



How bad are the effects of bad leaders? A meta-analysis of destructive leadership and its outcomes

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25 January 2012

Received in revised form 4 September 2012

Accepted 5 September 2012

Available online 28 September 2012

Keywords:

Leadership

Destructive leadership

Abusive supervision

Outcomes

Meta-analysis

ABSTRACT

While the focus on constructive leadership still dominates leadership research, an increasing number of studies investigate different forms of destructive leadership. This meta-analysis integrates different conceptualizations of destructive leadership and analyzes the relationship between destructive leadership and outcome variables. The search for articles yielded more than 200 studies of which 57 could be included in the meta-analysis. Results indicate the expected negative correlations with positive followers' outcomes and behaviors (e.g., attitudes towards the leader, well-being, and individual performance) and positive correlations with negative outcomes (e.g., turnover intention, resistance towards the leader, counterproductive work behavior). As expected, the highest correlation arises between destructive leadership and attitudes towards the leader. Surprisingly, the next highest correlation was found between destructive leadership and counterproductive work behavior. After discussing the results, an agenda for future research is proposed. Given the negative impact of destructive leadership, more knowledge is especially necessary regarding what triggers destructive leadership.

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1. Introduction

Traditionally, research into leadership has often been guided by the quest to find the most effective person or method to lead. Popular concepts such as transformational leadership (e.g., Bass, 1985) but even more recent developments such as ethical (e.g., Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005) or authentic leadership (e.g., Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008) focus on positive leader behavior and its effects. Sometimes the term 'leadership' is even limited to an exercise of personal influence resulting in enthusiastic commitment of followers: "proponents of this view argue that a person who uses authority and control over rewards, punishments, and information to manipulate or coerce followers is not really 'leading' them" (Yukl & van Fleet, 1992: 148). However, a recent stream of research (often under the label of 'supervision' or 'supervisory behavior') acknowledges that there is also a dark side to leadership (Conger, 1990): Regardless of what researchers and practitioners may consider ideal, some leaders behave in ways that are detrimental to their followers and often the organization as a whole.

There are two main reasons for the growing interest in the dark side of leadership: First, there is the question of the prevalence and costs as a result of destructive leaders. While Aryee, Sun, Chen, and Debrah (2008) consider abusive supervision, as the one concept that has dominated empirical research in this area, as a "low base rate phenomenon" (p. 394), other studies report a strong prevalence of destructive leader behaviors in organizations. For example in the Netherlands, Hubert and van Veldhoven (2001) report a prevalence rate of about 11%. Even higher prevalence rates have been found in a Norwegian study (Aasland, Skogstad, Notelaers, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2010) where about a third of employees report to have been subject to some type of destructive leadership behavior "often" within the six months prior to the questioning. In the US, abusive supervision affects an estimated 13.6% of U.S. workers (Tepper, 2007) at a cost of \$ 23.8 billion annually for US-companies (e.g., due to employee absenteeism, employee turnover,

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and lowered effectiveness; [Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006](#)). These numbers underline the high practical importance of this area of research.

The second reason for the interest in destructive leader behaviors stems from the findings that their effects on individual followers are quite severe. A large variety of outcomes have been studied in relation to destructive leadership behaviors. Examples include effects on job tension and emotional exhaustion (e.g., [Harvey, Stoner, Hochwarter, & Kacmar, 2007](#)), resistance behavior (e.g., [Bamberger & Bacharach, 2006](#)), deviant work behavior (e.g., [Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002](#)), reduced family well-being (e.g., [Hoobler & Brass, 2006](#)), and intention to quit and job satisfaction (e.g., [Tepper, 2000](#)). Both prevalence rates and potential serious effects of destructive leader behaviors make it a concept worthwhile of deeper investigation.

While for some time, a lot of literature focusing on detrimental aspects of leadership was narrative in nature (e.g., [Lipman-Blumen, 2004; Sutton, 2007](#)), making quantitative research syntheses next to impossible, research in this area has now also attracted substantial interest from quantitative researchers. [Tepper \(2007\)](#) stated in his qualitative literature review that most of the studies on abusive supervision have been conducted during just the last few years. Thus, the time seems ripe for a meta-analysis, quantifying the effect sizes that we can expect when leaders show destructive behaviors.

While meta-analyses already exist in the area of constructive leadership (i.e., [Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004; Wang, Oh, Courtright, & Colbert, 2011](#)) as well as in the field of general workplace harassment/aggression (i.e., [Bowling & Beehr, 2006](#)), a comprehensive quantitative review of destructive leadership is still absent. To our knowledge, only [Hershcovis \(2011\)](#) has undertaken such an endeavor. However, her intention was to meta-analytically compare supervisor-initiated aggression to other constructs of workplace aggression. Hence, she does not give a full overview of the consequences of destructive leadership but rather focuses on some outcome variables selected based on their usefulness for this comparison. Other meta-analyses have only focused on specific aspects of destructive leadership (i.e., supervisor aggression, [Hershcovis & Barling, 2010](#); non-contingent punishment, [Podsakoff, Bommer, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006](#)).

In summary, while there is increasing evidence that destructive leaders cause serious problems for followers, organizations and society, research in this area is lacking both an integration of the diverse concepts and a comprehensive, quantitative review of the consequences of destructive leadership. Such a review will not only provide a state-of-the-art overview of our knowledge in this area but also prospects for future theoretical and empirical developments. In fields of research like destructive leadership that are in a relatively early stage, a major problem concerns the inconsistency of the terminology (cp. [Tepper, 2007](#)). Hence, we will start by limiting the focus of our review by discussing the boundaries of destructive leadership and distinguishing it from the broader concept of destructive leader behavior. We will then discuss the different constructs of destructive leadership used in previous research to develop a definition and conclude which concepts we will include in our meta-analysis and why. Subsequently, we will briefly review prior research in this area and derive assumptions regarding the relationship between destructive leadership and different outcomes, before explaining how we conducted this meta-analysis and what the results were. We end with a discussion regarding what we know about destructive leadership so far and directions for future research.

2. Distinguishing destructive leader behavior and destructive leadership?

It is not an easy task to define destructive leadership for two main reasons. First, as already mentioned, some researchers claim that leadership can by definition only be positive (see [Yukl & van Fleet, 1992](#)). They reject the concept of destructive leadership as being an oxymoron and advocate for different terms to capture the negative side of leader behavior (e.g., supervision, management, or headship). Second, and perhaps as a consequence of this view, we see a rather scattered landscape of different terms, concepts, and studies all interested in the dark side of leader behavior but with some important differences. Leadership researchers only recently adopted the topic from other areas such as bullying and counterproductive work behavior ([Tepper, 2007; Thoroughgood, Tate, Sawyer, & Jacobs, 2012](#)). It therefore seems necessary to answer two main questions: Why should we speak of *leadership* with respect to the dark side of leader behavior? What exactly encompasses the term 'destructive leadership'? To answer these questions, we first need to establish a border between destructive *leadership* and the more general term of destructive *leader behavior*.

[Thoroughgood and colleagues \(2012\)](#) define destructive leader behavior as voluntary acts (committed by a person in a leadership, supervisory, or managerial position) which most people would perceive as harmful and deviant towards followers and/or the organization and which can either be physical or verbal, active or passive, direct or indirect. While others have made similar distinctions (e.g. [Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007](#)), it seems important to us to note that Thoroughgood and colleagues do not speak of destructive *leadership* but destructive leader behavior (unlike [Einarsen et al., 2007](#)). From our point of view, it is important to acknowledge that while it is self-evident that not everything a leader does is leadership, the comprehensiveness of the term 'destructive leadership' is still debatable due to the difficulty of the term leadership itself. [Yukl \(2006\)](#) summarizes the wide range of different definitions of leadership by stating that defining leadership is always to some degree arbitrary and subjective. However, most definitions share the assumption that leadership involves "a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group and organization" ([Yukl, 2006](#), p. 3). Hence, while destructive leader behavior can encompass a wider variety of harmful behavior which is not related to the leadership task (e.g., taking drugs at work, stealing from the organization; cp. [Thoroughgood et al., 2012](#)), the term of destructive leadership should be limited to those aspects which include follower-targeted influence (which is a key aspect in defining leadership). In summary, we argue here that destructive leadership is not the same as destructive leader or supervisor behavior as the latter refers to any type of negative behavior committed by a person in a leadership position, including counterproductive work behavior. In this meta-analysis, we focus on leader behaviors that are targeted towards the followers (and thus represent leadership) rather than the organization.

3. Different conceptualizations and a definition: what is destructive leadership?

Even though concepts such as the negative side of charismatic leadership (often called personalized charisma, [Howell, 1998](#)) or narratives about political leaders such as Hitler or Stalin (e.g., [Burns, 2003](#); [Kellerman, 2004](#)) have been part of the leadership discussion for a long time, the quantitative study of destructive leadership is a relatively recent one. Different conceptualizations of similar ideas have emerged almost at the same time. Examples of such conceptualizations include abusive supervision (e.g., [Tepper, 2000](#)), destructive leadership ([Einarsen et al., 2007](#)), toxic leadership ([Lipman-Blumen, 2004](#)), and petty tyranny ([Ashforth, 1994](#)). [Table 1](#) gives an overview of the different types of destructive leadership found in the literature. There are a few key aspects in which the definitions of these concepts differ which we will outline below.

- (1) *Perception versus actual behavior*: As is the case with constructive leadership, destructive leadership tends to be assessed from the followers' point of view. However, some definitions of the concepts included here explicitly refer to followers' perception of the leader's behavior (e.g., abusive supervision: [Tepper, 2000](#)) whereas others only refer to the leader's behavior (e.g., social undermining: [Duffy et al., 2002](#)). We argue that leader behavior can only have an effect when it is perceived by followers and in that sense, probably all the different concepts of destructive leadership include an element of perception.
- (2) *Intent*: Another question is whether or not the behavior shown by the leader is intentionally or unintentionally destructive. Some definitions of destructive leadership include the notion of intent (e.g., despotic leadership: [De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008](#)), other do not (e.g., petty tyranny: [Ashforth, 1997](#)) or do not do so explicitly (e.g., supervisor aggression: [Inness, Barling, & Turner, 2005](#)). While it is quite difficult to empirically differentiate these different notions (see the discussion between [Hershcovis, 2011](#), and [Tepper & Henle, 2011](#)), some authors stress that the intent does not have to be real but that the perception of intent is the key element here (e.g., social undermining: [Duffy et al., 2002](#)). We can assume that leader behavior that is perceived to be intentionally destructive is more harmful than behavior that is unintentionally destructive but both can be considered destructive.
- (3) *Physical, verbal, and non-verbal behavior*: Destructive leadership can encompass a wide variety of behaviors, including verbal and non-verbal behavior or even physical violence. While some definitions rule out physical behavior (e.g., [Tepper, 2000](#)), others include it in their definition (e.g., destructive leadership: [Einarsen, Skogstad, Leseth, & Aasland, 2002](#)). Even though physical violence may be a rather unlikely form of destructive leadership, it seems advisable to not completely exclude it from the definition in order not to limit the scope of destructive leadership too much in this early stage of research.
- (4) *Inclusion of outcomes*: Some definitions of destructive leadership explicitly refer to outcomes (e.g., [Einarsen et al., 2002](#)), others define the concept in more neutral terms (e.g., petty tyranny: [Ashforth, 1997](#)). An interesting discussion can be undertaken regarding the question as to whether or not the conceptualization of destructive leadership should refrain from including references to outcomes. On the one hand, a more neutral approach to assessing leaders' destructive behavior would be useful as, otherwise, testing correlations between the construct and its potential outcomes can be redundant. On the other hand, practically it can be difficult to differentiate destructive behavior from the destructiveness regarding its outcomes. We follow the arguments of [Thoroughgood and colleagues \(2012\)](#) in that we focus on the perceived nature of the target behavior rather than on its specific consequences as this may lead to the incorrect inclusion or exclusion of certain behaviors.

Table 1

Types of destructive leadership used in the studies included in the meta-analysis and articles that introduced the concept.

Type of destructive leadership	Articles that introduced the concept	Perception	(Perceived) Intent	Duration/ frequency	Physical, verbal, and non-verbal behavior	Target	Inclusion of outcomes
Petty tyranny	Ashforth (1997)	N	N		V/NV	F	N
Abusive supervision	Tepper (2000)	Y	N	Y	V/NV	F	N
Coercive power	Elangovan and Xie (2000)	N					Y
Abusive supervisory behaviors	Yagil (2005)	Y		Y	V/NV	F	N
Social undermining	Duffy et al. (2002)	N	Y	Y	V/NV	F/C ^a	Y
Supervisory abuse ^b	Bamberger and Bacharach (2006)	Y	N	Y	V/NV	F	N
Supervisor verbal abuse	Grandey et al. (2007)			Y	V	F	N
Unsupportive managerial behaviors	Rooney and Gottlieb (2007)			Y	V/NV	F	N
Aversive leadership	Bligh et al. (2007)	Y			V/NV	F	N
Destructive leadership	Einarsen et al. (2002)	N	N	Y	V/NV/P	F/O ^c	Y
Tyrannical leadership ^d	Hauge et al. (2007)	N	N	Y	V/NV/P	F/O ^e	Y
Despotic leadership	De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008)	N	Y		V/NV/P	F/O	N

Note: N = No; Y = Yes; V = Verbal; NV = Nonverbal; P = Physical; F = Follower; O = Organization; C = Colleagues.

^a In our meta-analysis, only supervisor behavior towards followers is included.

^b Definition based on [Tepper](#) but different instrument used. We assume the same characteristics as valid for [Tepper](#).

^c Only follower related behavior is included in our meta-analysis.

^d This is part of the destructive leadership model by [Einarsen et al. \(2002\)](#) and therefore follows the same definition.

^e Only follower related behavior is included in our meta-analysis.

Following this summary and consistent with the definition of leadership by Yukl (2006), we will define destructive leadership as “a process in which over a longer period of time the activities, experiences and/or relationships of an individual or the members of a group are repeatedly influenced by their supervisor in a way that is perceived as hostile and/or obstructive”. Some aspects of this definition deserve further explanation.

- (1) *Influence*: Exerting influence on followers is at the heart of most of the definitions of leadership (Yukl, 2006), which makes it also a key feature of destructive leadership. This means that a leader uses destructive leadership to achieve a certain aim and at least unintentionally (see discussion above) influences the activities and relationships within the group.
- (2) *Supervisor*: While many definitions of leadership in general do not define who exerts the influence, a definition on destructive leadership needs to be clear about this aspect and focus on hierarchical mistreatment (cp. Tepper, 2007). While not impossible, it seems rather unlikely that a person without formal authority can emerge and stay in a position of an informal leader in an organizational context by behaving destructively (at least in the long run). Many conceptions of destructive leader behavior include the abuse of formal power as an important means to intimidate and punish reluctant followers.
- (3) *Repetition over a longer period of time*: To qualify as destructive leadership, it seems also important that the negative influence on the group members is exerted not just once or twice but repeatedly over a longer period of time. This aspect roots deeply in the literature on workplace bullying (e.g. Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003) as it is important to distinguish destructive leadership from short-term conflicts or single destructive acts. It has to be stressed that a boss who has a bad day and takes it out on his or her followers should not be considered as a destructive leader (Tepper, 2007).
- (4) *Perceived hostility and/or obstructiveness*: As stated before, destructive leadership should be defined by the nature of the target behavior rather than its consequences (Thoroughgood et al., 2012). Hence, the core of destructive leadership lies in the hostile and hindering nature of the leader's behavior. While constructive leadership is defined as reaching common agreements about work and facilitating individual and collective efforts to achieve shared goals (cp. Yukl, 2006), destructive leadership on the contrary involves hostile behavior (like public ridiculing, taking credit for subordinates' successes, and scapegoating subordinates; Keashly, Trott, & MacLean, 1994) as well as impeding cooperative work in the team (like giving someone the silent treatment and prohibiting interaction with coworkers; Tepper, 2000). As stated above, it is important to note that hostility and obstructiveness can only be subjective evaluations “subordinates make on the basis of their observations of their supervisors' behavior” (Tepper, 2007, p. 4).
- (5) *Individual or group*: There is an ongoing discussion about the level of analysis in leadership research (see, e.g., Yammarino, Dionne, Chun, & Dansereau, 2005). Some conceptualizations of leadership explicitly refer to the individual level relationships (e.g., Leader–Member Exchange; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) whereas others imply group level relationships (i.e., the leader behaves the same towards all members of his/her group, e.g., transformational leadership: Bass, 1985). We assume that destructive leadership can refer to both levels, in the sense that leaders might target only one or few members of their group, and/or only one or few members of their group perceive destructive leadership, or they are generally destructive towards all of their followers.

4. Sharpening the focus: what is not destructive leadership?

An important issue raised by this definition of destructive leadership is the question as to whether or not laissez-faire leadership (non-leadership) can be included as a type of destructive leadership. Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, and Hetland (2007) argue in this direction and state that destructive leadership can take both active, manifest as well as passive, indirect forms. Skogstad and colleagues (2007) underline that not only the direct forms of supervisor hostility but also a lack of initiative and support can have negative effects on subordinates' satisfaction and performance. This argument is supported by their own empirical results (i.e., laissez-faire leadership is related to higher levels of role conflict, role ambiguity, and conflict with co-workers; Skogstad et al., 2007) as well as those of others (e.g., Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

However, as a concept should not be defined by its consequences (see above), the question remains if the term ‘destructive’ is really appropriate when talking about laissez-faire leadership. Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) note that destructive leadership results in harmful, long-term ramifications. The very broad conception by Skogstad and others (2007) may blur important differences within the field of the dark side of leadership. While it is certainly true that laissez-faire is an ineffective leadership style (i.e., inappropriate to achieve follower satisfaction and effective performance), we see a clear qualitative difference between non-leadership and active supervisor hostility as described by the concepts such as abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000) or petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994). The latter can be expected to have much more severe and potentially even qualitatively different detrimental consequences (for a similar argument see Ashforth, 1994).

An even more difficult aspect of the dark side of leadership is the so-called supportive-disloyal leadership (Einarsen et al., 2007) which is described as showing (too much) consideration for the welfare of followers while violating organizational goal attainment. Such leaders may steal resources from the organization, protect their followers from work, and grant their employees more benefits than they are obliged to (Einarsen et al., 2007). The difficulty with this concept is that this kind of leadership is normally not regarded as hostile by the followers as they may benefit from it (at least in the short run). While there can be no doubt that it is a destructive leader behavior with regard to the organization, supportive-disloyal can be expected to produce quite different reactions on part of the followers than other forms of destructive leadership such as abusive supervision or tyrannical leadership (see Einarsen et al., 2002).

Therefore, it should be treated as a separate area of destructive leader behavior in order not to blur the important differences between these concepts.

In summary, it now seems necessary to distinguish between *destructive* and *negative leadership* (cp. Schilling, 2009). In contrast to our definition of destructive leadership, negative leadership is used as an overarching term including commonly disliked and denounced behaviors ranging from ineffective (such as laissez-faire leadership) and anti-organizational behavior (such as supportive-disloyal leadership) to destructive aspects in the sense of our definition (cp. Kellerman, 2004).

In conclusion, in our definition of destructive leadership, we are inclusive in the sense that we include as many concepts as possible without blurring the concept. Other than excluding 'non-leadership' ('laissez-faire') and supportive-disloyal leadership for the reasons indicated above, we therefore decided to include a broad range of behaviors in our definition. Thus, we include verbal, non-verbal, and physical behavior as part of destructive leadership. With respect to the target of the behavior, we decided to focus on the follower as a target. The reason, as indicated above, is related to the question of leadership versus general destructive leader behavior. In our meta-analysis, we were not so much interested in leaders' general 'misbehavior' (which could also include, e.g., counterproductive work behavior) than in leadership behavior directed towards the followers.

5. Destructive leadership and outcomes: theoretical framework

Conducting a meta-analysis means that in terms of the constructs examined, we have to rely on research that has been conducted so far in the area for the selection of outcome variables. In reviewing the relevant literature in the field, we found that most of the outcomes of destructive leadership are assessed from a followers' point of view. Theoretically, and in line with our definition of destructive leadership, focusing on follower-related outcomes makes sense, as part of our definition is that destructive leadership is focused on influencing followers. As we outlined above, this is different from general destructive leader behavior as defined by [Thoroughgood and colleagues \(2012\)](#). The latter also refers to destructive behavior against the company, meaning that a different set of outcomes might be more relevant.

Outcomes under study in the area of destructive leadership can broadly be differentiated into leader-related concepts, job-related concepts, organization-related concepts, and individual follower-related concepts (see [Fig. 1](#)). While there are certainly outcomes that can be classified under several of these categories, we broadly used the following guidelines of categorization: Probably the easiest category to define is leader-related concepts. Here, we subsumed concepts that related directly to the leader such as follower resistance towards the leader (e.g., [Bligh, Kohles, Pearce, Justin, & Stovall, 2007](#)) and leader identification ([Ashforth, 1997](#)). These are dyadic concepts, in the sense that they are attitudes or behaviors shown by individual followers to individual leaders. One of the main concepts categorized as job-related is job satisfaction (e.g., [Tepper, 2000](#)). While different conceptualizations can comprise different aspects of job satisfaction (e.g., the supervisor or the organization), we argue that job satisfaction a) is often assessed with one question ([Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 2000](#)) relating directly to the job or b) assesses different facets that make up a job. Where specific aspects were differentiated (e.g., the supervisor), these were summarized under the respective other category (in this example, attitudes towards the leader).

Organization-related concepts comprise concepts that directly affect the organization such as organizational commitment or turnover. While one could argue that these concepts are influenced by a myriad of antecedents and also do not only affect the organization (e.g., people who leave the organization also leave their supervisor and their team), it seemed most appropriate to summarize them under organization-related concepts as they convey an attitude towards the organization as a whole.

We summarized stress, well-being, and performance under individual follower-related concepts as they are consequences that relate to the individual follower. Arguably, performance is broader and relates to the job as well as the organization, however, we categorized this variable as individual follower-related concept in order for it not to be confused with performance of the organization as a whole.

In the following, we will outline the expected relationships between destructive leadership and those outcomes as well as how we think the relationships will differ from each other with respect to their strength. We will also discuss differences in the effect sizes between destructive and constructive leadership.

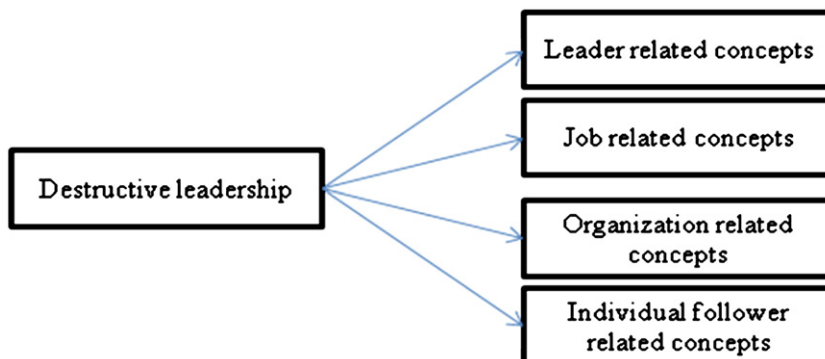


Fig. 1. Outcomes of destructive leadership.

5.1. Leader-related concepts

Several studies have looked into leader-related concepts, mainly follower resistance towards the leader (e.g., Bligh et al., 2007) and attitudes towards the leader (e.g., leader identification; Ashforth, 1997). The assumption is that followers show resistance towards destructive leaders. Tepper, Duffy, and Shaw (2001) argue that resistance such as ignoring request can be a way of frustrating leaders in a way that “is somewhat ambiguous from the target's perspective in terms of intent” (p. 975) and thus a good way to retaliate to leaders. Their results confirm that abusive supervision is positively related to resistance. With respect to attitudes towards leaders, an example is Duffy and Ferrier's (2003) study examining trust in the supervisor. They argue that abusive supervision should lower trust in the supervisor and indeed found empirical support for this hypothesis. On a more general level, it is likely that followers change their attitudes and behaviors towards the source of destructive behavior, that is, their leader. Based on the available theory and results, we assume:

H1. Destructive leadership will have negative relationships with positive leader-related concepts (such as trust) and positive relationships with negative leader-related concepts (such as resistance).

5.2. Job-related concepts

In the context of destructive leadership, the concept most examined is job satisfaction. Many studies argued and found that destructive leadership is negatively related to job satisfaction (e.g., Tepper, 2000; Tepper, Duffy, Hoobler, & Ensley, 2004) as supervisors form a significant part of one's job and, thus contribute to making a job a pleasant or unpleasant experience. Part of destructive leadership is putting forwards unreasonable demands or ridiculing followers, which are behaviors that make the daily experience of going to work displeasing. Other job-related attitudes under investigation were job dedication (Aryee et al., 2008) and work motivation (Elangovan & Xie, 2000). Being dedicated to a job that involves destructive leader behavior is likely to be difficult, even if the follower is dedicated to his/her profession in general. The same is true for motivation: Keeping up motivation in the light of abuse is unlikely in the longer run. Again, the assumption that destructive leadership is negatively related to these concepts was generally supported. Given prior theory and results we assume:

H2. Destructive leadership will have negative relationships with positive job-related concepts and positive relationships with negative job-related concepts.

5.3. Organization-related concepts

Organization-related concepts that have been examined in prior research include turnover intention (Ashforth, 1997), counterproductive work behavior (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007), justice (Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002), and commitment (Burriss, Detert, & Chiaburu, 2008). Regarding turnover intention, Ashforth (1997) found that petty tyranny is positively related to turnover intention. He argues that this is due to the unpredictability of petty tyrants which creates work alienation. Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) argue that in addition to direct retaliation to the supervisor, followers of abusive leaders will also show what they call ‘displaced’ deviance towards the organization. Their results support this assumption. With respect to justice, Tepper (2000) argues that followers of abusive supervisors will perceive his/her behavior as unjust and thus evaluated procedural justice as low. This notion was supported in his study. Arguably, commitment to an organization that ‘allows’ destructive leadership should be low as followers might think that the organization fails to protect them. This notion was empirically supported (e.g., Burriss et al., 2008).

H3. Destructive leadership will have negative relationships with positive organization-related concepts and positive relationships with negative organization-related concepts.

5.4. Individual follower-related concepts

Outcomes of destructive leadership on individual followers examined in prior research include affectivity, stress, well-being, and performance. In the context of abusive supervision and outcomes, affectivity is often used as a control variable (e.g., Breaux, Perrewe, Hall, Frink, & Hochwarter, 2008). Destructive leadership is often found to be positively related to negative affectivity (e.g., Tepper et al., 2004) and negatively related to positive affectivity (e.g., Wu & Hu, 2009). Technically, affectivity could also be an antecedent of destructive leadership, as people might differ in how they evaluate a leader's behavior based on their general affectivity. Stress and well-being are probably the most examined outcomes of destructive leadership, as it almost seems a matter of course that destructive leadership is positively related to stress and negatively related to well-being. Long-term and frequent exposition to destructive behavior from a person that is in charge is likely to cause stress and lead to lower well-being. Sample studies examining stress are Chen and Kao (2009) and Tepper (2000) and for well-being Hobman, Restubog, Bordia, and Tang (2009) and Burriss and colleagues (2008). Results for the relationship between destructive leadership and individual performance tend to support the notion that destructive leadership is negatively related to performance (e.g., Aryee, Chen, Sun, and Debrah (2007)). Theoretically, there are different reasons to assume that destructive leadership is likely to have an impact

on individual performance: First, followers may lower their efforts in the face of a destructive leader. Second, negative relationships between destructive leadership and motivation or well-being could explain why the performance of followers of destructive leaders is low.

H4. Destructive leadership will have negative relationships with positive individual follower-related concepts and positive relationships with negative individual follower-related concepts.

5.5. Strength of relationships

Looking at the different relationships outlined above, we can assume that not all of them will be of the same strength. In terms of the size of effects, we can assume that attitudes and behaviors that are directed towards the 'destructive' leader would be more strongly related to destructive leadership than relationships to job- or organization-related attitudes and behaviors. Attitudes towards the source of the negative experiences and direct 'retaliation' are likely to be influenced solely by the leader whereas other attitudes and behaviors are influenced by other sources as well.

H5. The effect sizes found for the relationships between destructive leadership and leader-related attitudes and behaviors will be higher than those for job- or organization-related attitudes and behaviors.

5.6. Destructive and constructive leadership

Based on [Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, and Vohs \(2001\)](#), [Einarsen and colleagues \(2007\)](#) assume that destructive leadership has stronger effects than positive leadership. While it is beyond the scope of this meta-analysis to directly compare effects of destructive and constructive leadership, we will examine the *size of the effects* of destructive leadership on various outcome variables and compare our results to prior meta-analyses on constructive leadership. In line with [Baumeister and colleagues \(2001\)](#) and [Einarsen and colleagues \(2007\)](#), we argue that negative behavior should have stronger effects than positive behavior. Thus:

H6. The effect sizes found for the relationships between destructive leadership and follower attitudes and behaviors will be higher than those for constructive leadership and follower attitudes and behaviors.

6. Method

6.1. Search strategy and inclusion/exclusion criteria

In order to identify articles to be included in the meta-analysis, we used three approaches (following procedures of other meta-analyses; cp. [Judge & Piccolo, 2004](#); [Judge, Colbert, & Ilies, 2004](#); [Hershcovis & Barling, 2010](#)). First, we reviewed the reference list of [Tepper's \(2007\)](#) overview article. Second, we conducted a literature research in PsycINFO, Google Scholar, and Web of Science to identify further studies. As there is at this stage not a unitary term in use for destructive leadership, we used a variety of search terms, such as abusive supervision, abusive leadership, destructive supervision, and destructive leadership. We restricted our search to keywords, title, and abstract. The cut-off date for this search was end of September 2010. [Table 2](#) depicts the search terms used and the number of articles found for each of those terms. Third, we also contacted colleagues working and publishing in this field on an individual basis to uncover some unpublished research.

Using all search strategies outlined above, we found 260 articles. The PsycINFO search yielded 104 studies. All other searches combined yielded another 156 articles.

We used several strategies to identify studies relevant for our meta-analysis. First, we reviewed the abstracts of the articles found. Based on the criteria outlined below, we discarded 44 articles after reading the abstracts. In the second stage, we reviewed the remaining 216 articles. Of those articles, 61 were deemed relevant, 152 were not relevant, and 3 were not available. Reasons for non-inclusion in our meta-analysis were: The articles reported no quantitative data (e.g., review or theoretical articles as well as qualitative papers were excluded), the study did not refer to hierarchical relationships (e.g., some studies referred to peer, rather than leadership behavior), the study did not use behavior as a unit of measurement (e.g., some studies focused on traits), the study did not take place in a formal work context (e.g., some studies comprised samples in mentoring relationships), the article was not written in English, the study did not include a form of destructive leadership (see above, we excluded studies that used laissez-faire leadership as a form of destructive leadership), or the study did not refer to personal leadership (e.g., some studies comprised structural or HRM type of leadership). We also excluded studies that did not differentiate the perpetrator of the negative behavior (e.g., some studies focus on workplace aggression in general independent of who shows the aggression, e.g., some studies reported in [Hershcovis, 2011](#)). Finally, some articles did not contain enough information to be included in our meta-analysis. We also excluded articles that reported on the same data set for a second time.

Table 2
Search terms and number of articles found in PsycINFO.

Search term	Number of articles found
Abusive supervision	46
Supervisor abuse	1
Abusive leadership	1
Bossing	9
Despotic leadership	2
Despotic supervision	0
Destructive leadership	11
Destructive supervision	0
Narcissistic leadership	4
Narcissistic supervision	0
Negative leadership	13
Negative supervision	7
Petty tyranny	2
Psychopathic leadership	1
Psychopathic supervision	0
Toxic leadership	4
Toxic supervision	0
Tyrannical leadership	2
Tyrannical supervision	1
Total N of articles found in PsycINFO	104

6.2. Coding procedure

For all studies relevant to our meta-analysis, we identified the measurement of destructive leadership used. [Table 1](#) gives an overview of the concepts used in the studies included in the meta-analysis and the article that introduced the concept. We did not further exclude studies here but rather included all studies satisfying our criteria outlined above. While this led to the inclusion of a variety of different assessments of destructive leadership, they all share a common core reflecting our definition of destructive leadership. From the different kinds of measurement, the abusive supervision scale ([Tepper, 2000](#)) was by far the most often used instrument. While the majority of studies ([Brown et al., 2005](#)) used the full 15-item version, some studies ([Baumeister et al., 2001](#)) used shorter versions ranging from 3 to 13 items taken from [Tepper \(2000\)](#) (see [Appendix A](#)). Three studies combined some of [Tepper's](#) items with those of other scales to measure abusive supervision.

Next, we identified all other variables included in each of the studies. Due to the focus of our study, we only included outcome variables (i.e., variables that may actually be affected by destructive leadership). Hence, demographic variables and follower personality were not incorporated into our analyses.

We then examined in how far studies used the same correlates of destructive leadership so that a meaningful meta-analysis of the respective relationships could be undertaken. Wherever possible, based on the number of studies using the same construct, we analyzed studies using the same construct (e.g., job satisfaction). However, as the outcomes were quite varied, we categorized them so that more studies could be included in each meta-analytic calculation of relationships. To achieve this, qualitative content analysis was chosen as an approach that combines the strengths of the grounded theory approach in the discovery of 'natural' categories with strategies from traditional content analysis (cp. [Schilling, 2006](#)). This included the basic processes of comparing the outcome variables and their constituting (sample) items found in the studies to develop categories. The first step was to find simple categories based on the constructs found in the different studies. Most outcome variables could be coded on the basis of their name as they were used in enough studies (e.g., positive affectivity, affective commitment, and job satisfaction). As a rule of thumb we created an outcome category if a variable was used in at least six different studies (cp. [Locke, 2002](#)). The second step was to analyze the rest of the variables to find commonalities in order to combine small categories (subsuming old or formulating new categories; [Conger, 1998](#)). For example, we defined a category 'follower resistance towards leader' which included variables such as leader-directed deviance, aggression, and retaliation; that is, variables which shared the idea of negative behavior towards the (destructive) leader. The two categories 'well-being' and 'organizational performance' were kept as first-order categories of outcome variables even though they comprised less than six studies as they could not meaningfully be combined with other outcome variables. Finally, we structured the thus established category system by subsuming the categories to four higher level groupings based on their focus (leader, job, organization, and individual follower). This categorization was conducted in line with our theoretical considerations outlined under "[Destructive leadership and outcomes: theoretical framework](#)". [Table 3](#) depicts all categories used and gives examples of the concepts that were summarized under each category.

For 2/3 of the articles, two raters conducted the categorization of the outcome criteria jointly. The codes were discussed and a coding scheme developed and applied. For the remaining 1/3 of the articles, two raters independently coded the variables with regard to the category system outlined above. A computation of the inter-rater-reliability for the categorized outcome variables used in these studies yielded a value of .90 (Cohen's kappa), which signifies high inter-rater agreement.

For all relevant studies, the correlations between destructive leadership and outcomes were extracted. [Appendix A1](#) indicates the studies that were used for each of the correlations. The numbers vary considerably as some outcomes were studied more commonly

Table 3
Categories used in the meta-analysis.

Category	Sample concepts
Leader-related concepts	
Follower resistance towards leader	Aggression, supervisor-directed deviance
Attitudes towards leader	Trust, liking
Job-related concepts	
Job satisfaction	Job satisfaction
Job-related attitudes	Dedication, involvement, motivation
Organization-related concepts	
Turnover intention	Intention to turnover, intention to quit
Counterproductive work behavior	Organizational deviance, counter-productive behavior at work
Justice	Distributive justice, pay fairness, procedural justice
Organizational performance	
Commitment	Affective commitment, organizational commitment
Individual follower-related concepts	
Affectivity	Positive affectivity, negative affectivity
Positive self-evaluation	Self-esteem, core self-evaluation, self-efficacy
Follower stress	Exhaustion, depression
Follower well-being	Life-satisfaction, physical well-being
Individual performance	OCB, performance, work effort

than others. Overall, 57 articles (some reporting more than one study) reported relevant results and all necessary information to be included in our meta-analyses.

6.3. Analyses

We used the program Comprehensive Meta-Analysis (Borenstein, Hedges, Higgins, & Rothstein, 2005) to conduct our meta-analyses. For each category of outcomes, we conducted a separate analysis. Where several correlations between the same constructs/outcome categories were reported in one study, we used several approaches to including them in our meta-analysis: First, if the correlations were independent (e.g., the same relationships were reported for different samples), we treated them as independent, including all relevant correlations in our analyses. Second, where dependent correlations were reported, for example, between several types of destructive leadership and the same outcome, or between destructive leadership and outcomes that were coded into the same category, we averaged the correlations. While there are different methods to correct these average correlations, most of them tend to lead to higher estimates of correlations (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004). Using the average therefore constitutes a conservative estimate of the overall correlation. Given that we assumed we would find relatively large effects and given also the possible practical implications of over-estimating effect sizes, we decided to use a conservative estimate.

We conducted all analyses twice, once with the raw correlations and a second time with the corrected correlations (corrected for unreliability where this information was available in the primary studies). We will, however, interpret only the meta-analytic results of the raw correlations as the corrected correlations constitute the upper limit of the estimation of the population correlation and, given we expect large effects, we decided to follow a conservative estimation in order not to exaggerate the effects of destructive leadership.

7. Results

Table 4 depicts the results of our meta-analyses. The results are very much in line with our expectations, showing that destructive leadership is negatively related to positive leader-related concepts and positively related to negative leader-related concepts, thus supporting H1. As we only found studies examining positive job-related attitudes to include in our meta-analyses, we can only in part support H2 in so far as destructive leadership is negatively related to positive job-related concepts. We assumed in H3 that destructive leadership will have negative relationships with positive organization-related concepts and positive relationships with negative organization-related concepts. Our results support this hypothesis. We also found support for H4 (Destructive leadership will have negative relationships with positive individual follower-related concepts and positive relationships with negative individual follower-related concepts), although the relationship between destructive leadership and positive affectivity was rather low. For all results it has to be noted, however, that the variance within the studies (Q_{within}) is often large, indicating heterogeneity of results.

As expected in Hypothesis 5, the strongest effects we found were for attitude towards the leader, indicating that destructive leader behavior is directly related to how followers feel about their leader. However, the relationship between destructive leadership and follower resistance (towards the leader), while still a strong effect and in the expected direction, is weaker than some of the other relationships, indicating that attitudes maybe more strongly affected by destructive leadership than behavior, at least where the leader is directly concerned.

Table 4
Outcomes of meta-analysis—correlations between destructive leadership and outcomes.

Concept	Q _b	k	N	r	CI		Q _w
					Lower limit	Upper limit	
<i>Leader-related concepts</i>							
Follower resistance (overall)	7.770**	8	2176	.295	.256	.333	
Abusive		6	1637	.263	.217	.308	131.773***
Other		2	539	.387	.313	.457	10.050**
Attitude towards leader (overall)	14.306***	7 ^a	1582	−.571	−.604	−.537	
Abusive		2	192	−.521	−.618	−.408	7.106***
Other		4	720	−.511	−.563	−.454	27.611***
<i>Job-related concepts</i>							
Job satisfaction (overall)	37.620***	21 ^a	8707	−.336	−.355	−.317	
Abusive		10	2724	−.272	−.307	−.237	45.372***
Other		10	5313	−.347	−.370	−.323	9.521
Job-related attitudes (overall)	2.189	6	2784	−.319	−.352	−.285	
Abusive		2	501	−.263	−.343	−.180	1.684
Other		4	2283	−.330	−.366	−.293	33.536***
<i>Organization-related concepts</i>							
Turnover intention (overall)	59.872***	11 ^a	6034	.313	.290	.335	
Abusive		5	2440	.222	.184	.260	13.594***
Other		5	2924	.339	.306	.371	32.213***
Counterproductive work behavior (overall)	23.352***	19 ^a	7610	.377	.358	.397	
Abusive		13	5219	.395	.372	.418	127.898***
Other		5	1721	.292	.248	.334	20.158***
Justice (overall)	18.068***	12	4625	−.321	−.346	−.294	
Abusive		11	2965	−.278	−.311	−.244	57.352***
Other		1	1660	−.393	−.433	−.352	0.000
Organizational Performance Commitment (overall)	5.540**	2	333	.039	−.069	.146	
Abusive		14	3821	−.212	−.242	−.182	
Abusive		10	3033	−.194	−.228	−.159	31.018***
Other		4	788	−.283	−.346	−.217	14.916***
<i>Individual follower-related concepts</i>							
Affectivity							
- Positive affectivity (overall)	0.068	8	2514	−.094	−.133	−.055	
Abusive		5	1839	−.097	−.142	−.051	2.324
Other		3	675	−.085	−.160	.009	24.486***
- Negative affectivity (overall)	13.564**	15	6860	.339	.318	.360	
Abusive		10	4881	.364	.339	.388	97.350***
Other		5	1979	.276	.234	.316	6.373
Positive self-evaluation (overall)	4.982**	13	2856	−.172	−.208	−.136	
Abusive		7	1504	−.211	−.259	−.161	51.430***
Other		6	1352	−.129	−.181	−.076	22.861***
Stress (overall)	32.089***	24	12,093	.243	.226	.259	
Abusive		12	3836	.314	.285	.343	55.980***
Other		12	8258	.210	.189	.230	91.769***
Well-being (overall)	28.188***	4	1057	−.346	−.398	−.291	
Abusive		3	990	−.366	−.419	−.311	28.188***
Other		1	67	−.010	−.250	−.231	0.000
Individual performance (overall)	2.011	12	4657	−.204	−.231	−.176	
Abusive		7	1946	−.180	−.223	−.136	11.012
Other		5	2711	−.221	−.256	−.184	17.095

"other" refers to studies that used instruments other than abusive supervision.

** p < .05.

*** p < .001.

^a Where a study used both abusive supervision and another instrument, the correlations reported in this study were averaged and included in the overall calculation but deleted from the moderator analysis.

The second strongest effect (though much smaller than the one for leader-related attitudes) emerged for counterproductive work behavior. This shows the wider effects of destructive leadership, in the sense that more general job-related behaviors are affected by destructive leadership behavior. While direct resistance towards the leader contains a greater risk of punishment by the leader, general counterproductive work behavior may be a safer (i.e., more clandestine) way to retaliate upon one's leader for his destructive leadership.

Job-related concepts such as job satisfaction and organization-related concepts such as turnover intention and the experience of justice also showed medium-sized correlations to destructive leadership although interestingly not as high as counterproductive work behavior.

As expected well-being, negative affectivity, and stress were found to be related to destructive leadership, indicating that this type of leader behavior has effects that are wider than just work-related. The relationship with occupational stress is not as strong as those for the two other variables. This may be a hint that an impairment of one's personal well-being and the experience negative emotions are more strongly affected by destructive leadership while occupational stress is influenced by other factors (e.g., the availability of coping resources). The experience that colleagues are exposed to the same kind of destructive leader behavior may work as a moderator in this relationship resulting in lower levels of stress (i.e., 'a problem shared is a problem halved'). We also found smaller but significant effects for organizational commitment, follower positive self-evaluation, and individual performance. These concepts are clearly influenced by a wider range of factors outside the leader's control but it is still striking that destructive leadership has an effect even on those aspects of their followers' lives.

As abusive supervision was the most often used concept in the studies we found, we compared the correlations between studies using the instrument assessing abusive supervision introduced by [Tepper \(2000\)](#) and outcomes, on the one hand, and studies using a different instrument to assess destructive leadership (e.g., petty tyranny) and outcomes, on the other hand. The results are depicted in [Table 4](#). At first glance the pattern of results of the moderator analysis does not seem to be very clear. However, looking a bit more closely, it seems that abusive supervision yields higher correlations than other instruments for more personal concepts such as affectivity and well-being. It is also more strongly related to attitudes and behavior directed towards the leader and CWB. In studies using instruments other than Tepper's questionnaire, we found higher correlations with outcomes such as resistance, turnover intention, justice, and performance. These seem to be more directly related to the job than the outcomes abusive supervision is more highly related to. Although this is speculation, we can assume that the reason for these differences is due to item contents: Reviewing the items of the abusive supervision instrument by Tepper in comparison to those of the other instruments, abusive supervision may have a stronger personal connotation as some of the behaviors listed seem less work-relevant than behaviors subsumed under other concepts. That means that the differences in correlations could be due to specificity matching ([Brunswick, 1956](#)).

We also compared our results to meta-analyses of constructive leadership. We assumed ([Hypothesis 6](#)) that the effect sizes found for the relationship between destructive leadership and follower attitudes and behaviors will be higher than those for constructive leadership and follower attitudes and behaviors. We selected the meta-analyses to compare our results to on the basis that (a) they report meta-analytic results of a constructive leadership concept (e.g., transformational leadership, LMX), (b) they include one or more outcomes that were included in our meta-analysis, and (c) they were not integrated in newer meta-analyses (e.g., [Judge & Piccolo, 2004](#), integrated the 'older' meta-analyses of [Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996](#); [Fuller, Patterson, Hester, & Stringer, 1996](#)). We found these meta-analyses using PsycINFO and the search terms "meta-analysis" and "leadership".

As shown in [Table 5](#), the pattern of results for destructive versus constructive leadership is slightly mixed. Most of the correlations are higher for constructive rather than destructive leadership with the exception of commitment and well-being. Interestingly, the pattern of results is different for different constructive leadership concepts: For the constructive leadership concepts LMX and transformational leadership all correlations are higher than those for destructive leadership. Thus, our sixth hypothesis was not supported.

8. Discussion

The aim of this meta-analysis was to summarize quantitatively the relationships that destructive leadership has with leader-related, job-related, organization-related, and more general person-related outcomes. One of the most interesting results of our meta-analysis is the fact that the pattern of results is not only as expected but also how narrow the confidence intervals are. This means that we can be rather confident in drawing conclusions about the expected strength and direction of the relationships between destructive leadership and outcomes. As expected, the results were strong for the outcomes related to the supervisor him/herself. Followers of destructive leaders are likely to have negative attitudes towards the leader and show resistance towards her/him. Indeed,

Table 5
Outcomes of destructive and constructive leadership.

Outcome	Destructive leadership	Constructive leadership	Concept	Source for constructive leadership
Attitude toward/satisfaction with leader	-.57	.68	Consideration	Judge et al. (2004)
		.27	Initiating structure	Judge et al. (2004)
		.62	LMX	Gerstner and Day (1997)
		.71	Transformational leadership	Judge and Piccolo (2004)
		.55	Contingent reward	Judge and Piccolo (2004)
Job satisfaction	-.34	.40	Consideration	Judge et al. (2004)
		.19	Initiating structure	Judge et al. (2004)
		.46	LMX	Gerstner and Day (1997)
		.23	Democratic leadership	Gastil (1994)
		.58	Transformational leadership	Judge and Piccolo (2004)
Turnover intention	.31	.64	Contingent reward	Judge and Piccolo (2004)
		-.28	LMX	Gerstner and Day (1997)
		-.21	LMX	Gerstner and Day (1997)
Commitment	-.21	.35	LMX	Gerstner and Day (1997)
Well-being	-.35	.26	Different constructive styles	Kuoppala, Lamminpaa, Liira, and Vainio (2008)
Individual performance	-.20	.22	Transformational leadership	Wang et al. (2011)

the relationship between destructive leadership and attitudes towards the leader was the strongest effect we found. This is in line with, for example, [Tepper and colleagues' \(2001\)](#) argument regarding direct retaliation towards the leader. The relationship between destructive leadership and attitudes towards the leader was stronger than the relationship between destructive leadership and the more behavioral resistance variable. We can only speculate as to why this is the case, but followers might shy away from direct resistance to avoid further destructive leadership behavior and a spiral of abuse, whereas attitudes are hidden from the leader.

Although, due to the correlative nature of the data, we cannot draw conclusions about causal relationships, we can assume that a destructive leader will find it difficult to convince the follower to 'follow', which will ultimately challenge his/her own position. Of course, for a while, destructive leadership might work in terms of achieving goals. Indeed, [Bardes and Piccolo \(2010\)](#) argue that goal setting can contribute to the emergence of destructive leader behaviors. Thus, these behaviors might be used to achieve goals. However, the relationship between destructive leadership and follower resistance implies that followers will in the long run not comply with the leader (at least if they do not have to fear severe punishment for this behavior). Of course, we cannot rule out that follower resistance is the cause of destructive leadership behavior rather than the other way round. More longitudinal research is needed to clarify causal effects.

Destructive leadership is also negatively related to positive attitudes towards the job. Supervisors constitute a large part of one's job and also have the power to shape the jobs of their followers. Some of this 'shaping' may be part of the destructive leadership (e.g., non-contingent punishment, [Ashforth, 1994](#)) and, therefore, it is not surprising that followers also lower their attitudes towards their job. Again, of course, we cannot rule out that negative job attitudes cause or contribute to destructive leadership. That would mean that supervisors' destructive behaviors are reactive. While this could be the case, it seems that not all supervisors react to negative attitudes or behaviors in a destructive way and that as a reaction this will likely aggravate rather than solve the problem, making it unlikely that destructive leadership is (solely) a reaction towards negative attitudes. In addition, prior longitudinal research into the relationship between bullying in the workplace and job satisfaction indicated that bullying causes lower job satisfaction rather than job satisfaction causing bullying ([Rodriguez-Munoz, Baillien, De Witte, Moreno-Jimenez, & Pastor, 2009](#)).

We also found that followers of destructive leaders have more negative attitudes towards their organization as a whole. [Burris and colleagues \(2008\)](#) argue for an overspill of negative feelings towards the supervisor to negative feelings towards the organization. This could be not only due to the leader being perceived as representative of the organization but also due to the perception that the organization does not intervene to protect their employees. Regardless of the reasons for the negative attitudes, destructive leadership seems to have a broader impact in the organization, in so far as employees regard the organization as a whole more negatively. This likely leads to costs for the organization as followers' turnover intention increases (e.g., [Van Dick et al., 2004](#)) and, probably, their performance decreases (e.g., [Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002](#)). The very strong correlation between destructive leadership and counterproductive work behavior should be particularly worrisome in this respect.

The high correlation we found could be due to three reasons: First, we assume that counterproductive work behavior in this context serves as an act of retaliation towards the leader which may prove safer than direct resistance towards the leader (displaced deviance, [Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007](#)). Second, destructive leaders may be seen as role models for their followers, conveying the message that negative behavior is appropriate in this organization. This explanation is closely related to the idea of [Brown and colleagues \(2005\)](#) concerning the process of social learning in the area of ethical leadership. Finally, destructive leadership and counterproductive work behavior could be a sign of a more general negative organizational culture that is permissive of these types of negative behavior. [Kusy and Holloway \(2009\)](#) point out two aspects of organizational culture that help or hinder toxic leader behavior: (a) system dynamics and (b) values. System dynamics are antecedents as they refer to the extent to which an organization encourages or discourages these leader behaviors. Values refer to principles and standards of dealing with toxic leaders. In any case, organizations should have a high degree of self-interest to deal with destructive leaders.

It seems that the effects of destructive leadership are even wider, touching the personal life of employees. Though to a lesser extent than leader-related, job-related, and organizational effects, we found that destructive leadership is also closely related to negative affectivity and to the experience of occupational stress (and negatively to personal well-being, respectively). Of course, we cannot rule out that the relationship is in the opposite direction, so that, for example, stress leads to a higher perception of destructive leadership. However, [Ferris, Zinko, Brouer, Buckley, and Harvey \(2007\)](#) argue that, for example, strategic bullying leads to control loss in followers and thereby increases stress. Ultimately, the consequence of these relationships could be societal costs if employees become unable to work for a prolonged period of time.

While a meta-analytic comparison of destructive and constructive leadership behavior was beyond the scope of our meta-analysis, we compared our results to meta-analyses of constructive leadership behaviors, such as transformational leadership. In line with [Baumeister and colleagues \(2001\)](#) and [Einarsen and colleagues \(2007\)](#), we expected destructive leadership to have stronger effects than constructive forms of leadership. However, a comparison of results did not confirm this notion. One interesting point to note here is that not all outcomes of destructive leadership have also been studied under constructive conditions and notably many negative outcomes have (to our knowledge) not been subject to meta-analyses yet. Here, future research is needed to clarify if destructive leadership has stronger effects on negative outcomes than constructive leadership.

9. Limitations of the study

Some limitations of our study are based in the data available from primary research. Probably the biggest drawback of our meta-analysis is that all our analyses are based on correlations. Most available research into destructive leadership is cross-sectional in nature (with the notable exception of some of [Tepper's](#) studies, e.g., [Tepper et al., 2009](#)). We, therefore, cannot draw conclusions about causal effects. In addition, studies on destructive leadership and its outcomes tend to use self-report data only. This means that

there is a potential for a method bias. However, the correlation differences we found between the different outcome variables will likely be similar but might differ in strength when method bias is avoided. While using self-report data only is a clear limitation, the issue lies in the nature of the research: A lot of the constructs summarized under destructive leadership explicitly refer to the perception of leader hostility as a defining attribute of destructive leadership. In addition, some of the outcomes are highly subjective.

Given that the field is relatively new, there were limits as to the possibility of analyzing moderators. We found large within studies heterogeneity which points to moderating influence. However, given the limited amount of moderators included in primary research, we were not able to include moderators here other than one on the measurement of destructive leadership.

Relatedly, we summarized different outcomes into categories to achieve a larger number of studies included in our individual analyses. However, that means that we cannot say much about differentiated effects. For example, under the heading of counter-productive work behavior different behaviors such as organizational and interpersonal deviance (i.e., negative behavior towards coworkers), active as well as passive counterproductive behavior are summarized. This limits in how far differentiated relationships between destructive leadership and outcomes could be examined.

We found only two studies which examined the relationship between destructive leadership and performance: De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) assessed perceived top management team effectiveness. Detert, Trevino, Burris, and Andiappan (2007) used different measures on the organizational level such as operating profit and actual turnover. De Hoogh and Den Hartog found no relationship between despotic leadership and organizational performance. Detert and colleagues only found one significant relationship out of the five they tested and that was with product loss (in this case, food loss). From these two studies, we cannot derive a clear conclusion regarding the relationship between destructive leadership and organizational performance. It seems that most of the results point to a zero or rather low relationship which is probably due to the fact that there are a myriad of influences on organizational performance and (bad) leadership is only one of them. In addition, based on our definition, we focused narrowly on destructive leadership rather than more general destructive leader behavior. Destructive leader behavior might be more strongly related to organizational performance as it would have a more direct effect on organizational performance (e.g., in the sense of stealing or fraud) than destructive leadership. At the same time, destructive leadership might have a long-term effect via low follower motivation or high turnover rates, where destructive leader behaviors might have more immediate effects.

Finally, all meta-analyses may be subject to the file drawer problem (Rosenthal, 1979). This refers to the tendency that negative or inconclusive results often remain unpublished by their authors (Sackett, 1979). With regard to our study, this bias may cause an overestimation of effects concerning the consequences of destructive leadership. While to our knowledge there still is no 'silver bullet' to solve this problem, we tried to minimize it by directly contacting colleagues working in this field asking for unpublished studies.

10. Methodological suggestions for future research

Most of the studies we found are cross-sectional and mono-method. Future research should, therefore, try to collect longitudinal data to determine the direction of the relationship. It is not inconceivable that destructive leadership is a reaction of a leader towards an adverse situation in the workplace (e.g., low follower commitment, high counter-productive work behavior). Ideally, leaders would be assessed from a point in time when they first lead a team in order to examine if their (perceived) behavior changes with their followers' attitudes and behaviors.

With respect to counterproductive work behavior but also other types of behavior, it would be interesting to examine in a more differentiated way which behaviors are most strongly affected by destructive leadership and if there is a difference in the effects depending on how long a follower is working for a destructive leader. One could assume that the types of counterproductive work behavior shown by followers get more severe the longer they serve under a destructive leader. For example, counterproductive work behavior may start with some withdrawal behaviors such as longer breaks and ultimately continue to aggression against co-workers and customers.

In addition to subjective data, future research should consider assessing data using diary studies, for example, asking participants to note incidents of destructive leadership and measuring their stress objectively. A further methodological suggestion is to collect peer ratings of destructive leadership, such as asking colleagues in how far a person is subjected to destructive leadership rather than indicating in how far they themselves perceive destructive leadership towards themselves. In addition, multi-level analysis could be used to assess the level of consensus among followers regarding the destructive leadership of their leader.

Interestingly, there are very few studies focusing on team-related consequences of destructive leadership (for exceptions see: Duffy et al., 2002; Duffy, Ganster, Shaw, Johnson, & Pagon, 2006; Fox & Stallworth, 2010; Hobman et al., 2009). It would be interesting to investigate if destructive leadership necessarily impairs coworker support and fosters conflicts in a team or may even lead to higher team cohesiveness (i.e., by having a 'common enemy').

As very few studies included organizational performance data, this is another area where research into destructive leadership can be enhanced by using objective data. More research is needed to examine in how far destructive leadership is related not only to 'soft' criteria but also to 'hard' performance data. Likely, the relationship between destructive leadership and organizational performance will be mediated by follower-related attitudes such as job satisfaction and well-being which will likely lead to a lower follower productivity.

11. Future research and theoretical developments

The limitations of our study not only stress the importance of advancing empirical research on destructive leadership in different ways but also underline the necessity of developing a comprehensive theoretical model. While this endeavor is beyond the scope of

our paper, the results of our study lead to several suggestions for future research in the area of destructive leadership and point to necessary “ingredients” of a theoretical model. The starting point for the development of a comprehensive model of destructive leadership is to look for theories that can inform such a model.

11.1. Theoretical foundations for a comprehensive model

To get a more complete picture, a theoretical model of destructive leadership has to develop ideas regarding the mechanisms which underlie the empirical relationships between destructive leadership and its antecedents and consequences. First, social learning—as also described for ethical leadership by [Brown et al. \(2005\)](#)—could be major basis for a better understanding of destructive leadership. According to social learning, followers imitate the destructive behavior of their supervisor in the form of resistance, counterproductive work behavior, or workplace bullying. This can explain the link between destructive leadership and follower outcomes.

The trickle-down model of abusive supervision ([Mayer, Bardes, Hoobler, Wayne, & Marinova, submitted for publication](#)) which is also based on social learning theory may serve to identify antecedents. They argue that leadership behaviors of higher level leaders are adopted on lower levels. Therefore, higher level destructive leadership can ‘trickle down’ to all levels in the organization. Psychological hardness ([Maddi, 2006](#)) may have a buffering effect on the relationship between the perception of destructive leadership on part of higher-level leaders and its imitation of a lower-level leader.

Social learning and trickle down models may have a greater impact when there is high power distance between leader and follower. This may not only increase the emergence of destructive leadership but also aggravate the effects of destructive leadership as the follower might feel he/she cannot react to the behavior (cp. [Tepper, 2007](#)) and therefore might develop symptoms of learned helplessness ([Seligman, 1975](#)).

Second, the perception of (interactional) injustice and follower reactions to it may be an important explanation for the impact of destructive leadership ([Bies & Tripp, 2005](#); [Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001](#)). For example, followers may try to ‘restore justice’ by changing their perception of the relationship with their leader or by taking action against the leader (‘getting even’). Perceived injustice (e.g., in the form of higher-level destructive leadership) and psychological contract breach can also be important sources for the emergence of destructive leadership. But as [Tepper \(2007\)](#) argues, not all leaders who believe that they have been mistreated abuse their followers. This relationship is likely to be moderated by characteristics of the leader and his/her followers. Followers who appear to be weak and vulnerable (e.g., high in neuroticism; [Costa & McCrae, 1992](#)) or provocative and difficult (e.g., low in agreeableness; [Costa & McCrae, 1992](#)) can be expected to be more likely targets of destructive leadership than their more emotionally stable and/or agreeable coworkers ([Aquino & Byron, 2002](#); [Tepper, 2007](#)).

Agreeableness and neuroticism ([Costa & McCrae, 1992](#)) as personality traits of the leader should be influential moderators in the relationship between perceived injustice and the execution of destructive leadership. As [Tepper \(2007\)](#) already outlined, supervisors low in agreeableness and/or high in neuroticism should be more likely to show destructive leadership as they are less concerned about the effects of their behavior and experience greater anger and frustration (and react to it more impulsively), respectively.

Third, destructive leadership can be perceived as an extreme social stressor which may lead us to understand how negative emotions and counterproductive work behavior arise as a consequence of destructive leadership (e.g., the stressor-emotion model; [Spector & Fox, 2005](#)). This may also prove helpful to explain the use of functional (e.g., seeking social support) and especially dysfunctional forms of coping (e.g., problem drinking; [Bamberger & Bacharach, 2006](#)) as reactions to destructive leadership. While this list of possible mechanisms is certainly not exhaustive, they may serve as starting points to explain the impact of destructive leadership. A high degree of neuroticism may aggravate the relationship between destructive leadership and negative affect and stress ([Costa & McCrae, 1992](#)).

As stated before, some conceptualizations of destructive leadership explicitly or implicitly include the notion of (perceived) intent (e.g. [De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008](#)). It seems likely that if followers perceive intent, the effects on their attitudes and behaviors are stronger than when they do not perceive intent (e.g., when they perceive the leader as reacting towards circumstances or simply as incompetent). Future research could examine this idea by either comparing different forms of destructive leadership directly or simply asking followers whether or not they think the leader uses destructive behavior with a specific aim. At the same time, irrespective of their followers’ perception of their intention, some leaders may use destructive leadership intentionally to achieve particular results, for example, higher productivity or attempting to bully an employee into leaving, while others might not be aware of the effects of their behavior. It would be interesting to examine in future research in how far actual intent is related to leaders’ attributes (e.g., narcissism or psychopathy; cp. [Paulhus & Williams, 2002](#)) and how it affects followers. However, actual intent might be very difficult to assess as it requires the respective leader to state intent.

Fourth, [Padilla and colleagues \(2007\)](#) introduced what they call the toxic triangle, referring to the characteristics of leaders and followers as well as the environmental context. They argue that destructive leadership is a result of all those characteristics. We have concentrated on *leaders’ behaviors* in our meta-analysis as it is the most widely examined aspect in this research area. That means that we looked at destructive leader behavior in isolation and did not take into account the environment in which destructive leadership happens (see e.g., [Kusy & Holloway, 2009](#), for a discussion around organizational environment). Nevertheless, integrating leader, follower, and organizational characteristics (e.g., as potential moderators) is necessary to get a more complete picture of the dynamics of destructive leadership. For example, destructive leadership could

be just shown by one or a few individual leaders or it could be part of an organizational culture. Such a culture would be characterized by social norms which legitimate destructive leadership as a means of exercising authority (Tepper, 2007). We can expect that destructive leadership emerges much easier and also has different effects (at least in terms of the strength of effects) if it is part of a culture (rather than an isolated phenomenon). In case of the former, followers might be able to transfer to a different department to escape the destructive leadership. They may also feel more encouraged to raise the issue with other people in the organization if the destructiveness is not widespread. Likewise, high power distance (Hofstede, 2001) as part of an industry and/or national culture may also influence the emergence of destructive leadership (Mulvey & Padilla, 2010) as this kind of negative leader behavior may be conceived as an acceptable expression of unequal power distributions in social organizations (Tepper, 2007). Further possible influences of the organizational and societal environment like checks and balances (e.g., media power, and legislation), organizational complexity, instability and dynamism, and perceived threat are outlined by Mulvey and Padilla (2010).

12. Conclusion

In conclusion, our meta-analysis shows the expected negative effects of destructive leadership and thereby confirms the urgency for organizations to deal with prevalent destructive leadership and avoid the occurrence of destructive leadership in the first place. Some of the effect sizes we found are rather substantial, underlining the importance of leaders and leadership in organizations. In terms of the future of destructive leadership research, this meta-analysis has shown many gaps in our knowledge and thereby serves as a call for more conceptual work as well as empirical studies in this important area of organizational behavior.

Appendix A. Articles included in the meta-analysis that use a measurement of abusive supervision

Abusive supervision articles	N of items
Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah (2004)	10
Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah (2007)	10
Aryee, Sun, Chen, & Debrah (2008)	10
Biron (2010)	15
Breaux, Perrewe, Hall, Frink, & Hochwarter (2008)	15
Brown, Trevino, & Harrison (2005)	No info
Burris, Detert, and Chiaburu, (2008)	4 (adapted)
Detert, Trevino, Burris, & Andiappan (2007)	3 (adapted)
Duffy and Ferrier (2003)	5 (adapted)
Dupre, Inness, Connelly, Barling, and Hopton (2006)	15
Harris, Kacmar, and Zivnuska (2007)	11
Harvey and Keashly (2006)	15
Harvey, Stoner, Hochwarter, & Kacmar (2007)	15
Hobman, Restubog, Bordia, & Tang (2009)	13
Hoobler and Brass (2006)	15
Inness, Barling, and Turner (2005)	15
Kiazad, Restubog, Zagencyk, Kiewitz, and Tang (2010)	15
Mayer, Bardes, Hoobler, Wayne, and Marinova (submitted for publication)	15
Mitchell and Ambrose (2007)	5
Rafferty, Restubog, and Jimmieson (2010)	15
Tate and Jacobs (2010)	15
Tepper (2000)	15
Tepper, Carr, Breaux, Geider, Hu, & Hua (2009)	5 (Study 1) 15 (Study 2)
Tepper, Duffy, Hoobler, & Ensley (2004)	15
Tepper, Duffy, & Shaw (2001)	15
Tepper, Henle, Lambert, Giacalone, and Duffy (2008)	15
Tepper, Moss, Lockhart, and Carr (2007)	15
Thau, Bennett, Mitchell, and Marrs (2009)	Combined measurement (Study 1) 5 (Study 2)
Thau and Mitchell (2010)	5
Wu and Hu (2009)	15
Yagil (2005)	15 (Study 2)
Yagil (2006)	15
Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy (2002)	Combined measurement

Appendix A1

Studies included in the meta-analysis.

Concept	Name of study
<i>Leader-related concepts</i>	
Follower resistance (9 samples)	Bligh et al. (2007) Dupre et al. (2006) Hershcovis and Barling (2010) Hoobler and Brass (2006) Kim and Shapiro (2008) Tepper et al. (2001) Tepper et al. (2007) Thau and Mitchell (2010)
Attitude towards leader (7 samples)	Ashforth (1997) Brown et al. (2005) Duffy and Ferrier (2003) Duffy et al. (2006) Rooney and Gottlieb (2007) Tate and Jacobs (2010) Elangovan and Xie (2000)
<i>Job-related concepts</i>	
Job satisfaction (21 samples)	Bligh et al. (2007) Breux et al. (2008) Duffy et al. (2006) Einarsen et al. (2002) Elangovan and Xie (2000) Fox and Stallworth (2010) Harris et al. (2007) Harvey and Keashly (2006) Hauge, Skogstad, and Einarsen (2007) Hershcovis and Barling (2010) Hobman et al. (2009) Lim and Teo (2009) Reeds and Bullis (2009) Rooney and Gottlieb (2007) Tate and Jacobs (2010) Tepper et al. (2004) Tepper (2000) Tepper et al. (2009) Aryee et al. (2004) Aryee et al. (2008) Ashforth (1997) Duffy et al. (2006) Elangovan and Xie (2000) Gould-Williams (2007)
Job-related attitudes (6 samples)	
<i>Organization-related concepts</i>	
Turnover intention (13 samples)	Ashforth (1997) Burriss et al. (2008) Duffy et al. (2006) Fox and Stallworth (2010) Gould-Williams (2007) Harvey et al. (2007) Harvey and Keashly (2006) Hershcovis and Barling (2010) Lim and Teo (2009) Rooney and Gottlieb (2007) Tate and Jacobs (2010) Tepper et al. (2009)
Counter productive work behavior (21 samples)	Biron (2010) Duffy et al. (2002) Duffy et al. (2006) Hershcovis and Barling (2010) Inness et al. (2005) Kim and Shapiro (2008) Lim and Teo (2009) Mayer et al. (submitted for publication) Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) Tate and Jacobs (2010) Tepper et al. (2008) Tepper et al. (2009) Thau et al. (2009) Thau and Mitchell (2010) Yagil (2005)

(continued on next page)

Appendix A1 (continued)

Concept	Name of study
<i>Organization-related concepts</i>	
Justice (12 samples)	Aryee et al. (2007) Burriss et al. (2008) Detert et al. (2007) Duffy and Ferrier (2003) Gould-Williams (2007) Hoobler and Brass (2006) Tepper (2000) Tepper et al. (2007) Thau and Mitchell (2010) Zellars et al. (2002)
Organizational Performance (2 samples)	Detert et al. (2007) De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008)
Commitment (15 sample)	Aryee et al. (2007) Ashforth (1997) Burriss et al. (2008) Duffy and Ferrier (2003) Duffy et al. (2002) Elangovan and Xie (2000) Harvey and Keashly (2006) Hershcovis and Barling (2010) Lim and Teo (2009) Tepper et al. (2004) Tepper (2000) Tepper et al. (2008) Tepper et al. (2009)
<i>Individual follower-related concepts</i>	
Affectivity (positive) (8 samples)	Bowling, Beehr, Bennett, and Watson (2010) Breux et al. (2008) Duffy et al. (2002) Harvey et al. (2007) Tepper et al. (2004) Wu and Hu (2009)
Affectivity (negative) (15 samples)	Zellars et al. (2002) Aryee et al. (2004) Aryee et al. (2008) Biron (2010) Bowling et al. (2010) Breux et al. (2008) Duffy et al. (2002) Duffy et al. (2006) Kim and Shapiro (2008) Tepper et al. (2009) Tepper et al. (2006) Thau et al. (2009) Wu and Hu (2009)
Positive self-evaluation (13 samples)	Zellars et al. (2002) Ashforth (1997) Bligh et al. (2007) Bowling et al. (2010) Duffy et al. (2002) Hobman et al. (2009) Inness et al. (2005) Kiazad, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Kiewitz, and Tang (2010) Rafferty et al. (2010) Rooney, Gottlieb, and Newby-Clark (2009) Tepper et al. (2009) Wu and Hu (2009)
Stress	Yagil (2006) Aryee et al. (2004) Aryee et al. (2008) Ashforth (1997) Bamberger and Bacharach (2006) Breux et al. (2008) Burriss et al. (2008) Chen and Kao (2009) Duffy et al. (2002)

Appendix A1 (continued)

Concept	Name of study
Individual follower-related concepts	Duffy et al. (2006)
Stress	Einarsen et al. (2002)
	Elangovan and Xie (2000)
	Fox and Stallworth (2010)
	Gould-Williams (2007)
	Grandey, Kern, and Frone (2007)
	Harvey et al. (2007)
	Hershcovis and Barling (2010)
	Hobman et al. (2009)
	Nyberg, Westerlund, Magnusson Hanson, and Theorell (2008).
	Rafferty et al. (2010)
	Rooney and Gottlieb (2007)
	Rooney et al. (2009) ¹
	Tepper (2000)
	Tepper et al. (2007)
	Thau and Mitchell (2010)
	Wu and Hu (2009)
	Yagil (2006)
Well-being	Burris et al. (2008)
	De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008)
	Hershcovis and Barling (2010)
	Hobman et al. (2009)
	Tepper (2000)
Individual performance	Aryee et al. (2007)
	Aryee et al. (2004)
	Aryee et al. (2008)
	Ashforth (1997)
	Bligh et al. (2007)
	Burris et al. (2008)
	Elangovan and Xie (2000)
	Gould-Williams (2007)
	Harris et al. (2007)
	Hershcovis and Barling (2010)
	Hoobler and Brass (2006)
	Thau, Aquino, and Bommer (2008)
	Zellars et al. (2002)

¹ This study reports the same sample as Rooney and Gottlieb and therefore was not included in our meta-analysis.

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