

Consequences of Toxic Leadership Behaviours: A qualitative investigation.

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade there has been increasing attention in the management literature to the 'dark side of leadership' and its impact on followers. Used frequently, toxic or destructive leadership behaviours can lead to serious problems in the workplace at the employee, team and organisational levels. This qualitative study, part of a larger PhD study, explores the impact of destructive leaders through the voices of affected followers, including consequences of their behaviour on their followers, and the strategies employees use to cope with such behaviours.

Key Words: Critical perspectives on leadership; leadership and personality; followership; stress and stress management.

The dark side of leadership, variously described in the literature as bad, abusive, toxic or destructive, (Einarsen, Aasland & Skogstad 2007; Kellerman 2004; Padilla, Hogan & Kaiser 2007; Tepper 2000; Trickey & Hyde 2009) has been shown to lead to a range of negative consequences for organisations, including unwanted turnover, reduced employee satisfaction and commitment and increased employee psychological distress (Mackie 2008; Tepper 2000). Substantial litigation and counselling costs can be incurred to address the effects of bullying, discrimination, abusive, toxic and destructive leadership (Richards & Freeman 2002; Sutton 2007). Yet every organisation makes selection mistakes, has its share of bad managers and many fail to monitor their leaders' performance in key areas (Hogan & Kaiser 2005; Trickey & Hyde 2009).

A range of negative impacts as a result of the dark side of leadership have been described, particularly at the individual employee level (Fowlie & Wood 2009; Kellerman 2004; Mackie 2008; Padilla, Hogan & Kaiser 2007; Richards & Freeman 2002; Sutton 2007; Tepper 2000): psychological distress, i.e. reduced self esteem, anxiety, depression, burnout, disengagement, difficulty concentrating; emotional harm; physical health problems, i.e. chronic fatigue, hair loss, insomnia, low energy; career impact, i.e. reduced work and life satisfaction, work and family conflict, reduced discretionary effort. Feelings of shame at being taken in and falling for destructive leader tactics are proposed to be common but harmful (Babiak & Hare 2007; Clarke 2005). In addition to individual harm, inter and intra team conflict often escalates (Babiak & Hare 2007; Boddy 2010; Clarke 2005), employee engagement, commitment and productivity is reduced, and poor decisions are made, often

with damaging results for the organisation, i.e. Enron, HIH, Roman Catholic Church, New York stock exchange (Kellerman 2004; Sutton 2007). Despite the substantial costs to organisations due to the effects of 'bad' leadership (Richards & Freeman 2002; Sutton 2007), often it is reported that little is done to address offending leaders and, as a result, employees either leave, or remain with the organisation but in a reduced capacity that eventually leads to harm to their well-being (Lipman-Bluman 2005; Sutton 2007).

There are a range of negative behaviours that, if repeated and systematic, are proposed to cause harm including, but not limited to, intimidating or abusive behaviour, ridiculing others, being arrogant and self centred with refusal to consider another point of view, manipulating and conning others, regularly lying or deceiving others, over controlling and micromanaging, showing no empathy, causing interpersonal conflict between others, explosive demonstrations of anger, failing to address issues and unethical behaviour (Babiak & Hare 2007; Boddy 2010; Clarke 2005; Kellerman 2004). Babiak and Hare (2007) and Clarke (2005) propose that when all these behaviours are demonstrated regularly by one leader it is indicative that followers are working for an 'organisational or corporate psychopath'.

While there are a number of books and articles outlining the purported effects toxic leadership behaviours have on followers and the distress caused (Babiak & Hare 2007; Boddy 2010; Brown 1964; Clarke 2005; Clements & Washbush 1999; Einarsen, Aasland & Skogstad 2007; Kellerman 2004; Lipman-Bluman 2005; Mackie 2008; Padilla, Hogan & Kaiser 2007; Sutton 2007; Thau & Mitchell 2010), many of these are conceptual in nature. As a result detailed empirical investigations of this issue are lacking. Indeed, only one similar qualitative study was identified, and that was conducted over forty five years ago (Brown 1964). Perhaps it is due to the fear invoked by toxic leaders and a resulting perceived conspiracy of silence in organisations surrounding this phenomena, with senior management unwilling to acknowledge there is an issue and direct reports unwilling to make a complaint (Babiak & Hare 2007; Kellerman 2004; Lipman-Bluman 2005), that there is a dearth of research from the victims of destructive leadership behaviours. They are often missed in organisational research as they have left the organisation, are on stress/sick leave or are too fearful to participate. There has been considerable research in the coping literature on how employees deal with

a range of workplace stressors, however no research was found that focused on understanding how followers cope with the stress caused specifically by toxic leadership behaviours and, in particular, how followers cope physically, emotionally and psychologically when they are the recipient of such behaviours. Nor is there empirical evidence on what stress-resilience interventions organisations can employ to assist followers when dealing with destructive leaders, other than at a conceptual level (Babiak & Hare 2007; Clarke 2005; Lipman-Bluman 2005).

There is little consensus among coping researchers on the range of coping behaviours and strategies used to deal with stressors. Finding a consistent taxonomy of coping behaviours over time has remained elusive (Brough, O'Driscoll & Kalliath 2005). Three coping styles that have been frequently identified are: problem-focused, attempting to remedy a threatening or harmful situation; emotion-focused, ventilating one's emotional responses to stressors; and avoidance-focused, removing oneself from exposure to stressors (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub 1989; Folkman & Lazarus 1980, 1988). Some studies suggest problem-focused coping is more effective in perceived controllable situations, whereas emotion-focused coping and avoidance-focused coping may be better in uncontrollable situations (Bowman & Stern 1995; Endler 1997; Knight 1990; Schell, Paine-Mantha, Markham & Morrison 1992). A more recent theory, cybernetic theory, views coping as a way to reduce the discrepancy between an individual's perceived current state and their desired state (Edwards 1992). Skinner, Edge, Altman & Sherwood (2003) attempted to identify a structure of coping by analysing 400 ways of coping from the coping literature and proposed 13 potential families of coping behaviours for a range of stressful situations, including problem solving and avoidance strategies. This study uses Skinner's categories as a filter of analysis for qualitative responses on ways of coping with toxic or destructive leader behaviours to investigate whether this framework is useful to increase our understanding. Such strategies may include problem solving, information seeking, helplessness, avoidance, self-reliance, seeking support, withdrawing, negotiating, accommodation, submission and defiance or opposition (Skinner et al. 2003).

This qualitative study seeks to find evidence of specific leader behaviours that are purported in the literature to negatively impact on employees' wellbeing by investigating the impact of leadership behaviours that followers report caused them distress, whether they were still working with the leader

or not, and the strategies they used to cope with such behaviours. It also investigates the impact on teams and the organisation, and whether the evidence supports the contention described in the literature that organisations avoid dealing with toxic or destructive leaders and their behaviour (Babiak & Hare 2007; Clarke 2005; Kellerman 2004; Lipman-Bluman 2005). The findings from this study may be used to develop an intervention to assist followers to become resilient to the effects of toxic leadership behaviours.

METHOD

Procedure

Survey Development

The questions were developed to gather evidence of destructive leadership behaviours and reported follower responses to toxic leadership behaviours outlined in the literature (Babiak & Hare 2007; Clarke 2005; Kellerman 2004; Lipman-Blumen 2005; Padilla, Hogan & Kaiser 2007). The survey investigated five areas of interest: specific behaviours toxic leaders demonstrate, “What did the manager do? What specific behaviours did they demonstrate?”; the impact of that behaviour on the respondent follower, “What impact did the incident/s have on you personally?”; the impact of that behaviour on teams/organisation “Overall, what was the result of their behaviour (for individuals, team/s and the organisation)?”; the coping strategies followers employ to cope with toxic leadership behaviours, “Looking back, what strategies did you use to deal with the poor behaviours? How have you coped, both at the time of the incident/s and since?” Respondents were also asked about the consequences to the leader of their behaviour, “What were the consequences for the leader/manager themselves?”. With the exception of demographics, the majority of the items were qualitative, with free text boxes for responses.

Survey Administration

The survey was advertised, via newsletter or email with a link provided, for participants to complete the survey online using a survey tool called LIME survey. Participants who had worked or were working for a toxic leader were invited to participate in a Consequences of Leadership survey through advertising via professional bodies, i.e. Australian Psychological Society newsletter, Griffith University newsletter, or public presentations and conferences, i.e. Australian Human Resources

Institute (AHRI) events, AHRI HR Practices Day 2010, College of Organisational Psychologists, Leadership Network, ICAP conference, client presentations.

Data Analysis

The exploratory nature of this research, combined with the objective of developing a targeted organisational intervention ruled out formal qualitative analysis approaches (Creswell 2007) (e.g. narrative, ethnography, grounded theory). The empirical perspective that matched the approach used here is the case study. However, whereas the case study methodology typically focuses on a limited number of cases in great detail, the approach of this study was to develop a broad understanding of destructive leadership and its impact across many cases. A method was needed to condense this body of data into a taxonomy of leader/follower behaviours and outcomes. Therefore, a quantitative analysis procedure was employed in this study.

Although some scholars object to the use of qualitative and quantitative methods in combination, mixed methods research is becoming increasingly popular (Creswell 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003). Indeed, where the research does not wish to develop new theory, but rather to simply describe phenomena of interest, content analysis may be appropriate (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). A variant of this methodology — directed content analysis — is particularly appropriate where existing theory of research is drawn on to inform 1) the coding schedule, 2) the relationships between variables and/or 3) the nature of relevant variables (Mayring 2000). Directed content analysis has been described as more structured than conventional approaches, given the reliance on extant theory and literature to guide the development of interview/survey questions, definitions of key constructs and coding schedules (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein 1999). Finally, researchers may analyse qualitative data under this approach by counting the frequency of codes; the proportion of coded instances in relation to the total sample indicates the relative importance of each category/theme (Curtis et al. 2001). Thus, directed content analysis seemed particularly suited to this study.

Given the alignment between the objectives of this study and the directed content analysis approach, this method was used to guide the analytic strategy. First, data were prepared for analysis by identifying and removing incomplete or poor quality responses. Only one case was removed during this process. Next, the data were coded using a first cycle method — initial coding (Saldana 2009).

Thereafter, a second pass on the data was conducted using a higher-order coding schedule developed from theory and the researcher's professional experience. Codes were reallocated to each category and the frequency of unique instances calculated. Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), NVIVO 8, was used to explore the data.

First cycle coding reduced the data to an initial set of codes. 'Codes' are defined as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldana 2009:3). These codes were then used to aggregate up to higher order categories and abstract themes. Initially, 402 unique codes were generated from these data using the initial coding methods (Saldana 2009), which considered phrases as the smallest unit of analysis.

Initial coding is an unrestricted first-cycle method that groups qualitative data into basic units, which facilitates comparison by the researcher (Charmaz 2006). Initial coding is a guiding framework for exploratory data analysis. Consequently, the initial coding method encourages the researcher to maintain an open perspective on all possible interpretations and directions inherent within the data (Saldana 2009). This first-cycle method was selected to ensure that the data, rather than the preconceptions of the researcher, guided the analysis.

In this study, first-cycle initial codes were developed in an emergent fashion — the data exclusively informed the creation of groupings. Following the initial pass, codes were refined by eliminating redundant and out-of-scope (with reference to the research questions) instances. Subsequently, a total of 255 unique codes were retained for the second cycle analysis.

Following the reduction of the data using first cycle coding methods, qualitative researchers may conduct a second aggregating process that increases the level of abstraction (Saldana 2009). According to the directed content analysis approach, existing theory and research may be drawn on to develop an analytical coding schedule (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein 1999). Further, the prevalence of particular codes may be used to interpret the strength of relationships or importance of particular variables within the boundaries of the target phenomenon.

Second-cycle coding was conducted in one pass over the data. The coding schedule was developed using existing leadership literature and the researcher's professional experience. Further,

data were coded by an independent researcher to maximise objectivity (and hence, the validity and reliability of the results). Additional categories were added as needed to ensure that the coding schedule was exhaustive in its coverage of the data. Unique instances of each category were calculated using the CAQDAS.

Participants

Seventy-six participants completed the full survey, 54 female and 22 male. Twelve were between the ages of 18-29 years of age, 23 between 30-39 years of age, 23 between 40-49 years of age and 17 were 50 and over. Predominantly the sample came from Australia, with two respondents from New Zealand and one from South Africa. Eighteen had undergraduate qualifications and 44 post graduate qualifications.

Twenty-four were from private sector, 42 from public sector and 10 from not for profit. The main industries represented were education, healthcare, financial services/accounting and professional services. Other respondents worked in emergency services, industrial/manufacturing, information technology, infrastructure/construction, military, resources and energy and sales and marketing. Forty-two respondents no longer worked for the organisation where the reported incidents happened.

RESULTS

As a result of the analysis five super-ordinate categories or themes described the response data:

1. Leader behaviour
2. Follower outcomes
3. Follower coping strategies
4. Team outcomes
5. Organisational outcomes

Leader Behaviour

Table 1 outlines the key themes reported for toxic leader behaviours, supported by example statements from respondents. Leader behaviors included examples of potentially destructive behaviours, such as narcissistic, Machiavellian or manipulative, intimidating, incompetent, unethical and micro-managing behaviours. Common behaviours included micromanaging “treated workplace

interactions as a fault-finding exercise” (20); bullying “a dictating and bullying style of management” (19); playing favourites “she had her favourites” “pitted subordinates against each other” (17); intimidating “regularly became abusive” (16); deceiving “lying” (16); unsupportive “if there were problems... he would... take no action” (13); authoritative dictatorship “my way or the highway” (11); taking credit for others’ work “presented my presentations to the board, replaced my name with his” (10); and making unreasonable demands “had to know what I was doing every minute of the day” (10). While the majority of respondents reported experiencing between one and four toxic leadership behaviours from their manager, 13 reported five or more toxic behaviours that were consistent with the criteria outlined for ‘organisational’ or ‘corporate psychopath’ (Babiak & Hare 2007; Clarke 2005).

Follower Outcomes

A range of examples of distressing consequences for respondents were reported, including physical health issues “From an average size 12 I dropped to a size 8”; emotional distress “I was very angry and disappointed”; and psychological harm “the incident has led to me suffering a major depression...”. A number of respondents reported reduced job satisfaction and feeling they had reduced career options. Five respondents felt exploited, with two of them reporting feelings of shame at putting up with the behaviour. Examples from respondents are outlined in Table 2. The most common follower outcomes were leaving the organisation (33), absenteeism (16), anxiety (23), reduced confidence (22), anger (21), mistrust (18), and feeling stressed (17). While the literature conceptualizes destructive leadership as regularly exhibiting a number of harmful behaviours, significant harm was reported even with just one toxic behaviour.

Follower Coping Strategies

Respondents reported eight themes in their coping strategies: confronting the leader or managing up to assist the leader to change their ways, reporting the bad behaviour, avoiding the leader or the situation, modifying diet and exercise, reframing their thinking about the situation, seeking social support, seeking professional support or using self protective strategies, such as keeping a journal of events as they happened. Table 3 matches these responses to the coping strategy families proposed by Skinner et al. (2003) and confirms a good fit with the proposed coping categorisation. The most

common coping strategies reported included seeking social support “Discussed the incident with family, friends and trusted colleagues.” (49); constructive thinking (cognitive restructuring) “I tried... to reflect on the fact that it wasn’t personal – it wasn’t about me.” (31); reporting the behaviours “I raised the issues as a grievance through a formal process.” (25); focusing on work “My response was to work harder.” (22); confronting the leader “Tried to name poor behaviours if I actually witnessed them.” (22); seeking counselling “Get counselling to try to survive.” (17); and bypassing the leader “I tried to avoid and work around him as much as possible.” (13). Some respondents reported trying problem solving approaches ‘at first’ (refer Table 3), but when these failed to be effective resorted to emotion-based or avoidance-based strategies.

Team Outcomes

Team conflict and team dysfunction were reported, attributed in part to the confrontational environment, demonstrations of favoritism and/or through social isolation by the leader of selected team members. Example responses included: “Suspicion and mistrust was rife. There were numerous examples of staff being accused of inappropriate behaviour, unfairly in most cases I believe. The conflict resolution process was ineffective ... There was a lot of buck passing, open hostility towards other team members...”. “There were conflicts between the different teams, which were supposedly an integrated service.”

Organisational Outcomes

Organisational outcomes reported included a loss of respect for upper management (generally due to inaction in dealing with the leader being described), a reluctance to approach leaders, low morale, productivity and quality and reduced confidence in the organisation. Example responses included: “The impact on me personally was to lose respect for and faith in the processes of the organisation.” “Staff did not believe that the organisation would support them.” “I did not feel supported by the organisation and became increasingly mistrustful. The organisation had poor conflict resolution processes and there was no attempt to achieve a fair resolution to issues.”

Consequences to Leaders

Just under half the sample, 34 out of 76, reported no consequences to the leader for their behaviour “Unfortunately, nothing.” “There were no tangible consequences.”, with seven reported as

being rewarded, "He remains successful in his career." "They have since gone on to a higher paying role." Twenty-one respondents reported distress at the lack of action taken by their organisation.

DISCUSSION

This qualitative study examined the coping strategies used by followers when subjected to toxic leadership behaviours. In addition to impacting their career, examples of high levels of physical, psychological and emotional distress were reported by respondents subjected to destructive leadership behaviours, and are outlined in Table 2. This study confirms the consequences of toxic or destructive leadership outlined in the literature as directly reported by victims of such behaviours (Lipman-Bluman 2005; Mackie 2008; Richards & Freeman 2002). Team and organisational costs such as lower engagement and productivity (Sutton 2007) were also confirmed.

An array of destructive leader behaviours were described, and are outlined in Table 1, including arrogance, intimidation, micro-managing, manipulation, incompetence and unethical practices and are consistent with behavioural inventories of abusive, toxic and destructive leadership (Babiak & Hare 2007; Clarke 2005; Einsarsen, Aasland & Skogstad 2007; Kellerman 2004; Padilla, Hogan & Kaiser 2007). For approximately half the leaders there were no consequences reported for their actions and frustration was expressed that the organisation failed to support the respondent in dealing with the toxic behaviours.

Respondents chose a range of coping strategies in an attempt to protect themselves and their team from their leader's behaviour. Reported coping strategies fit within the family of coping strategies reported by Skinner et al. (2003) and are outlined in Table 3 under key themes. Strategies that were reported to work well included problem solving by confronting the leader, information seeking by asking others for advice who had experience of this situation, and seeking social or professional support. Strategies that were reported as less effective were reporting the incidents to senior management, avoidance, withdrawing, submitting to the leader by trying harder to please them or trying to negotiate with the leader. Additional coping strategies mentioned were moderating diet and increasing exercise in an attempt to maintain resilience and wellbeing. It is interesting to note that for respondents who chose problem solving-focused strategies initially, such as managing up or calling the leader's behaviours, as soon as they perceived they could not influence or control the

situation or felt they were not being supported by the organisation, many chose avoidance-focused strategies, such as by passing the leader or leaving the organisation. This supported the suggestion in the coping literature that when a person feels they are in an uncontrollable situation they are likely to revert to avoidance-focused coping strategies (Bowman & Stern 1995; Endler 1997; Knight 1990; Schell, Paine-Mantha, Markham & Morrison 1992).

Theoretical Implications

The voice of victims of toxic leadership is often missed in organisational research into leadership and followership. As far as we are aware, this qualitative study provides a unique contribution to the literature in understanding the impact of leaders misusing their power as reported by the followers themselves. It provides a window or lens with which to hear and understand the extent of physical, emotional and psychological harm caused by toxic leadership. While the literature implies that the most harm is done by destructive leaders who exhibit the full range of toxic behaviours (Babiak & Hare 2007; Clarke 2005; Padilla et al 2007), this study highlights that harm can be caused by leaders exhibiting just one or two toxic behaviours, such as a combination of manipulation and intimidation.

When categorizing the qualitative comments on how followers coped with toxic leadership behaviours, the family of coping strategies proposed by Skinner et al. (2003) was a useful organizing framework to use and can be generalized beyond previous applications to categorizing coping strategies of followers in work environments with toxic leadership.

Practical Implications

This study is a call to executives to take prompt action to deal with toxic behaviours as soon as they are discovered in their organisation. At least a third of respondents reported being as distressed by the lack of support of their organisations as they were by the behaviour they were subjected to. This study highlights the importance of using effective selection methods when recruiting or promoting managers, such as using tools that screen for leadership derailers and toxic leadership styles that predict the behaviours reported in this study, to assist in protecting followers from being subjected to harm (Hogan & Kaiser 2005; Trickey & Hyde 2009).

The findings of this study also highlight that followers are as likely to try ineffective as effective strategies to cope with toxic leadership. For many, once their coping strategy failed they took leave or left the organisation. An intervention, developed on the basis of this research, that upskilled followers in effective coping strategies, based on positive psychology principles, maintaining health and wellbeing and seeking social and professional support, is likely to give followers the knowledge and skill they need to prevent them from coming to harm when confronting and responding to stressors as a result of toxic leadership.

Limitations

There are some limitations identified for this study. Due to the survey-based methodology, the researchers were unable to probe/explore unclear or ambiguous survey statements. Differing interpretations of the survey questions may have decreased the reliability of the instrument (i.e. increased error in measurement). There is also potential for a biased sample given the use of the convenience method, recruiting only those employees with particularly negative experiences with their manager/s.

Future Research

Measuring frequency of respondent statements is only indicative of importance and/or differences between groups of people. While respondents gave some indication in their responses as to which strategies worked and which didn't, quantitative research should be conducted asking respondents to rate the effectiveness of the coping strategies identified. Future research could design an intervention and measure its effectiveness in increasing follower resilience to toxic leadership behaviours, using the data gathered on coping strategies that were reported as effective. However, given that there are likely to be instances where the organisation has not acted in time to prevent harm, such a preventative intervention would be less successful. Therefore, exploration of an intervention based on restorative justice principles (Davey 2007; Thorsborne 1999) may be useful in validating the employees' experience and addressing the harm caused them.

Conclusion

This study furthers our understanding of the considerable physical, emotional and/or psychological harm done to followers by toxic leaders, which can be compounded by the

unwillingness of organisations to address their behaviours. The responsibility of executives is clear. It is imperative they regularly review leaders' behaviours as part of their performance management and act promptly to address toxic leadership behaviours when they are identified in their organisation, before they cause harm (Trickey & Hyde 2009). It demonstrates the strategies and behaviours identified in the coping literature are useful when studying how followers cope with destructive leaders' behaviours in order to assist us to understand how we can help followers to cope better with such behaviours, mitigating potential harm and increasing wellbeing and resilience of employees, which the literature suggests leads to increased productivity and less costs to the organisation (Richards & Freeman 2002; Sutton 2007).

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TABLES

TABLE 1: KEY THEMES – LEADER BEHAVIOURS

Behaviour	Example respondent statement
Intimidating	<p>“Constant use of fear based directives.”</p> <p>“A dictating and bullying style of management.”</p> <p>“They would reply with a cutting and nasty manner, resorting to personal insults.”</p> <p>“Criticising employees to others privately & publicly.”</p> <p>“Would ‘target’ people who for some reason had fallen out of favour.”</p> <p>“If an employee spoke up against the manager, he would “target” them and systematically try to get rid of them.”</p>
Emotionally volatile	<p>“Yelling, swearing and belittling managers in senior managers’ meetings.”</p> <p>“The person regularly became abusive towards me and my staff. He yelled and swore, including the F word.”</p> <p>“...abuse, tantrums and threatening behaviour..”</p>
Manipulating/ Machiavellian	<p>“Only over time realised that he actually had an amazing ability to charm, cultivate and manipulate everyone.”</p> <p>“Not taking advice, then blaming others.”</p> <p>“She has her favourites.”</p> <p>“Kept important information away from me.”</p> <p>“At first, the manager appeared quite charming and appeared interested in knowing all employees at a ‘personal’ level. It soon became obvious, however, that this simply a way to gather information that could later be used against the employee.”</p> <p>“The manager ‘pitted’ his subordinates against each other.”</p> <p>“When the manager identified a weakness in an employee, he would use this against the employee.”</p>
Micromanaging	<p>“He cheerfully got out his red pen and scribbled all over my documents. He seemed to believe it was his responsibility to do it to EVERY document, regardless of how good it was.”</p> <p>“Treated workplace interactions as a fault-finding exercise. It made me feel pretty awful to feel under constant unfriendly scrutiny.”</p> <p>“Had to know what I was doing every minute of every day.”</p> <p>“He took all of my decision making authority away.”</p> <p>“He would talk about me behind my back, go directly to my staff and request work from them, and not include me. He would further assign my staff to other duties without including me. I had a great working relationship with my staff and they would come and tell me as soon as it happened.”</p>
Ego-centred/ Narcissitic	<p>“Arrogance - my way or the highway.”</p> <p>“He has to win at all costs and it is pointless arguing with him.”</p> <p>“Lapses into numerous, time consuming, self praising anecdotes.”</p>
Laissez faire/ Incompetent	<p>“If there were problems and he was approached concerning them, he would listen, not engage in any discussion, take no notes, and take no action.”</p>

Unethical	<p>“This manager ‘talked the talk’ but was unable to ‘walk the walk’ in relation to service delivery.”</p> <p>“Lying.”</p> <p>“No deliverables were completed yet the manager wasn’t held to account yet was happy to take credit for things they had no involvement with/work done in their ongoing sick absences.”</p> <p>“Presented my presentations to the Board, replaced my name with his and gave me no acknowledgement.” Presented my presentations to the Board, replaced my name with his and gave me no acknowledgement.”</p> <p>“He led a stacked board who seemingly rubber-stamped his activities, some of which boarded on the fraudulent, or at the outside, represented a misuse of the (public) funds entrusted to the organisation.”</p> <p>“The manager had inappropriate "personal" relationships with several female staff members below his level.”</p> <p>“The manager made inappropriate comments to employees about their personal lives.”</p>
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TABLE 2: KEY THEMES – IMPACT OF DESTRUCTIVE LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOURS ON FOLLOWERS

Key Theme	Examples	Example respondent statements
Physical	Hair loss, viruses, insomnia, rashes, weight loss/gain, headaches	<p>“I suffered from 6 colds and took around 15 days off work, as my immune system had been affected by stress. My wisdom tooth became infected, and due to the reduction in my immune system, the infection took over and required serious dental work. I also was grinding my teeth harshly as I slept, requiring the use of a plate. My bowel movements were also not consistent at this time. I underwent blood tests to determine if there was a more serious cause, but was informed that I must reduce stress.”</p> <p>“I lost weight from an average size 10-12 I dropped to a size 8.”</p> <p>“I was not sleeping. I was displaying stress signs by loss of hair and itches etc.”</p> <p>“I have been physically sick on a Sunday night thinking about work and going to work on a Monday.”</p> <p>“Overall I pretty much bottled it up and as a result I have suffered severe health problems for the last 10 months.”</p>

Psychological	Anxious, depressed, burnt out, cynical, highly stressed, helpless, demotivated, socially isolated, feelings of self doubt, manipulated, undervalued	<p>“Anxiety, loss of professional and personal esteem, depression.”</p> <p>“I lost confidence in myself.”</p> <p>“I became very confused and isolated and started to doubt what I knew to be true.”</p> <p>“The incident has led to me suffering a major depression and developing an anxiety disorder, where every day I have to adjust my lifestyle to avoid anxiety attacks. I am also on numerous medications and have weekly visits to numerous specialists. I am unable to work or function ‘normally’. I am withdrawn, sensitive, lack confidence and motivation, agoraphobic, and suffer many side effects of the medication.”</p> <p>“I did not cope at all and became very depressed and unwell. I am still suffering with my illness. I needed help to complete this survey.”</p> <p>“I did move interstate and occasionally see a female figure that resembled my boss and I still get a nasty adrenaline rush - I guess it is a sort of PTSD as it came in the midst of a stellar decade of career growth and success.”</p> <p>“Due to this series of events I suffered a nervous breakdown.”</p>
Emotional	Angry, disappointed, disgusted, distressed, fearful, frustrated, mistrustful, resentful, humiliated	<p>“I was very angry at the time and disappointed.”</p> <p>“To this day I still feel angered for the unfair treatment that I received.”</p> <p>“I was disgusted.”</p> <p>“Hated him and what he was doing.”</p> <p>“I rarely left supervision sessions without crying.”</p>
Career	Reduced job satisfaction and reduced career options	<p>“I was extremely unhappy and dissatisfied in the workplace.” “I felt ... trapped as getting another job meant going for interviews and taking time off work.”</p>
Career	Turnover – left the organisation	<p>“In the end I took sick leave, looked for another opportunity and while she was on leave I went back to work, did my hand over and left.”</p> <p>“Looking for alternative employment.”</p>

TABLE 3: KEY THEMES – FOLLOWER COPING STRATEGIES BY FAMILY OF COPING

Family of Coping/ Key Theme	Example/s	Example respondent statements
Problem Solving	Managing up	<p>“At first I attempted to clarify expectations and roles, manage up.”</p> <p>“At first I tried to guide and lead the manager to more effective styles of leadership.”</p> <p>“I initially tried to coach my manager when certain behaviours started to impact on the team.”</p> <p>“Upward managing to attempt to get her to be more responsible.”</p>
Problem Solving	Undertaking health and wellbeing activities	<p>“I undertook activities such as yoga, breathing exercises, and increased my walking activities.”</p> <p>“I exercised by running every day, and I think this helped with the stress.”</p> <p>“I forced myself to continue to exercise, even when I didn't feel like it.”</p> <p>“NLP techniques on myself; yoga and meditation.”</p> <p>“I also exercise every day, and try to eat healthy, because it keeps me feeling relaxed and fit during the day.”</p>
Problem Solving	Instrumental Action: Formal complaint, informal complaint, whistle blowing	<p>“We attempted whistle blowing but it went nowhere through official channels. The only option was to leave.”</p> <p>“I chose to document each incident and make sure it was witnessed.”</p> <p>“I made numerous attempts to discuss issues as they arose, and to ensure the manager was included in processes. I finally attempted a formal mediation process that failed completely, partly due to a lack of support from senior management in following through.”</p> <p>“I openly challenged and raised the issues as a grievance through a formal process and resigned.”</p> <p>“My response was make a record of interview privately immediately and to seek advice from my union, who advised me to say nothing. The incident created feelings of mistrust and of being unsupported.”</p> <p>“I attempted to raise my concerns but these were continually ignored.”</p>

Problem Solving	Changed own behaviour	“I have tried to change my behaviours that upset her to improve my interaction with her.”
Self reliance	Emotional regulation	“I stayed calm and tried to keep the conversation focused on facts, diffuse his anger or finish the conversation quickly - although that was not always easy.” “I had to work hard to maintain a sense of inner calm and manage my state of mind.”
Opposition	Confronting or challenging leader	“I used problem solving behaviours. I confronted the bullies.” “I stood my ground and defended myself when confronted.” “My approach was to have straight talks with the manager.” “Tried to name poor behaviours if I actually witnessed them.” “At the time I would not compromise my integrity and I would still advocate for myself.” “I have always given her my point of view and on numerous occasions I have challenged her line of thinking.”
Accommodation	Cognitive Restructuring	“I have focused on what I can get out of a bad employment situation.” “I tried to keep calm and rational and reflect on the fact that it wasn't personal - it wasn't about me.”
Accommodation	Distraction	“I have distracted myself from the issues.”
Information Seeking	Seeking advice	“I would discuss things with people who were well qualified to give advice.” “I contacted the HR group manager for advice.”
Negotiation	Negotiating and bargaining	“...negotiated a redundancy.” “I tried to talk things through.” “I just worked harder, longer and tried to please.”
Seeking Support	Social Support: Family or friends	“Spent a lot of time discussing the situation with my husband and other friends.” “Discussed the incident with family, friends and trusted colleagues.”

Seeking Support	Social Support: Mentor or colleague	<p>“I found one other colleague, with whom I could debrief and that made things more bearable.”</p> <p>“I had a small network of people I had worked with previously with whom I was able to vent.”</p> <p>“Seeking support by other team members.”</p>
Seeking Support	Professional Support: Counselling, GP, Employee Assistance Program, Psychologist	<p>“Get counselling to try to survive.”</p> <p>“Saw my GP to have the incident and my reaction documented in case there are further incidents which may make me consider stress leave.”</p> <p>“I used legal support and the EAP service.”</p> <p>“I sought treatment from an organisational psychologist who was also very helpful. I also had a supportive GP.”</p> <p>“I have attended stress workshops, which teach you how to cope with all the different stresses in your life.”</p> <p>“I sought help from a psychologist and learned some strategies to cope.”</p>
Delegation	Shame	<p>“I actually feel sick when I look back on it. It was so shameful that a group of intelligent, thoughtful articulate staff were completely unable to meet the challenge of addressing this director’s behaviour.”</p> <p>“...still feel degraded and annoyed at myself for allowing that behaviour to be conducted towards me.”</p>
Avoidance/Escape	Increased absenteeism	<p>“Ultimately it led to my taking 3 months stress leave.”</p> <p>“This continuing attitude makes me feel like not coming to work.”</p> <p>“I took some sick leave when it got too much.”</p> <p>“Sick leave and recreation leave were my biggest defence against my team leader, because I wouldn’t have to see him if I wasn’t at work.”</p>
Avoidance/Escape	Bypassing leader	<p>“The section in which I worked tended to work around the person, forming our own informal work groups to solve problems and make the work happen.”</p> <p>“I chose to not engage with the manager.”</p> <p>“I tried to avoid and work around him as much as possible.”</p> <p>“I just managed to get through each day with little or no personal contact with him.”</p>

Avoidance/Escape	Focusing on work	<p>“My response was to work harder at trying to quickly become competent.”</p> <p>“I came in put my head down and worked.”</p> <p>“I worked harder and longer. I tried to improve how I worked.”</p>
Avoidance/Escape	Ignoring the situation	<p>“Just tried to ignore it.”</p> <p>“Low profile - don't question or challenge. Compliance.”</p> <p>“I would ignore and not respond to the behaviour so I believe my strategies were submissive, rather than assertive.”</p>
Submitting	Rumination	<p>“I still feel disgust and outraged that basic human rights, like the right to feel safe, to feel protected from bullying and harassment, is not even represented in some of the institutions that purport to study it.”</p> <p>“To this day I still feel angered for the unfair treatment that I received.”</p> <p>“Stress, anger, and a loss of sense of a reality you could trust according to the norms of human behaviour.”</p> <p>“...because I was angry, and I had lost a sense of proportion or perspective because of how odd and surreal everything was.”</p>
Helplessness	Feelings of helplessness	<p>“...a sense of helplessness around the options.”</p> <p>“... learned helplessness..”</p> <p>“I did not cope at all and became very depressed and unwell. I am still suffering with my illness. I needed help to complete this survey.”</p> <p>“Do I still doubt and feel insecure about my ability to do my work - totally - there is nothing I do not question or analyse to death.”</p>
Isolation/Social withdrawal	Feelings of isolation	<p>“Anyone who he believed was going to make him look bad was isolated.”</p> <p>“I became very confused, isolated and angry and started to doubt what I knew to be true - which takes you down the road to insanity.”</p> <p>“This has generally led to me being isolated by her and left out of things within the workplace - whether on a social level or a work opportunity basis.”</p>
