

ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP



Edited by

JOHN BRATTON

With a Foreword by Keith Grint

ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

THIRD
EDITION

 **Sage**



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For my grandchildren, Owen, Colbie, Felicity, and Philippa. May you experience life and nature in all its diversity – John Bratton

To mark the fifth anniversary of the introduction of lockdown, this new edition is dedicated to frontline healthcare professionals who cared for us through the COVID-19 pandemic, and to the families of those who lost their lives in doing so.

“‘Tis the times’ plague, when madmen lead the blind’.”

William Shakespeare, *King Lear*



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YOUR GUIDE TO USING THIS BOOK

Organizational Leadership has been developed with a number of print and online features to help you succeed in your course.

Leadership in Action boxes

Short case studies demonstrate leadership approaches and concepts in practice and introduce you to examples from around the world.

Critical Insight boxes

Contemporary debates and examples are analysed through different viewpoints and help you to develop your critical thinking skills.

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Short activities check your understanding as you progress through each chapter.

Chapter Review Questions

End-of-chapter questions test your knowledge and help you to identify areas for revision.

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Longer activities at the end of each chapter develop your research, analytical, and problem-solving skills.

Ethical Spotlight

An example of an ethical issue encourages you to reflect on the ethical challenges faced by leaders.

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Suggested book chapters and journal articles help you to build your bibliography for assignments.

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An extended case study in each chapter provides a deeper insight into how key leadership issues and ideas manifest in practice.



ONLINE RESOURCES

For lecturers, a selection of *tried and tested teaching resources* have been developed to accompany this text and support your course. Visit <https://study.sagepub.com/bratton3e> to set up or use your instructor login and access:

Teaching guide with notes and questions to support the use of the book in your teaching. The separate video teaching guide includes links to **video conversations with leaders**, sharing insights into the reality of leadership practice across a diverse range of organizations. Find out about:

- how leaders can incorporate social good into their business models
- leading teams on the front lines in Iraq
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All resources have been designed and formatted to upload easily into your **LMS** or **VLE**. Visit <https://study.sagepub.com/bratton3e> for more details.



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This is a collective project, and I am deeply indebted to the other chapter authors who have contributed to this book. Each brought their own research and perspective of leadership to their chapter. Collectively, I believe they have helped to produce a distinctive book that offers undergraduates a readable, context-sensitive, nuanced, and reflexive approach to studying contemporary leadership.

I would also like to thank all the participants who gave their time and shared their experience and perspective on leadership during the production of the book's leadership videos. These videos will not only accompany the book but form part of Sage's wider leadership video collection, providing students with a glimpse into the reality of leadership, beyond the rhetoric often learned in the lecture hall. Thanks also to retired Chief Superintendent Susan Hall for acting as the external reviewer for Chapter 18.

I wish also to record my gratitude for the support of colleagues at Queen's University Belfast, to Deputy Head of School, Professor Ciaran Connolly, and my writing companion, Laura Steele, for this volume and other books in recent years.

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Last, but not least, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Carolyn Bratton, my wife and best friend, for supporting me throughout the writing process.

John Bratton, Edinburgh and Calgary



FOREWORD

I have long since given up counting the number of new books on leadership, let alone trying to read them or even keep up with them. If the number increases in line with the existing trend there will soon be more leadership books than students of leadership – so where to begin? First, avoid the simply descriptive texts – unless your only goal is to resurrect the abbreviated contents for an exam paper. Second, ignore the leadership lists, by which I mean those titles that promise the seven steps to world domination, or sixteen irrefutable movements to glory, or the ten guaranteed approaches to billionaire status. As far as I can work out, few if any of these have any valid empirical foundation or even secure logic, though they do seem to generate significant wealth for the author – which tells us something about the motivations of both author and reader. Third, be wary of leadership texts that only offer rose-tinted utopias – such that if only we learn to love each other more and stop being selfish we can rid the world of its leadership monsters. Which brings me to our contemporary world. This is a place that appears to be recovering from COVID-19, suffering from wars, and fearing environmental or technological catastrophe, yet it is dominated by the opposite of the utopian leaders touted in the third category of books to avoid. In effect, a world where some leaders ride roughshod over the international and national laws and customs, designed to keep us safe and improve our lives. So, the idea that simply reading a description of successful leaders, or following a list of steps, or being nicer to each other will somehow set the world straight is frankly alarming, enervating, and self-destabilizing.

This does not mean we should collectively abandon the struggle to understand leaders and leadership or retreat to our ivory towers, but rather we should engage pro-actively in trying to both understand and change the world we live in. For that to occur we need leadership texts that make the readers think, reflect, and engage differently. John Bratton has assembled a cast of stars to cover all the major leadership topics, and the result is exactly the kind of book we need. Through an array of well-written, tightly structured, and proactively engaging chapters, *Organizational Leadership* sets out the contemporary field of leadership studies in such a way that it defies logic to assume a close reading and an engaged reflection will not change the readers for the better. Some of these topics are morally challenging – as they should be – some are technically difficult – as we should expect – but all are essential foundations for anyone trying to understand the contemporary world and considering how they can either lead better, or at least hold their leaders to account more rigorously. If you are looking for a comprehensive update or introduction to leadership in a world that is in desperate need of clear explanation and positive alternatives, then look no further.

Professor Keith Grint
April 2025



PREFACE

Since the second edition of this book, we have witnessed monumental contextual changes that will shape the processes of leadership. For Europe and North America, and much of the world, these changes seem to have engendered a sense of multiple crises all undoubtedly human made. Russia's egregious invasion of Ukraine, which has led to over 12,605 civilian deaths as of January 2025 (Statista, 2025), poses a crisis across Europe and directly impacts government expenditures, as resources are shifted to defence at the expense of research and public services. The civil war in Sudan which erupted in early 2023 has caused as many as 150,000 deaths, millions of people to be displaced, famine, and the widespread destruction of Khartoum, the capital and one of the largest cities in Africa (Slotnik, 2024). The Israel–Gaza war, which to date has resulted in the deaths of at least 62,000 civilians – 59.1% women, children, and people over the age of 65 by the end of June 2024 (*The Guardian* and Agencies, 2025) – and forced nearly two million people from their homes, is a humanitarian catastrophe that will destabilize the Middle and near East for decades. The UN Human Rights Council termed the carnage a genocide. Amid a cacophony of criticism and hand-wringing of western leaders and media outlets, with a few notable exceptions, at the time of writing US and European political leaders have been unwilling and unable to facilitate de-escalation and use diplomacy to end the war on Gaza.

Overshadowing these three crises is the fourth – global warming. In May 2024, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) recorded temperatures in Delhi close to 50°C for the first time, reinforcing the UN Secretary General, António Guterres' 2023 warning that the era of global warming had ended and 'the era of global boiling has arrived' (Niranjan, 2023). Extreme weather events linked to global warming inflicted devastation on many parts of the world. Reports from the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have identified human activity as 'unequivocally' the cause of rapid changes to the climate. The future of humanity is being decided by political and corporate leaders today. And that future is in jeopardy if leaders cannot make progress towards sustainable pathways to development and sustainable economic growth (Davies-Venn, 2024).

A fifth human-made crisis unfolded as we prepared this new edition – President Trump started a trade war against the world economies. Dubbed 'Liberation Day', his executive orders detailed the imposition of a minimum 10% tariff on Britain, and on others, with little distinction between long-term allies and adversaries alike. Economic pundits predict the tariffs could be catastrophic for the US economy as well as the world economies. These geopolitical events, which will shape organizational leadership in the mid-21st century, provide a fluid backdrop to studying leaders and leadership unimaginable only a few years ago.

NEW TO THE THIRD EDITION

Wherever relevant, the contributors have made connections between the global and national contexts and crises, in a way that is intellectually insightful and rewarding for students. This volume has been updated in several important ways:

- A new chapter on Dark Leadership.
- A new chapter on Leadership in Unstable and Extreme Contexts.
- An expansively revised chapter on Relational and Collaborative Leadership.
- An extensively rewritten chapter on Teams and Team Leadership, with a focus on the increased prevalence of working-from-home and virtual teams.
- A significantly rewritten chapter on Gender and Diversity in Leadership.
- An expansively revised chapter on Leading Organizational Change for Environmental Sustainability.
- In addition to important new post-2023 research findings, and everyday leadership practices reported in the media, this edition continues to give due attention to the need for intersectional analysis, ethical issues in leadership, gender and leadership, diversity, inclusivity and structural inequality.
- A critical interrogation of artificial intelligence in organizational decision making has been incorporated into this volume.

Retaining its accessible yet critical approach from previous editions, this edition will encourage students and leaders of all ages to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and to think differently about leaders and leadership in an age of ‘de-globalization’ and existential challenges.

AUDIENCE

This book is written for undergraduate and graduate courses in leadership, business and management, education, health and public sector leadership studies. It can also be utilized as an advanced supplementary text for organizational behaviour modules. It is also well-suited as a resource for practitioners undertaking in-house programmes and workshops on management and leadership development.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

Organizational Leadership is divided into four parts – which of course are interconnected – and 20 chapters:

Part I explains the closely connected concepts of management and leadership, and the diversity of perspectives to researching leadership before contextualizing leadership agency by examining the external and internal forces – power, culture, and corporate strategy – that influence both leaders and followers.

Part II reviews and critically analyses a selected number of traditional and contemporary theories of leadership, including trait, behaviour, contingency, charisma and transformative, relational, collaborative, dark, and followership.

Part III includes analyses of how ethical considerations influence leadership, how the complementary field of HRM informs and directs the way leadership and management are practised and how they impact employees and organizational outcomes. The other chapters include contributions explaining how leaders learn and can be assessed for development, and the value of diversity and inclusion in a leadership context.

Part IV turns the attention to some contemporary leadership issues and includes contributions on team leadership, artificial intelligence and leadership, leading pro-environmental change, leadership in extreme contexts, leading in public sector organizations, and leading urban and regional renewal.

9

DARK LEADERSHIP

George Boak and Kelly Rogers

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Introduction
- The nature of dark leadership
- Origins of dark leadership
- Effects of dark leadership
- Mitigating dark leadership
- Conclusion

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- explain and critically analyse theories of different types of dark leadership
- explain theories regarding factors that give rise to dark leadership
- analyse the personal, organizational, and societal effects of dark leadership
- evaluate strategies for mitigating and addressing dark leadership within organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Much theorizing about leadership focuses on the positive, considering good practices in how to lead others, yet experience shows that many people in leadership positions are not effective, and some are actively destructive. News items regularly recount examples of individuals in leadership positions who bully, harass, pressurize, and abuse those over whom they have authority or influence. For example, during the inquiry into the scandal of the UK Post Office's wrongful prosecutions of Post Office branch operators over problems shown to have been caused by the Horizon IT system installed by Fujitsu, a coterie of senior executives and politicians were called on to give evidence about what many call the worst miscarriage of

justice in UK legal history. Giving evidence to the inquiry, campaigner Alan Bates described the Post Office as having a 'toxic culture' and characterized its leaders as 'thugs in suits' (Sweney, 2024). This chapter explores theories about this dark side of leadership. We define dark leadership, summarize theories about the factors that give rise to it, consider the likely effects of dark leadership on the individual, their team members, their organizations, and on society at large, and finally we explore ideas about how dark leadership can be mitigated and contained.

THE NATURE OF DARK LEADERSHIP

The term 'dark leadership' is used in this chapter to include a variety of perspectives on negative and harmful types of leadership. We will largely focus on two types of dark leadership – destructive leadership (sometimes also described as toxic leadership) and abusive supervision. The term 'toxic leadership' was first coined by Lipman-Blumen (2005), and it has been taken as one type of destructive leadership (e.g., by Mackey et al., 2021). Lipman-Blumen's (2005) toxic leaders are characterized by making unrealistic promises to their followers, of safety, security, and success, in exchange for which the followers must do as the leader says. Although Milosevic et al. (2020) argue there is a difference between toxic and destructive leaders, others (e.g., Boak, 2021; Gupta and Chawla, 2024) treat the terms as synonymous and we will do the same in this chapter. There are overlaps between these two types of dark leadership, but abusive supervision has a distinctive research history and literature, so we discuss the two types separately in this section. The common feature of each of these types is that they involve harmful behaviour towards others – particularly those in more junior positions in the organization. A feature of most types of dark leadership is that individuals also harm their organizations, either deliberately or negligently.

Destructive Leadership

Destructive leadership has been defined as:

The systematic and repeated behaviour by a leader, supervisor or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organization by undermining and/or sabotaging the organization's goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being, or job satisfaction of subordinates. (Einarsen et al., 2007: 10)

According to this definition, harm is done either to the organization, or to the leader's subordinates, or to both.

In a systematic review of literature, Mackey et al. (2021) found 21 different types of destructive leadership. Mackey et al. (2021) take the view that destructive leaders 'tend to control, deceive, dominate, intimidate, manipulate, and threaten their followers, as well as defraud and steal from their organizations' (p. 706), whereas Einarsen et al. (2007) suggest we might differentiate between pro-organizational destructive leadership – where leaders drive employees hard in order to achieve the organization's aims, sometimes called 'tyrannical leadership' (Schyns and Schilling, 2013) – and anti-organizational destructive leadership, where the leader acts against the aims and purposes of the organization. Following this line of thinking, Krasikova et al. (2013) give the example of a leader in an

organization that prioritizes product safety who bullies followers to focus on greater product safety (pro-organizational), as opposed to a leader who directs followers to distribute unsafe products (anti-organizational).

Schyns and Schilling (2013: 139) argue that we should make a distinction between destructive leader behaviour and destructive leadership, in that leadership (destructive or otherwise) concerns the exercise of influence over 'followers', whereas destructive leader behaviour may encompass a wider range of negative behaviour by someone in a leadership position. Whilst we respect the thoughtfulness of this distinction, we will include within our discussion of destructive leadership in this chapter, as do Einarsen and Fosse (2022), the wider range of actions that may harm individuals (whether or not they are followers), organizations, and communities that are made particularly harmful by virtue of the leadership position of the person perpetrating them.

Some researchers focus on the cruel behaviour of destructive leaders towards their followers. For example, Aasland et al. (2010: 439) describe destructive leaders 'intimidating subordinates, belittling or humiliating them in public or exposing them to nonverbal aggression'; for Shaw et al. (2011: 581) a characteristic of destructive leadership is 'acting in a brutal bullying manner'; while Boddy and Taplin (2016: 974) describe some destructive leaders as 'abusive, bullying, impolite and uncaring towards employees'. Other behaviours of destructive leaders that researchers have identified include a lack of empathy and 'high levels of self-importance, which, in some cases, have become full-fledged delusions of grandeur' (Kets de Vries et al., 2016: 170), and also that dark leaders may behave in ways that can be described as 'grandiose, entitled, arrogant, exploitative, impulsive, and aggressive' (O'Reilly and Chatman, 2020: 6). Together with the exaggerated sense of their own importance and abilities, such leaders disregard the ideas and advice of others.

Abusive Supervision

Abusive supervision refers to dark leadership behaviours specifically directed at people over whom the leader has direct authority within the organization. Abusive supervision has been categorized as a type of destructive leadership (e.g., Krasikova et al., 2013; Schyns and Schilling, 2013) but it has an independent research history and literature of its own, so we discuss it separately here. Tepper (2000: 178) defined abusive supervision as 'subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage *in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact* (emphasis in original). Behaviours associated with abusive supervision include 'lying to followers, talking badly about them, or making them responsible for the leader's own mistakes' (Gauglitz et al., 2023: 169; also Samian et al., 2021) and can include 'undermining the contribution by the subordinates ... explosive outbursts by supervisors ... mockery, breach of promise, invasion of privacy and also silent treatment' (Goute et al., 2021: 154) and public ridicule (Tepper et al., 2017).

Tepper's (2000) original definition includes the perception of subordinates – the people who are subject to the supervision, and Tepper et al. (2017) argue that what is abusive or non-abusive is a matter of perception: people may interpret a supervisor's behaviour as abusive, or only abrasive (an example of 'tough love'). They argue that whether behaviour is perceived as abusive, or abrasive will depend on:

- the intent behind the behaviour – for example, is it intended to improve the subordinate's performance?
- the frequency of critical behaviour – more frequent behaviour tends towards abusive rather than abrasive
- the subordinate's self-perception, personality, sensitivity – if they are insecure and/or highly sensitive then critical supervision may more likely be perceived as abusive
- the context – in some organizations, such as the military, abrasive comments may be seen as more acceptable.

Considering a similar issue, Shrage (2013) asks whether it is ever all right for supervisors to yell at their subordinates and, after noting examples of successful leaders who used this as a means of influence, suggests that it depends on intent and the cultural context. In an analysis of Alex Ferguson, the highly successful manager of Manchester United football club, Crafton et al. (2021) recount how he used the 'hairdryer treatment' on team members (i.e., shouting in their face) and fierce criticism of other employees, but he also behaved in different, more positive ways towards them. However, where categorizations of behaviour depend on perceptions, there will always be room for disagreement, and one person's 'abusive supervision' may be another person's 'firm management'.

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION 9.1

ABUSIVE OR ABRASIVE?

Bullying – defined as intimidating or insulting behaviour that makes an individual feel uncomfortable, frightened, less respected or put down – is regarded as a breach of the UK Ministerial Code, which indicates the behaviour expected of government ministers. It is accepted that legitimate, reasonable, and constructive criticism of a worker's performance will not amount to bullying.

In early 2024 allegations of 'bullying and traumatizing' behaviour by a senior government minister were raised. Some officials claimed that staff members were often left feeling humiliated by the minister and were reduced to tears on several occasions. However, a spokesperson for the minister claimed the allegations were 'completely false and a flagrant smear'. They said the minister criticized examples of 'underperformance, complaints and bad behaviour' within her department, and that she had 'high standards and expectations'.

In an earlier case concerning another government minister, an official inquiry followed the resignation of the department's most senior civil servant, who said he had received allegations of the minister 'shouting and swearing, belittling people, making unreasonable and repeated demands'. The official report noted, 'this may not be done intentionally to cause upset, but that has been the effect on some individuals'. The minister rejected all the allegations against her.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- 1 How would you judge whether these are examples of abusive or of abrasive behaviour?
- 2 What further information would you need to make a judgement?

EXPLORE THIS TOPIC

BBC (2020) 'Priti Patel: Summary of official report into bullying claims', *BBC*, 20 November. Available at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-55015488 (accessed 19 May 2025).

Crerar, P. (2024) 'Kemi Badenoch accused of "bullying and traumatizing" staff', *The Guardian*, 30 July. Available at www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/jul/30/kemi-badenoch-accused-of-bullying-and-traumatizing-staff (accessed 19 May 2025).

Haddon, C. (2020) 'The handling of the Priti Patel bullying inquiry has fatally undermined the Ministerial Code', *The Institute for Government*, 20 November. Available at: www.institute-forgovernment.org.uk/article/comment/handling-priti-patel-bullying-inquiry-has-fatally-undermined-ministerial-code (accessed 19 May 2025).

Laissez-Faire Leadership

There is some disagreement as to whether laissez-faire leadership is a type of dark leadership. Laissez-faire leadership is characterized by an absence of direction or support. Aasland et al. (2010) argue that it is a type of dark leadership, as do Ågotnes et al. (2023), Milosevic et al. (2020) and Fosse et al. (2024). Hogan et al. (2021) reflect on the damage caused by 'absentee leadership' and state that it is the most common form of destructive leadership. On the other hand, Krasikova et al. (2013) argue that incompetent and ineffective leadership, such as laissez-faire leadership, is not dark leadership in that it lacks destructive intent, and Schyns and Schilling (2013) argue that there is 'a clear qualitative difference between non-leadership and active supervisor hostility' (p. 141) so that laissez-faire leadership should not be included as a type of dark leadership. The arguments on each side are reviewed by Einarsen and Fosse (2022), who conclude that laissez-faire leadership should be regarded as a passive form of destructive leadership, where a leader avoids providing help and support to a subordinate who has 'legitimate expectations' of receiving it (p. 103).

PAUSE AND REFLECT 9.1

Have you ever felt let down by a leader who did not give you the attention and help you felt you had the right to expect? Do you think this laissez-faire behaviour should be categorized as abusive supervision?

ORIGINS OF DARK LEADERSHIP

The origins of dark leadership are complex and multifaceted, stemming from a combination of early life experiences, inherent personality traits, specific career events, and contextual factors within organizations. This section explores these factors that give rise to dark leadership, supported by relevant research and theories.

Childhood Experiences

Early life experiences can significantly shape the development of learned behaviours and personality traits. Adverse childhood experiences, such as neglect, abuse, or exposure to authoritarian parenting, can contribute to the emergence of the Dark Triad traits in adulthood (Jonason et al., 2013; Kets de Vries et al., 2016). For example, individuals who experience neglect or abuse may develop narcissistic tendencies as a defense mechanism, seeking validation and control in response to feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness experienced during childhood.

The social learning theory proposed by Bandura (1977) suggests that children learn behaviours through observation and imitation. If a child is exposed to authoritative or manipulative parental figures, they may internalize these behaviours as acceptable ways to interact with others. As these individuals grow older and enter the workforce, they may replicate these behaviours in their leadership roles, leading to the manifestation of dark leadership. Furthermore, childhood experiences of powerlessness can drive individuals to seek positions of authority where they can exert control, often through manipulative or coercive means (Kets de Vries, 2006).

According to Avolio et al. (2023), parental influence is critical in shaping leadership potential. Their research reveals that authoritative parenting, which combines support with structure, fosters robust leadership qualities. In contrast, a lack of consistent boundaries and guidance can result in leaders who are more likely to engage in manipulative or unethical behaviours as they may not have learned the importance of balance and accountability (Avolio et al., 2023). Such early experiences can contribute to the development of self-centred behaviours and traits, where individuals compensate for a lack of parental control or affirmation by seeking power and admiration through exploitative means. Additionally, early rule-breaking behaviour is linked to leadership development but can also be indicative of potential dark leadership traits. Avolio et al. (2023) suggest that individuals who engage in rule-breaking during their formative years often develop assertiveness and risk-taking behaviours, which can be advantageous in leadership roles. However, when these tendencies are not moderated by ethical considerations, they can lead to dark leadership. Such individuals might challenge norms and pursue goals aggressively, sometimes disregarding ethical boundaries in the process. This can manifest in behaviours such as manipulation, deceit, and a lack of empathy, which are characteristic of dark leadership.

Personality Factors and Dark Leadership

Personality traits are a significant foundation for the emergence of dark leadership. The two approaches most often used to understand personality traits that underpin dark leadership

are the eleven dark side personality dimensions framework developed by Hogan Assessment Systems (Hogan and Hogan, 2001) based on the DSM-IV Axis II disorders and the Dark Triad comprising narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Paulhus and Williams, 2002). Most research into dark personality is based on the Dark Triad (Schyns, 2015) and we will concentrate on these traits here. High levels of one or more of these traits predispose leaders to engage in manipulative, self-serving, and unethical behaviours that can have detrimental effects on both followers and organizations.

Narcissism is characterized by an inflated sense of self-importance, a need for constant admiration, and a lack of empathy for others (Raskin and Hall, 1979). Narcissistic leaders are often motivated by a desire for power and recognition, leading them to exploit others to achieve their goals. This can manifest in behaviours such as overconfidence, arrogance, and a disregard for the well-being of subordinates. According to Rosenthal and Pittinsky (2006), narcissistic leaders often create toxic environments by fostering a culture of fear and dependency, where dissent is punished, and loyalty is rewarded regardless of ethical considerations.

Narcissistic leaders may dominate conversations, disregard feedback, and make decisions on their own, believing that they are the only ones capable of making the right choices. Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, is often highlighted as an example of a narcissistic leader (Sakker Sudha and Shahnawaz, 2020) and has been described as demanding and aggressive in his leadership. While narcissistic leaders can sometimes be effective, particularly in crisis situations that require bold action, their need for admiration and control can harm the organization. They may inspire short-term loyalty and results, but their inability to focus on others' needs often leads to long-term problems for the organization and its people.

Machiavellianism refers to a manipulative and strategic approach to achieving one's goals, often through deceit and exploitation (Christie and Geiss, 1970). Leaders high in Machiavellianism are typically pragmatic, calculating, and unencumbered by moral constraints. They are adept at navigating organizational politics and may use manipulation and coercion to secure their position and exert control over others. In leadership, they often present themselves as diplomatic or pragmatic, but their real goal is to consolidate power. They may form alliances with key stakeholders or manipulate situations to their advantage, often at the expense of their team or organization.

Machiavellian leaders are often seen as effective in the short term because they are willing to make tough decisions and take risks that others may avoid (Christie and Geiss, 1970). They may use flattery, deception, or coercion to get what they want. However, their willingness to disregard ethical standards often causes severe harm to individuals and organizations in the long run. Their manipulative behaviour undermines trust within the organization, leading to long-term problems. Employees under Machiavellian leaders may feel exploited or used and may feel compelled to engage in similar unethical behaviours to protect themselves or advance their careers. The overall organizational culture can become one of competition and backstabbing rather than collaboration and mutual support.

Subclinical **psychopathy** (Boddy, 2023) in leadership is characterized by a lack of empathy, acting impulsively, and a tendency to engage in harmful or antisocial behaviour (Hare, 1993). Psychopathic leaders can appear confident, charismatic, superficially charming and persuasive, using these traits to manipulate others. However, their charm often masks a deeper tendency toward cruelty, exploitation, and reckless decision making. Their impulsive decision making and disregard for the consequences of their actions can damage organizations

and the individuals around them. They are prone to unethical behaviour, and they often lack the emotional intelligence necessary to build strong, supportive teams. Babiak and Hare (2006) argue that psychopathic leaders can cause significant harm to organizations by fostering environments characterized by fear, instability, and high turnover. These leaders are often skilled at deflecting blame and may leave a trail of destruction as they move from one position to another. One of the key dangers of psychopathic leadership is its unpredictability. While narcissists and Machiavellians may be manipulative, they often have a long-term strategy in mind. Psychopaths, on the other hand, are more impulsive and may act without considering the long-term consequences of their actions. This can lead to erratic decision making, putting the organization and its employees at risk. Other traits have also been identified as underpinning dark leadership, including hubris, or excessive pride and self-confidence (Sadler Smith et al., 2017), greed (Haynes et al., 2015), dominance (Judge et al., 2009), and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Hunter, 2023).

PAUSE AND REFLECT 9.2

Take a moment to think about leaders you have encountered in your life, whether at work, in school, or in other areas. Do any of the traits discussed here resonate with your experiences? Reflect on how these behaviours impacted the team environment and morale.

Career Events

Specific career incidents can also play a pivotal role in fostering dark leadership behaviours. Leaders who encounter significant stress, power struggles, or ethical dilemmas early in their careers may develop coping mechanisms that lean toward the dark side. For instance, research by Padilla et al. (2007) on the 'toxic triangle' suggests that leaders who achieve success through unethical means may come to view these behaviours as necessary and acceptable for career advancement. Repeated reinforcement of such behaviours can lead to the development of a leadership style that is inherently dark and destructive. Early research into 'leader derailment' – where leaders who have shown initial success and promise subsequently fail due to character flaws or poor judgement – illustrates how career experiences can shape dark leadership. McCall and Lombardo (1983) found that derailed leaders often displayed traits such as insensitivity to others, an inability to adapt to changing circumstances, and a tendency to react to stress with abrasive behaviour. These traits, which may have been latent or controlled in less stressful situations, became more pronounced as leaders encountered greater challenges.

Moreover, the high-pressure environments of certain industries, such as finance or tech, can exacerbate these tendencies. Leaders in these sectors may feel compelled to adopt ruthless strategies to stay competitive, particularly if their organizations reward short-term gains over long-term ethical considerations. This is supported by studies such as that of Krasikova et al. (2013), who found that leaders under intense pressure may justify harmful behaviours as necessary for organizational survival, even when such actions ultimately undermine long-term success.

Rapid success or high-stress situations can lead individuals to adopt more extreme measures to maintain their status or control. For instance, experiencing early promotions without adequate oversight can lead to entitlement and unethical behaviour, as individuals may feel empowered to bypass rules and norms to achieve their objectives (Kellerman, 2004). This environment can further entrench dark leadership traits, as individuals may continue to exhibit manipulative or harmful behaviours to sustain their position.

Contextual Factors

The organizational context in which a leader operates can significantly influence the development and expression of dark leadership behaviours (Schyns, 2015). Organizational culture, follower behaviour, external pressures, and AI technology all contribute to the environment that either fosters or restrains dark leadership.

- **Organizational culture:** A culture that prioritizes results over ethics can create a breeding ground for dark leadership. When organizations emphasize outcomes above all else, leaders may feel justified in using any means necessary to achieve goals, including unethical or harmful tactics. This idea is supported by Hogan and Kaiser (2005), who argue that organizational environments that tolerate or even reward unethical behaviour encourage the emergence of dark leadership. In such cultures, leaders who engage in manipulative or coercive behaviour may be seen as effective, further reinforcing these destructive tendencies.
- **Reactions of followers:** The behaviour of followers can either enable or constrain dark leadership. According to Kellerman (2004), followers play a crucial role in sustaining or challenging dark leadership. Followers who are compliant, fearful, or dependent on the leader for their status or security may be less likely to challenge unethical behaviours, thereby enabling the leader's dark tendencies. Conversely, followers who are empowered to speak out and hold leaders accountable can act as a check on dark leadership, reducing its prevalence and impact. Whistleblowing by empowered followers serves as a critical mechanism to expose and counteract unethical behaviours, thereby mitigating the influence and consequences of dark leadership (see Chapter 10).
- **External pressures:** Leaders operating under significant external pressures, such as economic downturns, intense competition, or organizational crises, may resort to dark behaviours as a coping mechanism. Research by Schyns and Schilling (2013) indicates that leaders who feel threatened by external forces may adopt more autocratic and manipulative behaviours to maintain control. These leaders may justify their actions as necessary for survival, even when such behaviours have long-term negative consequences for the organization and its members. Neves and Schyns (2018) suggest that organizational change can create a conducive context for destructive leadership, where it indicates that normal rules need no longer apply.
- **Available technology:** The use of technology in decision making can influence dark leadership. Surveillance tools, like those used by Amazon to monitor employee performance, and other examples of micromanagement (e.g., Mettler, 2024; Riso, 2024) can foster a culture of control, pressure, and fear, reinforcing unethical behaviours. Conversely, technologies that promote transparency and employee well-being can counteract dark leadership tendencies.

EFFECTS OF DARK LEADERSHIP

Research on different aspects of dark leadership generally indicates that it has a damaging impact on teams and organizations, in the longer term if not immediately, and may also damage the career path and prospects of the individual leader. In this section we will largely consider key research findings about these damaging effects, considering the impact of dark leadership on the individual leader, on others around them, on the organizations in which they work, and on society.

Leader Emergence and Success

A number of studies indicate that individuals with high levels of narcissism, corporate psychopathy or Machiavellianism may be successful in applying for leadership positions, and may emerge as informal leaders in groups, as they are often ambitious and they present well on first appearance (Boddy et al., 2021; Elbers et al., 2023). However, their characteristic selfishness, lack of empathy and arrogance often mean that favourable impressions do not endure (Paulhus, 2014; Spain et al., 2014). Their performance in a leadership position may also be diminished by the more negative aspects of these dark personality traits (Boddy and Taplin, 2016; Den Hartog et al., 2020). Some managers thus find progress on their upward career path is 'derailed' by their behaviour before they reach a senior position (McCall and Lombardo, 1983; Kaiser et al., 2015), but as Kets de Vries (2014: 102) observes '... a surprising number of senior executives do have a personality disorder of some kind', and Boddy (2023) argues that corporate psychopaths are often found in leadership positions.

The relationship between narcissism and effective performance as a leader is not straightforward. Some researchers argue that there can be a positive effect of narcissism in leaders – it may enable them to be more visionary, dynamic and daring in their actions (Judge et al., 2009; Fatfouta, 2019); reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of narcissistic leaders, Maccoby (2000) argued that 'productive narcissists' in senior positions could inspire others with their bold visions and charisma. Kets de Vries and Balazs (2011: 389) also argued that narcissism 'is a key ingredient for success' as a senior manager, but 'it does not take much before a leader suffers from an overdose'. Grijalva et al. (2015) found that leaders were more effective when they had moderate levels of narcissism, rather than high or low levels.

Judge et al. (2009) also argued that a degree of Machiavellianism could be a key to success in situations where leaders need to manage complex power dynamics. Using other measures of the dark personality traits, Benson and Campbell (2007) and Kaiser et al. (2015) found a curvilinear relationship between them and leadership performance, similar to the findings of Grijalva et al. (2015) in relation to narcissism. Low scores as well as high scores in measurements of the dark traits were found to be associated with poor performance as a leader, and therefore likely to damage the individual's career, whereas moderate scores were found to relate to effective leadership.

PAUSE AND REFLECT 9.3

Have you come across individuals who have made a strong, positive first impression, but then did not live up to their early promise? How did they make such a good impression at first? In what ways did they later fall short?



Image 9.1 The Post Office scandal concerns the wrongful prosecution of hundreds of sub-postmasters and postmistresses. In January 2024, the UK government introduced legislation to exonerate all convicted sub-postmasters and offered compensation to victims as remedy for the reputational harm they suffered

Source: John Bratton ©

Impact on Others

The initial impact on others of individuals high in narcissism may be positive, as they can present as charming and confident in the short term, and as leaders they may appeal to followers, especially in times of uncertainty and challenge (Samian et al., 2021). However, in the longer term a leader's narcissism has been found to have a harmful effect on followers' job embeddedness and job engagement, and had a negative effect on employees' innovative behaviour (Norouzinik et al., 2022). However, Mehraein et al.'s (2023) review of 106 studies found a small number of examples (five out of eight studies) where narcissistic leadership had a positive effect on employee creativity and innovation.

As we saw in the previous section, the range of abusive behaviours that have been associated with dark leadership include belittling, blaming, bullying, and harassing others.

The effects of these behaviours on followers in the longer term have generally been considered to be negative, including higher stress, lower levels of motivation and satisfaction, and worsening of performance. Examples identified by researchers include 'lower levels of life satisfaction, diminished well-being, and less productivity' (Gauglitz et al., 2023: 169); lower employee morale and productivity (Gupta and Chawla, 2024); and undermining 'the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of subordinates' (Aasland et al., 2010: 440). The review of research on abusive supervision by Martinko et al. (2013) found that it resulted in psychological distress, and harmful effects on well-being, job satisfaction, and performance. Tepper et al. (2017) found that abusive supervision was associated with lower levels of morale and psychological health, and higher levels of counterproductive work behaviour and employee turnover. Similarly, Boddy and Taplin (2016) found that corporate psychopaths directly and indirectly decrease the motivation, job satisfaction and performance of those they influence.

One of the reactions of abused employees may be to retaliate against the supervisor (Martinko et al., 2013), but Lipman-Blumen (2005) observed that people often feel they do not have the power to challenge toxic leaders. Moving out from the ambit of the bad leader may be possible by leaving the department or organization where they work (Tepper et al., 2017). However, as we saw in the section above, what is abusive or non-abusive is a matter of perception: people may perceive a supervisor's behaviour as abusive, or only abrasive (Tepper et al., 2017). Steve Jobs is often held up as an example of a successful leader who was effective at motivating, even inspiring, his staff, despite often being abusive towards them (Samian et al., 2021).

Effects on the Organization

Most of the studies of the effects of dark leadership on followers, cited above, indicate decreases in employee motivation and performance, which are likely to damage the organization. Some researchers distinguish between destructive leadership that oppresses subordinates in the service of achieving organizational goals – driving others hard in order to 'get the job done' (Aasland et al., 2010: 441) – and the type of destructive leadership that also neglects or even actively works against the interests of the organization, for example by preventing subordinates achieving their task objectives, by stealing resources such as money, time or materials, or by sharing an organization's confidential information (Mackey et al., 2021). Although the behaviours that oppress followers to 'get the job done' may be seen as pro-organizational, it seems likely that, if they are perceived as abusive, they will have a negative effect on followers' motivation and performance, in the longer term if not right away, and therefore negatively impact the performance of the organization.

Societal Implications

The wider societal impact of dark leadership practices is likely to be a reduction in respect for individuals in leadership positions. Where leaders are perceived to lack integrity and to behave out of mainly selfish motivations, trust in them also diminishes (Hope-Hailey and Gustafsson, 2014). Leaders who behave in destructive ways may also be taken by some as role models to emulate, and in this way their negative behaviours are spread more widely.

CRITICAL INSIGHT 9.1

THE DARK TRIAD

Dark personality traits can often enable people to achieve leadership positions in organizations; the traits most commonly cited in this regard are narcissism, Machiavellianism, and subclinical psychopathy – the Dark Triad (see also Chapter 6). Each trait has a different effect on behaviour and thus on a person's approach to leadership, and each trait may be present in an individual to a certain degree, so we may say, for example, that someone is high in narcissism, or medium, or low. The influence of a trait on an individual's behaviour may be accentuated or diminished by the context in which they find themselves. For example, 'Machiavellians and Psychopaths have reduced empathetic abilities and use manipulation and intimidation techniques' (Duradoni et al, 2023).

ACTIVITY

From what you have read so far in this chapter, and based on any relevant experiences of your own, do you think that any positive outcomes can arise from leaders with Dark Triad traits, or are the negative impacts inevitable?

MITIGATING DARK LEADERSHIP

Dark leadership, characterized by self-serving, manipulative, or unethical behaviours, can be extremely damaging to an organization's culture, productivity, and the well-being of employees. Addressing and mitigating these behaviours is crucial for organizations aiming to create a healthy work environment. This section explores strategies to counter dark leadership, referencing works by Schyns et al. (2022), Moorman et al. (2023), and other scholars such as Padilla et al. (2007), Kellerman (2004), and Lipman-Blumen (2005). These strategies focus on organizational policies, implementing checks and balances, promoting ethical behaviour, leadership development, and employee support.

Identifying Dark Leaders

Recognizing dark leaders early is crucial for effective intervention. Dark leaders often exhibit traits such as narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, also known as the 'Dark Triad' (Paulhus and Williams, 2002). As we have seen from previous sections these leaders may appear charming, confident, and visionary, but underneath they manipulate, exploit, and prioritize personal gain over the organization's well-being. Dark leadership often manifests through observable warning signs and red flags. Behavioural cues include excessive control, micro-management, blaming others, and fostering a culture of fear.

Leaders who lack transparency, resist feedback, or take credit for others' work should raise concerns (Schyns et al., 2022). Additionally, high employee turnover, absenteeism, and low morale may indicate toxic leadership at the top. Moorman (2023) emphasizes that dark leaders frequently promote divisiveness, favouritism, and manipulate followers to serve their personal agendas. These behaviours create unhealthy work environments, contributing to stress and disengagement. Being aware of these patterns helps organizations intervene before the damage becomes irreparable.

Dark leaders often exhibit specific behavioural patterns, such as:

- 1 **Narcissism:** A sense of entitlement, craving admiration, and lack of empathy for others (Schyns et al., 2022). These leaders are more focused on advancing their own careers and status than on the well-being of their teams.
- 2 **Manipulation:** Dark leaders use deceit, flattery, and exploitation to maintain control and gain influence. Moorman (2023) notes that these leaders often manipulate followers to act against the organization's best interests.
- 3 **Authoritarianism:** Dark leaders frequently resist collaboration and transparency, seeking to dominate decision making. They foster a climate where dissent is discouraged, and fear is used to maintain control (Padilla et al., 2007).

Schyns et al. (2022) suggest that leaders and followers alone cannot tackle the problem of dark leadership, which can be seen as a systemic problem that develops and can be addressed from a systemic perspective. Schyns et al. (2022) argue that organizations can develop and establish systems and practices that are effective in protecting their employees from being exposed to dark leadership. It has been suggested that organizations can put emphasis on HR practices that include recruitment, career development, training, feedback systems, performance appraisal, and complaints systems. Leadership 360-degree feedback mechanisms allow employees, peers, and supervisors to provide input on a leader's behaviour, helping to flag issues early.

Organizational Policies

Organizational policies are the first line of defense against dark leadership. A strong policy framework establishes the ethical standards and acceptable behaviours that guide leadership actions. Schyns et al. (2022) underscore the importance of having clearly defined policies that outline the expected conduct of leaders and the consequences of violations. Policies should focus on integrity, transparency, and accountability, with a comprehensive code of conduct that applies to all levels of leadership. Regular updates and communication about these policies help to reinforce their importance. Kellerman (2004) points out that many instances of toxic leadership go unaddressed because policies lack effectiveness or are not enforced consistently, allowing unethical behaviours to persist. Therefore, organizations can ensure that these policies are supported by robust enforcement mechanisms.

Lipman-Blumen (2005) emphasizes that policies should extend to creating clear and confidential reporting mechanisms, where employees can safely report unethical leadership without fear of retaliation. Moorman et al. (2023) emphasize the need for confidential reporting mechanisms and whistleblower protections to ensure that employees who report unethical behaviour are safeguarded against retaliation (also see Chapter 10). Legal protections and

counselling services can also help employees who have been negatively impacted by toxic leadership. Moreover, organizations should provide training for managers and HR professionals to help them identify signs of dark leadership and provide support to affected employees. Having dedicated personnel, such as ombudsmen or ethics officers, ensures that employees have access to neutral, confidential resources.

Clear governance structures and grievance procedures are essential in mitigating dark leadership. Organizations should establish transparent, easily accessible systems for reporting unethical behaviour. Padilla et al.'s (2007) work highlights how conducive environments, characterized by a lack of oversight or weak governance, enable dark leadership to flourish. Strengthening governance by setting up regular leadership audits, anonymous employee feedback systems, and whistleblower protection programmes can prevent this. Grievance procedures should be easy to navigate, with clear guidelines on how reports are handled and what actions will be taken. This transparency encourages employees to report concerns and ensures that those reports are dealt with promptly and fairly. For example, the Wells Fargo scandal, where employees created fake accounts under intense leadership pressure, highlights the need for strict policy enforcement and governance to curb unethical practices (Flitter, 2017).

Organizational Feedback Mechanisms

Effective feedback mechanisms are crucial for identifying and addressing dark leadership early. Organizations should establish formal processes that allow employees to voice concerns about leadership behaviours. Anonymous reporting systems, confidential interviews, and regular employee surveys help organizations collect feedback without fear of retaliation (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Moreover, Leadership Development Programmes can incorporate regular feedback loops, encouraging leaders to reflect on their behaviours and continuously improve. When leaders are held accountable for feedback, they are more likely to adjust negative behaviours.

Promoting Ethical Behaviour

Ethical behaviour must be ingrained in the organization's culture to counter dark leadership. This goes beyond policies; it involves creating a work environment where integrity, empathy, and accountability are rewarded. As Schyns et al. (2022) highlight, promoting ethical leadership means emphasizing long-term benefits such as employee trust, organizational stability, and a positive reputation. Leadership training should prioritize ethical decision making. Brown and Treviño (2006) argue that ethical leaders act as role models for their teams, influencing the behaviour of others through example. Training programmes should provide leaders with the tools to recognize and navigate ethical dilemmas and demonstrate how ethical behaviour contributes to long-term success. For example, under Kalanick, Uber experienced rapid growth but also developed a toxic culture characterized by harassment, bullying, and unethical practices. His departure and the appointment of Dara Khosrowshahi marked a shift toward rebuilding the company's leadership through transparency and ethical behaviour (McCord, 2014).

Training and Awareness

Training and awareness programmes are essential to educating leaders and employees about the dangers of dark leadership. These programmes should include workshops and seminars on leadership ethics, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal skills. Goleman's (1995) work on emotional intelligence highlights the value of understanding and managing both personal emotions and the emotions of others. Leaders who possess these skills are less likely to engage in toxic behaviours such as micromanagement, manipulation, or emotional abuse. Awareness programmes should also educate employees about their rights and the resources available to them if they experience toxic leadership. Schyns et al. (2022) note that informed employees are more likely to recognize dark leadership behaviours and feel empowered to report them, which can help organizations intervene early.

Encouraging Self-Reflection and Emotional Intelligence

Encouraging leaders to engage in self-reflection is a critical strategy for mitigating dark leadership. Self-reflection helps leaders become aware of their own tendencies, including narcissistic or manipulative behaviours, and adjust their actions accordingly. Schyns et al. (2022) highlight the importance of self-awareness in preventing leaders from engaging in harmful behaviours. Training programmes that focus on developing emotional intelligence help leaders understand the impact of their actions on others. Goleman (1995) explains that emotionally intelligent leaders are better at managing their emotions and fostering positive relationships with employees. Leaders who possess these skills are more likely to create supportive, constructive work environments rather than toxic ones. Coaching, leadership reviews, and self-assessment tools further help leaders build empathy and ethical decision-making skills.

Leadership Development Programmes

Leadership development programmes are vital in cultivating ethical, emotionally intelligent leaders, and preventing the rise of dark leadership (see Chapter 13). According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence (EI) is crucial for effective leadership. Leaders with high EI are more empathetic, better at managing emotions, and more skilled at handling interpersonal relationships. This reduces the likelihood of destructive behaviours such as manipulation or emotional abuse as leaders with higher emotional intelligence are less likely to engage in toxic behaviours. Kets de Vries (2001) emphasizes the importance of self-awareness in leadership development. Leaders who understand their emotional triggers and behavioural patterns are better equipped to manage stress and avoid destructive actions.

Leadership programmes should incorporate self-assessment tools and coaching to help leaders reflect on their behaviour and make necessary adjustments. Coaching is an effective tool for leadership development. One-on-one coaching sessions allow leaders to receive personalized feedback on their behaviour, helping them develop empathy, emotional intelligence, and ethical decision-making skills. Kets de Vries (2001) notes that leaders who are coached on emotional intelligence are more likely to exhibit compassionate leadership, improving their relationships with employees and reducing the risk of toxic behaviour.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored theories about factors that give rise to dark leadership – childhood experiences, personality traits, career events, and contextual factors. We have reviewed ideas about the consequences of dark leadership, for the leader themselves, for those around them, and for their organizations. Further, we have seen that in some cases it may be difficult to distinguish between abusive and abrasive behaviour. Learning how to identify and counter dark leadership is crucial for building positive, effective, and ethical organizations. Several important strategies are available to tackle dark leadership and to mitigate its damaging effects. These include spotting harmful leadership traits, helping organizations understand the role that leaders play in shaping a workplace culture, and recognizing the importance of ‘whistleblowers’. By focusing on early detection, establishing strong organizational policies, promoting ethical behaviour, and supporting leadership development, organizations can reduce the negative impact of self-serving and manipulative leaders. By understanding these strategies, organizational leaders can prepare themselves to contribute to or lead organizations that value trust, accountability, and employee well-being, and thereby strengthen its culture.

CHAPTER REVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1 Define dark leadership and list three characteristics of dark leaders.
- 2 What are two major consequences of dark leadership for an organization?
- 3 Describe one strategy to mitigate dark leadership in a workplace.

RESEARCHING LEADERSHIP: PREDATOR AT HARRODS

An extreme example of dark leadership became public knowledge in late 2024 with the broadcast by the BBC of a documentary *Al Fayed: Predator at Harrods*. Mohamed Al Fayed, who died in 2023, was the billionaire owner of the prestigious London department store Harrods from 1985 to 2010. The documentary broadcast allegations by female ex-employees that Al Fayed sexually assaulted or raped them, and Harrods not only failed to intervene at the time but helped cover up the abuse. Following the broadcast, many more women came forward with similar stories of sexual abuse. The BBC stated that all the women who spoke to their investigative team said they had felt intimidated at work and felt unable to speak out. One said, ‘There was most definitely a culture of fear across the whole store – from the lowliest of the low, to the most senior person.’

(Continued)

QUESTIONS

Read the three reports below. How did Al Fayed keep his destructive actions out of the public eye for so long? What responsibility do you think Harrods has today for his actions?

(Note: the reports contain material that some people may find distressing. If you are affected in this way, do not continue with the exercise.)

Boffey, D. (2024) 'How Mohamed Al Fayed kept claims of sex crimes under cover for decades' *The Guardian*, 27 September. Available at: www.theguardian.com/world/2024/sep/27/how-mohamed-al-fayed-kept-claims-of-sex-crimes-under-cover-for-decades (accessed 19 May 2025).

Masud, F., Graham, D. and Price, E. (2024) 'Harrods boss tells BBC he is "dreadfully sorry" for Al Fayed abuse', *BBC News*, 8 November. Available at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cdj3x-jvwldpo (accessed 19 May 2025).

Price, H. and Davies, O. (2024) '65 more women tell BBC of sexual abuse by Al Fayed', *BBC News Investigations*, 10 October. Available at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c9wkqrn-58w9o (accessed 11 September 2025).

FURTHER READING

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Padilla, A., Hogan, R. and Kaiser, R.B. (2007) 'The toxic triangle: Destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18(3): 176–194.

Shafqat, T., Mushtaq, R. and Ahmed, A. (2025) 'Destructive leader behavior: Toward an increased understanding of how unethical leader behavior can harm subordinates', *Journal of Management Development*, 44(1): 66–82.

ETHICAL SPOTLIGHT: CHALLENGING WORK - SOCIAL MEDIA MODERATION

A lawsuit against their employers by over 140 moderators of social media content was reported in 2024. The moderators, based in Kenya, have been diagnosed with severe post-traumatic stress disorder by the head of mental health services at Kenyatta National hospital in Nairobi. They allege that this was caused by exposure to graphic social media content in very challenging working conditions. To moderate the website, to exclude harmful content, the moderators were required to view graphic material including murders, torture, suicides, child physical and sexual abuse, and bestiality. The work environment was a facility with glaring lights, very cold air conditioning, uncomfortable seats and bright screens. The moderators said they were closely monitored by supervisors concerning their speed and

accuracy of completing tasks, and the time they spent on breaks. The lawsuit alleges intentional infliction of mental harm and unfair employment practices. The employer stated that it provides technical solutions to limit employees' exposure to graphic materials, and that it requires subcontracting companies, such as the company included in this case, to offer counselling and healthcare services to staff, and to pay above local industry standards.

STOP AND REFLECT

The job these moderators are being asked to do is valuable, but evidently very unpleasant and stressful. Would you describe the alleged behaviours of the employer and the supervisors as examples of dark leadership (in relation to working conditions and close monitoring)? What behaviours would make the management of these moderators less dark and more ethical?

SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

- Booth, R. (2024) 'More than 140 Kenya Facebook moderators diagnosed with severe PTSD', *The Guardian*, 18 December. Available at: www.theguardian.com/media/2024/dec/18/kenya-facebook-moderators-sue-after-diagnoses-of-severe-ptsd (accessed 19 May 2025).
- Booth, R. and Kimeu, C. (2024) 'PTSD, depression and anxiety: Why former Facebook moderators in Kenya are taking legal action', *The Guardian*, 18 December. Available at: www.theguardian.com/world/2024/dec/18/why-former-facebook-moderators-in-kenya-are-taking-legal-action (accessed 19 May 2025).

CASE STUDY: NORWEGIAN POLICE SERVICE

In 2023 a survey of members of the Norwegian Police Federation asked police employees to express their opinion on aspects of working life in the organization, including the support of the top management and freedom of expression. The survey was returned by almost 3000 employees.

Almost 60% of respondents said that the organization was characterized by a 'culture of fear'. One respondent said 'Top management and HR have almost introduced totalitarian management. Critical views are often interpreted as disloyalty'.

Commenting on the results of the survey, criminologist and researcher Christin Thea Wathne said:

It gives cause for concern when 6 out of 10 state that they have refrained from expressing themselves freely internally for fear [it] will have consequences for their own careers ... If there is no room to ask the basic questions about how things are done and where the business is headed, there is little fertile ground for organizational learning.

(Continued)

In the survey, respondents were asked whether they felt supported by top management when the actions of the police were criticized in public. Only 4.3% said that top management were supportive, while 55.8% said that management provided little or no support.

CASE EXERCISE

- 1 Discuss whether this is an example of dark leadership in action, or simply the kind of leadership behaviour we might expect in a disciplined organization such as a police force.
- 2 How might management overcome the inhibition of organizational learning which appears to exist in this case?
- 3 Should top management be more supportive when their organization is criticized? Why/why not?

SOURCE

Inderhaug, E. (2023) 'Crisis of confidence in the police: Six out of ten police employees believe that the police are characterized by a culture of fear', *Politiforum*, 19 September. Available at: www.politiforum.no/seks-av-ti-politiansatte-mener-politiet-er-preget-av-en-frykktkultur/247254 (accessed 19 May 2025).