**When darkness meet leadership: Rethinking Workplace Mistreatment as a possibly integrated (dark) leadership style: The case of Incivility.**

**Abstract**

The current article overreaching goal is to frame mistreatment as a leadership facet. After reviewing the concept of mistreatment, through incivility, a specific form of mistreatment, and on the basis of data from different samples across time and populations taken in Israel, the notion that mistreatment is a leadership facet is established. As the current context on which leadership is utilized is being more stressful than ever, and as stress generate mistreatment, the importance of this change in perception is explained. The notion that such a difference in the way we perceive mistreatment can also lead to more accurate interventions of mistreatment conclude the paper.

**Introduction**

The topic of leadership and leader behaviour is one of the most studied issues in management literature, where numerous studies try to explore specific traits, behaviours, and leadership styles that lead towards successful leadership and positive followers' outcomes (Tepper, 2007; Schmidt, 2008). The full range of leadership (FRL) introduced by Bass and Avolio during the 1990s (Antonakis *et al.,* 2003; Bass 1997) has strongly influenced leadership theory and practice, presenting one of the most widely accepted models of leadership that can optimize organizational effectiveness (Smith *et al.,* 2004; Guhr *et al.,* 2019).

Despite its impact on theory and practice, it has a few shortcomings (Einarsen *et al.,* 2007; Jensen *et al.,* 2019; Krasikova *et al.,* 2013). One of these shortcomings refers to the concern that several aspects of leadership behaviours have not been included in the model, such as a variety of forms of leadership that have been characterized as being "destructive" (e.g., destructive leadership, abusive supervision, petty tyranny). Although most existing literature does have a focus on constructive leaders behaviour and sees leadership by definition as being only positive (Padilla *et al.,* 2007; Schyns and Schilling, 2013), in the last couple of decades researchers acknowledge there are also negative sides of leaders behaviour, namely, destructive or dark side of leadership (Higgs, 2009; Thoroughgood *et al.,* 2018).

These destructive facets of leadership styles are expressed through different terms which are included under the broader term of workplace mistreatment.

Workplace mistreatment is a broad term consist of a wide range of interpersonal harms employees might experience while at work. 'It is an extended or overarching term, capturing a range of more specific abuses and insults that workers may encounter, often routinely, in their workplace. It can include indiscriminate discourteous and disrespectful treatment, more targeted, personalized abuse, or more generalized unreasonable treatment where management practices and procedures are offensive, demeaning or used in a way that undermines confidence (Hodgins, Curtain and McNamara, 2014, p.54).

The negative impact of these mistreatments at work is unquestionable (Hodgins et al., 2014; Itzkovich and Heilbrunn, 2016; Schilpzand, De Pater & Erez, 2016). Indeed workplace mistreatment is associated with psychological distress, burnout, anxiety, depression and general reduced wellbeing all which are named by Schilpzand, De Pater & Erez (2016) all which are considered affective outcomes. Schilpzand et al. (2016) observed two additional categories of effects. Attitudinal outcomes - targets of mistreatment are less motivated, less committed, and their satisfaction from their coworkers and managers is decreased. These attitudinal outcomes trigger the third category of behavioural impacts. In this respect, Itzkovich and Heilbrunn (2016) noted that as a retaliation reaction, employees tend to damage the organization property and damage production processes.

Due to its impact, the academic field that has been dedicated to the study and mapping workplace mistreatment is inundated with different definitions and research tools. These definitions collapse into two main categories. The first category is directly related to the aggressors' status, and it is focused on power gaps between aggressors and their victims. Such definitions trace back offensive behaviours to a specific class of aggressors, those who rank higher than their victims on the organizational hierarchy. Such interpersonal mistreatment behaviours have been defined, among other terms, as interactional justice, petty tyranny, abusive supervision, toxic leadership, and destructive leadership. As aggressive behaviours are often perpetrated by individuals who rank higher than their victims in the organizational hierarchy and often "flow down" the organizational hierarchy (Itzkovich, 2015), these definitions manage to portray a large portion of offensive interpersonal behaviours. Although the prominence of power gaps underlying these behaviours, these definitions are considered as deviant behaviours, thus peripheral, detached from the mainstream of organizational behaviour and specifically, leadership theory.

In parallel, several other theoretical concepts have been put forward to account for a variety of offensive interpersonal behaviours that do not necessarily involve a power gap between perpetrators and victims. These behaviours comprise the second main category of definitions, all of which are focused on the boundaries and/or content of adverse interpersonal behaviours. (Itzkovich, 2015; Itzkovich et al., 2020). These definitions include Harassment, a term coined by Einarsen and Raknes (1997), emotional abuse, (Keashly, 2001), workplace incivility, (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Schilpzand, De Pater & Erez, 2016) and others.

Although the distinct theoretical route the two theoretical pillars took, it seems that the boundaries between the different terms forming the two pillars are blurred as can be learned by diving into the essence of incivility.

**The case of incivility**

incivility is defined as a rude, inconsiderate behaviour that can damage to the victim's willingness to utilize his or her positive potential within the organizational framework (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Schilpzand, De Pater, & Erez, 2016; itzkovich et al.,2020). It is distinctive from other mistreatments due to two main theoretical features. Firstly, the intention underlying an uncivil act is defined as ambiguous while different definitions such as bullying are defined as intended (Itzkovich, 2010, 2020). Secondly, it is defined as low intensity compared to other acts of mistreatment, such as bullying (Itzkovich, 2015).

Empirically these distinctive characteristics can be questioned for some reasons:

Firstly, All existing measures of incivility do not account for intention as the intention of the perpetrator is hard to operationalize (Itzkovich et al., 2020).

Additionally, the low-intensity part of the definition is not operationalized as well as the measures of incivility also account for high-intensity behavioural features such as yelling and humiliating, which are also considered as indicators of more intensified misbehaviours such as bullying (Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers, 2009).

**Are these pillars distinctive after all, or can we integrate concepts?**

The main feature that distinguishes the two main types of definitions (pillars) is that the first pillar focuses on the identity of the perpetrator while the second focus on the boundaries of the behaviour. If we dive into incivility measurement, we can notice that the original incivility measurements that are mostly used are indifferent to the identity of the perpetrator, inline with its definition which as well is indifferent to the identity of the perpetrator. The seven-item scale or its upgraded version of 12 items asks participants to indicate the frequency with which they encountered uncivil behaviour from supervisors or coworkers (Cortina et al. .2001; Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huerta, & Magley, 2013).

Although the theoretical legitimacy for different sources of perpetration, empirically this is not the case. In a serious of seven different samples collected in Israel across populations and subsequent periods, the authors enabled to account for the identity of the perpetrator in each data collection.

Although the original tools are indifferent to the identity of the perpetrator, another question was added to account for the identity of the perpetrator. Following the incivility indicators, respondents were also asked who was the primary source of the behaviours such as those described in the previous questions (i.e. referring to their mistreatment experience). The options included the following options: Your direct manager/supervisor; Colleagues in a similar position to yours. (Peers); Coworker on a lower level in the corporate hierarchy than you ; Coworkers on a higher level in the corporate hierarchy than you, but you are not directly managed by them; Customers or visitors (Itzkovich, 2010).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Table one shows unquestionably that the primary perpetrator of incivility is in power position compare to his victim. Thus more than anything else incivility can be considered a leadership style same as other forms of mistreatments. Comparing to constructs collapsing to the first pillar diving into the essence of constructs such as incivility is even more interesting as the first pillars' constructs are tuned to measure mistreatment from power holders. In the incivility case, which represents the second pillar, the distribution of perpetration could have been random. Yet, even when it was not controlled, findings from seven different samples show a clear foundation of power underlying incivility.

These findings correspond with Aquino and Thus' (2009) call to integrate all existing definitions of offensive interpersonal behaviours under a single term, 'victimization' which is focused on victims' perceptions and not perpetrator's characteristics or specific distinct quality of behavioural expressions.

Although it's well-grounded rational, the call for a unified conceptualization which is focused solely on the victim's perception can't capture the essence of mistreatment comprehensively.

Firstly, it doesn't account for the prevalence of power gaps between the two parties to the adverse interaction (Itzkovich, Dolev and Heilbrunn, 2018) which is prominent in a large portion of these behaviours. Secondly, it doesn't account for the differences in the impact these power gaps can generate compare to mistreatment between equals or compare to bottom-up mistreatment (Itzkovich 2014).

More importantly, although such calls can promote a conceptual cleanup and overcome theoretical overlaps, the issue in hand is much broader than the boundaries of the discussion mentioned above. From a broader perspective, it is not only a question of the unity of terminology but a question of its centricity and framework. Calling for a discussion on similarities and differences between constructs might leave these terms in a prereferral position, and being investigated under a framework of deviant behaviour (Robinsson and Bennet,1995). On the other hand, accounting for the centricity of power gaps embedded in such interactions can shift the discussion to a more centralized theme, namely leadership behaviours. Such conceptual change will strengthen the legitimacy and willingness to deal with these behaviours and promote more accurate mitigation of it.

Overall, discussing workplace mistreatment in the framework of leadership is scantly addressed (Hoel, Glaso, Hetland, Cooper, & Einarsen, 2011; Lee and Jensen, 2014). Most of the effort was focused on leadership in general. In contrast, other scholars focused on specific leadership models such as the full range of leadership model and investigated the relationship between its leadership facets and types of mistreatment (Lee and Jensen, 2014). All in all, these discussions overlooked the possibility that it is not only that mistreatment relates to some facets of leadership, but it can also be considered as an expression of leadership. To address this gap, in recent years (Einarsen et al. 2007; Itzkovich, Heilbrunn and Aleksić, 2020) suggested theoretical models that account for leader misbehaviours. As an example in Itzkovich et al. (2020) complete full range of leadership (CFRL) model, the ADL (active-destructive leadership) facet integrates purposely adverse leader behaviours that are active yet very destructive to both followers and organizations alike. The model put to front the idea that leaders can misbehave in an active as well as passive manners, implying that when we accept models of leadership, we should recognize the destructive potential of leadership, namely dark side of leadership.

**Why now more than ever before? when pressure and opportunity meet**

Understanding these darker facets of leadership who are costly to both individuals and organizations alike is essential more than ever before. After years of stability and security that characterized the foundations of employment, employees and employers, are facing new arrangements of work, in which secure employment is less attainable. Instead, employees are facing poor quality and relatively un-secure jobs across sectors (Fiorito et al.,2019). These precarious work arrangements are enhanced during the COVID-19, pandemic, which confronted employees with increased financial pressure, isolation from their social environment, fear of illness, or fear of potential loss of their job which became uncertain (Shaw et al., 2020).

Studies indicated that these stressors and others which reflect an imbalance between job demands and available resources to deal with these demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), constitute emotional and behavioural responses that might be counterproductive (Roberts et al. 2011). Indeed, Oyeleye et al. (2013) found that stress is related to job conflict. In the same route, Roberts et al. (2011) managed to show that stress leads to the perpetration of incivility.

As managers control the distribution of incentives and rewards that allow them to influence followers (Michel *et al.,* 2011), it is likely that in stressful times, the opportunity their power position enables, can be directed to mistreat followers for two reasons: Followers are less likely to retaliate as retaliation will increase the risk of losing more resources (Itzkovich 2014). Leaders would like to alleviate the negative emotions that arose by stressors in such stressful times and demonstration of mistreatment is a possible reaction for that purpose (Roberts et al. ,2011).

Framing mistreatment as a leadership facet is significant, and in light of its consequences, it should be noted and as much as possible, mitigated.

Yet it seems that if we dive into reported interventions of mistreatments, this notion becomes much more critical.

Thus far, only a neglectable amount of researches measured the effect of active interventions of different mistreatment (Howard, & Embree, 2020). Most of which overlooked the organization level (Hodgins, Curtain and McNamara, 2014), that was noted as crucial for a successful intervention process (Hodgins, Curtain and McNamara, 2014; Olsen et al., 2020; Simpson, Farr-Wharton, & Reddy, 2020). In a seminal review of mistreatment interventions, Hodgins et al. (2014) showed that not only the organizational level was overlooked when trying to mitigate mistreatment but also power holders namely, leaders are absent from most intervention plans that were reported by the authors. As mistreatment is mainly manifested through leaders as shown, it was expected that mitigation efforts would address power holders in specific. Still, it was not the case in any of the interventions reported. Thus, it is not surprising to find that the authors reported the effectiveness of most of the interventions as weak. To increase the effectivity, interventions must focus on leaders that are inclined to mistreat their followers in such stressful times. Due to the power in their hands, they have the opportunity to do so. For that to happen, as first stage, mistreatment must be perceived as a leadership style and not as a deviant, peripheral phenomenon.

**Conclusive remarks**

The overarching goal of the current article was to show a direct link between mistreatment and leadership as a potential facet for two main and complementary reasons.

1. To change the way scholars and practitioners perceive mistreatment.
2. Once perceived as a leadership malfunction, more effective intervention can be generated.

Leaders are fortunate to choose how to lead. Understanding that their options can be adverse is a first step in mitigating these dark facets of leadership. Especially in times of increased stress and multiple stressors which is the underlying mechanism of mistreatment, such change in perception is not ‘nice to have’ but more obligatory change, we all should make.

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