

**Destructive leadership in organisation management**  
**Strategies to mitigate it.**

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## **1. Introduction**

Studies and researches on the destructive leadership behaviour, types and its potentially negative effects on the organisation have been very limited in these last decades (Einarsen et al., 2007; Maher et al., 2021; Schilling, 2009; Sheard et al., 2013; Tran et al., 2013) due to its difficulty to analyse and draw conclusions (Schmid, 2018). The leadership role is viewed as a role that must encourage, motivate staff and the organisation's team (Brandebo, 2020; Einarsen et al., 2007; Lundmark et al., 2020; Tran et al., 2013, 2013) toward desirable goals and results to the benefit not only of the organisation but also to the employee's enhancement (Maher et al., 2021). In this regard, the leadership task is an important function that must show ethical and moral traits in order to positively impact and serve as an example to the organisation (Tran et al., 2013). But what happens when the organisations are led by leaders that show destructive behaviour? According to Sheard et al. (2013) the destructive behaviour of a leader in most cases causes loss to the company as triggers employee turnover (Aasland et al., 2009; Gandolfi & Stone, 2022; Schilling, 2009; Sheard et al., 2013; Tran et al., 2013, 2013) or damages the organisation's reputation (Schmid, 2018).

The main function of a leader is to lead the organisation and people to ensure that everything is done (Sheard et al., 2013). This represents difficulties and encompasses challenges by exercising different individual methods during decision-making and people management (Aasland et al., 2009; Lundmark et al., 2020; Tran et al., 2013). Developing such methods that, to some extent, might be very effective (Sheard et al., 2013) their unsocial effect leads to development of destructive behaviour (Einarsen et al., 2007; Krasikova et al., 2013; Schilling, 2009). While having the exact definition of the type of destructive attitude is tricky (Sheard et al., 2013), yet the researchers are trying to pay a close attention to types and shapes of destructive leader (Aasland et al., 2009; Einarsen et al., 2007; Gandolfi & Stone, 2022; Krasikova et al., 2013; Sheard et al., 2013) by analysing and discussing the existing literature to find the reasons and its impact (Krasikova et al., 2013; Sheard et al., 2013). Hence, analysing destructive behaviour and its different types will help to understand their dynamics results that are crucial when it comes to the company's reputation (Brandebo, 2020; Lundmark et al., 2020; Maher et al., 2021) or employees turnover (Aasland et al., 2009; Gandolfi & Stone, 2022, 2022; Schilling, 2009; Tran et al., 2013).

Hence, this report will critically analyse and review 12 contemporary literature articles to provide understanding on the destructive leadership, consequences, triggers, and strategies to manage it. It comprises of five sections. First section will introduce the concept of destructive leadership. Second section will discuss the literature review, definition of destructive

leadership concept, triggers, and types. Third section will depict the methodology approach and the last sections will be focused on the gaps and limitations conclusion and further research proposal.

## 2. Review of literature

### 2.1 Literature review process and selection

The main concept that this report will analyse is the destructive leadership, types, triggers, and mitigations strategies. To provide a proper definition and explain the concept, it was necessary to carefully select academic articles from contemporary literature. The literature used is of 2007 – 2022 period and were selected from Robertson library. The selection was done based on their study aim, key concepts, method used to conduct the research and the variety of data analysis methods and approaches to have the possibility to conduct a thorough and critical review and present a well justified answer to the key issue of presented report. The articles were selected in order give us the possibility to understand the types, effects, triggers, and possible strategies to diminish its destructive influences over the organisation and/or employees.

*Figure 1 Academic articles used for the literature review*

	Authors	Study key words	Method
1	Brandebo/2021	Destructive leadership, Performance, Crisis management	Quantitative
2	Tran et al./2013	Destructive Leadership; Satisfaction; Turnover Level; Subordinate Employee	Quantitative
3	Maher et al./2021	Destructive Leadership, Toxic, Abusive Supervision, Authoritarianism Impulsiveness of Leaders	Quantitative
4	Schmidt/2018	Destructive leadership, differential effects, dark leadership, turnover intention	Quantitative
5	Lundmark et al. /2020	Leadership, Span of control, Readiness for change, Organizational intervention, Contextual antecedents	Quantitative
6	Aasland et al./2009	Destructive leadership, constructive leadership behaviour	Quantitative
7	Krasikova et al./2013	Destructive leadership; destructive goals; influence; abusive supervision; deviant behaviors; counterproductive work behaviors	Qualitative
8	Brandebo/2020	Destructive leadership, Crisis management	Qualitative
9	Sheard et al./2013	Leadership, destructive behaviour	Qualitative
10	Schilling/2009	Destructive leadership; grounded theory; ineffective leadership; negative leadership;	Qualitative
11	Gandolfi & Stone/2022	Leadership, Toxicity; Toxic Leadership, behaviors, characteristics, and consequences	Qualitative
12	Einarsen et al./2007	Leadership; Destructive;	Qualitative

## **2.2 Importance of studying destructive leadership**

One of the main reasons to study destructive leadership is that all the previous researches have been focused on the role model leader and researches on the destructive leadership is rare (Schmid, 2018) taking into consideration that the main task of a leader is to strive to achieve the goals and interest of the company (Brandebo, 2020; Gandolfi & Stone, 2022; Maher et al., 2021) but not on to what expense can this be achieved. The questions on how it impacts the organisation as a whole or its employees (Brandebo, 2021; Lundmark et al., 2020; Sheard et al., 2013; Tran et al., 2013) needs to be studied in its core and after having a broad understating on its implications, and triggers a plan of strategies can be drawn to foresee or “cure” the effects of destructive behaviour. Based on the research done by Krasikova et al. (2013) this type of leadership can be linked to its harmful implications that brings to the company and creating unhappy employees resulting to instant turnover indicating a potential harm to the company, hence such behaviour need study to build effective measures and strategies. Therefore, destructive leadership behaviour must not me neglected or ignored.

## **2.3 Destructive leadership, types, and triggers**

According to Einarsen et al. (2007) a destructive leader behaviour is identified as a type of behaviour that is repeatedly and systematically exercised by a supervisor that effects the interest of the company by endangering its goals (Brandebo, 2020, 2021; Krasikova et al., 2013) and negatively effecting the performance of the employees resulting to high turnovers and negative company reputation (Aasland et al., 2009; Brandebo, 2020; Sheard et al., 2013; Tran et al., 2013). Another author, Krasikova et al. (2013) states that destructive leader’s attitude may damage the organisation or the employees by giving instructions to follow interests that are against the goals of the company or by exercising a behaviour that damages their well-being (Schilling, 2009; Tran et al., 2013) thus resulting to endangering the success of the company (Gandolfi & Stone, 2022). Notwithstanding their actions, being active or passive, the destructive leader’s behaviour scenarios are discussed to be harmful to the company and the team they lead (Schmid, 2018). The destructive leadership, based on the literature review and analysis, can be manifested in several forms and types such as tyrannical, derailed, and supportive–disloyal leadership (Einarsen et al., 2007) which may exercise the bullying, harassing, exploiting, lying, betraying, manipulating-in type of behaviour (Lundmark et al., 2020; Maher et al., 2021; Schilling, 2009). Another author identified the narcissist, abusive or authoritarian type (Maher et al., 2021) or the toxic leader that act to the destruction of the staff (Gandolfi & Stone, 2022) and organisation as a whole (Tran et al., 2013).

Hence what triggers the destructive leadership behaviour (Sheard et al., 2013)? Based on Gandolfi & Stone, (2022) research the destructive leadership can come in several forms and shapes thus determining the reasons that triggers such behaviour is of crucial importance. The destructive leader can manifest such behaviour when they encounter problems in achieving the company's goals (Krasikova et al., 2013), lack of experience in setting goals and engaging the staff to succeed in the role appointed to them (Schmid, 2018), or due to a decision or strategy that had bad repercussion at the company reputation or success (Brandebo, 2020). According to Tran et al. (2013) the leader has the responsibility to respond promptly to unforeseen issues that need attention, especially issues that will then determine the future of the organisation. Having a ready team or effective subordinates to support him/her during the decision-making process is necessary (Brandebo, 2021; Sheard et al., 2013; Tran et al., 2013) and very important therefore if the contrary will be experienced, the leader might show destructive behaviours (Tran et al., 2013). This scenario might happen also when the leader does not have the proper capabilities to exercise proper leadership (Maher et al., 2021) thus exercising the toxic type of behaviour (Gandolfi & Stone, 2022).

Tran et al. (2013) went a little bit deeper in the analysis and concluded that the destructive leader behaviour type can be triggered also by its subordinate's tendency to blame the leader when the goals success of the company is in question. This climate activates destructive behaviour by making the leader more hostile, argumentative, and exercising mistrust (Lundmark et al., 2020) towards his/her own team. Exercising a self-centred behaviour and putting themselves and their interest upfront is a type of attitude that will also trigger destructive behaviour (Gandolfi & Stone, 2022; Tran et al., 2013). According to Einarsen et al. (2007) a leader that exercises destructive behaviour can at the same time exercise a constructive one. The author argued that a leader that might act unethically with the team can at the same time act in line with the goals of the company and ensuring success and by the same arguments a leader that goes against the goals of company might be very supportive towards the subordinates (Aasland et al., 2009; Einarsen et al., 2007). Another author, Krasikova et al. (2013) argues that there are cases when a destructive leadership behaviour may bring benefits to the company but this will be only for a short period of time.

## **2.4 Strategies to mitigate destructive leadership**

By conducting the literature review of the 12 articles the below are the suggested strategies to mitigate the destructive leadership. According to Einarsen et al. (2007), having a good understanding of this type of leadership is crucial as it is also the promotion of positive leadership behaviour. A change in the practices and processes of the company's authority control exercise can result positively in mitigating the destructive leadership (Sheard et al., 2013). This type of behaviour can be lessened by implementing control structures within the organisation that can affect and adjust leaders' behaviour to the compliance of the rules and regulation of the organisation (Krasikova et al., 2013). The process of selection of the candidate, punishments and incentive alignment, encouraging the employees to speak up and denounce (Brandebo, 2020; Gandolfi & Stone, 2022; Lundmark et al., 2020) can be another strategy. While Maher et al. (2021) states that a comprehensive analysis will supply enough information on the destructive behaviour and consequently thus providing assistance in lowering the negative effects. Another author gave arguments that offering trainings for leaders to develop their capabilities will help to diminish the dangerous behaviours by targeting what triggers this behaviour (Schmid, 2018).

## **3. Methodology**

The articles chosen to conduct this literature review use qualitative and quantitative methods to justify their research topic. The articles pertain to the period 2007-2022, hence they encompass a decade and a half of research articles and analysis on the destructive leadership. A clear view on the methods and the authors choice on how data analysis was conducted are grouped in a structure that will be presented below.

### **3.1 Quantitative method**

The quantitative research method uses numbers and therefore employs numerical applications thus its outcome is precision (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018) due to the rigorousness and design to analyse the trends using precise measurements (Draper & Swift, 2011). This report will analyse 6 articles that use qualitative method to test their hypothesis raised. Same of the chosen articles (5 in total) use questionnaires as an instrument to collect the data and the other one uses study case with the aim to investigate this type of leadership behaviours.

The questionnaire method is a set of written questions with available space to respond used for gathering data when the author want to reach out a big number of respondents in a short period of time, securing confidentiality and no bias results (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). A

shortcoming of this method is that does not give possibility to the respondent to explain any confusing answer (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Four of the selected articles use a range of 300-700 participants (Brandebo, 2021; Lundmark et al., 2020; Maher et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2013) while another uses a larger number (2593) (Aasland et al., 2009) of participants.

Aasland et al. (2009) used the questionnaire sent to 2593 participants to analyse the frequency of destructive leadership types and to provide an extensive theoretical viewpoint. The author used the stratified random selection sampling and then the OCM and LCC analysis to process the data to examine the percentage of relation of different destructive leadership types. While the LCM method uses a specific criterion to classify if a participant was or not exposed to the destructive leader behaviour, the LCC classifies the participants groups with similarities in their responses. This method proved that destructive leadership behaviour is not uncommon but something that all employees will experience at least once during their work time (Aasland et al., 2009). Brandebo, (2021) sent questionnaires to 377 participants of 4 different organisations using cluster sampling to research on the difference amongst the destructive leadership during a normal situation compared when it's experienced an organisational crisis. The regression analysis was used to determine the correlation between destructive leadership in common situations and crisis management. While Lundmark et al. (2020) used web-based questionnaire in 2 years 2016-2017 period and the multilevel analysis method. The questionnaire was given in the beginning of 2016 and another one after 2 years to have a more encompassing definition of destructive leadership reasoning that the respondents would have enough experience working for their leader and be able to give responses to the benefit of the research aim. Another author used the semi-structured questionnaires distributed to 400 participants using demographic segmentation (by payment level, years of service, gender, and race) and the job or relation satisfaction within the work environment and turnover rate (Tran et al., 2013). The author used the descriptive statistics and regression analysis for the collected data and to test the hypothesis used regression, correlation, variance analysis to determine that destructive leadership can impact in the turnover level or job-satisfaction of the employees (Tran et al., 2013). While, Maher et al. (2021) used the cross-sectional sample method and the PLS structural regression data analysis for the 291 questionnaires to study the triggers to the destructive behaviour to determine the importance of connection among the predictors and occurrence of destructive leadership (Maher et al., 2021).

Another author, used 2 study approach, an experimental (3 hypothetical situations) based on an online study assignment of 297 participants and the second study collected responses from 167 employees from different organisations to investigate the impacts of different types if



destructive leadership behaviours resulting to prove that the destructive leader is a serious basis to negatively affect the employee's productivity and their job-satisfaction (Schmid, 2018). In the first study the author used the random sampling and one-way analysis of variance elaborated by the ANOVA software while for the second study used the snowball sampling and the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to analyse the collected data (Schmid, 2018).

Figure 2 Academic articles that used Quantitative research method for their analysis

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Brandebø/2021	Tran et al./2013	Maher et al./2021	Schmidt/2018	Lundmark et al./2020	Aasland et al./2009
Study key words	Destructive leadership, Performance, Crisis management	Destructive Leadership; Satisfaction; Turnover Level; Subordinate Employee	Destructive Leadership, Toxic, Abusive Supervision, Authoritarianism Impulsiveness of Leaders	Destructive leadership, differential effects, dark e leadership, turnover intention	Leadership, Span of control, Readiness for change, Organizational intervention, Contextual antecedents	Destructive leadership, constructive leadership behaviour
Method	Quantitative	Quantitative	Quantitative	Quantitative	Quantitative	Quantitative
Participants	337	400	291 individuals	study 1 - 297 Study 2 - 167	686	2593
Characteristics of participants	Municipalities, administrative boards, the police emergency service	20 organisation (80%) middle level employees (11%) senior level workforce	Police officers	1. Full-time employee 2. Different organisations	37 different organisations average age 49	Norwegian workforce 18-65 age
Sampling Method	Cluster sampling	Demographic segmentation	Cross-sectional sampling	1. randomly sampling 2. snowball sampling	Stratified random sampling	Stratified random sampling (age, work period, working hrs)
Data Collection	Questionnaire	Structured questionnaire	Adopted questionnaire	Experimental and a field study	Web-based questionnaire	Questionnaire
Data Analysis	Subgroup comparisons using t-tests, and one-way analyses of variance	descriptive and statistics to analyze the data	(PLS) structural regression analyses.	1. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA software) 2. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)	Multilevel analyses (Mplus software)	Operational classification method (OCM) and latent class cluster (LCC) analysis.

### 3.2 Qualitative method

The qualitative analysis method is a very distinct method that enables the researcher to have an extensive selection range of techniques and data collection and notwithstanding that there is no right or wrong option, this method will produce a very good quality research (Draper & Swift, 2011) as it is concentrated on the experience and lived perception (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018).

Six out of the 12 selected articles used the qualitative method for their research; 3 research papers used primary data collection strategy (interviews) the other 3 used the secondary data (literature review).

Brandebo (2020) used the open-ended type of questions during the interview of 21 participants and then applied the follow-up questioning individually using the snowball sampling method. The data analysis was done using the open coding and then storing them to different categories. Similarly, Schilling (2009) used the semi-structured interviews model to collect the data from 42 different top and middle level managers. The structure of the questions were open-ended questions data analysis content analytic rules and step by step models starting with transcript analysis, coding, categorising, and final revisions. While Sheard et al. (2013) used the interview method delivering open questions to 8 participants (5 CEO and 3 subordinates) of age 45 – 65, using the narrative approach as a good way to gather sensitive data. The analysis of the data transcripts was done using the coding system, reduction, and data interpretation. Another approach was used but Krasikova et al. (2013), Gandolfi & Stone (2022) and (Einarsen et al., 2007). The mentioned authors used the literature review process to produce a framework to better understand the destructive leader behaviour and also conducted broad research on deviant attitude. The analysis was done by reviewing, summarising, and integrating the vast literature on destructive leader to identify the typical features of it. According to Krasikova et al. (2013) the literature review was used to explain the borders of the destructive leader nature by making it more clear drawing attention to the its features producing a theoretical model to the benefit of other researcher that will study destructive leadership in the future. A different point of view was used by Gandolfi & Stone, (2022) as their research concentrated in studying the different elements shown be the toxic leader by conducting literature review on the types of behaviour and implications linked to toxic leadership. While Einarsen et al. (2007) used the conceptualisation method to provide definition on the behaviour of destructive leadership by using destructive behaviours defined in the literature and suggest a theoretical model to develop the research on this type of leadership.

Figure 3 Academic articles that used Qualitative research method for their analysis

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Krasikova et al./2013	Brandebo/2020	Sheard et al./2013	Schilling/2009	Gandolfi & Stone/2022	Einarsen et al./2007
Study key words	Destructive leadership; destructive goals; influence; abusive supervision; deviant behaviors; counterproductive work behaviors	Destructive leadership, Crisis management	Leadership, destructive behaviour	Destructive leadership; grounded theory; ineffective leadership; negative leadership;	Leadership, Toxicity; Toxic Leadership, behaviors, characteristics, and consequences	Leadership; Destructive;
Method	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative
Participants	Current destructive leadership literature	21	8	42	Destructive leadership literature	Destructive leadership literature
Characteristics of participants	Summarizes the extant destructive leadership research for expanding to further directions	Different organisation (regional, local and operational levels) in Sweeden	5 CEO and 3 subordinates (age 45-65)	Middle and Top Managers	Peer reviewed articles	Different articles
Sampling Method	By drawing on organizational leadership theory and the more general research on deviant behaviors in organizations	Snowball sampling	Narrative approach	Semi-structured interviews	Comparison and juxtaposition	Conceptualisation
Data Collection	Secondary data	Interview Open-ended questions and individual adapted follow-up questions	Open questions Interview	Open-ended questions	Secondary data	Secondary data
Data Analysis	Review, summarise, and integrate	1. Open coding process 2. Sorting the codes into different categories	Reduction and interpretation	Content analytic rules and step by step models	By comparison and contrast of literature on destructive behaviour	Review and summarise

## 4. Gaps and Limitations

### 4.1 Gaps

After critically reviewing the chosen articles it was demonstrated the negative impact of destructive leadership not only to the organisation but also the subordinates/employee, hence it is of an utmost importance to further research on the triggers and strategies to mitigate such behaviour (Sheard et al., 2013). Almost in all selected articles, researchers state that there is a sacristy in studies related to destructive leadership and triggers (Aasland et al., 2009; Brandebo, 2021; Einarsen et al., 2007; Gandolfi & Stone, 2022; Maher et al., 2021; Schilling, 2009; Sheard et al., 2013; Tran et al., 2013) as an attribution to the difficulty to analyse this behaviour and draw conclusions and strategies (Schmid, 2018). It must be pointed out that destructive leadership is a behaviour that is put into action, hence the human behaviour must be thoroughly analysed, especially with the relations it creates with the subordinates as it can be very tricky.

During the literature review it was noted the lack of empirical evidence therefore the studies done thus far were isolated investigations on the destructive leadership behaviour that appears to be not properly linked (Tran et al., 2013) and failing to apprehend the total picture of this phenomena (Brandebo, 2021). Based on the research articles, more research should be done with regard to the forms of destructive leadership, especially the toxic leader behaviour (Gandolfi & Stone, 2022) taking into consideration that such researches are very little and modest compared to the other types taking into consideration that there is a vast documented prove of its destructive outcomes (Gandolfi & Stone, 2022). Maher et al. (2021) points out the gap amongst the leadership concept and empirical finding, hence more research should be done to this regard.

## **4.2 Limitations**

While analysing the selected articles on the destructive leadership types, implications and strategies to mitigate it was noticed that using the experimental or study approach came with limitations as it was not based on real facts while the study was done at one point in time and was based on the experience and the feeling of the participant (Schmid, 2018). Another limitation was that during the interview process the data collected from the participants show information are based on their experience point of view and it cannot be proved that these data are precise or affected by how they perceive destructive leadership (Brandebo, 2020). In choosing the research methodology could be a limitation in itself as for instance the qualitative method approach combined with small amount of participants limits production of encompassing conclusions (Brandebo, 2020; Schilling, 2009). Using the review of literature as a method brings its limitations as the study is based on analysis of secondary data and the authors collection those data might have had their limitations also (Gandolfi & Stone, 2022). On the other hand using many sources and a relatively high data collection can be beneficial to prove and answer to the question raised during a study (Lundmark et al., 2020) but poses its limitations on how the interpretation of the data is performed (Gandolfi & Stone, 2022; Maher et al., 2021). Also, the collection of the statistics and information was done in a certain context and organisation or business process (Lundmark et al., 2020) and the analysis could not permit examination of the relation leader-employee/subordinate (Maher et al., 2021).

## **5. Conclusions and future research proposal**

The destructive leadership behaviour can be expressed in many forms that will eventually create negative effects not only for the company (Schmid, 2018) but it can result to employee turnover (Brandebo, 2021; Gandolfi & Stone, 2022; Maher et al., 2021;). Conducting more research studies towards this type of leadership, its triggers with enable the elaboration of a more comprehensive strategical framework on how to mitigate such behaviour. Hence not be limited to the strategic processes of candidate selection, incentives, employee's report methods (Brandebo, 2020; Gandolfi & Stone, 2022; Lundmark et al., 2020). A more tailor-made strategy should be used to face destructive leader's behaviour due to existence of many destructive leadership types (Schmid, 2018) that will affect the company (Brandebo, 2020) and the employees (Gandolfi & Stone, 2022). Hence it is important to consider as future research the frequency of behaviour inconsistencies in the leader-subordinate/employee relation (Lundmark et al., 2020;) because the leader study is established not only at a specific situation but also as relations and interactions of different variables involved in the given circumstance (Maher et al., 2021). According to Maher et al. (2021) potential research field can be the long lasting outcome of destructive leader impact and to work on the strategy to improve the leader-employee relation in order to find mitigation strategies. Also further analysis should be conducted on the issues under which the destructive leadership is established and if the personality or context in which the personality is exercised can from a bad leader (Brandebo, 2021).

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