Towards an understanding of stakeholder experiences of the destructive behaviour by leaders

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Abstract

Purpose – The extant literature exhibits a proliferation of constructs related to destructive leadership, leading to a problematic conflation of leadership styles with leadership behaviour. This research aims to address this conceptual ambiguity by gaining a deeper understanding of the experience of destructive leadership behaviour. The scope is deliberately confined to leaders' behaviours, as this approach allows for a more precise analysis of the phenomenon and helps to clarify the broad and diverse conceptualizations currently found in the literature.

Research Approach – This study adopted a qualitative research approach using semi-structured interviews to understand the lived experiences, antecedents, and consequences of destructive leadership behaviour. Data were gathered from a purposive sample of 20 participants who had direct experience working with or managing a destructive leader. The gathered data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Findings – The analysis confirmed existing literature regarding the experience and antecedents of destructive behaviour, with a few nuances. However, this research identified several novel sub-themes related to the consequences of this behaviour, specifically quiet quitting, hiding, the lingering effect on employees as well as the possibility of systemic fallout. These findings potentially extend existing theory by highlighting a previously underexplored link between destructive leadership behaviour, the employee response, the longer-term impact on employees, and the potentially undetected systemic nature of turnover over an extended period of time.

Research limitations/implications – The study was conducted in South Africa, and therefore the results may differ in a different geographical context.

Practical/managerial implications – The consequences of destructive leadership behaviour can be damaging to organisations, but the detrimental impact on employees is more extreme. Although organisations may have reporting processes in place, to deal with this phenomenon more effectively it is important to understand how these control mechanisms may fail.

Keywords – Destructive leadership; Destructive behaviour; Toxic behaviour; Toxic environment; Bad leadership.

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 Philosophy in Corporate Strategy at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

20 November 2025

Contents

Abstract ... ii
Declaration ... iii
List of Figures ... x
List of Tables ... x
Chapter 1: Introduction ... 12
1.1 Background to the research problem ... 12
1.2 Theoretical rationale ... 12
1.3 Business rationale ... 13
1.4 Research problem ... 14
1.5 Research questions ... 15
1.6 Research aims ... 15
1.7 The research contribution ... 16
1.8 The research scope ... 16
1.9 Conclusion ... 17
Chapter 2: Literature review ... 18
2.1 Introduction ... 18
2.2 Foundations of leadership ... 18
2.3 Defining leadership ... 19
2.4 Positive types of leadership ... 19
2.4.1 Transformational leadership ... 19
2.4.2 Transactional leadership ... 20
2.4.3 Servant leadership ... 20
2.4.4 Charismatic leadership ... 20
2.4.5 Authentic leadership ... 20
2.4.6 Assumptions about leadership styles ... 20
2.6 Conclusion on positive leadership ... 21
2.7 Exploring bad leadership ... 21
2.8 Types of bad leadership ... 22
2.8.1 Destructive leadership ... 22
2.8.2 Toxic leadership ... 23
2.8.3 Unethical leadership ... 23
2.8.4 Dysfunctional leadership ... 23
2.8.5 Abusive supervision ... 23
2.8.6 Laissez-faire leadership ... 24
2.9 Comparison of negative leadership constructs ... 24
2.10 Conclusions on bad leadership ... 25

2.11 Antecedents of bad leadership 26
2.11.1 Individual-level antecedents 26
2.11.2 Subordinate-level antecedents 27
2.11.3 Organisational antecedents 27
2.11.4 Role of power and authority 27
2.11.5 Environmental antecedents 27
2.11.6 Conclusions about the antecedents of bad leadership 28
2.12 Consequences of bad leadership 28
2.12.1 Impact on employees 28
2.12.2 Impact on organisations 30
2.12.3 Conclusions about the consequences of bad leadership 32
2.13 Contexts allowing for bad leadership 32
2.13.1 Organisational contexts 32
2.13.2 Culture and conducive environments 33
2.13.3 Conclusions about the contexts allowing for bad leadership 34
2.14 Managing and mitigating bad leadership 34
2.14.1 Exploring the mitigants for bad leadership behaviour 34
2.14.2 Human resource processes and policies 34
2.14.3 Training and development 35
2.14.4 Feedback, escalation and consequence management 35
2.15 Conclusion 36
Chapter 3: Research questions 38
3.1 Introduction 38
3.2 Research question 1 39
3.3 Research question 2 39
3.4 Research question 3 40
Chapter 4: Research methodology 42
4.1 Introduction 42
4.2 Research design 42
4.2.1 Strategy 42
4.2.2 Time horizon 43
4.3 Research methodology 43
4.3.1 Population 43
4.3.2 Unit and level of analysis 44
4.3.3 Sampling and sampling criteria 45
4.3.4 Sample size 45
4.3.5 Research instrument 46
4.3.6 Data collection 46
4.3.7 Data analysis 47

4.3.7.1 Coding 48
4.3.7.2 Application of thematic analysis 49
4.3.7.3. Identification of themes 52
4.3.8 Quality controls 53
4.3.8.1. Validity 53
4.3.8.2 Reliability 54
4.3.8.3. Social desirability bias 54
4.4 Ethical considerations 55
4.5 Data security and data handling 55
4.6 Research limitations 55
4.7 Conclusion 56
Chapter 5: Findings 57
5.1 Introduction 57
5.2 Findings: Research Question 1 57
5.2.1 Theme 1: Manifestation of destructive leadership behaviour 58
5.2.1.1 Absent leader sub-theme 58
5.2.1.2 Anger and rage sub-theme 59
5.2.1.3 Varied behaviour and response sub-theme 61
5.2.1.4 Blame sub-theme 62
5.2.1.5 Bullying sub-theme 63
5.2.1.6 Threatening sub-theme 64
5.2.1.7 Management style sub-theme 65
5.2.2 Theme 2: Experience of psychological control and manipulation 66
5.2.2.1 Micromanagement sub-theme 67
5.2.2.2 Intentionality sub-theme 68
5.2.2.3 Power and ego sub-theme 69
5.2.3 Conclusion of findings: Research Question 1 71
5.3 Findings: Research Question 2 72
5.3.1 Theme 3: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures 72
5.3.1.1 Incentives sub-theme 73
5.3.1.2 Restructuring theme 74
5.3.1.3 Misaligned expectations 75
5.3.1.4 Culture sub-theme 76
5.3.1.5 Insecurity sub-theme 77
5.3.2 Theme 4: Toxicity, precedent and pressure 78
5.3.2.1 Tone at the top sub-theme 79
5.3.2.2 Toxicity sub-theme 80
5.2.2.3 Assimilation sub-theme 81
5.3.2.4 Pressure sub-theme 82
5.3.3 Conclusion of findings: Research Question 2 83

5.4 Findings: Research Question 3 84
5.4.1 Theme 5: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement 84
5.4.1.1 Quiet quitting sub-theme 85
5.4.1.2 Hiding sub-theme 86
5.4.2 Theme 6: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour 87
5.4.2.1 Retaliation sub-theme 87
5.4.2.2 Sabotage sub-theme 89
5.4.3 Theme 7: Systemic organisational fallout 90
5.4.3.1 Organisational fallout sub-theme 91
5.4.3.2 High turnover sub-theme 92
5.4.3.3 Intention to leave sub-theme 93
5.4.4 Theme 8: Erosion of psychological safety and trust 94
5.4.4.1 Psychological safety sub-theme 94
5.4.4.2 Lack of trust sub-theme 96
5.4.5 Theme 9: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being 97
5.4.5.1 Emotional and psychological sub-theme 98
5.4.5.2 Lingering effect sub-theme 99
5.4.5.3 Self-criticism sub-theme 100
5.4.5.4 Self-perception sub-theme 102
5.4.5.5 Stress sub-theme 103
5.4.5.6 Fear sub-theme 104
5.4.5.7 Mental and physical health sub-theme 105
5.4.6 Conclusion of findings: Research Question 3 106
5.5 Conclusion 108
Chapter 6: Discussion 109
6.1 Introduction 109
6.2 Discussion: Research Question 1 109
6.2.1 Theme 1: Manifestation of destructive behaviour 109
6.2.1.1 Summary findings: Manifestation of destructive behaviour 110
6.2.1.2 Related literature: Manifestation of destructive behaviour 111
6.2.1.3 Findings versus literature: Manifestation of destructive behaviour 112
6.2.1.4 Conclusion: Manifestation of destructive behaviour 112
6.2.2 Theme 2: Experience of psychological control and manipulation 113
6.2.2.1 Summary findings: Experience of psychological control and manipulation 113
6.2.2.2 Related literature: Experience of psychological control and manipulation 113
6.2.2.3 Findings versus literature: Experience of psychological control and manipulation 114
6.2.2.4 Conclusion: Experience of psychological control and manipulation 114
6.3 Discussion: Research Question 2 114
6.3.1 Theme 3: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures 115

6.3.1.1 Summary findings: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures 115
6.3.1.2 Related literature: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures 116
6.3.1.3 Findings versus literature: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures 117
6.3.1.4 Conclusion: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures 117
6.3.2 Theme 4: Toxicity, precedent and pressure 117
6.3.2.1 Summary findings: Toxicity, precedent and pressure 117
6.3.2.2 Related literature: Toxicity, precedent and pressure 118
6.3.2.3 Findings versus literature: Toxicity, precedent and pressure 119
6.3.2.4 Conclusion: Toxicity, precedent and pressure 119
6.4 Discussion: Research Question 3 119
6.4.1 Theme 5: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement 119
6.4.1.1 Summary findings: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement 120
6.4.1.2 Related literature: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement 120
6.4.1.3 Findings versus literature: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement 121
6.4.1.4 Conclusion: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement 121
6.4.2 Theme 6: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour 121
6.4.2.1 Summary findings: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour 121
6.4.2.2 Related literature: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour 122
6.4.2.3 Findings versus literature: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour 122
6.4.2.4 Conclusion: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour 123
6.4.3 Theme 7: Systemic organisational fallout 123
6.4.3.1 Summary findings: systemic organisational fallout 123
6.4.3.2 Related literature: systemic organisational fallout 124
6.4.3.3 Findings versus literature: systemic organisational fallout 124
6.4.3.4 Conclusion: systemic organisational fallout 124
6.4.4 Theme 8: Erosion of Psychological safety and trust 125
6.4.4.1 Summary findings: Erosion of psychological safety and trust 125
6.4.4.2 Related literature: Erosion of psychological safety and trust 125
6.4.4.3 Findings versus literature: Erosion of psychological safety and trust 126
6.4.4.4 Conclusion: Erosion of psychological safety and trust 126
6.4.5 Theme 9: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being 126
6.4.5.1 Summary findings: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being 126
6.4.5.2 Related literature: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being 127
6.4.5.3 Findings versus literature: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being 128
6.4.5.4 Conclusion: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being 129
6.5 Conclusion of discussion 129
6.6 Conclusion 132
Chapter 7: Conclusion 133
7.1. Introduction 133

7.2 Principal theoretical conclusions 133
7.2.1 Conclusions: Research Question 1 133
7.2.1.1 Theme 1: Manifestation of destructive behaviour 133
7.2.1.2 Theme 2: Experience of psychological control and manipulation 134
7.2.2 Conclusions: Research Question 2 134
7.2.2.1 Theme 3: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures 134
7.2.2.2 Theme 4: Toxicity, precedent and pressure 135
7.2.3 Conclusions: Research Question 3 135
7.2.3.1 Theme 5: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement 135
7.2.3.2. Theme 6: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour 136
7.2.3.3 Theme 7: Systemic organisational fallout 136
7.2.3.4 Theme 8: Erosion of psychological safety and trust 137
7.2.3.5 Theme 9: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being 137
7.3 Research contribution 138
7.4 Recommendations for management 138
7.5 Research limitations 139
7.6 Recommendations for future research 140
7.6 Conclusion 141
References 142
Annexure A: Consequences for employees 152
Annexure B: Common terminology used for bad behaviour 153
Annexure C: Map of connections between leadership styles 154
Annexure D: Consistency matrix 155
Annexure E: Interview guide 156
Annexure F: Code list 158
Annexure G: Ethical clearance 180
Annexure H: Consent letter 181

List of Figures

Figure 1: No. of codes generated for subordinate and leader groups by interview 49

List of Tables

Table 1: Sub-themes, descriptions and linked codes 50
Table 2: Themes and sub-themes linked to research questions 52
Table 3: Colour coding of sub-themes and the number of codes linked 57
Table 4: RQ 1 Theme 1: Manifestation of destructive leadership behaviour 58
Table 5: Evidence of sub-theme: Absent leader 58
Table 6: Evidence of sub-theme: Anger and rage 60
Table 7: Evidence of sub-theme: Varied behaviour and response 61
Table 8: Evidence of sub-theme: Blame 62
Table 9: Evidence of sub-theme: Bullying 63
Table 10: Evidence of sub-theme: Threatening 65
Table 11: Evidence of sub-theme: Management style 66
Table 12: RQ 1 Theme 2: Experience of psychological control and manipulation 67
Table 13: Evidence of sub-theme: Micromanagement 67
Table 14: Evidence of sub-theme: Intentionality 68
Table 15: Evidence of sub-theme: Power and ego 69
Table 16: Themes and sub-themes related to RQ 1 71
Table 17: RQ 2 Theme 3: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures 72
Table 18: Evidence of sub-theme: Incentives 73
Table 19: Evidence of sub-theme: Restructuring 74
Table 20: Evidence of sub-theme: Misaligned expectations 75
Table 21: Evidence of sub-theme: Culture 76
Table 22: Evidence of sub-theme: Insecurity 77
Table 23: RQ 2 Theme 4: Toxicity, precedent and pressure 78
Table 24: Evidence of sub-theme: Tone at the top 79
Table 25: Evidence of sub-theme: Toxicity 80
Table 26: Evidence of sub-theme: Assimilation 81
Table 27: Evidence of sub-theme: Pressure 82
Table 28: Themes and sub-themes related to RQ 2 83
Table 29: RQ 3 Theme 5: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement 85
Table 30: Evidence of sub-theme: Quiet quitting 85
Table 31: Evidence of sub-theme: Hiding 86

Table 32: RQ 3 Theme 6: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour 87
Table 33: Evidence of sub-theme: Retaliation 88
Table 34: Evidence of sub-theme: Sabotage 89
Table 35: RQ 3 Theme 7: Systemic organisational fallout 91
Table 36: Evidence of sub-theme: Organisational fallout 91
Table 37: Evidence of sub-theme: High turnover 92
Table 38: Evidence of sub-theme: Intention to leave 93
Table 39: RQ 3 Theme 8: Erosion of psychological safety and trust 94
Table 40: Evidence of sub-theme: Psychological safety 95
Table 41: Evidence of sub-theme: Lack of trust 96
Table 42: RQ 3 Theme 9: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being 97
Table 43: Evidence of sub-theme: Emotional and psychological 98
Table 44: Evidence of sub-theme: Lingering effect 99
Table 45: Evidence of sub-theme: Self-criticism 101
Table 46: Evidence of sub-theme: Self-perception 102
Table 47: Evidence of sub-theme: Stress 103
Table 48: Evidence of sub-theme: Fear 104
Table 49: Evidence of sub-theme: Mental and physical health 105
Table 50: Themes and sub-themes related to RQ 3 107
Table 51: RQ 1 Theme 1 and sub-themes 109
Table 52: RQ 1 Theme 2 and sub-themes 113
Table 53: RQ 2 Theme 3 and sub-themes 115
Table 54: RQ 2 Theme 4 and sub-themes 117
Table 55: RQ 3 Theme 5 and sub-themes 119
Table 56: RQ 3 Theme 6 and sub-themes 121
Table 57: RQ 3 Theme 7 and sub-themes 123
Table 58: RQ 3 Theme 8 and sub-themes 125
Table 59: RQ 3 Theme 9 and sub-themes 126
Table 60: Findings compared to theory for all research questions 129

Chapter 1: Introduction

This qualitative research explores the experience of destructive leadership behaviour, from the perspective of leaders and subordinates because in contrast with the more upbeat and positive leadership research, there are calls for a more balanced view (Alvesson, 2020; Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Fischer et al., 2024).

There is a need for a greater understanding of destructive leadership behaviour and the impact it has on people and organisations, considering that the likely outcome may be bad.

1.1 Background to the research problem

The topic of leadership conjures up images of well-known political, religious, and business leaders, as well as those who champion social causes – some are great, while others are not so great. Not all leadership is the same and not all leaders are good (Haslam et al., 2024). Many high-profile leaders have been accused of creating a culture of fear, using intimidation tactics and unethical behaviour (Cunha et al., 2024; Rice et al., 2023), narcissism (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006), being abusive (Isaacson, 2012) and lacking empathy and emotional intelligence (Khan, 2021).

Although the idealistic view holds that leadership is positive and produces positive effects, it is necessary to acknowledge that leadership can and does result in adverse outcomes (Haslam et al., 2024). Some scholars exclude ineffectual leadership behaviours from the conceptualisation of bad, negative leadership (Schyns & Schilling, 2013) because these behaviours are not targeted at employees; they are merely the result of a lack of skills or abilities (Patel & Hamlin, 2017), however the effects can be described as destructive.

1.2 Theoretical rationale

Despite numerous leadership studies claiming positive outcomes from positive leadership styles and adverse outcomes from negative leadership styles, these findings are flawed as a result of the conflation of leadership style and leadership behaviour (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). Leadership scholars have claimed a positivity bias in leadership research (Alvesson & Einola, 2019), advocating for a more balanced and realistic view (Alvesson, 2020; Haslam et al., 2024) and calling for a radical change in leadership style research, which separates behaviour from followers' evaluation (Fischer et al., 2024).

In diverging from the positive leadership theme, numerous varied and confusing conceptualisations of negative, harmful and destructive leadership behaviour become

evident. This has prompted Modliba & Treffers (2025) to propose a unification of negative leadership behaviour, although the concepts may be muddled with leadership styles. They identified avoiding the conflation of leadership styles and instead focusing on leader behaviour. This theme is the focus of the current research: to investigate the experience of destructive leaders' behaviour.

In the majority of cases, the evaluation of leadership and leadership behaviours is from the perspective of subordinates (Abalkhail, 2022; Almeida et al., 2022; Cialdini et al., 2021; Modliba & Treffers, 2025; Shafqat et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2015), with few studies reporting on the direct study of destructive leaders, while the perspective of supervisors of destructive leaders is unknown. Thus, the perspectives of stakeholders in destructive behaviours are lacking. This prompted the refinement of the research participants in the current study to include stakeholders and their perspectives.

A number of antecedents for bad leadership have been identified at the individual, subordinate and organisational levels (Akinyele & Chen, 2025; Hassan et al., 2023; Modliba & Treffers, 2025; Naseer et al., 2016; Padilla et al., 2007; Patel & Hamlin, 2017). The consequences of destructive leadership behaviours are varied and range from a milder to a more severe impact on employees and their organisations (Abalkhail, 2022; Cialdini et al., 2021; Modliba & Treffers, 2025; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper, 2007; Xu et al., 2015). However, these studies may have been affected by the conflation of leadership styles and behaviours; more research is required.

Understanding the antecedents and consequences of destructive behaviour prompted another theme in the current research: to examine the antecedents and consequences of destructive behaviours at both the individual and organisational levels, from the perspective of stakeholders.

1.3 Business rationale

Research posits that behaviour at one level in the organisation cascades down to lower levels; therefore, the presence of harmful, damaging, destructive or deviant behaviour among senior leadership will likely result in subordinates experiencing some form of negative behaviour (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Strategic leadership and the top management team need to motivate (Elenkov et al., 2005; Wang et al., 2011) and influence (Samimi et al., 2022). Any undesirable behaviour from these leaders may result in demotivation among their teams and cause lower-level staff to experience a negative organisational culture, impeding the organisation’s ability to achieve its goals.

The consequences of undesirable behaviours by senior leadership can elicit unfavourable responses from employees, such as absenteeism, turnover and reduced performance, that have a direct impact on organisational performance. Annexure A contains a summary of the consequences. Given the possible impact of bad leadership on employees' performance, including turnover intentions and absenteeism, and the working environment, including profitability and reputation, it is important to understand how stakeholders in the organisation experience and react to negative behaviour.

1.4 Research problem

Overwhelming evidence indicates that bad leaders, bad leadership behaviour and negative, unethical or dysfunctional leadership inflict what could be irreparable damage on employees, teams, corporate culture, reputation and organisational performance (Abalkhail, 2022; Almeida et al., 2022; Cunha et al., 2024; Hassan et al., 2023; Krasikova et al., 2013; Li et al., 2024; Mackey et al., 2021; Modliba & Treffers, 2025; Shafqat et al., 2025). Simplistically "bad leadership is bad for everyone" by (Ryan et al., 2021, p. 74), but despite the evidence of damage and destruction, these behaviours continue to occur in organisations.

Of the literature reviewed, 58 terms were used to describe bad or negative leadership behaviour (Annexure B). The terms appearing more frequently are belittling, hostility, unethical, abusive, aggressive, humiliating, intimidating and micromanaging, with bullying, narcissism, manipulative and toxic behaviours appearing lower down on this preliminary list. These destructive leadership behaviours are aimed at the followers, in some cases, the leaders' team and/or their organisations (Abalkhail, 2022; Gauglitz et al., 2023; Krasikova et al., 2013; Li et al., 2024; Modliba & Treffers, 2025; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Xu et al., 2015). The study of leadership behaviours, together with the employee experience and response to the leaders' behaviour, is wholly aligned with social exchange theory.

Social exchange theory features strongly among the reviewed literature on bad leadership and is a vital lens through which to consider the exchanges between leaders and their subordinates and the relationships that form over time as a result of these exchanges (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Reciprocity is a rule of social exchange theory characterised by an interdependent relationship and the bidirectional flow of exchanges between parties, where an action is initiated and a reciprocal action is returned. However, a positive initiating action may not always result in a similarly positive response (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Social exchange theory explains that the positive and negative initiating actions or behaviours by leaders will be met with reciprocal responses from their subordinates (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Beliefs and cultural norms exist around reciprocity, which will influence how people will react to these social exchanges, although there is a tendency for negative treatment to be met with an equally negative response (Ahmad et al., 2023; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In some situations of negative behaviour from supervisors, the expected retaliation from employees may be withheld due to constrained labour markets (Cropanzano et al., 2017), and this may likely be the case in South Africa given the high rate of unemployment.

1.5 Research questions

The research questions were identified in the literature as areas requiring further study.

Firstly, there is a need to understand the experience of destructive leaders by role players outside of just employees, extending to other stakeholders (Abalkhail, 2022; Mackey et al., 2021; Modliba & Treffers, 2025), this prompted research question 1:

RQ 1: How do stakeholders identify and experience the behaviours of destructive leaders?

Secondly, research must explore stakeholders' assumptions of behavioural antecedents (Abalkhail, 2022; Mackey et al., 2021; Modliba & Treffers, 2025), prompting research question 2:

RQ 2: What do these stakeholders see as the antecedents of destructive behaviours?

Lastly, there is a need to understand stakeholders' description of the individual and organisational consequences, (Abalkhail, 2022; Mackey et al., 2021; Shafqat et al., 2025), leading to research question 3:

RQ3: What are the consequences of destructive behaviours at an individual and organisational level?

1.6 Research aims

The proliferation of constructs and diverse conceptualisations of destructive leadership leads to a potential lack of understanding of destructive behaviour, its antecedents and consequences. This research aimed to bring further clarity to the understanding of how destructive behaviour is identified and experienced by stakeholders in organisations.

Furthermore, the research sought to understand the antecedents and consequences for individuals and the organisation.

Given the important role that leadership plays in influencing and motivating teams and to address wicked problems (Grint, 2010), this research aimed to better equip top management to deal with the potential negative consequences of destructive behaviour on people, culture, and the organisation.

1.7 The research contribution

Ultimately, the aim of research is to advance what we know, or to make a contribution to the body of knowledge and Corley & Gioia (2011) suggest that a theoretical contribution can be based on the originality and the utility of research. Outside the grand ambitions of achieving originality, it is more realistic to find Incremental extensions of our knowledge, and this is where theory testing and refinement can add to theory (Crane et al., 2016).

The findings of this research confirmed the literature related to the identification and the experience of destructive leadership behaviour by leaders and subordinates, as well as the antecedents and consequences, adding to the body of knowledge.

In addition, in a few cases the findings differed from the literature, suggesting a refinement of the theory (Crane et al., 2016), these were identified as follows:

- Quiet quitting by employees as a consequence of experiencing destructive behaviour.
- Leaders' use of destructive behaviour to hide their lack of skills.
- The concept of attrition over time, where resignations spread and can become systemic, as a result of destructive leadership behaviour.
- The lingering effect, a profound and long-lasting impact on the mental, emotional and psychological wellbeing of employees.
- While fear is confirmed in the literature, the highly prevalent and specific nature of fear in the empirical data extends the theoretical understanding of this consequence of destructive leadership behaviour.

1.8 The research scope

The scope of this study included literature on destructive leadership as a meta-construct (Klasmeier et al., 2022) covering multiple conceptualisations of negative, bad or

dysfunctional leadership behaviour. The scope of the literature is not meant to be an exhaustive list of all destructive leadership types. Mackey et al. (2021) provide a more extensive list of 21 different destructive leadership styles.

Due to the conflation of leadership styles and behaviour this study aimed to specifically focus on the experience of destructive behaviour.

Data was collected from subordinates and leaders, specifically those that had worked for, or worked with a destructive leader, based in South Africa.

1.9 Conclusion

Having identified the research problem and the gaps in the existing research, the remainder of this proposal is organised in the following chapters. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on this topic, with the purpose of understanding the current debates and contributions of scholars relating to bad leadership. Chapter 3 outlines the research questions and Chapter 4 covers the proposed research method and design. Chapter 5 presents the results of the data analysis, which are discussed in Chapter 6. Finally, the contribution, future research, limitations and conclusion can be found in Chapter 7.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review explored various leadership styles (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023), including *despotic leadership* (Naseer et al., 2016), *dysfunctional leadership* (Abalkhail, 2022), *toxic leadership* (Akinyele & Chen, 2025), *destructive leadership* (Fosse et al., 2019; Li et al., 2024; Mackey et al., 2021; Padilla et al., 2007; Scheffler & Brunzel, 2020; Schyns et al., 2022; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Shafqat et al., 2025), *unethical leadership* (Almeida et al., 2022; Cialdini et al., 2021; Hassan et al., 2023), *narcissistic leadership* (Gauglitz et al., 2023; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006; Rovelli et al., 2023) and *laissez-faire leadership* (Klasmeier et al., 2022; Skogstad et al., 2007).

In addition literature related to leadership behaviour (Wang et al., 2011), *negative leader behaviours* (Modliba & Treffers, 2025; Patel et al., 2022; Toader & Kunze, 2021), *abusive supervision* (Tepper, 2000, 2007; Xu et al., 2015), *bullying* (Motsei & Nkomo, 2016) and *zombie leadership* (Haslam et al., 2024), was reviewed.

The following sections provide a broad overview of leadership, including its definition, an understanding of different leadership styles, leader behaviours and insight into the antecedents, consequences and contextual factors related to poor leadership.

2.2 Foundations of leadership

Leadership is described as a quality that an individual may possess, not granted merely by virtue of a title or role in the organisation's hierarchy. However, leadership is also a term used to refer to supervisors (Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al., 2022) and managers (Patel et al., 2022).

Samimi et al. (2022) refer to research concerning leadership styles that can motivate and influence followers to achieve the vision and shape the culture of organisations. Strategic leaders are defined by Samimi et al. (2022) as those at the top levels of the organisation who have a significant impact on the organisation. Several functions are performed by strategic leaders, including motivating and influencing others. Samimi et al. (2022) suggest that strategic leaders' behaviours can unify and rally support from followers.

However, given the significance of the senior management team on the organisational outcomes (Samimi et al., 2022), one can assume that negative leadership behaviour among this group, as described by Modliba and Treffers (2025), can have a profound negative impact on the performance of the organisation.

2.3 Defining leadership

Leadership is a social process of influence (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). The interrelatedness between the leader and those they lead emphasises the importance of the relationship and connections for effective leadership (Haslam et al., 2024). Leadership should be considered a group activity rather than the actions of a solitary individual because there can be no leader without their subordinates (Haslam et al., 2024). A leader's ability to influence (Alvesson & Einola, 2019) and motivate the team (Elenkov et al., 2005; Haslam et al., 2024; Samimi et al., 2022) is key to achieving an organisation's objectives (Naseer et al., 2016; Padilla et al., 2007), pointing to the interdependency between a leader and their subordinates.

It would be unreasonable to expect leaders to excel at everything; some leadership functions are more suited to leaders with specific characteristics. For example, overseeing operations would typically be managed by someone with a strong operational background (Samimi et al., 2022). Additionally, there cannot be a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to successful leadership because what might work in one organisation or environment will fail in others and leadership will look vastly different across different groups (Haslam et al., 2024). It is precisely for this reason that an overview of the different types of leadership is provided next.

2.4 Positive types of leadership

2.4.1 Transformational leadership

A transformational leader is someone who is uplifting for their followers (Elenkov et al., 2005). Transformational leadership involves a charismatic influence, being a role model for subordinates, providing inspiration and motivation with challenging work, supporting teams intellectually and providing mentorship and coaching for followers as needed (Elenkov et al., 2005).

Some scholars cite strong similarities between authentic leadership and transformational leadership, although the more controversial view is that authentic leadership is merely a moral upgrade of transformational leadership (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). Despite a lot of research on transformational leadership claiming positive outcomes, there has been little evidence that this leadership style actually transforms either individuals or organisations (Alvesson, 2020).

2.4.2 Transactional leadership

Transactional leaders are defined by Elenkov et al. (2005) as catering to their followers' immediate needs, while a transactional leadership style is described as a form of social exchange between leader and follower. This exchange relates to providing a reward for performance, taking action for non-performance or avoiding any action at all (Elenkov et al., 2005; Wang et al., 2011).

2.4.3 Servant leadership

A servant leader focuses on the ultimate good of the followers, almost a stakeholder view towards leadership (Eva et al., 2019). However, Alvesson and Einola (2019) point out that this creates challenges when conflicts of interest arise and the leader is faced with trying to please everyone.

2.4.4 Charismatic leadership

Charisma is noted as a trait associated with narcissistic leadership. In fact, there is a significant amount of overlap between charismatic leaders and narcissistic leaders (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). However, where they may differ is that charismatic leaders can establish trust; they are able to engender confidence in their abilities and they generally have good relationships with stakeholders. Some similarities have also been drawn between charismatic and transformational leadership (Wang et al., 2011).

2.4.5 Authentic leadership

Authentic leadership has been touted as a good form of leadership for some time and authentic leaders are described as possessing the virtues of being genuine to themselves (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). However, in reality, the roles, social norms and divergent stakeholders in businesses do not always allow for strictly authentic behaviour in the corporate environment (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). In fact, being transparent on personal views relating to contentious or sensitive issues may be extremely career-limiting (Alvesson & Einola, 2019).

2.4.6 Assumptions about leadership styles

Although leadership styles are often used to describe leadership behaviour, this is not always the case because, typically, the evaluation by a follower is subjective (Fischer et al., 2024). Some people may rate a specific behaviour negatively, whereas others will rate the same behaviour positively and the perception of good or bad can vary depending

on how the behaviour manifests, the type of behaviour used to influence, and the intentionality of the behaviour (Ryan et al., 2021).

The rating of good or bad leaders is not only an assessment of the outcomes they have achieved but also an interpretation of how people experience the behaviour of the individual (Fischer et al., 2024). Followers' perceptions are important in evaluating good leaders; their rating of a leader will be influenced by how closely their achievements are aligned with the follower's value system (Haslam et al., 2024). It must also be acknowledged that, in contrast to the prevailing understanding in leadership research, positive leadership styles do not necessarily lead to positive outcomes (Fischer et al., 2024). This extends to all positive and negative leadership styles and their respective negative or positive outcomes (Fischer et al., 2024; Fischer & Sitkin, 2023).

2.6 Conclusion on positive leadership

Alvesson and Einola (2019) warn researchers against the trend of excessive positivity in leadership studies, which comprises conflated concepts and malformed arguments. Others call for more theoretically sound research (Fischer et al., 2024). However, despite the plethora of positively framed leadership research, the reality is that leaders can behave in a manner that is harmful to their teams and organisations (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Leadership is not always good (Haslam et al., 2024), and hence the need to explore bad leadership, which is addressed in the next section.

2.7 Exploring bad leadership

There are many different conceptualisations of bad or negative leadership styles, amongst others destructive, unethical, or despotic leaders with variances in their associated behaviours or characteristics. According to Padilla et al. (2007, p. 180), destructive leaders are characterised by five factors: "charisma, personalised use of power, narcissism, negative life themes and ideology of hate". On the other hand, unethical leaders are linked to illegal and immoral behaviour, (Hassan et al., 2023) and destructive leaders use narratives to vilify opposition and promote solidarity (Padilla et al., 2007). While despotic leaders' behaviours are aimed at dominance and self-interest; and they have a propensity to manipulate followers for their own gain (Naseer et al., 2016).

Closely aligned to destructive leadership is narcissism, which is a personality trait that develops in infancy and endures through life (Rovelli et al., 2023). The behavioural characteristics of narcissists include entitlement, arrogance and a dominant, selfish

attitude. Psychopathic leaders are said to shamelessly exploit others with a clear conscience (Padilla et al., 2007). Narcissism and psychopathy form part of the "dark triad", which also includes Machiavellianism, a trait akin to a manipulative personality (Schyns et al., 2022, p. 251).

Despite the evidence of adverse outcomes ascribed to dark triad leaders, some suggest positive outcomes from these leadership types (Cunha et al., 2024), including the charisma and the vision of narcissists (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Organisations may allow the destructive methods applied by leaders to influence followers if this is in the pursuit of organisational goals and improved performance; however, as the degree of harm increases, the likelihood of retaliation or reaction intensifies (Krasikova et al., 2013).

2.8 Types of bad leadership

Destructive and dysfunctional leadership styles are prevalent in the literature. The intention here is not to provide an exhaustive list but rather to give an overview of those that form part of the literature reviewed for this study. Mackey et al. (2021) include a list of 21 destructive leadership styles in their systematic literature review, with definitions dating from 1988 to 2019. Although Tepper is the most widely cited (Scheffler & Brunzel, 2020) and his work is considered to be seminal in this field (Modliba & Treffers, 2025), the most widely studied negative leadership styles are destructive leadership and abusive supervision (Hassan et al., 2023; Mackey et al., 2021).

2.8.1 Destructive leadership

Destructive leadership has been described as a process, characterised by similar behaviours to narcissism, which involves the use of coercion and manipulation to achieve the leader's goals (Padilla et al., 2007). It is also referred to as a harmful behaviour (Krasikova et al., 2013). Schyns and Schilling (2013) note 12 different types of destructive leadership, including petty tyranny, abusive supervision and despotic leadership, demonstrating the varying conceptualisations of destructive leadership. Their definition of destructive leadership refers to the repeated actions of a supervisor that are perceived negatively. Key to this approach is the requirement of the leader to have formal authority over followers (Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

Krasikova et al. (2013) view destructive leadership as setting destructive goals and influencing people in destructive ways. More recently, the expanded definition of destructive leadership has been described as an influence process which includes negative behaviour, which has the potential to inflict harm, or the specific intent to inflict

harm on followers and the organisation (Mackey et al., 2021), extending to “abuse, bullying, manipulation, mistreatment, callousness and so on” (Ryan et al., 2021, p. 73).

Destructive leadership can also be considered an outcome, if the actions of the leader, follower and context result in damage or harm to stakeholders or the organisation. However, admittedly, not all outcomes of destructive leadership are adverse (Padilla et al., 2007); in some cases, it can lead to higher levels of performance from followers (Krasikova et al., 2013).

2.8.2 Toxic leadership

Toxic leaders exhibit negative behaviours, including the misuse of power, psychopathy and corruption (Akinyele & Chen, 2025). Toxic leadership should not be confused with the ‘toxic triangle’, which is the model developed by Padilla et al. (2007), depicting a triangle of destructive leaders, their followers and the environment which enables destructive leadership.

2.8.3 Unethical leadership

Although destructive leadership and unethical leadership are closely related, unethical leadership includes behaviour that is illegal, immoral, abusive or in breach of regulations (Hassan et al., 2023; Shafqat et al., 2025). Unethical leaders are said to be manipulative and rely on dominance and coercion to influence (Day et al., 2021). Their communication style can encourage unethical behaviour among their followers (Hassan et al., 2023), resulting in counterproductive workplace behaviour (Shafqat et al., 2025).

2.8.4 Dysfunctional leadership

The phenomenon of dysfunctional leadership is defined as complex, involving personality traits, organisational factors and contextual aspects (Abalkhail, 2022). A dysfunctional leader is described as a person who abuses power, demonstrates harmful behaviours and is humiliating, self-serving, insensitive and autocratic (Abalkhail, 2022; Patel & Hamlin, 2017). Specific dysfunctional behaviours mentioned in research include abusive language and public ridicule, blame, favouritism, attacking self-esteem and belittling (Abalkhail, 2022).

2.8.5 Abusive supervision

Tepper (2000) described abusive supervision as the perception of subordinates that their supervisors' ongoing hostile behaviour negatively influences their attitudes and

psychological well-being. The damage can extend beyond the organisation, even affecting subordinates' families (Tepper, 2007). Similarly, Xu et al. (2015) describe abusive supervision as a dysfunctional leadership behaviour which has an adverse impact on subordinates and the organisation. Mackey et al. (2021) find that studies focused on abusive supervision significantly outnumber the empirical studies in other styles of destructive leadership.

2.8.6 Laissez-faire leadership

The laissez-faire leadership style has been labelled as non-leadership in the way that leaders are seen to be passive and ineffective, they avoid making decisions or enforcing authority and even abdicating responsibility (Lerutla & Steyn, 2022). Some scholars consider laissez-faire leadership to be a destructive form of leadership due to its detrimental outcomes (Almeida et al., 2022; Fosse et al., 2019 Skogstad et al., 2007), although it could be appropriate with highly skilled employees who are not reliant on guidance (Fosse et al., 2019; Lerutla & Steyn, 2022). Some scholars who view laissez-faire leadership as ineffective (Lerutla & Steyn, 2022; Schyns & Schilling, 2013) have excluded it from destructive leadership due to the absence of hostility (Schyns & Schilling, 2013), while others have found evidence that laissez-faire leadership has a more pronounced negative impact on employee behaviour than abusive supervision (Klasmeier et al., 2022).

2.9 Comparison of negative leadership constructs

Upon inspecting the more negative leadership styles and the connections between them, it is apparent that there are several overlaps and similarities. Annexure C contains a map of the researcher's view of the connections between the leadership styles covered in the literature review. This map demonstrates the proliferation of constructs and various conceptualisations of bad or negative types of leadership covered in the literature review, and the explanation of the connections follow.

Abusive supervision has overlaps with petty tyranny, laissez-faire leadership as well as tyrannical leadership (Klasmeier et al., 2022; Tepper, 2000). Schyns and Schilling (2013) associate abusive supervision with destructive leadership. Gauglitz et al. (2023) point out that narcissistic rivalry, which is the more aggressive and defensive side of this personality trait, is directly related to abusive supervision; therefore, this links narcissism, abusive supervision and destructive leadership.

Although charismatic leadership is deemed to be a more positive leadership style, it is suggested that charisma is linked to destructive leadership, as destructive leaders are mostly described as charismatic (Padilla et al., 2007).

The aim of oppression, humiliation and antagonising subordinates is common in tyrannical leadership, abusive supervision and destructive leadership (Naseer et al., 2016). Machiavellianism is positively related to abusive supervision and likely associated with destructive leadership (Schyns et al., 2022), narcissism and psychopathy (Krasikova et al., 2013). Dysfunctional leadership is also linked to petty tyranny and bad leadership (Abalkhail, 2022).

Harmful leader behaviours, described as “intimidation, lack of care, self-centredness and excessive pressure for results” are associated with unethical leadership, specifically abusive supervision and destructive leadership behaviour (Almeida et al., 2022, p. 215), therefore, unethical leadership is related to abusive supervision and destructive leadership.

Psychopathy is included in the description of toxic leadership (Akinyele & Chen, 2025, whereas toxic leadership has also been described as taking various forms such as abusive supervision, destructive leadership and dysfunctional leadership, among others (Akinyele & Chen, 2025). Thus, toxic leadership is linked to abusive supervision, destructive leadership and dysfunctional leadership.

Notably, despite the difference in opinion of some scholars on the destructive nature of laissez-faire leadership, it is linked to both abusive supervision and destructive leadership (Almeida et al., 2022; Klasmeier et al., 2022).

In the midst of the numerous and varied conceptualisations of bad or negative leadership behaviour and leadership styles, the researcher has adopted the view that destructive leadership is a meta-construct, similar to Klasmeier et al. (2022), encompassing all forms of bad, negative, toxic, destructive and dysfunctional leadership behaviour.

2.10 Conclusions on bad leadership

Insights of behaviour can be gained from the views of leaders, their superiors, peers and followers to understand destructive leadership (Krasikova et al., 2013). The study of destructive leadership has been primarily based on how subordinates perceive their supervisors (Mackey et al., 2021; Modliba & Treffers, 2025), while the experience of other stakeholders in the organisation is unknown.

Unfortunately, leadership styles have been conflated with leadership behaviour, mixing the behaviour with leadership intent, execution or effect (Fischer et al., 2024; Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). Furthermore, terminologies and concepts have been used interchangeably in leadership descriptions (Hassan et al., 2023), making it difficult to understand and distinguish between the styles.

To crystallise this topic, Modliba and Treffers (2025) evaluated 25 leadership behaviours. They suggested that these leadership behaviours oscillate on a continuum between positivity and negativity, rather than being assessed as either good or bad. However, their systematic review was based on *leadership styles* rather than *behaviours,* which they defined as active, recurring and intentional behaviours targeted at individuals and teams and to a lesser extent, at the organisation (Modliba & Treffers, 2025).

Research describing actual negative behaviours of bad leaders is scarce due to the conflation of behavioural and non-behavioural concepts, such as leadership styles (Banks et al., 2023). A more dated example of a taxonomy of leadership behaviours is provided by Yukl (2012), it points out specific negative forms of behaviour, including unrealistic plans, micromanaging, excessive monitoring and unrealistic goals.

This study of leadership aims to understand what people do to influence others and recognises that behaviour is fundamental in the process of leadership (Fischer et al., 2023). The question that remains as a result of this review of the literature is as follows: Research Question 1 (RQ 1): How do stakeholders identify and experience the behaviours of destructive leaders?

2.11 Antecedents of bad leadership

2.11.1 Individual-level antecedents

Leaders' personality traits, including narcissism and psychopathic traits, as well as hubris, which is described as an inflated sense of self-worth, have been highlighted as antecedents for unethical leadership (Hassan et al., 2023). Emotional exhaustion and negative emotions have been suggested as antecedents for abusive supervision (Modliba & Treffers, 2025). Furthermore, stress, unattainable goals, uncertainty and abusive followers have been shown to cause negative leadership behaviour (Modliba & Treffers, 2025).

2.11.2 Subordinate-level antecedents

According to Padilla et al. (2007), personal leadership traits are insufficient to achieve destructive outcomes; the role of susceptible followers, as well as an enabling environment, must be considered. The antecedents at a subordinate level are, for example, abusive followership, as well as the relationship conflict that can arise between leaders and their followers (Modliba & Treffers, 2025). It is possible that the perception of destructive leadership can arise due to changes that are uncomfortable for employees, emphasising the need to establish antecedents when studying the phenomenon of destructive leadership (Li et al., 2024).

2.11.3 Organisational antecedents

Dysfunctional behaviour is likely in an environment that is lacking clear policies and rules (Patel & Hamlin, 2017). An accommodating corporate culture has been identified as a factor allowing toxic leadership to flourish (Akinyele & Chen, 2025), while the perception of a hostile or aggressive culture can result in negative behaviour (Modliba & Treffers, 2025). Other known antecedents of negative leadership behaviour include exposure to organisational change, as well as lower regulatory and moral identity (Modliba & Treffers, 2025). The excessive pressure for results that is commonplace in organisations today, may result in a single-minded drive for performance using destructive methods, and if successful these approaches can be supported by the top management team (Almeida et al., 2022). An interesting view is one whereby destructive leadership behaviour has a ripple effect beyond the point of impact, i.e. the incident between the leader and follower, which extends outwards within the organisation via a contagion effect and affecting the culture (Ryan et al., 2021).

2.11.4 Role of power and authority

In the absence of oversight, for example, by the board, the most senior leadership members in the organisation can operate autonomously; in cases of little or no oversight, destructive leadership goes unchecked, mainly for those in positions of power (Padilla et al., 2007). The lack of reporting mechanisms and opaque processes that deal with staff concerns is favourable for toxic leadership (Akinyele & Chen, 2025).

2.11.5 Environmental antecedents

In areas of low economic growth, high unemployment and a scarcity of jobs, subordinates will likely accept the consequences of bad leaders to secure their continued

employment and income (Naseer et al., 2016), allowing bad leadership behaviour to remain unchecked.

Narcissistic leaders will thrive in times of crisis and chaos, when there is a call for a new approach, but they are less effective in a stable environment, which requires only maintenance (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006).

2.11.6 Conclusions about the antecedents of bad leadership

Modliba and Treffers (2025) identify a number of antecedents of negative leadership behaviour at the supervisor, subordinate, dyad-related, as well as at the organisational levels. Interestingly, from their systematic review, the majority of the antecedents were supervisor-related, with far fewer at the other levels; however, structural antecedents, such as organisational change, require further investigation (Modliba & Treffers, 2025). Considering the need to include a broader set of perspectives, the following question was formulated: Research Question 2 (RQ 2): What do stakeholders see as the antecedents of destructive behaviours?

2.12 Consequences of bad leadership

2.12.1 Impact on employees

The consequences of poor leadership for employees, as described in the literature, are summarised in Annexure A; they are categorised into active responses to poor leadership, such as aggression, psychological impacts, including lower job satisfaction and emotional states, such as depression. Emotional contagion can spread the mood or emotions of individuals through observation, as well as direct and indirect interactions (Barsade et al., 2018). While from a team perspective, negative emotions can result in lower task performance (Barsade et al., 2018). A brief discussion of the consequences found in the literature, for employees who experience the destructive leadership types in section 2.8, is provided here:

Abusive supervision

Victims of abusive supervision claim an impact on attitude and psychological distress, which can result in resistance (Tepper, 2000, 2007). In response to abusive supervision, subordinates will likely experience emotional exhaustion and employ silence, a counterproductive behaviour, by intentionally withholding information about ideas, concerns or issues, which has the potential to affect the organisation adversely (Xu et al., 2015). Silence can be an active form of retaliation against abusive supervisors from

subordinates (Xu et al., 2015) or defensive silence, which is used as a coping mechanism to protect oneself against destructive behaviour (Guo et al., 2018; Hao et al., 2022).

Unethical leadership

Employees experiencing unethical leadership are prone to psychological distress (Cialdini et al., 2021). The exposure to unethical practices by leadership can cause malfeasance, resistance to change, hiding and deviant workplace behaviour (Hassan et al., 2023). Unethical leadership has been found to create a feeling of isolation among employees, which ultimately can result in counterproductive workplace behaviour, such as acts of revenge (Shafqat et al., 2025).

Destructive leadership

Destructive leadership behaviour is associated with burnout and negative emotions, increased turnover and lower performance in a military context (Fosse et al., 2019), extending to emotional exhaustion and depression, which may likely result in retaliation, resistance and counterproductive work behaviour (Schyns et al., 2022; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). In line with social exchange theory, negative treatment by a leader will result in negative emotions and related behaviour from their subordinates (Fosse et al., 2019). If the subordinate's reciprocal relational expectation is not met, retaliation could result (Toader & Kunze, 2021).

Dysfunctional leadership

Dysfunctional leadership can directly influence employees to resign and impacts their emotional state and level of work commitment (Abalkhail, 2022). Specific consequences include damage to self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy, working under the threat of being dismissed, and damage to their career, and (Abalkhail, 2022). The experience of the behaviour of a dysfunctional leader can create severe psychological problems for employees, which can filter through to other areas of the organisation, as well as the employee's family life (Abalkhail, 2022).

Toxic leadership

Toxic leadership is conceptualised as being multi-faceted and cannot be thought of as merely a few negative behaviours (Akinyele & Chen, 2025). The impact of toxic leadership behaviours on employees is profound and includes psychological distress, emotional disturbance, stress, turnover intentions and fear (Akinyele & Chen, 2025).

Laissez-faire *leadership*

Despite the debate on whether laissez-faire leadership is destructive or not, the impact on employees can be detrimental (Fosse et al., 2019) and can extend to role uncertainty, which is created by the failure to provide information or feedback, being exposed to conflict with co-workers due to leaders abdicating their responsibilities, and psychological distress (Skogstad et al., 2007). In comparison with Abusive supervision, laissez-faire leadership was found to have a more negative impact on employee behaviour (Klasmeier et al., 2022).

Employee turnover and intention to leave

Destructive leadership will affect employees' positive attitude towards their job (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Reduced job satisfaction and the resultant intention to resign are noted as outcomes of destructive leadership (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Dysfunctional leadership is attributed directly to employees' intention to leave, decreased performance, and reduced work commitment (Abalkhail, 2022).

Employee turnover, absenteeism, and lower performance are consequences of abusive supervision and poor leadership behaviour, while higher turnover intentions result from unethical leadership (Akinyele & Chen, 2025; Cialdini et al., 2021). In contrast, the lack of turnover may disguise employee turnover intentions, as followers may be forced to stay due to limited alternative employment opportunities (Tepper, 2000).

2.12.2 Impact on organisations

Reputation and brand damage

Unethical behaviour can be costly due to reputational damage (Cialdini et al., 2021) because it exposes the organisation to costly reparations, regulatory fines and sanctions (Kenton, 2022) and potential legal action too. Reputational damage, as a result of the actions of the company or an employee, can lead to reduced revenue, lower profits and reduced market value, which will negatively affect shareholders (Kenton, 2022). As a result of radical or scandalous behaviour, the public and investors may lose trust in management and this behaviour could affect the likelihood of an organisation being able to attract new employees (Kamp & Graf-Vlachy, 2024) or retain existing talent.

Financial losses

The financial costs of employees' psychological distress can be significant for organisations. For example, a lack of sleep may result in difficulties coping with the demands of the job, mistakes being made, which can result in losses, and, in more pronounced cases, the loss of productive labour and increased healthcare costs (Tepper, 2000). As a result of destructive leadership behaviour, employees may resort to counterproductive work behaviour, for example, the misuse of company resources, theft, destruction of property and sabotage, which may result in a financial cost (Marcus et al., 2016). Beyond financial losses, toxic leadership can result in shrinking profitability, impacting growth and raising the likelihood of organisational sabotage (Akinyele & Chen, 2025).

Costly turnover

High turnover can be expensive, especially the loss of highly skilled employees who are difficult to replace and whose departure also causes losses in productive capacity (Cialdini et al., 2021). There are numerous costs associated with hiring new employees (Akinyele & Chen, 2025), including advertising costs, candidate assessments, the use of recruitment companies and training.

Deterioration of organisational culture

Negative experiences at work are not unusual for most people, but the misconduct and failures of leadership require that the role of organisational cultures and social and societal factors be understood (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). Toader and Kunze (2021) caution about the outcomes of negative leadership behaviour, which includes retaliation from employees. However, equally damaging is the adoption of this negative behaviour by employees, which perpetuates a hostile environment within the organisation. Employees may resort to silence rather than speaking up, for fear of retaliation, indicating an environment devoid of psychological safety, which may affect the organisation's quality of decision making, innovation, group dynamics and ability to execute effectively (Edmondson & Mortensen, 2021).

Dysfunctional leadership and its associated negative behaviours can contribute to a dysfunctional organisational culture, characterised as lacking trust, disloyalty and displaying an egocentric attitude (Abalkhail, 2022). Modliba and Treffers (2025) describe the consequences of negative leadership as increased deviance, reduced identification with organisational values and lower organisational citizenship behaviour.

2.12.3 Conclusions about the consequences of bad leadership

Some behaviours have unintended consequences (Yukl, 2012), and although this could provide interesting insights, it would require knowledge of both the intended and unintended consequences of a particular behaviour, typically the purview of more senior levels of management in an organisation.

In summary, the consequences of negative leadership behaviours at an employee level include inter alia: frustration, absenteeism, turnover intention, lower performance, lower job satisfaction (Modliba & Treffers, 2025), emotional and psychological impacts, silence, stress, fear, revenge and retaliation.

Interestingly, some scholars propose that destructive leadership is not exclusively bad; some good outcomes can result (Thoroughgood et al., 2012). In fact, there are negative leadership types that are considered to be positive, for example, an autocratic leader is seen as positive for the psychological safety in teams (Modliba & Treffers, 2025).

The consequences of poor leadership are severe at both the individual and organisational levels, emphasising the importance for businesses to be able to identify, manage and mitigate the effects of poor leadership. Although the consequences of bad leadership have been studied mainly from the perspective of subordinates and focused more on the negative consequences, Modliba and Treffers (2025) suggest that the positive and negative consequences at different hierarchical levels would benefit from conceptual development.

In consideration of the consequences reviewed in the literature, the following question from the perspective of stakeholders was formulated: Research Question 3 (RQ 3): What are the consequences of destructive behaviours at the individual and organisational levels?

2.13 Contexts allowing for bad leadership

2.13.1 Organisational contexts

Flatter organisational structures are said to improve communication and remove any hindrance to the flow of information (Hassan et al., 2023). In contrast, a more hierarchical structure with its defined levels of authority can create a structural environment that is conducive to toxic and unethical leadership, creating the opportunity to distort information (Hassan et al., 2023). This is especially the case in cultural settings where it is deemed inappropriate to challenge those in authority (Akinyele & Chen, 2025).

In the absence of reporting mechanisms or controls and where management has more autonomy, the possibility for toxic leadership emerges (Akinyele & Chen, 2025). However, the lack of control and oversight not only leads to negative leadership behaviour but can also allow these behaviours to go unnoticed. Similarly, a high degree of discretion in senior roles with less supervision or oversight allows destructive leaders to abuse their power (Padilla et al., 2007). Aligning with the consensus view, Hassan et al. (2023) also raise the lack of appropriate oversight and control mechanisms as potentially facilitating unethical behaviour.

In comparison to leaders in the voluntary sectors, there is a higher likelihood of negative behaviours from leaders who work in for-profit companies (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). It is thought that non-profit companies are more likely to have power-sharing and democratic management styles, whereas leaders in for-profit companies are said to have concentrations of power and control over resources in their leadership teams (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008), which is necessary to achieve their personal goals and the goals of the organisation, stakeholders and shareholders.

Organisational change, such as retrenchments or downsizing, has been linked to negative leadership behaviours (Tepper, 2000). Stressful change and organisational crises can benefit from the narcissistic tendencies of leaders because they are confident and able to inspire their followers (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006) and be reassuring in times of crisis (Modliba & Treffers, 2025),

2.13.2 Culture and conducive environments

Unethical leadership relies on a supporting cultural environment. This has implications for government at a policy level. Policies should promote ethical leadership across all sectors of the economy (Hassan et al., 2023).

When the outcome of destructive methods to influence employees is deemed to be effective or successful in achieving the organisation's objectives, this behaviour will likely be tolerated and potentially celebrated (Krasikova et al., 2013). Cultural norms also play a role in fostering toxic leadership, for example, in societies where challenging those in authority or elders is frowned upon (Akinyele & Chen, 2025).

Destructive leadership will thrive in an environment of instability, where there is perceived or actual threat, or an organisational culture of uncertainty avoidance and a concentration of power, as well as one where there is no governance, oversight or other type of control system (Padilla et al., 2007). An environment can result in the behaviour becoming

systemic, where others mirror their leader's behaviour and reinforce the culture suggesting a contagion effect (Ryan et al., 2021). Particularly in their research on silence in the workplace, Kim and Wang (2024) assert that leaders set the example for employees.

2.13.3 Conclusions about the contexts allowing for bad leadership

The lack of governance, controls, and oversight features prominently among the contexts that enable poor leadership, as well as stressful changes, downsizing and organisational crises. The current business environment, characterised by rapid and sudden changes, may be an ideal breeding ground for poor leadership. Due to the widespread, dire consequences associated with bad leadership, it is necessary to understand the processes, policies and mechanisms that should be implemented to manage and mitigate bad and negative leadership behaviour.

2.14 Managing and mitigating bad leadership

2.14.1 Exploring the mitigants for bad leadership behaviour

Scholars have recommended specific policies and procedures to manage negative leadership behaviour (Hassan et al., 2023), including screening and selection feedback mechanisms from subordinates, such as 360-degree reviews (Naseer et al., 2016; Patel et al., 2022), training programmes (Cunha et al., 2024; Hassan et al., 2023; Naseer et al., 2016; Patel et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2015) and whistle-blowing protection (Naseer et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2015).

The consequences of the failure to detect dysfunctional behaviour in leaders have a long-term impact on those individuals who suffer the effects of this behaviour, as well as their organisations (Abalkhail, 2022). Therefore, the mechanisms to detect, prevent and manage this type of behaviour are essential for the well-being of staff and the organisation at large.

2.14.2 Human resource processes and policies

Due to the harmful effects of despotic leadership, organisations should be cautious about appointing these individuals in the first place (Naseer et al., 2016). Selection processes should include personality assessments to avoid the appointment of unethical leaders due to the potential for profound impact on staff and the organisation (Hassan et al., 2023).

The performance evaluations of leaders should include feedback from subordinates, as this may highlight issues related to bad behaviour (Naseer et al., 2016). However, this assumes that subordinates feel safe to report such behaviour and may therefore require a strict level of anonymity. Patel et al. (2022) echo similar guidance to include input from subordinates for managers' performance assessments. To avoid promoting individuals with narcissistic, psychopathic or Machiavellian traits, a 360-degree feedback from peers, superiors and subordinates is recommended (Schyns et al., 2022), as this feedback will highlight negative behavioural tendencies.

2.14.3 Training and development

Management training programmes should include modules on ethics (Hassan et al., 2023) and the awareness of the effects of abusive supervision to reinforce positive leadership practices (Xu et al., 2015). As much as it is crucial to ensure that leaders receive training on acceptable behaviour, it is essential to create an awareness of the consequences of bad leadership within the organisation (Naseer et al., 2016).

Patel et al. (2022) propose training courses and sensitivity initiatives to boost emotional intelligence and awareness of how leaders' behaviour is perceived, thereby minimising undesirable behaviour and maximising effectiveness. Training programmes should aid in identifying and managing destructive leaders, as well as understanding the effects of their behaviour (Cunha et al., 2024). Development activities should aim to improve culture and counteract the consequences and, presumably, the prevalence of toxic leadership (Akinyele & Chen, 2025).

2.14.4 Feedback, escalation and consequence management

Performance monitoring

Part of performance management programmes in organisations includes feedback in the form of engagement between the leader and subordinate to discuss overall outcomes, successes and areas requiring improvement. This feedback should consist of the result of any 360-degree reviews, where applicable. It is essential to understand how the input is received, as this can vary depending on the recipient's personality type. For example, the kind of response to performance feedback varies for dark triad leaders, as guided by Schyns et al. (2022):

- Negative: Narcissists typically disregard feedback, are unlikely to change their behaviour and may even react aggressively.

- Positive: Machiavellians will likely take on board and learn from feedback.
- Positive with explanation: Psychopathic leaders are unconcerned with right or wrong performance but they can understand what is acceptable behaviour versus what is not permitted.

As a result of these varied responses to feedback on performance and 360-degree reviews from peers and colleagues, leadership must adjust the way that the feedback is given to make sure that the message is understood clearly.

Whistle-blower protections

Whistle-blowing refers to the action of reporting wrongdoing by an individual, who may be at risk of losing their job (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005), which leads to the need for mechanisms to be in place to protect whistle-blowers from retaliation. Without protection, employees may refrain from reporting due to fear of consequences (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005).

Given that subordinates suffering the effects of abusive supervision may tend to resort to silence (Hao et al., 2022), the need for a safe escalation mechanism and protection mechanisms to ensure that the subordinate does not experience any adverse effects for such reporting must be emphasised (Xu et al., 2015). Naseer et al. (2016) suggest implementing a complaint handling process as a way for employees to report bad leader behaviour anonymously. Anonymity is vital due to the propensity of narcissists to retaliate (Schyns et al., 2022).

Clear disciplinary procedures

Organisations should implement policies and rules relating to abusive supervision, including consequence management to punish such behaviours (Xu et al., 2015). Awareness is insufficient to prevent the occurrence of dysfunctional behaviour; therefore, disciplinary action must be taken against leaders who behaviour in this manner (Patel & Hamlin, 2017). The disciplinary action should be reflected in performance ratings and impact remuneration (Schyns et al., 2022); in extreme cases, individuals should be removed from leadership roles.

2.15 Conclusion

The literature review is necessary to understand what is known about a topic and is fundamental to any research project (Webster & Watson, 2002). This review encompassed literature on leadership, leadership styles, effective leadership styles, as

well as a more detailed examination of scholarly work on poor or negative leadership, negative leadership constructs and how they are distinguished. The literature provided insight into the consequences of bad leadership from an employee and organisational perspective, as well as the contexts and mitigation strategies to address destructive leader behaviour. The researcher's approach for generating the research questions was to look for gaps in the literature, as opposed to the problematisation approach proposed by Alvesson and Sandberg (2011). This approach is explained further in the following section.

Chapter 3: Research questions

3.1 Introduction

A typical research approach is to develop research questions in a manner that extends or builds upon prior studies or identifies a gap in the literature (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). This section highlights areas of negative leadership that scholars have highlighted for future research, the themes identified and the research questions that this study aims to address.

Avoid conflating leadership style and behaviour

One theme identified in the literature was the conflation of leadership styles and the associated behaviours, and therefore the focus of the current research is to investigate the experience of destructive leaders' behaviour, with emphasis on behaviour.

The leader, follower and environment

According to Padilla et al. (2007), while leadership studies have focused on the individual leader, and the followers and the contexts that promote destructive leadership, what is needed is the study of all three or at least the leader and followers (Padilla et al., 2007). More recent research by Mackey et al. (2021) seems to echo a similar view, calling for research to improve the understanding of the antecedents of destructive behaviours and expand the scant research focusing on leaders, in combination with the role of followers and organisational environments that encourage destructive leadership.

Supervisors and subordinates

Modliba and Treffers (2025) explain that it is possible that leaders do not perceive their behaviour as negative, therefore future research should investigate supervisors' perceptions of their behaviour and match supervisors' and subordinates' perceptions. This could satisfy the call for research on social exchanges with co-workers and other stakeholders which needs further exploration (Ahmad et al., 2023; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Conceptualisation, antecedents and consequences

Modliba and Treffers (2025) suggest that more research is needed to understand the conceptualisation, antecedents and consequences of destructive leadership behaviours for subordinates, organisations and the leaders themselves. The literature review

presented in Chapter 2 identified some gaps that need to be addressed to expand the understanding of destructive leadership behaviour, the experience thereof, its antecedents and the consequences for individuals and organisations.

3.2 Research question 1

Multiple bad and negative leadership styles were described in section 2.8, all of which can be grouped under destructive leadership as a meta-construct. Although there are numerous descriptions of these leadership styles, the research of actual behaviours is scarce due to the conflation between leadership style and behaviour (Banks et al., 2023). Leadership should be conceptualised as a practice of influencing others, it is what people do, and hence the call for leadership science to focus on behaviours (Banks et al., 2023), the antecedents and consequences of these behaviours (Fischer et al., 2023).

Fischer and Sitkin (2023) bemoan the leadership research field for studying what good leaders and bad leaders do, rather they urge scholars to remove the valenced conceptualisations of leadership and instead focus on what leaders do. In particular they recommend keeping leader behaviour apart from employee evaluations and contextual features (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). Mackey et al. (2021) suggest that researchers study the full extent of destructive leadership including the experience by leaders, employees and the organisation.

The emphasis being that research should focus on behaviour, and the experience of this behaviour. Given the various conceptualisation of destructive leadership in section 2.8, for example toxic, negative, and dysfunctional leadership, it is not clear whether stakeholders would identify destructive behaviour as a leadership style, Furthermore, there is more to understand about the experience of destructive leadership behaviour by different stakeholders across the management hierarchy. Therefore, the research question is as follows:

RQ 1: How do stakeholders identify and experience the behaviours of destructive leaders?

3.3 Research question 2

Of the older research in the literature review, destructive leadership was deemed to be an outcome of three different influences, namely subordinates, an enabling environment and the leader's personal traits (Padilla et al., 2007). There may be unanswered questions about the types of culture, performance norms, rewards, and superior's actions

which can contribute towards toxic leadership, and which need further investigation (Day et al., 2021).

In some instances, the perception of destructive leadership can be misguided, in that the perception may be influenced by employee discomfort rather than intentional behaviour, so there is a need to establish the antecedents when studying the phenomena of destructive leadership (Li et al., 2024). The review of the literature of destructive leadership revealed a number of antecedents, including hubris, emotional exhaustion, stress and unattainable goals (Hassan et al., 2023; Modliba & Treffers, 2025).

The organisational environment is deemed to play a role, if not in causing destructive behaviour, but enabling or allowing for the behaviour to thrive. The type of environment that is seen as enabling for destructive leadership include those that lack proper governance, controls, without appropriate reporting mechanisms, and where people in positions of power and authority are untouchable (Akinyele & Chen, 2025). Contextual factors can play a role in destructive leadership behaviour too, such as pressure for results, organisation change or a crisis situation (Almeida et al., 2022; Modliba & Treffers, 2025; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006).

The literature revealed a number of antecedents related to destructive leadership, however due to the conflation of leadership styles with behaviour, it is not clear whether stakeholders would view the antecedents of behaviour (as opposed to leadership style) in a similar way. Hence the research question is as follows:

RQ 2: What do stakeholders see as the antecedents of destructive behaviours?

3.4 Research question 3

The literature reviewed, relating to the consequences of destructive leadership behaviour, revealed a number of concerning findings. The examples of consequences for employees, as contained in the literature, range from active aggression, retaliation and revenge to more passive responses like depression, exhaustion, and silence, resulting in psychological and emotional damage, distress, stress, fear and absenteeism (Abalkhail, 2022; Akinyele & Chen, 2025; Cialdini et al., 2021; Schyns et al., 2022; Tepper, 2000, 2007; Xu et al., 2015).

Amongst the consequences of destructive leadership for the organisation in the literature, scholars identified reputational damage, financial losses, theft, destruction of property and sabotage, costly turnover especially for skilled employees and the deterioration of

the organisational culture (Abalkhail, 2022; Akinyele & Chen, 2025; Cialdini et al., 2021; Marcus et al., 2016; Modliba & Treffers, 2025). Furthermore, the adoption by employees of the destructive behaviour they observe, has consequences for organisations, due to the contagion effect, which spreads this negative and destructive behaviour across the organisation (Barsade et al., 2018). The literature highlighted the negative impact of destructive leadership on culture, including creating a lack of trust, disloyalty, a lack of psychological safety, and lower organisational citizenship behaviour (Edmondson & Mortensen, 2021; Modliba & Treffers, 2025; Toader & Kunze, 2021).

What is known from the destructive leadership literature reviewed, are the consequences for individuals and the organisation. What is yet to be determined is whether these consequences differ when studying the *destructive behaviour* of leaders, rather than *destructive leadership styles*. Hence the following research question:

Research Question 3: What are the consequences of destructive behaviours at the individual and organisational levels?

This concludes section 3, and the following section presents the choices, design and research methods applicable for this study.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

4.1 Introduction

The most common elements contributing to the research methodology include the research objectives, the type of data needed, a definition of the population and sampling process, the time, the collection of data, and the data analysis approach (O'leary, 2004). All of the choices in relation to research methods need to address the research questions, and within the capacity of the researcher to achieve (O'leary, 2004), making sure there is alignment between the approach, the paradigm, the method, the data, and the analysis approach (O'leary, 2004) which is explained in the sections that follow.

4.2 Research design

Constructivism, often linked to interpretivism, is a worldview which holds that the understanding of meaning or experiences of individuals is varied, subjective, complex and formed by social norms and context (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Interpretivists focus on the participants and seek to understand their experiences (Samnani, 2013) and the meaning that individuals have of the world or the phenomena being considered (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Phenomenology focuses on an individual's lived experience of a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), not the causes, or the description thereof and can provide a way to explore and understand the social world (O'leary, 2004).

In this research, the researcher sought to understand people's perceptions and experiences of harmful or destructive leadership; hence, the proposed study is aligned with an interpretivist approach.

There is an element of uncertainty related to the topic of this study, due to the conflation of leadership styles and behaviour (Banks et al., 2023), as well as the proliferation of constructs (Mackey et al., 2021), and some scholars suggest that research on leadership should return to the study of behaviour (Fischer et al., 2023), and therefore the research is somewhat exploratory, aiming to extend the understanding of destructive behaviour.

4.2.1 Strategy

Qualitative research, in particular phenomenological research, is suited to exploring individuals lived experiences (Braun et al., 2019; O'leary, 2004) and understanding how they interpret social situations or problems, whereas quantitative research seeks to test the relationship or comparison of variables using statistical measurements (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). A qualitative research design was

appropriate in this study (Bhattacherjee, 2012) because it sought to explore and understand the phenomenon of destructive leadership.

The researcher concurs with Scheffler and Brunzel (2020), in that most of the research focusing on negative or destructive leadership has been quantitative in nature, dominated by questionnaires and self-report surveys (Banks et al., 2023; Fischer et al., 2023), which do not provide in-depth insight into leadership behaviours (Fischer et al., 2023). In this study, the researcher distinguished between destructive leader behaviours and the subjective evaluations of these behaviours from a second- or third-party perspective. This outcome was achieved using a semi-structured interview format, which, while enabling data comparability, also allowed for unanticipated, yet potentially valuable lines of enquiry to be pursued.

The approach applied in this study can be considered a mono method in that a qualitative method was used to collect and analyse data, rather than a mixed method, which combines qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). More specifically, this study used a "fully qualitative approach" (Braun et al., 2019, p. 848) in that qualitative data were collected from semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), and a reflexive thematic analysis technique, similar to that of Braun et al. (2019), was used for the analysis of the data.

4.2.2 Time horizon

Although a cross-sectional approach presents a limited view of the phenomena (Bhattacherjee, 2012), due to time constraints, the researcher was unable to conduct longitudinal research.

4.3 Research methodology

4.3.1 Population

This study sought to understand destructive leadership from the perspective of subordinates or line managers, specifically those individuals with experience of this phenomenon. Culture and sectoral uniqueness do not influence employees' perception of negative leader behaviour; therefore, sample selection could comfortably cut across industries (Patel et al., 2022). Similarly, leadership behaviours and perceptions thereof are found to be the same among leaders with culturally different backgrounds (Lerutla & Steyn, 2022). No cultural or sectoral limitations were applied to the selection of the study

population. Due to the researcher's locality, all participants, except for one, were localised to South Africa.

In comparison to leaders in the non-profit sector, leaders who work in for-profit companies are more likely to display negative behaviours (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008), hence their inclusion in the population. However, individuals working in non-profit organisations were not excluded, provided they had experienced destructive leadership.

Individuals may likely experience negative emotions as a result of destructive leadership behaviour, especially in the case of subordinates who may suffer the effects of this behaviour more acutely in the short term. The negative emotions experienced will play a role in the memory of this behaviour (Sharot & Yonelinas, 2008). Although adverse events are remembered more accurately (Kensinger, 2009), some details of the experience may be lost over time.

However, given the potentially emotive nature of such recollections, the researcher did not sample respondents who were currently experiencing or witnessing destructive leadership; the toxic leadership events were from past experiences. The accounts of respondents were likely to be more objective due to the time and space that had elapsed between the event and their mental processing of it, with consequent diminishment of any emotional discomfort. To ensure that respondents' memories of the event were still clear, the timeframe of investigation was between 18 and 36 months after the occurrence; however, some participants did share more recent experiences.

Participants were advised that if they experienced negative emotions during the interview, the interview would be stopped. None of the participants requested the interview to be halted, nor did they exhibit any visible signs of discomfort. None requested the services of a coach or counsellor.

Participants were selected from two groups of employees: those who were subordinates of a destructive leader and those who supervised or managed destructive leaders. Thus, all had experience of working with or working for a destructive leader.

4.3.2 Unit and level of analysis

The unit of analysis is the target of the study (Bhattacherjee, 2012). In this study, the investigation focused on the individual level. The topic of the inquiry was destructive leadership, which required a focus on a leader's role within a hierarchical organisation. To understand the experience of individuals most closely related to a destructive leader,

the level of analysis was at two different levels of the organisational hierarchy: the senior management level and the subordinate level.

4.3.3 Sampling and sampling criteria

Non-probability sampling applies in situations where some members of the population cannot be selected to participate in the study (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Purposive sampling is the most commonly used of the non-probability sampling types (Guest et al., 2017).

It was essential to purposefully select participants who were involved or exposed to the area of interest for this study. This type of sampling is used in qualitative studies to choose participants who understand the problem and can answer the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The purposive sample was selected from the researcher's professional network. The recruitment process included a message to the researcher's network on social media and communication groups to invite participation from those who had experience working for or with destructive leaders at a previous employer within the past 18 to 36 months. As explained in section 4.3.1, the criteria of the elapsed time was to minimise emotional discomfort, to potentially gain a more objective view and an accurate account of the experience from participants.

Convenience sampling has the lowest level of credibility of all approaches (Guest et al., 2017). It involves recruiting readily available participants (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The initial purposive sampling failed to provide sufficient participants for the leader group in the study, so the researcher requested that personal contacts refer other individuals who matched the required criteria for participation (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

4.3.4 Sample size

Qualitative research methods, such as interviews, are characterised by a small number of participants and although no definitive number of participants exists, Creswell and Creswell (2023) suggest that this number can differ depending on the approach, for example, up to ten for phenomenology, 20 participants for the descriptive method and as many as 30 for grounded theory.

Nowell and Albrecht (2019) state that qualitative studies with over 100 participants are rare and those with fewer than ten participants would need to be justified. Benchmarking sample sizes against existing literature is helpful (Nowell & Albrecht, 2019). Of the

qualitative literature reviewed, Motsei and Nkomo (2016) included 25 participants in a comparative study in the field of investigation.

The researcher bifurcated the sample for purposes of triangulation by choosing ten respondents who were, or had been, directly reporting to destructive leaders and a further ten respondents who had managed a destructive leader. It is important to note that none of the respondents formed part of an existing managerial hierarchy within a specific organisation. This was to reduce the risk of respondent bias.

To ensure a heterogeneous sample with maximum variation, participants from the same organisation were limited to no more than two. As such, the target sample included 20 respondents drawn from a minimum of ten organisations. The total intended sample was well within the 10–30 range described above. As this was a phenomenological design, 20 participants would exceed the quantum suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2023).

4.3.5 Research instrument

The consistency matrix (Annexure D) provides information on how the research questions were derived from the literature and the data collection tool to be used. Data collection instruments for in-depth interviews require an interview guide. The research instrument used in this study on destructive leadership was adapted from Vanek (2024). However, the researcher changed the thrust of the interview guide to ensure that the questions directly addressed the topic of the investigation, which emphasised the role of stakeholder experiences of destructive leadership behaviours. To ensure that the theoretical line of sight was maintained, the interview questions were directly linked to and are a subset of the study's research questions (Annexure E).

Semi-structured interviews are a more flexible approach to gathering the participants' views because they allow exploration of other ideas that may surface during the interview (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Although no definitive number of questions is prescribed for interviews, Creswell and Creswell (2023) suggest no more than ten questions, which is the number of questions in the interview guide for this study (Annexure E).

4.3.6 Data collection

Krasikova et al. (2013) assert that qualitative methods, such as interviews with leaders, their superiors, peers and followers, are likely to improve the understanding of

destructive leadership. The addition of all these stakeholders provides an alternative view to leaders' self-reports.

In a qualitative study, data gathering includes observations, interviews, documents and social media or audio-visual materials (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). For this study, in accordance with the qualitative mono-method approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted.

The use of technology to conduct online interviews is preferable to the face-to-face interview option, which would exclude participants outside a particular geographical area (Peasgood et al., 2023). Given the current prevalence of virtual meetings and the preference for online interviews among employed individuals (Peasgood et al., 2023), interviews were conducted online, using Microsoft Teams, which removed the limitation of geographical proximity for participation.

Data were collected from the proposed 1-hour interviews with each of the 20 participants, which were recorded using the Microsoft Teams recording feature. Furthermore, Microsoft Teams has a transcription function which aids in the verbatim transcription of each interview. The interview transcripts served as the primary data source for the analysis process, which is described next.

4.3.7 Data analysis

The analytic process described by Creswell and Creswell (2023) includes organising, reading, coding, applying themes, interpretation, framework application and representation. For this study, the researcher's approach is closely aligned to thematic analysis as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach is preferable when time is limited and it is flexible enough to be used across a range of research methods and research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis entails searching across data to identify patterns, and it follows a six-step process, including reading the data, generating codes, identifying themes, refining and defining those themes and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The researcher's background, experiences, values, perceptions and assumptions will play a role in the research, especially in qualitative studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), while the subjectivity brought by the researcher is integral to the approach (Braun et al., 2019). In particular, in reflexive thematic analysis, the interpretation, identification of patterns in the data, the analysis and assumptions are those of the researcher (Byrne, 2022), and the experience of destructive behaviour by the researcher as a subordinate,

and as a manager, may present a certain bias to the coding, analysis, interpretation and presentation of the study.

Computer-aided qualitative data analysis software, such as ATLAS.ti, can assist in the analysis of qualitative data (O'Kane et al., 2021). The researcher chose to use ATLAS.ti for the analysis of the data for this study because this tool was used effectively in a study by Motsei and Nkomo (2016), and a tool familiar to the researcher.

4.3.7.1 Coding

Coding, the process of assigning meaning to data, is a helpful tool for answering research questions. The types of codes can vary from semantic, or the surface meaning of data, to latent codes, which seek to describe the underlying meaning of the data (Braun et al., 2019; Byrne, 2022).

The coding process can be conducted using an inductive approach, which involves assigning codes that reflect the data without applying any preconceived ideas. On the other hand, a deductive approach to coding is driven by theory and references from a predetermined codebook (Byrne, 2022). Braun et al. (2019) suggest that the use of codebooks may affect the quality of qualitative analysis, so a codebook was not applied for this study.

The researcher applied an inductive approach, using the method of in vivo coding to assign initial codes. In vivo coding is a method that keeps the codes close to the language used by participants, highlighting the words or phrases that are meaningful (Saldaña, 2011). The list of codes can be found in Appendix F. The initial coding of the transcripts from the interviews with subordinates was concluded first, followed by the transcripts from the managers and stakeholders. One of the approaches to thematic analysis suggest that within 6 to 12 interviews, no new information is gathered, which is referred to as the point of saturation, however Braun et al. (2019) are not convinced of the usefulness of saturation as a guide to sample size nor is it useful for thematic analysis. A graphical representation of the number of codes generated from each interview for subordinates and leaders, is presented below (Figure 1), and although saturation was not the primary goal of the coding process, there was a slight decline in the number of codes generated, as the coding process progressed.

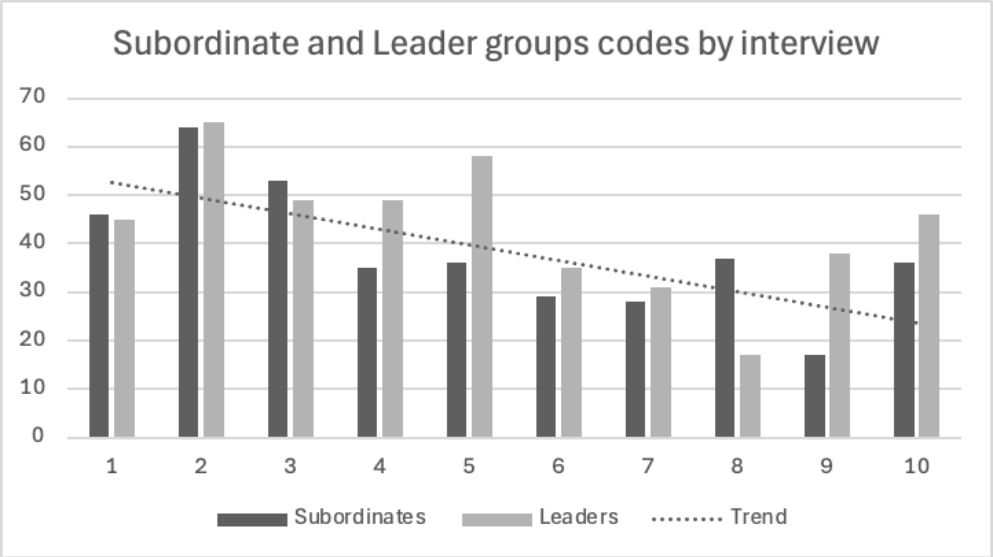

Figure 1: No. of codes generated for subordinate and leader groups by interview

4.3.7.2 Application of thematic analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis is comprised of six phases, (i) familiarising yourself with the data, (ii) generating initial codes, (iii) searching for themes, (iv) reviewing themes, (v) defining and naming the themes and (vi) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This section describes how these phases were applied for this study, the most notable deviation from Braun & Clarke (2006) is multiple coders.

Post the interviews with participants, the transcripts were loaded into Atlas.ti for the purposes of coding. The researcher started by reviewing the data without coding, a process referred to as **phase one** in reflexive thematic analysis, described as familiarising oneself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022).

The researcher then initiated the process of initial coding, highlighting sections in the data that held meaningful insights, which would contribute to answering the research questions referred to as **phase two** in reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). The initial coding process on Atlas.ti generated 816 codes, which the researcher considered too unwieldy for thematic aggregation (Annexure F). The in vivo codes were then extracted into Microsoft Excel for ease of working with such a large group of codes. The researcher proceeded to group the codes into categories to generate increasingly abstract categories, allowing for easier eventual comparison of data-derived material to theory-derived concepts.

Aligned with **phase 3** of reflexive thematic analysis, the researcher reviewed each code in relation to the broader list of codes to identify similarities (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne,

2022), a process which resulted in 445 consolidated groups. A large number of code groups were linked to very few codes, so the researcher chose to focus on those that held more significance for the study – specifically, those with five or more linked codes in keeping with **phase 4** of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). Table 1 lists the 35 sub-themes, sorted in alphabetical order, along with a brief description and the number of codes associated with each.

Table 1: Sub-themes, descriptions and linked codes

Sub-themes	Description/contains	Codes linked
Absent leader	Absence of leader, withdrawal and a leadership vacuum	12
Anger and rage	Shouting, screaming, swearing, being triggered	9
Assimilation	Observing, experiencing and imitating behaviour of others	8
Blame	Blame shifting, assigning blame and denying responsibility	9
Bullying	Aftermath of bullying, the behaviour, assigning affect and toxicity	21
Culture	Culture as antecedent or culture as a tool of fear and intimidation	12
Emotional and psychological	Impact on emotions, psychological effect and contagion	15
Fear	Fear, anxiety, silence, culture, financial insecurity, fear of retaliation, retribution, victimisation and a fear-based environment	28
Hiding	Avoiding the spotlight, hiding for protection and hiding a lack of skills	7
High turnover	Volume of people leaving, churn	6
Incentives	Incentives and rewards as antecedents, both good and bad outcomes	8
Insecurity	Insecurity as an antecedent	9
Intention to leave	People looking to leave	6
Intentionality	Intention to inflict harm, disrespect and demeaning	9
Lack of trust	No trust in the protection systems	8
Lingering effect	Long-term impact of the experience	12

Sub-themes	Description/contains	Codes linked
Management style	Linking behaviour to leadership styles	6
Mental and physical health	Impact on mental and physical health	9
Micromanagement	Control, suspicion, constant monitoring and detrimental impact	19
Misaligned expectations	Expectations of subordinates and expectations of leaders	27
Organisational fallout	Consequences of resignations	11
Power and ego	Power and autonomy, control, ego, influence and misuse of power	22
Pressure	Pressure as an antecedent for bad behaviour	7
Psychological safety	Silence, no freedom to voice opinions or challenge	11
Quiet quitting	Do only what is necessary, active disengagement	12
Restructuring	Bad behaviour visible in the case of restructuring, as an antecedent	6
Retaliation	Reciprocity and retaliation	8
Sabotage	Potential and deliberate sabotage	5
Self-criticism	Internalised, self-criticism, self-blame, self-doubt, weakness	17
Self-perception	Damage to self-esteem, self-worth and confidence	11
Stress	Constant and unpredictable threat, effect and psychological impact	9
Threatening	Threats of being fired, social isolation	7
Tone at the top	Top management setting the example	7
Toxicity	Approaches, culture, environment, people	24
Varied behaviour and response	Varied and pervasive, behaviour is accepted, allowed, condoned, excused and tolerated	23

4.3.7.3. Identification of themes

According to Byrne (2022), all data must be coded before moving on to the development of sub-themes and themes, which are used to unite groups of codes into a concept or idea (Braun et al., 2019) or "theoretical constructs" (Saldaña, 2011, p. 109). In the case of reflexive thematic analysis in particular, the themes are developed from the researcher's understanding of patterns of meaning (Braun et al., 2019). The data analysis identified several themes and sub-themes related to the research questions, in keeping with **phase 5** of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022) (Table 2).

Table 2: Themes and sub-themes linked to research questions

Research question	Theme	Sub-theme
RQ 1: How do stakeholders identify and experience the behaviours of destructive leaders?	Theme 1: Manifestation of destructive behaviour	Absent leader Anger and rage Varied behaviour and response Blame Bullying Threatening Management style
	Theme 2: Experience of psychological control and manipulation	Micromanagement Intentionality Power and ego
RQ 2: What do these stakeholders see as the antecedents of destructive behaviours?	Theme 3: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures	Incentives Restructuring Misaligned expectations Culture Insecurity
	Theme 4: Toxicity, precedent and pressure	Tone at the top Toxicity Assimilation Pressure
RQ 3: What are the consequences of destructive behaviour at the individual and organisational levels?	Theme 5: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement	Quiet quitting Hiding
	Theme 6: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour	Retaliation Sabotage
	Theme 7: Systemic organisational fallout	Organisational fallout High turnover

Research question	Theme	Sub-theme
		Intention to leave
	Theme 8: Erosion of psychological safety and trust	Psychological safety Lack of trust
	Theme 9: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being	Emotional and psychological Lingering effect Self-criticism Self-perception Stress Fear Mental and physical health

The last phase in reflexive thematic analysis, **phase six**, is producing the report. The format of writing up the analysis in this study, may differ from what is envisaged from a purely reflexive thematic analysis approach as suggested by Byrne (2022), although there was no intentional deviation from the process described by Braun & Clarke (2006).

4.3.8 Quality controls

Interpretivist research is more subjective than positivism and can be deemed less rigorous when considering reliability, validity and generalisation; however, different approaches are used to ensure interpretive research is dependable, credible, confirmable and transferable (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Nowell and Albrecht (2019) describe a number of strategies to deal with the elements of qualitative rigour, including those related to data collection, analysis and reporting; the use of different sources and member checking are mentioned across these areas.

The guidance offered by Braun and Clarke (2006) – not grouping data and avoiding using questions as themes – was followed to ensure a proper analysis. The researcher endeavoured to make sure that the themes were relevant to and supported by the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.3.8.1. Validity

In line with the approach taken by Motsei and Nkomo (2016) to strengthen the validity of the coding process, an independent academic, experienced in qualitative data analysis, was requested to review the coding. Furthermore, peer review is a process suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2023), which adds to the validity of a study. In this instance,

the researcher was reliant on her supervisor to review the coding and conduct the peer review of the study to ensure validity.

Multiple data sources can aid in triangulation, which can help with issues of reliability and validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Thus, the researcher improved the validity of the results by including both subordinates and line managers of destructive leaders in the study.

Validity is further enhanced by the explicit alignment of research questions to interview questions. The research questions were derived from gaps identified in the review of the literature (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011), this ensured that the theoretical line of sight was clear, and that the instrument measured what it set out to measure. This enhances the study's construct validity (Messick, 1989).

4.3.8.2 Reliability

Scholars' suggestions for conducting reliable qualitative studies include checking transcripts to rectify any mistakes, maintaining consistent codes and cross-checking codes with different researchers (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Although the researcher was unable to enlist the support of independent researchers to review the codes due to time and cost constraints, support from the researcher's supervisor helped ensure consistency.

A properly managed pilot study can identify weaknesses in the process followed to collect data and the approach and appropriateness of the data collection instrument, all of which enhance the quality of a research project (Malmqvist et al., 2019). The researcher recruited two participants to participate in the pilot study. The purpose of this pilot was to assess the interview protocol, including the questions and their sequencing, as well as the researcher's interview style, from the participants' perspective. Following this, any necessary adjustments would be implemented (Billups, 2022).

The outcome of the pilot was favourable, in that no changes were necessary to the interview protocol, questions or interview style. Furthermore, no particular issues were noted regarding the impact of social desirability bias, although both participants in the pilot study were subordinates.

4.3.8.3. Social desirability bias

There is a risk that participants may not wish to participate in a study about bad leadership due to the fact that it is seen as socially undesirable and respondents tend to

avoid negative assessments of themselves (Bhattacherjee, 2012).Therefore, the topic of interest may need to be masked to remove the effect of social desirability bias. Fisher (1993) explains social desirability bias as a situation where participants tend to avoid answering questions honestly and instead respond in a way that is more socially acceptable. Indirect questions can address the effect of social desirability bias versus direct questions, according to Fisher (1993).

No evidence of social desirability bias was detected during the interviews of both subordinates and leaders. This is likely because the participants were reflecting on the behaviour of someone else and not assessing their own behaviour negatively.

4.4 Ethical considerations

It is crucial to protect the rights of participants and the confidentiality of information gathered during the process of conducting the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). No data were collected before ethical clearance (Annexure G) had been granted in accordance with the process required by the Master's Research Ethics Committee of GIBS (GIBS, 2025).

Each participant was required to sign a consent letter (Annexure H), which advised that participation was voluntary and notified the individual that they could withdraw at any point. Information about the length of the interview, recording, reporting and storage of data, as well as provisions made for the confidentiality of participants, was provided.

4.5 Data security and data handling

Due to the confidential nature of the data gathered from participants, it was necessary to ensure that access to the data was strictly limited to the researcher, the researcher's supervisor, parties mandated to process transcriptions where relevant or GIBS staff for purposes of the study. Data were stored using pseudonyms to disguise the identity of respondents and the organisations in which they work. The researcher will store the data electronically using Cloud storage for a stipulated period of 10 years and secure it through password protection. Data will also be stored by the university for a period of 10 years using the standard published security protocols to maintain respondent confidentiality.

4.6 Research limitations

The study's results were not without limitations, as the participants were a select few, purposively selected from within the researcher's network and those recommended by

initial participants. The impact of this is that it would be difficult to repeat the findings in a new setting without detailed disclosure of all aspects of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

The researcher is based in South Africa and although there would be no exclusion of foreign participants, the findings would likely be localised and situated within the South African context, which may impact the applicability of results for individuals who work in organisations that operate in a different political, social, technological, economic and legal environment.

A further limitation is the study's cross-sectional time horizon. Longitudinal research has a higher level of validity (Bhattacherjee, 2012) than a cross-sectional study due to the temporal nature of the findings of the latter, as the measurement is taken at a single point in time.

4.7 Conclusion

The thematic analysis process resulted in the establishment of sub-themes and themes related to each research question. The themes and sub-themes linked to each research question (see Table 2), provides the structure that will be used to present the research findings in the next section, chapter 5, as well as the discussion in chapter 6.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the data-gathering and analysis process, in response to the research questions posed in Chapter 3. These findings are the result of organising the data from 20 semi-structured interviews, with ten participants providing insights from a subordinate perspective and ten providing insights from a leadership perspective. In the sections that follow, the similarities and differences of the two participant groups, subordinates and leaders, are compared.

A summary of the themes identified during the data analysis process was provided in Table 2, Section 4.2.10. In the sections that follow, the findings are presented by research question and the similarities and differences of the two participant groups, subordinates and leaders, are compared.

In presenting the findings of each sub-theme, the number of codes linked is included to indicate (i) those sub-themes that represent the most significant number of codes, reflected by a large number of participants and appearing more frequently across the data, (ii) those that are recurrent but not as pervasive as the sub-themes with many codes and (iii) those that appear relatively infrequently across the data but still offer valuable insights. For ease of reference, a colour coding is applied to indicate the sub-themes with high, medium or low code frequencies, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Colour coding of sub-themes and the number of codes linked

Significance of sub-theme	Number of codes
Many codes	20 or more
Medium number of codes	Greater than 10 and less than 20
Few codes	5 or more and less than 10

5.2 Findings: Research Question 1

RQ 1: How do stakeholders identify and experience the behaviours of destructive leaders?

Two themes were identified in relation to RQ 1: the manifestation of destructive leadership behaviour and the experience of psychological control and manipulation. The description of the themes and the sub-themes follows.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Manifestation of destructive leadership behaviour

This theme relates to the identification and experience of destructive behaviour by stakeholders, including both active and passive actions of a leader, as well as the various manifestations of this behaviour. The sub-themes include absent leader, anger and rage, varied behaviour and response, blame, bullying, threatening and management style. Table 4 provides a brief description of the sub-themes and their corresponding codes. The sub-themes are discussed in the sections that follow.

Table 4: RQ 1 Theme 1: Manifestation of destructive leadership behaviour

Sub-theme	Description/contains	Codes linked
Absent leader	Absence of leader, withdrawal and a leadership vacuum	12
Anger and rage	Shouting, screaming, swearing and being triggered	9
Varied behaviour and response	Varied and pervasive, behaviour is accepted, allowed, condoned, excused and tolerated	23
Blame	Blame shifting, assigning blame and denying responsibility	9
Bullying	Aftermath of bullying, the behaviour, assigning affect and toxicity	21
Threatening	Threats of being fired, social isolation	7
Management style	Linking behaviour to leadership styles	6

5.2.1.1 Absent leader sub-theme

The evidence for the sub-theme of an absent leader was selected in cases where participants described how the absence allowed for destructive behaviour or how absence was considered destructive (Table 5).

Table 5: Evidence of sub-theme: Absent leader

Quotation	Group
And during the year, if he wants something that you know he doesn't have – that's when he will give me a call or he'll send me a WhatsApp; otherwise, there's no conversation.	Subordinate

And when you hire and build a team, you bring people with different skills who can benefit from each other. Someone then, in that context, who closes themselves out was like, I'm not going to participate, actually leaves a gap within the team.	Leader
We were a small business. I was on his Exco here and I'd have no interaction with him. So you know that kind of behaviour. I mean, he wasn't a bad leader in that he did have my back to an extent, but he was absent, or unable to be present. Let's put it that way. He was unable to be present.	Leader
So the way I was explaining to people was when the king of the jungle checked out, the hyenas started to fight and they tore apart the landscape and that destroyed that business for a long time.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Absent leader

Subordinates explained situations where leaders were non-communicative, avoided engagement, were unable to be present and failed to provide clarity on expectations. One subordinate explained that the absent leader was not meeting their personal needs. In contrast, the other subordinate suggested that the absent leader was not meeting the organisation's needs due to the damage inflicted on the business. The metaphor used to describe the effect of a leader's absence was akin to hyenas fighting when the king of the jungle is not around.

From a leader's perspective, absence was experienced when a team member withdrew their participation or a leader was unable to be present, indicating that the team's needs were not being met due to the absence.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Absent leader

It would seem that the action of a leader being absent, regardless of the intention, can result in or enable destructive behaviour from both a subordinate and leadership perspective. Subordinates, the team and the organisation have needs that remain unmet in the case of an absent leader.

5.2.1.2 Anger and rage sub-theme

The evidence for the sub-theme of anger and rage was selected from participants who mentioned shouting, screaming, swearing and being triggered (Table 6).

Table 6: Evidence of sub-theme: Anger and rage

Quotation	Group
You know, people do not really apply their minds when, you know, when they're being shouted at or when they need stuff immediately. It is almost having to drop and refocus.	Subordinate
It became like a thing. Like if I was three minutes late for something, I would be like basically like shouted out and whatever.	Subordinate
Being very close to being rude and being very close to shouting and not even being aware of the audience around him.	Subordinate
In many respects, it was because they were the same. [Name] would blow up and shout and scream and swear and go on and so he had no way to control this guy.	Subordinate
I can't speak to the psychological state, but people who feel under pressure and then swear and shouts at everyone and play the victim, but out loud.	Leader
The modern way is not to shout and scream. That's not a way, I've seen that way back in the day, and there's some merits to that approach,	Leader

Analysis of sub-theme: Anger and rage

Evidence of shouting was common among some of the subordinates, with one participant claiming that this behaviour affects an individual's ability to focus on the task at hand. In some cases, the leader's actions seemed to be overly petty, with small things triggering the behaviour. Subordinates witnessed leaders being rude, shouting, screaming or swearing regardless of the setting or the audience.

Evidence of subordinates demonstrating anger in the office was raised by one leadership participant, who commented that although there is merit to shouting and screaming, it is not deemed the modern approach.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Anger and rage

Both leaders and subordinates witnessed the manifestation of anger and rage, with people shouting, screaming and swearing at work. This behaviour does not create a conducive working environment for subordinates. This differs from a leadership perspective in that, although the behaviour may not be condoned, one leader disclosed that there is merit in the approach.

5.2.1.3 Varied behaviour and response sub-theme

The evidence for the varied behaviour and response sub-theme was selected in instances where participants referred to the prevalence of destructive behaviour, the variety of the behaviour and the type of responses, such as when it was accepted, allowed, condoned, excused or tolerated (Table 7).

Table 7: Evidence of sub-theme: Varied behaviour and response

Quotation	Group
If management level or individuals at that management level allow that type of engagement to continue, then it is accepted; it almost becomes the norm, right?	Subordinate
So, it is almost like a little bit of that, not battered wife syndrome, but it feels a little bit like that. It is OK, like you can justify it, you know, shame man, you know, he works hard. So you know, therefore, the odd slap around the room is maybe acceptable.	Subordinate
… on the top and I also saw it at the bottom, but on the bottom, it was a lot easier for me to manage that because there I had direct influence...	Leader
This is going to be a problem, especially when this person started falling sick. So, it is not sporadic; it is a pattern.	Leader
I've observed destructive behaviour within teams that I lead. I do not believe there's a particular personal character traits. To be honest with you because I've observed the same individuals being orderly in other contexts.	Leader
They will, you know, some days they will wake up very set and then they'll give you, like, silent treatment. So also in terms of the behaviour, it varies. It is not the same thing all the time. And that's why it is very difficult to then escalate.	Leader

Analysis of sub-theme: Varied behaviour and response

In situations where executive leadership was aware of the behaviour, a subordinate suggested that it was condoned because the company results were good, something akin to ‘battered wife syndrome’ where the behaviour is tolerated, allowed or excused.

A number of participants from both groups expressed a similar view that when destructive behaviour continues without reprisal for a period, it is deemed acceptable and becomes the norm. Sometimes it takes the departure of several team members before action is taken. Both leaders and subordinates shared the view that destructive

behaviour was pervasive in some environments; it was observed at both the top and the bottom of the organisation, suggesting that the culture was conducive to toxic individuals.

Leaders explained that destructive behaviour manifests in many different forms and types. Some claim that it is not intermittent or sporadic, but rather a constant pattern. In contrast, others argue that, in their experience, individuals have acted in an orderly fashion in other situations.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Varied behaviour and response

Both subordinates and leaders shared the view that destructive behaviour was pervasive across the organisation. The manifestation of destructive behaviour was experienced by both groups of participants in different and subtle ways and at varying levels of intensity. There was consensus that if the behaviour was left to continue, it would become an accepted norm and tolerated when results were good. Leaders have different views about the frequency of the behaviour, as some consider it a pattern, while others believe it to be more sporadic.

5.2.1.4 Blame sub-theme

The evidence for the blame sub-theme was selected from participants who mentioned that leaders or subordinates were assigning blame (Table 8).

Table 8: Evidence of sub-theme: Blame

Quotation	Group
… him trying to then absolve himself, say well, you know, I've got these people and unfortunately, you know, they have now let me down. So, you know, now it is their fault. It is not my fault. So I think for his own sake, it was probably a case of self-preservation.	Subordinate
Whenever you hear a leader deflect any form of responsibility, then you know there's a problem.	Leader
And then they told me that no, it is because that individual couldn't work with them. I said, but why didn't you come to me? No, because that individual used your name to say I'm doing this because [Name] is expecting this and this, so we couldn't come to you because he blocked us and he said he is shouting at us. He is abusing us on your behalf. You understand?	Leader
There was a shift and then, because this individual was talking to everybody who could listen with a single perspective, right? And then everybody felt they	Leader

Quotation	Group
needed to have empathy, sympathy for the person. Now, as the boss, you're that bad person.	

Analysis of sub-theme: Blame

A subordinate described a situation where a leader assigned blame to his team for non-delivery as a way to deflect responsibility for non-delivery, for self-preservation. Interestingly, one of the leader participants also raised the point of deflecting responsibility, which he suggested was a clear sign of trouble.

Two of the leaders shared the common experience of being blamed by their subordinates. In one case, the team was made to believe that the bad treatment they received was at the behest of the leader. In the other example, the leader was blamed for unfair treatment.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Blame

Destructive behaviour, such as assigning blame to others and deflecting responsibility, was experienced by both subordinates and leaders. This behaviour manifested when leaders acted out of self-preservation and resorted to blaming subordinates for their own failures. Leaders also experience being blamed for unfair treatment or wrongfully blamed for the actions of their subordinates.

5.2.1.5 Bullying sub-theme

The evidence of bullying extends to the aftermath of bullying, the participants' experience of bullying behaviour, assigning affect and the related toxicity of this behaviour (Table 9).

Table 9: Evidence of sub-theme: Bullying

Quotation	Group
I think leaders who ill-treat people might get the job done but that job is done with pain.	Leader
But they deliver with bodies on the floor and blood on the walls and they would say the scorecard has been delivered.	Leader
He's a natural bully, OK? You can say that's destructive, but I thought it was the right thing for [Company] at that time, because sometimes, so you must be very careful to say a trait is always destructive.	Leader
… we're in trouble. [Company] is going nowhere. We were going to die. We have to do something drastically. Doesn't matter if he leaves bodies	Leader

Quotation	Group
lying around; that doesn't matter because if he doesn't leave bodies lying around, we're going to die anyway.	
… it is almost like that emotional bullying, so not physical, not being hit over the head or anything like that. But it is like that, emotional bullying.	Subordinate
Yeah, there was really nothing for me to escalate because you couldn't, performance-wise, you couldn't find a fault. Except that I felt like I was being bullied.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Bullying

Leaders identified examples of bullying behaviour, where leaders ensure delivery but cause pain and incur casualties in the team through the methods they use to achieve it. Some leaders suggest that a bully in a leadership position may sometimes be necessary, albeit temporarily, regardless of the consequences. Furthermore, one must be careful not to claim that bullying can never work, as it can be effective with a bully who listens; they are not all bad. One leader noted that bullying might be misconstrued in the example of a manager being firm to drive results.

Subordinates claim that experiencing emotional bullying, being pushed to accept an unfair performance rating and an absence of guidance can feel like bullying. There is a sense that there is no excuse for bullying, even if one has grown up that way.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Bullying

Some leaders see bullying as detrimental to the organisation and causing pain and injury for the team. In contrast, others suggest that sometimes a bully is necessary, at a particular time, regardless of the fallout. One leader admitted to relying on a bully to drive results, knowing full well the consequences for the team. Subordinates' experience of bullying is more of a feeling, described as emotional bullying rather than the physical type.

5.2.1.6 Threatening sub-theme

The evidence of threatening behaviour includes participants' experiences of the threat of being fired or more serious forms of threatening behaviour (Table 10).

Table 10: Evidence of sub-theme: Threatening

Quotation	Group
But they couldn't fire me because I wasn't doing anything wrong. I was just talking, the inconvenient truth.	Leader
In one case, I took the person aside. It was a little weird. Anyway, they were at the top of their voice saying, if you're going to fire me, then fire me in the office.	Leader
Remember, because no action was being taken, but already I was getting threats of being fired for one project, whereas I had, I think at that point, I'll just make sure, and as an example, I had like nine projects which I successfully delivered, and there was only this one project, but all. Yeah, it came down on me.	Subordinate
My first job straight out of university, which was a complete disaster where it ended in … like death threats.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Threatening

One leader mentioned that there was no threat of being fired because they had done nothing wrong. Another participant mentioned a case where a subordinate had no concern about the threat of being fired while behaving badly.

From the subordinate group, one participant shared the experience of being threatened with multiple firings by their manager. In contrast, in one extreme case, a subordinate received death threats from their manager.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Threatening

Two subordinates had been subjected to unwarranted threatening behaviour; the first was multiple threats of being fired, creating a sense of job insecurity, and the other was a more extreme case involving death threats. One leader rejected the risk of being fired for telling the truth, while another leader's employee had an apathetic response to the risk of being fired.

5.2.1.7 Management style sub-theme

Participants commented that management styles are linked to their perception of the resultant destructive behaviour (Table 11).

Table 11: Evidence of sub-theme: Management style

Quotation	Group
… but what you often find is that when is the crisis, people default to authoritarianism, not listening to each other. You'll do as I want. You know, I think obviously the environments of uncertainty, which also is a crisis environment … that behaviour comes up. You know because everybody is trying to protect themselves. There is chaos.	Leader
… it is more the leadership style, you know, it is autocratic, and at times innovation and thinking is reserved for certain individuals.	Leader
People must know who is a boss here.	Leader
… and I mean that's where I say it is not autocratic, autocratic leadership. I've come to realise there's definite value in that.	Subordinate
You do not deserve to shake my hand yet kind of thing …	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Management style

One subordinate suggested that there is value in an autocratic style of management; it is not necessarily destructive. A leader's perspective on an autocratic leadership style was that it stifles innovation.

A subordinate highlighted a more authoritarian type of leadership, where juniors were treated with disdain. The perspective from one leader was that when there is a crisis, people tend to revert to authoritarianism, being directive and not listening, because people are trying to protect themselves. Another leader suggested that some leaders feel the need to assert their power and ensure people recognise their status, potentially adopting an authoritarian or autocratic leadership style.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Management style

Autocratic leadership can be viewed in both a negative and positive light by both subordinates and leaders. Authoritarianism, such as that of leaders who insist that people respect their authority and positional power, is seen more negatively by both subordinates and leaders.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Experience of psychological control and manipulation

This theme is related to the identification and experience of destructive behaviour and the associated psychological control and manipulation, which encompasses the actions

taken by a leader to impose a form of control and to reinforce their position of power. The sub-themes within this theme are micromanagement, intentionality as well as power and ego. Table 12 provides a brief description of the sub-themes and their corresponding codes. The sub-themes are discussed in the sections that follow.

Table 12: RQ 1 Theme 2: Experience of psychological control and manipulation

Sub-theme	Description/contains	Codes linked
Micromanagement	Control, suspicion, constant monitoring and detrimental impact	19
Intentionality	Intent to inflict harm, disrespect and demeaning	9
Power and ego	Power and autonomy, control, ego, influence and misuse of power	22

5.2.2.1 Micromanagement sub-theme

The evidence associated with micromanagement includes references by participants to control, suspicion and constant monitoring, as well as the detrimental impact this has on individuals (Table 13).

Table 13: Evidence of sub-theme: Micromanagement

Quotation	Group
And not have the ability to do what they do best due to the fact that there's always Big Brother watching over you and sort of micromanaging things to the nth degree.	Subordinate
So it is like demoralising, right? Purely because you feel that you as an individual do not have the necessary skill set to do the job and you're always being second guessed in terms of what you're doing. So, it is demoralising.	Subordinate
One of my peers was elevated in the supervisory role and we got along like a house on fire when we were at the same level. But suddenly, when there was a supervisory role put on, what I experienced was this constant questioning, micromanaging of my behaviour or of me.	Subordinate
… he believes he must micromanage and you micromanage people that work hybrid. He would micromanage people to a point of … This person is off working off-site. She will get IT to log into this person's laptop to see are they really working or not. I mean, this is a senior person.	Leader

Analysis of sub-theme: Micromanagement

From a subordinate perspective, micromanagement was likened to a traumatic experience of having someone constantly watching over you and the constant questioning from leaders, which caused self-doubt. People cannot work independently; there is no autonomy, which slows things down, and as a result, they tend to make more mistakes.

Another subordinate cited the recent promotion of a colleague, which seemed to incite the micromanagement. The leader's example was an extreme case of a leader logging into an employee's laptop to confirm if they were really working. This situation involved a hybrid working arrangement, where employees alternated between working from home and the office; presumably, the manager was suspicious about what the person was doing.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Micromanagement

Micromanagement is a destructive behaviour and is considered as such by both leaders and employees. There are likely different levels of micromanagement intensity, considering examples such as secretly tracking activity or constantly watching over subordinates.

5.2.2.2 Intentionality sub-theme

The evidence of intentionality includes participants' accounts of the intent of destructive leaders to inflict harm, as well as disrespect and demeaning treatment (Table 14).

Table 14: Evidence of sub-theme: Intentionality

Quotation	Group
So I think for myself, the way I see it, it is less about the task and function, but more directly triggered at the person and in such a way that it is it feels as if it is intentional. In the intent to not grow, inspire or correct a problem but rather undermine a person.	Subordinate
The real motivation there is just revenge or some kind of, you know, I'm not much of a psychologist, but to me that goes beyond like … it is a dark trait...	Subordinate
I don't believe that people act without intent, right? So, I mean, observing other things that had happened in that particular relationship, the intention was to disempower our leader.	Leader

Quotation	Group
… call it an innocent I'm venting but it wasn't innocent. Obviously, it was the intent to cause discourse and that discourse was created because now there was noise in the system.	Leader

Analysis of sub-theme: Intentionality

The leaders' group raised two perspectives. The first was that people are intentional about their actions and there was an intention by one subordinate to disempower the leader. The second example involved a subordinate who was feigning innocence while venting but they intended to create disorder in the business.

Subordinates described situations where leaders' behaviour was intentional, insulting their appearance or upbringing as a way to discount their opinion and intentionally rating a subordinate's performance consistently low to undermine a subordinate.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Intentionality

According to the data, destructive behaviour is described as the intention to insult, inflict harm and seek revenge. This behaviour carries an element of intentionality, as experienced by leaders and subordinates alike.

5.2.2.3 Power and ego sub-theme

The evidence of the power and ego sub-theme included references by participants to power, autonomy, control, ego, influence and the misuse of power (Table 15).

Table 15: Evidence of sub-theme: Power and ego

Quotation	Group
I think it is an ego thing where you have this much power and at the end of the day, whether the project succeeds or not makes no difference to you. It is purely about the control element, the ability to control hordes of people and to steer a ship.	Subordinate
… I think it is ego, you know, if you've reached the top of your game, you are, you know, as an example, a chief executive of an organisation. So obviously, you know, some people attach great status and ego to roles such as that. So I do not know if it is a self-actualisation thing, like I've made it to the top, it is my view, my way or the highway. I know best, you	Subordinate

Quotation	Group
know. No one else dare challenge me because you know, I know what it will take and you know, being confident in that.	
You know, there are some cultures that believe that if I'm older, I must be right. If I hold a certain position, I must be right and they're not going to call me out on my faults because, who are they to call me out?	Leader
I saw within my Exco. There were people that were not getting honest feedback that were not always doing what they had to do and their management teams weren't calling them out because of this hierarchical type of structure that says look, I can't know more than the boss and the boss must have all the answers. And that for me is not sustainable going forward.	Leader
So it is a subordinate who is exhibiting bad behaviour. If that person has connections throughout the organisations, the organisation that person has the ear of many people, they can actually be quite destructive sometimes.	Leader

Analysis of sub-theme: Power and ego

Subordinates highlighted the destructive behaviour of leaders who have an overly inflated sense of self, the influential power of some destructive leaders to sway opinions within the senior management team and an assumption that the power to control large groups of people was the motive for the behaviour.

A subordinate raised an example related to ego: a CEO believed it was his way or the highway and that no one should challenge him because he knew what he was doing. Similarly, from the leader group's perspective, the leader who assumes that they are always right is destructive.

One participant from the leader group mentioned that power can be used to grow a team or to divide it. More than one leader highlighted the propensity for destructive leaders to suppress good people to maintain control. The power to influence can be derived from the connections that an individual has within an organisation; having the ear of many people can be destructive if misused.

Some cultures do not permit seniors or those in positions of power to be challenged by their subordinates.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Power and ego

Power can be used to grow or divide a team; some leaders use their power to suppress people and to avoid being challenged. The power to influence, although a valuable leadership trait, can be detrimental when used destructively. Positional power and ego can result in a fatal flaw or a blind spot, where leaders believe they know everything and are always right or they have the right to enforce their views upon others and silence dissenting views.

5.2.3 Conclusion of findings: Research Question 1

The analysis of the data in Section 5.2 set out to answer RQ 1: How do stakeholders identify and experience the behaviours of destructive leaders? The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the findings related to RQ1 are presented in Table 16 and discussed in the following section.

Table 16: Themes and sub-themes related to RQ 1

Research question	Theme	Sub-theme	Codes
RQ 1: How do stakeholders identify and experience the behaviours of destructive leaders?	Theme 1: Manifestation of destructive behaviour	Absent Leader	12
		Anger and rage	9
		Varied behaviour and response	23
		Blame	9
		Bullying	21
		Threatening	7
		Management Style	6
	Theme 2: Experience of psychological control and manipulation	Micromanagement	19
		Intentionality	9
		Power and ego	22

Theme 1: Manifestation of destructive behaviour

Destructive behaviour can be pervasive in some organisations, permeating all levels of the leadership hierarchy, and once entrenched, it becomes the norm. The manifestations of destructive behaviour as experienced by participants, including absence, anger, blame and bullying, can vary in subtle ways and at different levels of intensity.

Theme 2: Experience of psychological control and manipulation

The experience of psychological control and manipulation was categorised into micromanagement, intentionality of behaviour and the role of power and ego in destructive behaviour. Micromanagement, with varying levels of intensity, was cited by both leaders and subordinates. Power, including both the power to influence and positional power, is a more significant theme within the data; it can be used as a destructive force.

The following section will discuss the findings related to RQ 2.

5.3 Findings: Research Question 2

RQ 2: What do these stakeholders see as the antecedents of destructive behaviours?

Two themes were identified in relation to RQ 2: the first is dysfunctional organisational systems and structures and the second is a toxic organisational culture and lack of accountability. The descriptions of these themes and their sub-themes follow in the next sections.

5.3.1 Theme 3: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures

This theme presents triggers and organisational systems which can act as antecedents of destructive behaviour. Within this theme, the sub-themes include incentives, restructuring, misaligned expectations, culture and insecurity. Table 17 provides a brief description of each of these sub-themes, along with the number of linked codes. The sub-themes are discussed in the sections that follow.

Table 17: RQ 2 Theme 3: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures

Sub-theme	Description/contains	Codes linked
Incentives	Incentives and rewards as antecedents, both a good and a bad outcome	8
Restructuring	Bad behaviour visible in the case of restructuring as an antecedent	6
Misaligned expectations	Expectations of subordinates and expectations of leaders	27
Culture	Culture as an antecedent or culture as a tool of fear and intimidation	12
Insecurity	Insecurity as an antecedent	9

5.3.1.1 Incentives sub-theme

Participants raised incentives and rewards as antecedents of destructive behaviour, which could result in good or bad outcomes (Table 18).

Table 18: Evidence of sub-theme: Incentives

Quotation	Group
So if the issue is around I'm behaving like this because there's really no incentive for me. It is very difficult to try and create that motivation to behave in a particular way, right.	Leader
So in an instance where there's very little incentives to different staff members on a number of things, you are sitting with a lot of disruptive behaviour because somebody's thinking … I deliver, but what's in it for me? You know, apart from the normal salary that I get, what else do I get.	Leader
I think sometimes incentives also drive behaviour, so if your incentives are not aligned properly, some people will start behaving badly not because they are just bad people, but there's an incentive to do so.	Leader
Then we realised after four months. Geez, I mean the margins in this business have tanked and then we realised this person is actually giving this business away. Then you know you have to sit and say, listen, this is not how we run places in [Company]. We do not write business at any cost … So, so again, it is a misaligned incentive. So, so. People then will decide. I'll chase what works for me.	Leader

Analysis of sub-theme: Incentives

Several leaders cited incentives as influencing behaviour; curiously, none of the subordinates raised this point.

There are both good and bad outcomes from incentives, although it is suggested that without them, it is challenging to drive the correct behaviour. Some people will behave destructively due to the incentives in place, while others will behave destructively even in the absence of incentives.

Ultimately, people will refrain from specific behaviour if there is no tangible reward for their efforts, if they cannot see what is in it for them.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Incentives

Incentives can be a lever to drive behaviour. There can be both good and bad outcomes, whether incentives are present or not. Management must be mindful of misaligned incentives, which are those incentives that drive behaviour contrary to what they are trying to create.

5.3.1.2 Restructuring theme

The evidence of restructuring was gathered from participants, who explained that restructuring is an antecedent of destructive behaviour (Table 19).

Table 19: Evidence of sub-theme: Restructuring

Quotation	Group
You know especially organisational events such as restructures can place quite a large amount of pressure on said individuals because you know what does that mean for me? Let me, you know, hold on to information and without really understanding the toxicity of that. It is around protecting what I deem is mine, which we all know is not yours; it is the organisation's. But you know, people want to look out for themselves...	Subordinate
So the restructuring, I think it is one of the events as well that causes those kinds of environments, especially when it is a restructuring that has to let other people go...	Subordinate
It is accelerated because we can't say it started then. It is always been a thing, but now it has accelerated because people; it is restructuring. Everyone is trying to cover their back; everyone is trying to stay safe.	Subordinate
I'll give a typical example with the most popular one, Section 189. So now, immediately, when companies invoke Section 189, everyone in the organisation gets under this huge environment of panic.	Leader

Analysis of sub-theme: Restructuring

Several subordinates highlighted a restructuring event as creating an environment that fostered destructive behaviour. Restructuring establishes the need for people to look out for themselves and hold on to information, presumably as a way to inflate their worth. Restructuring and the threat of retrenchments create uncertainty, prompting people to protect their territory and cover their backs, stay safe and hopefully avoid losing their jobs.

This view was confirmed by a leader, who said that a restructure can create an environment of panic.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Restructuring

Restructuring can illicit destructive behaviour from subordinates and from leaders. In particular, when there are retrenchments, people will tend to look out for themselves in the fight to retain their jobs.

5.3.1.3 Misaligned expectations

The evidence of misaligned expectations encompasses both the expectations that management holds of subordinates and the expectations that subordinates hold of leaders (Table 20).

Table 20: Evidence of sub-theme: Misaligned expectations

Quotation	Group
You can't have favourites because everyone else will assume that they are less than, even if they're not.	Leader
We've seen a few of those cases where it is not. It is not harassment, but it was actually holding somebody accountable for the work that they were supposed to do. Yeah. So that's the other side of the coin that we need to balance at all times.	Leader
Yes, it is just, in my view. So in my view, that type of a leader is a leader who is not, is not engaging his or her, the people that reports under him, a person who does not care about their, you know what they're doing, what they're not doing; does not care about their well-being.	Subordinate
And I found that when a leader is not objective in the way they lead, it causes destruction.	Subordinate
destructive leadership is when there is no uniformity in how we act. So meaning, when you are leading a team, you have got favouritism.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Misaligned expectations

Both leaders and subordinates hold similar views that leaders should not have favourites in their team, as this leads others to feel less important. Leaders expressed that the misalignment of expectations among subordinates is destructive, including unrealistic expectations of bonuses or a sense of entitlement among employees with long tenure.

Sometimes it is the actions of a manager holding people accountable which elicit complaints about destructive behaviour as a way to deflect responsibility. Subordinates expressed varying needs that they have of their managers. Managers should engage with their people, caring about their well-being and providing clarity, while avoiding favouritism among their team.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Misaligned expectations

Leaders have certain expectations of employees in terms of behaviour and meeting the organisation's requirements; therefore, behaviour that fails to meet these expectations can be seen as destructive.

Subordinates expect managers to demonstrate a duty of care and due diligence towards them; a failure to do so, such as neglect, is perceived as destructive. This suggests that not only is active and intentional behaviour destructive but also passive and absent behaviour is destructive.

5.3.1.4 Culture sub-theme

The evidence that culture is an antecedent of destructive behaviour was gleaned from the views of subordinates and leaders on how culture drives behaviour (Table 21).

Table 21: Evidence of sub-theme: Culture

Quotation	Group
So we called it a culture of fear, right? We also called it a culture of getting results. In fact, it is a culture of getting results through fear.	Leader
… organisational culture that you build contributes highly in terms of what kind of disruptions you get from your subordinates.	Leader
Now it is not you distancing yourself from the team; it is the team wanting nothing to do with you. And that's also not conducive to a productive environment. I've seen culture being completely destroyed … culture in an organisation completely destroyed,	Leader
Yes, it becomes an organisational culture where everyone knows that to climb the ladder, you have no friends; you have to climb on top of everybody's back.	Subordinate
I think just in such a destructive culture, it is a pity that ideas and … the contribution that everybody can bring to an organisation to move it forward … is lost.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Culture

Leaders suggested that culture drives behaviour – a culture of fear can be used to drive results. In contrast, behaviour can influence culture – one leader's experience showed that the destructive behaviour of one influential subordinate damaged the culture within the organisation.

Subordinates suggested that a destructive culture drives behaviour in a way that can be used to silence all the voices in the room, where valuable contributions will be lost. Behaviour can also influence culture – those who wish to climb the corporate ladder will do so, at the expense of others.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Culture

Culture can drive behaviour, particularly destructive behaviour. In a culture of fear, all voices are silenced. Behaviour can also influence culture; destructive behaviour from individuals can damage culture.

5.3.1.5 Insecurity sub-theme

The evidence of insecurity as an antecedent to destructive behaviour extends to the perception that leaders are threatened by those who are more qualified than they are, not wanting anyone to show them up or outshine them (Table 22).

Table 22: Evidence of sub-theme: Insecurity

Quotation	Group
I think it is insecurities, you know, within themselves, you know, do you carry yourself like this because you are intimidated by the other person, that the other person knows more than you? Are you afraid that, what are they going to take your job? Right?.	Subordinate
They probably are threatened by something that you have to offer and they're not able to deal with that. As a result, they see you as a threat and the only way for them to protect themselves is to press you down, is to not engage with you so that you fail. Maybe the aim is that you will fail, and ultimately out of their way.	Subordinate
… people being insecure about your talents, people not wanting to see you excel …	Subordinate

Quotation	Group
Because they mustn't outshine me as the leader. And so I'm intimidated. So I'd rather keep them at bay. I squash any type of questioning of my decisions.	Leader
He doesn't like that guy challenging him, so he's going to find that thing to nail him, to push him down.	Leader
So it is quite interesting, significant thing about it to me; there's a lot of, generally, I think the theme I find in that behaviour is insecurity.	Leader

Analysis of sub-theme: Insecurity

Some subordinates seem to attribute destructive behaviour to insecurities on the part of the leader, for example, where the subordinate is more highly qualified or where the leader feels intimidated by the subordinate.

The participants of the leaders group seemed to corroborate the view of the subordinates that leaders behave destructively when they are intimidated and insecure. Two of the leader participants mentioned that insecure leaders do not like being challenged, suggesting the insecurity they have of someone finding something or showing them up.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Insecurity

Both subordinates and leaders agree that insecurity can play a part in the destructive behaviour of leaders who are intimidated by others.

5.3.2 Theme 4: Toxicity, precedent and pressure

This theme focuses on the example from the top, toxicity, assimilation and pressure, and how these could be considered antecedents for destructive behaviour. The sub-themes are tone at the top, toxicity, assimilation and pressure. Table 23 contains a brief description of the sub-themes and the linked codes. The sub-themes are discussed in the sections that follow.

Table 23: RQ 2 Theme 4: Toxicity, precedent and pressure

Sub-theme	Description/contains	Codes linked
Tone at the top	Top Management setting the example	7
Toxicity	Approaches, culture, environment and people	24

Sub-theme	Description/contains	Codes linked
Assimilation	Observing, experiencing and imitating behaviour of others	8
Pressure	Pressure as an antecedent for bad behaviour	7

5.3.2.1 Tone at the top sub-theme

The evidence for this sub-theme was selected from incidents where top management was mentioned as setting the example (Table 24).

Table 24: Evidence of sub-theme: Tone at the top

Quotation	Group
And I didn't realise that if the group CEO continues to have contact with the subsidiary businesses directly, we are never going to create hope. People are going to stay despondent because the negativity is coming directly from the personality of the group CEO.	Leader
The other organisations I've worked for, the tone from the top, led people to believe that to be abusive and to be a bully is OK.	Leader
So, people talk about culture and all those things, which is true, but it is set by somebody. It is not set by the people on the ground. It is set from the top.	Leader
That corruption and those things are taking place not only in government; it is taking place everywhere. Why? Because it started at the top, so it is filtering through and that's the same with a company. So for me, that's why the leader is so important.	Leader
… other organisations I worked for did not have that behaviour. It is the culture of the organisation and the tone from the top.	Leader

Analysis of sub-theme: Tone at the top

Leaders note that the tone from the top sets the example of behaviour, including destructive behaviour. Although culture permeates the organisation, it was suggested that it is established by someone, not a team, but an individual at the top of the organisation. Another leader explained how negativity directly created by the group CEO was infecting a subsidiary organisation, illustrating how the tone or behaviour spreads and affects an organisation's culture. Not all organisations have the same culture; in the

experience of two leaders, the more destructive culture was driven from the top, indicating that it originated from the CEO or the top management team.

The subordinate group did not specifically link destructive behaviour to top management or the tone being set at the top.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Tone at the top

Executive and top management set the tone for the rest of the organisation. Therefore, destructive leadership behaviour and cultures emanate from top management.

5.3.2.2 Toxicity sub-theme

The evidence of toxicity includes participants' reference to toxic approaches, toxic culture, toxic environment and toxic people (Table 25).

Table 25: Evidence of sub-theme: Toxicity

Quotation	Group
So, it is ultimately, in my view, one of the direct links to a toxic or bad environment; it is a direct link to the leader, either not doing something or the leader's the problem.	Leader
I have had first-hand experience of a of a very toxic environment and typically what you find is all the things I said earlier on a blame game, no one takes responsibility, no one talks. No one calls leadership out for their faults.	Leader
It becomes toxic rolling down because, as my manager, she also had pressures above. So that really builds a toxic environment. So, if there is no room for failure or room for mistakes for everyone to grow, that becomes a hostile environment.	Subordinate
Even [Name] used to talk about we had a toxic environment, but he had no idea how to change it. He had no idea why it was happening. And I used to sit there and say, no, but [Name], can you not recognise that it is you?	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Toxicity

The leaders' perception of toxicity is that it is squarely the responsibility of the leader, and toxic environments are described as one where there is blame, no acceptance of responsibility and no one talks.

Subordinates view toxic environments as ones where there is no room for mistakes, where everyone pretends everything is okay; even the leaders do not recognise the role they play. In addition, one subordinate said that you do not realise how bad these toxic environments are until you step away. For those who have not experienced any other kind of environment, it is considered the norm.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Toxicity

Toxic environments and toxic behaviour can result from the active behaviour of the leader or a passive response whereby the leader's inattention allows for toxic people to taint the environment. Both leaders and subordinates recognise toxicity; for some, it might not be visible until they leave.

5.2.2.3 Assimilation sub-theme

The evidence for assimilation includes instances where participants explain how destructive behaviour is assimilated through the action of observation, experience and then imitation of others' behaviour (Table 26).

Table 26: Evidence of sub-theme: Assimilation

Quotation	Group
… in their DNA; it is how they were taught to, it is how they were taught to lead, it is how they were led and they think that it is the right thing.	Leader
The project is running but in the process, they have destroyed so many souls and then it becomes a vicious cycle because these people that they are leading, they also lead like that later and so on. And so there's a lot of work to be done in the IT space.	Leader
I think it normally comes from the leader. So if you're the top leader in the business and you operate in a certain way, what happens? People below you see that and start operating like that. That's the problem.	Leader
No, they're used to it and maybe it is the way they were trained early on in their career. Or maybe they encountered some things which left them behaving in a certain way. You really can't pin it to one.	Leader

Analysis of sub-theme: Assimilation

A common thread among three participants from the leader group was that it is likely people will assimilate destructive behaviour because it is how they were trained or taught to lead, so they believe it is the right way to do things. For example, people tend to abuse

because they were abused or bully because they were bullied; so the cycle tends to continue as those who experience destructive behaviour go on to lead in the same manner.

Another leader provided an example of how people had observed the top leader behaving in a certain way and began to emulate it; even if those subordinates did not agree with the behaviour, they adopted it nonetheless. Yet another leader pointed out how senior people in a team set the tone for more junior people, which is disruptive to culture.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Assimilation

Training and observations of destructive leadership behaviour will be replicated by those who have experienced this when they go on to lead others. This creates a vicious cycle of observing and experiencing destructive behaviour and then inflicting that behaviour on others as subordinates progress through the organisation.

5.3.2.4 Pressure sub-theme

The evidence of pressure includes references to the fact that pressure can be seen as an antecedent for bad behaviour (Table 27).

Table 27: Evidence of sub-theme: Pressure

Quotation	Group
I think it is pressure. I think when there's a lot of pressure in the environment, people go to their default position, you know, because of how we handle pressure as leaders, maybe there's something.	Leader
So the pressures are massive on these people that are in top leadership positions. OK, and for me, so you have to acknowledge that when you look at them.	Leader
Where information is needed immediately in order to generate, for example, progress reports or certain packs, then that it is; it is almost like in a very pressurised event. When a pressurised event occurs, then that relationship just exponentially, you know, increases.	Subordinate
So any delay in those projects is really high pressure both at executive level and also for us to be able to respond to the market environment quickly. So yes, they were; it was a really pressurised environment, yeah.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Pressure

Leaders highlighted that when there is a lot of pressure in the environment, people can lash out or revert to their default position, suggesting that the behaviour is a sort of coping mechanism. One leader pointed out that the pressure of a top leadership position is immense and this must be considered when evaluating their behaviour.

Subordinates corroborate that pressure can be an antecedent for destructive behaviour, as in the example where information is needed immediately or where the delay in a project prevents an organisation from responding swiftly to the market.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Pressure

Both leaders and subordinates stated that pressure is likely to cause destructive behaviour. In some cases, the behaviour is a default response and could be considered a coping mechanism. Consideration must be given to the amount of pressure at the very top of the organisation.

5.3.3 Conclusion of findings: Research Question 2

The analysis of the data in Section 5.3 set out to answer RQ 2: What do these stakeholders see as the antecedents of destructive behaviours? The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the findings, related to RQ 2, are included in Table 28 and discussed in the section that follows.

Table 28: Themes and sub-themes related to RQ 2

Research Question	Theme	Sub-theme	Codes
RQ 2: What do these stakeholders see as the antecedents of destructive behaviours?	Theme 3: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures	Incentives	8
		Restructuring	6
		Misaligned expectations	27
		Culture	12
		Insecurity	9
	Theme 4: Toxicity, precedent and pressure	Tone at the top	7
		Toxicity	24
		Assimilation	8
		Pressure	7

Theme 3: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures

Inappropriate incentives, restructuring and a dysfunctional culture can be antecedents to destructive behaviour. Culture can influence behaviour negatively, just like behaviour can influence culture negatively. Misaligned expectations between leaders and subordinates may lead to the perception of destructive behaviour. In contrast, insecurity can contribute to the destructive behaviour of leaders who are intimidated by others.

Theme 4: Toxicity, precedent and pressure

Both leaders and subordinates recognise toxicity, although, for some, it might not be visible until they leave. The precedent set by executives and top management sets the tone for the rest of the organisation. Destructive behaviour becomes a vicious cycle as those who have observed and been trained to behave badly replicate this behaviour when they are promoted and inflict that behaviour on others. High pressure or a pressurised environment is likely to cause destructive behaviour.

The following section will discuss the findings related to RQ 3.

5.4 Findings: Research Question 3

RQ 3: What are the consequences of destructive behaviour at the individual and organisational levels?

Five themes were identified in relation to RQ 3: psychological withdrawal and disengagement, retaliatory and harmful work behaviour, systemic organisational fallout, erosion of psychological safety and trust and internalisation of harm. The descriptions of these themes and their sub-themes follow in the next sections.

5.4.1 Theme 5: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement

This theme relates to actions of withdrawal and disengagement as a consequence of destructive behaviour, where individuals refuse to go beyond the minimum requirements of their job or deploy tactics to escape attention and hide a lack of skills. Table 29 contains a brief description of the sub-themes and the linked codes. The sub-themes are discussed in the sections that follow.

Table 29: RQ 3 Theme 5: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement

Sub-theme	Description/contains	Codes linked
Quiet quitting	Do only what is necessary, active disengagement	12
Hiding	Avoiding the spotlight, hiding for protection and hiding a lack of skills	7

5.4.1.1 Quiet quitting sub-theme

The evidence of quiet quitting was selected from participants who described limited commitment, only doing what is necessary, and active disengagement (Table 30).

Table 30: Evidence of sub-theme: Quiet quitting

Quotation	Group
And what that led to is people working on the clock. They would never give extra. Never, because they didn't believe in him.	Subordinate
I see it in a culture where people keep their heads down; they just come to work. They can't wait for 4:00 or 5:00 to finish. They leave.	Leader
… anyone who exhibits non-behaviour, so not like go-slow or obstructiveness to that is in conflict with the strategic, like the objectives that of whatever the team or the organisation are trying to do.	Leader
And behaviour after that was just this is my empire and that's what I'm focusing on. Everything else is none of my business, even though we had made a, what do you call it, a pact as a leadership team, we bring our skills in for the benefit of the whole. This individual is like, count me out. My expertise, you will not enjoy them for free.	Leader
I work from 8:00 to 5:00. Not willing to do anything outside of that.	Leader
Like I said, some team members almost well, some actually quit and then others were quietly quitting in terms of giving their effort. You know, people stop giving their best when they do not see what they're doing it for.	Leader

Analysis of sub-theme: Quiet quitting

Only one subordinate noted that, in response to a destructive leader, team members work on the clock and do not put in extra effort as a result of the poor treatment.

More than one of the leader participants described a situation where people limit their efforts to only working hours or are on a go-slow; they stop giving their best in response to destructive behaviour. Another leader reported a case of destructive behaviour by a subordinate, who refused to provide anything extra beyond their immediate responsibilities, thereby withdrawing their support for the organisation and the leadership team.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Quiet quitting

The withdrawal of support for the organisation, the team and the leader is a consequence of destructive leadership behaviour. Subordinates tend to do only what is necessary, stick to contracted working hours, remain unengaged, lack commitment and refuse to give anything more.

5.4.1.2 Hiding sub-theme

The evidence of hiding includes references to avoiding the spotlight, hiding for protection and hiding a lack of skills (Table 31).

Table 31: Evidence of sub-theme: Hiding

Quotation	Group
So yeah, you do get the people that because obviously everything's being watched, people will tend to mask themselves into other jobs that and overcompensate for something that might be an easier task. Just to avoid being in the limelight of the main situation.	Leader
What you sometimes see is some people just do not have the skills to manage and then they start using these traits to hide their skills lack and you have to get through that as well so.	Leader
I do not think there were any personal issues with the person. They were simply just out of depth, but they tried to hide it and they got some bit of protection from above.	Leader
So if you feel you've got to start hiding or … or even worse, if you feel you've got to start playing the same games you know … then it becomes a really toxic environment.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Hiding

One of the participants from the leader group reported that in an environment of heightened scrutiny, when everyone is being watched, some people will start hiding by

moving themselves to other jobs, those that are not strategically important, to escape the spotlight of a micromanager. Similarly, a leader reported that people will keep their heads down in a bad environment with a destructive leader, intimating that people will not want to draw attention to themselves. Similarly, a subordinate claimed that they had to start hiding or adopt the same behaviour as a result of a destructive leader.

A different perspective was offered by two other participants from the leader group, who claim that people also use destructive behaviour when they are out of their depth and are attempting to hide their lack of management skills.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Hiding

Where employees are looking to escape destructive leadership behaviour, they tend to resort to hiding, including moving to other jobs.

Destructive behaviour can also be used as a tool to hide a lack of skills.

5.4.2 Theme 6: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour

This theme reflects the active, reciprocal and retaliatory responses that result from destructive behaviour, as well as both the potential and actual acts of sabotage experienced by leaders and subordinates. The sub-themes include retaliation and sabotage. Table 32 provides a brief description of the sub-themes and the corresponding codes. The sub-themes are discussed in the sections that follow.

Table 32: RQ 3 Theme 6: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour

Sub-theme	Description/contains	Codes linked
Retaliation	Reciprocity and retaliation	8
Sabotage	Potential and deliberate sabotage	6

5.4.2.1 Retaliation sub-theme

The evidence of retaliation includes where participants had indicated a form of reciprocity or retaliation as a reaction to the experience of destructive behaviour (Table 33).

Table 33: Evidence of sub-theme: Retaliation

Quotation	Group
Basically, activated the rumour mill and what happened after that? Some of the people who were in view right were like subordinates, 2–3 levels low, right? And some bad behaviour started there. You know, people almost rebelling.	Leader
Maybe that a person from outside was appointed over them or something like that. So, in this instance, what they do is they always pretend they do not know what needs to be done or they run around looking all confused.	Leader
… if that's what you're going to dish out, then I'm going to go and try and sort of counter that with my own attempts at foiling whatever it is that's going on. So I mean, and then you just operate in a very toxic environment.	Subordinate
… I couldn't even necessarily refer somebody from there. And it would have been a great opportunity for them from a perspective of them being on a platform where they could attract more investors or even more customers, right? So then they missed out on that because of that one experience that I had.	Subordinate
It really was a problem because now she doesn't communicate properly. She forgets certain things and some things we left behind on them because of the way she is. And it costed her in a way that because she treats me the way she does, even if I see a loophole that could be covered, I do not tell her.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Retaliation

The subordinates' views include retaliatory behaviour as a response to the leader's behaviour, using similar tactics to exclude or withdraw support intentionally. A more overt demonstration of retaliation was expressed by another subordinate when they explained that an organisation was excluded from participating in an event due to the treatment they had received. Retaliation can become an active and ongoing behaviour; as a result of the treatment a subordinate received, they were clearly demonstrating a vengeful attitude. Other examples of this behaviour manifest when an employee refuses to defend their leader or when they are absent – a more passive form of retaliation.

One leader explained a situation where an employee had retaliated for not being given the role for which they had applied by starting a rumour mill; people started rebelling,

seemingly over the perceived injustice suffered by the employee who was not appointed. Moreover, in this case, the individual withdrew their commitment to broader involvement outside of their role.

Instead of transparently dealing with issues, managers can institute actions to retaliate against employees, secretly attempting to sabotage a move that had been approved.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Retaliation

Subordinates institute retaliatory behaviour in response to destructive leadership behaviour, such as using similar tactics, excluding former colleagues from events, withdrawing support for their manager and refusing to defend their leader when absent.

Leaders have to withstand deliberate moves of sabotage from employees when they are not promoted, withdraw commitment to the organisation and incite support from colleagues via the rumour mill. Leaders can also derail employees by secretly sabotaging moves previously approved, a more covert action.

5.4.2.2 Sabotage sub-theme

Participants mentioned either the potential for sabotage or the action of deliberate sabotage (Table 34).

Table 34: Evidence of sub-theme: Sabotage

Quotation	Group
And then suddenly it became sort of a … and in that pulling together my stuff got altered, and it, and edited and you know. Yeah, I do not even know how to begin to explain that part.	Subordinate
… it is a doubt syndrome; they're creating this element of doubt where everyone else doubts you as a leader. They look at you as this person who is really egocentric … They want the other people to see you as this monster …	Leader
So it could be somebody that will try to challenge you in meetings. They will always try to counter what you say or maybe somebody who will actually have a flight behaviour, so they do not talk, but they do things behind you.	Leader
But I mean, look, it is a do, it is a do or die because they can sabotage the organisation at some point if they have not dealt with that hate...	Leader
… because you've got 10 000 people in the organisation and you can imagine if the bulk of those people are not really excited to be there	Leader

Quotation	Group
because they have to be there and sort of they hate you as a leader but they there because they need to get paid but then they use every opportunity to sabotage you.	

Analysis of sub-theme: Sabotage

Sabotage can come from all angles, including a leader's act of sabotage, a subordinate's intention to sabotage and the potential for sabotage. Only one participant from the subordinate group had experienced sabotage from their leader, who intentionally altered their work and then reported the work as substandard.

One leader's experience when asking for specific deliverables was that the employees chose to vilify the leader as someone who was always looking for errors. The manager who is driving for results will be concerned that the team may actually resort to sabotage by doing things behind the leader's back.

In the case of influential employees who are dissatisfied with a new senior executive appointment, some challenge it overtly, while others manoeuvre covertly. One leader expressed concern that some experienced employees hold the power to sabotage the organisation due to dissatisfaction with the appointment of a new leader. In this scenario, the subordinate views themselves as more experienced, more exposed and more knowledgeable than their new leader and can make it impossible for the leader to be successful, even inflict damage on the organisation if they are not brought onside.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Sabotage

The experience of sabotage was more commonly reported in the leader group and is particularly common when a leader is driving results or requesting deliverables. The leader group also expressed their concerns about the potential for employees who have the power to sabotage the organisation due to dissatisfaction with senior appointments.

5.4.3 Theme 7: Systemic organisational fallout

This theme represents employee turnover, a systemic issue resulting from destructive behaviour. This theme encompasses the intention of people to leave, as well as the organisational fallout resulting from resignations and high turnover. Table 35 provides a brief description of the sub-theme and the associated codes. The sub-themes will be discussed in the sections that follow.

Table 35: RQ 3 Theme 7: Systemic organisational fallout

Sub-theme	Description/contains	Codes linked
Organisational fallout	Organisational consequences of leaving	11
High turnover	Volume of people leaving or churn	6
Intention to leave	People looking to leave	6

5.4.3.1 Organisational fallout sub-theme

Participants expressed their views on the organisational consequences of people leaving the business or leaving their manager (Table 36).

Table 36: Evidence of sub-theme: Organisational fallout

Quotation	Group
… so it is the bad apples but bad apples can rot and people, then other people get upset and leave. It is never your bad people leave. It is your good people that leave and that's the other consequences.	Leader
I do not know how this middle manager got there, but yeah, I think that was I ultimately left, basically due to that.	Subordinate
But I left. When I left the rest of my team also then left, people who are reporting into me and that's that. I mean that's a lot of talent, but that's people who really knew what they were doing.	Subordinate
Suppose a lot of people stayed in that organisation until retirement, right? So, you know, I would not say that losing me specifically or some of the others set them necessarily back, right? So that's the sad thing, right? They will just carry on because the organisation has to... carry on and therefore they do but it is the opportunity cost of what they, of what they lost actually. So they might not know. But I think the people who were there and have left, can see the opportunity cost of what has been, what has been missed out on.	Subordinate
Here is a lot of account, a lot of leverage leadership has in a company with regards to its people and ultimately they're all saying that people do not leave companies; they leave managers is very, very true.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Organisational fallout

From the leader's perspective, the fallout of destructive leadership is the loss of good people; it is never the bad people who leave.

The subordinate group believes that the fallout from resignations due to destructive behaviour can result in an opportunity cost, including the loss of contributions from employees who have left, the loss of critical skills and the fact that it can be hard for the people who remain behind. The loss creates a contagion effect, where other people also leave the organisation. More than one participant from the subordinate group stated that people do not leave companies; they leave managers.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Organisational fallout

The fallout from resignations due to destructive leadership behaviour can result in the loss of critical skills, the departure of good people and opportunity cost. This can be particularly challenging for those who remain behind, potentially leading to further resignations.

5.4.3.2 High turnover sub-theme

Participants specifically mentioned employee turnover and churn as evidence of destructive leadership (Table 37).

Table 37: Evidence of sub-theme: High turnover

Quotation	Group
You find a lot of churn from a staff perspective, purely because people can't work in that environment. So, the sooner they get an option to move, they're out of the space...	Leader
Then the other two he did not know he employed here, so both of them left. And he replaced them. And the two that he replaced with left.	Leader
But she had gotten away with such behaviour because the people that she leads do not stay. You know, they do not stay beyond a certain period, right? So there's a trend in terms of when people leave, when they join that team.	Subordinate
And I wasn't the only one. I mean, this was, I think, most of us left within three to four years of that specific manager joining as manager.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: High turnover

The leaders shared examples of employee turnover, where people left at the first opportunity, as well as situations of high turnover resulting from destructive leadership behaviour.

On the other hand, subordinates cited destructive leaders as the cause of multiple people leading a business over several years. This resembles a form of contagion; as one member of the team leaves, more follow over time if the destructive behaviour continues unchecked. This finding was not replicated in the management group.

Conclusion of sub-theme: High turnover

High turnover can be considered a direct consequence of destructive leadership behaviour. If a number of people leave an organisation, a trend may become apparent relatively quickly or it may take place over several years.

5.4.3.3 Intention to leave sub-theme

The evidence of an employee's intention to leave was selected based on the fact that participants described individuals as looking to leave, needing to leave or being desperate to leave (Table 38).

Table 38: Evidence of sub-theme: Intention to leave

Quotation	Group
So all that happens is people stay in the job while they're looking for something else and the minute they find something else, you find they leave – high attrition levels and so forth.	Leader
So my immediate reaction was I needed to get out of the situation. And so, as a result, quite honestly, I started looking for other opportunities in employment.	Subordinate
… you're not focused on the task at end. You're focused on how do I get out of this place?	Subordinate
… you look for the first bus out of there.	Subordinate
If you're already scared of destructive leadership and bad behaviour, you know it takes quite a bold step to stand up for it and say, you know, I want to address this in the organisation. So people will just leave and that's, I suppose the other bad thing that comes from it, is that people do not say anything and they just leave and that behaviour continues.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Intention to leave

A participant from the leader group noted that as a result of destructive leadership behaviour, individuals will remain in their jobs for only as long as it takes them to find something else.

The subordinate participants expressed that they needed to leave; in some cases, there was an element of desperation to do so, as a result of which one's focus was not on the job but on finding other employment opportunities. One particular subordinate summarised it by saying they were looking for the 'first bus out of there'.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Intention to leave

The fact that people will choose to leave an organisation as a result of destructive behaviour seemed to be a common theme among both leader and subordinate participants. Some participants explained that when one is desperate to leave an organisation, there is a greater focus on finding new employment and less emphasis on their current responsibilities, which may hinder an organisation's ability to achieve its objectives.

5.4.4 Theme 8: Erosion of psychological safety and trust

This theme examines the impact of psychological safety, or its absence, and the consequences of a lack of trust stemming from destructive behaviour. Table 39 provides a brief description of the sub-themes and the corresponding codes. The sub-themes are discussed in the sections that follow.

Table 39: RQ 3 Theme 8: Erosion of psychological safety and trust

Sub-theme	Description/contains	Codes linked
Psychological safety	Silence, no freedom to voice opinions or challenge	11
Lack of Trust	No trust in the protection systems	8

5.4.4.1 Psychological safety sub-theme

Participants explained their silence, noting that there was no freedom to voice opinions and no option to challenge (Table 40).

Table 40: Evidence of sub-theme: Psychological safety

Quotation	Group
Then, in poor morale, I see it in a culture where people are scared to talk because there's reprisal if anything is said.	Leader
I saw within my Exco. There were people that were not getting honest feedback that were not always doing what they had to do and their management teams weren't calling them out because of this hierarchical type of structure that says look, I can't know more than the boss and the boss must have all the answers. And that for me is not sustainable going forward.	Leader
So [Name] said to me one of your colleagues actually came to complain that your strategy doesn't work and then you're destroying the company. … so and then you sit with these people and then nobody says anything to you. So it is like everything is fine …	Leader
So I mean, the things that come to mind for me is not creating a safe environment for your team, a safe environment to express opinions, to have challenging conversations.	Subordinate
If people start being scared of speaking to a leader or voicing an opinion or saying their piece, then you know that is a destructive place.	Subordinate
But there is no channel where everyone can feel free to go and say I'm coming to report my manager because we knew already. Nothing's going to be done. You end up shooting yourself out.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Psychological safety

From the leaders' perspectives, psychological safety is lacking in an environment where people are afraid to speak because of reprisal, where those in the upper echelons are not to be questioned or where there is an inability to challenge the boss. One leader explained that their subordinates refrained from raising any issues about a strategy but complained to other stakeholders, suggesting that there was no psychological safety, so they did not speak up.

Subordinates confirm the lack of psychological safety in their environments, claiming that people are too scared to speak or voice an opinion. In addition, reporting one's manager comes with potentially dire consequences for subordinates. In one case, a subordinate was prevented from speaking to senior stakeholders. Not being allowed to engage with stakeholders directly, they were forced to channel everything through their manager; essentially, the leader had become a blocker.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Psychological safety

Both leaders and subordinates agree that people need to be able to express their opinions and challenge constructively in a safe environment. However, if people are too afraid to speak up, then leadership will not be aware of a lack of psychological safety.

5.4.4.2 Lack of trust sub-theme

The evidence for the lack of trust sub-theme was selected from participants who reported having no trust in the protection systems (Table 41).

Table 41: Evidence of sub-theme: Lack of trust

Quotation	Group
But if you're stuck in this robust model where there's Big Brother on top of you, not trusting, no transparency, no view and no autonomy in terms of where you can execute, you tend to play within the guardrails.	Subordinate
Trust. And that's my own issues, yeah, it was absolutely trust. Trust that it would be handled and dealt with confidence that it wasn't me and coming to terms of it is not me.	Subordinate
So again, financial services, so absolutely, you would have had all the right policies there and accessible and we would have been advocating for it but it still takes courage to go hold on. This is the problem that I have.	Subordinate
So platforms are there, but whether people can trust those platforms …	Subordinate
I think it can be but there are a number of factors that, in my experience, do play out. Trust is a huge one in it and it starts with the trust and confidence of the person that's experiencing it, reach out and trust of the process, the system itself.	Subordinate
But I would have never felt safe in making use of such avenues for the fact that the people that you would be reporting it to, are the people who observe the behaviour and are the people who sort of are high-fiving the individual. So you do think that it is probably not a hill you want to die on, for fear you are also shown the door.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Lack of trust

Only subordinates highlighted the lack of trust, including the trust that leaders had in their abilities and the trust that people had in the processes in place to deal with destructive behaviour. One subordinate described how they resorted to playing within the guardrails

or playing it safe in an environment where there is no trust, no transparency and no autonomy.

Many subordinates reported that they had a lack of trust that issues would be dealt with confidentially if escalated, highlighting concern about the consequences of such reporting and the fear of being shown the door. Subordinates said it takes courage for people to act and utilise the organisational processes and to trust the process.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Lack of trust

A lack of trust in subordinates' ability to deliver will encourage them to play it safe and operate within acceptable guardrails. Subordinates need to have the courage to report behavioural issues in their organisations. However, this can be hampered when there is a lack of trust in the process or the level of confidentiality with which it is handled. The consequence of that lack of trust and courage is that people will not report the issues and the behaviour will continue.

5.4.5 Theme 9: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being

This theme relates to the impact on the emotional, psychological and physical well-being of individuals as a consequence of destructive behaviour. The sub-codes encompass emotional and psychological effects, lingering effects, self-criticism, self-perception, stress, fear and both mental and physical health. Table 42 provides a high-level description of each sub-theme and the corresponding codes. The sub-themes are discussed in the sections that follow.

Table 42: RQ 3 Theme 9: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being

Sub-theme	Description / contains	Codes linked
Emotional and psychological	Impact on emotions, psychological effect and contagion	15
Lingering effect	Long-term impact of the experience	12
Self-criticism	Internalised, self-criticism, self-blame, self-doubt and weakness	17
Self-perception	Damage to self-esteem, self-worth and confidence	11
Stress	Constant and unpredictable threat, effect and psychological impact	9

Sub-theme	Description / contains	Codes linked
Fear	Fear, anxiety, silence, culture, financial insecurity, fear of retaliation, retribution, victimisation and a fear-based environment	28
Mental and physical health	Impact on mental and physical health	9

5.4.5.1 Emotional and psychological sub-theme

The evidence for the emotional and psychological sub-theme includes the impact that destructive behaviour had on participants' emotions, as well as the psychological effect and emotional contagion (Table 43).

Table 43: Evidence of sub-theme: Emotional and psychological

Quotation	Group
I think leaders who ill-treat people might get the job done but that job is done with pain. Having destroyed the souls having destroyed the humanity of the people.	Leader
It is grave and it is not just grave for them … It is grave for their families and people that are connected to them. I have seen... where leaders, because of their toxic behaviour, has caused significant trauma and stress and in some cases it is caused individuals that report to them suicide.	Leader
And when I ask these people that are reporting to her how they are experiencing him, they're saying every time she has had a meeting with this individual, the anger, the negativity she passes on to them.	Leader
This unhappy person, this person who is always frustrated and any mention of that company just, you know, triggers you. You end up then arguing with your family about things that have nothing to do with them. So it really goes into your personal life as well.	Subordinate
Five years she was there, she was here for five years and I experienced traumatic, psychologically impacting. Horrible experience for the full five years she was here.	Subordinate
So now, how they feel ends up trickling into the rest of the team or how they lead you.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Emotional and psychological

Participants in the leaders group acknowledge that although some individuals will deliver, those who deliver using destructive behaviour will cause emotional harm, trauma and stress.

There is a similarity in the findings between the leader group and subordinates regarding emotional contagion. From a leader perspective, they reported that the team will suffer the effects of emotional contagion due to the negativity and anger that the leader passes on. A subordinate confirmed this, saying that when the leader is having a bad day, it affects the rest of the team.

Destructive behaviour has a profound impact on the emotional and psychological state of subordinates, including being an unhappy person, argumentative, crying a lot, suffering from anxiety and even requiring therapy for some participants.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Emotional and psychological

The leader group acknowledged the emotional and psychological impact of destructive leadership behaviour on subordinates. Both the leader group and the subordinate group share the perception of emotional contagion between the leader and their team. Unfortunately, the outcome of destructive leadership behaviour can have serious consequences on subordinates' emotional and psychological states, requiring therapy in some cases.

5.4.5.2 Lingering effect sub-theme

The evidence for the lingering effect sub-theme is based on the long-term impact that the experience of destructive behaviour had on participants (Table 44).

Table 44: Evidence of sub-theme: Lingering effect

Quotation	Group
So very interestingly, because it came and went probably for a period of 10 years, so some of it is aged wisdom.	Subordinate
I think I thought as soon as I leave this company, I'm going to be done, right and then I'm going to start afresh. But ironically, so when I joined then my new company, I was carrying, you know, some of the expectations from there …	Subordinate
When I see their names like, I still get triggered … I have flashbacks in terms of what I went through during those 12 months.	Subordinate

Quotation	Group
… when I found employment in a good company and then I had to really struggle overcoming those fears again because I was too scared to even make a mistake that I even carried that to my new job.	Subordinate
Wow. I'm gonna be honest. I probably still haven't fully recovered.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Lingering effect

No participants in the leader group mentioned the long-term impact on individuals, suggesting that they did not consider this to be a particularly important consequence of destructive behaviour for individuals or the organisation.

A number of participants in the subordinate group described the long-term effect of destructive leadership behaviour. In some cases, the individual had not yet fully recovered; in others, the effects persisted for a period of between five and ten years. Interestingly, the effects do not cease when the individual finds a new job; they carry the experience with them and struggle to overcome past fears. One participant reported having witnessed a repeat of the behaviour at their new employer and although it still affected them, they were able to identify it more quickly.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Lingering effect

Beyond the immediate impact and consequences of destructive leadership behaviour on subordinates, there is a long-term or lingering effect which continues even when the individual is working at a new place of employment. In the absence of a mechanism to identify those who have had a bad experience, leaders will be unaware of the potential impact this may have on the employee's contribution to the organisation.

5.4.5.3 Self-criticism sub-theme

The evidence for the self-criticism sub-theme is based on participants' experiences of self-criticism, self-blame, self-doubt and weakness resulting from destructive behaviour (Table 45).

Table 45: Evidence of sub-theme: Self-criticism

Quotation	Group
There's always an element of self-doubt. Then you know it is not them; it is me. So obviously I'm doing something wrong. Maybe you know obviously I'm the problem, maybe I can't take it or I do not understand.	Subordinate
And it is gotten to a point where I'm constantly questioning whether I am an OK, just an OK programme manager, not even a good programme manager, you know.	Subordinate
And if I just think about myself, you doubt yourself and the legitimacy of no one else is experiencing that and particularly if I think of my own situation, none of my colleagues were experiencing the same thing I was experiencing. So I kept thinking it was me.	Subordinate
It really made me feel like I do not belong in the company. It made me feel not to be more creative. I doubted everything that I do. I even doubted my skills and my education. Like I started asking myself, how did I get here? Did I study? Did I go to university? Because I started feeling like somebody who doesn't know anything. I think the effects were really, really, really bad in such a way that I really doubted.	Subordinate
Now you ask yourself, is the problem me or is the problem them, who is the problem here?	Subordinate
They institute self-doubt … low self-esteem and depression. They cloud one's purpose in life … People can easily forget who they are.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Self-criticism

Self-criticism was not a theme that was identified in the leader group.

As a consequence of suffering under destructive behaviour, subordinates described how they thought they were doing something wrong, doubting their abilities, questioning their knowledge, education and whether they were good at their job. In more than one case, subordinates believed they were to blame, that they had done something wrong and that they were the problem, especially when it seemed that colleagues were not experiencing the same issue.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Self-criticism

Self-criticism is the tendency to doubt your capabilities. This is evident in the numerous subordinates who assumed that they were the problem, they were doing something

wrong and wondering if they were good enough. This suggests that self-blame is a typical response to the experience of destructive behaviour.

5.4.5.4 Self-perception sub-theme

Evidence for the self-perception sub-theme is based on participants' experiences of damage to their self-esteem, self-worth and confidence (Table 46).

Table 46: Evidence of sub-theme: Self-perception

Quotation	Group
So consequences were that you start second-guessing everything you're doing.	Subordinate
In my case, it was clear; you know the reason the team is failing is because of you know, [Name], and other individuals. You know that's quite detrimental to your own self-belief and self-worth, right? So you would doubt yourself...	Subordinate
And I genuinely thought I didn't know what I was doing. It started to undermine my confidence in my ability to do my job,	Subordinate
So you really, it does weigh in on your self-esteem from a work perspective, right? So you question your capabilities; you question your experience, right?	Subordinate
Drive for very low self-esteem. Because remember, when someone is very disruptive in an organisation, that speaks a little bit more about their character than the organisation itself.	Leader

Analysis of sub-theme: Self-perception

In the leader group, one participant's perspective was that when someone displays destructive behaviour, it can reveal more about the individual's character than the organisation, suggesting that they may have low self-esteem.

A subordinate reported that, as a result of their experience with destructive behaviour, they began second-guessing themselves and lost confidence in their abilities. Another subordinate said it started to undermine their confidence and weighed on their self-esteem, causing them to question their capabilities. Being self-conscious and not being allowed to shine was the experience of one of the subordinates. Another subordinate explained destructive behaviour as being the kind of behaviour that breaks down the person, inflicting damage on their self-worth.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Self-perception

A leader's low self-esteem is a precursor to destructive behaviour, which affects the self-esteem of subordinates. The impact of destructive behaviour on self-confidence, self-belief and self-worth has a negative impact on the self-perception of those subordinates who experience it.

5.4.5.5 Stress sub-theme

Participants described how destructive behaviour caused stress, which impacted them psychologically (Table 47).

Table 47: Evidence of sub-theme: Stress

Quotation	Group
It is the compounding effect, I think of everything else, which then had consequences on family, family life, relationships or relationships at home as well, because you're just under this continual stress and strain.	Subordinate
Like, if they decide that that's what they want to do and that's like a very harsh realisation. So that concept has always stuck with me. But in terms of like the stress around it, it probably faded out over, I'd say, by year five.	Subordinate
I mean, because every time you have something to do or she ask you to do anything, it comes with so much anxiety, so much stress that you are literally panicking when you're doing this report because you're trying to make sure that there's no error.	Subordinate
So it is almost like you're just, you know, working with a gun against the head and you're wondering when the shot will go off. So that's not great from a psychological point of view.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Stress

Stress and its personal consequences were only noted in the subordinate group. Varying levels of stress were described, from a heightened level of stress created by receiving death threats and the feeling of having a gun against one's head, to a less extreme form of the stress of making mistakes. The outcome of constant, extreme stress was described as having a direct impact on personal relationships and family life.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Stress

Subordinates described the outcome of constant, extreme stress as a result of destructive behaviour as having a direct impact on interpersonal relationships, family and home life.

5.4.5.6 Fear sub-theme

Participants experienced anxiety, being scared, resorting to silence and the fear of consequences such as retaliation, retribution or victimisation, as well as a culture or environment based on fear (Table 48).

Table 48: Evidence of sub-theme: Fear

Quotation	Group
Then in poor morale, I see it in a culture where people are scared to talk because there's reprisal if anything is said.	Leader
… it takes time because firstly, especially the subordinates will not want to speak out because they're not too sure what will happen afterwards, the retribution or not.	Leader
… there's fear, or you're worried. You feel like you're walking on eggshells every day. I mean, that's not a great space to operate from.	Subordinate
It is almost to invoke fear. I am a senior manager. I'm wanting this information now and you will drop what you're doing in order to give me that information now.	Subordinate
So it made life very difficult. I was forever on my toes or forever scared of what she's going to do. Like it was just a mess. So any instruction from her came with a lot of anxiety because I know whatever I give her, the one thing she wants to do is look for a mistake so that she can come hard on me.	Subordinate
… but people are hesitant to even speak up when they feel disrespected because they do not know what actions will be taken against the person.	Subordinate

Analysis of sub-theme: Fear

The concept of fear featured very highly across the data. When operating from a place of fear, subordinates experience anxiety when considering returning to work after a weekend. One subordinate felt the need to tiptoe at the office and felt diminished as a result. Subordinates fear making mistakes due to the leader's intolerance of errors; the perception was that the leader was always looking for something about which to berate the employee.

The fear of retaliation, retribution and victimisation was a common theme among the participants in the subordinate group. Here, people are afraid to speak out; they do not want to criticise their leaders because they fear the consequences. People become scared to say anything and resort to silence; being non-responsive is considered a safer option. Some report the constant fear of backlash from mistakes. People shy away from speaking up if they feel disrespected because they are fearful of the consequences; they avoid escalation for fear of retribution or being dismissed.

Beyond the individual situations, some subordinate participants describe a fear-based environment, where the CEO leads by fear and subordinates cannot report the behaviour to anyone. Leaders also invoke fear by demanding attention, creating a fear persona. Sometimes, the fear and panic generated by a previous restructuring led to a fear of further retrenchments.

The participants in the leader group acknowledge that destructive leaders resort to driving output through fear and have noted that subordinates remain silent in cases where they fear losing their jobs.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Fear

Fear of losing one's job, being scared and anxious about being at work and the fear of punishment for making mistakes were common among subordinates. Restructuring and the experience of retrenchments also created an environment of fear and panic.

Leaders' perspectives on fear were limited to the fear of reprisal and retribution, resulting in people being scared to talk or speak out about destructive behaviour. Leaders sometimes used fear as a leadership tactic, invoking fear among subordinates and creating a fear persona.

5.4.5.7 Mental and physical health sub-theme

Evidence for this sub-theme was collected from participants who mentioned how mental well-being and physical health were impacted (Table 49).

Table 49: Evidence of sub-theme: Mental and physical health

Quotation	Participant Group
So it definitely has health consequences. I mean the one is the emotional consequences but I definitely found I couldn't pin it down at	Subordinate

Quotation	Participant Group
the time. It is amazing what reflection does. But I was suffering with immense migraines and continual IBS and things like that.	
I think I see now a lot of people who do not have options and still stay in that toxicity. It affects their well-being.	Subordinate
That's what worries me more than anything else because then it becomes a way of life. And we've had two suicide cases here, which is a direct consequence of that type of leadership.	Leader

Analysis of sub-theme: Mental and physical health

Both leaders and subordinates acknowledged that the experience of destructive behaviour has an impact on mental health and physical well-being. One leader claimed that destructive behaviour could affect a person's spirituality as well and echoed the view that people get physically sick. The grave consequences of compromised mental wellness were confirmed by two leaders, who noted that suicide had resulted from destructive leadership behaviour.

One subordinate witnessed that those who have no option but to stay in the toxicity are adversely affected and their mental wellness compromised, so the workforce is not operating at capacity. Another subordinate described personal health concerns, which in hindsight may have resulted from their experience of destructive leadership behaviour.

Conclusion of sub-theme: Mental and physical health

From the evidence, it would appear that there is a definite and direct link between destructive leadership behaviour and mental and physical health.

5.4.6 Conclusion of findings: Research Question 3

The analysis of the data in Section 5.3 set out to answer RQ 3: What are the consequences of destructive behaviour at the individual and organisational levels?

The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the findings, related to RQ 3, are included in Table 50.

Table 50: Themes and sub-themes related to RQ 3

Research Question	Theme	Sub-theme	Codes
RQ 3: What are the consequences of destructive behaviour at an individual and organisational level?	Theme 5: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement	Quiet quitting	12
		Hiding	7
	Theme 6: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour	Retaliation	8
		Sabotage	5
	Theme 7: Systemic organisational fallout	Organisational fallout	11
		High turnover	6
		Intention to leave	6
	Theme 8: Erosion of psychological safety and trust	Psychological safety	11
		Lack of trust	8
	Theme 9: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being	Emotional and Psychological	15
		Lingering effect	12
		Self-criticism	17
		Self-perception	11
		Stress	9
		Fear	28
		Mental and physical health	8

Theme 5: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement

In this theme, there was evidence of quiet quitting and withdrawing support for the organisation, as well as people hiding to escape a destructive leader or their lack of skills.

Theme 6: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour

Subordinates institute retaliation or sabotage in response to destructive behaviour.

Theme 7: Systemic organisational fallout

The consequences of destructive behaviour include high staff turnover, the intention to leave and the loss of talent. This can become systemic due to the contagion effect.

Theme 8: Erosion of psychological safety and trust

Destructive behaviour can create an environment where people are afraid to speak up or express an opinion. Although there may be mechanisms that people can use to escalate issues, they lack trust in the process and fear retribution.

Theme 9: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being

Emotional contagion occurs when the emotions of one individual influence those of others. The experience of destructive behaviour tends to linger with individuals, in some cases, long after they have left the organisation. There are multiple and diverse impacts on the psychological well-being of subordinates, which also affect their physical well-being. Fear featured highly across the data.

5.5 Conclusion

An approach closely aligned with that of reflexive thematic analysis was applied to arrive at the findings for the three research questions. The key findings from the data-gathering and analysis processes were presented in this chapter to extend the understanding of the experience, antecedents and consequences of destructive leadership behaviour. The following section, Chapter 6, compares the findings to the literature.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter compares the analysis completed in Chapter 5 with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The discussion is structured by the research questions to determine whether the theory is confirmed, contradicted or extended.

A systematic process was followed to identify appropriate literature from Chapter 2 for this analysis, similar to the process used by Dewar (2022), as follows:

- First: Search Chapter 2 for literature related to the sub-theme under review.
- Second: Search the articles that were used as sources for Chapter 2.
- Third: In the absence of literature being identified in the second step, search Google Scholar to identify appropriate sources of literature to compare against the findings.

For brevity, the section that follows is structed at the level of themes, even though the comparison of sub-themes are specifically included.

6.2 Discussion: Research Question 1

RQ 1: How do stakeholders identify and experience the behaviours of destructive leaders?

Regarding RQ 1: the experience of stakeholders, this section summarises the findings presented in Chapter 5 and contrasts these findings with the related literature from Chapter 2. It presents a comparison to highlight areas of similarity or difference and a conclusion as to whether the findings confirm, contradict or extend the body of knowledge.

6.2.1 Theme 1: Manifestation of destructive behaviour

Table 51: RQ 1 Theme 1 and sub-themes

Research question	Theme	Sub-theme
RQ 1: How do stakeholders identify and experience the behaviours of destructive leaders?	Theme 1: Manifestation of destructive behaviour	Absent Leader Anger and Rage Varied behaviour and response Blame Bullying

Research question	Theme	Sub-theme
		Threatening Management style

6.2.1.1 Summary findings: Manifestation of destructive behaviour

Absent leader: It would seem that the action of a leader being absent, regardless of the intention, can result in or enable destructive behaviour from both a subordinate and a leader's perspective. Needs from subordinates, the team and the organisation remain unmet in the case of an absent leader.

Anger and rage: Both leaders and subordinates have witnessed the manifestation of anger and rage, with people shouting, screaming and swearing at work. This behaviour does not create a conducive working environment for subordinates. This differs from the leader perspective in that, although the behaviour may not be condoned, one leader disclosed that there is merit in the approach.

Varied behaviour: Both subordinates and leaders shared the view that destructive behaviour was pervasive across organisations. The manifestation of destructive behaviour was experienced by both groups of participants in different and subtle ways, at varying levels of intensity. If the behaviour was left to continue, all agreed that it would become an accepted norm and be tolerated when results were good. Leaders have different views about the frequency of the behaviour, as some consider destructive behaviour a pattern, while others believe it to be more sporadic.

Blame: Destructive behaviour, such as assigning blame to others and deflecting responsibility, was experienced by both subordinates and leaders. This behaviour manifests when leaders act out of self-preservation and resort to blaming subordinates for their own failures. Leaders also experience being blamed for unfair treatment or wrongfully blamed for the actions of their subordinates.

Bullying: Some leaders see bullying as detrimental to the organisation and causing pain and injury for the team, whereas others suggest that sometimes a bully is necessary, regardless of the fallout. One leader admitted to relying on a bully to drive results, knowing full well the consequences for the team. Subordinates' experience of bullying is more of a feeling, described as emotional bullying, rather than something physical.

Threatening: Two subordinates had been subjected to unwarranted threatening behaviour; the first was multiple threats of being fired, creating a sense of job insecurity, and the other was a more extreme case, involving death threats. One leader rejected the risk of being fired for telling the truth, while another leader's subordinate had an apathetic response to the risk of being fired.

Management style: Autocratic leadership is viewed in both a negative and a positive light by subordinates and leaders. Authoritarianism, such as that of leaders who insist that people respect their authority and positional power, is perceived as more negative by both subordinates and leaders.

6.2.1.2 Related literature: Manifestation of destructive behaviour

Absent leader: Laissez-faire leadership is a non-responsive or avoidance type of behaviour, akin to the leader being absent (Fosse et al., 2019) that some scholars consider destructive.

Anger and rage: Manifestations of abusive supervision include loud and angry tantrums, speaking rudely and belittling subordinates in public (Tepper, 2000). The behaviour of dysfunctional leaders includes being abusive, humiliating and rude, verbal or physical bullying, being self-interested and acting in an autocratic manner by excluding subordinates from decision making (Patel & Hamlin, 2017). Research suggests a narcissistic leader's behaviour could be explained by "arrogance, feelings of inferiority, an insatiable need for recognition and superiority, hypersensitivity, anger, lack of empathy, amorality, irrationality and inflexibility, paranoia" (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006, p. 619) and specific behaviours such as manipulation, intimidation and coercion (Padilla et al., 2007).

Blame: Dysfunctional behaviour by leaders includes other types of behaviour, including blaming, public ridicule, yelling, threatening, ignoring or excluding subordinates and favouritism (Abalkhail, 2022).

Bullying: Bullying is named as one of the core behaviours identified by Akinyele and Chen (2025) in their study of causes and consequences of toxic leadership. However, it is sometimes seen as a tool to achieve results or to "bringing out the best in people" (Motsei & Nkomo, 2016, p. 58).

Threatening: The literature describes destructive leadership as the use of threats, intimidation and punishment (Abalkhail, 2022; Mackey et al., 2021; Patel et al., 2022)

Management style: The literature often refers to leadership styles when discussing destructive leadership, thereby raising concerns about the conflation of leadership styles with behaviour (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). Consideration should be given to the fact that in some cases, the perception of destructive leadership behaviour may be a result of changes that the leader is implementing for cultural or operational reasons (Li et al., 2024). Modliba and Treffers (2025) suggest that, despite a potential negative perception of authoritarian leadership, it might be positive for the organisation.

6.2.1.3 Findings versus literature: Manifestation of destructive behaviour

The finding of absent leaders creating a vacuum and the destructive behaviour that ensues was similar to the description of laissez-faire leadership (Fosse et al., 2019), although some scholars view this as non-leadership and prefer to exclude it from destructive leadership (Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

Specific behaviours named by participants, such as shouting, blaming, bullying, threatening and micromanaging, are confirmed in the reviewed literature.

The finding of management style was limited to autocratic leadership and authoritarianism, although the former was viewed in both a positive and negative light. The literature review is replete with references to leadership styles, an issue that was raised due to the conflation of leadership styles and behaviour. In contrast with the findings, authoritarian leadership could potentially be positive for an organisation (Modliba & Treffers, 2025).

6.2.1.4 Conclusion: Manifestation of destructive behaviour

No differences were found between the findings and the literature on the identification and experience of absent leadership, anger and rage, varied behaviour, blame, bullying and threatening as manifestations of destructive behaviour. The findings confirm the existing body of knowledge.

The findings on references to leadership style differed somewhat from the literature, as only autocratic and authoritarian leadership styles were mentioned. In contrast, in the literature, the identification of leadership styles in destructive leadership behaviour is widespread due to the conflation of leadership style and behaviour. This is a nuanced difference between how destructive behaviour is viewed from a practitioner's point of view and how some academics have described the behaviour to date.

6.2.2 Theme 2: Experience of psychological control and manipulation

Table 52: RQ 1 Theme 2 and sub-themes

Research Question	Theme	Sub-theme
RQ 1: How do stakeholders identify and experience the behaviours of destructive leaders?	Theme 2: Experience of psychological control and manipulation	Micromanagement Intentionality Power and ego

6.2.2.1 Summary findings: Experience of psychological control and manipulation

Micromanagement: This behaviour is identified as destructive by both leaders and employees. Micromanagement has different levels of intensity, as exemplified by secretly tracking activity or constantly watching over subordinates.

Intentionality: Destructive behaviour includes the intention to insult, inflict harm and seek revenge. This behaviour, experienced by leaders and subordinates alike, carries an element of intentionality.

Power and ego: Power can be used to either grow or divide a team. Leaders often use their power to suppress people and to avoid being challenged. The power to influence, although a valuable leadership trait, can be detrimental when used destructively. Positional power and ego can become a fatal flaw or a blind spot, where leaders believe they know everything and are always right or they have the right to enforce their views upon others and silence dissenting views.

6.2.2.2 Related literature: Experience of psychological control and manipulation

Micromanagement: This destructive behaviour, as well as excessive and intrusive monitoring, is a negative form of clarifying, task-oriented leadership behaviour (Yukl, 2012). The conceptualisation of destructive leadership behaviour includes micromanagement (Akinyele & Chen, 2025; Patel et al., 2022). A study of people who had experienced bullying expressed frustration at being micromanaged (Motsei & Nkomo, 2016), hinting at a possible perceived connection between micromanagement and bullying.

Intentionality: There is consensus among several scholars that most forms of destructive leadership behaviour have an element of intentionality, including the intent to

harm (Mackey et al., 2021; Modliba & Treffers, 2025; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper, 2007).

Power and ego: Power is mentioned in the literature as key to the destructive, unethical and even toxic behaviour of leaders in the manner that it is used to oppress people and disregard their emotions to gain personal benefit for the leader (Akinyele & Chen, 2025). Senior leaders have a certain amount of discretion that they can exercise in executing their responsibilities and this creates the opportunity for destructive leaders to abuse power, especially in top management positions, where there is less supervision (Padilla et al., 2007). Cunha et al. (2024) describe how power is relational; while some will share it with others to achieve things, some exercise power by terrorising others, which might be effective in the short term, but the outcome may be compromised.

6.2.2.3 Findings versus literature: Experience of psychological control and manipulation

Micromanagement was found to be a destructive behaviour and the literature confirms the finding. The intentionality of destructive behaviour also aligns with the literature. Power was widely found in the data, indicating that power was identified or experienced as a destructive behaviour, which is confirmed in the literature.

6.2.2.4 Conclusion: Experience of psychological control and manipulation

The identification and experience of destructive behaviour, such as micromanagement, the perception of intent to harm and the effect of power as a means of exerting control, confirm theory.

6.3 Discussion: Research Question 2

RQ 2: What do these stakeholders see as the antecedents of destructive behaviours?

Regarding RQ 2: the antecedents, this section summarises the findings presented in Chapter 5 and contrasts these findings with the related literature from Chapter 2. It presents a comparison to highlight areas of similarity or difference and a conclusion as to whether the findings confirm or extend the body of knowledge.

6.3.1 Theme 3: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures

Table 53: RQ 2 Theme 3 and sub-themes

Research Question	Theme	Sub-theme
RQ 2: What do these stakeholders see as the antecedents of destructive behaviours	Theme 3: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures	Incentives Restructuring Misaligned expectations Culture Insecurity

6.3.1.1 Summary findings: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures

Incentives: Incentives are levers to drive behaviour. However, both good and bad outcomes can occur, whether incentives are present or not. Management must be mindful of misaligned incentives, which are those incentives that drive behaviour contrary to what they are trying to create.

Restructures: These can illicit destructive behaviour from both subordinates and leaders. When retrenchments occur, people tend to look out for themselves in the fight to retain their jobs.

Misaligned expectations: Leaders have certain expectations of employees in terms of behaviour and meeting the organisation's requirements; therefore, behaviour that fails to meet the expectations of a manager can be seen as destructive. Subordinates expect managers to demonstrate a duty of care and due diligence towards them, and a failure to do so, such as neglect, is perceived as destructive. This suggests that not only is active and intentional behaviour destructive but passive and absent behaviour is also destructive.

Culture: Culture can drive behaviour, particularly destructive behaviour, as in the case of a culture of fear or silencing of voices. Behaviour also influences culture; destructive behaviour from individuals can damage culture.

Insecurity: Both subordinates and leaders believe that insecurity can contribute to the destructive behaviour of leaders who are intimidated by others.

6.3.1.2 Related literature: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures

Incentives: These can be used as a force for good or for evil, as the competition for rewards could drive destructive behaviour (Almeida et al., 2022; Krasikova et al., 2013).

Restructuring: Restructuring is noted as one of the organisational processes that can trigger bullying, a form of destructive behaviour (Motsei & Nkomo, 2016). Previous research conducted in a South African context reveals individuals jostling for positions and the opportunity for the misuse of power (Motsei & Nkomo, 2016).

Misaligned expectations: Employees have certain expectations of leadership, or managers, such as the need for leaders to be concerned for the well-being of employees; an uncaring attitude and unsupportive approach may result in role ambiguity or conflict (Almeida et al., 2022), all of which are categorised as harmful leadership behaviours and linked to destructive behaviour. Negative leader behaviours, including disrespectful and intimidating behaviour, a lack of guidance for staff, micromanaging and controlling behaviour, a lack of accountability, avoidance and ignoring behaviour, favouritism and an uncaring attitude towards staff, were identified in an analysis by Patel et al. (2022).

Beyond this conceptualisation of behaviours, an essential contribution from Patel et al. (2022) highlighted a range of poor management behaviours which people perceive to be ineffective, so not necessarily only those that are considered to be extremely bad. Modliba and Treffers (2025) highlight examples of subordinate behaviours, such as abusive behaviour, conflict, gossip and interpersonal deviance, which could be considered as an antecedent for reactive negative behaviour from leaders.

Culture: Disregard for cultural norms, such as respecting one's elders or the fact that challenging one's superiors is deemed taboo in some cultural settings, contributes to the acceptance of destructive or toxic behaviours (Akinyele & Chen, 2025). Destructive outcomes for an organisation are not only the work of a destructive leader but also of a conducive environment, described as one where there is instability, perceived threat, a culture of collectivism and the absence of management oversight or balance of control (Padilla et al., 2007).

Insecurity: Insecurity is linked to destructive leadership behaviour (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006; Tepper, 2007) in the sense that leaders will respond to threatening encounters with destructive behaviour to restore their sense of self.

6.3.1.3 Findings versus literature: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures

Incentives, restructuring, culture and insecurity are highlighted as antecedents of destructive behaviour in the findings and similarly confirmed in the literature.

Misaligned expectations are highlighted as a theme in the findings to emphasise that leaders have certain expectations of subordinates and, similarly, subordinates have expectations of leaders; the absence of which can be perceived as destructive behaviour. Although the literature confirmed subordinates' expectations of managers, no reference was found in the literature relating to leaders' expectations of subordinates.

6.3.1.4 Conclusion: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures

The findings of incentives, restructuring, culture and insecurity as antecedents of destructive behaviour are confirmed in the literature. Leaders' unmet expectations of subordinates, which can be perceived as destructive behaviour, were found in the data but not reflected in the literature. This can be seen as a nuanced difference, adding to the body of knowledge.

6.3.2 Theme 4: Toxicity, precedent and pressure

Table 54: RQ 2 Theme 4 and sub-themes

Research question	Theme	Sub-theme
RQ 2: What do these stakeholders see as the antecedents of destructive behaviours	Theme 4: Toxicity, precedent and pressure	Tone at the top Toxicity Assimilation Pressure

6.3.2.1 Summary findings: Toxicity, precedent and pressure

Tone at the top: Executive and top management set the tone for the rest of the organisation and therefore, destructive leadership behaviour and cultures emanate from top management.

Toxicity: Toxic environments and toxic behaviour can result from the active behaviour of the leader or a passive response whereby the leader's inattention allows for toxic people to taint the environment. Both leaders and subordinates recognise toxicity; for some, it might not be evident until they leave.

Assimilation: Training and observations of destructive leadership behaviour will be replicated by those who have experienced this when they go on to lead others. This creates a vicious cycle of observing and experiencing destructive behaviour and then inflicting that behaviour on others as subordinates progress through the organisation.

Pressure: Both leaders and subordinates agree that pressure is likely to lead to destructive behaviour. In some cases, the behaviour is a default response and could be considered a coping mechanism. Consideration must be given to the amount of pressure at the very top of the organisation.

6.3.2.2 Related literature: Toxicity, precedent and pressure

Tone at the top: Leaders drive organisational culture and therefore, behaviour demonstrated by the top leadership team will influence the rest of the organisation; even a small amount of destructive behaviour can result in a significant detrimental impact on employees (Akinyele & Chen, 2025). For Gauglitz et al. (2023), leaders' narcissistic rivalry is positively associated with abusive supervision, which is particularly important because narcissists will likely be found in leadership positions.

Toxicity: Toxic approaches can include intimidation and punishment (Akinyele & Chen, 2025). A toxic culture is broadly described as one which enables destructive leadership behaviour without sufficient checks and balances, while destructive behaviour would not exist without toxic people (Padilla et al., 2007).

Assimilation: Akinyele and Chen (2025) identified the likelihood of followers imitating the behaviours of toxic leaders, enabling the contagion of this behaviour within the organisation. Scholars have found that, in some cases, followers are likely to adopt and perpetuate the same visible behaviours of leaders, even those who role model inappropriate behaviours (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Toader & Kunze, 2021). This explains the contagion that occurs in organisations where destructive behaviour trickles down from senior to more junior levels through behavioural modelling (Toader & Kunze, 2021). Being exposed to the destructive behaviour of leaders may lead to employees imitating this behaviour because it is seen to be acceptable (Li et al., 2024).

Pressure: The negative leadership behaviour of supervisors could be linked to their higher levels of stress, emotional exhaustion and unattainable goals (Modliba & Treffers, 2025).

6.3.2.3 Findings versus literature: Toxicity, precedent and pressure

The ultimate responsibility for setting the example remains with those at the top of an organisation; this was confirmed in the findings and the literature. The literature identifies toxicity as an antecedent of destructive behaviour in approaches, people, the environment and culture; however, the findings reveal a nuanced difference where a leader's absence can allow toxic individuals to taint the environment.

The findings that employees assimilate the behaviour they witness from leaders and the pressure experienced by leaders as a result of high levels of stress and unattainable goals, which are antecedents of destructive leadership behaviour, were aligned with the literature.

6.3.2.4 Conclusion: Toxicity, precedent and pressure

The findings, which identified antecedents for destructive behaviour, including senior management setting the tone, approaches, environment and people-related toxicity, as well as the assimilation of behaviour and pressure, were all confirmed in the literature.

6.4 Discussion: Research Question 3

RQ 3: What are the consequences of destructive behaviours at the individual and organisational levels?

Regarding RQ 3: the consequences, this section summarises the findings presented in Chapter 5 and contrasts these findings with the related literature from Chapter 2. It presents a comparison to highlight areas of similarity or difference and a conclusion as to whether the findings confirm or extend the body of knowledge.

6.4.1 Theme 5: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement

Table 55: RQ 3 Theme 5 and sub-themes

Research question	Theme	Sub-theme
RQ 3: What are the consequences of destructive behaviour at an individual and organisational level	Theme 5: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement	Quiet quitting Hiding

6.4.1.1 Summary findings: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement

Quiet quitting: The withdrawal of support for the organisation, for the team and the leader is a consequence of destructive leadership behaviour. Subordinates tend to do only what is necessary and stick to contracted working hours; they are not engaged, lack commitment and refuse to give anything more.

Hiding: When subordinates seek to escape destructive leadership behaviour, they may tend to resort to hiding, including seeking other jobs. The findings also suggest that leaders can use destructive behaviour as a tool to hide a lack of skills.

6.4.1.2 Related literature: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement

Quiet quitting: The effect of reduced performance and absenteeism was echoed in earlier findings (Tepper, 2000). Naseer et al. (2016) identified that, as a result of being subjected to a despotic leader, subordinates would likely lower performance, withdraw creativity and potentially abstain from citizenship behaviours. Dysfunctional leadership is said to result in decreased involvement from employees and increased absenteeism (Abalkhail, 2022). Absenteeism is further confirmed as a consequence of harmful leader behaviours by Almeida et al. (2022).

The literature review did not specifically mention quiet quitting, so a third step of the process to identify literature was undertaken on Google Scholar. It revealed two papers regarding the topic of quiet quitting.

The phenomenon of quiet quitting has a devastating organisational impact. Employees who withdraw support, disengage and refuse to go beyond their primary responsibilities, can be a competitive disadvantage (Atalay & Dağıstan, 2024; Bolino & Klotz, 2022); presumably, in some cases, resignation in this situation would be welcomed.

Unsurprisingly, leadership and culture are key factors influencing quiet quitting, which includes employees refusing to work extra hours and essentially delivering only the minimum to meet job requirements (Atalay & Dağıstan, 2024). This behaviour is a deliberate reaction from employees who do not feel supported by their organisation (Atalay & Dağıstan, 2024), which, in the case of destructive leadership behaviour, may manifest in response to the organisation's failure to take action and remove the perpetrator.

Hiding: Hiding behaviour, where employees aim to avoid resource depletion due to unethical leader behaviours, was highlighted by Hassan et al. (2023). Hiding is also

described as people hiding to escape a destructive leader or hiding their lack of skills (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006)

6.4.1.3 Findings versus literature: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement

Some of the findings related to the concept of quiet quitting, which were confirmed in the literature, include withdrawal of support and a decline in performance. However, the findings revealed a more explicit behaviour of employees refusing to work beyond office hours and only doing what is necessary. Interestingly, absenteeism was only mentioned in the literature.

The topic of hiding, revealed in the findings as a tactic by employees to avoid the attention of a destructive leader, was confirmed by the literature. The deployment of destructive behaviour as a tactic to hide a lack of skills in the findings differed from the literature, which mentioned such behaviour as a ploy to secure promotion (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006).

6.4.1.4 Conclusion: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement

The findings provided a more explicit reference to quiet quitting and its associated behaviours than any found in the literature; this nuanced distinction prompted a search for additional literature. The concept of quiet quitting is considered a consequence of destructive leadership behaviour; this finding is seen to extend the literature on destructive leadership. Using destructive behaviour as a way to hide a lack of skills on the part of the leader also extends the current literature.

6.4.2 Theme 6: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour

Table 56: RQ 3 Theme 6 and sub-themes

Research question	Theme	Sub-theme
RQ 3: What are the consequences of destructive behaviour at an individual and organisational level	Theme 6: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour	Retaliation Sabotage

6.4.2.1 Summary findings: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour

Retaliation: Subordinates may institute retaliatory behaviour, such as using similar tactics, excluding former colleagues from events, withdrawing support for their manager,

and refusing to defend their leader when the leader is absent, in response to destructive leadership behaviour.

Sabotage: Leaders can also derail employees by secretly sabotaging moves previously approved, a more covert action. Leaders must withstand deliberate sabotage attempts by employees who are not promoted, as they may withdraw their commitment to the organisation and incite support from colleagues through the rumour mill.

The experience of sabotage was more commonly reported in the leader group and is particularly common when leaders are driving results or requesting deliverables. The leader group also expressed their concerns about the potential for employees who have the power to sabotage the organisation due to dissatisfaction, for example, with senior appointments.

6.4.2.2 Related literature: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour

Retaliation: Deviant organisational or counterproductive behaviour, including stealing from the organisation, was found to be a direct consequence of, or retaliation against, abusive supervision and destructive leadership (Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper, 2007). Abusive supervision can result in retaliation, as a result of the lack of support for employees (Yukl, 2012). Retaliation from employees to abusive supervision can come in the form of silence, which can the intentional behaviour of employees to withhold suggestions and refrain from reporting issues as a way to inflict damage upon the organisation or their supervisor (Xu et al., 2015).

Subordinates of destructive leaders tend to have a negative attitude towards their supervisor and their organisation, which can lead not only to turnover intention but also counterproductive work behaviour – a more clandestine form of retaliation against a destructive leader (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). In the case where employees or followers reject the leader's behaviour, or perceive it to be wrong, as in the case of negative leadership behaviour, this can result in retaliation or reciprocation (Toader & Kunze, 2021)

Sabotage: The types of behaviour specifically linked to counterproductive work behaviour include, among others, theft and sabotage with the intent to inflict damage on the organisation (Marcus et al., 2016).

6.4.2.3 Findings versus literature: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour

Retaliation as a response to destructive leader behaviour was clear among subordinates and well-documented in the literature. Concerns about sabotage were more prevalent in

the findings of the leadership group, with leaders expressing unease about employees' acts of sabotage, a concern echoed in the literature.

6.4.2.4 Conclusion: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour

Retaliation and sabotage from subordinates, as a consequence of their experience of destructive leadership behaviour, was confirmed in the literature.

6.4.3 Theme 7: Systemic organisational fallout

Table 57: RQ 3 Theme 7 and sub-themes

Research Question	Theme	Sub-theme
RQ 3: What are the consequences of destructive behaviour at an individual and organisational level	Theme 7: Systemic organisational fallout	Organisational fallout High turnover Intention to leave

6.4.3.1 Summary findings: systemic organisational fallout

Organisational fallout: The fallout from resignations due to destructive leadership behaviour can result in the loss of critical skills, the departure of talented individuals and opportunity costs. This can be particularly challenging for individuals who remain behind, potentially leading to further resignations, which suggests that turnover can become a systemic issue.

High turnover: High turnover can be considered a direct consequence of destructive leadership behaviour. Considering the number of people leaving the organisation, a trend may become apparent relatively quickly or it may unfold over several years.

Intention to leave: The fact that people intend to leave an organisation as a result of destructive behaviour appeared to be common among both leader and subordinate participants. Some participants explained that when one is desperate to leave an organisation, there is a greater focus on finding new employment and less on current responsibilities, which may hinder the organisation’s ability to achieve its objectives.

6.4.3.2 Related literature: systemic organisational fallout

Organisational fallout: As early as 2000, Tepper linked the likelihood of people leaving their jobs due to abusive supervisors and the consequential detrimental impact on those who remained in their jobs (Tepper, 2000).

High turnover: Turnover as a consequence of destructive leadership behaviour is frequently mentioned in the literature (Abalkhail, 2022; Akinyele & Chen, 2025)

Intention to leave: Unethical leader behaviour, such as those acts that violate norms, moral standards and expectations of conduct, can increase the turnover intention of staff (Cialdini et al., 2021). Subordinates' intention to leave is heightened when experiencing dysfunctional leader behaviour (Abalkhail, 2022). In their review of literature on toxic leadership, Akinyele and Chen (2025) identified a number of consequences of toxic leadership, including turnover and the intention to leave (Akinyele & Chen, 2025); similar consequences were suggested by Modliba and Treffers (2025).

6.4.3.3 Findings versus literature: systemic organisational fallout

As a consequence of destructive behaviour, high levels of turnover and a heightened level of employees' intention to leave impact organisations; this is confirmed in the literature. A nuanced difference was identified in the findings, in that employees' focus will be more on seeking alternative work opportunities and less on their current job, which was not previously reported in the literature reviewed.

Another minor difference in the findings was the systemic nature of the attrition; as team members begin to resign and depart from the organisation, others will follow. The findings highlighted that this could be over a shorter or longer period.

6.4.3.4 Conclusion: systemic organisational fallout

The findings about high turnover, employee intention to leave and the organisational impact as consequences of destructive leadership behaviour were confirmed in the literature. The impact of employees' intention to leave, specifically how they will focus their attention on finding alternative work, extends the literature. The systemic nature of employee attrition and its temporal nature extend the literature on the consequences of destructive leadership behaviour on organisations.

6.4.4 Theme 8: Erosion of Psychological safety and trust

Table 58: RQ 3 Theme 8 and sub-themes

Research question	Theme	Sub-theme
RQ 3: What are the consequences of destructive behaviour at an individual and organisational level	Theme 8: Erosion of Psychological safety and trust	Lack of trust Psychological safety

6.4.4.1 Summary findings: Erosion of psychological safety and trust

Lack of trust: Destructive behaviour can create an environment where people are afraid to speak up or express an opinion. Although there may be mechanisms that people can use to escalate issues, they lack trust in the process and fear retribution. The lack of trust by a leader in their subordinates' ability to deliver will encourage them to play it safe and operate within acceptable guardrails. The consequences of the lack of trust and courage is that people will not report the issues and the destructive behaviour will continue.

Psychological safety: The environment needs to be safe for people to express their opinions and challenges constructively. Both leaders and subordinates share this view. However, if people are too afraid to speak up, then leadership will not be aware of the lack of psychological safety.

6.4.4.2 Related literature: Erosion of psychological safety and trust

Lack of trust: Abusive behaviour from leaders can result in reduced trust from employees (Yukl, 2012). Schyns et al. (2022) suggest that it is essential to have a system where employees can raise complaints against leaders confidentially without fear of retaliation. Still, they warn that employees will only utilise these mechanisms if they trust the system.

Psychological safety: Toxic leadership has a negative impact on psychological safety (Akinyele & Chen, 2025). The fear of retaliation may prevent employees from whistle-blowing or reporting bad behaviour through processes (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). The absence of psychological safety can result in a reluctance of employees to speak up about issues such as destructive behaviour, for example, resorting instead to staying silent as a defensive mechanism (Hao et al., 2022).

6.4.4.3 Findings versus literature: Erosion of psychological safety and trust

In the findings, employees highlighted a lack of trust in the processes for raising issues and reporting destructive behaviour. This reduced trust is confirmed in the literature. The findings confirmed an erosion of psychological safety as a consequence of destructive behaviour, preventing people from reporting bad behaviour and resorting to silence. This was confirmed in the literature.

6.4.4.4 Conclusion: Erosion of psychological safety and trust

The findings related to the erosion of psychological safety and trust as a consequence of destructive behaviour were consistent with the literature.

6.4.5 Theme 9: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being

Table 59: RQ 3 Theme 9 and sub-themes

Research question	Theme	Sub-theme
RQ 3: What are the consequences of destructive behaviour at an individual and organisational level	Theme 9: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being	Emotional and psychological Lingering effect Self-criticism Self-perception Stress Fear Mental and physical health

6.4.5.1 Summary findings: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being

Emotional and psychological: The leader group acknowledged the emotional and psychological impact of destructive leadership behaviour on subordinates. Both the leader group and subordinate group shared the perception of emotional contagion between the leader and their team. Unfortunately, the outcome of destructive leadership behaviour can have serious consequences on subordinates' emotional and psychological states; some even require therapy.

Lingering effect: Beyond the immediate impact and consequences of destructive leadership behaviour on subordinates, there is a long-term or lingering effect which continues even when the individual is working at a new place of employment. In the absence of a mechanism to identify those who have had a bad experience, leaders will

be unaware of the potential impact this may have on the employee's contribution to the organisation.

Self-criticism: The findings highlighted instances of self-doubt, self-blame and self-criticism, all of which pointed to the tendency to doubt one's own capabilities. This was evident in the numerous subordinates who assumed they were the problem, believing they were doing something wrong and wondering if they were good enough, which pointed to a typical response to the experience of destructive behaviour.

Self-perception: Destructive leadership behaviour affects the self-esteem of subordinates and low self-esteem is a precursor to destructive behaviour. The impact of destructive behaviour on self-confidence, self-belief and self-worth demonstrates the adverse effects on self-perception for those subordinates who experience such behaviour.

Stress: The outcome of constant, extreme stress resulting from destructive behaviour was described as having a direct impact on the interpersonal relationships, family and home life of subordinates.

Fear: The fear of losing one's job, being scared and anxious about being at work and the fear of punishment for making mistakes were common among subordinates. Leaders' perspectives on fear were limited to the fear of reprisal and retribution, resulting in people being scared to talk or speak out about destructive behaviour. There was also evidence of leaders using fear as a leadership tactic, invoking fear among subordinates and creating a fear persona. Restructuring and the experience of retrenchments also create an environment of fear and panic.

Mental and physical health: Based on the evidence, it appears that in the cases of the participants, there is a definite and direct link between destructive leadership behaviour and mental and physical health.

6.4.5.2 Related literature: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being

Emotional and psychological: High levels of psychological distress were identified as a result of employees experiencing unethical leader behaviour, such as actions that violate standards and the expectations of moral conduct (Cialdini et al., 2021). Consequences of toxic leadership for employees include emotional exhaustion and psychological distress (Akinyele & Chen, 2025). Across the literature, Modliba and Treffers (2025) identified a number of personal consequences of negative leadership

behaviour, including emotional exhaustion, burnout, shame, stress, anxiety and depression and retaliation.

Lingering effect: The consequence of destructive leadership behaviour is that subordinates can experience long-lasting effects (Li et al., 2024).

Self-criticism: The effect of dysfunctional leadership behaviour for subordinates extends to self-doubt and the feeling of being less capable; people begin to question their own abilities (Abalkhail, 2022; Hassan et al., 2023)

Self-perception: Damage to self-esteem is highlighted as a consequence of destructive behaviour for subordinates (Fosse et al., 2019; Modliba & Treffers, 2025; Patel & Hamlin, 2017) and diminishes employees' self-confidence (Abalkhail, 2022).

Fear: Scholars suggest that authoritarian leadership can cause fear for subordinates, resulting in silence as a fear-based coping mechanism (Guo et al., 2018). Toxic leaders can create a culture of fear, which enables these leaders to maintain their position and allows their behaviour to remain unchecked (Akinyele & Chen, 2025).

Stress: Abalkhail (2022) highlighted a number of serious consequences for employees, as a result of dysfunctional leader behaviour, including stress, anxiety and emotional exhaustion, as well as impacts on self-esteem, depression and physical health problems. Unsurprisingly, Schyns and Schilling (2013) found that destructive leadership is related to a decline in employees' well-being and an increase in negativity and stress.

Mental and physical health: Abalkhail (2022) lists a range of consequences for destructive leadership behaviour on subordinates' health, including sleep disturbances, lack of concentration and increased stress and anxiety. The health and well-being of subordinates are negatively impacted by both active and passive forms of destructive leadership (Fosse et al., 2019).

6.4.5.3 Findings versus literature: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being

The consequences of destructive behaviour related to mental, emotional and psychological well-being were found to include a detrimental impact on the subordinate's self-perception, increased stress and elevated levels of fear; these were confirmed in the literature. Although the literature confirmed that subordinates can experience long-lasting effects of destructive behaviour, it was in relation to negative employee behaviour. In contrast, the findings were related to the duration of time the experience remained with the employee.

6.4.5.4 Conclusion: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being

The findings related to mental, emotional and psychological well-being as a consequence of destructive behaviour were confirmed by the literature. The lingering effect of experiencing destructive behaviour stays with employees for many years; even when they have moved to another organisation, the memory remains. This is a nuanced difference and extends the body of literature.

6.5 Conclusion of discussion

Table 60 presents an overall view of the findings in comparison to the theory for all the research questions.

Table 60: Findings compared to theory for all research questions

Theme	**Sub-theme**	**Findings**	**Theory confirmed, extended or nuanced**
RQ 1: How do stakeholders identify and experience the behaviours of destructive leaders?			
Theme 1: Manifestation of destructive behaviour	Absent Leadership	Absent leadership is destructive and can allow destructive behaviour from others.	Confirmed
	Anger and rage	Shouting and screaming are identified as destructive behaviour.	Confirmed
	Varied behaviour and response	Destructive behaviour is identified as varied and can be accepted or condoned and become the norm.	Confirmed
	Blame	Blame is identified as a destructive behaviour.	Confirmed
	Bullying	Bullying is identified as a destructive behaviour.	Confirmed
	Threatening	Threats of being fired are a destructive behaviour.	Confirmed
	Management style	Autocratic and authoritative leadership styles are destructive.	Nuanced

Theme	Sub-theme	Findings	Theory confirmed, extended or nuanced
Theme 2: Experience of psychological control and manipulation	Micromanagement	Destructive behaviour is evident in micromanagement.	Confirmed
	Intentionality	The intentionality of destructive behaviour is problematic.	Confirmed
	Power and ego	Power is used destructively.	Confirmed
RQ 2: What do these stakeholders see as the antecedents of destructive behaviours?			
Theme 3: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures	Incentives	Incentives can be a force for good or for bad.	Nuanced
	Restructuring	Restructuring is an antecedent for destructive behaviour.	Confirmed
	Misaligned expectations	Failure to meet expectations can be seen as destructive.	Nuanced
	Culture	Culture can be an antecedent of destructive behaviour.	Confirmed
	Insecurity	Insecurity on the part of the leader can be an antecedent for destructive behaviour.	Confirmed
Theme 4: Toxicity, precedent and pressure	Tone at the top	Top leadership sets the tone and can be an antecedent of destructive behaviour at lower levels.	Confirmed
	Toxicity	Toxic culture, approaches and people are an antecedent of destructive behaviour.	Confirmed
	Assimilation	Observation and experience of destructive behaviour can be antecedents of the behaviour.	Confirmed
	Pressure	Elevated levels of pressure are antecedents of destructive behaviour.	Confirmed
RQ 3: What are the consequences of destructive behaviours at an individual and organisational level?			
Theme 5: Psychological	Quiet Quitting	A consequence of destructive behaviour is that people quietly quit.	Extended

Theme	Sub-theme	Findings	Theory confirmed, extended or nuanced
withdrawal and disengagement	Hiding	In response to destructive behaviour, people tend to hide.	Extended
Theme 6: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour	Retaliation	As a consequence of destructive behaviour, people will retaliate.	Confirmed
	Sabotage	Sabotage can result from destructive behaviour.	Confirmed
Theme 7: Systemic organisational fallout	Organisational fallout	The fallout from destructive behaviour can be systemic.	Extended
	High Turnover	High turnover is a consequence of destructive behaviour.	Confirmed
	Intention to leave	As a result of experiencing destructive leadership behaviour, people intend to leave.	Nuanced
Theme 8: Erosion of psychological safety and trust	Psychological safety	Psychological safety is eroded due to destructive leader behaviour.	Confirmed
	Lack of trust	There is a lack of trust in processes due to destructive behaviour.	Confirmed
Theme 9: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being	Emotional and Psychological	The experience of destructive behaviour negatively impacts emotional and psychological well-being.	Confirmed
	Lingering effect	Memories of experiencing destructive behaviour are long-lasting.	Extended
	Self-criticism	The consequences of destructive behaviour by leadership are self-doubt and self-blame.	Confirmed
	Self-perception	The self-perception of those who have experienced destructive leadership behaviour is negative.	Confirmed

Theme	Sub-theme	Findings	Theory confirmed, extended or nuanced
	Stress	Elevated levels of stress are reported by those who have experienced destructive behaviour.	Confirmed
	Fear	The consequences of destructive behaviour include anxiety, silence, a fear of retribution, retaliation and a fear-based environment.	Extended
	Mental and physical health	The experience of destructive behaviour impacts mental and physical health,	Confirmed

6.6 Conclusion

Leadership is about relationships, which cannot exist without followers. Leaders need to have the ability to influence people to want to do certain things, rather than forcing people to do things; it is a group activity, a team sport and not an individual endeavour (Haslam et al., 2024). An important consideration is the fact that the consequences of negative leadership behaviour cannot be considered either good or bad but are complex with varying levels of intensity (Modliba & Treffers, 2025).

This chapter compared the findings in Chapter 5 with the literature presented in Chapter 2 to determine whether the findings confirm, extend or contradict the existing literature. The method used to identify the applicable literature was systematic: first, to review Chapter 2; second, to review the source articles; and third, to source additional literature by searching on Google Scholar. The third step was only necessary to source literature on quiet quitting.

The following chapter discusses the contribution, provides recommendations for business, outlines limitations and offers suggestions for future research.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

This section begins with the theoretical conclusions from the analysis in chapter 6, followed by the research contribution, thereafter a number of recommendations are suggested for management, the research limitations are highlighted, and the chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.

7.2 Principal theoretical conclusions

This section presents the theoretical status of the findings gathered in response to the three research questions, highlighting where the findings confirm existing theory (adding to the body of knowledge) or where they extend theory by introducing nuanced differences.

7.2.1 Conclusions: Research Question 1

RQ 1: How do stakeholders identify and experience the destructive behaviours of leaders?

Two themes were identified in the findings: the manifestation of destructive behaviour and the experience of psychological control and manipulation.

7.2.1.1 Theme 1: Manifestation of destructive behaviour

In the search to understand how stakeholders identify destructive behaviour, it was key to uncover whether leadership styles would feature strongly in the manifestation of destructive behaviour, to illustrate whether practitioners conflate behaviour with non-behaviour (Banks et al., 2023; Fischer et al., 2023; Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). Interestingly the prevalence of leadership styles was not as dominant as in the literature.

Confirmed findings: Specific destructive behaviours identified by stakeholders, such as absent leadership (akin to laissez-faire leadership), anger and rage (shouting, screaming and swearing), blame and threatening behaviour, were confirmed. In addition, the finding that destructive behaviour is varied and pervasive, becoming an accepted norm when tolerated, was confirmed by the literature.

Management style (nuanced): The finding that autocratic and authoritarian management styles are perceived as destructive was confirmed. However, the finding added a nuanced difference in the practitioner view (focusing narrowly on autocratic and

authoritarian styles) to the academic view, which frequently conflates various leadership styles with destructive behaviour.

7.2.1.2 Theme 2: Experience of psychological control and manipulation

Taking a phenomenological approach the research sought to understand the lived experience of stakeholders (Creswell & Creswell, 2023) of destructive leadership behaviour. The intentionality of destructive behaviour (Mackey et al., 2021) and the influence of power reflects the extent literature (Abalkhail, 2022), and micromanagement was identified by scholars as a destructive management practice (Abalkhail, 2022; Motsei & Nkomo, 2016).

Confirmed findings: The identification of micromanagement (including constant monitoring and scrutiny) as destructive behaviour was confirmed. The presence of intentionality (intent to harm or insult) in destructive behaviour was also aligned with extant theory. Findings confirmed that power is used destructively to exert control, suppress people and to avoid being challenged, which often stems from positional power.

7.2.2 Conclusions: Research Question 2

RQ 2: What do stakeholders see as the antecedents of destructive behaviours?

Two themes were identified in the findings as antecedents of destructive behaviour: dysfunctional organisational systems and structures and toxicity, precedent and pressure. The majority of the findings confirmed the theory, particularly in dysfunctional systems, toxicity and pressure.

7.2.2.1 Theme 3: Dysfunctional organisational systems and structures

Reward and incentives can be an antecedent for bad behaviour (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006; Tepper, 2007), while the lack of management oversight creates a conducive environment for destructive leaders (Padilla et al., 2007). In addition, restructuring can trigger destructive behaviour (Motsei & Nkomo, 2016) and when employees expectations of leadership are misaligned the leadership behaviour can be deemed to be destructive (Almeida et al., 2022).

Confirmed findings: Factors such as restructuring, culture (e.g., a culture of fear) and leader insecurity (feeling intimidated by subordinates) were confirmed as antecedents of destructive behaviour.

Incentives (nuance): The finding that incentives can be misaligned, driving destructive behaviour if not properly structured, was confirmed as an antecedent, even though incentives can be a force for good and bad.

Misaligned expectations (nuance): Misaligned expectations were confirmed as an antecedent for destructive behaviour. The findings highlighted a bilateral perspective; both subordinates' expectations of leaders (duty of care, engagement) and leaders' expectations of subordinates (professional behaviour), contribute to the perception of destructive behaviour; however, the literature primarily confirmed subordinates' expectations.

7.2.2.2 Theme 4: Toxicity, precedent and pressure

The search for antecedents of destructive behaviour revealed a few sub-themes: the example from the top, how the behaviour is assimilated, pressure and toxicity and were identified in the literature. Leadership sets the example, the tone is set at the top of the organisation (Akinyele & Chen, 2025) and toxic people and the culture create a toxicity that allows for the destructive behaviour of leaders (Padilla et al., 2007). Moreover, followers are likely to assimilate or adopt the behaviour of destructive leaders (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Li et al., 2024; Toader & Kunze, 2021). It is likely that stress and performance anxiety are linked to destructive behaviour (Modliba & Treffers, 2025).

Confirmed findings: The influence of the tone at the top, the presence of a toxic environment or toxic people, the assimilation (or imitation) of bad behaviour by employees and elevated levels of pressure on leaders were all confirmed as antecedents in the literature.

7.2.3 Conclusions: Research Question 3

RQ 3: What are the consequences of destructive behaviour at the individual and organisational levels?

While many of the consequences were confirmed, several key findings related to employee withdrawal and the long-term psychological impact extended the body of knowledge.

7.2.3.1 Theme 5: Psychological withdrawal and disengagement

A likely outcome of destructive leadership behaviour is the reduced performance from subordinates, absenteeism and withdrawal (Abalkhail, 2022; Almeida et al., 2022;

Naseer et al., 2016; Tepper, 2007). Hiding behaviour is likely from employees, when looking to escape the destructive behaviour of a leader (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006)

Extension of theory (quiet quitting): The finding that quiet quitting is a consequence of destructive behaviour extends the literature by providing a more explicit and detailed description of the behaviour (e.g. doing only what is necessary, refusing to work outside contracted hours, withdrawing commitment) as a deliberate response to negative leadership behaviour.

Extension of theory (hiding lack of skills): While employees hiding from destructive leaders was confirmed, the finding that leaders may deploy destructive behaviour as a tactic to hide their own lack of skills extends current literature.

7.2.3.2. Theme 6: Retaliatory and harmful work behaviour

In line with social exchange theory, the initiating actions of a leader for example, there is reciprocity of the exchange from the subordinate, and should the initiating action be a negative one, it is likely that the reciprocal action from the subordinate will be equally negative (Cropanzano et al., 2017).

Confirmed findings: The concepts of retaliation (passive and overt acts of revenge) and sabotage (deliberate acts to inflict damage) were confirmed as consequences of destructive behaviour.

7.2.3.3 Theme 7: Systemic organisational fallout

It is unsurprising that turnover and subordinates' intention to leave, features strongly across the literature as a consequence of destructive leadership behaviour (Abalkhail, 2022; Akinyele & Chen, 2025; Cialdini et al., 2021; Modliba & Treffers, 2025; Tepper, 2000)

Confirmed findings: High turnover and the intention to leave were confirmed as consequences of these factors.

Extension of theory (systemic attrition): The systemic nature of the organisational fallout (attrition spreading over a period of time, leading to further resignations) extends the theory.

Intention to leave and focus (nuance): The specific finding that employees, some of whom are desperate to leave, focus their attention on finding alternative work rather than fulfilling their current responsibilities, extends the theory.

7.2.3.4 Theme 8: Erosion of psychological safety and trust

Destructive leadership can create an environment lacking psychological safety, where employees resort to silence and refrain from voicing opinions (Akinyele & Chen, 2025; Hao et al., 2022; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005), lacking trust in the reporting mechanisms for fear of reprisal (Schyns et al., 2022)

Confirmed findings: The erosion of psychological safety (people being afraid to speak up and resorting to silence) and a pervasive lack of trust in reporting mechanisms and processes were confirmed as consequences.

7.2.3.5 Theme 9: Mental, emotional and psychological well-being

The impact of destructive leadership behaviour on employees has widespread consequences, from emotional and psychological (Akinyele & Chen, 2025; Cialdini et al., 2021; Modliba & Treffers, 2025) to the negative effect on self-perception and self-criticism, fear, stress, mental and physical health (Abalkhail, 2022; Fosse et al., 2019; Guo et al., 2018; Hassan et al., 2023; Modliba & Treffers, 2025; Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

Confirmed findings: Destructive behaviour negatively impacts emotional and psychological well-being (including emotional contagion, self-criticism, self-doubt, damage to self-perception, stress and poor mental and psychological health). Severe outcomes such as suicide were also reported.

Extension of theory (lingering effect): The finding that the lingering effect of experiencing destructive behaviour is profound and long-lasting (staying with employees for many years, even after changing organisations) extends the existing body of literature.

Extension of theory (fear): While fear is confirmed, the highly prevalent and specific nature of fear (fear of reprisal, anxiety, silence, fear-based environment, fear of punishment for mistakes) found in the empirical data extends the theoretical understanding of this consequence.

7.3 Research contribution

How people identify and experience the behaviours of destructive leaders mostly confirms the theory. A slight nuance was detected in the leadership styles that participants identified with destructive leadership behaviour, as opposed to the lengthy and varied leadership styles in the literature related to destructive leadership.

The antecedents of destructive behaviours of leaders confirmed existing theory, while two nuances were detected. Although incentives can be seen as an antecedent for destructive behaviour, it would seem that they can also be a force for good. The case where subordinates' behaviour is not aligned with a leader's expectations seems to present a nuanced difference from the literature.

Although an employee's intention to leave as a consequence of destructive leadership behaviour is common across the literature, the data seem to suggest that employees shift their focus almost exclusively to securing alternative employment rather than concentrating on their job, which appears to be a nuance of existing literature.

The consequences of destructive behaviour yielded numerous findings in the data; for the most part, these were confirmations of existing theory. Quiet quitting, as a response from employees experiencing destructive leadership behaviour, presented a possible refinement or extension of existing theory. The finding that leaders may behave destructively as a tactic to conceal their lack of skills also extends the current literature. The lingering effect of experiencing destructive behaviour from leadership on a subordinate can last for years; they take their responses and fears with them to new employers. This seems to present an extension of the consequences of destructive leadership behaviour in current literature.

The fear experienced by subordinates as a consequence of destructive leadership behaviour is not new; however, the specific nature of fear as found in the data seems to extend the understanding of this experience.

Beyond the turnover of employees resulting from destructive leadership behaviour, the sense that it could become a systemic issue was not found in the literature, and this appears to be a new finding.

7.4 Recommendations for management

The consequences of destructive leadership behaviour for employees can be severe, as it has a direct impact on their ability and willingness to contribute meaningfully to the

organisation's objectives. The effects of destructive behaviour of leaders are not only damaging but costly for organisations, either in terms of employee turnover, retaliation or, worse yet, those employees who quietly quit and withdraw their corporate citizenship behaviour. In addition, although a high turnover of people is a visible indicator of an issue, in some cases the turnover may occur over an extended period of time, but the resignation contagion may spread to other areas in the business and potentially become systemic. In this scenario the trend may take longer to detect, so management should consider monitoring turnover trends over longer periods.

Regarding employees' emotional and psychological well-being, the detrimental effects of destructive leadership can have a lasting impact on their ability to perform for an extended period.

In consideration of the findings and the theory on the experience, antecedents and consequences of destructive leadership behaviour, the following suggestions are made to identify this behaviour.

Mechanisms to detect and address destructive behaviour in organisations are essential. Although it is clear from the research that detection mechanisms, including whistle-blowing policies, are commonly in place, however people refrain from using them due to fear of retaliation, and the destructive behaviour remains unnoticed. To address this, top management and independent assurance providers must assess the level of psychological safety to prevent a culture of silence within the organisation.

Top management behaviour sets the tone and serves as the exemplar of behaviour within an organisation. The deployment of a particularly destructive leader should be done cautiously, with the proper controls and balance in place.

In summary, the identification, management and mitigation of the effects of destructive leadership behaviour require top-level commitment, robust human resource policies and training programmes to reinforce knowledge of the phenomenon, and the protection mechanisms available to staff.

7.5 Research limitations

This study was conducted in South Africa, an area that is often classified as an emerging economy (Ha et al., 2019). Due to this specific context, the findings may not be relevant in other contexts; the results may not be generalisable. Future studies would benefit from research conducted in different geographic regions.

Subjective interpretation is central to reflexive thematic analysis, and this interpretative approach is potentially susceptible to the researcher's bias. The researcher's centrality may limit the replicability of the findings.

The sample size was limited to 20 participants, comprising ten subordinates and ten leaders. Due to the convenience sampling of participants within the researcher's network, there may be an element of selection bias, which further limits the generalisability of the study.

Limitations as a result of the research method, choices and methodological approaches are reflected in Chapter 4.

7.6 Recommendations for future research

Due to the study participants primarily being from South Africa, future studies in other contexts may yield interesting results.

There are situational aspects to a leader's behaviour; a level of behavioural flexibility is required to adapt to a changing environment (Yukl, 2012). More research is required to determine whether destructive leadership behaviour is situational and what impact that may have on the experience of stakeholders and/or the organisation.

The researcher agrees with the "rampant construct proliferation", which Mackey et al. (2021, p. 714) identified in the diversity of destructive leadership styles and their respective conceptualisations in literature. This is echoed by Klasmeier et al. (2022) calling for future studies to focus on the interaction between leadership styles. This could possibly bring more clarity to the topic, especially considering the researcher's depiction of the connections and relatedness between leadership styles under the destructive leadership meta-construct. More work should be done in this regard.

The concepts that potentially extended the theory were not studied in great detail and may benefit from further investigation, specifically (i) whether quiet quitting is a more prevalent response from employees experiencing destructive behaviour, than actually leaving, (ii) a longitudinal study of turnover due to destructive leadership to find evidence of its potential systemic nature, and (iii) to evaluate the factors that contribute to or alleviate the lingering effect of destructive leadership behaviour for employees.

To advance what is known about destructive leadership, more empirical research is required, and beyond cross-sectional studies more longitudinal studies are needed to

observe the phenomenon over time, and to identify potential situational contexts, or mediating and moderating variables (Akinyele & Chen, 2025).

A novel suggestion from Modliba & Treffers (2025) is the use of experiments in the study of negative leadership to alleviate the bias issues related to a potentially unsavoury topic. This study did not explicitly set out to consider the impact of destructive leadership on team dynamics, and the inclusion of antecedents and consequences will extend the understanding of destructive behaviour at the group level (Hassan et al., 2023).

Lastly, quantitative research would improve the generalisability (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), testing the findings over a larger sample.

7.6 Conclusion

This aim of this research was to extend the understanding of stakeholder experiences of the destructive behaviour by leaders. The identification of destructive leadership behaviour, it's antecedents and consequences of this behaviour was highlighted, from the perspective of both leaders and subordinates. Using a qualitative research method, this study revealed that destructive behaviour is conceptualised and experienced in many different forms, with varying levels of intensity, resulting in widespread and serious consequences for both organisations and employees. The findings mostly confirmed the theory, barring five cases where it is possible that the extant theory was extended.

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Annexures

Annexure A: Consequences for employees

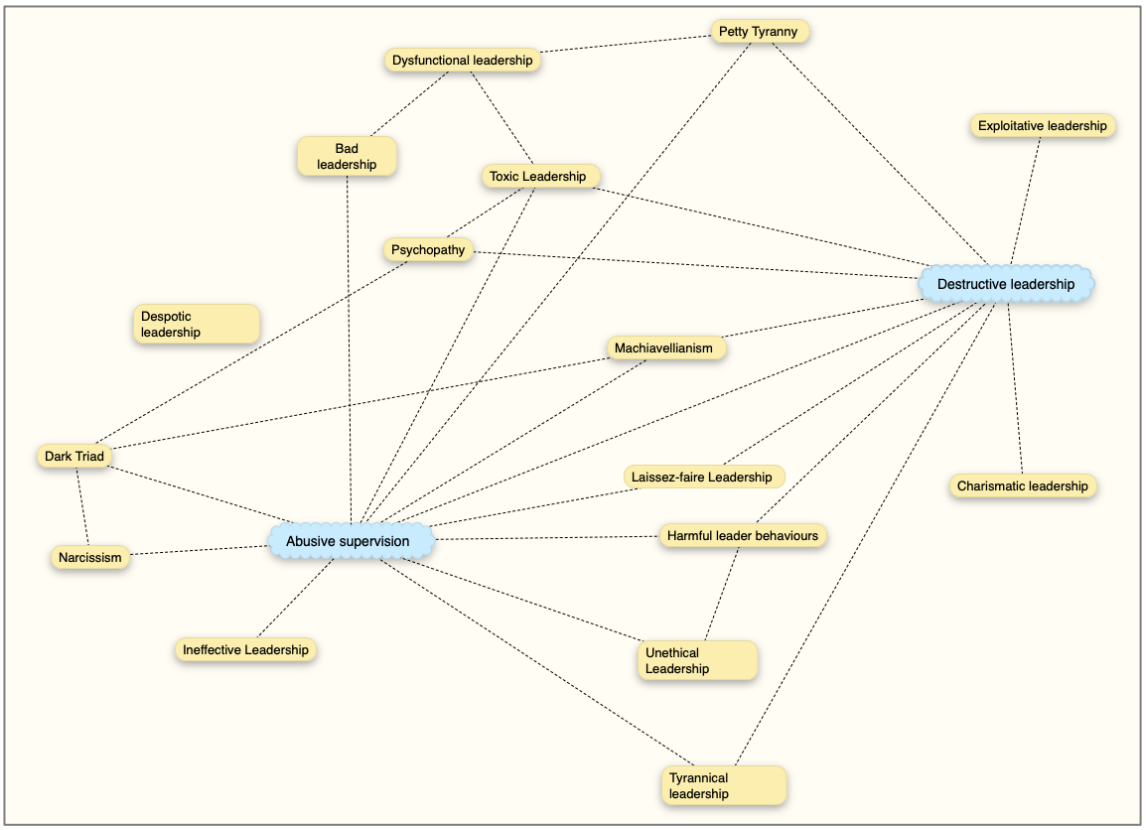
Consequences of negative, bad, destructive, enethical leadership on employees.			
Behaviours summarised from literatuve	**Active response**	**Psychological impact**	**Emotional states**
Absenteeism			
Aggression	X		
Anxiety			X
Burnout		X	
Counterproductive work behaviour	X		
Depression		X	
Deviant Workplace Behaviour	X		
Emotional Disturbance			X
Emotional Exhaustion			X
Emotional Suppression			X
Employee mental well-being		X	
Engagement	X		
Family well-being			
Feelings of alienation			X
Isolated			X
Knowledge hiding	X		
Lower commitment	X		
Lower creativity	X		
Lower Job Satisfaction		X	
Lower Life Satisfaction		X	
Lower Performance	X		
Malfeasance	X		
Moral disengagement			X
Moral outrage			X
Negative Affectivity			X
Negative Attitude			X
Organisational deviance	X		
Organisational identification			
Problem drinking		X	
Psychological distress			
Reduced commitment	X		
Reduced organisation citizenship behaviours	X		
Resistance	X		
Retaliation	X		
Revenge	X		
Serious psychological and physical problems		X	
Shame			X
Silence		X	
Stress		X	
Team Conflict	X		
Team Performance	X		
Turnover	X		
Turnover intention	X		
Work frustration	X		
Workplace deviance	X		

Annexure B: Common terminology used for bad behaviour

Comonality of terminology used to desribe bad leadership, bad behaviour

Term	Abalkhail (2022)	Caildini, Li, Samper, Wellman (2021)	Li, Yin, Shi, Damen, Taris (2024)	Kellerman (2024)	Legeret, Zehnder, Tur (2024)	Rovelli, de Massis, Gomez-Mejia (2022)	Pina e Cunha, Clegg, Rego, Simpson (2024)	Hogan, Kaiser, Sherman and Harms (2021)	Motsei and Nkomo (2016)	Tepper (2000)	Modliba and Treffers (2022)	TOTAL
Belittling	1		1							1	1	4
Hostility	1		1							1	1	4
Unethical		1		1	1						1	4
Abuses power	1								1		1	3
Abusive	1		1						1			3
Aggressive				1			1		1			3
Humiliating	1		1						1			3
Intimidation	1		1				1					3
Micromanaging	1						1		1			3
Arrogance					1	1						2
Authoritarian					1		1					2
Bullying			1						1			2
Callous				1			1					2
Discourage Initiatives	1									1		2
Entitlement						1	1					2
Favoritism	1								1			2
lack of empathy						1					1	2
Manipulative						1	1					2
Narcissistic					1			1				2
Rudeness	1									1		2
Selfishness							1				1	2
Toxic			1		1							2
Undermining	1		1									2
Amorality						1						1
Anger						1						1
Autocratic									1			1
Controlling	1											1
corrupt				1								1
Cruel							1					1
Dangerous				1								1
Degrading	1											1
Demeaning	1											1
Demoralization	1											1
Destroy trust							1					1
Destructive				1								1
Disrespectful	1											1
Envious						1						1
greedy				1								1
Impulsive							1					1
Inconsiderate	1											1
inept				1								1
Irrationalit						1						1
Marginalizing	1											1
Misuse of authority for personal gain	1											1
Non-verbal agression			1									1
Obsessive-compulsive								1				1
Obstructive			1									1
Paranoid								1				1
Passive-aggressive								1				1
Public critisism	1											1
Public humiliation	1											1
Reckless				1								1
Ridicule	1											1
Self important						1						1
Silencing	1											1
Superiority						1						1
Threats	1											1
Tyrannical			1									1

Annexure C: Map of connections between leadership styles



Source: Author's own

Annexure D: Consistency matrix

Research Questions (RQ)	Literature Review	Data Collection Tool	Data Analysis
RQ 1: How do stakeholders identify and experience the behaviours of destructive leaders?	Understand the experience of destructive leadership by stakeholders. (Abalkhail, 2022; Mackey et al., 2021; Modliba & Treffers, 2025)	Interview guide for semi-structured interviews	Coding and analysing themes to understand stakeholders' experiences of destructive behaviour.
RQ 2: What do these stakeholders see as the antecedents of destructive behaviours?	Explore stakeholders' assumptions of behavioural antecedents? (Abalkhail, 2022; Mackey et al., 2021; Shafqat et al., 2025)	Interview guide for semi-structured interviews	Coding and analysing themes to derive conclusions about the antecedents of destructive behaviour.
RQ 3: What are the consequences of destructive behaviours at an individual and organisational level?	Understand stakeholders' description of the individual and organisational consequences? (Abalkhail, 2022; Mackey et al., 2021; Shafqat et al., 2025)	Interview guide for semi-structured interviews	Coding and analysing themes to derive conclusions about the individual and organisational consequences of destructive behaviour.

Annexure E: Interview guide

Adapted format from Vanek (2024)

Topic being studied	Interview questions	Prompts
RQ 1: How do stakeholders identify and experience the behaviours of destructive leaders?	**Question 1:** What do you consider to be destructive leadership behaviour?	
	Question 2: Please give examples of destructive leadership behaviours from your own experience.	Subordinate or line manager
	Question 3: What is the aim of the leaders who display destructive behaviour, in your opinion?	
	Question 4: In what circumstances have you witnessed destructive leadership behaviour?	
RQ 2: What do these stakeholders see as the antecedents of destructive behaviours?	**Question 5:** In your experience, what personal characteristics of the leader, give rise to destructive behaviour?	
	Question 6: In your opinion, what are the organisational circumstances or contexts that cause destructive behaviour?	
RQ 3: What are the consequences of destructive behaviours at the individual and organisational level?	**Question 7:** Please describe the consequences of destructive leadership on individuals and the organisation?	
	Question 8: How does the organisation deal with destructive leadership behaviour?	Policies, processes
	Question 9: What mechanisms are used to deal with such behaviour, both formally and informally?	Protection mechanisms
	Question 10:	Frequency and escalation

Topic being studied	Interview questions	Prompts
	How effective are the mechanisms at an individual and organisational level? Please explain your answer.	

Annexure F: Code list

80s militaristic mindset
5000 people who are going to suffer, not the eight board members
A lot of churn due to destructive behaviour
A lot of leaders have a bit of a bully or narcissistic streak
A single individual can create a culture that is destructive across the organisation
Ability to sway the rest of the management team
Abuse because they were abused
Abusive people test the waters and then behaviour becomes the norm
Address it head on
Address mental health or we will leave a very bad world
Affected the rhythm of the team - leader made out to be the bad person
Agenda to fire, or protect those strategically important
Aim is to try and suppress you
All of us make mistakes as leaders
Already had a negative perception of the manager
Am I being overly sensitive
Am I good enough at my job
Am I not good enough
Ambitious manager and maybe I was in the way
Ancillary behaviours that drive destructive leadership
Anger and negativity passed onto the team - emotional contagion
Anxiety and depression because of this leader
Anxiety, stress and panic because mistakes are not tolerated
Any issues - you could be made the problem - toxic culture
As soon as pressure hits it goes down the drain
Assumed more power than the leader because behaviour was allowed
At best, they are average performers in high performance culture
At the expense of others
Autocratic leadership is not necessarily a bad thing
Autocratic leadership style and innovation and thinking is reserved for certain individuals
Avoid perpetuating and encouraging the behaviour even if they perform amazingly well
Bad behaviour destroys value
Bad leader redeployed to a different location
Badly behaving person who has the ear of many people, someone who has influence
Behaviour is not sporadic it is a pattern
Be careful to say this trait can never work
Becomes a vicious cycle because the victims go on to lead the same way
Behaviour condoned because the results were good

Behaviour exponentially worse under pressure
Behaviour is not innate in people - very good people
Behaviour ongoing and aggravated by reporting demands
Behaviour puts people on edge, they seek answers from Manager
Behaviour that creates discourse in a team
Behaviour that goes against the values and culture
Behaviour was pervasive - accepted norm, cultural
Behaviour was tolerated by top management because results were good
Behaviour where working together becomes difficult
Behaviour with the intent to undermine a person
Behaviour becomes the norm
Behaviour was pervasive – top and below
Being blamed for non-performance of team member
Big brother is watching micromanaging and people cannot do their best
Biggest enemy because you are loyal to the CEO
Blame and shame in the organisation
Blaming behaviour on leaders manager
Blow up and shout and scream and swear
Boss acting negative toward me because of gossip
Built my own protection mechanisms
Bullied because they were bullied and they think it is right
Bully helps to change things around
Bullying is not the problem; the problem is not listening
Burnout and severe disengagement
Business doing well - no justification for the behaviour
Business with toxic culture is doomed
By the book, do not react, do not raise your voice, do not judge
Calls on a Sunday about being fired
Cannot be agile with big brother watching
Cannot be angry with them because they helped us
Can’t change management style, and must move somewhere else
Carried my experience to the next job
Carried the fear to my new job
Centralised control and toxic culture drives you to want to leave
CEO did not even respond when I raised it
CEO involved in every detail and people feel distrusted
Certain behaviours that might be considered bad or destructive, but not necessarily bad
Changed reporting lines but she still had ways of getting to her
Changes made without it being obvious for the manager
Check out because evaluating next move but disappointing

Clock watching, they would never give extra
Colleagues avoid voicing their concerns
Colleagues raised the issue with manager
Coming across in a very aggressive manner
Common feature across some of these people, they have no curiosity
Companies invoke a Section 189 and there is an environment of panic
Competent and trusted in the sector, but does it himself
Complaints from colleagues indirectly
Completely shut down and no responses
Consequence management is limited when you are making money
Consequence of marking down performance - cost of training
Consequence on organisation - people leave
Constant fear of backlash from mistakes
Constant horrible, traumatic, psychological experience
Constant monitoring does not drive you to want to achieve more
Constant oversight is demoralising
Continual stress and strain and consequences for family and personal relationships
Conversation with colleagues built courage
Cost of rework
Could have had a significant impact on my career
Counter what you say or do things behind your back
Created a more damaging relationship rather than ease
Creates a loop, it happens throughout - cultural
Creates chaos in an executive team when someone closes themselves off
Creates drama when they check out but they are still there
Creating a fear persona
Creating a place of fear
Creating this doubt syndrome - they want other people to see you as a monster
Critical skills are lost
Culture in an organisation gets completely destroyed
Culture in the business is the problem
Culture of getting results through fear
Cutting others' throats to protect oneself
Cycle playing itself out again at a new company - quicker to identify
Damaging my self-worth - just a minute taker
Dark trait, a personal vendetta and revenge
Definite value in autocratic leadership
Deflecting responsibility
Deliberately changing my stuff - deliberate undermining
Delivery is not sustainable

Depressed and anxious for 5 years
Destroyed the souls and humanity of the people
Destructive behaviour manifests in many different and subtle ways
Destructive behaviour takes on different forms - unhappy, very upsent, silent treatment
Destructive leader will meet their deliverables - it is never the results; it is the how
Destructive leaders are emotionally intelligent but lack empathy
Detrimental to self-belief and self-worth
Different type of destructive behaviour
Difficult to create motivation for behaviour when there is no incentive
Difficult to manage bad behaviour from a former superstar
Disorganised and talking down on people
Disrespectful treatment from the CEO to junior employee
Disrupting my strategy with the behaviour
Disruptive subordinate they start bullying
Do something with the feedback not just a tick-box exercise
Do things that please the manager
Do what you are asked and nothing more
Does not like being challenged
Does not mean you have to fire the person, just move somewhere else
Doing a lot to try and mirror and mask
Dominant leadership, underperformance in the team and got fired
Do not believe people act without intent
Do not have this level of trust
Do not talk up to me
Do not want to upset the apple cart he is delivering
Do not take a decision refer up refer up refer up
Do not want to raise it and be victimised
Dotting i's and crossing t's - people being over cautious
Doubt your capabilities - self-doubt
Drop it and hope for the best, but wrong signal to others
Ego and narcissism, accomplishment - it is my way or the highway
Emotional blackmail, feel special and motivated, but then used against you
Emotional bullying in the workplace
Emotional impact and pushed to therapy
Enable feedback to managers blind spot - potentially unaware
Environment gets worse calls for better leadership - expectations of leaders
Escalation to HR ineffectual
Especially men think "I am it" - who is she
Eventually I left because of the lack of leadership and environment
Eventually it became obvious when clients were complaining

Eventually the team does not want to have anything to do with the destructive leader
Everybody is aware of what is happening - a whole toxic thing
Everyone else is accepting so why raise it
Everyone is on guard, no one trusts anybody, secretly recording on phone
Everyone is pretending everything is fine
Everything stands and falls on leadership
Exaggerating errors
Exit interviews just feel like a paper exercise
Expect feedback from manager - but it is all about them
Expectations of women to be quiet and oblige
Experience destructive behaviour at different levels, junior you see it and you are scared
Experienced two situations in 25 years in the financial services industry
Extreme overconfidence
Failure was punished
Fake integrity not walking the talk
Favouritism and overlooking mistakes
Fear and unsure of yourself
Fear lessens the creativity
Fear of financial insecurity
Fear of retrenchment
Fear of retribution - escalation not considered safe
Feedback is positive but the feedback from outside is different
Feel like you are walking on eggshells all the time, not conducive for getting things done
Feel undervalued, no interest in developing a career path - people leave
Felt like bullying behaviour so I supported a change in reporting line
Felt like I did not know anything - self-doubt
Felt like I was being bullied
Few changed their behaviour for the good
Few people never aligned with anyone
Fight for survival, they just want to stay - no remorse
Find a lot of blame
Focus on new chapter but still get triggered when I see them
Focus on their little boxes and do not interfere with others
From afar you know he is not a nice person
From bliss to no talking again when he came back to work
Gave leeway but kept everyone in line
Give him feedback but he would still continue
Give people the courage to do something about it
Go-slow or obstructiveness
Go with the flow with questionable top management decision

Going to end up at the CCMA
Good leader associated with royalty
Gossiping - causing doubt about the team
Gotten rid of mid-level executives for harassment
Governance is fine but people need autonomy
Grave consequences of those reporting to destructive leaders
Grievances quashed because of fear in the system
Group level HR were an enabler of toxic culture
Hands off company money and company women
Harassment and blame, never good enough
Harassment policy includes bullying as well
Hard for an organisation to function properly, constructive progress in a toxic environment
Hard for the people who stayed
Has not managed to moderate himself out of his culture
He fixed it by selling us
He is a natural bully but I thought it was the right thing for the company
He wanted to make my life as terrible as possible
Health consequences, not just emotional consequences
Hidden from Exco level in a lot of industries
Hidden hatred towards you as a leader
Hiding and playing the same game then it becomes a really toxic environment
High performing team creates pressure for under performers
High turnover
High turnover of direct reports
Highly paid responsible people, it disappoints me to tolerate this
Highly respected and highly feared in the organisation
Hiring better people and it crowds out averageness
History of people in hospital who worked for the same manager
Holding people accountable being rude and shouting
How dare you go to the CEO directly
How do you prove someone is not collaborative
How it made me feel - zero respect for him
HR exec not someone to challenge the system enough
HR partners are specialists to help managers deal with issues
Hypersensitive to my own behaviour because of what I experienced
I am in a fear culture
I am not overly social and I do not need to 'hobnob'
I became very aware of people's dark side - as a result of the experience
I could be myself again once they removed the situation
I could never be supportive because of how she operated - payback

I could see that the team was suffering
I could not connect with my children any more
I did not want to defend him when he was not there
I did not see it until my colleagues pointed out my work was fine
I did not want to show weakness
I do not think anyone was willing to address the behaviour head on
I do not think people want to bully everybody - believe they need to be firm
I do not try and make sure that the CEO sees me
I do not want any person to go through what I went through
I do not want to assume that people are bad innately, they just choose the wrong tools
I know he does not know but I am not going to challenge him because he is a bully
I left because of the manager
I manage around people if I have to
I probably still have not fully recovered
I stuck it out for four years, four years to long
I tried to help everybody and the guy who solves problems
I wanted to prove that I am competent
I was a colourful peacock - to closed down feathers and black
I was number 2 on the list - on of the most challenging period of my career
I was not running away from toxic leadership I was running towards me
I will try to sort it out myself
I would still be at the company if it was not for this experience
I am a tough person but not everyone can do that
I have allowed for this - self-blame
Ideas are shot down
If I allow such behaviour as a leader you will lose the respect of your team
If I am older I must be right - cultural norm
If I had stayed I would have felt that I had sold my soul to the devil
If I raise the issue they will come guns blazing
If manager blocks speaking to team then you know there is a problem
If people decide to rebel there is nothing you can do about it
If they applied themselves correctly - beneficial to organisation
If we do not deal with it, we become an organisation of people who always quarrel
If we do not do something urgent we are going to destroy a lot of people
If you fear coming to work, walking on eggshells and feel diminished - it is not a good space
If you know how to work with a bully, that is fine
If you are going to fire me, then fire me
Ill-treatment gets the job done with pain
Immediate reaction was I had to get out of this situation - looking for other employment

Impact on family life - taking frustration home with me
Impact self-esteem and question your capabilities
Impacted people with potential
Impacting personal time
Impacts negatively on organisational performance
Impacts teams ability to understand goal
Impossible to manage individual and their outcomes / deliverables
In a crisis people often resort to authoritarianism, they do not listen to each other
In IT we do not train for leadership we train for technical excellence
In the way that a positive outcome is achieved the result can be quite toxic
In tough times the right qualities shine through
Inability to articulate the strategy causes rework
Inability to challenge the boss
Unable to be present not a bad leader
Incentives also drive behaviour - people can start behaving badly
Incompetent and they blame other people
Inconvenient truth
Individuals choose which leaders they will follow, which environments they are aligned
Industrial relations or HR matters are a minefield
Inexperience and power - can act out destructively
Informal discussion to raise the issue but no change
Informal escalation does not work
Initially manager was going to perform a co-ordinating role
Initially the subordinates do not want to speak out for fear of retribution
Insecure and protecting their territory
Insecurity changing my title depending on audience
Insisting that they have the final say
Insomnia due to stress - Sleep was affected
Intent to spite me
Intentional and directly aimed at the person
Intentionally treating someone badly
Invoke fear and demanding urgency
Irreconcilable differences - agree an amicable separation
Is the problem me? Self-doubt
It affected the level of respect the team had for the leader
It causes distance and hard - everything has to be contracted formally
It does not matter if he leaves bodies lying around because we are going to die anyway
it does not mean he is all bad
It is a bold step to stand up against destructive leadership, and people will just leave
It is how they were taught and how they were led

It is started at the top and it filters down
It is the things that they do that influence
It makes one doubt if behaviour continues after engagement
It must be me because none of my colleagues experiencing the same thing
It takes courage and trust to report incidences
It takes courage to escalate or to report the problem
It takes the organisation back from a culture perspective
It was a white boys club
It was not innocent venting; it was intentional to cause discourse
It was not just me imagining things, that this is a real experience - self-doubt
It is actually abuse
It is never bad people that leave, the good people leave
It's a collection of smaller this that disrupt the rhythm of the team
It's the culture and the tone from the top - I did not experience this behaviour
Just do what you want to - Absent leadership
Keep good people down
Keep on bullying people that know what they are doing, is destructive
Keeping things to themselves to remain relevant
King has checked out; the hyenas start to fight
Labour laws do not allow for flexibility - they put the responsibility on the leader
Lack of accountability, play games, manipulative and change information
Lack of basic leadership skills
Lack of commitment, loyalty and people are not engaged
Lack of consultation from manager
Lack of direction and leadership - as a consequence my lack of involvement
Lack of emotional control
Lack of guidance on expectations from manager
Lack of incentives drives disruptive behaviour - what is in it for me
Lack of interest from people in Leader's intervention
Lack of proper communication
Lack of respect did cause chaos from a leadership perspective
Lack of transparency, collaboration, communication and trust
Lack of trust not someone I want to work with
Lack of trust that it would be dealt with
Late for meetings and unprepared
Lead by fear and no one was going to question it
Lead in different ways depending on the situation
Leader checks out
Leader departure created a vacuum
Leader does not promote team

Leader enabled toxic people
Leader failed to acknowledge their role in toxic environment
Leader must be objective - Leadership Expectations
Leader must care about their team, and what they are doing - leadership expectations
Leader not toxic but allowed toxicity to exist
Leader retreated and empire building began
Leader should be open to being wrong
Leader should get team where they are - Expectations of leaders
Leader wants to have his finger in every pie and when delivered he wants to say it is his
Leader who is Incapable of stamping their authority
Leader without power or autonomy can be breeding ground for bad behaviour
Leader withdrew his presence
Leaderless team fending for themselves
Leaders accountable when people complain about how they lead
Leaders and team member as friends - underlying bias
Leaders interpret the behaviour as disrespect and they over-react creating a culture of fear
Leaders need to identify the pattern early
Leaders should be involved in the details to defend their team
Leaders that just pursue their own self-interest
Leadership at the top
Leadership creating toxic environment led us down a path
Leadership is about caring - expectation of leadership
Leadership models are changing with younger generations impact
Leading the charge in terms of how we would behave
Leading with the heart to change the culture
Less capable leader does not have the courage
Let it slide one too many times
Leverage off other senior managers
Like battered wife syndrome where the behaviour is excused
Likeable person but they were simply out of their depth
Liked as a human being not as a leader
Lock people in with a 3-month notice period and shares to prevent them from leaving
Locked himself in an office
Lodged a grievance - I fought back
Long-term consequences is it becomes the norm
Looked seamless from the outside, but it damaged the relationships
Lose credibility if you do not live people first value
Luckily, I resigned - she got fired after I left
Maintained way of working in new job
Make it a social meeting

Makes one self-conscious and I must not shine
Management blind spot there is no ill intent just unaware
Management is just a job, leadership is caring
Management took action to indicate the organisation takes harassment seriously
Manager ended up being a sort of psychopath
Manager feedback to me versus moderation is different - dishonesty
Managers need to prove they tried to address the behaviour
Manager promoted because of tenure but should never be a manager
Manager pushing me to accept non-performance rating
Manager was ambitious
Manager was passed over for CEO position
Manager was very offended I was looking for another job
Manager's insecurity - bash me and belittle me
Managers must go through training for the people side
Manipulative especially with more junior people and projecting negative narratives
Masking through the blame game
Maybe get rid of that person
Maybe it is just me
Maybe it was a way to make me fail
Maybe it was not about me maybe it was about the manager
Maybe it’s the way they were trained
Maybe she was trying to exert her presence as a leader
Mental health - it affects people physically, mentally and spiritually
Mental health issue
Mental wellness can be an issue for those who stay
Micromanagement - are they really working or not
Micromanagement - the level of detail of ME involvement
Micromanagement and performance management is the hard one
Micromanagement of all functional areas
Micromanagement, insecurities, lack of self-awareness
Micromanaging things to the nth degree
Minefield that is labour relations legal framework
Minimal communication from manager
Misaligned expectations - Sense of entitlement from senior team members
Misaligned incentives cause destructive behaviour
Misinformed decisions were taken
Mistakes are allowed then people are healthy in their behaviour
Mistreat people at work you are illtreating their families as well
Modern approach even the floor sweeper matters - expectation of leadership
Money is good but morale and work-life balance is compromised

Morale and the demeanour of the people
More qualified - may have created a threat
More reporting than actual execution to satisfy management's need to understand
Most of us left within 3 - 4 years because of that manager
Moved out so no consequences for the former leader
My boss was seeing a psychiatrist - things were really bad
My colleagues were in the middle we could not support each other
My constituent first - leaders last
My first job was a complete disaster ended in death threats
My stuff got altered and edited
Narcissist and bully taking over was completely disastrous
Narcissist part that I am never wrong
Narrow mindedness that rebelling for being a bad person is a good thing
Need a seasoned HR practitioner on the side of business
Negative narratives that can have a detrimental effect on you
Negotiated approach - make sure the team moves
Never a time without labour relations issues
New manager and self-doubts kicked in
New people need to know that they are here to deliver in an organisation
Newly appointed supervisor - constant question and micromanaging
No autonomy to decide to work on a whiteboard
No clarity provided by the manager
No clarity provided following the return to work from suspension
No connection between type of person and disruptive forever
No effort from business after all my effort
No freedom of communication - values not lived
No informal structures to deal with destructive behaviour
No loyalty to the people that work for him
No policy that deals with destructive behaviour
No respect for boundaries
No room for failure - toxic and hostile environment
No self-belief and desperation in the way I put myself forward
No time to look after what is going on in your own house
No trusting no transparency and no autonomy and play it safe
No understanding of leading people
No way of measuring the how - how people behave or act
Nobody prepared to take a decision
Nobody wants to work with him
Not a hill you want to die on - for fear you are shown the door
Not a toxic leader but created a toxic environment by withdrawing

Not allowed to speak to senior stakeholders
Not appointing the strongest people
Not at the expense of others - leadership expectations
Not conducive to a high performance culture
Not creating a safe environment for team to express opinions
Not focused on the task, you focus on how do I get out of this place
Not intermittent, not sporadic, it is there at all times
Not just IT industry by highly technical areas
Not just IT, technical areas as well
Not the best but people must want to follow him
Not to shout and scream although there are merits to that approach
Not what is expected - a leader is supposed to guide me
Not willing to do anything outside of 8 to 5
Nothing is going to be done - no psychological safety
Now I am in control, this whole control thing
Once they removed the situation they really got to see me
Once you are in it, you do not realise how bad it is, until you step away
One person had never really been managed properly
Only removed when the results are bad
Operating from a fear perspective
Opportunity growth is impacted which is potentially unknown
Organisation lost 9 months of efficacy
Organisation lost out on Ideas that were shot down and made out as being silly
Organisation may not have felt the impact of resignations, but missed out on innovation
Organisation suffers without the diversity of thought in a destructive culture
Organisation was losing talent and reputation damage
Organisational culture contributes the disruptions
Organisations are going through restructuring and people are anxious
Organisations lose critical skills
Our institutions are not that strong
Our people are our greatest asset - but inauthentic
Outdated culture incompatible for millennials
Outdated management practices
Overheard guys saying we need to pay of this guy, he is giving us a problem
Overlooked for a senior role and did nothing for 12 months
Overly important sense of self and ego identified in destructive leaders
Patriarchal dominance
Penalised without clear requirements
People are meeting on weekends to discuss people
People are not happy and there is burnout

People are scared to talk
People are scarred for life
People are vulnerable even though policies exist
People avoiding the spotlight
People being held accountable alleging harassment
People being left behind but not graceful enough to step sideways or down
People being shouted at, cannot apply their minds
People below start replicating the behaviour
People considering escalation are same people high-fiving the individual
People did not take manager seriously and impacted team
People do not feel comfortable to do their best
People do not leave companies they leave managers
People envy, they want to be at that position, and they believe they are better
People fall out of favour and get moved
People get physically sick
People just do not want to managed at all
People just do not want to work
People keep their head down
People looking to leave
People make more mistakes because you are not vested
People mask themselves into other jobs because of being watched
People must know who is boss here
People not as vocal in strained economy
People not wanting to see you excel
People retire, resign or something that results in a different kind of termination
People scared to voice an opinion or say their piece
People should be able to challenge constructively
People should feel free to express themselves
People skills were non-existent and individual unaware
People stay in the toxicity because they do not have options
People that are not fit for purpose any more or have been over promoted
People that fail to deliver - sloppy work
People that should not be in leadership positions
People who lead when there is chaos, it is about me being elevated
People who stay in that toxicity it affects their health
Perception that a listed company has built in protections
Performance incentives play a part in disruptive behaviour
Person needs to trust the processes to deal with destructive behaviour
Person resigned and people were cheering saying there's four more to go
Personal circumstances are kept private so should not have played a role

Personal gain and power consolidation
Personification of a bully
Platforms are there to escalate but lack of trust in them
Policies on paper but they are not effective
Policies provide management authority and power to abuse the system
Poor governance, poor oversight and no accountability
Positive from the experience - deliberate about how I lead
Post millennial mindset want to execute independently not micromanagement
Poven executives who come with immense power
Power and ego, and the ability to control hordes of people and to steer the ship
Power consolidation, dominating people through fear
Presenting an opposing view that is uninformed
Pressure for delivery - numbers were down
Pressure is massive for people in top leadership
Probably threatened and they want to see you fail
Progressively bad treatment from Manager - shouted at
Project and lead as if they understand, is most dangerous
Project is running by they destroyed so many souls
Promoted for talent but destroyed all the people in his team
Push the product at the expense of the people
Put me in a dark corner in the office - punishment
Quietly quitting
Range of experience from poor management to threats on my life
Reaffirm self-belief and self-worth - self-confidence
Rebellion and refusing to do certain tasks
Refuses to meet expectations
Religious practices not appropriate for professional environment
Relocated to London and all day meeting to watch you work
Remove the team from the situation, as much as possible
Replace with a leader that will take the people along
Reporting to you but you do not seem to know what you are doing
Reprimanding team is seen as a bad leader and bullying
Responsibility at all levels of leadership to call out destructive behaviour
Responsibility for management should be shared at the higher levels
Restructures and people want to look out for themselves
Restructuring and people are covering their backs
Restructuring causing survival behaviour
Restructuring is a trigger for destructive behaviour
Results driven culture
Retaliating with my own attempts to foil what is going on - Toxic environment

Retaliation - I will only focus on my area - you will not enjoy my expertise for free
Retaliation for not getting a role - started the rumour mill and people started rebelling
Retaliation for the treatment - payback
Reward for performance can also drive disruptive behaviour
Rewards can go both ways creating good and bad behaviour
Risk to execution, risk to culture and unknown risk - what the person will or will not do
Refuses to meet expectations
Sabotaged before and now a protection mechanism that creates dissonance with the team
Scared, fear and walking on eggshells not a great space to operate from
Second-guessing everything you are doing
Secretly sabotaging
Seeing behaviour prevents people giving feedback
Seen as less of a leader if you can manage a misbehaving individual
Self-blame - it was me, let me try to do something different - I did not see it
Self-doubt and confidence impacted for a period of 10 years
Self-doubt, it is not them it is me, and I am doing something wrong
Self-preservation from the best to the worst leader I have ever worked for
Self-preservation or get out of my way, do not challenge me
Self-preservation resulted in destructive behaviour
Self-preservation shifting blame on team members for non-delivery
Self-doubt, low self-esteem, depression and it could cloud one's purpose
Selfish and do not think for the long term, only short term
Selfish behaviour, narcissistic
Senior in tenure, but cite the rules for everything they do
Senior people set the tone for juniors and new people but their behaviour is disruptive to culture
Sexual harassment
She had gotten away with the behaviour for so long
Short term incentives are a lever that management can use
Short-termism, no mistakes, want results now - you get this behaviour
Shouting at everyone in the room
Shuffled the deck a little bit without manager feeling targeted
Silence all the voices in the room - Culture of fear and intimidation
Similar age and similar life stage as manager
Skilled in making sure their image is spotless, outside of leader
Some had tried formal channels without success
Some of the team members actually quit
Some people are blindsided
Some people can be very dangerous - handle with kid gloves
Someone decided that I am not good enough - and I benefited

Someone like me who will never succumb to failure
Someone that breaks a person down and destructive to the team
Someone wanting a particular thing to work
Someone who feels they are more experienced and more knowledgeable - disruptive
Sometimes it is blindness
Sometimes it is personal problems that are affecting people's behaviour
Sometimes people are so unhappy they want to leave - you get some odd behaviour
Sometimes you need a bully to get through stuff
Stand up to the CEO, here today and gone tomorrow
Star in another field and they could not manage to do the job
Still learning not to panic if I make mistakes - lingering effect
Stress and fear about the manager finding me and what they would do
Stress over the experience faded over a period of 5 years - but the scars remain
Strong enough to keep those people in check
Strong people survive at least for a while, but you hurt people
Struggling with stress
Suicide cases as a direct result of that type of leadership
Superstar employee pretends they do not know anything because new person
Supporting our precious boy but the difficult time lasts for years
Suspended for not taking instruction about a calculation
Suspension was unjust
Suspension was very stressful
Swear and shout at everyone and play the victim when under pressure
Taking out juniors in the presence of senior management
Talkers marginalised and victimised
Talking in the corridors
Tantrums on emails and tantrums in meetings
Team leader exposed and everybody trying to steal her funds
Technocrats that should not be leading
Telling people they are not good enough
Tendency of being a bully, part of your DNA, is no excuse
The amount of faith and trust put on leadership
The are grandiose - someone seeking attention
The best and the worst manager in one individual
The board wanted performance
The board would overrule the psychometric process
The burden to correct is unfairly on the leader
The closer you get you realise the levels of evil
The consistently do not show up
The dangerous employees are the ones you keep paying every month and not performing

The deliver with bodies on the floor and blood on the walls
The desire to control an outcome and bad management behaviour comes up
The do not buy into the vision and rally people
The example is set at the top
The higher you go the more difficult to remove behaviour
The impact on people should not be underestimated
The need to watch their back, someone trying to backstab me
The only way to stand up and question it was by resigning, the only way out
The organisation is not firing at 100%
The organisation suffers - doing the bare minimum
The organisation was focused on getting the results
The outcome can be positive from toxic behaviour
The people that she leads do not stay
The right middle management will stand up to toxic management
The same individuals being orderly in other contexts
The system allowed the behaviour until 3-4 people left
The team is divided - a feeling of importance for leader
The team is divided and that is where the leader get their importance
The theme I find in this behaviour is insecurity
The third time you say something he listens
The time I worked there was wasted and I had to rebuild my life
The use their ability to inspire people negatively
There comes a point where you rather earn less and have peace of mind
There is a lot of churn and a constant learning gap
There is no one that hates you
There is nowhere to hide in financial services
There was a hit list of people that needed to be eliminated in an organisation
There was no support for when I was struggling
These are all bad apples in one degree or another
These people are quite thick skinned and do not even care
They are still quiet about it - no reasons provided
They could sabotage the organisation if they have not dealt with their hate
They do not know what excellence looks like
They do not know what they do not know - most dangerous person
They drive output out of fear
They end up clipping big salaries and not earning them
They got away with it because the company was delivering results
They got away with the behaviour because there was no burning platform
They got rid of her
They influence people negatively

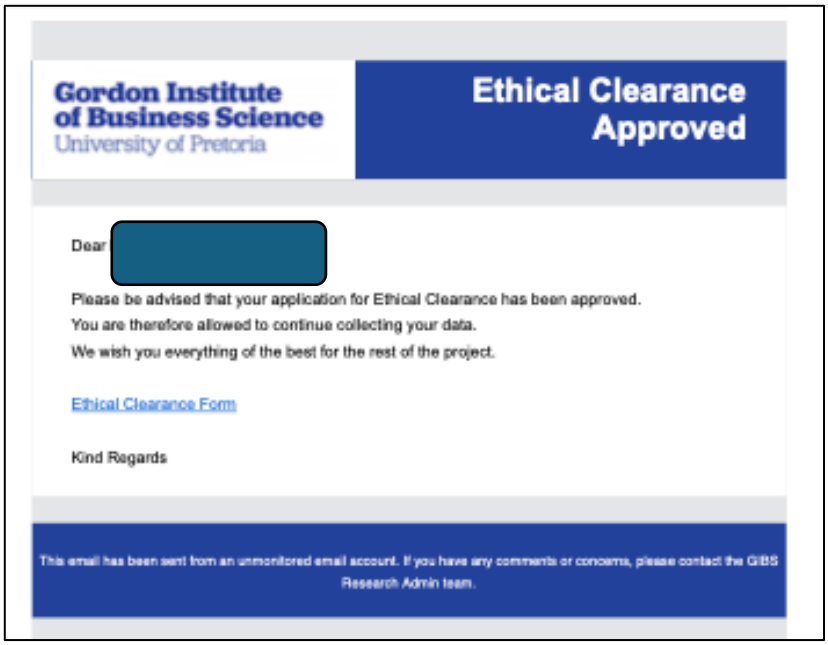
They just chose the wrong tools to get the outcome
They just do not take feedback, been doing this for decades
They just keep quiet
They make such an egregious mistake it goes against employment contract
They mustn't outshine the leader
They never really had competition so they could get away with it
They see what you do and they do the same thing
They start to run organisations down because of the power they have
They tried to hide it and they got protection from above
They use every opportunity to sabotage you
They want to control everything
They will not speak in a meeting they will triangulate and speak to colleagues
Things can feel pretty overwhelming with continual stress and strain
This woman starts again with attacking me
Thought he was holding his people accountable, but actually very cruel
Threats of being fired
To get to the top you climb on someone else's back - cut-throat culture
Tone at the top - group CEO's influence
Tone from the top led people to believe it’s okay to be abusive and to bully
Too few genuinely good leaders
Top performer starts acting like a 5 year old
Toxic culture accepted by those that stick around, or you out of there
Toxic culture and negative leadership behaviour in culture survey
Toxic environment as no one talks
Toxic environment leader had no idea how to change it
Toxic fund manager fight, scream and shout
Toxic leaders thrive in poor economies
Toxic or bad environment links to the leader
Toxicity created when leader stopped paying attention
Training to unlearn the bad habits of leadership
Treat me like a friend and then use it against me
Tried to engage manager but he declined
Triggered by a very small thing
Try and balance the stick and the carrot for performance
Try and create optimal solutions with poor building blocks
Trying to push the ones that are good, push them down
Two months after leader left the team turned around
Unable to deal with people
Uncomfortable, unhappy and not valued as a result of destructive leadership
Undermine my confidence in my ability to do my job

Undermines team morale and erodes trust
Understanding the shadow part of humanity makes me stronger
Unfairly accused of insubordination and unprofessional behaviour
Unlearn bad behaviour
Unmet aspirations in the management hierarchy
Unreasonable and unrealistic bonus expectations
Use behaviour to hide skills lack
Verge of a nervous breakdown
Very detailed, magnifying glass does not help for execution
Very low self-esteem at an individual level
Very reckless with behaviour
Want the deal at the expense of the company
Wasting energy constantly trying to anticipate needs
Watching over is traumatising less efficient and error prone
We can see that it is not coming from the heart
We exited her for a harassment case or we would have lost credibility
We know after three years he must go
We need to be taught to lead
We need to lead with kindness, more sustainable in the long run
We only have consequence management policies for hard facts
We talk infrequently and then it is all about the manager
Weakness - I just accepted blame putting myself down
What was making these individuals happy was that they are being feared
When challenged he said I did not mean it like that
Whenever they move they feel comfortable to move with their own people
When running away from a role it changes the way you present yourself
When the company is in trouble se we get a tough guy
When there's an audience, then he behaves like that
When there’s a lot of pressure people go to their default position
Where is it broken?
Withholding participation and shows up badly
Will not speak up for fear of what actions will be taken against the person
Work hard and manager with rip it to shreds
Work slower with someone watching over you, work weekends and long hours
Workforce not operating at full capacity because they are not well
Working with a gun against your head wondering when the shot will go off
Would only greet people of the same race
Wrong culture or wrong behavioural traits are dire for organisation
You are the only one who seeing them as bad
You become public enemy number one

You become this unhappy person - emotional well-being
You can hide it for a period but it is not sustainable
You can see those that have been on the transformation path
You can use power to divide or to the grow the team
You can work with a bully that listens
You cannot have favourites because everyone else will assume they are less than
You cannot say anything about the dismissal
You could raise this, but at your peril. It would not have ended well for you
You could sense it is like favouritism
You do not deserve to shake my hand
You employ a weakened HR that will not give you a problem
You get the wrong people in your organisation because you think they are smarter
You have to stand up for what is right
You hope that people can modify their behaviour
You look for the first bus out of there
You lose your confidence
You must manage healthy competition
You need to learn from your mistakes
You need to take a few punches, take one for the team
You should not have to set house rules with adults
You show people we do not have a monster, but we have accountability
Young super-bright people run away - those that stay have admitted defeat
Cat: Absent leadership
Cat: Anger and rage
Cat: Assimilation
Cat: Behaviour and response
Cat: Blame
Cat: Bullying
Cat: Culture
Cat: Emotional and Psychological
Cat: Fear
Cat: Hiding
Cat: High turnover
Cat: Incentives
Cat: Insecurity
Cat: Intention to leave
Cat: Intentionality
Cat: Lack of Trust
Cat: Lingering effect
Cat: Management style

Cat: Mental and physical health
Cat: Micromanagement
Cat: Misaligned Expectations
Cat: Organisational Fallout
Cat: Power and ego
Cat: Pressure
Cat: Psychological safety
Cat: Quiet quitting
Cat: Restructuring
Cat: Retaliation
Cat: Sabotage
Cat: Self-criticism
Cat: Self-perception
Cat: Stress
Cat: Threatening
Cat: Tone at the top
Cat: Toxicity

Annexure G: Ethical clearance



Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

Ethical Clearance Approved

Dear [redacted]

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.
You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.
We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Ethical Clearance Form

Kind Regards

This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS Research Admin team.

Annexure H: Consent letter

Dear sir/madam,

I am conducting research on the negative side of leadership behaviour. Our interview is expected to last no longer than an hour, and will help to understand stakeholder experiences, the causes and consequences of destructive leadership behaviour.

Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.

By signing this letter, you are indicating that you have given permission for:

- The interview to be recorded;
- Verbatim quotations from the interview may be used in the report, provided they are not identified with your name or that of your organisation;
- The data to be used as part of a report will be publicly available once the examination process has been completed; and
- All data to be reported and stored without identifiers.

If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are

provided below.

	Researcher	Research Supervisor
Name		
Email		
Contact number		

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____ Date: _____