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# **ZACHARY SHEAFFER**

Dept. of Economics & Business Administration, Ariel University, Israel

# HOW DO SELF-EFFICACY, NARCISSISM AND AUTONOMY MEDIATE THE LINK BETWEEN DESTRUCTIVE LEADERSHIP AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIOUR

## **Abstract:**

Previous research has pointed to the adverse effect of destructive leadership (DL) on counterproductive work behaviour (CWB), yet the mechanism by which DL engenders or aggravates CBW is not fully understood. Drawing on theories of despotic leadership, CBW and OB in general, we proposed and tested a model in which self-efficacy, autonomy and narcissism mediate the effect of DL leadership on CBW. Results of survey data predicated on 845 respondents employed in various Israeli industries indicate that autonomy and self-efficacy attenuate the adverse effect of DL on CWB, whilst narcissism aggravates self-efficacy's moderating impact on CWB. This study sheds further light on the ways in which autonomy, self-efficacy and narcissism shape adversative workplace settings.

# **Keywords:**

Counter productive work behaviour Destructive leadership

#### Introduction

Counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) is any intended behaviour on the part of organisational members perceived as contrary to legitimate organisational interests (Gruys & Sackett, 2003). Workplaces contain behaviours that range from laudable to ethically contemptible. Some employees pursue organisational and their own legitimate goals while others egotistically follow personal agendas (Ones, 2002). The latter include such inappropriate behaviours as filching supplies, padding expense accounts, online private messaging and gambling (Ng. Lam & Feldman, 2016). The damage is not solely financial, but importantly moral and ethical (Klotz & Bolino, 2013). Employee engagement in CWB has attracted scholarly interest for years. Investigators have classified several causes for unseemly actions, including stressful workplace environment (Fida et al., 2015), moral ambiguity in certain organisational circumstances (Spector & Fox, 2010), destructive leadership (hereafter DL) (Cohen, 2016), and personal traits (Mount, Ilies & Johnson, 2006). Adverse organisational effects on the evolution or intensification of CWB have formed the core of numerous studies since the late 1990s (cf. Craig & Gustafson, 1998). Both DL and CWB are organisationally ruinous with far reaching adverse effects. Thus, investigators necessarily focus on myriad antecedents that constitute, sustain or aggravate the interaction between the two constructs, thereby converging on potentially harmful offshoots typifying this multifaceted relationship. We seek to contribute to the comprehension of the underlying roots of CWB by focusing on how DL, autonomy, self-efficacy (hereafter SE) and narcissism predict and mediate the association between DL and CWB.

One way to attenuate CWB is to dismiss destructive leaders. However, exploring employee personality settings in which CWB occurs may be equally effective in unearthing antecedents to CWB. These include the types of employees who can handle or endure caprices of destructive leaders and mitigation of damage attributed to the DL's direct-adverse effect on the evolution of CWB in workplace settings. Previous research has employed DL, autonomy, SE and narcissism as predictors or mediators in various models (cf. Grijalva & Newman, 2015). To the best of our knowledge, however, no previous study has yet to posit and integrate DL behaviour as a dependent variable and a job characteristic (autonomy), a factor affecting the goal-performance association (SE) and a personality disorder (narcissism) as antecedents of CWB or as constructs mediating the link between DL and CWB. The linkage between DL and CWB has been theorised and extensively studied (Skogstad et al., 2014), not least due to leadership toxicity, which is known to elicit employees to implicitly or explicitly voice dissatisfaction owing to continuous exposure to manipulation, bullying, harassment or exploitation (Schynes & Schilling, 2013). As such, the purpose of this study is to first unpack the underpinning assumptions of the mediating role of these aforementioned constructs. We thus aim at showing how organisations can decrease CWB. First, knowing that DL aggravates CWB, we employ autonomy as a regulating factor. Second, narcissism is an embedded personal disorder and, hence, endogenous. Therefore, much like SE, it may be affected by the degree of autonomy granted to employees (Jonason, Wee & Li,

2015). We contend that autonomy constitutes a key to attenuating the detrimental impact of DL on CWB in that it enhances SE that conceivably reduces CWB. We also conjecture that excessive narcissism aggravates CWB; hence, we postulate that when it mediates this association, it diminishes SE's effect on CWB. Narcissists are typified by inflated self-views and overconfidence. Hence, we expect a positive relationship between narcissism and SE (Hirschi & Jaensch, 2015), because, typically, narcissism aggravates CWB (Grijalva & Newman, 2015). It is thus reasonable to infer that narcissism hinders the relationship between SE and CWB.

This article has two primary goals. First, to examine the association between DL and CWB. Second, to examine the role of autonomy, SE and narcissism as mediators of the DL – CWB association. Simply stated, we aim at clarifying and extending understanding of the unique and interactive effects of autonomy, SE and narcissism as constructs mediating the relationship between DL and CWB.

## **Theory and Hypotheses**

## **CWB**

CWB is any volitional activity by employees liable to harm or infringe upon legitimate organisational and stakeholder interests (Dalal, 2005). This applies to wide-ranging specific acts such as interpersonal violence, theft, absenteeism and sabotage, somewhat overlapping with associated constructs such as incivility, workplace retaliation and aggression (Spector et al., 2006). As opposed to anti-social behaviour (cf. Portnoy & Farrington, 2015), CWB does not presume that harm doing is premeditated (Spector & Fox, 2005). The common defining component amongst CWBs is observable damage rather than such non-observable antecedents as intention to inflict damage, deviance or social norms. Hence, CWB's definition avoids confining apriori theoretical approaches. CWB consists of a broad domain of employee behaviours and is a well-established topic in organisational research (Fox & Spector, 2004). CWB extends across a spectrum of severity, ranging from minor to extreme transgressions. Particular CWB subsets are related to the motivations of the behaviours, including anger (Krischer, Penney & Hunter, 2010), workplace aggression (Lee & Brotheridge, 2013), narcissism (Grijalva & Newman, 2015) and retaliatory behaviours like revenge and retribution (Samnani, Salamon & Singh, 2014). Another subclass is workplace deviance (Meier & Spector, 2013) that breaches organisational norms (Guay et al., 2015). Within these domains, CWB denotes the doing of harm, owing to purposeful action or thoughtless indifference to the organisation or its members (Salgado, 2002).

### DL

The inclusiveness of the term Destructive Leadership is contentious owing to the complexity of leadership itself (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Whilst destructive leader behaviour incorporates a wider diversity of harmful conducts unnecessarily related to

leadership tasks (e.g. stealing, alcoholism), DL is constrained to follower-targeted influence (Schyns & Schilling, 2013: 140). DL features concepts including abusive supervisors (Rafferty & Restubog, 2011), bullying (Einarsen, Skogstad & Glasø, 2013), derailed leadership (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1988), psychopathy (Boddy, 2014), tyrannical or despotic leadership (Hauge et al., 2007; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008) and toxic leaders (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). The extant literature on leadership has yet to adopt a common conceptual framework or definition of DL. Abusive supervision is characterised as subordinate perceptions regarding supervisor engagement in hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours (Tepper, 2007). Ashforth (1997) portrayed petty tyranny as the repressive, erratic and spiteful employment of power and authority. Toxic leaders (Lipman-Blumen, 2005: 18) act without integrity by misleading and engaging in other disreputable behaviours. Leadership toxicity refers to corruption, duplicity, sabotage, manipulation and other unethical, illegal and criminal acts (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Kellerman (2004) conjectured that leaders may involve themselves in corruption by stealing, lying and cheating and by advancing self-interest ahead of the organisation's legitimate interest (Krasikova, Green & LeBreton, 2013). This behaviour undercuts organisational goals, tasks, resources and effectiveness with detrimental, long-term ramifications (Padilla, Hogan & Kaiser, 2007).

## **DL and CWB**

The relationship between DL and CWB is well documented in past research (*cf.* Einarsen, Aasland & Skogstad, 2016). A recent meta-analytical study identifies key DL-related outcomes that, in turn, generate or aggravate CWB: low satisfaction with job and leader, voluntary turnover intentions, low commitment, eroded well-being and individual performance (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Recent research on corporate scandals focuses on the detrimental effects of the Dark Triad on workplaces (*cf.* Boddy & Boddy, 2016; Nubold et al., 2017). This triad typifying DL (Spain, Harms & LeBreton, 2014) includes narcissism (excessive self-centeredness), psychopathy (absence of empathy and remorse) and Machiavellianism (a sense of deceit and manipulativeness), each liable to result in undesirable and counterproductive workplace attitudes (Boddy, 2014).

Effects of DL on employee behaviour are embedded in and explicated by the Reciprocity Norm (Burger et al., 2009), social exchange processes (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) and psychological contracts (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). Individuals subjected to DL adjust their performance behaviours, job attitudes and other criteria downwards (Tepper, 2000). Commonly, , subordinates may adjust their behaviour downwards by engaging in CWB (Wei & Sei, 2013), which involves harmful actions that employees engage in vis-à-vis their organisation or its members (Tepper, Duffy & Breaux-Soignet, 2012). Consequently, abusive supervision is found to be positively and significantly correlated with CWBs directed at both organisation and supervisor (Tepper et al., 2009). Therefore, it can be hypothesised:

Hypothesis 1: DL is positively related to CWB.

# **DL and Autonomy**

Autonomy is an individual perception of the extent of control possessed over work behaviours, incorporating choices concerning work methods and initiating actions (Spreitzer, 1995). When organisations empower employees regarding performance monitoring, employee autonomy perceptions are boosted (Stanton, 2000). The desire for personal control constitutes a strong motivator of employee behaviour (Greenberger & Strasser, 1986), much like the desire to reclaim lost freedoms (Brehm & Brehm, 1981). Autonomy is an important job design feature (Karasek & Theorell, 1990), referring to the extent to which employees can determine pace, sequence and methods to accomplish tasks (Volmer, Spurk & Niessen, 2012). Job autonomy allows selfdetermination and meaning (Ryan & Deci, 2006), and is important for creative work as it affords employees a sense of job responsibility (Mirchandani & Lederer, 2014). Since empowerment involves job enrichment, employee sense of autonomy increases. Therefore, the extent to which a job is enriched along a core dimension such as autonomy affects the interrelatedness between leader behaviour and subordinate outcomes (Schaubroeck, Walumbwa, Ganster & Kepes, 2011). This relationship is reversed when leadership turns destructive as employees actively seek meaningful work. Job meaningfulness is associated with a sense of engagement at work (Jiang, Tsui & Li, 2015). Hackman and Oldham's (1976) Job Characteristics Model defined a meaningful job as one that incorporates characteristics including autonomy. In contrast, meaningless work is related to detachment and apathy in one's job (Steger et al., 2013). Under these circumstances employees are unable to engage themselves in their work, hence motivation and attachment abate (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004). Indeed, abusive supervision diminishes subordinate beliefs that they have a meaningful job by adversely affecting employee perceptions of their job's characteristics (Rafferty & Restubg, 2011). When direct supervisors inadequately treat employees, the latter seek to reinstate a sense of autonomy and control. Furthermore, transformational leadership is related to lower levels of harassment because it provides greater autonomy and independence. We thus hypothesise:

Hypothesis 2: DL is negatively related to employee perception of job autonomy.

# **Autonomy and CWB**

In a context of diminished autonomy, employees face lower discretion over work tasks; hence, they are less capable to positively affect their work environment (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). This powerlessness induces employees to engage in CWB. Theoretical research is inconclusive regarding the effect of work autonomy on CWB. Some suggest a negative association (Bennett & Robinson, 2003), whilst others contend that job autonomy accompanies employee counterproductive exploitation of their discretion (Martin, Lopez, Roscigno & Hodson, 2013). Essentially, by damaging the organisation through CWB, employees endeavour to reclaim decision autonomy and rebalance their organisational share of power (Bennett, 1998). Lawrence and

Robinson (2007) reported a negative association between CWB and decision autonomy. They argued that centralisation elicits employee resistance, as the authority structure undercuts employee decision autonomy. Additionally, individuals perceiving low autonomy are more likely to respond to job stressors/injustice with CWB (Jensen & Raver, 2012). By engaging in deviant behaviour, employees decrease the frustration and powerlessness they encounter (Dischner, 2015). According to Fox, Spector and Miles (2001), individuals who perceive high autonomy tend to engage in conflicts associated with higher personal CWB. Autonomy may thus provide latitude to respond to conflict with personal retaliatory behaviours. That is, highly autonomous individuals are in positions enabling latitude to engage in personal CWB without having to fear retribution. This is because autonomy empowers employee latitude to respond to conflict with retaliatory behaviours (Fox & Spector, 1999). In addition, highly autonomous individuals are powerful, such that they have the latitude to engage in personal CWB without fear of vengeance. Aptly, Social Exchange Theory and the Person-Situation Framework point to the relationship between all types of organisational support, including empowerment, as moderators of the association between the Dark Triad personality traits and CWB (Palmer, Komarraju, Carter & Karau, 2017). Meaning individuals characterised by Dark Triad disorders engage in CWB less frequently when they perceive higher levels of organisational support such as leveraging autonomy. However, individuals who epitomise any of the Dark Triad syndromes, but without organisational support, are more likely to engage in CWB (Palmer, 2016).

Thus, the third hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Higher perceived work autonomy is related to lower CWB.

# Autonomy as mediator of DL and CWB

Why do autonomous employees attenuate DL's deleterious effects on workplace behaviour? DL aggravates CWB, although positive-discretionary behaviours amongst subordinates, for which autonomy is essential (le Blanc et al., 2017), is likely to mitigate the overarching harmful effect of DL on CWB. Consequently, Velez and Neves (2016) showed that job autonomy constitutes a buffer offsetting the detrimental impact of abusive supervision on workplace deviance. Specifically, higher job autonomy is likely to reduce production deviance because it attenuates psychosomatic symptoms that often aggravate CWB. Thus,

Hypothesis 3a: Autonomy mediates the relationship of DL and CWB.

## **DL and SE**

SE is the belief in one's capacity to marshal the motivation, cognitive resources and courses of action required for situational demands (Wood & Bandura, 1989: 408). Research on the causes of SE offers a robust foundation for anticipating a negative

association between socially undermining behaviour (DL) and SE. Victims of DL may be diagnosed with a form of social stress similar to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder with debilitating effects on the individual (Arnsten et al., 2015). Hence, underlings subjected to whimsical (destructive) leaders often suffer psychosomatic, psychological and social effects hindering SE (Einarsen, 1999). In this vein, DL has been associated with impaired well-being or diminished SE (Duffy, Gangster & Pagon, 2002) and self-esteem (Burton & Hoobler, 2006). Indeed, DL constitutes an unremitting assault on subordinate feelings, their self-esteem and notably their SE (Skogstad, Nielsen & Einerson, 2017). DL has detrimental effects on employees, such that they become incapable and feel unwelcome. It also engenders negative self-evaluations manifested in low self-esteem and depleted SE (Peng, Chen, Xia & Ran, 2017). Adverse determinants of SE include evaluative feedback, an antecedent to SE appraisals. Devaluative feedback undermines SE (Bandura, 1997) owing to social estrangement and diminishing self-confidence (Baron, 1988). These factors create inefficaciousness and inability of meeting workplace situational demands (Duffy, Gangster & Pagon, 2002).

Thus, we hypothesise:

Hypothesis 4: DL is negatively related to SE.

# Autonomy as a mediator of the linkage between DL and SE

Autonomy enables space for employee self-determination in that they may select alternative ways to managing tasks and experience ownership, thus more directly affecting outcomes (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012). Autonomy, therefore, inspires employee motivation to assume responsibility and to persist despite hindrances. Similarly, SE enhances willingness to take action (Cohen, 2014). SE and autonomy share some reciprocity in terms of being dependent or independent variables (Jungert et al., 2013). Chiviacowsky, Wulf and Lewthwaite (2012) suggested that satisfying a learner's need for autonomy increases perceived SE. Indeed, the effect of autonomy supportive conditions is that they communicate respect for participant competences that, in turn, foster learner confidence, and thereby SE (Hooyman, Wulf & Lewthwaite, 2014). Similarly, Jungert et al. (2013) found that changes in autonomy significantly support motivation and occupational SE. They also enhance people's judgment concerning their ability to successfully accomplish their work, overcome impediments and pursue career tracks (Abele & Spurk, 2009). Perceived job autonomy positively affects SE according to Wang and Netemeyer (2002), since individuals who perceive their job to be decidedly autonomous feel they can perform tasks singlehandedly, which, in turn, engenders the autonomy-efficacy relationship (Wang & Netemeyer, 2002). We, therefore postulate:

Hypothesis 4a: Autonomy mediates the relationship between DL and SE.

#### **SE and CWB**

The effect of SE on CWB is rarely examined as a correlational relationship. Wang and Lian (2015) explored this association, but SE's effect on CWB was measured with other elements of psychological capital (PsyCap), including hope, optimism and resilience (Luthans et al., 2010) concurrently. Hence, the higher the level of employee PsyCap, the more cohesive the internal working environment and interpersonal relationships. High PsyCap employees are more positive and optimistic in initiating and exploring new initiatives to ameliorate adverse circumstances. Therefore, they do not succumb to CWB. High PsyCap individuals are often invigorated, demonstrated in long-lasting performance, as highly efficacious individuals endeavour towards objectives they personally believe capable of attaining (Luthans et al., 2008). Efficacious employees tend to react aggressively when encountered by negative feedback that threatens their positive self-views (Baumeister, Smart & Boden, 1996). Pertinently, depletion of individual self-control affects the association between integrity and off-task behaviour, including CWB (Bazzy, Woehr & Borns, 2017). When ego is eroded individuals tend to engage in off-task behaviour. Hence, loss of self-control amplifies CWB (Bazzy & Woehr, 2017). In contrast, manifestation of integrity and avoidance of CWB typify employees endowed with a matching level of self-control of which SE is critical (Baron, Mueller & Wolfe, 2016; Marcus, te Nijenhuis, Cremers & Heijden-Lek, 2016). This clarifies why employee SE determines the propensity to engage in potentially risky and costly behaviours (Ho & Gupta, 2014). This is because SE is also associated with individual courage (Hannah, Sweeney & Lester, 2007), such that SE lessens their tendency to fear intimidating circumstances. Predicated on PsyCap Theory (Dawkins, Martin, Scott & Sanderson, 2015), the more efficacious the employees, the less likely they are to engage in CWB. Contrastingly, whenever highly efficacious employees confront DL, they will likely engage in CWB. Hence, we can postulate:

Hypothesis 5: Employees with higher SE will exhibit lower CWB.

#### **SE and Narcissism**

Narcissists have high expectations for themselves (Turnipseed & Cohen, 2015), whilst highly efficacious individuals have a high need for achievement (Phillips & Gully, 1997). As such, this encapsulates the relationship between narcissism and SE. Narcissists consistently evaluate themselves as superior to others (Byrne & Worthy, 2013) and are often highly efficacious (Hirschi & Jaensch, 2015). They thus necessarily perform best in the presence of an evaluative audience (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002). High self-confidence and SE are linked with high achievement (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002), and these three traits are, therefore, plausibly associated with narcissism. Narcissists display inflated self-views and overconfidence, and since the latter is associated with SE, the interrelatedness of narcissism, overconfidence and SE is necessarily positive (Mathieu & St-Jean, 2013). Brookes (2015) showed that overt narcissism, but not the narcissism construct as a whole, is positively associated with SE. The overt form is

described (Fossati, Borroni, Eisenberg & Maffei, 2010) as an exaggerated sense of self-importance, grandiosity and desire for attention. Indeed, overt narcissism is a more adaptive element of narcissism (Brunell et al., 2011) because it entails a stronger belief concerning goal attainment without inflated self-image, and, hence, constitutes a more adaptive component of narcissism at large.

We thus can postulate:

Hypothesis 6: Employees with higher SE are more likely to exhibit higher narcissism.

#### **Narcissism and CWB**

Narcissism is 'a preoccupation with grandiose fantasies of self-importance, a need for admiration, and a lack of empathy, which appears by early adulthood and manifests in a variety of settings' (DSM-IV; APA, 2000: 717). It thus results in exploitativeness, arrogance and entitlement (Fountoulakis, 2015). Predicated on these negative, interpersonally harmful features, the instinctive presumption is that narcissism is interrelated with such aberrant workplace behaviours as CWB (Grijalva & Newman, 2015). Drawing on the Social Exchange Perspective, O'Boyle at al. (2012) showed that reductions in the quality of job performance, illustrated by CWB, are consistently related to narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy. Relatedly, the Theory of Threatened Egotism and Aggression accounts for narcissistic tendencies, notably aggression (Baumeister, Bushman & Campbell, 2000). This theory presupposes that individuals with high self-esteem, described as hypersensitive, tend to experience increased negative emotions, resulting in destructive outpourings (Baumeister et al., 2000). Penney & Spector, (2002) showed that narcissistic individuals experience more anger preceding their propensity to engage in CWB. Thus, the Theory of Threatened Egotism and Aggression explains the positive relationship often found between narcissism and CWB (Hart, Adams & Tortoriello, 2017). The Emotion-Centred Model of Voluntary Work Behaviour offers an alternative account. Braun, Aydin, Frey and Peus (2016) found that the narcissism of leaders is positively associated with employee negative emotions, mediating the positive link between leader narcissism and supervisor-targeted CWB.

Thus, we hypothesise:

Hypothesis 7: Employees with higher levels of narcissism are more likely to engage in CWB.

#### Narcissism as a mediator of SE and CWB

Narcissism is positively associated with SE since narcissists tend to demonstrate high need for achievement, which often accompanies self-efficacious individuals (Mills & Fullagar, 2017; Philips & Gully, 1997). Nevertheless, when subordinate self-efficacy is intertwined with, or partially affected by, narcissistic tendencies, the latter exacerbates

CWB. Self-sufficiency is a component of narcissism perceived as a 'positive' trait because it is a socially adaptive facet of this disorder (Schmitt, 2017), which fares well with healthy expression of self-efficacy. This is not the case with superiority, exhibitionism, entitlement, vanity and exploitativeness (Miller et al., 2016), whose deleterious influence nullifies or suppresses the positive effect of self-sufficiency, a type of personal (or collective) autonomy. As narcissistic traits, in general, appear jointly, they necessarily obfuscate the mitigating effect of SE on CWB.

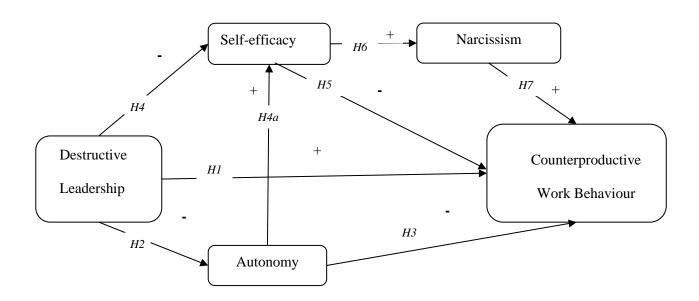
Hypothesis 7a: Narcissism mediates the relationship of SE and CWB.

## **Research Model**

Based on the above discussion, we now formulate the study's conceptual model (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Conceptual model and hypotheses

Figure 1: Theoretical model



#### Method

# Sample and Procedure

Employees representing multiple occupations were surveyed in order to improve external validity and enhance generalizability (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Using a referral sampling method (Mirela-Cristina, 2011), 845 employees representing various occupations participated (84% response rate): 4% were unskilled workers; 10% managers; 8% clerical employees; 29% professionals; 19% practical engineers, technicians, agents, and associate professionals; 8% skilled employees and 21% agents, sales and service workers. Fifteen percent were public-sector employees and the remainder were employed in the private sector. Participants were asked to fill-in a structured questionnaire. Respondent average age was 35 years (SD 12.5), with average job tenure of seven years (SD 8.64). Participants were 44% male. Twenty-seven percent of the participants had a high school diploma, 11% had a partial university credit, 51% had a bachelor's degree and the remainder an MA or higher. In addition, 66% were non-managerial employees, 11% were low-level, 18% mid-level managers and 4.5% were senior managers.

## Measures

All measures were administered in Hebrew and scales were translated using forward-backward translation (Bracken & Barona, 1991).

# Dependent Variable.

CWB. The Interpersonal and Organisational Deviance Scale was used to examine employee CWB (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = 'every day'; 5 = 'never') frequency of engaging in behaviours described in the items. Deviance behaviour at work was divided into interpersonal (7 items) and organisational (8 items) deviance. A sample item for interpersonal deviance was, "Said something hurtful to someone at work", while for organisational deviance, "Taken property from work without permission". In this study, Alpha Cronbach's for this measure was .82 for interpersonal deviance, similar to the reliability of .78; and .91 for organisational deviance, similar to the reliability of .81 (Bennet & Robinson, 2000). We treated both parts of the deviance scale (all 15 items) as a single measure gauging the extent of deviant behaviour. Reliability for the 15-item scale was .93.

## Independent variables.

DL. DL behaviour was defined by Einarsen, Aasland and Skogstad (2007) as "the systematic and repeated behaviour by a leader, supervisor or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organisation by undermining and/or sabotaging the organisation's goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-

being or job satisfaction of his/her subordinates" (p. 207). DL was measured using a 15 item scale of abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000) using a validated forward-backward translation of the scale. Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency with which their supervisors engaged in each of the 15 behaviours, using a 5 point Likert response scale ranging from 1 = "I cannot remember him/her ever using this behaviour with me" to 5 = "He/she uses this behaviour very often with me". Sample items were, "Ridicules me" and "Puts me down in front of others". The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .92 Tepper's  $\alpha$  was .90 (2000).

SE. Perceived SE refers to the degree to which individuals believe in their ability to influence events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1977), and was assessed using an eight-item scale (Chen, Gully & Eden, 2001). Respondents were asked to evaluate each item on a five-point Likert scale (1 = 'absolutely disagree'; 5 = 'absolutely agree'). Sample items were, "I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself" and "When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them". Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this measure was .91, similar to the .88-.91 values reported by Chen, Gully and Eden (2001).

*Narcissism.* Narcissistic individuals are typified by a highly positive or inflated self-concept, and use a range of intrapersonal and interpersonal strategies for maintaining positive self-views (Campbell, Rudich & Sedikides, 2002). Narcissism was measured using the abridged NPI-16 (Ames, Rose & Anderson, 2006). This version included 16 pairs of statements on a dichotomous scale of which respondents were asked to choose between A or B. Sample items were: A = "I know that I am good because everybody keeps telling me so" and B = "When people compliment me I sometimes get embarrassed". The scale's  $\alpha$  was .77 and Ames, Rose and Anderson's  $\alpha$  was .69 (2006).

Job Autonomy. Perceived job autonomy is the extent to which employees feel they can structure and control how and when they do their particular job tasks (Spector, 1986). We used a three-item scale of autonomy/self-determination (Wang & Cheng, 2010). Respondents were asked to assess each item on a five-point Likert scale (1 = 'strongly disagree'; 5 = 'strongly agree'). A sample item was, "I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job". The scale's  $\alpha$  was .89 (Spreitzer, 1995).

## **Data Analysis**

To estimate the research model, we used a SEM two-step approach, in which construct validity was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) followed by a comparison of a sequence of nested structural models (Bollen, 1989). We used several goodness-of-fit indices to assess the model's fit:  $\chi^2/df$ , CFI, TLI, NFI, IFI and RMSEA (Kline, 1998).

#### Results

# **Preliminary Analysis**

**Descriptive Statistics.** Means, standard deviations and correlations amongst research variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Means Standard deviations and Correlations

Variable	М	SD	DL	AUTO	SE	NARC	CWB
DL	1.36	.53	(.92)				
AUTO	3.59	.95	26**	(.89)			
SE	3.97	.57	11**	.22**	(.91)		
NARC	.368	.22	.03	04	.21**	(.77)	
CWB	1.50	.55	.29**	22**	22**	.15**	(.93)

*Note*. N=845. \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001; Alpha coefficients at the diagonal DL= Destructive leadership; Auto= Autonomy; SE= Self-efficacy; NARC= Narcissism; CWB= Counterproductive work behaviour

CWB was significantly related to DL, autonomy, SE and narcissism (r=.29; r=-.22; r=-.22; r=.15, p < .01, respectively). DL was related to autonomy and SE (r=-.26; r=-.11, p < .01, respectively), autonomy was related to SE (r= .22, p < .01) and SE was related to narcissism (r= .21, p < .01).

**Validity and Reliability.** To test discriminant validity, we compared the square root of the AVE (diagonal in Table 2 below) to all inter-factor correlations. All factors demonstrated adequate discriminant validity since the diagonal values were greater than the correlation (Hair et al., 2010). We also computed composite reliability (CR) for each factor. The CR ranged from .89–.93, indicating good reliability for all factors (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 2
Validity Test Results for Measurement Model

Variable	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	NARC	CWB	DL	SE	AUTO
NARC	.77	.19	.05	.02	.43				
CWB	.93	.45	.09	.06	.19	.67			
DL	.92	.44	.09	.05	.04	.31	.66		
SE	.91	.55	.06	.05	.23	-24	-14	.74	
AUTO	.89	.73	.07	.05	-07	-24	-27	.25	.85

CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; MSV= Maximum Shared Variance; ASV=Average Shared Squared Variance; DL= Destructive leadership; Auto= Autonomy; SE= Self-efficacy; NARC= Narcissism; CWB= Counterproductive work behaviour

Prior to testing the model hypotheses, we sought to provide evidence of the construct validity of the research variables. We performed CFA in order to assess whether each of the measurement items loaded significantly onto the scales with which they were associated. The results of the overall CFA showed an acceptable fit with the data:  $\chi^2$  = 2536.2; df = 1438 ( $\chi^2$ /df = 1.76); CFI = .95; TLI = .95; IFI = .95; NFI = .90; RMSEA = .03. CFA results indicate that the relationship between each indicator variable and its respective construct was significant (p < .00), establishing the posited relationships amongst indicators and constructs, and thus convergent validity (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998).

Pointing to self-reported data, Chan (2009) suggests that many alleged problems associated with self-report are overstated. Nevertheless, awareness concerning selfreport limitations and CMV necessitated several remedies. We applied several ex-ante remedies to the questionnaire design. First, respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality and that there are no right or wrong answers. They were requested to answer as honestly as possible (Chang, Van Witteloostuijn & Eden, 2010). Second, we used different scale endpoints and formats for the predictor and criterion measures in order to reduce method biases caused by commonalities in scale endpoints and anchor effects (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Third, we used scale reordering (Sprangers & Schwartz, 1999) in order to reduce consistency artefact effects. Finally, we ensured that the questionnaire did not include ambiguous, vague and unfamiliar terms such that individual items and the questionnaire as a whole were formulated concisely (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). Additionally, we employed ex-post remedies in the form of statistical tests. Following Podsakoff et al. (2003), the effects of CMB were assessed by using the CFA of alternative model structures. The results of the one-factor model yielded a poorer fit with the data; other two-factor, three-factor and four-factor models also failed to show a better fit with the data, whereas the hypothesised structure's model exhibited a good (better) fit. Next, Harman's single-factor test was used to evaluate whether a CMV was present. Results show that the single factor accounted for only 17.8 of the total variance (Krishnan, Martin & Noorderhaven, 2006). The ex-ante and ex-post procedures we employed provided some indication that CMV may not be a severe problem.

# Model testing

We tested the hypothesised mediating relationships through a series of nested model comparisons using SEM (Bollen, 1989) (Table 3).

Table 3
Parameter Estimates and Structural Relationships

Relationships		Standardised Direct Effect	Regression Weights			
			Estimat e	C.R.	р	
DL	→CWB	.24	.24	7.19	<.001	
AUT	O →CWB	12	07	-3.48	<.001	
SE	→ CWB	19	19	-5.84	<.01	
NAR	C → CWB	.18	.45	5.68	<.001	
AUT	O → SE	.20	.12	5.79	<.001	
SE	→ NARC	.21	.08	6.16	<.001	
DL	$\rightarrow$ AUTO	25	44	-7.37	<.001	
DL	→ SE	25	07	-1.83	>.05	

Note. N=845.

DL= Destructive leadership; Auto= Autonomy; SE= Self-efficacy; NARC= Narcissism; CWB= Counterproductive work behaviour

The results show that the suggested model fits the data well ( $\chi^2$  = 7.79; df = 2; p=.02;  $\chi^2$ /df = 3.89; CFI = .98; IFI = .98; NFI = .97; RMSEA = .05). Our findings support the main hypothesised relationships between DL and CWB (H1) (.24, p=.00), between DL and autonomy (H2) (-.25, p=.00), between autonomy and CWB (H3) (-.12, p=.00), between DL and SE with marginal support (H4) (-.07, p=.06), between autonomy and SE (H4a) (.20, p=.00), between SE and CWB (H5) (-.19, p=.00), between SE and narcissism (H6) (.21, p=.00) and between narcissism and CWB (H7) (.18, p=.00).

As for mediating effects, we tested three competing models, one for each mediating relationship. The findings support our hypothesised model (with the three mediating relationships) and shows the best fit (see Table 4). The results illustrate the following: a full mediating role of autonomy on the relationship between DL and SE such that DL does not affect SE significantly when autonomy is present; a partial mediation of autonomy on the relationship of DL and CWB (i.e. DL increases CWB directly and indirectly through autonomy) and a partial mediation of narcissism on the relationship of SE and CWB such that the higher the narcissism, the less SE decreases CWB (see Table 5).

Table 4
Comparisons of Path Coefficient and fit indices of Structural Equation Models

Compansons	Hypothesise		Model 2	Model 3
	d Model			
<u>Path</u>				
DL→AUTO	25***	44***	Path excluded	25***
AUTO→SE	.20***	Path	.20***	.20***
	.20	excluded		
DL→SE	06	-11***	06	06
DL→CWB	.24***	.24***	.24***	.23***
SE→NARC	.21***	.21***	.21***	Path excluded
NARC→CW B	.18***	.18***	.18***	.18***
AUTO→CW B	12***	12***	12***	12***
SE→CWB	19***	19***	19***	19***
Fit indices				
$\chi^2$	7.79	40.62	60.36	44.85
df	2	3	3	3
$\Delta \chi^2$	-	32.83 p<.00	52.57 p<.00	37.06 p<.00
$\chi^2/\mathrm{df}$	3.89	13.54	20.12	14.95
RMSEA	.05	.12	.15	.13
CFI	.98	.87	.80	.85
NFI	.97	.86	.79	.85
TLI	.90	.55	.32	.50
IFI	.98	.87	.80	.85

Note. N=845; \*\*\*p < .001.

DL= Destructive leadership; Auto= Autonomy; SE= Self-efficacy; NARC= Narcissism; CWB= Counterproductive work behaviour; RMSEA=root mean square error of approximation; CFI= comparative fit index; TLI=Tucker-Lewis coefficient; IFI=incremental fit index.

Table 5

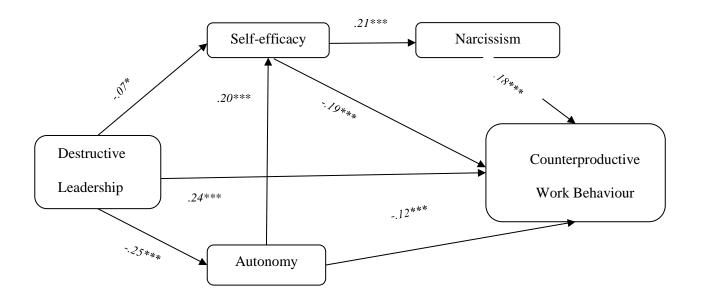
Mediation effects

THE GRANT CHECK									
Relationship		Direct β		Direct β with		Indirect β		Mediation	
		w/o		mediation				type	
		mediati	on					observ	ed
DL – AUTO – SE	Ξ	12***		07 (NS	S)	05**	*	Full	
DL – AUTO – CWB		.27***		.24***		.05***		Partial	
SE - NARC - C	WB	18***		14***		.36***		Partial	
<i>Note.</i> N=845.	*p	<	.05,	**p	<	.01,	***p	<	.001.

DL= Destructive leadership; Auto= Autonomy; SE= Self-efficacy; NARC= Narcissism; CWB= Counterproductive work behaviour

In sum, the findings support our hypotheses that DL increases CWB whilst autonomy decreases it and mediates DL's effect on SE such that it alleviates some of DL's detrimental effect on CWB. In addition, SE decreases CWB. Narcissism, which aggravates CWB, mediates this relationship and lessens SE's effect on CWB. The findings are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Structural Model.



*N*=845, \*p<.05, \*\*\**p* < .001

## **Discussion**

CWBs are exhibited by employees throughout an organisation. They are detrimental to organisational success and impair individual quality of work life (Spector & Fox, 2010). As such, they have generated abundant applied and theoretical interest. For instance,

how do personal attributes (SE), disorders (narcissism), and the quality of being selfgoverning (autonomy) affect and/or mediate the association between DL and CWB? Contemporary investigators focus primarily on subordinate perceptions of DL behavioural expressions, styles and their after-effects on subordinates and organisations (Skogstad, 2017). We partially follow this line of research by exploring such critical constructs as autonomy, SE and narcissism that function as in-betweens in the ever-important and extensively studied link connecting DL and CWB. This relationship has been extensively addressed, and most studies point to the former as a key antecedent of the latter (cf. Cohen, 2016). We drew on the extant OB theoretical frameworks (autonomy and SE). According to Psychoanalytic Theory (narcissism), negative consequences emanate from a convergence of destructive leaders, vulnerable followers and conducive environment (DL). This is shown in Robinson and Bennett's (1995) typology, encompassing workplace deviance and aggression (CWB). Predicated on this theoretical groundwork, we empirically explored how SE and autonomy mediate the link between DL and CWB as well as how narcissism annuls or transposes the negative (yet conducive) association between SE and CWB. Our findings provide some support for predictions derived from previous models, positing DL as a major factor for the generation and aggravation of CWB (cf. Eschleman et al., 2015). Specifically, it was found that DL negatively affects SE, which, in turn, reduces CWB. As expected, SE was found to be positively associated with narcissism, which, in turn, aggravates CWB. Consistent with our hypothesis, DL is directly related to increased CWB. We found that DL reduces autonomy whilst the latter decreases CWB. The inclusion of autonomy and SE as constructs that mediate the relationship between DL and CWB has been a dominant component in many studies addressing this critical association (cf. Houghton & Yoho, 2005). However, the integration of narcissism as a mediator provides additional and novel insights, notably owing to the prevalence of this phenomenon in present-day workplaces (Fox & Freeman, 2011). Subsequently, it appears as crucial in exploring how the inclusion of narcissism weakens the positive effect of SE in decreasing CWB. We followed recent studies emphasising the relationship between aberrant personality traits and deviant workplace behaviours (cf. Grijalva & Harms, 2014), in which the Dark Triad component of narcissism is the dominant predictor of CWB. In our model, narcissism amplifies CWB apparently because most respondents reflect individualist cultures as opposed to narcissists from collectivist cultures who perform fewer aberrant workplace behaviours (Grijalva & Newman, 2015). It also may be the case that most respondents are characterised by 'bigger egos' (Penney & Spector, 2002). Thus, in addition to being adversely affected by DL, their egotistical predispositions prompted severer CWB. Fida et al. (2015) show that self-efficacious individuals have a lower propensity to act counterproductively. With respect to narcissism, undesirable (counterproductive) behaviour is related to this syndrome (Fox & Freeman, 2011) as narcissists often perceive themselves as victims. They interpret adverse intent when interacting interpersonally; hence, they are sensitive to negative interactions, predispositions liable to lead narcissists to behave counterproductively at work (Wu & Lebreton, 2011). We have shown in this vein that narcissism aggravates CWB when it mediates the link between SE and CWB, demonstrating that the existence of this Dark Triad disorder weakens SE's attenuating effect on CWB.

The interface involving DL, workplace and CWB has drawn considerable research (*cf.* Harold & Holtz, 2015). Theoretically, the confluence of Social Exchange Theory, Despotic Leadership Theory and Leader Member Exchange (LMX) accounts for how DL undermines the 'civility' of workplaces and, notably, how it aggravates employee CWB. Indeed, we show that DL is essential in exacerbating CWB, although pronounced SE and autonomy attenuate this adverse effect. However, the prevalence of narcissistic expressions enhances rather than lessens the offsetting effect of self-efficacious employees on CWB.

Our study makes several potential contributions to the extant CWB literature. We present an inclusive model in which we address more than 'constructive' constructs that, if attended to, have the capacity to attenuate the overall adverse effect of DL on CWB. Rather, we employ narcissism, an innate syndrome shown to exacerbate CWB. We include this avowedly 'harmful' factor in a research model that largely accounts for how SE and autonomy mitigate DL's adverse effect on CWB. The presence of narcissism in our model attests to a somewhat realistic perspective, suggesting that no organisational loci are devoid of potentially adverse effects.

#### **Limitations and Future Research**

It should be noted that several limitations that may have influenced the results. First, though the research population was adequately large (N=845), we controlled for neither industry nor other organisational characteristics. Specifically, we also did not incorporate corporate culture characteristics. These controls could have affected the findings in several important ways and valuable insights may be gained by integrating some of the aforementioned control variables, notably organisational culture and the private-public dichotomy. Future research should consider the use of not only a heterogeneous research population, but also controls that are likely to generate sharper resolutions vis-à-vis findings and practical implications thereof. We encourage future investigators to consider additional 'negative' constructs that may be potentially employed along with 'positive' ones whenever the link between DL and CWB constitutes the key research continuum. These may include hubris, overconfidence and such intraorganisational and leadership constructs as inadequate supervisory support and leadership patterns. These and other potentially illuminating constructs may be addressed using employee assessments. In addition, narcissism was used as a mediator in our model. Recent personality research argues that individuals exhibit fluctuations and dispositional changes (Howell et al., 2017; Hudson & Fraley, 2015). Over time, one disposition may be affected by another (as can be shown in longitudinal studies applying diary designs). Thus, personality dispositions can be used as mediators (e.g. Mann et al., 2017). We believe that this is the case with narcissism in our model. However, narcissism may also be tested as a moderator in the relationships

of the above constructs and CWB.

As such, we recommend measuring research constructs by applying dyads and/or measuring independent and dependent variables sequentially at different points in time. Second, data were self-reported; hence, it is possible that respondent biases, common across measures, may have distorted observed associations. Even so, obtaining measures of personality without employing self-reports is difficult. We did employ necessary remedies to minimise CMB effects. Similarly, the estimation of individual engagement in CWB is difficult to gauge through objective measures or supervisor ratings since, oftentimes, CWB transpires covertly (Penney & Spector, 2002), making it difficult to identify through these other methods. Thus, CWB self-reports may be advantageous in associating individuals with particular behaviours (Cohen et al., 2013). Additionally, it appears probable that respondents may even under-report CWB owing to a self-presentation bias (Penney & Spector, 2002). If indeed this is the case, correlations with CWB in our study may essentially underestimate the true associations.

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