term.

Temporariness of Destructive Leadership Outcomes

Two additional points are necessary regarding leadership outcomes. First, this more holistic lens on destructive leadership does not imply that a group, organization, or even society be completely "destroyed" for a leadership episode to be

destructive. Most groups and organizations experience a range of leadership episodes across their life cycles that vary in their constructiveness or destructiveness. For instance, Hitler's Germany was obviously a case of destructive leadership, but Germany today is a powerful and prosperous nation once again. The key point is that for many reasons, including mortality (e.g., leaders and followers dying), attrition (e.g., leaders and their groups retiring), term limits (e.g., leaders and their administrations coming to a preset end), or removal (e.g., leaders and their regimes being ousted from power), leadership outcomes, destructive or constructive, are temporary. Most groups, organizations, and civilizations rise and fall, win and lose, thrive and decay, and many vanish or go extinct – suggesting leadership episodes have a start, a life, and an eventual conclusion.

Second, although leadership episodes have a birth, a life, and an end, of which the outcomes may be easy to evaluate, oftentimes their outcomes are more ambiguous. Even for US presidents, where there are clear starts and ends to their tenures due to term limits, the impacts of their administrations may persist long after their terms conclude. For example, should the Obama Administration be assigned all the blame for the 2008 US financial crisis and, conversely, should the Clinton Administration be granted all the credit for the economic prosperity in the United States during the late 1990s? Obviously, prior administrations (i.e., the Bush and Reagan White Houses, respectively, in the latter examples) and their actions or inactions often play a role. The task of evaluating leadership outcomes is rendered even more complicated by the fact that there will rarely be a consensus among different constituents, even for leadership episodes widely recognized as utter disasters or highly successful. As noted earlier, inevitably some people will fare poorly from largely constructive leadership episodes, while some will fare well from generally destructive ones.

Yet, on balance, there will usually be a majority opinion on a leadership episode's eventual results, whether destructive, constructive, or somewhere in the middle. The point is that leadership episodes have starts and ends and that identifying whether specific ones are destructive requires waiting to evaluate the totality of group outcomes associated with them once they run their course (see [Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007](#); [Thoroughgood & Padilla, 2013](#); [Thoroughgood et al., 2012, 2018](#), for additional readings).

Methodological Approaches

To study destructive leadership in a more holistic manner, I recommend several approaches. First, we need more qualitative studies, which focus on human interactions as they unfold in natural contexts and which can account for temporal changes in leadership episodes over time. Interviews, case studies, and other qualitative methods are rare in the leadership literature, yet they offer many advantages, such as the ability to reveal the rich inner workings of complex social-organizational processes. In a case study of Bristol Royal Infirmary, [Fraher \(2016\)](#) utilized a systems approach to examine how certain leader, follower, and environmental factors combined, over seven years from the pediatric cardiac

surgical program's start to its end, to produce destructive outcomes, including the deaths of dozens of babies undergoing surgery. Leadership episodes entail complex patterns of interactions among leaders and followers, followers and other followers, and leaders and leaders, all within context. Qualitative studies help untangle these patterns, uncover explanatory variables, and generate new theory. Thus, they often foster shifts in the way scholars approach research questions.

Second, leadership scholars have displayed a growing interest in historiometric analysis, a procedure that allows access to data not attainable using traditional surveys (e.g., Hunter, Cushenbery, Thoroughgood, Johnson, & Ligon, 2011). Historiometry entails coding qualitative data from historical sources into quantitative indices, which are analyzed using traditional statistical analysis. In terms of leadership, data are typically derived from academic biographies of historical leaders. While not without limitations, this approach allows tracking of psychological, behavioral, and environmental factors that shape leadership processes and their results. For example, Mumford (2006) studied the years spanning 120 historical leaders' rise to, height of, and fall from power. Historiometry can compare factors related to leaders, followers, and contexts over time and how these factors combine to influence group and organizational outcomes.

Conclusion

Destructive leadership processes represent complex mosaics that cannot be truly understood by focusing solely on leaders and their behaviors. By defining destructive leadership in terms of "bad" leader behaviors, leader-centric approaches assume that such behaviors are sufficient to create "bad" leadership outcomes, despite the fact that it is difficult to connect these behaviors clearly with destructive outcomes for all groups, organizations, and their constituents in the long term. As noted earlier, this is because the effects of "bad" leader behaviors depend on a myriad of factors related to followers and the environment. Relatedly, leader-centric analyses conceal the roles of susceptible followers and conducive environments in contributing to destructive leadership processes, despite the reality that these factors are central *parts* of these processes and shape how they unfold over time. Without a more balanced perspective on destructive leadership, possible solutions are not evident given the process is not analyzed as a whole. Accordingly, the purpose of this chapter was to move beyond "bad" leader behaviors when defining destructive leadership and toward a focus on destructive group outcomes and the contributing roles of susceptible followers and conducive environments over time. By adopting a more holistic lens on destructive leadership, more effective solutions and preventative remedies are possible.

Note

1. Parts of this chapter have been published in Thoroughgood, C. N., Sawyer, K. B., Padilla, A., & Lunsford, L. (2018). Destructive leadership: A critique of leader-centric perspectives and toward a more holistic definition. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 151, 627–649.

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Chapter 2

How Can Anyone Be Like That? – Systematising Destructive and Ineffective Leadership

Jan Schilling and Birgit Schyns

Abstract

Research has overwhelmingly focused on the positive side of leadership in the past. However, research into negative aspects of leadership is picking up pace. This chapter will provide an overview of two prominent aspects of negative leadership, namely, abusive supervision and laissez-faire leadership. Research has shown that both types of leadership have significant negative consequences both for organisations as a whole as well as individual followers. Examples include lower job satisfaction, stress, as well as lowered performances and a higher likelihood of counter-productive work behaviour. Both abusive supervision and laissez-faire researchers acknowledge that these leadership styles take effect through the perception of followers. That is, they consider that the same behaviour can be interpreted differently by different followers and will, hence, lead to different follower-related outcomes. Abusive supervision and laissez-faire are, however, very different in terms of the actual leader behaviours described. While abusive supervision is a style that is actively destructive, laissez-faire is destructive via lack of support for followers' goal achievement. We end the chapter with an outlook for future research, notably an attempt to systematise future research into destructive leadership with respect to the different forms it can take.

Keywords: Negative leadership; destructive leadership; abusive supervision; laissez-faire leadership; self-serving leadership; leader influence behaviour

Introduction

The key to being a good manager is keeping the people who hate me away from those who are still undecided. Casey Stengel (1890–1975)

Destructive Leadership and Management Hypocrisy, 21–34

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Research into leadership has long focused on positive leader attributes and behaviours such as trying to find the best leader or the behaviour that promises the best results (Schilling, 2009). However, probably due to large-scale corporate scandals, leadership research has opened up to the negative side of leadership (Tepper, 2007). Research has found that negative leaders (such as leaders high in narcissism or psychopathy) have a significant negative impact on organisations and their members (e.g., Grijalva, Harms, Newman, Gaddis, & Fraley, 2015; Landay, Harms, & Credé, 2019). The same applies to research into negative leadership: several studies and meta-analyses found that negative forms of leadership such as abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000) or destructive leadership (e.g., Einarsen, Skogstad, & Aasland, 2010) are negatively related to follower attitudes and behaviours (Martinko, Harvey, Brees, & Mackey, 2013; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Similarly, a substantial amount of research showed that leaders doing nothing (laissez-faire leadership) had significant negative consequences for organisations and followers (e.g., Judge & Piccolo, 2004). In this chapter, we will provide an overview of the two most researched forms of negative leadership, that is, abusive supervision and laissez-faire leadership, their antecedents and consequences. Following Schyns and Schilling (2013), we use negative leadership as an overarching term comprising commonly disliked and condemned behaviours ranging from ineffective leadership such as laissez-faire leadership to destructive leadership such as abusive supervision. We will finish the chapter with an outlook for future research into destructive leadership, notably suggesting a way to further differentiate the construct.

Abusive Supervision: Definition and Outcomes

Abusive supervision is defined as ‘subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact’ (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). It is likely currently the most commonly researched negative leadership concept (see, for example, the meta-analysis by Schyns & Schilling, 2013). It becomes clear from the definition of abusive supervision that the phenomenon is based on perception. That is, what counts is not so much what the leader does but how this is perceived by his/her followers (Brees, Martinko, & Harvey, 2016; Wang, Harms, & Mackey, 2015), including the possibility that the same behaviour is perceived differently by different followers (Schyns, Felfe, & Schilling, 2018; Wang, Van Iddekinge, Zhang, & Bishoff, 2019). However, it is important to note that both studies cited here (Schyns, Felfe et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2019) found that leader behaviour has a strong impact on follower perception and remains the main reason for those negative perceptions. The interest in this leadership style is likely so high due to the significant costs related to abusive supervision, stemming from turnover, sick leave, low performance, as well as medical costs (Tepper, 2007; Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006).

Abundant research has been conducted on the outcomes of abusive supervision. In particular, abusive supervision is negatively related to attitudes towards the

leader, such as supervisor commitment and satisfaction to a higher degree than to other outcomes (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). This shows the direct negative effect that abusive supervision has on the working relationship between abusive leaders and their followers. It is also negatively related to attitudes towards the job, such as job satisfaction (Martinko et al., 2013; Schyns & Schilling, 2013), indicating that the effects of abusive supervision spillover to a person's daily work experiences. It also leads to more counterproductive work behaviour as well as less organisational citizenship behaviour, lower performance and higher turnover intentions, ultimately negatively affecting organisation that employs the abusive supervisor (for an overview: Martinko et al., 2013; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper, 2007). Followers of abusive supervisors are equally less committed to their organisation (e.g., Tepper, 2000), indicating that they are making the organisation at least partly responsible for the behaviour of the supervisor (Shoss, Eisenberger, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2013).

Unfortunately, the effect of abusive supervision does not remain solely at work. Indeed, followers of abusive supervisors experience more stress and lower well-being. Their life satisfaction goes down (Tepper, 2000), they experience more conflicts at home (Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Wu, Kwong, Liu, & Resick, 2012), and they are more likely to engage in problem drinking (Bamberger & Bacharach, 2006). This indicates that followers of abusive supervisors experience a lower quality of their overall and not just their work life.

Abusive Supervision: Antecedents and Emergence

Antecedents of abusive supervision are to this date less intensely researched than outcomes. However, this research has recently gained some traction. We know that abusive supervision can occur due to three types of causes: causes in the organisation, causes in the follower and causes in the leader him/herself.

In terms of the organisation, abusive supervision can occur as a trickle-down effect (Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah, 2007; Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, & Marinova, 2012), that is, the leader is experiencing some form of injustice (e.g., procedural, distributive, and/or interactional; Colquitt, 2001; Greenberg, 1993) from his/her own supervisor and emulates this behaviour to his/her own followers. This can be due to a feeling that what the supervisor does (e.g., exercising interactional injustice in form of a negative or even hostile behaviour) indicates what is allowed and maybe even the norm in an organisation (cp., Schyns & Schilling, 2013). In the case of procedural (i.e., unfairness of the processes that lead to decision outcomes) or distributive injustice (i.e., the unfairness of decision outcomes), the effect may be due to displaced aggression, where the leader does not dare to retaliate to his/her own supervisor but rather kicks down to the followers. This displaced aggression often targets followers who the leader perceives to be weak or those who act provocatively (Aquino, Grover, Bradfield, & Allen, 1999; May, Wesche, Heinitz, & Kerschreiter, 2014). Research has also shown that stress due to organisational goal setting can increase destructive leadership (Bardes & Piccolo, 2010).

Follower behaviour may also trigger abusive supervision. For example, a leader might react with abusive supervision towards a follower who shows low performance in an attempt to increase their performance, to retaliate (impulsively or intentionally) against this ‘provocative behaviour’ (Liang et al., 2016; Mawritz, Greenbaum, Butts, & Graham, 2016; Pan & Lin, 2016). Note that these actions and reactions can lead to a negative spiral of further reduced follower performance and further increased follower counter-productive work behaviour.

Antecedents of abusive supervision grounded in leader characteristics often make them more likely to view their followers in a negative light. For example, leaders might be prone to negative views of followers, in general, as some narcissists might be (Hansbrough & Jones, 2014) or show a hostile attribution bias (i.e., the tendency to attribute others’ behaviour to negative intentions) (Liang et al., 2016). They might also have a strong tendency to focus on the bottom line (Mawritz et al., 2016) or are motivated by performance enhancement motives or injury initiation motives (Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012; Mawritz et al., 2012; Tepper, 2007). Some researchers have focused on leader personality as the explanation for abusive supervision. For example, Boddy (2011, see also chapter 5 in this book) introduced the concept of corporate psychopaths, that is, employees with psychopathic tendencies that are more often than statistically expected found in leadership positions. Braun (2017) outlines the role of leader narcissism in destructive leadership. Using the HEXACO model of personality, Breevaart and De Vries (2017) show that agreeableness and honesty–humility were negatively related to followers’ perceptions of abusive supervision.

Laissez-Faire Leadership

As opposed to an actively destructive leadership style, such as abusive supervision, laissez-faire leadership is much more passive, though it also leads to significant negative outcomes (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). In defining laissez-faire leadership, it is important to note that this leadership style is not the same as retreating to give followers autonomy. Rather, laissez-faire leadership, also sometimes called non-leadership (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939), is characterised by a lack of leadership related to, for example, giving followers the necessary support to achieve goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Followers are instead left to their own devices to figure out how and what to do and often have to take decisions that are not within their remit. Similar to abusive supervision, laissez-faire leadership is a question of perception; one follower’s laissez-faire leadership might be another one’s job autonomy (Wong & Giessner, 2018).

Interestingly, there is a lot less research into laissez-faire leadership than into abusive supervision although we can assume that phenomenon is likely to be widespread (e.g., Aasland, Skogstad, Notelaers, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2010, for data on Norway). Research into laissez-faire leadership has often been conducted as part of the so-called full-range model of leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1993), where it serves as a comparison to active and effective leadership styles such as transformational or transactional leadership (e.g., Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008).

Skogstad and colleagues (Skogstad, Aasland, Nielsen, Hetland, Mattiesen, & Einarsen, 2014) are among the few scholars to make laissez-faire leadership the centre of their studies.

Similar to abusive supervision, laissez-faire leadership is negatively related to attitudes towards and the evaluation of leaders (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008). Due to the lack of guidance from the leader, followers of laissez-faire leaders experience more role stress, more role conflict, and more role ambiguity (Barling & Frone, 2016; Skogstad, Hetland, Glaso, & Einarsen, 2014). Ultimately, followers simply do not know what their tasks are. Not surprisingly, laissez-faire leadership leads to a negative evaluation of their leader (Wong & Giessner, 2018), psychological strain and increased team conflict (Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2007). In terms of outcomes that are directly relevant for the organisation, followers of laissez-faire leaders show less organisational citizenship behaviours and are less committed to their organisation (Buch, Martinsen, & Kuvaas, 2015).

We know very little about the reasons for the emergence of laissez-faire leadership, and what we know is mainly related to some hypothetical considerations as to why leaders end up showing laissez-faire leadership. It is likely that leaders who themselves experience role ambiguity due to laissez-faire leadership of their superiors (cp., Skogstad, Hetland, Glaso, & Einarsen, 2014) are likely to show laissez-faire leadership as they do not know what their task is relatively to their followers. Further, leaders who see their role as fulfilling tasks other than leadership or those that have a lot of tasks outside their role as leaders are likely not to spend enough time on leading their followers due to bad self-leadership (Furtner, Baldegger, & Rauthmann, 2013). Finally, leaders might be scared of making mistakes either due to their own personality structure (e.g., high neuroticism and/or negative affectivity; Joseph, Dhanania, Shen, McHugh, & McCord, 2015) or because they work in an organisation that punishes mistakes harshly (Schilling & Kluge, 2009; Vince & Saleem, 2004). As a result, leaders will likely not engage in leadership, so they cannot be blamed for doing anything wrong.

A Meta-Model of (Negative) Leadership Research

The research into negative forms of leadership does not have the same long tradition as research into positive leadership (Schyns, Neves, Wisse, & Knoll, 2018). As we have shown above, the last decade has clearly seen important progress concerning our knowledge with regard to the dark side of leadership, its antecedents and consequences. Research has predominantly focused on abusive supervision as a core construct of destructive and laissez-faire as a core construct of ineffective leadership. However, besides those two streams of research, a multitude of other concepts concerning the dark side of leadership have been proposed in the literature (cp., Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Some of those concepts bear clear resemblance to abusive supervision (e.g., petty tyranny, Ashforth, 1994; abusive supervisory behaviours, Yagil, 2005), while others seem to focus on other, diverging facets of destructive leadership (e.g. toxic leadership,

e.g., [Lipman-Blumen, 2005](#); narcissistic leadership; e.g., [Braun, 2016](#); tyrannical leadership, e.g., [Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007](#)). These lines of research and the multitude of different concepts have not been integrated so far but rather developed independent from each other. To advance our knowledge on the dark side of leadership, we argue here that we need a clearer differentiation of what defines negative leadership and how different negative leadership constructs can be categorised. Learning from the field of positive leadership, where concept proliferation has been discussed as one major issue that might hinder progress in knowledge ([Meuser et al., 2016](#)), we suggest that it is important to understand the various different forms of negative leadership better in order to categorise existing concepts but also to provide a way forward to add concepts in a theoretically meaningful way.

In the past, there have already been efforts to categorise the field of leadership with a special focus on the dark side of leadership. The most prominent conceptual model in this regard was presented by [Einarsen et al. \(2007\)](#) who differentiated leader behaviour in terms of the target (followers vs. task/organisation). That is, leadership behaviour can be either pro or against the organisation or pro or against the employee, leading to four types of leaders: constructive (pro-pro), derailed (against-against), tyrannical (pro organisation, against employees), or supportive-disloyal (against organisation, pro employees). This concept is helpful as it points to the importance to differentiate positive and negative forms of influence behaviour. Interestingly, the different forms of leadership described by [Einarsen et al. \(2007\)](#) implicitly share the idea that leadership implies an intention directed at others (i.e. followers and/or organisation). However, other researchers have proposed concepts of (destructive) leadership behaviour that do not explicitly include the notion of intent (cp., [Schyns & Schilling, 2013](#)). Moreover, it has been stated that leaders can also be self-serving ([Rus, van Knippenberg, & Wisse, 2010](#)). That is, leaders can have goals that serve others (followers, organisation) or goals that serve themselves. Similarly, [Howell \(1988\)](#) differentiates between socialised and personalised charisma. Here charismatic leaders use their influence either in a self-aggrandising, non-egalitarian and exploitative way, or they are collectively oriented, egalitarian and non-exploitive ([House & Howell, 1992](#)). This again differentiates leadership in terms of the goals it has. When categorising leadership concepts, it thus seems to be important to take the intention of leadership into account. Based on these considerations, we propose a meta-model of leadership concepts which uses and extends existing classifications.

The core of leadership is often defined as ‘goal-oriented influence’ (cp. [Yukl, 2012](#)) which includes two basic aspects which naturally form the basis of almost all leadership concepts, that is, intention (goal) and influence behaviour (means). Building on these aspects, the first dimension of our model focuses on the intent that is associated with a certain leadership behaviour. As stated above, the leadership literature has proposed concepts which focus on self-serving intentions (i.e., furthering the interests of the leader), other-serving intentions (i.e., furthering the interests of others, e.g., the organisation and the followers) or a lack of intention (i.e., the influence behaviour does not – explicitly – serve a particular cause). The second dimension is concerned with the kind of influence behaviour

(i.e., the means of leadership) which can be evaluated as positive (i.e., using pleasant, likable and/or socially accepted means to influence others), negative (i.e., using hostile, obstructive and/or socially unacceptable means to influence others) or absent (i.e., refraining from influencing others).

Based on these two dimensions (intentions and means) and the three forms (self/other/lack and positive/negative/absent), we derive nine possible areas of leadership concepts (see Table 2.1). This model is not necessarily intended as a description of actual leadership behaviour (which often is much more complex, subjective and ambiguous) but rather as a meta-model to categorise different leadership concepts and to systemise the research landscape and provide more conceptual clarity, also for potentially missing concepts.

Starting in the first column, we can distinguish three areas of leadership research which focused on positively evaluated leadership styles and behaviour. However, even in terms of positive means, leaders can pursue self-serving intentions. We describe this area as *insincere leadership*. At first glance, this leadership behaviour might appear positive; however, the leader is only interested in pursuing his/her own goals. Research in this area includes ‘the shadow side of charisma’ (Conger & Kanungo, 1998) or pseudo-transformational leadership (Bass, 1998; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Certain personal characteristics are supposed to distinguish between positive and negative forms of charismatic and transformational leadership (i.e., socialised versus personalised charisma, authentic transformational versus inauthentic pseudo-transformational leadership). In essence, the distinction is regarded as a question of the leader’s intentions. While there are some studies concerned with the impact of authentic charismatic/transformational leadership (for a review see Bass & Riggio, 2006), empirical research on insincere leadership is still scarce (e.g., Barling, Christie, &

Table 2.1. A Meta-model of Leadership Concepts.

	Positive Influence Behaviour	No Influence Behaviour	Negative Influence Behaviour
Self-serving intention	<i>Insincere leadership</i> (e.g. dark charisma; pseudo-trans formational)	<i>Fake leadership</i> (e.g. impression management)	<i>Derailed leadership</i> (e.g. exploitative; narcissistic)
No intention	<i>Virtuous leadership</i> (e.g. ethical; moral; behavioural integrity)	<i>Non-leadership</i> (e.g. laissez- faire)	<i>Abusive leadership</i> (e.g. petty tyranny; abusive supervision)
Other-serving intention	<i>Constructive leadership</i> (e.g. transformational; empowering; servant)	<i>Failed leadership</i> (e.g. self- sacrifice; non- delegative)	<i>Coercive leadership</i> (e.g. tyrannical; despotic)

Turner, 2008; Lin, Huang, Chen, & Huang, 2017). In contrast, the other two cells in this column focus on the most heavily researched parts of leadership which we call here *virtuous* and *constructive leadership*. Virtuous leadership encompasses leadership models that focus on positive influence as an end in itself. Examples of this area of research include ethical leadership (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005) and leader behavioural integrity (Simons, 2002; Simons, Leroy, Collewaert, & Masschelein, 2015), which focuses on the perceived inconsistency between words and deeds. In contrast, constructive leadership research is based on the idea that leaders use positive means to serve and achieve positive outcomes for others (such as the organisation and/or the followers). The most prominent model in this part of leadership research is obviously the full range model of leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Bass & Riggio, 2006) with its main components transformational and transactional leadership. However, other concepts such as empowering leadership (e.g., Arnold, Arad, Rhoades, & Drasgow, 2000; Hassan, Mahsud, Yukl, & Prussia, 2013) and servant leadership (Van Dierendonck, 2012) also fall into this area, which most certainly has drawn the majority of attention in leadership research so far.

The second column of Table 2.1 categorises leadership models that deal with leaders who, in essence, do not lead. Here, we differentiate between leaders who appear to be doing something (i.e., self-serving *fake leadership*) to serve their own career, those that have no clear intention (*non-leadership*) and those that intend to lead others but end up not doing so, but rather focus their efforts on performing operative tasks themselves (*failed leadership*). Fake, self-serving leadership is reflected in impression management research. While there is a great body of work on impression management and impression management tactics in the work place (e.g., Bolino & Turnley, 2003; Turnley & Bolino, 2001), the number of studies concerned with impression management and leadership is rather scarce (for example, see Sosik, Avolio, & Jung, 2002). In contrast, laissez-faire leadership as the absence of intentional influence has received some attention (especially due to its role in the full range model of leadership; Bass & Riggio, 2006). In contrast, the area of failed leadership can be regarded as widely uncharted territory in leadership research (cp., Schilling, 2009). The absence of goal-oriented influence behaviour is based on a leader's positive intentions to protect followers (and/or the organisation) by not delegating tasks, but rather executing them him or herself (Better if I do that myself so I know that there won't be any mistakes). Due to a lack of focus and time, failed leaders lose sight of their actual leadership tasks.

Finally, leaders use negative means to serve themselves (*derailed leadership*), without any specific goal intentions (*abusive leadership*), or with positive intentions such as the intend to further performance (*coercive leadership*). As stated before, the vast majority of research into the dark side of leadership has focused on abusive supervision which has been described as the display of hostile behaviour towards followers without a specific intention (cp., Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper, 2000, 2007). We describe this and similar approaches (e.g., petty tyranny; Ashforth, 1994, 1997) as abusive leadership as this term implies an often unfair and cruel use of power without a specific goal, just because the leader has the means to do so. Coercive leadership encompasses a variety of concepts which

focus on the goal-oriented use of hostile influence behaviour towards followers. Tyrannical leadership (Einarsen et al., 2007) which has been defined as a style where leaders systematically humiliate, belittle and manipulate followers 'to get the job done' (Skogstad, Aasland, et al., 2014) and despotic leadership (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008) are examples of this area of leadership concepts. The empirical evidence on these models is rather limited so far, as the concepts have mainly been investigated by the original authors. Finally, research into derailed leadership includes new concepts like exploitative leadership (Schmid, Pircher Verdorfer, & Peus, 2019) which focuses on leader's negative influence behaviour driven by self-interest as well as a growing stream of research into narcissistic leadership (e.g., Ouimet, 2010; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2008) and leader narcissism (e.g., Braun, 2017; Grijalva et al., 2015), especially in the context of the dark triad (psychopathy, Machiavellianism, narcissism) (e.g., Schyns, Wisse, & Sanders, 2019; Schyns, Gauglitz, Wisse, & Schütz, 2021).

Conclusion and the Future of (Negative) Leadership Research

As the discussion on our meta-model has shown, the future of negative leadership research would benefit from a clear differentiation of existing and delineation of future concepts. In general, future research should focus on issues of prevalence of those different types of leadership, their specific antecedents and consequences. More specifically, four aspects will be important to address in future research:

- (1) *Differentiating coercive and abusive leadership*: As Liu et al. (2012) show, followers' attributions for the motives behind their leaders' abusive supervision (performance–promotion vs. injury–initiation) can have an important impact on the consequences of destructive leadership. Hence, we encourage researchers to theoretically differentiate intentional (coercive) and unintentional (abusive) forms of destructive leadership and empirically investigate their effects. The idea that the behaviour of destructive leaders is more likely to be accepted in organisations as long as they 'get the job done' (cp., Sutton, 2007) seems a promising hypothesis for future research.
- (2) *Analysing derailed leadership in its context*: It seems reasonable to assume that derailed leadership (e.g., narcissistic or exploitative leadership) is particularly dependent on an enabling environment in the sense that a leader's supervisors do not notice or look away from the devastations of his/her derailed leadership. We, therefore, need in-depth investigations of derailed leadership systems analysing the interplay of destructive leaders, destructive followers and destructive contexts (cp., Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007) to better understand how situational factors enable, facilitate and/or protect extreme forms of destructive leadership.
- (3) *Investigating fake, failed and non-leadership*: As stated before, while we have some knowledge of its consequences, the antecedents of laissez-faire leadership have not been sufficiently investigated. In addition, the delineation of other forms of zero leadership based on positive or negative intentions (failed

and fake leadership) in our model opens new perspectives for concept development and empirical investigations concerned with their causes as well as their personal and organisational consequences.

- (4) *Uncovering insincere leadership*: Even though the concepts of pseudo-transformational leadership and personalised charisma were introduced more than two decades ago, the amount of research in this area is rather small. Most certainly, this is due to the fact that investigating negative intentions behind apparently good leadership behaviour is particularly difficult. Nevertheless, analysing the antecedents and consequences of insincere forms of leadership is particularly necessary to distinguish it from constructive or virtuous leadership. Following Conger (1998), qualitative research could be particularly useful here to investigate this complex and ambiguous concept.

While the research on abusive supervision has clearly dominated our understanding of negative leadership until now, we hope that our overview can stimulate research in areas that have not received the attention they deserve. The dark side of leadership has more to offer than just one main road; there are some interesting areas off the beaten track: side roads, small passages and shady alleys, but all leading to promising views.

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Chapter 3

Fifty Shades of Darth Vaders in Organizations: An Overview of Destructive Leadership

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Abstract

The common notion that leaders should be ethical, good, responsible and trustworthy has been strongly challenged in the fields of business and politics worldwide. Due to the high prevalence of unethical leadership by immediate supervisors and decline in trust in leaders (Coward, Gilley, Avery, Barber, & Gilley, 2014), scholars started to pay closer attention to the dark sides and destructive aspects of leadership. Many different concepts are suggested to define the dark side of leadership, and each of them captures similar but distinct dimensions. In this vein, Einarsen and colleagues' (2007) constructive and destructive leadership model serves as an umbrella concept for different types of dark sides of leadership, covering concepts which have been studied separately such as abusive supervision, tyrannical leadership, petty tyranny, toxic leadership and leader derailment. The present chapter aims to provide a summary of the definitions of these interrelated constructs to acknowledge some other leadership (e.g., paternalistic leadership, pseudo-transformational leadership) and personality styles (e.g., Machiavellianism, narcissism) that have not been considered in this framework and to provide suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Destructive leadership model; paternalistic leadership; pseudo-transformational leadership; narcissistic leadership; Machiavellian leaders; abusive supervision

Introduction

Past research on leadership was heavily dominated by studies focussing on positive and effective leadership (e.g., Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee,

2014). Yet, especially beginning with the 2000s, studies focussing on the dark and destructive sides of leadership have tended to increase (e.g., Fosse, Anders, Einarsen, & Martinussen, 2019). This is not a coincidence considering the empirical evidence that at least one-third of employees are exposed to unethical practices of their supervisors and that trust in leaders have significantly declined (e.g., Cowart, Gilley, Avery, Barber, & Gilley, 2014). For example, the prevalence of destructive leadership (DL) behaviours was reported as ranging from 33.5% to 61% in a Norwegian employee sample (Aasland, Skogstad, Notelaers, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2010). Such findings indicate that DL is a widespread phenomenon in work organizations.

Due to empirical studies documenting high rates of unethical treatment towards employees and organizations by leaders, several researchers developed models of DL in organizational contexts (e.g., Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007; Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013). Since different researchers define DL differently, one and may be the most important limitation of existing models is the ambiguity involved in defining and determining the content of DL (Krasikova et al., 2013). In both Einarsen et al.'s (2007) and Krasikova et al.'s (2013) DL models, definitions of DL involve destructive effects both on the organization and employees. However, the scope of Einarsen et al.'s model, which includes counterproductive work behaviours performed by managers, is broader. Therefore, in this chapter, Einarsen et al.'s model of DL is used as a framework in the discussion of different types of DL.

Einarsen et al. (2007) conceptualized DL as an umbrella term covering a variety of negative leadership behaviours exhibited towards subordinates or the organization, or both. Additionally, the same leader may switch between constructive and DL behaviours at different times. Hence, neither constructive nor DL styles are an all-or-none phenomenon rather, they can co-exist within the same leader's behavioural repertoire (Aasland, Skogstad, Notelaers, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2010). Einarsen and colleagues' DL model considers leader behaviours as a combination of (pro- or anti-) behaviours towards the organization and (pro- or anti-) behaviours towards the employees. According to the model, leader behaviours involving pro-organization and pro-subordinate define *constructive leadership* (i.e., the desirable end); leader behaviours which are harmful for both the organization and the subordinates (i.e., anti-organization and anti-subordinate) refer to *derailed leadership* (i.e., the worst scenario). Combination of anti-organization and pro-subordinate leadership styles define *supportive-disloyal leadership*. Finally, combination of pro-organization and anti-subordinate leader behaviours refer to *tyrannical leadership*. In the middle of their destructive and constructive leadership (DCL) behaviour model, there is also a *passive DL* namely, *laissez-faire leadership* (Aasland et al., 2010). In a Norwegian employee sample, tyrannical leadership was reported to be the least common and laissez-faire leadership was reported to be the most common type of DL (Aasland et al., 2010).

The DCL behaviour model (Einarsen et al., 2007) was proposed to be an inclusive model. Yet, it represents a leader-centric view to leadership. On the other hand, a comprehensive understanding of DL requires not only focussing on

DL behaviours but also focussing on other factors in addition to the leaders (i.e., environments where such leadership emerges are not limited to the organization only, but includes culture, time, the leader and the followers) (Thoroughgood, Sawyer, Padilla, & Lunsford, 2018). Moreover, DL cannot be restricted to supportive-disloyal, tyrannical and derailed leadership as it is the case in Einarsen et al.'s model. Furthermore, the roles of followers and/or cultural contexts are largely ignored in the DCL model. Finally, whether a leader is perceived as destructive by all subordinates or whether DL may also be positively related to positive outcomes is also ignored. Therefore, in addition to including the environmental and follower characteristics, a comprehensive DL model needs to cover actors other than the leader and also a broader range of DL styles.

Based on the DCL behaviour model (Einarsen et al., 2007) and the criticisms associated with it, this chapter aims to critically review and add on the supportive-disloyal leadership, tyrannical leadership and derailed leadership styles. Some other leadership styles that can at times turn into these distinctive DL styles are acknowledged and integrated to Einarsen et al.'s model. These leadership styles are paternalistic, narcissistic, Machiavellian and pseudo-transformational leadership styles. Finally, in line with the criticism directed towards leader-centric models of DL propositions for future research are made.

Supportive–Disloyal Leadership

In their model, Einarsen et al. (2007) described supportive-disloyal leaders as the leaders who are engaging in acts benefiting their subordinates (i.e., pro-subordinate) while at the same time engaging in acts contradicting with the legitimate interests of the organization (i.e., anti-organization). Such kind of leaders value their subordinates at the cost of their organization's interests. Although in the DCL model the destructive part of supportive-disloyal leadership has been typically defined as leaders engaging in theft to benefit their subordinates, some acts of such leaders may be subtler. For example, leaders who have higher levels of relationship orientation may also fall in this category. However, in the literature, both leader consideration and relationship orientation are proposed as positive leadership assets. Although some leaders may consistently be higher in terms of their relationship orientation or leader consideration, most of the time depending on the context and the task at hand, leaders switch between relationship orientation and task orientation as it is the case in Fiedler's (1964) Contingency Theory of Leadership. Hence, rather than being a stable leadership style, this may reflect a preferential strategy used by leaders in order to be effective. Furthermore, in line with the criticism directed toward leader-centric models of DL, followers are active agents who are influential in the leadership process (e.g., Thoroughgood et al., 2018). Additionally, a comprehensive model of DL should also take the macro (i.e., cultural and societal) and micro level (i.e., organizational) factors into consideration. For example, considering the Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) Theory (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975) which focuses on leader–follower dyads and makes a distinction between leader's in- and out-groups, it is highly likely that even a supportive-disloyal leader tends

to show different levels of consideration towards his/her subordinates. Specifically, the same leader may be supportive towards in-group subordinates, but be unsupportive towards out-group subordinates simultaneously. These supportive/unsupportive acts may either be pro- or anti-organization. For example, in order to have allies in the organization, a leader may support a group of subordinates regardless of their performance (i.e., which is a type of supportive, but may either be pro- or anti-organization act). Alternatively, a leader may perceive a high performing subordinate as a threat and may not support him/her (i.e., which is an anti-subordinate and at the same time anti-organization act). Thus, rather than being a trait-like characteristic of a leader, supportive–disloyal leadership reflects a strategy used by the same leader as part of the leading process. In addition, what types of cultures, organizations and followers make a leader supportive–disloyal should also be considered.

Another leadership style which was relatively ignored in research related to DL is paternalistic leadership (PL) style. PL is an emic leadership style which is effective particularly in cultural contexts characterized by high power distance and collectivism (Aycan, 2006), and it is defined as a hierarchical relationship in which the leader provides care and protection to his or her followers and expects loyalty and deference in return. PL consists of five dimensions which are family atmosphere at workplace, individualized relationships with subordinates, involvement in subordinates' non-work lives, loyalty expectation, and status hierarchy and authority (Aycan, 2006). The first three of these dimensions imply that such leaders act like a family elder (e.g., father/mother/elder brother or sister) towards their subordinates; they form close and in-depth relationships with them and provide support to their subordinates regarding issues in their non-work lives. Indeed, these three dimensions of PL are found to be strongly and positively associated with four dimensions of transformational leadership (i.e., idealized influence, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation) (Göncü Köse & Metin, 2019). The last two dimensions of PL (i.e., loyalty expectation, and status hierarchy and authority) involve expectations of loyalty and deference towards the leader as well as unquestioned acceptance of his or her authority and status quo. On the other hand, Farh and Cheng (2000) argue that PL involves three dimensions which are authoritarianism, benevolence and moral leadership. Similar to Aycan's (2006) dimensions of loyalty expectation and status hierarchy and authority, Farh and Cheng's (2000) dimension of authoritarianism consists of expectation of unquestionable obedience as well as acceptance of the leader's absolute authority and control. Consistent with Aycan's (2006) dimensions of family atmosphere at workplace, individualized relationships with subordinates and involvement in subordinates' non-work lives, Farh and Cheng's (2000) dimension of benevolence refers to a leader's genuine interest in and concern for subordinates' well-being both in work and non-work domains. Finally, moral leadership dimension consists of unselfishness, self-discipline and moral conduct.

Up to now, many studies showed that PL was positively associated with a number of positive employee-related outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational identification, supervision trust,

supervisor-rated organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB), self-rated task performance and organizational outcomes such as a decrease in turnover intentions (Bedi, 2020). Yet, some behaviours of paternalistic leaders may constitute typical examples of DL as they are systematic and repeated, do not include an intention to harm, yet violate the legitimate interest of the organization. However, the PL style is more likely to be in accordance with the supportive–disloyal leadership style than it is with the other three types of DL. Einarsen et al. (2007) suggest that supportive–disloyal leaders may encourage their subordinates for loafing, and they may provide their subordinates more benefits than they deserve. Different from transformational leaders, individualized relationships formed by paternalistic leaders with subordinates extends to non-work domains which contribute to the formation of strong bonds between these leaders and their subordinates. In addition, although they may act in a bittersweet manner when they recognize mistakes, paternalistic leaders often protect their subordinates from outside criticisms. Therefore, paternalistic leaders are likely to tolerate their subordinates' loafing or procrastination behaviours and to cover their subordinates' mistakes or even misconduct, at the expense of the benefit of the organization. They may act in these manners also to show their own authority and status. To illustrate, they may let resistant subordinates break workplace safety rules just to give the message that he/she gives more importance to his/her subordinates' opinions than orders from upper management and organizational rules. Therefore, although paternalistic leaders are successful in increasing employees' morale, job satisfaction and other positive work-related attitudes and behaviours especially in specific cultural contexts, they may unintentionally destruct the legitimate interest of the organization.

Machiavellianism is also a candidate predisposition displayed by many leaders that may well lead to supportive–disloyal outcomes. The meta-analysis of Barbuto and Moss (2006) indicated that individuals' Machiavellianism scores had small-to-moderate associations with the influence tactics of exchange tactics, ingratiation, forming coalitions, upward appeals and assertiveness. In a more recent study, Machiavellians were shown to resort to the soft tactics of charm, appearance, joking or kidding, exchange of a favour, promise of reward, ingratiation, alliances and offering compliments and the hard tactics of threat of appeal, threat of punishment and manipulation of the person or situation (Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012). It is known that Machiavellians' world view rests on the belief that 'ends justify the means'. The soft tactics might at first appear as supporting their subordinates, but in fact would potentially harm the organization by leading to 'gangs' or actually turning against those and resorting to the use of hard tactics towards employees who did not play along with their soft tactics. Thus, friendliness, flattery and appealing to emotions make up only one facet of Machiavellianism and might be short-termed. It is worth adopting the actor–partner interdependence and one-with-many models to follow leader–follower dyads by focussing on how displays of soft tactics and hard tactics unravel across critical incidents and how the leader and follower affect each other's behaviour bidirectionally.

Derailed Leadership

The metaphor of a train coming off the track is used to describe derailed leaders who, unintentionally, fail to support both the subordinates and the organization. [Furnham \(2010\)](#) argues that leaders who fail are more common than leaders who are successful and that researchers should give more emphasis to derailed leaders rather than efficient leaders who constitute the minority. Derailed leaders may be successful at their careers up to a point; however, they make fatal mistakes which lead them to fail ([Henderson, 2010](#)). In an early study, [McCall and Lombardo \(1983\)](#) argued that the 10 most common reasons of leadership derailment were ‘(1) An insensitive or bullying style; (2) Aloofness or arrogance; (3) Betrayal of personal trust; (4) Self-centred ambition; (5) Failure to constructively face an obvious problem; (6) Micromanagement; (7) Inability to select good subordinates; (8) Inability to take a long-term perspective; (9) Inability to adapt to a boss with a different style; (10) Overdependence on a mentor’ (cited in [Najar, Holland, & Van Landuyt, 2004](#), p. 1). According to the Center for Creative Leadership, common characteristics of derailed leaders are being resistant to change and adaptation, having poor interpersonal relationships, failure to build and maintain effective teams, being unable to meet task-related objectives and being unable to widen their functional orientation ([Inyang, 2013](#)).

Toxic leadership, a type of derailed leadership, is defined as

...individuals who, by virtue of their destructive behaviours and their dysfunctional personal qualities or characteristics, inflict serious and enduring harm on the individuals, groups, organizations, communities and even the nations that they lead ([Lipman-Blumen, 2005a](#), p.2)

and they may either intentionally or unintentionally inflict harm ([Lipman-Blumen, 2005b](#)). [Pelletier \(2010\)](#) identified eight behavioural dimensions of toxic leaders as attack on followers’ self-esteem, lack of integrity, abusiveness, social exclusion, divisiveness, promoting inequity, threat to followers’ security and laissez-faire. In order to mask their incompetence and maintain position control, toxic leaders use upward (e.g., self-promotion) and/or downward (e.g., controlling employees) influence tactics, and, in turn, such efforts create toxic work environments and negative influences on employees’ performance ([Milosevic, Maric, & Loncar, 2020](#)). Moreover, toxic leaders may serve as role models for other employees in the organization ([Gallus, Walsh, van Driel, Gouge, & Antolic, 2013](#)). In their definition of toxic triangle, [Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser \(2007\)](#) stated that leaders, followers and environmental factors are all responsible parties for the emergence of DL. Consistently, research indicated that proactive efforts of followers who are exposed to toxic leaders are critical in dealing with leader toxicity ([Milosevic et al., 2020](#)). Additionally, [Pelletier \(2012\)](#) reported that in-group and out-group employees respond differently to toxic leaders. Employees who are members of the out-groups are much more motivated to challenge the toxic leader.

Two other forms of derailment are *laissez-faire* (Skogstad, Hetland, Glasø, & Einarsen, 2014) and pseudo-transformational leadership (Barling, Christie, & Turner, 2008). Pseudo-transformational leaders differ from *laissez-faire* leaders such that they put on an appearance like authentic leaders to fulfil their goals, but violate ethical and moral codes in the background (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Their expectations from and behaviours towards their followers mimic those of Machiavellian leaders. Specifically, pseudo-transformational leaders start with apparent transformational behaviours such as individual consideration that would encourage their followers' unconditional loyalty to and dependence on them, but then continue with hard tactics making loyal followers dread the leader's authority; so that the leader's self-interests are achieved via subordinate compliance (Barling et al., 2008). Other pseudo-transformational behaviours can appear as inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation, especially when leaders want to initiate change and innovation. Innovation is at the core of a successful business world but needs to be planned and executed carefully. Pseudo-transformational leaders tend to rush into innovation without consulting followers or checking facts only to make a name as a pioneer (Hughes & Harris, 2015).

Tyrannical Leadership

Tyrannical leaders are those who cause subordinates to suffer but do not necessarily perform other detrimental acts which would negatively affect attainment of organizational goals. Such leaders may even be high performers who give priority to tasks and duties at the expense of subordinates. One of the most studied tyrannical leadership styles is abusive supervision. Abusive supervision includes unpleasant, hurtful and hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours performed systematically or regularly by a supervisor, and it excludes physical contact (Tepper, 2000). Abusive supervisors may overtly humiliate their subordinates, get angry without reason or engage in covert hostility by behaving in a hurtful manner, accusing their subordinates falsely, withholding consideration, ignoring subordinates and/or easily breaking promises. Stein, Vincent-Höper, Schümann, and Gregersen (2020) also found that abusive supervisors were likely to show disrespect towards their subordinates by giving them illegitimate or unnecessary tasks. Similar to other DL styles, Tepper (2000) emphasizes that abusive supervision is also subjective in nature.

Previous findings from international samples revealed that there are mainly supervisor-level and organization-level antecedents of abusive supervision. The dark triad personality traits (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), low level of self-control (Yam, Fehr, Keng-Highberger, Klotz, & Reynolds, 2016), experience of high-level stress (Burton, Hoobler, & Scheuer, 2012), perceptions of injustice (Rafferty, Restubog, & Jimmieson, 2010), low level of emotional intelligence (Xiaqi, Kun, Chongsan, & Sufang, 2012), high levels of conflict with peers (Harris, Harvey, & Kacmar, 2011) and history of family conflict (Garcia, Restubog, Kiewitz, Scott, & Tang, 2014) are among the supervisor-related predictors. In addition, Tepper,

Moss, and Duffy (2011) reported that supervisors were more likely to experience relationship conflict with and engage in abusive behaviours towards subordinates for whom they reported ‘deep-level dissimilarity’ (i.e., the belief that the supervisor and employee differ in terms of deeply held values and attitudes). It is also likely that subordinates who evaluate their supervisors as low on leader–group prototypicality may perceive higher levels of abusive supervision than subordinates who evaluate their supervisors as high on prototypicality. However, majority of the studies regarding abusive supervision did not consider dyadic and group identification-based nature of leadership (Thoroughgood et al., 2018). Few studies that investigated organization-related predictors of abusive supervision revealed that hostile organizational norms and ineffective communication patterns (Zhang & Bednall, 2016), hostile organizational climate (Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, & Marinova, 2012) and organizations in which extremely high goals were set for supervisors (Mawritz, Folger, & Latham, 2014) were among these predictors.

Although abusive supervision is more widespread in Asian countries than the United States (Mackey, Frieder, Brees, & Martinko, 2017), contrary to Anglo countries, supervisor hostility is evaluated as acceptable in Confucian countries (Vogel et al., 2015). Indeed, Mackey et al. (2017) suggest that cultural differences in collectivism, individualism, power distance or achievement orientation are highly likely to affect subordinates’ perceptions of supervisory injustice. There is a big void of research that examine direct effects of cultural orientations on perceptions of abusive supervision as well as moderating effects of cultural values on relationships of abusive supervision with employee-related, work-related and organizational outcomes. Finally, it is suggested here that, leadership styles may influence the association of abusive supervision with negative outcomes and should also be examined in future research.

Petty tyranny is another tyrannical leadership style. Ashforth (1997) defined petty tyrants as “*those who uses their power and authority oppressively, capriciously, and perhaps vindictively*” (p. 126). Six dimensions of petty tyranny are arbitrariness and self-aggrandizement, belittling subordinates, lack of consideration, a forcing style of conflict resolution, discouraging initiative and noncontingent punishment. Both abusive supervisors and petty tyrants target subordinates, and their definitions exclude physical contact. However, different from abusive supervision, petty tyranny includes both hostile and non-hostile behaviours resulting in a broader concept (Cacciatore, 2015). Revised definitions of petty tyranny include domineering, being pushy, manipulative, conceited, selfish and loud behaviours (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004). Petty tyranny is also defined as a type of self-serving leadership (Boudrias, Rousseau, & Lajoie, 2020). With this respect, such leaders may not necessarily be pro-organizational rather; in order to attain their personal goals, which may also contradict with that of their employing organization, such leaders abuse their subordinates. Moreover, organization’s tolerance for petty tyrants may facilitate emergence of such leaders. Furthermore, a high power distance culture which justifies status differences between managers and subordinates may also encourage such kind of leadership. Finally, some characteristics of followers (e.g., trait anxiety) may also be positively related to petty tyranny (Kant, Skogstad, Torsheim, & Einarsen, 2013).

Machiavellianism can lead to tyrannical leadership especially when supervisors perceive their position power to be high (Wisse & Sleebos, 2016). The description of tyrannical methods provided by Einarsen et al. (2007) points exactly to Machiavellian strategies, such as forming gangs, generating distrust and creating scapegoats of those they punish severely as a warning to others. Machiavellian tyrants might do so by justifying their behaviours with the belief that the 'in-group' actions are always correct and they serve the interests of the organization. Indeed, their tactical repertoire (Jonason et al., 2012) would enable them to easily switch from hard tactics towards the subordinates to soft tactics towards top management/customers/outside organizations in establishing new relationships/alliances and leading to desired organizational performance. Hence, their tyrannical acts towards subordinates may easily be ignored. Moreover, at times, Machiavellian leaders might see unethical/immoral behaviour as instrumental to organizational gain (e.g., withholding employee compensation). Research showed that the probability of acting on one's moral/ethical reasoning capacity is greatly reduced by a Machiavellian value orientation (Den Hartog & Belshak, 2012; Sendjaya, Pekerti, Härtel, Hirst, & Butarbutar, 2016) further supporting the notion that Machiavellians could easily turn into abusive leaders. Perceptions of being bullied were observed more with Machiavellian leaders in hierarchical and adhocracy cultures (Pilch & Turska, 2015) which imply that tyrannical leadership perceptions could be culture-bound.

Another line of research on DL focuses on narcissism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) which is a personality trait characterized by grandiosity, arrogance, self-absorption, entitlement, fragile self-esteem and hostility (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Empirical evidence suggests that narcissists are more likely to emerge as leaders (Brunell et al., 2008) and attain leadership positions because they are charming and highly extraverted (Grijalva, Harms, Newman, Gaddis, & Fraley, 2015). Due to the difficulty in distinguishing between individuals who are really self-confident and who are narcissistic, they both attain leadership positions in organizations (O'Reilly, Doerr, Caldwell, & Chatman, 2014). However, research showed that narcissistic leaders are lacking empathy, manipulative and aggressive (Nevicka, Van Vianen, De Hoogh, & Voorn, 2018) all of which are related to negative outcomes for employees and organizations. In addition, such leaders are likely to put unrealistic goals or to make risky decisions because of their overconfidence, and such behaviours are destructive for both employees and organizations.

Conclusion

Our review points to leadership styles (e.g., paternalistic) and personality tendencies (Machiavellianism and narcissism) that were not acknowledged in Einarsen and colleagues' (2007) DCL model. As seen, all DL behaviours share commonalities with one another and can appear in more than one quadrant of the DCL model. Future research needs to study all DL behaviours in order to map them on a multidimensional scale to see their empirical overlaps.

Overlaps across DL quadrants are not surprising considering that whether a leader style will result in DL at all or which type of DL it will result in would be determined also by factors other than the leader. As [Thoroughgood et al. \(2018\)](#) emphasized, leader-centric approaches are not sufficient in determining the destructiveness of leader styles, but rather follower characteristics, contextual factors and the time frame, all embedded in the systems framework, would interactively determine how the leader styles will play out. Such a systems framework can holistically be assessed qualitatively and provide a direction for the important variables that can be integrated into quantitative research. Quantitative models would require partitioning the system into its appropriate levels (i.e., nation-, environment-, organization-, group-, dyad- and individual-level) and identifying the antecedent and outcome variables at the relevant level. Measurement of ‘destruction’ needs to be operationalized carefully, independent of leader characteristics. Leader behaviours that result in meeting organizational goals (a constructive outcome) might also result in follower dissatisfaction (a destructive outcome); hence operationalizing levels of outcomes seems necessary to delineate when and for what/who leadership is destructive.

Researchers in the fields of organizational behaviour and industrial and organizational (I-O) psychology mainly focus on the micro-context and put emphasis on follower outcomes. This is not surprising as attainment of organizational goals would be short-termed unless the workforce is productive. Hence, the dyadic relation between the leader and the follower(s) is of utmost importance for these fields of study. The LMX, individualized leadership, relational leadership, leader–follower congruence theories all seek to understand the dynamic nature of these dyads ([Kim et al., 2020](#)). Nevertheless, few empirical research have utilized the most suitable modelling techniques to understand this dynamic relationship. Extant research on dyads enjoys the actor–partner interdependence model (APIM; two members of a unique dyad not sharing members with other dyads) and the reciprocal one-with-many model (OWM; multiple partners – subordinates – nested within one focal person – leader) ([Kashy & Kenny, 2000](#)), nevertheless they were found as the least used methods in research on leader–follower dyads ([Kim et al., 2020](#)). These models enable identifying reciprocal effects across the members of dyads across time and if dyad members’ characteristics interact in affecting member outcomes. In this chapter, we discussed that leader behaviours displayed by Machiavellianist leaders could lead to outcomes that could both qualify as supportive–disloyal or tyrannical leadership, based on follower perceptions. Similarly, the same leadership style can lead to a constructive outcome, again based on follower perceptions. For instance, trust in Machiavellian leaders decrease when followers are also Machiavellian ([Belshak, Muhammad, & Den Hartog, 2018](#)). As shown in separate studies, leader self-serving behaviours depended on follower low self-esteem ([Barelds, Wisse, Sanders, & Laurijssen, 2018](#)) and follower low self-esteem influenced whether ‘dark’ leaders were perceived as abusive or not ([Neuvicka, De Hoogh, Den Hartog, & Belshak, 2018](#)). Thus, it would be expected that low self-esteem followers would perceive such leaders as tyrannical. Researchers can make use of APIM and OWM to simultaneously capture such dyadic associations across time.

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Chapter 4

A Typology of Destructive Leadership: PseudoTransformational, Laissez-Faire, and Unethical Causal Factors and Predictors

Wallace A. Burns, Jr

Abstract

There are several permutations of destructive leadership types. Most involve active leadership actions, but some involve passive actions (or lack of leadership). A review of the literature reveals a relative dearth of root causes of destructive leadership type, but a reasonable sampling of causal factors and predictors of destructive leadership results. The author focuses on three relevant and representative destructive leadership types: Pseudotransformational, Laissez-Faire, and Unethical, and scoured the literature for root causes, causal factors, and predictors related to each. He further compared and contrasted these leadership types to differentiate their similarities and differences and discussed the causal factors and predictors associated with the operationalization of these leadership styles.

Keywords: Destructive leadership; pseudotransformational leadership; laissez-faire leadership; unethical leadership; leadership typology; leadership causal factors

Introduction

There are a variety of destructive leadership behaviors that have been described and operationalized, such as workplace bullying, tyrannical leadership, and abusive supervision (Skogstad, Aasland, Nielsen, Hetland, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2014). Most of these destructive leadership behaviors are actively wrought, though some, such as laissez-faire, are both demonstrably destructive and yet passive (i.e., a lack of leadership). Surprisingly, the empirical research in terms of the root causes of

destructive leadership is limited despite the significant negative consequences on subordinates and the organization as a whole (Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2007).

Skogstad et al. (2007), as cited in Unal, Warren, and Chen (2012, p. 14), defined destructive leadership as the “systematic and repeated behavior by a leader, supervisor or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organization by undermining and/or sabotaging the organization’s goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of his/her subordinates.” This leadership trait has been shown to cause workplace stressors and subordinate stress (Kelloway, Sivanathan, Francis, & Barling, 2005; Skogstad, Anders et al., 2014).

There are many shades of destructive leadership, from abusive supervision, bullying and harassment, petty tyranny, and toxic leadership to the dark side of leadership, bad leadership, narcissistic leaders, derailment, and incompetent leadership (Brown & Mitchell, 2015), narcissistic leaders, derailment, and incompetent leadership. This chapter provides a typology on three primary destructive leadership types – pseudotransformational, laissez-faire, and unethical – and discusses and analyzes the causal factors and predictors associated with each. The purpose is to differentiate between the three types by comparing and contrasting their similarities and differences.

Writer Frank Sonnenberg described a bad leader as lacking talent and skill. He described a destructive leader as lacking character. With this understanding of destructive leadership in general and these three destructive leadership types in specific, the following sections of this typology will distinguish each of these types by their similarities and differences, followed by a discussion of causal factors and predictors associated with each.

Pseudotransformational, Laissez-Faire, and Unethical Leadership Defined

These three destructive leadership types share this in common: They consistently result in negative outcomes, and they are relatively hard to define. Negative outcomes might include poor employee retention, higher employee turnover, reduced employee production, poor employee morale, lack of team chemistry, lack of communication, and all other outcomes associated with micromanagement, a lack of leadership vision, unclear expectations, and abusive behavior such as bullying. And, as can be seen below in Fig. 4.1, defining the boundaries of these leadership types is more art than science.

Pseudotransformational Leadership

Pseudotransformational leadership (PTL) behavior has been described as selfish yet inspirational, resulting in the suppression of independent thought in subordinates. Subordinates feel like they matter very little. Lin, Huang, Chen, and Huang (2017, p. 187) stated that PTL is “driven by the interaction between transformational

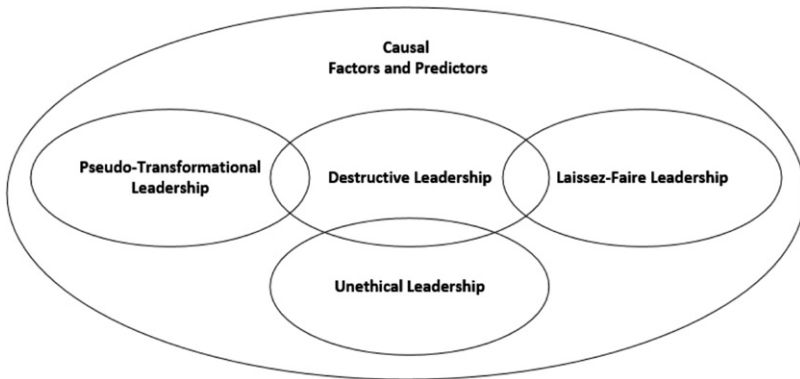


Fig. 4.1. A Destructive Leadership Typology.

leadership and the subordinates' perception of their supervisor's manipulative intention... More specifically, when subordinates perceive the manipulative intention of transformational leadership, they are less likely to identify with the organization, which ultimately limits their willingness to demonstrate contextual performance activities."

Barling, Christie, and Turner (2207) developed and described the concept of the pseudotransformational leader as follows:

Pseudo-transformational leadership (i.e., the unethical facet of transformational leadership) is manifested by a particular combination of transformational leadership behaviors (i.e., low idealized influence and high inspirational motivation) and is differentiated from both transformational leadership (i.e., strong idealized influence and high inspirational motivation) and laissez-faire (non)-leadership (i.e., low idealized influence and low inspirational motivation). (p. 851)

Barling, Christie, and Turner (2008) defined PTL as the unethical facet of transformational leadership, making it an unproductive combination of transformational leader behaviors such as strong idealized influence and high inspirational motivation, and nonleadership behavior such as low idealized influence and low inspirational motivation. Spangenburg (2012), posited that PTL is counter to authentic transformational leadership, which must be based on moral foundations. Spangenburg described this disconnection as whitewater rafting in a hurricane. What could go wrong?

Krishnan (2005) defined PTL by what it is not, meaning by what comprises transformational leadership. He cited Burns (1978) as defining transformational leadership as "when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality." Krishnan emphasized that transformational leadership emphasized a value system,

identification with and affected toward the organization and the successful tenure (or duration) of the leader–follower relationship. Cote (2017, p. 53) posited that a transformational leader “focuses on the follower’s values, emotions, ethics, long-term goals while assessing motives, and satisfying their needs in a transformational process that changes people.” PTL changes people, indeed, but in the opposite, unproductive manner.

PTL, moreover, involves transformational leadership that is related positively to a follower’s willingness to engage in counterproductive, unethical behavior for the benefit of the company (Effelsburg, Solga, & Gurt, 2014; O’Reilly & Chatman, 2020). This is why, PTL can be so negatively invasive: Its faulty lure enabling a hard-to-stop negative wave of momentum. A comedian described this nonproductive yet alluring activity as akin to people fighting for good seats on the *Titanic*. Additionally, according to Nielsen and Daniels (2016), there is no way to measure whether leaders are truly transformational or pseudotransformational, that no existing measures explicitly capture the health and well-being side of transformational leadership.

Graham, Ziegert, and Capitano (2015, p. 425), citing Walumbwa et al. (2008), made this grounded distinction between good and bad transformational leadership: “Under authentic leadership, the leaders possess strong moral values and do not use their charismatic influence to manipulate followers. Yet, under pseudo-transformational leadership, the presence of the leaders’ ethical motivations is not necessarily present, and the leader focuses on the self at the expense of others. This difference between a self-focus and other focus is at the core of the distinction between authentic and pseudo-transformational leadership.”

Finally, the difference between transformational and PTL may hinge on one important human factor: integrity. As Parry and Proctor-Thomson (2002, p. 75), so well-described it: The discrepancy between these conceptions of transformational leadership, i.e., ethical vs. unethical, or conditionally ethical or unethical, is not purely academic. If transformational leadership does not possess integrity nor promote ethical behavior, then the question must be raised as to the value of promoting, training, and developing it.

Laissez-Faire Leadership

According to Breevaart and Zacher (2019, p. 384), whereas transformational leadership is associated with positive outcomes, laissez-faire leadership (LFL) negatively affects followers, and leaders are perceived as less effective by their followers when they use both transformational and laissez-faire leadership because it reduces followers’ trust in their leader. Recommended practitioner points included:

- Leaders should inspire, support, and intellectually challenge their followers on a weekly basis because these transformational leadership behaviors enhance followers’ trust in the leader.
- Leaders should refrain from a passive approach towards their followers, especially in weeks when they do not show transformational leadership because this approach reduces followers’ trust in the leader.

- Leaders use different leadership behaviors within the same week, and the effects of these behaviors are rather short-lived (i.e., within that week rather than across weeks).
- Followers' trust in the leader positively predicts followers' perceptions of leader effectiveness (p. 385).

These practitioner points promote the teamwork needed for strategic organizational success. LFL works to weaken teamwork and the synergy normally required for success. In this regard, Breevaart and Zacher asked a prescient question regarding laissez-faire leaders: Do they deliberately withdraw from the workplace because they are not able or willing to lead, or do they intentionally decide that they do not need to interfere with their followers (i.e., a sign of good leadership and understanding followers' needs)? More on this will be discussed later in the chapter.

Pahi and Hamid (2016) detailed the destructive “magic” of the laissez-faire leader, who provides a lack of role clarity, involvement with the group, accountability, and otherwise active participation. This style can work where the team needs practically nothing from the manager. But, more often than not, the laissez-faire leader fails to provide the needed leadership.

LFL has been shown to possess strong negative relationships with various leadership criteria, and this absence of leadership is as important as is the presence of other types of leadership (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008). Their research found lower follower satisfaction with the leader, reduced subordinate-rated leader effectiveness, subordinate-perceived role nonclarity, and reduced supervisor-rated subordinate performance.

Barling et al. (2008) distinguished between PTL and LFL practitioners. Laissez-faire leaders lack both prosocial and egotistical values and are indifferent and uninterested in leading or inspiring. As such, PTL practitioners are found to exert more pervasive negative effects on the organization and its members.

LFL's negative effect on organizational success is pervasive. Its enactment of passive-avoidant and non-responsive leadership behavior can enable the bullying process to endure, and progress and the bullying behaviors associated with such sustained and escalated scenarios seem to be particularly relevant antecedents of job insecurity (Glambek, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2018; Schuh, Zhang, & Tian, 2013).

As there are links between PTL and LFL, there are also links between LFL and unethical leadership (UL). According to Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2014):

While these effective leadership components appear to comprise an important aspect of ethical leadership, their absence – in the form of “laissez-faire” leadership – does not seem sufficient to elicit the perception of unethical leadership. Rather, unethical leadership seems to be characterized primarily by actively negative traits and behaviors such as egoism, dishonesty and corruption, inhumane and unfair treatment, manipulation and destructive behavior, and a short-term perspective on success. Focusing on the anti-poles

of the unethical leadership attributes for describing a leader – i.e., a humane, honest, and credible leader who treats others in a compassionate and fair manner and has a strong value-orientation and a long-term view on success – may be a useful way to isolate the essential components that define ethical leadership as distinct from simply effective leadership. (p. 355)

This distinction is very important to understand the uniqueness of LFL in the broader domain of UL. And to add a layer of complexity, there are significant differences between the Western and Eastern Cultures. For example, in Eastern cultures, as opposed to Western cultures, ethical leadership was particularly associated with leader modesty and openness to other ideas, and ethical leaders were often described to show personal detachment from material success indicators (financial wealth, status, etc.) and to act as servants to society in Eastern cultures (Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2014, p. 355). As one would expect, LFL causes conflict and role ambiguity, which often led to bullying and stress. LFL was positively correlated with role conflict, role ambiguity, and conflicts with coworkers, which together support that LFL behavior is a destructive behavior (Skogstad et al., 2007).

Multiple studies of LTL have pinpointed the enduring problem of “good leader, bad behavior.” Chen, Zhu, and Liu (2019) explored the variant behavior of trusted leaders, Wellman et al. (2019) appraised the effect of formal laissez-faire leaders on informal leadership, Kelloway et al. (2012) studied the mediating role of employee trust in leadership, and Pahi and Hamid (2016) investigated the relationship between LFL and commitment to service quality, where LFL is of paramount significance and needs to be taken into greater consideration for effective employee and organizational outcomes.

Finally, with respect to transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership, there appears to be a difference between male and female practitioners. According to Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen (2003):

A meta-analysis of 45 studies of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles found that female leaders were more transformational than male leaders and also engaged in more of the contingent reward behaviors that are a component of transactional leadership. Male leaders were generally more likely to manifest the other aspects of transactional leadership (active and passive management by exception) and laissez-faire leadership. Although these differences between male and female leaders were small, the implications of these findings are encouraging for female leadership because other research has established that all of the aspects of leadership style on which women exceeded men relate positively to leaders’ effectiveness, whereas all of the aspects on which men exceeded women have negative or null relations to effectiveness. (p. 569)

This difference between men and women, as detailed in this aggregation of 45 studies, is discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Unethical Leadership

Unethical leadership (UL) behavior refers to behavior or actions that are illegal or violate moral norms and has many negative tentacles. [Egorov, Maxim, et al. \(2019\)](#) defined five UL behaviors as follows:

- Acting in self-interest and misusing power
- Deception and dishonesty
- Lack of accountability, compliance, or transparency
- Lack of personal values or moral code
- Incivility
- Narrow or short-term focus

These behaviors, while unethical, as mentioned, may not be illegal. [Barling et al. \(2008, p. 852\)](#), found that UL behavior included ethical transgressions that are not necessarily illegal but must be characterized on a day-to-day basis.

[Unal, Warren, and Chen \(2012\)](#) defined UL as the use of power and authority for an improper purpose and/or in an improper manner and whose behavior deviates from universal ethical norms (pp. 5–6). But, while UL can be found at all levels of an organization, formal supervisory UL behavior – where the supervisor had formal authority over subordinates and involved the use of power – occurs when such authority is used in an inappropriate manner or for an inappropriate purpose ([Gan, 2018](#); [Wang & Li, 2019](#)). To make it harder to expose, a dark leader’s personality may, in the short term, be mistaken for a positive relationship with good leadership, according to [Pietrulewicz \(2016\)](#), who added:

what appears appealing in the short term may, in the long term, evolve into very toxic and unethical leadership behaviors which in turn will contribute to a more polluted organizational environment. Moreover, some researchers have found that an ethical context and a bright personality dimension such as emotional stability, can moderate the relations between leaders’ dark personality and leadership and outcomes. (p. 173)

[Morais \(2017\)](#) and [Morais, Abrams, and Randsley de Moura \(2020, p. 9\)](#) studied the 2016 US Presidential Election and found that “group members’ perceptions of leadership ethicality may affect behavioral attributions about their leaders, and the acceptability and endorsement of future unethical leadership,” which supported their central argument that unethical in-group leadership succeeds and it encourages relaxation of the group’s ethical standards.

Narcissism can be found behind a leader’s tendency to engage in unethical behaviors. [Blair, Helland, and Walton \(2017\)](#) described their findings on leader narcissism:

The results empirically support the relationship between narcissism and a leader's tendency to engage in behaviors associated with unethical leadership. The managers in this study who scored high on a narcissism scale were likely to ignore input from others, censure critical viewpoints, demand that their decisions be accepted without question, and undermine others' authority when engaging in the A.C. exercises. Furthermore, these individuals also had a tendency to alienate others, falsify information to support their actions, make exaggerated claims concerning their recommendations, substitute anecdotes or analogies for hard evidence, and persuade others through emotional argumentation rather than rational argumentation. Thus, these findings offer support for the assumption that narcissism is key to understanding why some leaders have a propensity to behave in a self-serving, unethical manner when interacting with and influencing others. This study adds to the literature by showing a link between narcissism and objective observations of unethical leader behaviors.

The effect of narcissistic UL includes ignoring caution, taking an unnecessary risk, revisionism, exaggeration, and blame-shifting, all of which work against team stability and productivity.

Workplace pressures might increase the incidence of UL. Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2014) found that UL practitioners, who were found to lack enduring values and make decisions arbitrarily, elevated these traits during operationally stressful periods, i.e., at exactly the wrong times when active, motivating leadership was needed most. Joosten, van Dijke, Van Hiel, and De Cremer (2014, p. 1) argued, "...that the hectic and fragmented workdays of leaders may increase the likelihood that they violate ethical norms. This highlights the necessity to carefully schedule tasks that may have ethical implications. Similarly, organizations should be aware that overloading their managers with work may increase the likelihood of their leaders transgressing ethical norms."

To remedy UL challenges within organizations and individuals, leaders have a prominent position in the chain of control to act as role models and create ethical environments within organizations by demonstrating to followers the right behavioral boundaries set within an organization (Kabeyi, 2018). Graham, Ziegert, and Capitano (2015) argued that inspirational and charismatic transformational leaders elicited higher levels of unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB) than transactional leaders when the leaders used loss framing but did not gain framing. Furthermore, followers' promotion regulatory focus moderated this relationship such that the effect held for followers with a low promotion focus, but not for individuals with a high promotion focus (p. 423). Unal, Warren, and Chen (2012) added that from a managerial perspective, identifying the causes and consequences of unethical supervision may reduce the occurrence of such [UL] behaviors and their detrimental effects (p. 17).

As can be seen in this typological review, UL is a multifaceted challenge to good order and productivity. Combined with PTL and LFL, these operationalized destructive leadership behaviors affect teams and organizational productivity.

The following sections discuss causal factors and predictors associated with destructive leadership.

Causal Factors and Predictors

A thorough review of the literature found very minimal empirical research identifying the root causes of destructive leadership, including PTL, LFL, or UL. Meaning, there was no fundamental reason for the occurrence of these destructive leadership styles evident in practice, which may underscore why it is so prevalent (human nature) and hard to eradicate (no root cause identified). Agnotes et al. (2018) made an observation that is fitting here: Parent trust is rooted in child disclosure of information. When a child hides from parents, parents may lose trust topically, or at the least, trust but verify. Destructive leadership, by its nature, is most often hidden from plain view. This section looks behind the destructive leadership curtain for causal factors and predictors that may help provide an understanding of the destructive leader's behavior.

Table 4.1 provides an array of causal factors and predictors associated with each destructive leadership covered here, taken from a thorough review of the literature.

Pseudotransformational Leadership

With reference to Table 4.1, Section 1, the PTL *causal factors* were relatively narrow in effect, confined to either a small subset of behavior or of relatively insignificant scope. The primary causal factors included conflicts of interest and subordinate explanation of destructive behavior. Specific behaviors of transformational leadership and constructive leadership are often antithetical to PTL. Interestingly, PTL, but not LFL or UL, was associated with perceptions of abusive leadership, and femininity was more likely to influence identification with leaders.

The *predictors* associated with PTL were more impactful than the causal factors in scope and organizational reach. PTL's negative traits such as fear of, dependence on, and/or obedience to the leader, perceptions of abusive supervision, and follower's perceptions of job insecurity were all relatively predictive. Women were more prone than men to deliver rewards, being a predictive opposite (to PTL) action of effective performance. Low-level individual consideration toward direct reports was predictive and may lack followers' trust, respect, and idealized influence. Charismatic leadership was predictive of various destructive outcomes. Finally, under a PTL practitioner, followers are invested in core self-evaluation.

Laissez-Faire Leadership

With reference to Table 4.1, Section 2, the LFL *causal factors* were more passive but no less dangerous to organizational success. Mediation should be shortened as increased lag time reduced causality. Individuals spontaneously inferred causal locus of individual behaviors based on categorization, stereotyping, and

Table 4.1. Matrix of Source to Destructive Leadership Causal Factors and Predictors.

Source	Causal Factor	Predictor
Section 1: Pseudotransformational Leadership		
Barling et al. (2008)	Specific behaviors that constitute transformational leadership and how the behaviors are perceived.	Fear of the leader, obedience to the leader, dependence on the leader, perceptions of abusive supervision, and followers' perceptions of job insecurity.
Eagly et al. (2003)	Causation of constructive leadership on subordinate job satisfaction may come quickly and wane as quickly.	Women were more prone than men to deliver rewards to subordinates for appropriate performance, a behavioral pattern that is predictive of effective performance by leaders.
Effelsberg and Solga (2015)	Conflict of interest between economic goals of an organization and interests of external stakeholders.	Low levels of individual consideration toward direct reports and may lack followers' trust, respect, and an idealized influence.
Effelsberg, Solga, and Gurt (2014)		Charismatic leadership was predictive of various destructive outcomes.
Lin et al. (2017)	Subordinate explanation.	Contextual performance, with a meta-analytic correlation.
Joosten et al. (2014)	Pseudotransformational, but neither transformational nor laissez-faire leadership, will be associated with perceptions of abusive supervision.	

Kim, Liden, Kim, and Lee (2015)

Saint-Michel (2018)

Effelsberg and Solga (2015)

Core self-evaluation affects employee outcomes.

“Femininity” is more likely to influence identification with leaders.

Situations comprising a conflict of interest between economic goals of an organization and interests of external stakeholders.

Followers are high in core self-evaluation.

Moderating effects of leaders’ sex on the positive relationship between their communal orientation and transformational leadership.

Section 2: Laissez-Faire Leadership

Ågotnes, Einarsen, Hetland, and Skogstad (2018)

Breevaart and Zacher (2019)

Glambek, Anders, and Einarsen (2018)

Hinkin and Schriesheim (2008)

Kelloway et al. (2005)

Proposed mediation model should use shorter time frame.

Lag time weaken causality.

Individuals spontaneously infer causal locus of individual behaviors based on categorization, stereotypes, and automatic processing.

Coworker conflict and stressors predicted new cases of self-reported workplace bullying.

Trust in the leader.

Bullying on job insecurity.

Nonreinforced subordinate good performance will lead to negative subordinate affective and behavioral responses (e.g., dissatisfaction and decreases in performance).

Individual trust and individual well-being, i.e. leader–subordinate shared perceptions.

Table 4.1. (*Continued*)

Source	Causal Factor	Predictor
Skogstad, Hetland, Glasø, & Einarsen (2014)	Role ambiguity.	Role ambiguity.
Skogstad, Aasland, Nielsen, Hetland, Matthiesen, and Einarsen (2014)		Lowered job satisfaction over a 2-year time span.
Skogstad et al. (2007)	Precursor of interpersonal conflicts and role stress, resulting in bullying and psychological distress.	Safety-specific passive leadership predicts safety-related variables such as safety consciousness and safety climate.
Section 3: Unethical Leadership		
Blair, Helland, and Walton (2017)		Narcissism predicts which individuals emerge as leaders; there is a high incidence of narcissism in the ranks of leadership.
Egorov et al. (2019)	Leaders' self-ratings of moral foundations are independent from follower ratings.	Leaders' or followers' sensitivity to a certain moral foundation was more important for the prediction of the focal unethical leadership perceptions.
Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2014)	Disregard of responsibility to society.	Long-term success improbable.
Gan (2018)		Employee moral justification would mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and unethical employee behavior.

Gigol (2020)
Graham et al. (2015)

Kabeyi (2018)

Kalshoven, Hans,
and Boon (2016)

Miao, Newman, Yu,
and Xu (2013)

Morais, Abrams,
and Randsley de
Moura (2020)
Pietrulewicz (2016)

None of the indirect effects between ethical leadership, unethical pro-organizational behavior, and organizational identification for the different levels of autonomy were significant.

The ethical culture of an organization is regarded as an important component of the organizational context in order to account for unethical behavior.

Role of leaders is a situational aspect which predicts employees' ethical behavior.

Decision-making is often wrong and, therefore, not useable as a predictor.

Individual's organizational identification alone does not predict unethical pro-organizational behavior.

Sickness absenteeism in year 2, but not in year 3.

Table 4.1. (Continued)

Source	Causal Factor	Predictor
Resick et al. (2011)	Privacy and display abusive behavior varies by culture.	Uncertainty avoidance...The extent to which a society relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events.
Ünal, Warren, and Chen (2012)		Violations of dignity, more so than violations of autonomy or procedural justice, will aid in the development of theory.
Zhang, Liang, Tian, and Tian (2020)	Field study is not ideal for establishing causal direction.	Charismatic leadership may lead to followers' unethical pro-organizational behavior; predicting why and when employees may engage in unethical behaviors.

automatic processing. Role ambiguity was highly predictive, as was the incidence of interpersonal conflict and role stress, which resulted in bullying and psychological stress.

The *predictors* associated with LFL were plentiful, which seemed counterintuitive when compared to PTL. LFL behavior was predictive of role ambiguity, bullying on job security, distrust in the leader and coworker conflict, role ambiguity, and lowered job satisfaction over the near term. Stressors were predictive of new cases of self-reported workplace bullying.

Unethical Leadership

With reference to [Table 4.1](#), Section 3, the UL was predictive of leader disregard of responsibility to society. Leader self-ratings of moral foundations were found to be independent of follower ratings. These two predictors emanate, it would seem, from a base of narcissism in the leader. The ethical culture of an organization was regarded as an important component to account for unethical behavior. Cultural norms seemed to play a role in categorizing ethical leadership breaches and displaying abusive behavior.

The *predictors* associated with UL were many. The UL practitioner, as narcissistic, was highly predictive. Leaders' or followers' sensitivity to a certain moral foundation was more important for the prediction of the focal UL perceptions. Long-term success under a UL practitioner is less likely. Leader roles are a situational aspect that is predictive of employee ethical (and unethical) behavior. Decision-making was unusable as a predictor. An individual, organizational identification alone does not predict UPB. Sick leave absenteeism was predictive in year two but not in year 3. The extent to which society relies on social norms, rules, and procedures – uncertainty avoidance – is predictive to some degree. Violations of dignity, more so than violations of autonomy or procedural justice, were predictive. And finally, charismatic leadership may lead to followers' UPB, which is predictive of why and when employees may engage in unethical behavior.

Conclusion

This typology covered three forms of destructive leadership, pseudotransformational, laissez-faire, and unethical, endeavoring to compare and contrast similarities and differences associated with each leadership type. A thorough review of the literature found that empirical research is less than definitive. Targeted research is needed to identify and analyze the root causes of destructive leadership behavior, as nearly no data are available in this area. This typology focused on what was available and honed into detail each destructive behavior covered here.

PTL operationally results in a *lack of integrity*. This lack of integrity in the leader often leads to operational and organizational conflicts of interest and counter-productivity. The pseudotransformational leader is often a charismatic leader, who initially appears to be what he or she is not over the short term, and organizationally and operationally effective and productive leader. The opposite is true over time.

LFL is often hard to peg in terms of its operational effect because of its passivity, its lack of leadership. This gap in leadership often leads to a *lack of teamwork* and is affected culturally differently in the Eastern Hemisphere than in the Western Hemisphere, where deference and attitudes are markedly different. One silver lining attributable to this leadership behavior is individual initiative, which makes sense in an environment lacking leadership. Society relies on social norms, rules, and procedures, a healthy behavior often neglected by laissez-faire leaders.

UL inevitably produces a *lack of productivity*. These leaders are often narcissists, which underscores why societal “greater good” goals and organizational core objectives are very often neglected in favor of the unethical leader’s own priorities.

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Chapter 5

Corporate Psychopaths and Destructive Leadership in Organisations

Clive R. Boddy

Abstract

The study of corporate psychopaths has gone from something which some academic peers found somewhat incredible, and even laughable, in 2005, to an area where an increasing amount of research is taking place across many disciplines. The paradigmatic view in 2005 was that psychopaths were criminal and, therefore, to be found in prisons and not in ‘respectable’ corporations. That chapters like this on corporate psychopaths and destructive leadership are now invited in 2020 for inclusion in academic management books that illustrates how relatively quickly the idea that psychopaths are found in corporations has gained acceptance. Nonetheless, destructive, unethical and psychopathic leadership is, by and large, still unexpected in the workplace, and this magnifies its impact as employees struggle to know how to deal with it. Such destructive leadership is also jarring and quite often traumatic for the employees concerned as well as being damaging to the organisations involved. This chapter examines psychopathic leadership and outlines its importance. This subject has been covered before in books and other chapters which describe psychopaths as organisational destroyers and producers of a climate of fear. Therefore, an aim of this chapter is to present some of the most up-to-date findings on corporate psychopaths and how they influence their environment via abusive supervision involving discrimination, ridicule and lowered job satisfaction. Abusiveness and unfairness lead to employees experiencing workplace stress and reduced mental health. The implications of corporate psychopathy for corporate legal responsibility are only just being considered as lawyers, ethicists and philosophers engage with this difficult subject.

Keywords: Destructive leadership; corporate psychopaths; unethical leadership; psychopathic leadership; abusive supervision; psychopathy

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the most destructive, self-oriented and ruthless leader that employees can ever meet in the workplace. That person is the corporate psychopath. Although injurious at an individual level, that destructiveness magnifies once a corporate psychopath reaches leadership positions because of the size and power of organisations and the authority divested by organisations onto their leaders (Boddy, 2006). Corporate psychopaths are accomplished at getting to the top and even better at making their presence felt once they get there. This is important because leaders are highly influential in determining the fate of the organisations they run.

Many researchers, therefore, conclude that the success or failure of organisations largely depends on the personality of the leader (Havaleschka, 1999; Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994; Kaiser & Hogan, 2007) and that this is particularly true when the leader's personality is dark (Hogan & Hogan, 2001), or malevolent like that of the corporate psychopath (Boddy, 2017; Van Scotter & Roglio, 2018). Nonetheless, despite the common experience of managers working with dark, toxic and even 'evil' colleagues (Delbecq, 2001), toxic leadership has arguably not, until recently, been accorded the importance or standing it deserves, according to commentators such as Mehta and Maheshwari (2014). Further, insufficient is known about such destructive leaders (Thoroughgood, Tate, Sawyer, & Jacobs, 2012), although corporate psychopaths have been called archetypally destructive and toxic leaders (Boddy, Miles, Sanyal, & Hartog, 2015) indicating that personality or character and toxicity are closely linked.

Destructive leadership is of great import because such leaders put self-interest before organisational interest and cause severe harm to employees and organisations (Goldman, 2006; Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013, 2014) and whole societies, where they jeopardise humanity's long-term future (Althaus & Baumann, 2020; Boddy, 2013) and sustainability (Boddy & Baxter, 2021). Destructive leadership is, thus, consequential as it degrades the quality of life for everyone it touches (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Destructive leadership may also be magnified in its effects, and writers on leadership explain how multiple research studies demonstrate that 'bad is stronger than good' in terms of the impact of negative people, experiences and information on events (Kaiser, LeBreton, & Hogan, 2015) and that destructive leadership appears to have a disproportionately greater impact than positive leadership (Schyns, 2015; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Moreover, the malevolent nature of darker leaders is hidden because dark leaders like psychopaths are adept at deceptive impression management (Edens, Buffington, Tomicic, & Riley, 2001), and so many people are unaware of these leader's true malevolence (Althaus & Baumann, 2020). This talent for impression management has been postulated as a reason for their ability to get promoted more often than their peers (Babiak, Neumann, & Hare, 2010; Chiaburu, Muñoz, & Gardner, 2013; Clarke, 2005).

It does appear to be evident that a negative person such as a destructive leader has a much-amplified initial impact than a 'good' leader does on an organisation and its members. There are a number of possible reasons for this, and some of these are explored here. Firstly, the majority of people are moral and ethical for most of the time, and so when a dark event occurs, it is a jarring and often traumatic experience for nearly everyone involved. Secondly, it is a relatively rare experience, and so many or even most people do not know how to deal with it. Working closely with a destructive leader in an organisation happens perhaps once in a lifetime (and never for some people), and there is almost nothing beforehand that has prepared the individual employee for the eventuality. Thus, employees confronted with a psychopathic leader seem to go through a series of emotional and mental states from initial shock to bewilderment, then frustration and anger and finally to a state of resigned and traumatised indifference (Boddy et al., 2015). The subject of destructive psychopathic leadership and its importance is explored in this chapter starting with an explanation of who corporate psychopaths are.

Corporate Psychopaths

Psychopaths are people with no scruples, empathy or affective regard for others, and this enables them to take an entirely self-interested approach to life. Corporate psychopaths have been referred to as executive, primary and successful psychopaths, and this type of successful psychopathy may be a variant of psychopathy wherein the more adaptive traits, such as charm and poise are prominent, masking the malignant aspects of psychopathy from initial view (Lilienfeld, Watts, & Smith, 2015). Such psychopaths may be cognisant that overt anti-social behaviour will not serve them well in their quest for the money, power and prestige that they crave.

Corporate psychopaths are the approximately 1.2% of employees who score highly enough on measures of primary psychopathy to be identified as problematically psychopathic. Their presence as managers, inter-alia, results in lowered levels of corporate social responsibility (CSR), heightened bullying, increased employee workloads and reduced job satisfaction among the people who work under them. Corporate psychopaths seem to be good at getting to the top of organisations, and so between 4% and 10% of top managers, varying by industry sector, are highly psychopathic. For example, a psychologist named Christopher Bayer, who provides psychological therapy to Wall Street professionals, argues that based on his experience the number of psychopaths working on Wall Street is close to 10 percent (DeCovny, 2012). Indeed, since the publication of the theory that corporate psychopaths were influential in the excessive greed and risk-taking characteristic of events leading up to the last global financial crisis (the Corporate Psychopaths Theory of the Global Financial Crisis) (Boddy, 2011), the word 'Financial Psychopath' have been added to the lexicon of descriptors of corporate psychopaths. In support of this theory, it has also been established that psychopaths are willing to take investment and gambling risks with other people's money (Sekścińska & Rudzinska-Wojciechowska, 2020).

Notably, in addition to a core of 1.2% individual employees being psychopathic, a further 20% or so of employees also demonstrate significant psychopathic traits. For example, researcher Michael Levenson and his colleagues reported, in 1995, that 23% of males in their sample endorsed eight out of 16 statements relating to primary psychopathy. These authors reported that this commonplace embodiment of psychopathic attitudes in elite groups implies that behaviour entailing considerable social costs may be enacted by these people. Psychopathic characteristics exist on a continuum where moderate levels may go unnoticed in society (Smith, 1985) but where a certain number of such traits may indicate high psychopathy (Edelmann & Vivian, 1988), and those possessing such traits in abundance may be called psychopaths.

Unfortunately, the latest (not yet published) research indicates that when corporate psychopaths work together as managers and employees, there is a 'double jeopardy' effect, which magnifies their destructiveness and results in a workplace environment marked by many adverse outcomes. Corporate psychopaths are reported to be effective at projecting appeal and at upward impression management (colloquially known as 'kiss-up, kick down' behaviour) and are, therefore, successful at gaining preferment and advancement at work (de Vries, 2012). They charm, lie and manipulate their way to advancements within the organisations they are purported to work on behalf of. They claim the good work of others as their own, while persuasively and impressively asserting ownership of competencies and qualifications that they do not really possess or have not earned (Babiak, 1995; Boddy, Miles, Sanyal, & Hartog, 2015). This, together with their selfish characters means that when corporate psychopaths do gain leadership positions, then one of the pre-requisites (i.e. ethical leadership) for constructing and sustaining virtuous business organisations (Wright & Goodstein, 2007) is lost.

Leadership and Its Importance

Leadership influences all who are led, other stakeholders and overall organisational performance (Waldman, Ramirez, House, & Puranam, 2001; Waldman & Yammarino, 1999), and has, therefore, been identified as being the most important area of study in the social sciences (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Leaders are able to initiate changes in the structural conditions within organisations over time, through utilising the resources that they have control over as a result of their positions, and they also act as role models for others (Voegtlin, Patzer, & Scherer, 2012). Therefore, whether leaders are destructive or not has considerable consequences, and the darker, more destructive side of leadership has been identified as being important because of these consequences (Aasland, Skogstad, Notelaers, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2010; Baker, 2013; Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Hogan, Raskin, & Fazzini, 1990; Kaiser, LeBreton, & Hogan, 2015; Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007).

According to corporate psychopathy theory, leadership is gradually getting worse because corporate psychopaths are reaching senior leadership positions in greater numbers. They are attracted by greed, and the desire to attain the

ever-increasing salaries offered by senior organisational positions (Boddy, 2011). Simultaneously, corporate psychopaths are facilitated in their reaching senior leadership positions by the reliance on shallow, 'interview-only' based selection and promotion procedures. In these superficial selection processes, those people who present themselves in the most desirable way are offered advancement (Furnham, 2014a, b). In this latter scenario, interviewees who are smooth, unflustered, extroverted and charming but absolutely prepared to lie about their accomplishments, claim the good work of others and to grandly overstate their qualifications and abilities, have the advantage. They rise through the ranks despite any opposition that they may encounter (Babiak, 1995).

Commentators on corporate psychopathy cite the crisis in leadership trust and the seemingly never-ending stream of corporate misfeasance and multiple recent ethical lapses in businesses (Boddy, Ladyshevsky, & Galvin, 2010b; Tang, Chen, & Sutarso, 2008) as evidence of their position. Corporate psychopaths, with their careerist orientation (Chiaburu et al., 2013), do appear more often at senior organisational levels (circa 4% or more) than they do in the adult population (circa 1%) as a whole (Babiak et al., 2010; Coid, Yang, Ullrich, Roberts, & Hare, 2009). Further, leadership has been frequently described as being in a state of crisis in ethics (Sankar, 2003), trust (Bachmann, Gillespie, & Kramer, 2012; Chambers, Drysdale, & Hughes, 2010; Werhane, Hartman, Archer, Bevan, & Clark, 2011) and honesty (Cooper, 2012). The corporate world has been described as being too tolerant of problematic and unethical executives (Congleton, 2014). Commentators suggest that many current events in the world reflect the 'miserable failure' of modern leadership (Bhole, 2001). A further suggestion is that this failure has contributed to the potential crisis of survival of humanity (Bhole, 2001; Boddy, 2013) in terms of over-fishing, deforestation and environmental degradation.

Influence of Psychopathic Leaders on Employees

Psychologists usually study psychopathy at the level of the individual; asking and examining questions – such as, are corporate psychopaths successful at rising to the top of organisations? – and finding that they are adept at this (Board & Fritzon, 2005; Kholin, Kückelhaus, & Blickle, 2020). However, it is arguably the influence of corporate psychopaths on other employees that is of much greater interest because their impact is so profound and indeed, disturbing. For example, studies have shown that the main source of job satisfaction is the employee's supervisor, but more specific examinations of this have uncovered that it is the level of psychopathy of the supervisor which determines whether employees will enjoy some job satisfaction or not (Boddy & Taplin, 2016).

Fig. 5.1, below, shows the medium strength and statistically highly significant correlation between the psychopathy of managers (scaled from 10 to 30) and employees experience of abusive supervision (scaled from 1 to 5) in a sample of Australian white-collar workers in 2018. Respondents were reported on the psychopathic traits of their managers, and later, on their experience of abusive supervision at work. There is a clear

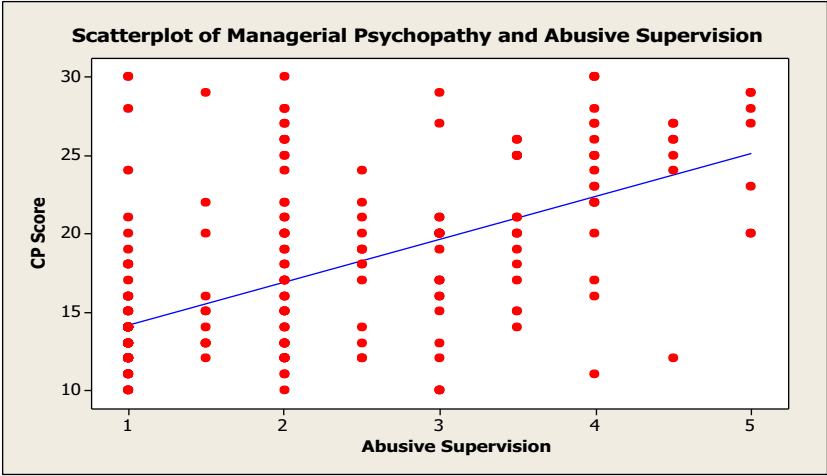


Fig. 5.1. Psychopathy in Managers and Employees Reporting of Abusive Supervision. *Notes:* Pearson correlation of Corporate Psychopathy (CP) Score and Abusive Supervision = 0.590, *P* Value = 0.000. Copyright Clive Boddy, used with permission.

correlation between high psychopathy and high abusiveness, and the implication of this is that if an employee works under a corporate psychopath, then it is more likely that the employee will experience relationship conflict and abusive supervision.

To obtain some qualitative understanding of how this effects employees at the individual level, below are some typical quotes from communications with people who have worked with a highly psychopathic manager. The sheer destructiveness of the event is notable, encompassing bullying, a deteriorating mental state and levels of stress that employees compare to post-traumatic stress disorder.

It is like a non-human machinery of destruction moving forward, regardless of what ‘human’ objections are put forward. (Senior UK Charity Employee, 2019)

By the time I realized I was being abused and bullied, I was in no state of mind to figure out my rights. (Senior Corporate Banking Employee, 2019)

(We) have gone through an incredible amount of stress for well over one year now that has resulted in both of us suffering from PTSD. (Senior UK Charity Employee, 2019)

The stress of dealing with a psychopathic supervisor leaves employees with reduced cognitive abilities to deal with what they are experiencing, leaving them even more vulnerable to abuse and manipulation. These communications with people who have worked with corporate psychopaths, together with my own and other's qualitative investigations relating to similar instances in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom led to the idea that psychopathic managers probably had a great effect on the mental health of the employees who they worked with.

Realising also that the abusiveness, shown in Fig. 5.1, probably impacted the mental health of employees, this issue was investigated in Australia in 2019 (see Fig. 5.2 below). Findings indicate that the mechanisms via which psychopathic leaders control their subordinates include the use of malicious and aggressive humour. On average, employees working under corporate psychopath managers agree that in their organisation people laugh at other employees as a form of bullying and they also agree that their manager is sarcastic, ridicules them and puts them down in front of other employees. These are not the tactics that transformational leaders use, and relative to psychopathic leaders, transformational leaders utilise light humour, civility and give employees a large degree of autonomy, enabling employees to do their own jobs in the way they see fit.

Additionally, compared to those with transformational leaders, employees with psychopathic leaders are less likely to agree that their leaders communicate a clear and positive vision of the future, treat staff as individuals, instill

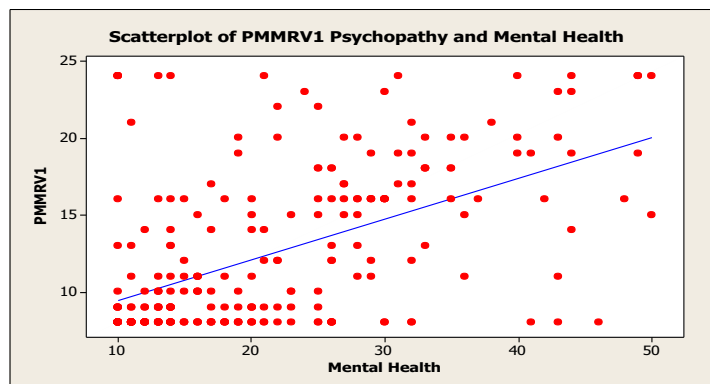


Fig. 5.2. Psychopathy in Managers and Mental Health in Employees. *Notes:* Pearson correlation of psychopathy in managers and mental health of employees = 0.535, P Value = 0.000. Copyright Clive Boddy, used with permission.

pride or motivate employees to work hard. Conversely psychopathic leaders are viewed as unresponsive to personal interactions, egocentric, insincere and lacking in self-blame. Furthermore, psychopathic leaders are also less good at fostering trust, giving recognition and supporting employee training and development, relative to transformational leaders. These negative experiences influence the mental health of employees, and in psychopathic workplaces, employees find themselves having to deal with the difficult emotions of other employees more often.

Fig. 5.2, below, shows the medium strength and statistically highly significant correlation between the psychopathy of managers (scaled in this case from 8 to 24) and the mental health of employees (scaled from 10 to 50) in a sample of Australian white-collar workers in 2019. Respondents reported on their own mental health and on the psychopathic traits of their managers. There is a clear correlation and the implication that if an employee works under a corporate psychopath, then the employee's mental health will suffer. Employees working under corporate psychopath managers are more likely to report feeling nervous, hopeless, restless and worthless than those working under normal managers (Boddy, 2014). Similarly, those working under corporate psychopaths report that they feel relatively tired, depressed and sad.

It appears from other research findings that the only people who are resilient to the abusiveness of psychopathic bosses are employees who are fairly psychopathic themselves. Individuals high in primary psychopathy have been found to embody characteristics that enable them to experience higher levels of well-being and lower levels of anger than their peers do under conditions of abusive supervision (Hurst, Simon, Jung, & Pirouz, 2017). Similarly, even military personnel who possess psychopathic traits are less likely to be traumatised by combat than non-psychopaths are (Anestis, Harrop, Green, & Anestis, 2017).

Influence of Psychopathic Leaders on Organisations

Fake Corporate Social Responsibility

Recent research indicates that employees working in organisations that are run by corporate psychopaths are more likely to report that the organisation engages in CSR activities merely to look good to external observers. In other words, those organisations engage in fake CSR activities. This finding corresponds with previous research which has already indicated that organisations run by corporate psychopaths are less likely to be seen as engaging in genuine socially responsible activities (Boddy, Ladyshevsky, & Galvin, 2010a), while the psychopathic among us are more likely to be willing to engage in environmental offending by dumping toxic waste materials illegally (Ray & Jones, 2011).

Corporate psychopaths may also fake other attitudes and behaviour in order to present a mask or façade of being a caring, politically correct or concerned leader. In one case study, a senior executive used an anti-gender discrimination façade to present as a concerned and caring manager. However, once a bullying accusation against him was made public (within the organisation) then over 20

other employees came forward to make similar accusations. An internal investigation led to the removal of the manager from post. However, he was moved sideways to a post with the same rank.

Increased Gender Discrimination

Corporate psychopaths are theorised to use divide and rule techniques in gaining and maintaining power. This is achieved by breaking up large power blocks into smaller pieces that individually are less powerful than the person implementing the divide and rule strategy. Thus, religious intolerance, homophobia, ethnic and sex and gender differences may all be used as a basis to set groups of employees against each other, so that they do not present a united front to face the machinations of the corporate psychopath. This is all largely unexplored in research; however, corresponding with theoretical expectations, employees do report significantly higher levels of observing gender discrimination when they work under corporate psychopaths compared to when they work under normal managers.

Greater Schadenfreude

Schadenfreude is the taking of pleasure from seeing others fail or fall or experience misfortune. Psychopaths have no empathy towards or care for other people, and they do experience schadenfreude (Porter, Bhanwer, Woodworth, & Black, 2014). Latest (not yet published) research findings from the workplace confirm this happens at work and show that levels of ridicule and sarcasm aimed at fellow employees are both higher when corporate psychopaths are present as managers. This may be utilised as a part of corporate psychopaths divide and rule attempts, as described above.

Double Psychopathy Double Trouble

The latest research into corporate psychopaths at work has investigated what happens in cases when both the managers and the employees are high in psychopathy. Findings are generally that when both are simultaneously present, outcomes are worse than when just the managers are psychopathic. Simultaneous employee psychopathy adds to, or even worse, stimulates even further increases in adverse outcomes, involving behaviour like yelling, supervisory abuse and ridicule. Also, there is some evidence that organisations led by corporate psychopaths may become increasingly psychopathic over time as caring employees leave the hostile environment while those more impervious to hostility – typically the partially psychopathic – stay. Leaders involved in employee selection tend to appoint people with similar characteristics to their own (Havaleschka, 1999), and, thus, organisations may well become increasingly culturally psychopathic over time.

Poor Financial Decision-Making

Recent evidence from other researchers shows that organisations managed by the psychopathic make financial decisions that may be detrimental to the organisation's future (Mesly & Maziade, 2013) and can be prone to fraud (Boddy, 2020), fraudulent activities (Haapasalo, 1994) and attempted fraud (Jeppesen, Leder, & Futter, 2016). In particular for a view on fraud and psychopathy, see the following papers (Perri & Brody, 2011; Ramamoorti, 2008). Fraud has often been assumed to be something that corporate psychopaths would get involved in (Boddy, 2006), but little robust research has been conducted in this area. Recent research findings that females are less involved in fraud and embezzlement than males may well be due to the differences in psychopathy between males and females. Females are less often psychopathic and less severely psychopathic, than males are, and so the findings that females are less dishonest may be explained by their lower levels of psychopathy.

Poor Employee Well-being

The well-being of employees suffers greatly under the abusive supervision of the corporate psychopath and employees may experience outcomes such as stress-related illness and depression. Research into this subject concluded that corporate psychopaths employ common procedures for accomplishing their objectives, involving discordant voice, open harassment and bullying to fashion, an apprehensive, acquiescent and easily controlled workforce (Boddy, Malovany, Kunter, & Gull, 2020). Employees are burnt-out by this experience (Oyewunmi, Akinnusi, & Oyewunmi, 2018) and report feeling stressed and emotionally exhausted to the extent that they can no longer do their jobs effectively because of the cognitive impairment brought on by the actions of their psychopathic supervisor. In support of the above viewpoints, leader psychopathy has been found to be related to self-serving behaviour and a disregard for the interests of others (Barelds, Wisse, Sanders, & Laurijssen, 2018) especially when those others are vulnerable or have low self-esteem. This is because psychopaths are adept at spotting weaker victims and choose them because of their ease of control and compliance and because retaliation is less likely.

Employee Confusion

Research just undertaken in Australia indicates that employees working under psychopathic managers often feel that they do not know what is happening in their organisation. Communications are diminished, organisational goals are unclear, written materials are seen as being less credible and there is a significant correlation between manager psychopathy and employee confusion.

This corresponds with past research which found lower levels of adequate training, information about what to do and higher levels of incorrect instructions and inadequate help from others for employees working under psychopathic managers (Boddy, 2010).

Implications for HR Practice and Policy

The implications for human resources practice, of the findings reported in this chapter, are likely to be that potential appointees for senior management and leadership positions in particular should be screened for psychopathy, and if appointed, closely managed with clear rules and regulations applied to their behaviour in the workplace. However, this may represent discrimination in some jurisdictions and raise various ethical problems which have been detailed in a recent book on the ethics of screening for psychopathic traits in employees (Steverson, 2020). On the other hand, absencing the close regulation of the psychopathic, other employees may have viable legal redress to seek compensation from the corporation for the abuse and associated mental illness, initiated and sustained under a corporate psychopath manager (Sheehy, Boddy, & Murphy, 2020).

From the discussion in this chapter, it appears that the importance of personal ethics and values in leadership is reinforced and emphasised. Destructive leaders lack virtue, care, integrity, empathy and conscience. Studies of corporate psychopaths indicate that being of immoral character in terms of being unfair, dishonest, ruthless and uncaring is at the heart of destructive leadership. If the study and understanding of leadership is one of the most important subjects in the social sciences, because leadership is so consequential, then policy should be concerned with promoting caring, responsible ethical leaders and restraining destructive irresponsible leaders. Screening leadership candidates for integrity and for caring and/or psychopathic personality traits would help enable this.

Conclusion

Continuing research into how corporate psychopaths influence the lives of those around them is uncovering new insights into their unethical and self-oriented decisions. Gender discrimination, ridicule and aggressive humour, including schadenfreude, are among their stock-in-trade approaches to personnel management. This is in addition to the yelling, bullying and abusive supervision that have already been identified as associated with psychopathic leadership. Fake CSR and fake concern for others are among the tools they use to disguise their uncaring personalities. Together with their efforts at upward impression management, this fakery can help them appear competent and caring as managers when in fact, they are nothing of the sort. Employee confusion, mental distress, reduced well-being, workplace withdrawal and organisational decline are the outcomes of their presence as organisational leaders. This means that employee job satisfaction declines markedly under corporate psychopath managers as has previously been discovered. Corporations may be liable in law for the adverse consequences that employees may suffer under psychopathic managers, and recent papers have begun to explore this.

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Chapter 6

Dispositional Characteristics of Abusive Supervisors

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Abstract

This chapter provides an overview of research on dispositional supervisor characteristics as well as specific individual-level antecedents, correlates, boundary conditions and processes of supervisors who display hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours towards their followers (i.e., abusive supervision). More specifically, empirical research findings on the relationships between specific supervisor characteristics and subordinate-rated perceptions of abusive supervisor behaviours are summarized and critically discussed. To better understand what contributes to abusive supervision, the moderating role of follower characteristics and the greater organizational context are taken into account as well. The chapter closes with an integrated process model of abusive supervision, an outlook and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Abusive supervision; supervisor characteristics; leadership; traits; organizational behaviour; supervisor–employee interaction

Introduction

In the last two decades, abusive supervision has received growing attention in organizational research. Scholars have increasingly examined the manifold negative effects of abusive supervision, including those that affect employees and different levels of organizations (for an overview, see [Mackey, Frieder, Brees, & Martinko, 2017](#); [Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017](#)). Such interest is warranted because a well-rounded insight into leadership stems from investigating the many aspects which make a leader ([Kellerman, 2004](#)) – including those that derive from the ‘dark side’ of leadership ([Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka, 2009](#); [Schyns & Schilling, 2013](#)). As [Xiaqi, Kun, Chongsen and Sufang \(2012\)](#) note, ‘bad leadership is

as ubiquitous as it is insidious in organizations and must be more carefully examined' (p. 257).

Although reviews of abusive supervision show a surge of interest (e.g., [Martinko, Harvey, Brees, & Mackey, 2013](#)), an amplified focus of personality characteristics that may facilitate abusive behaviours is required. Understanding antecedents, correlates and boundary conditions on the side of the supervisor is critical; it can help devise interventions to prevent the occurrence, and hence, consequences of these detrimental behaviours ([Tepper, 2007](#)). Further, it informs both optimal personnel selection (i.e., filling leadership positions) and the designing of training programs aimed to develop leaders and reduce abusive supervisory behaviour. Against this backdrop, scientists and practitioners must deeply consider antecedents, correlates and boundary conditions involved in the processes that cause leaders to behave in ways that are perceived as abusive by their employees. The present chapter provides a general overview of research on characteristics empirically linked to abusive supervisor behaviours. We chose this specific focus for two reasons. First, the empirical research on abusive supervision reveals a strong imbalance between studies that examine the *consequences* and studies that examine the *antecedents* of abusive supervision, with the latter being significantly underrepresented ([Tepper et al., 2017](#)). Second, in terms of the explanations of abusive supervision, much research has focused on social and organizational contextual factors (e.g., organizational culture, experience of abusive behaviours from own supervisors, social learning processes, role overload, etc.), whereas supervisor personality traits have received less attention ([Tepper et al., 2017](#)). However, behaviour is caused not only by the environment but also by the dynamic interplay of personality and environmental and situational factors ([Rauthmann, 2016, 2021](#)).

We begin by defining abusive supervision as a construct. Next, we present empirical findings linking abusive supervision to personality traits (see [Table 6.1](#) for an overview of correlations). We restrict our selection of literature to studies that examined abusive supervision following [Tepper's \(2000\)](#) conceptualization of the construct, as this stream of research has received most attention in the highly diverse and fragmented literature on destructive leadership ([Scheffler & Brunzel, 2020](#)). We begin with more commonly studied personality traits, such as the Big Five and the Dark Triad traits, and follow with constructs less studied (i.e., emotional intelligence, attachment style, perfectionism and mindfulness) yet gaining empirical attention. Final remarks are offered in the concluding section, where we outline interaction effects, future directions and practical implications.

Abusive Supervision

Abusive supervision is typically defined as 'subordinates perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical contact' ([Tepper, 2000](#), p. 178). Since this construct is by definition the perception of a supervisor's behaviour by others, it naturally follows that this perception is *also* influenced by factors that cannot be solely attributed to the leader, such as the personality of the follower (for an overview, see

Table 6.1. Overview of Supervisor Traits Empirically Linked to Subordinate-reported Abusive Supervision.

Supervisor Characteristic	Correlation (<i>r</i>)	Reference
<i>Big Five</i>		
Conscientiousness (Big Five)	0.18 [†] −0.27**	Camps et al. (2016) Eissa and Lester (2017)
Agreeableness (Big Five)	−0.35**	Eissa and Lester (2017)
Neuroticism (Big Five)	0.51**	Eissa and Lester (2017)
<i>HEXACO</i>		
Honesty-Humility	−0.45***	Breevaart and de Vries (2017)
Agreeableness	−0.42***	Breevaart and de Vries (2017)
Conscientiousness	−0.28**	Breevaart and de Vries (2017)
Openness to experience	−0.31***	Breevaart and de Vries (2017)
<i>Dark Triad</i>		
Machiavellianism	0.16* 0.30** 0.52**	Kiazad et al. (2010) Wisse and Sleebos (2016) Lyons et al. (2019)
Narcissism	0.12 [†] 0.42**	Wisse and Sleebos (2016) Lyons et al. (2019)
Psychopathy	0.19** 0.66** −0.26**	Wisse and Sleebos (2016) Lyons et al. (2019) Mathieu and Babiak (2016)
<i>Other Traits</i>		
Emotional intelligence	−0.25* −0.33**	Xiaqi et al. (2012) Li et al. (2020)
Anxious attachment	0.40**	Robertson et al. (2018)
Dependent attachment	−0.38**	Robertson et al. (2018)
Perfectionism	0.21**	Guo et al. (2020)
Mindfulness	−0.26* −0.29**	Lange et al. (2018) Liang et al. (2015)
Self-control capacity	−0.39***	Pundt and Schwarzbeck (2018)
Neuronal executive control	−0.33*	Waldman et al. (2018)

Note: Only statistically significant bivariate correlation coefficients (in *r* units) without control variables are shown. In studies written in *italics*, supervisor traits were rated by the followers.

****p* < 0.001; ***p* < 0.01; **p* < 0.05; [†]*p* < 0.10.

Mackey et al., 2017). However, such ‘perceiver effects’ (which also play a role in the study of other leadership constructs) lie outside the scope of the current chapter. Nonetheless, the reader should bear this ‘side of the coin’ in mind when considering the phenomenon of abusive supervision.

Abusive supervision is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by various antecedents both within the supervisor and also within followers, the leader–follower exchange and organizational context variables. For example, factors such as low self-control, a history of familial violence and Theory X assumptions (i.e., the typical subordinate lacks ambition, avoids responsibility and is egocentric in goals; [Tepper, 2007](#)) have been posited to play a role. Moreover, from the perspective of moral psychology, violence – displayed through abusive supervision – can often be seen as an act driven by morality ([Rai & Fiske, 2011](#)). Based on external observation, a supervisor's hostile behaviour may appear arbitrary; yet, it can still follow a certain logic and may be considered justified and morally appropriate in the eyes of the leader. Against this background, the explanation of abusive supervisor behaviour with a focus on intrapsychic processes is conducted from different perspectives. While some authors, for instance, take a self-regulatory perspective on abusive supervision, highlighting the role of certain personality traits in self-regulation, other scholars address how personality traits affect fundamental assumptions about relationships, perceptions of interaction partners and attribution processes that ultimately lead (or lead not) to abusive supervisor behaviours.

Personality Characteristics of Abusive Supervisors

Basic Personality Traits

When considering dispositional antecedents of certain behaviours, initial interest often entails basic or broad personality traits. Given the time since [Tepper's \(2000\)](#) introduction and the increasing popularity of the construct of abusive supervision in organizational research, the number of empirical studies examining relationships with leaders' basic personality traits, such as the Big Five (i.e., openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism), is still relatively small, though a larger body of research links followers' personality traits to their perceptions of abusive supervision (for an overview, see [Mackey et al., 2017](#)). Examining the relationships between leaders' Big Five traits and abusive supervision, [Camps, Stouten and Euwema \(2016\)](#) found an only marginally significant and rather small positive correlation between conscientiousness and abusive supervision. Assessing three of the Big Five personality traits, [Eissa and Lester \(2017\)](#) found that follower-rated abusive supervisor behaviours were negatively related to leader-rated conscientiousness and agreeableness, while positively related to neuroticism. Additionally, leaders' traits moderated the positive relationship between supervisors' frustration and abusive supervision such that higher neuroticism led to a larger correlation and higher agreeableness led to a smaller correlation.

Drawing on the HEXACO personality framework (Honesty/Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness), [Breevaart and de Vries \(2017\)](#) found that honesty-humility, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness were negatively related to followers' perceptions of abusive supervision. On this basis, [de Vries \(2018\)](#) later described three specific dark leader traits ('Three Nightmare Traits') which have serious negative consequences for followers and/or entire organizations: dishonesty (i.e., low level of honest-humility), disagreeableness

(i.e., low level of agreeableness) and carelessness (i.e., low levels of conscientiousness). As [de Vries \(2018\)](#) theorized, these traits may be especially explosive when leaders also have high levels of extraversion and low emotionality. According to his model, behavioural expressions of these Three Nightmare Traits can be triggered by situational cues, and leaders with high levels of the traits are attracted by specific situations. For example, leaders with high dispositional dishonesty may prefer and seek out situations or contexts where they can exploit others for their own good. Leaders who are dispositionally disagreeable may more often find themselves in situations where obstruction is afforded, whereas leaders who are dispositionally careless may avoid situations characterized by high levels of duty ([de Vries, 2018](#)). These findings suggest that examining the roles of so-called 'dark' traits in abusive supervision could be a fruitful avenue.

The Dark Triad

The so-called Dark Triad comprises three sub-clinical traits commonly considered to reflect the 'dark' side of personality: Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy. Introduced in this combination by [Paulhus and Williams \(2002\)](#), the Dark Triad quickly attracted much interest and has since stimulated a large number of empirical articles, also in organizational sciences ([LeBreton, Shiverdecker, & Grimaldi, 2018](#)).

Machiavellianism can be described as 'a tendency to distrust others, a willingness to engage in amoral manipulation, a desire to accumulate status for oneself, and a desire to maintain interpersonal control' ([Dahling, Whitaker, & Levy, 2009](#), p. 227). It is often accompanied by a lack of empathy, emotional detachedness and a tendency toward selfish goal attainment ([LeBreton et al., 2018](#)). Narcissism is characterized by feelings of grandiosity and an extremely high need for attention and recognition, a tendency towards exploitation of others and a lack of empathy ([LeBreton et al., 2018](#)). Psychopathy consists of tendencies to manipulate others, to engage in criminal behaviour, to live an erratic lifestyle characterized by breaking the rules and callous affect ([Williams, Paulhus, & Hare, 2007](#)).

In the field of organizational psychology, the Dark Triad is the subject of a steadily growing number of studies ([LeBreton et al., 2018](#)), including studies on leadership behaviours (e.g., [Grijalva, Harms, Newman, Gaddis, & Fraley, 2015](#); [Volmer, Koch, & Göritz, 2016](#)). Considering that scholars have already discussed possible links between 'dark' traits and abusive supervision on a theoretical level more than 10 years ago ([Tepper, 2007](#)), it is surprising that there are still comparatively few studies that empirically test these ideas and hypotheses.

[Wisse and Sleebos \(2016\)](#) found significant positive relationships between all three Dark Triad traits and abusive supervision, with Machiavellianism having the greatest effect.¹ Additionally, the authors found that the relationship between Machiavellianism and abusive supervision was moderated by the perceived power of the leader, such that the effect was only present in leaders with high position

¹In multiple regression analyses, only Machiavellianism significantly explained variance.

power, but not in leaders with low position power. A link between Machiavellianism and abusive supervision was also found by [Kiazad, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Kiewitz and Tang \(2010\)](#) who showed that this relationship was mediated by authoritarian leadership behaviour. [Waldman, Wang, Hannah, Owens and Balthazard \(2018\)](#) examined only the role of narcissism in abusive supervision. Although they did not find a significant association between the two variables, there was an interaction effect between narcissism and political skill, such that a significant relationship between narcissism and abusive supervision was found for leaders with a low level of political skill, but not for leaders with a high level of political skill. This means that although narcissism appears to be a risk factor for abusive supervision, it only manifested itself in abusive behaviour when a supervisor had only a low level of political skill, which would otherwise have a tempering effect.

Empirical findings on the role of Dark Triad traits for abusive supervision were also reported by [Mathieu and Babiak \(2016\)](#) who found supervisor psychopathy to be positively related to abusive supervision and by [Lyons, Moorman and Mercado \(2019\)](#) who found positive relationships between all three Dark Triad traits and abusive supervision. [Lyons et al. \(2019\)](#) showed that for narcissism and psychopathy but not Machiavellianism, the relationships to abusive supervision were moderated by leader–member exchange, such that they became weaker with a higher quality of relationship. It should be noted, however, that in both studies of [Mathieu and Babiak \(2016\)](#) and [Lyons et al. \(2019\)](#), supervisors' traits were – in contrast to all other studies cited in this chapter – not rated by the supervisors themselves but by their followers who also rated abusive supervision. Thus, the higher risk of a common source bias should be kept in mind when interpreting their results.

Taken together, there is empirical evidence that Dark Triad traits are positively related to abusive supervision. However, to what extent they ultimately manifest in abusive supervision often depends on additional personal and situational variables (e.g., perceived power or political skill).

Emotional Intelligence

In the leadership context, research suggests the capacity for identifying, controlling and managing one's emotions promotes a leader's development of social competencies, such as providing constructive communication and fostering positive interpersonal relationships ([McCleskey, 2014](#)). Emotional intelligence (EI) has been described as 'the ability to carry out accurate reasoning about emotions and the ability to use emotions and emotional knowledge to enhance thought' ([Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008](#), p. 507). Although far from uncontroversial ([Antonakis, Ashkanasy, & Dasborough, 2009](#); [Côté, 2014](#)), the construct of EI has stimulated a large body of empirical research in organizational sciences (for an overview, see example, [Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2017](#)).

In leadership research, EI has been studied primarily in the context of positive leadership behaviours, such as transformational or authentic leadership ([McCleskey, 2014](#); [Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2018](#)). However, scholars have also begun to shed light on its role in the dark side of leadership. [Xiaqi et al. \(2012\)](#) found supervisors' self-rated EI was negatively related to follower-rated abusive supervisor behaviours. A negative relationship between these constructs was also

reported by Li, He, Sun and Zhang (2020). They further showed that abusive supervision was related to leaders' stressors via ego depletion and that EI moderated the relationships between stressors and ego depletion such that the relationships were weaker when EI was higher. Thus, supervisors with high EI seem to be better equipped to effectively cope with stressors and have a higher level of self-control that may prevent them from engaging in abusive behaviours (see also [Pundt & Schwarzbeck, 2018](#) for the relationship between self-control and abusive supervision).

Further published studies investigating the direct links between EI and abusive supervision are scarce though there appear to be a few more empirical studies in the gray literature (see [Zhang & Bednall, 2016](#) for a meta-analysis including such unpublished studies). However, against the backdrop of these first empirical results and given its evident application in the leadership domain, EI seems promising to further understand abusive supervisor behaviour.

Attachment Orientations

Another promising avenue to shed light on characteristics related to abusive supervision are attachment orientations, which concern cognitive-emotional and behavioural processes of attachment (i.e., the human proclivity to seek and develop affectional bonds to others; [Bowlby, 1980](#)). The original framework of avoidant, anxious and secure attachment styles ([Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978](#)) remains still very popular, although in contemporary research the classification into distinct categories has given way to a dimensional approach that seems to be more suitable to explain relevant outcomes ([Yip, Ehrhardt, Black, & Walker, 2017](#)). Rooted in clinical psychology, attachment theory was originally conceived for parent-child relationships. However, research regarding adult attachment has acknowledged similar dynamics in attachment in organizational relationships, such as with leaders, mentors, the organization and co-workers ([Harms, 2011](#); [Yip et al., 2017](#)).

The influence of attachment theory in organizational literature is growing: From 2011 to 2016, more studies have been published on the topic than the preceding 25 years combined ([Yip et al., 2017](#)). Despite its popularity, limited research has considered the role of attachment orientations in abusive supervision. However, research has not sidestepped supervisory dynamics altogether. Leadership scholars have increasingly implemented a 'dyadic perspective' or the use of analytical/theoretical frameworks which consider attachment behaviours of both parties (supervisor and subordinate) in the dyadic relationship, for example, insecure attachment in both the supervisor and subordinate predicted lower evaluations of the relationship ([Richards & Hackett, 2012](#)). Furthermore [Davidovitz, Mikulincer, Shaver, Izsak and Popper \(2007\)](#) found avoidant attached supervisors were perceived by subordinates as less sensitive and available, and for the subordinates lacking secure attachment, decreased well-being resulted.

From these findings, it would appear that leaders with a secure attachment orientation may be able to easier connect with and support their followers, develop meaningful work relationships and also demonstrate less abusive behaviours. To

date, there are barely any empirical studies on these relationships, with the exception of [Robertson, Dionisi and Barling \(2018\)](#), who found that abusive supervisor behaviours were positively related to an anxious and negatively related to a secure attachment orientation of leaders. Both relationships were mediated by supervisors' social self-efficacy. These results suggest that supervisors who display elevated levels on secure attachment dimensions believe they have the ability to cultivate successful relationships (i.e., exhibit higher levels of social self-efficacy) and are subsequently less likely to enact abusive supervision. In contrast, supervisors with higher anxious attachment orientation are likely to doubt their abilities to develop successful relationships (i.e., exhibit lower levels of social self-efficacy) and then engage in higher levels of abusive supervision. Although these findings suggest that attachment orientations may be valuable in understanding leader behaviour, additional research is needed to disentangle its precise effects in predicting abusive supervisor behaviour.

Perfectionism

Another personality trait that has been linked to abusive supervision is perfectionism ([Guo, Chiang, Mao, & Chien, 2020](#)). Perfectionism captures 'a tendency to set unrealistically high standards of performance and characterized by biased and overcritical evaluations of self and others' ([Ocampo, Wang, Kiazad, Restubog, & Ashkanasy, 2020](#), p. 144). It goes hand in hand with a high level of fear of making a mistake and, therefore, getting 'bad' results. To achieve flawless results in the workplace, perfectionists seek absolute control over every aspect of their work. Against this background, supervisors high in perfectionism are faced with a special challenge. First, due to their position, their success depends not only on their own work results but also on those of their subordinates. Second, it is impossible for them to control every aspect of the work of their subordinates, and, hence, they must delegate.

In line with this, [Guo et al. \(2020\)](#) found a negative relationship between leader perfectionism and leader perceived control. Furthermore, they found that a perceived loss of control is related to a higher degree of abusive supervisor behaviours. This latter finding could be explained in two ways. First, abusive behaviour can be seen as an attempt to regain control over the work of employees (e.g., *If I cannot directly control them, I can put pressure on them so that they are careful not to perform badly*). Second, a perceived loss of control can lead to stress and anger, which in turn increases the probability of abusive supervisor behaviours. However, the strength of the relationship between leaders' perfectionism and their perceived control depended upon subordinates' feedback-seeking behaviour: more feedback-seeking behaviour coincided with a weaker relationship between leader perfectionism and leader perceived control, whereas less subordinate feedback-seeking behaviour led to a stronger relationship. In other words, when subordinates show a high degree of feedback-seeking behaviour and involve their leaders in their work, they strengthen their leaders' perception of having control over them, resulting in less abusive supervisor behaviours.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness describes an attention to the present experience with an open, non-judgemental attitude (Bishop et al., 2004). Although mindfulness is usually defined as a state, research shows that there is a trait-like tendency towards mindful states that varies between individuals (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Initially, mindfulness was studied in the field of clinical psychology, but in the last decade, the construct has increasingly garnered attention in organizational psychology. A growing number of empirical findings suggests positive effects of mindfulness on various aspects of experience and behaviour at work (for an overview, see Good et al., 2016; Mesmer-Magnus, Manapragada, Viswesvaran, & Allen, 2017).

In the area of leadership research, studies have provided empirical evidence for correlations between mindfulness and positive leadership behaviours, such as interpersonal justice (Reb, Chaturvedi, Narayanan, & Kudesia, 2018), effective communication behaviour (Arendt, Pircher Verdorfer, & Kugler, 2019) and authentic leadership (Nübold, Van Quaquebeke, & Hülshager, 2019). Against this backdrop, scholars have also begun to shed light on buffering effects of mindfulness on negative leader behaviours, including abusive supervision. Using data from leaders and their teams, Lange, Bormann and Rowold (2018) found a negative relationship between leaders' self-reported mindfulness and destructive leadership, including some aspects of abusive supervision. Liang et al. (2015) went a step further by investigating the role of mindfulness in the processes leading to abusive supervision. In three studies, they examined leaders' hostility toward their followers as a mediator between poor employee performance and abusive supervisor behaviours. Taking a self-control perspective on abusive supervision, they proposed that most leaders do not intentionally engage in abusive supervision and that the question whether hostility towards employees ultimately manifests itself in actual hostile behaviour depends on the self-control capacities of the leaders. More specifically, they demonstrated that leaders' mindfulness moderated the relationship between follower-directed hostility and abusive supervisor behaviour, such that the relationship was weaker when levels of leader mindfulness were higher. This could be explained with mindful leaders being better in managing (automatic) behavioural responses to emotional states.

These results are in line with empirical findings regarding the positive relationship between mindfulness and self-regulation capacities such as self-control (Frieze, Messner, & Schaffner, 2012), emotion regulation (Leyland, Rowse, & Emerson, 2018) and executive functioning (Teper, Segal, & Inzlicht, 2013), which in turn have been found to negatively correlate with abusive supervisor behaviour. Pundt and Schwarzbeck (2018) found leader-rated self-control to be negatively related to abusive supervision. Furthermore, Waldman et al. (2018) found a negative relationship between neural correlates of executive control (measured by electroencephalography (EEG)) and abusive supervision. Taken together, there are promising first results indicating that mindfulness can offer a buffering effect on the processes leading to abusive supervisory behaviours.

Summary, Outlook, and Conclusion

Summary and Caveats

Recent years have witnessed an increased interest in supervisor level related to abusive supervision. A number of traits have been empirically associated with abusive supervisor behaviours, and in the present chapter, we gave an insight into the current state of this line of research (see [Table 6.1](#) for an overview).

Several points are noteworthy when evaluating existing empirical evidence. Given that many people may (often anecdotally) surmise what ‘type’ of person tends to be an abusive supervisor, the number of studies in which relationships between follower-perceived abusive supervisor behaviour and supervisors’ personality traits remain comparatively small. Further, the statements that can be derived from previous research should mostly be interpreted with caution in that their results have not been replicated to date and usually cannot be interpreted in a causal manner. Furthermore, many of the studies presented here examined only direct bivariate relationships between specific personality traits and abusive supervision, while neglecting possible interaction effects with other variables.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of abusive supervision, it is important to understand not only *which* traits are related to abusive supervisor behaviours but also *when*, *why* and *how* these traits are expressed in these behaviours. In other words, the dynamics, mechanisms, processes and functioning of traits in their interplay with environmental or situational conditions are important to understand ([Kuper et al., 2021](#); [Rauthmann, 2021](#)). While some of the studies addressed in this chapter focused on looking at correlations between specific traits and abusive supervision, others went a step further and considered interaction effects with other psychological or environmental variables. An example of this are the findings of [Guo et al. \(2020\)](#), showing that leader perfectionism was only positively related to abusive supervision when employees’ feedback-seeking behaviour was low. Furthermore, these empirical findings demonstrate that leaders’ traits can take effect (1) only under certain conditions and (2) at different points in the processes that underlie abusive supervisor behaviour (see [Fig. 6.1](#)). In this context, it is evident that a complex phenomenon such as abusive supervision cannot be explained by only one personality trait, but that it is a result of multi-layered processes in which different aspects of personality play a role in interaction with each other and with different environmental variables.

Future Research

Against the background of caveats referenced above, a number of questions arise that are relevant for future research and practice. First, future research should follow the path that some of the referenced studies have already taken and *systematically* investigate interaction effects between different variables that, in combination, have an impact on abusive supervision. These can be interaction effects between: (1) different traits and skills of the leader, (2) traits of the leader and behaviours of the employees (e.g., absenteeism, poor job performance, etc.) or (3) leaders’ traits

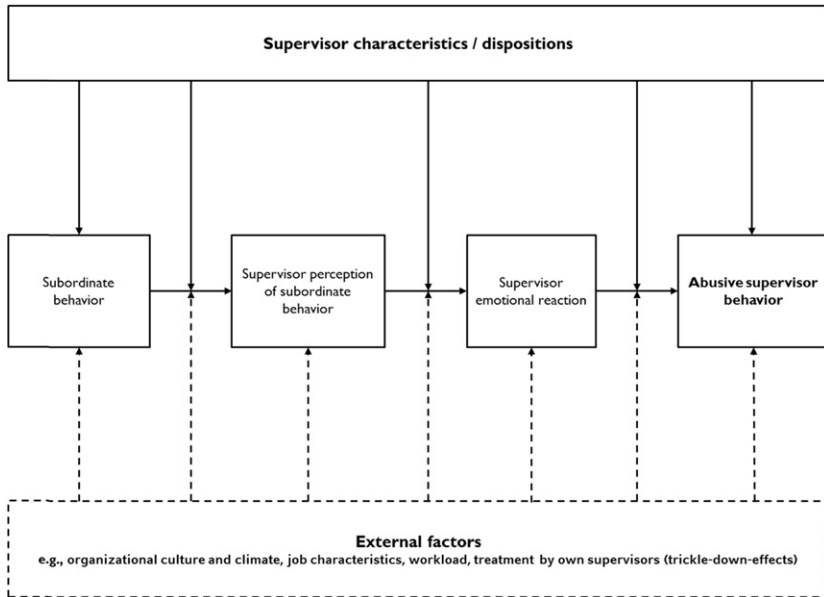


Fig. 6.1. Proposed Process Model of Abusive Supervision Integrating Supervisor Characteristics and Environmental Variables.

and environmental or organization-related variables such as organization or team climate (Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, & Marinova, 2012) or human resource systems (see Mossholder, Richardson, & Settoon, 2011). For example, Hoobler and Brass (2006) showed that situations where a supervisor perceived a psychological contract breach were particularly likely to incite abusive supervision when the supervisor held a hostile attribution bias. Such person or trait \times situation interactions may, thus, be a fruitful avenue for increased research. Second, traits are, of course, not perfectly stable across time, but also malleable (Bleidorn, Hopwood, & Lucas, 2018; Roberts et al., 2017). Thus, intervention studies could be used to examine how abusive supervision could be reduced by, for example, increasing mindfulness (see Nübold et al., 2019 for an example of such intervention studies). On the practice side, organizations could integrate training programs into their staff development and use research findings to adapt existing programs.

Since Tepper's (2000) introduction of the construct of abusive supervision, a large body of research has not only empirically examined this phenomenon but also advanced theory development. However, the topic is still approached from different angles (e.g., taking a trickle-down or a self-control perspective), and a theoretical framework that integrates different kinds of nomological network variables (e.g., antecedents, correlates, moderators, mediators, outcomes) at different levels (i.e., leader characteristics, dyadic social processes, job characteristics, environmental variables) and from different perspectives has not been devised so far. As illustrated in

Fig. 6.1, such a framework should integrate situational, environmental and contextual variables as well as supervisor characteristics and employee behaviour, which can additionally all interact in different ways to explain abusive supervisor behaviours. Although the model in Fig. 6.1 does not exhaust all possible nomological variables involved in the processes resulting in abusive supervision, it may serve as a first step towards an integration of the existing research and future theory development.

Conclusion

Twenty years after the introduction of the construct of abusive supervision to the field, the scientific interest in this phenomenon is still unabated. The numerous empirical findings of the last two decades have in many ways broadened our understanding of the manifold (negative) effects of abusive supervision but also of its various antecedents, correlates and boundary conditions, especially in terms of supervisors' enduring characteristics. As outlined in this chapter, a focus on supervisors' characteristics in interaction with other variables inside and outside the supervisor has the potential to make an important contribution to the understanding and, thus, hopefully also in prevention of abusive supervision.

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Part 2

The Outcomes of Destructive Leadership and Leader Hypocrisy

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Chapter 7

The Impact of Destructive Leadership on Followers' Well-being

Irem Metin-Orta

Abstract

A plethora of research has been carried out both in terms of addressing different conceptualizations of destructive leadership and its relationship with various outcomes. In this vein, this chapter focuses on the relationship between destructive leadership and followers' well-being. In particular, it addresses the current state of inquiry about the plausible effects of destructive leadership on the followers' mental and physical health, including experiences of stress, emotional exhaustion, and negative affectivity. Furthermore, it presents empirical research exploring the underlying mechanisms of this relationship. Finally, it proposes the implementation of occupational interventions to prevent and/or reduce destructive leadership behaviors and later provides recommendations for prospective research. Thus, the current chapter contributes to the extant literature by providing a comprehensive view regarding the detrimental effects of destructive leadership on the followers' well-being as well as offering insight into how to deal with its negative effects.

Keywords: Leadership; destructive leadership; well-being; stress; emotional exhaustion; negative affectivity

Introduction

The worldwide prevalence of the dark or destructive side of leader behaviors which include physical violence and nonphysical hostility (Tepper, 2007) has increased significantly in the last decades. It was reported that 11% of the employees in the Netherlands (Hubert & van Veldhoven, 2001), 13.5% in the United States (Schat, Frone, & Kelloway, 2006), and 33.5% of those in Norway (Aasland, Skogstad, Notelaers, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2010) experienced some form of destructive leadership behaviors. In parallel with the high prevalence of negative leadership behaviors, including its passive form of laissez-faire leadership, research has

shifted its attention from constructive and effective sides of leadership to the “destructive and dark side of leadership” under several research stream terms like “destructive” (Einarsen, Aasland & Skogstad, 2007), “tyrannical” (Ashforth, 1994), “abusive” (Tepper, 2000), and “toxic” (Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

This dark side of the leadership phenomenon (Conger, 1990) is primarily of two perspectives, leader-centric and follower-centric; while the leader-centric perspective emphasizes the destructive and harmful traits of the leaders, the follower-centric perspective focuses on the followers and how leaders are perceived by them (Webster, 2015). While the primary focus of this chapter is the follower’s perspective, contemporary literature elaborates it further by investigating the roles of the leader, the follower, environmental context, and their interactions (“toxic triangle”; Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007) simultaneously.

The widely agreed notion in the follower-centric perspective is that leaders play a crucial role in their subordinates’ behavioral, attitudinal, and health patterns and outcomes (Breevaart, Bakker, Hetland, & Hetland, 2014; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Supporting this conception, in their meta-analysis, Schyns and Schilling (2013) examined the plausible effects of destructive leadership on leader-related outcomes (e.g., attitudes toward the leader such as trust or liking, and followers’ resistance against the leader such as aggression), organization-related outcomes (e.g., organizational commitment and turnover intention), job-related outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction and job-related attitudes such as involvement and motivation), and individual follower-related outcomes (e.g., affectivity, stress, well-being, and performance). Among the latter group, follower stress (e.g., exhaustion and depression) and well-being (e.g., life satisfaction and physical well-being) are reported as the most examined outcomes of destructive leadership. Additionally, positive and negative affectivity, self-evaluation in the form of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and follower’s individual performance are also indicated as important outcomes with respect to destructive leadership practices (Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

Given that, the main aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive overview of destructive leadership concerning its outcomes on the followers’ well-being. Furthermore, it aims to explain the plausible effects of moderators and mediators in these relations. Therefore, this chapter would contribute to researchers in providing information on the consequences of destructive leadership regarding the followers’ well-being and offering suggestions for future research directions. It would also contribute to professionals in proposing strategies to prevent or reduce destructive leadership behaviors in organizations.

Destructive Leadership and Followers’ Well-being

An Overview of the Conceptualization of Destructive Leadership

In referring to the dark side of leadership, as it is stated before, scholars use a broad variety of concepts such as “abusive supervision” (Tepper, 2000), “destructive leadership” (Einarsen, Aasland & Skodstad, 2007), “toxic leadership” (Lipman-Blumen, 2005), “tyrannical leadership” (Johan Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2007), and “petty tyranny” (Ashforth, 1994) (see Schyns & Schilling, 2013 for a review).

These concepts are related, albeit vary whether the behaviors are physical, verbal, or nonverbal, whether they are perceived by the followers or only referring to the leaders' actual behaviors, whether they are intentionally or unintentionally destructive, and whether they include references to outcomes (Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

Among these concepts, Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad (2007, p. 208) define "destructive leadership" as

...the systematic and repeated behavior engaged by a person in leadership, supervisory or managerial position that undermines and/or sabotages the organization's goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of his/her subordinates.

Similarly, Thoroughgood et al. (Thoroughgood, Tate, Sawyer, & Jacobs, 2012, p. 231) provide a broad and overarching definition for "destructive leader behaviors" as counterproductive work behaviors including a wide variety of voluntary and harmful acts toward the followers and/or organization (e.g., stealing from the organization or appearing intoxicated at work). On the other hand, Schyns and Schilling's (2013) definition of destructive leadership does not include organizational outcomes; rather, it merely focuses on follower-related outcomes. They acknowledge that destructive leadership does not encompass all hostile and/or obstructive behaviors; yet, it only includes those behaviors that are repeated over a long period and targeting the followers rather than the organization (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). As there is a lack of consensus on the conceptualization and terminology of this construct, this chapter focuses on the latter definition of destructive leadership addressing verbal, nonverbal, or physical behaviors towards the followers. In line with this definition, as such, it reviews the extant literature concerning its outcomes on the followers' well-being.

Destructive Leadership and General Well-being

Subjective well-being is defined as "the individuals' subjective and global judgment whether the individual is experiencing the relative presence of positive affect, the relative absence of negative emotions, and having satisfaction with their life" (Diener, 1984, p. 543). Numerous studies on leadership behaviors demonstrate evidence that those in leadership positions exhibit behaviors that may have destructive consequences for the followers' well-being. For instance, a systematic review of empirical research reveals that positive leader behaviors, such as consideration and support, are positively related to affective well-being and low levels of stress among employees; whereas, negative leader behaviors such as control, low support, and abuse are positively associated with poor well-being and high levels of stress (Skakon, Nielsen, Borg, & Guzman, 2010). Likewise, although not directly capturing the destructive leadership articles, a meta-analysis on the consequences of abusive supervision reveals its positive associations with anger, anxiety, depression,

distress, and emotional exhaustion as well as its negative associations with psychological health and organization-based self-esteem (Zhang & Liao, 2015).

In another study, Nyberg, Holmberg, Bernin, and Alderling (2011) explored the effects of perceived destructive managerial leadership on the psychological well-being of a cross-cultural sample of European hotel industry employees. In measuring destructive leadership, the authors utilized the questions appearing in GLOBE regarding autocratic, malevolent, and self-centered leadership types. Autocratic leaders refer to managers who act in commanding and dictatorial ways; malevolent leaders are those who are actively unfriendly and negative, and self-centered leaders are those who prefer to work and act alone and pursue their self-interests (Nyberg et al., 2011). The findings show that perceived self-centered leadership practices are positively associated with poor mental health (e.g., worrying and feeling low) and increased levels of behavioral stress (e.g., withdrawing and not being able to relax). Furthermore, it is revealed that adverse psychosocial work characteristics particularly high job demands, low degrees of control, and poor support from colleagues and supervisors mediate the relationship between autocratic and malevolent leadership styles and employee psychological well-being (Nyberg et al., 2011). These findings indicate that, in addition to destructive leadership behaviors, negative working conditions also have an important effect on the followers' mental health.

Additionally, destructive leaders may trigger stress-related health complaints such as loss of concentration, general fatigue, insomnia, and bad dreams among the followers (Erickson, Shaw, Murray, & Branch, 2015). Accordingly, the followers may begin to hate their jobs, feel depressed about their work-life, intend to quit their job, and experience problems in family and personal relationships (Erickson et al., 2015). In a cross-cultural study, Zwingmann et al. (2014) investigated the health-promoting and health-hampering effects of different types of leadership behavior in 16 countries. It is found that a passive form of leadership behaviors ("laissez-fair leadership") is negatively associated with the subordinates' physical health, including headache and fatigue, and psychological well-being in all countries. Similarly, in a recent meta-analysis, Montano, Reeske, Franke, and Hüffmeier (2017) explored the associations between different leadership styles and varying mental health states of the subordinates, including affective symptoms, psychological functioning, and health complaints. The findings of the meta-analyses reveal that aggressive and authoritative behaviors of destructive leaders have adverse effects on the subordinates' affective symptoms, burnout, stress, well-being, and psychological functioning.

It has been acknowledged by the authors that destructive leadership may deteriorate subordinates' mental health through different mechanisms (Montano et al., 2017). The first theoretical framework is built on the presence of a threatening situation initiated by the leaders. Accordingly, those harmful and stressful situations lead to the hyperactivation of neuroendocrine processes, eliciting neurotic symptoms in subordinates. Similarly, the second framework concerns the arousal of negative emotions that the subordinates experience under exposure to aggressive behaviors of destructive leaders (Montano et al., 2017). The following sections in this chapter discuss the significant findings of the empirical research on the associations between destructive leadership behaviors (e.g., the passive form of

leadership) and the subordinates' experiences of stress, emotional exhaustion, and negative affectivity.

Destructive Leadership and Stress

Stress refers to the degree at which individuals feel overwhelmed or unable to cope due to unmanageable pressures, and it is usually coupled with the elements of fear, dread, anxiety, irritation, annoyance, anger, sadness, grief, and depression (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). In the work context, stressors are "work-related characteristics, even situations that lead to experiences of stress," while a strain is "an employee's physiological or psychological response to stress" (Hart & Cooper, 2001, p. 94; Hurrell, Nelson, & Simmons, 1998). Destructive leadership is regarded as one of the important predictors of social stressors that the individuals experience at work as a result of the superiors' offensive, unfair, illegitimate, harmful, and hostile acts (Skogstad, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2017).

The literature pertaining to the association between destructive leadership and stress highlights Kelloway et al.'s framework for poor leadership (Kelloway, Sivanathan, Francis, & Barling, 2005). In this framework, inadequate leadership is proposed to be a "root cause" (precursor) of workplace stressors such as role conflict, role ambiguity, and low-quality interpersonal treatment by the leader, which in turn result in experiences of stress reactions and strains by subordinates. Building upon this framework, Skogstad et al. provide supportive evidence that superiors' passive type of destructive leadership is positively associated with the subordinates' experiences of workplace stressors, bullying, and psychological distress (Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland & Hetland, 2007). In particular, it is found that role conflict, role ambiguity, and conflicts with coworkers mediate the effect of laissez-faire leadership on bullying. Furthermore, workplace stressors and bullying together fully mediate the relationship between laissez-faire leadership and psychological distress. The findings overall suggest that the leaders' absence, uninvolvedness, and not providing feedback and rewards influence the subordinates' role experiences negatively (Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2007).

Similarly, the stressors-strain framework is based on the view that workplace stressors contribute to poor mental and physical health (Hart & Cooper, 2001). Within this framework, Skogstad, Hetland, Glasø, and Einarsen (2014) explored the influence of laissez-faire leadership on the followers' reactions to stress and strains using a large representative sample in Norway. The longitudinal data gathered by the three-wave survey of a sample of the Norwegian workforce reveal that laissez-faire leadership behaviors, which are prevalent at 21% in Norway (Aasland et al., 2010), intensify the followers' stress reactions and strains by increasing workplace stressors such as role ambiguity (Skogstad et al., 2014). This finding is also supported by Diebig, Bormann, and Rowold's study (2016) in which ambiguity-increasing (passive) leadership behaviors promote follower stress measured through hair cortisol. Likewise, in a sample of US employees, Barling and Frone (2017) reveal that three role stressors (role ambiguity, role conflict, and

role overload) and psychological work fatigue (depletion of mental and emotional resources) together mediate the effect of passive leadership on the followers' mental health. The findings indicate that passive leadership behaviors create conflicts at work, which in turn deteriorate the followers' well-being and health.

In a recent study, [Che, Zhou, Kessler, and Spector \(2017\)](#) tested the effect of passive leadership on the stress levels of employees drawing upon the "root cause" framework ([Kelloway et al., 2005](#)). Using a sample of 274 employee-coworker dyads, the findings reveal that both self-reported and coworker-reported passive leadership are found to be associated with increased workplace stressors (e.g., workload and work-family conflict) and higher levels of burnout and physical symptoms such as stomach problems and nausea. Furthermore, two workplace stressors together mediate the effect of passive leadership on employee burnout and physical health. This finding suggests that passive leadership might not only harm the psychological health of the employees but also beget poor physical health.

Overall, the aforementioned research indicates the health-hampering effect of avoidance or absence of leadership. Even though some of the past studies reveal inconclusive findings regarding the associations between laissez-faire leadership, stress, and affective well-being (see [Skakon et al., 2010](#) for a review), more recent findings ([Barling & Frone, 2017](#); [Che et al., 2017](#)) support the notion that leaders' not performing the expected duties in their leadership role bring about negative consequences to their followers' well-being through increasing their experiences of work-related stress.

Destructive Leadership and Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion, as a key determinant of burnout, refers to the "chronic state of physical and emotional depletion that results from an excessive job, personal demands, and/or continuous stress" ([Wright & Cropanzano, 1998](#), p. 486). Previous research has provided support for the proposition that deleterious practices of leadership result in increased levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion in followers ([Tepper, 2000](#); [Zhang & Liao, 2015](#)). Indeed, [Hobfoll's \(1989\)](#) conservation of resource (COR) theory serves as the theoretical framework in empirical studies for establishing a relationship between destructive leadership and emotional exhaustion. COR theory suggests that the threat, or the actual loss, of resources activate the individuals' strain processes, thereby harming their well-being ([Carlson, Ferguson, Hunter, & Whitten, 2012](#); [Zhang & Liao, 2015](#)). That is, when employees are confronted with destructive and abusive leaders who consume their psychological resources, those employees would have fewer resources for strain resistance and then become depleted. Accordingly, a great deal of previous research has pointed out psychological and physical problems among employees (see [Zhang & Liao, 2015](#) for a review).

[Zhang and Liao's \(2015\)](#) meta-analysis investigating the consequences of abusive supervision provides important conclusions regarding its detrimental effect on the subordinates' emotional exhaustion. Even though the studies in the

meta-analysis do not specifically address the destructive leadership concept, the results show consistent and positive associations ($r = 0.35$) between abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, among older subordinates and those who spent a long time with their supervisors, the relationship between an abusive supervisor and emotional exhaustion was less negative. This finding indicates that as the subordinates age, become experienced, and spend more time with their supervisors, they can better cope with their misbehaviors, which, in turn, mitigates the detrimental effect of the supervisors' abusive behaviors (Gross et al., 1997; Zhang & Liao, 2015). Schyns and Schilling (2013) also conducted a meta-analysis regarding the consequences of different forms of destructive leadership on a variety of outcomes. Their findings also postulate that destructive forms of leadership are found to be strongly related to emotional exhaustion, strain, and depression among followers.

Recent studies provide additional evidence across context-specific findings and discuss the vulnerability of particular organizational contexts for the prevalence of abusive behavior. For instance, it is argued that leadership practices in the military context vary from those of the industrial context as "military personnel is faced with demanding tasks and environments that require more structure and professionalism than what is needed in other contexts" (Fosse, Skogstad, Einarsen and Martinussen., 2019, p. 709). Emphasizing the importance of mental endurance and emotional strength in military contexts, Brandebo, Nilsson, and Larsson (2016) explored the deleterious effects of leadership on several follower outcomes. With the survey data gathered from military employees working in four countries (Estonia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the Netherlands), Brandebo et al.'s (2016) findings postulate stronger associations of emotional exhaustion with three dimensions ((1) passive, cowardly; (2) uncertain, unclear, messy; and (3) threats, punishments, over demands) of destructive leadership than constructive leadership after controlling for emotional stability, knowledge of the leader, and nationality effects. Likewise, Fosse, Skogstad, Einarsen, and Martinussen (2019) systematically reviewed the influence of both active and passive forms of destructive leadership, particularly in the military context. The findings demonstrate that both active (e.g., abusive supervision) and passive (e.g., laissez-faire) destructive leadership practices, in general, lead to detrimental outcomes in military settings in the form of reduced subordinate general health and well-being, increased emotional exhaustion, and negative affectivity.

Kilroy, Chenevert, and Bosak (2016) conducted a study with a sample of 2,175 nurses working in Canadian hospitals. Their findings provide evidence that destructive leadership is negatively related to the nurses' emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and effective organizational commitment. In particular, the two dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization) partially mediate the relationship between destructive leadership and affective commitment in a health-care context. In another study, Hetland, Sandal, and Johnson (2007) have explored whether the subordinates' burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and low professional efficacy, could be predicted concerning how they perceive their immediate superior's leadership style among Norwegian IT employees. Researchers reported a significant positive association between a passive-avoidant

form of leadership (“laissez-fair leadership”) and the emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout.

The findings of [Hetland, Sandal, and Johnsen \(2007\)](#) are also consistent with other research, where laissez-faire leadership, characterized by the superior’s avoidance and inaction when subordinates require leadership ([Skogstad et al., 2014](#), p. 323), is found to be positively associated with the leader’s emotional exhaustion ([Zopiatis & Constanti, 2010](#); [Zwingmann, Wolf, & Richter, 2016](#)). Building upon COR theory ([Hobfoll, 1989](#)), it might be argued that passive-avoidant forms of leadership might lead to workplace stressors and depleted resources, and thereby, increase emotional exhaustion among subordinates and leaders ([Zwingmann et al., 2016](#)). Similarly, in a recent meta-analytic study ([Kaluza, Boer, Buengeler & van Dick, 2020](#)), the findings postulate remarkable evidence regarding the association between leadership behaviors and leaders’ well-being, indicating that a destructive form of leadership not only harms the followers’ well-being but also that of the leaders themselves.

Destructive Leadership and Negative Affect

Negative affect (NA) is defined as “the subjective experience of distress and subsumes a broad range of negative mood states including fear, anxiety, hostility, and disgust” while positive affect (PA) refers to “a pleasurable mood state including enthusiasm, interest, joy, mental alertness, and determination” ([Watson, Clark, & Carey, 1988](#), p. 347). Given that the leaders can be perceived as constructive and destructive by the followers, the behaviors of those leaders’ can elucidate both positive and negative emotional reactions in their followers ([Skogstad et al., 2017](#)). Previous research has investigated and found support for the proposition that destructive leadership behaviors are positively related to negative affectivity (e.g., [Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006](#)) and negatively related to positive affectivity (e.g., [Wu & Hu, 2009](#)). In particular, destructive leadership has been linked to increased negative feelings including anger, irritation, or bitterness ([Erickson et al., 2015](#)). Furthermore, [Basch and Fischer](#) indicate that 22% of negative emotional events and 7% of positive emotional events at work are attributed to the acts of management (cited in [Skogstad et al., 2017](#), p. 163). Similarly, [Weiss and Cropanzano \(1996\)](#) argue in Affective Events Theory that workplace events trigger affective responses which, in turn, influence workplace attitudes and behavior. As negative affectivity hampers individuals’ well-being and productivity, it seems useful to comprehend the influence of destructive leadership practices on their followers ([Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017](#)).

In a comprehensive research, [Schmid, PircherVerdorfer, and Peus \(2018\)](#) examined the three forms of destructive leadership practices on the followers’ emotional reactions with both experimental and field studies. The authors have focused on the follower-directed (e.g., abusive supervision), organizational-directed, and self-interested behaviors (e.g., exploitative leadership) as three forms of destructive leadership practices. Using the samples of graduate students (experimental design) and employees (field survey), their findings confirm that destructive leadership is

a key source of negative affectivity among the followers. The overall findings suggest that different types of destructive leadership practices affect followers differently, but follower-directed destructive leadership practices are found to have the strongest association with negative affectivity. In particular, abusive supervision was related most strongly to overall NA and the “afraid” and “upset” subdimension of NA. Furthermore, both abusive supervision and exploitative leadership are negatively associated with PA.

The body of research linking destructive leadership practices to negative affectivity commonly build their premises on the negativity bias and “the bad is stronger than good” phenomena (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001), which suggest that negative events and information have a stronger influence than positive ones. Accordingly, negative information has a great capacity to emotionally and motivationally influence the individuals, where it offers important implications for destructive leadership. That is, as compared to constructive leaders, destructive leaders are supposed to have stronger impacts on the emotional and motivational states of their followers (Brandebo et al., 2016; Schmid, PircherVerdorfer, & &Peus, 2018). This argument is also in line with Dasborough’s (2006) findings, which assert that when employees are asked to recall leader emotion-evoking behaviors, they are more likely to report negative incidents and recall them more intensely and in more detail as compared to positive ones.

Glasø, Skogstad, Notelaers, and Einarsen (2018) examined the mediating role of positive and negative emotions on the relationship between the followers’ perceptions of their leaders as considerate or tyrannical and their attitudinal outcomes. Using Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) as a base, Glasø et al. (2018) show that exposure to tyrannical leadership is linked to higher levels of NA among followers, which in turn results in lower work engagement and increased turnover intentions. This finding converges with Kessler, Bruursema, Rodopman, and Spector’s study (2013), which reveals that passive-avoidant leadership is positively associated with the followers’ negative emotions, which in turn is linked to more counterproductive work behaviors. It is argued by the authors that passive-avoidant leader’s behaviors such as not providing constructive direction, not clarifying expectations, and not helping to solve problems might trigger their followers’ feelings of anger or frustration. As a result, they engage in more counterproductive work behaviors (Kessler, Bruursema, Rodopman, & Spector, 2013). These findings indicate that destructive leadership triggers negative feelings among their followers, which in turn leads to adverse organizational outcomes.

Conclusion

Destructive leadership behaviors in organizations have received growing attention from researchers and practitioners over the past decade. Accordingly, a consistent body of research has shown that leaders’ destructive behaviors are related to a range of individual and organizational outcomes (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). This chapter adds to the existing knowledge by providing a detailed understanding of

destructive leadership considering its plausible influence on the followers' well-being. The extensive examination of the related literature shows consistent associations of destructive forms of leadership behaviors with the followers' mental and physical well-being. In particular, research demonstrates that exposure to destructive leadership has a detrimental impact on the followers' affective symptoms, burnout, stress, physical health, and psychological functioning (Montana et al., 2017; Nyberg et al., 2011; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Skakon et al., 2010; Zwingmann et al., 2014).

The vast majority of the studies pertaining to the effect of deleterious leadership behaviors point out increasing levels of emotional exhaustion (Brandebø et al., 2016; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Zhang & Liao, 2015) and negative affectivity (Glasø et al., 2018; Kessler et al., 2013; Schmid et al., 2018) in the followers. Building upon Hobfoll's (1989) COR theory, it is argued that the threat, or the actual loss, of resources when followers are exposed to destructive and abusive leaders activate the individual strain process, thus harming their well-being (Carlson et al., 2012; Zhang & Liao, 2015). Recent studies (e.g., Fosse et al., 2019; Kilroy, Chênevert, & Bosak, 2016) further provide additional evidence across context-specific findings.

Numerous research also demonstrate the health-hampering effects of the passive-avoidance form of leadership. It is argued in the "root cause" framework that inadequate leadership, for instance, leaders not meeting the subordinates' expectations, increases the followers' work-related stress and strains (Kelloway et al., 2005). Supporting this notion, several studies reveal associations between laissez-fair leadership and the followers' increased experiences of stress and strains through greater workplace stressors, including role ambiguity and role conflict (Diebig, Bormann, & Rowold, 2016; Skogstad et al., 2007, 2014). More importantly, it has been established that these workplace stressors mediate the effect of laissez-fair leadership on a broad range of mental and physical health outcomes (Barling & Frane, 2017; Che et al., 2017; Skogstad et al., 2007).

Even though the impact of destructive leadership on the follower-related outcomes has been extensively studied by scholars, there is still a lack of research on what are the precise predictors of leaders' deleterious behaviors, as well as how destructive leadership influences leader-related outcomes. Some researchers suggest personality traits, interpersonal problems, perceived injustice, and low organizational identification as some of the potential antecedents of leader destructive behaviors (Aasland et al., 2010; Glasø, Einarsen, Matthiesen & Skogstad, 2010), while others raise the need for future work to examine leader-related outcomes associated with destructive leadership (e.g., leaders' own well-being; Kaluza, Boer, Buengeler, & van Dick, 2020). Besides, this chapter documents the need for more research to identify why and when destructive leadership has such deleterious effects on the followers' well-being (Skogstad et al., 2017). As a result, an investigation of the plausible effects of moderators such as internal resources (e.g., resilience, optimism, self-efficacy) or external resources (e.g., family, organizational support, belongingness) in buffering or enhancing the outcomes would contribute to a more complete understanding of this relationship (Barling & Frone, 2017; Zwingmann et al., 2016).

Future research in this field may also benefit from conducting cross-cultural research (Zhang & Liao, 2015; Zwingmann et al., 2014) and testing whether

cultural dimensions such as power distance or individualism versus collectivism (Hofstede, 1984) play a moderating role in this relationship. People living in societal cultures with high levels of power distance show more respect for authority (Hofstede, 1984). Such patterns are likely to alleviate the detrimental effects of negative leadership behaviors, which are considered more acceptable in cultures with high power distance (Tepper, 2007; Zhang & Liao, 2015).

Another point is that, even though previous research has expanded our understanding of destructive leadership and its effects on the followers' well-being, the cross-sectional nature of the data in the majority of the research limits our ability to conclude causality. That is, one cannot rule out the possibility of reverse or reciprocal relations between leadership behavior and follower's well-being. For instance, past studies demonstrated that the followers' well-being (Van Dierendonck, Haynes, Borrill, & Stride, 2004) or behaviors (e.g., deviance; Lian, Ferris, Morrison, & Brown, 2014) influenced the followers' perception of, and/or actual behaviors of, the leaders. Therefore, these issues need to be further investigated within longitudinal and experimental designs to increase clarity regarding the direction of the relationship. Besides, the self-report technique has been used in a majority of the studies which might lead to common method bias. Likewise, leader behaviors are measured through the appraisals of the employees which might be influenced by extraneous (i.e., mood, sex, education) variables (Skakon et al., 2010; Van Dierendonck et al., 2004). In future studies, researchers may use coworker reports (Che et al., 2017) or observational methods to gather more valid and objective data.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the findings of research demonstrating the adverse impact of destructive leadership on the followers' well-being provide important practical implications. First, organizations might take some steps to prevent or manage destructive leader behaviors. For instance, managers might be informed about general norms and ethics concerning destructive behaviors and its deleterious effects on the well-being of the followers (Barling & Frone, 2017; Nyberg et al., 2011). Besides, feedback mechanisms such as the 360-degree method might be employed for the accurate evaluation of superiors (Erickson et al., 2015). Furthermore, systematic training programs on how to deal with problems in interactions might be provided for leaders and followers (Zhang & Liao, 2015). Likewise, leadership development training that improves constructive leadership behaviors might be implemented in organizations (Che et al., 2017; Glasø et al., 2018; Kaluza et al., 2020; Nyberg et al., 2011).

Second, organizations might implement appropriate health-promoting programs to preserve the followers' well-being. As for the leaders' well-being, researchers suggest stress and burnout interventions in which leaders are encouraged to talk openly about their well-being and ask for help when they need to (Kaluza et al., 2020). This intervention might also be applied to employees in organizations. Likewise, psychological and medical treatment to recover from past experiences, promoting one's coping abilities, and building self-confidence might be effective especially for employees suffering from long-term consequences of destructive leadership (Skogstad et al., 2017). Hence, these strategies will not only improve both followers' and leaders' well-being but also the organizational performance as a whole.

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Chapter 8

Organizational Outcomes of Destructive Leadership: Summary and Evaluation

Serdar Karabati

Abstract

A growing body of research with contributions from different parts of the world documents accounts and analyses of negative behaviors by persons in leadership positions. Researchers today are acknowledging and paying increasing attention to the consequences of leadership that is characterized as being destructive. The chapter outlines organizational outcomes of destructive leadership and aims to emphasize the person–situation interaction in explaining these organizational phenomena. Both the direct outcomes that result from poor decision-making and the indirect effects that emerge as a consequence of the destructive leader’s negative impact on the followers are discussed.

Keywords: Destructive leadership; the dark side of leadership; self-serving leadership; employee well-being; employee performance; toxic triangle

Introduction

Management theory has explored leadership from a variety of perspectives, starting with the classical view of the traits of a leader to contingency theories and such contemporary views as transformational leadership ([Hernandez, Eberly, Avolio, & Johnson, 2011](#)). Interest in the concept has persisted because leaders are thought to significantly influence organizational performance ([Wang, Tsui, & Xin, 2011](#)). As a consequence, most scholars have been concerned with understanding the most effective leadership style ([Shaw, Erickson, & Harvey, 2011](#)). In relation, leadership has received comparatively less critical scrutiny because the relevant analyses have typically subscribed to positive undertones in explaining the concept ([Craig & Kaiser, 2013](#)). However, a growing body of research from all over the world has documented accounts and analyses of abuse, aggression, narcissism, and other forms of negative behaviors by persons in supervisory roles. Researchers today are acknowledging and paying increasing attention to the consequences of leadership

that are characterized as being destructive (Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013; Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

Although literature in the area is still developing, there is agreement that an inclusive concept of destructive leadership should account for destructive behaviors aimed at both subordinates and the organization (Schmid, Pircher Verdorfer, & Peus, 2018). Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad (2007) have proposed the following definition for destructive leadership:

[T]he systematic and repeated behavior by a leader, supervisor or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organization by undermining and/or sabotaging the organization's goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of subordinates. (p. 208)

In light of this definition, the following provides an outline of the organizational outcomes of destructive leadership as categorized into direct versus indirect effects. The chapter concludes with a brief evaluation of the interaction between individual and contextual factors that together shape and amplify destructive leadership as well as its consequences.

Effects of Destructive Leadership

Destructive leaders are dishonest, disagreeable, and careless. They not only create a culture of anxiety, fear, and distrust, but also breed planning-related and operational problems that pave the way to dissatisfied clients and poor performance (de Vries, 2018). These negative organizational outcomes of destructive leadership emerge both directly and indirectly. The direct outcomes result from detrimental behaviors and decision-making, such as making risky strategic moves or engaging in decisions that violate laws or regulations. Indirect effects, on the contrary, emerge largely as a result of the destructive leader's negative impact on the behaviors and well-being of the followers or subordinates.

In their summary of literature in the area, Craig and Kaiser (2013) showed that the negative outcomes of destructive leadership may be tied to six sources or reasons: namely, unethical leadership, the dark side of charisma, narcissism, abusive supervision, toxic leadership, and negligent leadership. Although each of these represents a distinct conceptualization, they do not always require separate analyses. As an example of the overlapping of these elements, unethical leadership is frequently used interchangeably with toxic leadership as both refer to immoral and vicious behaviors (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). The outline presented in this chapter follows this reasoning and discusses the detrimental outcomes of destructive leadership without emphasizing a comparison among its different sources.

Direct Effects of Destructive Leadership on Organizational Outcomes

Leaders shape the culture of an organization, bridge divides between constituents of the organizational system, and set the direction for success (Ulrich & Yeung, 2019).

The effects of good leadership quickly become visible, but destructive leadership may be difficult to recognize as it leads to a slow, and possibly agonizing, erosion throughout the organization. Therefore, several common symptoms must be identified to detect the trajectory toward destructive leadership. A typical symptom is the leader's growing interest in pursuing his/her personal goals, prioritizing them over, or even replacing them with organizational goals. The tendency to pursue personal goals is triggered usually by self-absorption and grandiosity, which are common traits of narcissistic personalities (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). The narcissistic personality is one of the most studied conceptualizations in the literature on destructive leadership (Scheffler & Brunzel, 2020). A meta-analysis has revealed that midlevel narcissism in a leader may be necessary to facilitate and drive organizational performance (Grijalva, Harms, Newman, Gaddis, & Fraley, 2015). Beyond this optimal level, however, a more likely outcome of narcissism in the leader is an escalated motivation to engage in deceitful behaviors or faulty decisions to safeguard personal interests and gains. A study on the characteristics of the personalities of US presidents revealed that presidents with grandiose narcissism had a greater inclination to attach importance to their own political success over effective policy development (Watts et al., 2013). A study in Portugal showed that chief executive officers (CEOs) who scored high on narcissism overevaluated their performance beyond objective indicators (Guedes, 2017). It has also been suggested that narcissistic leaders take advantage of their influence over activities, such as financial reporting, to protect their public image (Olsen, Dworkis, & Young, 2014). Surprisingly, self-interested behaviors may not be unique to narcissistic leaders. It has been suggested that even charismatic leaders may exhibit problematic inclinations similar to narcissism (Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007). In their discussion on the characteristics of charismatic leaders, House and Howell (1992) made a distinction between personalized charismatic leadership, which is exploitative, non-egalitarian, and self-aggrandizing, and socialized charismatic leadership. Leaders with personalized charisma react to organizational issues typically from the perspective of their own needs and concerns and are motivated to maximize personal gain without regard for the entire organization (O'Connor et al., 1995).

Leaders may become destructive not only by prioritizing their personal goals but also by engaging in decisions or activities that result in erratic performance. For example, one study showed that narcissists selected more volatile stocks for their portfolios owing to heightened approach motivation and lost significantly more money during the tracking period than non-narcissists (Foster, Reidy, Misra, & Goff, 2011). This finding is supported by another study on CEOs that revealed that narcissists generated more extreme and irregular performance than non-narcissists (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007). On the positive side, the boldness or proactiveness that characterizes a narcissistic leader is an indicator of an entrepreneurial orientation (Wales, Patel, & Lumpkin, 2013) that might lead to firm growth in certain periods. However, because observers and the media typically focus only on evidence that helps reproduce success stories, variance in the CEO's or company's performance tends to be ignored (Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin, & Frese, 2009). Alternatively, a destructive leader's swift decision-making may be regarded as agility and readiness to change, two competencies needed to respond

to environmental volatility. Nevertheless, this argument is unconvincing because strategic agility does not pertain only to speed but also to awareness developed through reflection on the decision process (Joiner, 2019) and openness to new evidence (Doz & Kosonen, 2008). Destructive leaders are poor candidates for strategic agility because they do not reflect on their judgment (Conger, 1990), disdain advice (Kausel, Culbertson, Leiva, Slaughter, & Jackson, 2015), ignore data and feedback (Aravena, 2019), and tend to make decisions based on inadequate information (Shaw et al., 2011).

Indirect Effects of Destructive Leadership on Organizational Outcomes

Destructive leaders are inclined to divert organizational goals and fail to provide steady business performance. They indirectly harm the organization as they also damage the attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and emotions of employees. A major negative consequence of destructive leadership is decreased job satisfaction and well-being of subordinates owing to unreasonable demands, harassment, low integrity, and injustice (Einarsen et al., 2007; Kaiser & Hogan, 2010; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper, 2000). Job satisfaction is critical not only because it shows that employees are fulfilled but also because it relates significantly to job performance, especially in complex jobs (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001). As verified in different types of organizations, such as restaurants, hotels, plants, schools, and stores, job satisfaction is a predictor of various organizational outcomes, including productivity and customer satisfaction, at the unit level as well (Benitez, Peccei, & Medina, 2019; Harter, Schmidt, & Killham, 2003; Whitman, Van Rooy, & Viswesvaran, 2010). Put generally, destructive forms of leadership seem to be stronger predictors of job satisfaction than constructive forms of leadership (Skogstad et al., 2014).

In addition to negatively shaping critical employee attitudes, such as those related to job satisfaction, destructive leadership adversely affects employee perceptions and behaviors. Studies have shown that abusive supervision distracts perceptions of the safety climate of the organization, which determines safety participation by employees (Mullen, Fiset, & Rhéaume, 2018). Similarly, laissez-faire leadership negatively affects the climate and employee consciousness of safety in manufacturing environments and leads to increases in rates of injury due to such factors as the prioritization of productivity over safety (Kelloway, Mullen, & Francis, 2006; Zohar, 2002). A destructive leader may even encourage employees to distribute unsafe products to maximize sales (Krasikova et al., 2013). Another group of studies has revealed that destructive leaders are also detrimental to creativity and innovation. Two studies in China on sales and R&D teams in various industries revealed that destructive leadership (either defined as abusive supervision or self-serving leadership) is negatively related to creativity, where this was measured as the generation of new and useful ideas (Jiang & Gu, 2016; Peng, Wang, & Chen, 2019). Similarly, a study on Portuguese firms revealed that destructive leadership has a negative effect on innovation because it hampers the employees' ability to adopt new ways of doing things (Lopes Henriques, Curado, Mateus Jerónimo, & Martins, 2019).

An investigation on a public safety organization in Canada found that proactive behaviors and innovation by the team were negatively affected by abusive supervision (Rousseau & Aubé, 2018). Even when creativity is not critical for the business, destructive leaders become an impediment to their subordinates because they ignore advice and obstruct the cooperation needed to carry out tasks (Brandebou, 2020). Forms of destructive leadership, such as narcissistic or abusive supervision, pose an additional threat as they also pave the way for undesirable reactions, such as deviant behaviors (Zhang, Li, Liu, Han, & Muhammad, 2018) or service sabotage by employees (Chi, Chen, Huang, & Chen, 2018).

Negative organizational outcomes also emerge because of affective symptoms and reduced employee well-being due to exposure to destructive leadership. A meta-analysis has verified that destructive leadership is correlated negatively with psychological functioning, and positively with stress, burnout, and negative affect, which in turn are associated with different individual- and group-level indicators (Montano, Reeske, Franke, & Hüffmeier, 2017). Affect is an integral component of work as most tasks are not just activities but also emotion-laden social interactions (Erez, Misangyi, Johnson, LePine, & Halverson, 2008). Employees should generally enjoy positive emotional states both for ethical and humanistic reasons (Kaplan, Bradley, Luchman, & Haynes, 2009). A destructive leader's sense of entitlement, however, often leads to self-serving abuses of privilege and power (Conger, 1990; Sankowsky, 1995; Wisse & Sleebos, 2016) and creates a toxic environment of dominance and even oppression (O'Connor, Mumford, Clifton, Gessner, & Connelly, 1995; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). In such an environment, employees are more inclined to suppress their emotions. A climate of emotion suppression results in a high level of emotional exhaustion in the individual and the team, which negatively affects performance (Chiang, Chen, Liu, Akutsu, & Wang, 2020).

Although an individual's personality traits play an important role in affectivity and the formation of attitudes (Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & de Chermont, 2003), job-related outcomes are also affected by emotional states induced by the context of the work and leadership. Fair treatment, for example, has repeatedly been linked to positive affect, such as happiness (Kaplan, Cortina, Ruark, LaPort, & Nicolaides, 2014). Abusive and exploitative leadership, however, are associated with negative affect (Schmid et al., 2018). On the other hand, unsympathetic superiors tend to be unaware of their subordinates' feelings or goals and lack the competence to positively motivate others (Farmanara, 2019). Experiments have revealed that even a mildly positive affect systematically influences cognitive processes (Ashby, Isen, & Turken, 1999). Therefore, a display of positive emotions by leaders is necessary to form shared goals with their subordinates and reduce conflict within teams (Seong & Choi, 2014). Studies have shown that the more positive emotions employees feel during a workday, the higher their levels of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and optimism throughout that day (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2012). Positive affect also increases sociability, cooperation, and prosocial behavior (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005), and enhances a multitude of desired skills, such as flexibility (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005) and problem-solving (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987). A simulation study with

nuclear power plant crew, for example, showed that shared positive affect leads to a more effective team by increasing coordination and information sharing (Kaplan, LaPort, & Waller, 2013).

In summary, destructive leaders are characterized by a multitude of negative traits and behavioral inclinations, which damage organizational culture and impair business performance. Nevertheless, analyses of destructive leadership should not be restricted to investigations of individual differences across traits but should extend to examinations of the potential reciprocal or interactive mechanisms of the person–organization interface.

Conclusion

Destructive leadership involves abusiveness, authoritarianism, manipulateness, or narcissism (Einarsen et al., 2007; Tepper, 2007), and is manifested in behaviors ranging from aggressiveness to less typical ones, such as being an obstruction to negotiations (Shaw et al., 2011). Passive or avoidant leadership should not be regarded merely as a lack of constructive leadership because it is a form of destructive leadership that relates to such behaviors as (silent) bullying at work (Johan Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2007).

Destructive behaviors are frequently accepted and even legitimized because they may suggest to others that the person who exhibits these behaviors has the rightful power to act freely (de Vries, 2018). It may be argued that senior positions are more susceptible to destructive leadership as they are characterized by fewer constraints, a larger span of control, greater power, and authority (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008; Kaiser & Hogan, 2007; Lundmark, Nielsen, Hasson, von Thiele Schwarz, & Tafvelin, 2020). This is especially true in unstable environments, where leaders are typically granted greater authority to confront circumstances that demand quick action. We should be wary of this vulnerability particular to people in senior positions, not only because power has the potential to (further) corrupt individuals but also because most leaders are under pressure due to scarcity of resources (Krasikova et al., 2013) or project difficulty (Collins & Jackson, 2015). As project difficulty increases, for example, the leader's attention may be overwhelmed by negative stimuli, which may deplete his/her self-control skills (Hagger, Wood, Stiff, & Chatzisarantis, 2010).

The environmental context is as critical as personality because it may either trigger or suppress the undesirable intentions of the person in a leadership position (Padilla et al., 2007). According to Mischel (1977), personality is most important in weak situations that provide ambiguous cues for appropriate action. When the work done is unstructured or the person has principal discretion to make decisions, personality traits become more predictive of performance (Judge & Zapata, 2015). Conversely, strong situations provide unambiguous cues about social expectations and appropriate behaviors, and, thus, reduce the variation in peoples' actions. In highly ethical contexts, for example, negative qualities are rendered ineffective because individuals are restricted to a behavioral repertoire and the norms imposed by the organization (Hoffman et al., 2013). It is challenging for destructive leaders

to succeed in stable systems with strong institutions and mechanisms of control over power.

Leadership is a function of the interaction between the characteristics of the person, the situation or the context, and the qualities of the followers. Analyses of leadership, including destructive leadership, should subscribe to this perspective by simultaneously investigating these constituents. We should also move further away from the heroic leadership model, which is leader-centric, and toward relational and interactional models that emphasize challenges and improvements in the work and the relevant organizational practices (Higgs, 2009). Additional longitudinal or qualitative studies are needed to understand the interplay between factors intrinsic and extrinsic to leaders and to answer the question if destructive leadership can be explained as a negative transformational process.

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Chapter 9

Leader Hypocrisy and Its Emotional, Attitudinal, and Behavioral Consequences

Arzu Ilsev and Eren Miski Aydin

Abstract

Hypocrisy is a widely recognized concept in both academic literature and popular media. However, very few studies have examined the reflections of hypocrisy in leader's behaviors in organizational behavior literature. Leader hypocrisy mainly refers to the misalignment between words and deeds of a leader. This chapter first provides a review of the concept of hypocrisy and its various conceptualizations in philosophy, social psychology, and organizational behavior literatures. The chapter then focuses on the implications of leader hypocrisy for organizations and its members by presenting the studies conducted on the emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral consequences of leader hypocrisy (word–deed misalignment) and leader behavioral integrity (word–deed alignment). Moreover, some of the gaps in the literature are identified, and suggestions are made for future research on the topic.

Keywords: Hypocrisy; leader hypocrisy; behavioral integrity; word–deed misalignment; trust in leader; moral integrity

Introduction

Hypocrisy is an eye-catching topic in the popular press and has received a great amount of attention by philosophers and social psychologists. It is mainly defined as the misalignment between the words and deeds of individuals. Despite the recognition it receives, little is known about its reflections and ramifications in organizational life. Some scholars have focused on organizational hypocrisy and tried to identify the antecedents and consequences of hypocrisy at the organization level (e.g., [Christensen, Morsing, & Thyssen, 2013](#); [Wagner, Korschun, & Troebs, 2020](#)); however, very few studies have been conducted on hypocrisy at the individual level. Research on leader hypocrisy, which is at its earlier stages, uses

leader hypocrisy and leader behavioral integrity interchangeably and mainly focuses on the consequences of leaders' behavioral integrity. Although low behavioral integrity is an essential component of leader hypocrisy, it is not sufficient to capture the concept entirely. It is argued in the philosophy literature that hypocrisy goes beyond word–deed misalignment and should be considered as a multifaceted concept which must include the actor's intentions.

This chapter aims to provide an overview of hypocrisy of leaders with respect to its reflections and consequences in organizational life. To this end, first the definitions of hypocrisy are reviewed, and then results of empirical studies investigating the outcomes of leader hypocrisy are presented. It should be noted here that research on leader hypocrisy is nascent, and very few studies have examined the consequences of leader hypocrisy *per se*. However, a number of studies have been conducted on leader behavioral integrity, which is mostly considered as the antonym of hypocrisy. Hence, research on the outcomes of leader behavioral integrity are also presented in this chapter.

This chapter would contribute to the literature by providing information on leader hypocrisy and its attitudinal and behavioral outcomes such as trust in supervisor, organizational commitment, intention to quit, and performance. Furthermore, by highlighting some of the gaps in the literature, suggestions for future research are provided.

Conceptualization of Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy is a complex, multilayered concept that has received a great amount of attention and has been heavily discussed and studied by social psychologists and philosophers (Alicke, Gordon, & Rose, 2013). The term “hypocrisy” which is generally considered as an antonym of behavioral integrity was initially used to describe the inconsistency between talk and action, presentation, and results (Simons, 2002). Although the definition of hypocrisy as misalignment between words and actions is widely used, this definition have been questioned and it is argued that hypocrisy goes beyond inconsistency between words and deeds.

Some researchers suggest argue that hypocrisy is not simply an inconsistency between words and actions, but it involves a moral element. McKinnon (1991) maintains that hypocrites' actions are aimed at presenting an image of someone of good character. They know what intentions are morally correct, and they try to deceive others into thinking that these are the true intentions with which they acted or upon which they will act. Along the same line, Batson, Kobryniewicz, Dinnerstein, Kampf, and Wilson (1997) define moral hypocrisy as motivation to appear moral yet, if possible, avoid the cost of actually being moral. They also distinguish between moral hypocrisy and moral integrity stating that the latter is the motivation to actually be moral.

Monin and Merritt (2012) further argue that hypocrisy does not necessarily refer to failing to practice what one preaches (i.e. behavioral inconsistency) and maintain that hypocrisy can also occur in the absence of behavioral inconsistency. For example, applying double standards or assuming a false appearance of virtue

do not involve misalignment between words and actions but are also considered hypocritical. The authors propose that what makes a person a hypocrite is dishonesty and deception or preaching in bad faith, which they refer to as hypocrisy without behavioral integrity. They, therefore, claim that conceptualizations of hypocrisy should include any claim to morality made to satisfy ulterior and self-serving motives. Recently, [Wagner et al. \(2020\)](#) in their work on corporate hypocrisy have integrated the different views discussed here so far and have proposed that inconsistency and deception are two facets of hypocrisy. The researchers use the term *moral hypocrisy* to refer to the belief that a firm is trying to appear more virtuous than it is with an ulterior, self-serving motive, and *behavioral hypocrisy* to refer to the belief that actions demonstrated by a firm are inconsistent with its statements.

Apart from inauthenticity or the intention to deceive, there is also an ongoing debate in the literature regarding whether weakness of will, and self-deception also constitute hypocrisy ([Alicke et al., 2013](#)). The authors argue that people may wish to behave consistently with their values but may not be able to do so due to a lack of control or lack of discipline. In this case, inconsistency is not intentional but is due to weakness of will; however, it may still be perceived by others as hypocrisy. Moreover, people may be truly self-deceived and not recognize the incongruity between their actions and values. Word–deed misalignment here is not intentional but may be interpreted as hypocritical.

In his recent theoretical work, [Bartel \(2019\)](#) have posited that hypocrisy is not a distinct moral category whose wrongness can be explained by a unitary theory. He states that each case of hypocrisy can be reduced to instances of deception or instances of *akrasia* (i.e. weakness of will). According to the author, a *deceptive hypocrite* is one who professes a particular moral belief but is disposed to act in a way that is inconsistent with what he or she believes. On the other hand, an *akratic hypocrite* is one who believes in a particular moral belief and yet, at times, actually acts in a way that is inconsistent with his or her belief. It is the sincerity of the professed belief that differs among two types of hypocrites. Deceptive hypocrites are insincere about their believing in a particular moral belief and are motivated by a desire to appear sincere, whereas akratic hypocrites are very sincere about their believing in the same moral belief but are not necessarily motivated to deceive. In short, deceptive hypocrites are *liars* and hypocrites, but akratic hypocrites are *irrational* and hypocrites. Therefore, in order to consider someone as hypocrite and hold him or her morally accountable for his or her inconsistent behavior, one needs to understand whether that person is a liar or as weak willed.

Pointing out the confusion in literature regarding what constitutes hypocrisy, [Alicke et al. \(2013\)](#) conducted an empirical study in order to explore the elements of attitude-inconsistent behavior that influence ordinary judgments of hypocrisy. They presented participants with behaviors that are manipulations of different dimensions of hypocrisy and asked them whether they thought that the behavior described was hypocritical. In order to avoid any possible influence on participant's judgments, multiple scenarios to assess each dimension were asked. The scenarios incorporated “endogenous” and “exogenous” aspects of hypocrisy.

Endogenous aspects refer to factors that are essential to the definition of hypocrisy such as the intention to deceive others, the degree of discrepancy between the attitude expressed and the contradictory behavior, the nature of the attitude–behavior discrepancy (i.e. public pronouncement of attitude), the weakness of the will, and genuine self-deception. On the other hand, exogenous aspect of hypocrisy are psychological variables that may influence hypocrisy judgments, but that are not generally viewed as essential criteria for defining the concept such as the character and reputation of the actor, the need to consider competing social values, the severity of the behavior, and the nature of the outcome (negative or positive). Based on the results of this study, the authors concluded that hypocrisy is a multifaceted concept since all of the endogenous and exogenous factors mentioned above are to some degree and depending on the situation presented in the scenarios considered as hypocrisy by laymen.

Effron, O'Connor, Leroy, and Lucas (2018) also draw attention to the confusion regarding the definition of hypocrisy and state that the terms “word–deed misalignment,” “low behavioral integrity,” and “hypocrisy” are used interchangeably. However, they argue that these concepts are different from each other. Specifically, word–deed misalignment occurs when a person says one thing but does another thing. The authors claim that misalignment is merely an objective description of behavior rather than a subjective perception, and not all misalignments are perceived to be hypocritical. Behavioral integrity, on the other hand, is the degree of alignment people perceive between words and deeds. It is a trait that people attribute to other people based on their behavioral patterns. If someone is perceived low in behavioral integrity, it indicates that he or she is saying and doing different things.

According to Effron et al. (2018), hypocrisy is a morally discrediting interpretation of perceived word–deed misalignment. While low behavioral integrity is a perception that words and deeds are misaligned, hypocrisy is an *explanation* of why they are misaligned. Most studies on hypocrisy (e.g., Alicke et al., 2013; Cha & Edmondson, 2006; Greenbaum, Mawritz, & Piccolo, 2015; Jordan, Sommers, Bloom, & Rand, 2017) agree that hypocrisy involves some sort of inconsistency, and that hypocritical behaviors advance the actor's self-interests. The inconsistency between attitudes and behaviors is generally perceived as hypocrisy, but in reality, inconsistency by itself does not necessarily indicate hypocrisy. Indeed, hypocritical behavior by itself can sometimes be innocent or desirable under certain circumstances. The theoretical study by Effron et al. (2018) attempts to identify when and why “saying one thing but doing another” is considered as hypocrisy. The scholars proposed a new model that considers how people interpret word–deed misalignment and their reactions to it. According to the model, when a person witnesses an actor saying one thing but doing another, the person asks himself or herself implicitly or explicitly two sets of questions. The first question is asked in order to find out whether the words and deeds are misaligned, and if the answer is yes, to what extent. The second question is asked to discover why the words and deeds are misaligned. When a misalignment between words and deeds is perceived, then this inconsistency is considered as a sign of low behavioral integrity. In this case, the person tries to find out the reason for this

inconsistency. If the reason is not attributed to an unearned moral benefit for the actor, then the reaction will tend to be neutral or even positive. On the other hand, if the reason is attributed to an unearned moral benefit for the actor, it is interpreted as hypocrisy. In this case, the person's reaction will be negative such as distrusting the actor or even morally condemning him or her. Therefore, what distinguishes behavioral integrity from hypocrisy is the attribution to an intention to receive a benefit not earned by the actor. One of the contributions of this model to literature is that it tries to clarify the confusion between behavioral integrity and hypocrisy.

To summarize, researchers have different views of hypocrisy and have not yet reached an agreement on its conceptualization. Hypocrisy is sometimes considered as a misalignment between words and deeds, other times as a false claim. Some researchers argue that while it involves word–deed misalignment, it is the perceived intention that qualifies it as hypocrisy, and hypocrisy is perceived when there is an intention to deceive or to gain unearned benefits. In recent years, research in social psychology has acknowledged that these different facets do not represent competing views; rather, they depict the multifaceted nature of hypocrisy in a differentiated manner (Wagner et al., 2020).

In the organizational behavior literature, leader hypocrisy is defined as the misalignment between words and deeds of the leader (Greenbaum et al., 2015). The review of the relevant literature presented above suggests that this definition may not be sufficient to capture the concept in its entirety. More research should be conducted on the conceptualization of leader hypocrisy in order to define the concept clearly and to determine whether it should capture dimensions such as false claims to morality and the intentions of the leader to deceive or to gain unwarranted benefits.

Consequences of Leader Hypocrisy

Studies investigating the outcomes of leader hypocrisy per se are relatively rare. Only three studies (Cha & Edmondson, 2006; Greenbaum et al., 2015; Liborius, 2014) have focused specifically on the consequences of leader hypocrisy (i.e. word–deed misalignment), whereas other studies mainly examined the consequences of leader behavioral integrity (i.e. word–deed alignment). Since a lack of behavioral integrity can be considered as equivalent to hypocrisy (Simons, Friedman, Liu, & McLean-Parks, 2007), findings of the studies on the outcomes of leader integrity are also presented in this section. This section also includes the findings of studies conducted in areas other than management and organizational behavior since they provide clues to the possible effects of leader hypocrisy in organizations.

Affective and Attitudinal Consequences

There are a large number of affective and attitudinal outcomes that have been linked to leader word–deed alignment. These outcomes appear to coalesce around

three categories: emotional reactions to and judgments of the leaders, trust in leader, and attitudes toward the job and the organization.

Emotional Reactions to and Judgments of the Leader: It is common sense to think that hypocrite leaders are disliked by most people. When it comes to the effects of leader hypocrisy, one expects to find studies that examined how hypocrisy is evaluated by followers. Surprisingly, in the organizational behavior literature, very few studies (e.g., [Cha & Edmondson, 2006](#)) focused on employees' emotional reactions to and judgments of hypocrite leaders. However, studies conducted in the fields other than organizational behavior provide insight into how employees might react to leader hypocrisy.

In an experimental study involving criminal and moral transgressions, [Laurent, Clark, Walker, and Wiseman \(2014\)](#) examined the relationship between hypocrisy and emotional reactions. The results of the experiments showed that the more the criminals were perceived as hypocrites, the more negative emotions (i.e. anger and disgust) were elicited. Furthermore, emotional reactions mediated the relationship between perceived hypocrisy and attribution of guilt and the desire to punish the criminal.

[Jordan et al. \(2017\)](#) in a study involving a series of experiments showed that hypocrites who condemn the moral failings of other people but behave badly themselves are perceived negatively. These researchers developed the theory of false signaling in order to explain why this occurs. According to this theory hypocrites are disliked because they use their condemnation of others to mislead people about their moral character. Condemnation of immoral behavior dishonestly signals that they are morally good, but they fail to act in accordance with these signals. This deception creates dislike and negative perceptions in others. Similarly, in her theoretical work on hypocrisy, [McKinnon \(1991\)](#) suggests that hypocrites are disliked because of the dishonesty and cheating they engage in. She further argues that it is not the mere dishonesty that creates dislike, rather people detest hypocrites because they collect unwarranted moral reputation or avoid merited blame and they do so by manipulating the judgments of people. Furthermore, hypocrites are highly likely to be motivated to achieve power and status that can be attained if they manage to elicit positive moral assessments without having to pay the actual price of acquiring virtuous dispositions.

In a qualitative study, [Cha and Edmondson \(2006\)](#) found employee perceptions that the leader was a hypocrite (i.e. acting inconsistently with the values espoused) lead to disappointment and anger, which in turn resulted in disenchantment. In other words, the leader's violation of organizational values he or she espoused lowers the level of enthusiasm previously generated by the leader's emphasis on those values.

Two studies have investigated how leader behavioral integrity influences employees' perceptions of the effectiveness of their leaders. [Moorman, Darnold, and Priesemuth \(2013\)](#) have found that leader behavioral integrity had an indirect effect on the perceptions of leader effectiveness through the mediating effect of trust in the leader. [Hinkin and Schriesheim \(2015\)](#) examined the same effect, but their results were insignificant.

To summarize, studies have shown that leader hypocrisy has important influences on the reactions of employees. Specifically, leader hypocrisy seems to be related to negative emotions such as dislike, anger, disgust, and disappointment. Leader hypocrisy also seems to influence perceptions of the effectiveness of the leader. The effect of hypocrisy on employee judgments, however, is not clear. [Cha and Edmondson's \(2006\)](#) qualitative study suggests employees might be disenchanted and feel less enthusiastic when leaders behave hypocritically which is an indication of a low level of perceived leader effectiveness. The study conducted by [Moorman et al. \(2013\)](#) also suggests a link between hypocrisy and leader effectiveness, although their study showed this link to be an indirect one through the effect of trust in leader. The insignificant result for this indirect effect found by [Hinkin and Schriesheim \(2015\)](#) and the lack of studies investigating the direct effect of leader hypocrisy on perceived or actual leader effectiveness suggest that more studies are needed to investigate this relationship.

Trust in Leader: One of the important outcomes of leader hypocrisy established in various studies is trust in supervisor. Trust can be defined as the willingness of someone to be vulnerable to the actions of another based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party ([Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998](#)). Studies reviewed here have shown that trust has both a direct relationship with leader word–deed alignment as well as a mediating effect on the relationships between word–deed alignment and several employee outcomes. Much of this work is based on [Simons's \(2002\)](#) behavioral integrity theory where behavioral integrity is conceptualized as a perceived pattern of alignment between words and deeds. The theory suggests that a leader's pattern of word–deed alignment or misalignment influences trust in the leader which in turn affects other outcomes such as intention to stay in the organization and employee performance. [Simons \(2002\)](#) explains the effect of integrity on trust by using two mechanisms: perceived behavioral reliability and perceived goal or value congruence of the leader. The author argues that that a leader who consistently adheres to espoused values becomes more predictable. This behavioral reliability creates a sense of certainty regarding the future actions of the leader. In other words, followers become confident in their expectations of the leader's reliability and believe that the leader can be trusted to behave in line with their own expectations. Furthermore, when leader words and actions are misaligned, followers may believe that their leaders may not be willing to show them their actual values or goals. This, in turn, is likely to lead to follower inferences that the leaders do not trust the followers enough to tell them the truth. Thus, followers may interpret the word–deed misalignment as a cue that their leaders do not trust them. This perception of mistrust of leaders in followers might result in inferences that the leaders have goals or values that are incompatible with those of the followers, which in turn results in lower levels of trust in leaders.

In line with the predictions of behavioral integrity theory, a number of studies have found that followers' perceptions of leader behavioral integrity was positively related to trust in leader ([Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2015](#); [Kannan-Narasimhan & Lawrence, 2012](#); [Palanski & Yammarino, 2011](#); [Simons et al., 2007](#)). In addition,

Simons, Leroy, Collewaert, and Masschelein (2015) in a meta-analysis of 14 published and seven unpublished studies confirmed the positive relationship between behavioral integrity and trust in leader. Therefore, it can be said that reduced level of employee trust in supervisor is an important outcome of leader hypocrisy or low leader behavioral integrity. Due to this significant impact, researches have proposed trust in supervisor as a mediator of the relationship between leader word–deed (mis)alignment and employee attitudes and behaviors, which will be explained in the following sections.

Attitudes towards Job and Organization: Studies that examined the attitudinal outcomes of leader word–deed (mis)alignment mostly investigated the effects of leader behavioral integrity. Only one study (Greenbaum et al., 2015) looked at how leader hypocrisy influences employees' work-related attitudes. These studies build on behavioral integrity theory (Simons, 2002) and argue that leader word–deed (mis)alignment affects work-related attitudes by positively influencing trust in leader.

One of the attitudinal outcomes examined in the literature is intention to stay in the organization. Simons et al. (2007) found a direct positive impact of leader behavioral integrity on intention to stay. Moorman et al. (2013) examined whether behavioral integrity negatively influenced intention to quit through the mediating effect of trust in leader, but did not find support for the mediating effect. Greenbaum et al. (2015) examined the effect of leader hypocrisy on subordinate turnover intentions and found a positive effect. The authors explained the impact of leader word–deed (mis)alignment on intention to stay by building on social cognition literature and behavioral integrity theory (Simons, 2002). Specifically, they suggest that perception of leader hypocrisy makes it difficult for subordinates to predict the leaders' future behaviors or their true intentions. The uncertainty associated with perceived hypocrisy is likely to create discomfort in subordinates which they will be motivated to reduce. One way of reducing the discomfort is psychologically distancing themselves from the leader and the organization that presumably endorses such hypocritical behavior. Increased thoughts of quitting the job are a manifestation of such withdrawal.

Organizational commitment is another commonly investigated work-related attitude and is showed to be positively influenced by leader word–deed alignment. For example, Simons et al. (2007) and Leroy, Palanski, and Simons (2012) showed that leader behavioral integrity is positively associated with affective organizational commitment. Kannan-Narasimhan and Lawrence (2012) and Hinkin and Schriesheim (2015) looked at whether organizational commitment was influenced by leader integrity both directly and indirectly. They found support for the direct effect as well as the indirect effect of integrity on commitment mediated by trust in leader. Furthermore, the meta-analysis conducted by Simons et al. (2015) confirmed the positive relationship found in empirical studies.

Mostly single studies were conducted to examine the relationships between other work-related attitudes and leader word–deed alignment. Erkutlu and Chafra (2016) examined the effect of leader behavioral integrity on organizational identification and found a positive association. They also found that this affect was weaker when leader's power distance orientation and organizational politics

perceptions were high. Vogelgesang, Leroy, and Avolio (2013) found a positive relationship between leader behavioral integrity and work engagement. Moorman et al. (2013) showed that the relationship between behavioral integrity and work engagement is mediated by trust in leader. Kannan-Narasimhan and Lawrence (2012) examined the association between leader behavioral integrity and organizational cynicism and found support for both the direct effect of integrity and the indirect effect through trust in leader. Leader behavioral integrity was also shown to influence job satisfaction (Simons et al., 2007), and Moorman et al. (2013) found that this effect was mediated by trust in leader. Hinkin and Schriesheim (2015) and Palanski and Yammarino (2011) found that leader behavioral integrity positively influences satisfaction with supervision. Finally, Simons et al. (2007) showed that leader behavioral integrity has a positive impact on employee perceptions of justice.

Behavioral Consequences

In extant research, a number of studies have linked leader behavioral integrity to employee behaviors. These studies mostly examined the indirect relationship between leader behavioral integrity and behavioral outcomes. These studies consider employee behaviors as distal outcomes and argue that behavioral integrity has an impact on employee behaviors by improving employee attitudes toward job, leader, or organization. To date, no studies have investigated the behavioral outcomes of leader hypocrisy. However, results of the studies on behavioral integrity may shed some light on the possible employee behavioral outcomes of leader hypocrisy.

Task Performance: Leroy et al. (2012) proposed that leader behavioral integrity influences employee performance indirectly by improving employees' affective commitment to their organizations and found support for this hypothesis. In a longitudinal study, Vogelgesang et al. (2013) showed that leader behavioral integrity positively affected employee performance by improving employees' work engagement. In a study utilizing different data collection methods, Palanski and Yammarino (2011) examined both the direct and indirect effects of behavioral integrity on employee performance. The authors did not find support for the direct effect of integrity on performance. Their results suggested that the relationship between leader behavioral integrity and performance was mediated by trust in and satisfaction with the leader. They concluded that leader behavioral integrity helps to create conditions (e.g., trust) under which followers can perform their jobs, but it cannot directly influence performance levels.

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors: Dineen, Lewicki, and Tomlinson (2006) and Kannan-Narasimhan and Lawrence (2012) examined both the direct and the indirect effects of supervisor behavioral integrity on the helping dimension of organizational citizenship behavior. The result showed that supervisor integrity did not have a direct effect on helping behavior; rather, the relationship was mediated by trust in supervisor. Liborius (2014) conducted an online experiment and found support for the positive effect of leader behavioral integrity on employee citizenship behaviors. Furthermore, the relationship between integrity

and citizenship behaviors was found to be moderated by employee neuroticism. Specifically, the relationship between integrity and citizenship behaviors was stronger for employees with lower levels of neuroticism.

Building on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), Tomlinson, Lewicki, and Ash (2014) propose that leader behavioral integrity is positively associated with organizational citizenship behaviors because perceptions of the leader's integrity are favorably viewed as a valuable social resource that employees reciprocate via prosocial behaviors that exceed formal requirements. Their study supported the positive influence of leader behavioral integrity on citizenship behaviors. In addition, they showed that this effect was moderated by values congruence such that the effect was stronger when leaders' values were aligned with those of the followers'. Finally, Dineen et al. (2006) showed that leader behavior integrity, interacting with supervisory guidance, had a positive impact on citizenship behaviors.

Other Employee Behaviors: Limited research has investigated the behavioral outcomes of word–deed (mis)alignment apart from task performance and organizational citizenship behaviors. These studies focused on leader behavioral integrity when examining the outcomes of alignment of leaders' words and actions. In a study that examined the effects of leader behavioral integrity and supervisory guidance on deviant behaviors, Dineen et al. (2006) found that leader behavioral integrity had a negative relationship with deviance behaviors directed toward individuals and organizations. Furthermore, integrity and guidance interacted in their effects on deviant behaviors. Another study (Liborius, 2014) investigated the impact of leader behavioral integrity on employee voice behavior and found support for the relationship.

Overall, results of the studies reviewed above suggest that leader hypocrisy might have important effects for employees, leaders, and organizations. Negative emotional reactions and judgments of the leaders and their effectiveness, level of trust employees have in their leaders, work attitudes, and behaviors such as satisfaction, work engagement, organizational commitment, task performance, citizenship behaviors, and deviant behaviors are highly likely to be influenced by leader hypocrisy. Research on this topic is relevantly new, and very few studies have empirically examined the consequences of leader hypocrisy. However, as presented above, studies conducted on leader behavioral integrity and on hypocrisy in fields other than organizational behavior provide a solid groundwork on which hypotheses can be built and empirically examined.

Conclusion

The concept of hypocrisy is far from new and gains both scholar and popular interest. Hypocrisy in organizational life has recently started to gain attention in the organizational behavior literature. Research has mainly focused on hypocrisy at the organizational level; however, there is very limited research on hypocrisy at the individual level. Although there are a number of studies on leader behavioral integrity, defined as alignment between a leader's words and deeds, studies conducted on leader hypocrisy, defined as misalignment between a leader's words and

deeds, are very few. Given that research on leader hypocrisy has just started, the potential for research that addresses implications of leader hypocrisy is significant.

This chapter provided a comprehensive review of various conceptualizations of hypocrisy in philosophy, social psychology, and organizational behavior literatures. The review suggests that there is a lack of clarity on the definition of hypocrisy. Misalignment between words and deeds seems to be a generally agreed upon element of hypocrisy. However, there is an ongoing debate on the nature of misalignment that qualifies as hypocrisy. It is argued that mere disagreement between words and deeds may not be perceived as hypocritical and proposes that conceptualizations of hypocrisy should include false claims to morality or intention to deceive others or to gain undeserved benefits. More theoretical and especially empirical studies are required to clarify this issue. Recent work by [Effron et al. \(2018\)](#) has tried to differentiate between the concepts of word–deed misalignment, behavioral integrity, and hypocrisy, and seems to provide a good starting point theoretically. This also applies to the conceptualization of leader hypocrisy that uses the word–deed misalignment definition. Most of the studies relevant to this topic mainly focused on leader behavioral integrity (i.e. word–deed alignment), and leader hypocrisy is simply considered as low behavioral integrity. However, as this review suggests, it is possible that leader hypocrisy goes beyond a simple inconsistency between words and actions and may involve the dimensions proposed in philosophy and social psychology literatures. Thus, research should focus on clearly defining leader hypocrisy and determining whether it is a multidimensional construct.

This chapter also focused on the outcomes of leader hypocrisy and reviewed relevant literature on this topic. Studies conducted on the consequences of leader hypocrisy are also rare. However, results of the studies conducted to examine the outcomes of hypocrisy in social psychology, philosophy, and politics as well as those conducted to investigate the outcomes of leader behavioral integrity provide significant basis for research on outcomes of leader hypocrisy. These studies suggest that leader hypocrisy is likely to influence judgments of the leader and his or her effectiveness; work-related attitudes such as satisfaction with the job and the leader and work engagement; and work-related behaviors such as in-role and extra-role task performance, and deviant behaviors. Finally, the theoretical foundation of the aforementioned studies is behavioral integrity theory ([Simons, 2002](#)) which suggests that leader word–deed (mis)alignment has an impact on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes by influencing the level of trust employees have in their leaders. While this prediction has been supported by some studies reviewed in the previous section, other mechanisms such as employee emotions or attributions they make for the misalignment might also play important roles in this relationship.

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Chapter 10

A Manifestation of Destructive Leadership: Downward Mobbing and Employees' Stress-Related Growth

Didar Zeytun and Zeynep Aycan

Abstract

This chapter is based on a study investigating the effect of downward mobbing on employees' stress-related growth (SRG) with the mediator role of burnout and the moderator role of personality hardiness and coworker support. Data were collected from 367 employees (177 females, 186 males) through MTurk. Self-report measures were administered to participants who have been exposed to mobbing by their supervisor/manager in at least one of their previous work experiences. Moderated mediation analysis suggested that burnout mediates the relationship between mobbing and SRG where burnout and growth were negatively associated. Coworker support appeared as a significant but inadequate moderator to promote growth. Post hoc analysis suggested that there is a curvilinear relationship between burnout and growth, and hardiness is a significant – but insufficient – moderator in the direct relationship. Implications for science and practice will be discussed.

Keywords: Stress-related growth; mobbing; burnout; hardiness; social support; posttraumatic growth

Introduction

When the German philosopher Nietzsche wrote in his book *Twilight of the Idols*, “Out of life's school of war: What does not destroy me, makes me stronger” (1889/1998), the underlying idea behind this quote was quite appealing for most by its very nature. However, since the idea entered the scientific field within the last 30 years, it has been rarely investigated in the work context, with an

extremely limited scope. Therefore, this research aims to understand growth following adversity in the workplace.

Researchers have used several terms to describe the concept such as post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995), stress-related growth (SRG; Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996), thriving (O’Leary & Ickovics, 1995), and benefit finding (Affleck & Tennen, 1996), all of which point to “the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crises” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 1). For the current study, the term ‘stress-related growth’ will be used since not all experiences are traumatic but stressful in the workplace.

Among those highly stressful events in the workplace, mobbing is one of the most prevalent and destructive ones, where in the United States, 19% of workers suffer from mobbing (Namie, 2017), and in European countries, the prevalence ranges between 1.4% and 38.1% (Milczarek, 2010). Within all types of mobbing, downward mobbing, which is “the intentional and repeated inflictions of physical or psychological harm by superiors on subordinates within an organization,” (Vandekerckhove & Commers, 2003, p. 42), is the most widespread due to the power imbalance in a mobbing experience (Duffy & Sperry, 2014). Therefore, in this study, the effect of downward mobbing on employees’ SRG will be investigated. Since growth from suffering requires intense meaning-making effort following the stressful event (Park, 2010), a major breakdown leading to this process can be considered as essential. For this reason, burnout is expected to mediate the relationship between downward mobbing and SRG.

Although growth is a general tendency for human beings (Maslow, 1968), SRG after a highly stressful event is not inevitable; to experience a positive change after adversity, an individual needs to have some personal resources. The literature mentions several resources associated with growth, such as openness to experience (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996), social support (Rzeszutek, 2017) and coping style (Park et al., 1996). This study investigates the moderator role of hardiness and coworker support on the basis of the following arguments (Fig. 10.1). First, the appraisal of life’s challenges is considered an important

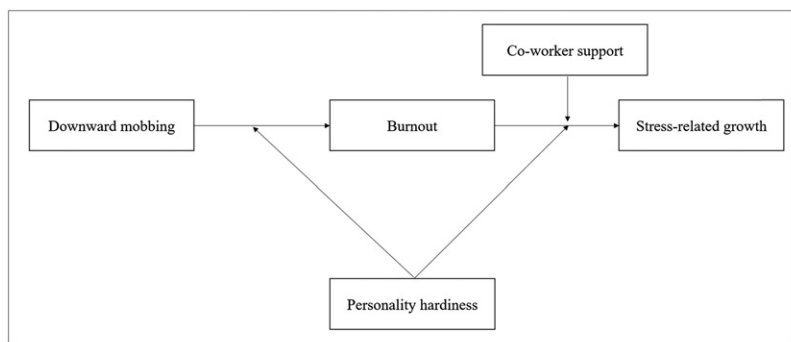


Fig. 10.1. Research Model of the Present Study. *Source:* Figure is the Original Work of the Authors.

factor in promoting growth (e.g., [Park et al., 1996](#)), and since hardiness is closely related with appraisals of stressful situations and acting upon them ([Maddi, 2004](#)), we suggest that this trait might be helpful in dealing with mobbing exposure and further promoting growth. Second, social support has been suggested as one of the most important factors in dealing with interpersonal traumas ([Charuvastra & Cloitre, 2008](#)), and in the work context, we propose that coworker support might be a better facilitator of growth than nonwork support due to the proximity and the lack of spillover effect, all of which will be expanded in later sections.

Moreover, we controlled several variables on the basis of their effects on growth. Since females report greater level of growth ([Akbar & Witruk, 2016](#)), we controlled gender; older people are more inclined to report growth regardless of their adverse experience ([Boyle, Stanton, Ganz, & Bower, 2017](#)), we controlled age; and considering that over time, participants' growth experiences are likely to change ([Park et al., 1996](#)), we controlled the time passed after mobbing exposure.

The current study aims at making significant contributions to both science and practice by taking a counterintuitive approach and suggesting growth after stressful events at work. This study aims to be embedded in the positive organizational psychology literature, which also discusses strengths and positive traits of the employees to cope with adversities in work life. Potential results are expected to contribute to the positive organizational science literature ([Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003](#)) by focusing on the positive experience triggered by stressful work events.

The relationship among those constructs can generate helpful understandings for practitioners especially in the prevention of mobbing and burnout. Within the age of talent war, organizations are striving to retain their true talent and maximize the productivity of their employees. Since mobbing and burnout are associated with increased turnover intentions ([Ertüreten, Cemalcılar, & Aycan, 2013](#)), organizations may look for further prevention mechanisms to avoid associated financial loss. However, the ultimate aim should be to prevent the occurrence of mobbing, rather than finding a silver lining to it.

Literature Review

SRG at Work

SRG is defined as positive psychological, spiritual, and social transformation as a result of stressful life experiences ([Park et al., 1996](#)), and it has rarely been investigated in the work context with a focus on traumatic work experiences. However, there is a dearth of literature about the possible growth as a result of more common adversities at work ([Maitlis, 2020](#)).

In the conceptual model that [Maitlis \(2020\)](#) has recently proposed to explain the mechanism behind growth from suffering at work, following traumatic or highly stressful work experiences, individuals' assumptive worlds are challenged, which is associated with failure in adaptive emotion regulation and cognition. This process may promote ruminative thoughts, and then toward sensemaking,

which are facilitated with the help of social and organizational support. As a result, growth might occur, and it may also affect other work-related outcomes such as positive work identity, career proactivity, and prosocial leadership (Maitlis, 2020). This study puts several of these ideas into an empirical test.

Several mechanisms have been proposed to explain growth from suffering (Joseph & Linley, 2006), and the most prolific mechanisms behind this concept are explained through the Assumptive World Theory (Janoff-Bulman, 1992) and the meaning-making model (Park & Ai, 2006). The assumptive world is a personal and unique schema reflecting individuals' beliefs about the world and the self, based on earlier experiences, and it gives meaning, reality, and purpose to life (Beder, 2005). The theory proposes that negative life events affect three deep-rooted assumptions: *benevolence of the world*, *meaningfulness of the world*, and *self-worth* (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Through exposure to traumatic events, those assumptions are shattered and need to be rebuilt to integrate incompatible information with the existing schema (Armeli, Gunthert, & Cohen, 2001). The second mechanism is through the meaning-making model (Park & Ai, 2006) based on the theoretical work of Victor Frankl (1968). The model argues that when individuals experience traumatic or highly stressful life events, the incongruence between the event and global meaning determines the level of distress, and the effort to reduce this discrepancy leads to meaning-making efforts, which may lead to growth as an end product (Park & Ai, 2006). As a result, positive transformation is expected in three major areas of life: *perception of self*, *relationship with others*, and *philosophy of life* (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

Downward Mobbing and SRG

Mobbing is defined as persistent, sustained harassment of an individual by colleagues or superiors in the workplace (Zapf & Einarsen, 2001). Although frequency and duration are assumed to be important components of mobbing, there is no specific agreement upon these characteristics. Besides duration and frequency, power imbalance is considered one of the core components of mobbing (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996). Due to this, downward mobbing has the highest prevalence among all mobbing cases (Namie, 2017).

In essence, downward mobbing is humiliating and emotionally abusive (Duffy & Sperry, 2012). Those characteristics have the potential to threaten the self-worth of the subordinates and may lead them to reevaluate their assumptions about the world. After mobbing experience, those fragmented beliefs may lead individuals to meaning-making efforts to integrate their new realities with their self-concept and their worldview (Park, 2010). Vogel and Bolino (2020) have suggested that the way individuals appraise and cope with the memories of their experience with abusive supervision may lead to growth following posttraumatic stress. They suggested that purposive reexperiencing the abuse helps employees to realize their strength, therefore helping them to continue their lives in a more positive way. In downward mobbing, it is highly expected that individuals may ruminate on the memories of the emotional abuse that they were exposed to and suffer until they properly integrate those memories with their worldview.

Hitting Rock Bottom before Growth: The Role of Burnout

Burnout is a syndrome resulting from chronic stress at work and consists of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The relationship of mobbing with burnout syndrome has been established in the literature (e.g., Raja, Javed, & Abbas, 2018). Building on the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the process of growth from suffering, burnout is assumed to be an important mediator in this relationship for two reasons. First, Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) suggests that people experience stress when they lose their resources, are threatened with resource loss, or fail to gain resources following resource investment. In downward mobbing, employees may experience resource loss, which might take the form of reduced self-esteem, due to intense humiliation and emotional abuse, or their social environment at work due to ostracizing. They are threatened with resource loss, due to verbal or nonverbal threats or unjustified criticism of their work, which may cause job insecurity. Following resource investment, they may fail to gain resources that may take the form of promotion or other work-related benefits.

Secondly, it is assumed that, to experience growth, the exposure to stressful or traumatic events needs to have a significant impact (i.e., a breakdown) on the individual to lead to meaning-making efforts (Maitlis, 2020). Thus, we assert that in order to grow, employees may need to experience severe breakdown associated with their mobbing exposure. In the workplace, burnout is one of the most prevalent forms of breakdown, which is also strongly associated with profound interpersonal relationships (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Hardiness as a Personal Resource for Growth

Hardiness is a personal resource that helps individuals deal with stressful situations and turn them into growth opportunities (Kobasa, 1979; Maddi, 2002). It consists of three different – but related – dispositions: challenge, control, and commitment. Challenge refers to the belief that change is a normal part of life and is an opportunity for growth. Control refers to the idea that a person can affect the course of his/her life and can actively change events. Commitment indicates that no matter how difficult, it is important to stay involved and maintain a sincere curiosity and interest about the world (Kobasa, 1979; Maddi, 2002). Maddi (2013) suggests that to identify people as ‘hardy,’ they must be strongly disposed to all three of these characteristics.

Several studies have revealed that hardiness may buffer the negative effects of mobbing in the workplace (e.g., Reknes, Harris, & Einarsen, 2018). Since hardiness helps individuals handle stressful situations in a better way and appraise these situations as less threatening (Allred & Smith, 1989), it may alleviate the effects of mobbing exposure, which may lead to burnout. Vogel and Bolino (2020) also suggest that growth is more likely to occur following abusive supervision if the individual perceives that event as a challenge instead of threat, which is highly consistent with the propositions of personality hardiness. In the case of mobbing,

if individuals consider that they have a potential to change the course of events, if they stay involved, and if they accept that stress and adversity is a part of life, they would be more likely to deal with the emotional demands of the exposure more effectively.

Since Maddi (2004) operationalized hardiness as existential courage to find meaning in life, people who are high in hardiness are expected to engage in meaning-making efforts to understand their adverse experience. Taking the Meaning Making Model (Park & Ai, 2006) into consideration, we may expect people who experience downward mobbing and are high in hardiness to be more likely to be involved in meaning-making efforts and grow out of their adversity. We further expect a significant moderating role of hardiness in the mediated model linking downward mobbing to burnout and SRG.

H1. Hardiness will moderate the relationship between downward mobbing and burnout in such a way that individuals who are high in hardiness will experience less burnout as a result of mobbing experience, compared to those who are low in hardiness.

H2. Burnout will mediate the relationship between downward mobbing and SRG in such a way that the strength of a mediating effect depends on the level of hardiness. More specifically, individuals high in hardiness will grow from mobbing experience through burnout more than individuals who are low in hardiness.

Coworker Support as a Facilitator of Growth

Another important factor that may facilitate growth could be social support. Social support has also been found to be an important facilitator of growth from suffering (Park et al., 1996). Helgeson and Lopez (2010) have proposed five different mechanisms in which social support facilitates growth following adversity. First, self-disclosing the stressful or traumatic experience indirectly leads to personal reflection and cognitive processing. Second, social support makes room for additional cognitive processing by alleviating the burden associated with the stress. Third, receiving support may demonstrate that people are benevolent and therefore may lead to growth especially in the 'relationship' domain. Fourth, the provider of support may share specific suggestions on possible benefits, which may lead the recipient to reflect upon the situation. Lastly, providers may share their observations regarding the path to growth and may guide recipients.

In the work context, support from coworkers can be considered as more effective than nonwork social support for two reasons. First, constant negative experience sharing with nonwork social environments may have a spillover effect and negatively affect the relationship (Lewis & Orford, 2004). Second, in the work context, coworkers are the most proximal support resources who can be reached more easily in the case of immediate emotional need.

H3. Burnout will mediate the relationship between downward mobbing and SRG in such a way that the strength of a mediating effect depends on the level of

coworker support. More specifically, individuals with higher levels of coworker support will grow from mobbing experiences through burnout more than individuals who have lower levels of coworker support.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Data was collected in March 2020 by providing a Qualtrics link to participants through MTurk, Amazon's online crowdsourcing service. The prerequisite for participation in the study was exposure to mobbing in one of their previous work experiences. Participants were rewarded with \$0.30 through the unique IDs provided to them at the end of the survey.

A total of 794 participants completed the study. G*Power analysis suggested a minimum sample size of 89 to achieve 0.95 power with a medium effect size (0.15) and 0.05 error probability with nine predictors. Of the total, 327 participants were excluded on the basis of at least one of the following criteria: (1) they did not answer at least two of the three attention check items correctly, (2) they answered qualitative questions with copy/paste texts instead of writing their experience, (3) they completed the survey in a extremely short period of time (less than five minutes) indicating inattentive responses, or (4) they occurred as an outlier in the assumption checks. Furthermore, 99 participants were eliminated because of missing data. The final sample comprised 367 participants (50.7 % males, 48.2% females). Twenty-seven percent were in the age group of 26–31 years, and 20.4% were in the age group of 20–25 years. Of the total, 47.4% have bachelor's degrees and 24.8% have master's degrees. The participants' work experience when they were exposed to mobbing was in the range of 1–10 years with an average of 2.51 years.

Since the questions about mobbing experience were retrospective, several strategies were adopted to increase the reliability of the responses. First, as suggested by [Burton and Blair \(1991\)](#), at the beginning of the survey, participants were informed about the importance of the accuracy of their mobbing memory and, therefore, their retrieval effort. Secondly, following Iarossi's recommendation (2006), before starting the survey, participants were asked open-ended prompting questions about their mobbing experience, and they were required to write down a summary of their memories. Lastly, an "I do not remember" option was added to not force participants to choose an answer for a question that may not reflect the actual event.

Measures

The survey contained questions related to demographics, mobbing experience, burnout, coworker support, hardiness, SRG, organizational trust, and losing hope. The survey also included qualitative questions asking about mobbing experiences to help participants remember the event more accurately. The questions that followed were based on this episode.

Mobbing: Mobbing was measured with Quine's mobbing scale (1999). The scale consists of 20 items with "yes" and "no" response options. To measure downward mobbing, instructions were given as follows: "Within the *mobbing experience by your supervisor/manager*, please indicate whether each statement is applicable for you. If you [were] exposed to mobbing multiple times, please consider the experience that had the strongest impact on you." A sample item was "persistent attempts to humiliate you in front of colleagues." Reliability of original scale was 0.81 for the original study (Quine, 2001) and 0.79 for the current study.

Burnout: Burnout was measured with the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Demerouti, 1999) with 16 items and with a 4-point Likert-type response scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. A sample item was "There were days when I [felt] tired before I [arrived] at work." Cronbach's alpha of the original scale was 0.74 for the exhaustion subdimension and 0.79 for the disengagement subdimension. It was 0.82 for the current study.

Stress-related growth (SRG): SRG was measured with the revised version of Stress-Related Growth Scale that was developed to reduce illusionary growth, which is the possibility of stating positive effects of the stressful event as a coping mechanism and keeping their positive perspectives about the event (Boals & Schuler, 2018; Taylor, Kemeny, Reed, Bower, & Gruenewald, 2000). The scale consists of 15 items with a 7-point bipolar scale ranging from -3 = a very negative change to $+3$ = a very positive change. A sample item was "I experienced a change in the extent to which I can be myself and not try to be what others want me to be." Cronbach's alpha of the original scale was 0.93, and for the current study, it is 0.95.

Hardiness: Hardiness was measured with the 15-item Short Hardiness Scale (Bartone, 1995) with a 4-point Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 = not at all true to 4 = completely true. A sample item was "How things go in my life depends on my own actions." Cronbach's alpha of the original scale was 0.83 (Bartone, 1995) and that of the current study was 0.78.

Coworker support: Coworker support was measured with the Social Support Scale by using only the coworker support subdimension (Caplan, Cobb, French, van Harrison, & Pinneau, 1980) with a 5-point Likert-type response scale ranging from 0 = don't have any such person to 4 = very much. The original scale consisted of four items, and one item was added to measure satisfaction with the received support. A sample item was "How much could your colleagues be relied on when you were experiencing mobbing?" Cronbach's alpha for the coworker support subdimension was 0.79 for the original scale (Repeti & Cosmas, 1991) and 0.87 for the current study.

Results

Data Analysis

To test the hypothesized relationships, Hayes' (2018) PROCESS macro statistical software was used. We tested a full moderated mediation model by using model 64, and statistical significance was evaluated with 5,000 boot-strapped samples to

create bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs, 95%). The indirect effects were evaluated at three levels of the moderators: one standard deviation (SD) from the mean, mean, and one SD above the mean.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics, correlations among variables, and reliability coefficients are presented in [Table 10.1](#).

As seen in [Table 10.1](#), both moderators are significantly correlated with SRG in the expected direction. The strongest correlation with growth was coworker support ($r(367) = 0.38, p < 0.01$). Although the skewness and kurtosis values for the time passed and intensity of the mobbing exposure were greater than the cutoff values (namely, one for skewness and three for kurtosis), we did not transform those variables since only extreme normality violations may affect the statistical results unless the sample size is relatively small ([Hayes, 2018](#)). Lastly, assumption check results indicated that the homoscedasticity assumption was violated; therefore, SRG scores were log transformed.

Hypotheses Testing

We controlled age, gender, and the time passed after mobbing exposure to test our full moderated mediation model with PROCESS macro for model 64. Results failed to support the first and second hypotheses – hardiness would moderate the relationship between downward mobbing and burnout and individuals high in hardiness will grow from mobbing experience through burnout more than individuals who are low in hardiness ($b = 0.02, t = 0.97, p = 0.33$; $b = 0.00, t = -0.41, p = 0.68$, respectively) ([Table 10.2](#)). However, coworker support appeared as a significant moderator between burnout and SRG, where higher coworker support alleviated the negative effects of burnout on employees' growth ($b = 0.001, t = 3.61, p < 0.001$). However, since the direction of the relationship between burnout and SRG is negative and coworker support did not turn the relationship to positive in any of the levels ([Fig. 10.2](#)), the third hypothesis was not supported either. The overall model explained significant variance in the employees' SRG ($R^2 = 0.29, F(9,357) = 15.95, p < 0.001$).

Post hoc Analysis

Given the negative direction of the relationship between burnout and SRG, we suspected a curvilinear relationship between burnout and SRG; thus, hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. Firstly, burnout was added as a linear term and the squared value of burnout was added as a quadratic term to the model, and the resulting R^2 change was significant ($F(5,361) = 9.78, p < 0.05$), implying a better model fit. The quadratic equation of burnout accounted for an additional 2% of the variance in SRG scores. Visual inspection of the quadratic regression

Table 10.1. Descriptive Statistics, Alpha Coefficients, and Correlations.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Skewness	Kurtosis
1. Gender	–	–	–									
2. Age	–	–	0.11*								0.83	–0.04
3. Intensity of mobbing	6.74	1.64	–0.01	0.17**							–1.1	1.3
4. Downward mobbing	11.56	4.03	0.02	0.15**	0.41**	(0.78)					–0.28	–0.37
5. Burnout	46.96	9.27	0.21**	0.13*	0.19**	0.26**	(0.82)				–0.28	–0.05
6. Stress-related growth	5.76	18.43	–0.001	–0.6	–0.06	–0.05	–0.32**	(0.95)			–0.36	–0.02
7. Hardiness	41.58	6.81	0.04	0.12*	–0.001	–0.01	–0.05	0.34**	(0.80)		0.02	0.89
8. Coworker support	13.37	4.94	–0.08	0.01	–0.18**	–0.19**	–0.34**	0.38**	0.13*	(0.89)	–0.47	–0.86
9. Time passed	6.33	6.29	0.11*	0.52**	0.07	0.08	0.05	0.08	0.10	0.01	1.8	3.6

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. The table is the original work of the authors.

Table 10.2. Moderation Effect of Hardiness and Coworker Support on the Association between Downward Mobbing and Stress-related Growth (SRG).

Predictors	Outcome Variable: Burnout				Outcome Variable: SRG			
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	SE	%95 CI	<i>B</i>	<i>T</i>	SE	%95 CI
Constant	45.67	4.97	9.17	27.63~63.70	1.97	5.08	0.39	1.21~2.73
Gender	3.52	5.05	0.87	1.81~5.23	0.04	1.76	0.02	-0.00~0.08
Age	0.54	1.68	0.32	-0.09~1.18	-0.02	-2.79*	0.01	-0.04~-0.01
Mobbing	-0.12	-0.16	0.70	-1.49~1.27	-0.00	-0.19	0.00	-0.01~0.01
Hardiness	-0.28	-1.29	0.22	-0.71~0.15	0.01	1.32	0.01	-0.01~0.03
Mobbing × hardiness	0.02	0.97	0.02	-0.02~0.05	—	—	—	—
Burnout	—	—	—	—	-0.02	-2.24*	0.01	-0.03~0.00
CS	—	—	—	—	-0.04	-2.76*	0.01	-0.07~-0.01
Burnout × hardiness	—	—	—	—	-0.00	-0.48	0.00	-0.00~0.00
Burnout × CS	—	—	—	—	0.00	3.77**	0.00	0.00~0.00

Note: $N = 367$. Beta values are unstandardized coefficients as it is suggested by [Hayes \(2018\)](#). CS = Coworker support. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$. The table is the original work of the authors.

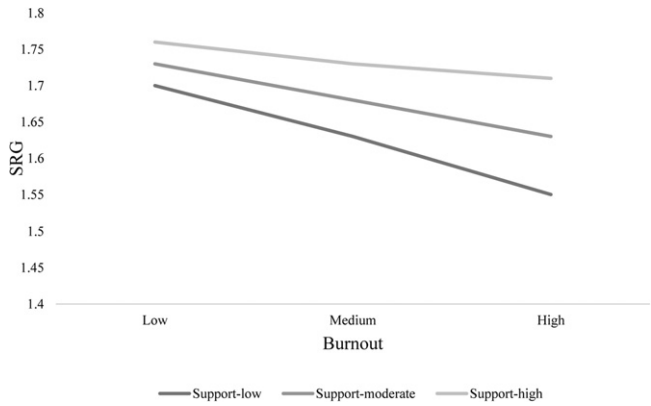


Fig. 10.2. Moderation Effect of Coworker Support. SRG, stress-related growth. *Source:* Figure is the Original Work of the Authors.

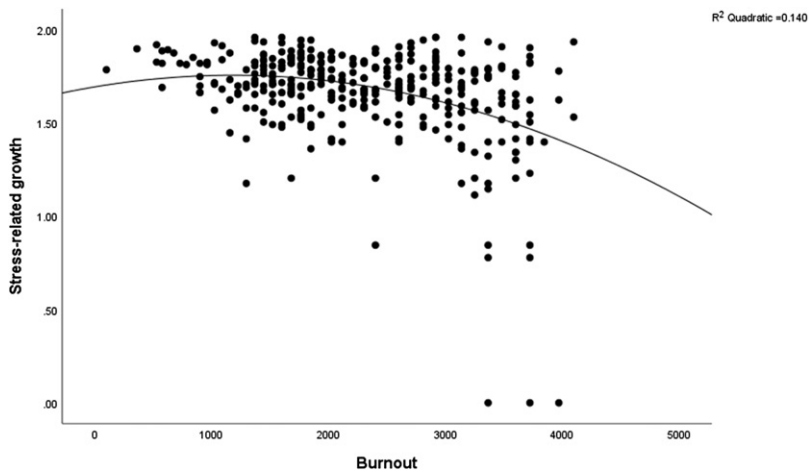


Fig. 10.3. Stress-related Growth Scores Plotted against Quadratic Burnout Scores with the Best Fit Quadratic Curve. *Source:* Figure is the Original Work of the Authors.

lines plotted in Fig. 10.3 indicated that after a certain point of burnout, the growth process might be inhibited and, further, affected negatively.

As the main argument of this research is the effect of workplace adversity on employees' growth, we further examined the direct relationship between downward mobbing and SRG, together with two moderators. We ran PROCESS macro for model 1 twice for each moderator, and the results revealed the significant moderator role of hardiness in the relationship between downward

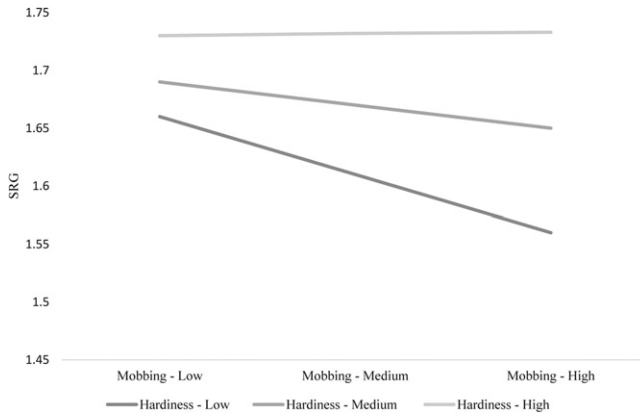


Fig. 10.4. Moderation Effect of Hardiness. *Source:* Figure is the Original Work of the Authors.

mobbing and SRG ($b = 0.001$, $t = 2.03$, $p < 0.05$). While individuals with lower hardiness scores were affected by downward mobbing negatively in terms of SRG scores, higher hardiness scores appeared to have a marginal positive effect; however, the positive effect was not significant ($b = 0.0004$, $t = 0.08$, $p = 0.94$, 95% CI $[-0.01, 0.01]$) (Fig. 10.4).

Discussion

In the current study, we adopted a counterintuitive approach to mobbing experience and suggested that employees who were previously exposed to downward mobbing may grow depending on several resources, namely hardiness and coworker support. Our results confirmed previous studies on the positive relationship between mobbing and burnout (e.g., [Raja et al., 2018](#)); however, none of the moderators turned the negative effect of downward mobbing on SRG through burnout positive. Our post hoc analysis revealed that there was a curvilinear relationship between burnout and growth, and especially after a certain degree of burnout, the growth process is affected negatively. Moreover, hardiness appeared as a significant moderator within the direct relationship between mobbing and growth with a marginal (but insignificant) positive effect on SRG for hardy individuals.

These results may imply four different explanations. Firstly, because individuals exposed to mobbing spend their emotional resources on fixing problematic interpersonal relations with their supervisor, their resources are depleted, which might inhibit the resource requiring meaning-making process. Since scarcity in resources might lead individuals to choose shortcuts as suggested in the dual process models ([Bargh, 1994](#); [Kahneman, 2011](#)), individuals might prefer to use shortcuts in the way that they make sense of their adverse experience. Thus, they

continue with their old assumptions or may adopt a more cynical view to protect themselves from future adversities. As a result, they may not experience growth or might experience a change but in the negative direction as suggested in our results.

Secondly, we did not examine the strength of the work identity of individuals, which can be considered an important predictor of the strength of the impact of mobbing exposure which, in turn, pushes meaning-making efforts forward (Vogel & Bolino, 2020). Considering that we collected data from MTurk, one might argue that the majority of participants might not have a strong work identity since identity in unstructured work is more volatile (Lehdonvirta & Mezier, 2013). Considering shattering of the assumptions about self and others might be more destructive if those assumptions are an important part of “who they are,” work identity might play an important role in the growth process, and therefore, some of our participants might not be motivated toward meaning-making effort. Rather than depleting emotional resources, hitting rock bottom might be an identity crisis caused by mobbing experience; therefore, individuals might experience identity-related outcomes (Conroy & O’Leary-Kelley, 2014) such as radical career changes, which could also be considered as a growth outcome (Vogel & Bolino, 2020).

Thirdly, the negative relationship might be the result of the lack of other possible moderators that might change the direction of the relationship. We asserted that hardiness and coworker support may change this relationship, yet they were insufficient in promoting the growth process. Among other possible moderators, coping strategies might play a crucial role in facilitating growth, since resources may exert their impacts on SRG through coping strategies (Park & Fenster, 2004). Therefore, without examining the effect of coping strategies, only looking at our current moderators might fall short of explaining the process.

Moreover, there might be other mechanisms following mobbing exposure to promote meaning-making effort and facilitate growth. We argued that employees need to hit rock bottom following mobbing exposure; however, we did not anticipate other possible mechanisms in which the resources are not fully depleted but provide a significant amount of psychological distress to lead growth. Meaning-making efforts, therefore growth, might be promoted by other mediators such as the abovementioned identity loss process, posttraumatic stress disorder, or milder psychological experiences than burnout.

Another important reason for these results might be the crucial effect of time on SRG, which we could not be modeled methodologically. Since, growth takes time and the experience of SRG may vary in accordance with the time passed after the exposure, participants’ growth might not reflect the growth that they could possibly have experienced following mobbing exposure.

The explication of the insignificant results on the moderator role of hardiness might be twofold. Firstly, Maddi (2013) suggested that to consider an individual as “hardy,” they should score high in each dimension of hardiness. Since we investigated our variable as a uniform construct, it is not possible to suggest that those who scored high in hardiness scored high in each of the three dimensions. Secondly, personality has been suggested as the antecedents of being victims of mobbing behavior (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). However, according to the reversed

causal mechanism, dispositions might be the outcomes of mobbing experiences, instead of being only the antecedents (Hamre et al., 2020). In this case, one can expect that hardiness might be a disposition, which developed after being exposed to mobbing; therefore, it did not exist while the individual was experiencing mobbing. Although in post hoc analysis hardiness appeared to be a significant moderator, it might indicate that hardiness might be a helpful but inadequate resource to experience growth.

As a final point, the results revealed the significant moderator role of coworker support and SRG in a way that coworker support alleviated the negative effect of burnout, but it did not turn the relationship positive our last hypothesis was not supported either. For this case, there might be one more explanatory mechanism to explain the effect of coworker support in addition to the five mechanisms that Helgeson and Lopez (2010) had proposed. Since burnout is a state of depleted resources (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), support from coworkers might substitute the required emotional resources to alleviate the negative effect of burnout, which inhibits the growth process following mobbing exposure. Since any level of coworker support did not turn the relationship between burnout and growth positive, coworker support can be considered an effective but insufficient resource for promoting growth.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This research makes several important contributions to the positive organizational psychology literature. First, mobbing is an extremely impactful – if not traumatic – and prevalent hardship in workplaces. The research that has been done on mobbing – unsurprisingly – focused on the negative effects of the exposure. However, as the positive psychology movement focuses on the strengths of an individual, and positive states and traits (Cameron et al., 2003), this research is an initial attempt to show the relationship between growth and mobbing through burnout.

This research also extends the growth following adversity literature especially on the “ordinary work” by examining the effect of more prevalent adversity in ordinary work on employees’ growth. In response to several scholars’ calls (e.g., Maitlis, 2020; Vogel & Bolino, 2020) for further investigation of the possibility of growth following highly adverse events in the workplace, this study makes a significant contribution to the SRG literature in the work context.

From a practical perspective, besides having significant negative effects during the time of exposure (Niedl, 1996), results showed that the negative effect of mobbing is not temporary, and it affects the employee long after. The long-term negative effect of mobbing exposure on employees might be interpreted as decreased psychological well-being since questions in the SRG survey asked about self-confidence, having better relationships, and being able to work through problems in their daily lives. Along with these adverse outcomes, this might be problematic from a social/economical perspective as well. In the long run, experiencing negative changes in those psychological dimensions can be expected to

decrease employability, resulting in decreased labor force participation, which has negative effects on social and economic improvement. Thus, these results may lead policymakers to develop strategic interventions to prevent mobbing in workplaces.

We were extremely sensitive to not frame this study as “positive effects of mobbing”. With regard to that, we showed the effect of downward mobbing on burnout, which is costly due to performance loss (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004), decreased relationship quality among coworkers (Deloitte, 2015), and increased turnover intentions (Ertüreten et al., 2013). This suggests HR professionals should focus more on leadership practices in their organizations as this has potential to directly affect aforementioned outcomes.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Although having important strengths, this study was not free from limitations. The first and foremost limitation was collecting retrospective data from the participants. Besides adopting several strategies to increase accurate responding, we also collected mobbing data from the same individuals a month later, and the analysis suggested that the difference between the answers was marginally insignificant, suggesting accuracy in the data. The second limitation was cross-sectional data, which prevented us from claiming causality in the relationship. This, in turn, might help us to explain the negative direction of the relationship, yet stay insufficient. To address these two limitations, researchers might consider adopting a longitudinal design, in a way that starts data collection concurrently with the mobbing exposure, assessing the symptoms of burnout syndrome after a while since there is no specific time suggested to observe burnout following mobbing exposure, and collecting growth data over the following two years.

Third, the motivation to fill out this survey was a considerably small amount of money (\$0.30). Since motivation can be considered as an important factor in accurate reporting in survey designs, this might be problematic considering the required recalling efforts from participants. Another relevant concern is due to the self-report data from participants, which is generally open to bias (Rosenman, Tennekoon, & Hill, 2011).

Fourth, although we provided a description of mobbing in the beginning of the survey, we are not sure whether the participants followed the criteria when they were deciding to participate in the survey. It is highly possible that some participants considered one-time conflict with their managers as mobbing, which might affect results in an important way since persistent exposure is an important part of the mobbing definition (Zapf & Einarsen, 2001). Future researchers might consider collecting quantitative data face-to-face with a screening procedure since this might give them an opportunity to accurately assess whether the participants' experience is congruent with the mobbing description.

Lastly, we have not examined the other possible moderators proposed in the literature, such as religiousness (Park et al., 1996), openness to experience

(Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996), and coping (Armeli et al., 2001), which might have greater potential to promote growth. Moreover, we did not know how participants' mobbing experiences affected them in ways which might lead to meaning-making effort because, as Vogel and Bolino suggested (2020), the strength of employees' work identities could be considered an important factor in promoting growth. Future studies might consider assessing the other possible moderators and the strength of work identity and job involvement.

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Chapter 11

Toxic Illusio in the Global Value Chain: The Case of Amazon

Aybike Mergen and Mustafa Ozbilgin

Abstract

Toxic leadership is often studied from a leader-centric perspective, which focuses on the detrimental outcomes of leaders with destructive ideas and practices. In this chapter, we provide a global value chain (GVC) perspective, which accounts for effects of corporate leadership from inception of a product or service idea to its consumption across the value chain. In particular, we demonstrate how toxic leadership is sustained through an illusio, i.e., the allure of the often-charismatic leadership discourse, which is rendered unaccountable due to lack of global regulation of GVCs. This allows for global organizations and toxic leaders to exploit weaknesses in national-level regulation. Drawing on a netnographic study of toxic leadership in Amazon, we demonstrate how toxic leadership created the illusion of success while perpetuating toxicity and exploitation across their complex value chains internationally.

Keywords: Toxic leadership; global value chain; Amazon; followers; corporate leadership; illusio

Introduction

We are living in a “complex, uncertain and globalized” world (Donati, 2017, p. 13), and our understanding of organizations and their ethics should reflect this reality. More specifically, to account for the complexity and interconnectedness of the global relational networks that contemporary organizations create and operate in, we need a more inclusive and robust approach than one that limits our understanding to individual acts in corporations as it is typically done in management and organization studies. Accordingly, we suggest the global value chain (GVC) as an approach in order to understand how corporate toxic leadership

phenomena is rendered blurred and made invisible in a complex global context where global organizations and leadership set global strategies and only face local and national regulation.

Unlike prior approaches that focus heavily on the financial bottom line (e.g., Rappaport, 1986) or regulatory compliance (e.g., Levi-Faur, 2011), the GVC approach focuses on the value creation and distribution in businesses across functions, operations, and geographies along the production to consumption line. GVC concept frames corporate phenomenon as the coordination of multiple interrelated supply chains across different geographies without abandoning the pursuit of profitability or return on investment (Ozbilgin, Tatli, Ipek, & Sameer, 2016). Understanding what GVC is and how it exacerbates toxicity is important because, in the absence of international laws and coercive regulatory measures, there are only very few things that can help enforce an ethical take in global organizations. A number of sustainability and ethical initiatives that are voluntarily founded under the umbrella of the United Nations do not go far enough in identifying and combating corporate misconduct.

Leadership is critical in shaping any organization (Burns, 1978), and leaders are key actors in determining organizations' vision and mission (Bass, 1990) and organizational culture (Sergiovanni & Corbally, 1986) and in prioritization of goals (Berson, Halevy, Shamir, & Erez, 2015). As such, responsible leadership could make a difference to the effective and ethical management of GVC, whereas toxic leadership could have the opposite effect. When the organization's leadership phenomenon is toxic, it has hidden and intertwined implications for all levels of the GVC. We define toxic leaders in the same way as Lipman-Blumen's toxic leadership framework (2005): toxic leaders are leaders who create serious and enduring harm by engaging in "destructive behaviors" and exhibiting "dysfunctional characteristics." Unfortunately, there are plenty of examples of crises induced by toxic leadership, such as the leadership at the Cochrane foundation (Greenhalgh, Ozbilgin, Prainsack, & Shaw, 2019), major fraud at Theranos (Hartmans & Leskin, 2020), and scandalous use of private user data by Facebook (Graham-Harrison & Cadwalladr, 2018), to name a few.

Nevertheless, leaders are not the sole actors of toxicity. It is a toxic *illusio*, which includes the toxic visions of leaders, followers, and the toxic context (Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007), that makes a leadership toxic (Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021). *Illusio* is defined as "the tendency of participants to engage in the game and to believe in its significance, that is, believe that the benefits promised by the field are desirable" (Heidegren & Lundberg, 2010, p. 12). Reflecting Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) conceptualization of *illusio*, in this chapter, we frame toxic leadership as an *illusio* in which the allure of a game prevents players from developing a healthy sense of distance to its ethical aspects. We examine how the toxic *illusio* creates adverse outcomes along the GVC, exploiting weak and absent regulation. We examine how toxic *illusio* is sustained by the individuals across the value chain and who often fail to see how toxic the game is as they do not have a full view of the GVC. Indeed, lack of insights into the intricate workings of a GVC renders toxic practices invisible to the players of the game as well as most regulators and public.

We choose Amazon as our case study to explain how toxic illusio is sustained in the GVC due to Amazon's global size and market dominance, variety of its services, and its organizational culture created and sustained by its infamous founder and CEO Jeff Bezos. As of mid-2020, Amazon has dedicated websites in 17 countries in four continents and delivers purchases to almost anywhere in the world (Manning, 2019). It is an e-commerce giant that serves as a platform for independent merchants around the world, a cloud computing service that provides a wide range of digital functionality from governments to start-ups, and a logistics company that is now fiercely competing with established companies in the industry among many other endeavors. Since its humble beginnings back in 1994 as an online bookstore, Amazon became a global empire that dominated an ever-increasing number of industries, and its toxic effect is felt across its GVC.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, we explain what GVC is in more detail. Second, we define toxic illusio and discuss the mechanisms that contribute to its sustainability. Third, we explain Amazon's GVC and how each link on that chain supports and maintains the toxic illusio. We conclude with a discussion on possible measures against the formation and sustenance of toxic illusio in GVCs.

Global Value Chain

GVC approach is a way of looking at organizations as a set of connected operations from emergence of a product or service idea to its manufacturing and ultimate consumption across functions and geographies (Ozbilgin, 2019). In global organizations, value chains are often regulated by a patchwork of national regulations, and there are only a limited number of regulatory pressures such as changing social morals, activism by social movements, customer boycotts, and voluntary agreements among global organizations. In a previous study, which explored ethical regulation of global organizations in terms of diversity, four distinct approaches to governance are identified (Ozbilgin et al., 2016): (1) shareholder approach, which focused on profitability and return on investment; (2) stakeholder approach, which focuses on the triple bottom line (i.e., profits, people, planet); (3) regulatory approach, which focuses on self-regulation, legal regulation, and market regulation; and finally (4) GVC approach, which focuses on transnational fairness and holds organizations accountable for their transnational practices.

The concept of "value chain" was first introduced by Porter (1985) as a framework for "developing a corporate strategy to promote firm competitiveness by directing attention to the entire system of activities involved in producing and consuming a product" (Inomata, 2017, p. 19). In contrast to the "supply chain" approach that is traditionally focused exclusively on standardized postinnovation steps such as procurement and manufacturing, the value chain approach also includes processes that add value such as product innovation, branding, and consumer relations. Notably, GVC approach applies not only to manufacturing

firms but also to different varieties of modern multinational companies such as “service multinationals and the so called ‘digital MNEs’” (Kano, Tsang, & Yeung, 2020, p. 579).

As the study of the generation and distribution of value within and between firms across geographies, GVC is not a simple extension of the value chain approach. Indeed, “global commodity chain” (Gereffi & Korzeniewicz, 1994), which focuses on the wealth distribution, can be considered as a predecessor of GVC. GVC as a concept was first introduced by the Global Value Chains Initiative (2000–05), and it was explored further by Gereffi, Humphrey, and Sturgeon (2005) in terms of governance structures. More specifically, Gereffi et al. (2005) suggested three dimensions (known as 3Cs model) for understanding the nature and configuration of GVCs: (1) the complexity of transactions, (2) the codifiability of transactions, and (3) competence of suppliers. Building on these three dimensions, Gereffi et al. (2005) also developed a global chain governance typology consisting of five types, ranging on the degree of power asymmetry between partners and extent of explicit coordination with partner’s production activities. Their typology ranges from hierarchy, through captive, relational, and modular, to market. The governance type of a GVC can be shaped by “several factors, including history, institutions, social and geographical context, and path dependence” (de Vasconcellos et al., 2015, p. 387), and it has implications for the role distribution and the bargaining power of its partners.

Leadership as a Toxic Illusio

The dark side of leadership is gaining traction in the literature, and a number of different conceptualizations of toxic/destructive leadership have been proposed in the last two decades (e.g., destructive leadership: Padilla et al., 2007; pseudo-transformational leadership: Tourish, 2013). In this chapter, we use Lipman-Blumen’s approach to toxic leadership in the sense that we consider a leadership toxic if and when it “creates serious and enduring harm” (2005). Notably, a leadership phenomenon can be toxic even when it provides benefits to some followers if it causes more harm overall through deinstitutionalization, decreased transparency and responsibility, lack of accountability, corruption and self-interested allocation of resources, as well as violation of fundamental human and animal rights, and environmental harm (Pelletier, 2010). Needless to say, toxicity of a leadership phenomenon is not a binary attribute as there are degrees to it ranging from minor corruption to torture and murder.

We transcend leader-centric formulation of toxic illusio by exploring the emergence and co-construction of toxic leadership with the leaders, followers, and all communities involved. Thus, we frame toxic leadership as a process-relational socially constructed phenomenon that emerges at the interplay of individual choices and chances in a particular context and over time. Drawing on Bourdieusian concept of illusio, we seek to explicate the toxic leadership phenomenon (e.g., Thomson, 2017). Indeed, the construct of illusio is recently applied to the toxic leadership to

explain the mechanisms that draw in and keep followers as players of the game (Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021).

When individuals are absorbed in a game, they lose their ability to develop a healthy distance to the game that they play. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), the game becomes elusive to its players who continue to believe that the game is worth playing despite its dire consequences. When blinded by the allure of the game, players fail to both criticize the negative consequences of the game and recognize and switch to other games with better outcomes. As such, through illusio a toxic environment is legitimated as normal and the toxic illusio itself becomes a self-serving system that evades scrutiny from its participants (Greenhalgh et al., 2019). What Lipman-Blumen calls the allure of toxic leadership is similar to the Bourdieusian concept of illusio in the sense that the game and its routines evade scrutiny and become appealing to its players. Yet Bourdieu also accounts for how the vested interests of the players as well as their unquestioned routines help shape their collective illusio.

As the illusio is co-constructed by all parties that join the game and the context in which the game takes place, the leader and the followers mutually sustain the toxic illusio and give it internal legitimacy. Consequently, our approach emphasizes how followers are not passive, innocent bystanders but wilful, self-interested agents who sustain and support the toxic illusio together with the leader and other followers. In the context of GVCs, illusio is enhanced further as the shift of values and resources across countries, operations, and functions of organizations often remains unaccounted for. Thus, the uneven distribution of riches and exploitation that value chains cause across geographies and operations are a significant part of the illusio that remains elusive to the players of the game.

Jeff Bezos and the Behemoth of Amazon

Jeff Bezos left his job at a Manhattan hedge fund and found an online bookstore in 1994 with an estimated \$300,000 investment from his parents. He became a millionaire three years later when he raised \$54 million in Amazon's initial public offering. Twenty-five years later, Jeff Bezos is the richest man on the planet with a net worth of almost \$200 billion (Forbes, 2020). Although he started off with books, Bezos reportedly aimed higher than a simple online bookstore even in the beginning. Accounts of early Amazon employees demonstrate that the founder had the original intentions to build a "utility" that would become indispensable to commerce (Khan, 2017). Indeed, Amazon did not only become an "Everything Store" (Stone, 2013) but also a logistics company (Fulfillment by Amazon and Amazon Logistics), a grocery delivery service (Amazon Fresh and Whole Foods), a hardware manufacturer (e.g., Kindle e-readers, Echo and Alexa devices, and Fire tablets), a book publisher (Kindle Direct Publishing) as well as a production studio and distributor (Prime Video), and a cloud computing giant that offers a wide range of cutting-edge services such as data storage, blockchain, and developer tools (Amazon Web Services; AWS). Amazon's market cap is currently more than \$1.6 trillion, and its net revenue increased more than tenfold in the last

10 years, from \$24.5 billion in 2009 to \$280.5 billion in 2019 (Clement, 2020). Its brand value grew 52% in 2019 alone, surpassing companies like Apple, Google, Microsoft, and Facebook (Furness, 2019).

As the founder, CEO, and president of one of the “great success stories” of American entrepreneurship, Jeff Bezos received lots of praise for being a visionary and his leadership skills. He was the “Time Person of the Year” in 1999 and “Forbes Businessperson of the Year” in 2012. He was consecutively declared the top CEO by *Harvard Business Review* (2019) and portrayed as a model “transformational leader” in popular press (e.g., Hartung, 2013) and white papers (e.g., Hatfield, 2017). Amazon’s “14 Leadership Principles” has been offered as a path to success by many, including the magazine of Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania (Bharti, 2015). Representing what Jeff Bezos envisions as the building blocks of a successful company, these leadership principles focus on extreme customer centrism and a perpetual entrepreneurial spirit that also coincides with Bezos’ famous “Day 1” attitude (Moore, 2020). Yet, Amazon’s 14 principles also challenge popular management approaches, encouraging employees to confront each other strongly and “not compromise for the sake of social cohesion” (Amazon, n.d.). Moreover, Jeff Bezos’ willingness to create a harsh working environment that is proud to exhibit “purposeful Darwinism” (Garcia, 2015), in which only the most ambitious, competitive, and productive employees survive, is not even an extreme example of his company’s toxic effects.

As the examples discussed below demonstrates, Amazon under Jeff Bezos’ leadership creates serious and enduring harm for each link in its GVC. Yet, its stock prices and sales figures are going up and more and more companies are joining its platforms as vendors or AWS clients. How is it possible that Amazon is growing with great acceleration even while it is public knowledge that it hurts its workers, suppliers, environment, and even the “valued” customers? There has been extensive media coverage that attempted at explaining how toxic leadership goes unnoticed and without scrutiny even when it is blatant. Most interesting among the suggested ideas has been the customer disinterest in corporate wrongdoing and misconduct due to toxic leadership. A piece in New York Times explained how customers may be disinterested in the toxic leadership throughout the value chain:

Why would otherwise brilliant men behave in such destructive ways? The first answer is that they can. Genius covers a lot of sins. A great product is a great product, and you don’t have to do everything right to be successful. Most customers don’t care how the sausage gets made, as long as it tastes good. (Schwartz, 2015).

Fig. 11.1 below shows how the sheer size and complexity of operations at Amazon serve as a shield for its customers to have an insight into the toxic aspects of its leadership in its value chain.

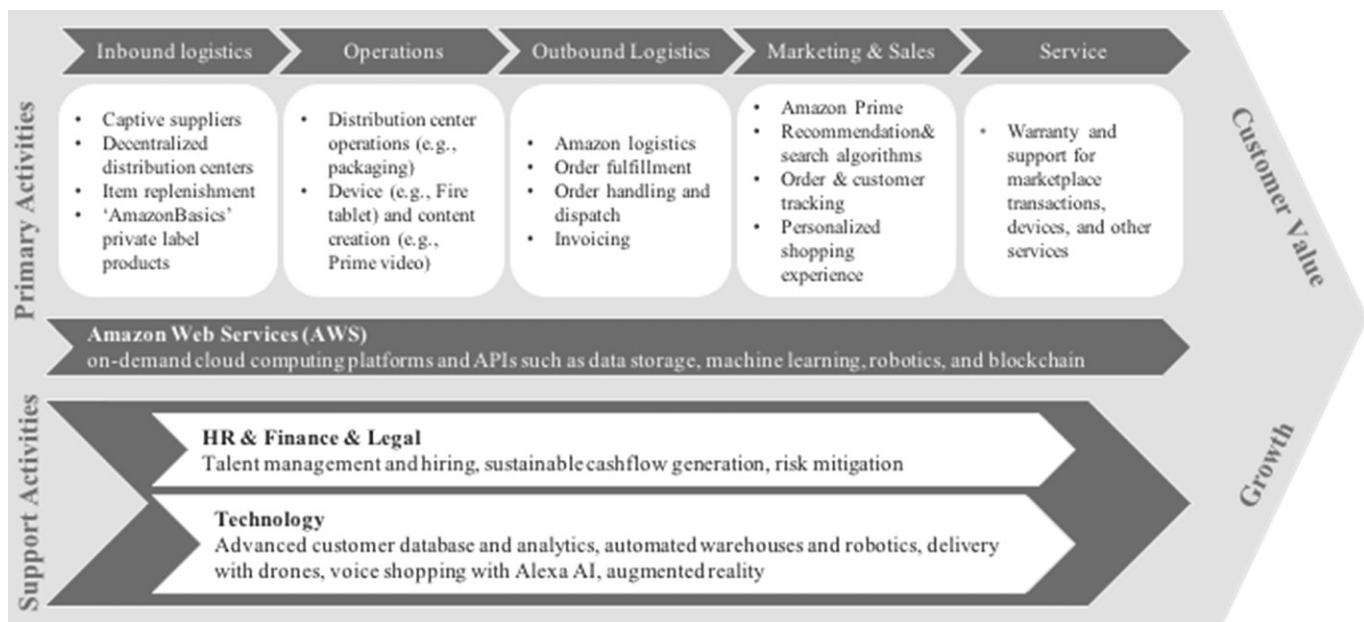


Fig. 11.1. Toxic Illusio of Amazon Across Its Global Value Chain. *Source:* Adapted from Kandemirli (2018).

Suppliers

Amazon has a captive type of relationship with its suppliers across its GVC. Captive type of GVC governance suffers from the greatest imbalance of power across its geographic reach and throughout its complex operations (de Vascconcellos et al., 2015). Indeed, Amazon's marketplace suppliers depend not only on Amazon's algorithms and marketing strategy to reach their consumers but also on its logistics chain to deliver their goods. Furthermore, due to its diversified business portfolio (e.g., AWS), Amazon has also become a service provider to some of its own suppliers and competitors, which further complicates the supply chain relationship and power dynamics while protecting Amazon from scrutiny.

If we are to examine the emergence and sustenance of Amazon as a global giant, we should trace its toxic approach from back when it was just an online company that sells books. Not surprisingly, Amazon's relationship with book publishers was largely supportive and straightforward in its early days (Murrell, 2014). Publishers were happy that Amazon had a very low return rate of unsold books and that it offered a much bigger catalog than the large chains, such as Barnes & Noble, which helped their backlists, or the "long tail," significantly. But as Amazon came out of the dot-com bubble crush stronger and started to gain dominance in the market, things dramatically changed for the publishing companies. Indeed, Amazon became more and more like the brick-and-mortar retail giant Walmart, demanding ever-increasing concessions from publishers to make their books visible in customer searches and recommendations algorithms, or even to make them available for purchase. Amazon developed an especially viscous relationship with small publishers making it impossible for them to negotiate a decent deal, ultimately pushing them out of the market by starving them of income and insights into sales figures. For instance, the "Gazelle Project," Amazon's alleged negotiation strategy for small publishers, suggested Amazon employees to approach them "the way a cheetah pursues a sickly gazelle" (Streitfeld, 2013). Such predatory behavior is not limited to small publishers as Amazon would decline to negotiate with most publishers and would cut them out of its website if they demand more than what is on offer (Packer, 2014). Nevertheless, despite the disadvantages Amazon's market dominance create, publishing companies remain in the toxic game and "in a vicious cycle, [they are] becoming more and more dependent on Amazon" (Murrell, 2014).

Expanding from books to nearly all industries, Amazon has grown more toxic over time. Amazon absorbed companies or pushed them out of the market by hostile business tactics such as predatory pricing (i.e., pushing down prices of some products temporarily to make the market untenable for other companies; Sussman, 2019), paying suppliers with excessive delays over 90 days (Fox, 2014), or producing and selling identical products (e.g., NFL pillows; Khan, 2017). These toxic leadership examples show that Amazon has become vicious in its business to business dealing and yet retained a relatively innocuous relationship with its customers who were more interested in its low prices and accessible service provision, enticing suppliers to remain in the toxic illusio.

Employees

Amazon's singular focus on customer value in terms of low prices, rapid purchase, and reach has rendered its toxic leadership in its dealings with suppliers, competitors, and its own employees relatively invisible. Indeed, employee relations is one of the most toxic aspects of Amazon's GVC.

In terms of white-collar employees, Amazon typically hires people who are similar to its founding leader Jeff Bezos, technically oriented, introverted, and lacking in social skills (Fox, 2014). Employee voice, i.e., the ability of employees to realize their visions at work in reflexive and authentic ways (Sameer & Ozbilgin, 2014), is curbed in such a context. Employees routinely work beyond their means and often to their detriment in terms of lack of leisure and personal time (Kantor & Streitfeld, 2015). Excessively long working hours that frequently exceed 85 hours per week and unchallenged forms of bullying and harassment create a toxic work environment to the extent that crying is normalized in Amazon offices. Even John Rossman, a former executive who wrote multiple flattering books about Amazon's leadership principles, admits that employees feel the tension of excessive demands at work (Kantor & Streitfeld, 2015). The company portrays employees as competing athletes, pushing them to perform to their physical and psychological limits. Competition for ideas is expected of workers, and employees are actively encouraged to confront others' ideas. Indeed, former employees report that Jeff Bezos himself actively contributes to this toxic culture and remarks such as "Are you lazy or incompetent?", "I'm sorry, did I take my stupid pills today?", and "If I hear that idea again, I'm gonna have to kill myself" are relatively common from the founder and CEO (Gavett, 2013). As a result of such a hostile environment, employee turnover rate is high. "Weaklings" either give up and quit themselves or are weeded out yearly, while only the true "Amazonians" survive, effectively applying what Robin Andrulevich, a former top Amazon human resources executive who helped draft the company's leadership principles, openly calls "purposeful Darwinism" (Opray, 2015). Yet, clearly, Amazon keeps on attracting great talent. Highly qualified individuals apply for the job openings at Amazon in great numbers, and they strive and fiercely compete to be deemed an Amazonian (Anders, 2018) as surviving in Amazon is both a success and status symbol and it looks great on their resumes.

The situation is similar, if not worse, for blue-collar workers, who suffer poor working conditions in terms of demands on time, low pay, and dire circumstances for health and safety (McClelland, 2012). Indeed, former employees' accounts picture the work environment in distribution centers as "a high-tech version of the dehumanized factory floor satirized in Chaplin's 'Modern Times'" (Packer, 2014). The performance metrics enforced by Amazon are so stringent that it is a common practice for employees to pee in a bottle instead of spending a big chunk of their "29 minutes and 59 seconds" lunch break in overcrowded bathrooms (Bloodworth, 2018). An investigation by The Guardian in 2018 shows that not only numerous Amazon warehouse employees had serious workplace injuries but also Amazon's treatment of its injured employees leaves them "homeless, unable to work or bereft

of income” (Sainato, 2018). Furthermore, worker demands, both individually and collectively, are held secondary to the so-called “needs of the customer.” Arguing that the unions are “obstacles that would impede its ability to improve customer service” (Packer, 2014), Amazon fights unionization efforts with a diverse set of tools that range from termination of employment (Campbell, 2019) to a heat map that ranks Whole Foods stores according to the risk of unionization (Leon, 2020). Employees are also under the double threat of a changing job market: Amazon shrinks other job opportunities by pushing local brick-and-mortar businesses out of the market (Mitchell, 2013) while also investing heavily in robotization and automation, which will render warehouse jobs irrevocably redundant (Del Rey, 2019).

Customers

Customers seem to be favored when compared to how Amazon treats the rest of its GVC. In fact, Amazon is proud to create customer value by offering a wide range of choices, low prices, and convenience of purchase with one click system and efficient delivery. Furthermore, its operations are hidden behind a website, shielding customers from the responsibility, as well as the guilty conscience, of being an accomplice of Amazon’s toxic impact. Yet, consumers are not exempt from the harmful outcomes of Amazon’s toxic illusion either. First of all, Amazon’s business model creates captive customers by eliminating competition through price competition (e.g., Khan, 2017). When the competition is eliminated Amazon simply pushes prices up. Second, with all the data it collected, Amazon has the frightening ability of first-degree price discrimination (i.e., tailor the prices based on the customer’s unique profile; Useem, 2017). Finally, in the long run, elimination of competition inevitably changes the market structure, diminishing opportunities for entrepreneurs and open markets, resulting in lower product quality, variety, and innovation (Lynn & Khan, 2012). As such, while customers appear to get a good deal, they are treated as useful idiots, whose needs are catered for until Amazon consolidates enough market power.

System-wide Effects

Beyond customers, employees, and suppliers, Amazon also has more general toxic effects. The systemic nature of toxicity is most evident in the monopolistic tendencies of Amazon. Amazon hides its toxic monopolist ambitions with discourses of customer welfare based often solely on low prices and instant access. More specifically, in the context of antitrust law, the current definition of “consumer welfare” is restricted with the short-term price effects and it is “unequipped to capture the architecture of market power in the modern economy” (Khan, 2017). Beyond providing opportunities for predatory pricing, such short-sighted understanding of “welfare” is especially risky in cases of online platforms such as Amazon because

these companies become the intermediaries of the system, controlling critical infrastructure at the expense of their rivals and general public.

A second path for Amazon's system-wide toxic effects is the data empire that Jeff Bezos created. Amazon was obsessed with collecting and utilizing data from its very early days. Indeed, Bezos allegedly chose books as his initial market partly because it was a good way of "gathering data on affluent, educated shoppers" to whom he would then proceed to sell other products (Packer, 2014). In addition to the its marketplace platform, Amazon also collects immense amount of data from its diverse range of subsidiaries such as Audible.com (seller and producer of digital audiobooks, radio and TV programs, and audio versions of magazines and newspapers), Health Navigator (develops application programming interfaces for online health services), Ring (home automation such as smart doorbells and locks), and Twitch (a live streaming platform that is very popular especially with younger demographics). Recently, Amazon also ventured into the budding face recognition industry, accessing data from police departments by offering real-time face scan services for a token fee of \$6–\$10 a month (Dwoskin, 2018). As such, the span and the depth of data amassed by Amazon are worrisome as a perpetuating factor for its market dominance. Yet, perhaps even more worrisome is the possibilities such data offer in conjunction with Amazon's rapidly developing artificial intelligence technologies.

Conclusion

Toxicity, leadership, illusio, and GVCs are elusive concepts that have contested definitions and frames. Such laxness hinders our efforts to hold leadership of global organizations accountable for their toxic decisions and outcomes. We identified the leadership in Amazon as a robust example through which we can explore toxicity in the GVC. In this chapter, we showed how Amazon's toxic illusio is formed as well as how it protects Amazon's leadership from the accountability of their adverse effects across the GVC.

There is a lack of global regulation that can hold toxic leadership accountable in global organizations. In the vacuum of accountability structures, global leadership practices elude scrutiny for the dire outcomes of their key leadership decisions and actions. The complex nature of global organizations in terms of their value chains with operations across different industries, functions, and geographies allows them to move resources and value internationally. Such transfers of resources are often done to the advantage of global organizations in an increasingly liberalized economic system. Scholars such as Stieglitz (2019) have identified the negative consequences of such liberalization on democracy and equality internationally. National-level legislation is ill equipped to deal with complex operations of GVCs. Thus, there is dearth of regulatory frameworks for identifying and tackling corporate misconduct, leadership toxicity, and wrongdoing in GVCs.

One of the interesting ways that Amazon sustained toxic illusio thus far has been in its ability to use customer welfare as a shield behind which it could perpetuate

its toxic leadership, which harmed its competitors, employees, and ultimately its customers when the former two are subjugated through monopoly and robotization. Amazon has grown so large that its size, portrayed as a success story, also helps it avoid criticism. Particularly at a time when COVID-19 pandemic rendered Amazon's home delivery service as essential for survival of customers, it is very hard to scrutinize its expansionist and monopolistic ambitions. The illusory effects of a focus on customer welfare based on low prices are very evident in the way the toxic effects of Amazon's operations across its value chain are largely ignored.

We predict that Amazon's success may yet become its weakness into the future. For instance, in some product lines when the competition is eliminated and employees are automated out of their jobs, prices are ultimately pulled up (Khan, 2017). When customers find out that customer care is contingent upon market conditions, the toxic illusion may be shattered, causing customer protests and deterioration of the brand reputation. Indeed, customer power appears as a significant force in contexts where legal regulation of value chains is absent for global organizations. Furthermore, Amazon's growing role as a major employer, especially in rural towns in the United States, puts their employee relations into the spotlight. Warehouse workers' protests against the working conditions during the pandemic (Palmer, 2020) as well as Amazon's reaction (Wong, 2020) gained significant public attention. A way forward is to move toward global regulation (e.g., antitrust, union rights) to combat the toxic and destructive effects of global organizations, which are currently able to operate without significant barriers and limits to their greedy market domination tactics. To that end, it is of paramount importance to inform the public about the toxic effects of these behemoth organizations and sustain public pressure on company leaderships as well as lawmakers and diplomats to create real change.

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Part 3

Emerging Issues in Destructive Leadership: A Special Concern to Measures and Remedies of How to Deal with It

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Chapter 12

Measuring Destructive Leadership

Selin Metin Camgoz and Pinar Bayhan Karapinar

Abstract

As the literature reveals an ongoing debate on the lack of agreement for a comprehensive conceptualization and definition of destructive leadership, the measurement of the construct is still problematic. Therefore, this chapter aims to review and summarize the current ways of measuring destructive leadership. A systematic review was conducted to examine the destructive leadership instruments. This chapter covers both qualitative and quantitative instruments in assessing destructive leadership and provides a brief overview of the scale development of the instruments. In addition to destructive leadership scales, commonly used harmful leadership scales such as abusive, tyrannical and toxic scales were also included for comparison purposes.

Keywords: Destructive leadership; destructive leadership measures; petty tyranny scale; abusive supervision scale; toxic leadership scale; destructive leadership instruments

Introduction

The dark side of leadership practices in general, and destructive leadership in particular, has recently received increased attention across many disciplines. As society and organizations have been witnessing the prevalence of leaders who have abused their power in ways which have proved detrimental to the welfare of organizations and employees (Martin, 2014), destructive leadership practices need to be included and considered as part of contemporary leadership studies. Despite its growing interest, the literature reveals a continuing debate for a total consensus on destructive leadership conceptualization. An early definition of Einarsen, Aaslandand, and Skogstad (2007):

...a systematic and repeated behaviour by a leader, supervisor, or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organization by

undermining and/or sabotaging the organization's goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of subordinates, (Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007, p. 208)

receives attention among multiple conceptualizations. These conceptualizations, in turn, have generated a restricted number of measuring instruments, yet the issue of how to adequately assess and measure different destructive behaviour patterns in differing contexts (active versus passive perspective and subordinate perspectives) still remains.

In response to the need for systematic knowledge of measuring instruments, the objective of this chapter is to contribute to the body of knowledge by reviewing and developing an understanding of the available destructive leadership scales. A systematic review is conducted to examine the destructive leadership instruments and to discuss their similarities and differences with other dark side leadership measures. Accordingly, studies have been undertaken through Scholar Google databases with search terms such as 'destructive leadership' in the title of the study and 'instruments', 'scale', 'measurement', 'assessment', 'survey' and 'inventory' in the title and the abstract of the study. Furthermore, additional research was identified by checking through the reference list of the selected articles. This examination yielded a total of seven instruments encompassing the destructive leadership. Although the systematic review limits the search term to 'destructive leadership', we also provide a subsection that briefly presents some of the early developed harmful leadership scales such as tyrannical (Ashforth, 1987), abusive (Tepper, 2000) and toxic (Schmidt, 2008).

The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows: First, we present the typology of Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad's (2007) destructive and constructive leadership (DLC) model as the conceptual framework. Following the DCL model, we provide detailed information concerning each of the seven destructive leadership instruments (Balwant, Birdi, & Stephan, 2020; Einarsen, Skogstad, Aasland, & Loseth, 2002; Erickson, Shaw, & Agabe, 2007; Larsson, Brandebo, & Nilsson, 2012; Lu, Ling, Wu, & Lin, 2012; Shaw, Erickson, & Harvey, 2011; Thoroughgood, Tate, Sawyer, & Jacobs, 2012) generated from a systematic review. Third, we include and briefly discuss the well-known tools of tyrannical, abusive and toxic leadership scales (TLSs). The conclusion then discusses the findings by highlighting the neglected areas in measuring the destructive leadership field and thus offers recommendations for potential future research.

The Concept of Destructive Leadership: A Focus on DCL Model

Although there are many different conceptualizations of destructive leadership (Schmid, PircherVerdorfer&Peus, 2018; Schyns & Schilling, 2013), a wide range of destructive leadership measurements rely on the Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad's (2007) conceptual typology of destructive leadership. This typology, entitled 'Destructive and Constructive Leadership Model', identifies four different

kinds of leadership style based on the behaviours ‘directed towards subordinates’ and ‘directed towards the organization’ (Einarsen et al., 2007).

According to the typology, behaviours directed towards subordinates range from anti-subordinate to pro-subordinate. Leaders who engage in *anti-subordinate behaviours* undermine or disturb the motivation of subordinates, which might affect adversely the well-being of employees. Those leaders usually engage in behaviours such as bullying, harassment and mistreatment of subordinates. However, leaders who involve in *pro-subordinate behaviour* promote the subordinates’ motivation and well-being by taking care and providing support to them.

Similarly, organization-oriented leadership behaviours range from anti-organizational to pro-organizational. Anti-organizational behaviours refer to the ones that violate the legitimate concerns and the goals of the organization. Those leaders may involve in behaviours like stealing from the organization and sabotaging its effectiveness. Pro-organizational behaviours, in contrast, include the behaviours of working towards the utility of the organization. These leaders may determine clear goals, assist subordinates and provide support for organizational strategies. According to the DCL model, a leader might enact destructively on one dimension, and constructively on another dimension, or might enact destructively on both dimensions (Einarsen et al., 2007).

The model portrays three destructive and one constructive type of leadership behaviours entitled as tyrannical (pro-organizational combined with anti-subordinate behaviours), derailed (anti-organizational and anti-subordinate behaviour), supportive–disloyal (pro-subordinate combined with anti-organizational behaviours) and constructive leadership (pro-organizational and pro-subordinate behaviours) (Einarsen et al., 2007). Yet, arguing the notion that destructive forms might also come in passive forms, *laissez-faire* leadership is introduced and placed at the center of the DCL model. In this sense, *laissez-faire* leadership refers to the passive behaviours of exerting minimum effort for the work combined with minimum consideration for the subordinates (Aasland, Skogstad, Notelaers, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2010).

Reviewing Destructive Leadership Measures

Destructive Leadership Scale of Einarsen et al. (2002)

Einarsen, Skogstad, Aasland, and Løseth (2002) developed a destructive leadership scale based on the DCL model (cited in Aasland et al., 2010). This questionnaire – originally published in a Norwegian article – consists of a total of 22 items, 16 of which link to the 4 factors (tyrannical, derailed, supportive–disloyal and *laissez-faire*) and 6 of which refer to constructive leadership behaviour. Accordingly, *tyrannical leadership behaviour* was measured using four items. Sample items are ‘has spread incorrect information about you or your co-workers, in order to harm your/their position in the firm’ and ‘has humiliated you, or other employees, if you/they fail to live up to his/her standards’. *Derailed leadership behaviour* was measured by four items. Sample items include ‘regards his/her staff more as competitors than as partners’ and ‘has used

his/her position in the firm to profit financially/materially at the company's expense'. The third factor – *supportive-disloyal leadership behaviour* – is measured by four items, such as 'has behaved in a friendly manner by encouraging you/your co-workers to extend your/their lunch break' and 'has encouraged you to enjoy extra privileges at the company's expense'. The *laissez-faire leadership behaviour* is also measured by four items borrowed from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 1990). The sample item is 'has avoided making decisions'. In addition to the DCL model, six items (e.g. gives recognition for good performance) are used for measuring constructive leadership behaviours. In that specific questionnaire, the participants are requested to report the leadership behaviours that they had experienced during the last six months. The response categories were in four-scale format ('never', 'sometimes', 'quite often' and 'very often or nearly always'). The Cronbach alpha reliabilities ranged from 0.65 (supportive-disloyal leadership behaviour) to 0.81 (constructive leadership behaviour). However, the scale is criticized for demonstrating lower Cronbach alpha reliabilities of supportive-disloyal leadership subscale.

Using the survey of Einarsen et al. (2002), Aasland et al. (2010) provided further evidence for the DCL model and the instrument. Based on a sample of the Norwegian workforce, laissez-faire leadership behaviour has been reported as the most prevalent destructive leadership behaviour, whereas the tyrannical leadership style has been reported as the least prevalent destructive leadership behaviour (Aasland et al., 2010).

Destructive Leadership Factors of Erickson et al. (2007)

In their exploratory study, Erickson, Shaw, and Agabe (2007) aimed to identify both the destructive, bad leadership practices and the actions that the followers attribute to their leader. With this purpose, Erickson et al. (2007) requested the respondents to write narrative descriptions of a particularly bad leader by using a web survey. By asking 'What specific actions and behaviours by this leader caused you to classify him or her as a bad leader?', the authors have collected 767 specific behaviours. Subsequently, the authors classified those behaviours into 11 categories: (1) autocratic behaviour; (2) poor communication; (3) unable to effectively deal with subordinates; (4) poor ethics/integrity; (5) inability to use technology; (6) inconsistent/erratic behaviour; (7) poor interpersonal behaviour; (8) micromanagement; (9) poor personal behaviour; (10) excessive political behaviour and (11) lack of strategic skills.

As the nature of the Erickson et al. (2007) study was exploratory, the authors did not develop a scale but simply assessed the consequences of those bad leaders on individuals' personal and organizational lives in their study sample. Their findings indicate that bad leaders have tremendous negative influences both on the subordinates and the organizations. Moreover, an interesting finding about the Erickson et al. study (2007) was that even though the leaders were labelled as bad, they still received promotions on the one hand and escaped punishment for their destructive behaviours on the other hand.

Destructive Leadership Questionnaire of Shaw et al. (2011)

Shaw et al. (2011) developed the widely known Destructive Leadership Questionnaire (DLQ), a scale that measures the attributes of the prototype of destructive leaders from the perspective of subordinates. This scale is theoretically grounded by the qualitative study of Erickson et al. (2007) in which 767 examples of bad leadership behaviours on 11 dimensions are collected. Moreover, some items from narcissistic and TLSs were also borrowed for generating the item pool of DLQ. After the expert judgement evaluation process and factor analyses, the final version of DLQ included 104 behaviour-focused items in 20 factors and 19 personality-focused items in four factors. Table 12.1 illustrates sample items of DLQ. In addition to these, an extra item of DLQ also rates the overall view of subordinates on leaders on a scale ranging from 1 to 100, where '1 = the absolute *WORST* leader you could imagine working for and 100 = the absolute *BEST* leader you could imagine working for'.

The response format of the questionnaire contained six scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6), where higher scores denoted higher levels of destructive behaviours and traits. A 'don't know' option was also provided for each item. The scale showed adequate internal consistency coefficients ranging from 0.72 to 0.96.

The short version of the DLQ is also used in several types of research (Erickson, Shaw, Murray, & Branch, 2015). This short version includes only 22 discrete behaviours that are cited as characteristic of destructive leaders (Erickson et al., 2015). The DLQ scale is also used in several cross-cultural studies, and its factorial equivalence is also validated in the Iranian version of DLQ-I (Shaw, Erickson, & Nassirzadeh, 2014, 2015).

Shaw et al. (2011) argue that subordinate perceptions of a leader's behaviour as 'good or bad' might vary from the perceptions of superiors. In this way, the authors note that DLQ differs from the other dark side leadership scales because it utilizes a subordinate 'cognitive schema' perspective. However, the scale is also criticized for being validated solely on a sample of the overeducated population.

Destrudo-L Questionnaire of Larsson, Brandebo, and Nilsson (2012)

Larsson et al. (2012) tried to develop a short and easy-to-use scale for assessing the destructive leadership behaviours, particularly in a military context. In developing the instrument, the authors initially collected data by using a qualitative approach in which the soldier respondents were asked to write down examples of bad military leadership behaviours. Those behaviours derived from the qualitative methods are then reduced into 43 behaviours and then pilot tested on a sample of Sweden military and armed forces.

The final version – Destrudo-L questionnaire – is a context-specific measurement tool designed to capture the destructive elements of leadership in the military. The Destrudo-L includes 20 destructive behaviour items with a total of five dimensions such as (1) arrogant, unfair (e.g. 'makes subordinates feel stupid', 'behaves arrogantly'); (2) threats, punishments, overdemands (e.g. 'shows violent

Table 12.1. Behaviour-Focused and Personality-Focused Factors of Destructive Leadership Questionnaire (DLQ).

Factor Names	Sample Items	# Of Items
Behaviour-focused items of DLQ		
FACTOR 1: making decisions based on inadequate information	<i>My boss has his/her head in the sand.</i> <i>My boss does NOT have a clue what is going on in our business unit.</i>	5
FACTOR 2: acting in a brutal bullying manner	<i>My boss places brutal pressure on subordinate.</i> <i>My boss enjoys making people suffer.</i>	7
FACTOR 3: lying and other unethical behaviour	<i>My boss lies a lot.</i> <i>My boss often acts in an unethical manner.</i>	7
FACTOR 4: micro-managing and over-controlling	<i>My boss is a micro-manager.</i> <i>My boss attempts to exert total control over everyone.</i>	7
FACTOR 5: not making expectations clear to subordinates	<i>I rarely know what my boss expects of me.</i> <i>I often have to guess what my boss expects of me.</i>	5
FACTOR 6: ineffectual at negotiation and persuasion	<i>My boss is very ineffective in, persuading others.</i> <i>When negotiating with others my boss is usually a total failure.</i>	4
FACTOR 7: inability to deal with new technology and other changes	<i>My boss avoids having to use new technology.</i> <i>My boss seems not to enjoys new technology.</i>	4
FACTOR 8: inability to deal with interpersonal conflict or similar situations	<i>The punishment my boss gives is often inappropriate for the offence.</i> <i>My boss manages interpersonal conflict poorly.</i>	4
FACTOR 9: lack of credibility within the organization	<i>Very few people see my boss as a credible manager.</i> <i>My boss has lost credibility with stakeholders.</i>	3

Table 12.1. (Continued)

Factor Names	Sample Items	# Of Items
FACTOR 10: playing favourites and other divisive behaviour	<i>My boss has personal favourites.</i> <i>My boss tends to show excessive favouritism.</i>	3
FACTOR 12: ineffective in coordination and management of issues	<i>My boss is an ineffective coordinator.</i> <i>When my boss makes a mistake, shelhe rarely corrects it.</i>	4
FACTOR 13: not seeking information from others	<i>My boss rarely seeks opinions from a wide variety of people.</i> <i>My boss does not seek out or pay attention to the opinions and wishes of subordinates.</i>	4
FACTOR 14: acting in an insular manner relative to other groups in the organization	<i>My boss does not care about happening in other unit.</i>	2
FACTOR 16: not having the skills to match the job	<i>The skills of my boss do not match his/her job well.</i>	3
FACTOR 17: inability to prioritize and delegate	<i>My boss is unable to prioritize very well.</i>	4
FACTOR 18: exhibiting inconsistent, erratic behaviour	<i>You can rarely predict how my boss is likely to behave.</i>	3
FACTOR 19: unwillingness to change mind and listen to others	<i>My boss is very poor at listening to what others are saying.</i> <i>Once my boss has made up his/her mind, there is no changing it.</i>	3
FACTOR 20: inability to understand and act on a long-term view	<i>My boss can only talk about very short-term issues.</i> <i>My boss does not understand the big picture well.</i>	9
FACTOR 21: inability to develop and motivate subordinates	<i>My boss is ineffective at educating and developing subordinates.</i> <i>My boss is NOT very good at developing the skills of subordinates.</i>	5
FACTOR 22: inability to make clear, appropriate decisions	<i>My boss is very poor at getting to the point quickly and clearly.</i> <i>I have trouble understanding what my boss means or wants.</i>	4

Table 12.1. (Continued)

Factor Names	Sample Items	# Of Items
Personality-focused items of DLQ		
FACTOR 1P: an inconsiderate tyrant	<i>My boss could best be described as mean.</i> <i>My boss is a tyrant.</i>	6
FACTOR 2P: lazy and incompetent	<i>My boss is lazy.</i> <i>My boss is incompetent.</i>	4
FACTOR 3P: overly emotional with negative psychological characteristics	<i>My boss often gets emotional.</i> <i>My boss seems to have huge mood swings.</i>	7
FACTOR 4P: careless when dealing with people in various situations	<i>My boss is often careless when dealing with situations.</i>	2

Source: Adapted from Shaw et al. (2011).

behaviours’, ‘puts unreasonable demands’); (3) ego-oriented, false (e.g. ‘takes the honor of subordinate work’, ‘puts own needs ahead of the group’); (4) passive, cowardly (e.g. ‘does not dare to confront others’) and (5) uncertain, unclear, messy (e.g. ‘behaves confused’, ‘is bad at structuring and planning’). The response scale ranged from 1 (do not agree at all) to 6 (fully agree). The authors also confirmed the overall one-factor structure (G-factor) of the instrument.

Larsson et al. (2012) note that the Destrudo-L instrument is superior to other measures as it contains fewer items and is easy to administer and interpret. Moreover, they also argue that the same instrument could be used in 360-degree leader evaluation and evaluation contexts as well.

Destructive Leadership Scale of Thoroughgood et al. (2012)

Building on the argument that existing scales do not assess the multidimensional nature of destructive leadership, Thoroughgood et al. (2012) developed a destructive leadership scale through inductive (i.e. critical incidents) and deductive methods. Drawing upon the definition of destructive leadership behaviour by Einarsen et al. (2007) as well as Buss’s (1961) aggressive behaviour taxonomy, across several studies, the authors initially collected examples of critical incidents in which a leader/manager was perceived to act in a harmful or deviant manner. As a result of this process, the authors listed a total of 92 behaviours, 72 of which were regarded as distinctive behaviours and 20 of which were taken from the existing measures. After factor analysis, the final version of the instrument consisted of a total of 40 items with 3 factors. Those three subfactors are

subordinate-directed behaviours ('invades subordinates' privacy', 'insults or criticizes subordinates in front of others'), *organization-directed behaviours* ('falsifies documents', 'ignores phone calls and/or e-mails') and *sexual harassment behaviours* ('brings inappropriate material to work', 'engages in romantic and/or sexual relationships with others from work').

Thoroughgood et al. (2012) argue that the newly developed scale differs from the other types of destructive leadership measures because (1) it integrates various destructive leadership behaviours into a multidimensional framework, (2) it captures a wide range of behaviours that existing measures miss (such as physical, active and direct versus verbal, passive and indirect behaviours), (3) it captures subordinate-directed acts and (4) it provides support for the instrument's construct and criterion validity and its predictive validity over abusive supervision.

Destructive Leadership Questionnaire of Lu et al. (2012)

With the argument that destructive leadership characteristics and perceptions might differ under different cultural contexts, Lu, Ling, Wu, and Liu (2012) emphasized the importance of developing a measurement tool particularly designed for the Chinese context. Hence, to improve the existing theoretical framework of destructive leadership, the authors developed a destructive leadership survey in China by utilizing the inductive method. Their item construction started with generating a large item pool and reducing the number of items with expert judgement. Then the construct validity and the factorial structure of the questionnaire were examined by exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses using a sample of Chinese employees. The DLQ scale of Lu et al. (2012) is a scale based on subordinates' perceptions. The final version of the instrument consists of 20 items classified by 4 factors: corruption, excoriation on subordinates, abuse of subordinates and the loss of professional morality. Responses are given on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from not at all agree (1) to strongly agree (6).

The '*corruption factor*' (*six items*) is defined as the leader's behaviour that violates the interests of the organization by personal gain. Sample questions for the corruption factor include 'collecting kickbacks' and 'gaining the organization's properties by cheating'.

'*Abuse of subordinates factor*' (*five items*) refers to verbal and/or emotional abuse on the part of leaders towards subordinates at work. The sample items include 'verbal attacks on subordinates' and 'take vengeance on subordinates'.

'*Excoriation on subordinates factor*' (*four items*) refers to exploitative and oppressive behaviours of destructive leaders, characterized by a forceful, harsh attitude rather than one of respect and courtesy. 'Requiring subordinates to work overload' and 'showing no understanding of or sympathy for the actual difficulties of subordinates' refer to the sample items for this factor. Compared to the abuse of subordinates' factor, those behaviours are usually considered as passive harmful behaviours shown by the leaders.

The factor of ‘*the loss of professional morality*’ (*five items*) refers to the leaders’ behaviours that violate moral and ethical principles such as lack of moral self-discipline and autocracy. ‘Creating cliques’ and ‘cronyism’ are the sample items for this factor.

The Cronbach alpha reliabilities of the factors are reported as 0.84, 0.89, 0.94, 0.92 and 0.95 for loss of professional morality, abuse of subordinates, corruption, excoriation on subordinates and total DLQ scales, respectively. Lu et al. (2012) note that, although their DLQ scale shows some similarities to Tepper’s abusive supervision scale (2000), destructive leadership behaviours in China distinguish themselves from other Western countries particularly in relation to the factors of loss of professional morality and excoriation on subordinates that capture the leader’s anti-subordinate behaviours.

Destructive Instructor-Leadership Scale of Balwant et al. (2020)

Drawing on the notion that destructive leadership has primarily been explored in the business context (Schyns & Schilling, 2013), but that harmful behaviours are also seen in instructor–student relationships, Balwant, Birdi, & Stephan (2020) developed a destructive instructor-leadership scale that is particularly valid in the educational context. This measurement tool is aligned with the destructive leadership definition of Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton (2013) (see Krasikowa, 2013). The authors generate the items by enhancing the existing items of Tepper (2000)’s abusive leadership scale and incorporating additional items from Balwant’s (2017) interview findings.

The final version of the destructive instructor-leadership scale is a scale of a 13-item measure encompassing three dimensions: irresponsibility, victimization and callous communication. The *dimension of irresponsibility* refers to the dishonourable leadership actions in which followers are outrightly deceived or led towards inconsistent goals. ‘Misled me’ and ‘threatened me’ are the two sample items among a total of four. The second dimension of *victimization* contains five items, and it refers to the leader’s harassing and ‘picking on’ approach. The sample items include ‘made negative comments about me to others’ and ‘invaded my privacy’. The last *dimension of callous communication* includes a total of four items in describing the harmful communication actions by the leader. ‘Put me down in front of other people/students’ and ‘ridiculed me’ are sample items. The response format was a 5-point scale (1 = I cannot remember my instructor ever using this behaviour with me; 5 = My instructor used this behaviour very often with me). The internal reliabilities of the scales range from 0.81 to 0.91.

Among those three dimensions, the dimension of callous communication is reported to yield the strongest predictor of the outcomes of satisfaction, extra effort and effectiveness in instructor–student relationships. In terms of methodology, the newly designed measure provided support for criterion and discriminant validity. However, the authors also note that further replication of the newly developed scale to employee samples is recommended to improve its generalizability.

Existing Measures of Other Dark Side Leadership Instruments

Petty Tyranny Scale of Ashforth (1987; 1994)

Ashforth, one of the pioneering scholars emphasizing the dark side of leadership, defines the petty tyranny as ‘the tendency to lord one’s power over others’ (Ashforth, 1997, p. 126). As such, *tyrannical leaders* use their power and authority despotically, capriciously and unkindly. Those leaders commonly engage in harmful behaviours that take forms such as ‘arbitrariness, self-aggrandizement, belittling others, lack of consideration, a forcing style of conflict resolution, discouraging initiative, and noncontingent punishment’ (Ashforth, 1994, p. 755).

Following the definition of petty tyranny, Ashforth (1987, 1994) developed and validated a tool for measuring tyrannical leadership behaviour. The generation of those items relied on the actual critical incidents of employed business students. The final version of the Petty Tyranny Scale includes 47 tyrannical behavioural items compromising 6 factors. Those factors are arbitrariness and self-aggrandizement (e.g. ‘uses authority or position for personal gain’), belittling subordinates (e.g. ‘yells at subordinates’), lack of consideration (e.g. ‘looks out for the personal welfare of group members-reversed item’), forcing conflict resolution (e.g. ‘a forced acceptance of his or her point of view’), discouraging initiative (e.g. ‘encourages subordinates to participate in important decision-reversed item’) and no contingent punishment (e.g. ‘My supervisor is often critical of my work even when I perform well’). Each item was measured on a 5-point frequency scale ranging from never (1) to very often (5). The internal reliability Cronbach alpha coefficients of those subdimensions were reported as 0.81 and 0.94 (Ashforth, 1987).

Abusive Supervision Scale of Tepper (2000)

Tepper’s (2000) abusive supervision scale is one of the scales in widespread use for measuring the harmful practices of the leaders in the leadership literature (Tepper, Moss, Lockhart, & Carr, 2007). This scale has been built upon the definition of abusive supervision, in which the definition of petty tyranny leadership is revised and improved by excluding physical contact. Accordingly, abusive supervision refers to ‘the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical contact’ (Tepper, 2000, p. 178).

The final version of the abusive supervision scale includes 15 items capturing non-physical abuse items in one global factor. The sample items are ‘My boss blames me to save himself/herself embarrassment’ and ‘My boss ridicules me’. The frequency of the manager engaged in each behaviour was rated on a 5-point frequency scale from ‘I cannot remember him/her ever using this behaviour with me’ (1) to ‘He/she uses this behaviour very often with me’ (5). The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the scale is reported as 0.94 (Tepper, 2000).

Even though the abusive supervision scale is designed as a one-factor scale, later studies emphasize the relatively lower values of the goodness of fit statistics

for the one-factor solution (Tepper et al., 2009). Those studies revealed the existence of two factors (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007), six factors and even seven factors by using confirmatory factor analysis. Therefore, this scale has been criticized methodologically for the inconsistencies in its factorial structure (due to the existence of dual item scales in its six/seven-factor solution).

Furthermore, in some studies, a few items have been borrowed from abusive supervision scales. For instance, Detert, Trevino, Burris, and Andiappan (2007) have used three items and Greenbaum, Hill, Mawritz, and Quade (2017) and Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) have used five items from Tepper's scale in their studies.

Toxic Leadership Scale of Schmidt (2008)

The term of toxic leadership has been popularized by Lipman-Blumen (2005). She defines toxic leaders as those 'who act without integrity by dissembling and engaging in various other dishonorable behaviours' (p. 18), such as 'corruption, hypocrisy, sabotage and manipulation, as well as other assorted unethical, illegal, and criminal acts' (Lipman-Blumen, 2005, p. 18). Lipman-Blumen (2005) points out that the definitions of toxic leadership need to include the intentionally destructive behaviours that the leaders subject their subordinates to. She also emphasizes the multidimensional nature of the construct.

Based on Lipman-Blumen's (2005) definition, Schmidt (2008) designed the TLS. By utilizing qualitative and quantitative methods across military and civilian sectors, Schmidt (2008) developed 30 items to measure all aspects of the TLS: authoritarian leadership, abusive supervision, narcissism, self-promotion and unpredictability dimensions. Accordingly, the dimension of *authoritarian leadership* is measured using 6 items. All items in the scale start with 'My current supervisor...'. The sample item for authoritarian leadership dimension includes 'does not permit subordinates to approach goals in new ways'. The *abusive supervision* dimension is measured using seven items, a sample of which is 'reminds subordinates of their past mistakes and failures'. The *narcissism* dimension includes five items, such as 'thinks that he/she is more capable than others'. Likewise, the dimension of *self-promotion* is also measured using five items. 'Accepts credit for successes that do not belong to him/her' represents the sample item for the self-promotion dimension. *Unpredictability* is measured using seven items. The sample item is 'has explosive outbursts'. The participants demonstrated their level of agreement by using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Schmidt (2014) also utilized the 15-item version of TLS. By using the factor analysis of Schmidt (2008) study, three items from each dimension were selected. Thus, in the shortened version of the scale, each dimension is represented by three items. The reliability analyses for the subscales were presented as follows: authoritarianism ($\alpha = 0.84$), abusive supervision ($\alpha = 0.79$), narcissism ($\alpha = 0.81$), self-promotion ($\alpha = 0.85$) and unpredictability ($\alpha = 0.85$).

Conclusion

A thorough examination of destructive leadership indicates that it arises as an important organizational and societal reality and is thus worthy of ongoing and extended study from different perspectives. This chapter aimed to provide an overview of the question of how destructive leadership is measured. Particularly, we seek to provide an updated analysis of the quantitative and qualitative assessments of the destructive leadership that are published since 2002, through a systematic review. The search term of destructive leadership revealed a few numbers of instruments and scales tapping the destructive leadership behaviours.

A number of interesting conclusions can be drawn for this chapter on reviewing measurement instruments. The first thing refers to the conceptualization of the destructive leadership construct. The main problems are the emergence of multiple terms, overlapping definitions, dimensions and categories of destructive leadership (Einarsen et al., 2007; Pelletier, 2010). That is to say that although prior literature offers several definitions of the destructive construct, and some commonalities across various definitions exist, there is not a total consensus by the scholars. The conceptualizations mostly diverge on the dimensions of the destructive leadership, which might strongly blur the generation process of the measurement instruments. Second, in parallel with the first concern, there seems to be a strong need for exploring and designing new or redesigned measures that might identify the situational and dispositional aspects of destructive leadership practices. With that in mind, we still need psychometrically sound and easy-to-use context-specific measurement instruments (Aasland et al., 2010). As destructive leadership behaviour comes in many forms and dimensions, such as pro- versus anti-subordinate behaviour and pro- versus anti-organizational behaviour, future research could refine existing measures and/or come up with new ones to better capture the cognitions and affects (Krasikova et al., 2013). Third, there seems to be sufficient evidence that cultural factors might shape the perception and the experiences of destructive leadership (Lu et al., 2012); however, not many studies explicitly examine this or succeed in reflecting any subsequent variations through the measurement instruments that are used. Drawing a clear picture of a culture's impact on destructive leadership and then redesigning the scales in a culture-specific way might be an important area for future enquiry.

Besides the conceptual issues, methodologically, there seems no consensus with respect to their psychometric qualities of content, predictive, convergent and discriminant validities of the available destructive leadership instruments. Even, most of the articles do not report the test-retest reliabilities of those instruments. In line with this, the destructive leadership scales also need to be validated for different cultures, as cultural variations prevail in the construct and definitions of destructive leadership.

We believe that this chapter will hopefully serve as a supplementary guiding material for scholars who are moving forward with empirical future studies in this area and stimulate the progress of empirical research into the phenomenon of destructive leadership.

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Chapter 13

Cognitive Biases of Destructive Leadership: A Special Focus on Machiavellianism

Yonca Toker-Gültaş, Afife Başak Ok and Savaş Ceylan

Abstract

Organizations are investing their resources to identify effective leaders; however, the most commonly utilized assessments of leadership potential do not cover the social cognitions of individuals. Trait assessments, which are explicit in nature, also have other problems, including faking and socially desirable responding. In this chapter, we highlight the importance of leaders' implicit reasoning processes, with a particular focus on cognitive biases, in an attempt to understand how destructive leaders frame the world, situations and people and how they justify their choice of behaviours and decisions. Empirical evidence in the literature supports the valid use of implicit reasoning measurements in organizational contexts. Thus, we first summarize and list the cognitive biases of destructive leaders as identified in the literature. We then turn our focus on Machiavellian leaders as they have been associated with destructive leadership. We present the most common six cognitive biases and justification mechanisms of Machiavellian leaders based on our qualitative analysis of interview responses from 72 employees. We aim to encourage researchers and practitioners to make use of the literature on implicit reasoning and to further contribute to developing measures assessing such implicit reasoning processes.

Keywords: Destructive leadership; Machiavellianism; cognitive biases; justification mechanisms; implicit reasoning; motives

Introduction

Organizations are investing their resources for the identification of leaders who would be an asset for achieving the organization's mission, vision and the well-being of employees. In addition to following traditional means such as appointment of leaders by authorities, democratic election or simple rotation, researchers

have devoted years of investigation to identify the best selection practices utilizing psychological tests. The most common means of selecting leaders based on scientific research have been leaderless group discussions, cognitive ability tests, personality tests, structured interviews and simulations (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994). The premise of utilizing such assessments has been that they capture the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities, personality characteristics, affective states and behavioural repertoires of potential and effective leaders (e.g. Hoffman, Woehr, Maldagen-Youngjohn, & Lyons, 2011). Nevertheless, the most commonly utilized leadership assessments do not cover the social cognitions of individuals. Leader personality, an important predictor, is assessed through the lenses of trait theories, which focus on lasting patterns of behaviour determined by conscious motives, measured by biased self-report assessments. Identification of implicit cognitive processes of leadership would add to our understanding of the ‘self’ more holistically and lend to unbiased leader assessments.

We posit that leader personality assessment should include implicit social cognitions, and the first step in such assessments is to identify how leaders reason. In this chapter, we first introduce the concepts of *cognitive biases* and *justification mechanisms* with their method of assessment and then review the literature on destructive leaders’ implicit reasoning processes. Finally, we present Machiavellianism as a special case of destructive leadership (DL) and share our qualitative analyses of how Machiavellian leaders reason. Thus, we aim to provide readers with an understanding of how destructive leaders frame the world and justify their choice of behaviours and decisions.

Cognitive Biases and Their Assessment

Behavioural displays of personality are the product of various underlying needs and cognitive processes. Traits are the resulting descriptions of behaviour, whereas needs tell us why people behave the way they do (James & Mazerolle, 2002; McClelland, 1985; McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989; Winter, John, Stewart, Klohn, & Duncan, 1998). Needs and motives are the driving forces of behaviour and determine the intensity and persistence of specific behaviours over time.

The mediating link between needs/motives and resulting behaviours is social cognition. Decision-making and attribution are shaped by individuals’ underlying motives (Kunda, 1990). According to Kunda, two universal motives are reaching at the most objective conclusion and reaching a conclusion that would serve the self. Serving the self is known as motivated reasoning and involves biased reasoning. Motivated reasoning stems from an effort to fulfil a specific need and entails rationalizing goal-directed behaviour. Not all goal-directed behaviour is in line with societal norms and expectations, still individuals feel the need to preserve their positive self-image and esteem by appearing reasonable and rational. For instance, aggression is not welcome by society; thus, aggressive individuals bank on their cognitive biases and resort to specific justification mechanisms such as ‘retaliation would preserve justice’, which, in their minds, would make

their behaviour more appealing. Such justification mechanisms operate like psychological defence mechanisms (James, 1998; James & Mazerolle, 2002; Kunda, 1990).

Individuals cognitively process incoming information, analyze and frame the situations they encounter by placing the situation in a cognitive schema. Once a situation is interpreted, that situation now has personal meaning and is subjective. Repeated use of a schema results in ‘framing proclivities’ (James & Mazerolle, 2002, p. 35), which are biased ways of interpreting the same situations. So, while people are motivated towards achieving a certain end (e.g. power, aggression, control), they bank on their cognitively biased framing proclivities, and the resulting behaviour is conditional on the initial motive and biases. In sum, implicit cognitive biases direct individuals in shaping, defining and giving meaning to their perceptions, evaluations, considerations and expectations while adapting to their environments (James & Mazerolle, 2002). Multiple motives encompassing multiple cognitive biases could give rise to a cluster of behavioural displays, which we name ‘personality’. We can take our focal construct of Machiavellianism as an example. Due to some biases that are frequently preferred by Machiavellian leaders (described in more detail in the following sections of this chapter), Machiavellian leadership is a form of DL. Fig. 13.1 displays three motives, each with a representative cognitive bias, which altogether give rise to Machiavellian leader behaviours.

The intuitive, spontaneous and unconscious nature of implicit processes require suitable measures. Since cognitive biases are implicit and automatic, their assessments should inevitably be implicit (Uhlmann et al., 2012). James (1998) developed the Conditional Reasoning Test (CRT) format to objectively measure individuals’ construct-related cognitive biases. Identification of multiple cognitive biases is indicative of a certain behavioural repertoire such as aggression or toxic leadership, among others.

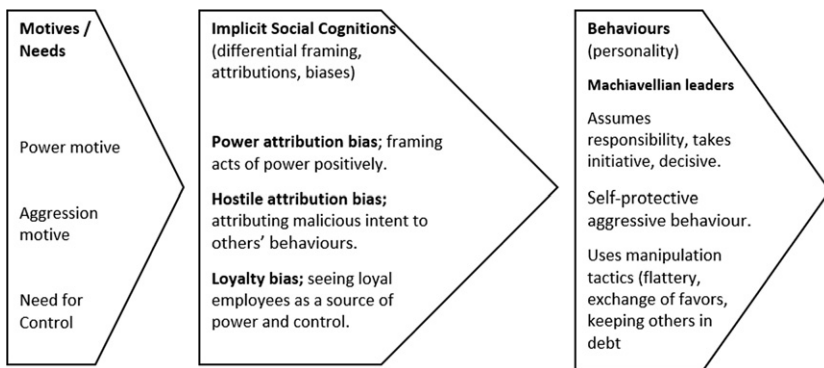


Fig. 13.1. Multiple Needs, Resulting Implicit Biases and Resulting Behaviours Described as Machiavellian Leaders.

Source: Figure is the Original Work of the Author.

So far, CRTs have been developed to assess achievement motivation (i.e. CRT relative motive strength, James, 1998), aggression (James et al., 2005; James & McIntyre, 2000), toxic leadership (James et al., 2011; Wright, 2011) and transformational leadership (Demiran, 2015; Demiran, Toker, & Sümer, 2017). Validities of these CRTs are in most cases better than, or at least equivalent to, their conceptual self-report tests. Still, since implicit and self-attributed (i.e. self-reported) motives and personalities have been shown to be distinct systems (e.g. Bing, LeBreton, Davison, Migetz, & James, 2007; James, 1998; McClelland et al., 1989; Winter et al., 1998), the measurement of implicit biases adds empirical variance in predicting outcomes. For instance, implicit and explicit measures of personality traits predict unique aspects of job performance (Vecchione et al., 2017). Therefore, implicit measures are useful for researchers interested in predicting incremental variance beyond explicit measures (Chong, Djurdjevic, & Johnson, 2017) and are not contaminated with issues inherent to self-report measures of personality such as social desirability and evaluation apprehension (e.g. Greenwald & Nosek, 2008). Thus, it seems worthwhile to identify the cognitive biases of DL and specific personalities observed with destructive leaders (i.e. Machiavellianism) as a starting point to develop more rigorous assessment for identifying potentially destructive leaders.

Cognitive Biases of Destructive Leaders

Review of the literature on leader personalities, needs and motives sheds light on the related cognitive biases and justification mechanisms leaders have adopted in appearing rational while engaging in motive-directed behaviour. Successful leadership has been associated with high implicit needs for power, activity inhibition and a low need for affiliation (McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982). The need for power is the most prominent need and has been associated with short- and long-term leader success (e.g. House, Spangler, & Woycke, 1991; McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982). Social assertiveness and dominance were also reported as characteristic features of effective leadership (Foti & Hauenstein, 2007; Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002; McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982). Leadership has also been associated with the need for achievement (House et al., 1991) and the personality characteristics of achievement, dependability and conscientiousness with moderate meta-analytic effect sizes (Judge et al., 2002).

Several cognitive biases identified in the literature related to the needs of power and achievement can be associated with leadership. The achievement-motive biases, identified and described by James and Mazerolle (2002), can potentially apply to all leaders, not just destructive but also constructive leaders. Other cognitive biases that apply to constructive leaders, specifically transformational leaders, have also been identified (Demiran, 2015; Demiran et al., 2017). Two of the power motive biases, the agentic bias and the power attribution bias (James et al., 2011), are expected to be observed in leaders with both constructive and destructive styles.

The definitions of these biases that we deemed common to all leaders are as follows: (1) *agentic bias*, a tendency to take the perspective of higher status agents

when making strategic decisions rather than taking the perspective of those lower in the organization or society who will be affected by the actions, and (2) *power attribution bias*, a tendency to frame acts of power in positive terms such as taking initiative, assuming responsibility and being decisive, which are assumed to lead to positive outcomes such as organizational survival, stability and success, to view the powerful as talented, experienced and successful. Some other biases were identified to be particularly relevant to DL.

In recent years, there is an increase in the number of studies that are focussing on the destructive and/or dark side of leadership. Higher costs associated with DL both for employees and organizations and efforts towards identifying the prevalence of DL are stated to be responsible for this increase (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). In their meta-analytic study, Schyns and Schilling (2013) reported that DL is negatively related to leader trust, employee justice perceptions and affective organizational commitment. In addition, DL was positively related to follower resistance.

Two of the cognitive biases identified by James and colleagues (James et al., 2011; Wright, 2011) – the social hierarchy orientation bias and the leader intuition bias – are specifically related to destructive leaders. James and colleagues combined these two biases (also the power and agentic biases) together with biases related to aggression in order to identify effective and ‘*toxic leaders*’. Brief definitions of the leader-related biases are (1) *social hierarchy orientation bias*, framing that having hierarchical authority structures, disproportionate influence, privilege and distribution of resources are rational ways of organizing and leading (as opposed to egalitarian power structures) and that optimal decisions are made without consulting lower levels; and (2) *leader intuition bias*, a tendency to have experience-based intuition (tacit knowledge) of how to solve strategic problems, specifically believing that having personal responsibility for important decisions, being the centre of communication, rewarding or punishing subordinates, being in control of resources, increasing their power by forming alliances and coalitions and receiving recognition for such things as being an expert or a first-mover (even if being a first-mover is not strategically sound) are strategic resources they can make use of.

Implicit aggression biases (James et al., 2005) descriptive of toxic leaders were identified as (1) *hostile attribution bias*, a tendency to frame others’ behaviours as threatening to self and resorting to self-protective behaviour justifying aggression; (2) *potency bias*, framing social interactions as dominance versus submissiveness and equating dominance with strength and bravery that brings respect; (3) *retribution bias*, belief that retribution is necessary to restore pride, honour and respect; (4) *victimization by powerful others bias*, framing the actions of powerful others as exploitation; (5) *derogation of target bias*, labelling targets of their aggressive behaviour as evil, immoral or untrustworthy and (6) *social discounting bias*, framing social norms as restrictive of free will, promoting feelings of reactance.

The CRT leadership developed based on the implicit power and aggression motives predicted store sales and profit (James et al., 2011). Wright (2011) studied the predictive power of the test with leadership peer and self-nominations. CRT

was scored to reflect a total leadership score, a power motive-based score and an aggressive motive-based (toxic leader) score. The total leadership score (including power and aggression biases) and the power motive score predicted peer power nominations. The total leadership score predicted toxic peer nominations in an MBA sample. Even though these results do not include toxic leadership motives' associations with toxic behaviours per se, they do indicate that aggression motives can be perceived as toxic and such biases can be differentiated from power motives. James and colleagues emphasized that aggressive people who want to lead (i.e. with a high-power motive) channel their power motives into abusive and hostile behaviours that create toxic environments for their co-workers and subordinates. Such toxic leaders are seen as 'bullies'. Leaders who lack aggressive motives but possess high-power motives are thought to be less likely to become destructive leaders.

Abusive supervision is one of the DL styles that continues to attract research attention (e.g. [Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017](#)). [Tepper \(2000\)](#) defined abusive supervision as '*subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical contact*' (p. 178). Two recent meta-analytic studies reported that abusive supervision is related to a series of antecedents and outcomes regarding the employees, organizations and supervisors ([Zhang & Bednall, 2016](#); [Zhang & Liao, 2015](#)). For instance, [Kiazad, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Kiewitz, and Tang \(2010\)](#) reported a significant relationship between Machiavellianism and abusive supervision. Downward mobbing is another manifestation of abusive supervision ([Ertureten, Cemalcılar, & Aycan, 2013](#)), and highly Machiavellian leaders are also inclined to engage in downward mobbing ([Kiazad et al., 2010](#)). These findings demonstrate that Machiavellianism might be both an antecedent and a kind of DL that calls for focused attention. Hence, the implicit cognitive biases and justification mechanisms of Machiavellian leaders are discussed in the following section.

A Special Case of DL: Machiavellianism

Machiavellianism is a personality trait proposed by [Christie and Geis \(1970\)](#), and the main premise of this trait is that when being honest and moral is not effective, one can use deceit or manipulation. Traditionally, Machiavellianism is categorized as a dark personality trait. Machiavelli's advice on unethical behaviours is summarized as 'the end justifies the means'. High Machiavellians are characterized by being manipulative, ethically amoral, not trusting others, desiring status and control of others, being callous, having a cynical view towards others and exploiting others ([O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012](#)). Such employees are more likely to violate social exchange relationships with their subordinates or superiors and have a proclivity to engage in counterproductive work behaviours including mistreatment of employees ([O'Boyle et al., 2012](#)). This finding is in line with that of [Kiazad et al. \(2010\)](#) that perpetrators' predispositions (i.e. Machiavellianism) is responsible for DL behaviours such as abusive supervision.

However, research also states that high Machiavellian leaders are perceived as charismatic as they are pragmatic and flexible and have high organizational skills (Deluga, 2001). Moreover, high Machiavellians are reported to use both hard (e.g. manipulation of the person, manipulation of the situation) and soft (e.g. charm, exchange of a favour) influence tactics successfully at work (Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012). Therefore, one can observe both bright and dark sides of leadership in terms of Machiavellianism (Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka, 2009).

Machiavellian leaders are not free from cognitive biases or justification mechanisms in their interactions with superiors and subordinates. For example, leader intuition bias (James et al., 2011; Wright, 2011), which is commonly used by destructive leaders, involves a combination of using hard (e.g. rewarding or punishing subordinates) and soft (e.g. forming alliances and coalitions) influence tactics, which are characteristics of Machiavellian employees (Jonason et al., 2012).

Similarly, due to the social hierarchy orientation bias, Machiavellian leaders tend to maintain their status within the organizational hierarchy. Moreover, implicit aggression biases including hostile attribution, potency, retribution, victimization by powerful others, derogation of target and social discounting biases, which are associated with toxic leaders (James et al., 2005), may also apply to Machiavellian leaders. As Machiavellian people lack empathy, have a cynical view that makes them prone not to trust others, have a desire for status and manipulate and exploit others (e.g. O'Boyle et al., 2012), they may tend to perceive other employees' behaviours as threatening and perceive themselves as vulnerable for exploitation by others and suffering. Combined with their ease of accessibility to aggressive thoughts (Kiazad et al., 2010), high Machiavellian leaders are expected to possess the following cognitive biases. In turn, their employees would experience the behavioural manifestations of these biases in the form of workplace mistreatment such as abusive supervision and mobbing.

Research on Machiavellian leaders at work is very limited in terms of capturing the implicit biases. Unsurprisingly, Machiavellianism is measured extensively with self-report measures, which are prone to socially desirable responding (O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, Story, & White, 2015). In addition, both reliability and validity of the popular Machiavellianism scales have been questioned. One reason for the lack of construct clarity might be the implicit and explicit components of the construct. For instance, one popular subscale of Machiavellianism is cynical view of human nature, which manifests itself through cognitive processes. In contrast, manipulative tactics are usually measured with the frequency of specific behaviours. Therefore, we believe, Machiavellianism as a special case of DL, deserves better investigation in terms of cognitive biases.

Cognitive Biases of Machiavellian Leaders

Following the procedure described for developing CRTs, we decided that cognitive biases of Machiavellian leaders can be investigated using qualitative

analyses of real work incidents. For this purpose, we analyzed data collected for a larger project. The main aim of the project was to collect work incidents of both employees and leaders and identify Machiavellianism-related incidents/behaviours/thoughts. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 72 employees (i.e. employees both from managerial positions and non-managerial positions). The mean age of the participants was 31.5 years (range: 18–56 years), and 53% of the participants were female. Participants were employed in various jobs and sectors. The interview protocol included six questions. First, we gave each participant a broad definition of Machiavellianism and asked them to recall a typical behaviour that they observed. Next, definitions of specific Machiavellianism factors (i.e. interpersonal manipulation, cynical view, spitefulness, amorality and greed) were presented and participants were asked to report a corresponding incident/behaviour. We asked every participant about the motive/cognitive bias of the actor reported in the incident. Once data were collected, the three authors of this chapter categorized the incidents and the cognitive biases attributed to each incident. The final list consisted of 121 cognitive biases, and the frequencies ranged between 1 and 31. Below we list the most frequent cognitive biases of Machiavellian leaders by providing brief definitions:

- *The end justifies the means bias*: The overarching bias that Machiavellian leaders resort to is the idea that if organizational or personal gains are met at the end, then socially unapproved, unethical or even illegal behaviour can be justified. Organizational or personal gains are generally related to making profit and gaining reputation. Typical behaviours that violate social norms are lying and misuse of personnel or resources.
- *Elimination bias*: Leaders who wish to further climb the career ladder or wish to preserve their status make continuous comparisons with potential rivals, do not trust their integrity and manipulate others to make them believe that their rivals are not as good as them. This bias is the basis of Machiavellian's cynical world views. Their aim is to eliminate the best. They do not frame other successful people as ones to collaborate with but see them as threats to the self and organizational goals. Here the justification is that rivals will not contribute to organizational goals as well as he/she can, that they do not possess the required skills or values and that if one does not eliminate them, they will try hard to harm you. Thus, they resort to behaviours such as assuming sole responsibility on tasks or achievements, misrepresenting facts, belittling rivals or looking for a 'smoking gun'.
- *Self-promotion bias*: A tendency to think that one should always appear better than they are to gain respect even when they are not actually putting the necessary effort into tasks or have experienced setbacks and failures. Constant announcements of success stories, misrepresenting facts by emphasizing or even exaggerating success stories and not revealing failures, convincing one's work group to take on very challenging tasks to gain

visibility or criticizing others to appear better than them are among the tactics used.

- *Loyalty bias*: A tendency to frame loyalty as a necessity for success. Loyal employees are seen as a source of power and control; thus, Machiavellian leaders engage in tactics such as charm, flattery, exchange of favours, promise of reward, ingratiation or keeping others in debt to keep employees loyal to them. Loyalty means acceptance of a leader's opinions, values and decisions. Leaders are, in return, loyal to their employees, creating a paternalistic leadership style. Non-loyal employees, however, are not respected for speaking their own minds but are seen as a threat to the road to achievement. When loyalty bias is combined with power bias, non-loyal employees can be penalized harshly as a means to restore respect and pride. As a result, employees are either in-group or out-group members.
- *Fear of elimination bias*: Cynic leaders worry that every move they make is closely monitored and that others are after finding their mistakes to use against them or that their mistakes will be harshly criticized by others. Thus, they do not accept having committed any mistakes on their part, are overly sensitive to others' evaluations and can react aggressively to any hints of criticism. The fear of elimination bias can join with the hostile attribution bias.
- *Entitlement bias*: Many Machiavellians were observed to display a narcissistic tendency of entitlement. Entitlement is characterized by a tendency to believe that you deserve what you want and that others can be exploited to achieve one's goals. They believe their time is more valuable than other people, thus others should do the hard or mundane part of work, that they are worthy of respect just because they know people at high places, that they can use all resources whereas others cannot and that a 'sucker is born each minute to exploit'.

In addition to the above-listed biases identified specific to Machiavellian leaders, they also display previously identified biases such as the *power attribution, potency, hostile attribution and retribution biases*. The emphasis on power bias is that Machiavellian leaders see themselves superior and the source of sole authority, combined with potency bias where they frame themselves as the dominant party – the boss. Cynic Machiavellians have a tendency for making hostile attributions to others' (potential rivals, competitors or followers) intentions and actions. Finally, retribution bias is used as a way to restore authority, superiority and a display of power and strength to maintain loyalty. Some biases associated with Machiavellianism overlap with biases stemming from the power and aggression motives, whereas others are more distinct and specific to Machiavellian framing. In [Table 13.1](#), we present a comparison of Machiavellian biases with other biases relevant to DL. Such an evaluation is at present only based on the descriptions of cognitive biases as identified in the interviews and necessitates further empirical evaluation to ascertain their commonalities or distinctiveness.

Table 13.1. A Comparison of Machiavellian Biases with Destructive Leadership (DL) Biases.

Machiavellian Biases	Comparison with Other DL Biases
The end justifies the means bias	This bias is particular to Machiavellians. Machiavellian leaders possess a variety of behavioural tactics that can be used for both individual and organizational aims. Individual aims include getting a promotion or personal gain, and organizational aims include increasing profit or beating a rivalry. As long as there is a desired end, all means are acceptable.
Elimination bias	A special form of the more general hostile attribution bias.
Self-promotion bias	Resembles potency bias in the sense that gaining respect is of utmost importance, but self-promotion biased leaders' aim is to enhance the self (even if in doing so others are hurt) rather than actively resorting to punishment and aggression.
Loyalty bias	Overlaps with power attribution bias and is a specialized form of leader intuition bias to strategically pursue goals using social interactions. Nevertheless, in Machiavellian leaders, the means for achieving power and goals are first sought through harmonious tactics rather than autocracy. When the loyalty bias is combined with the aggression-related potency bias and retribution bias, then it can take a penalizing form.
Fear of elimination bias	A special form of the more general hostile attribution bias.
Entitlement bias	A destructive form of the power attribution bias. Somewhat overlaps with social hierarchy orientation in perceiving privilege of resources and also with potency.

Power and aggression biases observed with Machiavellian leaders

Power attribution bias	Power bias can be considered as an underlying bias behind the entitlement bias.
Potency bias	Defined as framing social interactions as dominance versus submissiveness and equating dominance with strength and bravery that brings respect. Entitlement bias can be considered as a specific form of potency bias.

Table 13.1. (*Continued*)

Machiavellian Biases	Comparison with Other DL Biases
Hostile attribution bias	Defined as a tendency to frame others' behaviours as threatening to self and resorting to self-protective behaviour justifying aggression. With this respect, hostile attribution bias can be considered as an umbrella bias with a broader content including elimination bias and fear of elimination bias. It may also be considered as a result of the cynical world view of Machiavellian leaders.
Retribution biases	Defined as a belief that retribution is necessary to restore pride, honour and respect. It can also be considered as an underlying motive behind fear of elimination bias, entitlement bias, power bias and loyalty bias.

Note: The table is the original work of the author.

Conclusion

Implicit processes inherent in leadership are vital to empirically and accurately studying leadership. In this chapter, cognitive biases of destructive leaders are summarized to encourage future research on developing implicit measures. We also offered a list of common cognitive biases of Machiavellian leaders based on qualitative analysis of work incidents. This investigation needs to be replicated and extended in scope. However, we believe cognitive biases of Machiavellian leaders summarized in this chapter might be an encouragement to further develop implicit measures, such as CRTs. We are currently in the process of developing a CRT on Machiavellianism. We would like to encourage researchers to study the cognitive biases of abusive, tyrannical and paternalistic leaders and other traits like Machiavellianism that are antecedents of DL.

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Chapter 14

Public Myth and Metaphor: Negative Narratives, Lost Reputations and Bankers' Leadership Illegitimacies from the Media during the Financial Crisis of 2008–2009

Fran Myers

Abstract

The global financial crisis proved profoundly shocking for economic and political life. In the United Kingdom, media reporting of sudden insolvency in the banking sector, its teetering on the edge of collapse and subsequent injection of taxpayer funds by a desperate government thrust sector leaders and negative aspects of their leadership into the public glare. This is particularly significant in light of pre-crisis reporting narratives that ignored negative attributes in favour of financial successes and dealmaking. Many sector leaders had been previously unknown, but where certain individuals had featured in prior media reports, they were often lauded for dynamism, risk-taking and 'great man' attributes. However, with the outbreak of a crisis and search for blame and responsibility, previously celebrated or ambiguous values and activities were surfaced for public judgement and found wanting or even dangerous to society. Whilst political and economic aspects of the crisis have since generated a great deal of research, only limited scholarship has focused on narrative understandings and myths generated around positive and negative leadership behaviours. Whilst heroes and villains have served as metaphors for human behaviour since early societies started telling stories, the abrupt nature of this crisis triggered metaphorical narratives to the fore. This chapter will consider the dual phenomena of press coverage generated around negative leadership stories and how patterns of villainy, illegitimacy, demonisation and ruined reputations contributed to shared myths of the crisis.

Keywords: Financial crisis; negative leadership; media; mythmaking; reputation; narratives

Introduction

Prior to acquisition of ABN AMRO and accompanying thwarting of rivals Barclays during October 2007, the anticipated deal had been touted as another defining ‘encore’ (Morais, 2003), for Fred Goodwin, the CEO of Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS). Leading continued consolidations of European banking through successful integration would have seen him cement his existing reputation as a former *Forbes* Global Businessman of the Year for the ‘brilliantly strategised hostile takeover’ of NatWest (Dunne, 2002). However, almost immediately afterwards, rumours swirled of overpayment, overconfidence and lack of due diligence. Less than a year later, the whole British banking system came within hours of collapse (Berry, 2012), precipitated by the US bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers. Banks were declared insolvent, and Goodwin was ignominiously removed from his post as part of UK government rescue, which he described as a ‘drive-by shooting’ (Hutton, 2008). His abruptly ruined reputation during what the *Daily Mirror* headlined as ‘Bloodbath of the bankers’ (Lyons, 2008) proved a representative pivot of the crisis and challenged popular discourses on transformational leadership.

Interlocking human stories of the financial crisis are complex, and there are many avenues of interest. Many commentators focussed on outcomes of economic debacle and concluded subsequent loss of trust in corporations and their management. Another subset of contributors analysed these events as a failure of leadership, documenting a knock to transformative leadership fashions. A third group considered contextual factors behind toxic leadership in the sector. However, only limited attention has yet focussed on stereotyped and mythologised depictions behind this leadership pivot through the press and public presentation of these individuals. Whilst researchers have rightly concluded that responsibility for the crisis and subsequent downturn was perceived by both media and public to be due to excessive greed, hubris and general incompetence of senior bankers (Tourish & Hargie, 2012, p. 1046), patterns in media reporting remain less analysed.

This chapter therefore does not retell organisationally orientated stories of the rise and fall of such men, nor consider insights from followership perspectives, or the material consequences of their decisions. Instead, it analyses public stories of their arrogance, greed and destruction and what they say about the dark twin of leadership. Whilst negative press narratives have featured to support analyses of bankers’ decision-making and leadership qualities (Whittle & Mueller, 2011), the idea of a publicly aired hero’s journey, zero to hero to zero again, has not been fully explored. This is surprising, as the concept of peripeteia in terms of rapid reversal of fortune is a key element in what shifts both news articles and public perceptions of leadership. Similarly, debates on constructed leadership ‘images’ are well established (e.g. Meindl, 1995, p. 330). This chapter therefore discusses

storytelling in media pivots on bankers, particularly Goodwin. This is in terms of the public perception of leadership when social lines are breached, as well as considering what might be achieved by metaphorical depictions.

Media Stories and Reputation Management

One accepted construct of modern British statehood is that media discourses can serve as proxy for public opinion, part of ensuring open democracy and those with power wield it responsibly. Whilst that outlook is contested through critical argument that the press serves the privileged (Curran & Seaton, 1981/2018), continued social commitment to independent media still makes it a useful ground for considering public ideas on leadership. This includes the presentation of oversimplified either/or (Collinson, 2020) discourses on positive or heroic aspects of leadership or negative, 'dark side' connotations (Conger, 1990). Situations such as the banking crisis help surface such discourses, reappraising ideas on leadership and its manifestations.

Publicly aired accounts are a valuable resource. Collinson (2020, p. 3) notes how much academic research orientates around positives of leadership, treating power and control as unproblematic. He uses the banking crisis to theorise how research should pay closer attention to its 'damaging and dysfunctional aspects' (p. 14). Some narratives of self-promotion, charisma and control are carried out on an individual basis by leaders themselves through personal stories (e.g. Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007; Gabriel, 1997) as reputation building. Others are driven from inside organisations, as part of selling success, such as noted by Tourish and Vatcha (2005) in their study of corporate cultism at Enron. In crisis situations, media can amplify both these strands through a third layer of discourses, putting leadership into wider social contexts. This adds another dimension to established theories of leadership that generally discuss its attributes in either the terms of the individual (e.g. Stein, 2013) or as product of dynamic interactions within the organisational context in search of power (e.g. Tourish, 2020).

However, powerful discourses of positive spin and personal heroism in organisational and public life means that negative connotations and critique can become harder to find, or even taboo, which hinders analysis. It is when crisis stories enter the public realm that negative behaviours or reports from former employees become visible and where analysis of media outputs in difficult situations can surface valuable insights. The financial crisis is particularly accessible in this aspect, as focus on individual leader's wrongdoing alongside more general 'banker bashing' (Hay, 2013, p. 23) was at the core of much reporting.

Hitherto, banking CEOs were lauded for their roles in a global industry that had rapidly furthered neoliberal models for economic and social policies. Cocooned within a long boom of high employment, increasing deregulation, easy credit, rising asset worth and consumer confidence, bankers had long been economically welcomed (Tett, 2010, p. 106) and thus politically insulated from media critique. Reassurances were promoted by policymakers, such as Chancellor

Gordon Brown's confident promise of 'no return to boom and bust'¹ and in the United States, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan's assurances of effective fiscal management through system sophistication and risk spreading (Gamble, 2009). Assurances of safety and expertise encouraged minimal interventions and little rein on acquisitions or outside testing of complex modelling.

This chapter therefore uses an interpretative approach to UK press articles about bankers' leadership understood as a series of pivots. It covers the liminal state of crisis from the fall of Lehman in September 2008 through to the furore during the Treasury Hearings in February 2009, before the industry started to return to business as usual. The argument offered is whilst combinations of interrelated discourses presented by the media in separating 'good' and 'bad' bankers (Froud, Moran, Nilsson, & Williams, 2010, p. 30) facilitated industry recovery, they also offer opportunity to consider connotations of leadership. These are discussed in three sections, which are broadly chronological. The first charts human failings of leaders and the dialogic patterns presented in the press as the crisis erupts, discussing the implications of 'heads must roll' (Jones, 2008) discourses. The second section considers metaphorical descriptions of bankers as animals. It makes the case that as the size of the crisis becomes known, the relationship between wronged public and errant CEOs changes to convey darker aspects of banking leadership. The third section considers the final dramatic act, where the full scale of the crisis story and the size of the recovery bill are exposed and individual bankers' reputations are demonised.

Human Failings

The first media pivot for banking leaders happened just prior to the global financial crisis where sudden and largely unexpected difficulties upset years of innovation, advancement and profit generation within the sector, bringing an abrupt sea change to UK media reports.

Identified by both themselves and media outlets as '*Masters of the Universe*' since Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities*, banking CEOs had previously provided an embodiment of global neoliberal transformational leadership. They were presented through media and organisation alike as 'supreme leaders' (Gabriel, 1997) via 'fearsome reputation' (Bolger, 2007). Having superhuman qualities became part and parcel of being a 'real' leader (Gabriel, 1997, p. 338) for a global sector during an era of rapid change. For example, 'SuperFred and the Kryptonite Factor' (Sunderland, 2005) or 'Sir Fred Goodwin, a towering figure in world banking and a hero to many...' (Hosking, 2008). As such, they placed themselves as a 'leader as saviour' (Collinson, 2005), the epicentre of their organisation's successes.

Hence, these individuals often enjoyed heroic depictions separated from ordinary organisational members. For example, 'All hail, Sir Fred...the chief executive's warrior spirits held the bidding consortium together' (Pratley, 2007) or praise for particular expertise, e.g. 'Goodwin's analytic skills and unusual flanking manoeuvres are increasingly catching attention' (Morais, 2003). Davis (2018,

pp. 50–51) notes how much such positive affirmations were massaged via PR and symbiotic relationships between elites in the city. Company reputations were bolstered through active selling and public reputation building from flattering media interviews where identical outlooks were shared (Berry, 2012, p. 266). Dissenting voices were downplayed or ignored, e.g. when Goodwin was asked whether he ‘wasn’t turning into a bit of a megalomaniac’, the journalist frames the question as jarring, saying that Goodwin sounded ‘anything but’ (Harrison, 2005). Additionally, virtue was made out of potentially hostile or less socially adjusted characteristics, e.g. ‘brisk and brusque’. Morais (2003) implies congruence with ‘original thinking’ and ‘impeccable’ delivery. Such approaches were considered particularly suited to an era of rapid change and technical innovation, despite reservations around moral aspects and legitimisation (Robinson & Kerr, 2009, p. 877).

Once the crisis came, flattering our hero portraits were immediately delegitimised. What was considered as positively defining for success swung widely in the press as journalists struggled to make sense of the crash and understand possible implications. For example, ‘In the two decades since Tom Wolfe described the investment bankers on Wall Street as self-styled “masters of the universe”, that sense of invincibility has only grown. Until now’ (Teather, 2008). Risk-taking and dominant behaviours that had previously been considered admirable for delivering big deals and maximising profits, e.g. ‘Goodwin who is feared and revered... will be vindicated’ (Fraser, 2007), were abruptly identified as negative and harmful. These portrayals fit well with the convention-defying narcissistic CEOs noted by Chatterjee and Hambrick (2007, p. 352) who can produce fluctuating organisational performance.

Reframed attributes such as narcissism, hubris and misplaced arrogance, alongside excessive behaviours such as bullying and gambling, headline to describe banking leaders, spinning existing tropes. ‘Executives who have presided over their institutions like personal fiefdoms driven by ego and hubris have turned out to be architects of their firms’ downfall’ (Hargreaves, 2008). First to receive this treatment from the press was Dick Fuld, as Lehman filed for bankruptcy. Self-perpetuated heroic stories of the ‘pugnacious’ risk-taker who saved the bank in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks (White, 2008) U-turned overnight to metaphorical images of an out-of-control gambler and thug. Sender, Guerrero, Thal Larsen, and Silverman (2008) describe him as having ‘rolled the dice...one more time’, ‘with the clock ticking’, whilst Freedman (2008) condemns him as a brawler, ‘threatening to rip the arms off those shorting his company’.

Similar negative attributes for Goodwin swiftly followed. This can be traced through the label ‘Fred the Shred’. The epithet harked back to his move from Clydesdale to RBS ‘because of his fearsome reputation for cost cutting’ (*The Scotsman*, 1998) and had been cemented through describing job losses as ‘mercy killings’ (Barrow, 2001). However, such behaviours had been repeatedly affirmed through internal bonuses and successive sector and public awards (Harris, 2006).

Media oscillation between admiration for individual banker’s skills and condemnation for the crisis is noted by Glynos, Klimecki, and Willmott (2012, p. 306), who report incompatible positions between ‘incompetent wreckers’ of an

entire economy and ‘super clever masterminds’ fixing the system to their own ends. They consider consequences of focus on ‘high-profile’ individuals as enjoyed distraction, ensuring narrowed debate and swift return to normal. This is certainly an important point; by focussing on individual wrongdoing, wider questions on banking structures and capitalist frameworks were minimalised. However, by focussing on human failings such as greed and incompetence, capitalist discourses of ‘rational in the circumstances’ persist, that given the opportunity readers might act in the same way. For example, in *The Guardian* (2007), the paper remarks that ‘these preposterous figures are in fact rational actors in the economic system in which they find themselves’. Therefore, personal failings of banking leadership also send a signal to the public that things have changed or at least need to appear to change.

The accomplishment of such pivoted narratives is that CEO behaviours that have become synonymous with success within an organisation and affirmed via the public sphere are rapidly identified as inappropriate and invalid. Having failed to shift leadership to accommodate the credit crunch, their approaches are no longer required. The sector needs their failings aired quickly alongside swift removal so that business can return to normal. Hence, the press presents two groups, separating ‘the vast majority’ of ‘able, honest’ senior bankers who remain in the fold to support ‘ministers and officials desperate for help’.

For every Sir Fred Goodwin, the sacked and excoriated former chief executive of Royal Bank of Scotland, there is a John Varley or an Eric Daniels, the chiefs respectively of Barclays and Lloyds, both very much still in their jobs. (Hosking, 2009)

In summary, the archetypal hero of eponymous and organisational stories now needs identification as the bad guy. This is encapsulated at the Capitol Hearings, where Congressman John Mica addresses Dick Fuld: ‘If you haven’t discovered your role, you’re the villain today. You’ve got to act like a villain’ (Clark & Schor, 2008).

Rhetoric of Animalisation

The second pivot for media reports built momentum alongside the growing crisis and would see bankers’ leadership start to move from depicting regular human failings left behind for more judgemental metaphors of animalisation. As the first phase of crisis reporting had really been what Tett (2010, p. 275) calls ‘stunned confusion’, the press had been reluctant to be too hard on bankers’ leaders if the market recovered quickly. This is illustrated through comments made by Wilby (2008). He notes how regular ‘Meltdown Monday’ headlines come and go, acknowledging media outlets had been torn between the big story and not damaging the economy unnecessarily. However, heavier judgements fall as realisation of the scale of the crisis begins to take shape, and be recognised as ‘really, really bad’.

Whilst the first press pivot had at least allowed failed banking leaders a social status, here behaviours are metaphorically judged as ‘something for humans to avoid’ (Goatly, 2006, p. 15) and therefore outside responsible society. Bankers became an out-group. Traits of animals are projected onto both bankers as a wider group and banking leaders in particular. These can be divided into two main metaphorical types: ‘active’ animal descriptions where the failing leader is either still in role or actively doing damage or ‘reactive’, focussing on attributes displayed in ritual reckoning activities, such as the 2009 Treasury Hearings. These will be discussed in turn.

The first, active category of animalisation presented in press outputs is closely aligned to predation, as defined by Kerr and Robinson (2011, p. 153) in their analysis of leadership elites. Here the authors set out how banking leaders come to change from being seen to capture value for shareholders benefit (good) to that of personal gain (ambiguous). This idea is also congruent with conditions for disastrous outcomes noted by Conger (1990, p. 44) where the leader has exaggerated behaviours, has lost touch with reality and views the organisation as a tool for personal gain alone.

Immense personal gains enjoyed by these highly successful individuals had been acceptable, even desirable in boom times, whilst everyone was making good money. Luyendijk (2015, p. 169) reports on a ‘dog eat dog world...every man for himself’ as representative of the banking culture, so it was unsurprising that similar attributes would generate successful leaders. Hence, Fuld’s nickname of ‘The Gorilla’ had previously been employed as a valuable attribute in the field. Bawden (2008) writes before the crash how he is ‘known within his brokerage as “the gorilla” because of his tough, no-nonsense approach to management’ and that this should ‘serve him in good stead’. Similarly, Teather (2008) explains the term ‘the Gorilla’ in reference to his reputation as one of the toughest guys on Wall Street.

However, immediately following Lehman’s bankruptcy, the reports pivot, and excessive personal gain is no longer acceptable. For example, the *Daily Mirror* frontpage leads with ‘Gorilla of Greed’ (Manning, 2008b), referring to his ‘swollen’ and ‘big swinging ego’ as personally responsible for 26,000 job losses, gambling his empire away. Stein (2013, pp. 287–288) using linkages between narcissism and leadership demonstrates how Fuld’s previous heroic reputation as a ‘uniquely prized leader’ central to Lehman had led him to live as a ‘potentate’. Self-gratification and glory during boom times were dangerous in a crisis situation, where the industry was fighting for survival and the leader was required to respond. Previously tolerated, even eulogised behaviours such as gambling and bullying threats such as eating short sellers alive (Tibman, 2009, p. 155) were seen as the epitome of bad practice. The press reflected public disgust that he had protected his own assets by putting them in his wife’s name whilst employees were made jobless. Hence, Seib (2009) stated: ‘the Gorilla has become the symbol of everything that was wrong with Wall Street’.

Charteris-Black (2005, p. 109) discusses how rhetorical animal metaphors are invariably associated with negative evaluations. This could be through destructive attacks, such as the gorilla mentioned previously, or other sorts of damage. The

idea works equally well in conveying public disgust through the press for Fred Goodwin, whose early metaphors communicate out-of-control behaviour, as a relentless ‘deal junkie’ (Martin, 2013). His former superhero persona is now often depicted as a runaway horse or rider, e.g. ‘Fred “The Shred” Goodwin galloped madly over the precipice’ (Wighton, 2008). Equally, the laxity of the Board at RBS receives similar approbation for permitting such behaviour, with Chairman Tom McKillop ‘under fire for utterly failing to rein in his gung-ho chief executive...’ (Evans, 2008). The metaphor cuts to the wider political arena, with then Leader of the Opposition, David Cameron, reporting government mismanagement of the affair via,

...It is not so much that they shut the door after the horse had bolted – they shut the door after the horse had won the 3.20 at Uttoxeter. (Chapman, Laurance, & Koster, 2009)

In terms of the ‘reactive’ phase of animalisation, these news stories serve two main purposes. The first castigates other leaders who used the crisis as an opportunity to cash in. For investment fund heads vilified for profiting on expected losses and ‘misery’ as banking sector staff members lose their jobs, they are seen as creating no value, rather sucking needlessly out of a troubled economy. Hence, Philip Falcone, who gambled that HBOS share price would plummet, reportedly earning him ‘hundreds of millions’, receives a *Daily Mirror* front page ‘Greedy Pig’ (Sommerlad & Antonowicz, 2008). This demonstrates a second binary separation between those leaders who create value and are constructed as ‘good’ and those who do not. Kamm (2008) dialectically constructs differences between industrialist and financial predator. Whilst noting that both can create workers misery, named entrepreneurs such as Bill Gates or Richard Branson who produce are contrasted positively against those ‘regarded as parasitic even in a culture that celebrates commercial success’.

The second focus of reactive animalisation conveys change once the leader has left the organisation. Whilst disgraced leaders can do no further damage, their organisations have to reckon the cost of their animal-like behaviours, furthering their own interests rather than those of the firm. Toynbee (2009) sets Goodwin’s behaviour into the frame of elite individuals who see no wider social worth other than their own interests: ‘it’s not his fault, it’s a bad upbringing among grab-what-you-can and eat-what-you-kill predators. His feral overclass thinks it owes nothing to society...’. Animal descriptions are therefore overwhelmingly negative, such as a revisit of the pig from the *Daily Mirror*, e.g. ‘Snout on your ears’ (Manning, 2008a), and the vulture and the weasel from *The Sun* (2009; Maxwell, 2009).

The other metaphor that gains traction is the capitalist fat cat. Whilst imaging such as the frightening gorilla and runaway horse are active CEO behavioural metaphors, once sacked, Goodwin needs to be re-orientated. He is now the passive recipient of an (unwarranted) bonus and pension that taxpayers are forced to stump up for. Journalists ostracise these individuals whose excessive greed at social expense is singled out as a hallmark of negative leadership. Hence, ‘one of

banking's fattest cats is to become the highest-profile casualty' (Chapman & Brummer, 2008). Moir (2009) writes of Goodwin being 'neutered' as 'top cat of fat cats', positing that any further greed would spatter 'his greedy guts over the country in a toxic shower of debt and hubris'.

What this second phase of animal narratives as judgement achieves is a separation between bankers' actions and those of a responsible society. Banking leaders have become part of a discourse of irresponsibility to accompany public distancing from their failures.

Enter the Demonology

The final media pivot on bankers' leadership provides the last act of the press drama on the crisis. This is the demonisation of banking leaders and the culture that produced them. As the economy starts to stabilise, discourses purpose around how society can come to terms with the aftermath. With large chunks of the industry in public ownership, the cost to the taxpayer comes into full focus and blame takes its final form. Much press coverage here focusses around the procedural routines of the Treasury Hearings during February 2009, noted as 'show trials' by Engelen et al. (2011, p. 36), and the subsequent campaign to remove Goodwin's knighthood.

These hearings have proved excellent material as discrete case studies in the leadership field. Notable contributions here include Whittle and Mueller (2011) and Tourish and Hargie (2012), who consider what was attempted in terms of blame reduction through metaphors and storytelling by banking leaders. Whilst Whittle and Mueller (2011, p. 117) focus on discursive devices used to construct moral aspects of leadership, they also note how such events make significant contributions to public understanding of issues. This includes assignments of blame, responsibility and avoidance as part of the story of the crisis. As far as press reports are concerned, this is where disgraced bankers' reputations fully develop into the threatening other, in the shape of an archetypal devil from traditional storylines (Moxnes & Moxnes, 2016).

There are two main media functions for such narratives, the first cements complete separation of these dangerous individuals and their leadership from what is now seen to be appropriate, so as to aid recovery. A symbolic caricature of the disgraced leader works well here. For example, captions of photographs appear in press sources, headlined '*Biggest losers*', with Arlidge (2008) commenting: 'Reputations have been shredded. Sir Fred Goodwin bet half of Edinburgh... Lehman Brothers' Dick Fuld may have looked like Dr Evil but turned out to be Dr Stupid...'. Salacious storylines are a form of public misdirection from stories of corporate waste as the expected recession takes shape.

Hence, during the Hearings, banking leaders are manifested in the press through apocalyptic terminology. Hill (2009) headlines with: 'Let us unleash the Four Horsemen of the Apologies'. Goodwin is assigned a narrative role as either sorcerer or devil whose skills cast a spell of monetary ease and false prosperity, and now it has gone horribly wrong and the alchemy of banking practices is seen

as 'snake oil' (Aitken, 2009) from a 'rotten banking culture'. Bankers' attempts to reduce blame for their actions as rational in the circumstances as they experienced unexpected market turbulence receive little sympathy from the press who lampoon their self-pity. Instead, reports focus on an elite 'cartel' culture, often with 'unmanageable portfolios' and no wider social responsibility. Media stories castigate figures such as Philip Green for holding unwarranted non-executive directorships in the sector (Fleming, 2009).

Similarly, Treneman (2009) pillories former poacher Lord Myners for his 'sympathy for the devil', as government figures 'all but put horns and a tail on Sir Fred'. She sums up her own feelings on the witch-hunt to recover his pension, closing with 'I could hear the cackle all the way from Scotland'. For all of the fuss and opprobrium, Goodwin still walks away with £16 million (Reade, 2009). Headlines such as '*Fury at the Fred Devil*' from the *Daily Mirror* (Parsons, 2009) note valuable political capital available in demonisation. 'Some say there is a witch-hunt against the likes of Sir Fred Goodwin because their sickening greed detracts from the failures of the Government'. Former banking leaders therefore become what Glynos et al. (2012, p. 305) describe as a 'paradigmatic target around which to focus public expressions of outrage'.

The second function for demonisation is that people should understand that there will be a price to pay for previous easy credit. This is both for organisations and public. Media outlets seize on survivor stories, commenting on 'morning beatings' (Dey & Walsh, 2009) for RBS staff, contrasting this with sumptuous private offices known as 'Sir Fred's Pleasure Dome' alongside fruit flown in from Paris for the favoured few (Oakeshott & Foggo, 2009). Much post-event reporting fits with elements reported by Tourish and Vatcha (2005) on cultlike conditions at Enron and the enforced silencing of dissent, toxicity and exaggerated self-positioning noted by Conger (1990). In terms of taxpayers, they need to accept future spending cuts and austerity measures. By naming former banking leaders as demons, then the public come to understand a Faustian pact has been in place, where the price will be recession and hardship. Such linkages are never far away in press reports here: 'There is something curiously consistent about the rogues' gallery of banking executives paraded across the front pages whenever the R-word – recession – is mentioned' (Ahuja, 2009). Ideas on the persistent turn to magic or mythical terms in hard times are explored by Charteris-Black (2005, p. 209) who notes the conjunction of these types of descriptors with feelings of inadequacy for humans in controlling their environment, 'not surprising that their use should recur in times of crisis'. These ideas are resonant here, as the transformation of money into spectacular returns had been seen as a magical act, and therefore a product of sorcery. Such imagery is summed up by Reid (2009) who comments: 'Sir Fred...waved a magic wand and turned a provincial bank into a glossy global giant', brought down by his 'vaulting ambition'.

Conclusion

Presentations of banking leaders as a series of interrelated pivots through a frightening crisis situation suggest that perceptions of positive and negative

leadership are both social phenomena and personally constructed narratives. What may have served well for profit-making as transformational leadership during boom times was suddenly repositioned as negative, despite no changes in the behaviours of these men. While other commentators are correct that such storylines misdirected the public from wider failings in the industry and on to individuals, media focus on 'rogue' leaders enables a consideration of what happens when leadership appears bad. As more negative stories emerged, these men became further away from social belonging, and despite the lack of material punishment for their actions, they enter social repertoires as moral lessons and judgement on leadership's dark side.

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Chapter 15

Destructive Leadership from a Cross-Cultural Perspective: Is There a Convergence or Divergence?

Ozge Tayfur Ekmekci and Semra Guney

Abstract

Much of the cross-cultural research addresses the ongoing debate regarding the convergence or divergence of leadership theories and models in countries having different cultures and socio-economic conditions. This chapter aims to integrate destructive leadership and culture by pointing out the plausible cultural norms and values inducing or preventing destructive leadership. The chapter firstly provides brief definitions of culture and destructive leadership along with the cultural dimensions used to categorize the societies. Additionally, the chapter reviews the research findings pertaining to the perception of destructive leadership in different cultures and societies. While acknowledging the existence of universals regarding negative/dark leadership behaviours, the divergence regarding the understanding and enactment of the leadership is also stressed out.

Keywords: National culture; universal leadership; destructive leadership; cross-cultural perspective; divergence of leadership; convergence of leadership

Introduction

To date, much has been said about what leadership is and what constitutes effective leadership. However, the desire to reach a universal definition of leadership and define behaviours and attributes particular to effective leaders makes the extant literature seem far from reality. At this point, one needs to question the validity and applicability of the research findings and ask the very intriguing question: Do the conceptualization of leadership and actual leadership practices converge in different countries having different cultures and socio-economic conditions? In other words, is it safe to assume that individuals in different

societies understand the same thing when a particular leadership style, such as authoritarian or transformational leadership, is mentioned? Because leadership is a multilevel phenomenon involving individuals, groups and organizations (Pearce & Sims, 2000; cited in; Grow & Armstrong AM, 2017, pp. 3–28), understanding how leadership is endorsed among the members of different cultures seems to be more important than reaching a universal definition of effective leadership (Grow & Armstrong AM, 2017, pp. 3–28). Moreover, focusing on the positive side of leadership by stressing leadership styles (such as servant, transformational, ethical) seems to provide a one-sided view of the leadership phenomenon. In the extant literature, leaders are often portrayed as heroic or saviours of organizations in crisis (Bligh, Jeffrey, Pearce, Justin, & Stovall, 2007). However, the existence of dark leaders in politics (e.g., Adolf Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini) and businesses (e.g., Jeffrey Skilling of Enron; Bernard J. Ebbers of WorldCom) calls for a need to stop the romanticization of leadership and acknowledge the plausible dark sides of leaders. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in understanding the nature and prevalence of destructive leadership, which involves ‘unethical and immoral decisions of leaders within organizations’ (Kurtulmuş, 2017, p. 109). Despite the growing interest in academia, there remains a paucity of research that examines destructive leadership in countries other than the West (Shaw, Erickson, & Nasirzadeh, 2015). As Kurtulmuş (2017) states, most of the leadership studies are conducted in North American and European contexts, yet informal institutional frameworks can be completely different from context to context. Therefore, there is a need for scholars from different countries to explore how a particular context may impact the propensity of leaders to engage in unethical and inappropriate behaviours that are against the legitimate interests of the organizations and followers through imposed norms, values and limitations.

In this vein, this chapter aims to fill the gap in the literature by integrating dark leadership and culture. The chapter addresses the cultural factors that either induce or prevent dark/destructive leadership. Investigating leadership from a cross-culture perspective is believed to contribute not only to extant literature but also to practitioners. Uncovering whether globalization is causing organizations to adopt similar leadership principles and practices could be invaluable because of the increasing prevalence of cross-border exchanges of leaders all over the world. Similarly, knowing the desired leadership styles in each country, and the differences between them, could have implications for the training, selection and success of expatriate leaders (Grow & Armstrong AM, 2017, p. 11). Last but not the least, focusing on destructive leadership phenomena from a cross-cultural perspective could help identify cultural characteristics that make individuals more tolerant of – or even in need of – destructive leaders. Such an endeavour could be valuable for increasing awareness about destructive leadership and reducing the prevalence of it, if not its total elimination.

The Role of National Culture on Leadership

Although more cross-cultural studies are now conducted in the leadership area, there is still a North American bias in many of these studies regarding leadership

models and even measures (Den Hartog & Dickson, 2004). The North American view of leadership relies on individualism, which emphasizes rationality, individual incentives, follower responsibilities and hedonism, as opposed to aesthetics, religion, superstition, group incentives, follower rights and altruism, which are the features emphasized by collectivism (House, 1995, p. 443). Despite the search for a universal definition, model and measure of leadership, a considerable number of studies demonstrate that effective leadership differs across cultures.

Luthans, Peterson, and Ibrayeva (1998) argue that leadership behaviours are influenced not only by the leader's personality and the demands of others (i.e. followers) but also by the constraints on the leader's domain of activity and influence (namely the environment). In other words, certain leadership practices and behaviours are either effective or ineffective depending on cultural, political and economic factors. However, one needs to first understand what culture encompasses and how it influences followers and leaders to have a thorough understanding of the leadership–culture relationship.

As indicated in the GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness) Project, the culture reflects 'shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of collectivities' (House et al., 1999, p. 13). In a way, national culture reflects a society's core values and norms, which are passed from one generation to another through 'Social Learning'. Members of society generally regard political, opinion or business leaders as role models and internalize their values, norms, attitudes and behaviours (Luthans et al., 1998). Through the social learning process, national culture affects the attitudes and behaviours of both leaders and followers.

To date, a voluminous number of anthropological and ethnographic studies have tried to identify cross-cultural differences differentiating one society from others (Dickson, Castaño, Magomaeva, & Den Hartog, 2012). Inspired by those studies, researchers in management and organizational psychology have also focused on the impact of national culture on leadership, human resource management and other managerial issues. In this pursuit, those researchers identified cultural dimensions along which societies could be classified. For example, in one of the earliest works, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961; as cited in Dickson et al., 2012) mentioned six dimensions that differentiate cultures: (1) beliefs about the nature of humans (good/evil, changeable/unchangeable); (2) relationships among people (individual, collective, hierarchical); (3) relation to the environment (mastery, subjugation, harmony); (4) activity (doing, thinking, being); (5) time orientation (past, present, future); and (6) space use (public, private). Hofstede (1980), in his well-known cultural framework, mentioned about four dimensions (individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity) which have been extensively utilized in categorizing national cultures. The Individualism–Collectivism Dimension simply reflects societal differences regarding independence and interdependence. People from individualist cultures value independence and give priority to their self-interests, whereas people from collectivist cultures value interdependence and give priority to a group or collective interest. Uncertainty avoidance reflects the society's degree of

being tolerant/intolerant to ambiguities. Accordingly, people in uncertainty avoidant cultures avoid ambiguities and try to minimize the risks and uncertainty by imposing rules and norms. The power distance involves the degree of acceptance for hierarchical relationships. People valuing high power distance are thought to accept the unequal distribution of power in organizations as normal and something desirable. The fourth dimension, masculinity/femininity, on the other hand, reflects society's tendency to embrace masculine values such as strength and competitiveness or feminine values such as compassion, empathy and relationships. Of those dimensions, Hofstede (1980) argues that power distance and uncertainty avoidance might influence the efficacy of particular leadership styles. Specifically, uncertainty avoidance could make leaders more intolerant of taking risks and adherent to rules and regulations, whereas power distance, reflecting the degree of acceptance for power inequalities, could make leaders more authoritarian and affect the success of the participatory leadership style. Erez and Earley (1993) supported this assertion and revealed the moderating role of national culture on the relationship between participation and performance. The researchers found participative leadership to be more effective in egalitarian and collectivist societies.

Following the conceptual framework of Hofstede, Project GLOBE (House, Hanges, Javidan, & Dorfman, 2002) analyzed 64 cultures based on nine dimensions: performance orientation, future orientation, assertiveness, power distance, humane orientation, institutional collectivism, uncertainty avoidance and gender egalitarianism. While uncertainty avoidance, power distance and future orientation dimensions are conceptually very similar to the dimensions cited in Hofstede's model, the others are quite different (Dickson et al., 2012). In Project GLOBE, individualism/collectivism is broken into two sub-dimensions: Collectivism I and Collectivism II. While Collectivism I refers to the willingness of the members of the society to support the collective distribution of resources and give importance to collective action, Collectivism II refers to the society members' devotion, pride and agreement with their organization and families (House, Javidan, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2002). Like collectivism, the masculinity–femininity dimension was split into Gender Egalitarianism and Assertiveness (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, Gupta, & GLOBE associates, 2004). Gender Egalitarianism reflects the extent to which organizations choose to act according to gender biases, whereas Assertiveness reflects the social interaction styles and the degree to which individuals tend to be aggressive, assertive and confrontational when communicating with others (Dickson et al., 2012; House et al., 2002). The ninth dimension, Humane Orientation, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which organizations or societies value being fair, friendly, generous and kind (House et al., 2002). GLOBE study reported the effects of uncertainty avoidance, collectivism and gender egalitarianism on self-protective, team-oriented and human-oriented leadership styles. In uncertainty avoidant societies, self-protective, team-oriented leadership and human-oriented leadership styles were found to be more prevalent, while participative leadership was rare. Collectivism and gender egalitarianism were found to predict charismatic/value-based leadership positively, yet predict self-protective leadership negatively (Dickson et al., 2012). In societies with a high power

distance, self-protective leadership turned out to be a prominent leadership style, while charismatic/value-based and participative leadership styles were the least executed ones. Apart from the prevalence of particular leadership styles, the GLOBE study identified leadership preferences that are valued across cultures. Results indicated approximately 20 leadership attributes that are universally endorsed and associated with effective leadership (Den Hartog et al., 1999). Accordingly, a leader is expected to be encouraging, motivational, dynamic and visionary, while renouncing noncooperative, ruthless and dictatorial approaches (Dickson et al., 2012).

Like GLOBE Study, other researchers also highlighted the existence of universal leadership styles and behaviour. Contrary to many researchers reporting cross-cultural differences, Burns (1978) claims that a transformational leadership style might be universal. The researcher notes that transformational leaders might not pursue their self-interest by setting goals for followers and inspiring them, which are universally desired leadership attributes. Similar to Burns (1978), Bass (1997) also suggests that transformational leadership transcends national boundaries, and, thereby, cultures. Although both Burns (1978) and Bass (1997) developed and tested the concept of transformational leadership in an individualistic society (i.e. United States), Bass argues that

...transformational leadership could be more effective and applicable in collectivistic cultures as the ideal collectivistic value of acting beyond self-interests for the good of the group and organization is more compatible with this leadership style. (Luthans et al., 1998)

Dorfman et al's study (1997), in a way, supports the claims of Burns (1978) and Bass (1999) about the universality of some leadership attributes with data gathered from different countries: Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Mexico and the United States. In a recent study, Grow and Armstrong AM (2017, p.21) note

...the similarity between Australian and Chinese managers in regards to adopting transformational and transactional leadership styles, yet emphasize the fact that Australian managers prefer transformational leadership more than their Chinese counterparts.

Similar to Burns (1978) and Bass (1997), Long et al. (2012; cited in Windsor, 2017) claim that some mainstream (or Western) leadership theories may be universally applicable; however, the existence of unique processes and factors might require context-specific leadership constructs, especially in Asia. That is, although concepts such as transformational leadership may be valid, specific behaviours shown may vary depending on cultural norms and values. For example, transformational leaders may be more likely to adopt the participatory style in egalitarian societies such as the Netherlands (Den Hartog et al. 1999) and Denmark, while those leaders may use more directive approaches in high power distance societies, such as Turkey and China.

Destructive Leadership and Culture

Destructive leadership has started to be a prominent topic in the leadership literature given the increasing number of studies focusing on negative behaviours as well as the high prevalence of corporate frauds, bribing and unethical behaviours in organizations. Despite the extensive research (e.g., [Furnham, Hyde, & Trickey, 2014](#); [Griffin & Lopez, 2005](#)) into destructive leadership, there is no consensus about its conceptual definition or even its name. Over the last two decades, destructive leadership has carried a number of labels, such as ‘tyrannical’, ‘aversive’, ‘derailed’ and ‘dark’. For example, [Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad \(2007\)](#) defined destructive leadership as:

...the systematic and repeated behaviour by a leader, supervisor, or manager that violates the legitimate interests of the organization by undermining and/or sabotaging the organization’s goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, wellbeing or job satisfaction of subordinates. ([Einarsen et al., 2007](#), p. 208)

This definition takes into both behaviours directed toward subordinates and the organization itself. In their model, [Einarsen et al. \(2007\)](#) mention three types of destructive leaders: (1) the tyrannical leader, who demonstrates anti-subordinate yet pro-organization behaviours; (2) the derailed leader, who demonstrates both anti-subordinate and anti-organization behaviours; (3) the supportive leader, who engages in pro-subordinate yet anti-organizational behaviours. The authors ([Einarsen et al., 2007](#)) also mentioned ‘laissez-faire leadership’ as a fourth type of leadership, characterized by an avoidance of responsibility. Besides [Einarsen et al. \(2007\)](#), other researchers also draw attention to negative and unconstructive forms of leadership under different headings such as dysfunctional leadership ([Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka, 2009](#); [Wu & Lebreton, 2011](#)), aversive leadership ([Bligh, Kohles, Pearce, Justin, & Stovall, 2007](#)), tyrannical leadership ([Ashforth, 1994](#)), narcissistic leadership ([Glad, 2002](#)) and toxic leadership ([Lipman-Blumen, 2005](#); [Whicker, 1996](#)). Without delving into the construct definitions and similarities or differences between the aforementioned dark/negative leadership styles, the following paragraphs summarize the studies conducted about negative leadership styles all around the world.

In their analyses of leadership practices in post-communist countries, [Luthans et al. \(1998\)](#) urged researchers to think more about whether

...the cultural traditions and the legacy of past leaders make some nations’ members more tolerant and even ‘need’ dark leaders more than the other nations’ members. (p. 188)

The researchers claimed that leaders in communist countries generally exhibit attributes particular to dark leaders and followers seem to support and show tolerance towards them. It is argued that communist leaders maximize their political survival by eliminating potential opponents. Additionally, these ‘dark’

leaders are claimed to expect other people (i.e. followers) to show unconditional loyalty and even sacrifice their present well-being in exchange for future prosperity. According to [Luthans et al. \(1998\)](#), leaders in communist countries exhibit 'dark' leadership by losing touch with reality or pursuing only personal gain which could result in harm to people or organizations. The researchers gave Stalin – a Russian Communist leader – as an example of a dark leader, who sought heroic recognition and persisted with actions regardless of their consequences. [Luthans et al. \(1998\)](#) explained the emergence of and the tolerance toward dark leadership with the uncertainty avoidant and collectivist nature of the communist countries. The researchers claimed that collectivism creates a preference for a leader who can guide the masses and unite the people around a common goal, which could cause the emergence of a one strong leader figure in society. Furthermore, due to the high prevalence of uncertainty avoidance, it is argued that followers in collectivist countries have a greater desire for dictatorial leaders, as they promise a sense of security and structure. Given the traditional cultural values appreciating power distance, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance and the relatively poor economic and political conditions, [Luthans et al. \(1998\)](#) argue that communist and post-communist countries are more vulnerable to 'dark' leaders compared to other countries in the world. In parallel with [Luthans et al. \(1998\)](#), [Windsor \(2017\)](#) also emphasizes the fact that researchers need to focus more on the relatively under-explored topic of 'the effects of leadership practices that are unethical by universal standards but morally tolerable by cultural norms' (p. 129).

Despite the remarks of [Hofstede \(1980\)](#) and [Luthans et al. \(1998\)](#) about the plausible effects of cultural norms and values, the scant number of studies focused on the perception of dark leaders in different cultures. Some studies (e.g., [Hoel, Glasø, Hetland, Cooper, & Einarsen, 2010](#)) utilized [Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogsdal's \(2007\)](#) a destructive leadership framework in different cultures and settings. As indicated before, the destructive and constructive leadership (DCL) behaviour model of [Einarsen et al. \(2007\)](#) mentions five categories of leadership behaviour. Putting aside the first category, which is constructive leadership, three categories of leadership represent active forms of destructive leadership (i.e., tyrannical, derailed and supportive–disloyal leadership). The last category, which is laissez-faire leadership, refers to a passive form of destructive leadership. Although the supportive–disloyal category had a relatively low internal reliability, the data obtained from the Norwegian sample fitted the five-factor model of DCL satisfactorily in a study conducted by [Aasland, Skogstad, Nielsen, Notelaers, and Einarsen \(2010\)](#). That particular study revealed the laissez-faire leadership to be the most prevalent destructive leadership category, followed by supportive–disloyal leadership and derailed leadership. Tyrannical leadership, which involves humiliating and manipulating the followers to reach the goals and strategies of the organization, was found to be the least prevalent destructive leadership category ([Aasland et al., 2010](#)).

Like [Aasland et al. \(2010\)](#), [Shaw, Erikson, and Nasirzadeh \(2015\)](#) examined the nature and prevalence of destructive leader behaviours in a recent cross-cultural study conducted with Australian, American and Iranian leaders. The researchers report no significant differences between Australian and American

leaders concerning the meaning and frequency of destructive leadership. However, when Shaw et al. (2015) compare leaders from America and Australia with their Iranian counterparts, they find the worst, middle and best leaders differ significantly from one other concerning the frequency of destructive leader behaviours. Despite small differences between American–Australian and Iranian samples, the nature, and prevalence of, destructive leader behaviours seem to converge in both samples having different cultures.

However, contrary to these findings, a qualitative study conducted in Turkey (Karakitapoğlu-Aygün & Gumusluoglu, 2013) reveals that cultural context might affect the form and enactment of both positive and negative leadership. In that particular study, the researchers use ‘non-transformational leadership’ as an umbrella term reflecting negative leadership behaviours ranging from ineffective/incompetent to destructive/unethical behaviours. Accordingly, the destructive/unethical leadership behaviours could involve intimidation, manipulation, abuse, coercion and one-way communication, while incompetent/ineffective behaviours involve showing no interest or concern for tasks and followers. With the data gathered from 31 employees from different sectors through semi-structured interviews, the researchers identified five categories of non-transformational leadership. The Turkish participants defined the first category, the so-called *destructive leadership*, as abusive, coercive, aggressive and intimidating. Accordingly, destructive leaders manipulate their followers to reach their own goals, use threats and fear, show aggressive, intimidating behaviour and use impression management tactics to not to lose their position. The second leadership category, *closed leadership*, is associated with intolerance of the risks and showing a dogmatic approach to new ideas. Closed leaders tend to reject new ideas by creating lame excuses and even sabotage attempts to change. The third non-transforming/negative leadership category is *passive/ineffective leadership*. In this particular style, leaders cannot set a clear vision for their followers and cannot persuade them to take responsibility for the tasks or organize their work (i.e. set objectives and divide up labour). By avoiding responsibilities and decision-making, these leaders seem to resemble laissez-faire leaders, who had been pointed out in previous studies (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2007) conducted in other countries. However, as the authors point out, passive/ineffective leadership seems to arise mainly from incompetence, rather than the indifferent attitudes of the leaders as in the case of laissez-faire leadership. The fourth leadership category, *active-failed leadership*, is found in leaders and managers who do not have any vision. Active-failed leaders tend to monitor the followers closely, interfere with their work and want them to work according to the rules and regulations without giving priority to the important operations. The last category is named as miscellaneous leadership, reflecting leaders occupying their position due to circumstance and politics rather than ability. The participants indicate that these leaders do not deserve their positions because they work hard or show superior performances, rather they obtained it through luck and use of political manoeuvres. Although the authors identify five categories, they indicate that the first category (i.e. destructive leadership) is the most frequently mentioned and also the most unethical form of negative leadership. They also point out that

destructive leadership is similar to the abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007); despotic, exploitative and insincere leadership (Schilling, 2009); derailed leadership (Einarsen et al., 2007); strategic bullying (Ferris, Zinko, Brouer, Buckley, & Harvey, 2007); and toxic leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 2005) in terms of its conceptual definition.

Like Karakitapoğlu-Aygün and Gumusluoglu (2013), Lu, Ling, Wu, and Liu (2012) examined the content and structure of destructive leadership with data gathered from Chinese employees. The results of the survey revealed that destructive leadership consists of four distinct dimensions: (1) corruption, (2) excoriation of followers, (3) abuse of followers and (4) the loss of professional morality. The corruption dimension includes behaviours violating the legitimate interests of the organization through using entrusted power for personal interests. Reflecting the core of destructive leadership, corruption involves cheating, receiving bribes, using company property for personal affairs and abuse of power for personal gain. The second dimension, 'excoriation on subordinates', mostly reflects exploitation and oppression of subordinates by forcing them to work excessively, showing no empathy toward their problems, and being unjustifiably demanding. Abuse of subordinates, the third dimension reported by Lu et al. (2012), resembles tyrannical leadership of Ashforth (1994). Abuse of subordinates refers to all sorts of 'aggressive behaviours to intervene and undermine the work and life of subordinates', including forcing subordinates to leave the organization, attacking them through insults, interfering with their relationships, engaging in discriminatory actions and taking revenge on subordinates. The last dimension, 'the loss of professional morality', reflects the unethical behaviours of the leaders by creating in-group out-group distinctions, showing autocratic and self-centered/egocentric behaviours. Lu et al. (2012) indicated that the content and structure of destructive leadership in the Chinese context resembles the model of Einarsen et al. (2007) and the research on abusive supervision conducted by Tepper (2000). The researchers pointed out that the corruption dimension in their study and anti-organization behaviours in Einarsen et al.'s model (2007) both violate the legitimate interests of the organization and thereby reflect the negative side of leadership. Additionally, *excoriation on subordinates and abuse of subordinates dimensions are akin to* anti-subordinate behaviours detailed by Einarsen et al. (2007) and Tepper (2007) as they involve maltreatment of the subordinates. However, Lu et al. (2012) indicate that the Chinese conceptualization of destructive leadership is different from the conceptualization of the aforementioned researchers as it includes the loss of professional morality and passive forms of anti-subordinate behaviours, such as showing no empathy toward subordinates and being excessively demanding.

Thoroughgood, Tate, Sawyer, and Jacobs (2012) developed an inventory of destructive behaviours using inductive and deductive methods from data obtained from the United States. The researchers revealed a three-factor structure: subordinate-directed, organization-directed and sexual harassment behaviours. Subordinate-directed destructive leadership is argued to be closely related to the concepts that are discussed within the framework of destructive leadership. These concepts are listed as abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007), petty tyranny (Ashforth,

1994), supervisor undermining (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002) and laissez-faire leadership. Unlike previous studies, subordinate-directed destructive leadership entails not only non-physical and non-severe forms of behaviours (i.e. management-by-exception, laissez-faire) but also physical and severe forms of behaviours (i.e. petty tyranny, supervisor undermining) targeting the subordinates. The organization-directed destructive leadership involves all forms of rule or norm-violating behaviours that are at odds with the legitimate interests of the company. Although it seems like a subordinate-directed destructive behaviour, Thoroughgood et al. (2012) conceptualize sexual harassment as a distinct category, given the fact that sexual harassment is more rare and severe. The researchers accept that their findings may not be generalizable to other cultures, noting that individuals from high power distance societies could be more tolerant of tyrannical or despotic leader behaviours because they tend to accept and expect the inequality between leaders and followers.

In another study conducted in Chile (Aravena, 2019), the teachers labelled their principals as destructive leaders if they exhibited autocratic leadership, communicated poorly with the teachers, showed inconsistent/erratic behaviours and had poor strategic skills. In-depth interviews with teachers revealed that school principals showing attributes particular to autocratic leaders (i.e. acting in a dominant, abusive and oppressive way) violate the interest of the organization by putting self-interests ahead of the organization. Such selfish behaviours were regarded as the most common and prevalent form of destructive leadership by the participants. The other frequently cited dimensions of destructive leadership were having poor communication with followers and showing inconsistent/erratic behaviours such as showing reactive rather than proactive supervision and making slow or poor decisions. The last and least frequently mentioned dimension of destructive leadership reflected leaders' inability to focus on relevant tasks, thereby losing the direction of the organization. Aravena (2019) states that the conceptualization of destructive leadership in the Chilean setting is similar to the conceptualization and dimensions (i.e. autocratic behaviour, poor communication, an inability to deal with subordinates, poor ethics, an inability to use technology, inconsistent/erratic behaviour, poor interpersonal behaviour, micro-management, poor personal behaviour, excessive political behaviour, lack of strategic skills) used by Erickson, Shaw, and Agabe (2007) and Shaw, Erickson, and Harvey (2011) to measure the incompetence of the leaders.

Conclusion

The extant literature reveals that some cultural dimensions (i.e. power distance and collectivism) might create an institutional framework where questioning the behaviour of leaders is difficult. When the power of leaders within the organization is strong and being a member of the organization is very important for followers, the followers tend to act according to group consensus and adhere to their leaders' decisions (Kurtulmuş, 2017). In such an institutional framework, most of the time the leader's unconstructive behaviours and inappropriate

decisions are not even questioned. This negative situation could be further exacerbated when the leader has characteristics of a dark leader, such as narcissism, Machiavellianism or psychopathy. In this sense, more country-specific studies are needed to uncover the relationship between destructive leadership and various contextual factors including philosophical–religious systems and cultural characteristics. However, as [Dickson et al. \(2012\)](#) noted, one should be careful about these country-specific studies as they often use models and measures developed in North America, which restrict the applicability of theories and concepts in the rest of the world where there are different cultural norms and institutional frameworks.

The existence and the negative impact of destructive leaders on organizations and followers could be alleviated, if not eliminated, by creating a stronger organizational culture. In this vein, the awareness of individuals could be raised regarding the possible effects of national culture in inducing negative leader behaviours or making societies more tolerant of unethical and destructive leaders. Such an awareness could be a good starting point for designing leadership programs. Besides raising awareness, writing down a code of ethics restricting the effects of dark leadership traits and behaviours could be a viable solution for tackling destructive leaders.

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Chapter 16

Gender and Destructive Leadership: An Examination of Follower Perceptions

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Abstract

For many years, researchers from management, psychology, sociology, and other disciplines have studied not only the differences that gender makes in the style of managers' leadership but also how the gender of the subordinates affects their perceptions about the different behavior of male and female leaders. Those studies mostly focused on gender and constructive leadership styles, thus neglecting potential destructive aspects of leadership. Therefore, this chapter aims to understand the relationship between men and women and the observations of employees regarding the destructive leadership behaviors of both male and female managers. The results of the study, which was conducted with 130 participants who have been working under different managers, highlight several issues and interpret them in terms of the different psychological and sociological theories and models.

Keywords: Gender; destructive leadership; gender of follower; gender of a leader; abusive supervision; toxic leadership

Introduction

Contemporary research on gender in leadership has been focused on two inter-related approaches. Initially, some scholars were interested in the gender of a leader. Although researchers proposed that gender may act as a personality variable and lead to different leadership styles, some studies revealed gender to be a significant factor when it comes to constructive leadership (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen 2003; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Rosener, 1990), while others did not. (Bass, 1990; Dobbins & Platz, 1986).

Historically, scholars have devoted considerable attention to gender differences in constructive leadership but neglected the role of gender on destructive leadership. Destructive leadership is defined in different forms, but generally,

studies rely on leader behaviors (Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007). However, some followers may regard the behavior of a leader as destructive, whereas others consider the same behavior to be constructive (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Supporting this view, Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) proposed the “toxic triangle” model. This model suggests that destructive leadership includes different components, namely leaders, susceptible followers, and a conducive environment. The first component expresses the characteristics of the destructive leaders. The susceptible follower component emphasizes the needs of the followers, and in this context, the followers’ perceptions can identify whether the leaders are considered destructive (Chua & Murray, 2015; Padilla et al., 2007). Most scholars accept the conducive environment component as referring to the interactions between the leader and the followers (Padilla et al., 2007).

Based on the model of Padilla et al. (2007), this chapter aims to discover the relationship between a manager’s gender and the subordinates’ perception of their destructive leadership behavior and understand the degree to which the gender dissimilarity between managers and subordinates affects the subordinates’ perception of destructive leadership. Therefore, this chapter first reviews the gender and destructive leadership literature, then presents the research results, and tries to interpret them in accordance with the results of previous studies.

Theories about Gender and Leadership

The difference between men and women has been argued about for quite a long time. Some researchers emphasize the differences in almost every aspect, such as thinking, behaving, communicating, perceiving, and feeling as if they belong to different worlds (Dindia & Canary, 2009). In this vein, gender role theory and stereotypes (Eagly, 1987) are mainly used to explain the role of gender in leadership. Gender refers to the social categories of male and female, which include a set of psychological features and roles (Helgeson, 2012) that have been assigned to the biological category of sex by society. Gender role theory (Eagly, 1987) assumes that, due to the gender-specific roles and behavioral expectations, male characteristics are focused on agentic qualities such as being aggressive, independent, competitive, dominant, strong, ambitious, successful, rational, nonemotional, and direct. Female characteristics, however, are focused on communal qualities such as being more expressive, supportive, facilitative, egalitarian, cooperative, attractive, thoughtful, unaggressive, emotional, nurturing, concerned with people, and sharing more personally with others. The result of a study conducted in 110 countries has shown that parents exert greater pressure on boys to be self-reliant and to strive for achievement, whereas the pressure on girls is to be nurturant and responsible (Ember, 1970), consistent with gender role expectations (Aries, 2002; Dindia & Canary, 2009). Thus, work and leadership roles are assigned to men, while family and domestic roles are assigned to women. In this sense, traditional gender role expectations could be associated with the behavior of a leader and the perceptions of followers.

Furthermore, Eagly and Karau (2002) argue that stereotypes, which reflect “beliefs about the features of the biological or psychological categories of male and female” (Helgeson, 2012), may also affect the individual’s perception in two ways. First, individuals may view a female leader less favorably than a male one as she is perceived to lack the desired agentic qualities for a leadership position. Second, if a female leader *does* demonstrate agentic leadership qualities, this may be seen as conflicting with the traditional female gender role.

Perception of Destructive Leadership: The Gender of the Leader

Among the dark sides of leadership, Einarsen et al. (2007) has defined destructive leadership as “the systematic and repeated behaviors by a leader, supervisor or manager that violate the legitimate interest of the organization by undermining and/or sabotaging the organization’s goals, tasks, resources and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of subordinates.” It includes many different concepts of leadership such as laissez-faire (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939), abusive (Tepper, 2000), aversive (French & Raven, 1959), narcissistic (Brunell, Gentry, Campbell, & Kuhnert, 2006), toxic (Lipman-Blumen, 2005), and tyrannical (Ashforth, 1994). In this chapter, rather than accepting destructive leadership as a unitary form, each concept is considered.

Given the role of the gender on work life, some previous studies have reported that the gender of the leader may influence the perception of followers. Women and men are expected to engage in behaviors that are consistent with their gender role. However, when the individual in a position of leadership displays behaviors that are incongruent with their gender roles, it is considered by some to be a violation (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992), which may influence the perception of followers. For instance, Heilman and Okimoto (2007) have shown that female leaders are evaluated more negatively than male leaders, being perceived as more hostile than men and less suited to being a leader. Hogue and Lord (2007) also argue that women who display agentic leadership behavior are seen as possessing a certain ambiguity. This assessment leads to a negative perception of her, decreasing her suitability as a leader in the eyes of her followers. Similarly, in Williams and Tiedens’s (2016) meta-analysis on gender differences in leadership, results reveal that male leaders who show agentic leadership behavior are viewed as competent, whereas female leaders who demonstrate comparable agentic and dominant behaviors are likely to provoke and are therefore viewed as less likeable.

In line with gender role expectations, it is also assumed that men are more aggressive and more egoistic than women, while women are more nurturant than men. Partially supporting this stereotype, extensive evidence from meta-analyses of research on gender differences conducted by Hyde (2005) concludes that gender difference in aggression is moderate in degree. Also, recent studies demonstrate that men have more of a tendency to display aggressive behaviors in organizations (Gonzalez-Mulé, DeGeest, Kiersch, & Mount, 2013). Many experimental studies of adult aggression of males and females show that the differences are related to

the normative expectations that society holds for the role of each gender (Gonzalez-Mulé et al., 2013). Campbell and Muncer (2008) demonstrate that males show aggressive behaviors to gain power or dominate a situation. Therefore, it can be expected that male leaders are perceived as more aggressive than female leaders.

Similarly, studies examining gender differences among leaders showing narcissistic traits report that female leaders were less effective than males. Most probably, narcissistic female leaders demonstrate qualities like an inflated sense of self-importance, ruthlessness, dominance, insensitivity, and lack of empathy, which conflict with the gender role of a woman (De Hoogh, Den Hartog, & Neveicka, 2015).

However, Thoroughgood, Hunter, and Sawyer (2011) focused on the follower perceptions and reactions to aversive leadership. As the aversive leadership is mainly based on coercive power, Thoroughgood et al.'s (2011) findings reveal that female aversive leaders were considered more aversive than their male counterparts. Moreover, the poor performance of female leaders results in more negative perceptions than male leaders with a negative performance.

Perception of Destructive Leadership: Gender of the Follower and the Gender Similarity between Leader and Follower

It is suggested that the gender of the subordinate is a significant predictor of the perception of workplace aggression. It is revealed that women are more sensitive to hostile work environments, and female employees can perceive higher extents of workplace mistreatment compared to male employees (McCord, Joseph, Dhanani, & Beus, 2018; Tepper, 2007; Vance, Ensher, Hendricks, & Harris, 2004). By using the qualitative and quantitative methods, Atwater et al. (2016) report that abusive supervision increased work and job withdrawal via the negative emotional reactions of subordinates. However, this effect is moderated by the gender of subordinates. When lower levels of negative emotional reactions to abusive supervision are demonstrated, female employees have a greater tendency to display work withdrawal behaviors than men. This finding may suggest that, as women are more likely to take criticism more personally, they may be more affected by lower levels of abuse and lower level of emotions. Similarly, the study findings of Wang, Jiang, Yang, and Shing Chan (2016) indicate that when employees perceive abusive supervision, women reported higher levels of emotional exhaustion and intention to leave the organization than men. Drawing on the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu, & Westman, 2018), it is argued that abusive supervision might be a signal of a poor subordinate and superior relationship, which may accelerate the perceived stress and the feeling of loss. Thus, it may lead to more psychological reactions, particularly for women (Wang et al., 2016).

Chua and Murray (2015) examined the gender differences with respect to toxic leaders, drawing on a sample of 381 employed participants. Their results indicate that women perceive the toxic leader more negatively than men. Similarly, Singh,

Dev, and Sengupta (2017) report that female subordinates are more perceptive to toxicity in their leaders. Authors also state that as women tend to process the information in detail, they seem to be more sensitive and affected by negative messages than men (Chua & Murray, 2015; Singh et al., 2017).

Additionally, Chua and Murray (2015) demonstrate that the gender of the toxic leader affects the subordinates' perception of them, through information processing. It is assumed that individuals have a predisposition toward viewing members of the same sex as competition. Such a predisposition may lead to perceiving the same-sex leader more negatively. Specifically, female employees elaborate more on the negative nuances when the leader is female rather than male.

When gender-stereotypic behavior expectations that call for solidarity between female employees and their female managers fail, it is labeled as "Queen Bee" for women in management. The Queen Bee phenomenon focuses on the negative relationship between those females, blaming the female manager for not supporting other women to reach senior management positions while evaluating them as aggressive. Some researchers assert that although women are as competitive as men, they direct this behavior toward other women (Mavin, 2008). However, some others argue that many female employees undermine the authority of women, as they believe that men should be in the positions of authority. Therefore, as women employees expect their female managers to be motherlike and more nurturant than men, they tend to behave toward them as a woman, while they react to male managers as bosses, considering them more suitable for these positions (Mavin, 2008). It is interesting that female employees appear to accept senior men helping other men to rise into management positions using social networks, even though the women themselves are equally qualified. Despite this, they do not complain about the injustice. Thus, based on the assumption that female employees label their senior women leaders as Queen Bees, they might judge their leadership behavior to be more destructive than that of senior men.

Recently, Taftaf (2018) examined supervisor and subordinate gender and gender similarity in the dyad between them, in terms of perception of abusive supervision from a Turkish sample. Study results revealed that male participants perceive higher levels of abusive leadership compared to female participants. Moreover, different from previous findings, it is found that female participants perceive female supervisors as more abusive, whereas male respondents perceive male supervisors as more abusive. Based on the study findings, Taftaf (2018) supports Green, Anderson, and Shivers's (1996) view, which asserts that gender similarity does not predict the high-quality relationship between superior and subordinate.

However, Tepper, Moss, and Duffy (2011) emphasize the demographic dissimilarity in the context of abusive supervision. Individuals are inclined to be more positive toward the others who display a greater similarity with themselves, while they might be more aggressive toward others who display a lesser similarity. Similarly, in their meta-analytic study, Zhang and Bednall (2016) demonstrate that gender dissimilarity is positively related to the perception of abusive supervision.

This findings remind the similarity–attraction theory (Byrne, 1971), which describes the tendency of individuals to be attracted to others who are similar to themselves (Ruijten, 2020). Different factors can affect one’s perceptions of similarity and dissimilarity with other individuals, and in this regard, gender is one of the most visible demographic factors. Thus, similarity–attraction theory might also predict demographic dissimilarity in the setting of abusive supervision.

Addressing narcissistic leadership specifically, De Hoogh, Den Hartog, and Nevicka (2015) – based on a sample of 145 manager–subordinate dyads – report that male subordinates evaluate female narcissistic leaders more negatively, as highly narcissistic female leaders violate the gender role expectations. However, female employees do not have any gender bias in evaluating the effectiveness of narcissistic leaders.

Considering the insufficient and conflicting results of previous studies, this research aims to discover the relationship between gender and destructive leadership behavior, together with the gender dissimilarities of managers and subordinates and the latter’s perception of destructive leadership.

Method

The data gathered were from 130 participants who have been experiencing subordinate–leader relationships, of whom 39.8 % were male and 60.2 % were female. In forming a measurement tool, the computer-based indexing tool was used. The widely used scales related to destructive leadership behaviors such as “toxic leadership” (developed by Schmidt, 2008), “abusive supervision” (developed by Tepper, 2000), and destructive leadership researches (such as Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013 and Einarsen et al., 2007) were used in framing the text. In the text mining process, stop words such as “the,” “at,” “and,” “or” were excluded from the indexing system. Thirty-nine behaviors were obtained.

After determining the keywords, the measurement statements were formed using them for both female and male managers. Sample items included “Male managers humiliate his subordinates/Female managers humiliate her subordinates” and “Male managers belittled his subordinates/Female managers belittled her subordinates.” Participants were asked to rate their degree of agreement using a 5-point Likert-type scale format, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” A higher score indicates a higher level of destructive leadership behavior.

Findings

Prior to the factorial evaluation, the data were analyzed according to managers’ (leaders) and participants’ (subordinates) gender. The destructive leadership score is based on the average number of items of destructive behavior assigned to each gender. Results revealed the overall mean score of male destructive leadership to be higher than that of the female score ($M = 3.73$ to $M = 3.35$, respectively). In order to analyze whether there are any differences regarding participants’ gender

in their evaluation of female and male managers' destructive behaviors, t-test was performed. The result indicates that women participants evaluated the male managers' destructive behaviors significantly higher ($t(128) = 1.706, p < 0.05$) ($M = 3.75$) than those of female managers ($M = 3.58$). However, no differences were found in respect to subordinates' gender in the assessment of female managers' destructive leadership.

After the overall assessment of the data, a principal component analysis with a varimax rotation was carried out to explore the possible structure of the destructive leadership behaviors. Different models with two-, three-, four-, or five-factor solutions were tried in turn, and the three-factor model seemed to be the best in terms of its simplified and conceptually accurate loading pattern. The model explained 65 % of the variance and verified the distinctiveness of factors.

The first factor was named as "abusive supervision" and composed of 18 items that are related to hostile behaviors toward subordinates such as humiliating, ignoring, lying, blaming, mistrusting, and belittling. The factor loadings ranged between 0.58 and 0.91. The second factor was labeled as "tyranny in management," with 12 items that are describing destructive managerial practices such as disempowering, restricting, manipulating, coercing subordinates, and not taking responsibilities or not adapting to new situations and developing new managerial skills. The factor loadings of items ranged between 0.62 and 0.97. The third factor was loaded by nine items, reflecting anti-organizational behaviors like theft, absenteeism, swindling, and other unethical behaviors in organizations. This factor was therefore labeled as "anti-organizational behaviors," and the factor loadings ranged between 0.65 and 0.93. Table 16.1 indicates the Cronbach's α values and correlation coefficients of the factors. The correlations between the factors ranged from 0.55 to 0.80. Cronbach's α values were found to be 0.81, 0.83, and 0.89 for female and 0.82, 0.79, and 0.88 for male abusive supervision, tyranny in management, and anti-organizational behaviors, respectively.

Fig. 16.1 demonstrates that all participants' responses – regardless of gender – indicate that male managers' abusive supervision, tyranny in management, and anti-organizational behaviors are perceived as being higher than the female managers' destructive leadership behaviors. Specifically, 74.4% of all participants deemed male managers' supervision to be abusive, compared to 66.2% who viewed female leaders in the same way.

Similarly, participants perceived tyranny on the part of managers and anti-organizational behaviors to be higher among male managers than female managers. Over 75% of all participants viewed male management as tyrannical, while this is around 70% for female managers. Likewise, male managers are perceived as having more anti-organizational behaviors (72.6%) than their female counterparts (64.2%).

When these results were analyzed with respect to the gender of the subordinates (Fig. 16.2), it could be seen that the destructive leadership of managers of the different genders is perceived differently. Specifically, female subordinates perceived male managers as more abusive (75%) and tyrannical (77%), whereas male subordinates perceived female managers as more abusive (70.2%) and tyrannical (73.6%).

Table 16.1. Cronbach's α Values and Correlation Coefficients of the Destructive Leadership Subfactors.

	Female (abusive supervision)	Female (tyranny in management)	Female (anti-organizational)	Male (abusive supervision)	Male (tyranny in management)	Male (anti-organizational)
Female (abusive supervision)	(0.81)					
Female (tyranny in management)	0.78	(0.83)				
Female (anti-organizational)	0.67	0.74	(0.89)			
Male (abusive supervision)	0.80	0.59	0.65	(0.82)		
Male (tyranny in management)	0.55	0.79	0.69	0.58	(0.79)	
Male (anti-organizational)	0.64	0.68	0.78	0.64	0.69	(0.88)

Note: The values in the diagonal are Cronbach's α values.

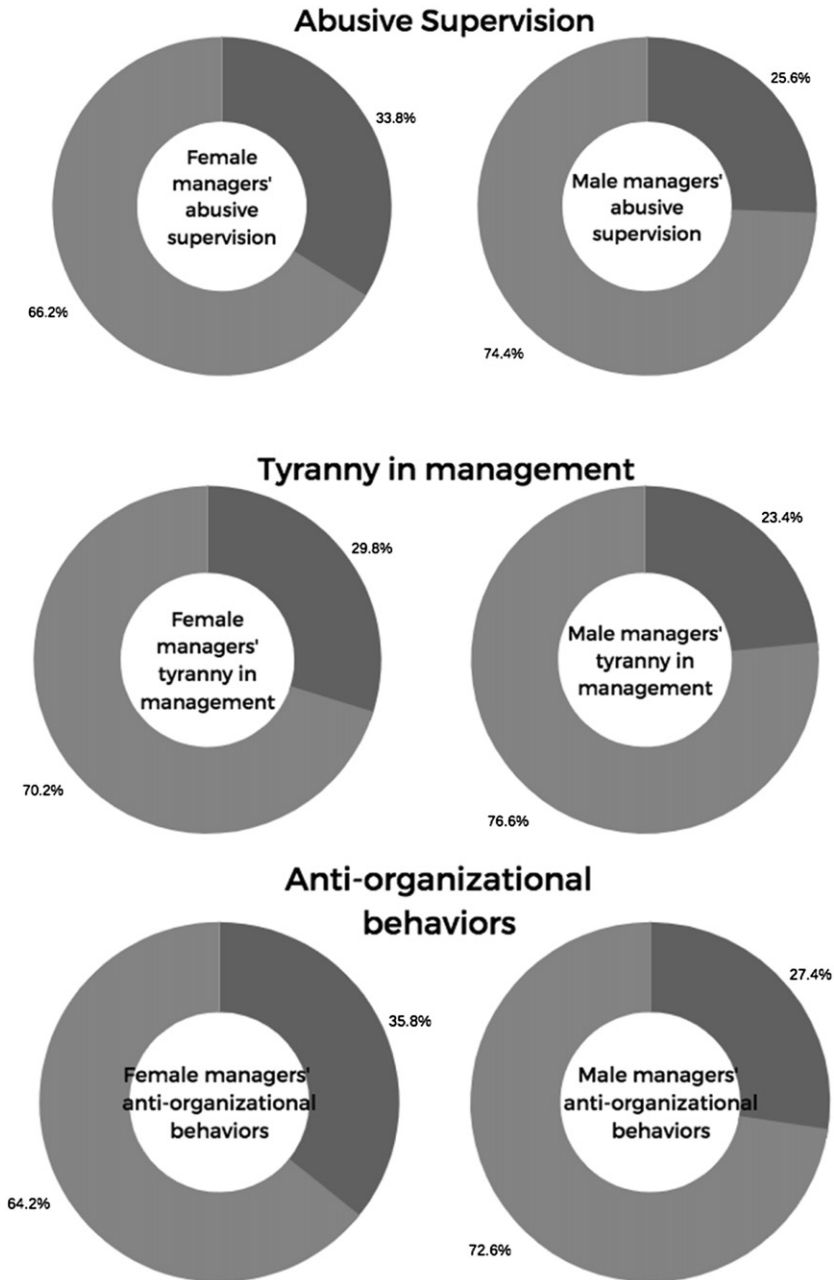


Fig. 16.1. The Percentage of Perceptions on Female and Male Managers' Destructive Leadership Behaviors.

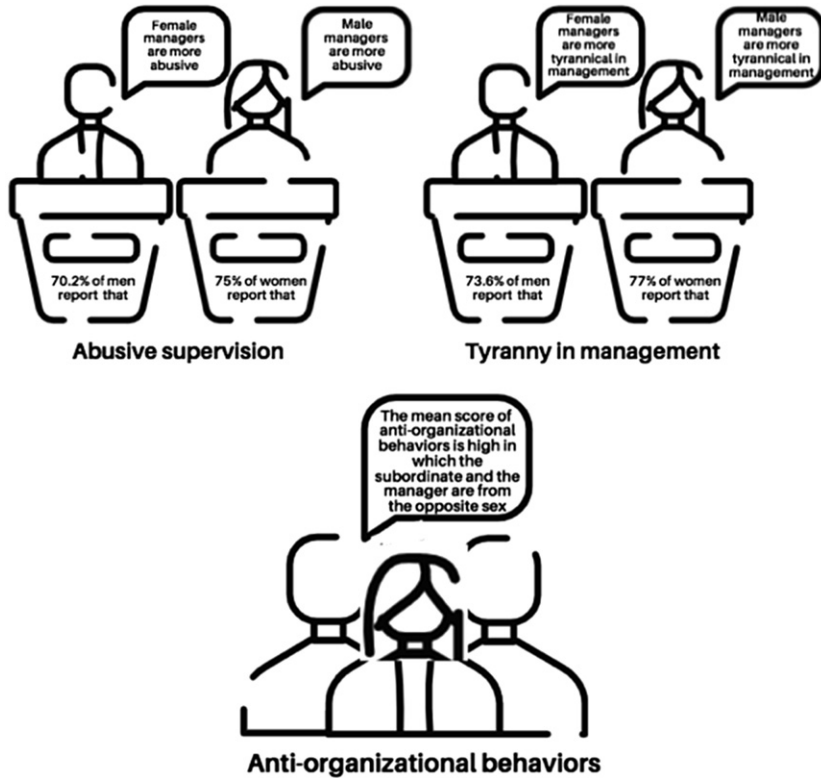


Fig. 16.2. Female and Male Subordinates' Perception Differences of Male and Female Managers' Destructive Leadership Behaviors.

The results revealed that both female and male subordinates who participated in this study consider female and male managers' abusive supervision and tyrannical behaviors in management significantly differently from each other. Table 16.2 indicates that female managers' abusive supervision is perceived differently by male and female subordinates ($t(128) = 1.621, p < 0.05$), in which men perceived female managers more abusive ($M = 3.51$) than women did ($M = 3.23$). However, for male managers' abusive behaviors, there is a significant difference between men and women ($t(128) = 0.493, p < 0.05$). Women perceive male managers' abusive supervision higher than men do, the figures being $M = 3.75$ and $M = 3.45$, respectively.

Moreover, men perceived female managers as highly tyrannical in management ($M = 3.68$), and this is significantly different ($t(128) = 1.541, p < 0.05$) from the perceptions of female subordinates ($M = 3.44$). Conversely, female subordinates ($M = 3.85$), compared to male ($M = 3.60$), evaluated the male managers' tyranny in management significantly ($t(128) = 1.312, p < 0.05$) higher than that of female managers.

Table 16.2. Mean Difference of Male and Female Destructive Leadership Behaviors According to Female and Male Subordinates.

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
	<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>T</i>	df	Sig. (2-Tailed)	Mean Difference
Female (abusive supervision)	4.769	0.231	1.621	128	0.017	0.2790
Male (abusive supervision)	0.010	0.919	0.493	128	0.023	0.2984
Female (tyranny in management)	1.871	0.174	1.541	128	0.026	0.2425
Male (tyranny in management)	0.040	0.843	1.312	128	0.046	0.2557
Female (anti-organizational)	5.941	0.416	1.833	128	0.769	0.0780
Male (anti-organizational)	0.387	0.535	0.266	128	0.791	0.0481

Finally, when it comes to seeking to establish whether there is a link between gender and anti-organizational behaviors of managers, the following can be observed. Although there are not any statistically significant differences, the mean score of male participants' perceptions on female managers' anti-organizational behaviors ($M = 3.40$ for men and $M = 3.33$ for women) and the mean score of female participants' perceptions on male managers' anti-organizational behaviors ($M = 3.60$ for men and $M = 3.64$ for women) are higher compared to opposite-sex scores.

Conclusion

This study attempts to investigate the significance of gender within destructive leadership behavior. The results of the study address several issues and can be interpreted in terms of the subordinates' and managers' gender. The findings can be grouped into three categories: (1) all subordinates' overall evaluations about the destructive leadership behaviors of the managers under whom they have worked, (2) male and female subordinates' perceptions about the female and male managers' destructive leadership behavior, and (3) evaluations of the dimensional structure of destructive leadership in terms of the gender of both the participant subordinates and the leaders themselves.

First of all, the mean scores in the study indicate that all participant subordinates, regardless of their gender, perceive male and female managers' leadership behavior as mostly destructive (specifically, abusive, tyrannical, and anti-organizational). This interpretation is based on the perceived failures to meet the requirements of the job description of a manager and manage effectively (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). The reason for the similar behavior of male and female managers might be the result of holding a position of power. Managers have authority to make decisions regarding their subordinates and direct them, especially in countries that are commonly characterized as high power distance cultures like Turkey, where this study was conducted. Hofstede (1980) describes power distance as the degree to which individuals accept the inequalities of power in the society. In high power distance cultures, managers have unlimited power and control over subordinates, and in turn, subordinates have an unquestioning, submissive attitude (Khatri, 2009). Thus, when power is used legitimately by those at the top of the power structure, individuals rarely question them (Wang & Nayir, 2010). As managers do not feel the need to justify and defend their decisions or behaviors to the subordinates, unethical behavior gets covered up or goes undetected (Khatri, 2009). Moreover, employees who are from high power distance cultures may expect autocratic behavior from their managers (McFarlin & Coget, 2013).

However, although male and female subordinates perceive the leadership behavior of both male and female managers to be destructive, the findings reveal that those perceptions differ significantly, depending on the gender of the managers. Women (as opposed to their male counterparts) perceive male managers' destructive behavior as higher than the female managers. The similarity-attraction theory can be put forward as one of the possible explanations for this finding. People like others when they perceive that they have many things in common. Based on the theory, many study results indicate that perceived similarity affects liking (Seidman, 2018). This result of the study can also be interpreted by social identity theory, which focuses on intergroup relations and self-conceptualization in intergroup context (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to this theory, similar individuals (e.g., in terms of demographic characteristics) share similar values and expectations and form an in-group, while they view others as the out-group (Park, Carter, DeFrank, & Deng, 2018). Gender, as a relevant demographic feature to personal identity, represents a crucial base for evaluations of similarity. Foley, Linnehan, Greenhaus, and Weer (2006) report that followers who have gender-similar supervisors expect to have more support and favorable treatment from them, which leads to positive perceptions on gender-similar leaders and vice versa. Consistently, the current study shows that female subordinates' perceptions of the destructive behavior of male managers are higher than and different from the assessment of the male subordinates. Although there is no consensus concerning the impact of gender dissimilarity/similarity on leadership perceptions, these results extend the empirical findings. We also find that there is no significant difference between men and women's perceptions of female managers' destructive leadership behavior. One reason for this absence of the subordinates' gender difference in

evaluating female leaders is the low level of mean score of female managers' destructive leadership, compared to male managers. This result is similar to some previous study findings (e.g., [Gonzalez-Mulé et al., 2013](#); [Glass & Cook, 2018](#)) where researchers proposed that male managers are considered by subordinates to be more aggressive and destructive, while female ones are perceived as being more compassionate, sensitive, and caring. Thus, even if the gender dissimilarity is accurate in the destructive leadership concerns, participants of both sexes consider female managers to be less destructive. In other words, it seems that female managers' behavior is perceived in accordance with the gender-stereotypic expectations. It can be claimed that this result indicates that the gender differences in leadership style may be in part due to the early socialization effects on core values that shape behavior.

Another finding demonstrates the dimensional structure of destructive leadership and explores these dimensions in relation to gender. Abusive supervision, tyranny in management, and anti-organizational behaviors are found as the subcategories of destructive leadership, which are mentioned in some conceptual studies (e.g., [Einarsen et al., 2007](#); [Krasikova et al., 2013](#)) but need further research to be defined empirically. In essence, the findings suggest that participants perceived opposite-sex managers as more abusive and tyrannical in management. Unlike in the second set of findings, which posit no difference on male and female participants' assessment about female managers' destructiveness, male subordinates are also found to have highly negative perceptions regarding the abusiveness and tyranny of female managers. However, no significant difference is found for anti-organizational behaviors in terms of subordinate–manager gender. These findings can be interpreted in the light of destructive leadership behaviors toward both subordinates and the larger organizations ([Einarsen et al., 2007](#)). This would suggest that, while the subordinate–manager gender dissimilarity is effective in the perceptions of destructive behavior toward the subordinates, it is not so in the assessments of negative behavior toward the organization. Furthermore, these results highlight that the destructive leadership is a broad and inclusive concept and the role of subordinate–manager gender dissimilarity changes according to subconstructs.

The limitations of this study should be considered. First of all, it is just a demonstration of frequencies and percentages in terms of destructive leadership behaviors and gender. Secondly, the data collected were exclusively from subordinates. Superiors may well evaluate the behaviors of a leader quite differently. [Einarsen et al. \(2007\)](#) have highlighted that while the subordinates view the managers' leadership behavior as destructive, the upper management may view them as constructive overall and therefore be disposed to tolerate some of the destructive behaviors.

In sum, this chapter emphasizes that gender is an important variable in explaining the destructive leadership. It can be suggested that for a better understanding of the relationship between destructive leadership and gender, a multidimensional structure of destructiveness would need to be examined.

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Chapter 17

The Dark Side of Nonprofit Leadership: Cases, Causes, and Consequences

Marco Tavanti and Anna Tait

Abstract

This chapter reviews ethical challenges confronting nonprofit administration in relation to organizational managerial practices and leadership behaviors. Through a theoretical model of nonprofit-specific toxic leadership, it reviews the dynamics of destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments in cases of unethical and corrupt nonprofit organizational behaviors. It provides a case for prioritizing oversight responsibilities of the board of directors, board supervision, promoting ethical culture in organizational leadership, and implementing policies for addressing destructive and corrupt nonprofit leaders. It reflects on how nonprofit toxic leadership primarily erodes public trust in the nonprofit sector and concludes with practical recommendations for recentring positive behaviors congruent with the nonprofit's social and public good mission.

Keywords: Nonprofit ethics; toxic leadership; unethical cases; nonprofit organizations; destructive leaders; conducive environments

Introduction

Leadership has become crucial in the study of public, private, and nonprofit organizations (NPOs) facing volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Elkington, Van der Steege, & Glick, 2017). Yet, most of the studies focus on “good” and “inspiring” leadership examples ignoring the lessons that can be learned from “bad leaders” or “dark,” “toxic,” and “unethical” leadership practices (Higgs, 2009). Since the beginning of leadership research in the twentieth century (King, 1990), a significant quantity of empirical research has been conducted, supporting the strong correlation between constructive leadership styles and positive organizational outcomes (Ko, Ma, Bartnik, Haney, & Kang, 2018). As a result, leadership education is often one sided and fails to address the negative

aspects of leadership and management. Establishing an understanding of the theoretical concepts surrounding constructive leadership practices is important, however, since there has been a historical prevalence of leaders who have abused positions of authority and inflicted indescribable damage and harm to their nations, organizations, companies, and communities (Brown & Mitchell, 2010), and it justifies the need for a greater understanding of the “dark side” within leadership and management education.

Throughout “dark side” literature, various terms have been utilized to describe a variety of unethical leadership behaviors including “toxic,” “destructive,” “tyrannical,” “abusive,” and “dysfunctional” behaviors (Monahan, 2012). A growing body of empirical research discusses the characteristics of unethical leadership; nonetheless, narratives of “destructive” or “toxic” leadership concepts are given increasing attention. Reviews of empirical literature have identified no substantial distinctions between destructive and unethical leadership (Lašáková & Remišová, 2015). Unethical leadership combines both violations of ethical principles and legislative rules and infiltrates beyond the leaders’ own actions, encouraging and manipulating others to engage in unethical conduct (Lašáková & Remišová, 2015). It can be argued that destructive leadership is unethical, and unethical leadership is destructive (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). The “dark side” of leadership manifests within all sectors of society, and toxic leaders are a painful but common reality within many organizations (Tavanti, 2011). Throughout this chapter, we use “toxic,” “destructive,” “bad,” and “unethical” to describe the manifestations of the “dark side” of leadership within the nonprofit sector.

NPOs are not exempt from “bad” examples of leadership. In spite of the good purpose of nature of their diverse missions in society, the nonprofit sector reflects similar corruptions and dysfunctionalities of other organizations and agencies in business and government but with a notable expectation. Their “doing good” mission and reputation is a more vivid contrast with “bad actions” of some leaders generating obvious contradictions, ugly scandals, and threatened public trust. Nonprofits promote grassroots economic development, deliver human services, protect civil rights, prevent environmental degradation, and serve many other objectives that were previously wholly unaddressed or abandoned by the state (Salamon, 1994). Yet, the more competitive and unreliable mechanisms to secure resources contrasted by the higher demands for diminishing administrative costs and increasing impact reporting have generated organizational contexts vulnerable to employee burnout, mission creeps, starvation cycles, and leadership abuses (Raymond, Walker, & Sheehan, 2012). However, the “mission impossible” of many NPOs is no excuse for unethical leadership behaviors, which undermines the very core of public trust. The success of an NPO in surviving in a competitive sector and achieving its mission depends on strong ethical leadership and an aligned culture that allows the organization to fulfill its mission and ultimately thrive. The National Council for Nonprofits observes that

America’s charitable nonprofits rely on the public trust to do their work. That is why it is so important that charitable nonprofits

continuously earn the public's trust through their commitment to ethical principles, transparency, and accountability. (National Council of Nonprofits, n.d.-a)

Ethical behavior is fundamental for any leader, organization, and sector, but the nonprofit–social sector ethics is imperative as the sector itself represents the good of the society. Recurring scandals with unethical, corrupt, and toxic leadership damage the good reputation of the organizations, especially those – like most nonprofits – that have a mission to serve our communities and positively impact our society. Unfortunately, economic downturns and times of crises often favor moral meltdowns resulting in public scandals that can erode public confidence in nonprofits.

Given the mission-driven nature of NPOs in our society, it would also be assumed that self-interested individuals would choose to pursue careers in other sectors (LeClair, 2017). Sadly, not all NPOs and the people within them are truly dedicated to the greater good and neither is the nonprofit sector immune to destructive leadership. Destructive or “toxic” leaders are also present in the nonprofit sector and end up being one of the key systemic issues factoring ethical scandals in NPOs. Nonprofit toxic leaders represent a dark unethical practice as they further undermine the public trust in the sector and what it represents through its socially beneficial and impactful organizational missions. Toxicity undermines leader's mandates in organizations, their relations with subordinates, and the organizations' short- and long-term responsibilities with stakeholders and communities (Hitchcock, 2015). In other words, toxicity is examined here in its unethical aspect as well as in its consequences for the public trust invested in the organization's purpose, productivity, prosperity, and partnerships.

This chapter explores some unethical dynamics of nonprofit organizational leadership through the lenses of theoretical models for leadership behaviors and toxic leadership contexts. It reflects on the lessons learned from the various unethical nonprofit cases examined by the University of San Francisco's *Master of Nonprofit Administration* (MNA) graduate students (<https://usfblogs.usfca.edu/nonprofit/ethics/>). These cases provide some ethical analyses on the leadership and organizational governance shortfalls due to dynamics of criminal or negligent leaders, disengaged board governance, and lack of regulated environments. These dynamics are the basis for this chapter and the emerged cases, causes, and consequences generate important lessons and recommendations for promoting ethical nonprofit management and leadership practices in the sector.

The Consequence of Damaged Public Trust

The damages of toxic leadership and unethical behaviors in NPOs go beyond the loss of public money and the private corrupt and often illegal (sometimes criminal) appropriation of funds. The real damage is undermining public trust and delegitimizing the essential benefits that many (most) nonprofits provide to our

communities and societies. In other words, the real dark side of unethical nonprofit leadership is the erosion of public trust (Becker, Boenigk, & Willems, 2020).

Annually, these abusive individuals cost US businesses an estimated 23.8 billion dollars due to reduced productivity, employee absenteeism and turnover, and legal costs (Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006). A study by the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (2018), of both NPOs and for-profits, estimates that a typical organization expends 5% of its revenue to fraud each year. Asset misappropriations such as theft, misuse, and fraudulent disbursements were the most frequent, while financial statement frauds, including improper valuation or improper disclosure, were the costliest to an organization (Archambeault, Webber, & Greenlee, 2015).

Many cases of corruption within the nonprofit sector remain untold, while others are discovered only when publicly donated funds have been misused and the trust of the public is already lost. The well-known case of the United Way exemplifies misused donations for social and human service projects worldwide to fund William Aramony's extramarital affairs. Only following attentive investigative journalism efforts from The Washington Post and *Regardie's* magazine did the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Internal Revenue Service (IRS) initiate investigations of his leadership role at the charity (Shapiro, 2011). The investigation revealed later that the initial figures were a scratch on the surface and that \$1.3 million of philanthropic-public dollars had been utilized to pay for Mr. Aramony's romantic affair with a seventeen-year-old girl and additional benefit for himself and his friends (McFadden, 2011).

Corruption and scandals damage the public's trust in the sector often manifested through decreased support from traditional and generous donors (Brindle, 2019). NPOs rely heavily on the trust and generosity of members of the public who donate because their personal values are reflected in the organizational mission. The corruption and scandals for a few damage the reputation and capacity to perform of the many. Civil society scholars and practitioners maintain that NPOs are principal actors because their work is mission driven with the intention for the societal greater good (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). For this reason, NPOs are held by the community to higher moral standards than their corporate counterparts. Yet, the board of directors (BOD) of NPOs are complicit by not fully integrating these community voices and social accountability demands and, in turn, contributes to a sector-wide shortfall in sound governance, accountability, and transparency (Doig, 2006). With the common situation of many NPOs held to higher standards but with poor governance oversight, the sector is vulnerable to destructive individuals, who face few obstacles in establishing themselves in new or existing organizations. Numerous unethical nonprofit cases analyzed by the MNA program reveal a common factor in the BODs' lack of competency, diversity, and conflict of interests (COIs) often resulting in irresponsible lack of supervision on their duties toward the organization's mission, finance, and administration (usfblogs.usfca.edu, n.d.). The required structures of nonprofit boards have a primary duty to preserve and promote ethics as reflected in their good governance duties and their intent to impact identities (BoardSource, 2017).

Unfortunately, many enter the nonprofit sector with good intentions but without competent knowledge often resulting in unethical, ineffective, and unsustainable efforts.

The Cause of Weaker Regulatory Environment

In the last 20 years, several systemic and organizational factors influenced the weakening of a regulatory framework affecting the overall performance, sustainability, and ethical behaviors of nonprofits. At the systemic level, the shift to conservative government dominance in Western democracies in the 1980s, also known as the “Reagan-Thatcher era,” led to the downsizing of government and had several implications for the nonprofit sector (Feldstein, 2013). Firstly, there was a significant shift in service provisions as funding was withdrawn from tax-funded government-operated social services. NPOs were required to expand quickly through philanthropic resources, to meet the increasing demand for social services (Salamon, 1994). This rapid expansion would have required funding from governments, intergovernmental organizations, private foundations, and corporate sponsors (Dolšák, Parr, & Prackash, 2018). Yet, as power resides with those who hold financial resources (Tuan, 2004), the power dynamic between the funders and NPOs has led to the neglect of both sound governance practices and quality service delivery at NPOs. This generated situations of financial uncertainty for most NPOs often caught into a cycle of starvation, a diminishing of overhead expenses necessary to guarantee quality and generate social impact (Gregory & Howard, 2009; Pallotta, 2009). In spite of these systemic restrictions, governments remain reliant on NPOs to deliver social services through grants and contracts (Boris & Lott, 2017), and the funding structures and increasing competition for available funding have led to a sector-wide culture of “sweat equity”; staff members are underpaid and overworked to compensate for the abandoning of full-cost budgeting (Greco, 2018). In addition, the continual growth of the nonprofit sector creates significant challenges for the federal and state regulatory bodies responsible for the oversight of 1.5 million IRS-registered NPOs across the United States (McKeever, 2018). The capacity of regulatory bodies to identify and address malfeasance is a concerning factor as a weakened regulatory environment enables corruption, which threatens the sector (Boris & Steuerle, 1999).

At the organizational level, several factors have contributed to poor regulatory oversight of the nonprofit sector. Budget cuts and years of political disputes have greatly weakened the regulatory powers of the IRS. While the capacity of the IRS has been questioned, the role of state-level regulation and enforcement has been wholly under-recognized and under-resourced (Boris & Lott, 2017). While it seems evident that both federal and state-level regulators are failing to keep up with the increasing demands of the sector and the sharing of information between offices may seem like an obvious and constructive solution to aid nationwide regulation, the Pension Protection Act of 2006 inadvertently placed criminal charges on states that obtain NPO information from the IRS. This is ironic as the

IRS Form 990 (required annual federal tax filing form) of every NPO is publicly accessible information (Boris & Lott, 2017).

Technological advances have regulatory implications for NPOs and for external regulators. Risks arise from the collection and storage of employee, volunteer, client, and donor data (Gloeckner & Lockwood Herman, 2018). Without explicit guidance on where and how this information should be utilized and protected, NPOs are susceptible to unethical and costly events and the accompanying loss of reputation. The use of technology has enhanced twenty-first century philanthropic giving, but also creates a challenging environment for state regulators who lack the resources and technological infrastructure to analyze and track data usage across the sector (Boris & Lott, 2017). Third-party independent organizations, such as Charity Navigator and GuideStar by Candid, go beyond the state and federal reporting requirements and provide transparent data-driven ratings (LeClair, 2017). Yet, donors must make an effort to investigate NPOs beyond these ratings and the information submitted on IRS Form 990 by NPOs as these should be regularly scrutinized by stakeholders and regulators. The investigation into the recent college admissions scandal revealed that multiple Form 990s filed by the Key Worldwide Foundation included falsified claims of donations to other NPOs (Byrd & Nelson, 2019). This scandal was picked up in an investigation by the FBI and leads to the questions of how many of the other 1.5 million registered NPOs submit dishonest information on an annual basis.

The IRS regulation allows individual or corporate donors to make unlimited anonymous contributions to social welfare organizations with 501(c) (4) status – and the so-called infiltration of “dark money” into the US political system (Overby, Novak, & Maguire, 2013). Additionally, the IRS permits social welfare organizations to donate to other registered social welfare organizations, and this does not contribute to the political spending total of the donor organization for the fiscal year, even if the funds are donated with the intent for political use by the recipient. This loophole has allowed social welfare groups to invest heavily in politics without reaching their individual spending cap (Colinvaux, 2014). The nondisclosure of donors to social welfare organizations makes it increasingly difficult for the public to see which corporations and individuals have made significant financial contributions to a political candidate and in turn has contributed to a US political system that has a concerning lack of transparency. It is extremely difficult for voters to determine what and who candidates truly represent (Baek, 2013).

The Causes of Toxic Leadership Behaviors

The dark side of nonprofit leadership results when individuals or groups abuse the power of their leadership positions. The literature provides several definitions of toxic, destructive, abusive, narcissistic, and bullying leadership behaviors. Lipman-Blumen (2005) describes toxic leaders as individuals

...who, by virtue of their destructive behaviors and their dysfunctional personal qualities or characteristics, inflict serious

and enduring harm on the individuals, groups, organizations, communities and even the nations that they lead. (p. 2)

Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad (2007, p. 208) use the word “destructive” to describe such leadership behavior and define it as “the systematic and repeated behavior by a leader, supervisor or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organization’s goals, task resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of subordinates.” The authors emphasize the inclusion of “repeated” and “systemic” in the definition, which excludes isolated or uncharacteristic cases of leader misbehaviors.

Reed (2004) suggests three common symptoms of toxic leaders, which are an apparent lack of concern for their subordinates, the belief by subordinates that their leader is primarily motivated by self-interest, and that the leaders’ personal and interpersonal dynamics negatively affect the organizational climate. Further, Lipman-Blumen (2005) suggests these individuals lack honesty and transparency; prioritize outside ambition and self-actualization over the well-being of others; intentionally act to intimidate, demean, demoralize, and marginalize others; are highly oppressive and critical of others; and utilize their position to maintain power while undermining any potential successors.

It is often difficult to detect toxic or destructive leaders within the nonprofit sector (Tavanti, 2011). Some may appear to be highly competent and effective, while their actions and behaviors have a multifaceted detrimental impact on their subordinates and the wider community. For example, consider William Rick Singer of the Key Worldwide Foundation examined in the college admission scandal case (Byrd & Nelson, 2019). For any donor looking to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged individuals, his NPO, the Key Worldwide Foundation, and its mission may have aligned perfectly with the donors’ intent. However, an FBI investigation into the practices of Mr. Singer and his nonprofit and for-profit organization revealed him to be the conductor of the biggest college admissions scam ever prosecuted by the US Department of Justice (Durkin, 2019).

The regulatory environment of the nonprofit sector allows destructive individuals, like Mr. Singer, to operate freely while cultivating a protective shield of followers, who may buy into foul play for their own personal benefit or play along to ensure they continue to earn a wage to self-sustain. Either way, the leader’s actions are detrimental to the stated goals of the organization. In the short term, it may seem that these individuals are effective in leading the organization to success, but this is inevitably outweighed by the long-term detriment to financial and human resources (HRs) (Tavanti, 2011).

Nonprofit leadership behaviors are visually explained in Fig. 17.1, a simplified version of the model developed by Einarsen et al. (2007) adapted to the nonprofit context. The axis of the model outlines nonprofit leadership behaviors as more constructive (pro behaviors) or less constructive (anti behaviors) in relation to the leader’s principled actions and behaviors toward the subordinates and the organization. Subordinate-orientated dimensions of nonprofit leaders include “pro” behaviors that cultivate motivation, satisfaction, and well-being while supporting

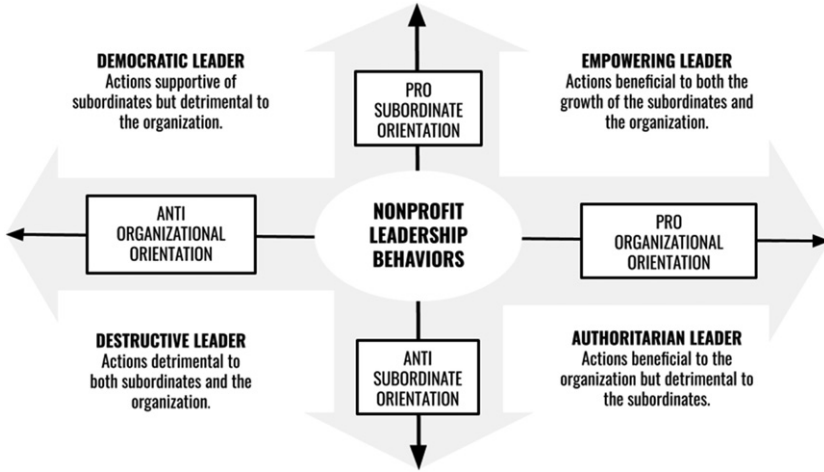


Fig. 17.1. Nonprofit Leadership Behaviors. *Source:*
Adapted from the work of Einarsen et al. (2007).

subordinates, whereas “anti” behaviors may involve the bullying, harassment, and mistreatment of subordinates. The alterations in language utilized to describe leadership styles within the four quadrants of the adapted model were applied to increase understanding and relevance to the nonprofit sector. In NPOs, where the people and social causes we serve have and should have a priority in the mission of the organization, we expect also a value alignment in the relations with subordinates, staff, and other internal stakeholders to the organization. These two types of leaders could be democratic and participatory when they benefit the subordinates or autocratic and dictatorial when disregarding the people’s well-being and voice in the process or prioritization of organizational values.

Organizational dimensions too have “pro” behaviors in which the leader’s actions contribute to organizational success through the planning and utilization of a comprehensive strategy, with clearly denied goals and objectives outlined to cultivate growth and positive change. On the flip side, “anti” organization behaviors include actions such as theft, sabotage of organizational goals and mission, and other forms of corruption that violate the legitimate interests of the organization. On the darker side of these orientations, we recognize a destructive or toxic leadership typology when the well-being of neither the organization nor of its people is taken into consideration. On the opposite side, we call empowering leadership the more ethical and executive leaders capable of prioritizing and effectively promoting the well-being of both the subordinates and of the organization.

This model of nonprofit leadership behaviors with orientations toward people (subordinates, followers, stakeholders) and/or toward tasks (organization’s sustainability and well-being) provides a theoretical explanation for the deceptive nature of destructive leaders. It shows also how leaders may be evaluated

differently by different parties within the organization. For example, a destructive nonprofit leader may be perceived as a high-achieving and effective individual by the BOD if the organization is achieving its goals, while the subordinate's view of the same leader may be predominantly negative if their well-being and job satisfaction is sacrificed. Three quadrants detail destructive and disjointed styles of nonprofit leadership including authoritarian (tyrannical) leadership, destructive (derailed) leadership, and democratic (supportive-disloyal). The final quadrant describes a desired empowering (constructive) leadership typology.

While this model explains diverse dynamics of leadership behaviors in NPOs, it does not explain unethical and corrupt behaviors behind personal responsibility. Toxic causes and destructive effects of unethical NPOs often go beyond the behaviors of leaders. Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) explain how behaviors of followers and environmental factors contribute to an individual's opportunity to lead destructively within the nonprofit sector. The "toxic triangle of nonprofit leadership" has been adapted from Padilla's theory and is displayed in Fig. 17.2 with its "destructive leaders," "susceptible followers (or subordinates)," and "conductive environments."

The consequences of unethical leadership within NPOs are increasingly likely to have negative consequences to the organization's central mission, affect the quality of service delivery, and therefore have negative impacts on the wider organizational community (Lašáková & Remišová, 2015). Theoretical aspects of destructive leadership are applicable across sectors; however, there are several differences in organizational and regulatory structure between nonprofit and for-

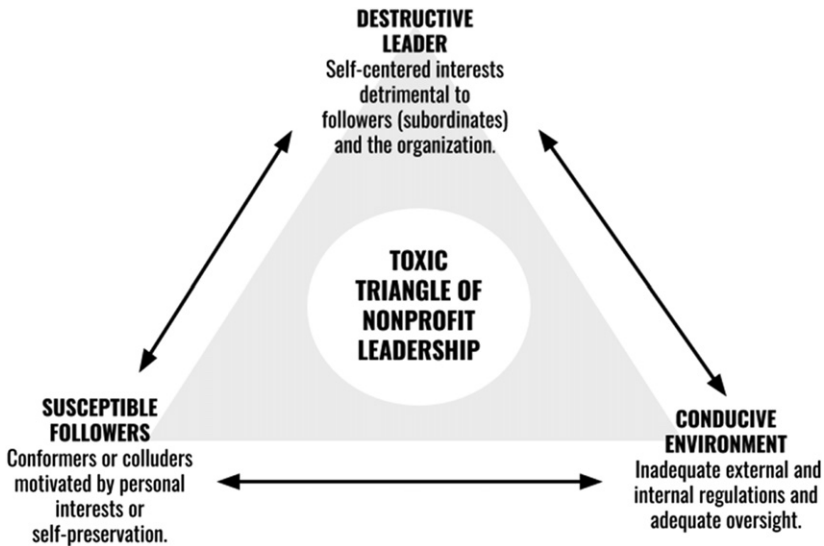


Fig. 17.2. Toxic Triangle of Nonprofit Leadership. *Source:* Elaborated from the theory of Padilla et al. (2007).

profit entities. As discussed earlier, NPOs are regulated externally by the IRS and state attorney general's offices. The internal organization should be led by the BOD, who have a fiduciary duty to provide sound governance to the organization. The nonprofit sector is in a unique position when compared to for-profit counterparts as no external party or individual has a personal stake within the organization, and board members serve on a voluntary basis. This may affect the stringency of oversight from individual board members. For these reasons, we adapted the environmental aspects of the toxic triangle model by [Padilla et al. \(2007\)](#), to include nonprofit-specific regulatory practices that are so crucial for explaining and preventing numerous cases of nonprofit leadership abuses.

[Padilla et al. \(2007\)](#) draw on empirical literature and categorize two categories of followers that allow toxic leaders to behave destructively within organizations: conformers and colluders. The individuals of both groups tend to comply with leaders on the basis of fear and passively allow the destructive leader to assume power. Conformers may be vulnerable to bad leadership due to unmet basic needs, negative image of self, and psychological immaturity and often attempt to reduce the consequential outcomes of not partaking in the activities and passively allow the destructive leader to assume power. Colluders affiliate with destructive leaders through selfishness and ambition to seek personal gain through active participation with destructive leadership. Colluders often share worldviews with the destructive leader, which increases the individual's personal motivation to follow and support. When colluders include other people in the administration, a perfect toxic storm can emerge with centralized decision-making powers, compromised regulatory policies, and undermining potential successors or rivals. This can lead to the solidification of toxic cultural norms.

The "conductive environments" in which destructive leaders and susceptible followers interact is often manifested in the absence of checks and balances and the institution favoring destructive leadership. Other conducive factors may include systemic instability and poor governance due to lack of public insight and understanding of operations within an NPO. Institutions that lack systemic stability, adequate oversight, and a culture in which followers have a strong sense of support and loyalty are unlikely to identify and prevent the damaging effects of destructive leadership.

Whether a destructive leader's behaviors are anti-organizational, anti-subordinate, or both, if susceptible followers are present and the environment is conducive, the negative outcomes of the leader's actions will infiltrate beyond the internal morale and impact the wider organizational community.

The Cases of Nonprofit (Unethical) Organizational Leadership

Organizational leadership case study analysis is a powerful teaching method that helps students identify norms and theories in complex real-life situations. A significant body of research supports the use of detailed real-life cases in ethical training programs to enable individuals to go beyond right and wrong and engage in an ethical decision-making process ([Brock, 2008](#); [Remišová, Lašáková, &](#)

Kirchmayer, 2019; Tavanti & Wilp, 2019). The inclusion of scenario-based learning, examining the leader's behaviors and responsibilities with followers and contexts, establishes a mindset framework that can influence the way students assess and formulate decisions (Roehrman, 2014). Tavanti & Wilp. (2018) explain the value of case studies in the teaching and learning of anti-corruption in nonprofit management education to develop moral intelligence and ethical leadership principles. The learning experience aids the development of nonprofit leaders equipped to advance sound governance and HR practices as they enter the sector and, as they do so, leads the establishment of ethical foundations from which organizations improve and flourish.

This teaching method is utilized in the University of San Francisco's MNA program allowing students to learn and reflect upon the ethical leadership behaviors through the analysis of unethical and illegal case studies, examining the reasons that brought individual leaders and their organizations to engage in immoral activities (usfblogs.usfca.edu, n.d). Students are required to select and analyze a case of an NPO and their leaders engaging in unethical conduct. The teaching exercise requires students to utilize publicly available sources to summarize the case providing background information, the context, and the events following the uncovering of an unethical scandal. Students are required to discuss the applications and relevance of the case studies in regard to ethical leadership practices and create discussion questions to be utilized when presenting their analysis to their peers. Following the presentation and a classwide discussion, case studies are finalized and shared with the public through the MNA program blog with the hope of promoting ethical practices and preventing unethical and illegal pitfalls in the mission-driven works of our communities. This educational exercise aims to aid the ethical development of students through the recognition of ethical challenges and moral responsibilities specific to NPOs and nonprofit leadership.

In this section, the circumstances underlying three scandals are summarized and further analyzed using the 'toxic triangle model'. There are many cases that represent the dynamics of destructive (or corrupt) leaders, susceptible (or complicit) followers, and conducive (legitimizing) environments. The students select cases based on their relevance for better understanding unethical decision-making and sense of entitlement of the leaders to abuse the system for personal gains. They also select them to better understand the dynamics with complicit followers and with often incapable or unwilling BOD who fail to detect, investigate, and remedy leadership abuses. The following cases are a sample of recent scandals to represent the main nonprofit ethical concerns for toxic and unsupervised leadership. The method of analysis follows a template emerged from the ethical readings, audits, and tools used in the nonprofit ethical leadership course for determining and documenting the personal, organizational, and systemic responsibilities (Agard, 2011; Ferrell et al., 2015; Grobman, 2018; Johnson, 2018, 2019). Through the review of existing documentations on the case emerged from investigative journalism, social media reports, and attorney general documents, the students' analyses of the cases reflect their sensitivities as young professionals and emerging nonprofit sector leaders surrounding issues such as women and gender discrimination, institutional power abuses, and perceptions of privilege

and entitlements. The selected sample of cases offers insight into the failures at the level of the individual, institution, and wider regulatory environment, which allows toxic leaders to operate and inflict harm on organizations and their constituents. The three case studies demonstrate the scope for malfeasance within the different subsections of the nonprofit sector and highlight the multifaceted aspects of organizational oversight and governance in which shortfalls or inadequacies can result in devastating outcomes.

Case 1: The Oxfam Sex Scandal Case

The Oxfam case was first analyzed by Grace Komarek-Meyer and Barbora Křišová (2018) to examine the leadership responsibility to act immediately and effectively after reporting of sexual misconduct in field operations or satellite offices. The Oxfam sex scandal case provides a reflection on systemic issues including sexism, racism, and classism in international development work in one of the United Kingdom's largest charities and a global humanitarian aid organization (www.oxfam.org). The first allegations of Oxfam workers sexually assaulting recipients of humanitarian aid emerged during 2010 Haiti earthquake relief operations. The investigation that followed reported on sexual misconduct allegations within the organization's operations in other international locations and within the organization's charity shops in the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, Oxfam senior leadership and board together prioritized the reputation of the organization to ensure funding over the safeguarding of the victims of abuse and recipients of aid. The laissez-faire leadership approach and patriarchal power structures within the organizations were evident in the behavior of the male CEO who was dismissive of a female staff member who was standing up for women and children.

The Oxfam case exemplifies all the trajectories of nonprofit toxic leadership behaviors. First, among the various aspects of destructive leaders, the senior leadership of the organization demonstrated a lack of safeguard and for their most vulnerable stakeholders violating the core of the organization's mission. Second, at the susceptible followers' level, the staff, volunteers, and those closely working with the director failed to properly report the violations. Third, the regulatory policy and monitoring mechanisms of the organizations were clearly inadequate as they enabled the situation and legitimized the delayed responses. The publicization of the Oxfam scandal led to the uncovering of other similar horrifying stories from other humanitarian aid organizations including Save the Children (McVeigh, 2020) and to highlighting the need for adopting internal and external regulatory systems for NPOs/NGOs working with vulnerable populations. The case forces us to critically reflect on the actual benefit of good intentions with poor execution. It also introduces the dark side of historic imperialism in north-south relations reflecting dynamics of (neo)colonialism even in good international humanitarian interventions (Jayawickrama, 2018). A growing body of literature suggests the current approach is substantially flawed and it would require an honest, multistakeholder, and critical examination of

humanitarian interventions across borders, cultures, and inequities. It would require examining our implicit biases across gender, race, and social class statuses revealing patriarchal, colonialist, and neoliberal and other structural dynamics. [Table 17.1](#) includes some other elements at these three levels explained in all of the case studies.

Case 2: The Epstein Donation Scandal

The Epstein Donation scandal was first presented and reviewed during a 2019 nonprofit ethical leadership course with the title: *Voldemort's Money: Donations from "He Who Must Not be Named"* ([Ashley & Sansern, 2019](#)). The case highlights how personal connections with wealthy donors without proper institutional policies and coordinated efforts can lead to unethical and questionable fundraising practices.

Jeffrey Epstein was a New York-based American financier and convicted sex offender. His social circle included many high-profile celebrities, influential billionaires, and politicians. Epstein pleaded guilty and was first convicted of the sexual exploitation and abuse of minors in his homes in 2008, serving 13 months in custody with extensive work release. In July 2019, he was arrested on federal charges for sex trafficking of minors as young as 11 years of age, in Florida and New York ([Watkins, 2020](#)). One month following his arrest, he committed suicide in his jail cell in Manhattan. Between his first conviction and death in 2019, Epstein made numerous donations to several political, philanthropic, and academic institutions. In 2006, when his sexual crimes became publicly known, many institutions attempted to terminate their relationships with him. This unfortunately was not the case for all institutions. The MIT Media Lab, under the leadership of Director Joi Ito, disregarded university policies and continued to accept Epstein's money, marked them as "anonymous," and used his contacts to establish relationships with other wealthy donors. Ito, who has since admitted that he received \$1.25 million from Epstein, resigned in September 2019.

This case shows the nonprofit organizational leadership ethical dilemma of how to deal with tainted money. It also shows how morally lax leaders could create institutional repercussions affecting many other people (subordinates and employees) and undermining the organizational reputation (donors and other stakeholders). It shows also that even with policy institutions in place, toxic or corrupt leaders could find and justify their process and means to obtain fundraising results.

Case 3: The College Application Scandal

The college application case was first examined during a 2019 nonprofit ethical leadership course with Dr. Tavanti and the MNA students. The case was presented under the title: *You Failed the Test: Wealthy Parents and the Illegal and Unethical World of Manufacturing College Applications* ([Byrd & Nelson, 2019](#)). It presents a contemporary illustration of how weak NPOs can be manipulated for

Table 17.1. Analysis of Ethical Case Studies with an Application of the Toxic Triangle of Nonprofit Leadership.

Organizational Shortfall	Case Study 1: Oxfam Sex Scandal (Komarek-Meyer & Křišová, 2018)	Case 2: The Epstein Donations Scandal (Ashley & Sansern, 2019)	Case 3: The College Application Scandal (Byrd & Nelson, 2019)
Destructive leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Absence of ethical decision-making. (2) Drift from the legitimate interests of the organization (mission, values, and priorities). (3) Lack of concern for the safeguarding of service users and stakeholders. (4) Prioritization of reputation over service user/volunteer welfare. (5) Inability to listen to the concerns of subordinates. (6) Ignoring repeated reports of misconduct. (7) Failure of every member of the board of directors to comply with the fiduciary duties of trust, loyalty, and care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Absence of ethical decision-making. (2) Joi Ito concealed the MIT Media Lab's relationship with Epstein and refused to report the real numbers to the university and the public. (3) Drift from the legitimate interest of organizational mission, values, and priorities. (4) Despite being fully aware of Epstein's convictions, Ito continued to solicit and accept donations from Epstein. (5) Disobedience of policies from MIT leadership (as Epstein had been added to the disqualified donor list, but donations continued to be accepted and disguised). (6) Depending on the varying policies at MIT, this may not necessarily have been illegal conduct but is immoral. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Absence of ethical decision-making. (2) Drift from the legitimate interest of both his for and nonprofit organizations (mission, values, and priorities). (3) Self-interested leader abuses an authoritative position in for-profit and nonprofit entities for his personal financial gain. (4) Utilization of bribes and corrupt activities to influence the unethical decisions of others in positions of power.

		(7) Ito lacked integrity and honesty. When Epstein was arrested, he denied the relationship he had with Epstein and hid the numbers. He made excuses and also asked colleagues to support him in hiding the truth.	
Susceptible followers	<p>(1) The internal organizational staff and volunteers who were aware of sexual abuse/assault failed to report concerns to any external regulators/legal entities.</p> <p>(2) Those immediately under the executive director failed to raise concerns about the lack of accountability from those above them.</p>	<p>(1) The internal organizational staff and volunteers who were aware of the acceptance of donations from Epstein failed to report concerns to any external regulators/legal entities.</p> <p>(2) Those immediately under Ito failed to raise concerns about his lack of accountability.</p> <p>(3) Staff in supervisory positions chose to ignore numerous reports from the development staff of the acceptance of funds from Epstein.</p>	<p>(1) Parents guardians were willing to pay large fees in order to admit their children to a college of their choice.</p> <p>(2) SAT/ACT test administrators facilitated cheating, accepted bribes, tampered with scores, and took exams in place of students.</p> <p>(3) College coaches and college administrators accepted bribes to influence admission outcomes for their personal benefit.</p>
Conducive environment	<p>(1) Poor oversight (self and external).</p>	<p>(1) Poor oversight (self and external).</p> <p>(2) Lack of governing input and oversight from the board of directors.</p>	<p>(1) Poor oversight (self and external).</p>

Table 17.1. (Continued)

Organizational Shortfall	Case Study 1: Oxfam Sex Scandal (Komarek-Meyer & Křišová, 2018)	Case 2: The Epstein Donations Scandal (Ashley & Sansern, 2019)	Case 3: The College Application Scandal (Byrd & Nelson, 2019)
	(2) Lack of governing input and oversight from the board of directors.	(3) Inadequate policies: (undraising, gift acceptance, and whistleblowers).	(2) Lack of governing input and oversight from the board of directors.
	(3) Inadequate policies: whistleblower policy lacked rigor at Oxfam (fear of retribution/lack of employee awareness).	(4) Lack of diversity in decision-making personnel (predominantly male leadership team).	(3) Inadequate policies (conflicts of interest and whistleblowers).
	(4) Lack of employee/volunteer screening and referencing.	(5) Organizational lacked ethical culture transparency and supported dishonest and immoral practices.	
	(5) Organizational culture of impunity.		

Source: The original work of the author.

self-dealing and other fraudulent leadership behaviors including money laundering and racketeering. It also stands at the forefront of deeper ethical issues for equity, access, and privilege in higher education.

The highly publicized college admissions scandal involves William Singer, the owner and director of both the for-profit organization Edge College & Career Network, LLC (Edge), and the Californian-based (501(c)(3) public charity, the Key Worldwide Foundation (Key). This case resulted in charges of racketeering, money laundering, conspiracy to defraud the United States, and obstruction of justice. The NPO Key, claiming to be devoted to providing college opportunities for underprivileged students, was directly tied to for-profit organization Edge through its CEO and owner, Singer. He was supported by two collusive followers; Steven Masera served as an accountant in both entities and Mikaela Sanford played multiple roles in each organization.

Laundrying the extravagant fees for his services as “donations,” Singer was able to please parents who were willing to buy into an unethical scheme to ensure their children attend the university of their choosing. Singer identified corruptible college coaches, college administrators, and admissions test administrators who were willing to influence certain admissions outcomes for a fee. Singer funneled the fraudulent “donations” from parents to pay bribes for falsified admissions scores and to college athletic coaches and administrators to admit nonathletes into their universities. The IRS did not pick up the case. However, following an investigation orchestrated by the FBI, over 50 individuals including Singer, the staff at his organizations, 33 parents, several coaches, and administrators were arrested.

The Lessons of the Nonprofit Cases

The implications of these nonprofit unethical cases are clear. In the absence of effective external regulation, the sector must adopt rigorous internal regulatory systems to prevent and address bad leadership practices in order to prevent harm to vulnerable populations and to protect the public’s trust in the positive and integral role NPOs have in our society. The following are the three main and most common lessons emerging from these cases and analyses. They represent some urgent and practical solutions against personal, organizational, and systemic unethical behaviors.

Lesson 1: Promoting Effective BOD Oversight

The dark side of nonprofit leadership is prevented and remedied through effective BOD governance. Research indicates that oversight practices including the utilization of an independent voting board and an external audit are the best methods of ensuring corruption is avoided in NPOs (LeClair, 2019). The BOD of an NPO are essentially trustees who have a duty to guide the organization toward a sustainable future. Collectively, the board is responsible for ensuring that its organization utilizes sound, ethical, and legal governance and financial management policies (National Council of Nonprofits, n.d.-a). If a governing board fails

to perform their fiduciary duties in advising and overseeing the conduct of the executive director and core leadership team, destructive leaders have the ability to steer organizations off course. NPO board members are recruited and serve as volunteers and collectively have three primary fiduciary duties: the duty of care to ensure that all assets are utilized rightfully, the duty of loyalty to ensure activities and transactions are in the legitimate interest of the organization, and the duty of obedience to ensure the organization abides with the legal and regulative realms ([The National Council of Nonprofits, n.d.-b](#)). Numerous studies have shown how organizational integrity is maintained through a carefully selected BOD, regular ethical and legal trainings, and COI policies ([Fischer, 2019](#); [Lockwood Herman, 2010](#); [Renz, 2019](#)).

Lesson 2: Integrating Ethical Trainings in Organizational Culture

Research shows that instituting a strong ethical organizational culture prevents misconduct ([Cabana & Kaptein, 2019](#); [Zhang et al., 2019](#)). Beside the leadership's responsibility to demonstrate integrity, an essential strategy for promoting ethical decision-making and ethical conduct within organizations is the use of codes of ethics ([McFarlane & Alexakis, 2016](#)). The implementation and exercise of shared codes of ethical conduct and compliance prevent violations and promote ethical cultures so that value statements and policies become more than a document to read. They inspire a day-to-day ethical decision-making ([Blodgett, 2011](#); [Farooqi, Abid, & Ahmed, 2017](#)). Ethics and governance training often become a low organizational priority and are easy items to cut from budgets in challenging times. Yet, ethical training programs should be considered a core element in long-term risk management and privileged tools for improving employee morale awareness and promoting virtuous leadership ([Remišová et al., 2019](#)). NPO leaders must acknowledge their responsibility in shaping the ethical tone of the organization and fostering an internal climate that will strengthen the relationship and reputation with stakeholders and partners ([Paine, 1994](#)).

To facilitate organization-wide ethical development, it is important to ensure that adequate communication and feedback channels are implemented ([Wallestad & Geiger, 2019](#)). In turn, increasing the distribution of shared knowledge fosters a stronger sense of shared purpose and loyalty among organizational stakeholders and aids the development of strong relationships built upon trust and accountability ([Carufel, 2017](#)). Technological advances have created significant opportunities for NPOs to promote an organizational ethical culture through the utilization of online platforms ([Appleby, 2016](#)). Social media has become a standard communication tool allowing organizations to engage with their constituencies ([Milde & Yawson, 2017](#)) and has served as a catalyst for the cultivation of transparency. The benefits of increased organizational transparency reach far beyond the immediate sphere of social media platforms and enhance organizational cohesiveness and the investment of stakeholders in the mission, vision, and goal ([Carufel, 2017](#)).

Promoting financial transparency through the sharing of information regarding resource allocation is an integral aspect of effective financial leadership.

The disclosure of financial information, including the IRS required tax filing forms and independent financial audits, through the organizational online platforms is common practice in the nonprofit sector and demonstrates a commitment to transparency and effective financial management. This promotes ethical behaviors internally and places a high value on public trust (Rhode & Packel, 2009). In the interest of best serving their given constituents, nonprofit leaders must be proactive in the evaluation of practices and receptive of questions and feedback. Leaders too should prioritize the cultivation of organizational cultures where adaptability and flexibility are valued, allowing the organization to remain relevant in the current climate (Axelrad, 2017).

Lesson 3: Addressing Mechanisms for Reporting Destructive Behaviors

Detecting, preventing, and overcoming toxic and destructive leadership is an organizational and systemic responsibility (Tavanti, 2011). Those individuals who courageously denounce such behavior need to be protected and regarded. They also need to be accompanied by proper mechanisms to facilitate reporting and communication and by proper processes for investigation and remedy (Wallestad & Geiger, 2019). These mechanisms can be formally implemented through HR channels such as whistleblowing policies (Farooqi et al., 2017) and informally reinforced through supportive personnel (Tavanti, 2011). Policies must include a written statement reiterating the organization's commitment of non-retaliation against anyone who reports misconduct and that individuals will not suffer any professional consequences. In addition, organizations need to have actionable codes of conduct that include mechanisms in which the perpetrator, whether it be a board member, staff member, or donor, is dealt with appropriately (Wallestad & Geiger, 2019). This should apply to whistleblowing, harassment, and discrimination policies.

Conclusion

This analysis of nonprofit toxic leadership cases has provided some understanding about the systemic causes and consequences in the sector. Toxic leadership in NPOs does not simply come from unethical leaders. Instead, they often manifest themselves from a context of legitimizing contexts characterized by unregulated environments and ineffective supervision mechanisms. The pressure for professionalization in the social services provided by NPO will continue to grow even without a commensurable level of financial support and formalized education competencies. Unfortunately, scandals will continue to occur. However, thanks to the advancements in technology, NPO transparency and accountability will also become a factor in the prevention of negative leadership behaviors. As NPOs are charged with important and essential services to the community, especially vulnerable and less fortunate populations, they also need to be equipped with sound governance to operate ethically to maintain the public trust. Their public services to the community need to be aligned with urgent leadership and

organizational and systemic practices that demonstrate accountability and promote transparency. These recent scandals we have presented convey important lessons about avoiding the same errors and establishing systemic corrections to detect, denounce, prevent, and remedy violations.

HR management has a critical role in ensuring that ethical training, leadership evaluation methods, policies, and reporting mechanisms are robust and up to date. But it goes beyond HR. The NPO leadership, its BOD, its administrators, and the entire organization's stakeholders should see themselves as carrying a torch of light in difficult societal challenges. Such light cannot be extinguished if the NPO's ethical principles are kept at the core of the organization's practices. However, NPO will not effectively promote an ethical organizational culture simply with lofty values statements and compliance trainings. It needs to promote a culture of transparency with effective accountability mechanisms to detect vulnerabilities in leaders, followers, and the environment. In addition, nontraditional solutions should be employed as in the case of the use of social media to disclose abuses and announce the repercussions publicly. Although some NPOs may perceive this a threat to their branding, the more comprehensive analyses of how the organizations have remedied the problems behind the scandals can be a valuable lesson for organizational learning and transparent administration.

Leadership development and systematized nonprofit-specific education must also be a priority for preventing bad leadership and promoting good practices. However, educating current and future leaders of the nonprofit sector requires more than developing leadership values and learning about general ethical principles. Real case study education can be instrumental in translating values into practice and discerning more ethical decision-making processes into the complexity of our organizations and cultures. Nonprofit leaders at all organizational levels are required to use their moral compass to ensure activities and outcomes are in the legitimate interest of the NPO and benefit the population it serves. It can be argued that a foundation of ethical leadership education is applicable across sectors and should be prioritized in the interest of societal greater good. The high ethical expectations for nonprofit leaders should become a paradigm for evaluating and educating leaders across sectors. We can learn from leadership failures and poor organizational examples in the nonprofit, government, and business sectors as the responsibility for a better world goes beyond sectors and individual behaviors. Understanding the dark side of nonprofit leadership is not for lessening the value of the sector and the importance of those social missions. Instead, it is for encouraging a collective will to serve better and impact our communities more effectively.

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