Gordon Institute of Business Science
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Follower perceptions of benefits from destructive leadership for organisations operating in hostile environments

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for the degree of Master of Business Administration.

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Abstract

Purpose –

The purpose of this research was to establish whether destructive leaders are perceived by followers to be capable of driving beneficial outcomes for organisations, especially those operating in hostile external environments. For the purposes of this study a "hostile external environment" is/was construed to mean the uncertain socio-political milieu within which South African-based organisations or subsidiaries operate. From an economic point of view a "hostile economic environment" also refers to resource constraints or adverse circumstances directly attributable to macroeconomic policy and the implementation thereof.

Design/methodology/approach –

A qualitative research design was applied to explore this through a phenomenological research strategy. A semi-structured interview process was conducted to seek follower perceptions, whose feedback was thematically analysed to address the study's research questions and objectives.

Findings –

The findings of this research indicate that positive contributions to organisational outcomes in hostile external environments are possible in the presence of destructive leadership styles.

Research limitations/implications –

The research was conducted within an emerging economy classified as presenting a hostile external environment to organisations operating there, namely South Africa.

Originality/value –

This research is original in its contextual focus on hostile external environments, and the interplay of destructive leadership with organisational outcomes especially those that are beneficial in such cases.

Keywords

Follower perceptions, organisational benefits, destructive leadership, hostile external environments

Plagiarism Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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Table 1: List of abbreviations and acronyms

APA7	American Psychological Association referencing system (7th ed.)
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
ChatGPT	Chatbot: Generative Pre-trained Transformer
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
ESG	Environmental, Societal & Governance
FMCG	Fast moving consumer goods
GIBS	Gordon Institute of Business Science
HDS	Hogan Development Survey
HR	Human Resources
ILT	Implicit Leadership Theory
LLM	Large Language Model, includes ChatGPT
M&A	Mergers and Acquisitions
MBA	Master of Business Administration
NLP	Natural Language Processing
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RQ	Research Question
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SA	South Africa (an emerging economy)
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SMME	Small, Medium and Micro Enterprise
TMT	Top Management Team
UP	University of Pretoria

A detailed Glossary of Terms is contained in the Appendices for readers seeking further exposition or definitional clarity.

CHAPTER 1: DEFINITION OF PROBLEM AND PURPOSE

1.1 Introduction and Problem Description

" Without an opportunity, their abilities would have been wasted, and without their abilities, the opportunity would have arisen in vain." –

Niccolo Machiavelli (The Prince (1532))

There is a growing appreciation in academic literature that forms of leadership traditionally viewed as "bad" can be advantageous, while those seen as "good" can suffer from shortcomings (Borgholthaus et al., 2023; Camm, 2019; Haar & de Jong, 2023; Mackey et al., 2021; Qin et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2018). A fair assessment of the pros and cons of a particular leadership style should consider the context within which that style is exercised; for example, whether such contexts are conducive to a particular leadership style; therefore it is critical to understand the context in which any leadership style is being investigated for determining its effectiveness (Haar & de Jong, 2023; Mackey et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2018; Tourish, 2020). This merits further exploration of the positive contribution destructive leadership can make to organisational outcomes (Borgholthaus et al., 2023; Brownell et al., 2021; Myung et al., 2017; Neely et al., 2020).

With a shift to definitions of destructive leadership that are less leader-centric, it is worth considering how interactions of leaders with followers over time may benefit organisations (Mackey et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2018; Thoroughgood et al., 2018). Although organisational leadership plays a significant role in organisational performance; the role of destructive leadership, specifically, and its relationship with organisational outcomes is less well understood; and moving beyond this to a consideration of the role that the external environment, especially one that is hostile plays in the dynamic of this relationship, is still less clear; therefore, the role of destructive leadership and the moderating role of hostile external environments on organisational outcomes present opportunities for further research (Holmes et al., 2021; Palmer et al., 2020). The research problem then is framed with reference to the difficulties in perceiving benefits from destructive leadership for organisations

operating in hostile external environments, especially as perceived by followers.

1.2 Research Contribution and Theoretical Rationale

The research aims at a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between destructive forms of leadership within harsh contexts, and associated organisational outcomes. The unit of observation for this research problem is located at the level of the individual follower whose perceptions are to be explored, for elucidation of this issue at the level of the unit of analysis, namely the organisation. Thus, the organisation is the unit of analysis for this research; while the follower constitutes the unit of observation in seeking their perceptions of leadership applicable at the organisational level.

This research seeks to explore the ways in which followers perceive leaders with reference to the implicit ways in which leaders are conceived of, how followers conceive of leaders as worthy of positions of leadership, and the factors that make for effective execution of the duties and responsibilities of leadership on an ongoing basis, once an individual has been promoted to a position of leadership (Epitropaki et al., 2013; Hogan et al., 2021). The outcomes that are achieved at the organisational level as a consequence of various leadership styles, especially destructive forms thereof, are considered herein so as to better understand the forms that such outcomes might take, and whether they might be viewed as beneficial or drawbacks to any organisation, considering the nature of these advantages or disadvantages, such as the period over which these are conferred, whether playing out over the short or long-term. The context sets the stage on which the interplay of leadership and organisational outcomes takes place. It is in a specific environmental context that the specific relationship between antecedent and consequences will take place with this determining the boundary conditions within which this relationship is shaped. This research thus aims to integrate follower perceptions about leadership, organisational outcomes and the environmental context.

These themes are associated with the following research gaps.

Exploring assumptions that destructive leadership is "bad": That the results of research into the impact of destructive leadership on organisations and followers is heterogeneous suggests that results are not always intuitively obvious but rather curvilinear (Mackey et al., 2021). Therefore, the advantages of dark traits merit

further exploration to identify situations where beneficial outcomes emerge (Smith et al., 2018). In this vein, Cesinger et al. (2023) uncover a positive relationship between narcissistic leadership and certain forms of organisational commitment; thereby revealing a need for further research into the complex nature of such relationships.

Positive contributions to organisational outcomes: There is a need for research to better understand when firms in various stages might benefit from leaders with dark triad personalities (Borgholthaus et al., 2023; Brownell et al., 2021). Further, avenues for research into specific positive organisational outcomes exist, and these include, inter alia, the effect of the celebrity status of the chief executive officer (CEO) on external stakeholder relations; and benefits in the use of modern stakeholder communication channels, such as social media platforms, with reference to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the social and political environment by executive managers (Neely et al., 2020). However, this research will not specifically focus on any of these avenues but rather seek to gather insights into the perceptions of followers and the general positive contributions that destructive leaders might make, with the possibility of such advantages arising here given that they have already been identified as extant.

Competitiveness in hostile external environments: There is a research gap on how adverse external environments moderate the relationship of negative CEO personality with firm performance (Palmer et al., 2020). Further investigation is warranted into how organisations derive advantages from leaders with traits of narcissism during times of economic hardships, where amicable relationships with stakeholders such as leaders in the business community and government are requisite, as in many emerging markets, and this offers opportunities for novel applications of contingency theory (Holmes et al., 2021).

Contingency theory is applicable as a theoretical lens for this research based on its productive application to multiple related cases, viz. organisational outcomes contingent on selection versus interaction or system approaches; pay premiums for managers contingent on the level of managerial control; organisational performance contingent on effective HR selection practices; and effective leadership behaviours contingent on contextual variables, such as goals and tasks, relationship status, and the position and power of the leader (Combs & Skill, 2003; Daft, 2011; Iszatt-White et al., 2018; Kim & Ployhart, 2018; Van de Ven & Drazin, 1984).

This research being located at the intersection of the phenomena discussed is therefore currently relevant. It will explore destructive leadership from the counterintuitive angle of unexpected benefits for organisations operating in harsh external environments in the context of an emerging economy in crisis. While the following table summarises the research gaps that have been discussed thus far. The subsequent discussion turns to the merits for this research from a business perspective.

Table 2: Summary of research gaps identified

Theme	Research Gap (RG)
Exploring assumptions that destructive leadership is "bad"	**RG1:** Heterogeneity in results on the impact of destructive leadership on organisations indicate that these outcomes are not always "bad" (Mackey et al., 2021). There is a need to further explore dark traits to identify situations where these may be advantageous (Smith et al., 2018). For example, Cesinger et al. (2023) demonstrate that narcissistic forms of leadership have a positive relationship with certain forms of organisational commitment, highlighting the need for further research to achieve better understanding of complexities in relationships with organisational outcomes.
Positive contributions to organisational outcomes	**RG2:** There is a need for research to better understand when firms in various stages might benefit from leaders with dark triad personalities (Brownell et al., 2021). Positive effects for organisations is the focus of this research. Examples of these have been observed with respect to CEO celebrity status and its effects on external stakeholder relations; benefits have also been identified with executive management benefits in the use of modern stakeholder communication channels, such as social media platforms, with reference to for example CSR, the social and the political environment; with positive effects thus constituting under-researched phenomena (Neely et al., 2020). Therefore, positive contributions to organisational outcomes merit further study.

Theme	Research Gap (RG)
Competitiveness in difficult external environments	**RG3:** The moderating role of adverse external environments subject to significant resource constraints on the relationship between negative CEO personality and the effect it has on firm performance requires further research (Palmer et al., 2020). The role of narcissism during economic crises or hardships, including for countries where cordial relationships, including with business and political leaders are required, such as many emerging economies, needs further investigation (Holmes et al., 2021).

1.3 Business Rationale

The current political environment poses challenges from escalated geopolitical tensions, which features conflicts associated with global and economic repercussions (The Economist, 2023b). When these are combined with other economic hardships, such as disruptions to global supply chains, a slowdown in the spread of globalisation, including a reversal of the trend towards increased liberalisation of international trade (The Economist, 2023a), hostility in the external environment arises that makes it difficult for organisations to adapt. In such hostile environments, organisations face adverse circumstances externally in instances involving change that is unpredictable, rivalry that is ferocious, customer loyalty that is fickle, or constraints on resources that are severe (Palmer et al., 2020).

1.3.1 South Africa - an emerging economy in crisis

Emerging economies serve as better benchmarks of hostile external environments compared to advanced economies in that they present higher levels of risk to organisations, and due to the existence of structural gaps, resource scarcities and institutional voids (Cao & Shi, 2021; Ireland & Hitt, 1999). An example of a country that is an emerging economy and that subjects its host organisations to an hostile external environment is South Africa. Already Lipton (2014) considered the erosion of South Africa's constitutional democracy. Currently, organisations operating there are subject to severe constraints of resources achieved through multiple service delivery failures, including unreliable supply of electricity and water, and logistical infrastructure inadequacies; to these high unemployment and poor economic growth

are added to make for a country in crisis and on the verge of failure (The Economist, 2023c).

Organisations in environments like these need to adapt to these circumstances if they are to survive. Such organisations desperately need to understand what factors might provide competitive or other advantages in such environments, especially when determining suitable leadership styles (Holmes et al., 2021; Neely et al., 2020). It is South Africa that is the location for this study. Specifically, for a study of the intersection of destructive leadership with outcomes for organisations operating in the country. That South Africa is not a developed economy but an emerging one strengthens the argument for locating this study there (Borgholthaus et al., 2023). Further, on account of risk into descent as a failed state, South Africa qualifies more specifically as an emerging economy in distress; and it is among these ranks of hostile external environments that this study is located (The Economist, 2023c).

1.4 Conclusion

Having identified research gaps and an aligned research problem in this chapter, the remainder of this report is organised per the following structure. In Chapter 2 a literature review considers the research gaps identified in greater detail and places these within the current body of knowledge pertaining to destructive leadership, associated organisational outcomes, and the external, environmental context. Chapter 3 will map the research gaps presented in the literature review to the research questions that served as the focal point of the research conducted. Afterwards, Chapter 4 reveals the research methodology and design that enabled the focal research questions to be answered. Chapter 5 presents the results of this research. Then, Chapter 6 discusses these results in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes this report.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a review of the academic literature on leadership will be conducted. Its main focus will be on destructive forms thereof; follower perceptions of leadership; organisational outcomes associated with various leadership styles, especially those styles referred to as destructive; and business operating environments, especially hostile or challenging ones. This literature review seeks to present both the current state of knowledge in the relevant domain and identify research gaps wherein this research might be placed. The review aims to uncover themes associated with the unexpected benefits of destructive and dark-side leadership on organisations especially those operating in hostile environments, and uncover research gaps associated with these themes.

The following conceptual model presents the primary constructs to be considered in this chapter, their relationships with each other and to the research gaps (RG) and research questions (RQ) that are developed here.
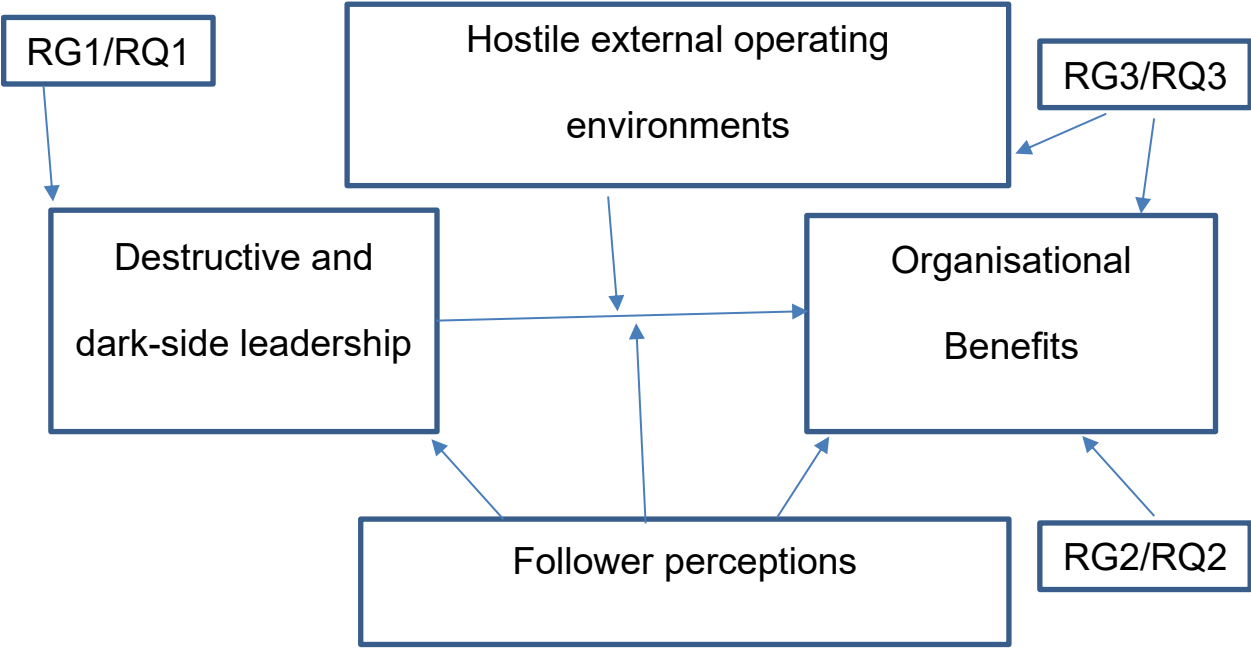
Figure 1: Conceptual model

The following figure presents an outline of this chapter. It represents the progression from micro-level constructs through the meso-level and culminating at the macro-level view.
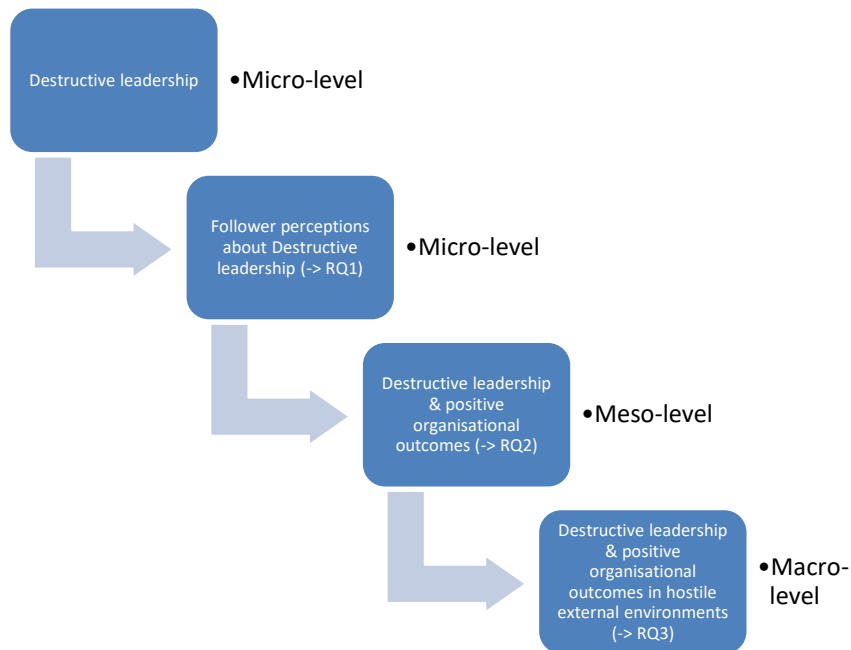
Figure 2: **Roadmap for Chapter 2**

2.2 Various forms of leadership

When considering leadership, the traditional focus has been on the leader as a "hero", classified under the umbrella of "Great Man theories" (Daft, 2011, p.27). Associated leadership styles include those that are referred to as charismatic and transformational; in fact, transformational leadership encompasses charismatic leadership (Du Brin, 2013). Thus, they both have in common high overall positive relationships with "(a) follower job satisfaction, (b) follower leader satisfaction, (c) follower motivation, (d) leader job performance, (e) group or organisation performance, and (f) rated leader effectiveness" (Du Brin, 2013, p.129).

Various positive leadership styles that are associated with beneficial outcomes for organisations, teams and subordinates have associated dark sides that are under-researched. These dark sides include the following leadership styles with their respective dark-side elements: charismatic and transformational leadership when unethical or associated with narcissism; humble leadership with negative leader consequences from an agentic perspective, or when subordinates attribute the humility of the leader as being self-serving, and thus driving workplace deviance; servant leadership when associated with fuzzy thinking, lack of self-awareness, or an unacknowledged dark-side; and emotional intelligence when directed to self-serving benefits (Camm, 2019; Du Brin, 2013; Kilduff et al., 2010; O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020; Qin et al., 2020). A lack of self-awareness is a common theme among these leadership styles, and is associated with the destructive leadership style (Da Fonseca et al., 2022).

It is evident from the above that multiple leadership styles tend to have associated dark sides, whether they are classified as a dark-style or a leadership style accompanied by a dark-side when accompanied by an excess of positive qualities that are associated with the relevant style of leadership. While the focus in leadership research is predominantly on constructive forms of leadership, such as transformational and charismatic forms; it is the dark side of leadership, associated with destructive forms of leadership, that is relatively under-researched (Mackey et al., 2021; Thoroughgood et al., 2018). This form of leadership is where we will direct our gaze to next.

2.2.1 Destructive leadership

Destructive forms of leadership are associated with dark-side traits, which might be viewed as "bright-side" traits that are taken to excess, thus the dark side to these traits emerge from the shadows (Kaiser et al., 2015). The dark side is encapsulated by the 11 dimensions of the Hogan Development Survey (HDS). They include, inter alia, "bold" (arrogant), "mischievous" (charming), "colourful" (impulsive), and "imaginative" (innovative) dark side traits, all four of which are associated with leader behaviours that are excessively "strategic" but weak in "operational" dimensions (Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Kaiser et al., 2015). Lack of self-awareness is also associated with destructive forms of leadership as well as descent and derailment from healthier leadership styles (Camm, 2019; Da Fonseca et al., 2022).

Mackey et al. (2021) identified multiple styles of destructive leadership that involve, inter alia, elements of abuse, corruption, derailment, despotism, exploitation, bullying, incivility, negativity, tyranny and toxicity. Studies into destructive leadership have been conducted at both the level of the individual CEO (Borgholthaus et al., 2023; Chandler et al., 2021; Cragun et al., 2020; Haar & de Jong, 2023; Kim et al., 2021; Palmer et al., 2020; Picone et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020) and that of the top management team (Cesinger et al., 2023; Holmes et al., 2021; Neely et al., 2020) providing insights into the operation of destructive leadership within the upper echelons of organisations.

Another construct that relates to destructive leadership is that of the Dark Triad. Identified by Paulhus and Williams (2002), it is composed of three elements, namely subclinical narcissism, Machiavellianism, and subclinical psychopathy, which they demonstrated are not mutually exclusive but rather overlap to a significant degree. Sub-clinical psychopathy is often referred to as corporate psychopathy, and is described as a "wild" personality that lacks remorse, that is unconcerned about morality, and is callous (Jonason & Webster, 2010; Paulhus et al., 2021).

The construct Machiavellianism, named in homage to Niccolo Machiavelli, author of, inter alia, "The Prince", a seminal work in the study of politics that provides advice on navigating the "real" world of politics, or "realpolitik" with political skill capable of deployment for negative consequences, is a measure of a "crafty" personality that

tends to manipulate and exploit others for achieving their own selfish purposes (Hayek et al., 2017; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Paulhus et al., 2021). Narcissism, from the mythical Greek figure Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection, is a "special" personality that involves grandiosity, attention and admiration seeking (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Jonason & Webster, 2010; Paulhus et al., 2021).

After the addition of another construct to the Dark Triad, namely "everyday sadism", the Dark Tetrad was developed (Bonfá-Araujo et al., 2022). Various measures of the constructs associated with the Dark Triad and Dark Tetrad have been developed and refined as the operationalisation of these constructs has improved. These include for the Dark Triad, a 12-item measure, namely the Dirty Dozen, developed by Jonason and Webster (2010), and for the Dark Tetrad, a four-factor measure, or Short Dark Tetrad, developed by Paulhus et al. (2021).

Individuals with a high-risk appetite such as certain dark triad personality traits especially psychopathy would have a bias towards strategic decision-making that involves the firm in both a high degree of commitment and firm scope; this is preferred over operational decision-making that involves both a low degree of commitment and firm scope, and thus a relatively low profile for the individual, being the opposite of what a narcissistic or hubristic leader would seek (Jonason & Webster, 2010; Paulhus et al., 2021; Shivakumar, 2014; Tourish, 2020). These personality types possess certain advantageous properties, such as the ability to charm at "zero acquaintance" as in the case of narcissism, a property especially beneficial in human relations given the importance of first impressions on relationship formation (Back et al., 2010). Further, narcissism is especially beneficial for hastening one's rise to the position of CEO (Rovelli & Curnis, 2021).

The negative Dark Triad personality trait can be contrasted with its more recently developed positive equivalent, namely the Light Triad personality trait composed of Kantianism, Humanism, and "Faith in humanity" (Kaufman et al., 2019, p.1). While the dark triad is associated with destructive leadership; the novelty of the light triad construct explains the paucity of empirical studies into the construct, especially in the leadership domain where a well-developed nomological network is lacking regarding leader effectiveness, and leader emergence in the first place, as well as its place in prevailing implicit leadership theories (Epitropaki et al., 2013; Hogan et

al., 2021; Kaufman et al., 2019; Schyns et al., 2022).

Dark Triad and Light Triad should not be viewed in binary terms rather they are extremes delineating a continuum or spectrum upon which individuals constituting the human population lie (Kaufman et al., 2019). This is also consistent with the Hogan Development Survey (HDS) which conceives of the human population lying upon a spectrum with respect to the 11 HDS dimensions with the Goldilocks zone lying in a central range, so that both a deficit or an excess of a dimension can be conceived of as being misfits or mal-adaptations to the stresses and strains of modern life and workplace requirements (Kaiser et al., 2015).

Humans possess combinations of dark side traits, the resulting personalities prevalent in dark or light triad traits then work together or at cross purposes, cooperatively or collaboratively, in leader and follower relations within certain environments or contexts, both inside and outside the organisation, and when these relations cooperate then constructs such as the toxic triangle may form, with organisational outcomes shaped by this complex interplay (Kaufman et al., 2019; Padilla et al., 2007; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Paulhus et al., 2021).

Associated styles of and concepts for destructive leadership have been identified including, among others, toxic leadership, abusive supervision, and petty tyranny; these overlapping constructs point to the need for establishing construct clarity (Mackey et al., 2021; Thoroughgood et al., 2018). There is a need to integrate individual traits into leadership theory with reference to the population of top executives (Holmes et al., 2021); these include the dark triad traits of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, of which the latter two remain relatively under-researched (Holmes et al., 2021); with further research opportunities relating to a dark tetrad including "everyday sadism", or alternatively "schadenfreude" or "spitefulness", as an additional element (Bonfá-Araujo et al., 2022; Mackey et al., 2021; Van Dijk, 2005).

Schyns et al. (2022) have postulated a model of the antecedent role of the dark triad in destructive leadership with reference to mitigating destructive leadership through HR practices. Research into the related construct of hubris, which is connected to narcissism- an element of the Dark Triad, is also called for, specifically its origin

through the interaction of behaviours and dispositions within organisational contexts (Tourish, 2020). Further research gaps involve the "bright side" of these "dark side" traits (Cragun et al., 2020; Mackey et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2018).

Complex definitions of destructive leadership that are relatively recent have emerged, and these challenge traditional leader-centric views; rather presenting the construct more holistically as a dynamic, time-based, and co-creational process extending beyond the leader alone (Thoroughgood et al., 2018), and incorporating a more complex construct formulated by Padilla et al. (2007) referred to as a "toxic triangle" that involves both followers susceptible to the sway of the destructive leader and an environment conducive to its formation. These two elements of the triangle feature in addition to that of the destructive leader. Thus, the formation of such toxic triangles better embeds destructive leadership within organisations (Padilla et al., 2007).

For example, in the case of hubris this is co-constructed and involves interactions through time in a group setting situated within an organisation (Tourish, 2020). The hubristic leader might be contrasted with the strategic leader who is said to embody confidence in a manner that steers clear of hubris and is also associated with stoicism; thus it is presented as a leadership style capable of allowing firms to achieve strategic competitiveness in the 21st century through its keen focus on developing organisational human capital (Ireland & Hitt, 1999). On the other hand, hubris has been associated with the global financial crisis of the early 21st century and multiple problematic behaviours, distinguished from narcissism, and extending beyond over-confidence to include recklessness, "self-interested behaviours", an "insulation from reality", "contempt for critical feedback", and "abusive behaviour" (Tourish, 2020, p.96).

Other recent studies into destructive leadership and overlapping constructs (Borgholthaus et al., 2023; Chandler et al., 2021; Cragun et al., 2020; Haar & de Jong, 2023; Kunz & Sonnenholzner, 2023; Liu et al., 2021; Palmer et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020) undergirded by the upper echelons theory of Hambrick & Mason (1984) have also identified the antecedent role of the background characteristics of an organisation's top management team on that organisation's outcomes. For example, Kunz and Sonnenholzner (2023) demonstrate a relationship between the

overconfidence of an organisation's management and the resilience of that organisation.

Research gaps pertaining to destructive leadership also exist in exploring populations beyond that of the CEO especially in the case of hubris, an extreme form of overconfidence, to better understand the origin of these constructs within organisations (Tourish, 2020); developing an improved understanding of destructive leadership, such as any associated positivity; and uncovering associated triggers for this form of leadership (Mackey et al., 2021). Next, we shift our focus to follower perceptions about leadership.

2.2.2 Follower perceptions about leadership

The factors that enable leader emergence, such as follower classifications of individuals as leaders and their perceptions about the rise of individuals to positions of leadership are based upon simplified schemas referred to as implicit leadership theories (ILTs) (Epitropaki et al., 2013). Leader emergence is related to but distinct from the construct of leader effectiveness (Hogan et al., 2021). Follower expectations of leaders include that leaders lead by example, especially if they expect changes from followers (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

2.2.3 Follower perceptions about destructive leadership

Follower perceptions of destructive leadership offer the advantage of avoiding self-report bias associated with self-report measures of destructive leadership and overlapping constructs (Min et al., 2019). However, with follower reports of destructive leadership it is the victim's perspective that is provided but not that of the perpetrator thus triangulation limitations apply (Min et al., 2019). As abusive supervision has been associated with destructive leadership in most empirical studies of destructive leadership (Mackey et al., 2021), this is likely to have a negative effect on follower perceptions of such leadership.

When considering the perceptions of followers regarding destructive leaders, there is a need to appreciate that perceptions of such leaders are different to associated organisational outcomes (Thoroughgood et al., 2018). For example, the charisma of the leader has a "dazzling effect" on others thus shaping their perceptions (Hogan et al., 2021). The qualities that facilitate initial emergence as a leader are distinct

from and not necessarily the same as those that that are conducive to effectiveness as a leader once appointed, so it is conceivable that dark side traits may on the one hand facilitate emergence as a leader while on the other not foster the properties necessary for ongoing leader effectiveness after emergence has occurred (Hogan et al., 2021). Where differentiation of constructs is not achieved then high levels of ambiguity are expected, as was observed by Tourish (2020) among interviewed participants in a qualitative study into the related leadership construct of hubris, and such ambiguity was also observed among the respondents in this research as reported on in Chapter 5.

Follower perceptions of destructive leadership will depend on whether those followers fall within any toxic triangle that may have formed within the applicable organisation, specifically as susceptible followers (Padilla et al., 2007). Followers outside of such toxic triangles will be expected to have radically different perceptions of the destructive leader at the apex of such toxic triangle when compared with those within such triangles. However, the increasingly complex conceptualisation of susceptible followership within organisations possessing toxic triangles makes it clear that the place of followers is not static and rather dynamic, especially when susceptible followership is conceived of under the more complex susceptible circle taxonomy (Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood et al., 2012).

In the realm of destructive leadership, it is critical to draw a distinction between subjective perceptions of reality and objective reality; this is similar to the research philosophy of critical realism where reality is experienced both sensationally at the level of an object and then again after those sensations have been subjectively processed (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The distinction between identity and reputation with a group is also pertinent here; while identity is the individual's sense of themselves and more subjective, their reputation among others is more objective in being based on multiple perspectives beyond that of oneself (Hogan et al., 2021).

However, for any individual or group, it is perception that ultimately shapes reality, as in the case of a CEO's personality and the perceptions that markets have of the risk levels and shareholder returns associated with that firm (Harrison et al., 2020). Further perceptions vary based on perspective, for example internal organisational perceptions of destructive or dark triad leaders, for example those of followers,

versus perceptions that are external to the organisation, for example those of external stakeholders such as customers (Haar and de Jong; 2023).

Krasikova et al. (2013) make it clear that various forms of destructive leadership are associated with destructive actions but differentiate these with respect to associated goals: with abusive supervision and petty tyranny being unclear about what goals are to be achieved; while pseudo-transformational leadership and personalised charismatic leadership hone in on achieving destructive goals, where the leader's goals are preeminent and followers' goals are irrelevant; leaving strategic bullying and managerial tyranny to focus on goals that are either destructive or constructive, here organisational goals may be pursued, but involving the deployment of bullying behaviours for example.

Heterogeneity in results on the impacts of destructive leadership on organisations and followers highlight that results vary and are not always "bad" (Brownell et al., 2021; Mackey et al., 2021). There is therefore a need to further explore dark traits to identify situations where these may be advantageous, and to develop an overall better understanding of the complex relationship of destructive leadership with organisational outcomes (Smith et al., 2018). For example, while Bouncken et al. (2020) find that Dark Triad traits of leaders negatively moderate relationships with firm performance; Cesinger et al. (2023) demonstrate that narcissistic leadership has a positive relationship with certain forms of organisational commitment, and identifies the clear need for research into potential moderators of the relationship. This highlights the contingent nature of the phenomenon, and the need for qualitative research to achieve greater appreciation of nuance in understanding this phenomenon (Thoroughgood et al., 2018). This leads to the first research question: **Research Question 1:** What assumptions do followers have about destructive leadership?

A boundary condition pertains to this first research question delineating that it is the perceptions of followers, and only followers, of destructive leaders that falls within the scope of this research project, with follower perceptions forming an area of consideration within its own right (Mackey et al., 2021). This means that the way destructive leaders are perceived by any other parties be they peer-group leaders, leaders higher up in the organisational hierarchy, other organisational stakeholders,

or indeed any external parties that would not qualify as stakeholders are not considered in this research. Later, on it will become clear that an unintended, but interesting, sub-categorisation pertains to the followers impinging upon the sample that was ultimately included in the research, and by implication another subset of followers that was not considered, and hence availing of future research opportunities in this active field of study.

2.3 Organisational outcomes

Organisational outcomes will be considered from the perspective of followers. This is more suitable for assessing outcomes that are more subjective in nature and lend themselves to qualitative assessment such as ethical and social responsibility (Myung et al., 2017), or celebrity status (Neely et al., 2020). In considering organisational outcomes, it is helpful to make a distinction between those which are shorter versus longer-term for further evaluating these. Longer-term considerations, such as ongoing sustainability and profitability, might be expected to take precedence over shorter-term factors such as immediate profits that may be associated with longer-term costs. With sustainability fostered through business transformations that are systemic in nature; organisations might then move beyond profitability to include wider measures of organisational success such as those pertaining to sustainability, corporate governance, societal, and environmental factors (Boddy, 2024; Padayachee, 2017; Waddock, 2020). While the Dark Triad is associated with short-term strategies (Jonason & Webster, 2010).

As Boddy (2024) argues, it is the identification and avoidance of corporate psychopathy in the upper ranks of an organisation that makes for organisations that are sustainable, viable, ethical, and that consequently make for safer investments. The contrast between short-term and long-term factors can be related to the dark triad, specifically narcissism, where the personality trait's success and popularity with others over the short-term, especially at "zero acquaintance", and rapid ascent to the rank of CEO, might be contrasted with its mal-adaptiveness involving associated personality traits of exploitativeness and entitlement becoming prevalent over the longer term, when short run advantages are reversed (Back et al., 2010; Rovelli & Curnis, 2021).

2.3.1 Destructive leadership and contributions to organisational outcomes

Earlier research into destructive leadership has highlighted its expected association with numerous negative outcomes at multiple conceptual levels, namely those related to the leader, the job, the organisation, and finally the individual follower (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). More recent research into the impact of destructive leadership, and associated dark-side personality traits, on organisational outcomes has considered its role as both antecedent and moderator. In an antecedent role for various forms of organisational commitment, namely affective, continuance, and normative, with mixed results (Cesinger et al., 2023); for workplace mistreatment (Min et al., 2019); for leader performance and follower attitude, health and well-being (Fosse et al., 2019); and for overall firm performance in the case of the CEO (Palmer et al., 2020).

Recent scholarship makes it clear that there is a complex relationship between destructive leadership and organisational outcomes involving multiple mediators and moderators (Haar & de Jong, 2023; Palmer et al., 2020; Petrenko et al., 2016). Further highlighting this complexity, destructive leadership itself may act as a moderator on firm performance (Bouncken et al., 2020).

In addition to distinguishing between short- and long-term gains from destructive leadership, it is helpful to differentiate between performance indicators that are external, and more likely to be positive, against those that are internal, and more likely to be negative, such as staff satisfaction levels and retention rates, to aid in evaluations (Haar & de Jong, 2023). Internal measures such as effective communication from followers are less likely to be achieved in the case of abusive supervision, which is often associated with destructive leadership (Tepper et al., 2007). This means that internal measures of the destructive leader's performance based on the feedback of followers, on account of communication breakdowns, may be underestimating associated destructive outcomes.

There is a deleterious impact associated with each component of the dark triad and an individual's counterproductive work behaviours, with Machiavellianism and psychopathy, there is also a negative impact on the individual's job performance (O'Boyle et al., 2012). While for the narcissistic leader, a misalignment exists between the leader's interests and that of their organisation with their own needs

placed above those of the organisation (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). In the case of CEO narcissism levels and associated complex organisational outcomes, one can discern outcomes, based on the example of CSR, that are both advantageous, such as the profile of a firm's CSR activities, and disadvantageous, such as poor financial outcomes for the organisation in terms of its CSR investments; also raising the question of alignment with organisational objectives as to whether CSR activities are conducted to meet the personal needs specific to a narcissistic personality type with organisational interests relegated to a secondary level if considered at all (Petrenko et al., 2016).

Curvilinearity in research results into destructive leadership's impact on organisations and followers indicate that results are not always detrimental but that the relationship between these constructs is more complex involving multiple mediators and moderators (Haar & de Jong, 2023; Mackey et al., 2021; Petrenko et al., 2016). Also, with a proliferation of constructs associated with destructive leadership, it becomes difficult to disentangle the organisational effects of each of these constructs (Mackey et al., 2021; Thoroughgood et al., 2018).

There are further research gaps here in the antecedent role of dark personality on organisational commitment in the case of managers; its cascading effect when applied at the micro-level of influence down through the organisational hierarchy and the emergent organisational consequences; its detrimental effect on entrepreneurial orientation; and its effect on perceptions of organisation's CSR and social responsibility initiatives in the case of narcissistic leaders (Bouncken et al., 2020; Cesinger et al., 2023; Myung et al., 2017; Palmer et al., 2020).

Destructive leaders encourage their followers to pursue goals that are misaligned with those of the organisation, and more severe results, typically harmful, including counterproductive work behaviours and aggression arise when compared with ineffective forms of leadership, which tend to have less severe negative outcomes, such as those bearing on task performance and safety standards (Krasikova et al., 2013; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). In the case of CEOs possessing dark triad traits, negative performance outcomes typically occur for internal organisational measures of performance, while results for external measure are more mixed, and depend on whether direct effects or indirect effects via moderated mediation models, for

example, are being considered (Haar & de Jong, 2023).

Guarding against the negative outcomes of destructive leadership and constructs that drive it, such as the dark triad, calls for greater organisational awareness of these constructs, accompanied by a willingness as well as necessary action to manage destructive leadership; this includes ensuring that such individuals are not recruited, especially to positions of leadership where the outcomes for the organisation and followers are most deleterious (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Organisational awareness should be increased and HR practices developed and enhanced pertaining to "recruitment and promotion, career development and training, disciplinary actions, performance appraisal and feedback systems, complaints system" (Schyns et al., 2022, p.252). Destructive leadership presents greater research gaps when it comes to its relationship with positive organisational outcomes rather than the obvious negative outcomes mentioned in this section. It is this contribution to positive outcomes that is considered next.

2.3.2 Destructive leadership and positive contributions to organisational outcomes

Focusing specifically on those positive contributions to organisational outcomes that have been identified in the presence of destructive leadership is the focus of this section; this being a domain with greater research gaps than those discussed thus far. This encompasses the bright side of destructive forms of leadership, an active field of current scholarship, especially in the workplace (Cesinger et al., 2023; Harms & Spain, 2015; Picone et al., 2021).

In considering advantages brought by destructive leaders to an organisation, it is helpful to reflect upon those benefits that may not be as they appear. For example, at first glance, financial statement fraud and fake CSR may seem to benefit organisations, but in reality, they involve deceit that disguises what the public sees more for flattery than genuinely benefiting the affected stakeholders. Narcissism has plays a role in fraud, especially when widespread, as it requires a destructive or unethical leader, particularly the CEO, to get the buy-in of followers, which can be enabled by followers that are apparently altruistic but actually possess a maladaptive, egoistic narcissism; and this is further facilitated by the creation of a toxic triangle (Johnson et al., 2019; Padilla et al., 2007). Further, narcissism in the

CFO and auditors of an organisation lead to weaker organisational risk assessments and a heightened risk of fraudulent financial reporting (Johnson et al., 2021).

For Dark Triad leaders, specifically in the case of CEOs, indicators of outcomes, such as measure of entrepreneurship, that are external to the firm are more likely to be positively related with this type of leader than internal measures of outcomes associated with the leader (Haar & de Jong, 2023). In research conducted by Haar and de Jong (2023), with innovation measured through breakthrough sales. Further, the positive relationship identified between the Dark Triad CEO, or show-person, for this variable was found to be moderated by competitive rivalry and to be mediated by the quality of a firm's top management team (TMT), which measure has been operationalised as the knowledge and experience of the organisation's TMT (Haar & de Jong, 2023).

A comparison of direct effects against those of moderated mediation models, in the case of the impact of CEO Dark Triad on external measures of organisational performance, such as organisational innovation, leads to mixed results; while positive contributions are found in the case of direct external measures of organisational performance, when the same effects are examined using moderated mediation models, the effects seem non-existent, thus it is clear that for any positive outcomes being investigated in the case of destructive leadership, relationships of outcomes with leadership are likely to be complex (Haar & de Jong, 2023). Overconfidence, similar to narcissism and hubris, in leadership also drives positive organisational outcomes. Managerial overconfidence has been demonstrated to be positively associated with several measures of organisational resilience, specifically an improvement in social resources, but mixed results pertaining to financial resources (Kunz & Sonnenholzner, 2023). While overconfidence in the CEO has been found to benefit an organisation's advertising investments (Wong & Wang, 2018).

That there is heterogeneity in the results on the impacts of destructive leadership on organisations points to a richer, more nuanced relationship between these constructs with the possibility of positive outcomes depending on context (Brownell et al., 2021; Mackey et al., 2021). For example, the behaviours associated with abusive supervision have been found to later motivate the guilt-afflicted, offending

supervisors to engage in constructive behaviour at both staff and task level (Liao et al., 2018).

That toxic triangles form in the real world may hint that certain individuals, especially those that enter the toxic triangle perceive there to be an advantage from the formation of this construct, possibly extending beyond the vested interests of those participating to include those of the organisation, even if these may be unethical. Thus, it might be expected that follower perceptions would vary depending on where they lie with reference to an extant toxic triangle, whether susceptible followers or not, and thus whether they orbit within a susceptible circle (Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood et al., 2012).

There is a need for further research on the potential positive outcomes for organisations of destructive leaders at the level of traits, attitudes and behaviours (Mackey et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2018); on the adaptive role of these traits in senior managerial occupations requiring agency and the exercise of power (Smith et al., 2018), for positive forms of manipulation and negotiation (Hirschfeld & Van Scotter, 2019), in the context of corporate social responsibility (Myung et al., 2017; Petrenko et al., 2016), or firms in entrepreneurial stages (Brownell et al., 2021); their motivations and the constructiveness thereof (Mackey et al., 2021; Palmer et al., 2020); and whether any unexpected benefits only accrue over the short term (Palmer et al., 2020). This leads to the second research question:

Research Question 2: What positive contributions do destructive leaders make to organisational initiatives and outcomes?

Boundary conditions pertain to this second research question, delineating that it is organisational outcomes that are being investigated, and not any direct follower or stakeholder outcomes, except to the degree that these may indirectly impinge upon organisational outcomes such as through second order effects. Further, it is positive organisational outcomes that are sought. Hence, it is appreciated that wherever positive organisational outcomes do occur, these may be accompanied by negative outcomes, both to the organisation, and beyond, for example extending to organisational stakeholders, and these outcomes need to be acknowledged to more fully appreciate the complex nature of the forces at play. With perceptions, specifically follower perceptions hereof being the chief concern of this study.

2.4 Competitiveness

Ireland and Hitt (1999) advise firms that if they are to maintain a competitive edge while operating in the complex and challenging global environment of the current century then they will need to embrace strategic leadership; they argue that such leadership is focused on the development of human capital, ethical conduct, and an organisational culture that is effective; practices that are essential to successfully executing strategic leadership. These focus areas would seem to contradict many of the outcomes associated with destructive leadership, and thus it might be difficult to conceive of cases in which this leadership style would benefit organisations, especially since strategic leadership is about fostering growth over an emphasis on reducing costs and downsizing, on confidence that avoids hubris, on outcomes as well as processes, thus it seems to be the antithesis of destructive leadership (Ireland & Hitt, 1999). However, strategic leadership also calls for collaborations with the government of a host country; and it is here that destructive leadership, and related constructs such as narcissism, may have a role to play in so far as cordial relations need to be maintained between businesses themselves as well as with government, especially in emerging economies (Holmes et al., 2021; Ireland & Hitt, 1999). Further, competitive rivalry is found to result in a less negative relationship on organisational outcomes of a dark triad CEO (Haar & de Jong, 2023).

2.4.1 Developed and emerging economies

A great deal of research on destructive leadership has been conducted within developed economies, such as New Zealand (Haar & de Jong, 2023). Thus, research outside these countries is called for; with Haar and de Jong (2023) calling for research outside of New Zealand. Also much of the extant research on this topic is placed within developed economies; thus naturally leading to a research gap within emerging economies.

Emerging economies differ from developed economies in being subject to high levels of risk (Ireland & Hitt, 1999). Cao and Shi (2021) explain that emerging economies differ from advanced economies due to the existence of three factors. First, resource scarcities, for example lacking specialised human capital. Second, structural gaps, from weaker informal networks for example. Third, institutional voids, from weaknesses in both formal and informal institutions. These significant differences

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merit research into the unique context of emerging economies (Borgholthaus et al., 2023). This research has thus been placed firmly within this context, specifically with a focus on South Africa. A country whose constitutional democracy Lipton (2014) feared was at risk of erosion. A country that is currently at risk of descent into a failed state, especially due to resource scarcities, including unreliable supply of electricity and water, and logistical infrastructure inadequacies (Cao & Shi, 2021; The Economist, 2023c).

2.4.2 Hostile external environments

Multiple examples of external environments that are potentially hostile to organisations might be conceived of; one such, researched in the developed, OECD economy of New Zealand considers the case of competitive rivalry as a moderator variable in a moderated mediation model testing the impact of a Dark Triad CEO on both external and internal operationalisations of organisational performance outcomes (Haar & de Jong, 2023).

The role of destructive leadership in external environments involving adversity and resource constraints require further investigation (Palmer et al., 2020). There is for example a need to explore what relationship exists between narcissistic leadership and performance outcomes for organisations in both economic and social terms shedding further light on the ambiguous role of narcissism in such contexts (Myung et al., 2017). An example of a hostile environment is one in which a required change initiative is obstructed by employees resisting the required change as it is associated with discomfort (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

An example of a country that subjects its host organisations to an hostile external environment is South Africa. Organisations operating there are subject to severe constraints of resources achieved through multiple service delivery failures, including unreliable supply of electricity and water, and logistical infrastructure inadequacies; to these high unemployment and poor economic growth are added to make for a country in crisis and on the verge of failure (The Economist, 2023c).

Organisations in environments like these need to adapt to these circumstances if they are to survive. Such organisations desperately need to understand what factors might provide competitive or other advantages in such environments, especially

when determining suitable leadership styles (Holmes et al., 2021; Neely et al., 2020). It is South Africa that is the location for this study. Specifically, for a study of the intersection of destructive leadership with outcomes for organisations operating in the country. That South Africa is not a developed economy but an emerging one strengthens the argument for locating this study there (Borgholthaus et al., 2023).

Short-term versus long-term organisational outcomes in hostile environments
In hostile environments the dynamic between long-term and short-term factors shifts as survivability features more highly in organisational considerations when compared with nice-to-haves that are not required by legislation or regulations.

Leadership and competitiveness in hostile external environments
Followers expect their leaders to lead by example, especially if such leaders expect difficult changes from followers that are most likely required in challenging circumstances (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

2.4.3 Destructive leadership and competitiveness in hostile external environments
While O'Boyle et al. (2012) find that organisational outcomes, specifically an individual's workplace behaviours, associated with one's dark triad traits are negative such as poor "quality of job performance" and higher levels of counterproductive work behaviour; they also find that these associations are moderated by authority and culture, so that these associations are less negative with the individual possessing greater authority in the organisation in the case of Machiavellianism and psychopathy, and less negative for all Dark Triad traits in the case of more collectivist cultures (p.557).

Further research is required into the moderating role of difficult external, operating environments where onerous resource constraints apply on the relationship between negative CEO personality and its effect on the performance of firms (Palmer et al., 2020). The role of concepts associated with destructive leadership, including narcissism, during economic crises or hardships, especially in countries where business success is dependent on the maintenance of cordial relations with leaders in the government and business community, such as many emerging economies, requires further scrutiny, and offers opportunities for novel applications of

contingency theory (Holmes et al., 2021). Further, the applicability of contingency theory to this investigation is based on its fruitful application to multiple related cases that bear a resemblance to this one as follows: organisational outcomes contingent on selection versus interaction or system approaches; pay premiums for managers contingent on managerial control versus governance strength; organisational performance contingent on the effectiveness of HR selection practices; and effective leadership behaviours that are contingent on contextual variables, including goals, tasks, the relationship status with the follower, and the leader's position and power (Combs & Skill, 2003; Daft, 2011; Iszatt-White et al., 2018; Kim & Ployhart, 2018; Van de Ven & Drazin, 1984). The adaptive role of destructive form of leaderships contingent upon particular situations requires further exploration (Hirschfeld & Van Scotter, 2019; Smith et al., 2018).

Haar & de Jong (2023) demonstrate that the relationship between Dark Triad leadership and organisational performance measures, both external and internal, are moderated by competitive rivalry; thus providing a fruitful avenue for the exploration of destructive leadership, namely the role of external environment as a moderator. This leads to the third research question:

Research Question 3: What competitive advantages do destructive leaders confer on organisations in harsh external, operating environments both over the short and long term?

The boundary conditions for research question 3 are clearly demarcated by a focus on environments that can be classified as harsh, wherein organisations struggle to satisfy the needs of both their primary stakeholder, namely shareholders (those that are operated on a for-profit basis), as well as multiple other stakeholders. Elements of the operating environment (such as rapid and/or unpredictable change; a struggle to remain competitive; contextual or resource constraints) contribute to this "unhappy" state of play.

2.5 Conclusion

Despite the important moderating role of external environments on the relationship between destructive leadership and organisational outcomes, there is a lack of research on the topic (Holmes et al., 2021; Palmer et al., 2020). This literature review has shown the need for further research into destructive leadership, follower

perceptions thereof, any associated, positive organisational outcomes, and the moderating influence of external operating environments on organisational competitiveness.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question of this study seeks to provide insight into destructive leadership, uncover any unexpected benefits, and explore how they are perceived by the followers of the respective leader.

Primary research question: What are follower perceptions of any unexpected benefits of destructive leadership for organisations?

3.1 Research Questions

The following three subordinate research questions were derived from the primary research question and will delve into destructive leadership, follower perceptions thereof, any associated, positive organisational outcomes, and the moderating influence of external operating environments on organisational competitiveness. The question sequencing enables movement from the micro- through to a meso/macro-level of discussion, with followers constituting the unit of observation, and organisations the unit of analysis. The final research question places the organisation (meso-level) within its industry or the broader economy, and thus is placed at the macro-level.

Research Question 1: What assumptions do followers have about destructive leadership?

Research Question 2: What positive contributions do destructive leaders make to organisational outcomes?

Research Question 3: What competitive advantages do destructive leaders confer on organisations in harsh external, operating environments?

These subordinate research questions, their associated themes, and corresponding research gaps are presented in the following table.

Table 3: Research Questions mapping to research gaps

Research Question (RQ)	Research Gap (RG)
RQ1: What assumptions do followers have about destructive leadership?	**Theme:** Exploring assumptions that destructive leadership is "bad" **RG1:** Heterogeneity in results on the impact of destructive leadership on organisations indicate that these outcomes are not always "bad" (Mackey et al., 2021). There is a need to further explore dark traits to identify situations where these may be advantageous (Smith et al., 2018). For example, Cesinger et al. (2023) demonstrate that narcissism has a positive relationship with certain forms of organisational commitment, highlighting the need for further research to achieve better understanding of the complex relationship with organisational outcomes.
RQ2: What positive contributions do destructive leaders make to organisational outcomes?	**Theme:** Positive contributions to organisational outcomes **RG2:** There is a need for research to better understand when firms in various stages might benefit from leaders with dark triad personalities (Brownell et al., 2021). Positive effects for organisations is the focus of this research, and these have been observed with respect to CEO celebrity status and its effects on external stakeholder relations; benefits have also been identified with executive management benefits in the use of modern stakeholder communication channels, such as social media platforms, with reference to for example CSR, the social and the political environment; with these constituting under-researched phenomena (Neely et al., 2020).
RQ3: What competitive advantages do destructive leaders confer on organisations in harsh external, operating environments?	**Theme:** Competitiveness in difficult external environments **RG3:** The moderating role of adverse external environments subject to significant resource constraints on the relationship between negative CEO personality and the effect it has on firm performance requires further research (Palmer et al., 2020). The role of narcissism during economic crises or hardships, including for countries where cordial relationships with leaders in the government and business community are required, such as many emerging economies, needs further investigation (Holmes et al., 2021).

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1 Purpose of the research design

The purpose of the research design was exploratory as this is suitable for exploring new or emergent phenomena for which scientific knowledge is limited yet undertaking the discovery process is worthwhile (Saunders & Lewis, 2018; Stebbins, 2001). Destructive leadership and related constructs qualify as such based on ongoing current research in the field (Bonfá-Araujo et al., 2022; Borgholthaus et al., 2023; Haar & de Jong, 2023; Tourish, 2020). Exploratory research designs also serve practical purposes for a single researcher without the resources to undertake more extensive research such as mixed methods while still allowing for gaining insights (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.2 Philosophy

An interpretivist research philosophy was selected aligned with the research aim of understanding differences between people understood as "social actors" (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). However, as the researcher is also a "social actor" this had a bearing on their interpretations of other "social actors" and their roles in social settings (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Thus, it was incumbent upon the researcher to firstly acknowledge the limitation that arose in this case, and provision for this in the way the research was undertaken.

An interpretive approach was applied in destructive leadership research into perceptions of negative leader behaviour (Patel at al., 2022). An interpretivist approach can be contrasted with that of a positivistic approach, while the former is the underlying philosophy being appropriate for qualitative research, several positivistic influences apply here that the researcher was aware of, inter alia: a literature review that was heavily reliant upon quantitative research in its survey of relevant literature, the use of quantitative terminology such as "moderators", and the researcher's own biases based on their quantitative background and training (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, this provided an opportunity for the researcher to challenge their own biases and to develop their capabilities beyond a pure influence from positivistic philosophy alone.

In the realm of destructive leadership, it is critical to draw a distinction between subjective perceptions of reality and objective reality; this is similar to the research philosophy of critical realism where reality is experienced both sensationally at the level of an object and after sensations have been subjectively processed, and this thus served as a relevant reference point for this research (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.3 Research approach selected

An inductive research approach was deemed appropriate as the aim was to advance theory by the systematically aggregating separate data points into more generalisable insights (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Theoretical advancement, whether by confirmation, contradiction, or extension, applies to nascent fields of enquiry like destructive leadership per this study. Hence, more inductive investigations employing qualitative studies are required in the realm of destructive leadership research (Thoroughgood et al., 2018).

4.4 Methodological choices

The methodological choice was that of mono-method qualitative. Qualitative approaches are appropriate for exploring interactions between people in settings that are natural (Thoroughgood et al., 2018). Qualitative studies have been applied in destructive leadership research exploring the experience of unethical administrative leadership (Sam, 2021), for extension of theory pertaining to hubris beyond the psychological and into the organisational (Tourish, 2020), and are needed for further inductive investigations exploring the destructive leadership construct more holistically (Thoroughgood et al., 2018). While a mono-method was selected over multi- or mixed-methods due to resource limitations for the researcher in time and human resource availability.

4.5 Strategy

A phenomenological research study was the selected research strategy as it allows for uncovering "pure" essences, reveals such essences in the experiences of phenomena by people (Creswell et al., 2007; Sanders, 1982), and has been applied

in researching destructive leadership and related constructs, namely destructive, toxic, and autocratic forms of leadership (Brown, 2019; Da Fonseca et al., 2022; Kassim, 2023). This research strategy also enables a nuanced perspective on organisational problems with an appreciation of the important role of context or boundary conditions; and is also suitable for delving into human consciousness, an important element in leadership research (Sanders, 1982). The research strategy is consistent with an exploratory study (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The selected research strategy has several other merits, including its popularity for research in the social sciences (Creswell et al., 2007), such as the science of management; it allows for extensions in the range of participation and flexibility in data collection; and exploration of lived experiences and sense making at the individual level (Smith, 2004), being followers and their perceptions for this study.

4.6 Time horizon

A cross-sectional time horizon was utilised providing a "snapshot" study (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). A cross-sectional choice was pragmatic for the researcher given the time and resource constraints of conducting research as partial fulfilment of an MBA. Therefore, longitudinal studies were ruled out despite presenting greater opportunities for data comparison over a longer time horizon with subsequent benefits for the credibility and transferability of the study's findings.

4.7 Population

The target population for this study included employees exposed as followers to destructive leadership at the micro-level. Experience of the phenomena by researched subjects was a requirement for this phenomenological study, allowing for greater flexibility in the choice of population (Creswell et al., 2007; Smith, 2004). A target population with managerial experience at the organisational level allows the requisite perspective of leaders as well as followers, with followership typically preceding appointment to positions of leadership (Bresnen, 1995; Carsten et al., 2010).

4.8 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis was the organisation, while the unit of observation was the individual follower who has shared in the experience being researched (Creswell et al., 2007). As such, the research phenomena was investigated at the respondent level (individual) but the level of analysis was conducted at the meso-level (organisational) which enabled broader inferences to be drawn from the inputs of interviewees. This aligned with Chapter 3, with Research Question 1 relating to the micro-level of discussion, being the individual as the unit of observation, being the individual follower and considering their perceptions of destructive leaders; while the subsequent research questions building up to the meso-/macro-level of discussion with the organisation as the unit of analysis, and Research Question 3 pertaining to the macro-level of the organisation within a particular operating environment, namely one that is hostile.

4.9 Sampling method and size

As explained by Braun & Clarke (2006), smaller sample sizes are expected for qualitative research relative to quantitative methodologies given that the data analysis process is considerably more time consuming. Various recommendations on the appropriate sample size for a qualitative study exist. Saunders and Lewis (2018) suggest setting the sample size at 12 to 30 individuals where the sample is selected from a heterogeneous population using non-probability sampling as per qualitative data collection; where the aim is to achieve data saturation with no new insights about the research questions emerging from further data collection efforts. Creswell et al. (2007) recommend that between 5 and 25 individuals be interviewed for a phenomenological research strategy.

Based on these recommendations, a sample size of 16 participants was targeted in this study as a credible midpoint in the range specified by Creswell et al. (2007), and this was sufficient for data and thematic saturation to be achieved; such saturation criteria being the basis for determining sample size (Guest et al., 2006). As the focus was on context, the proposed sample size was appropriate (Levitt et al., 2018). The specified sample size included a participant from the pilot study used to test the interview guide prior to conducting the study proper as the pilot study required only slight modifications to the interview guide, which was thus deemed appropriate for application in the pilot study.

The sampling method applied was that of non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling applied as the researcher did not have a sampling frame with a complete population list, ruling out random selection and the calculation of associated selection probabilities (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

The researcher applied an indirect purposive sampling approach, so that the study participants might be selected based on the researcher's judgment in determining applicable selection criteria, especially experience of the researched phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This was achieved by specifying the relevant selection criteria in the researcher's request for volunteers from their professional network accessed via social media, specifically LinkedIn. The use of social media for recruiting research participants is an effective manner of communicating with potential participants who are active users thereof as well as affording the opportunity to contact large numbers of potential participants (Given, 2016). The researcher also received assistance from others who shared the original request for research participants with their wider networks enabling access to a more diverse audience than would have otherwise been possible by solely accessing the researcher's network alone.

The indirect purposive sampling approach referred to above was utilised for communicating that this research was being conducted. The interest of potential volunteers was heightened given that the issue researched is pervasive and nascent per the significant research gaps existing in the field (Thoroughgood et al., 2018). Elements of the Dirty Dozen, a screening tool for the Dark Triad (Jonason & Webster, 2010), were included in the request for participants to ensure exposure among participants to Dark Triad leaders.

While direct purposive sampling approaches reliant on the researcher's judgment were intended for actively sampling participants from the researcher's professional network according to certain sampling criteria (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). In the event, the researcher struggled to obtain the desired sample size, and was therefore required to settle on those who volunteered regardless of refined sampling criteria beyond exposure to destructive forms of leadership. Further, with participants self-selecting for inclusion by responding to the request to participate; individuals that

might be classified as susceptible followers were excluded as these would likely not have identified as reporting to a destructive leader (Padilla et al., 2007). Ultimately, the recruitment techniques applied by the researcher led to the target sample size of 16 participants being achieved.

An element of snowball sampling was also deployed following the initial purposive sampling to improve population heterogeneity by having the initial set of participants suggest further participants employed by the same organisation and reporting to the same destructive leader enabling intra-company comparisons, and to reduce researcher bias arising from purposive sampling alone. Snowball sampling applied together with purposive sampling would have improved the heterogeneity of the sample allowing maximum variation at both intra- and inter-company level for interesting and valuable patterns to emerge, and through these the identification of key themes via the data analysis process (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). In the event of this study, only a single participant was obtained through the snowball sampling approach discussed with the rest obtained through purposive sampling. It might be argued that volunteer sampling applied in the reliance on volunteers responding to the initial request for research participants (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

In relying on the third-party perspectives of followers, self-report biases associated with first-party accounts from the leader were avoided; however, the reliance on the victim's perspective alone and not that of the perpetrator led to triangulation limitations applying (Min et al., 2019).

Target sample

The following table presents the original target sample for this research, which aimed to get a total sample of 16 participants sourced from eight organisations, allowing inter-organisational comparison. Further, these were targeted to be sourced across different industries, allowing inter-industry comparison. The sourcing of two participants per organisation would have provided opportunities for intra-organisational triangulation.

Table 4: Target Sample

Organisation	Respondent
A	A1
A	A2
B	B1
B	B2
C	C1
C	C2
D	D1
D	D2
E	E1
E	E2
F	F1
F	F2
G	G1
G	G2
H	H1
H	H2

Actual sample

In conducting this research, 16 participants were sourced for semi-structured interviews. The sample contained managers primarily, and surveyed a diverse sample of participants across industries and organisations. Opportunities for intra-organisational comparison were limited to a single organisation, namely organisation A, only enabling triangulation at a very limited scale. However, heterogeneity was enhanced across organisations by including participants from different organisations allowing for greater inter-organisational comparison across multiple industries as per the results presented in chapter 5.

Respondents were classified according to organisation (alpha-classification) and employee number by organisation (numeric-classification). Organisation size is also provided for further information to differentiate between large organisations and small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The interview formats are also included,

these were one of three types, namely "in-person" conducted "face-to-face"; "virtual" being virtual with both voice and video over a suitable video conferencing technology such as Google Meet, MS Teams or Zoom; and "virtual-voice only" without the advantage of video and using the same conferencing technology.

Table 5: Actual Sample Details

Respondent	Industry	Organisation size	Interview format
A1	Education & Training	SME	In-person
A2	Education & Training	SME	In-person
B1	Information Technology	Large	Virtual
C1	Finance	Large	Virtual
D1	Professional Services	SME	In-person
E1	Engineering	SME	In-person
F1	Mining	Large	Virtual
G1	Professional Services	SME	Virtual-voice only
H1	Finance	Large	Virtual
I1	Logistics	Large	Virtual
J1	Media	SME	In-person
K1	Finance	Large	Virtual
L1	Manufacturing	Large	Virtual-voice only
M1	Public Sector	SME	Virtual-voice only
N1	FMCG	SME	Virtual
O1	Manufacturing	Large	Virtual

4.10 Measurement instrument

For this qualitative study, the researcher sought to speak to interviewees about specified themes in the form of predetermined questions; the researcher's aims included generating data to develop theories, collecting data on certain topics, seeking interviewee perspectives in narrative format, and thus accessing their worldviews; therefore, the appropriate measurement instrument was an interview guide, or interview schedule, covering relevant topics from the study and some

introductory questions for each of the research questions and topics covered (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). A consent form was included in the interview documentation pack, and the researcher, who conducted all the interviews, ensured that the consent of interviewees was obtained prior to conducting interviews; recording equipment was utilised for subsequent transcription of interviews, and participant consent was obtained for this (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). In formulating the interview guide, the researcher assisted by their supervisor ensured that interview questions remained consistent with both the primary and subordinate research questions; and these were framed as open ended for seeking the perspectives of those participating in the study (Creswell et al., 2007).

The researcher applied Sanders (1982) suggestion for quality over quantity by asking fewer questions and probing these intensively as in a semi-structured approach. Certain interview questions were framed as closed-ended to determine whether the participant had a perspective on the matter; however, where applicable elaboration was requested from the interviewees for these questions to maintain open-endedness. Questions were event-focused so as to appeal to the episodic memory of each participant, and thus aid them in accessing memories when considering the impact of specific leader behaviours (Hansbrough et al., 2021), a note to the interviewer was included in the interview guide for this purpose. Similarly, interviews were recently conducted, via the critical incident technique, by Tourish (2020) in exploring the related construct of hubris in seeking vivid accounts of specific incidents and favouring a focus on the significance attributed by participant's rather than accurate details.

Table 6: Interview schedule mapped to the corresponding research gaps and research questions

Research Gap (RG)	Research Question (RQ)	Interview Questions
Theme: Exploring assumptions that destructive leadership is "bad" **RG1:** Heterogeneity in results on the impact of destructive leadership on organisations indicate that these outcomes are not always "bad" (Mackey et al., 2021). There is a need to further explore dark traits to identify situations where these may be advantageous (Smith et al., 2018). For example, Cesinger et al. (2023) demonstrate that narcissism has a positive relationship with certain forms of organisational commitment, highlighting the need for further research to achieve better understanding of the complex relationship with organisational outcomes.	**RQ1:** What assumptions do followers have about destructive leadership?	**Question 1:** What do harmful leadership and harmful leadership behaviours mean to you? **Question 2:** What personal experiences have you had of leaders pursuing goals that differ from those of their organisation? **Question 3:** What are the aims of harmful leaders for you? **Question 4:** What outcomes do you associate with harmful leadership?

Research Gap (RG)	Research Question (RQ)	Interview Questions
Theme: Positive contributions to organisational outcomes **RG2:** There is a need for research to better understand when firms in entrepreneurial stages might benefit from leaders with dark triad personalities (Brownell et al., 2021). The effect of CEO celebrity status on external stakeholder relations; executive management benefits in the use of modern stakeholder communication channels, such as social media platforms, with reference to CSR, the social & political environment are under-researched phenomena (Neely et al., 2020).	**RQ2:** What positive contributions do destructive leaders make to organisational initiatives and outcomes?	**Question 5:** In your experience how do harmful leader behaviours show themselves in the workplace? **Question 6:** Have you experienced any situations where these harmful or dysfunctional leader behaviours have had beneficial outcomes for the organisation? Please elaborate. **Question 7:** In these situations, can you identify elements of these seemingly dysfunctional behaviours that might be interpreted as skills or strengths? Please elaborate. **Question 8** Were these behaviours, implicitly or explicitly, accepted by the organisation because there was a beneficial outcome that was used to justify these? Please elaborate.

Research Gap (RG)	Research Question (RQ)	Interview Questions
Theme: Competitiveness in difficult external environments **RG3:** The moderating role of adverse external environments subject to significant resource constraints on the relationship between negative CEO personality and the effect it has on firm performance requires further research (Palmer et al., 2020). The role of narcissism during economic crises or hardships, including for countries where cordial relationships with leaders in the government and business community are required, such as many emerging economies, needs further investigation (Holmes et al., 2021).	**RQ3:** What competitive advantages do destructive leaders confer on organisations in harsh external, operating environments?	**Question 9:** Have you experienced any situations where the leadership behaviours described earlier assisted the organisation in difficult circumstances? (e.g. rapid and/or unpredictable change; competitiveness challenges and fierce rivalries; contextual, infrastructure, or resource constraints; unfavourable political or economic conditions). Please elaborate. **Question 10:** In such situations were the leader behaviours beneficial to the organisation in the short-term but adverse in the long-term (or vice-versa)? Please elaborate. **Question 11:** In such instances, did the organisation review the situation (formally or informally) for competitive reasons? If so, how? **Question 12:** What was the short, medium and/or long-term consequence for the dysfunctional leader?

4.11 Data gathering process

The data gathering process was commenced after a successful application for ethical clearance. Data gathering required the recruitment of participants aligned with the study's sampling criteria, namely followers who had been exposed to destructive leaders.

Consistent with phenomenology, data gathering was flexible, but conducted by in-depth interviews (Creswell et al., 2007; Sanders, 1982; Smith, 2004). The data gathering process involved semi-structured interviews with the interview questions covering relevant themes while allowing the interviewer flexibility to apply judgment around the exclusion of interview questions or the inclusion of additional questions, especially probing questions (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The interview questions were open-ended and actively sought the views of study participants (Creswell et al., 2007). They were informed by the study's research questions, which were related to key themes (Creswell et al., 2007). Interviews were recorded and transcribed (Sanders, 1982) with participants consent; the interviewer took notes during interviews; and interviews were a combination of virtual and in-person with the mode determined by the preferences of the interviewee on whose terms these interviews were conducted. Comparing these modes, in-person interviews had the advantage of providing additional visual or non-verbal signals that were more difficult to detect in virtual formats, and were absent in voice only formats. The use of a combination of modes ensured that the advantages of these variations were captured in the research process. As advised by Given (2016), the analysis of the data was started in the data gathering phase through the researcher's own reflections, initial sense making, and through taking field notes.

In presenting the findings or results in Chapter 5, participants were referred to by alpha-numeric identifiers to ensure confidentiality.

4.12 Data analysis approach

As expected, the bulk of the data analysis took place after the data gathering phase was completed (Given, 2016). The approach applied for the analysis of the data collected via the interview process was thematic content analysis using enabling software in the form of Atlas.ti for computer-aided qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) (Saunders & Lewis,

2018). Atlas.ti was made available by the researcher's educational institution. A multi-stage process was used for building theory, including development of categories based on the collected data, setting an appropriate "unit of data", for example a sentence, and attaching the developed categories to the units of data (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

The data analysis approaches were informed by the research questions of this study (Creswell et al., 2007). The study's phenomenological research strategy sought units of meaning or themes in the data analysis process employing a structured approach for arriving at the essence of the phenomenon being researched, and later contextualising the identified themes (Creswell et al., 2007). Four levels of analysis for a phenomenological research strategy applied, first describing phenomena revealed in the interviews; second identifying themes based on descriptions with reference to the multi-stage process described for building or testing theory; third subjective reflection of themes; and last identifying the essences in the themes (Sanders, 1982).

Thematic analysis (TA) was undertaken roughly by applying the guidelines specified by Braun and Clarke (2006), specifically on the phases outlined but did not strictly adhere to their guidelines. Braun and Clarke (2006) specify a six phase process that starts first with the researcher having to familiarise themselves with the data that they have collected through their interview process. Second, the generation of initial codes. Here, instead of the traditional manual coding process, the researcher deployed the Beta version of the artificial intelligence (AI) coding functionality in Atlas.ti. This classifies as an inductive coding process as the coding process was independent of theory according to Braun and Clarke (2006), who also describe such a coding process as "bottom up".

The coding process presented its own challenges in that the AI functionality is a Beta, or testing, version and generates code based on a Large Language Model, or natural language processing, technology with a proclivity towards excessive code generation despite modifications by Atlas.ti to manage this excess (Kalpokas, n.d.a). Thus, the researcher needed to be actively involved in code consolidation through the deletion and merging of initial codes that were generated by the AI functionality with reference to the study's research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Further discussion of the coding process, both advantages conferred and challenges faced, is provided below.

Returning to the other phases in the process elucidated by Braun & Clarke (2006), the third through fifth phases pertain to themes, namely the search for these, the review thereof, and their definition or naming. Having completed the first five phases, the researcher was able to proceed to the final phase in which the report was produced, the content of the report appears in Chapter 5.

Braun & Clarke (2006) emphasised that the six phase process they developed for reflexive TA needs to be understood as a recursive rather than a linear process, meaning that the researcher does not proceed through the six phases in a linear fashion, definitively concluding one phase before moving to the next, rather the researcher, especially the amateur, is continually cycling through the phases moving backwards and forwards in a quest for meaning, aiming to find a compelling story supported by the themes finally settled on that are well supported by evidence in the form of quotations from the primary data gathered in the form of interviews.

TA is also highly recommended given its foundational status for qualitative methodologies, and thus suitable for application by amateur researchers (Morgan, 2022). Limitations pertaining to subjective interpretations into theme identification are mitigated by providing evidence in the form of quotations to support these (Morgan, 2022). Support for the use of TA was provided by its use in related research such as into hubris within finance and banking organisations (Tourish, 2020). Further discussion of the various phases undertaken in the data analysis is presented next commencing with the first phase, namely the researcher's familiarisation with the interview data collected.

4.12.1 Familiarisation with interview data collected

Interview recordings were converted to transcripts using transcription software, and subsequently prepared for subsequent data analysis with reference to interview transcription conventions pertaining to clear demarcation between interviewer and interviewee. Anonymisation thereof was undertaken including for any references to either individuals or organisations referred to in the interviews conducted. Interviews were then saved as separate files, interview details were included within each file, interviewer

questions were italicised, and corrections were made for any typographical errors and to ensure consistent spelling of words per UK English conventions (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.12.2 Coding process

A description of the coding approach is included here. AI coding was deployed based on the Beta version of the Atlas.ti auto-coding function (Kalpokas, n.d.b). Given that the coding process is subjective and varies by researcher, there is no definitive and assured method of arriving at the same codes for varying researchers with varying interpretations subject to individual lenses applied in the coding process (Saldaña, 2014); hence the use of an alternative coding tool, namely an AI tool, was not expected to detract from a quality perspective.

There are several advantages of the AI coding tool. First, it is interview agnostic, as it is not involved in the interviewing process. A researcher, who conducted the interviews, would not have the advantage of approaching the coding from such a perspective given that they would have been involved in the interview process. It may be argued that it is less subjective than an individual researcher, thus offering advantages similar to those that might be associated with working with a team of researchers; with these advantages being unavailable to an individual researcher toiling solo. Second, it lends itself to a more quantitative approach to the analysis thereby reducing subjectivity and playing to this researcher's quantitative strengths. Third, the use of a Beta version with limitations requires that the researcher remain actively involved in the coding process.

The AI coding tool also suffers certain drawbacks. First, only a beta version of this tool is currently available. Second, excessive codes are generated in the coding process, despite measures taken by Atlas.ti software developers to manage this excess, requiring a potentially laborious process to reduce these to something more sensible by the researcher. Third, there are limitations to the AI large language models deploying natural language processing which tend to be socially skewed in terms of the data used for their training so that social biases and prejudices can impinge upon the operation of such models, and thus calling for some element of cross-check or triangulation from the researcher (Howard & Borenstein, 2018; Kalpokas, n.d.a). Fourth, interviewer content is

automatically coded; even though, it is only the interviewee content that should be coded, and this requires tedious deletion of such codes (Saldaña, 2014). Fifth, the codes generated are not checked for relevance against the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006); hence any content that includes interviewees going off topic or interview questions not well equipped to elicit the information sought to answer the research question will likely be coded, which would be unlikely to occur in a manual coding process where the research question would be front of mind during the coding process. Sixth, the value derived from the subjectivity of the researcher is lost to the extent that the researcher is not involved in the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The researcher executed the following steps. First, they merged codes that were effectively identical, for example singular versus plural renditions of the same code. Second, they deleted irrelevant codes, especially those attached to interview questions or other interviewer generated content (Saldaña, 2014). Third, they reviewed individual codes from multiple perspectives, such as sense-making, meaningfulness, relevance, and value added (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moving more deliberately and carefully through the coding process to check for relevance to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A two-stage analysis, one on the entire transcript, and one on the transcript split by research question based on associated interview questions was conducted.

The application of TA presented several advantages. These included its appropriateness for a novice researcher from multiple perspectives, such as requiring less knowledge from both a theoretical and technical perspective than more advanced forms of analysis such as conversation and discourse analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An active role remained for the researcher in the theme identification process, given that these do not merely emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The researcher noted that various coding approaches were applied by the Atlas.ti AI coding functionality, including process, descriptive, and in vivo (Saldaña, 2014). Process coding, which only uses gerunds (being words ending in "ing"), pertained to actions identified in the data analysis, and included actions performed by humans, their thinking, as well as more abstract conceptions, was especially applicable for this phenomenological study (Saldaña, 2014). Examples of process coding identified in the final codebook (Appendix 6) include "Analytical thinking", "Blame shifting", "Feeling undervalued", and

"Whistleblowing".

In vivo coding, which is based on the respondent's actual language gives rise to more frequent codes than process coding, and is likely used by Atlas.ti AI coding based on the large number of codes generated. Examples included references by interviewees to "Narcissism" and "Machiavellianism", being elements of the Dark Triad, and codes were assigned with these names. While these codes were derived inductively by the AI coding process; the researcher considered assigning these codes to the manual insertion prior to checking the Atlas.ti output; this based on the Dark Triad having been identified as an overlapping construct related to destructive leadership, as discussed in Chapter 2, and hence this would have qualified as a deductive form of coding (Saldaña, 2014).

Descriptive coding, which involves the use of nouns was used (Saldaña, 2014). Examples from the final codebook (Appendix 6) include "Dysfunction", "Dishonesty", "Injustice", "Manipulation", "Perfectionism". On completion of this process a final codebook was generated which appears in Appendix 6.

4.12.3 Thematic generation

Akin to correlation analysis in quantitative research, a code co-occurrence analysis was performed in Atlas.ti at primary and subordinate research question level to assist in identifying the strength of relationships between codes for initial ideas about potential code groupings at sub-thematic level (Friese, 2012). While a code document analysis assisted with identifying codes most commonly occurring, for consideration of inclusion in the themes generated; the process was akin to descriptive statistical analysis in quantitative research (Friese, 2012).

The themes were not derived from the interview questions as this does not make for good thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Instead, the ultimate output of this process was a draft three-level hierarchical classification of all codes, which lie at level 3 of this hierarchy. Sub-themes, or subcategories, derived from the level 3 codes constitute level 2 of the hierarchy. Finally, themes, or categories, derived from the level 2 sub-themes constitute level 1 of this hierarchy. A diagram representing this hierarchical classification process is presented here.
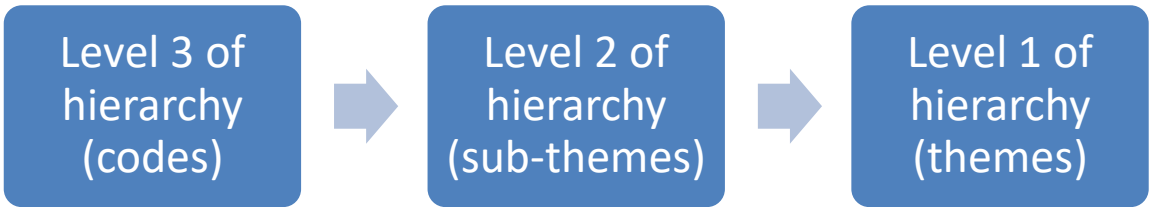
Figure 3: Three-level hierarchical classification process

In the event a five-level hierarchical classification was deployed aided by Chat GPT. This aided in converting from codes, at the fifth level of the hierarchy, through three sub-thematic hierarchical levels to a fifth hierarchical level, namely the ultimate themes. This process is summarised in the following diagram.
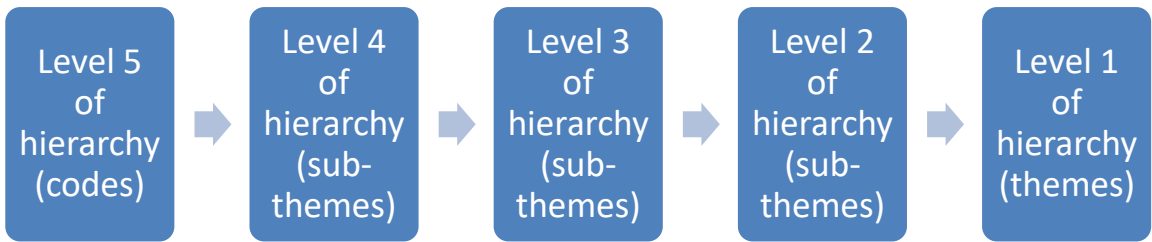
Figure 4: Five-level hierarchical classification process

The analysis was performed for each of this study's three research questions, and served as input to the fourth phase of the process, namely a review of the themes generated to be discussed next.

4.12.4 Thematic review and definition

Quotations were selected for inclusion under a theme and associated sub-theme based on associated codes. This information was sourced from the code book that provides the mapping between the various hierarchies of theme, sub-theme, and code. Quotations were selected based on appropriate code and density (the number of codes attached to the quote), with higher densities favoured for inclusion. A quote length of two to four sentences was targeted for the extracts quoted in Chapter 5 on the results of this study (Gibbs, 2007). Limitations pertaining to subjective interpretations into theme identification were mitigated by providing evidence in the form of quotations to support these interpretations (Morgan, 2022).

4.12.5 Report writing

Ultimately, in conducting qualitative research, this researcher aimed to contribute to theory development and deployed tools to this end; the development of a strong narrative offered an opportunity to achieve this (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2017). The writing of this report, specifically the results section of the data analysis process presented an opportunity for doing so.

4.13 Quality controls

A rigorous process of quality controls was applied that included a pilot interview process to assure the quality of the interview guide that was deployed in the semi-structured interview process (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This involved a single respondent with similar characteristics to the full sample, and was conducted prior to the data collection proper phase of the overall research process (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This provided a test for feasibility and enabled rectification of any problems identified prior to commencing the data collection proper phase, which also conferred advantages from a time management perspective by reducing the risks to the formal data collection process from issues only being identified in this later phase of the research (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

It also conferred several quality control advantages, including respondent understanding of interview questions and accurate recording of data generated during interviews as well as a seamless process for transcribing and safely storing data collected (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). However, the process also added another time management element that had to be accommodated in the overall project planning for this research.

Further quality control was achieved by applying various forms of triangulation. Triangulation is one of several tools for ensuring validity in qualitative research, and was appropriate as the researcher dealt with a multiplicity of information sources while searching for themes (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Of four forms of triangulation, the most applicable was that across the study participants, who were the data sources (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Other forms of triangulation were not applicable: theoretical triangulation, only would have applied in the case of applying multiple theories; with a single method of data collection, namely semi-structured interviews, triangulation across data collection methods did not apply; and with a single investigator conducting the research, triangulation covering investigators did not apply (Creswell & Miller, 2000). A major advantage of employing triangulation was the overlay of a systematic approach to the study for locating common themes and efficiently moving beyond overlaps (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

"Peer debriefing" contributed further to quality, credible findings, and this role was performed by the researcher's supervisor, who was selected for their familiarity with the research topic and significant experience in supervising dissertations at Masters level. The researcher's supervisor also identified and challenged any assumptions made by the researcher, while not accepting anything at face value (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The use of clear audit trails throughout the process, for example from any recorded interviews in data collection phase through to their transcription and processing in the data analysis phase, added further credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000). A consistency matrix provides an overarching structure, and is included in Appendix 1.

4.14 Ethical considerations

Interviews were kept strictly confidential and no source, individual or organisation, was identified in the text of the final report. All data used in the research report were reported and stored without any identifiers tracing back to the respondent or their organisation. This

ensured the confidentiality of the participants and their organisations.

4.15 Data handling and data security

Data was captured and stored to ensure compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPI Act). Data were stored in the cloud and on the researcher's own PC, with access to both being password protected. Consent was gained from the research participants to process and store their information, and to ensure they understood what the information was used for. Only information relevant to the research was collected. The data will only be stored for as long as it is needed, and then deleted using suitable data deletion methods.

4.16 Methodological Limitations

Several methodological limitations applied to this research. First, for a cross-sectional rather than a longitudinal time horizon especially where leadership is conceived of as a non-static phenomenon that evolves over time (Thoroughgood et al., 2018). However, interviews were conducted on experiences over time, despite being conducted at a specific point in time, and consistent with a phenomenological research strategy the emphasis was on the heart of the phenomena explored, and so this process did yield valuable insights (Sanders, 1982). Second, significant factors for undermining the validity of the findings and conclusions of this research were biases around subject selection and testing (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Biases around subject selection emerged as the researcher was reliant on their judgment in applying purposive sampling; mitigation strategies included limited snowball sampling in addition to purposive sampling. Third, reduced generalisability followed from applying non-probability sampling (Torres-Marín et al., 2022).

Fourth, the interview process may have involved subjects that were keen to impress the interviewer, such self-reporting limitations would apply more especially where "deviant workplace behaviours" have occurred (Min et al., 2019; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). However, the use of third-party assessments, namely the perspectives of followers helped to mitigate against leader self-reporting biases that would have been self-serving or aimed at socially desirability (Borgholthaus et al., 2023). Fifth, the memory of respondents due to the time elapsed since exposure to the respective destructive leader, and emotional

distance due to the recency of exposure to the leader. Mitigation for these involved ensuring that respondents who had not been employed by the reference organisation for longer than three years or less than 18 months were included within the sample. Sixth, triangulation limitations with respect to only obtaining victim accounts but not that of the perpetrator. Seventh, no attempt was made to infiltrate toxic triangles as neither destructive leaders nor susceptible followers were specifically targeted; nor where applicable were HR employees or others involved in whistle-blowing structures (Padilla et al., 2007).

4.17 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that the selected research design was arguably well-suited to investigate phenomena in a research domain such as destructive leadership where construct clarity is still being sought by scholars. The suitability of a qualitative research design for exploring destructive leadership has recently been demonstrated by Tourish (2020) who employed the same to develop an organisational theory for hubristic leadership in finance and banking.

Research Propositions were formulated on the study's findings to channel future qualitative enquiry along specific lines. Sufficient specificity was not obtained to conclude the study with any hypotheses for investigation via a large-scale quantitative study, which would improve generalisability of the research study, though future quantitative studies have been called for. Conducting a longitudinal study on this topic in future would better account for developments over time and the investigation of root causes (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

Introduction

A largely objective process has been applied to derive the results presented in this chapter, one that is reliant on deploying advanced, modern technology in the form of large language models (LLMs) and natural language processing (NLP), this is both changing the way research is done and society more generally (Kalpokas, n.d.a). Specifically, OpenAI's GPT model in the Atlas.ti AI functionality that automates the coding process and provides interview and code summaries (Kalpokas, n.d.a). To an extent, this violates the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2006) in diminishing the role of researcher subjectivity in the research process.

However, an advantage of using the AI coding function is that it has not been "corrupted" by being directly involved in the interview process, which aligns with advice to perform the first line coding from an interview agnostic perspective. It also would seem to adhere to Braun and Clarke (2006) regarding coding as many potential theme patterns as possible by treating all interview text equally in the coding process and avoiding anecdotal coding. But it does not specifically check the generated codes for relevance against the research question, implicitly assuming that interview questions and the answers provided to these in the interview process will answer the research question posed. This maintains a role for the researcher in ensuring that codes are relevant to research questions, and the researcher also has a role to play in funnelling down codes to sub-themes and then themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Description of the participants and context

In the following section a description of the participants and the context of the research is provided.

Participant description and details

Further details about the participants for this research first referred to in Chapter 4 are included here for further context. This includes job title at the time of reporting to the destructive leader, and the time duration that lapsed since their exposure. Most

participants were at managerial rank at the time of reporting to the destructive leader. Those that were not were subsequently appointed to managerial roles. Such respondents were thus able to consider the interview questions from the perspective of both follower and leader.

In terms of time lapse, the ideal participant would have been one that was exposed to the destructive leader less than 18 months ago, so that memory of the time discussed would be sufficiently recent; but also one that was exposed more than six months ago, which would have allowed some time for recovery from any emotional exhaustion associated with reporting to such a leader. For this research, a range of participants were surveyed. Of the 16 participants, 6 were within the ideal range (37.5%) as presented in the following table, which also includes the job titles of the participants at the time of exposure.

Table 7: Actual Sample Exposure Details

Respondent	Job Title	Time since exposure- within ideal range (Y/N)?
A1	Senior Manager	Y
A2	Middle Manager	Y
B1	Consultant	N
C1	Middle Manager	Y
D1	Middle Manager	N
E1	Senior Manager	Y
F1	Middle Manager	Y
G1	Non-managerial	N
H1	Senior Manager	N
I1	Senior Manager	Y
J1	Middle Manager	N
K1	Middle Manager	N
L1	Middle Manager	N
M1	Executive Manager	N
N1	Non-managerial	N
O1	Middle Manager	N

Of the 16 participants, only 3 (18.8%) continued to work for the destructive leader about whom they were interviewed. This is an unsurprising statistic, and it is expected that the destructive leader played a significant role in the employee turnover observed in these cases.

Data saturation test

The results of a data saturation test on the consolidated codes are presented here. They demonstrate that coding saturation was achieved by conducting 16 semi-structured interviews. This is demonstrated by the rapid run off in the data saturation test curve of unique codes generated by interview.
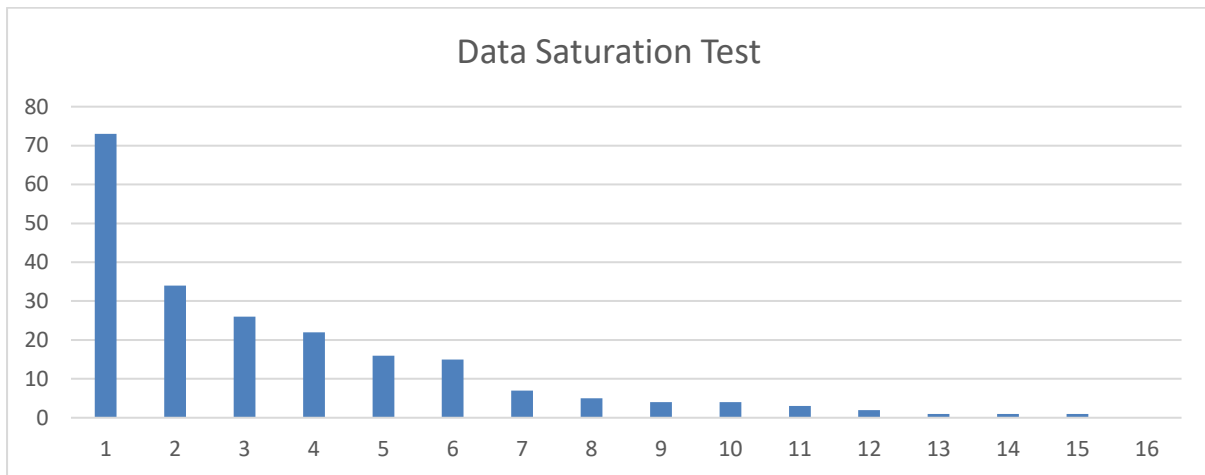
Figure 5: Data saturation test on consolidated codes

Presentation of results

The following results pertain to the research questions summarised in Chapter 3, which in turn followed from research gaps identified in Chapter 2. The results are presented according to sections for each research question with content arranged thematically within these sections. Themes have been generated through a process of thematic analysis with hierarchical grouping of codes into sub-themes and then themes.

Summary of counts

A table of code counts in total and split by research question (RQ) is presented in the following table. This presents the total first-line codes generated by the Atlas.ti AI coding functionality; the number of codes by research question; as well as the number of sub-themes and themes by research question. The significant difference between first-line and consolidated codes is on account of the propensity of the LLM's deployed by AI functionality to generate excessive codes, which then need to be manually reduced, or consolidated, by the researcher.

Table 8: Code counts by research question (RQ)

	Total	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3
Total first-line codes	**644**			
Total consolidated codes	**214**			
Number of **codes** by RQ	**214**	61	75	78
Sub-themes by RQ	**39**	19	11	9
Themes by RQ	**7**	3	1	3

The following table presents a breakdown of the sub-theme counts according to theme, which are in turn classified according to research question. This presenting a further level of detail on sub-theme breakdowns from the higher level figures presented in the previous table.

Table 9: Breakdown of Sub-themes by Theme

	Sub-theme count
Research Question 1	**19**
- Theme 1	9
- Theme 2	8
- Theme 3	2
Research Question 2	**11**
- Theme 1	11
Research Question 3	**9**
- Theme 1	3
- Theme 2	3
- Theme 3	3

The following table arranges sub-themes according to themes which are in turn arranged by research question. A three-level hierarchical numbering is included for ease of reference. While a code count is included for each research question, theme and sub-theme.

Table 10: Sub-themes arranged by theme with code counts

#	Description	Code Count
1.	**RESEARCH QUESTION 1**	**61**
1.1.	**Theme 1: Micro-level follower perspectives – employee perspectives & interactions**	**30**
1.1.1.	Sub-theme 1: Employee Experience - leadership	4
1.1.2.	Sub-theme 2: Interpersonal Relationships- conflict	4
1.1.3.	Sub-theme 3: Workplace Dynamics - power dynamics	5
1.1.4.	Sub-theme 4: Cognitive Factors - confusion	1
1.1.5.	Sub-theme 5: Individual Attributes - fear	7
1.1.6.	Sub-theme 6: Job Satisfaction and Recognition - lack of clarity	2
1.1.7.	Sub-theme 7: Work-Life Balance - stress	1
1.1.8.	Sub-theme 8: Interpersonal Dynamics - influence	2
1.1.9.	Sub-theme 9: Impact on Followers - Toxic Work Environment	4
1.2.	**Theme 2: Meso-level organisational impact**	**26**
1.2.1.	Sub-theme 1: Leadership - inefficiency	3
1.2.2.	Sub-theme 2: Leadership Characteristics	5
1.2.3.	Sub-theme 3: Leadership Perception	4
1.2.4.	Sub-theme 4: Organisational Consequences	1
1.2.5.	Sub-theme 5: Organisational Concerns	6
1.2.6.	Sub-theme 6: Organisational Impact - frustration	2
1.2.7.	Sub-theme 7: Organisational Performance - pressure	1
1.2.8.	Sub-theme 8: Organisational Dynamics- dysfunctional leadership	4
1.3.	**Theme 3: Ethical and financial considerations**	**5**
1.3.1.	Sub-theme 1: Communication and perception	4
1.3.2.	Sub-theme 2: Responsible and ethical culture	1

#	Description	Code Count
2.	**RESEARCH QUESTION 2**	**75**
2.1.	**Theme 1: Positive Impact on Organisational Elements**	75
2.1.1.	Sub-theme 1: Leadership and Management - leadership	11
2.1.2.	Sub-theme 2: Individual and Team Behaviours – stress and lack of clarity	13
2.1.3.	Sub-theme 3: Autonomy and Awareness - Uncertainty	1
2.1.4.	Sub-theme 4: Leadership Styles and Behaviours –Lack of empathy	28
2.1.5.	Sub-theme 5: Positive Contributions and Adaptability- Teamwork	6
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Conventions applied

Certain conventions have been applied for editorial redaction purposes to the participant quotations included in this chapter. These include anonymising the names of individuals or organisations referred to, such editorial redaction has also been applied to analytic commentary as appropriate. Further, editorial redaction has been applied to eliminate repetition in the chosen excerpt (the needless restatement of a particular point) or redundancy (use of linguistic 'fillers' like '...you know?').

5.1 Results: Research Question 1

Research Question 1: What assumptions or perceptions do followers have about dysfunctional, harmful, or destructive leadership?

In seeking an answer to Research Question 1 on follower perceptions about dysfunctional forms of leadership, three broad themes or categories were identified as precursors to answering the question posed. First, the leader's approach to financial considerations and the ethics underpinning it - as perceived by the follower ("ethical and financial" category). Second, at the meso-level - the organisational impact stemming from the dysfunctional leader's activities as perceived by the follower ("organisational impact" category). Finally, at the micro-level, the specific follower's perspectives following from their workplace interactions with destructive leaders ("follower perspectives" category).

These three themes were associated with 19 sub-themes or subcategories, which are considered within each of the relevant broad themes presented next as providing a structured narrative to aid in addressing Research Question 1. Overriding this are perceptions ruling over objective realities, thereby allowing destructive leaders to emerge in the first place.

5.1.1 Theme 1: Micro-level follower perspectives – employee perspectives & interactions

Nine sub-themes were identified as relevant in addressing this theme with respect to answering the research question about follower perceptions of destructive leadership.

5.1.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Employee Experience - leadership

Employee experiences and perceptions of destructive leadership are expected to vary by employee as the form of "destructiveness" or dysfunction varies by leader. As elaborated on by A1, a former senior manager in the education sector, employee experiences and thus perceptions are likely to vary according to each individual, and the follower's own leadership theories of what constitutes leadership, and the form of leadership presented by the applicable leader. A1 goes on to identify what he perceives as three levels of dysfunctional leadership that are differentiated by the severity of dysfunction manifested by the leader, and even hinting at a possible fourth level.

> *"I think what you're gonna find … is that there's different sorts of levels of dysfunctional. So you might interview someone who says there was a dysfunctional leader because the person could not manage conflict and you need to be able to do that as a senior leader or whatever. I would say, yeah, that's probably somewhat dysfunctional and can lead to some issues. Then you probably get another level where you've got a leader who's particularly cantankerous, you know, and everybody's on edge all the time and not too bad. Then there's this, which I would call a third level, which just everything is toxic. It wasn't like they were redeeming characteristics that one can point to. It was more, …, sort of the lying political Machiavellianism, money going missing, people in tears, staff retention problems, international partners laying formal complaints, court cases, lawyers. … I feel like there's sort of three levels, maybe even a fourth level..."*

Sometimes the dysfunctional leadership perceived by followers is not so much a consequence of the specific leader and their characteristics, as it is the organisation and what may be overly ambitious objectives cascaded down to the leader and the resulting dysfunction that follows. As recounted by C1, a male who was a middle manager in the finance industry, observing just such a dynamic playing itself out.

> *"However, I think indirectly those goals of the organisation led to certain unwanted consequences, which was now the dysfunctional leadership that it was resulting in. So what I mean now is Organisation C was on the drive to improve profits, you know, improve its branding, improve its marketplaces. However, what was not being thought of as, how, or the manner in which that was to be done. So then that*

now resulted in leaders being assigned ambitious numeric or … quantitative scorecard measures, which they had no idea as to how to achieve them. … that now results in dysfunction, because you wonder, do I now instil fear in the employees to make them come to the party in terms of what they need to deliver? Or do I take, let's say a transformational approach…"

5.1.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Interpersonal Relationships- conflict

The perceived role of interpersonal relationships in the spread of destructive leadership throughout an organisation is highlighted by participant A1, a senior manager in the education sector. He reflects on the tipping point between whether the emergence of destructive leadership within an organisation is allowed to spread, possibly involving the formation of alliances similar to that associated with a "toxic triangle", or whether it is put to a stop before it can start spreading and alliances start forming.

> *"I think if you're in an environment where everybody's clean and there's one person who's a problem, they'll get rid of that person. Especially when the person is like a nuclear Armageddon level problem. They're not gonna last long. However, if you've got a narcissist, and a Machiavellian, and a bit of a psychopathic type, and then a non-trustworthy one, who's stealing money out the back door, and you put them all on an executive committee or something of that nature, there's a lot of incentive for them to look after each other. So it's almost like you get to a tipping point of the rot and once it tips over that point, very difficult to go back because no one's incentivized to (…)."*

While A2, a middle manager in the education sector, referring to the same destructive leader postulates that the inadequate organisational response may be driven by one of several motives. These include being unwilling to take action for lack of courage, being unable to obtain desired outcomes based on whatever action is taken or actively facilitating the leader and their associated conduct as those higher up in the organisational hierarchy perceive it as being beneficial or necessary for whatever reason.

> *"Possibly, it's one or the other extreme. It's either that and leadership is too nice and kind, and they don't know how to deal with this, and they're hoping that it'll dissipate away, or they've spoken to her many times and said: "you know, like, you*

need to calm down, don't be like that". Or they're quite explicitly protecting her because she's got something, or because they're somehow okay with it based on the things that she has to offer."

5.1.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Workplace Dynamics - power dynamics

The workplace dynamics may be perceived by followers as facilitating associated power dynamics thus resulting in a lack of either firm responsiveness or negative consequences for the leader on account of any destructive behaviour. This account is provided by J1 about her time as a middle manager in the media industry.

> *"So they wouldn't really, it wouldn't be criticised. So, … it was his company and … so it usually was condoned what he was doing, and there was no HR, so there was no consequences for the way he spoke to staff or the way he treated them."*

Participant I1, a female who was a senior manager in a logistics firm under a perceived destructive leader, recounts the power dynamics at play via alliances between her male leader and other leaders in the organisation, who together were able to ensure that they got the votes required to implement the solutions they proposed. I1 also identifies how when such power dynamics move to more advanced levels then the danger of a systemic spread of the associated alliances takes hold.

> *"So … the alliances are with people in positions of power, people that can influence other areas of the organisation. When solutions are proposed, there's already support from those that are aligned with him. So that's how those solutions get voted in. And … when it's alliances like that, it becomes systemic. So it's a whole system that's involved here. So it's, it's different levels."*

The above highlights the different levels of sophistication with respect to the alliances leaders form, possibly connected to the level of the dysfunctional leader involved.

5.1.1.4 Sub-theme 4: Cognitive Factors - confusion

Confusion reigns as followers attempt to make sense of the actions of destructive leaders; as related by F1, who as a middle manager in the mining industry had reported to a

destructive leader and observed a puzzling creation of a vacancy for a post still occupied by a colleague of his. Thus, cognitive dissonances are the consequence for those impacted by such "mysterious actions".

> *"…very well-respected gentleman in the company, performed extremely well, you know, achieved a lot for the business … like a lifetime contribution. And not very long, maybe three, four months after this new leader took over the leadership of our team, he opened a new position, exactly the same job title as this other gentleman's job title."*

5.1.1.5 Sub-theme 5: Individual Attributes - fear

The individual attributes perceived in destructive leaders by followers include those of instilling fear in an individual to express their own opinion because of the likely backlash involved. As relayed by H1, who was a senior manager in the finance industry at the time.

> *"I… was constantly fearful of my opinion because if your opinion was different, she would make you feel like you were stupid."*

These individual attributes extend to using fear to achieve perceived favoured outcomes for the organisation; as recounted by C1, a former middle manager in a financial institution.

> *"…do I now instil fear in the employees to make them come to the party in terms of what they need to deliver?"*

The fear that various types of destructive leaders engender among followers may also have a bearing on how they perceive any damaging organisational consequences. Here A1, a former senior leader in the education sector, fears negative repercussions for the organisation associated with the destructive leader.

> *"…and I have a great fear that it won't be long before the press gets hold of some of the stuff that's taken place, which is very sad because … I was super proud to work for the place and study at the place…"*

5.1.1.6 Sub-theme 6: Job Satisfaction and Recognition - lack of clarity

For followers to achieve job satisfaction and recognition requires clarity from the leader, something a dysfunctional leader is unlikely to provide as relayed by O1, a male who had been a middle manager in the manufacturing industry. Participant O1 reported to a male perceived as being a destructive leader, where clarity on what was required of staff was not forthcoming from the dysfunctional leader.

> *"In… order for the subordinates, myself and the other people to do what we're supposed to do, we need to have a clear idea of what we're trying to achieve. So at the time, we didn't have it, really. So whether what you are doing … is the right thing, like the manager, like the leader needs to be … on your back … each and every time because he doesn't give you a clear path."*

As recounted by participant I1, a female who had reported to a perceived destructive leader in the logistics industry, who observed leaders making decisions in situations where they were unfit to do so.

> *"I think it was the lack of understanding of what the risks would be. I think it was complete lack of experience, complete lack of knowledge around when taking the decision … and insufficient research and insufficient collaboration with the people that did understand."*

5.1.1.7 Sub-theme 7: Work-Life Balance - stress

When it comes to achieving work-life balance, followers perceive that it is not unusual for the focus to be on achieving this desirable outcome for the destructive leader at the expense of followers. In this case, participant M1, an executive manager in the public sector, recalls how her destructive leader was focused on her own stress levels, while unconcerned about those around them who were expected to do all they could to ease the stress of "number one", displaying an antiquated practice.

> *"There's this… sense of… they're… incredibly busy, they're incredibly stressed… they have all of this responsibility, so everybody around them is meant to just make their lives easier. So it's almost like … and in doing that it creates … this culture where you have … it's almost … like people are… almost serving them, which is not what, you know, in today's day and age, an organisation culture should be."*

5.1.1.8 Sub-theme 8: Interpersonal Dynamics - influence

At the level of interpersonal dynamics, the ability to influence is perceived as key, and as H1, a female senior manager formerly reporting to a dysfunctional leader in the finance industry, recalls she perceived the destructive leader as able to demonstrate influence.

> *"She… talks a good game. She has… she's very gifted."*

Influence plays an important role in alliance formation, which as mentioned above is a common behaviour for destructive leaders to engage in. Such influence and the alliances enabled by such skills can ensure that interpersonal dynamics are leveraged by the destructive leader for self-preservation purposes as recounted by participant I1, who reported to a destructive leader in the logistics industry and observed the leveraging activity referred to.

> *"…like for instance, if you look at, okay, so people have gone through whistle-blowing, but if you have an alliance with somebody in compliance that looks after whistle-blowing, guess what's going to happen? It's not gonna go any further!"*

The ability to make strong first impressions is an important skill in influencing others, especially when deployed for self-advancement by the destructive leader, but certain destructive leaders may be lacking in this skill, as recalled by L1, a middle manager in the manufacturing industry.

> *"… that really didn't set the tone off very well ((redacted))? So, you know, the importance of, of making a, a good first impression and this just wasn't there."*

Powers of influence when poorly applied are more likely to repel than to attract, especially for staff lower down in the hierarchy as recounted by E1, a female who was a former senior manager in the engineering industry.

> *"And this is what they didn't see by how many staff left because of that individual."*

5.1.1.9 Sub-theme 9: Impact on Followers - toxic work environment / lack of support

The impact on followers of destructive leaders, as they perceive it, results in a toxic work environment. The toxicity engendered on the workplace environment by the destructive leader is recounted by A1, a former senior manager in the education sector.

> *"It's generally a state of toxicity where there's a wake of destruction that's left behind in various domains. So one, it would be the personal lives of just the individuals and the kind of psychosocial wellbeing."*

The toxic work environment also impacts followers in the form of higher turnover as recounted by participant E1, formerly a senior manager in the engineering industry. E1 emphasises the significant role played by destructive leaders in high staff turnover, and the various techniques used to bring this about.

> *"So instead of managing staff, they would make staff uncomfortable, and they would leave. Instead of developing staff, they would make staff uncomfortable, and they would leave. Instead of seeing why a staff member might be struggling. Make it uncomfortable as possible, and they would leave."*

5.1.2 Theme 2: Meso-level organisational impact

The theme pertaining to follower perceptions of the organisational impact of destructive leadership covered eight sub-themes, and these are collectively placed at the meso-level of the organisation. The focus is on the organisational impact of the dysfunctional leader and follower perceptions thereof. This theme is arranged hierarchically building up from the level of leadership (sub-theme 1). Then onto the characteristics that distinguish the leader, and where destructive forms thereof feature (sub-theme 2). Next, the perceptions of followers about leaders and especially leadership gone rogue (sub-theme 3). Thereafter, the consequences for the organisation as the destructive leader is unleashed upon the organisation and its workforce (sub-theme 4). These leading to concerns for the organisation (sub-theme 5); as performance implications materialise (sub-theme 6); the organisational impact plays out (sub-theme 7); and the dynamics for the organisation unfold in the broader competitive landscape (sub-theme 8).

5.1.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Leadership - inefficiency

In interviewing followers about destructive leaders, such leaders were implicated in inefficiency. An example that speaks to inefficiency from higher up in the organisational hierarchy is highlighted by A1, a male senior manager in the education sector, who speaks of the appointment of his leader, a female that was later perceived as destructive by numerous employees. He then goes on to recount how nothing was done about her perceived destructiveness, thereby demonstrating at a minimum inefficiency from the executive leadership, who failed to adequately respond to the situation, as well as disbelief by employees lower down the hierarchy about the leaderships' lack of responsiveness.

> *"So last I heard all the staff members reporting to her are seeking to leave (…) actively. Nothing's been done about her. As it were. Nothing at all. Which makes the, I think, the situation quite unique. It's not as though there was a little pep talk or a coaching thing or whatever."*

A1 goes on to highlight how perceived inefficiency was accompanied by a sense of disbelief.

> *"You know, it wasn't like the psychologist and coach was expecting to get standard answers, you know, instead what they got was … us saying that this is absolutely insane how this person is even … ((expression of disbelief)), even still employed. We cannot, we cannot understand."*

Inefficiency as an outcome of dysfunctional leadership is also highlighted by D1, a male middle manager in the professional services sector recounting his exposure to a leader who lacked the requisite knowledge of where expertise lay within his functional domain and thereby failed to efficiently tap into such expertise.

> *"I mean, then they're in a leadership position and some of the time they don't even know who to ask. You know, who at my company that works for me actually knows how to answer D1's question. And I, I have no idea. So, you know, what this person, it seems to me, knows how to do is order people around and instruct them, we'll fix it, you know, we'll fix it."*

5.1.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Leadership Characteristics

Having considered what might arise from a leadership perspective, this sub-theme considers the characteristics associated with the dysfunctional leader and the resulting organisational impact as perceived by followers.

Such characteristics include manipulation, a characteristic consistent with the Machiavellian personality type, as described by E1, a female, who was a senior manager in the engineering industry, commenting on a destructive leader disguising their selfish plans while enacting their manipulative schemes.

> *"So it's like: "(…), if I can't have it no one can". That's what the mentality, that seems to come through: "If I can't have the business to myself, then no else can. But I don't want anyone to know that this is my plan, so this is what I'm going to do.""*

Further manipulation is described by A1, a senior manager who reported to a perceived, destructive female leader when they were employed in the education sector. The participant recognised that the manipulativeness of the dysfunctional leader might be deployed to not only deleterious ends but also to advantageous outcomes for her organisation.

> *"Yeah, so look, someone who is, let's say manipulative, politically connected, prone to abuse, so on, those are not all going to result in short-term positives. That's not what I'm saying. But what I'm saying is that there will be aspects, so they might be really good at business development and sales, you might be able to get them to get rid of a particularly problematic employee. Okay. Or they might be highly persuasive with potential partners, these sorts of things."*

A2 exposed to the same destructive leader discussed above when she was employed in the education sector as a middle manager identifies characteristics common to Dark Triad personalities as did A1. Interestingly, in this case the "lack of empathy" that is associated with the everyday psychopath, has spread beyond the leader and is now reciprocated by team members back towards the leader, as the environment becomes conducive to an increased level of toxicity, thus enabling further elements of the "toxic triangle" to take hold. One may even detect a sense of "schadenfreude" or "spitefulness" in this reciprocation.

"It was a nice team, but nobody would even write a message to her to get well soon, because people lacked empathy for her, because she had lacked empathy towards us for so long."

Further elements of the Dark Triad are demonstrated by this female destructive leader, who supported by her organisation, engages in bullying behaviour against A1, a male senior manager in the educational sector, thereby a bullying culture becomes entrenched within the organisation.

"As soon as there was action against her, suddenly the institution was behaving highly irrationally. Which again, in turn, the reason I raised it is not for my own victim complex. It's more that it sends a message and I think it was done to send a message. They actually said that to me in court. They're gonna make an example of me. So no one else ever tries to step up. So that sort of thing I guess becomes, yeah, culture, but it's basically bully tactics, I guess. And those who do remain within the structures of the institution are largely petrified."

Further bullying behaviour is recounted by participant J1, a female middle manager in the media industry, reflecting on an incident when she reported to a female destructive leader who took exception to the way she was dressed and proceeded to unleash a diatribe followed by subsequent action to drive home the perceived slight to which she had taken "great exception".

"And it also manifested in comments about how one was dressed … because she didn't like the way that person was dressed, she'll make a comment, like, like to me, she said: "Do I think I am Miss South Africa when I was wearing tights and a jersey over it? And then also … she organised an image consultant to basically highlight the fact that she wasn't happy with the way that staff were dressing, who then went through an hour of telling people how to dress."

5.1.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Leadership Perception

Under follower perceptions, considering broader community perceptions of destructive leadership, A1, a former senior manager in the education sector, identifies unfair treatment of staff as something widely perceived and acknowledged among his colleagues.

"So this individual eventually after my team was being so heavily abused and a number of staff … had been short paid, I had not been paid for certain amounts of work I had done, she had gotten rid of a lot of staff members through really hostile sort of engagements."

While staff were unfairly treated, this destructive leader was treated rather well. As relayed by A2, a female middle manager, who demonstrates that the destructive leader was spared reciprocation by her organisation of the unfair treatment that she directed towards her reporting staff.

"And she's been on sick leave regularly and they tell her take your time, you know, you need to feel better, but it's been some time … and she still doesn't come to the office. But when there was an opportunity to go abroad …, she hopped on the plane, then she was okay."

Unfair treatment consistent with a "toxic triangle" that involves favouritism extended by the destructive leader to those that would be described as "susceptible followers" is identified by I1, a female who formerly served as a senior manager in the logistics industry, who had reported to a male destructive leader.

"…and where there is favouritism and special privileges for certain individuals as opposed to others. And as a result of the behaviours, it leads to a toxic environment, which then results in a number of people leaving the environment."

5.1.2.4 Sub-theme 4: Organisational Consequences

Follower perceptions of the consequences of destructive leadership for organisations include higher staff turnover, not always in the form of a normal resignation, but more "exceptional forms" of resignation such as those labelled "constructive dismissal", and subsequently associated with judicial action involving deleterious consequences for the firm. The following is from participant A1, a male senior manager, recounting his experiences in the education sector.

"So I was forced to resign with immediate effect citing constructive dismissal. And, and I took them to the labour court and I won."

The above account is supported by A2, a female middle manager, commenting on the same destructive leader.

"High resignations, unhappy staff…"

"Turning the tables", the destructive leaders may find themselves the subject of staff turnover. As recalled by participant B1, a male formerly in the IT industry, such turnover tended to involve "separation agreements", and would require the organisation to adapt to the disruption.

"Well, the consequences, a lot of them, some of them resigned, some of them were unfortunately fired. Well, very well, probably more, more of a separation agreement. But I mean, a lot of them, if eventually it was a change in … management structure, right?"

5.1.2.5 Sub-theme 5: Organisational Concerns

Participant A1 perceives concerns for the organisation associated with the destructive leader's conduct. The participant, a male senior manager in the education sector, describes how these concerns stemmed from the leader's Dark Triad personality traits, which were corroborated by an expert outsider who called for an organisational response.

"And that person wrote up a coaching report that went to the senior structures at that time and it was meant to be like a developmental report, but instead the person actively chose to write a report saying like, the greatest narcissist on earth has infiltrated this place. You've gotta do something about it."

A concern for organisations would also be that it takes time for employees to identify the destructive nature of a particular individual's form of leadership, thus highlighting the importance of responding as soon as signals emerge, such as staff beginning to engage in whistleblowing through the organisation's available channels. This account from H1, a female who reported to a dysfunctional leader in the financial industry.

"…one of my ex-colleagues called me, and we've become friends, and she said to me: "I finally understand what you used to go through with this person." And she

says, what I said to her: "What do you mean?" And she says: "No, I experienced it today.""

A2, a former middle manager in the education sector, observed a cynical "work-life balance" in her destructive leader.

"And people have often seen her out at restaurants, clearly doing fine. Yeah. But she's too ill for the things that she doesn't want to do."

5.1.2.6 Sub-theme 6: Organisational Impact - frustration

The impact for organisations of destructive leaders as perceived by followers includes a heightened sense of frustration among followers in their encounters and dealings with the destructive leader. As recounted by M1, a female executive manager reporting to a female destructive leader in the public sector. M1 further recounts how that frustration is associated with a lack of decisiveness in the destructive leader that increases uncertainty among followers regarding their dealings with the leader.

"So there's like … this mentality that, you know, that… there's no consideration of the fact that people have to, people have … to still go ahead, and do things based on this decision, that time is wasted just by something that could take five minutes or whatever. So there's no consideration that, you know, there are people that are waiting, people that are relying on this decision to be made to go ahead and do things.""

Further frustration and uncertainty that impact the organisation and its employees are conveyed by F1, a male who formerly served as a middle manager in the mining industry, relating the experience of a colleague. Here the destructive leader acts without informing employees of his actions and associated rationale resulting in a great deal of uncertainty among the affected employee trying to make sense of what is happening and at the same time having to deal with the natural feelings of frustration that arise in such situations.

"And not very long, maybe three, four months after this new leader took over the leadership of our team, we opened a new position, exactly the same job title as this other gentleman's job title. And then obviously, I phoned up this guy, who I've known for many years, and say: "Hey man, what's up with this? Why is there an

open box, with the exact same title as you have, under our new leader? What's going on? Are you leaving? What's happening?" He said: "F1 …, I don't know, this was never discussed with me. I don't know what the plan is, I don't know if it's my future... I just don't know."

Participant E1, formerly a senior manager in the engineering industry, wonders why organisations do not do more to address dysfunctional leadership especially considering the significant costs involved at both the organisational and the individual level, given the organisational role and responsibility in the formation of individuals that they employ.

"What I don't understand is why companies don't do more to prevent a dysfunctional leader from influencing their business. … I still have not got that answer. … I've had several conversations with individuals, even with senior individuals, but no one can tell me why certain individuals are still in a business, in a position where they're influencing the outcomes of other people's careers, of other people's futures. I cannot answer that question. I wish I could, because they'll be like, this is what, that this is the exact reason why they've got someone who is so toxic in an organisation."

5.1.2.7 Sub-theme 7: Organisational Performance - pressure

Followers perceive the destructive leader affecting the performance of the organisation. This might be done by pressuring employees to ensure that the organisational performance desired by the organisation's upper echelons is achieved, especially in trying circumstances. As related by participant C1, a male who served as a middle manager in the financial industry while reporting to a male perceived as a destructive leader.

"And therefore in these exigent circumstances, it's allowed that we put pressure on all the managers and all the employees."

Pressure could also manifest when followers of a certain personality allow themselves to be "volunteered" for high pressure projects, or are at least perceived to do so, and where the risk of project failure is high with unrealistic expectations possibly entering the fray. As relayed by D1, a male middle manager in the professional services sector exposed to dysfunctional forms of leadership.

"…who end up working a lot harder when they're … constrained. And whether or not people know, it's whether or not someone in a leadership position knows you've got someone "green" that's working for you, but comes through in the way that they act. They always say: "Yes, it's okay, I'll do this." They don't argue back. And so they are easy punching bags,…"

Responsibility for the inevitable failure is then placed on these employees.

"…get into big trouble and… they … feel terrible, and … they can't sleep, and … they're working until three in the morning, only for to like have a catch up four hours later at 7:00 AM to be told the whole failure is your fault."

5.1.2.8 Sub-theme 8: Organisational Dynamics- dysfunctional leadership

Followers also perceive the role of destructive leaders on organisational dynamics. Employees in a financial firm observe extreme cases of the dysfunctional leader sending mixed messages by cycling between condemning and praising his workers, and in so doing creating an unnerving dynamic for staff trying to make sense of the inconsistent communication stemming from the leader. This cognitive dissonance is related here by C1, a former middle manager in the financial sector.

"There were times when… this leader would just explode, and go off about how everyone is unproductive, and how, you know, no one is actually earning their paychecks, and everyone just gets paid for nothing. But then the following week, I mean the leader would report back on the good work that has been done and the good feedback that comes from the upper management teams, you know, to say: "You guys are performing well, it's noticed by the CEO, congratulations, I think this week we can take it a bit easy, and we are having a, a tea party or an equivalent, you know, to celebrate these short-term wins.""

Organisational dynamics involving third parties may also involve detection of the Dark Triad traits of certain destructive leaders as relayed by H1, a female senior manager in the financial sector, recalling her encounter with a third party in which the narcissistic nature of her dysfunctional leader was discussed.

"So I went for career coaching... And I, I was very honest with the coach …, and I

told her everything that was going on. And from what I told her …, and what she experienced herself from this specific leader, she said to me that this leader seems like a narcissist. And this was a professionally trained individual. Because, before my coaching session even started, my boss phoned the coach and said, she's like: "that I'm jealous of her, that I feel the need to be like her.""

The narcissistic nature of a Dark Triad type of destructive leader is also detected as negatively impacting organisational dynamics through several examples. E1, a former senior manager in the engineering industry, recounts the same with reference to the belittling behaviour that is a characteristic of this personality type.

"In my opinion and from my experience, a dysfunctional leader is when you undermine your staff. When you pit staff against one another, when you, when you take someone's knowledge and you belittle them and you, you almost take it as, say for instance, you are an engineer and you are a mechanical engineer for the last 10 years, but me as a narcissist, I'm now saying to you don't know anything. So they would constantly undercut."

Participant E1 goes on to contrast the dysfunctional leadership observed with alternative leadership styles, such as servant leadership, and advocates in favour of the latter.

"…I can tell you now that I was also influenced by dysfunctional leadership. And only when I started studying and reading up on servant leadership, reading up on how you should be working with your teams, what are the bad habits that managers have got, that I realised what I'm being taught: it's not the right way!"

5.1.3 Theme 3: Ethical and financial considerations

This theme highlights the tension between a natural desire to conform to ethical standards on the one hand and the pursuit of alternative objectives on the other, such as organisational politics for career advancement, or financial gain, especially as measured by the organisational metric of profitability. The tension follows from a belief that financial gain necessarily requires some level of compromise at the level of ethics, and that ultimately these two factors are irreconcilable. The aim is to test follower perceptions of destructive forms of leadership against this theme.

This theme was subdivided into two sub-themes, namely that of communicative and perceptive elements, being the leader's communication style and followers' perceptions thereof ("communication and perception" subcategory), and the management of one's responsibilities thus demonstrating a commitment to an exemplary ethical culture ("responsible and ethical culture" subcategory).

Where followers have had negative experiences of dark side or dysfunctional leaders, they may perceive the presence of an underlying ethical compromise that results in financial benefits for the organisation. The leader's dark side, and the public demonstration thereof, thus perceived as a requisite property for financial gain, with a compromise of ethical standards perceived to be required, especially if the business environment is perceived as demanding such compromise. A Faustian Bargain thus seems to apply, with financial gain requiring ethical compromise, and the associated emergence of such individuals into positions of leadership facilitated by exhibiting these characteristics.

An example would be the dysfunctional leader's own, typically selfish, objectives prioritised over the ethical consideration of their employees' well-being and morale as recounted by participant M1, an executive manager in public services, who shares how this continues to embolden the dysfunctional leader in their approach as organisational outcomes are largely on account of their exclusionary decision making.

> *"So it doesn't matter, …, all the other dynamics that in play, like when you think about employees, you think about HR, you think about sometimes in Finance, I suppose you think about, …, just general employee engagement, …, how you build morale, how you create that culture. They don't believe in, … all of that. I think a*

dysfunctional leader wants to achieve what they wanna achieve, and they wanna achieve it the way they wanna achieve it. Almost like, …, "it's their way or the highway", and because we … achieve that goal at the end of it, it kind of like empowers them or enables them to, to continue doing what they're doing 'cause it, it clearly is working."

5.1.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Communication and perception

The sub-theme "communication and perception" within the theme of "ethical and financial" considerations is one of vexation for followers where there is great difficulty in aligning what is said, or publicly communicated, by dysfunctional leaders against what they believe is actually going on. Hence, cognitive dissonances might arise as followers attempt to reconcile what is communicated by the destructive leader with their own perceptions of what is going on in the workplace.

Participant A1, a male, who recounts his time as a senior manager in the education sector, posits that communication might involve ideological elements, or "Kool-Aid being sold", but ultimately staff morale suffers as the disconnect emerges. This involves a threat extending beyond staff to customers, namely the students of the organisation.

> *"But I can say with honesty, that what happened with me resulted in some extremely poor morale issues post my departure. And I'm still in touch with a lot of the folks there, and a lot of loss of faith and it's kind of, it's a strange thing to say, but when you're dealing with an educational institution …, having faith in the kind of, in the particular Kool-Aid that they're selling is like everything really. So some of the stuff that could potentially come out in the press and maybe, maybe it never will, I don't know, but it would be probably bad enough for the current students … to question their decision to actually study there in the first instance. So yeah …, anyway, long-winded but net negative I think."*

Participant J1, a female in the media industry reflects upon her perceptions of communication gone "wrong" when working for the male CEO of an SME where "yes men" on the board of directors do not proffer criticism per their fiduciary responsibilities, but

rather are biased towards hopes of positive outcomes, and are therefore ready to accept whatever means are used by the destructive leader as long as the ultimate outcome of financial gain is achieved.

> *"I think his risk-taking was condoned when it was making money, and it was successful. And I mean, and also his board was basically "yes men". So …, even if, … there were consequences that were negative, they would be "yes men". So … it wouldn't be criticised. …, and it was his company and so, … it usually was condoned what he was doing, and there was no HR, so there was no consequences for the way he spoke to staff or the way he treated them."*

While H1, a female senior manager in the finance industry notes the aura associated with her dysfunctional leader who is perceived as exceptional almost beyond measure.

> *"…Brene Brown and Erik Kruger, John Sena, "The Diary Of A CEO", she listens to every podcast, every, anything and everything. She's on all social media channels. She's up to date with anything and everything, and what's in the news, … she's perceived as very together."*

Communication even becomes weaponised as staff are made to doubt their perceptions of self-worth against the communication of the dysfunctional leader. This account also by H1, from the finance industry, highlights how followers, in this case a colleague, are made to reconsider their self-worth in the context of a perceived reasonable request for a promotion that is devastatingly dismissed by a female dysfunctional leader.

> *"So basically that individual had asked for a promotion, and she says she made her stand in a room, and read out the job description line by line, and then proceeded to tell her how useless she was, and that she's not doing any of the "effing crap" that is listed there. So why should she get the promotion?"*

The consequences of such disconnects between what is communicated by the dysfunctional leader and that which is perceived by the follower tend to be deleterious for organisational culture, resulting in higher staff turnover and the loss of the follower's

autonomy for example. The following account as recollected by G1, a female who reported to a dysfunctional female leader in a professional services firm, is an instance of this.

> *"…if the culture doesn't feel like a place for you, people do tend to leave a bit. So I do recall that around that time it was very hard to keep people in the building, in the team. So I think from one perspective that was probably one of the outcomes. To be honest, I think a lot of them were more, they were more culture-based, and more based on …, how people saw themselves within the organisation. And even reflecting on my own experience, it doesn't allow you to almost find your level of autonomy, and that room to who you wanna be, because it's almost keeping you in line."*

5.1.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Responsible and ethical culture

Dysfunctional leaders may seek to be perceived as responsible leaders by their followers by attempting to provide evidence of high ethical standards. As M1, a female executive manager in the public sector, relates that such emphasis by her female dysfunctional leader on building a reputation as a hard-worker can be leveraged downwards in the organisational hierarchy to develop a culture of upward servitude to the dysfunctional leader on account of the hard-working ethic that the leader has ostensibly demonstrated in her commitment to her workplace responsibilities.

> *"There's … this sense … of… they're incredibly busy, they're incredibly stressed. They … have all of this responsibility, so everybody around them is meant to just make their lives easier. So it's almost like, … and then… in doing that it creates … this culture where you have, you know, it's almost … like people … are almost serving them, which is not what, …, in today's day and age, an organisation culture should be."*

However, dysfunctional leaders remain keen to exercise their high-risk appetite even if this contradicts a seemingly strong ethical culture. As related by J1, a middle manager in the media industry, whose destructive leader undertook a risky business venture that was condoned following the success thereof.

"I suppose with these risky behaviour, if you maybe one that was condoned was he, he had a very profitable arrangement with a radio station …, and it was the only game in town that did such shows … in this country. And then he earned a lot of advertising money from that."

Such levels of responsible work ethic, or lack thereof, can be contrasted with that of E1, the follower of a dysfunctional leader in the engineering industry, who felt responsible for the dire straits that her firm faced and was prepared to take drastic and personally costly action to temper the pain felt by her subordinates for whom she felt responsible and demonstrated a level of empathy, unlike the destructive leader who typically lacks empathy, especially if they are a dark triad individual, perhaps even vindictively demanding that the pain be spread across the entire workforce.

"I also took a salary reduction, and I voted for it because it benefited the company, it benefited the team, and it stopped my staff being let go, …If the decision was being made to cut my sales team, and then they repurposed them, and then as a result, I didn't, I didn't resign, but I was close to, because I'd just hired every single one of my sales team in the last six months through a year. They'd all left businesses that they had been at for a long time that last in and first out. So if, if it wasn't for me, they would've been safe. So in my mind, because they weren't safe, I would've rather said: "Let me take voluntary retrenchment. You guys pay me out, I'll go and study, and keep my sales staff." Whereas the other ones: "No, their salaries must be cut too."

Conclusion for Research Question 1 Results

Three broad themes were considered in addressing Research Question 1. First, "ethical and financial considerations" considering the tension between ethical standards and alternative objectives, such as financial gain or organisational politics, thus a form of "Faustian bargain" between these competing dimensions is identified involving cognitive dissonance, high staff turnover, and pursuit of risky behaviours. Second, "meso-level organisational impact" with destructive leadership being associated with inefficiency, manipulation, unfair treatment, and performance pressure. Finally, "micro-level follower perspectives" that includes the alliance formation, navigation of power dynamics, and poor goal clarity. These three themes were in turn associated with 19 sub-themes that added a further level of richness or nuance in addressing Research Question 1.

5.2 Results: Research Question 2

Research Question 2: What positive contributions do dysfunctional, harmful, or destructive leaders make to organisational initiatives and outcomes?

5.2.1 Theme 1: Positive Impact on Organisational Elements

A single theme was developed as an aid to answering research question 2 about the positive contributions to organisations of destructive leaders, namely that of "positive impacts on organisational outcomes". 11 sub-themes were developed within this overarching theme.

5.2.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Leadership and Management - leadership

The paradoxical nature of destructive leadership is reflected upon by A1, a former senior manager in the education sector, who in a balanced account of his former destructive leader highlights the advantages associated with the leader but also the downsides. The advantages include selling new business, persuasiveness, and downsizing organisations.

> "But what I'm saying is that there will be aspects, so they might be really good at business development and sales, you might be able to get them to get rid of a particularly problematic employee. Okay. Or they might be highly persuasive with potential partners, these sorts of things. But ultimately the kind of toxicity, the lies, the disingenuousness, the staff retention issues, the corruption issues, all of these things are going to lead, and when I say longer term, I mean probably no more than five or six months, are gonna lead to nothing particularly good."

Whether leadership and management might be perceived as possibly possessing positive elements where destructive forms of leadership are at play depends to some extent on the level of destructiveness manifested in their leadership or management style, and the individual characteristics behind that style. A1 here refers to the potential of "redeeming

characteristics" for certain levels of destructive leadership on the one hand, while on the other no such characteristics are perceived to be present at all.

> *"I think what you're gonna find … is that there's different sorts of levels of dysfunctional. So you might interview someone who says there was a dysfunctional leader because the person could not manage conflict and you need to be able to do that as a senior leader or whatever. I would say, yeah, that's probably somewhat dysfunctional and can lead to some issues. Then you probably get another level where you've got a leader who's particularly cantankerous, you know, and everybody's on edge all the time and not too bad. Then there's this, which I would call a third level, which just everything is toxic."*

Destructive forms of leadership might be deployed to ensure favourable organisational outcomes even if this is at the expense of staff wellbeing. As recounted by C1, a former middle manager in the financial sector, who observes that driving feelings such as fear within employees may be reckoned necessary to bring about ambitious, or possibly fanciful, outcomes.

> *"So then that now resulted in leaders being assigned ambitious numeric or quantitative, quantitative scorecard measures, which they had no idea as to how to achieve them. Now, that now results in this function, because you wonder, do I now instil fear in the employees to make them come to the party in terms of what they need to deliver? Or do I take, let's say a transformational approach to say…"*

Destructive forms of leadership might be applied to ensure positive organisational outcomes via doing what is perceived to be the necessary "dirty work" of the organisation, which other leaders would prefer not to do. So, the higher level, or more extreme forms, of destructive leader may be seen as ideal for executing such outcomes as recounted by E1, a former senior manager in the engineering industry.

> *"… the narcissist, who's the 10. Yeah, it was an advantage to the company in a way that they didn't have to do, almost, like any dirty work, if I can put it that way."*

Again destructive forms of leadership may be able to deliver positive outcomes in the short term but these are typically associated with long-term negative consequences as recounted by D1, a middle manager in professional services. He observes how redeploying human resources according to short-term priorities incurred long-term costs on those hastily redeployed resources as the destructive leader seeks to please the CEO.

> *"So … the CEO said: "this is important today". You know, and, and that's probably not quite true, but the priority definitely, sort of, changed in such a way that this whole environment becomes very unpredictable, and you… say: "It's okay, I'm gonna just put all the resources there and then I'm just gonna put all the resources there." And … the effect of that is that you are making progress on the things, which are priorities at a specific point in time, but you are burning people out, and you're making it a difficult environment to work in, operate in."*

5.2.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Individual and Team Behaviours – stress and lack of clarity

Perceptions vary by individual, and so engendering "toughness" within staff may be portrayed as a positive organisational outcome where hiding emotions is encouraged in the workplace team environment. Here, H1, a former senior manager in the financial industry recalls the destructive leader "leading by example" by hiding their emotions, and thus displaying their mental toughness for team members to replicate.

> *"Yes. Like… you mustn't cry at work if, even if somebody dies, like, I mean her father passed away, and it was in the middle of a work day, and she said to us, oh all of us, that she's got her priorities right. And she went to a meeting. So yeah."*

Stress becomes a marker of a positive outcome when taken on for the benefit of the organisation, something then that the destructive leader should be rewarded for taking on in service of the workplace by receiving the servitude of their underlings. As recounted by participant M1, an executive manager in the public sector.

> *"There's … this sense of… they're incredibly busy, they're incredibly stressed. …, they have all of this responsibility, so everybody around them is meant to just make their lives easier."*

Destructive leaders may strategically deploy a lack of clarity, communication, and direction to drive a potentially positive organisational outcome of which followers remain largely unaware. As recounted by O1, who had acted as a middle manager in the manufacturing industry, and been subjected to such lack of clarity.

> *"So I was in one division, we had our own plants with 15 workers, and then there were different divisions on different sites. So I believe, where is the idea in the whole organisation? I was not very aware of where we were going."*

Doubts may arise among followers as to the reasons for the ascent to leadership of certain individuals perceived as toxic, and who fail to see organisational benefits being derived from such ascent. Participant I1, formerly reporting to a destructive leader in the logistics industry, reflects upon such a situation, and speculates about the role of societal norms of trust placed in leaders or authorities as enabling such leadership to continue even if organisational benefits ultimately fail to materialise.

> *"Beneficial for the organisation? I don't, I haven't observed that it's been beneficial for the organisation. I've been, I've noticed that it's beneficial for the individual, not the organisation, but I mean generally people within the organisation trust people in authority and you don't get many questions asked about it. It's just people talk in the corridors as opposed to actually raising the issues."*

5.2.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Autonomy and Awareness - uncertainty

Autonomy of a business unit may be assumed by the leader as well. Where the division overseen by the perceived destructive leader is one whose contribution to a company's financial results is difficult to ascertain then a "free for all" may arise; where the boldest claim responsibility for positive outcomes, regardless of contribution and yet find themselves rewarded so that the environment is ideal in that it is conducive to emergence without being able to ascertain leader effectiveness. As recounted by H1, a senior manager in the financial industry, this environment of uncertainty was at play with the destructive leader referred to.

> *"Marketing is referred to as a spend-centre. So the tracking, … the absolution, where you have to say: "Thanks to marketing X was done." Or this, do you understand what I mean? It's always the perception that is created, that you, you*

are in a business unit, and in this business unit, … the only person who's allowed to shine is that individual. So it, it's very difficult to say like: "Did the business benefit because I'm really not exposed to…?" Like, I create an EXCO report, and I had, I had EXCO, like, you know, findings for EXCO, but I never presented to EXCO. She would, yeah. So, so it, was it beneficial to the business or not beneficial to the business? I can't answer that. I mean, I can tell you that from an annual results perspective, you know, no, the, the results were not great the last financial year, but that's, that's all I can tell you."

Uncertainty also arises from indecisiveness associated with the dysfunctional leader who takes their time making important business decisions and lords their power to make decisions and delay in making such decisions over their followers. The decisiveness then possibly being presented as meticulous decision making to those higher up in the hierarchy. As recounted by M1, a female executive manager in the public sector, who also reflects upon the costs further down the line of such indecisiveness in terms of poor execution or implementation.

"… the hardworking part of it. ... So there's like this mentality that… so there's no consideration of the fact that people have to… still go ahead, and do things based on this decision, that time is wasted just by something that could take five minutes or whatever. So there's no consideration that, you know, there are people that are waiting, people that are relying on this decision to be made to go ahead and do things. And… when it comes to accountability of those decisions, then it's also as if… the part that that indecisiveness played… in the timing of… implementing those things now is forgotten. And… you kind of fall short with… the fact that you haven't been able to implement all of that."

For the destructive leader to come in and shake things up may yield positive organisational outcomes, as recounted by D1, a middle manager in the professional services sector. Participant D1's dysfunctional leader appeared to get results by purging elements that were harming the organisational culture. However, the speed of change may have been such as to cause feelings of "indigestion" for the affected employees.

"…you know, a workforce, who has become accustomed to a particularly kind of docile leadership structure, who's just, everything goes, you know, then you, you

kind of have this, kind of, new leader, who comes in, who views things quite differently, and who's taken that... And…I suppose because of that, that docile nature of the prior leader, you know, things have just been left to decay, and the environments has become a little bit unpredictable and stagnant. And then you can, you know, somebody who comes in, and says: "No, no, this is absolute nonsense, you know, this is how it's gonna work from now on." And, you know, you know, get, get everything back onto track."

5.2.1.4 Sub-theme 4: Leadership Styles and Behaviours – deceptive / lack of empathy / appearance vs reality

While deceptive behaviour by the destructive leader may be detected by certain followers, those higher up in the hierarchy may confuse this for something more benign. Thus, while followers may expect negative consequences for the behaviour, the situation thus may play out in the destructive leader's favour as recounted by participant A2, a former middle manager in the education sector. Her leader maintained her title, and associated privileges, despite a marked reduction in responsibilities.

"So she's been off, due to a serious illness …, ill for an extreme amount of time, and she was promoted, and she got a few extra units reporting to her, and they've all since been removed from her. So they no longer report to her, yet she still maintained that new title of being the leader for all of these units."

Behaving with a lack of empathy, something characteristic of the Dark Triad personality, especially the corporate psychopath, will drive staff turnover, which may be seen as desirable depending on organisational circumstances. Participant E1, formerly a senior manager in the engineering industry, recounts how it may be perceived as a skill contingent on organisational circumstances in driving regular staff turnover.

"So instead of managing staff, they would make staff uncomfortable, and they would leave. Instead of developing staff, they would make staff uncomfortable, and they would leave. Instead of seeing why a staff member might be struggling. Make it uncomfortable as possible, and they would leave."

Again shorter-term gains are contrasted with longer-term costs, here with reference to manipulative behaviours. As A1, a former senior manager in the education sector, shares how the ability to drive business revenue, especially in difficult circumstances would be appreciated while this benefits the organisation even though the destructive leader may be engaged in more "behind the scenes" nefarious ends. This is done by using their masterful skills of manipulation, especially in the case of the master manipulator, namely the Machiavellian.

> *"I think on a net effect level, those sorts of behaviours are ultimately never beneficial. But there are some aspects, like for instance, in a tough climate, having those traits can assist in driving some levels of business development. Because if you are quite sort of psychologically manipulative, driven by money, trying to create more money because you might be stealing it, so you're motivated to then, yeah, it could be helpful in that way, I suppose. But I think, ultimately it becomes a net negative because you, kind of, eventually get found out either through poor behaviour or through unethical practices or whatever it might be. So I think with any of these kind of darker behaviours, there is gonna be a shorter-term based plus side or possible series of plus sides. But I think the ultimate outcome is almost always negative."*

5.2.1.5 Sub-theme 5: Positive Contributions and Adaptability - teamwork / collaboration

Positive contributions are possible, especially in financial metrics such as revenue generation, as discussed by participant G1, employed in professional services while reporting to a dysfunctional leader. The organisation accepts the dysfunctional leadership despite the associated negative cultural impact until this overshadows the positive contribution.

> *"I think that the organisation did put up with it, you know, on the basis of: it was working, you know, and clearly it was quality output, and then there was good revenue. But I think over time, the cultural impact, you know, losing people that you, that the broader organisation saw value in, I think at, at first it, it was almost like a bit of a "light bulb" or, or like a flicker of, hey, maybe this person's methods are not actually overall beneficial for us, until eventually when the company was… So you could almost say when we went through a restructure, …, then in deciding*

… to change, the realisation that … she was no longer … a partner, …, who could move within the next phase for the organisation."

When considering the role of teamwork in ensuring that positive organisational contributions are made then perspective is key. The conclusion as to whether a positive contribution is present may depend on the perspective from an internal competitive angle rather than that from an internal collaborative angle. As related by B1, a former junior manager in the IT industry, a positive contribution was made by the destructive leader in seeking to engage his team in competition with other internal organisational teams rather than collaboration, and if successful thereby demonstrating the superiority of his team vis-à-vis other teams in the organisation.

"Because I, I mean, you could definitely still see that they are still within their previous company's mission, and mission, and mission statement, you know, not yet aligned to what Organisation B … tries to achieve. So it's still, still very much driven towards their own P& L statement. How can they, how could they themselves benefit?"

While collaboration may be an important element of effective team functioning. It may not be something favoured by the destructive leader who struggles to accept criticism or being challenged. As related by J1, a former middle manager reporting to a male destructive leader in the media industry. The leader might eventually acknowledge the value of criticism, and thereby benefit the organisation, but only after causing harm to the individual providing that criticism.

"But on the other hand, he might have been more successful had he created an environment where people were able to collaborate, and be able to speak up and challenge. And ironically while … he would be publicly humiliating people and wasn't really open to being challenged on things. If you did challenge him, you would actually find him appreciating it a day or so later. But… to me the cost of the challenge was very high on one's own personal psychology."

5.2.1.6 Sub-theme 6: Organisational Dynamics and Culture - conflict

The ability to navigate conflict and deploy it to one's ends, by for example fomenting conflict in the workplace with strategic and selfish ends in mind, might be advantageous to furthering the destructive leader's career, while at the same time convincing the upper ranks of the organisational hierarchy that an organisational benefit has been delivered. As recounted by participant J1, a middle manager formerly reporting to a destructive leader in the media industry, the destructive leader preyed on people's insecurities by deploying their political skills to turn organisational dynamics in their favour, and further an organisational narrative in their favour with suggestions of overall organisational benefit, especially where competition within teams is portrayed as a healthy organisational outcome to be made part of a healthy organisational culture.

> *"I mean, what he was very good at was, and I don't know if it was deliberate, most people he hired in the company had low self-esteem, and what he looked at was their weaknesses, and where others, …, and their strengths, and he would align there, those, he would find someone who to, … So, so say for example you were in the same kind of role, he would work you against each other, so that instead of working together, you would actually start working against each other, which didn't lead to a very productive and healthy environment. And also there was no HR. So you also found that issues, that of staff, that were, that would treat certain people in a very,…, inhospitable way. Nothing was dealt with …, and it was left on you, to basically, to be told that: "You need to try sort these things out.""*

Where workplace toxicity has become a part of the organisational culture then it is likely that this has been noticed by the upper echelons of the organisation, and is therefore likely being permitted or even facilitated, especially if it is clear that nothing is being done by the upper echelons to eradicate toxicity within the organisational culture. Thus organisational endeavours are driven to serve this toxic culture, which subsumes the organisation's ultimate objectives as related by participant A1, who was employed in the education sector.

> *"a lot of times the kind of toxicity sort of stuff, if it's persistent, it means it's been enabled because no organisation that cares to solve for toxicity, like extreme toxicity would allow it to persist more than, I don't know, a couple of months maybe. …, but I think persisting toxicity, persisting longer than probably four to five, max six months, is almost certainly being enabled if not actively supported."*

Conflict may be allowed to fester, an environment in which the destructive leader may thrive by deploying behaviours such as lack of communication replaced instead by microaggressions. The destructive leader may use the lack of communication to maintain control as they leverage their "inside knowledge" of the situation to their own benefit. As recounted by participant N1, who reported to a male destructive leader while working in the FMCG industry, microaggressions were deployed and power was subsequently accumulated by depriving the follower of it and claiming it for himself given that the situation made this outcome relatively easy for the destructive leader to achieve. Thereby, the destructive leader was able to deploy his communication skills to devastating effect against his follower while upwardly communicating a position of masterful delivery of organisational objectives.

> *"And …, this role delivers 80% of his deliverables. So he will spend inevitably more time with me than anyone else. But the nice thing is he's also involved in the resourcing process. So he has … a say as to who gets … hired, and whatever. But from the onset, "from the jump" as they say on the streets. There's personality clashes. You know, he feels that I have an arrogant personality. The unfortunate thing is I feel that he has the same kind of personality, therefore there's an impasse. But this impasse is not addressed openly, or put on the table to say: "I feel this way, or I feel that way." It's addressed in a microaggressions type way, which is rather a futile way … of doing it. So … that is the background. So everything that unfolds in our relationship with my manager then is premised on that. Later, I would then make a determination that says: he needed to hold on to the relationships, and the customers, that the customer base that I was looking after, because that made him feel powerful, you know, that made him feel like he was in charge of everything that's going on, that made him feel, feel like he, he was a manager, and he could be seen, and he could speak the volumes. He could speak to the KPIs in his team with ease. Remember I said: if I deliver my KPIs, he, he delivers by, by the virtue of the weighting on the role, right? So there's, there's, there's that. So I've spoken more about, I, I said it's "a blessing and a curse"."*

5.2.1.7 Sub-theme 7: Communication and Confidence

The ability to communicate effectively and confidently is a key skill within the workplace for furthering one's own career and ensuring that resources are directed towards functional units overseen by the leader for effective organisational deployment or otherwise.

The destructive leader may deploy their communication skills to demonstrate levels of confidence consistent with implicit leadership theories, positions aiding further promotion or resource accumulation. Further, they may demonstrate excessive levels of confidence, possibly even hubris, in the belief that "more is better". Participant L1, a middle manager in the manufacturing sector, recounts how the newly appointed destructive leader came in with "all guns blazing", lacking familiarity within the manufacturing operations of the firm that he was joining, singing his own praises while at the same time undermining and dismissing the functional unit he had just been appointed to head up and damaging the morale of newly appointed followers in the process, while clearly demonstrating his hubristic leadership style.

> "So let's, … talk about, well … ego …., the person comes in from a completely different manufacturing space. ... this person is from a completely different space, and within one week of his arrival sort of criticises the entire operation saying how this is, you know, a fraction of the impact that he was exposed to. And, you know, he could change our entire operations effectively in his sleep. So, you know, coming into discredit everything that we are doing, and we're working pretty hard to achieve what we're achieving, it just felt quite, quite disingenuous. And… I think a lot of the respect was lost in that, in that sort of engagement to, because I effectively felt like he's coming in saying: 'I'm, I'm better than you are as an organisation'."

Another example of overconfidence is shared by participant A2, who served as a middle manager in the education sector, observing that the female destructive leader, in the upper echelons of the organisation, is focused on her own selfish ends, especially advancing and maintaining her career in the upper echelons of the corporate space. The focus is on advancing and building relationships with those in upper reaches of the corporate hierarchy. The lower reaches of the organisational hierarchy are treated with disdain. Thus, instead of being associated with positive organisational outcomes, overconfidence is in this case selfishly exerted.

"I think their aim is self-preservation, and to also get themselves to the top, and to maintain that power. And I think it's egotistical leadership that is for the I, for the me, and yeah, I think it's just the self, that's motivating. She would be strategically nice with people that she could gain something from. So top executives, and the person that leads up the legal team, the person that leads up HR, she'd strategically befriend people that could benefit her. But anyone that was below her, she didn't need to be respectful to."

Such overconfidence, or hubris where applicable, might be deployed upwards within the organisation or externally to impress, and place, the destructive leader's career and stakeholder engagement capabilities on an upward trajectory.

If not self-congratulatory as consistent with the overconfident personality then outward-directed compliments from the destructive leader are likely to be insincere or superficial. The egotistical mindset struggling to perceive value added in any exerted effort in the workplace beyond their own. As relayed by participant F1, who served as a middle manager in the mining industry while reporting to a destructive leader, who refused to engage in team building activities but gave insincere compliments on terms dictated by himself demonstrating his hubristic leadership style in the process. Thus, minimal benefit is derived by the organisation from the leader's minimal efforts.

"… something else that bugged me about the guy was, …, I invited him several times: 'Hey, come to site. Come to meet the team. Come do this. We waiting for you. Hey, we'd be happy to receive you.' And he never came to… my site, but … he was very comfortable in calling a team meeting and saying: 'Oh, you guys are so great, and I know you're so talented, and you're doing a great job.' It's like: 'Where in the hell do you even get off? Having the gall to say something like that? When you haven't bothered to come, and sort of, meet the team? How can you even make an assessment of their level of commitment, and the level of performance?'"

5.2.1.8 Sub-theme 8: Perception and Beliefs - unfair treatment

Followers are overworked as a means of cost-cutting and treated as expendable resources. The cost-cutting thus applied may benefit the organisation, particularly over the short-term, but over the long-term, it is expected to be deleterious both for the organisation and the followers affected. Participant A2, who was employed as a middle manager in the education sector, recalls how she was overworked, her contribution underappreciated, and her resignation exerted a high cost on her and her former organisation.

> *"Cost cutting. In terms of overworking staff, I had repeatedly stated towards the end of my time there that I couldn't manage the workload because there was too much on my plate. Following my resignation, I was replaced and the person who replaced me after three weeks got an assistant so that the two of them could do the work that I'd done before. But I was never acknowledged for being overworked."*

The destructive leader can never allow their followers to outshine them, especially in the light of those higher up in the hierarchy as shared by H1, who formerly reported as a senior manager to a female destructive leader in the finance industry. She relays how only those who conformed to their role as clear subordinates would be permitted into the toxic triangle as susceptible followers to the destructive leader and rewarded accordingly, while outsiders who would not fulfil the role of "susceptible followers" were punished accordingly. Thus, only members of a toxic triangle are permitted to be perceived as making positive contributions to organisational outcomes.

> *"…I was in charge of the small business section of the company, and there was another guy, he was "teacher's pet", ... And he was allowed to present his own work to the business. But because my work was at a level that could be seen as "GREAT", she took it, and she said: "I'm going to present this." So then I, I went to her and I said: "Well, you know, you're no longer going to be looking after this department. You are moving along to, to, to a group department. I don't understand why?""*

5.2.1.9 Sub-theme 9: Psychological and Emotional Impact - resignation

Sometimes it may require a process akin to a "baptism of fire" for organisations to derive any benefit from toxic forms of leadership. In the following account participant A1, who

was a senior manager in the education sector, recounts how he attempted to blow the whistle on his destructive leader but instead found himself under fire as the leader was being protected from above. In the end, the participant took remedial action that had negative consequences for the organisation from which it may have learnt some lessons about the need to address destructive leaders more seriously, and so there was potential for positive long-term gain there.

> *"And I eventually stepped forward and laid a formal grievance. Now the institution has a policy that they will deal with the grievance within 10 working days. I got to day 54 I believe it was, and nothing had been done, but it came to light that the organisational head … had shared the whistleblowing letter I sent with the guilty party. As you can imagine, that didn't end too well. So I was forced to resign with immediate effect citing constructive dismissal. And… I took them to the labour court and I won."*

Where action is not taken against the destructive leader then it may lead to lots of resignations and toxicity becoming the norm as shared by participant A2, who was employed in the same firm as A1.

> *"((Sigh of exasperation.)) High resignations, unhappy staff, gossip culture, gossiping, a lot of gossiping,…"*

Participant F1, a former middle manager in the mining industry, speculates that the only organisational benefit of his destructive leader, if it was intended, was to get him to quit but it came at a high cost. It affected staff morale and no benefits were observed from a financial metric perspective.

> *"…as much as I was aware that my own emotional state is being negatively impacted, and I said: "Look, listen here, you need to make, you need to try your absolute best not to go to work, and subsequently influence your team negatively." I am not convinced that I was able to avoid passing it down as much as I tried. I don't think I was able to, I think there was a, I think there, it was, it was impossible for me to hide my discontent. Like I say, I cognitively tried, but I don't think I succeeded. And I think that flipped down into my team as well, which made, it was damaging to team morale, and it, and then it just made things more difficult than it*

needed to be. So, no, I wouldn't say that I can think of a positive outcome for that business. Certainly there wasn't any short-term cash-flow gains, there wasn't any like mergers and acquisitions that went through successfully, and because it was bunched through and went through, you know, no, no, no. I wouldn't say any positive outcomes. Unless a positive outcome was that they wanted to get rid of me, because I quit."

5.2.1.10 Sub-theme 10: Interpersonal Skills and Influence

The destructive leader may be able to influence the organisational culture to such an extent that they leave an imprint on the organisation that has a lasting impact on staff who came under their sway. Under such sway there is a bias in assessing whether organisational outcomes are positive. Here, participant E1, a former senior manager in the engineering industry, shares about a perceived narcissistic destructive leader and his ongoing negative influence.

"…it's the influence that they have on future leaders, on managerial staff, on even supervisory staff, anyone who's underneath them, they see what a narcissist does and then they go: "Oh, he does it.""

5.2.1.11 Sub-theme 11: Emotional Well-being and Pressure

Emotional well-being is relegated down the list of priorities as the focus is on applying pressure to followers to ensure that positive organisational outcomes are achieved by overworking staff at the cost of their well-being. As shared by D1, a middle manager in the professional services sector reporting to a destructive leader, for whom the focus was on getting as much as possible out of followers regardless of the toll especially upon their health.

"…what's happening there is they have got certain targets that they need to meet, and effectively your work influences their KPI, and so they drive you to do a lot of work, and they do, kind of, whatever they can to make sure that, you know, you're working the whole time. And it could be at the expense of your own health."

Conclusion for Research Question 2 Results

In addressing research question 2 about positive organisational outcomes associated with destructive forms of leadership, a complex relationship involving paradox should be acknowledged in discussions on the subject. While the downsides are more easily articulated, there are potential upsides, which need to be carefully delineated in their rich nuance to ensure an accurate portrayal of the situation. This results section has attempted such delineation while considering the views of participants across multiple industries. The advantages of destructive leadership styles are seen in client facing roles involving sales or business development, for example. Thus, redeeming characteristics are observable among the destructive elements, and combined with societal norms around trusting authority figures makes it difficult to address this issue adequately. A balanced analysis needs to be maintained so that the associated downsides are not ignored, and a relative comparison conducted to determine which prevails. Such leadership styles have been shown in the results presented here to be associated with manipulation, tough, low empathy, emotionless approaches to situations, especially those that are more challenging. It is with an eye to challenges in the environment that we turn our gaze for a discussion of the results of research question 3.

5.3 Results: Research Question 3

Research Question 3: What competitive or other advantages do dysfunctional, harmful or destructive leaders confer on organisations operating in harsh external environments?

Three themes were identified as playing a role in answering this research question about the role played by those employing destructive leadership styles for organisations that are operating in harsh or challenging external environments. These three themes were associated with three sub-themes or subcategories each, and thus nine sub-themes in total. These are considered within each of the relevant broad themes presented next as providing a structured narrative to aid in addressing Research Question 3.

In which a perceived need to demonstrate toughness can arise; a Faustian bargain between the qualities perceived to be necessary to survive are weighed against the qualities that followers and other stakeholders seek in the resulting trade-off.

When operating in challenging, hostile or recessionary external and economic environments that likely possess an abundance of uncertainty then the type of leadership likely to lead to organisational success will probably differ from that required under other circumstances, such as that in a munificent environment for example. A determination of the thriving style of leadership is thus contingent upon the organisation's operating environment. This notion is encapsulated by D1, a middle manager in the professional services sector, speculating on the potentially beneficial role of a destructive leader well aligned to a firm's external operating environment.

> "…, I can see, generally speaking, how in a different situation, you can have a leader, who has little regard, I suppose, for people, and … how they feel and, and whether or not they're burned out, who can come into an environment that is particularly complex, and you know, let's say, you know, unpredictable, and actually turn that situation around by not paying too much regard."

5.3.1 Theme 1: Organisational Dynamics

5.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Psychological and Emotional Impact - emotional struggles: fear

Fear may be applied to followers by the destructive leader for strategic ends. According to participant A1, formerly a senior manager in the education sector, fear to act against the destructive leader means that structures for alerting the organisation to the presence of such leaders are not utilised and the leader continues to be able to operate with impunity as the upper hierarchy remains oblivious to the associated treachery.

> *"So a lot of people left and many, many people laid complaints, but they were petrified to lay formal complaints or formal grievances. So eventually I stood forward to lay a formal grievance and unfortunately, I realised the entire structure was questionable."*

The fear mentioned by A1 was also felt by A2, formerly a middle manager at the same organisation, who also sought action against the destructive leader after A1 had done so previously. However, no action against the destructive leader was noted.

> *"Our colleague …, formally raised a complaint, and followed protocol, and he was told that a process was in place in terms of an investigation. During that investigation, he was moved to another unit and then he subsequently resigned. When I spoke up about that, and in fear, to HR, they said: "Just because he's left doesn't mean they're not looking into it. He did raise valid concerns and he still made a case and they are still looking into that." That was more than a year ago and nothing has happened since."*

Participant E1, formerly a senior manager in the engineering industry, highlights how the actions of a destructive leader may be viewed as acceptable and beneficial for an organisation during difficult times like the Covid pandemic but that effect dissipates after the crisis period and manifests in phenomena, such as "the great resignation" and "quiet quitting".

> *"…after Covid, a lot of people realised their work environments: where they were*

valued and, actually, where they weren't valued. And the companies who showed their staff that they valued them, they've stuck through them, thick and thin, … they've seen the benefits that they've done for their staff, but the companies that didn't value their staff, they are the ones, remember "the great resignation" that started happening after Covid. That was one of the biggest reasons for it. Even the "quiet quitting" that people talk about, it's not "quiet quitting": It's where you made up your mind to realise that this is not the right place for me."

5.3.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Organisational Outcomes and Performance - negative impact / success

That the destructive leader is capable of delivering positive organisational outcomes and performance because of perceived risk-taking behaviour and out of box thinking is shared by J1, who reported to a dysfunctional leader in the media industry. However, this was associated with several costs, especially involving staff.

"And there was also the 9/11 collapse of the state buildings, which he had navigated the company through, a very small company, and even the Tech Bust, 'cause he basically listed at that time. … and … he was able to create jobs, which was yeah, which were positives. But on the other hand, he might have been more successful had he created an environment where people were able to collaborate, and be able to speak up and challenge. And ironically while … he would be publicly humiliating people and wasn't really open to being challenged on things. If you did challenge him, you would actually find him appreciating it a day or so later. But… to me the cost of the challenge was very high on one's own personal psychology."

The observation that short-term benefits are typically delivered with long-term costs is reiterated by C1, a middle manager who formerly reported to a destructive leader in the financial industry. For an organisation that is obsessed with surviving over the short-term in especially trying circumstances, this may be adjudged to be a fair compromise.

"I would say there is typically … an improvement, you know, in… as far as output and productivity, as far as work targets and expectations go. However, I also believe that it's not long lived, it's not sustainable. I think the, the negative effects of that harmful version of leadership in the long-term, I mean they supersede the short-term performance, and you end up now in a situation where people are now

looking for outside opportunities, or rather, even if they're still in the company, they wouldn't want to associate with you as a leader in a business context. So it drives people away from you. It creates a negative perception of the organisation because once you leave, when you think of that particular logo or brand, you think of that particular leader invariably. So I think it's got short-term benefit, but over the long-term it's not sustainable. You know, you keep bringing in new people into the business, but if you don't change the leader that's leading these new people, you are just recycling the problem."

Further, C1 shares how destructive leaders, when called to reflect upon their successes, will typically overlook the negative aspects involved, such as personal brand damage on account of harmful relationships with followers, and will rather portray themselves as "hero" leaders working wonders for their organisations vis-à-vis masterful execution of turnaround strategies for organisations experiencing challenging times. The destructive leader is incapable of providing an accurate and balanced narrative of the evolution of situations and their role therein. It may even be delusional for one to expect otherwise when receiving destructive leaders, when called to reflect upon their successes, will typically overlook the negative aspects involved.

"I think long term, whenever the employees that you used to lead, … think of you, they don't think of you in a positive light. …, we look at you as someone who just, … you were never for the employees, you just represented one side, which was the organisational side when it came to, to leadership. You were more of a bad manager than a leader, …, that sought to lead and to transform the workplace. … I actually saw this leader also resign from the company and move to a … different company, a financial service provider. In the short-term, there was a bit of a, a "hero" effect towards this leader to say that you were able to quickly turn around the situation. You were able to bring about the results that we really needed at the time that we needed them. And yeah, I mean, we'd like to know what was your best practice, how did you do it so that other leaders in the organisation can follow suit as well. And of course that's never also a transparent discussion, because rarely the leader actually mentions the negative things that they did in order to induce that performance. I think long-term also, I think overall you're, …, despised as a person, you know, outside of work sort of thing. I think there's a stigma towards you, in terms of who you are personally and professionally, because that's how I

feel about that particular leader when I reflect and I think of them.”

Being able to execute on cost cutting such as downsizing for organisations battling in difficult trading conditions is even more appreciated. The downsizing is achieved almost effortlessly, but questions arise about the quality of staff lost in the process and the resultant impact upon the organisation's ultimate survivability in trying circumstances. A point shared by participant E1, formerly a senior manager in the engineering industry.

> *“Oh, … the narcissist, who's the 10. Yeah, it was an advantage to the company in a way that they didn't have to do, almost, like any dirty work, if I can put it that way. But it was a major disadvantage. And this is what they didn't see by how many staff left because of that individual. Managers left because of him. Sales staff left because of him. Workshop staff left because of him. Drafting department staff left because of him. Buyers left because of him. Who else?”*

In seeking to ascertain the causes of positive outcomes during harsh circumstances, uncertainty abounds as to the ultimate causes, so the situation is ripe for those in the habit of claiming credit to do so when apportioning credit is difficult. Destructive leaders in possession of dark triad traits, especially Machiavellians, thrive in manipulating such situations to their advantage, the more successively if surrounded by humble colleagues. As relayed by H1, a former senior manager in the finance industry when exposed to a destructive leader, a lack of certainty was ripe for manipulation by anybody prepared to venture a self-serving explanation.

> *“I can tell you during Covid, you know, no one really lost their jobs, you know, and that came from working together. But more than that I can't tell you.”*

5.3.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Organisational Culture and Dynamics

In certain environments, it may be that appearances that are potentially divorced from reality supersede that which is better aligned with reality. Especially in harsh environments, qualities such as subterfuge and other properties associated with the Dark Triad may be especially prized by organisations. The dynamic plays out in the following instance as reflected upon by H1, who as a senior manager in the financial industry reported to a destructive leader.

"Like you can be as toxic as humanly possible, as long as you appear to be put together, and as long as you appear to have your "ducks in a row", you are "untouchable"!"

The destructive leader, especially one with Machiavellian traits predominating among any dark triad traits possessed, may manipulate the environment through a "smokescreen effect". This threatens the organisation and makes it seem that the environment is more hostile on account of self-inflicted damage. As related by participant E1, formerly a senior manager in the engineering industry, the leader "keeps their cards close to their chest" and is willing to threaten the organisation's survivability through their actions.

"So it's like: "if, if, …, if I can't have it no one can". That's what the mentality, that seems to come through: "If I can't have the business to myself, then no one else can. But I don't want anyone to know that this is my plan, so this is what I'm going to do." And then they under, it's almost like the foundations of an organisation will get undermined by the narcissist. So it's not always, and like that's why when I look at it, I'm going: "Why would you treat your staff so badly that they want to keep leaving? Why would you micromanage?"

As related by A1, formerly a senior manager in the education sector, the destructive leader, if sufficiently destructive, especially if possessing dark triad traits would be willing to go to extreme lengths to get their way as per the following colourful description.

"Especially when the person is like a nuclear Armageddon level problem."

On account of the destructive leader's extremely problematic conduct, one may speculate that childhood trauma is the root cause.

A1 goes on to share an example that demonstrates why followers are likely to fear the destructive leader, namely the extreme lengths such individuals are prepared to go to so that they might have their way. In this case involving extreme legal action against a vulnerable individual. Thereby, only organisational advantages associated with this conduct are allowed to surface.

"I actually got a resignation letter that was subpoenaed in court where she begs

them not to share the resignation letter with the toxic party because she doesn't want to be taken to the high court. So this level of like spirals of toxicity where everything becomes dysfunctional, ..."

Fear may be engendered by the destructive leader to shut down communication so that nobody has the courage to take them and their leadership style to task; as the costs, if the leader is not adequately dealt with, may be too high for a follower to weather the likely storm unleashed by the destructive leader. The destructive leader's harsh approach ensures that only positive organisational outcomes associated with their conduct are publicly communicated. This dynamic is recounted by E1, a former senior manager in the engineering industry.

"'Guys tell the truth! Be brutally honest. Tell the truth.' Nothing gets done. What happens? All of a sudden someone hears about something that was said, and a target gets planted."

This highlights the role of responsible leadership with the role of leadership being considered further in the next theme discussed.

5.3.2 Theme 2: Leadership Factors

5.3.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Organisational Leadership and Management - lack of support

When organisational leadership and management demonstrate certain qualities that followers find distasteful, such as lacking empathy or not providing support, but that may be deemed necessary for organisations operating in hostile environments. Then a desire to reciprocate may lead to an organisational culture where the destructive leader's undesirable qualities can become more widely entrenched to include staff that are not necessarily members of any existing toxic triangles. Participant A2, who reported to a destructive leader in the education sector, indicates how easily a desire to reciprocate among followers took hold within the organisation.

> *"And the team was, it was a nice team, but nobody would even write a message to her to get well soon, because people lacked empathy for her, because she had lacked empathy towards us for so long."*

That such destructive leaders tend to be protected by HR whenever disgruntled staff seek redress and approach HR via the available structures in their organisation suggests that HR has reasons for protecting that leader which may be contingent on the value perceived to be derived from them in the particular circumstances that the organisation finds itself. Participant H1, who reported to a destructive leader while employed as a senior manager in the financial industry, refers to her ultimately futile attempts to have HR intervene both by indirect approach, through whistleblowing structures, and directly.

> *"I was too scared to go to HR. I called them twice unofficially. But if I called you unofficially, right? In an HR space, and I'm talking to an HR practitioner, and you are aware of what I am going through, like, could you not launch some kind of investigation into this person's behaviour? Do you care enough? And … there was nothing done while I was there."*

5.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Individual Traits and Behaviours - pressure

The destructive leader is one that applies significant pressure on followers to deliver, which may obtain the results they and the organisation desire in the short-term, but it often comes at the expense of quality. When operating in a harsh external environment, the need to ensure organisational survival is heightened, and this has a contingent impact on organisational decision-making. In such cases correct diagnosis of the external environment is key to success based on appropriately developed organisational objectives. Participant L1, a middle manager reporting to a destructive leader at executive management level in the manufacturing industry, shares how a dynamic of compromise developed when the dysfunctional leader insisted on hasty delivery despite strong objections from the participant, who was responsible for execution in this case.

> *"There was an activity that we …, so my team and I were tasked to do …, and it was a big unknown and, … we used to, you know, colloquially call it a black box 'cause absolutely nobody understood what was going on. And because I'm in the R&D space, the task was … handed over to me to go try and figure … this out. And I get a call in the morning from my, my HOD to say: "we need an answer today". And I, I pushed back quite firmly, and my HOD is not the dysfunctional leader in the story, it's the Exec. I pushed back saying: "I'm, I'm not going to give you an answer today, because I don't know what I'm doing myself. And any answer I give you is only going to be part of an answer, and I might change my answer tomorrow. And that makes everybody look foolish." So that message got escalated to the Exec, the Exec sends a message back down to say: "Do it today, or I'll find someone else who can.""*

Selective application of pressure may be applied unfairly to followers by a destructive leader; but when evaluated from a strategic or tactical perspective it may be perceived as beneficial. As shared by participant N1, who reported to a dysfunctional leader in the FMCG industry, whose selective pressure while unfairly applied was used to get results.

> *"If they were applied across the board, they would've been beneficial in trying times, but they were only applied to me. ... If I think he was smart enough to realise that if he applied enough pressure with me, he'd be able to deliver his stuff all the*

time. I mean his numbers all the time. So that's exactly what he did. So he didn't have to apply the same pressure to everyone else. To my detriment though… to my wellbeing being greatly compromised. But, …, there are times when you need to change your tactics so you can deliver what you need to deliver."

5.3.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Recognition and Evaluation – accountability / lack of accountability

Organisations may be willing to overlook certain negative features associated with a destructive leader provided that the perceived benefits delivered exceed the drawbacks. Participant A2, who formerly reported to a destructive leader of an organisation operating in the education sector in the challenging South African economic environment, reflects upon such a dynamic of overlooked downsides, including that of disgruntled reporting staff, that may have been rationalised with reference to a challenging operating environment.

> *"The fact that they didn't do anything after these 10 people complained is a very clear message that they're not, they're either not concerned with the ramifications of this person's actions or they don't, or they balance it out with the fact that she brings in enough money. They did seem to care about the staff that were complaining, but not enough to do anything about it."*

In a demonstration that the qualities that enable leader emergence may differ from those that ensure leader effectiveness, especially in challenging operating conditions, participant O1, formerly a middle manager in the manufacturing industry while reporting to a dysfunctional leader, here recounts how poor decision-making and deficiencies in accountability demonstrate that leadership effectiveness was lacking despite leadership emergence having occurred, perhaps on account of notions of effectiveness, including or especially in challenging environments.

> *"…that's usually how it works. No idea of, no clear path of, where we're supposed to go. Then the decision making becomes erratic. Like one day we're going left, one day we're going right. And then when, sorry for, for the language, but when "shit hits the fan", usually the leader is blaming the subordinates. That is the, like, that's usually how it works. And in my case, that was a daily, weekly occurrence."*

5.3.3 Theme 3: Organisational Impact

5.3.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Communication and Collaboration - communication / collaboration

Being able to make hasty decisions and cutting down on collaboration in difficult circumstances may be advantageous from an organisational perspective in terms of navigating such challenges with speed and decisiveness. However, as recounted by C1 such approaches to decision-making are unlikely to be appreciated by knowledge workers, and thus result in a long-term expense to the organisation in terms of an inability to retain these critical human resources; also, hurried decision-making is presented as inimical to "out of the box" thinking, which aids with creative approaches to addressing organisational problems.

> "… you need to be someone who's good at problem solving and I would, say, also be creative, as well in terms of your thoughts. You… need to be able to think out of the box, because when you have a narrow manner of interpretation, you just now over, over amplify the negative sides, or the negative parts of your dysfunctional leadership because there's only one way to, and that's "your way or it's the highway", and that's never good, especially with, you know, your normal white-collar workers, your knowledge workers prefer more consultation, engagement, as opposed to dishing out of orders and instructions."

Communication skills that involve high levels of empathy, associated with high levels of emotional intelligence, are emphasised as key leadership qualities again by C1, a former middle manager in an organisation in the financial industry subject to destructive leadership. However, destructive leaders may thrive in organisations that consider such skills as too "wishy-washy" and a barrier to the tough-mindedness deemed more suitable in trying circumstances.

> "I… think one needs to have a, a high amount of EQ because you need to be able to, you know, have empathy and understanding of what's going on in the thoughts and feelings of the employees that you are leading."

Participant E1, a former senior manager in the engineering industry, considers the communication skills and charisma that destructive leaders may possess, especially certain dark triad personalities, such as narcissists, that may be termed "dark side charismatic leaders". She reflects upon some of the uses to which such communication skills might be deployed, likely benefiting organisations, especially those operating in harsh external environments.

> *"And so highly charismatic, highly, highly charismatic. Charm the, the daylights out of anybody. Could sell Eskimo to anybody. Very well spoken, well groomed. But when the, when the rose glasses come off- very different. So skillset there, I would say: "gift of the gab", they could definitely talk … their ways out of situ… Not out of! Talk other people into situations. That's probably a better way of putting it. 'cause they could, they would never see themselves as the problem, or so they don't have to talk themselves outta a situation. But they're gonna- be able to talk you, or someone else around you, into that situation."*

Participant F1, who served as a middle manager in the mining industry, recounts an experience of his destructive leader's communication style, which can be contrasted with the empathetic style referred to earlier. Instead, the style seems to be devoid of empathy, but potentially beneficial to the organisation in "effectively" dealing with highly charged communication by removing emotional expression, from one side of the communicating parties at least. Such situations more likely in organisations navigating challenging circumstances. However, in this case, high emotional intelligence in reading others seems to be at play. An example of the dark side of empathetic leadership.

> *"Look, …, I must say he was always, you know, he never appeared flustered, or not calm … in any interaction that I witnessed at all. Even to the extent that it looks like it came across as robotic. So, you know, maybe that is a strength, very, very calm and collected. He was very, very good at using the right words with interactions with site leaders. He's, … onsite peers and yeah, he was …, incredibly, incredibly good at understanding the personalities, and the strengths, and weaknesses of the people that he interacted with. And I think he was good at using it to his advantage."*

What sets destructive leaders apart from others as emergent leaders is often unclear, and this lack of clarity for others may create advantages for exploitation, especially in challenging circumstances. Such lack of clarity applies in the case of participant I1, who reported to a destructive leader in the logistics industry. She surmised that communication skills were the likely advantage enabling the destructive leader to sell their ideas in the organisation.

> *"I don't know if it's, it would be, again, the ability to sell, sell the, the concept or sell the idea of what he was trying to, to achieve. Although the delivery of it failed, the positive attribute would be that he was able to sell it to the business to position it in such a way that he got buy-in."*

5.3.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Ethical and Moral Implications – deception / corruption / unfair treatment

In the context of corrupt organisational practices involving mismanaged funds; A2, a former middle manager in the education sector, reflects upon deceptive practices that involved followers when reporting on fund usage to funders. Corruption being an example of a contributor to a hostile external environment, in this case internal corruption being aligned with that in the external environment, and possibly deemed a necessary even if undesirable business enabler, namely the South African political and economic environment. This situation provides an example of how a toxic triangle may spread as the destructive leader acting in a conducive environment pressures followers to become susceptible, either as colluders or at least conformers, submitting to pressure to falsify accounts, likely for fear of losing their jobs.

> *"So using this person as an example, there have been cases where the organisation promised funders that money would be spent in a certain way and a certain amount of money would be spent. And her dysfunctional leadership resulted in spending client money that was supposed to be toward the a certain program ... It was funding that was intended to benefit individuals and this money was mismanaged and misused in the sense that it wasn't spent. But we would have to report to clients that the money was spent 'cause we had to follow the leadership of this person."*

Referring to the same destructive leader as above, participant A1, a senior manager at

the same organisation, considers the presence of political connections as potentially advantageous for navigating the challenging South African business landscape.

> "…someone who is, let's say manipulative, politically connected, prone to abuse, so on, those are not all going to result in short term positives."

Participant A1, also reflects upon the issue of mismanaged, or misappropriated funds at the organisation. The conclusion to this reflection hinting at the benefit of lacking empathy in terms of perpetrating such outcomes. While the outcome may not have been beneficial to the affected organisation, several potential beneficiaries in the organisation's upper echelons may have benefited from this corrupt practice, and easily placed their own selfish interests above that of the organisation that they had the authority to steer and make crucial decisions about in a certain ethically challenging environment to which they contributed.

> "Then we started noticing money going missing because this particular area ran specifically on certain forms of funding …, which is easy money to make disappear. So it was many millions that we would get and by the end of the funding period …, suddenly there would be a large sum unspent … on a Friday, come Monday, it's off the budget. So yeah, and I think that was particularly disheartening for most because the money was meant to, it was meant for social development type stuff that an educational institution … could do through outreach and engagement and running programs."

Participant E1, formerly a senior manager in the engineering sector, reflects on the perceived expendability of individuals, especially followers, who on seeking to exit the toxic triangle and rejecting the status of susceptible followers find themselves rejected and perhaps ultimately ejected from the organisation. This being the fate of formerly susceptible followers who express an unwillingness to continue acting per the destructive leader's orders, perhaps as the environment becomes less challenging and stressful, thus presenting an opportunity for the followers to reflect on the ethics of conduct expected by the destructive leader.

> "As soon as you become a person of substance, and no longer: "Yes sir. Okay, sir. How many? Okay. How high must I jump? How high must I jump?" As, as soon as you, you no longer become a: "Yes sir. Yes ma'am." That is when they turn."

A destructive leader can be contrasted with a more ethically responsible one in terms of the sacrifices one is willing to make. Participant E1 again, a former senior manager in the engineering industry, reflects on the case of a voluntary retrenchment that she was willing to accept to save jobs while her firm was operating in a harsh external environment, and contrasts this with a destructive leader insisting that any pain associated with readjustment, in the form of salary cuts in this case, be spread from themselves to all employees.

> *"I also took a salary reduction, and I voted for it because it benefited the company, it benefited the team, and it stopped my staff being let go … So in my mind, because they weren't safe, I would've rather said: "Let me take voluntary retrenchment. You guys pay me out, I'll go and study, and keep my sales staff." Whereas the other ones: "No, their salaries must be cut too.""*

5.3.3.3 Sub-theme 3: External Environment and Adaptation - adaptability

Participant C1, formerly a middle manager in the banking industry, considers the qualities required for organisational survival, especially challenging environments. He appreciates the contingent nature of effective leadership allied to the organisation's external operating circumstances and ties this to adaptability in appointed leadership. Alternatively, organisations may place the bar lower by appointing leaders contingent on the organisation's circumstances, and not expecting adaptability so much in the leader as in the leadership appointment or emergence structures existing within the organisation. The participant implies that this is the inferior approach from a competitiveness perspective and ties this to the fortunes of his former organisation.

> *"I think in the long term, you know, I would've loved to have been a part of the company, to see what it moved to beyond that period, that I was in, with, within the organisation. But I think once a company is able to balance what the immediate requirements are from a survival point of view, I think they should then be able to revert to a more healthier form of leadership. And hence, I say the leader needs to be adaptable because you need to know which elements that you, you, you deploy in response to certain circumstances that you're encountering in your workplace, long-term. I mean, the company seems to still be doing okay. It's, it's surviving, but it's still not up there, you know, in terms of performance, ..."*

The ability of his destructive leader to successfully adapt to changing circumstances in an "unpredictable environment" is highlighted by participant D1, a middle manager in the professional services sector. He highlights the leader's ability to identify any need for the organisation to change track and thus reallocate resources as necessary.

> *"I can definitely say that my most recent experience with this dysfunctional leader was in a very rapidly changing and unpredictable environment. So I mean, that was true, … that the overall experience there was that it was unbearable, but it was navigated, you know, it was being dealt with on a day-to-day basis. And that was because of that leader. This… leader was able to, you know, look at a situation, and say: "All right, well everything's screwed clearly, you know, this completely changed direction. I'm gonna just pull this resource off of this project, and just put it there to get that going." So like in and of itself, that's sort of one stream, you know, it got what it needed at that exact time, and then the very next day, or the very next week, you know, some circumstance changes, and then that stream is just paused, and then everything is moved, you know, to that side."*

Conclusion for Research Question 3 Results

In addressing research question 3 about the advantages associated with destructive leadership for organisations operating in harsh external environments; the results presented here address three main themes. First, leadership factors pertaining to followers, including a lack of support and accountability combined with high pressure. Second, organisational dynamics with emotions such as fear preventing followers addressing concerns, and weighing gains, predominantly over the short-term, with associated long-term costs. Third, organisational impact considering the role of communication, adaptability, and ethical considerations. These various factors may be related with perceptions around successful performance by destructive leaders operating in challenging environments leading stakeholders to conclude that such forms of leadership may confer advantages, instead of perceiving the need for action against destructive forms of leadership.

Conclusion

In addressing the primary research question of this study of follower perceptions of positive organisational outcomes associated with destructive leaders in hostile external environments; multiple themes have been identified to aid in the presentation of the results of this study. These include trade-offs, such as those between financial objectives and ethical considerations. The role of perception, especially that of followers as the participants for this study, contrasted with reality; and that these do not align in certain instances.

Other themes pertaining to the research questions that were addressed in this chapter include follower perspectives, positive impacts on organisational elements, and organisational impacts. Various other concepts discussed in the thematic exploration of the results presented include leadership, and associated characteristics; organisational dynamics and consequences; cognitive dissonances; and ethical factors. In the next chapter, the results presented in this chapter will be compared to those from theory as presented in the literature review of chapter 2.

Before progressing to the next chapter, the following table (**table 11**) serves as a helpful segue into the chapter 6 discussion. It presents each of the themes discussed in this chapter by research question, and then selects from among the top two most popular sub-themes per theme based on the count of codes associated with each of the sub-themes. (Three sub-themes are presented in the case of research question 2 which has a single theme, instead of the three themes attached to the other two research questions). It was decided to restrict the number of sub-themes to the top two per theme for discussion in chapter 6; instead of discussing all sub-themes that were included in chapter 5 for three reasons. **First**, it would be physically impossible to meaningfully cover all the sub-themes in chapter 5 within the spacing specifications for chapter 6 without superficial coverage of sub-thematic content. **Second**, to allow for meaningful discussion of selected sub-themes, and the emergence of richer nuance in the resulting exposition. **Third**, a discussion of sub-themes selected on the basis of the number of associated codes was expected to lead to a richer and more meaningful discussion.

Table 11: Top Two Sub-themes per Theme for discussion in Chapter 6

#	Description	Code Count
1.	**RESEARCH QUESTION 1**	
1.1.	**Theme 1: Micro-level follower perspectives – employee perspectives**	
1.1.3.	Sub-theme 3: Workplace Dynamics - power dynamics	5
1.1.5.	Sub-theme 5: Individual Attributes - fear	7
1.2.	**Theme 2: Meso-level organisational impact**	
1.2.2.	Sub-theme 2: Leadership Characteristics	5
1.2.3.	Sub-theme 3: Leadership Perception	4
1.3.	**Theme 3: Ethical and financial considerations**	
1.3.1.	Sub-theme 1: Communication and perception	4
1.3.2.	Sub-theme 2: Responsible and ethical culture	1
2.	**RESEARCH QUESTION 2**	
2.1.	**Theme 1: Positive Impact on Organisational Elements**	
2.1.1.	Sub-theme 1: Leadership and Management - leadership	11
2.1.2.	Sub-theme 2: Individual and Team Behaviours – stress and lack of clarity	13
2.1.4.	Sub-theme 4: Leadership Styles and Behaviours – deceptive	28
3.	**RESEARCH QUESTION 3**	
3.1.	**Theme 1: Organisational Dynamics**	
3.1.1.	Sub-theme 1: Psychological and Emotional Impact - Emotional struggles	18
3.1.2.	Sub-theme 2: Organisational Outcomes and Performance	12
3.2.	**Theme 2: Leadership Factors**	
3.2.1.	Sub-theme 1: Organisational Leadership and Management	12
3.2.2.	Sub-theme 2: Individual Traits and Behaviours - pressure	7
3.3.	**Theme 3: Organisational Impact**	
3.3.1.	Sub-theme 1: Communication and Collaboration - Communication	7
3.3.2.	Sub-theme 2: Ethical and Moral Implications – Deception / Corruption	12

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter, the aim is to align the thematic content organised by research question in chapter 5 with the thematic content presented in critically reviewing the literature in chapter 2. The content is again arranged by research question, and in comparing the results from chapter 5 with the theory in chapter 2, an attempt is made to ascertain whether theory has been confirmed, contradicted, or extended.

Rationale for sub-theme selection

The rationale for the selection of certain of the sub-themes presented under the results in the previous chapter is discussed here. Each of the themes applying to the three research questions as presented in chapter 5 will be discussed. For each of these themes, two sub-themes will be discussed with these selected based on the highest number of associated codes.

6.1 Discussion: Research Question 1

Research Question 1: What assumptions or perceptions do followers have about dysfunctional, harmful or destructive leadership?

This section discusses the relationship between theory, as presented in chapter 2, with the results of this study, presented in chapter 5. The aim is to identify the connection between theory and results as these pertain to the research question about follower perceptions of destructive leadership.

6.1.1 Theme 1: Micro-level follower perspectives – employee perspectives & interactions

6.1.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Workplace Dynamics - power dynamics

Workplace and associated power dynamics were perceived by followers to allow organisations to not respond suitably to the destructive behaviour of dysfunctional leaders. Instead such behaviour is ignored and possibly even condoned. Alliances may form involving multiple destructive leaders within an organisation that support each other, and are thereby enabled to exercise power more extensively. Further, there is a risk of the systemic spread of such alliances to include multiple alliances within an organisation, and conceivably to spread yet further and come to encompass industries and possibly even economies, even extending into government.

The alliances that form exhibit multiple forms of sophistication, and these might be connected to a leader's level of destructiveness, from mild to more extreme forms. Thus multiple levels of sophistication might be postulated which would apply to any particular alliance formation that involves a destructive leader. These alliances would involve other leaders, followers, and/or peers within the organisation. Again, the sophistication level of the alliance may vary depending on the level of dysfunction attached to the dysfunctional leader involved, and these alliances may range from tactical forms up to more strategic forms. Hence the type of destructive leader is pertinent to such discussion.

A **research proposition** follows, namely that the level of strategic alliance involving any

destructive leader depends upon the level or type of destructive leader involved.

Organisational politics also feature in this analysis of the results of this study, especially deployed in the service of alliance formation, whether strategic or tactical, and capable of deployment for negative consequences (Hayek et al., 2017). Political and ethical considerations are related with reference to the relative importance of "ends" achieved versus "means" undertaken to achieve such "ends". Ethical considerations will be relegated whenever a trade-off seems necessary with objectives that involve organisational politics, career advancement or financial gain.

The results of this study include the demonstration of superficial levels of charm or glibness, especially on first acquaintance, i.e. zero-acquaintance. The deployment of political skills are referenced in the results of this research and demonstrate how alliances can be formed for protective purposes. Such alliances contribute to perceptions of leader effectiveness.

6.1.1.5 Sub-theme 5: Individual Attributes - fear

The study found that the individual attribute of fear is perceived by followers to arise in multiple guises in contexts featuring destructive leaders. These include instilling fear in followers who become reluctant to transparently express their opinions on workplace matters with the threat of retaliation looming if such stances are not favoured by the destructive leader. Fear is felt by those followers who experience heightened levels of responsibility for organisational outcomes, and who fear that reputational damage may follow any irresponsible conduct by a destructive leader. Fear among followers may be deployed by destructive leaders as a mechanism to drive favoured organisational outcomes such as increased productivity.

Fear plays a role in determining whether followers become involved in extant toxic triangles in the workplace, specifically assuming the role of susceptible followers, whether as conformers or colluders, and more sophisticated taxonomies of followership within the toxic triangle, with those orbiting outside of the toxic triangle fearing for the safety of their ongoing employment and at risk of being subjected to negative workplace practices (Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood et al., 2012). Many of the participants in this study, who observed toxic triangles existing within their organisations appeared to mostly orbit

outside of the triangle. However, boundaries are murky, dynamic and not clearly defined, thus on occasion, followers outside a toxic triangle may be lured or coerced, even if temporarily, following dubious instructions or pressure, especially invoking fear, from the destructive leader.

The results discussed here are thus **confirmatory of theory** as discussed in chapter 2. Specifically, the existence of toxic triangles, with certain followers within these triangles, and the research participants largely outside of such triangles (Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood et al., 2012).

6.1.2 Theme 2: Meso-level organisational impact

6.1.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Leadership Characteristics

The characteristics found by followers to be associated with destructive leadership include manipulation and deception, consistent with the Machiavellian personality type. Such characteristics might be deployed beyond selfish ends to also benefit of the leader's organisation, including through revenue generation, persuasiveness deployed for favourable business outcomes, and painful corporate restructuring, including any necessary downsizing. Other Dark Triad traits, such as everyday psychopathy, might be evident in a lack of empathy that facilitates the required "downsizing mindset". This research **confirmed theory** in the case of Dark Triad traits, namely everyday narcissism, Machiavellianism and corporate psychopathy, which were explored and observed as characteristics or traits found in destructive leaders. (Mackey et al., 2021; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Paulhus et al., 2021; Schyns et al., 2022).

This research **confirmed theory** about a lack of empathy, consistent with Dark Triad traits, that was in turn reciprocated by followers towards the destructive leader displaying low empathy, which drew on the constructs of schadenfreude and spitefulness. These constructs are related to everyday sadism, which is an element of the broader Dark Tetrad construct; further, it has been suggested that spitefulness or schadenfreude might take the place of sadism in the dark tetrad construct. (Bonfá-Araujo et al., 2022; Mackey et al., 2021).

The Dark Triad is also characteristic in bullying behaviours expressed by the destructive

leader possessing such traits, and possibly supported by their organisation in engaging in bullying behaviours towards employees perceived to be problematic at an organisational level. The research confirmed theory about the Dark Triad being associated with bullying or abusive behaviour; this overlapping with other constructs associated with destructive leadership, such as abusive supervision (Mackey et al., 2021).

Dysfunctional or destructive forms of leadership are contrasted with other, more positive, forms of leadership, such as servant leadership. However, these positive forms are still subject to dark sides that require management to ensure that they do not veer into more destructive domains. Further positive forms of leadership, such as charismatic and transformational, are prone to manifesting with dark sides, especially narcissistic traits, featured among the Dark Triad. The existence of such overlaps of dark with bright sides of leadership is **confirmatory of theory**.

6.1.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Leadership Perception

Followers were found to be aware of and thus perceive the unfair treatment typically exercised by the destructive leader towards employees, especially those ranking lower down the organisational hierarchy. This happened while the destructive leader was treated well by the organisation, as if with "kid gloves", conveying a greater sense of unfairness among followers. Further, favourites are selected by the destructive leader from among their followers, and this leads to a greater sense of unfairness as certain staff are perceived to be treated better than others on unfair grounds. Such prevailing unfairness within the workplace leads to disgruntlement among staff and increased toxicity; all of which drive increased staff turnover.

Theory is confirmed here with the destructive leadership construct being extended beyond the individual, or traditional leader-centric view, to encompass a more complex construct. For example, its conception beyond the individual to the formation of a more encompassing "toxic triangle" that extends beyond the destructive leader alone to include further elements associated with this more complex construct, such as "susceptible followers", that manifest in various forms such as "colluders" or "conformers", and other more recent forms of susceptible followership where a more sophisticated taxonomy of these two constructs is developed (Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood et al., 2012).

Unfairness is perceived by followers that fall outside of the orbit of the toxic triangle by

virtue of not subscribing to the category of susceptible followers. The consequence of doing so is more general exclusion, including from favourable treatment. With these dynamics combining to lead to the perception of unfair treatment. Consistent with theory, followers expect their leaders to lead by example, especially if such leaders are implementing difficult changes (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

6.1.3 Theme 3: Ethical and financial considerations

6.1.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Communication and perception

The results of this research find that cognitive dissonances are perceived by followers to arise in the case of communication issued by a destructive leader. This happens on account of a disconnect between what is communicated by such leaders and follower perceptions of reality. Thus followers of such leaders are unable to reconcile what is heard against their own worldviews, and make sense of the vision being communicated by the leader. The ideology of the destructive leader is essentially divorced from reality, and the resulting disconnect has a negative impact upon staff morale who are unable to believe in and support the vision and mission communicated by the leader.

Those followers that discern the disconnect from reality can be contrasted with those that might be referred to as "yes men". These might be equated to susceptible followers within the toxic triangle construct, specifically colluders, in that they buy into and believe in the ideology communicated by the destructive leader (Padilla et al., 2007). This enables a co-constructed delusion between leader and followers, which may insidiously infiltrate the corporate culture (Tourish, 2020).

Delusions of grandeur as might be expected from grandiose narcissists or hubristic leaders cannot be grounded in what followers perceive to be happening "on the ground" at the workplace. The leaders preach a gospel that is at ends with common sense, and associated with grandiose notions tied to strategic decision-making involving the firm in both a high degree of commitment and firm scope, for example (Shivakumar, 2014). This aligns with the "insulation from reality" associated with hubristic leaders (Tourish, 2020, p.96).

When considering follower perceptions of destructive leaders, a tension is found to arise

between conforming to ethical standards and pursuing alternative objectives including career advancement and financial gain. This balancing act is further complicated by notions that balancing these seemingly opposing elements is impossible. Thus a choice needs to be made between one or the other reminiscent of a Faustian Bargain. At the conclusion of deliberations on these matters, the destructive leader believes to have arrived at a superior solution.

Ironically, a deficit in one of these elements may lead to a deficit in the other. For example, poor ethical standards leading to negative financial outcomes on account of a deficient ethics. With the ethical deficiencies leading to interventions or financial sanctions from a regulatory authority (Johnson et al., 2021). This **confirms the theory** presented.

In the results of this study, leader's discussed in the semi-structured interviews were found to be high in confidence, demonstrating an excess of ego, and in cases verging on the hubristic, including placing themselves above criticism; such qualities are conjectured to have contributed to the emergence of such leaders and are **confirmatory of theory,** specifically Implicit Leadership Theories, with leaders ultimately expected to drive positive organisational performance (Epitropaki et al., 2013; Hogan et al., 2021; Tourish, 2020).

Finally, cognitive dissonances are used by destructive leaders to weaponise interactions with followers through bullying behaviour. Hence, followers that fail to yield to the destructive leader may be bullied into submission or driven to leave the organisation. This **confirms theory** where the destructive leader, especially one within the Dark Triad, is associated with bullying, or abusive, behaviour; this overlapping with other constructs associated with destructive leadership, such as abusive supervision (Mackey et al., 2021).

6.1.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Responsible and ethical culture

The destructive leader was found to be one that might deceptively or self-righteously seek to portray themselves as ethical and responsible leaders as perceived by followers. This might be done by attempting to exhibit desirable features of the "ideal worker" such as a hard-working ethic. Successfully demonstrating that attainment of such lofty ideals has occurred may then be directed towards aligning staff with the destructive leader as susceptible followers in a toxic triangle deployed in the service of the destructive leader and their selfish ends (Padilla et al., 2007).

Followers are advised to remain cautious in such eventuality as any destructive behaviour will indicate that the destructive leader has not undergone a "Damascene conversion" but instead remains a destructive threat to the organisation as they have remained while employed by the organisation. For example, the ongoing presence of an excessively high risk-appetite in the leader will serve as a sign that the destructive leader possesses an unreformed dark side, possibly in Dark Triad form that then continues to threaten the safety or even the viability of the organisation.

A lack of empathy, consistent with a Dark Triad personality, has pertinence here in that empathy provides some sense of direction when ethical conduct is sought. With the lack of such compass a sure sign that a destructive leader is present with Dark Triad traits at their core. As an illustration of the argument presented, destructive leadership embodying multiple Dark Triad, or Dark Tetrad, traits are considerably more harmful to followers than milder forms of destructive leadership, such as "absentee leadership".

A consideration of pro-organisational outcomes that result from unethical practices features in this analysis of the results presented in this study; for instance, where the destructive leader engages in such practices, and hence expects followers to become "susceptible", at least as "conformers" if not necessarily "colluders", and to concede to engaging in such practices; this also embodies forms of exploitative leadership, where such practices are encouraged among followers for the selfish purpose of advancing the leader's career (Mackey et al., 2021; Padilla et al., 2007).

The results of this study are **aligned with theory** positing a typical willingness among destructive leaders to sacrifice ethical considerations in favour of financial gains (Johnson et al., 2019). With ethical considerations in general continually relegated whenever there are potentially competing objectives that involve organisational politics, career advancement or financial gain with this deemed paramount as positive organisational outcomes.

6.2 Discussion: Research Question 2

Research Question 2: What positive contributions do dysfunctional, harmful, or destructive leaders make to organisational initiatives and outcomes?

This section discusses the relationship between the theory presented in chapter 2, with the results of this study presented in chapter 5 and in so doing more comprehensively answers the research question on the positive contributions of destructive leadership to organisational outcomes.

6.2.1 Theme 1: Positive Impact on Organisational Elements

6.2.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Leadership and Management - leadership

Destructive leadership was found to embody a paradoxical nature concerning organisational outcomes being associated both with anticipated negative outcomes but also with less expected positive organisational outcomes. Positive outcomes were typically associated with external organisational measures of performance, such as sales or business development; while negative outcomes apply to internal organisational measure of performance tied to staff morale with poor retention resulting.

Such analysis is necessarily complex as are the associated outcomes. The advantages of such forms of leadership presented in the results of this study include those associated with increasing sales including new business, persuasiveness, and corporate downsizing through layoffs. This is consistent with similar empirically established positive relationships, such as that between CEOs that possess dark triad traits and innovation, as measured by breakthrough sales, i.e. new product sales as a proportion of total sales (Haar & de Jong, 2023). The results correspond more generally with the finding that destructive leadership is more closely associated with external organisational gains, such as attracting new business and more generally increasing sales; while likely incurring internal organisational costs, such as negatively impacting staff morale and turnover (Haar & de Jong, 2023). These results are thus **confirmatory of existing theory**.

The level of destructiveness associated with any leader is found to drive their associated

leadership style with some milder forms of destructive leadership possessing redeeming characteristics, while more extreme forms are highly toxic and advantages associated with such extremely difficult to discern. The relationship of organisational benefits associated with any of these leadership styles is thus posited to vary by term with the least benign forms delivering benefits over shorter terms when compared with more benign forms of destructive leadership. Such leaders are often also found to be associated with fanciful outcomes that have more to do with the personal preferences of the perceiver rather than those of the organisation; in which case the perceived benefits of destructive leadership are divorced from reality.

Multiple levels of dysfunctional or destructive leadership are postulated or proposed. While the literature identifies multiple overlapping constructs associated with destructive leadership; the destructive leadership construct is evolving as construct clarity is sought, and in the process its relationship with related constructs evolves. However, there is uncertainty as to how many levels of destructive leadership exist and how each of these potentially extant levels overlap with constructs associated with destructive leadership. In turn, available taxonomies such as the Hogan Development Survey (HDS) may assist in forming an appropriate taxonomy. This thus **extends theory**.

A **research proposition** follows, namely that multiple levels of destructive leadership exist, and these overlap with various of the constructs associated with destructive leadership.

Further **theory extension** occurs with these multiple levels of destructive leadership may in turn being classified uniquely with respect to associated varying outcomes and varying splits of these between positive and negative organisational outcomes, the severity thereof, and the associated organisational environment.

A **research proposition** follows, namely that multiple levels of destructive leadership may be classified uniquely based on the level of destructive leader and the varying organisational outcomes associated with these. These outcomes have varying allocations between positive and negative, the severity thereof, and the associated organisational environment.

6.2.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Individual and Team Behaviours – stress and lack of clarity

Hiding emotions, such as distress, stress and anxiety, was found to be supported by destructive leaders as requisite properties for individuals in the workplace, and for driving positive organisational outcomes. While hiding emotions means that issues underlying such emotions do not surface, and result in outcomes that are detrimental to the affected employees and their organisation; the destructive leader may benefit in so far as damaging issues occurring do not surface under their "aegis", and instead are allowed to fester and spiral while the destructive leader continues with "business as usual".

Instead negative emotions, like stress, may be lionised when portrayed as being in the service of the organisation, and demonstrating organisational commitment. Such conduct may then be exemplified by the destructive leader, and followers expected to engage in similar conduct. As an example, being tough in the workplace may become normalised and expected conduct, and come to find itself a part of the corporate culture.

The results demonstrate that a destructive leader may seek to create confusion among employees for strategic purposes. With an associated lack of clarity that might be exploited by the destructive leader, who having created confusion maintains personal clarity in the matter. The destructive leader then exploits the confusion of followers, and any other employees, strategically misinformed as part of their devious scheme. This is **confirmatory of theory** of the Dark Triad aligned with destructive leadership, specifically the manipulative characteristic of the Machiavellian (Paulhus et al., 2021).

Confirmatory of theory, the emergence of leadership is confounded with that of leadership's effectiveness so that once emerged the leader might remain in place, being perceived as effective regardless of the outcomes delivered by such leader (Hogan et al., 2021). Acting against leader derailment in such instances would be cultural norms of unquestioning respect and trust for leaders and the implicit leadership theories that inform these norms (Epitropaki et al., 2013). Further, implicit followership theories not only support unquestioning support of the leader but also lack of challenge from followers against the poor conduct of destructive leaders (Epitropaki et al., 2013).

Destructive leadership might be contrasted with servant leadership in that servitude is expected of the followers by the leader. The dark side of servant leadership might then be compared to the dark side that is emblematic of destructive leadership (Camm, 2019).

6.2.1.4 Sub-theme 4: Leadership Styles and Behaviours – deceptive / Lack of empathy / appearance vs reality

The results of this research indicate the varying perceptions apply in the case of destructive leadership including making positive contributions to organisational outcomes. Such leaders are typically perceived as effective by those higher up in the hierarchy with any negative features of the leader typically overlooked. This allows such individuals to emerge through promotion into positions of leadership in the first place, and to be subjected to a presumption of competence, especially by those higher up the hierarchy, thereby remaining safely ensconced following their emergence into such positions of authority.

The perception of such leaders from followers will be based upon the effectiveness of such leaders in leading their followers to delivering positive organisational outcomes, and this includes the treatment of staff through for example exhibiting empathy towards followers. While behaving with a lack of empathy, something characteristic of the Dark Triad personality, especially the corporate psychopath, will drive staff turnover. This may be seen as desirable depending on organisational circumstances by those higher up in the hierarchy.

While destructive leaders may drive business revenue; they may engage in "behind the scenes" nefarious ends. The destructive leader, who is a Machiavellian, will deploy their masterful skills of manipulation to drive outcomes in their favour (Paulhus et al., 2021). This would include seeming to deliver beneficial organisational outcomes even if these are illusory, and only their own selfish ends are served.

The associated organisational outcomes from destructive leadership are shown to differ between those that track internal measures of performance, which involve followers, from those that track external measures of performance. These results are thus **confirmatory of theory** that internal organisational outcomes associated with destructive leaders classified as Dark Triad being negative (Haar & de Jong, 2023). Specifically, the results correspond more generally with the finding that destructive leadership is more closely associated with external organisational gains, such as attracting new business and more generally increasing sales; while likely incurring internal organisational costs, such as negatively impacting staff morale and turnover (Haar & de Jong, 2023).

6.3 Discussion: Research Question 3

Research Question 3: What competitive or other advantages do dysfunctional, harmful or destructive leaders confer on organisations operating in harsh external environments?

This section discusses the relationship between theory as presented in chapter 2, with the results presented in chapter 5. This is being done with the goal of answering the research question under consideration, namely that about competitive and other advantages of destructive leadership for organisations operating in harsh external environments.

6.3.1 Theme 1: Organisational Dynamics

6.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Psychological and Emotional Impact - Emotional struggles: Fear

The results of this study indicate that destructive leaders apply fear towards strategic ends in driving follower conduct which may yield advantages for organisations operating in harsh external environments. Followers become fearful to seek redress against destructive behaviours exercised by the leader, and available organisational structure remain unutilised. This reports in underreporting, and gives rise to erroneous beliefs within HR and among more senior leaders in the organisation about the true levels of toxic or destructive leadership present within the organisation.

The cycle of underreporting is also informed by a lack of responsivity and action from available structures, such as through HR and dedicated whistleblowing structures, when utilised. This leads followers to turn away from utilising such structures and thus drives the cycle of underreporting. These underreporting outcomes lead to a perception from higher up the hierarchy that the destructive leader is not engaged in nefarious or destructive outcomes, and thus the leader is viewed more favourably with respect to organisational outcomes including when the organisation is experiencing a hostile external environment.

While the destructive leader may seem to yield beneficial organisational outcomes during difficult periods or in hostile external environments. It was found that such benefits are

short-lived and dissipate once the crisis period has passed. Thus, this form of leadership may confer benefits during a crisis period but these benefits will likely be unsustainable beyond such periods.

This is **confirmatory of theory** that destructive leadership if associated with any positive organisational outcomes then these are more likely only beneficial for shorter term outcomes (Jonason & Webster, 2010).

The role of contingency theory is highlighted here in that the type of leadership that is suitable depends on the situation or environment (Combs & Skill, 2003; Daft, 2011; Iszatt-White et al., 2018; Kim & Ployhart, 2018). In this case, with the external environment, specifically that in South Africa, being more hostile there is a widely held perception that more of the properties associated with destructive leadership are desirable or even necessary.

6.3.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Organisational Outcomes and Performance - Negative Impact / Success

The results indicate that destructive leaders are capable of yielding positive organisational outcomes for organisations operating in harsh external environments. This may stem from heightened risk-taking allied with, inter alia, driving innovation through out-of-the-box thinking. Although such benefits are typically associated with downsides especially as experienced by followers. Further benefits tend to be short-term in nature while associated with long-term organisational costs.

Destructive leaders are expected to overlook negative aspects associated with their leadership when asked to reflect upon their successes, which would be highlighted alone-fuelling delusional and grandiose thinking about their abilities. The ability of destructive leaders to engage in brutal cost cutting for downsizing organisations battling in difficult trading conditions is highlighted by followers.

The root causes of any positive outcomes materialising in harsh circumstances are unclear. This uncertainty is exploited by the destructive leader to claim credit in such circumstances. Here Dark Triad traits, especially that of Machiavellianism, may manipulate situations involving such uncertainty to drive home the notion that they are the responsible parties for leading the observed organisational success.

That destructive leaders may yield positive organisational benefits associated with innovative organisational outcomes is **confirmatory of theory** indicating that dark triad CEOs may deliver positive organisational outcomes derived from innovation at the level of product sales, while also incurring costs based on internal measures of performance (Haar & de Jong, 2023). That Machiavellians might benefit from leveraging their manipulative nature to create impressions of their superior leadership capabilities is also **confirmatory of theory** (Paulhus et al., 2021).

6.3.2 Theme 2: Leadership Factors

6.3.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Organisational Leadership and Management- Lack of support

Negative consequences are associated with organisational leadership that is unleashed to drive organisational outcomes that may be deemed necessary, and also advantageous, for firms operating in hostile external environments. Such negative consequences include a reciprocation of destructive behaviours and associated toxicity; this reciprocation amounts to spitefulness or schadenfreude. This is thus **confirmatory of theory** that has postulated an extension of the Dark Triad to the Dark Tetrad, and has identified the overlap of the added construct of sadism with the related of constructs of spitefulness and schadenfreude (Bonfá-Araujo et al., 2022).

Further, destructive leaders that lack empathy and fail to provide support for followers can create a culture where such undesirable qualities are entrenched. Further reciprocation then follows and toxicity in the work environment is compounded. These outcomes are exacerbated where HR is deemed to conspire in protecting destructive leaders, and thus seems to "aid and abet" the associated destructive behaviour. This evokes greater concern among followers when existing whistle-blowing structures are deemed deficient and additional avenues for redressing destructive behaviour are unavailable.

The importance of organisations responding appropriately is another theme occurring in the results of this study; with organisational responses to destructive forms of leadership found to be wanting, even where internal structures to address such matters exist, such as through HR and whistle-blowing mechanisms (Schyns et al., 2022). Thus HR practices identified by Schyns et al. (2022) including further firm awareness of destructive forms of

leadership and appropriate response mechanisms require enhancement.

That the results of this study provide examples of leadership and other relevant internal structures failing to act against destructive leadership when reported provides an enabling or conducive environment for this leadership and more complex associated constructs, such as toxic triangles, to take shape and fester, and be portrayed as being in the interests of the organisation, possibly subsuming the organisational culture, is **confirmatory of theory** (Johnson et al., 2019; Padilla et al., 2007).

Multiple levels of dysfunctional or destructive leadership are postulated; uncertainty as to how many levels of destructive leadership exist and how each of these potentially extant levels overlap with constructs associated with destructive leadership & the associated external environment that the organisation operates in. This **extends theory**.

A **research proposition** follows, namely that multiple levels of destructive leadership exist, and these addition to overlapping with various of the constructs associated with destructive leadership, also overlap with the associated external environment that the organisation operates in.

6.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Individual Traits and Behaviours - pressure

Destructive leaders are able to apply harsh pressure to followers to ensure that they deliver on organisational objectives when such organisations are operating in hostile external environments. This may deliver results that appear desirable for these organisations, especially over the short-term. But such outcomes typically also involve compromising on the quality of outputs generated meaning that sub-par outcomes eventually emerge; and this outcome is found to apply across multiple industries. That such delivery also requires exerting unfair pressure on followers means that staff morale is also negatively impacted by the associated destructive conduct.

External environmental factors, especially if deemed harsh, influence organisational decision-making. The optimal organisational response is one that is well suited to the external environment. While a response that involves applying harsh measures, both internally and externally, may seem most appropriate. Variations on this that are contingent upon the situation may be more effective, for example harsh measures only applied externally or internally. Bearing in mind that harsh internal measures are likely to

have a deleterious impact on staff morale.

The role of contingency theory is pertinent here in that the type of leadership and the organisational response depends on the external environment (Combs & Skill, 2003; Daft, 2011; Iszatt-White et al., 2018; Kim & Ployhart, 2018). For an hostile external environment there is a perception that destructive leadership is necessary to cope. This belief may not allow sufficient contingency in the developed response to be well suited to the environment that is actually faced. There is a role for contingency theory for both explaining the emergence of leaders and their continued elevation for performing certain roles required by organisations especially in highly context-dependent cases (Combs & Skill, 2003; Daft, 2011; Iszatt-White et al., 2018; Kim & Ployhart, 2018). Thus, the distinction between leader emergence and effectiveness is less sharp or distinct in the context of challenging external operating conditions; and so excellence in one of the constructs is more likely to be confused with excellence in the other. These findings are **confirmatory of theory** as to the applicability of contingency theory for organisations operating in such environments and the emergence of destructive leaders in such cases.

6.3.3 Theme 3: Organisational Impact

6.3.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Communication and Collaboration - Communication / Collaboration

For organisations operating in hostile external environments, it was found that a perception that hasty decision-making is optimal exists. Allied with this is a perceived need for reduced collaboration to enable speed and decisiveness. This is at ends with the slower, deliberative thinking that fosters creativity and that may be preferred by knowledge workers, hence driving turnover of such employees. Instead, tough-mindedness was found to be deemed more suitable for operating prosperously in hostile environments. Dark Triad personalities, such as narcissists demonstrate low empathy in their communications and weak ethical standards that would fail to obtain buy-in, but their visionary communication skills counter this disadvantage when it comes to obtaining the buy-in necessary for implementing any necessary harsh measures.

Where destructive leaders possess strong communication skills and charisma, these may be deployed to more effectively advance their careers through organisational promotion

and reward for example, but also to obtain buy-in from followers and the wider organisation for driving corporate restructuring necessitated by the external operating environment. This is especially the case for certain dark triad personalities, such as narcissists, who become dark side charismatic leaders (Du Brin, 2013). This finding is thus **confirmatory of this theory**.

6.3.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Ethical and Moral Implications – Deception / Corruption / Unfair Treatment

When considering the ethical implications from destructive leadership for organisations operating in hostile external environments. Deceptive practices, especially involving followers, while problematic at an ethical level can benefit the organisation in such operating environments. Further, if the environment is one characterised by corruption then this will compound the hostility associated with the operating environment, especially from an ethical perspective, seeming to justify compromising ethical standards. The environment thus becomes conducive to the spread of unethical conduct, and destructive leaders supported by followers, who have been pressured into "susceptibility", are thus able to drive organisational outcomes that are underpinned by deception yet perceived as beneficial, especially over the short-term.

This is thus **confirmatory of theory** about toxic triangles, their structure, formation, and how these are enabling ingredients for driving overall toxicity and associated outcomes at the organisational level (Padilla et al., 2007).

Destructive leaders were found to lack empathy and this enables engagement in ethically dubious practices, even including criminality. Such practices may be deemed necessary for organisations, especially when operating in hostile external environments. Further, followers who wish to exit toxic triangles through refusal of "susceptibility" will no longer be deemed cooperative, and will likely find themselves treated harshly, and rejected, in line with any general organisational consensus of responding to perceived hostility in the environment with hostility.

Destructive leaders were also found to insist that organisational responses to stressors in a hostile external environment be distributed among all employees, including followers. This may be perceived as advantageous for the organisation as spreading organisational in the case of cost-cutting will enable such cost-cutting to more widely implemented and

hence achieve more in responding to environmental hardship.

Further, it was found that any connections possessed by the destructive leader, whether these be in business, the operating industry, the wider economic, or political, might be deployed not only for selfish ends but also for seeming organisational benefits especially for organisations dealing with harsh circumstances.

The proclivity of the destructive leader for unfair treatment and lack of empathy were found to be potentially beneficial for organisations, especially those navigating hostile external environments, including engaging in corrupt practices perceived as necessary in a harsh environment. It is argued that South Africa is a hostile environment for conducting business. This is due to "state capture" having undermined the state apparatus together with wider forms of corruption imposing significant infrastructural constraints upon the country's economy, which has led to talk in reputable international media of the possibility of a failed state (The Economist, 2023c).

Theory is confirmed in cases involving organisational fraud, or more specifically financial reporting fraud; with the destructive, or unethical, leader, exploiting favourable personal characteristics in followers to successfully execute such schemes, where apparent altruism linked to maladaptive, egoistic narcissism may be involved (Johnson et al., 2019). With follower proactivity expected to block devious outcomes, fraudulent schemes are further enabled by the successful formation of a toxic triangle (Johnson et al., 2019; Padilla et al., 2007).

Conclusion of discussion

The following table provides a summary by research question, theme, and sub-theme of where theory has been confirmed or extended in this chapter. In so doing, it bridges into the discussion of theoretical contribution in the following chapter that concludes this report. The table highlights that for certain sub-themes a richer contribution is made with respect to theory than for other sub-themes in that there are multiple entries in the table for certain sub-themes while others have a single entry pertaining to this sub-thematic discussion.

Table 12: Findings compared to theory for all Research Questions

#	Research Question (RQ)	Theme (T)	Sub-Theme	Findings	Results against theory
1.1.3.	RQ1: Follower perceptions	Micro-level follower perspectives – employee perspectives & interactions (T1)	Workplace Dynamics - Power Dynamics (ST3)	Level of strategic alliances involving any destructive leader depends upon the level or type of destructive leader involved.	Extended
1.1.5.			Individual Attributes – fear (ST5)	Existence of toxic triangles.	Confirmed
1.2.2.		Meso-level organisational impact (T2)	Leadership Characteristics (ST2)	Dark Triad traits, namely everyday narcissism, Machiavellianism and corporate psychopathy, were observed as characteristics or traits found in destructive leaders.	Confirmed
1.2.2.				Lack of empathy, consistent with Dark Triad traits, that was in turn reciprocated by followers towards the destructive leader displaying low empathy, which drew on the constructs of schadenfreude and spitefulness in the Dark Tetrad.	Confirmed
1.2.2.				Overlap of dark with bright sides of leadership.	Confirmed

#	Research Question (RQ)	Theme (T)	Sub-Theme	Findings	Results against theory
1.2.3.			Leadership Perception (ST3)	Destructive leadership construct being extended beyond the individual, or traditional leader-centric view, to encompass a more complex construct, e.g. toxic triangle.	Confirmed
1.3.1.		Ethical and financial considerations (T3)	Communication and perception (ST1)	Destructive leader, especially one within the Dark Triad, is associated with bullying, or abusive, behaviour; this overlapping with other constructs associated with destructive leadership, such as abusive supervision.	Confirmed
1.3.1.				Poor ethical standards leading to negative financial outcomes on account of a deficient ethics.	Confirmed
1.3.1.				Destructive Leader high in confidence, demonstrating an excess of ego, and in cases verging on the hubristic, and the emergence of such leaders.	Confirmed

#	Research Question (RQ)	Theme (T)	Sub-Theme	Findings	Results against theory
1.3.2.			Responsible and ethical culture (ST2)	The willingness among destructive leaders to sacrifice ethical considerations in favour of financial gains.	Confirmed
2.1.1.	RQ2: Positive organisational outcomes	Positive Impact on Organisational Elements (T1)	Leadership and Management – leadership (ST1)	The results correspond more generally with the finding that destructive leadership is more closely associated with external organisational gains, such as attracting new business, and more generally increasing sales; while likely incurring internal organisational costs, such as negatively impacting staff morale and turnover (Haar & de Jong, 2023),	Confirmed

#	Research Question (RQ)	Theme (T)	Sub-Theme	Findings	Results against theory
2.1.1.				Multiple levels of dysfunctional or destructive leadership are postulated; uncertainty as to how many levels of destructive leadership exist and how each of these potentially extant levels overlap with constructs associated with destructive leadership.	Extended
2.1.1.				Multiple levels of destructive leadership may in turn be classified uniquely with respect to associated varying outcomes, and varying splits of these between positive and negative organisational outcomes, the severity thereof, and the associated organisational environment.	Extended
2.1.2.			Individual and Team Behaviours – stress and lack of clarity (ST2)	Dark Triad is aligned with destructive leadership, specifically the deviousness characteristic of the Machiavellian.	Confirmed

#	Research Question (RQ)	Theme (T)	Sub-Theme	Findings	Results against theory
2.1.2.				Emergence of leadership is confounded with that of leadership's effectiveness.	Confirmed
2.1.4.			Leadership Styles and Behaviours – deceptive / Lack of empathy / appearance vs reality (ST4)	Internal organisational outcomes associated with destructive leaders, classified as Dark Triad, are negative. Destructive leadership is more closely associated with external organisational gains, incurring internal organisational costs.	Confirmed
3.1.1.	RQ3: Positive organisational outcomes in hostile external environments	Organisational Dynamics (T1)	Psychological and Emotional Impact - Emotional struggles: Fear (ST1)	Beneficial over the short-term but costly over longer time horizons.	Confirmed
3.1.2.			Organisational Outcomes and Performance - Negative Impact / Success (ST2)	Positive organisational benefits associated with innovative organisational outcomes.	Confirmed
3.1.2.				Machiavellians might benefit from leveraging their manipulative nature to create impressions of their superior leadership capabilities.	Confirmed

#	Research Question (RQ)	Theme (T)	Sub-Theme	Findings	Results against theory
3.2.1.		Leadership Factors (T2)	Organisational Leadership and Management- Lack of support (ST1)	Progressing from the Dark Triad to the Dark Tetrad, and identification the overlap of the additional construct of sadism with the related of constructs of spitefulness and schadenfreude.	Confirmed
3.2.1.				Toxic triangles involving conducive environments.	Confirmed
3.2.1.				Multiple levels of dysfunctional or destructive leadership are postulated; uncertainty as to how many levels of destructive leadership exist and how each of these potentially extant levels overlap with constructs associated with destructive leadership and the associated external environment that the organisation operates in.	Extended
3.2.2.			Individual Traits and Behaviours – pressure (ST2)	Applicability of contingency theory for organisations operating in hostile external environments and the emergence of destructive leaders in such cases.	Confirmed

#	Research Question (RQ)	Theme (T)	Sub-Theme	Findings	Results against theory
3.3.1.		Organisational Impact (T3)	Communication and Collaboration - Communication / Collaboration (ST1)	Destructive leaders possess strong communication skills and charisma; this is especially the case for certain dark triad personalities, such as narcissists, termed "dark side charismatic leaders".	Confirmed
3.3.2.			Ethical and Moral Implications – Deception / Corruption / Unfair Treatment (ST2)	Toxic triangles, their structure, formation, and how these are enabling ingredients for driving overall workplace toxicity.	Confirmed
3.3.2.				Organisational fraud, or more specifically financial reporting fraud, where apparent altruism linked to maladaptive, egoistic narcissism may be involved.	Confirmed

Conclusion

This chapter presented a discussion of selected sub-thematic content drawn from the previous chapter. The content was selected on the basis of number of associated codes as this was expected to lead to a richer and more meaningful study, while also allowing for a practical approach to the exposition of material presented in the results and comparing these meaningfully to the theory from chapter 2. The following chapter concludes this report, and summarises the theoretical contribution drawn from this chapter.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter that concludes this report, principal conclusions will be presented, the significance of the results of this study to theory will be discussed, as will practical contributions in the form of practitioner benefits. Limitations of this research as well as future research avenues opened up by these are discussed next. Concluding comments round up this chapter and the report.

7.2 Principal Conclusions

Area of study and importance

In this research the subject of study was that of destructive leadership, and the positive contributions that such leaders might make to organisations operating in hostile external environments with reference to the perceptions of followers of such leaders. While leadership research is primarily focused on positive forms of leadership, encapsulated by terms such as the "hero-leader". Destructive leadership is pervasive and is becoming more widely recognised as a viable and necessary form of leadership research. This leadership style, while generally associated with negative organisational outcomes, does at times yield positive organisational outcomes; and it is these that have been the focus of this research. Further, it is the perception of followers pertaining to these matters that has been sought.

Research context and importance

The context for this research was that of hostile external environments where destructive leadership is posited to yield greater perceived organisational benefits than in other contexts. This study has been located within the context of an emerging economy in distress, arguably on the verge of becoming a failed state, namely South Africa (The Economist, 2023c).

State of knowledge

The subject of destructive leadership has attracted a great deal of attention from scholars relatively recently (Hogan et al., 2021). This scholarly attention can be contrasted with that

applied to positive forms of leadership that has received a great deal more attention, and has dominated academic interest in leadership from its inception. The focus on positive forms of leadership means that the field is comprehensively researched.

In the area of destructive leadership, more is known about the downsides associated with this form of leadership from an organisational perspective. By implication, less is known about any positive organisational outcomes that such leaders are capable of delivering. And less still about the specific contexts within which destructive leaders yield the greatest advantages for organisations. In particular, the connection of destructive leadership with organisational outcomes in hostile external environments is of great interest.

Research questions

The primary research question of this study asks what organisational benefits do followers perceive destructive leaders to yield in harsh external environments. This was simplified into three sub-research questions that were posed. These honed in on destructive leaders as perceived by followers, as delivering positive organisational outcomes, and as specifically yielding favourable outcomes for organisations operating in hostile external environments.

Methodology

The research questions posed about destructive leadership were addressed by deploying a qualitative methodology. This sought to explore the perceptions of followers by applying a phenomenological strategy to understand their personal lived experiences of destructive leadership. An interpretivist philosophy with an inductive approach to theory development was applied. A cross-sectional time horizon was selected for this study with data collection taking place through semi-structured interviews which were analysed thematically.

Findings and interpretation

This study found that beyond expected negative organisational outcomes, there are positive organisational outcomes associated with destructive leaders, and that these are consistent with literature on this topic. Negative organisational outcomes tend to be associated with internal measures of organisational performance (Haar & de Jong, 2023). While any positive organisational outcomes are associated with external measures of organisational performance (Haar & de Jong, 2023).

This research also found that positive organisational outcomes under destructive leaders were context dependent. Hostile external environments were found to yield especially nuanced insights into such forms of leadership. Again this research was confirmatory of other research on the subject.

7.3 Theoretical contribution

The theoretical contribution of this study includes both the confirmation and the extension of theory. In this research theory was confirmed in several ways. This included confirmation of the existence of various pertinent constructs, including toxic triangles, Dark Triads, Dark Tetrads, hubristic leadership, and abusive supervision. Various theoretical contrasts or tensions were confirmed, including those between leadership emergence and effectiveness, internal and external organisational outcomes, and short-term gains versus long-term costs. The overlap of dark with bright sides of leadership was confirmed. As were the relationships between innovation and organisational benefits, and that of the financial costs of unethical behaviours. Finally, suitable applications for contingency theory in the domain were confirmed. In the remainder of this section on theoretical contributions, greater exposition upon these contributions is provided. These relate to each of the sub-themes discussed in chapter 6 with greater nuance and thus detail arising in the case of certain sub-thematic content, thus leading to greater exposition here.

Further details of the confirmation of theory are discussed here in twenty-two cases. **First**, toxic triangles were confirmed to exist in multiple cases, including where individual attributes such as fear were applied to either form or extend the membership of an existing toxic triangle; thus demonstrating that this is an extant construct within the organisational setting. **Second**, the leadership characteristics of destructive leaders were shown to include Dark Triad traits of everyday narcissism, Machiavellianism and corporate psychopathy in certain cases. **Third**, leadership characteristics aligned with a lack of empathy, thus consistent with Dark Triad traits, and further expected reciprocation from followers aligned with the traits of schadenfreude or spitefulness building on the Dark Triad to the Dark Tetrad. **Fourth**, leadership characteristics of dark side leadership traits being aligned with bright side traits in the same destructive leader indicating an overlap of these constructs. **Fifth**, perceptions of destructive leaders extending beyond the individual, consistent with leader-centric views, to encompassing more complex constructs such as the toxic triangle that

extends beyond the individual leader. **Sixth**, follower perceptions of destructive leaders as involved in bullying and related abusive behaviours and demonstrating the overlap of the destructive leadership construct with that of abusive supervision. **Seventh**, perceptions of destructive leaders subscribing to weak ethical codes that are associated with negative financial outcomes stemming from deficiencies in the destructive leader's conduct.

Eighth, destructive leaders demonstrating high levels of confidence with an excess of ego and verging on the hubristic, and perceptions of these as contributing factors to the emergence of the leader. **Ninth**, destructive leaders being willing to sacrifice ethical considerations for advancing financial gains from an ethical cultural perspective. **Tenth**, that destructive leadership is more closely related with positive organisational outcomes when assessed against external performance metrics, such as improving new business and sales more generally, rather than internal performance metrics, such as staff morale and turnover. **Eleventh**, individual behaviours of the destructive leader being aligned more specifically with the devious Machiavellian construct within the overarching Dark Triad. **Twelfth**, in the case of destructive leader behaviours where those behaviours conducive to emergence as a leader are confounded and undifferentiated from those make for leader effectiveness. **Thirteenth**, that internal organisational outcomes associated with destructive leadership styles, classified as Dark Triad, tend to be negative; with destructive leadership being more closely associated with external organisational gains, while incurring internal organisational costs. **Fourteenth**, while the psychological impact of the destructive leader is beneficial over the short-term, it is costly over longer time horizons.

Fifteenth, the destructive leader being associated with positive organisational outcomes associated with innovative organisational outcomes. **Sixteenth**, Machiavellians benefiting from a performance perspective from leveraging their manipulative nature to create impressions of their superior leadership capabilities. **Seventeenth**, destructive leadership progressing from the Dark Triad to the Dark Tetrad, and the identification of the overlap of the additional construct of sadism with the related constructs of spitefulness and schadenfreude. **Eighteenth**, destructive leadership within toxic triangles as well as conducive environments therein. **Nineteenth**, the applicability of contingency theory for organisations operating in hostile external environments and the emergence of individuals possessing destructive leader traits in such cases. **Twentieth**, the strong communication skills and charisma of destructive leaders, especially certain dark triad personalities, such as narcissists, termed "derailed charismatic leaders". **Twenty-first**, ethical considerations and their relation with toxic triangles at the structural, formative, and enabling level for driving overall workplace toxicity. **Twenty-second**, ethical considerations in organisational fraud, or more specifically financial reporting

fraud, where apparent altruism linked to maladaptive, egoistic narcissism may be involved.

This research also extended theory in several cases. Extension of theory was uncovered relating to multiple levels of strategic alliances within organisations, and the sophistication thereof. Further theoretical extension applied to the case of multiple levels of destructive leadership, as to the relationship of these levels with organisational outcomes and context.

Greater exposition on the extension of theory is provided here for the four applicable cases. **First**, it was determined that strategic alliances within organisations operate at multiple levels of sophistication, and that these are dependent upon the level or the type of destructive leader that is involved within any specific alliance, and such alliances are shaped by workplace or power dynamics. **Second**, that multiple levels of destructive leadership are postulated to exist, what is unclear is how many such levels exist and how each of these levels may in turn overlap with various of the constructs that are associated with destructive leadership. **Third**, multiple levels of destructive leadership may be classified uniquely based on the level of destructive leader and the varying outcomes associated with these, further varying allocations of these between positive and negative organisational outcomes, the severity thereof, and the associated organisational environment are envisaged and may be accordingly determined. **Fourth**, multiple levels of destructive leadership are postulated, but there is uncertainty as to how many of these levels of destructive leadership exist, and how each of these potentially extant levels overlap with constructs associated with destructive leadership and the associated external environment that the organisation operates in.

From these extensions four research propositions follow. **First**, the level of strategic alliance involving any destructive leader depends upon the level or type of destructive leader involved. **Second**, multiple levels of destructive leadership exist, and these overlap with various of the constructs associated with destructive leadership. **Third**, multiple levels of destructive leadership may be classified uniquely based on the level of destructive leader and the varying organisational outcomes associated with these. These outcomes have varying allocations between positive and negative, the severity thereof, and the associated organisational environment. **Fourth**, multiple levels of destructive leadership exist, and these addition to overlapping with various of the constructs associated with destructive leadership, also overlap with the associated external environment that the organisation operates in.

7.4 Practical contribution

The practical insights associated with this research relate to the recruitment, promotion, and ongoing employment of destructive leaders. It is clear that downsides are always associated with this style of leadership, and these apply both specifically to followers and more broadly to various organisational outcomes. A question for organisations arises about how to manage this form of leadership and mitigate its deleterious effects. In instances where there are benefits to be derived from destructive leadership, it is critical that the associated downsides are continually mitigated. Further, organisations, through relevant internal structures, need to continually assess whether destructive leadership is a risk that the organisation can tolerate after taking into account the significant downsides involved with this style of leadership.

The conclusion of such ongoing deliberations may be that this form of leadership is intolerable even in conditions that may favour this leadership style such as an hostile external environment, especially on comparing any short-term benefits against the inevitable long-term costs. It is unlikely that the long-term sustainable survivability of the organisation is improved through the promotion or recruitment of destructive leaders. Instead organisations should rather focus on leadership development strategies tailored to the organisations in which they operate. This can be achieved through ensuring the HR function is responsive and aware of organisational dynamics that portend the emergence of destructive leaders and associated toxic triangles. Organisations thus need ensure that reporting mechanisms, especially whistle-blowing options, are effective and responsive.

7.5 Limitations

Several methodological limitations applied to this research as follows, the application of a cross-sectional rather than a longitudinal approach; biases in subject selection and self-reporting; those resulting from a qualitative methodology such as reliance on non-probability sampling; issues of memory and emotional distance among participants; a sample restricted to victim accounts, thus excluding toxic triangle elements of perpetrators, susceptible followers and those contributing to a conducive environment. These limitations are covered in greater detail in chapter 4 under methodological limitations.

Various other limitations apply to this research. **First**, a lack of consideration for the relationship between organisational industry, size or maturity with any positive organisational outcomes delivered by destructive leaders. While such parameters have been identified in the results presented, differences between these have not been highlighted and discussed. **Second**, researcher bias insofar as this made it difficult to move beyond binary notions of good and bad, and thus to consider the more complex interplay between destructive leadership, organisational outcomes, and context.

Third, reliance on participants, who are not trained clinicians, for diagnosing Dark Triad traits and without the application of applicable diagnostic tools in this study. While participants were expected to be able to identify destructive forms of leadership, they may be less clear on more specific constructs, such as the Dark Triad, that overlap with destructive leadership but are not the same. To aid in this process, some of the requests made for participants included diagnostic criteria in describing the type of leadership sought. **Fourth**, participants may classify leaders as dysfunctional based more on dislike than merit. **Fifth**, participants with limited exposure to hostile external environments. However, it may be argued that organisations operating in South Africa are operating in an hostile external environment. **Sixth**, triangulation was only achieved in the case of a single destructive leader discussed in the semi-structured interviews of this research. As mentioned, triangulation through the inclusion of destructive leaders, susceptible followers or employees in oversight structures was not achieved.

7.6 Future research suggestions

Multiple future research suggestions are provided here. **First**, a deliberate attempt might be made to improve triangulation with respect to any destructive leader being considered. By sampling interview participants that in addition to those followers who perceive the leader as destructive, include susceptible followers, who view the leader more favourably, including both colluders and conformers, the destructive leader themselves, and others that may contribute to a conducive environment for the formation of toxic triangles, such as more senior leaders, boards in the case of the CEO, and HR and whistle-blowing structures meant to prevent toxic triangles (Padilla et al., 2007). Triangulation is optimised through considering the perspectives of followers, peers and superiors. It is envisaged that such research would be conducted within particular organisations via a case study strategy with reference to potential candidates for destructive leadership within the selected organisation. Biases among research participants should be considered and

adequately addressed. Ethical considerations including effective protection of participant anonymity need to be adequately addressed in designing such a research study.

Second, research into a taxonomy and subsequent development of a nomological network for multiple postulated levels of destructive leadership and the organisational outcomes, both negative and positive, associated with these. Further, consideration of contextual dependencies might also be explored. Mixed method studies would be well suited for identifying a taxonomy through a qualitative exploratory study with reference to existing taxonomies such as the HDS considering the nuances involved with multiple types of destructive leaders in varying contexts to improve conceptual clarity. Such study would then be followed by a quantitative study based on a large sample to empirically determine a nomological network that would accommodate various independent and dependent variables as well as associated mediators and moderators, thus leading to the development of moderated mediation models.

Third, a similar study to that suggested above, but in this case considering multiple levels of strategic alliances varying in sophistication and involving various types of destructive leaders. **Fourth**, conducting the study in varying types of hostile external environments to determine the impact on the nomological network of variations in the environment.

7.7 Conclusion

This research considered the subject of destructive leader and follower perceptions thereof. The aim was to identify positive contributions made to organisational outcomes by such leaders. The context within which this study was located was that of hostile external environments. By applying a qualitative methodology, it found that destructive leadership is capable of delivering positive organisational outcomes, but that the nature of such outcomes is context dependent with hostile external environments proving especially promising for studying the interaction of destructive leadership with organisational outcomes. It confirmed theory in many cases as well as extending theory in a few cases.

"When you see corruption being rewarded and honesty becoming a self-sacrifice, you may know that your society is doomed." -
Ayn Rand (Atlas Shrugged (1957))

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Consistency Matrix

Research Questions (RQ)	Literature Review	Data Collection Tool	Data Analysis
RQ1: What assumptions do followers have about destructive leadership?	**Theme 1:** Exploring assumptions that destructive leadership is "bad" (Cesinger et al., 2023) (Mackey et al., 2021) (Smith et al., 2018)	Interview guide for semi-structured interviews	Coding, finding, and analysing themes to derive conclusions about destructive leadership.
RQ2: What positive contributions do destructive leaders make to organisational initiatives and outcomes?	**Theme 2:** Positive contributions to organisational outcomes (Brownell et al., 2021) (Neely et al., 2020)	Interview guide for semi-structured interviews	Coding, finding, and analysing themes to derive conclusions about positive organisational outcomes.
RQ3: What competitive advantages do destructive leaders confer on organisations in harsh external, operating environments?	**Theme 3:** Competitiveness in difficult external environments (Holmes et al., 2021) (Palmer et al., 2020)	Interview guide for semi-structured interviews	Coding, finding, and analysing themes to derive conclusions about competing in difficult environments.

Appendix 2: Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Absentee leadership	Similar to the Laissez-faire leadership style in allowing "group members the freedom to do basically what they want with almost no direction." (Du Brin, 2013, p.129)
Abusive supervision	"…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) This is classified as being an active type of destructive leadership. (Fosse et al., 2019) Measurement items associated with abusive supervision include ridicule, insults, "silent treatment", being put down, such as accusations of incompetence, invasion of privacy, reminders of "past mistakes and failures", no credit for difficult jobs, blame, breaking promises, projecting anger, negative comments, rudeness, preventing interactions among co-workers, and lying. (Tepper, 2000, p.189-190) Abusive supervision features in the majority of empirical studies on destructive leadership; and such behaviour is associated with increased staff turnover, reduced "job and life satisfaction", reduced "normative and affective commitment", work conflict and "psychological distress"; with destructive outcomes mediated by justice levels within the organisation.

	(Mackey et al., 2021; Tepper, 2000, p.178)
	Hershcovis (2011) identified an overlap of several other constructs with abusive supervision, these include "bullying, incivility, social undermining, and interpersonal conflict" (p.499). Hershcovis (2011) argued that efforts at differentiating between these constructs were failing to advance knowledge in workplace aggression research.
Charismatic leader	A leadership style that often results in the positive affect of others, possessing vision, and focused on personal brand or reputation (Du Brin, 2013). Charismatic leadership has a dark side with such leaders possibly lacking ethics and being narcissistic (Du Brin, 2013).
Competition vs Collaboration	According to Daft (2011), the organisations that are most successful are those focused on "teamwork, compromise, and cooperation" thus fostering "horizontal collaboration" (p.9). This can be contrasted with the "old-paradigm mindset" (p.8) to leadership of "internal competition and aggressiveness" (p.9).
Complexity Theory	This pertains to interconnections associated with richness that enable the emergence of unexpected outcomes; "order" responses apply in that complexity is deployed as a diagnostic and solution tool for managing complexity (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). In the context of destructive leadership, this is an avenue by which nefarious elements associated with destructive leadership might be managed, and positive elements highlighted. This theory applies to destructive leadership on various levels, including complexity of outcomes where destructive leaders are involved, namely both negative but

	also positive; extension of the complex of the destructive leadership concept beyond leader-centric conceptions to those that are more dynamic and complex with multiple overlapping constructs at play (Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood et al., 2018).
Conducive environment	The "environmental factors" of a conducive environment to a toxic triangle and destructive leadership are "instability, perceived threat, cultural values, and absence of checks and balances and institutionalization." (Padilla et al., 2007, p.185)
Contingency Theory	Contingency Theories have been related to leadership scholarship in determining leadership behaviours that are most effective with reference to the applicable context in which the "group or organisational situation" plays a key role as well as associated variables (Daft, 2011, p.20). Contingency theory has multiple applications beyond those mentioned above, for example Kim and Ployhart (2018) apply contingency theory in the domain of HR selection practices demonstrating that the effectiveness of selection practices are contingent on the competitive environment and economic context within which the organisation operates. The application of contingency theory to varying contexts may explain the role of contingency in leadership and leadership selection with respect to destructive forms of leadership.
Corrupt leadership	"The leader and at least some followers lie, cheat, or steal to a degree that exceeds the norm, they put self-interest ahead of the public interest" (Kellerman, 2004, p. 44 as cited in Mackey et al., 2021, p.707)
Dark Triad	"Offensive yet non-pathological personalities…, three are especially prominent: **Machiavellianism, subclinical**

	narcissism, and subclinical psychopathy."
	(Paulhus & Williams, 2002, p.556)
	Paulhus and Williams (2002) describe the **Machiavellian** construct as one associated with those in possession of manipulative personalities; these individuals engage in manipulative and cold behaviours.
	Paulhus and Williams (2002) identify a **subclinical** form of **narcissism**; this involves "grandiosity, entitlement, dominance, and superiority" (p.557).
	Finally, the third element of the triad, namely **subclinical psychopathy** features "high impulsivity and thrill-seeking along with low empathy and anxiety" (Paulhus & Williams, 2002, p.557).
	The citation included here being to the seminal work that launched the Dark Triad into popular scholarly imagination and fascination setting researchers on a course to explore and decode these fascinating, yet also "offensive" personality types. According to Paulhus and Williams (2002), these have thus attracted the most interest for empirical endeavours of personalities that might be classified as "socially aversive".
	The inter-correlations between the three elements of this construct range between 0.25 and 0.50 (correlation significance at $p<0.001$ for a two-tailed test) indicating moderate inter-correlation but construct distinctiveness (Paulhus & Williams, 2002).
	The "Dirty Dozen" provides a "clean" and "concise, 12-item measure of the Dark Triad".
	(Jonason & Webster, 2010)

	The dark triad has a negative association "with life satisfaction and growth-oriented outcomes"; it has strong "linkages to selfish, exploitative, aggressive, and socially aversive outcomes." (Kaufman et al., 2019, p.1)
Dark Tetrad	The Dark Triad with its "ego boosted" by the addition of a further construct to its "gang", namely the **sadistic** personality trait, thereby yielding a Tetrad; according to Chabrol et al. (2009), "sadistic personality disorder is characterized by a pattern of cruelty, aggression and demeaning behaviour" (p.734). Other associated properties of this construct, as identified by Chabrol et al. (2009) include the derivation of joy from the suffering of others. Further Chabrol et al. (2009) admit that the four constructs constituting the Dark Tetrad overlap, but assert that they are however distinct. In a meta-analytic review, Bonfá-Araujo et al. (2022)
Dark-side leadership	This has been related to the Dark Triad by Mackey et al. (2021).
Dark-side traits	The dark side is encapsulated by the 11 dimensions of the Hogan Development Survey (HDS), and includes, inter alia, "bold" (arrogant), "mischievous" (charming), "colourful" (impulsive), and "imaginative" (innovative) dark side traits, all four of which are associated with leader behaviours that are excessively "strategic" but weak in "operational" dimensions (Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Kaiser et al., 2015). Also known as "socially aversive traits". (Kaufman et al., 2019, p.1)
Decisions (firms)	According to Shivakumar (2014), firm decisions can be classified into four categories, strategic (involving both a high degree of commitment and firm scope), neo-strategic

	(involving a low degree of commitment but high firm scope), tactical (involving a high degree of commitment but low firm scope), and operational (involving both a low degree of commitment and firm scope).
Destructive Leadership	A sampling of definitions is presented below to convey a sense to the reader of the evolution of this construct through time. The final proposed definition indicates that adequate definitions need to account for its complex nature as a construct extending beyond the leader to include groups, especially followers; while accounting for organisational outcomes; and accommodating its dynamic nature. **"Critical leader factors" of the destructive leader in the "toxic triangle" (2007):** "charisma, personalized use of power, narcissism, negative life themes, and an ideology of hate." (Padilla et al., 2007, p.180) A feature of destructive leadership is that it "is seldom absolutely or entirely destructive: there are both good and bad results in most leadership situations." (Padilla et al., 2007, p.179) **Definition (2013):** "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" (Krasikova et al., 2013, p.1310) **Proposed Definition (2018):**

	"An inclusive definition should acknowledge destructive leadership as (a) a group process involving flawed, toxic, or ineffective leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments, and consisting of (b) destructive group or organizational outcomes, as well as (c) a dynamic time frame." (Thoroughgood et al., 2018, p.628)
	Note of clarity: A distinction between the destructive leadership construct and associated outcomes is helpful in providing clarity into studies about the relationship between destructive leadership and outcomes (Schyns & Schilling, 2013).
Destructive leadership behaviour	"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." (Einarsen et al., 2007, p.208) Based on a review of the literature Schmid et al. (2018) find that there are three major types of such behaviours: 1) follower-directed forms that are abusive 2) organisation-directed forms including theft 3) self-interested forms involving exploitation to reach personal goals They go on to demonstrate that each of these affect followers differently but predictably with reference to emotional reactions, specifically negative affect, and turnover intention, both of which are shown to be heightened.
Ethical leadership	Ethical leadership is a positive leadership style as evidenced by its proposed positive relationship with the following antecedents, "situational influences" in "role modelling" and "ethical context", and "individual

	characteristics" in "agreeableness", "conscientiousness", "moral reasoning", and "locus of control"; further, it has a proposed positive relationship with the following positive outcomes, "follower ethical decision making", "prosocial behaviour", and "follower satisfaction, motivation and commitment". (Brown & Trevino, 2006, p.596) Ethical leadership overlaps with transformational, authentic, and spiritual leadership constructs with respect to "altruism", "integrity" and "role modelling". (Brown & Trevino, 2006, p.598) Unsurprisingly, ethical leadership has a proposed negative relationship with the Machiavellianism antecedent. (Brown & Trevino, 2006)
External environmental hostility	"Adverse external circumstances, such as unpredictable change, fierce rivalry, low customer loyalty, and severe resource constraints" (Palmer et al., 2020, p.168)
Follower perceptions	Follower perceptions of destructive leadership should be distinguished from actual behaviour; therefore follower perceptions of behaviours of leaders (an example of which is abusive supervision) are distinct from the behaviour alone (Schyns & Schilling, 2013).
Hubris	"a branch of moral cruelty. Hubris entails the assertion of superiority through the exuberant, unabashed, and contemptuous violation of another person's equal moral standing, often through … forms of ill-treatment designed to denigrate or diminish others. Hubris is marked by a settled disposition to reduce, shame, or humiliate others as a means of asserting, consolidating, or relishing in one's own relative pre-eminence." (Button, 2011, p.312 as cited in Tourish, 2020, p.90)
Hubristic leadership	This is marked by the following five behaviours in the organisational context, "over-confidence and over-

	persistence", "recklessness", an "self-interested behaviours" involving an "insulation from reality", "contempt for critical feedback", and "abusive behaviour" (Tourish, 2020, p.96).
Humble leader	Such leaders can metaphorically be described as being exposed to a "double-edged sword" of humility in that there is a two-fold exposure for such leaders to the consequences associated with this leadership style being expressed, i.e. positive consequences from a "communal" perspective for followers, teams, and organisations, but negative consequences from an agentic perspective for the leader themselves. (Zapata & Hayes-Jones, 2019, p.47)
Laissez-faire leadership style	Allows "group members the freedom to do basically what they want with almost no direction." (Du Brin, 2013, p.129) This is classified as being a passive type of destructive leadership. (Fosse et al., 2019)
Leader Narcissism	"Leaders' actions are principally motivated by their own egomaniacal needs and beliefs, superseding the needs and interests of the constituents and institutions they lead"" (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006, p.629)
Leadership	"…an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes and outcomes that reflect their shared purposes" (Daft, 2011, p.5). According to Daft (2011), the "old-paradigm mindset" of leadership is one that incorporates properties of "stability, control, competition, uniformity," that is "self-centred", and casts the leader as "hero", and can be contrasted with the "new-paradigm mindset" which incorporates "change and crisis management, empowerment, collaboration, diversity, a higher ethical purpose," while casting the

	leader as "humble" (p.8). Concepts associated with leadership have evolved through the following "Great Man theories, trait theories, behavior theories, contingency theories, influence theories, and relational theories" (Daft, 2011, p.27). Leadership with its emphasis on "soft" skills can be contrasted with management which emphasises "hard" skills (Daft, 2011). While "Management strives to maintain stability and improve efficiency. Leadership, on the other hand, is about creating a vision for the future, designing social architecture that shapes culture and values, inspiring and motivating followers, developing personal qualities, and creating change within a culture of integrity." (Daft, 2011, p.27)
Leadership Styles	Popular styles of leadership based on their coverage in authoritative literature include charismatic and transformational styles (Du Brin, 2013).
Light Triad	These are "positive traits", this construct "consists of three facets: Kantianism (treating people as ends unto themselves), Humanism (valuing the dignity and worth of each individual), and Faith in Humanity (believing in the fundamental goodness of humans)". The construct predicts "life satisfaction and a wide range of growth-oriented and self-transcendent outcomes above and beyond existing measures of personality". The Light Triad's nomological network is measured by "the 12-item Light Triad Scale." (Kaufman et al., 2019, p.1)
Machiavellianism	A "crafty" personality associated with secretiveness, getting "important people" on one's side, avoiding direct conflicts to ensure future pliability of individuals,

	employing a "low profile" to "get" one's "way", planning to manipulate situations, strategic use of flattery, a love for successful tricky plans (Paulhus et al., 2021, p.222). The use of manipulation, deceit, flattery, and exploitation for one's "own ends". (Jonason & Webster, 2010, p.429) Machiavellianism has a negative relationship with ethical leadership (Brown & Trevino, 2006).
Management	Management with its emphasis on "hard" skills can be contrasted with leadership which emphasises "soft" skills (Daft, 2011). While "Management strives to maintain stability and improve efficiency. Leadership, on the other hand, is about creating a vision for the future, designing social architecture that shapes culture and values, inspiring and motivating followers, developing personal qualities, and creating change within a culture of integrity." (Daft, 2011, p.27)
Narcissism	A "special" personality perceiving themselves as "natural" leaders, persuasive, show offs, with "exceptional qualities", and headed for stardom. (Paulhus et al., 2021, p.222) A personality that seeks admiration, attention, "special favours", and "prestige or status". (Jonason & Webster, 2010, p.429) Narcissists have been shown to be charming and popular at zero-acquaintance (Back et al., 2010).
Outcomes	Outcomes associated with destructive leadership include multiple concepts, namely those that are "leader-related", "job-related", "organisation related" and "individual follower related" (Schyns & Schilling, 2013, p.142).
Organisational	Care needs to be taken to differentiate between the

Outcomes	destructive leadership construct and associated outcomes preventing conflagration of these; clear differentiation of these constructs, namely destructive leadership and its associated outcomes, enables studies into their relationship (Schyns & Schilling, 2013).
Political skill	"An individual's ability to understand and influence others in social situations, as well as cultivating one's social network." (Hayek et al., 2017, p.405) Hayek et al. (2017) challenge the traditional overemphasis of research into political skill as a "positive intrapsychic influence" (p.405). Hayek et al. (2017) go on to identify a research need for exploration of "the possible negative intrapsychic consequences of high levels of political skill"; which they attempt to address through their own research (p.405).
Private sector	Sector of the economy that is in private hands, i.e. not in public hands.
Psychopathy	A "wild" personality that is perceived as "out of control", fighting authorities and rules, often involved in fights, law breaking, and revenge seeking. (Paulhus et al., 2021, p.222) Personality lacking remorse, that is "callous or insensitive", unconcerned "with morality", and "cynical". (Jonason & Webster, 2010, p.429)
Public sector	Sector of the economy that is in public or state hands, including State Owned Enterprises (SOEs).
Sadism	"…the dispositional tendency to engage in cruel, demeaning, or harmful behavior for dominance or pleasure." Sadism has been shown to positively predict "interpersonal deviance, instigated incivility, and cyberbullying frequency above and beyond the dark triad." Further, sadism has been identified as "the most important predictor of workplace mistreatment compared to other dark triad predictors." (Min et al., 2019, p.1)

	A "mean" personality that enjoys fights, violence, as well as the misfortune and suffering of others. (Paulhus et al., 2021, p.222)
Schadenfreude	"…pleasure at another's misfortune" (Van Dijk, 2005, p.933) According to Van Dijk (2005), schadenfreude increases with the affected parties perceived responsibility for the misfortune suffered; and it is also mediated by how deserving the party's misfortune is perceived to be.
Suscpetible followers	Support the destructive leader in the toxic triangle. There are two types, namely conformers that "passively allow bad leaders to assume power because their unmet needs and immaturity make them vulnerable to such influences"; and colluders that "support destructive leaders because they want to promote themselves in an enterprise consistent with their worldview." (Padilla et al., 2007, p.185) An expanded taxonomy of susceptible followership referred to as "vulnerable followers" forming a "susceptible circle" establishes additional constructs associated with the above two constructs of susceptible followership. First, for conformers, namely "lost souls", "bystanders", and "authoritarians". Second, for colluders, namely "acolytes" and "opportunists". (Thoroughgood et al., 2012, p.902)
Toxic triangle	A construct involving three elements, namely a destructive leader, susceptible followers (either colluders or conformers), and a conducive environment. (Padilla et al., 2007)
Transformational leadership	These leaders are charismatic, motivational visionaries; they are focused on empowering and innovating. Further, transformational leadership encompasses charismatic

	leadership. (Du Brin, 2013). However, many such leaders are also narcissistic (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020). In light of this, O'Reilly and Chatman (2020) highlight the importance of effectively differentiating the true "transformational" leader from "pseudo-transformational" forms.
Turnarounds (organisational)	With organisational decline comes dislike, avoidance, the hiding of information, and denial of responsibility; "pathologies" that are mutually reinforcing; this makes a successful organisational turnaround difficult; with success contingent upon organisational context. (Kanter, 2003)
Zero-acquaintance	First sight or interaction in the case of people who are meeting for the first time and have never interacted before (Back et al., 2010). See Narcissism.

Appendix 3: Interview guide

<u>**Interview details**</u>

Interview details *		
Date of the interview:		
Place of the interview:		
Name of the interviewee:		
	Current role	**Previous role (DL exposed)**
Date:		
Job title:		
Industry:		
Company name:		
Company size:		

* Please note that this information is purely for the researcher's reference and will not be used to identify any individual or their organisation by name, or provide personal information that may reveal the identities of either or both. The pro-forma Letter of Informed Consent outlines the protection provided to respondents (and by implication their organisations).

Theme	Interview Questions	Notes to the Interviewer
Exploring assumptions that destructive leadership is "bad"	**Question 1:** What do harmful leadership and harmful leadership behaviours mean to you? **Question 2:** What personal experiences have you had of leaders pursuing goals that differ from those of their organisation? **Question 3:** What are the aims of harmful leaders for you? **Question 4:** What outcomes do you associate with harmful leadership?	Avoid generalisation and rather have the interviewee cite experiences.
Positive contributions to organisational outcomes	**Question 5:** In your experience how do harmful leader behaviours show themselves in the workplace? **Question 6:** Have you experienced any situations where these harmful or dysfunctional leader behaviours have had beneficial outcomes for the organisation? Please elaborate. **Question 7:** In these situations, can you identify elements of these seemingly dysfunctional behaviours that might be interpreted as skills or strengths? Please elaborate. **Question 8:** Were these behaviours, implicitly or explicitly, accepted by the organisation because there was a beneficial outcome that was used to justify these? Please elaborate.	Avoid generalisation and rather have the interviewee cite experiences. (Questions 6-8 are intentionally closed-ended to focus the attention of the interviewee to specific events by appealing to episodic memory (Hansbrough et al., 2021), and thus include a request for elaboration to ensure an element of open-endedness is maintained.)

Theme	Interview Questions	Notes to the Interviewer
Competitiveness in hostile external environments	**Question 9:** Have you experienced any situations where the leadership behaviours described earlier assisted the organisation in difficult circumstances? (e.g. rapid and/or unpredictable change; competitiveness challenges and fierce rivalries; contextual, infrastructure, or resource constraints; unfavourable political or economic conditions). Please elaborate. **Question 10:** In such situations were the leader behaviours beneficial to the organisation in the short-term but adverse in the long-term (or vice-versa)? Please elaborate. **Question 11:** In such instances, did the organisation review the situation (formally or informally) for competitive reasons? If so, how? **Question 12:** What was the short, medium and/or long-term consequence for the dysfunctional leader?	Avoid generalisation and rather have the interviewee cite experiences. (Questions 9-11 are intentionally closed-ended to focus the attention of the interviewee to specific events by appealing to episodic memory, and thus include a request for elaboration to ensure an element of open-endedness is maintained.)

Reference

Hansbrough, T. K., Lord, R. G., Schyns, B., Foti, R. J., Liden, R. C., & Acton, B. P. (2021). Do you remember? Rater memory systems and leadership measurement. *The Leadership Quarterly, 32*(2), 101455.

Appendix 4: Letter of Informed consent

Dear Madam/Sir

My name is <Researcher Name>. I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA. I am conducting research on dysfunctional leadership, and am trying to find out more about the unexpected benefits of this type of leadership for organisations operating in hostile environments. My research project title is 'The unexpected benefits of destructive and dark-side leadership for organisations operating in hostile environments'. The purpose of the research is to analyse harmful leadership by understanding assumptions about such leaders, the positive contributions that they may make to organisations, especially organisations operating in hostile external environments.

I would sincerely appreciate your time and willingness to participate in this study. The interview will be a semi-structured format with open-ended questions. The interview duration is expected to be between 45 and 60 minutes. With your permission, I request that the interview be recorded and transcribed to capture the content of the interview. The interview will be kept strictly confidential and no source, individual or organisation, will be identified in the text of the final report. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. With your permission, our interview will be transcribed for purposes of academic analysis. Please note that all data to be used in the research report will be reported and stored without any identifiers to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. On request, a copy of the research findings will be made available to you. With your permission and by signing below, you give your consent to participate.

For any further questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the researcher or supervisor of the study. Contact details are provided below.

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____

Researcher:	Supervisor:
<Researcher Name>	<Supervisor Name>
Email: <Researcher Email>	Email: < Supervisor Email >

Appendix 5: Ethical Clearance
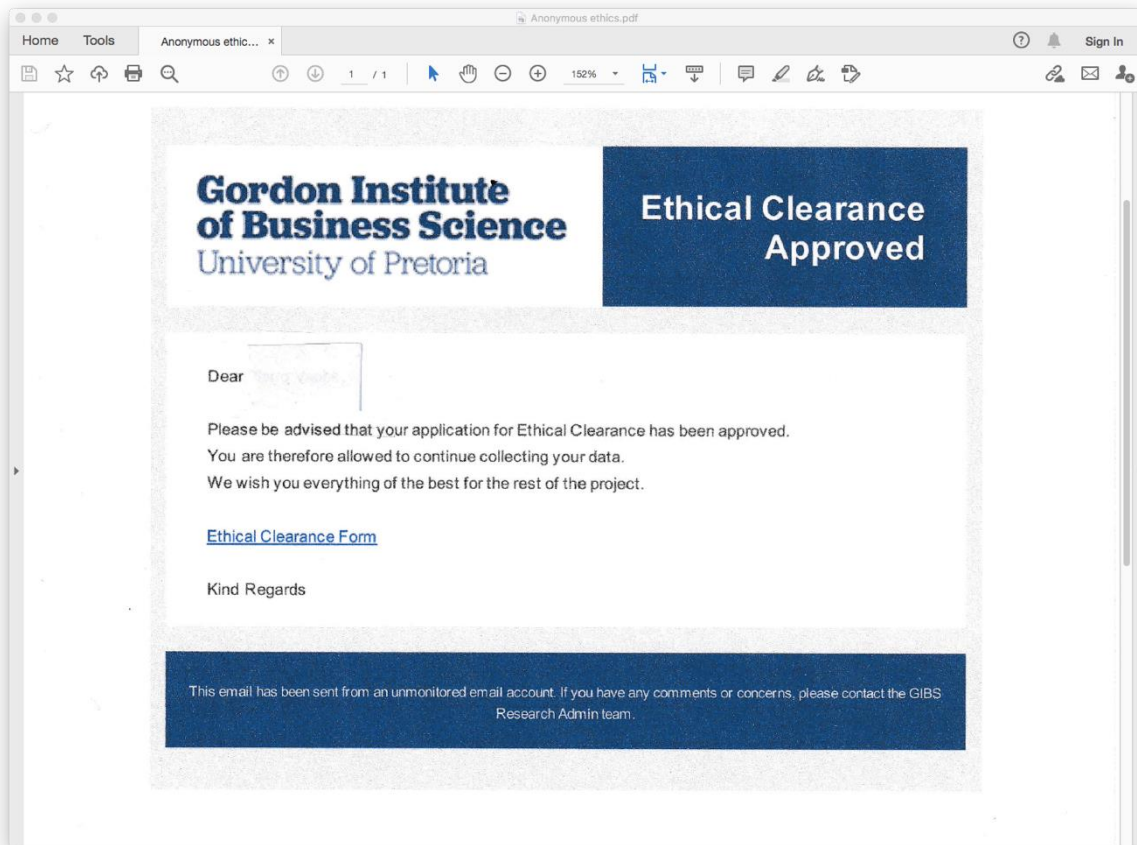
Appendix 6: Final Code Book
Research Question 1 - Code Book

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Employee Perspectives and Interactions	Cognitive Factors	Confusion
		Contradiction
	Employee Experience	Concern
		Customer Dissatisfaction
		Employee Turnover
		Experience
		Leadership
		Learning
		Management
		Self-reflection
	Impact on Followers	Anger
		Anxiety
		Career Dissatisfaction
		Emotional Distress
		Job Insecurity
		Lack of Collaboration
		Lack of Support
		Negative Work Environment
		Resentment
		Toxic Work Environment
	Individual Attributes	Ambiguity
		Awareness
		Bias
		Decision-making
		Emotional Impact
		Fear
		Feeling Undervalued
		Humility
		Indecision
		Injustice
		Insecurity
		Low Self-esteem
		Perception
		Stress
		Understanding
		Unrealistic Expectations
	Interpersonal Dynamics	Agreement
		Alignment
		Autonomy
		Influence

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Employee Perspectives and Interactions (cont.)	Interpersonal Relationships	Betrayal
		Communication
		Conflict
		Defensiveness
		Disagreement
		Disbelief
		Distrust
		Empathy
		Misalignment
		Trust
	Job Satisfaction and Recognition	Appreciation
		Career Advancement
		Confirmation
		Fairness
		Lack of Clarity
	Work-Life Balance	Sustainability
	Workplace Dynamics	Authority
		Collaboration
		Communication Issues
		Leadership Issues
		Leadership Style
		Miscommunication
		Organizational Culture
		Organizational Dynamics
		Organizational Goals
		Power Dynamics
		Teamwork
		Toxic Leadership

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Ethical and Financial Dimensions	Communication and Perception	Blame
		Blame Shifting
		Credibility
		Criticism
		Culture
		Curiosity
		Disappointment
		Disillusionment
		Doubt
	Responsible and ethical culture	Financial Concerns
		Reflection
Organizational Impact and Dynamics	Leadership and Management	Accountability
		Adaptability
		Ambition
		Control
		Inefficiency
		Responsibility
	Leadership Characteristics	Bullying
		Corruption
		Ineffective Leadership
		Lack of Empathy
		Lack of Transparency
		Machiavellianism
		Manipulation
		Micromanagement
		Mismanagement
		Narcissism
		Retaliation
		Toxic Behavior
	Leadership Perception	Deception
		Favoritism
		Insincerity
		Lack of Communication
		Lack of Direction
		Lack of Respect
		Self-awareness
		Selfishness
		Unclear Expectations
		Unfair Treatment
		Whistleblowing

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Organizational Impact and Dynamics (cont.)	Organizational Concerns	Bottom Line
		Evaluation
		Perfectionism
		Performance Evaluation
		Productivity
		Promotion
		Recognition
		Support
		Toxicity
		Work Stress
		Work-life Balance
		Workplace Dynamics
	Organizational Consequences	Job Loss
		Lack of Accountability
		Resignation
	Organizational Dynamics	Change
		Comparison
		Competition
		Creativity
		Dysfunction
		Dysfunctional Leadership
		Organizational Structure
		Outsourcing
	Organizational Impact	Frustration
		Hostility
		Inconsistency
		Negative Impact
		Uncertainty
	Organizational Performance	Morale
		Motivation
		Pressure

Research Question 2 - Code Book

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Positive Impact on Organizational Elements	Autonomy and Awareness	Awareness
		Uncertainty
	Communication and Conflict	Communication issues
		Comparison
		Concern
		Conflict management
		Consequence
		Contradiction
		Criticism
		Miscommunication
		Organizational dynamics
	Emotional Well-being and Pressure	Emotional distress
		Pressure
	Individual and Team Behaviors	Acceptance
		Ambiguity
		Ambivalence
		Anger
		Anxiety
		Confusion
		Critical thinking
		Curiosity
		Defensiveness
		Disagreement
		Disappointment
		Disapproval
		Disbelief
		Disillusionment
		Doubt
		Evaluation
		Fear
		Frustration
		Insecurity
		Introversion
		Job insecurity
		Lack of clarity
		Lack of support
		Persuasion
		Resentment
		Skepticism
		Stress
		Validation

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Positive Impact on Organizational Elements (cont.)	Interpersonal Skills and Influence	Influence
		Perception
		Self-awareness
	Leadership and Management	Agile methodology
		Authoritarian leadership
		Autonomy
		Change management
		Complexity
		Customer service
		Dysfunction
		Efficiency
		Expansion
		Experience
		Explanation
		Financial resources
		Impact
		Indecision
		Inefficiency
		Leadership
		Leadership style
		Management
		Mismanagement
		Productivity
		Promotion
		Protection
		Speculation
	Leadership Styles and Behaviours	Abuse
		Accountability
		Appearance
		Authority
		Bias
		Blame shifting
		Bullying
		Calmness
		Control
		Corruption
		Credibility
		Culture
		Deception
		Dishonesty

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Positive Impact on Organizational Elements (cont.)	Leadership Styles and Behaviours (cont.)	Dysfunctional leadership
		Emotional intelligence
		Fairness
		Favouritism
		High expectations
		Incompetence
		Inconsistency
		Ineffective leadership
		Injustice
		Innovation
		Insincerity
		Interpersonal skills
		Lack of accountability
		Lack of collaboration
		Lack of communication
		Lack of empathy
		Learning
		Manipulation
		Misconduct
		Motivation
		Narcissism
		Negative impact
		Negativity
		Perfectionism
		Performance evaluation
		Perspective
		Power dynamics
		Project management
		Reflection
		Responsibility
		Risk-taking
		Self-improvement
		Self-reflection
		Short-term focus
		Silence
		Strategic behavior
		Stress tolerance
		Success
		Toxicity

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Positive Impact on Organizational Elements (cont.)	Leadership Styles and Behaviors (cont.)	Trust
		Understanding
		Work environment
		Work overload
		Work-life balance
		Workplace culture
	Organizational Dynamics and Culture	Compliance
		Conflict
		Employee dissatisfaction
		Employee turnover
		Lack of action
		Lack of consequences
		Lack of transparency
		Leadership issues
		Misalignment
		Negative work environment
		Organizational challenges
		Organizational change
		Organizational culture
		Organizational dysfunction
		Perceived injustice
		Toxic work environment
		Work stress
		Workplace dynamics
	Perception and Beliefs	Unfair treatment
		Unrealistic expectations
	Positive Contributions and Adaptability	Adaptability
		Analytical thinking
		Appreciation
		Collaboration
		Communication
		Creativity
		Effective communication
		Empathy
		Problem-solving
		Recognition
		Strategic thinking
		Teamwork
	Psychological and Emotional Impact	Emotional impact
		Resignation

Research Question 3 - Code Book

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Leadership Factors	Individual Traits and Behaviours - pressure	Ambivalence
		Analytical thinking
		Blame Shifting
		Copycat behaviour
		Critical Thinking
		Curiosity
		Decision-making
		Emotional intelligence
		Machiavellianism
		Persuasion
		Pressure
		Problem-solving
		Skepticism
		Speculation
	Organisational Leadership and Management- Lack of support	Compliance
		Control
		Delay in process
		Dependency on consultants
		Dysfunctional Leadership
		Explanation
		Ineffective leadership
		Lack of Accountability
		Lack of action
		Lack of clarity
		Lack of communication
		Lack of consequences
		Lack of support
		Lack of transparency
		Leadership
		Leadership issues
		Management
		Manipulation
		Misalignment
		Organizational challenges
		Organizational change
		Organizational dynamics
		Organizational structure
		Outsourcing
		Power Dynamics
		Toxic Leadership

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Leadership Factors (cont.)	Recognition and Evaluation – Accountability / Lack of accountability	Accountability
		Appreciation
		Career advancement
		Compensation
		Fairness
		Promotion
		Protection
		Recognition
		Reflection
Organizational Dynamics	Organisational Culture and Dynamics	Acceptance
		Contradiction
		Corruption
		Organizational Culture
		Organizational Politics
		Toxic Work Environment
		Workplace Dynamics
	Organisational Outcomes and Performance - Negative Impact / Success	Ambition
		Causality
		Competition
		Complexity
		Dysfunction
		Efficiency
		Expansion
		Failure
		Financial impact
		Impact
		Incompetence
		Inconsistency
		Inefficiency
		Influence
		Innovation
		Long-term perspective
		Motivation
		Negative Impact
		Organizational dysfunction
		Organizational effectiveness
		Productivity
		Short-term focus
		Success
		Sustainability
		Teamwork

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Organizational Dynamics (cont.)	Psychological and Emotional Impact - Emotional struggles	Abuse
		Awareness
		Concern
		Confusion
		Consequence
		Disappointment
		Disbelief
		Disengagement
		Doubt
		Fear
		Feeling undervalued
		Financial concerns
		Frustration
		Hostility
		Humility
		Insecurity
		Morale
		Narcissism
		Negativity
		Perception
		Perfectionism
		Perspective
		Resentment
		Resignation
		Resilience
		Responsibility
		Retaliation
		Self-awareness
		Self-reflection
		Stress
		Support
		Trust
		Uncertainty
		Unrealistic expectations
		Validation
		Work environment
		Work overload

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Organizational Impact	Communication and Collaboration - Communication / Collaboration	Advertising
		Blame
		Collaboration
		Communication
		Communication Issues
		Comparison
		Confirmation
		Conflict
		Conflict management
		Contrast
		Criticism
		Disagreement
		Lack of Collaboration
		Miscommunication
	Ethical and Moral Implications – Deception / Corruption / Unfair Treatment	Bias
		Budget Management
		Burnout
		Career Dissatisfaction
		Conspiracy
		Cost Analysis
		Culture
		Deception
		Dishonesty
		Distrust
		Diversity
		Employee dissatisfaction
		Employee Turnover
		Evaluation
		Injustice
		Job dissatisfaction
		Job Insecurity
		Job loss
		Job satisfaction
		Perceived injustice
		Toxic behavior
		Toxicity
		Unfair Treatment
		Whistleblowing
		Work-Life Balance

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Organizational Impact (cont.)	External Environment and Adaptation - Adaptability	Adaptability
		Adversity
		Ambiguity
		Change
		Change Management
		Risk-taking

Appendix 7: Copyright Declaration Form

See next page.

COPYRIGHT DECLARATION FORM

Student details			
Surname:		Initials:	
Student number:	21854191		
Email:	21854191@mygibs.co.za		
Phone:			
Qualification details			
Degree:	MBA	Year completed:	2024
Title of research:	GIBS: Follower perceptions of benefits from destructive leadership for organisations operating in hostile environments		
Supervisor:			
Supervisor email:			
Access			
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