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Destructive leadership behaviour: A definition and conceptual model

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Abstract

This paper proposes a definition and a descriptive model of destructive leadership behaviour. Destructive leadership behaviour is defined as the systematic and repeated behaviour by a leader, supervisor or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organisation by undermining and/or sabotaging the organisation's goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of his/her subordinates. Three categories of such destructive leadership are identified in the proposed model: tyrannical, derailed, and supportive–disloyal leadership behaviour. The model may provide a useful link between the field of leadership and research on bullying, counterproductive behaviour, and aggression at work. The model contributes to a more nuanced concept of destructive leadership showing how destructive leadership behaviours also may have constructive elements. © 2007 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Leadership; Destructive; Abusive; Tyrannical; Derailed; Disloyal; Aggression; Deviance

1. Introduction

Little research and theory development has addressed destructive leadership behaviours and the potential negative effects of such behaviours on the organisation (Tepper, 2000); comparatively more research has investigated constructive, effective or successful leadership (Kelloway, Mullen, & Francis, 2006). Traditionally, leadership research focuses on factors associated with *effective* leadership, often with an implicit assumption that ineffective leadership simply reflects the *absence* of leadership (Ashforth, 1994). However, research on destructive aspects of leadership clearly document that this phenomenon includes a variety of different behaviours that is not limited to the mere *absence* of effective leadership behaviour (Ashforth, 1994; Bies & Tripp, 1998; Einarsen, Skogstad, Aasland, & Løseth, 2002; Kelloway et al., 2006; Tepper, 2000). Recent research on bullying at work has documented that some 5%–10% of employees are subjected to bullying at any one time (Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel, & Vartia, 2003), where as much as 80% of the cases involve a superior in the role as the alleged bully (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003). In an English study some 40% of the participants reported that they had experienced bullying from a leader during their working career (UNISON, 1997). In a study among 73 managers, Lombardo & McCall (1984) discovered that as many as 74% of them had experienced an intolerable boss. Namie & Namie (2000) found that 89% of those experiencing bullying at work perceived leaders as the main bully. Studies like these clearly document that leaders may actively

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behave in a destructive manner towards subordinates. In addition, sabotage, theft, and corruption among managers have been documented (Altheide, Adler, Adler, & Altheide, 1978; Dunkelberg & Jessup, 2001; Kellerman, 2004; Lipman-Blumen, 2005), although existing empirical research in this domain is limited.

Several authors have therefore recently called for a closer examination of the characteristics and outcomes associated with destructive leadership (Kellerman, 2004; Kelloway, Sivanathan, Francis, & Barling, 2005). Burke (2006) posits that by exploring the “dark side” of leadership, a more accurate view of leadership may emerge, which again may contribute to the general understanding of leadership effectiveness and leadership development. Based on a literature review, Baumeister, Bratlavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs (2001) conclude that there is overwhelming support to the notion that negative events in social interactions have a stronger effect than do positive events. Hence, understanding and preventing destructive leadership may be as important, or even more important, than understanding and enhancing positive aspects of leadership.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) to propose a definition of destructive leadership behaviour that captures the different destructive behaviours described within this research field, and (2) to propose a conceptual model of leadership behaviour that incorporates the notion that a destructive leader may simultaneously show both destructive and constructive behaviour. With this model we aim to expand the research field of leadership behavior to also include potentially destructive elements of leadership. Second, we contribute to a more nuanced concept of destructive leadership behaviour by arguing that some leaders may display behaviour consisting of both constructive and destructive elements.

2. A definition of destructive leadership

Researchers have proposed a number of concepts that arguably fall within the domain of destructive leadership that is aimed at subordinates. These include “abusive supervisors” (Hornstein, 1996; Tepper, 2000), “health endangering leaders” (Kile, 1990), “petty tyrants” (Ashforth, 1994), “bullies” (Namie & Namie, 2000), “derailed leaders” (Schackleton, 1995), “intolerable bosses” (Lombardo & McCall, 1984), “psychopaths” (Furnham & Taylor, 2004), and “harassing leaders” (Brodsky, 1976). Destructive actions directed against the organisation have also been identified (e.g., working towards goals other than those defined by the organisation), examples being Lipman-Blumen’s (2005) concept of “toxic leaders” and McCall & Lombardo’s (1983) concept of leader derailment.

Although there are obvious similarities among these concepts, researchers have yet to adopt a common definition or conceptual framework of destructive leadership. While “abusive supervision” is defined as “*subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical contact*” by Tepper (2000), p.178, Hornstein (1996) describes an abusive leader as “*one whose primary objective is the control of others, and such control is achieved through methods that create fear and intimidation*” (Hornstein, 1996). Ashforth (1994) describes a petty tyrant as “*someone who uses their power and authority oppressively, capriciously, and perhaps vindictively*” (p.126). Kile (1990), using the term health endangering leaders, defines these leaders as someone “*who behaves in such a manner towards subordinates that the subordinates develop poor health, and attribute these health problems to the leader’s behaviours*” (p. 26). Lipman-Blumen (2005) describes “toxic leaders” as “*leaders who act without integrity by dissembling and engaging in various other dishonourable behaviours*” (p. 18), including behaviours such as “*corruption, hypocrisy, sabotage and manipulation, as well as other assorted unethical, illegal, and criminal acts*” (p. 18). Kellerman (2004) also points out that leaders may involve themselves in corruption, by lying, cheating and stealing, or otherwise putting their self-interest ahead of the organisation’s legitimate interest.

Ultimately, an inclusive concept of destructive leadership should account for destructive behaviour aimed at both subordinates and at the organisation. With that in mind, we propose the following definition of destructive leadership:

The systematic and repeated behaviour by a leader, supervisor or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organisation by undermining and/or sabotaging the organisation’s goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of subordinates.

2.1. An all-inclusive concept

Our definition encompasses behaviours in two domains, that is, behaviours directed toward subordinates and behaviours directed toward the organisation itself. Vrendenburgh & Brender (1998) note that managers have the

opportunity to abuse *both* organisational members and/or the organisation through their use and misuse of power. Hence destructive leadership may undermine or sabotage the well-being, motivation and satisfaction of subordinates, as well as the effectiveness of the organisation by targeting tasks, resources and goals. Second, unlike [Tepper's \(2000\)](#) definition of abusive supervision, we include all physical *and* verbal behaviour in our definition of destructive leadership. In explaining the different behaviours that the proposed definition includes, it may be useful to apply [Buss' \(1961\)](#) classification of aggressive behaviours, which distinguishes between three dimensions; physical versus verbal aggression, active versus passive aggression, and direct versus indirect aggression. An all-inclusive concept of destructive leadership must include behaviour from each domain. Consequently, destructive leadership behaviours are not necessarily active and manifest, but may also constitute *passive* and *indirect* behaviours. An example of passive-physical-indirect behaviour may be a leader who fails to protect a subordinate's welfare, for example in a working environment with potential safety risks ([Neuman & Baron, 2005](#)). An example of passive-verbal-indirect behaviour may be a leader failing to provide a subordinate with important information or feedback ([Neuman & Baron, 2005](#)).

Yet, in order for any behaviour to be defined as destructive according to the proposed definition, the leader must perform the behaviour *systematically and repeatedly* and violating the *legitimate interest* of the organisation. On the other hand, the proposed definition does not include any *intent to harm* as a qualifying element, highlighting that instances of thoughtlessness as well as ignorance and incompetence may be included in the concept. Because these three elements are unique to our definition, we explain them in greater detail below.

2.2. Systematic and repeated behaviour

The proposed definition of destructive leadership behaviours focuses on repeated and systematic behaviours. Hence, the definition excludes isolated misbehaviour such as an uncharacteristic outburst of unjustified anger. On this issue we follow the European research tradition on bullying in the workplace, which emphasizes that “*in order for the label bullying to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g. weekly) and over a period of time (e.g. about six months)*” ([Einarsen et al., 2003](#)). The focus on systematic and repeated behaviours has important implications. One must accept that leaders occasionally make poor decisions, or otherwise have a “bad day” at work. It is only when this behaviour becomes systematic and repeated that it can be classified as destructive behaviour. Hence, it is only when leaders make mistakes repeatedly or repeatedly act aggressively towards subordinates that they may be characterised as being destructive. Such a criterion is also supported by [Tepper \(2000\)](#) who focuses on sustained displays of hostile behaviours in his definition of abusive supervision.

2.3. No call for intent

Many researchers do not make explicit whether their definition of destructive leadership includes the intention to cause harm ([Ashforth, 1994](#); [Ma, Karri, & Chittipeddi, 2004](#); [Vredenburg & Brender, 1998](#)), whereas others explicitly exclude unintentional behaviour from their definition ([Bies & Tripp, 1998](#); [Kile, 1990](#)). It is our position that the definition should not include intent, because what makes leadership destructive has less to do with the leaders' intentions than with the outcomes of the leaders' behaviour. Furthermore, any isolated and therefore potentially accidental behaviour is already excluded in the definition through the focus on systematic and repeated behaviour. Destructive leadership behaviour may therefore include behaviours that were not intended to cause harm, but as a result of thoughtlessness, insensitivity, or lack of competence, undermines subordinates and/or the organisation. [Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper \(2002\)](#) also argue that intent may create an artificial barrier for an operational definition of hostile behaviours at work, as it is difficult to verify an actor's intentions (see also [Hoel, Rayner, & Cooper, 1999](#)).

In the case of organisational theft, which may be seen as one example of destructive behaviour in organisations, [Greenberg \(1997\)](#) argues that there are distinct differences based on whether the intent of the theft is of an *antisocial* or a *prosocial* nature. Parallel to this, [Altheide et al. \(1978\)](#) found that theft in organisations may be considered “... *ritualistically and symbolically tied to becoming a successful employee, one who gets along well*” (p. 101). Based on this assumption [Greenberg \(1997\)](#) distinguishes between the actor's *intentions*, whether they are prosocial or antisocial, and between the *targets* of this behaviour being either the employer or co-workers. By crosscutting these two dimensions, he identifies four distinct social motives for a theft; *Approval, Support, Even the score* and *Thwart* ([Greenberg, 1997](#), p.89). In the case of the *Approval* motive, the theft is motivated by a prosocial intent directed toward the organisation. Leaders, for instance, may then participate in stealing from the organisation because they wish to

behave in accordance with norms expressed or supported by their own superiors. Hence, their behaviours may be a result of observational learning more than an explicit intent to harm. A *Support* motive, which is based on a prosocial intent in order to support colleagues, means that the thief, in our case a leader, may only behave in accordance with group norms condoning the behaviour. When behaving in accordance with an *Even the score* motive, the theft is conducted with an antisocial intent as opposed to the previous two motives, and the target of this intention is the employer. In this situation, the thief wishes to harm or strike back at the employer. For instance, as revenge from a perceived injustice by the employer, a leader may take part in stealing. In the last scenario, the *Thwart* motive, the intent of the thief is again antisocial, but the target is one's colleagues.

In all these cases, the leader's theft behaviour arguably has the effect of sabotaging and undermining the organisation, irrespective of the actor's intentions. We would argue that the same is true for other kinds of destructive behaviour. Yet, although the intent or motive behind the leader's behaviour is not included in the proposed definition, it is important not to underestimate the significant part intent may play in subjective judgements made by subordinates and superiors when labelling a leader as destructive (Tepper, 2000).

2.4. *The legitimate interest of the organisation*

According to our definition, behaviours are destructive if they violate the legitimate, that is, the rightful and lawful, interests of the organisation. Webster's New Word Dictionary offers several explanations of the word "legitimate": 1) "allowed by law or custom; lawful, 2) staying or being within the law, 3) logical correct; reasonable, 4) justifiable or justified, 5) following established rules, standards etc." Hence, legitimate interests are about what is lawful, justifiable and in the best interest of an organisation, the latter being defined by established internal rules and by internal formal power structures and procedures. By including "legitimate interest" in the definition, we follow Sackett & DeVore (2001) in their definition of "counterproductive workplace behavior."

Sackett & DeVore (2001) state that behaviours violating the legitimate interest of the organisation, to a certain degree overlap with the related terms, illegal, immoral, or deviant behaviours. These concepts have different connotations, with illegal behaviours defined in terms of laws and the jurisdiction in which the organisation functions, immoral behaviours defined in terms of a particular cultural value system, and deviant behaviours defined in terms of behaviours that deviate from a norm (Sackett & DeVore, 2001). If, for example, a majority of leaders in an organisation have grown accustomed to bill their organisation for private dinners and holidays, one might say that they are behaving in accordance with the norm of that particular organisation, and therefore it will not be defined as deviant behaviour. However, based on the proposed definition, this behaviour will be considered destructive because it violates the *legitimate* interest of the organisation, which is the optimal use of financial, material and human resources in the service of the organisation and its owners. Likewise, a behaviour that opposes a legitimate decision, goal or strategy of the firm, is to be regarded as destructive from the moment these decisions, goals or strategies are enforced. Hence, not altering one's behaviour in times of change may be seen as destructive if these changes can be said to be in accordance with legitimate interests of the organisation.

Of course, an organisation cannot freely determine its legitimate interests. Some behaviours, for example that a leader resigns his position and the organisation for a personal career improvement, may of course represent behaviour that is contrary to the organisation's interest, yet do not carry the connotation of wrongdoing that accompanies behaviours viewed as illegal, immoral, or deviant. Thus, it cannot be regarded as violating any *legitimate* interest of the organisation.

Further, both employees and employers are obligated to behave in accordance with national or international norms, laws, and agreements. Leadership behaviour may be considered destructive only if it violates the legitimate interests of the organisation as defined by a given society at a given point in time (Einarsen, Nielsen, Raknes, & Skogstad, 2005). This implies of course that what will be perceived as destructive behaviour may vary between different societies over time. For example, new laws condemning smoking in public buildings imply that while smoking in your own office was not considered destructive behaviour before the ban, it will violate an organisation's legitimate interest after the law is implemented. Many kinds of leadership behaviours that are considered destructive today, may have been regarded as being in accordance with the legitimate interest of the organisation at another point in time (Christie & Geiss, 1970). For instance, Ironside & Seifert (2003) describe the established leadership philosophy during the beginning of the industrial revolution as follows; "Their need to secure the adaptation of workers from the rhythms of agricultural and domestic work to the discipline of factory production resulted in management regimes in which fines,

beatings, sackings, and all forms of harassment and abuse were the daily experience of the majority” (p.383). Hence, what may be defined as a legitimate use of the organisations total resources, including its employees, depends on the legal, historic and cultural context of the organisation.

3. A conceptual model of leadership behaviour

The second aim of this paper is to propose a conceptual model of destructive leadership behaviour that is congruent with the proposed definition. Since the definition proposes two separate dimensions of destructive leadership behaviour (i.e., behaviour directed towards subordinates and behaviours directed towards the goals, tasks and effectiveness of the organisation), we assume that leaders are capable of acting destructively on one dimension while behaving constructively on the other. A leader who bullies and harasses subordinates may still act in accordance with the goals of the organisation, securing a strong focus on task completion and effectiveness. Likewise, a leader who acts in opposition to the legitimate goals of the organisation may still be supportive towards subordinates. Furthermore, many or even most leaders will not act destructively on either dimension, but rather behave constructively towards subordinates and the organisation. These leaders are concerned with the welfare of their subordinates while simultaneously behaving in a manner that facilitates organisational goal attainment.

Our model may be viewed as an elaboration on Blake & Mouton’s (1985) Managerial Grid, a framework that employed the dimensions, *concern for people* and *concern for production*, to produce a conceptualisation of effective and ineffective leadership. Ineffective leadership was described by the terms “Impoverished Management” (i.e., a minimum of concern for both production and people), “Authority–Obedience” (i.e., a high focus on production combined with minimum consideration for people), and “Country Club Management” (i.e., a maximum concern for people coupled with a minimum concern for production). Although these forms of leadership may reflect *ineffective* leadership behaviours by showing *minimal* concern for either people or production, the model does not address *destructive* leadership behaviour. By extending the two dimensions to include these destructive behaviours, we propose a model that captures both constructive and destructive leadership.

Fig. 1 shows our model. In accordance with our definition, the model has two basic dimensions: subordinate- and organisation-oriented behaviours. The subordinate oriented dimension describes leadership behaviours ranging from anti-subordinate behaviours to pro-subordinate behaviours. Anti-subordinate behaviours violate the legitimate interest of the organisation by undermining or sabotaging the motivation, well-being, or job satisfaction of subordinates, and may involve behaviours like bullying, harassment, or other kinds of incivility and mistreatment of subordinates. Pro-subordinate behaviours, on the other hand, are behaviours that foster the motivation, well-being, and job satisfaction of subordinates, including taking care of and supporting subordinates (e.g., listening to subordinates, attending to social

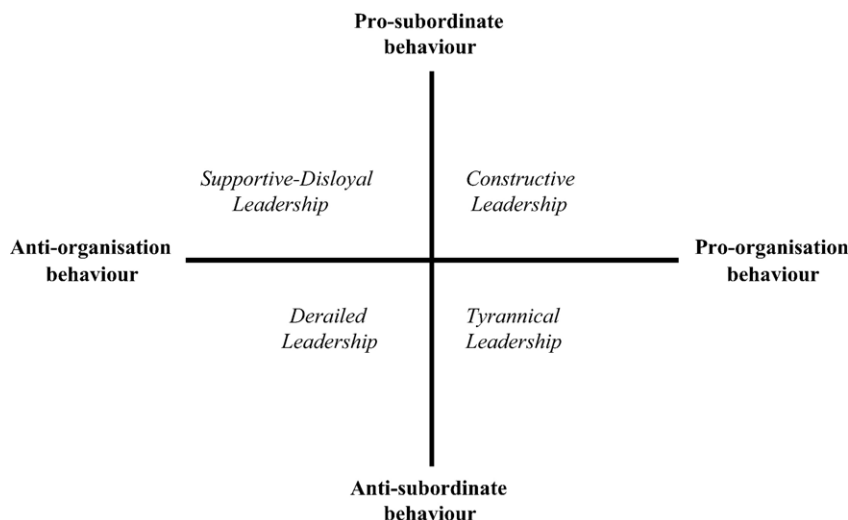


Fig. 1. A model of destructive and constructive leadership behaviour.

relations among subordinates, giving praise when due, and showing appreciation and respect). The second dimension describes organisation-oriented behaviours, ranging from anti-organisation behaviours to pro-organisation behaviours. Anti-organisational behaviours violate the legitimate interest of the organisation and include such things as stealing from the organisation (be it material, money or time), working towards goals that are in opposition to those of the organisation, sabotaging the goal attainment of the organisation, or being involved in other forms of corruption. Pro-organisational behaviours involve working towards the fulfilment of the organisation's goals, setting clear and unambiguous objectives, making or supporting strategic decisions, and implementing organisational change, among other things.

Furthermore, leaders' behaviours may be described as more or less constructive (pro-behaviours) and more or less destructive (anti-behaviours) on each of the two dimensions. By crosscutting the two dimensions, the model presents four categories of leadership behaviours, three of which are destructive: (1) Tyrannical Leadership Behaviour (pro-organisational oriented behaviour coupled with anti-subordinate behaviour), (2) Derailed Leadership Behaviour (anti-organisational behaviour as well as anti-subordinate behaviour), and Supportive–Disloyal Leadership Behaviour (pro-subordinate behaviour, while simultaneously displaying anti-organisational behaviour).

The model yields a nuanced picture of the phenomenon of destructive leadership. By considering the two dimensions (subordinate and organisation), the model also suggests a fourth type of leadership behaviour, where leaders act constructively on both dimensions in the model, which is pro-subordinate and pro-organisation behaviour (Constructive leadership behaviour). In the following sections, we describe these four categories further.

3.1. *Tyrannical leadership*

Tyrannical behaviours undermine the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of subordinates, without necessarily being clearly destructive as regards to the organisation's goals. Tyrannical leaders may behave in accordance with the goals, tasks, missions and strategies of the organisation, but they typically obtain results not through, but at the cost of subordinates (Ashforth, 1994; Tepper, 2000). They humiliate, belittle, and manipulate subordinates in order to “get the job done.” Tyrannical leadership behaviour has some features in common with the leadership style that Blake & Mouton (1985) term “Authority–Obedience,” in which the leader places emphasis on task completion. However, where the “Authority–Obedience” leader takes little interest in subordinates and wishes to spend as little time as possible interacting with them, tyrannical leaders act aggressively towards subordinates, possibly out of the belief that doing so will engender increased work effort. Previous research on health endangering leaders (Kile, 1990), abusive supervision (Bies & Tripp, 1998; Tepper, 2000), petty tyrants (Ashforth, 1994), and intolerable bosses (Lombardo & McCall, 1984), describes behaviours that resemble the characteristics of tyrannical leadership behaviour as portrayed in the model. However, these studies focus mainly on the negative consequences such behaviour has for subordinates and addresses only indirectly the organisational implications.

Brodsky (1976), however, argues that leaders who harass their subordinates may nevertheless perform well on other work related assignments. In accordance with this, Skogstad (1997) posits that leaders who behave destructively towards subordinates may not necessarily be destructive in other interpersonal relationships, be it with customers or business partners or towards upper management. They may also have strong technical skills. Ma et al. (2004) call this, “*the paradox of managerial tyranny*,” arguing that tyrannical leadership may lead to extraordinary performance, even when subordinates suffer. They further argue that the tyrants' prime hold on subordinates lies in the ability to create an elaborate justification for their tyrannical methods. Examples of such tyrannical methods include creating groups of insiders and outsiders, fomenting distrust within the group, using propaganda, and creating scapegoats who they punish harshly to serve as a warning to others.

Because *tyrannical* leaders may behave constructively in terms of organisational oriented behaviour while displaying anti-subordinate behaviours; subordinates and superiors may evaluate the leader's behaviour quite differently. Subordinates may view the leader as a bully, while upper management views him/her favourably. Accordingly, Ma et al. (2004) note that upper management may tolerate tyrannical leadership behaviour, at least in the short run.

3.2. *Derailed leadership*

Derailed leadership behaviour involves behaviour that departs from constructive leadership behaviour on both of the dimensions depicted in Fig. 1. These leaders may display anti-subordinate behaviours like bullying, humiliation, manipulation, deception or harassment, while simultaneously performing anti-organisational behaviours like

absenteeism, shirking, fraud, or theft. McCall & Lombardo (1983) used the concept of derailment to distinguish the qualities of successful from failed managerial careers. McCall & Lombardo (1983) identified ten causes of leader derailment including specific performance problems with business activities, being unable to adapt to new situations or to develop necessary management skills, and being insensitive to others by displaying an abrasive, intimidating and bullying style of management. The latter problem included being cold, aloof and arrogant, betraying of trust, failing to delegate tasks and responsibilities, or failing to build teams. In addition, some derailed leaders were overly ambitious, for example by thinking more about the next job than the present one, by spending too much time and effort trying to please upper management, failing to staff effectively, being unable to think strategically, being unable to adapt to a superior with a different management style, and being overly dependent on an advocate or mentor.

Although McCall & Lombardo's (1983) concept of a derailed leader is narrower than our use of the term, we nevertheless believe that the concept of "derailed leadership behaviour" captures well the behaviour of leaders who are destructive towards both subordinates and the organisation. This is because McCall & Lombardo (1983) describe leadership behaviours that involves both anti-subordinate behaviours (e.g., intimidating and bullying subordinates) and behaviours that are destructive on an organisational dimension (e.g., laziness, lack of appropriate management skills, failing to build teams, being unable to think strategically and spending more time occupied with matters other than their work assignments).

Shackleton (1995) argues that it is the leaders' failure to adapt that is the major contributor to their derailment. She emphasises that changes brought about by a new leader, a radically different job, a reorganisation, or entry into the upper echelons of the hierarchy, require that the manager change and adapt in order to remain successful. Leaders who derail may have the same formative experiences as successful leaders, however, derailed leaders fail to learn from mistakes.

Conger (1990) focuses on similar themes in his study of the "dark side" of leadership, where he recognises that leaders may use their charismatic qualities for personal gain and abusively turn against what is good for their followers as well as for the organisation. Conger (1990) points to three particular skill areas that can contribute to such problems; the leaders' strategic vision, their communication and impression-management skills, and their general management practices. Examples of the "dark side" of the leader's strategic vision might be that the leader's vision reflects internal needs of the leader rather than those of the market, or the vision may reflect the leader's unrealistic or distorted perception of what the market needs. In both cases, the vision is not in the legitimate interest of the organisation. The potential liabilities in the leader's communication and impression management skills may surface through exaggerated self-descriptions and claims for the vision, and a habit of gaining commitment by restricting negative information and maximising positive information. The potential liabilities of a leader's management practices may be displayed in his/her poor management of people networks, unconventional behaviour that alienates subordinates, creation of disruptive "in-group/out-group" rivalries, and an autocratic, controlling management style (Conger, 1990). Conger's description of "the dark side" of leadership includes behaviours that violate the legitimate interest of the organisation, both by undermining or sabotaging the organisation's goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness, and by undermining the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of subordinates, and may therefore be regarded as derailed leadership behaviour.

3.3. Supportive–disloyal leaders

Supportive–disloyal leaders show consideration for the welfare of subordinates while violating the legitimate interest of the organisation by undermining task and goal attainment. Such leaders may steal resources from the organisation, be it material, time, or financial resources (Altheide et al., 1978; Ditton, 1977). Supportive–disloyal leaders may grant their employees more benefits than they are obliged to at the cost of the organisation. They may also encourage loafing or misconduct on the part of subordinates (Einarsen et al., 2002). Supportive–disloyal leadership behaviour has some features in common with what Blake & Mouton (1985) termed, "Country Club Management," as both types reflect an overriding concern with establishing camaraderie with subordinates.

Few studies have focused on leaders who are destructive towards the organisation. Greenberg (1997) argues that this may be explained by the fact that such behaviours primarily have been defined as a law enforcement problem instead of a management problem. It is known, however, that theft, fraud, and embezzlement are widespread problems in today's business world, and that leaders on different organisational levels may participate in such behaviours (Altheide et al., 1978; Greenberg, 1997; Mars, 1994; Reese, 1992; Rosoff, Pontell, & Tillman, 2002). Examples of such behaviours are found in a study by Altheide et al. (1978), where superiors rewarded subordinates by giving them products the company manufactured. Some arranged for stealing among subordinates by letting products "gather dust" so that

subordinates could purchase them at a reduced price (Altheide et al., 1978). Ditton's (1977) study of British bakeries, is another example, where thefts were so profound and accepted by some superiors that they planned for extra loaves to be baked to avoid running short during the day.

It must be emphasised that supportive–disloyal leadership behaviour may include destructive behaviours other than theft. Leaders may engage in sabotage or actively prevent goal attainment. The intention of the supportive–disloyal leader may not necessarily be to harm the organisation; rather he or she may be acting upon a different “vision” or strategy in support of other values and goals than that of the organisation, even believing that he or she acts with the organisation's best interest at heart. Leaders who lack strategic competence may still be able to nurture friendly relationships with subordinates; but even though they may be popular among some or all of their subordinates, these leaders would be considered destructive if their behaviour is not in the legitimate interest of the organisation.

3.4. *Constructive leadership*

The fourth quadrant of the model describes leaders who behave constructively both towards subordinates and the organisation. First, these leaders act in accordance with the legitimate interests of the organisation, supporting and enhancing the goals, tasks, and strategy of the organisation as well as making optimal use of organisational resources. Simultaneously, they enhance the motivation, well-being and job satisfaction of their followers by engaging in behaviours such as inviting subordinates to an extended engagement, and granting involvement and participation in decision processes. These leaders are concerned with the welfare of their subordinates while simultaneously being focused on goal attainment and the effective use of resources in the service of the legitimate interests of the organisation. We acknowledge that the proposed model does not do justice to the considerable body of research that has sought to identify the characteristics of constructive leadership (Bass, 1990; Yukl, 2002). Our purpose here is merely to use a broad conceptualisation of constructive leadership to draw attention to distinctions that may be made in terms of the ways destructive leadership manifests.

3.5. *What about passive and inactive forms of leadership?*

The proposed model does not explicitly define passive forms of leadership, such as laissez-faire leadership, which is included in some general leadership models (e.g. Bass, 1990; Blake & Mouton, 1985), and the focus of some works on destructive leadership (e.g. Kelloway et al., 2005, 2006). “Laissez-faire leadership” represents a leadership style where the leader has more or less abdicated from the responsibilities and duties designated to him/her (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939). For instance, in their work on the “Managerial Grid”, Blake & Mouton (1985), describe “impoverished management” as a kind of leadership where the leader exerts a minimal amount of effort to get required work done combined with a minimal concern for subordinates. This type of leadership behaviour has several characteristics in common with both “laissez-faire leadership” (Bass, 1990) and what has been called “passive management-by-exception” (Bass, 1990). Leaders engaging in the passive management-by-exception style only intervene when problems are either brought to their attention or become impossible to ignore (Bass, 1990). Leaders who rely on a laissez-faire style try to avoid decision-making and the responsibilities associated with their position (Bass, 1990).

Intuitively, one might situate laissez-faire leadership in the middle of our framework. However, Stogdill (1974) points out that comparing laissez-faire leadership to non-leadership is a severe mistake, which has caused conceptual confusion around this leadership style. The appointment of a person to a leadership role evokes legitimate expectations among both subordinates and superiors that, when left unfulfilled, may have consequences that are not in the organisation's best interests. In a qualitative study of Swedish PhD. students who had dropped out of their doctoral program, Frischer & Larsson (2000) identified laissez-faire leadership by supervisors as the main reason for this attrition. Hence, in keeping with our characterisation of derailed leaders, laissez-faire leadership may have negative consequences for both students (subordinates) and the university (organisation). Lewin et al. (1939) also found negative consequences of this kind of leadership in their experimental study of the teacher-student relationship in classroom settings. Compared to authoritarian and democratic leadership, laissez-faire leadership was associated with work of low quality and quantity. Moreover, when the laissez-faire leader physically left the room, the children's performance improved.

Consistent with the definition of destructive leadership introduced in this paper, laissez-faire leadership violates the legitimate interests of organisations, by for example “stealing time”, while also possibly undermining the motivation,

well-being and job satisfaction of subordinates (e.g. by failing to meet their legitimate expectations of guidance and support). Hence, laissez-faire should be considered a form of destructive leadership. Because laissez-faire leadership has the potential to undermine organisational objectives and/or subordinates' well-being, it may be classified according to any of the three destructive leadership cells identified here; the appropriate cell may depend on how laissez-faire leadership is enacted. Hence, empirical research is needed to investigate how laissez-faire leadership behaviour is associated with the other leadership behaviours described in the proposed model. One possibility may be that "passive versus active behaviours" constitutes a third dimension in our framework.

4. Conclusion

The variety of concepts and behavioural descriptions falling under the overarching concept of destructive leadership has expanded significantly in the past years due to a welcome increase in research (e.g. Einarsen et al., 2002; Kellerman, 2004; Kelloway et al., 2006; Tepper, 2000). Although there is some conceptual overlap among these concepts, no agreed upon definition or overarching concept exists within this field, making it difficult to compare and contrast the findings of different studies.

With those problems in mind, we proposed a definition and a model, which contributes in several ways to destructive leadership theory and research. First, the proposed definition and the accompanying model contributes to our understanding of destructive leadership by offering a broad and inclusive concept of destructive leadership behaviour, including behaviours directed both towards subordinates and toward the larger organisation. Second, the proposed model presents a nuanced picture of destructive leadership behaviour, pointing out that destructive leaders may display destructive and constructive behaviours simultaneously. Third, the model presents a taxonomy of destructive behaviours that clearly defines and differentiates the main forms of such behaviours. It is our belief that the proposed model has the potential to serve as a basis for integrating research on such diverse constructs as leader bullying, incivility, abuse, counterproductive behaviour, deviance, undermining, corruption, and theft. Future research should attempt to empirically distinguish among the destructive leadership behaviours identified in our framework (e.g., their etiology, antecedents, and consequences). It is our hope that the proposed definition and model will stimulate further research and theory development in the area of destructive leadership.

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