A Semi-Systematic Review of Interventions against Destructive Leadership

John Clemens Nagler

Master Thesis – Work, Organisational and Personnel Psychology

[*s3796582*]

[*07*] [*2024*]

Department of Psychology

University of Groningen

Examiner/Daily supervisor: Diana Rus

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Abstract

Destructive leadership is highly prevalent, affecting a significant proportion of the workforce, and it has been shown to lead to various adverse outcomes for employees, organisations, and stakeholders in terms of productivity, performance, and climate. To address this issue, organisations should implement interventions that aim to reduce destructive leadership. To do this effectively, these interventions must be rooted in sound scientific research. However, the literature on destructive leadership interventions is scattered, calling for a comprehensive review of the field. Thus, we conducted a semi-systematic literature review to identify, summarise and evaluate the different interventions (e.g., in terms of quality and effectiveness) aimed at reducing or eliminating destructive leader behaviours (DLB) within organisations. The review identified three intervention studies aimed at reducing destructive leadership in the workplace – two aimed at changing leader behaviour and one aimed at the organisational climate. Two were successful in significantly reducing DLB; one was not. We analysed the quality of these intervention studies and found all to be of good methodological quality. Given this small sample size, we supplemented the findings with exploratory papers - that were not interventions by definition - but established causal relationships with destructive leadership and can inform future intervention development. We integrated the results of the exploratory papers into the broader literature and suggested ways in which these could be used for new interventions. Furthermore, we discussed the importance of a holistic approach to destructive leadership, as well as the strengths and limitations of this research and gave practical recommendations.

Keywords: intervention, review, destructive leadership, abusive leadership

A Semi-Systematic Review of Interventions for Destructive Leadership

Who has not overheard a manager being rude to an employee or seen the trope of an abusive manager being used in movies like "The Devil Wears Prada"? We might have seen people being ridiculed at work, heard from friends what a lying “jerk” their boss is or experienced a manager who took credit for our work. Hence, it should not come as a surprise that leaders can and do sometimes engage in destructive behaviours (Schyns & Schilling, 2013) such as lying (i.e., behaving unethically), taking credit for others' work (i.e., acting self-serving), or ridiculing subordinates (i.e., acting abusively) – all of which are indubitably undesirable.

While attention to the issue of abuse within the domestic setting has gained societal traction and laws have been introduced to make such behaviours illegal, the work domain still lags behind (Breevaart et al., 2022). The prevalence of destructive leader behaviour is so high that 10-16% of employees will experience it during their working time (Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper et al., 2006; Tepper et al., 2017). Some estimations even put the prevalence at up to 33% (when less severe types, such as laissez-faire leadership, are included; Aasland et al., 2010). Importantly, research has shown that destructive leader behaviour (DLB) does not only negatively affect individual employee's health and well-being (Simard & Parent-Lamarche, 2021), work performance and team morale (Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper, 2000) but also increases turnover and creates overall hostile work environments (Milosevic et al., 2020). Critically, abused employees often cannot escape the effects of their destructive leaders by simply leaving their jobs. As with domestic abusive relationships, an escape from the cycle of abuse is more challenging than the layperson might assume (Breevaart et al., 2022). However, even if the abused is able to escape the scenario, the adverse effects produced by the destructive leader's behaviour follow them – with effects carrying over to

subsequent employment (Vogel & Bolino, 2020). Additionally, DLB (destructive leadership behaviour) has been shown to have trickle-down effects whereby employees and teams are also more likely to engage in unethical work behaviours (Hannah et al., 2013). Clearly, destructive leader behaviour is not only detrimental to the individuals themselves but also damaging to organisational performance (Aasland et al., 2010; Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper et al., 2017). This plethora of adverse effects makes one thing clear: Organisations would benefit from understanding what types of interventions they could employ to reduce the incidence of DLB.

Despite the growing body of work focusing on destructive leader behaviour, articles explicitly considering interventions are still few and far between, and the body of work is scattered, which might also be due to the multifaceted nature of the issue (Fischer et al., 2021). Indeed, destructive leader behaviour can encompass a host of different behaviours ranging from abusive supervision to self-serving and unethical behaviours (cf. Thoroughgood et al., 2012). Moreover, it results from a confluence of factors at different levels (i.e., the leader, the followers and the context; cf. Fischer et al., 2021). Suggestions for interventions aimed at combating destructive leader behaviours range from providing feedback (Avolio et al., 2009) and training (Kelloway & Barling, 2010) to institutionalising reporting mechanisms (Avolio et al., 2009). It is noticeable that these interventions can vary significantly in terms of quality, cost, effort and effectiveness (Kelloway & Barling, 2010). Given the fragmented nature of this literature, it is essential to review and summarise the existing research. This will enable organisations to identify effective strategies that can be implemented while also providing a foundation for future research by highlighting what has been explored and what gaps remain. This thesis will, therefore, aim to identify, summarise and evaluate the different interventions (e.g., in terms of quality and effectiveness) designed to reduce or eliminate destructive leader behaviours within organisations.

Theoretical Background

Examples of destructive leader behaviours range from lying to subordinates, public ridicule, and blocking of promotions to general hostile behaviours such as uncontrolled verbal outbursts (Breevaart et al., 2022; Tepper et al., 2017). However, solely focusing on the behaviours of the leader seems to be reductionistic since "when elements of the leader, follower, and context converge, their outcomes may be different from those driven by any bilateral interactions among them" (Dulebohn et al., 2022, p. 9). Based on the assumption that any type of leadership emerges from the interaction between the follower's desire for authority and direction, the leader's ability and motivation to lead, and the situation calling for leadership, Padilla and colleagues (2007) coined the theory of the toxic triangle; destructive leadership is not only defined by the leader's behaviour or traits but by the interplay of leader, follower and context. Additionally, Padilla and colleagues (2007) stressed four other features of destructive leadership: 1. It involves dominance, coercion and manipulation. 2. It involves being steered by a selfish orientation 3. The outcomes negatively impact followers and organisations 4. It is not exclusively destructive. These features have consequently been accepted as the best-fitting definition of destructive leadership (Thoroughgood et al., 2012; Velez, 2016). The toxic triangle model has also been applied in a case study at a US university, where researchers confirmed its practical value in the field (Pelletier et al., 2019).

Elements of the Toxic Triangle

Destructive Leaders

Destructive leaders are often characterised by certain traits such as charisma, narcissism, an ideology of hate and/or a need for power (Padilla et al., 2007). Hereby, possessing "a single element is probably insufficient: hateful individuals driven by a selfish need for power but lacking rhetorical skills and stamina might not achieve significant power"

(Padilla et al., 2007, p. 182). As Krasikova et al. (2010) state, this voluntary engagement – whether motivation to act harmfully or lack of motivation to be constructive – distinguishes destructive behaviours from leader ineffectiveness. In destructive leadership, leaders are aware of their actions, whereas in ineffective leadership, they are not. DLB can arise from various leader-related factors, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Overconfidence can be defined as the inflated judgement of one's abilities. This can result in ignoring potential flaws in one's ideas and disregarding contrary evidence (Shipman & Mumford, 2011). Self-centeredness may also cause leaders to dismiss their followers' ideas and adopt a selfish demeanour, making leaders more likely to act destructively (Shipman & Mumford, 2011). This same self-centeredness can also originate from a feeling of entitlement that the leader might possess. Research by Whitman et al. (2013) has shown that leaders who believe they deserve more are more likely to engage in abusive supervision. Interestingly, researchers from China have discovered that a sense of entitlement can moderate the relationship between the perceived overqualification (in case this feeling is present in the leader) and DLB, via heightened job anxiety (Guo et al., 2024). To be exact, leaders with high entitlement are more likely to see their overqualification as a danger to their identity – since they are not achieving what they think they should - which exacerbates the effect on job anxiety and, therefore, exploitative behaviours. Both the aforementioned characteristics of self-centeredness and entitlement are also part of the concept of narcissism. Since each, on its own, already positively correlates with DLB, it comes as no surprise that narcissism, too, is positively related to destructive behaviours. According to Hansbrough and Jones (2014), this is at least partly due to the narcissist's implicit followership (IFT) and implicit leadership (ILT) theories. Narcissistic leaders more often hold implicit leader theories – mental prototypes of what constitutes a leader – that include leader tyranny (the belief that domineering and manipulation are inherent aspects of leadership; Offermann et al., 1994).

Based on this and combined with implicit followership theories that are characterised by insubordination and incompetence, narcissists see themselves justified in engaging in DLB – they believe leaders ought to act as such and subordinates deserve it (Hansbrough & Jones, 2014). Another dark triad trait that is linked to DLB is psychopathy. In their 2016 study on psychopathy, greed and competitiveness, Laurijssen and Sanders found that psychopathy was positively linked to the frequency of self-serving behaviours the participants exhibited. All these findings demonstrate that egocentric personality traits are positively related to the display of destructive leadership behaviours.

Cognitive factors can also drive a leader toward destructive behaviour. Notably, many destructive leaders share a preponderance to engage in moral justifications (Mawritz et al., 2023). Moral justifications are the inclination of an individual to justify contemptible behaviours (Bandura et al., 1996, as cited in Mawritz et al., 2023). Hence, individuals high in moral justification engage in "cognitive re-construal" when acting destructively, thereby disengaging from their moral standards. By these means, persons engaging in this cognitive process can justify their reprehensible acts due to the act's value to the perpetrator. Ergo, "aggression may be viewed as an appropriate response if it has the potential to protect one's honour or reputation" (Mawritz et al., 2023, p.183). Another justification, separate from strictly moral reasonings, is that the leaders believe in eliciting greater performance in their subordinates. In their study, Watkins and colleagues (2019) demonstrated that some leaders simply believe that by performing DLB, they increase the performance of their subordinates. Importantly, they found that a leader's empathy can buffer the effect of those instrumentality beliefs. Sometimes, the instrumentality of DLB may also be different. A recent study from 2020 found that some leaders might also engage in DLB to conceal their incompetence and maintain a position of control (Milosevic et al., 2020). By creating ambiguity and confusion in their work environment, these leaders interfere with others' work. Their strategies can

include convincing their superiors of their value with anecdotal evidence and hindering their subordinates by creating obstacles - all to position themselves as the primary problem solver (Milosevic et al., 2020). It is important to note that this does not conflict with Krasikova et al. (2010) excluding leader incompetence (ineffectiveness) as a component of DLB. In the article by Milosevic et al. (2020), it is the leader's deliberate action to conceal their incompetence that renders them destructive, as opposed to merely lacking knowledge or skills, as described by Krasikova et al. (2010).

Of course, leaders do not only face a loss of control when they are incompetent. Wisse et al. (2019) investigated the relationship between fear of losing power and self-serving behaviour in a scenario experiment. Their findings indeed suggest that such fear is positively associated with self-serving behaviours. In a related study, leaders were more likely to engage in DBL if they felt their personal goals were unattainable with legitimate means (Erickson et al., 2015). Those goals might be cementing their position in the organisation (intending to prevent power loss) or achieving promotions. The frustration that arises from the inability to reach their goals can thus entice the leader to become destructive. In both cases (fear of losing power and failed goal attainment), the leaders' followers can play a significant role. Followers might impair the leader's ability to achieve their goals (Erickson et al., 2015). Similarly, followers rising within the organisation can threaten the leader's power, increasing the chances of power loss and prompting the leader to behave destructively (e.g., blocking promotions; Wisse et al., 2019). In the latter case, the rising follower can also elicit a feeling of envy in the leader. Leheta et al. (2017) suggest that thus, leaders can, even without necessarily being threatened by a loss of power, have feelings of envy, which consequently prompts them to lash out.

As we can see, there is a vast amount of research on leader-centric antecedents for destructive leader behaviour. However, it also becomes apparent that followers play a critical role in shaping destructive leaders.

Susceptible Followers

> "It only requires the good follower to do nothing for leadership to fail" (Grint, 2005, p. 133).

Both followers and leaders are causal agents whose bilateral influence alters each other's attitudes, behaviours and outcomes (Shamir et al., 2009). One way followers might contribute to destructive leadership is through follower resistance (meaning opposing or failing to perform managerial requests). Research by Van der Velde and Gerpott (2023); Güntner et al. (2021) and Shillamkwese et al. (2020) has shown that followers expressing resistance or acting resistant could provoke DBL. The possible identified pathways in which this happens are that the resistance is threatening the identity of the leader (Van der Velde & Gerpott, 2023), the resistance produces a negative effect (e.g., decreases productivity or delays processes; Güntner et al., 2021) and that the resistance drains the leaders' self-regulatory resources, resulting in hindrance stress (Shillamkwese et al., 2020). Relatedly, destructive leaders seem to explicitly target followers who engage in counterproductive work behaviours, as these reflect poorly on the leader and are salient (Mackey, 2021). Moreover, certain follower characteristics tend to enable destructive behaviours. For instance, followers with the personality trait of self-sacrificing self-enhancement (a category of maladaptive narcissism) have been shown to enable their leader's unethical behaviour by complying with the leader's pressure (Johnson et al., 2019). Understanding how these different follower actions can elicit or enable destructive behaviours in the leader is vital for understanding how organisations can influence the nature of these relationships.

Moreover, not only a follower's antagonistic or enabling behaviours can contribute to DLB. Implicit followership theories (held by the followers themselves) have been identified as playing an essential role in whether followers resist or comply with leaders' unethical suggestions. For instance, followers with the IFT of a "good citizen" who want to comply with their leader's wishes were shown to be more likely to contribute to unethical leadership. On the contrary, followers with the IFT "insubordination" - who hold the belief that defiance is an aspect of followership - showed decreased compliance with the unethical suggestions, thus rendering this specific followership theory a potential avenue for curbing DLB (Knoll et al., 2017). Additionally, how followers think about themselves has also been shown to be related to destructive leadership. Mergen and Ozbilgin (2021) suggest that toxic leadership particularly appeals to followers with high personal uncertainty (uncertainty about one's values, identity and self-concept). Following toxic leaders provides a strong worldview and the relative ease of forming a stable self-concept (Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021). To avoid moral dissonance, individuals often normalise the toxicity. These effects gain relevance when considering that a follower's self-esteem (a concept closely related) influences DBL. In fact, research by Mawritz et al. (2023) suggests that low self-esteem of followers can act as a trigger and increase DLB in leaders high on trait anger.

To categorise all these different followers, Padilla and colleagues (2007) suggest two types of follower categories that enable destructive leadership: conformers and colluders (see also Thoroughgood et al. 2018 for an expansion of these two categories). Conformers allow destructive leaders to assume power because "their unmet needs and immaturity make them vulnerable to such influences" (p. 183) and are often purely unable to resist (based on normative commitment, need for acceptance or fear/lack of courage). In contrast, colluders see chances to promote themselves and assist in destructive behaviour mainly based on shared values or for personal gain. Whereas this classification provides us with insights into

why destructive leadership sometimes seems unopposed, it also ignores the fact that the dyadic relationship between follower and leader is always marked by a power imbalance and a structural pressure for the follower to do what is told (Blom & Lundgren, 2020). Ignoring this aspect of their relationship – the context in which it happens – robs us of essential tools for understanding the emergence and facilitation of DLB. More authoritarian organisational contexts, for instance, will also heavily shape what kind of implicit leadership theories followers possess and, hence, what behaviour they find acceptable (Blom & Lundgren, 2020; Knoll et al., 2017). Thus, looking at the context is essential.

Conducive Environments

Already, Plato recognised in his philosophical discussions the importance of context in leadership (Avolio, 2007). For instance, solid and stable systems with appropriate checks and balances make it hard for destructive leaders to succeed (Padilla et al., 2007). On the other hand, other types of contexts will be more conducive to destructive leadership. According to Oc (2018) – who based themselves on Johns (2006) – leadership contexts can be divided into *omnibus* and *discrete.* Omnibus contextual factors include "where" (national culture, institutions & markets and organisations), “who” (demographic compositions), and “when” (relative time in which the situation is embedded in). Discrete contextual factors include “task context” (characteristics of the job or task, such as complexity or demands), “societal context” (climate, culture or social network structures such as network centrality), “physical context” (hazardous work conditions, physical barriers between leader and follower or noise and lighting), and “temporal context” (timing of shifts, time pressure and duration of tasks). In the following, we will present research on how some of these different contexts might aid the emergence or maintenance of DLB.

For instance, specific “where” omnibus factors that have been linked to DLB include external uncertainties such as economic recessions and job layoffs (Badura et al., 2022).

Other studies have corroborated the idea that organisations undergoing significant changes (e.g., downsizing) create stress and uncertainty for employees, which can foster conditions conducive to abusive supervision (Neves, 2014). Hence, organisations should be aware that a context such as this can create environments where DLB is more likely to emerge. In addition, a contextual factor that belongs to the "societal context" category is the presence of a masculinity contest culture. Such an organisational culture is dominated by the avoidance of showing weakness, social dominance and prioritising work above all (Matos et al., 2018). Unsurprisingly, such a societal context creates the conditions for destructive leadership to emerge and take a foothold. In their research, Matos et al. (2018) found that a masculinity contest culture is positively related to stress, work/life conflict and reported toxic leadership practices. Meanwhile, Aryee and colleagues (2008) discovered that the structure of work units moderates the impact of abusive supervision on both behavioural and psychological strain, with both types of strains being higher in mechanistic structures where control and authority are more prevalent. Related to the same sub-context (societal), Tepper et al. (2008) hypothesised that organisational norms influence deviant behaviours within companies. By investigating coworkers as role models, they found that abusive supervision workplace deviance was significantly higher if the deviant perceived coworkers to engage in themselves or approve of the behaviours.

Overall, this evidence supports what some philosophers suspected thousands of years ago - contexts are an essential building block of leadership. It appears that the more positively oriented the context within and around the organisation is, the less likely workplace deviant behaviours, such as those seen in destructive leadership, will occur (Ayree et al., 2008; Avolio, 2007; Neves, 2014; Padilla et al., 2007; Tepper et al., 2008). Indeed, when Pelletier et al. (2019) applied the toxic triangle model (and therefore took a holistic approach to destructive leadership) to a case study conducted at their own university, they concluded that

the context, including its checks and balances as well as its conducive or mitigating effects, might be the most critical piece in the puzzle of destructive leadership.

What Can Be Done?

As discussed, there are various reasons why destructive leadership can emerge and take root. Given its harmful effects on organisations and their employees, practical strategies are needed to address it. Researchers have suggested a range of interventions, starting with refining selection procedures to filter out potentially destructive candidates (Erickson et al., 2015), providing training and feedback to destructive leaders already in the organisation (Avolio et al., 2009; Kelloway & Barling, 2010), implementing institutional mechanisms such as rewarding constructive leadership (Erickson et al., 2015), and improving reporting mechanisms and enforcing consequences for destructive leadership behaviours (Erickson et al., 2015). Concrete examples have been, for instance, investigated by Laurijssen and colleagues (2023), who explored whether clear rules are successful in reining in destructive behaviours in psychopathic leaders. Indeed, their research supported the hypothesis that establishing clear rules is a viable intervention for addressing destructive behaviour - in psychopathic leaders, at least.

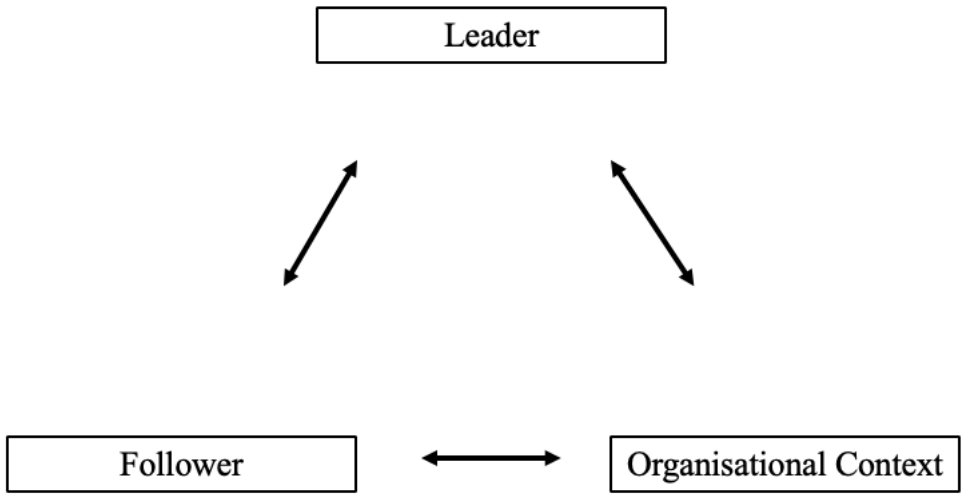
Evidently, research is ripe with potential ideas of what could be done. However, the current literature on interventions to curb destructive leadership is scattered and scarce. Thus, a systematic review of intervention studies is necessary to provide an overview of the existing literature. This is why we performed a semi-systematic review to answer the question: What types of existing interventions address destructive leadership in the organisational context, and how well are they designed?

Our literature review on destructive leadership clearly showed the importance and distinctness of the three levels - *leader*, *follower*, and *organisational context* – involved in the emergence of destructive leadership. We see a holistic approach (see also Pelletier et al.,

2019) as highly relevant for developing interventions since uniquely intervening only on one level (e.g., at the leader level) will inevitably miss out on beneficial intervention opportunities (Wisse & Rus, 2022). For instance, in research on mitigating and changing bullying behaviours, a holistic approach to tackling the bully, victim, and context has been shown to be most effective (Gaffney et al., 2021). Moreover, tackling destructive leadership holistically can enable companies to use different avenues to address destructive leadership instead of being stuck with a unidimensional approach. Therefore, we will classify the interventions found in our search into whether they addressed destructive leadership at the leader, follower or organisational context level or a combination of those (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Theoretical Model



Methods

A semi-systematic literature was conducted to analyse the current published research on interventions that address destructive leadership. During the process, the PRISMA Guidelines were followed (Prisma, 2020), which were developed to safeguard the quality of

(semi-) systematic reviews by encouraging transparency in reporting regarding the reasons behind the research, all steps that were undertaken to produce the results, and the appraisal/ synthesis of such results (Page et al., 2021). In line with current practice, limitations to the scope of the search were made to safeguard the quality of results and ensure the project's feasibility (Siddaway et al., 2019; Snyder, 2019) (see Figure 2). These limitations implied the exclusion of grey literature (e.g., Lawrence et al., 2012) and an exclusive focus on primary empirical peer-reviewed articles. These decisions were taken to ensure the quality of the studies included (i.e., intervention studies). Given the field's small size, dissertations that met the aforementioned criteria were also included in the search. Moreover, studies published in languages other than German and English were excluded due to the researcher's language constraints.

Information Sources and Search Strategy

The search was conducted in PsycINFO, Web of Science, and ProQuest databases on February 22, 2024. The databases were chosen in consultation with the thesis supervisor and an expert at the University Library, Groningen. The choices were made based on their good performance in producing relevant results (PsycINFO), their broader scope to increase the number of hits (Web of Science), and their option to include dissertations (ProQuest).

For each of the three databases, the same Boolean search string was used (see Figure 2). The keywords for the string had been sourced from existing literature (e.g., Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper, 2000) and created in consultation with the thesis supervisor and the expert from the University Library. We used different word combinations in multiple trial runs. The final selection was based on their ability to yield relevant results while simultaneously excluding too many non-topical hits. The keywords were (destructive or abusive or unethical or self-serving or autocratic or toxic) AND (supervis* or manag* or boss

or leader*) AND (interventions or strateg* or best practic* or HR pract* or lead* development).

The first search without exclusions resulted in 1249 results on PsycINFO, 12206 on Web of Science and 2872 on ProQuest. During the search, the language was restricted to "German" OR "English" in all databases, decreasing the hits to 1226 on PsycINFO, 11933 on Web of Science and 2818 on ProQuest. After the initial search, which delivered vast numbers of irrelevant results, we further restricted the search scope in each database in consultation with the supervisor. For each database, the restrictions (terms) slightly differ due to the different search options of each product. In PsycINFO, we restricted the search by document ("journal article") and publication type ("peer-reviewed journal"). This restriction lowered the results to 715 on PsycINFO. The similar restriction document type ("article") and peer-reviewed limited the results to 9763 on Web of Science. Given the enormous number of results on Web of Science the *refine search* option was used by inputting the original Boolean string again. This led to a significant reduction of non-topical articles to a total of 6402. We further restricted the search by means of the Web of Science Categories to exclude content categories such as Entomology, Agronomy, and Water Resources (see Appendix A for a complete list of included categories). In ProQuest, the search was limited to "full text", "peer review", and document type "article" with a result of 2014 articles. Also, here, the large number of non-topical articles made further restrictions necessary. This was done through the filter *Subjects* to exclude topics such as Pests, Insects and Suicide & Suicide attempts (see Appendix B for a complete list of included Subjects), resulting in 910 articles. The final number of hits was 715 on PsycINFO, 1464 on Web of Science and 910 on ProQuest for a total of 3090.

Duplicates were deleted with Zotero's help, resulting in 2567 unique articles across all three search engines.

Article Selection

The final selection of the articles was done in four steps: 1. Screening of the titles 2. Exclusion based on the abstracts 3. Backwards search 4. In-depth reading of the articles.

In step 1, 2446 articles out of 2567 were removed based on titles indicating that they were far removed from the research question. These concerned articles that were, for example, either medical or biological in nature or where it was evident that rather than focusing on interventions, they focused on antecedents of destructive leadership. At the end of this stage, 121 articles remained in our database.

In step 2, 89 articles were excluded after reading the abstract. Attention was paid to whether the articles explicitly or implicitly focused on an intervention, practice, training, or method to address destructive leader behaviour in the workplace. Articles were also excluded based on their abstract if it became apparent that they were not empirical research articles but rather reviews or meta-analyses. At the end of step 2, we retained 32 articles.

In step 3, a backwards search was conducted to identify relevant articles that had slipped through the cracks (Briscoe et al., 2020). During this process, attention was paid to articles that were referenced in either the selected literature or in two review articles that had been excluded as part of step two. Unfortunately, we could not identify any new literature.

In step 4, all the remaining articles were thoroughly reviewed to ensure their relevancy to the research question. The article inclusion was primarily based on the definition of organisational interventions: "Organisational interventions can be defined as planned, behavioural, theory-based actions that aim to improve employee health and well-being" (Nielsen & Abildgaard, 2013, p. 285). To be classified as an intervention, the research thus had to be a planned action to address behaviours and be grounded in theory. Moreover, it needed to consist of an experimental group that receives the intervention to modify behaviours and a control group to be eligible (e.g., Deeks et al., 2003; Saunders et al., 2003;

Schaufeli, 2004). Therefore, the manipulation could not merely aim to explore relationships between variables; it needed to aim at changing behaviour to enhance employee health and well-being directly. The assessment criteria of Donaldson and colleagues (2019) and Nielsen & Abildgaard (2013) were also instrumental in this process, emphasising that ideal intervention research should include a baseline measurement, a targeted behaviour modification phase, and a post-intervention analysis of effects.

During that process, we identified three intervention studies. Given the limited number of articles identified in our review, in Step 4, we re-read all the papers (N=32) remaining in our database. This was done to identify potential articles (which establish causal relationships) that – although not technically interventions – could be analysed for exploratory reasons as first steps towards developing new interventions. We identified a total of four papers showcasing relevant causal relationships. Thus, the process concluded with a final tally of three intervention studies and four exploratory studies, all of which were read and classified based on the research model. Henceforth, each intervention and exploratory study will be presented in separate sections.

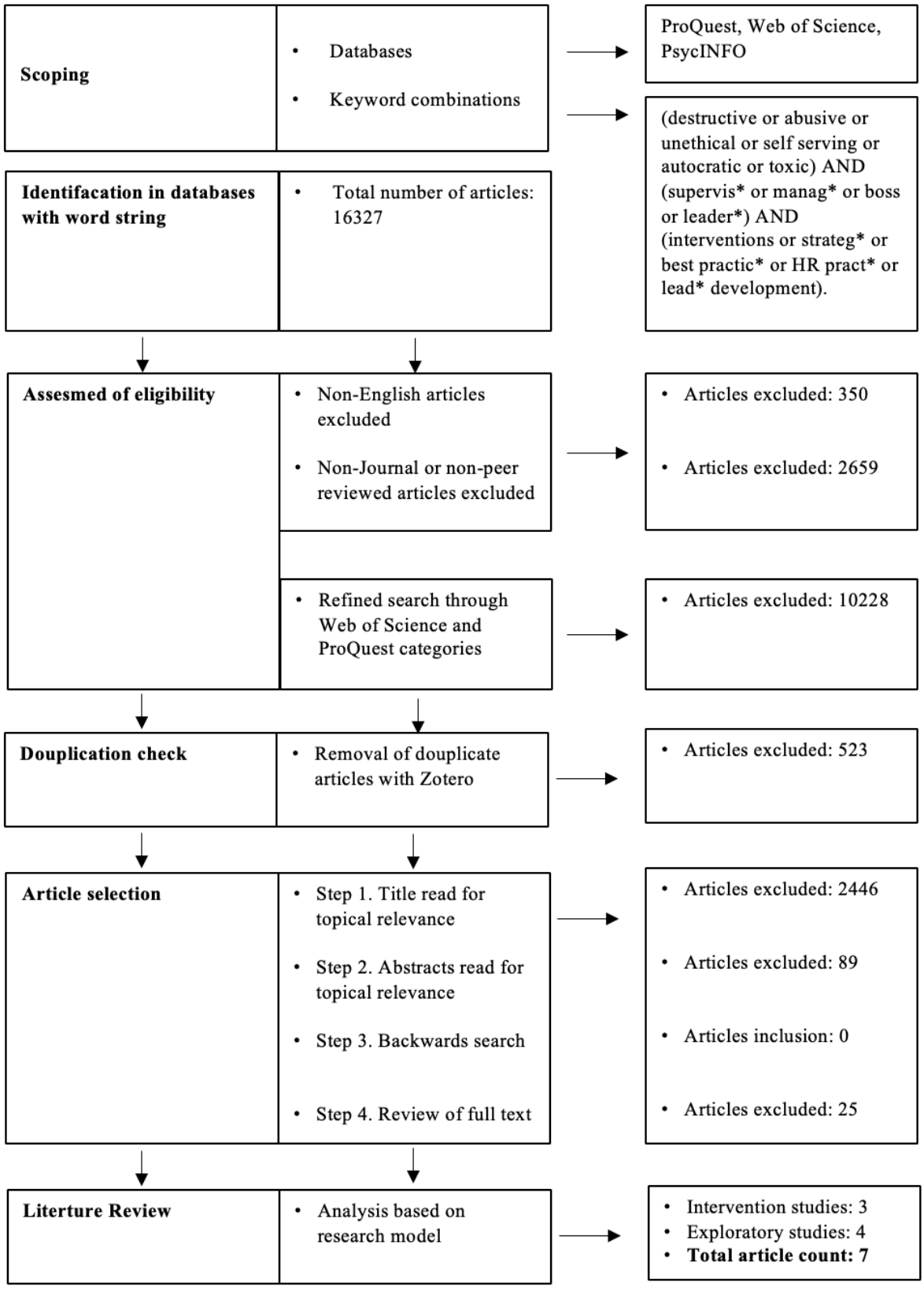
Evaluation Criteria for Interventions

Part of the aim of this research was to evaluate the quality of the interventions. Thus, before we dive into the sections presenting the studies, we present the criteria by which we judged the designs. Optimally, participants are randomly assigned to either the control or experimental group, eliminating biases (Deeks et al., 2003; Saunders et al., 2003). Nonrandomised control interventions can still have some predictive validity but should only be undertaken if randomised studies are unethical or infeasible (Deeks et al., 2003). Otherwise, the risks of selection biases are too significant, and they are more likely to produce a biased effect (with low internal validity). Within both control and experimental conditions, the delivery method (e.g., online videos or group seminars) can vary (based on the

goal of the intervention and study design). Currently, conflicting evidence exists regarding which method is most effective (Donaldson et al., 2019), therefore, we will abstain from evaluating these. Researchers do agree that a pre-and-post measurement design paired with randomised controls is the "gold standard" for assessing organisational interventions (Nielsen & Abildgaard, 2013). Additionally, researchers should consider the industry (to assess external validity), intervention type (e.g., training, workshops, lectures to gauge feasibility), duration (of the sessions), and the follow-up time points (for the assessment of sustained effect; Donaldson et al., 2019). The aforementioned list of recommended criteria will serve as a guideline to assess the interventions of this literature review.

Figure 2

Review Procedure



Results

In the following section, the results of the literature search are presented (see Table 1). The articles are classified utilising the theoretical model (Figure 1) into the *leader, employee,* and *organisational context* sections; each section is defined by the category that represents the main target of the intervention. We identified three eligible articles that we categorised based on the theoretical model; two could be placed under *leader* and another under *organisational context* as the target of the intervention. Since none could be found for *employee*, this section will be missing. Regarding the exploratory part, a total of four articles will be presented, one under *leader and employee* (since the study contained aspects addressing both), and three could be placed under *leader*.

Intervention Studies

Study Characteristics

All the included articles are recent, ranging from 2017 to 2023. Each article featured one study where the intervention was tested in the field. The sample populations were heterogeneous and stemmed from different regions: the United States, Germany, and Turkey. Across all studies, various sectors were represented (industry, finance & insurance, healthcare, consulting & auditing, public service and others).

Interventions on the Leader Level

As established earlier, three pathways exist to address destructive leadership in the organisational context. The first and perhaps most apparent one addresses the root of the destructive behaviour — the leader. In the following, two interventions for destructive leaders are presented.

Table 1

Literature Matrix Intervention Studies

Title	Authors	Year	Sample	Findings
Leader:				
Defeating abusive supervision: Training supervisors to support subordinates	Gonzalez-Morales et al.	2018	USA, Leaders (N = 23), Followers T1 (N = 443), Followers T2 (N = 449), restaurants	Supportive supervision training was successful in reducing destructive supervision.
Mindful leadership: Evaluation of a mindfulness-based leader intervention	Lange and Rowold	2019	German, Leaders (N = 58), Followers (N = 270), various sectors	The mindfulness intervention was successful in reducing stress but only marginally effective in reducing destructive leadership
Organisational Context:				
Improving Workplace Climate in Large Corporations: A Clustered Randomised Intervention	Alan et al.	2022	Turkish, Leader and Employee (N = 2200), various sectors	The organisational climate intervention was successful in reducing destructive leadership.

Note: This table gives an overview of the final selection of intervention studies

In the first study, Gonzalez-Morales and Colleagues (2018) implemented training to increase supportive leadership behaviours (SBL), which were hypothesised to displace destructive leadership behaviours. During the intervention, they employed a pre-post-test design with a baseline (including needs analysis) established two months prior to the training (i.e., the pre-test), the intervention, and a post-test nine months later.

The pre-test included a measure of supervisor support and abusive supervision, which were both assessed based on follower reports. Furthermore, followers ($N = 270$) answered a short critical-incident questionnaire to identify situations that needed addressing during the training. The trainees were sourced from seven restaurants (belonging to the same chain) in the United States. In total, 23 supervisors were trained over two months to learn four supportive leadership strategies (benevolence, sincerity, fairness, and experiential processing). The first three training sessions took place weekly. The last training took place one month later. All training sessions were about two hours long and took place in the company's headquarters, under the cloak of improving overall organisational effectiveness.

The training was performed by the researchers and centred around two themes: (a) Explaining the benefits of SBL and (b) Training leaders in using the four supportive leadership strategies. Examples of the first strategies are explaining the utility of providing assistance and positive feedback to their employees or training vignettes where the employee performed exceptionally well under challenging circumstances and the supervisor failed to show recognition. The vignettes for all four strategies were centred around the main themes identified during the needs analysis. During the training, multiple different pedagogical techniques were used (roleplays, group discussions and lectures). At the end of each session, flashcards were distributed to summarise what had been learned. These cards were also meant to be continuously used by the trainees to revisit and consolidate the learning. Moreover, what was learned from the previous session was revisited at the beginning of each subsequent

meeting. Nine months after the training, supervisor support and abusive supervision were reassessed among the followers of the leaders who had completed the training.

The results showed that both the amount of supportive supervision and abusive supervision were successfully changed, with the amount of supportive supervision significantly increasing and the amount of abusive supervision significantly decreasing. These results indicated a sustained effect since the post-measurement was taken nine months after the training. These findings support the effectiveness of the presented intervention in addressing destructive leadership behaviours.

In the second study, Lange and Rowold (2019) aimed to reduce leaders' destructive behaviours by training them in mindfulness. Similarly to the first study, a pre-post-test design was used, including a baseline three months before the intervention and a post-test three months after. The training took place during a three-month interval. The study was conducted with a sample of 328 participants, 19 of whom were the leaders receiving the training, whereas the rest consisted of the employees belonging to the leaders' teams. The participants were sourced from different German companies representing varied sectors (e.g., public service, industry, health, consulting & auditing).

As part of the baseline, leaders had to self-rate their mindfulness and stress levels while followers assessed their leaders' destructive leadership behaviours. The intervention itself rested upon two pillars: (a) Explaining the impact of mindfulness on workplace outcomes such as well-being, work relations, and performance; (b) Creating intrinsic motivation to engage in mindfulness by giving the participants the feeling of competence, autonomy and relatedness. Besides the experimental and control groups, the researchers created a second control group that practised mindfulness through an online platform (FITMIT5). Also, the experimental group participants were encouraged to use this platform,

and both groups received regular reminders to engage with one video per workday. The intervention itself comprised three elements:

1. A seven-hour training on *Mindful Leadership.* Lectures by a coach, group work and role play comprised this seminar. The first hour aimed to educate the leaders on understanding stress and the possible resources they had. This was followed by a one-and-a-half-hour session in mindfulness as a resource. The rest of the session concerned mindfulness exercises and addressing communication skills and leadership behaviours based on individual 360-degree feedback. Effective communication could be explored through roleplay, or mindfulness practices like yoga or breathing techniques were showcased. The seminar ended with short summaries by each participant on what they had learned.
2. An individual 30-minute follow-up to deepen and combine the theoretical understanding with the practical experiences gained. Here, the participant could receive confidential support from the trainer.
3. A 90-minute group follow-up, two to three months later, to discuss and revisit the experiences after the training. Each participant had to present their experience and learnings. This was partly done to facilitate the learned topics. Additionally, this was used to increase participants' commitment to the intervention since they had known that they would have to present their experiences.

Three months after concluding the intervention, leaders again had to self-rate their mindfulness and stress to assess the effects, while followers assessed their leader's destructive leadership behaviours. The results showed that the mindfulness intervention significantly increased the leader's mindfulness compared to the control groups and successfully reduced the leader's stress levels. The ratings of destructive leadership were lower but only reported as "marginally significant" ($p = 0.06$).

Interventions on the Organisational Context Level

Besides addressing destructive behaviours at the level of the perpetrator or supporting the victim in how they can safeguard themselves, creating an environment that can stifle or prevent such behaviours can be another avenue for success (Pelletier et al., 2019). We found one study that addressed creating an improved work climate to combat destructive leader behaviour. This study will be presented below.

Analogously to the two leader interventions, Alan and colleagues (2022) employed a pre-post-test design. They hypothesised that their training program, aimed at enhancing the relational atmosphere, would improve the organisational climate and subsequently lower the amount of destructive leader behaviours. The intervention was implemented in 20 large firms located in Turkey that operate in sectors such as defence, finance, construction, and energy. It was carried out over the course of a year with a final sample of 2200, 25% of which were leaders. The baseline was established a year in advance. The training was administered over six months (see below Step 1) and evaluated (see below Step 2) with post-measures after the training had concluded.

The baseline was conducted with a total sample of 3000 employees, of which 17% held managerial positions. As part of the baseline, participants participated in "incentivised games to elicit social and economic preferences" (p. 160). Other components were a detailed social network elicitation, a detailed survey (covering collegiality among employees, perceptions of meritocracy in the firm, workplace satisfaction, and behavioural norms), and cognition tests. On average, the baseline data collection took 3 hours.

The experimental group received the training in the first half and the control group in the second half of the year after the post-measure had already been taken. This was done to reward all participating companies and not disadvantage those in the control group. The intervention was implemented in cooperation with a consulting firm and included imagery,

active roleplaying, creative drama and vulnerability exercises. The training module comprised two major parts:

1. Step 1: A series of online (due to COVID-19) workshops where participants were allocated into mixed groups. Sessions included conversations about the participants' workplace vision or imagining a desirable workplace environment, including a discussion afterwards on potential hurdles and how to overcome these. Others included roleplay exercises where, e.g. participants would express what behaviour they expected from their leaders and what defines a peaceful and good leader, including professional language.
2. Step 2: After the active training, participants were closely monitored during an eight-week follow-up where they developed their own project surrounding the themes. The outcome variables were measured using performance games (such as a sabotage game measuring how many participants would sabotage their competition/coworker), social networks (prevalence of support networks), and a survey of the employees. More items captured the collegiality, behavioural norms and workplace satisfaction.

The results showed that the intervention effectively improved the climate among the departments that participated in the study. Job separation significantly decreased, and these effects persisted beyond the implementation period. Additionally, a significant decrease was found for destructive behaviours such as sabotage endowment (the tendency of the participants to sabotage another to gain an advantage) and antisocial tendencies.

Exploratory Studies

Study Characteristics

The following section presents the exploratory articles (see Table 2). Most of the included articles are recent, ranging from 2017 to 2023, with one exception from 1990. All

articles included multiple studies, resulting in 9 studies across 4 articles. The sample populations were heterogeneous, stemming from different regions: 5 from the United States (one of which was sourced from Prolific and two from Amazon Mechanical Turk – all three of which were specified as US-based samples in the articles), and 4 from China. Across all studies, various sectors were represented (industry, finance & insurance, health, attendance, consulting & auditing, public service and others). One study falls under both the *leader* and *employee* categories since both aspects are present. The remaining three studies are targeting the *employee* category.

Leader and Employee Level

In 1990, Baron investigated different strategies that either the leader or the follower can use to buffer the effect of destructive criticism. He defined four main pathways in which the outcome of destructive (criticism) behaviour could be dealt with. 1. Incompatible response approach: A with the negative emotion incompatible emotional state is induced through means of distraction. 2. Apology: The "simple" act of the destructive leader to apologise for their behaviour. 3. External attribution: Explaining that the destructive criticism has not occurred due to the follower's behaviour but that the harshness can be attributed to external causes. 4. Catharsis: Allowing followers to express their anger towards the destructive leader.

He tested his assumptions in one experimental study with a population of students and subsequently in a field study with working adults. The results showed that both apologies by the perpetrator and information that the harsh criticism had external causes significantly reduced anger and promoted positive feelings. Interestingly, it was found that Catharsis (expressing their anger towards the perpetrator) had the opposite effect, significantly increasing anger and decreasing perceptions of fairness. Baron (1990) also found that

managers considered the adverse effects of destructive criticism on motivation and working relationships less severe than employees.

Employee level

One reviewed exploratory paper employed two longitudinal designs, while two featured both longitudinal and experimental designs within their sub-studies.

In the first article, Jiang et al. (2022) examined whether boundary-blurring behaviours can act as a measure for employees to reduce the destructive leadership they receive. They carried out two studies, one experiment and one longitudinal field study, the first being sourced from Prolific (USA sample), the other being Chinese. Both studies used employees as their participants. Jiang et al. (2022) hypothesised that higher engagement in boundary-blurring behaviours (forms of self-disclosure by sharing, e.g., personal issues, displaying family pictures and discussing non-work-related matters) would lead to higher supervisor liking. Since leaders' liking towards their employees has been shown to restrain destructive tendencies, this would decrease destructive leadership (Tepper et al., 2011; Chen et al., 2021a, as cited in Jiang et al., 2022). The outcomes revealed that leaders exhibited significantly higher liking toward the employee in the high (vs. low) boundary-blurring behaviour condition. Moreover, high supervisor liking was significantly negatively related to destructive leadership intention.

In the second article, Lu and colleagues (2023) investigated whether the employee's advice network and friendship network centrality buffer destructive leadership's effect on employee thriving. The researchers conducted one longitudinal and two experimental studies to test their hypotheses. The samples were Chinese and US American (sourced from Amazon Mechanical Turk), respectively. They hypothesised that increased advice and friendship network centrality could strengthen the followers' resources to cope with destructive leadership.

Table 2

Literature Matrix Exploratory Studies

Title	Authors	Year	Study Type	Samples	Findings
Leader and Employee:					
Countering the effects of destructive criticism: The relative efficacy of four interventions	Baron	1990	1. Lab Experimental, 2. Field Experimental	1. USA, Student (N = 60) 2. USA, Employees (N = 87), various sectors	Both the perpetrator's apologies and the information that the harsh criticism had external causes significantly reduced anger and promoted positive feelings. Catharsis (expressing one's anger back) had the opposite effect.
Employee:					
Benefits of non-work interactions with your supervisor: Exploring the bottom-up effect of employee boundary-blurring behaviour on abusive supervision	Jiang et al.	2022	1. Field Experimental, 2. Longitudinal Field	1: USA, Employees (N = 175), various sectors; 2: China, Employees (N = 367), a large manufacturing company	Boundary blurring behaviours increase supervisor liking, which in turn reduces destructive leadership.
Mitigating the harms of abusive supervision on employee thriving: The buffering effects of employees' social-network centrality	Lu et al.	2023	1. Longitudinal Field, 2. Field Experimental, 3. Field Experimental	1. China, Employees (N = 168), manufacturing company; 2. USA, Employees (N = 304) N=304, various sectors; 3. USA, Employees (N = 308), various sectors	Abusive supervision negatively affects employee thriving. This effect is buffered by employee friendship and advice network centrality.
Moving from abuse to reconciliation: A power-dependence perspective on when and how a follower can break the spiral of abuse	Wee et al.	2017	1. Longitudinal Field, 2. Longitudinal Field	1. China, Employee and Leader matched pairs (N = 245), real-estate; 2. China, Employee and Leader matched pairs (N = 363), banking	Supportive supervision training is successful in reducing destructive supervision.

Note: This table gives an overview of the final selection of exploratory studies.

The findings indicated that both advice-network and friendship-network centrality moderated the relationship between destructive leadership and thriving, meaning thriving is not significantly impacted by destructive leadership behaviours if network centrality is high. Conversely, this means destructive leadership harms employees more when network centrality is low. Furthermore, task performance, creativity and organisational citizenship behaviour were also shown not to be impacted by destructive leadership if network centrality was high.

In the final article, Wee and colleagues (2017) investigated the relationship between the follower's symmetric (equal between follower and leader) dependence, the abusive supervision experienced by the follower and the degree to which the followers used different balancing operations. They tested their model in two longitudinal field studies in different sectors in China. They hypothesised that followers could employ balancing operations to decrease their dependence on the leader (i.e., avoidance balancing options) or increase the leader's dependence on the follower (i.e., approach balancing operations). Since a leader's power advantage over the follower may be one of the triggers for destructive leadership (e.g., Tepper et al., 2009; Tepper et al., 2015, as cited in Wee et al., 2017), they proposed that more symmetric dependence will lower the amount of destructive leadership experienced. The studies demonstrated a negative relationship between a leader's dependency on their follower and the occurrence of destructive leadership; higher leader dependency predicted less abusive behaviour. Conversely, follower dependency on the leader was associated with increased destructive leadership. Additionally, approach operations were positively associated with reconciliation efforts by the leader, mediated by increased dependency on the follower.

Discussion

This semi-systematic review aimed to assess and present the current literature on interventions for destructive leadership. Given the significant prevalence of destructive leadership in the field and its adverse effects on employees and organisations, companies would greatly benefit from validated, high-quality interventions that can assist them in addressing DLB. Although research on destructive leader behaviour is expanding, studies focusing on interventions are limited, and the available literature is scarce and scattered. This limits researchers' overview of what interventions have been devised and restricts organisations from tackling the issue scientifically. Therefore, we aimed to create an overview in the hopes that it will advance theoretical knowledge regarding destructive leadership interventions and present practical options for organisations.

In the introduction and theory, we began by showcasing the multifaceted nature of destructive leadership and how, for each of the elements (*leader, follower, context*), there are a multitude of antecedents that can elicit, produce or facilitate destructive leadership behaviours. Based on this, we proposed a model (Figure 1) which we aimed to use to classify the interventions of the review. We conducted a semi-systematic literature review based on the PRISMA guidelines (Prisma, 2020), following the procedure depicted in Figure 2. The final sample of relevant articles was three (see Table 1 for an overview). Indeed, despite broad search terms and a closer look at over 2600 articles, only three intervention studies could be identified, which means that the domain was even more scarcely populated than feared. We hope that by doing this review, researchers can appreciate the need for more high-quality intervention studies to assist companies and followers in dealing with their destructive leaders. To supplement these and give additional input for the development of interventions, we have also included articles that establish causal relationships between variables and

destructive leadership in an exploratory section. In the following section, we will first evaluate the intervention studies found and then proceed to the exploratory papers.

Evaluation of Intervention Studies

First and foremost, we will assess the quality of the interventions to gauge their value for future projects (see Table 3 for a short overview). As introduced in the methods, we used several criteria for this, namely, the use of pre-post-tests, randomised controls, the variety of sectors (external validity), intervention method and duration (feasibility), and the follow-up time points (sustainability of effect).

Table 3
Evaluation Intervention Studies

Title and Citation	Study Design	External Validity	Feasibility	Sustainability of effect
Leader:				
Defeating abusive supervision: Training supervisors to support subordinates, Gonzalez-Morales et al. (2018)	Moderate: pre-post-test design, clustered (by restaurant) randomised control	Low: only US-based restaurants	High: four sessions of two hours	High: effect present at three-month post-training on DLB
Mindful leadership: Evaluation of a mindfulness-based leader intervention, Lange and Rowold (2019)	High: pre-post-test design with randomised control	High: varied sample from companies belonging to different sectors	Moderate: one full day of training and two minor follow-ups	High: effect present at nine-month post-training for stress and not significantly on DLB
Organisational Context:				
Improving Workplace Climate in Large Corporations: A Clustered Randomised Intervention, Alan et al. (2022)	Moderate: Pre-post-test design, clustered (by the entire organisation) randomised control	High: varied sample from companies belonging to different sectors	Low: many trainings across multiple departments and long timeframe (1-2 months)	High: effect present at multiple months post-training (measurement moment differed across organisations) on DLB

Note: This table gives an overview of the evaluation of the intervention studies

Out of the three studies, Lange and Rowold's (2019) intervention study on mindfulness was the only one fully meeting the "gold standard" for interventions set by Nielsen and Abildgaard (2013) of having both a pre-post-test design with randomised control groups. Not only was the control group randomised, but they also had two control groups, one waitlist control and another that trained mindfulness with an online tool. Gonzalez-Morales and Colleagues' (2018) intervention study on supportive supervision also used a pre-post-test design. Contrary to the first example, trainees (the leaders) were not individually randomly assigned to the conditions. Instead, the division was made based on a random assignment of half of the restaurants to one or the other condition. Since multiple leaders worked at the same restaurant, assignment to the conditions happened in restaurant-based clusters. Alan and colleagues (2022) also employed a pre-post-test design in the third study. However, since the intervention addressed organisational climate, whole companies were allocated to either the control or the intervention condition, making individual random assignment to the conditions impossible.

Regarding external validity, the study by Lange and Rowold (2019) had a varied sample from different industries, ensuring good external validity. In contrast, Gonzalez-Morales and Colleagues' (2018) study only sampled restaurants in the USA, which raises concerns regarding the generalisability to other sectors. Lastly, the study by Alan and colleagues (2022) was excellent in terms of external validity due to the large variety of sectors represented in the study and the outstanding sample size.

Training investment for the intervention of Lange and Rowold (2019) was moderate, with one full training day and two more minor follow-ups, keeping feasibility high. Training feasibility seemed reasonable for the intervention of Gonzalez-Morales and Colleagues (2018) as four sessions of two hours each were sufficient to complete the intervention. Lastly, the feasibility of the intervention by Alan and colleagues (2022) is comparatively low due to

the more considerable time investment (around 1-2 months) in the different types of sessions. Additionally, compared to the leader-only interventions, the followers also received the training, making it considerably more resource-intensive, which might raise questions regarding achievability in organisational settings.

All three studies had a delayed post-test measurement, ensuring sustained effects. The follow-ups happened three months after training (Lange & Rowold, 2019), nine months after training (Gonzalez-Morales et al., 2018), and a few months later (varied between organisations), supplemented with a comprehensive assessment of the effects based on various measures (Alan et al., 2022).

To conclude, for the study by Lange and Rowold (2019), unfortunately, and perhaps most importantly, the results showed that the ratings of destructive leadership were lower but only found to be "marginally significant" ($p = 0.06$). On the other hand, the mindfulness intervention successfully increased the leader's mindfulness compared to the control groups and reduced the leader's stress levels. In terms of study design, the article leaves little to be desired. As an intervention to reduce stress in leaders, this intervention is well-positioned to make a positive impact. Nevertheless, given the non-significant effect on destructive leadership, interested parties should exercise caution if considering this intervention to reduce destructive leadership. In contrast, while the study by Gonzalez-Morales and Colleagues (2018) scores lower on some aspects of intervention quality (i.e., clustered assignment of participants to the control and experimental condition; the limited sample from only one restaurant chain), which might raise questions regarding the transferability of the results, the study also had clear strengths. The fact that they could measure decreases in destructive leadership nine months after the intervention is an excellent indication of a sustained effect; the appropriate time investment indicates good feasibility and this combined with the solid pre-post design, shows promise for future implementations. Nonetheless, replicating the

results with a different, perhaps more varied, sample would lend further strength to this intervention. Lastly, Alan and colleagues' (2022) intervention is by far the most resource-intensive. The amount of time and effort that went into it might be discouraging for interested parties. However, the intervention was effective in reducing destructive leadership. Additionally, and in contrast to the other intervention studies, the organisation-wide change in climate was able to produce more widespread changes that can go beyond a reduction in destructive leadership (e.g., a reduction in job separation or a positive effect on employee satisfaction). From this, it can be concluded that a more comprehensive contextual approach is superior if the goal is to improve the relational atmosphere in general and not only positively change destructive leader behaviour. We will explore this line of reasoning further in the theoretical implications.

In general, the presented studies all show surprisingly high research design quality (using a pre-post-test design and establishing long-term effects). Considering the difficulties regarding implementing an intervention design study in companies, the external and internal validities are convincing. Whereas one of the studies could not show significant changes in destructive leadership, both other interventions are good options for stakeholders to consider. The relative success of the organisational-wide intervention (changing multiple other factors positively besides destructive leadership) also lends further proof to the idea that more holistic and climate-focused interventions might bring the most positive results.

Theoretical Implications and Future Research

The present review has several theoretical implications. First, it contributes to the literature on interventions for destructive leadership by providing an overview of the field's current state. To be exact, this study reveals the dire need for more intervention research on a topic that is said to negatively affect at least 10-16% of employees during some part of their career (Aasland et al., 2010; Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper et al., 2006; Tepper et al., 2017).

Second, we introduced and set out to use a holistic model of destructive leadership spanning the three categories of *leader, employee* and *organisational context.* However, we only identified intervention articles within the categories of *leader* and *organisational* context. This contrasts with much of the contemporary literature on destructive leadership that calls for a unified approach (Fischer et al., 2021; Gaffney et al., 2021; Thoroughgood et al., 2018; Wisse & Rus, 2022). This is especially important given that the application of unified models (e.g., the toxic triangle) to real organisational cases, such as the study by Pelletier et al. (2019), suggests that solely intervening at the leader level would not suffice to combat DLB and neither would a focus on solely equipping employees with methods to combat DLB or its effects. Thus, "it is critical to take a systemic approach" (Wisse & Rus, 2022, p.325). However, given that most literature still focuses on the leader in leadership (Thoroughgood et al., 2018; Velez, 2016), further neglect of the employee and potentially the context in intervention research is probable. Future research would benefit from not only focusing on designing interventions aimed solely at the leader level, but rather from taking a holistic approach that also considers the employee and context. Third, the theoretical literature on the dark side of leadership has been increasingly using destructive leadership as an overarching term (Thoroughgood et al., 2018). However, we noticed a strong focus in the literature on abusive supervision, a subcategory of destructive leadership. Indeed, two of the three intervention studies and three of the four exploratory papers in this review used abusive supervision as their outcome variable. We find this neglect of other destructive behaviours, such as self-serving or unethical leadership, concerning. A focus on abusive supervision will inadvertently fail to address other aspects of dark leadership (e.g., unethical, self-serving or laissez-faire leadership). More importantly, if further ignored, less severe but rather predominant destructive leadership styles, such as laissez-faire leadership, will continue to wreak havoc on organisational goals and employee well-being freely (Aasland et al., 2010).

Fourth, the majority of articles in both our samples relied on follower ratings of perceived destructive leadership. Follower perception can vary based on individual differences such as attribution style, organisation-based self-esteem or core self-evaluations, which can explain significant variance in the perceived destructiveness (cf. Velez, 2016). For instance, one follower might interpret being screamed at by their leader as fair and another as deeply disturbing. Therefore, it makes sense to examine which measurement methods are most unbiased (such as coworker assessments by Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) or game-based assessment used by Alan and colleagues (2022)). In addition to these broader theoretical implications derived from the intervention studies, we also identified several more specific implications related to each individual study.

First, the study by Gonzalez-Morales et al. (2018) showed that an intervention aimed at promoting supportive supervision - by increasing benevolence, sincerity, procedural and informational justice and experiential processing (processing stimuli without instantly judging or evaluating them) – effectively reduced destructive leadership. Future research could further investigate whether interventions that include training sessions aimed at changing leaders' implicit followership theories - mental prototypes of what constitutes a follower - might have similar effects. Indeed, previous research has shown that negative IFTs (i.e., implicit followership theories like "incompetence") held by the leader can lead them to act more destructively (or non-supportively; Hansbrough & Jones, 2014). Therefore, leaders holding such negative beliefs (e.g., insubordination and incompetence; Sy, 2010) may be less likely to engage in supportive supervision. Since the intervention's success hinges on its ability to "convince supervisors of the benefits to themselves and the organisation of substituting supportive supervision for abuse and to provide them with the skills needed to provide such treatment" (Gonzalez-Morales et al., 2018, p. 157), it is our opinion that additionally addressing the IFTs of the supervisors might help break down a barrier that could

prevent leaders from engaging in supportive leadership. Furthermore, research has shown that some leaders have a high instrumentality orientation, which might lead them to act destructively if they think it aids their goals (e.g., to increase performance; Watkins et al., 2019). To intrinsically motivate leaders, we think it would be beneficial to try to convey not only the positives of supportive supervision but also the negative effects (e.g., on performance) of DLB. Moreover, we concur with the authors of the intervention that the effect of the intervention should be investigated in high-stress scenarios where DLB seems to be more likely to emerge and replace supportive actions (Krauter, 2020; Labrague et al., 2021; Ng et al., 2021). This is why we believe that directly addressing the misconceptions about the supposed positive aspects of DLB through educational materials will be beneficial, as these misconceptions may become more pronounced in stressful situations (Walter et al., 2015). Lastly, we want to note that this intervention has only replaced destructive leadership with supportive supervision without addressing the root causes. Therefore, we advise testing this intervention in various contexts, such as the mentioned high-stress situations.

Second, the research by Lange and Rowold (2019) revealed that an intervention focused on increasing mindfulness decreased stress. They also found a decrease in destructive leadership, albeit not to a statistically significant extent. Their intervention was based on the proposed link between heightened mindfulness, reduced perceived stress in leaders, and a subsequent decrease in DLB. While Lange and Rowold (2019) could only find support for the association between their mindfulness intervention and reduced stress, multiple research articles that we have read support the link between reduced stress and decreased DLB (Krauter, 2020; Labrague et al., 2021; Ng et al., 2021), indicating that further investigation can be fruitful. Additionally, we think that mindfulness might also be helpful in addressing moral justifications – the tendency of some people to rationalise unethical behaviour. Mindful leadership, as trained in the intervention, was proposed to enhance individualised

consideration (cf. Lange & Rowold, 2019). By adapting the mindfulness training to include reflection on moral values, future interventions could prevent the "cognitive re-construal" of the leader and, therefore, lower their propensity to act destructively (Mawritz et al., 2023). Furthermore, mindfulness interventions could potentially help address a leader's overconfidence, which has been linked to DLB (Shipman & Mumford, 2011).

Third, the study by Alan and colleagues (2022) demonstrated that an intervention on improving the organisational climate effectively reduces DLB. From a theoretical perspective, this intervention demonstrated the effectiveness of holistic approaches to workplace interventions. Thanks to the comprehensive intervention that trained both leaders and employees to enhance the organisational climate, the researchers were able to observe a host of beneficial effects. These effects included but are not exclusive to decreased employee separation (how many employees leave the company), increased department social network density, workplace satisfaction, meritocratic values, leader professionalism, and collegial conduct such as more prosocial and less antisocial behaviour. This wide range of positive effects does not come as a surprise when considering the literature. For instance, in this intervention, one way of creating a cooperative climate was to decrease competitiveness. This aligns with other work showing that a competitive climate promotes DLB (cf. Wisse et al., 2019), hence a focus on lowering it seems warranted. Furthermore, the increase of intra-department network density as a result of the intervention can be linked to the earlier presented study on network centrality by Lu and colleagues (2023). Lu et al. (2023) discovered that advice and friendship centrality lead to lower perceived DLB by increasing the employee's resources. Given the measured increase in social network density as part of the intervention, this could partly explain the lower reported destructive leadership. Another exciting research avenue might be to look at the effects of a positive climate on a leader's need to conceal their incompetence. As Milosevic et al. (2020) established, by acting

destructively, some leaders conceal their incompetence and position themselves as problem solvers for issues of their own creation – “toxic leaders build the right context that strengthens their leadership “(Milosevic et al., 2020, p.131). A positive climate with suitable support mechanisms might decrease leaders' need to conceal their incompetence and act destructively. The wide variety of positive effects on the organisation further highlights the usefulness of holistic approaches to DLB. While we presented two possible mechanisms that might explain the reduction in DLB, the intervention article itself presented little information on their hypothesised reasons for the positive outcomes. This is why we would advise future research to focus on the specific underlying mechanisms driving these effects.

The literature on antecedents and causally linked variables with destructive leadership seems to grow daily. Thus, we are confident that researchers can use this large body of work for new intervention designs. However, what must be recognised is that such intervention studies in the field come with significant costs and investments in terms of time, which might explain the small body of literature available. Therefore, research on possible intervention designs that might deliver the benefits of reducing DLBs while keeping time and financial investments at bay are sorely needed.

Whereas it turned out that the literature on actual interventions to combat DL is scarce, our review identified a few papers that could be used as helpful inputs for designing future interventions (i.e., our exploratory papers). Surprisingly, these exploratory articles mostly focused on the follower, contrasting with the focus on the leader we found in the interventions. As Lu et al. (2022) wrote in their article, the fact that followers have the power to change and cope with situations opens new avenues to successfully tackling destructive leadership. Giving tools to those with the most significant incentive to produce change might crystallise as an essential way of addressing the issue. In the following, we will present the things we learned from the exploratory articles that have been presented.

Wee et al. (2017) studied the relationship between power dependence and destructive leadership, finding that increasing leaders' power dependence on followers effectively reduces destructive leadership. One of the author's proposed mechanisms was that power imbalance (i.e. the follower is dependent on the leader) increases the leaders' experienced sense of entitlement in the dyad. This is in line with other research that found heightened entitlement to be related to an increase in DLB (Guo et al., 2024; Whitman et al., 2013). Wee et al. (2017) found that the so-called approach balancing operations (i.e., increasing the leader's dependence on the follower) were most effective in lowering DLB. Approach balancing operations can be divided into "coalition formation" and "value enhancement". During value enhancement, followers become indispensable by acquiring new skills or crucial information. Research has shown that when the follower holds control over resources and goals that the leader values, the leader closely monitors the follower to maintain a positive relationship, as destructive behaviour could hinder the leader's ability to achieve their objectives (Erickson et al., 2015). Indeed, the follower's instrumentalist value has been demonstrated to actively shape their leader's behaviour (Watkins et al., 2019). Similarly, Erickson et al. (2015) found that leaders might engage in DLB if that aids their goal attainment. Conversely, if destructive behaviour contradicts the leader's goal attainment, they will refrain from acting destructively. Future research on interventions should explore the impact of providing training to followers to increase their instrumentality, enabling them to acquire new skills or refine existing ones, and examine how this affects the DLB they experience. During coalition formation, followers join forces with highly valued followers, increasing the importance of the leader acting appropriately. Based on this, we propose an intervention in which employees get trained to network with high-value employees. Part of that strategy can also be to encourage high-value employees to look out and pay attention to victims of DLB and actively connect with and shield them. However, we encourage

researchers to develop interventions that cautiously modulate the power dynamic, considering the relationship between power loss and DLB. Research has found that the fear of power loss can increase a leader's destructive behaviour (Wisse et al., 2019), and it is possible that power-balancing operations by the follower could evoke such fears in the leader. To summarise, power dependence plays an integral part in the follower-leader dyad. By increasing followers' power through coalition formation (e.g., training networking abilities and encouraging friendships at the workplace) and value enhancement (e.g., creating workshops and in-house education) during interventions, we believe that DLB could be successfully decreased. However, the link between fear of power loss and an increase in DLB should encourage researchers to approach this topic cautiously.

Lu et al. (2023) found that both advice network and friendship network centrality buffer the effects of destructive leadership on employee thriving. The researchers proposed that this effect functions through the relationship between socio-emotional resources and perception of DLB, where more available resources help followers cope with DLB. This is consistent with, inter alia, the barrier model of abusive supervision by Breevaart and colleagues (2022), where the researchers postulate that abusive supervision strips the follower of necessary resources to cope with and escape from abusive supervision. Lu et al. (2023) propose that network centrality can increase the follower's ability to cope, whereby advice and friendship networks function in different ways. Centrality in advice networks enables followers to seek knowledge from others within the organisation on how to navigate DLB (Lu et al., 2023). On the other hand, centrality in friendship networks can help followers cope with DLB by reducing social isolation (Breevaart et al., 2022), heightening self-esteem (which lowers the chances of being targeted; Kim & Oh, 2023; Mawritz et al. (2023)), and lowering the propensity to engage in counterproductive work behaviours (CWB) in response to the DLB due to their ability to vent to others (Behfar et al., 2020). The latter being a

mechanism is of considerable importance since research has linked CWB to an increase in DLB (Güntner et al., 2021; Mackey, 2021; Shillamkwese et al., 2020; Van der Velde & Gerpott, 2023), creating a self-perpetuating cycle. One way in which network centrality might curb the exhibition of CWB was proposed by Zagenczyk and Powell (2023), who found that followers who have close ties to others in the organisation imitate their organisational citizenship behaviours. Thus, the organisation's positive "societal context" will steer the follower's behaviour away from CWB. These findings show that while Lu et al. (2023) argued that network centrality primarily enhances the follower's resources to cope with DLB (which in itself still presents a valuable finding), the literature suggests the effects of network centrality on behaviour may be more direct. Therefore, we think assisting followers through intervention measures and organisational practices to increase their network centrality is a valuable way to address DLB. Such interventions could be seminars on how to build workplace friendships, mentoring programmes which have been shown to increase the protégés network (Srivastava, 2015), and information on their beneficial effects on an employee's work life (such as general positive affect and increased self-perception; Kim & Oh, 2023). Furthermore, an intervention should develop methods to encourage followers to share knowledge and experiences and seek help if needed, thereby increasing advice network centrality. Lastly, the link between network centrality and the heightened impact of others' behaviours (such as organisational citizen behaviour) on the individual underscores the importance of fostering a positive organisational climate (societal context). Increasing followers' network centrality without simultaneously ensuring a positive climate – one that followers are likely to emulate - could otherwise lead to unintended adverse effects (i.e., followers emulating unfavourable behaviours).

Jiang et al. (2022) investigated boundary-blurring behaviours' influence on supervisor liking and destructive leadership, finding that more boundary-blurring behaviours lead to less

destructive leadership. The indirect link via supervisor liking can be explained by research findings of Mawritz et al. (2023), who demonstrated that supervisors frequently engage in moral justifications to rationalise their destructive behaviour towards their followers. Since researchers have found that supervisors raise their ethical standards in interactions with followers they like (Walter et al., 2015), justifying their immoral behaviour towards those followers becomes challenging. Indeed, corroborating evidence shows that supervisor liking leads the leader to view acts of the follower more positively in general and antagonistic acts as less hostile (Dulebohn et al., 2017). Since perceived follower antagonism can prompt leaders to act destructively (Güntner et al., 2021; Mackey, 2021; Shillamkwese et al., 2020; Van der Velde & Gerpott, 2023), we believe that increasing the liking of the follower is a valid way to address the leader's attribution bias. Similarly, Watkins et al. (2019) suggest that when leaders mistakenly believe that destructive leadership behaviour enhances performance, they "either implicitly or explicitly weigh the benefits to performance against the costs to employee well-being when deciding how to manage their employees" (p. 269). We propose that supervisor liking biases the leader to give greater weight to employee well-being concerns, rather than making decisions about behaviour solely based on its believed instrumentality. Based on this research, we consider the following to be practical: First, interventions should focus on workshops and team-building measures that encourage both leaders and followers to share personal details, increase their interactions on social media, or participate in activities unrelated to working together. Additionally, companies could create more chances for supervisors and employees to build informal working relationships by facilitating interactions outside of the workplace (e.g., birthday celebrations, dinner groups, sports events). Second, the authors suggest that boundary-blurring behaviours might be more common in positive climates. We encourage this link to be further investigated as it could lend continued support towards the importance of good organisational climates. Hence,

combining a boundary-blurring intervention with measures to improve the societal context at the workplace might amplify the intervention's effect on reducing DLB.

To summarise, from the exploratory research, we can extract creative ways for employers or researchers to change the destructive behaviours of their leaders: 1. Reducing the followers' power dependence on the leader effectively reduces destructive leadership. 2. Centrality of the follower in their friendship and advice networks reduces the effect of destructive leadership on the follower. 3. Engaging in more boundary-blurring behaviours reduces the number of destructive leadership experiences. 4. What is more, the study by Baron (1990) gives suggestions on how leaders can reconcile with their followers after destructive (criticism) has taken place. Both an apology by the leader and a possible explanation for the harsh criticism to external causes can reduce the effects of destructive criticism. Both of these measures are easy enough strategies to be taught and made aware of.

We conclude by emphasising the importance of a contextual, holistic perspective. As shown by Alan et al. (2022), interventions training followers and leaders yield multiple positive outcomes beyond reducing DLB. Additionally, transforming an organisation's climate may also activate or enhance other mechanisms that help curb destructive leadership (e.g., boundary-blurring becoming more natural or increased network centrality in positive climates). Leadership emerges from an interaction between the leader, follower and the context. Focusing on just one of these while failing to address the others – such as addressing destructive leaders but neglecting susceptible followers or conducive environments - may not produce sustained results. For instance, even if a leader is now trained to act more supportively, a competitive, masculinity-contest culture might push them to revert to old patterns. We posit that long-term change can only be achieved if organisations recognise that changing one or the other is insufficient. Therefore, we see it as essential for future research

on interventions to recognise the critical role of climate and context and advocate for strategies that address all three factors of the toxic triangle.

Strengths and Limitations

This study possesses both some strengths and limitations. To begin with, our study was conducted adhering to the PRISMA guidelines (Prisma, 2020), a set of strict methodical rules to safeguard the quality of (semi) systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021). Additionally, our initial search string was intentionally broad, anticipating a limited number of results. The search string was rigorously tested and refined in collaboration with a database expert at the University Library of Groningen to achieve the optimal balance between identifying relevant literature and practicality. Moreover, we utilised the three most relevant databases for psychology research.

On the other hand, the exclusion of grey literature, an exclusive focus on primary empirical peer-reviewed articles, and the disregard of articles written in any other language but German and English are limitations of our study, which may have contributed to the minimal sample size. While these exclusion criteria were used to ensure the quality of this paper, they might have led to the exclusion of relevant articles. For instance, the exclusion of grey literature could have introduced bias into our findings and conclusions due to the possibility of publication bias (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001). Since grey literature has been found to often be of similar methodological quality, some researchers suggest that including grey literature can improve literature reviews (Bellefontaine & Lee, 2014). Thus, we suggest the inclusion of grey literature in future reviews on DLB interventions – mainly due to the currently small amount of literature available. Moreover, even though the use of the for our research topic most relevant databases PsycINFO, Web of Science and ProQuest ensured that a large part of the academic literature was scoured, future research could include other search engines/databases, which might also have resulted in additional relevant articles. This is why

we recommend future research to include other and more databases to further increase the ability to find the entirety of relevant articles. Additionally, due to the enormous amount of hits, we used different database settings to exclude a large part of the non-topical results (such as the *refine search* option on Web of Science). Also, in this process, relevant literature could have been excluded. A larger research team (or one with the ability to speak more languages) could have done more of the article selection manually and found more interventions - as it were, the present review was already a monumental task. Hence, research teams with more human resources or time are advised to do more of the work manually to avoid letting any of the scarce articles slip through the cracks.

Another limitation is how the list of exploratory papers came to be. These articles were selected based on two factors: (a) They were similar enough in title and abstract to an intervention study to still be included in the fourth step of the screening process. (b) They established causal relationships between a variable and destructive leadership. Mainly, factor (a) is of concern. This research set out to find scientifically valid intervention studies. The inclusion of exploratory papers was not part of a systematic analysis of the field but rather born through an opportunistic decision. That is why the presented results might only represent a very narrow view of the entire literature in the field. For example, the fact that most of the exploratory studies exclusively addressed the follower level might have been a consequence of how the process played out rather than an indication of how the current research field develops. Therefore, we recommend conducting a more thorough and systematic review of the literature to ensure a complete understanding of the existing research, providing a stronger basis for developing interventions.

Practical Implications

It became apparent that most of the literature focuses on antecedents and theoretical mechanisms, with minimal concrete**,** practical interventions that could help companies

address destructive leadership. Still, this study presented two effective interventions on DLB that can still inform researchers, coaches, and companies of the right tools to address destructive leadership. By collecting and summarising what are far-scattered sources for destructive leadership interventions, this study enables interested parties to gain an overview of which validated options exist to implement these in the field. Additionally, these interventions have been analysed regarding their validity and can be implemented with the knowledge that they meet the scientific standard. This analysis enables interested parties to quickly gain an overview of the intervention's feasibility, training methods and target, assisting them in selecting the right tools. We will summarise the practical implications based on what we have learned from the intervention studies and exploratory articles.

1. Training supportive supervision is effective in countering destructive leadership. Additionally, it may be beneficial to focus on both the advantages of supportive supervision and the disadvantages of destructive leadership.
2. Improving the organisational climate effectively reduces DLB. Moreover, the intervention not only enhanced employee retention, departmental social network density, workplace satisfaction, meritocratic values, and leader professionalism but also fostered prescriptive norms and increased prosocial behaviour among employees. This demonstrates that organisations can reap a wide range of benefits from climate interventions. Additionally, employing both boundary-blurring behaviours and network centrality as measures against DLB may be more effective in positive climates. Finally, several studies have highlighted that competitive climates negatively influence the organisation (Milosevic et al., 2020; Pelletier et al., 2019; Wisse et al., 2019), reinforcing the importance for organisations to carefully manage their climate.

3. Organisations could mitigate DLB by balancing the power dynamics between leaders and followers. To achieve this, we recommend offering a range of free in-house training sessions to help followers develop new skills or refine existing ones. Additionally, we advise training followers' networking abilities.
4. Increasing employees' network centrality can be an effective strategy for helping followers manage destructive leadership. Organisations could organise seminars on how to build workplace friendships, establish mentoring programmes, and provide information on workplace friendships' beneficial effects on an employee's work life. Furthermore, implementing structures that encourage followers to share knowledge and experiences and seek help if needed can also benefit the employee's network centrality.
5. Organisations could encourage and facilitate boundary-blurring behaviours to decrease destructive leadership. Suggested approaches include organising workshops and team-building activities that encourage leaders and followers to share personal information, interact more on social media, and engage in non-work-related activities together. Additionally, companies could increase opportunities for supervisors and employees to develop informal working relationships by facilitating interactions outside the workplace. This might involve hosting birthday parties, group dinners, sports events, and other activities that foster social connections between supervisors and employees beyond the work environment.
6. Friendship at the workplace has numerous positive effects on employees' well-being (Durrah, 2023). Additionally, the presented studies on power dependence (which suggests that strong friendships can shield followers from DLB) and network centrality (which indicates that friendships can help cope

with DLB) demonstrate that friendships are powerful tools for enhancing workplace well-being. Therefore, we recommend that companies recognise the value of workplace friendships and actively facilitate their development.

7. Practising mindfulness effectively reduces a leader's stress and could be helpful when addressing it. Even though research indicates that this should also translate to a reduction in DLB (Krauter, 2020; Labrague et al., 2021; Ng et al., 2021), further research should first test interventions before they should be implemented to address DLB.

Conclusion

The present semi-systematic review provides an overview of published and peer-reviewed articles on interventions for destructive leadership. We started with 16000 articles, of which over 2600 were manually analysed, and ended with three interventions. Hence, we found a significant lack of available research that desperately needs addressing in the future. Luckily, the interventions we identified are of high methodological quality, although one failed to produce significant results in reducing destructive leadership. Additionally, we provided a selection of exploratory studies – on which basis we suggested possible interventions – which can aid researchers in creating new interventions that are urgently needed. We did notice a focus in the reviewed literature on abusive leadership, which we would like to see changed in the future. This review can help researchers grow this field of study by informing them about its shortcomings, presenting promising literature that can be used to design new interventions and showcasing how interventions can be classified and assessed. Additionally, an overview of existing interventions, however small, can help interested parties select those most applicable to their needs.

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Appendix A

Overview of Web of Science Category Inclusions

The included categories for the database of Web of Science are: Management, Business, Public Environmental Occupational Health, Multidisciplinary Sciences. Psychology Applied, Social Sciences Interdisciplinary, Social, Issues, Psychology, Psychology Multidisciplinary, Economics, Psychology Social, Behavioural Sciences

Appendix B

Overview of ProQuest Subject Inclusions

The included subjects for the database of ProQuest are: toxicity, self destructive behavior, intervention, mental health, studies, decision making, behavior, experiments, quality of life, research, lead, leadership, questionnaires, qualitative research, statistical analysis