Impact of Destructive Leadership on Innovative Work Behavior: Exploring the Role of

Psychological Safety

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Abstract

In contemporary organizations, fostering innovative work behavior is vital for maintaining competitiveness and adapting to rapid changes in the global environment. This study investigates the relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior, emphasizing the moderating role of psychological safety. The majority of previous studies indicate a negative impact of destructive leadership on innovative work behavior by fostering a climate of fear. However, some recent studies suggest that destructive leadership may paradoxically stimulate innovation under certain conditions. This study addresses this controversy, proposing that a supportive environment can buffer the negative effects of destructive leadership, thereby enabling continued innovation. Utilizing a multi-source field study conducted in Dutch companies, involving 91 dyads of leaders and employees, this research employs a survey-based dyadic approach. The findings reveal that while destructive leadership negatively impacts psychological safety, it shows a positive effect on innovative work behavior. Moreover, instead of the hypothesized moderating effect, psychological safety mediates the relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior. This study advances the understanding of how leadership styles impact organizational innovation and underscores the importance of creating a psychological safe environment to sustain innovation despite the presence of a destructive leader. These insights are crucial for developing leadership training programs and organizational policies aimed at enhancing innovation by promoting psychological safety. Future research should continue to explore the complex dynamics between leadership styles and innovative work behavior in various organizational contexts.

Keywords: Destructive leadership, innovative work behavior, psychological safety, dyadic approach, leadership style

Impact of Destructive Leadership on Innovative Work Behavior: Exploring the Role of Psychological Safety

In contemporary organizations, change and adaptation are crucial for long-term success. Increasing globalization and rapid technological advances make organizations more dynamic and competitive (Wang et al., 2022). This dynamic environment underscores the importance of fostering innovative work behaviors to effectively generate and realize new ideas (Van der Vegt & Janssen, 2003). As a result, organizations need employees capable of managing global competition and environmental uncertainty through innovation (Janssen, 2001). Previous research has highlighted a significant association between employees' innovative work behavior and organizational leadership styles, emphasizing the role of leadership in promoting innovation (Liden et al., 2014; Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

Einarsen et al. (2007) developed a management model, which categorizes leaders' behaviors along a continuum, ranging from anti-behaviors towards organizations and employees (destructive leadership) to pro-behaviors (constructive leadership). Constructive leadership, which promotes the legitimate interests of employees in making team-oriented decisions, plays a crucial role in fostering innovation, characterized by generating and promoting new ideas (Arasli et al., 2020; Van der Vegt & Janssen, 2003). Leaders who provide support and reinforcement enhance innovation by encouraging employees to take risks and generate new ideas (Yidong & Xinxin, 2013). However, the aforementioned destructive leadership style is just as prevalent as constructive leadership (Aasland et al., 2010). Destructive leadership is characterized by recurrent actions that disrupt resources and efficiency, and negatively affect employee motivation, well-being, and job satisfaction (Einarsen et al., 2007). The prevailing view indicates that such leadership behaviors decrease employee motivation and hinder innovative work

behavior by invoking fear of negative consequences in employees when sharing ideas or contemplating risky decisions (Akram et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2022; Choi et al., 2022; Henriques et al., 2019). However, contrary to this dominant perspective, several studies have reported that destructive leadership can, under certain conditions, lead to increased innovation (Mehraein et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2019). For example, a study by Rasool et al. (2018) proposes that employees are more willing to engage in innovative projects to aim for a promotion as a means to escape the negative impact of such leadership. Additionally, other studies have found an inverted U-effect on innovative work behavior, which suggests that moderate levels of destructive leadership could foster employee innovation, while high or low levels inhibit innovative work behavior (Lee et al., 2013).

The existence of such contradictory findings has significant implications for both theory and practice. Theoretically, it challenges the conventional view that destructive leadership solely inhibits innovative behavior and suggests that the relationship may be more complex and context-dependent. Practically, understanding this nuanced relationship is crucial for organizations aiming to foster innovation. If certain conditions can indeed mitigate the negative effects or even transform destructive leadership into a motivating force for innovation, it is vital for organizations to identify and leverage these conditions.

The objective of this study is to reexamine the controversial relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior in the Dutch context. The dynamics between employees and leaders is examined through a dyadic approach. A dyadic approach focuses on the interactions between leaders and employees, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how the relationship dynamics between leader and employee influence organizational outcomes. This method allows an examination of the reciprocal influence of

leader behaviors and employee responses, and how individual differences and contextual factors modulate these interactions.

Several prior studies have identified moderators that can hinder the negative impact of destructive leadership on innovative work behavior. For instance, a large survey-based study of employee-leader dyads in China found that distributive and procedural justice mitigates the negative impact of destructive leadership (Akram et al., 2021). Another dyadic study conducted in China by Chen et al. (2022) found that interpersonal harmony also moderates this relationship. In Portugal, a caring work climate was identified as a moderating factor, although this study relied solely on self-report measures from employees rather than using a dyadic approach (Henriques et al., 2019).

Specifically, I am examining the underlying mechanisms of psychological safety as a potential moderating variable on the relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior. Psychological safety denotes an environment where employees feel comfortable in expressing their thoughts without fear of belittlement or marginalization by peers or authority figures (Garvin et al., 2008). Research has shown that psychological safety positively influences innovative work behavior by promoting open communication, collaboration, and a willingness to explore new ideas without apprehension about negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999; Irai & Lu, 2018; Yang, 2020; Zhu et al., 2022). Given that destructive leadership can reduce psychological safety within an organization, understanding the interplay between these factors is crucial (W. Liu et al., 2016; Zhu & Zhang, 2019).

This study seeks to determine the extent to which psychological safety can buffer the adverse impacts of destructive leadership or even promote innovative work behavior, thereby enhancing innovation despite the presence of destructive leadership. Therefore, a multi-source

field study explores the three variables and their relationships, employing a survey-based dyadic approach in Dutch organizations

Theoretical Development

Destructive Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior

The destructive leadership style is characterized by consistent and recurrent actions of a leader that damages the legitimate interests of the organization (Einarsen et al., 2007). Such behaviors include hindering or disrupting organizational objectives, tasks, resources, and efficiency, and adversely affecting employee motivation, well-being, or job satisfaction (Einarsen et al., 2007). Consequently, destructive leadership behavior can have a detrimental impact on both employees and organizational effectiveness. Decreasing the effectiveness entails the reduction of innovative work behavior among employees, as it fosters an environment where employees fear negative consequences for taking risks or sharing ideas (Choi et al., 2022; Henriques et al., 2019). This fear of the destructive leader impedes creative and innovative engagement within the organization (Choi et al., 2022; West & Farr, 1989, as cited in Van der Vegt & Janssen, 2003).

Innovative work behavior encompasses a complex process involving three distinct behavioral tasks: idea generation, idea promotion, and idea realization. Initially, unique and useful ideas are generated, often inspired by identifying work-related problems or emerging trends (Druckner, 1985, as cited in Van der Vegt & Janssen, 2003). These ideas are then promoted through social activities to gain support and influence within the organization. This culminates in idea realization including the implementation of an idea through creating a product or prototype of the idea for application in groups, organizations, or job roles (Galbraith, 1982; Kanter, 1988, as cited in Van der Vegt & Janssen, 2003).

Research has shown a significant negative relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior (Akram et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2022; Choi et al., 2022; Henriques et al., 2019). This study seeks to replicate these findings and expand the theoretical framework by integrating social exchange theory, which posits that social interactions are based on reciprocity and trust (Blau, 1964). Positive treatment and support from leaders create a sense of obligation among employees to contribute reciprocally to the organization, thereby, fostering innovative work behavior through enhanced effort and motivation. Conversely, under destructive leadership, employees experience diminished trust and intrinsic motivation, leading to negative attitudes and reduced willingness to reciprocate, ultimately resulting in a decline in innovative work behavior.

Hypothesis 1: Destructive leadership is negatively related to innovative work behavior.

Psychological Safety and Innovative Work Behavior

Psychological safety, as defined by Edmondson (1999), refers to the perception that one can take interpersonal risks without fear of negative consequences. In such work environments, individuals feel secure to express dissenting opinions, ask questions, admit mistakes, and propose alternative viewpoints without the risk of being marginalized or criticized, fostering a supportive and open workplace culture (Garvin et al., 2008). Psychological safety has been consistently linked to the outcome variable innovative work behavior (Irai & Lu, 2018; Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Zhu et al., 2022). According to self-determination theory, psychological safety fulfills employees' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are essential for intrinsic motivation and growth (Deci & Ryan, 1985, as cited in Zafar et al., 2023). Therefore, when employees feel psychologically safe, they engage in open discussions about mistakes, seek feedback, and ask questions without fear of negative consequences (Kahn,

1990). This environment alleviates anxiety and fear of failure, enabling employees to focus on growth and learning (Zhu et al., 2022). Consequently, a psychologically safe workplace enhances the likelihood of engaging in innovative work behavior by initiating projects, demonstrating proactive behavior, and generating creative ideas, rather than reacting defensively to perceived psychological threats (Zhu et al., 2022). Therefore, encouraging psychological safety is crucial for fostering innovative work behavior. Building upon the self-determination theory and these findings, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 2: Psychological safety is positively related to innovative work behavior.

Psychological Safety as a Moderating Variable

The majority of previous research indicates a negative impact of destructive leadership on innovative work behavior due to decreased employee motivation and fear when sharing thoughts and ideas (Choi et al., 2022; Henriques et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2022). This fear induced by the destructive leader can lead to reduced psychological safety in the work environment (W. Liu et al., 2016). Low psychological safety evokes discomfort in freely expressing thoughts, which is strengthened by destructive leadership, inhibiting employees from sharing their ideas openly (Henriques et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2022). As a result, I expect that low psychological safety strengthens the negative relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior in organizations.

High psychological safety, in contrast, creates a work environment that supports and encourages employees' full creative potential, enhances innovation, and contributes to organizational success. In a psychologically safe environment, employees tend to feel secure in interpersonal interactions, leading to an increased likelihood of expressing their own opinions and ideas (L. Liu et al., 2023). Team members can discuss and exchange thoughts and ideas

freely, gaining feedback and support from each other (Ortega et al., 2013). Differing opinions and ideas are valued in a high psychological safe work environment despite the potential risks of failure which innovation carries (West, 1990, as cited in L. Liu et al., 2023). Accordingly, I expect that in a highly psychological safe work environment, the relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior is weaker, or even that high psychological safety enhances innovation despite the presence of destructive leadership.

According to the job demands-resource theory, psychological safety serves as a vital resource that can buffer the adverse impact that destructive leadership, as a job demand, has on innovative work behavior (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Tummers & Bakker, 2021). By providing a supportive environment, psychological safety helps mitigate the negative effects of destructive leadership, thereby enabling employees to focus more on creative endeavors (Ortega et al., 2013). This fosters a workplace environment that supports continuous innovation. Psychological safety could moderate the relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior by providing a supportive context that mitigates the harmful effects of destructive leadership, underscoring the importance of cultivating psychological safety as a strategic organizational resource for promoting sustained innovation and competitive advantage (Ortega et al., 2013). Therefore, I hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3: Psychological safety moderates the relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior. High psychological safety weakens the negative relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior (*3a*). The relationship is strengthened by low psychological safety (*3b*).

The overall research model is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Research Model
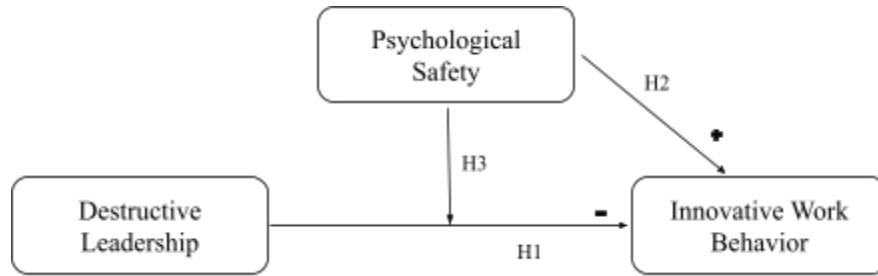
Methods

Participants

The sample consisted of leaders and employees from Dutch companies, all older than 18 years, Dutch-speaking, part of a team, and working at least 17 hours a week. A total of 225 leaders and 233 employees participated. However, a significant number of participants were excluded due to non-consent to participation, incomplete responses, insufficient work hours, or a mismatch of the code the dyads needed to create to match their responses for the analysis (see Appendix A for further clarification). Therefore, the effective sample size contained 182 employees and leaders, meaning a total of 91 dyads. The employee sample was 44% men and 56% women, aged 18 to 63 ($M = 33.63$, $SD = 12.22$), and working 17 to 40 hours per week ($M = 31.53$, $SD = 7.56$). The majority worked for the organization for two to five years (28.5%). The leader sample was 63.7% men and 35.2% women, aged 22 to 65 ($M = 41.90$, $SD = 12.59$), and working 18 to 60 hours per week ($M = 37.38$, $SD = 7.54$). Most leaders were employed for more than five years (37.8%). About 80% of the entire sample had higher education degrees. The most mentioned working sectors were healthcare (13.2%), hospitality and catering (11.1%), and construction, retail, and wholesale (7.8%). Most organizations had fewer than 50 employees (42.2%), followed by organizations with over 250 employees (33.3%). The majority of the dyads

interacted a few times per week (57.8%) and 26.7% interacted daily. Additionally, most employees were part of teams with three to five direct members (30.8%).

Study Design and Procedure

The study was a multi-source field study conducted cross-sectionally. Before recruiting participants, approval by the Ethics Committee of the University of Groningen was acquired. Data were collected from a convenience sample, recruited by students of the University of Groningen who approached Dutch companies via personal network, email, or by direct door-to-door approach in cafés, restaurants, or shops. Participation was voluntary, with participants free to leave the questionnaire at any time, and no compensation was provided.

Dyads received a link to the online surveys (programmed in Qualtrics) in Dutch. The questionnaires differed for employees and leaders, as employees completed a questionnaire about their working relationship with their leader, and leaders did the same for their employee. The survey began with a brief introduction explaining the research aim, followed by an informed consent form to formally agree to participation. Moreover, confidentiality was assured, and participants created a unique code with the two last letters of their surnames to match dyad questionnaires in the data analysis (see Appendix A for further clarification). The questionnaires took around 15 minutes to complete, and at the end, a debrief and the option to ask questions was provided. The survey concluded with questions about demographics.

In total, 14 variables were measured to assess the working dynamics within the dyad. Some variables, such as different leadership styles (shared, destructive, despotic), were measured solely in the employee questionnaire, while others, such as innovative work behavior and performance, were measured only in the leader questionnaire.

Measures

The items in these scales were translated into Dutch for the use in the questionnaires for the dyads. The full scale in both Dutch and English for all three variables can be found in Appendix B.

Destructive Leadership

Destructive leadership was measured through 12 questions in the employee questionnaire, focusing on the leader's decision-making based on inadequate information, as well as micromanaging and over controlling. These questions were derived from the destructive leadership questionnaire designed by Shaw et al. (2011), which was based on research by Erickson et al. (2007). However, we adapted this scale to fit our dyadic approach. An example item from factor one, making decisions based on inadequate information, is, *"My supervisor reacts without thinking about it"*. An example item from the factor micromanaging and over controlling is, *"My supervisor does not trust me to do my job correctly"*. Participants responded using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*). Therefore, higher scores indicate a more destructive leadership style. The Cronbach's alpha of this subscale was $\alpha = .93$, indicating a very high internal consistency and reliability of the items.

Innovative Work Behavior

Innovative work behavior was measured through nine questions in the leader questionnaire, divided into three subscales: idea generation, idea promotion, and idea realization. The utilized scale, tailored to our dyadic approach, is an adapted version based on research by Van der Vegt and Janssen (2003) on innovative work behavior. Sample items include: *"Creating new ideas for improvements"* for idea generation, *"Exciting key people in his/her work about innovative ideas"* for idea promotion, and *"Implementation of innovative ideas in his/her work"* for idea realization were used. Participants responded using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from

1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*), with higher scores indicating more innovative work behavior from the employee. The high reliability of the scale is indicated by the Cronbach's alpha of α = .95.

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety was measured using five questions in both the leader and employee questionnaires, based on a scale by Garvin et al. (2008). However, an adapted version from the original scale was used to fit our dyadic approach. Participants indicated their agreement or disagreement on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*), with items such as *"When working with my employee/leader, I usually talk easily with him/her about problems and disagreements"*. Higher scores indicated a higher level of psychological safety within the organization. The combined scales from the leader and employee questionnaires demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of α = .75.

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Results

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Descriptive Statistics

Prior to the data analysis the descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables included in the model were investigated (Table 1). The mean score for innovative work behavior indicates a moderate level of engagement in innovative behaviors in the sample ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.24$). The mean score of destructive leadership suggests relatively low levels of destructive leadership behaviors in the sample as perceived by the participants ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 0.89$). Psychological safety has a relatively high mean score, reflecting that participants generally feel psychologically safe in their work environment ($M = 5.81$, $SD = 0.76$). The correlation between innovative work behavior and destructive leadership is small, and positive ($r = .01$). It is not statistically significant indicating no meaningful relationship. Innovative work behavior also has a weak positive correlation with psychological safety ($r = .17$), suggesting that higher levels of

psychological safety are associated with more innovative work behavior. Lastly, psychological safety and destructive leadership show a strong, statistically significant negative correlation ($r =$ -.69).

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Core Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Innovative Work Behavior	3.87	1.24	–					
2. Destructive Leadership	1.79	0.89	.01	–				
3. Psychological Safety	5.81	0.76	.17	-.69**	–			
4. Team Size	2.62	0.87	.06	-.14	.217*	–		
5. Organization Size	1.91	1.04	-.25*	-.02	.01	.23*	–	
6. Frequency of Dyad Interactions	3.10	0.67	.17	.10	-.15	-.12	-.18	–

Note. $N = 90$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

A linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the effect of destructive leadership and psychological safety on innovative work behavior. Prior, the five primary assumptions of a linear regression were checked. Firstly, we checked for linearity between the variables. The graphs indicate a linear relationship between psychological safety and destructive leadership, as

well as between psychological safety and innovative work behavior (Figure 2, Appendix C).

Although the linear relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior is

weaker, it was deemed acceptable to proceed with the analysis. Secondly, a Shapiro-Wilk test for

normality was conducted. The p-value of innovative work behavior was nonsignificant ($p = $

.340), revealing a normal distribution. However, the p-values for psychological safety ($p < .001$)

and destructive leadership ($p < .001$) were significant, suggesting deviations from normality.

Histograms revealed that destructive leadership is slightly right-skewed, indicating relatively low

scores in our sample (Figure 3, Appendix C). Psychological safety scores were generally high

across the sample, indicated by a left-skewed histogram (Figure 4, Appendix C). Despite these

violations, proceeding with the linear regression analysis was considered acceptable. Thirdly, a

Levene's test was used to check for equal standard deviations among different population groups.

The p-values were nonsignificant (Based on Mean $p = .139$), meaning the assumption of

homogeneity of variance was met. Moreover, to check the assumption of uncorrelated residuals,

the Durbin-Watson test was used, and the results showed acceptable independence of errors

(Durbin-Watson = 1.95). Lastly, multicollinearity between the independent and moderating

variables was checked. The highest correlation coefficient was $r = -.69$ between destructive

leadership and psychological safety, reflecting no significant multicollinearity. Variance inflation

factors for destructive leadership ($VIF = 1.89$) and psychological safety ($VIF = 1.89$) also

confirm that multicollinearity was within an acceptable range for the analysis. The tests showed

that all five assumptions were met to a satisfactory degree, allowing the linear regression

analysis to be conducted.

Hypotheses Testing

Overall, the complete model, including the predictors and the interaction, explains 9% of the variance in innovative work behavior ($F(3,86) = 2.85$, $p = .04$, $R^2 = .09$). When adjusted for the number of predictors in the model, the total explained variance is approximately 6% ($R^2_{adj} = .06$). Destructive leadership was hypothesized to be negatively related to innovative work behavior (H1). A linear regression analysis conducted using Process Macro Model 1 by Andrew Hayes (2018) indicates a significant direct effect of destructive leadership on innovative work behavior ($t(86) = 2.01$, $p = .047$). However, contrary to the hypothesis, this relationship is positive ($b = 1.59$). Additionally, a significant direct effect of psychological safety on innovative work behavior was found ($t(86) = 2.77$, $p = .007$), which aligns with the second hypothesis that higher levels of psychological safety lead to an increase in innovative work behavior (H2). Lastly, I checked for a moderation effect between destructive leadership and psychological safety on innovative work behavior (H3). This analysis indicates that no significant moderating effect was found ($t(86) = -1.63$, $p = .106$).

Table 2

Results of PROCESS Moderation Analysis on Innovative Work Behavior

Model	coeff	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	-2.38	2.18	-1.09	.277	-6.71	1.94
Destructive Leadership	1.59	.79	2.01	.047*	.02	3.18
Psychological Safety	1.04	.38	2.77	.007**	.29	1.79
Interaction	-.27	.16	-1.63	.106	-.59	.06

Note: $N = 90$. CI = 95%, *$p < .05$ **$p < .01$.

Additional Exploratory Analyses

Further analysis was performed to examine the potential effects of other variables. Team size (1 = 0 – 2 members to 4 = more than 9 members), organization size (1 = fewer than 50 employees to 3 = more than 250 employees), and the frequency of dyad meetings (1 = less than once a month to 4 = daily) were controlled for in the analysis. These variables were included because larger teams are generally associated with greater diversity and innovation (Hülsheger et al., 2009), larger organizations tend to positively impact innovation (Camison et al., 2004), and more frequent dyad interactions are linked to increased employee innovation (Chadwick, 2023). With these control variables, the explained variance in innovative work behavior increased to 19% ($F(6,83) = 3.19$, $p = .007$, $R^2 = .19$). However, the interaction effect remained nonsignificant ($b = -0.29$, $t(83) = -1.83$, $p = .070$). Additionally, both team size ($b = 0.125$, $t(83) = 0.99$, $p = .321$) and frequency of dyad interactions ($b = 0.30$, $t(83) = 1.61$, $p = .110$) did not show significant effects on innovative work behavior. In contrast, organization size had a significant positive influence on innovative work behavior ($b = -0.35$, $t(83) = -2.39$, $p = .019$).

Finally, a mediation model was employed to test whether psychological safety mediates the relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior. Using Process Macro Model 4 by Andrew Hayes (2018), the analysis revealed a significant full mediation via psychological safety. The complete model, including the predictors, explains 6% of the variance in innovative work behavior ($F(2,87) = 2.88$, $p = .062$, $R^2 = .06$). When adjusted for the number of predictors in the model, the total explained variance is approximately 4% ($R^2_{adj} = .04$). This indicates that destructive leadership indirectly influences innovative work behavior through its negative impact on psychological safety. Specifically, destructive leadership significantly predicts lower levels of psychological safety ($b = -0.58$, $t(82) = -8.86$, $p < 0.000$), indicating that

increased destructive leadership is associated with decreased psychological safety. Additionally, psychological safety significantly predicts higher levels of innovative work behavior ($b = 0.55$, $t(87) = 2.39$, $p = 0.019$), suggesting that higher perceived safety in the organization fosters enhanced innovative behavior. However, the direct effect of destructive leadership on innovative work behavior is nonsignificant ($b = 0.02$, $t(88) = 0.11$, $p = 0.913$).

The mediation analysis confirmed indirect effects through psychological safety, as evidenced by a 95% confidence interval that excludes zero, *CI* [-0.61, -0.07]. The negative indirect effect ($b = -0.32$) suggests that higher levels of destructive leadership lead to reduced psychological safety, thereby diminishing innovative work behavior. Thus, destructive leadership indirectly influences innovative work behavior through the mediator of psychological safety.

Table 4

Results of PROCESS Mediation Analysis on Innovative Work Behavior

Effect	Estimate	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Total Effect	.02	.15	.11	.913	-.27	.31
Direct Effect	.34	.19	1.73	.088	-.05	.73
Indirect Effect	-.32	.14	-	-	-.61	-.07

Note: $N = 90$. CI = 95%, * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify whether and how psychological safety plays a role in the relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior. Prior to data collection, I hypothesized that destructive leadership would lead to a decrease in innovative work

behavior (H1), conversely, psychological safety would show a significant increase in innovative work behavior (H2), and an interaction effect between psychological safety and destructive leadership on innovative work behavior would be present (H3). The primary analysis shows support for a positive relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior which is in contrast to my hypothesis. Further, the analysis provides evidence for psychological safety leading to more innovative work behavior. However, when examining the moderating effect the results were nonsignificant and did not support the expected outcome. Follow-up analyses that included controlling variables revealed that with an increasing organization size the innovative behavior was strengthened. Lastly, the mediation analyses suggested that destructive leadership only indirectly hinders innovative work behavior through the mediator psychological safety.

Theoretical Implications

As aforementioned, the majority of previous research found that destructive leadership leads to a decrease in innovative work behavior (Choi et al., 2022; Colquitt et al., 2007; Henriques et al., 2019). In contrast, the result of the current study reveals a surprising positive relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior. This finding contradicts the notions of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), which posits that destructive leadership behavior would weaken employees' trust and reciprocity, ultimately reducing innovative behavior. However, the current findings challenge this theory, suggesting a need to reassess existing leadership theories in relation to innovative work behavior.

Although the literature extensively supports the predicted negative relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior, recent studies have identified a surprising positive relationship between certain destructive leadership traits and innovation (Kashmiri et al.,

2017; Lee et al., 2013). For example, Rasool et al. (2018) found a positive relationship between despotic leadership and innovative work behavior. Despotic leaders often engage in micromanaging and create a high-pressure, result-oriented work environment similar to those created by destructive leaders (Khizar et al., 2023). Rasool et al. (2018) suggest that public sector employees with open-ended contracts might engage in self-presentation and innovative projects to enhance their career prospects, aiming for promotions to escape the impact of despotic leadership. Given the substantial similarities between despotic and destructive leadership, the findings from Rasool et al. (2018) may also apply to destructive leadership, potentially explaining the results of the current study. Moreover, fear and anxiety induced from negative reinforcement from destructive leaders can theoretically drive goal achievement to avoid punishment, potentially fostering innovation within the organization (Podsakoff et al., 2016 as cited in Mehraein et al., 2023). The present study expands existing knowledge by demonstrating that destructive leadership can promote innovative work behavior across a variety of industry sectors, expanding on Rasool et al.'s (2018) findings from the public sector. Employing a dyadic approach allows for insights into the direct impact of the leader's behavior on employees, highlighting the complexity and reciprocal nature of this relationship.

In line with prior research, the results provide evidence for psychological safety leading to an increase in innovative work behavior (Irai & Lu, 2018; Yang, 2020; Zhu et al., 2022). This relationship aligns with the notions of self-determination theory. The theoretical framework predicts that due to psychological safety fulfilling the employees' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, open discussions about mistakes and feedback seeking is fostered (Deci & Ryan, 1985, as cited in Zafar et al., 2023; Kahn, 1990). Consequently, this enhances the likelihood of generating new ideas, and initiating projects, leading to more

innovative work behavior (Zhu et al., 2022). Thus, the findings support self-determination theory, contributing to existing literature and expanding our understanding by providing unique insights into the working dynamics between leaders and employees through the use of a dyadic approach, which helps to explain how these interactions influence innovative work behavior.

We expected that psychological safety would potentially weaken or strengthen the negative relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior, however, the study does not support this. Instead, an indirect mediation was identified, indicating that destructive leadership leads to reduced psychological safety, which in turn accounts for a decrease in innovative work behavior. This finding aligns with prior research that has identified psychological safety as a mediator between destructive leadership and innovative outcomes (W. Liu et al., 2016; Zhu & Zhang, 2019).

The findings suggest that even in the presence of a destructive leader, fostering a psychologically safe environment can mitigate the negative effects and maintain innovative efforts, especially through the reduction of workplace anxiety (L. Liu et al. 2023; Zhu & Zhang, 2019). According to social cognitive theory, external factors typically influence behavior indirectly through cognitive processes (Bandura, 2001). Building on this premise, destructive leadership, as an external factor, induces fear among employees, thereby diminishing psychological safety (Akram et al., 2021; W. Liu et al., 2016). Conversely, high psychological safety correlates positively with innovation (Ortega et al., 2013). However, low psychological safety evoked by destructive leadership stifles innovative work behavior (Henriques et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2022). Thus, destructive leadership primarily impacts innovative work behavior through the cognitive mechanism of psychological safety. Consequently, the findings support

social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), emphasizing the central role of psychological safety in organizational contexts for fostering innovative work behavior.

When controlling organizational size, we found that innovative work behavior increases with the size of the organization. Larger organizations have more resources to counteract losses, making them more prone to risk-taking, which is connected to greater innovation (Damanpour, 1992). Additionally, larger organizations benefit from having more professionals and advanced technologies, enabling them to adopt more innovations (Nord & Tucker, 1987 as cited in Camison et al., 2004). This highlights the significant role of organizational size in fostering innovation, suggesting that practitioners should design strategies that leverage organizational resources and structures to enhance innovation, even in smaller organizations.

This study expands our understanding of destructive leadership theory by challenging the conventional view that destructive leadership directly hinders innovation. Instead, it adds to the existing research that destructive leadership is context-dependent and can also enhance innovative work behavior (Mehraein et al., 2023; Rasool et al., 2018). Thus, destructive leadership can potentially enhance innovation directly. However, if it hinders psychological safety, it can indirectly reduce innovative work behavior. These novel insights enrich our theoretical understanding of how destructive leadership interacts with innovative work behavior within organizations, highlighting the critical role of psychological safety in mediating this interaction.

Practical Implications

Although the findings suggest that in certain contexts destructive leadership can enhance innovation within an organization, it is crucial for leaders to adhere to ethical boundaries, regardless of the possible positive outcome for innovation (Den Hartog & Dockson, 2018, as

cited in Mehraein et al., 2023). Especially as destructive leadership has been found to negatively impact well-being and increase stress, burnout, and health complaints (Grill, 2023; Montano et al., 2017). In contrast, the findings have also shown that destructive leadership can hinder innovation if the destructive leader reduces psychological safety. Therefore, developing strategies to promote a secure and supportive work environment characterized by support and respect could counterbalance the negative effects of destructive leadership on innovative behavior.

Effective leadership training programs should adopt a dual approach. Firstly, the reduction of destructive behavior among leaders should be addressed. Secondly, equal emphasis should be on building and maintaining a psychological secure work environment. Organizations should implement practices and policies that encourage open communication within the team and with leaders, minimize the fear of negative consequences, and provide support for risk-taking. This is especially important for smaller organizations, where innovation tends to be lower. Furthermore, these insights necessitate a reevaluation of leadership theories, emphasizing psychological safety as a crucial element of leadership models. By integrating leadership style with psychological safety, this study contributes to developing a more comprehensive theoretical framework that incorporates the roles of leadership style and psychological safety in fostering innovative work behavior.

Strengths, Limitations and Future Research

This study builds on several strengths, including the use of validated multi-item scales with high reliability, ensuring the robustness of the findings. Additionally, the diverse Dutch sample encompasses various demographics such as age, working hours, and industries, enhancing the external validity across the Dutch population.

However, the study also faces several limitations that could affect the validity and generalizability. The positive relationship observed between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior may be influenced by unexamined variables. Past research suggests that distributive and procedural justice (Akram et al., 2021), interpersonal harmony (Chen et al., 2022), and a caring climate (Henriques et al., 2019) moderate this relationship. Consequently, the observed positive link might result from these unexplored moderating variables, indicating a potentially complex interaction. Future research should include these and other potentially influencing variables to develop a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior.

Alternatively, the relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior might be nonlinear. Previous studies have shown curvilinear relationships (Lee et al., 2013; Mehraein et al., 2023). This would suggest that innovative work behavior may be fostered at moderate levels of destructive leadership but hindered as destructive leadership intensifies (Lee et al., 2013). Future research should explore this possibility to expand current findings, potentially improving the predictive power, depth, and theoretical implications.

Methodological issues, such as a nonresponse bias, could also influence our findings. Participation in the study was voluntary, potentially biasing the sample towards dyads motivated to benefit their company or supporting research objectives. Consequently, a destructive leader that is sabotaging or undermining the organizational goals (Einarsen et al., 2007), might be less inclined to participate in the research due to a lack of interest in the development or the advancement of knowledge of their organization and employees, leading to being underrepresented in the sample. This underrepresentation could potentially distort the findings and hinder the accurate investigation of the relationship between destructive leadership and

innovative work behavior. Future studies should aim to increase response rates through incentives and clear communication of the study's significance, thereby improving the accuracy and predictive power of the findings.

Lastly, the cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to establish causality. Longitudinal research would enable us to draw more definite conclusions about causal relationships and observe organizational changes over time. Specifically, exploring how changes in psychological safety mediate the impact of destructive leadership on innovative behavior longitudinally would provide valuable practical and theoretical insights. However, the dynamic nature of contemporary work environments, as shown by most of our participants working only two to five years in their current jobs, presents challenges in selecting a consistent sample. Therefore, strategies must be developed to address participant attrition between the different measuring points (Abbad & Carlotto, 2016).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study provides evidence that suggests a crucial role of psychological safety in mediating the relationship between destructive leadership and innovative work behavior. While the findings indicate a positive link between destructive leadership and innovation, they also challenge existing perspectives, prompting further investigation into additional factors that may moderate or mediate this relationship. Furthermore, the study confirms the positive influence of psychological safety on innovative behavior, revealing a mediation effect rather than the initially hypothesized moderation. This highlights the complex interplay between destructive leadership, psychological safety, and innovative work behavior, emphasizing how psychological safety can buffer against the adverse effects of destructive leadership on innovation. Overall, these findings underscore the importance of psychological

safety in fostering organizational innovation. They advocate for comprehensive exploration and continuous research to understand the factors that enhance organizational effectiveness and competitiveness, particularly amidst the challenges posed by globalization and rapid technological advancements.

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Appendix A

Code Employee

To be able to compare your answers with those of your supervisor and maintain the anonymity of your data, we would like to ask you to create a code. The code is designed so that no one, not even the researchers, can identify you personally. The guideline for creating the code is as follows:

The code consists of 2 elements:

1. The last 2 letters of your supervisor's last name. (Example: Van der Broek = EK)

2. The last 2 letters of your own last name. (Example: De Vries = ES)

Enter the 2 elements (4 characters) in the field below (for the current example, this would be: EKES)

Code Employee

To be able to compare your answers with those of your employee and maintain the anonymity of your data, we would like to ask you to create a code. The code is designed so that no one, not even the researchers, can identify you personally. The guideline for creating the code is as follows:

The code consists of 2 elements:

1. The last 2 letters of your own last name. (Example: Van der Broek = EK)

2. The last 2 letters of your employee's last name. (Example: De Vries = ES)

Enter the 2 elements (4 characters) in the field below (for the current example, this would be: EKES)

Appendix B

Measure Innovative Work Behavior

Dutch

Onderstaand staan een aantal specifieke werkgedragingen die te maken hebben met nieuwe ideeën. Wilt u aangeven hoe vaak uw medewerker deze werkgedragingen vertoont in zijn of haar werksituatie. [1 = nooit; 2 = sporadisch; 3 = af en toe; 4 = regelmatig; 5 = dikwijls; 6 = heel vaak; 7 = altijd]

Hoe vaak komt het voor dat uw medewerker in zijn/haar werk ....

[Idee-Generatie]

1. Nieuwe werkwijzen, technieken of instrumenten bedenkt.

2. Met originele oplossingen komt voor werkproblemen.

3. Creatieve ideeën bedenkt voor verbeteringen.

[Idee-Promotie]

4. Steun mobiliseert voor vernieuwende ideeën.

5. Bijval oogst voor vernieuwende ideeën.

6. Sleutelfiguren enthousiast maakt voor vernieuwende ideeën.

[Idee-Realisatie]

7. Vernieuwende ideeën uitwerkt tot werkbare toepassingen.

8. Vernieuwende ideeën planmatig invoert.

9. De invoering van vernieuwende ideeën grondig evalueert.

English

Below are several specific work behaviors that are related to new ideas. Could you indicate how often your employee exhibits these work behaviors in their work situation? [1 = never; 2 = sporadically; 3 = occasionally; 4 = regularly; 5 = frequently; 6 = very often; 7 =

always]

[Idea-Generation]

     1. Searching out new working methods, techniques, or instruments.

     2. Generating original solutions to problems.

     3. Creating new ideas for improvements.

[Idea-Promotion]

     4. Mobilizing support for innovative ideas.

     5. Acquiring approval for innovative ideas.

     6. Making important organizational members enthusiastic for innovative ideas.

[Idea-Realization]

     7. Transforming innovative ideas into useful applications.

     8. Introducing innovative ideas into the work environment in a systematic way.

     9. Evaluating the utility of innovative ideas.

Measures Destructive Leadership

Dutch

De volgende vragen gaan over uw leidinggevende.

Geef alstublieft aan in hoeverre u het eens bent met de stellingen.

[1 Helemaal mee oneens; 7 Helemaal mee eens; 4 niet mee eens, niet mee oneens]

Mijn leidinggevende:

1. .. reageert vaak zonder na te denken.

2. .. heeft geen idee wat er zich in ons team afspeelt.

3. .. is onwetend over zaken die zich afspelen in zijn/haar directe omgeving.

4. .. reageert impulsief.

5. .. heeft niet genoeg aandacht voor wat werkelijk belangrijk is.

6.   .. controleert mij continu.

7.   .. wil totale controle over mij uitoefenen.

8.   .. is autoritair.

9.   .. vertrouwt er niet op dat ik mijn werk op een correcte manier uitvoer.

10.   .. wil controle over mij uitoefenen.

11.   .. geeft mij geen belangrijke taken omdat hij/zij mij niet vertrouwt.

12.   .. deelt geen macht met mij.

English

The following questions are about your supervisor.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the statements.

[1 Totally disagree; 7 Totally agree; 4 disagree, don't disagree]

My supervisor:

1. .. Often reacts without thinking.

2. .. Has no idea what is going on in our team.

3. .. Is ignorant of things going on in his/her immediate environment.

4. .. Reacts impulsively.

5. .. Does not pay enough attention to what is really important.

6. .. Is constantly checking up on me.

7. .. Wants to exercise total control over me.

8. .. Is authoritarian.

9. .. Does not trust me to do my job correctly.

10. .. Wants to exercise control over me.

11. .. Does not give me important tasks because he/she does not trust me.

12. .. Does not share power with me.

Measures Psychological Safety

This scale was used in both the leader and employee questionnaires. However, only the word "leidinggevende" (leader) was replaced by "medewerker" (employee) in the other version.

Dutch

De volgende vragen gaan over samenwerking met uw leidinggevende.

Geef alstublieft aan in hoeverre u het eens bent met de stellingen.

[1 Helemaal mee oneens; 7 Helemaal mee eens; 4 niet mee eens, niet mee oneens]

1. In de samenwerking met mijn leidinggevende is het gemakkelijk om mij uit te spreken en mijnmening te geven.

2. Als ik een fout maak in de samenwerking met mijn leidinggevende, wordt dat tegen mij gebruikt.

3. In de samenwerking met mijn leidinggevende, praat ik meestal gemakkelijk met hem/haar over problemen en meningsverschillen.

4. In de samenwerking met mijn leidinggevende wil ik graag informatie delen over wat wel en niet werkt.

5. 'Je kaarten dichtbij je houden' is de beste manier om vooruit te komen in de samenwerking met mijn leidinggevende.

English

The following questions are about cooperation with your supervisor.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the statements.

[1 Totally disagree; 7 Totally agree; 4 disagree, don't disagree]

1. In working with my supervisor, it is easy to speak out and express my opinion.

2. If I make a mistake in working with my supervisor, it is used against me.

3. In cooperation with my supervisor, I usually talk easily with him/her about problems and

   disagreements.

4. In working with my supervisor, I am happy to share information about what works and what

   doesn't.

5. 'Keeping your cards close to you' is the best way forward in working with my supervisor.
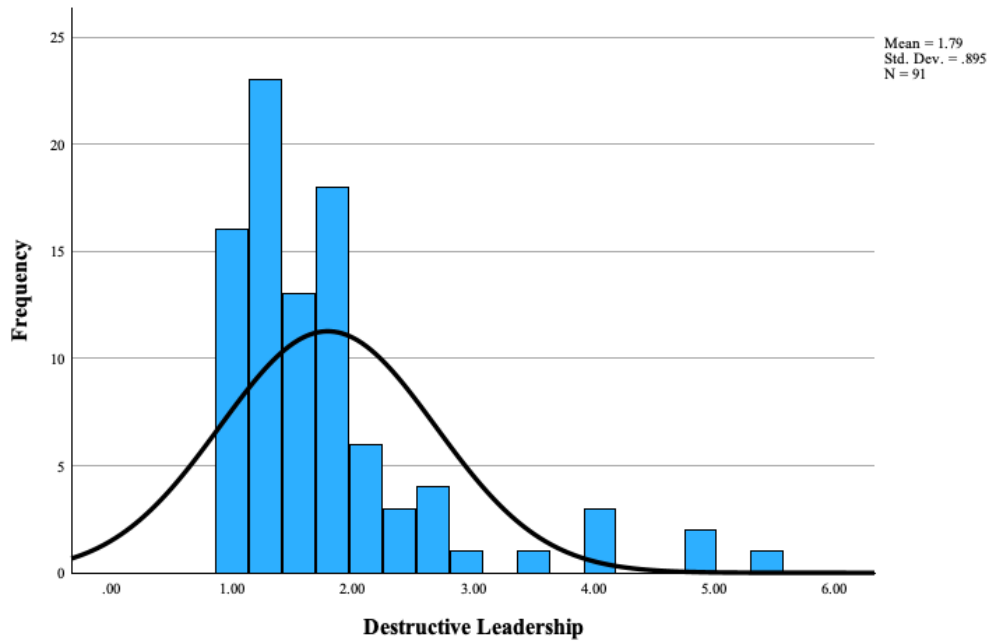
Appendix C

Figure 2
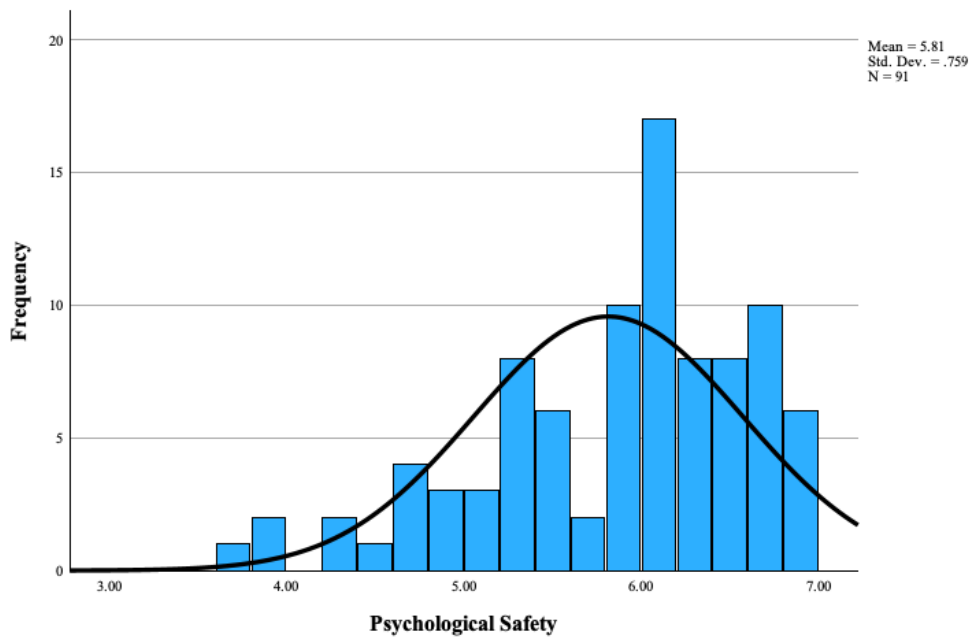
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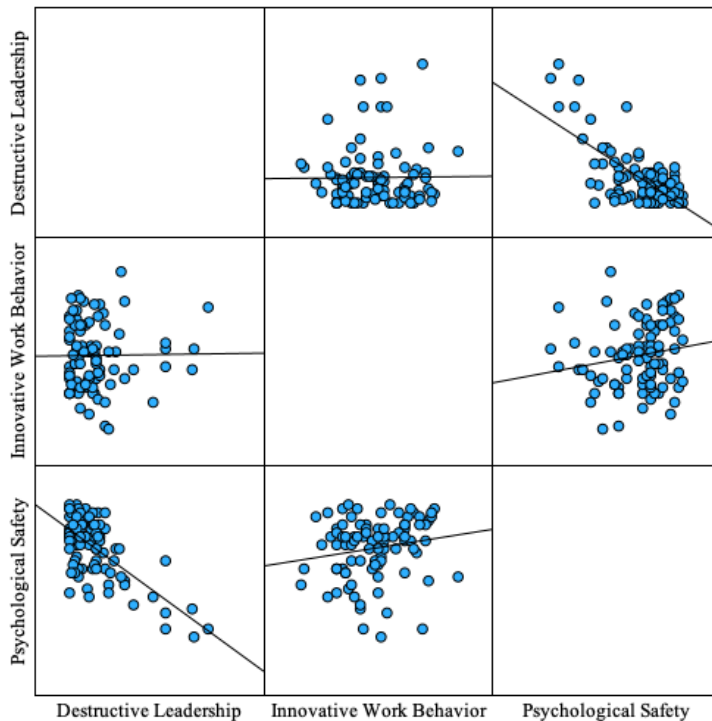
Figure 3

Histogram Indicating Normality Destructive Leadership

Figure 4

Histogram Indicating Normality Psychological Safety

Figure 5

Histogram Indicating Normality Innovative Work Behavior