

Workplace Mistreatment: A Qualitative Study of the Antecedents of Supervisor-Employee Relationship Challenges

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Kim Grimwood

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Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my God, for whom without I am not.

ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore the phenomena of aggression in the workplace, its context, and its antecedents, with a particular focus on the impact the supervisor has on the employee in this situation. The study is located in the *workplace mistreatment* arena, and because it looks at the relationship between the employee and supervisor, the *abusive supervision* arena, in particular. The phenomenon of abusive supervision was established around 2003 and since, for the last 20 years, has been researched, with numerous academic studies contributing to its now fairly well-established sub-category within *workplace mistreatment*.

With around 20 years of work experience in the corporate financial arena, the researcher has observed this phenomenon at certain times, not applied only to herself, but also to others in the workplace. The interest in this research stems from this observation. The primary research question of this study is: *What are the perceived reasons the supervisor behaves aggressively towards the employee?* This study aims to contribute to the field of workplace mistreatment - and abusive supervision – through employing an *inclusive innovation* approach, and accessing participants in a *financial institution*, using a *qualitative approach* for extraction of *antecedents*, from the *Global South* region (South Africa in particular).

The research for this study was conducted using sixteen participants in individual ninety-minute interviews. Further, it was executed using a video conferencing tool, and interviews were held with employees from one of the largest financial institutions in South Africa (with around 7,000 employees). The participants ranged in age, gender, race, work tenure, and role sizing (position). The participants contributed by exploring the challenges and causes of the supervisor-employee relationship from both the supervisor's and the employee's perspectives.

A thematic analysis was done on the data collected, and four central themes emerged. These themes revolved around the four principal parties within the organisation: the supervisor, the employee, the leaders, and the team. There are three key categories used in describing the reasons the supervisor behaves aggressively, as pertains to the literature on abusive supervision. These are the threats faced by the supervisor from within, the threats from below and the threats from above. The research findings of this study corroborated core points in these three categories. In particular, that the supervisor falls prey to being overwhelmed by an inability to cope (threats from within), and that they are also vulnerable to envy and the use of power dynamics as a tool of engagement where employee differences exist (threats from below). In addition, they are often obliged to serve the demands of senior leadership (threats from above).

The new insights this research brings is to present additional causes under each of the three existing threats. This research, in addition, presents a *fourth* threat that should be considered under abusive supervision. This additional category of threat has been labelled “threats from *around*”. This relates to the threat that presents itself to the supervisor from the *team members*

themselves. The influence the teams have on the relationship between the supervisor and employee in the work environment, includes dynamics within the team that impact the supervisor, which includes gossip, overt competitiveness, bullying and the effect a powerful minority has on the supervisor. This research shows that it is a key cause of conflict to be considered when exploring the relationship, particularly the aggressive tendencies, between the supervisor and employee.

Overall, the research process produced many insights, and its conclusion was that the supervisor impacts the employee, but not in isolation; leaders and teams are accountable here also. Recommendations for further study include that the additional causes presented under each threat and the threat from around should be further corroborated. Further qualitative studies should be undertaken using the qualitative method presented in this study but also applied to the Global North, using financial institutions where possible. Additional research into the following particularly interesting elements may result in an even deeper understanding of the problem: the (mis)use of power in the context of workplace mistreatment; the presence of envy and immaturity; the role of training and clarity of communication; the impact of manipulation in the promotional process; the lack of timely empowerment of employees, and evasive leaders.

It is the hope of the researcher that this study will be enjoyed, but also taken and used to enhance the broader field and ultimately to drive a solution. One such solution, a proposed praxis model, is presented in this study, and aims to show how to, practically, help those experiencing these phenomena in the workplace. Ultimately, the hope is that one day workplace mistreatment, and abusive supervision, will be phenomena about which those in the workplace will be well-informed and with which they will be well-equipped to deal with appropriately. Thereby moving one step closer to achieving greater peace and joy within the workplace.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

At the precipice of this research journey, the researcher, herself, had experienced a few interactions of poor quality, with team members and supervisors alike. Dismissing those interactions as once-off occurrences - or something that she should take full ownership for – she did not realise at first that this could be something others in the workplace were experiencing. It was when embarking on her research that the researcher discovered the breadth and depth of the issue at hand. In her experience, the team members would be agitating and aggressive at unexpected - sometimes inappropriate - moments, privately and publicly. Similarly, the supervisor would be unexpectedly dismissive or aggressive, also at inappropriate times. Across her eighteen years of work experience, she witnessed these interactions in the workplace, not only in her own case, but also in the case of others around her, in the workplace. It is with this observation that she chose to engage on discovering what this phenomenon was, through this research.

The following chapter uncovers the research problem, the context wherein the problem lies, and the particular academic research question that was formed. It concludes with an acknowledgement of the scope and some limitations of the research, together with an outline of the thesis that follows.

1.2. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

As the researcher started uncovering the issue a bit more, she noted that the number of academic studies, as well as the amount of internet content, relating to this subject matter - aggression within the workplace - both from formal and informal viewpoints, was considerable. It ranged from people who, having experienced aggression within the workplace themselves gave personal accounts in videos, to extensive academic discourse - some of which are covered further below - about conceptual, character and definitional issues. The researcher was pleased to observe that numerous individuals were already passionate and driving engagement in this area. She, herself, was now excited about the opportunity to explore this subject matter more rigorously and contribute to the academic content.

The phenomenon being discussed, academically, is referred to as *workplace mistreatment*. Workplace mistreatment as a phenomenon, includes concepts such as *workplace aggression*, *workplace violence*, *abusive supervision*, *petty tyranny*, *bullying*, and *counterproductive workplace behaviour*, each of which also has its own field of study (Aquino & Thau, 2009). There are in fact, many terms used when referring to the problem of aggression in the workplace. An infographic depiction of the various terms that are used across the internet platform relating to workplace aggression is given below:



Figure 1: Infographic depicting the array of terms used in workplace mistreatment

This gives a depiction of the extent of terms and definitions, each of which are valid, but together create a plethora of terms and definitions to contend with in this sphere. Within the academic sphere, the literature on workplace mistreatment is fairly considerable. The academic interest started with H. Leymann, who in 1990, wrote an article about workplace bullying, questioning the similarities he had observed between childhood-bullying and adulthood-bullying in particular (Mattiesen & Einarsen, 2010). Most authors contend that the “founding author” of this discourse of workplace mistreatment was in fact, Carroll Brodsky, in 1976, with his book titled “The Harassed Worker”. Here C. Brodsky mentions that there have been instances where people have been targeted in the workplace, in situations that have left them feeling dejected and powerless (Dupre & Barling, 2006). Following Leymann, Einarsen in 1994, released an article further expanding on the construct of workplace bullying (Mattiesen & Einarsen, 2010). This was localised in Scandinavia, but soon found its way to the research community in the United States (Namie, 1996; Andersen, 1996; Sharma, 2017). The discourse ventured into other constructs - such as incivility and abusive supervision (Tepper, 1998) - and

did not have one specific definition within the construct at the time (Tepper, 2000). As time went on, in the early-to-mid-2000's, there appeared to be stability in four constructs, where authors were following one of these four streams within the general phenomena of workplace mistreatment (Pilch & Turska, 2015). These four constructs were *workplace aggression*, *workplace bullying*, *abusive supervision* and *incivility*. The following table highlights some of the key contributors at the start of the academic development of this phenomenon:

Brodsky (1976)	Harassment	Repeated and persistent attempts by a person to torment, wear down, frustrate, or get a reaction from another person; it is treatment which persistently provokes, pressures, frightens, intimidates or otherwise cause discomfort in another person
Thylefors (1987)	Scapegoating	One or more persons who during a period of time are exposed to repeated, negative actions from one or more other individuals
Matthiesen, Raknes & Rrökkum (1989)	Mobbing	One or more person's repeated and enduring negative reactions and conducts targeted at one or more persons of their work group
Leymann (1990)	Mobbing/ Psychological terror	Hostile and unethical communication that is directed in a systematic way by one or more persons, mainly towards one targeted individual
Kile (1990a)	Health endangering leadership	Continuous humiliating and harassing acts of long duration conducted by a superior and expressed overtly or covertly
Wilson (1991)	Workplace trauma	The actual disintegration of an employee's fundamental self, resulting from an employer's or supervisor's perceived or real continual and deliberate malicious treatment
Ashforth (1994)	Petty tyranny	A leader who lords his power over others through arbitrariness and self aggrandizement, the belittling of subordinates, showing lack of consideration, using a forcing style of conflict resolution, discouraging initiative and the use of non-contingent punishment
Vartia (1993)	Harassment	Situations where a person is exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more persons

Table 1: The development of academic terms used in workplace mistreatment

While there are various academic terms relating to aggression in the workplace (as depicted above) that can identify the problem, this researcher has chosen the particular term *workplace*

mistreatment. The two main reasons are because it is, of late, the more widely used term to denote the phenomenon of aggression in the workplace, and because it is often referred to as the “overarching term” that encapsulates all the other key terms in the academic field.

More colloquially, the aforementioned academic terms attempt to cover the spectrum of forms of expression of aggression in the workplace - subversive (incivility) to overt (workplace violence). The following table depicts an example of this range.


		Physical Actions	Verbal Actions
 Escalating expressions of violence	Overt aggression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical assaults • Weapons offenses • Theft • Rape • Arson • Biting • Murder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inflicting psychological trauma • Hateful expressions of anger
	Mobbing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sabotage • Stalking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spreading rumors • Taunting • Organizing actions against the victim
	Bullying		
	Harassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pranks • Property damage • Sexual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insults • Sexual • Discrimination
	Threatening behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throwing objects • Destroying property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statements that elicit alarm or threaten a person's welfare
	Intimidation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shaking fists or other gestures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statements that instill fear or alarm
	Disrespect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eye rolling • Laughing at a person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swearing • Using condescending language

Table 2: Depiction of spectrum of aggression, with examples

The topic of workplace mistreatment, since it saw popularity in the early 1990’s, has continued to grow over the last nearly 40 years, as it has become a more established field of study. The studies are to address the expected prevalence of the phenomenon, to show that it both exists and requires attention. The prevalence of workplace mistreatment occurring in the United States is estimated to be as high as 95%. The prevalence of this phenomenon is also said to be frequent amongst certain demographics – e.g. with regards to gender (female mainly), race (non-White mainly) and age (older mainly) (Hershcovis et al, 2013). There have been two notable studies done in South Africa by one Doctor of Commerce (Pietersen, 2005 and 2008), but outside of this there are not many located in Africa or even in the general Global South (i.e. including Australia, New Zealand and South America), especially as relates to workplace mistreatment in organisations outside of the medical field (Sharma, 2017).

The particular area of interest for this research relates to the dynamic between the supervisor and the employee. The supervisor's behaviour toward the employee is often deemed to be the most important dynamic within the workplace, more directly impacting the well-being of the employee. Within the *workplace mistreatment* arena, the literature on *abusive supervision* focuses on this relationship. The importance of this relationship rests on the authority the supervisor is given in the context of the work of the employee, as well as the high rate of interaction and the reliance the employee has on the supervisor. The prevalence of abusive supervision, suggested by some studies, is that those who experience abusive supervision is around 10% to 30% of the working population (Tepper, 2015). Authors in this field suggest, that this may even be superficially low, camouflaged by a tendency of targets to be fearful of discussing their experiences as victims, even when reports can be made anonymously (Bies, 2016). There is currently no notable South African research on abusive supervision, in particular.

What is important to consider when exploring this problem is also the impact it has within the workplace. Various authors have focused their studies on the consequence this problem has on the individuals within the workplace. The uncovering of these impacts has been said to be one of the major reasons why the public - and academic - interest of workplace mistreatment has grown (Bies, 2016). Consequences of workplace mistreatment occur at individual, organisational and societal levels.

At the individual level, researchers have found that, for targets, workplace mistreatment can have an adverse effect on mental and psychical health (Roscigno et al, 2009). Depression, stress, sleep problems, mood swings, and - at the extreme - suicide, are all listed as consequences of workplace mistreatment (Roscigno et al, 2009). These are generally classified under physiological and psychological outcomes. Work-related outcomes are items such as the intent to leave, absenteeism, and job dissatisfaction (Schat & Kelloway, 2003). At an organisational level - a level that is currently not widely studied - research suggests that the cumulative effects of workplace mistreatment on the organisation is on its performance and overall bottom-line (Lamertz, & Aquino, 2004). Still other studies suggests that workplace mistreatment has negative consequence for witnesses and more indirectly, can affect the organisation's culture where such behaviours can permeate multiple departments and divisions of the organisation (Hershcovis, 2010). At a team level, members who have been mistreated are likely to experience feelings of isolation and embarrassment (Aquino et al., 2009). A study

found that in instances of workplace mistreatment occurring within a team, perceptions around team success were low (Roscigno et al, 2009). Overall, research at a group-level also requires some attention in the field (Roscigno et al, 2009). At a greater societal-level, the consequences of workplace mistreatment are suggested to be growing medical costs, premature retirement and a greater need for social services and welfare (Schat et al, 2003). One study contends that workplace mistreatment may have an influence on unemployment levels, interpersonal relationships beyond work and legal costs associated with court cases (Leblanc et al, 2002). Future research on societal-level consequences have also been urged (Pilch et al, 2015).

Impacts of abusive supervision as detailed in the literature also range from mild to severe. Some of the impacts of abusive supervision allude to a reduction of performance with supervisors sometimes explicitly using performance rating exercises as a way to devalue employees (Walter, 2015). *Withdrawal* is also considered a consequence, with a good body of work contributing to the claim. Withdrawal includes concepts such as *turnover*, *job satisfaction*, *intentions to quit*, *organisational justice*, *psychological distress*, and *employee disengagement* (Barnes, 2015). Several studies have linked the exposure to abusive supervision to the subjective perceptions of the employee's well-being such as depression and self-regulation impairment (Thau et al., 2010). One such study suggests that the symptoms of abusive supervision bear a stark similarity to those of post-traumatic stress disorder (Ganster & Rosen, 2013). Research into impacts on well-being suggests that insomnia, doctor visits, self-medicating behaviour, hospital claims and cortisol levels, among others, are linked to abusive supervision (Thau et al, 2010).

Even with the growth of the field, there are continual calls by authors for further contribution to the field. Gaps exist in areas such as - amongst others - full understanding of the problem of workplace mistreatment, its causes and the use of differing methodologies (Aquino & Thau, 2009). There is, therefore, a continuous need for contribution of further studies to this field. This thesis intends to further explore the problem and its causes, in particular, and thereby contribute to the field in this way. While this thesis will continue the exploration of the problem, being embedded within the inclusive innovation framework, the researcher's ultimate aim is to produce a solution to reduce, or eventually eliminate, this problem. In order to create an apt solution for this, the problem needs first to be understood and from that understanding, a solution developed. Inclusive innovation employs, in its framework, the need to look at the participants of the "problem" and include them and their view in the derivation of the

solution (Heeks et al, 2013). The problem here being the workplace mistreatment found between the employee and supervisor, and the participants being the employees, the supervisors, the leaders and the team. By engaging the participants in understanding the problem with the intent of a solution, it expressly includes them (Heeks et al, 2013). A potential solution which will employ the principle of inclusive innovation is mapped out in the praxis model outlined briefly in the Discussion Chapter (5), and further detailed in Appendix B. The consequence of providing a solution to this problem is to enable a reduction, with an aim to eradication, of this phenomenon which is a critical contributing factor to the inhibition of innovation in the workplace. Thereby, not only by using the inclusive innovation principles to formulate a solution here, but also to through the practical implementation of that solution, liberate the workplace for innovation.

1.3. THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

The research therefore lies within the broad spectrum of workplace mistreatment. The *workplace mistreatment* arena houses various key topics, each of which has a full-bodied extent of research relating to it. As mentioned in the previous section, workplace mistreatment as a phenomenon includes concepts such as *workplace aggression*, *workplace violence*, *workplace incivility*, *mobbing*, *bullying*, *abusive supervision*, *petty tyranny*, and amongst others, *counterproductive workplace behaviour*. Due to the extent of different academic terms being discussed in the various literature, definitional issues become important to dissociate one area of study from another. There continues to be general disarray stemming from the over-lap of different definitions and an attempt to attain coherence within each (Gilbaldi & Cusack, 2019). There have however, been attempts such as workshops attended by the various leading authors in the fields, to try to achieve cohesion (Sharma, 2017). As an example of the definitional importance: *workplace aggression*, is defined as “the act or behaviour takes place in the workplace that is aggressive, either overtly or subverted, towards each other” (Thau et al, 2010). *Workplace incivility* refers to “any behaviour that is discretely aggressive, capturing minor discretions.” (Thau et al, 2010). Each definition allows researchers to know in which nuance of workplace mistreatment their focus lies.

1.3.1. Workplace Mistreatment

As mentioned earlier, this particular research around workplace mistreatment started as workplace aggression and bullying - mainly, around the 1990s - and was mainly off the back of numerous medical studies (Bartlett II & Bartlett 2011). It then continued to develop as depicted below in the following rough timeline, as created by this researcher.

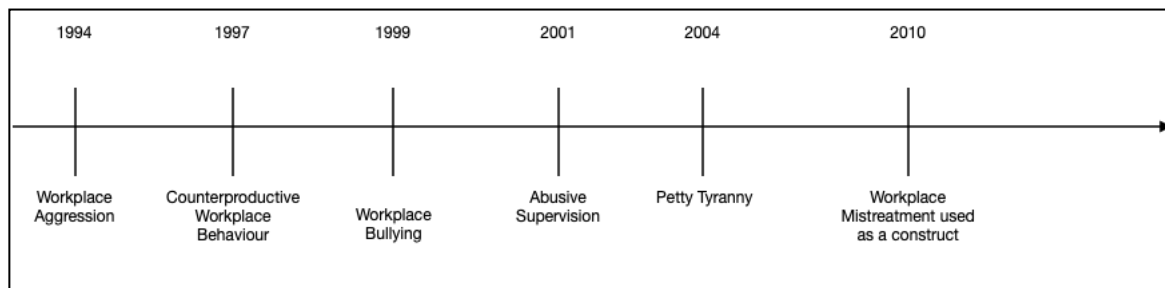


Figure 2: A timeline of the development of terms in the academic arena

The typical parties involved in the discourse relating to workplace mistreatment are predominantly the following four: the supervisor, the employee, the leader, and the team member. Typically, the client and the family member, while impacted or potentially a contributor, are often not dealt with as parties in the *workplace mistreatment* literature. Within the *workplace mistreatment* arena, as relates to the relationships between these parties, the constructs of *workplace aggression*, *bullying* and *workplace incivility* - amongst others - typically do not focus the discourse on any particular relationship (Thau et al., 2010). *Abusive supervision* and *petty tyranny*, however, has become known to be discourse that relates to the particular relationship between the supervisor and the employee (Thau et al., 2010). Other relationships, such as the team-member-and-the-supervisor, the leader-and-the-supervisor and the leader-and-the-team member, amongst others, are not as diligently studied within the *workplace mistreatment* arena, as yet, as is the supervisor-employee relationship.

Outside of the relationships, the arena itself - the organisation, its culture, policies and rules - is discussed in the more general workplace mistreatment literature. The context - the work pressures, work procedures, demographics, external environment - is also often discussed here. These various areas of discussion - the relationship, the arena, and the context - are often not mutually exclusive and do overlap when discussing any one area. In particular, to discuss relationships means to discuss the effect of the arena and the context impacting it.

Workplace mistreatment relates to uncovering and expanding on those areas of aggression within the workplace that are either overt or subversive. The following figures depict what is typically referred to as “iceberg models.” They present a good depiction of what is left “uncovered” or “un-named”, but that has equal, if not greater, potential for damage – usually presented as the bottom half of the “iceberg.” Here the overt (“visible”) aggression is shown relative to the subversive (referred to here as “invisible”) aggression. The second iceberg model depicts, in a similar way, those variants that are usually reported, and those that are not.

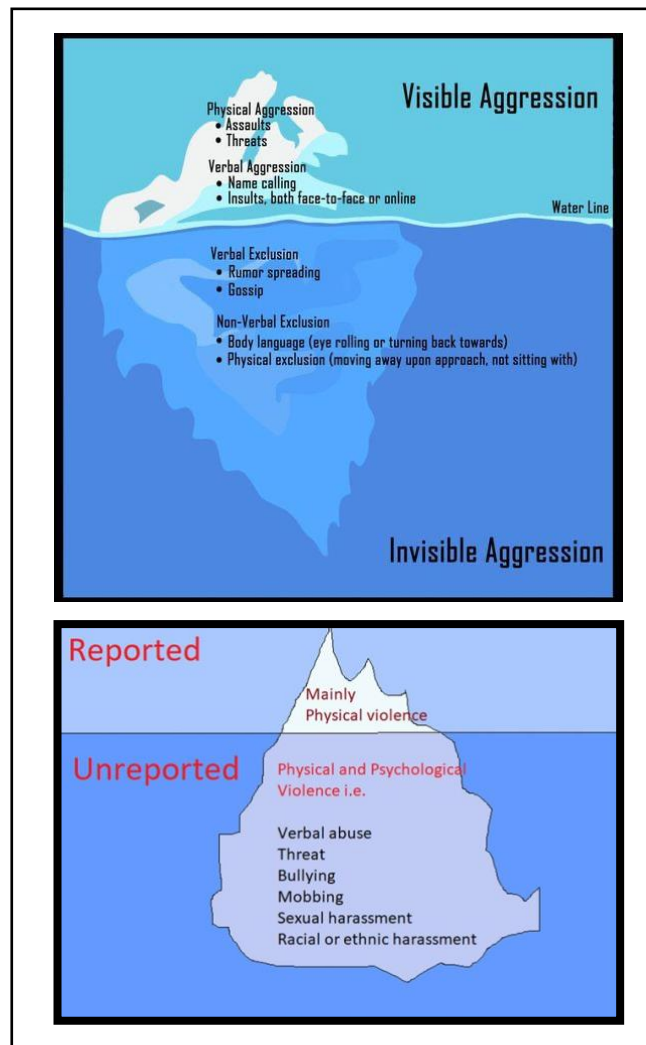


Figure 3: Iceberg models

It is important that the spectrum of aggressive behaviour that is included within the *workplace mistreatment* arena is noted.

1.3.2. Abusive Supervision (The Employee -Supervisor Relationship)

As mentioned before, the main focus of this research is to delve into the more intimate relationship of the supervisor and the employee. The proximity of these two individuals to each other, relative to anyone else in the organisation, creates an interesting dynamic; and, in particular, the trust, reliance and power dynamics at play are intensified here. It has in instances, been likened to an adult domestic relationship (Thau et al, 2010). The challenges found within this relationship - the supervisor-employee - is located within the workplace mistreatment arena, within the abusive supervision construct in particular.

The supervisor's characteristics form a key part of what forms the basis of why aggressive situations occur. Areas of the supervisor's characteristics such as identity, self-regulation impairment and social learning are considered in the abusive supervision literature (Whitman, 2013). Such characteristics collectively aim to put forward reasons to why the supervisor's influences, including role models, contribute to their aggressive behaviour towards the employee. While only a small body of literature exists, currently, relating to these particular supervisor characteristics, there are still other researchers who are researching the impact of power and additional identity-related characteristics of the supervisor that evoke abuse (Whitman, 2013).

As an example of the discourse around the supervisor's characteristic, as raised in the literature, one of the key points refers to a strong individual identity held by the supervisor. This relates to the way in which a person is preoccupied with how he/she is different from others. The research purports that those with a strong individual identity are said to be motivated mainly by self-interest and opportunities to demonstrate their superiority over others. This is noted to lead to higher levels of abusive supervision (Cross, 2011). One study suggests that the reason this might be the case is because individual-orientated supervisors might engage in abusive behaviour to enhance the power-distance in order to differentiate themselves from their followers (Johnson, 2012).

There are various dynamics that contribute to the expression of workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision within the workplace. The following diagram presents some contributing dynamics, which are argued to centre around power and control:



Figure 4: Examples of engagement dynamics relating to workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision

Most of the studies that are found in the *workplace mistreatment* arena and the *abusive supervision* arena are often quantitative, and a specific call for more qualitative studies have been made by some authors (Cross, 2011). This is further detailed in Chapter Two, however as a note the reason for the lack of qualitative studies is mainly because of the difficulty researchers find in performing a qualitative study in this context.

1.3.3. Antecedents

The additional key focus of this thesis is on uncovering the antecedents of the abusive supervision phenomenon. The causes of why the problem occurs, and persists, this researcher purports, are at the heart of finding an appropriate solution. Definitions and consequences, compared to antecedents, are often the most researched elements given more attention both academically, and more informally. Causes are often less readily, or easily, discussed, and therefore less featured in the literature. Breadth of research into the antecedents of workplace mistreatment has, however, grown over the last decade (Barling, 2009). Now, with more contribution to the antecedents, a way of categorising the discussion seems to have emerged.

Tepper et al., in a paper in 2017, formulated the construct of *identity threat* to support the discussion of antecedents with abusive supervision. This thesis similarly, employs the use of this construct, identity threats, in its consideration of antecedents. *Identity threat* is a term used to describe a situation where a supervisor experiences threats to their identity as a leader, and as a result has their sense of power and control, and potentially their competence, shaken (Tepper et al., 2017). Several other published papers have also categorised discussions about antecedents using this construct (e.g., Liu, 2012; Mawritz, 2012). Teschi's social interactional theory of aggression puts forward the view that, when circumstances prevent an individual from experiencing a desired-self or society-identity, they use hostile behaviour as a useful restoring behaviour (Brown, 2005). Evidence suggests that holding a position of power tends to increase one's reactivity to competence threats, because with that position comes a belief that one has to be competent in that position (Cheng & Chartrand, 2003). That reactivity is said to take the form of abusive supervision.

One of the discussion points raised in the literature, under the threats from within relate to social learning. Social learning theory explains that one reason why supervisors engage in abusive behaviour is because they have come to believe that it is acceptable and rewarding (Yam, 2016). It suggests that individuals learn which behaviours and attitudes are considered appropriate in different contexts partly through observing their environments (Wang, 2010).

Other points relating to the identity threats presented in the literature are discussed further in Section two.

1.4. THE RESEARCH QUESTION AND CONTRIBUTION

The research question of this study covers the exploration of the following two principal points:

- Given the assumption that workplace mistreatment exists at large within the workplace (which is not an unreasonable one), what does the specific mistreatment of the employee by the supervisor look like in the workplace today - in particular in the Global South and in the Corporate financial arena?
- Importantly, what are the reasons this occurs?

Summing up, the thesis and main research question of this study is:

What are the perceived reasons the supervisor behaves aggressively towards the employee?

The main focus is on the antecedents.

It is the researcher's hope that this study further contributes to the exploration and understanding of workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision, and can be used globally, but also indicates the prevalence within the Global South. The study further contributes to the field through using a qualitative approach, where this is not typically used in this field. In addition, the researcher has been given access to the corporate financial arena, another area of the field which is not readily researched. Lastly, the focus, as mentioned before, is on the antecedents. Antecedents, as indicated, are less featured in the discourse of workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision, relative to definitional issues and consequences. This study is intended to be used both by authors within the academic field, and practitioners in the workplace. As raised earlier, being embedded within an inclusive innovation degree, one of the aims of this research is to contribute to the understanding of the problem in order to drive a solution within the field. A suggested praxis model is introduced in the Discussion Chapter (5), and further detailed in Appendix B. The ensuing result is to engender an improved work-environment, one that is more creative, free of abuse, and facilitates innovative work.

1.6. SCOPE AND LIMITATION

As mentioned, this research will explore the above-mentioned research question in the context of the Global South Corporate financial arena. Such research has not extensively been studied outside of the Global North. This research will also be exploring these questions using participants in the financial industry, in South Africa in particular, using one of largest South African financial institutions as a point of access. Particularly because of access issues, current academic research does not explore corporate financial institutions; it tends to be focused either on educational institutions or the medical arena. It is important to explore financial institutions, given the tendency - according to the literature and publicity - for more aggressive individuals to be drawn to it.

The researcher notes that a potential limitation is that, as the researcher, she may be quite embedded within the research itself, having eighteen years of work experience within the workplace wherein she was observing these phenomena. She is very aware and cautious of any embedded bias. It is her hope, however, that this will lend itself to a sincere, authentic and caring voice, rather than to criticism of the workplace; a form of authority on this context.

1.7. THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis will start with the introduction as laid out here, which gives context to the motivation of this study. This will then be followed by the literature review which further explores the current status of the field. Thereafter, the thesis will lay out the chosen methodology with which the research has been conducted. Subsequently, the research findings will be presented. The discussion chapter will then lay out the contribution this study gives to the current academic field, including its recommendations for future research. Lastly, the conclusion of this research is given.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace mistreatment as a phenomenon, includes constructs such as *workplace aggression*, *workplace violence*, *abusive supervision*, *petty tyranny*, *bullying*, and *counterproductive workplace behaviour*, each of which has its own field of study, as mentioned in Section 1.2 of this study. The literature on workplace mistreatment is considerable and has also grown in size over the last ten years as the constructs become more established and the phenomena more publicly acknowledged. Even with it's recent growth, there are calls from authors within the field for continued contribution, particularly where gaps exist in the literature. These include, amongst others, elements such as the comprehensive understanding of the problem of workplace mistreatment, the application of different methodologies within the field, and the study into its causes (Aquino & Thau, 2009).

The research into workplace mistreatment is contended to have started as an investigation firstly, into the constructs of *workplace aggression* and *bullying*. This occurred around the early 1990s, and developed over the last four decades with the creation of other constructs and discourse surrounding that. As a note, the medical field, in particular nursing, had, and continues to have, an appreciable number of studies focused on similar exploration, stemming from prior 1990 (Bartlett II & Bartlett, 2011). A representation, according to the researcher, of the developments between 1994 and 2010, and the constructs which seem to have emerged at various times, is given below (as presented earlier):

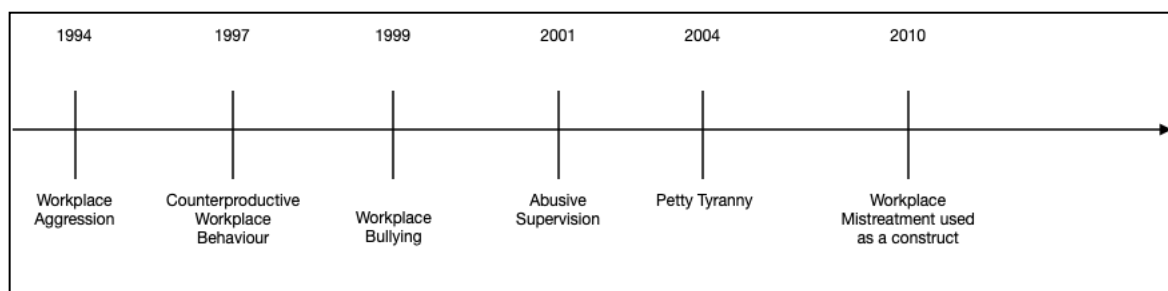


Figure 5: A timeline of the development of terms in the academic arena

There continues, however, to be a general disarray within the workplace mistreatment arena as relates to its terms and constructs used. The cohesion between authors and across constructs appears to be a difficulty within the field (Gilbaldi & Cusack, 2019). Certain elements within

each construct tend to over-lap, and within any given construct a general lack of coordination persists (Gilbaldi & Cusack, 2019). There are, however, attempts - such as workshops held, attended by various leading authors in the field - to try to achieve cohesion (Sharma, 2017). One of the outcomes of these workshops was to endeavour to agree on certain terms used within the academic arena (Sharma, 2017). There were at large, numerous terms for similar concepts being used within the literature - especially as relates to the constructs of *workplace violence* and *workplace aggression* (Sharma, 2017).

With a considerable amount of literature on organisational workplace aggression - around 40,000 results in a single academic search - navigating the literature was quite demanding. The researcher chose a sequential approach using time of construct emergence – as depicted in the figure above - to construe the literature. Together with this, bearing in mind what the research question of the study was, allowed the researcher to ensure the relevant focus areas within the available literature was found. This was also needed in order to identify potential gaps in the academic literature.

The following chapter covers the academic literature review completed for this research and provides a concluding summary, at the end of this chapter, of the various points raised. The layout of the chapter will describe the state of literature for *workplace mistreatment*, as a general construct, and consider the rise of interest in it as a topic. The chapter will disclose the main authors involved and a view of their contribution to the occurrence, antecedents, and consequences of workplace mistreatment. Closing the workplace mistreatment discussion, some criticism of the field will be presented. The chapter will then continue to a discussion around abusive supervision, the particular arena within which this study is located. It will give an overview of this arena and present, as is the main component of this study's research question, the current thought on antecedents of abusive supervision. It concludes by briefly conferring the consequences and critiques within the abusive supervision field, also.

2.1. WORKPLACE MISTREATMENT

Workplace mistreatment is a construct that has received much attention over the last two decades; in particular, in the media and in academic research (Leblanc & Barling, 2004). More often, the media has represented stark instances of workplace violence, at least in the 1990s

(Hepworth & Towler, 2004). More recently, a web search on workplace bullying can return thousands of search results and YouTube videos. Whether it is labelled “workplace violence,” “workplace aggression,” “workplace bullying,” or “incivility in the workplace,” it appears that the phenomenon of workplace mistreatment is of interest, concern and point of engagement to the general public (Sharma, 2017).

As introduced in Section 1.1., the academic interest started with H. Leymann, in 1990, followed by S. Einarsen (1994) who further expanded on the construct of *workplace bullying* (Mattiesen & Einarsen, 2010). This was localised in Scandinavia, but soon found its way into the research community in the United States as the discourse ventured into other constructs, such as *incivility* and *abusive supervision* (Tepper, 1998). As time went on, in the early-to-mid-2000s, there appeared to be stability in four principal constructs - *workplace aggression*, *workplace bullying*, *abusive supervision*, and *incivility* - where authors were following one of these four streams within the general discourse of workplace mistreatment (Pilch & Turska, 2015). Today, the interest and contribution continues with numerous articles published in the general domain of workplace mistreatment, and still other Masters’ and Doctorate theses written on the topic, almost thirty years later (Sharma, 2017). Within the various constructs, over the last two decades, studies have focused predominantly on either *workplace bullying* or *workplace aggression*, and to a lesser extent *abusive supervision* (Pilch & Turska, 2015). Comparatively, little focus appears to have been given to *workplace incivility*, which details the more subversive nature of aggression in the workplace.

The consequences of the phenomena under the umbrella of *workplace mistreatment*, in whatever form, have been argued to be severe. It ranges from workplace incapacities to concerning health issues (Aquino, 2000). This is also what has, arguably, been the cause of the most recent spike in interest around this topic, of the public and Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals, in particular (Ashkanasay & Nicholson, 2003). Research on the antecedents of workplace mistreatment has also been growing over the last decade. It is noted to take of two forms: dispositional, as relates to personality and demographics; and, situational, as relates to leadership, management, organisational culture, and others (Aquino & Bommer, 2003). The three general areas most studies have focused on when researching workplace mistreatment include the outcomes (consequences), the antecedents, and also the prevalence of workplace mistreatment (Aquino et al., 2003).

As relates to prevalence, it has been noted in various studies that have taken place in Australia, the United Kingdom, Asia, Scandinavia, the United States, and other countries (Hershcovis & Reich, 2013) that these phenomena appear to be present globally. As mentioned in Section 1.1., the occurrence of workplace mistreatment in the United States is estimated to be as high as 95%; while, in other countries, such as the Scandinavian regions, as low as between 5% and 10% of the working population (Sharma, 2017). This has brought to light the possible influence of national cultures, on which not many studies have been done to-date (Sharma, 2017). As relates to the demographic of individuals experiencing this phenomenon, it is said to be frequently prevalent to females, to non-White individuals and those of older age (Hershcovis et al., 2013). However, it is observed that too many studies exist to contradict these claims on predominance of demographic, and so it is generally accepted that there is not yet a clear conclusion of the prevalence in any one of these demographic fields (Hershcovis et al., 2013). What, however, does appear to be clear is that not much research exists, empirically, relating to the perpetrator's demographics. Most studies focus on the target's demographics.

As mentioned earlier, there have been only two notable studies completed in South Africa (Pietersen, 2005 and 2008), and apart from this, there are not many located in Africa or even the general Global South (i.e., including Australia, New Zealand, and South America), especially as relates to workplace mistreatment in organisations outside of the medical field (Sharma, 2017).

The empirical studies within workplace mistreatment are mostly quantitative studies, with the measure developed by Einarsen (Negative Acts Questionnaire, 1996) being used most often and having been further developed and now established within the field (Mattiesen & Einarsen, 2010). The majority of the studies on workplace mistreatment, however, are theoretical studies (construct creating), theoretical literature review, or meta-analyses of the many quantitative studies that have been done (Van Fleet & Van Fleet, 2012). There are not many qualitative studies that have taken place, and a few authors in their recommendations have pointed this out and asked the field for more contribution to these (Ghosh, Jacobs & Reio, 2011). Some of the theoretical studies that intend to discuss, or create, constructs have borrowed concepts from the sociology and psychology of human aggression, the authors arguing that it is important to draw from these fields so as to “not reinvent the wheel” (Aquino & Bommer, 2003). A large part of the discussion is based on the observations drawn from management studies, organisational

psychology, or organisational politics (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). There is an urge in the field to develop more empirical studies (Mitchell et al., 2007). As raised earlier, there is also a nod to the nursing field, which, around the 1990s and prior, had pioneered some interesting studies in the field of workplace aggression in the health care field (Rosignano, Lopez & Hodon, 2009).

There are a number of critiques that exist in this field; in particular, as relates to the construct, its interpretation, and its perception, and also as relates to the way in which the field is developing (Taylor & Kleumper, 2012). There are authors who suggest that the field appears dispirited and does not lean “on giants” - seeming to create its own content with each iteration (Taylor et al., 2012). Moreover, the constructs, while acknowledging the sensitivity of the issues, can be said to be interpreted differently by different individuals. It could be argued that the perception of the “target” that he or she is being bullied, or engaged with aggressively, differs depending on who is looking at it (Taylor et al., 2012). It appears that the authors are addressing this criticism through clearer definitions and open discourse with these critics, as well as a more refined way to develop the field (Taylor et al., 2012).

A point to note about the literature is that there are four main parties that are said to contribute to workplace mistreatment: the supervisor, the employee, the leader (often dealt with more discretely as “the organisation”) and teams (labelled as “groups” in the literature) (Martinko, Douglas & Harvey, 2006). The supervisor and employee impacts are dealt with under the individual-level considerations within the literature. As mentioned, the leader is dealt with as the overarching view of the organisation, where, typically, the leader-related impacts are dealt with most often under the “toxic leadership” literature, which seems to be kept separate from “workplace mistreatment” literature (Glomb, 2002).

2.2. ANTECEDENTS OF WORKPLACE MISTREATMENT

The breadth of research into the antecedents of workplace mistreatment has grown over the last decade. Research into the antecedents focuses on helping to explain the presence of workplace mistreatment. Prior to this, it was mainly the consequences that were of most interest in academic research (Barling, Dupre & Kelloway, 2009). Now, with more contribution to the research on antecedents, some way of categorising the discussion seems to have emerged.

The main components presented for the discussion of the antecedents are: antecedents at an individual level, at an organisational level, at a group level, and at a societal level (Pilch & Turska, 2015). The group level will be discussed as a subset of the organisational-level discussion. While there has been a nod to the fact that workplace mistreatment both effects and is possibly caused by such societal-level issues as national culture, not much work to-date has been done in this area (Martinko, Douglas & Harvey, 2006), so it will not be covered in any detail. The individual level is presented here first.

2.2.1 Individual level

At an individual level, firstly, both “target” and “perpetrator” issues are dealt with. The target, however, has been the main focus of most studies done in this field to-date. The issues discussed therefore pertain particularly to the findings as relate to the targets; however, it is to be noted that this implies two things: one, that it is acknowledged by the authors in the field that this could appear to locate the problem with the target and so could constitute some indirect “blaming” (Zapf, 1999); and two, that more studies are required in the field that focus on the individual issues of the perpetrator (Van Fleet & Van Fleet, 2012).

The individual-level factors refer mainly to dispositional attributes – i.e., personality or demographic items (Aquino, 2000). Looking at the individual-level factors for the target: findings suggest that targets’ personalities tend to have higher levels of what is termed “neuroticism” and “extraversion” (particularly “impulsiveness”); but this latter point has been contradicted by further studies suggesting instead lower levels of extraversion (Sharma, 2017). It is also argued that, in fact, the lower levels of extraversion are more likely, theoretically, to be the case (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). Empirical evidence is yet to be shown, however. The perpetrator is found to have a tendency towards control and power-imbalance (Rayner & Hoel, 1997).

As relates to the demographics assumed, studies - as mentioned before - have been contradictory, but some researchers have reported that females are more likely to be targets. Others have indicated no difference between genders. As relates to age, some researchers have found that older people are more likely to be mistreated than younger ones;

however, as with gender, there are conflicting findings. In the UK, a study showed significant differences between mistreatment among White respondents versus the more ethnic minorities. The latter group is shown to experience a higher frequency of mistreatment (Hepworth & Towler, 2004). Other studies, however, have concluded that there are no significant differences between racial groups in the prevalence of workplace mistreatment. Researchers have found that males are more likely to engage in mistreatment, as perpetrators, than females. However, others have found that more females are perpetrators against other females.

The other aspect of individual-level factors relates to work-related, or situational, factors. Perpetrators are said to exhibit “aggressor” behaviours when workloads are high and it is a high-strain job (Hepworth et al, 2004). Targets are said to be vulnerable to aggressor behaviours when there is low job security and when there is role-ambiguity (Hepworth et al., 2004).

2.2.1 Organisational level

At the organisational level, the antecedents are further discussed by leadership and management style, organisational culture and ethical climate, organisational policies and practices, and some other situational factors.

Leadership and management style is said to be different between supervisors (Ashkanasay & Nicholson, 2003). “Leadership” refers to executive or senior management leadership, rather than to supervisors - individuals who are known to direct, more than operate, the flow of work (Ashkanasay et al., 2003). It is noted in the literature that leadership is often perceived to abuse power when workplace mistreatment exists in their environment (Roscigno, Lopez & Hodon, 2009). As well as the “abuse of power,” there is a reference to leaders being “too weak and indistinct” in certain instances; and in these cases also, workplace mistreatment occurs (Roscigno et al., 2009). Weak leadership is said to be leadership that chooses not to “intervene” when workplace mistreatment occurs and may typically result in the aggressor perceiving there to be a lower risk of being caught and punished for workplace mistreatment (Roscigno et al., 2009).

As relates to the management style, here again, reference is made to the executive or senior management and has similar nuances to leadership influences on workplace mistreatment. An “authoritarian” management style through creating fear may indirectly encourage supervisors to use workplace mistreatment (bullying in particular), as a mechanism to display authority (Dupre & Barling, 2006).

Organisational and cultural structures may enable, trigger, and reward workplace mistreatment (Balducci, Alfano & Fraccaroli, 2009). Workplace mistreatment may well be stimulated by organisations that normalise abusive, or even competitive, behaviours (Balducci et al., 2009). This may even be normalised by certain work-groups within the organisation itself (Balducci et al., 2009). Organisations characterised by strong power imbalances can create conditions conducive to workplace mistreatment, and the result can be the institutionalisation of such behaviours (Aquino & Douglas, 2003). Some organisations seem to permit, in some sense, workplace mistreatment (bullying in particular) as “the way things are done” (Aquino et al., 2003). One other point studies make is that organisations may well see workplace mistreatment as the “efficient” way of inducing performance (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). Considerations such as striving for excellence, without consideration of the costs, may help workplace mistreatment become acceptable in organisations (Mitchell et al., 2007). Some organisational cultures may even encourage toughness from their employees, which may provoke workplace mistreatment as a sign of this toughness (Ashkanasay & Nicholson, 2003). In these organisations, workplace mistreatment may become an accepted and even encouraged part of the culture (Ashkanasay et al., 2003). In these instances, workplace mistreatment may be perceived positively by senior management (Ashkanasay et al., 2003).

Ethical climates (also known as instrumental climates) where decisions are made in one’s own self-interest or in the organisation’s interest have been found to have increased workplace mistreatment (Ghosh, Jacobs & Reio, 2011). Employees, here, tend to act egotistically. The contrasting climate is that of a “caring” or “rules-based” ethical climate (Ghosh et al., 2011). Situational factors relating to the organisation that impact the occurrence of workplace mistreatment include organisational change or organisational restructuring (Dupre et al., 2006). This has been shown to illicit job insecurity, which is said to be a catalyst for workplace mistreatment (Hepworth & Towler, 2004). It is also argued that the type of work given to the employee can also illicit workplace mistreatment through causing frustration, especially where

these are small or repetitive tasks (Leblanc & Barling, 2004). Reward structures that provide incentives for employees to compete with one another can stimulate workplace mistreatment through behaviours that are intended to weaken the competition (co-workers) (Leblanc et al., 2004).

Concerning group-level antecedents, where groups here refer to those divisions of individuals within the workplace, such as departments or teams, that function for some reason together (Taylor & Kleumper, 2012). It is said that such groups are likely to change their group norms as a result of workplace mistreatment (Taylor et al, 2012). Researchers have found that employees are more aggressive when witnessing other, more aggressive colleagues (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, R.D. 2001). Still others have found that employees tend to take sides when witnessing workplace mistreatment between a perpetrator and a target, and more often takes the perpetrator's side in fear of becoming the next target (Barling, Dupre & Kelloway, 2009). This can be particularly destructive for group norms and cohesion.

Moreover, employees other than just the perpetrator, through mimicking the behaviours observed, may start mistreating the target and other group members (Hershcovis & Reich, 2013). As a result, this can develop group norms that are accepting of these behaviours (Hershcovis et al., 2013). Researchers therefore suggest that group norms that tolerate or even encourage workplace mistreatment between individuals can stimulate mistreatment within the group overall (Hershcovis et al., 2013).

“Status inconsistency” is a term used by researchers to describe a situation where, within a group, there is an employee (or employees) that is different from the other members of the group based on age, gender, race, or some other characteristic (status) (Aquino & Bommer, 2003). Such employees are said to be vulnerable to being made targets of workplace mistreatment in the group, given a potential perceived power disparity between other members of the group and the employee (Aquino et al., 2003). A study found that 20% of targets felt that they were mistreated because of being different from others (Aquino et al., 2003). There has been a study that has suggested employees who experience status inconsistency might also tend towards being perpetrators as a result of the aggression that builds up (Aquino et al., 2003).

Lastly, there are situational factors contributing to group-level antecedents for workplace mistreatment; for example, high levels of conflict between tasks, a low level of openness in communication, and the interdependence of tasks. All of these items suggest higher levels of workplace mistreatment within work groups (Dupre & Barling, 2006).

2.3. CONSEQUENCES OF WORKPLACE MISTREATMENT

In this section, the outcomes of workplace mistreatment being present in an environment are looked at. On this topic, there is slightly more research, compared to the research on antecedents (Roscigno et al., 2009), and the main findings are highlighted. Here, the outcomes are discussed in a similar way to those of the antecedents: by individual level (the target) and organisational level (including group level).

As indicated in Section 1.1., at the individual level, for targets, researchers have found that workplace mistreatment can have an adverse effect on mental and psychological health (Roscigno et al., 2009). Depression and stress, sleep problems and mood swings, and - at the extreme - suicide, are all listed consequences of workplace mistreatment (Roscigno et al., 2009). These are generally classified as physiological and psychological outcomes. Work-related outcomes are such items as intent to leave, absenteeism, and job dissatisfaction, and researchers have found a positive correlation associated with these and workplace mistreatment (Schat & Kelloway, 2003). In the discussion of what the outcomes are for the individual, as relates to the impact of workplace mistreatment behaviours, it makes little sense to be discussing these for the perpetrator, as it can be expected that the perpetrator, being the instigator, has obtained the particular outcome that they desired (Homant & Kennedy, 2003). It could be noted that increased success rate may result in ego-building or the likelihood of the situation being repeated. There is little research on outcomes for the perpetrator.

At an organisational level, the effects of workplace mistreatment are not widely studied and there has been a call to contribute to this part of the field (Hershcovis et al., 2013). As raised in Section 1.1., there is a study, however, that suggests the cumulative effects of workplace mistreatment on the organisation is on the organisation's performance and its overall bottom-line (Lamertz & Aquino, 2004). Also referred to earlier, still another study suggests that workplace mistreatment has a negative consequence for witnesses and suggests that the

consequences of workplace mistreatment can have further-reaching consequences than just for the target (Penney & Spector, 2002). More indirectly, it is purported that workplace mistreatment can affect the organisation's culture, where such behaviours can permeate through multiple departments and divisions of the organisation (Hershcovis, 2010). In this way, certain aggressive individuals, particularly if holding important positions, can influence aggressiveness within the organisation's culture (Hershcovis, 2010). At a team level, members who have been mistreated are likely to experience feelings of isolation and embarrassment (Aquino et al., 2009). A study found that, in instances of workplace mistreatment occurring within a team, perceptions around team success was low (Roscigno et al., 2009). Here also, mistreatment in groups can produce more mistreatment within that group (Roscigno et al., 2009). Overall, research at a group level also requires some attention within the field (Roscigno et al., 2009).

Brief mention can be made here to the assertion that, at a societal-level, the consequences of workplace mistreatment may, as raised in Section 1.1., include growing medical costs, premature retirement, and a greater need for social services and welfare (Schat et al., 2003). Also as presented earlier, one study contends that workplace mistreatment may have an influence on unemployment levels, interpersonal relationships beyond work, and legal costs associated with court cases (Leblanc et al., 2002). Future research on societal-level consequences have also been urged (Pilch et al., 2015).

2.4. A FOCUS ON SUPERVISOR AGGRESSION (ABUSIVE SUPERVISION)

Attention now turns to the focus of this study: abusive supervision. As mentioned earlier, this falls under the overall umbrella of *workplace mistreatment* as a phenomenon (Zhang & Liao, 2015). Where this differs from the other constructs, mainly, is that it focuses on the supervisor-employee relationship and not on the colleague-to-colleague, group-to-employee or organisation-to-employee relationships (Zhang et al., 2015). It specifically relates mainly to the supervisor at any level (also sometimes known as line or direct reporting managers; junior, mid-level, or senior management) (Zhang et al., 2015). While the construct could focus on the aggression displayed by the employee towards the supervisor (and this is discussed in other constructs), this particular construct typically discusses the mistreatment that is displayed by the individual perceived to have more power: the supervisor (Bass, 2008). The concept of

abusive supervision for this construct has often been synonymous with other concepts, such as *supervisor aggression*, *supervisor undermining*, *petty tyranny*, *destructive leadership*, and even the more severe discussion of *toxic leadership* (Bass, 2008). This researcher has intentionally titled this thesis “supervisor-employee relationship challenges” so as to not use the more negatively associated title of “abusive supervision.” Abusive supervision, however, is the more academically-accepted term and one that will be explained in more detail here.

The construct of *abusive supervision* was developed by Tepper in 2000. Tepper defines *abusive supervision* as “a subordinate’s perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical contact” (Tepper, 2000, p. 134). Around 20 years have passed since Tepper first wrote about abusive supervision; and since he introduced it, a significant body of relevant empirical work has been produced; in particular in the last 10 years. The following is an outline of the number of studies that relate to abusive supervision that have been published over the last two decades: there were 14 articles published between 2001 and 2006, 62 articles between 2006 and 2010, and 152 between 2011 and 2015 (Tepper, Simon & Park, 2017). That means that two-thirds of the literature on abusive supervision has been published between 2001 and 2015 (Tepper et al., 2017). Another trend is that interest seems to be growing as to the antecedents of abusive supervision. There were zero published papers on antecedents prior to 2006, 14 between 2006 and 2011, and 45 between 2011 and 2015 (Tepper et al., 2017). While there has been an upswing in interest in antecedents, there has been a much greater growth of interest in the consequences of abusive supervision (Bies, 2016).

Some studies suggest, as raised earlier, that the prevalence of abusive supervision (those who experience abusive supervision) is around 10% of the working population (Tepper, 2015). One study suggests that the prevalence is around 30%, but that study focuses on university athletics and the prevalence is assumed to differ from traditional industry sectors ((Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2015). Generally, however, the current studies have shown abusive supervision to be low (Bies, 2016). Authors in this field suggest, however, that this may be camouflaged by a tendency of targets to be fearful of acknowledging their experiences as a victim, even when reports can be made anonymously (Bies, 2016). Other authors contend that the numbers shown, however low, may even be inflated since some targets may perceive abuse that has not

actually occurred or interpret non-abusive behaviour as abusive (Bies, 2016). These are theoretical arguments at present.

As is the main focus of this study, the antecedents of abusive supervision as found in the current literature are laid out below.

2.5. ANTECEDENTS OF ABUSIVE SUPERVISION

Antecedents of abusive supervision help explain the phenomenon, and it is said that, from such research, insights are likely to be derived that can inform work practitioners who want to eliminate or manage the effects of supervisory abuse. As mentioned before, causes are of particular interest to this study because of this ability to drive insights. Studying consequences is useful also to get an understanding of the extent to which abusive supervision might be impacting employees in the organisation; however, studying consequences is seen more as observing the effects or listing what went on, than as looking at the potentially unseen causes of this, which are more pervasive. It is to be hoped that, through further contribution to the study of antecedents, any critical concern surrounding their validity can be further established.

As introduced in Section 1.2., Tepper et al., in a paper in 2017, covered antecedents using the concept of *identity threat*, which is employed similarly here to discuss the antecedents of abusive supervision. *Identity threat* is understood to describe a situation where a supervisor experiences threats to their identity as a leader, their sense of power and control, and their sense of competence is shaken (Tepper et al., 2017). Several published papers have categorised some antecedents according to this description (e.g., Liu, 2012; Mawritz, 2012). Teschi's social interactional theory of aggression holds that, when circumstances prevent an individual from experiencing a desired-self or society-identity, they use hostile behaviour as a useful restoring behaviour (Brown, 2005). Evidence suggests that holding a position of power tends to increase the reactivity to competence threats because with that position comes a belief that you have to be competent in that position (Cheng & Chartrand, 2003). That reactivity is said to take the form of abusive supervision.

This section now goes on to discuss what studies have suggested are the three main threats to the supervisor: first, identity threats from within - those the supervisor experiences which may come from their own inclination to experience certain traits, such as self-regulation and social learning; second, identity threats from below that come from the subordinates' characteristics and/or behaviours; third, identity threats from above, which relate to the actions and demands on the supervisor from a higher authority. Bear in mind that the ultimate effect - that which is the focus here of these potential causes - is that the supervisor takes out the aggression on the employee, regardless of the source.

2.5.1. Threats from Within (Supervisor Characteristics)

The supervisor's characteristics cover areas such as identity, self-regulation impairment, and social learning, as raised in Section 1.2. These collectively aim to put forward reasons that relate to the supervisor's influences and role models that contribute to their aggressive behaviour towards the employee. While only a small body of literature exists relating to the threats from within, currently, there are still researchers who are looking into the power and identity-related characteristics of the supervisor that evoke abuse (Whitman, 2013).

There are two main points that are raised in regards to identity. As presented earlier, the first relates to a strong individual identity, one in which a person is preoccupied with the way he/she is different from others, and where those with a strong individual identity are said to be motivated mainly by self-interest and opportunities to demonstrate their superiority over others. This can lead to higher levels of abusive supervision (Cross, 2011). A study suggests that the reason this might be the case is because individual-orientated supervisors might engage in abusive behaviour to enhance the power-distance in order to differentiate themselves from their followers (Johnson, 2012). The second point here is that certain personality traits may also indicate self-interest and a strong need for power and control. Studies have referred to specific traits such as the supervisor's *psychological entitlement*, which is described as "the persistent belief that one is entitled to and deserves more than others" (Kiazad et al., 2010, p 234). Traits such as *the dark triad*, a concept used to describe the combination of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy is mentioned here (Kiazad, 2010). While this delves into the psychology of abusive supervision, it is worth mentioning here. A study suggests that supervisors are more abusive when they are lower in emotional intelligence, higher in

psychological entitlement, and less politically skilled (Cheng, 2004). As relates to Machiavellianism, this trait is argued to make aggressive thoughts more accessible and thereby facilitate hostile behaviour. Consistent with these ideas, another study has suggested that the practical implementation of this trait is in an authoritarian leadership, or management, style (Zhang & Bednall, 2016). The supervisor using this style tends to assert absolute authority and control over employees, and often demands unquestionable obedience (Zhang et al., 2016). More research into these areas has been suggested by authors in the field (Zhang et al., 2016).

It is said that, when people prefer consistency in what they do and in what they hope to accomplish, this is labelled “academically as behaviour-goal consistency” (Swann 2012). When self-regulation processes are working properly, people are able to maintain good behaviour-goal consistency (Swann, 2012). To ensure this continues to work properly requires and consumes self-resources such as mental energy, personal willpower, and social support (Swann, 2012). As relates to self-regulation impairment, self-regulation theories are considered important to help explain why self-regulation impairment occurs (Schmeichel & Baumeister, 2004). Theories of self-regulation are concerned with explaining how individuals manage thoughts, emotions, and impulses in a way that maintains the behaviour-goal consistency (Carver & Scheier, 1982). Ego depletion theory is one such theory. Ego depletion theory suggests that, when there are repeated efforts to regulate behaviour-goal consistency, it causes individuals to experience self-regulation impairment, a state of exhaustion with respect to the finite pool of resources the individual has available to draw from in order to self-regulate (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Regulatory failure is said to be evidenced by self-destructive behaviours, such as self-medication, procrastination, and aggression (Baumeister, 1997). In several studies, scholars have suggested ego depletion theory as a way to explain why individuals in supervisory positions may abuse their direct reports (Collins & Jackson, 2015; Wang, 2010; Yam, 2016). Items such as handling difficult client interactions, implementing strategic change, and difficult workflow are said to be examples of work items that can deplete a supervisor’s resources leading to self-regulation impairment and consequent abusive situations (Collins et al., 2015). It is suggested that something as simple as sleep quality may be in direct correlation with ego-depletion (Wang, 2010). It has further been suggested that a stressful home or family situation can also have a direct effect on the self-regulatory process and, hence, the prevalence of abusive supervision at work (Yam, 2016).

Lastly, as relates to social learning, as discussed in Section 1.1, social learning theory puts forward that one explanation of why supervisors engage in abusive behaviour is that they come to believe it is acceptable and rewarding (Yam, 2016). It suggests that individuals learn which behaviours and attitudes are considered appropriate in different contexts, partly through observing their environment (Wang, 2010). Several studies have, using social learning theory, tended to focus on role models and organisational or societal culture (Pundt, 2014; Yam, 2016).

Workplace role models (abusive behaviour enacted by senior management in order to promote performance) and familial role models (parents who are seen as authority figures, combined with a situation wherein there is familial undermining or parental aggression) are expressed as findings that may describe why abusive supervision occurs. Role models are said to be an important feature of social learning, since, through role models the individual is determining which behaviours to mimic by looking to those they perceive as high in status and credibility (Brown, 2005). It is said that this may even occur at a subconscious level, which implies that, where it exists, abusive behaviour could be adopted unintentionally (Mawritz, 2012).

As mentioned in the earlier section on antecedents of workplace mistreatment, aggressive organisational norms or hostile organisational cultures are also antecedents of abusive supervision; in particular, when employees are led to believe that such behaviour is acceptable (Liu, 2012). One study suggests that some societal culture or national culture influences the supervisor's behaviour (Kiewitz, 2012). This study examined abusive supervision in an Anglo culture versus a Confusion one, and suggested that the standard differences in the acceptability of supervisory hostility across these regions differed (Kiewitz, 2012). The study suggested that this could be explained mainly by the different degrees of cultural acceptance of power differences within a given hierarchical structure (Kiewitz, 2012).

2.5.2. Threats from Below (Employee Characteristics/Behaviours)

Here those behaviours of employees that might be considered “going against the grain” by supervisors, whether real or perceived, is considered. Two theories describing why the supervisor reacts aggressively to certain behaviours or traits of the employee are: moral exclusion theory and victim precipitation theory. In addition to these theories, counter-productive workplace behaviour as exhibited by the employee and real or perceived norm

violations are also considered by the supervisor to be instances of the employee actively creating a threat and inciting aggressive tendencies.

Moral exclusion theory suggests that the individual - in this instance the supervisor - develops a psychological boundary, or what is referred to as a “scope of justice,” which is deemed to separate them from those (the employee) whose behaviour they label “unworthy of just treatment” (Opotow, 1995). An example of this might be when an employee’s performance falls short of the standards set by the supervisor, which results in harsh treatment (Hafer & Olson, 2003).

Victim precipitation theory suggests that individuals - in this case the employee - may appear vulnerable and unable to retaliate or defend themselves, and so become prone to being targets of aggression (known in this theory as the “submissive victim”) (Elias, 1986). There is also the case, within this theory, of the supervisor considering the individual/employee to appear aggravating and to be displaying behaviour in need of correcting (this is known in theory as the “provocative victim”) (Elias, 1986).

As mentioned, it tends to aggravate the supervisor when the employee displays counter-productive workplace behaviour (CWB), which includes acts of time-wasting or working on redundant tasks (Simon, 2015). In addition to this, even where the employee simply exhibits a tendency to avoid the supervisor, these may be assessed by the supervisor as a violation of organisational norms, or at least of their understanding of it (Simon, 2015). In particular, the organisational norm that creates aggravation is the expectation that superiors are to be treated with dignity and respect (Simon, 2015). An unfavourable reaction to the supervisor’s attempts at charismatic behaviour may also be considered to be a provocation and threat to the supervisor’s self-esteem (Pundt, 2014). Such norm violations tend to threaten the supervisor’s status and perceived control, and can lead to aggressive acts that are intended to attempt to reclaim that power which was assumed to be lost in that interaction (Pundt, 2014).

Each of these instances in this, is said to potentially pose a threat to the supervisor's identity, since the supervisor's performance is often measured including the performance of the employee (Khan, 2016). It is even said to cause aggravation to the supervisor because traits or behaviour such as these can be deemed to interfere with the supervisor's goal accomplishment or to compromise their need for authority (Khan, 2016).

Another consideration here is the concept of *social dominance and deep-level dissimilarity*. *Social dominance* is defined as "the belief that organisations which maintain status inequalities are deemed effective" (Khan, 2016, p 360). These are believed to be organisational structures that enhance cooperation and are more egalitarian (believing that people are equal and have equal rights) in nature (Khan, 2016). Recent studies suggest that a supervisor that is high in alignment with social dominance will perceive high-achieving performers as a threat, since they pose a direct threat to the organisational hierarchical structure (Wang, 2015). *Deep-level dissimilarity* refers to a belief that there is a fundamental difference between the individual - in this case the supervisor - and the employee, in an attempt to explain the supervisors' perception of relationship conflict and what may be deemed the employee's "poor performance" (Tepper, 2011). This also creates animosity and the condition of a broken-down relationship becoming irreparable (Tepper, 2011).

2.5.3. Threats from Above (Displaced Aggression)

While it has not been widely studied, there is one theory that offers an explanation as to why superiors to the supervisor may well cause abusive supervision between the supervisor and the employee. It is understood that, in a typical hierarchical structure, supervisors may receive threats from hierarchically-superior sources (Tepper, 2006). The result of this, however, is usually abusive behaviour displayed towards the employee (Tepper, 2006). The reason this happens is because of what is called "displaced aggression" (Tedeschi & Norman, 1985). This occurrence happens when the supervisor expresses their frustration on less powerful targets - those who are deemed relatively safe targets - rather than on the true source of their stress (Tedeschi & Norman, 1985). One particular theory that is used in the studies that do discuss this issue is the justice perspective (Greenberg & Scott, 1996). It aims to explain why supervisors display displaced aggression. It suggests that the organisation's injustice, as enacted by the superior and perceived by the supervisor, threatens the supervisor's sense of

dignity and respect (Greenberg et al., 1996). The supervisor then, in turn, is led to negatively respond to the employee and, through this, may feel the injustice was alleviated and equity was restored (Greenberg et al., 1996). An authoritarian leadership style has, in these studies, been found to exacerbate the relationship between the supervisor's interactional injustice and abusive supervision (Tepper et al., 2017).

The chapter now covers the consequences of abusive supervision, before concluding.

2.6. CONSEQUENCES OF ABUSIVE SUPERVISION

With the main focus of this study being antecedents, this section will not delve into too much detail. However, it is felt that, after mention of the outcomes following the discussion of the potential causes, it is only appropriate to give the full context of the construct and phenomenon, abusive supervision. There are three main areas of consideration here: performance, withdrawal, and well-being. Each of these areas of consequence are dealt with in turn, below.

The performance of the employee as a result of abusive supervision has only been researched by a handful of studies (Tepper et al., 2017). In particular, as mentioned in Section 1.1., these studies allude to a reduction of performance as a result of abusive supervision (Walter, 2015). Here, however, the use of performance measures has been contested by some, given that most of the performances being assessed are those using performance ratings supplied by the supervisor (Detert, 2007). While not all industries can have objective measures of performance (restaurant services is one such industry), the softer, more subjective performance measures - particularly those that are dictated by the supervisor - while providing insight, could diverge from actual performance (Detert, 2007). It is said, in fact, that softer performance measures may be one way of executing abusive supervision, enabling the supervisor to rate employees less favourably than their performances genuinely warrant (Detert, 2007). Social psychologists have used just this - performance-rating exercises - as a way to measure the extent to which those in leadership positions devalue their employees (Walter, 2015). The recommendation by researchers for future use of this measure is to request it from sources other than the supervisor (Tepper et al., 2017).

The other area of consequences of abusive supervision that has received much attention and has a good body of work associated with it is the study of withdrawal, as introduced in Section 1.1. *Withdrawal* includes concepts such as *turnover*, *job satisfaction*, *intentions to quit*, *organisational justice*, *psychological distress*, and *employee engagement* (Barnes, 2015). Tepper (2017) found that abusive supervision positively correlated with the incidence of self-reported voluntary exits (turnover). More research into the nuances of this area has been recommended, such as: do employees quit because of an accumulation of dissatisfaction or is it as a result of a once-off instance (Tepper et al., 2017)?

The third area of consequences are the issues of the employee's well-being, discussed in studies mainly as "subjective well-being" and "objective well-being" (Thau & Mitchell, 2010). Several studies, as raised in Section 1.1., have linked exposure to abusive supervision to subjective perceptions of the employee's well-being, such as depression and self-regulation impairment (Thau et al., 2010). One such study suggests that the symptoms of abusive supervision bear a stark similarity to those of post-traumatic stress disorder (Ganster & Rosen, 2013). Studies in objective well-being are scarce, and future research in this area has been recommended (Tepper et al., 2017). Suggested examples of objective well-being, as presented earlier, are believed to be insomnia, doctor visits, self-medicating behaviour, hospital claims, and cortisol levels, among others, and with good reason are said to be linked to abusive supervision (Thau et al., 2010). One particular study suggests that stressors, such as abusive supervision, can have an impact on the immune system, as well as the cardiovascular and metabolic systems (Tepper, 2007).

2.7. CRITICS OF ABUSIVE SUPERVISION

To conclude this presentation of the current thought on abusive supervision, some thoughts that have emerged as a Far Right critic of abusive supervision is shared. There is an understanding that these constructs can be foreign to some and possibly overly-sensitive to others, which is expressed in the body of work in this area and the societal focus and academic call for work in this area. However, it is evident that this phenomenon is something that needs to be paid attention to and that solutions need to be created, despite the voices of critics. The three main points of contention from critics are as follows: concern about the subjectivity of the evaluation of abusive supervision (external negative criticism), concern about the employee's decision to

describe the supervision as abusive or not (self-criticism), and finally concern that there is limited data from supervisors (self-criticism).

Critics have expressed concern about the fact that the contributions to the research have not always been precise in acknowledging that the work covers an “employee appraisal of abusive supervision” (Tepper et al., 2017). Their concern would be alleviated, say critics, if there was an aim for greater objectivity in the assessment of responses by also including independent evaluators (such as multiple peers), or, alternatively, by making it clear that the focus is on perceived abusive supervision (Chan & McAllister, 2014). Scholars in the field have come back to suggest that, while the criticism is noted, the following considerations would need to be taken into account in the critics’ requests (Tepper et al., 2017). Looking at the definition of *abusive supervision* described earlier: “subordinate’s perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical contact.” An important conceptual feature of this definition is the characterisation of abusive supervision as a subjective perception (Tepper et al., 2017). This is implied in the definition when “subordinate’s perceptions” are mentioned.

From the construct’s inception, those contributing to the scholarly domain have indeed assumed that subordinate’s reports are subjective evaluations (Tepper, 2000). They have said that they have never claimed, at any point, to capture the supervisor’s behaviour in an objective manner (Tepper et al., 2017). Regarding the first request of the critics, scholars of abusive supervision point out that agreement among subjective perceptions of the supervisor’s behaviour does not make for objectivity (Tepper et al., 2017). One particular study suggests that intersubjective agreement on a social phenomenon does not provide evidence for an objective truth (Longino, 1990). In addition, the dominant view among scholars is that the supervisors tend to vary their behaviour across direct reports (Tepper et al., 2017). Also, workplace mistreatment - of which, as mentioned, abusive supervision is one form - is often performed covertly, unseen by observers and often in a manner that perpetrators can shrug off as an innocent misunderstanding (Aquino, 1999). In other words, when it comes to perceptions of abusive supervisor behaviour, inter-subordinate disagreement is to be expected and a better reflection of reality than agreement (Tepper et al., 2017).

Scholars also suggest that, when referring to other frequently-examined organisational behaviour constructs - such as organisational citizenship behaviour, stress, or transformational leadership - the words “perceived” are not repeatedly used in an attempt to clarify to the reader that it was perceived (Tepper et al., 2017). The field then adheres to the tradition by removing the necessity to use the word “perceived” each time the word “abuse” or “abusive” is used. In fact, scholars contend that the definition speaks to this subjective perception at the outset of any paper and for the duration following it should be assumed that the prevailing conception of abusive supervision is being considered (Tepper et al., 2017).

The second point about the decision employees make around labelling supervision “abusive” or not relates to employees who believe themselves to be targets of abusive supervision, but may not categorise their supervisors as “abusive” (Ferris, 2007). Renowned individuals such as Steve Jobs and certain athletic coaches may be considered as examples where direct reports may perceive their behaviour as “abrasive” or as issuers of “tough love” - rather than “abusive” - where in fact it might teeter on the latter (Bies, 2016).

Similarly, to what was mentioned above, the subjectivity associated with perceptions of supervisory abusiveness results in different employees interpreting it differently and the same subordinate interpreting the behaviour differently at different times (Aquino, 1999). In fact, it is said that “the same individual could view a supervisor’s behaviour as abusive in one context and non-abusive in the next, and two subordinates could differ in the evaluations of the same supervisor’s behaviour” (Aquino, 1999, p 145). The question then emerges as to what leads an individual to evaluate the supervisor as abusive in one instance, and not in another. Similarly questioned - if we assume that, in the minds of the individuals, there is a line that separates abusive supervisors from abrasive supervisors - is what causes the perceiver to choose to evaluate the supervisor as one rather than the other (Bies, 2016). It is suggested, but not yet studied, that the “abuse” label is likely to be applied more readily when supervisors are colder and more calculating, reflecting hostile intent or ambivalence toward the target’s well-being (Bies, 2016). It may also be more readily labelled “abuse” if it occurs frequently (Bies, 2016). As an example, it is thought that the “abuse” label is more likely to be used when actions such as public outbursts, derogatory name-calling, inappropriate blaming, and credit-taking are not an odd occurrence, but a sustained behavioural pattern (Ferris, 2007). The use of the label of “abuse” may also be influenced by the organisation’s cultures and norms. Where abusive

supervision is accepted as a norm - or in situations where this behaviour may be regarded as acceptable, such as under conditions such as a crisis or when the team's performance is considered exceptional - then the label of "abuse" may not readily be used (Ferris, 2007).

Lastly, the point around scarce data as regards to the responses of supervisors that are included in the abusive supervision literature domain is laid out. It is acknowledged that most studies invoked here look at the construct through evaluations provided by the employee. This is argued to be appropriate for a number of reasons, but it is acknowledged that more research should be done focusing on the supervisor's responses, as they are expected to be informative (Johnson, 2012). The main reasons why it is argued that employee evaluations should be the predominant consideration in this field are three-fold: first, it is said to be typical of research in a leadership domain to focus on the employees' responses (Johnson, 2012); second, researchers of abusive supervision, in general, have had questions with a focus on employee experience and have typically been interested in understanding the thought processes of the target (Johnson, 2012); and, third - and potentially most importantly - it is questionable whether supervisors are in the position to provide accurate responses around the occurrences (Johnson, 2012). Concern around using self-reports is that individuals may not be willing to admit they execute acts that harm others (Lin, 2016). As mentioned before, it is also contested whether workplace mistreatment, of which abusive supervision is a component, is always visible to observers and even targets themselves (Lin, 2016). In these instances, it is often the case that only the perpetrator is in the position to acknowledge workplace mistreatment has occurred, so the abuse is easily hidden. A further note is that supervisor reports on abusive supervision are not more objective than employees', but it is acknowledged that it can be a useful alternative (Johnson, 2012).

2.8. CONCLUSION

This literature review aimed to outline for the reader the general state of the literature on workplace mistreatment, and specifically, on abusive supervision. It navigated the concept's current popularity, historical establishment, and definitional and terminology issues, as well as its prevalence, antecedents, consequences, and, in the case of abusive supervision, criticism.

There are four main take-aways. First, there are a number of different constructs embedded within the workplace mistreatment phenomenon, one of which is the focus of this study: abusive supervision.

Second, while there has been an increase in academic contributions to the literature on abusive supervision in recent years, there is still a scarcity in the areas of qualitative studies, group-level workplace mistreatment, antecedents of abusive supervision, and supervisor-specific self-reports.

Third, the literature on both workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision has had a surge in scholarly interest in the antecedents and consequences of these phenomena in the workplace. The key antecedent and consequence categories for workplace mistreatment are individual-level and organisational-level causes and outcomes. For abusive supervision, these are causes relating to identity-based threats, to the supervisor, and to outcomes relating to performance and well-being.

Lastly, critics have voiced their concern over subjectivity and data points within the area of abusive supervision, which has raised discussion of whether and how to deal with these. The overall sentiment is that research on workplace mistreatment and (in particular) abusive supervision are welcomed and further scholarly contribution is needed. This study aims to address the scarcity of qualitative studies in the field and will continue to build on the literature on antecedents. In this contribution, the hope is that the study will help develop creative ways to deal with the problem of abusive supervision and so improve the work environment for others.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter looks at the research approaches and design to the study that has been used. The philosophies that the researcher is taking for this research, and the collection and analysis processes that have been followed.

Organisational phenomena, such as workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision, are often more complex than they are given credit for (Lee SK, 1992). A fairly robust consideration of what is needed to conduct empirical studies in this area is therefore recommended. This is particular relevant for organisational studies that incorporate a behavioural element to it.

3.1. RESEARCH APPROACH AND STRATEGY

3.1.1. Research Philosophy

Philosophical perspectives are important because, when made explicit, they reveal the assumptions that researchers are making about their research, leading to choices that are applied to the purpose, design, methodology and methods of the research, as well as to data analysis and interpretation. This matter needs to be addressed because researchers may have different assumptions about the nature of truth and knowledge and philosophy helps us to understand their assumptions. The philosophy of the research mainly revolves around whether knowledge is created or whether it is discovered. There is validity in different views for different fields of study. However, for this particular field of workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision, the researcher tends towards the epistemological belief that knowledge is *created* (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003). The study is as such constructivist in nature, using social constructivist theory which analyses processes “in which the individuals describe and explain the world in which they live or how they see it” (Gergen & Wieschaus, 1985, p. 3f). The essence being that the knowledge of the study was created and moulded through questioning and observing; rather than developed from an already formed phenomenon (Azungah, 2018). The concept of workplace and supervisor aggression and its causes, in particular as relates to the purpose of this study, are those that are moulded as the concept is further observed. While some might think of it as a phenomenon already existing, it is

sometimes readily arguable whether an instance is generally accepted as workplace or supervisor aggression or not. The persistent study and observance of it, confirms its existence.

The benefits that come with the field of workplace mistreatment being relatively young (around 30 years old), when compared to a subject matter such as human aggression (around 140 years old or more), is that it is clearer to see the process of how knowledge can be constructed. Those constructs, or concepts, that become what is referred to as the “knowledge” in the field (Azungah, 2018). Ultimately, at an established stage, this knowledge can be transferred and used to educate others not directly in the academia, on (Sandelowski et al., 2003).

3.1.3. Reasoning Approach

The approach of the study follows an inductive approach. This is making plain observation, upfront, of the issues brought forward and *thereafter* developing theory using these observations (Azungah, 2018). This approach is found to be most useful for this study, and the topic of workplace mistreatment, because in the interviews conducted upfront it will be important to, as with the literature review, gain an understanding of the broad constructs and possible issues/causes at play here. In this it is possible to *observe plainly* the content and context, upfront, before making any “judgements” on how to *construct* the knowledge. The knowledge creation can then be developed thereon (Sandelowski et al., 2003).

Regarding deductive and abductive approaches, the other approaches that could have been adopted, these are covered here. The deductive approach, which instead looks at trying to draw a pattern from the information gathered *beforehand*, to then project what these patterns may be in the data to be collected and thereafter see if the data fits this assumption. It is a slightly more pre-emptive approach based on an initial view. In this way, the study would rather not make any initial assumptions about what the data might show or not; instead there is a preference to be sure to display a more “open” approach of *first* gathering and then analysing the data for theoretical underpinnings (Azungah, 2018). Abductive reasoning, on the other hand, tries to address the gaps that inductive and deductive reasoning approaches might miss. However, it can be slightly complex trying to combine both a more “logical” approach (deductive) with the more “created” approach (inductive). The difference between abductive, inductive and deductive is considered to be quite blurred, each approach sharing some qualities with the

other, and so which approach to use is deemed a matter of choice for the researcher (Azungah, 2018). The subject matter at hand, being workplace mistreatment and supervisor aggression, has its own complexities and the preference is to stick with the tried and tested and less complex approach of inductive reasoning, as mentioned above, rather than abductive reasoning (Sandelowski et al., 2003).

3.1.2. Research Approach

The research problem of this study relates to what the perceived causes (antecedents) are for supervisor aggression towards the employee. This fits into the abusive supervision area within the workplace mistreatment arena at large (Moon & Blackman, 2017). The various academic methods in use today are broadly categorised as either quantitative or qualitative approaches, or a mixed method approach. For this particular field of study, the choice of approaches is mainly between the quantitative method and qualitative one, as positioned below (Azungah, 2018). The mixed method approach, while it is useful in presenting some of the aspects found in both the quantitative and qualitative approaches, tends towards a complexity required in analysing both aspects that is not generally done in this field.

As relates to the quantitative approach, its use for this study can be alluring because it is known to be used extensively in the field of workplace mistreatment over the last 30 years, roughly since its inception. It has been the easiest way to obtain the sensitive information needed to be extracted for analysis in this field (Azungah, 2018). Multiple quantitative measures have been developed initially, by researchers, and some of the more trusted measures have been repetitively tested and in some instances adopted globally, to date (Sandelowski et al., 2003). Further to this, there have been various meta-analyses of a cross-section of empirical studies conducted at the time, which have contributed to the trust of these measures (Azungah, 2018), making its use even further attractive. Notwithstanding is my contribution in this stance of my actuarial science and statistical background. While things may look promising to then use a quantitative method, there are further reasons as to why currently, for this study, a qualitative approach is more suitable.

Key to bring into the discussion here is what the essential values of quantitative versus qualitative methods are, and the views they are based on. In particular, quantitative views are

said to be based on the presumption that phenomena are discovered, rather than knowledge created, and predictions are made by observing the differences between people's traits or abilities, rather than exploring their insights. (Azungah, 2018). Qualitative approaches are based on a principle of attempting to understand what is happening within the cases and then uses that understanding to make generalizable findings. (Azungah, 2018). The researcher is "creating not discovering" the contribution to the solution for the research problem. The focus of the research is rather to produce "useful insights" rather than a "correct representation" (Azungah, 2018). With this in mind, it is my belief that the research will benefit from taking a qualitative approach in experiencing the participants understanding and creating useful insights from this; rather than assuming that something already exists in the experience or mind of the participant and extracting that to draw inferences, based also on the assumption that other participants experience the same thing (Sandelowski et al., 2003). A qualitative study can come in various forms, but all have the common element of the human contact. There is said to be a richness of content that comes with obtaining data using the qualitative study, that cannot be achieved as well from a quantitative one. The quantitative analysis becomes very numerical, while still retaining the essence of "making sense of human feedback", sometimes with numerical analyses important information, however slight, can be lost (Azungah, 2018). The ability to perceive and pick up on body language and slight nuances in tone, even though video calls during COVID protocols, is an important component of qualitative studies, that can provide deeper insights.

Dealing with the topic of workplace mistreatment can require additional sensitivity in the research method considered, and things such the choice of words used in the communication is important. The way a question is phrased may need to be done so as to not allude to aggression/abuse/mistreatment and thereby avoid skewing the responses (Azungah, 2018). While qualitative studies do have the issue of being subjective and bringing in the researchers views, it does have the added benefit of engagement and relatable data extraction. The data extraction of a quantitative study could be quite complex to understand as more sophisticated statistics are used. Most importantly, in the field it is evident as mentioned earlier that there have been multiple quantitative studies (around 100 of 150 empirical papers), but there have been very few qualitative studies. The reason for this is argued to be the difficulty in obtaining consent for interviews, the difficulty in the topic of discussion and also the potential subjective influence, as mentioned earlier (Sandelowski et al., 2003). Even with these concerns or

hindrances, there are authors in the field who have urged future researchers to take on more qualitative studies; to allow the insights of this minority approach to help contribute to the field in a possibly different way (Azungah, 2018).

In summary, the researcher would therefore be applying a constructivist approach, using an inductive reasoning, with qualitative methods to data collection, extraction and analysis.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN, DATA COLLECTION METHODS, DATA ANALYSIS METHODS AND SAMPLING

In this section the research design, the data collection and data analysis approach, as well as the sampling and research criteria for this study are presented.

3.2.1. Research Design

A brief summary of what was done with the participants: All 16 interviews ranged between 60 minutes to 90 minutes, with the average duration of the interviews being around 75 minutes. The interviews were conducted using Microsoft Team's video conferencing call function and recording facility. The recordings were immediately available only to the researcher to download in order to be transcribed. All 16 participants were given an overview, verbally, of the consent form (Appendix A) received electronically before the interviews began. Any questions raised, while only a few, were addressed immediately, before starting. The participant's signed the consent form either before, at the start of the interview or shortly after for convenience, and returned it. All 16 participants consented.

The title of the study that was shared with the participants beforehand was "Challenges as relates to the supervisor-employee relationships in the workplace today." It was intentional to not use the words abusive or aggression, so as to not facilitate pre-conceptions and pre-decided topics of engagement. Not using the words "Challenges" was considered to be left out initially, but to include it was decided to ensure that the participants are not side-swept as to what truly is intended to be discussed. The participants as the conversation went forward, seem to be fairly comfortable with talking about aggression as the conversation progressed.

When using a qualitative method, there are various options relating to the specific design that can be used (Kallio et al, 2016). For this study one-on-one interviews will be used. While focus groups could be used, it is felt that interviews will add more value. In particular, one-on-one interviews are able to provide increased direct engagement with the individual, assisting with allowing them to feel more comfortable and giving them a platform to share their experiences more openly with only one individual. The argument may be that focus groups do this more effectively in some instances, but they do run the risk of having sentiment transferred between attendees. The interviews would be semi-structured. While structured interviews may be said to give more focused questioning combined with an element of objectivity, the semi-structured interviews allows the discourse to follow where it is naturally leading (Kallio et al, 2016). In this way, insightful take-outs can emerge and clarifications are allowed to happen as and when needed (Sandelowski et al., 2003).

The Interview

The conversation began consistently for each participant, with a general question intended to ease into the discussion, about how they were finding working from home during lock-down in a COVID-19 pandemic state. The responses were intentional, engaging and quite open. This was followed by an assertion that the questions relating to the purpose of the interview would then commence. They were reassured of their anonymity and also that they could use their own experiences, past or present; or the observations over their tenures of other colleagues or teams. They were also presented with responding to that question either using the hat of the employee, or the hat of the supervision. The intention here is to attempt to elicit an unbiased or balanced review of the situation. The discussion then developed organically, as the response was given. Where the employee-perspective was given first, the supervisor-perspective was discussed after to cover both views.

The first question being “What would you say, in your experience or observation, the challenges of the supervisor-employee relationship is in the workplace today?”. The discussion then developed organically with a large number of participants feeling comfortable to take that question forward and provide a fairly lengthy response initially. The researcher making notes of what the participant was saying in order to further develop an understanding of various key

aspects in their response. Full attention was needed for each participant as each participants response differed so that the extent and nature of questions differed followed this initial question. When sufficient discussion took place on this particular intent, the following structured question was asked “If you can, what do you think the causes of those challenges within that relationship is”.

The semi-structured questions aimed to focus on the experience and observation of the individual, as relates to the supervisor’s aggression towards the employee. The semi-structured questions were lightly drafted in advance, but took shape in the interview itself. The light draft that was followed was:

1. What, in your experience or observation, are the challenges in the supervisor-employee relationship, in the workplace today; from the *employee’s* perspective {“wearing the hat of the employee”};
2. Could you expand on some of the specifics of what you’ve raised as the challenges? (Shows that you, as the researcher has listened and prompts further expansion on certain key aspects they have raised so that a deeper level of understanding can be gained around these, where time and willingness allows).
3. Why do you think this occurred in the way it did? (Prompts the extraction of the causes from the participant).
4. Who were the parties involved – the employee, the supervisor, the supervisor’s superior, the organisation, other team members? (Attempts to isolate who initiated the aggression displayed by the supervisor).
5. What, in your experience or observation, are the challenges in the supervisor-employee relationship, in the workplace today; from the *supervisor’s* perspective {“wearing the hat of the supervisor”}; (Looks at the aggression that might emerge, but as spoken of from the supervisor’s perspective, that is often not collected as data within this field).
6. What are some of the consequences you have seen from this, where there are challenges?

Any questions used themselves did not use the words “aggression”, “abuse” or “mistreatment” directly, so as to not be leading. Questions were posed using more subtle language such as “challenges” and “issues” which supported the creation of a comfortable situation and not an

insensitive extraction solely for the benefit of the study. It was well received and the participants still raised sensitive issues. The use of the more subtle language used initially, in the conversation allowed for the unravelling of the consideration of the topic as the participant decides, without being forceful – either of the more intensive consideration of mistreatment, or otherwise a lighter consideration of some issues were raised. By not using harsh language and being generally sensitive to the participant in the interview, there was also minimal “transference” of any possible remnant of the researcher’s “agenda”, should there have been. The researcher’s agenda being very top of mind in not biasing the discussion, was very evident throughout each interview. The interview gave ample time for clarification and discussion of anything as prompted by the participant should it have been unclear. The important point that was reiterated to the participant was that this was “a conversation”; that together with the researcher, they were “exploring” the occurrences and that ultimately they are “contributing” towards the overarching study of the relationship of the supervisor and employee in the workplace today.

3.2.2. Sampling and Research Criteria

The sampling size met the criteria of being between 15 to 20 participants, from a financial organisation within the Southern Hemisphere. The sample is aimed to be random, and a spread across business unit, tenure, race, gender, age and role size.

The Organisation

The study used convenience sampling (Suen, Huang & Lee, 2014), in approaching the organisation that the researcher worked for. The main reason for this is since financial organisations are often difficult to access for this particular type of research, not wanting to acknowledge that there may be instances of workplace mistreatment or abusive supervision occurring within their organisation. The other reason is due to the possibility of gaining access to the Human Resource Executives more readily, for clearance of the study, than otherwise would have been allowed. As an employee, there is a level of trust and understanding that is built, that may be more difficult otherwise. This aspect should not be abused. The organisation that was approached, and that allowed access to their employees, for this study was a large financial organisation operating for the last 175 years across the South African region, and also

in some parts of Africa. It has an employee base of around 7,000 individuals across its locations. The Human Resource Executives (HRE) were approached, as a first point of contact with the organisation around the study, to ascertain the willingness of the organisation for this study to be conducted. It was made clear to them what the study was about - i.e. workplace mistreatment. They responded positively and confirmed they would welcome the study and further added that it aligned to their current drive in creating policies around workplace bullying.

A permission letter from their learning department and a confidentiality agreement from their legal department was needed to be signed by both the researcher and the academic supervisor with respects to the detail of the study and the content of the data collection. The HRE expressed a willingness to help in whatever way possible. The organisation will have no ownership of the data and the agreement was that the organisation will remain anonymous throughout the thesis.

The Participants

In generating participation, around 50 employees and supervisors across the business were selected according to their range of age, race, length of experience (tenure), role size (seniority within the organisation) and divisions within the organisation. The need for diversity was made clear by the researcher. The approach to only select 50 employees to target within the organisation was a combination of understanding that employees do not pay due attention to organisational “global” generic emails, that are not addressed to them, and that there was a drive completed in the recent by the organisation requesting employees to specify explicitly if they would like to be involved in future research conducted within the organisation. Due to the nature of the qualitative semi-structured interviews, following 16 interviews the researcher saw that they were reaching saturation (Charmaz, 2014), and so 16 interviews were adequate for the exploratory study. The participation rate from the original 50 emails sent, was then around 32%. A similar study done around Workplace Mistreatment in the Nursing Environment (2018), used a sample size of 14 for the structured interviews conducted.

The Human Resource Executive, who was located in the Learning Division within the organisation, was a senior manager within the organisation and was responsible, together with

her superior, to sign off the access to the organisation for this study. The HRE and the researcher had two video conferencing calls ahead of the researcher being granted access, for the HRE to understand the nature and content of the research. The full title of the thesis and the specific phenomena of workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision was shared with the HRE, explicitly. Note that there was no former relationship or exposure between the HRE and researcher. The HRE shared that senior management has been made aware of situations that relate to the area of the study, and that they are launching an organisational-wide program relating to workplace aggression, shortly. The timing was good to conduct the study. The HRE was able to provide the list of those employees who had expressed interest in future studies with the Learning Division. The researcher compiled the content of the email, where the wording “Challenges in the workplace between the supervisor and employee” was used, rather than “Abusive supervision”, so as to not be provocative and create bias in who responds. The response to the email were 20 employees, however 4 were unable to make time for the interviews over the 30 day period the researcher was granted access for.

The participant’s demographic make up was as displayed in the following table:

Age Range	Number	Tenure	Number	Role	Number	Gender	Number	Racial Class (SA)	Number
20-25	2	0-5 yrs	2	Employee (Junior)	2	F	12	Black	2
25-30	3	5-10 yrs	4	Employee (Senior)	5	M	4	Asian	4
30-35	1	10-15 yrs	2	Employee (Mid-level)	2			White	5
35-40	3	15-20 yrs	4	Supervisor (Junior)	3			Coloured (Mixed Race)	5
40-45	3	20-25 yrs	4	Supervisor (Mid-level)	1				
45-50	2			Supervisor (Senior)	3				
50-55	2								

Table 3: Demographics of the participants

3.2.3. Data Collection Methods and Research Instruments

The employees of the organisation were approached for participation in the study using a constructed email request. On confirmation of their willingness to participate, more detail was given to them and a suitable time allocated to conduct the interview. The consent form was provided at the time of setting up the interview so that they could peruse it in advance. As mentioned, the interview had a duration of between 60 and 90 minutes.

Because of the current lock-down COVID19 considerations at the time of this study, the interview was done digitally. In conducting the interview, Microsoft (MS) Teams (the generally accepted face-to-face meeting software of the organisation) was used. The video call was used as an acceptable method for communication as by the time the interview took place, the employee was conducting meetings on a daily basis for around a year, using this particular method. At the start, the researcher familiarised herself with the participant through general chatting and a less formal or related question of “How were they finding the work from home situation during COVID?” The participants dealt well with this question and most engaged in open and sometimes humorous responses. This allowed a fairly relaxed atmosphere to then continue the more pertinent questions. At the start of the call, the employee was given as much time as they needed to address any particular question, relating either to the reason they were there, the consent form or the topic as explained via the email. Once the intended questions were asked, any more unstructured prompts, outside of the semi-structured questions, were kept in line with the intent of the interview method and study.

In conclusion of the interview, the researcher reassured the participant that the conversation will be anonymous and they were welcome to request a copy of the recording of the interview or the findings of the thesis. None of the participants requested a copy of the recording, but most expressed interest in getting sent a copy of the final marked thesis, for interest. Most expressed thanks and reiterated the interest they had in the conversation. The recording was then made available immediately from the MS Teams software, which the researcher then had to download. The download was quite large and stored on the researchers private device and then also in a password protected cloud-based drive.

The download, which was in a MP4 format, was then converted to an MP3 format. In the MP3 format, this file was compatible with the MS Word Transcription functionality. On uploading the MP3 in MS Word, and clicking on Transcribe, the software then, taking some time, converted the file into a MS Word document with the relevant content. This worked as an initial capture of the content, however, the Transcription function was not very effective and captured certain phrases incorrectly. A professional transcriber was then employed to use the MP3 audio files and the MS Word documents to fully transcribe the 16 interviews. The transcription files were checked for accuracy, manually. The academic supervisor also reviewed a sample of the transcribed data. After successfully done, these transcriptions were used by the researcher to then continue with the analysis.

3.2.4. Data Analysis Methods

In order to conduct the analysis of the study Grounded Theory was used. The researcher analysed each transcription, reading each participant's responses repetitively to isolate the correct insights from that sentence (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher loosely allocated key descriptions to what encapsulates the intent of that sentence. There were sometimes more than one key description within one sentence, and a few within one paragraph for a given participant. Grounded Theory does not dictate using prescriptive codes, but instead allows themes to emerge from the empirical data (Suddaby, 2006).

This loose labelling became the starting point to categorise and link the information contained within the participants' responses. This was not an easy process as there were similarities between the responses, that made it difficult to recall the uniqueness and differences in the stories. The researcher was keen to retain the uniqueness of each participant's story. The researcher, however, needed to draw on the similarities in order to create the themes emerging within the responses. A Thematic Analysis is employed for decoding the responses. The researcher decided to refer to each participant by the nature of their story-telling, as an example:

- Participants 5, 8 and 9 were referred to as "The Instructors", since their story-telling had a slightly more lecture-styled, instructing the researcher of the way the workplace is.
- Participant 1, 2 and 14 were "The Experiencers", since they expressed their stories in the way that shared the detail, nuances and their feelings within their experience.

- Participant 10, 12, 15 and 16 were “The Innovators”, since in their story-telling they were keen to provide solutions, innovations that could be done and had a different tone to their responses.

In this way, it helped the researcher recall a bit more easily the participant and their response and the context in which it was given, and how it could be similar or different from another, while retaining the essence of what they intended to communicate in the labelling.

The researcher was careful to not transfer her passion and interest into the process. The transcripts were read and the areas of the conversation where the participants were mostly contributing, isolated, so as to try to ensure that the responses used were not incorporating the researchers part of the conversation. In addition, noting those elements where, in retrospect, appeared to be prompted by the researcher and gauged that the participant’s response was given to address that interest, rather than something that emerged from the participant themselves. It is noted, however, that even with intent awareness and consideration to detach oneself from the data, the researcher acknowledges that her bias and interests might still be present (Charmaz, 2014).

The researcher moved from loose coding, to a more focused coding process. This follows a Constructivist Grounded Theory (Goulding, 2002). The loosely coded themes were categorised together under certain groups where they all seem to fit a similar pattern or intent. This process was visited more than once, and some loosely coded themes shifting between categories. This then led to the understanding of a common language between those loosely coded themes categorised together. Revisiting the sentences from which the loosely coded themes emerged, helped initiate fresh thinking as to how the group linked together and what the category could more formally be labelled. In particular, the differences between the other groups and making it clear how they were distinct was quite difficult, since there are links even between two seemingly distinct groups. Understanding the level “deeper” where the two concepts start becoming more distinct, was important to reach.

Once the more formal labels for each grouping was reached, the way they interacted with each other was attempted to be drawn out. An example of one of the participant’s transcripts that was completed in this way, is given below:

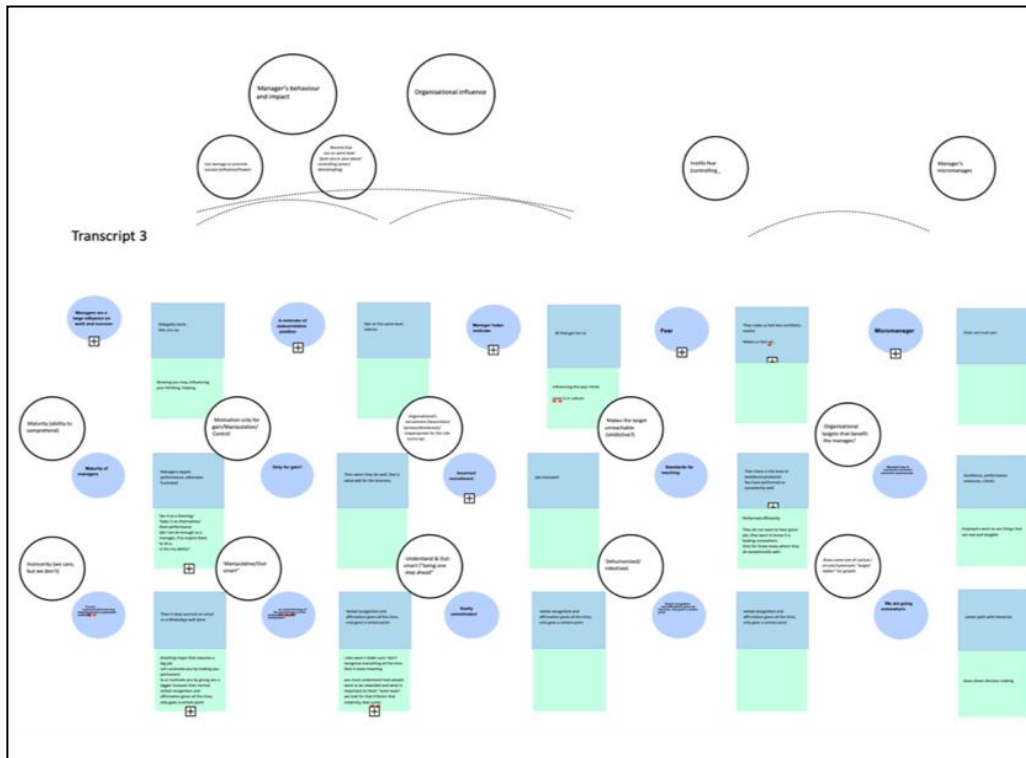


Figure 6: Data labelling and categorising example

Using the formalised labels, the researcher considered how this fit in with theory (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2013). This was initially quite difficult as the researcher considered using a framework that spoke to the various characteristics of abuse: control, management, power, envy. However, the nature of these areas are fairly detailed and could be the framework of a subsequent study, but for this current study the researcher chose to “zoom out” and communicate the responses in relation to the field that the phenomena exists within. The field can be visualised as the greater organisation and within that organisation the key individuals interacting with each other and causing reactive situations, should be considered. It is through these individuals, referred to in this thesis as parties, that workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision occurs. It then made sense that using the four key parties, of the supervisor, the employee, the leader and the team member was sensible. Moreover, as relates to these four key parties, it was clear that the participants spoke consistently not of only the supervisor and

the employee, even though the questions related to these two primary parties, but they then chose to add the additional parties within their responses, the leaders and the team members.

These key parties were not giving a comprehensive enough categorisation for the quality of responses. When the researcher then chose to bring in the theoretical construct of threats of the supervisor (threats from within, below and above), the responses started fitting into this structure quite well. Moreover, it was appreciated that it was consistent with current theoretical frameworks. It also allowed the researcher to more evidently note the contribution of the new threat (threat from around).

This process allowed for the creation of the four themes within which the findings were then analysed, the threats from within, threats from below, threat from above and that of the threats from around.

3.3. LIMITATIONS

In addition to this, an argument for the credibility of 16 strong participants to qualify the findings might be made. The 16 participants were interviewed over a 90-minute period, where the engagement was intense, and topics discussed that required in depth thought and reflection. The amount of effort required to deliver this consistently over a 90-minute period was commendable. Based on a previous similar study relating to workplace mistreatment only 14 participants was used and deemed to be credible. The 16 participants were strong contributors, delivering quality content and engaged dialogue. The understanding was that not a large population would be willing or interested in sitting in an interview, and in particular discussing the challenges they faced or observed in the supervisor-employee relationship. As mentioned, of the 50 targeted there was a 32% participation rate of 16 participants. Future studies, using a similar method, could aim to target 100 to increase the number of participants to around 32, if the same participation rate holds.

Another limitation, deemed for this study was that it will focus on the financial sector that does, to a certain extent, limit the range of income statuses observed. The assumption is that there is a dominance of middle-to-higher income earners, rather than those of the lower-income brackets. Due to the financial nature of the organisation, there may also be other slight

imbalances such as knowledge, awareness, social and physical well-being – these being potentially higher than the average working population.

An additional limitation that was assumed ahead of the interviews for this study was the possible mis-interpretation of the questions asked. In particular the understanding and consistency of that understanding, as it relates to workplace mistreatment. There was also the general assumption that the populous being interviewed will have had some level of introspection around the challenges they or others they may have observed, have had, as relates to this relational dyad of the supervisor-employee. This was in fact the case, the participants excelled in their introspection, immediate understanding and knowledge of this topic even with using words such as “challenges” instead of “mistreatment”. This, therefore, was not a concern or issue for this study. It is noted as a consideration for future studies. This general awareness and understanding is anticipated ahead of any study in relation to workplace mistreatment or abusive supervision in order to be aptly able as a participant to acknowledge and correctly talk to these issues arising in the workplace.

Related to the above, an additional considered limitation was that a general level of disinterest in the exercise as it develops, arises. This would possibility be due to not having sufficient understanding to draw on or because they feel disengaged with the purpose of the study, once more readily understood. While some participants did tend to disengage towards the end of the interview, it was attributed to the length of the interview and the intensity of the questions and engagement required. These were around 4 participants in total, while some others had said that they could continue talking about this topic and were disappointed the time had ended. Future researchers can look to reducing the 90 minutes to 60 to 75 minutes and keep the initial chats to a minimum. This should be sensitively considered as 90 minutes was for most deemed to be satisfactory, and also the initial chats was very useful to creating a sense of comfort for the participant. The researcher can use their discernment depending on the participant. This was be monitored and an attempt to address this through clarification and slight changes in the questions asked or tone used, was made during the interview. With this limitation, it is also assumed that there is a *depth* of experience to draw upon in responding to these questions, which might always be the case; but further exploration of other - such as student experiences - proved, in one instance in this study, useful.

Another set of limitations here, is the nature of believed anonymity and developing biases displayed by the participant. The reference to believed anonymity refers to the instances where the participant was displaying slight disbelief, in the confirmation that the responses to what they were contributing would be entirely anonymous. This comes with a general distrust of the organisation, especially as relates to the topics discussed - asking the employees of the organisation about times when they have had experienced challenges with a supervisor, when that might be recent, may come across as though the researcher has been asked to indirectly investigate or address some current issues as requested by the HRE or supervisor themselves. The level of confidentiality, even though expressed clearly through the consent form and reiterated in person in the interview, might not be entirely believed. The nature of scepticism in regards to this, might present itself in the participant being overly cautious to answer, in fear of being reprimanded or of their supervisor finding out what they have said. Linked to this is the nature that these conversations may be interpreted as “gossip”, and so the researcher was sensitive to these elements when conducting the interviews. This was only sensed with two participants.

The nature of developing biases during the interview comes with the sense that the participant is initially cautious of the interview and interviewer, while still being willing, and comes into the conversation with a need to judge and familiarise themselves with the interviewee. The resultant judgement may be that the interview is not worth contributing a level of authenticity to and should be treated as an exercise to complete to move on to the next meeting. In addition, that the researcher is made to feel familiar, in a connection drawn with race, gender, age or work association, and then enacted with in a slightly condescending manner in an attempt to show that they are in a better position to talk about the topic than the researcher is - which comes across then as a lecture on the part of the participant rather than an engagement. The researcher found this occurred with four participants, those who mainly of the same race, similar age and who tended towards being young supervisors in the organisation. The researcher did also make it known to the participants, openly, that she did work for the organisation, which might have created a bias for these four participants. The other participants did not seem to be bothered by this. It seemed in fact to aid some of the openness and presumed understanding of certain organisational dynamics in the conversation.

An item to point out here, while not being a direct *limitation* of this study, is the general sensitivity of the topic. While it is becoming more and more common in current times to openly talk about issues such as mistreatment and abuse, there may still be pockets of the organisational and societal community that do not openly talk about this, or want to, or even similar “lighter” styled discussions. It is noted that some people may see such discussions or questioning as intrusive and may avoid giving too much information. This was not the majority of the participants for this study, there may have been 2 participants who tended to be fairly reserved and suspicious. As mentioned before, most of the participants welcomed the open discussion about these issues, and were ready to discuss them with a host of points to consider.

3.4. RESEARCH ETHICS

The Commerce Ethics in Research Committee was presented with the issues involved in this study, and have, on the 7th January 2021, issued an ethics approval for conducting the research needed for this study.

The utmost effort was made to protect all the participants. A written consent form was provided and explained to participants. This consent form addressed the psychological safety concerns that includes the security of information, the anonymity of their identity and contribution, and the right to end the interview should any content or question make them feel uncomfortable. With respect to the video recordings, they remained within the possession of the researcher only. It was transferred to a password-protected storage drive and the recordings on any laptop or computers, used for any preparation was discarded once the recordings were transcribed. The transcriptions, only, were passed onto the supervisor for discussion around the presentation of the findings. The transcriptions was used only to inform the findings of the research.

The recordings of the semi-structured interviews can be considered as confidential data. A confidentiality agreement was signed with the consented organisation to ensure no confidential data are disseminated in a manner other than agreed to. While the video content, due to no in-person meetings because of COVID 19, may constitute “identifiable records”, these have been securely stored as mentioned above post transcription.

There was potential psychological risk due to the nature of the participants having to recall some sensitive issues, but the interviewer adhered to the strictest caution as relates to the emotional well-being of the interviewee at the time the interview was held. The interviewer did not dwell or dive into issues that participants did not openly want to explore. The consent form, in particular, drew out the following statement for the benefit of the participant: *"I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. I understand that the interview, because of the nature of the research (looking at challenges in the supervisor-employee relationship), may leave me with slight discomfort. I can, at any time, end the interview or decline to answer a question." in the consent form. Maybe add something about how you will respond if you notice discomfort, e.g., pause the interview, ask if the person is comfortable to continue or would like a break or to stop altogether."*

Written consent was requested using the consent form as in Appendix A. This was distributed ahead of the meeting; once the participant confirmed attendance. The participant was made aware that they could ask questions via email, if needed, ahead of the interview. The consent form was discussed at the start of the interview, questions around clarity and then formal signatures before it commenced, was conducted.

The psychological risk of talking or recounting ordeals that are posed in the interview as challenging, was acknowledge. That these could have potentially left the participant experiencing slight discomfort. This was carefully monitored during the interviews and only one participant stated that she felt like she was going to cry, and the researcher paused the questioning, asked her if she needed a break and then expressed gratitude for her sharing and that the researcher understands and acknowledges the experience she has been through which she shared with the researcher. A long pause was given where a sense of comfort was restored. She followed on to say that she was happy to be recounting her experiences, and had forgotten all she had accomplished and had to overcome. Outside of this one participant, most discussions were not very emotional. All participants interacted with great thought, insight and reflection of the topic, which surprised the researcher.

An alternative approach is to conducting a fairly sensitive qualitative study, is to conduct a quantitative study, with a specific set of questions. Here it is likely that the distance between the researcher and the participant would be thought to reduce some of the potential discomfort,

however the nature of the questions will likely pose a similar risk as a qualitative study. The field has made a call for more qualitative studies and so this particular study has aimed to contribute to the field in this way. The nature of the study, being around workplace mistreatment and supervisor aggression is something that will likely always encounter obstacles of psychological safety when it comes to empirical studies. This is one of the reasons why, as the researcher understands, it is difficult to conduct empirical studies in this field. It is also why there are many more theoretical discussions in this field compared to empirical ones, which tends to leave the discourse in the field slightly imbalanced in its effectiveness. The contention is that in order to investigate what is currently affecting individuals in the workplace, that might potentially be impacting their psychological safety, one needs to conduct these studies so that the causes may be assessed, and solutions remedied.

The study was limited to 50 individuals, of which sixteen responded, out of an employee source of around 7,000. This is mainly due to the anticipated nature of the interviews and the possible risk of psychological discomfort. The matter in consideration is a presumption which as a researcher in this field, needs to be made, before embarking on the study, however, in light of the actual study the true risk experienced may well be slight. Many of the individuals interviewed, as mentioned, did not find the discussion of these matters sensitive as they have had to “deal” with them and had already reflected upon it and found sense of it in their own way. They were in fact, surprisingly, comfortable and insightful of the detail of their experiences as it relates to the phenomena of challenges of the supervisor and employee. Overall, the presumed or real risk was outweighed by the insights that were drawn from such interviews that is believed to contribute positively to the further expanding awareness and understanding of workplace mistreatment. This in turn, as mentioned before, is aimed to then help render solutions to mitigate or reduce these instances and protect the psychological safety, among other things, of individuals in the workplace.

The researcher was constantly aware of the potential for discomfort, and did not wish to ignore this or create any additional discomfort for the participants. While the should not be great, this is

The only person, other than the researcher, who would know who the respective persons interviewed were, is the HRE liaison mentioned above. However, she is aware of the

sensitivity of the context of the interviews, and is not expected to have approached the participants for further discussions after. The video recordings and transcripts were in no way, provided to the HRE liaison. The participants, amongst themselves, do not know who has been interviewed, as their identity between each other was anonymous and their interviews were conducted separately, through video conferencing at different times.

The interviews extended between 60 and 90 minutes, wherein a large amount of information and discussion occurred. Using quotes from the full length of discussion, such as "I did not expect them to treat me that way", is not expected to enable identification of the participant, in that the researcher has been careful to use the quote in a way, embedded in the text, that does not make it explicitly evident. Also given the volume of text, the quote should not be identifiable. The use of quotes has not been used too heavily in the dissertation, and not full sentences or paragraphs, but rather phrases that help confirm a point being made. However, the issue about the organisation potentially being able to identify the participant through quotes is noted, and the content of the quote has been considered in relation to this.

Even though the researcher worked at the organisation, at the time of the study, the separation of the researcher's work as a professional employed by the organisation differed substantially to the level of investigation needed for this study. The work being employed for, being more quantitative in nature. The organisation is also particularly large, as mentioned before around 7,000 employees, and the researcher across her seven years with the organisation worked only in two departments, each with a total of around 500 employees only – collectively resulting in the researcher being in contact with at most, around 1,000 (one seventh) of the full working population of the organisation. The result is that the researcher's knowledge and access to individuals was limited, and particularly as pertains to this topic and prior discussions, non-existent. The possibility for conflict of interest has thereby been assessed and no clear conflict of interest found. As mentioned before, the connection is used in this study as be a source of convenience; but judged to be an appropriate fit for the study in relation to its size, nature, duration of operations and access to employees that may experience workplace mistreatment.

As a potential additional ethical consideration, the question may arise from the readers as to how a "non-psychologist" is allowed to conduct a study that seems to address sensitive issues. Many of the empirical studies in this field, albeit most quantitative, were done by researchers

who were not psychologists or organisational psychologists but instead were business practitioners and experts who had observed or experienced this, or similar, phenomenon in the workplace for years before. With this exposure and experience they could approach this subject matter, and the research needed, with a sense of wisdom, knowledge and empathy. In addition to this, the researcher, being a business practitioner herself for the last 18 years, and having during this time accumulated an understanding of various organisations, the workplace and its individuals in general and in particular as relates to the conscious observance over the last 10 years specifically of the workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision dynamics. In dealing with and observing these aspects, the researcher has developed an awareness of what is needed to engage with individuals, appropriately and professionally, around this topic. The researcher also has observed dynamics that would allow her to be sensitive to nuances of when a participant talks about a particular aspect of the workplace or engagement, even if organisational jargon is used intentionally or unintentionally. Being a qualified professional also requires certain ways of engaging with others where it is important to be aware of oneself and at best, try not to transfer one's own emotions or become emotional oneself, when difficult or sensitive conversations arise. This particular topic is of great interest to the researcher and she was able to deal with the participants with the utmost sensitivity and to elicit a fair, unbiased, academic outcome where no participant was left with a sense of unease.

Outside of the nature of the topic of workplace mistreatment and the sensitivity to it, the researcher does not see any additional ethical issues with the study. What is more promising is that while being very open and transparent with the organisation on what the study is relating to, they were very excited to get involved. It fortunately, when compared to even 20 years ago, is a more widely accepted discussion in the organisation among HRE professionals and employees in general.

Overall, it was endeavoured that the ethical nature of this study was of high standards and did not intend to jeopardise the environment or well-being of the individuals participating in this study.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings speak to the outcomes extracted from the interviews. As a reminder of the methodology of the research collection and analysis, a qualitative data collection - via interviews - was used and a thematic analysis was completed on the data. There were sixteen participants, and these participants were chosen randomly covering a range of gender, race, age, role size (position) and years of work experience. The data was coded using an constructivist grounded theory and the capturing of the a particular type per person (the instructors, the experiencers, the innovators) assisted with navigating the rich data, isolating key themes their contributions eluded to. What follows in this chapter are the highlights of these contributions, presented by the emerging themes.

The main purpose of this study, and the questions posed to the participants, relate to the contribution to understanding the antecedents of the challenges in the supervisor-employee relationship. The research question that this study addresses is:

What are the perceived reasons the supervisor behaves aggressively towards the employee?

As mentioned, in order to address this research question, the research findings were categorised into different themes. The principal themes that emerged related to the four central parties within the organisation: the supervisor, the employee, the leader and the team member. In particular, the following was extracted as the broad elements that impact the supervisor's aggressive tendencies towards the employee:

1. The situation of the supervisor - including training, recruitment process, personal ability to cope, tendencies such as control and trust;
2. The situation of the employee - the ability for the employee to know their own surroundings, the understanding and level of communication, awareness of what the supervisor may want;
3. The influence of leaders – the culture the leader drives, the tolerance of certain harmful behaviours within the organisation;
4. The influence of teams – team gossip, powerful minorities, bullying.

A coherent approach was needed to presenting these themes within the research findings. Adopting the same approach as employed by Tepper et al, in their 2017 paper, the threats from within, the threats from below, the threats from above and here, the research presents an additional threat - not evidently dealt with in the current abusive supervision literature - threats from around (relating to the influence of teams). This is depicted more graphically below:

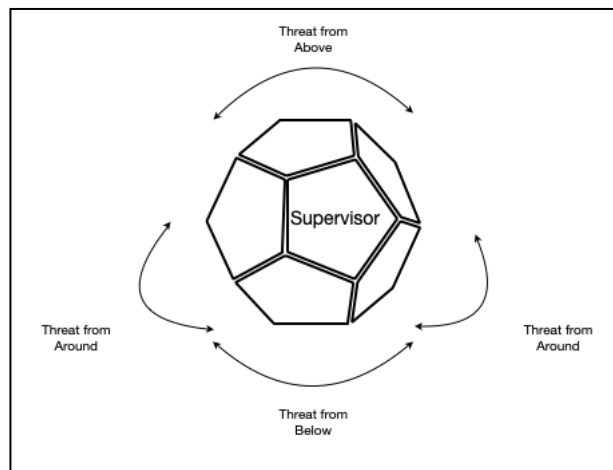


Figure 7: Threats faced by the supervisor as relates to abusive supervision

Within each threat, the impact of the party on themselves and on others (including the culture around them), is considered. This dynamic is depicted below and the individual here could be any of the four of the aforementioned parties: the supervisor, the employee, the leader or the team member.

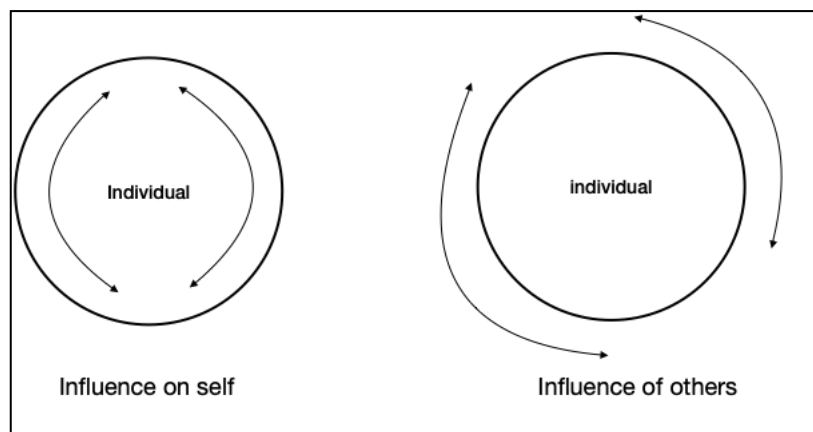


Figure 8: The influence the individuals have within the workplace

For the sake of anonymity, and an inability to identify any one situation or experience, the quotes within this chapter have been given as precisely as possible, with some further expansion provided by the researcher for added context for the reader.

4.1. THE SITUATION OF THE SUPERVISOR (THREATS FROM WITHIN)

The supervisor forms a critical part of the employee’s day-to-day working life. They delegate tasks, comment on performance to the employee and to others, and assist with the correct completion of tasks. They make the employee either feel welcomed or not, and adequate or not. It is this proximity and intimacy of relationship that forms the impact, where aggression may exist, that can be quite severe on the employee. The supervisor’s tendencies, traits and attitudes impact the behaviour of the supervisor towards the employee. It also affects their impression or perception of the employee. Where this is not positive, the supervisor may act aggressively towards, the employee. The need for control and authority micromanagement and petty tyranny, reactive insecurity and adopted management style are discussed in more detail below. The term often used in the literature, that relates to authority, is “power”. Here the researcher uses the term “authority” to speak to the nature of the supervisor that provokes a display of power, while, knowingly, this may not be the only instance in which an unwelcomed display of power is given. The terms will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis. The following section presents the concepts of control and authority, micromanagement and petty tyranny, and also covers the lack of trust as raised by the participants.

The following sub-chapter outlines the findings of what the participants said about the supervisor’s reasons for displaying aggression towards the employee, as relates to the supervisor’s position. This can be addressed in the following way, outlined in the table below:

Supervisor’s Tendencies, Traits and Attitudes
1. The Need for Control and Authority (<i>transacted through Micromanagement and Petty Tyranny</i>)
2. Reactive Insecurity (Envy and Jealousy)
3. Adopted Management Style

Table 4: Supervisor’s Tendencies, Traits and Attitude (Threats from within)

4.1.1. Supervisor's Tendencies, Traits and Attitudes

4.1.1.1. The Need for Control and Authority (*transacted through Micromanagement and Petty Tyranny*)

i. Control and Authority

The supervisor may have a need to control certain situations that involve the employee, as the circumstance arises. One such instance is where many tasks are required to be completed, within a given deadline, and the employee displays a lack of ability or interest. The supervisor may seek to help the employee in this instance, by taking control of the situation – their behaviour and work processes, in particular. While the initial purpose of taking control is to help, or motivate, the employee, the problem appears to arise in three different instances – when the act of taking control persists for longer than is needed, when the act is done in an aggressive manner (either in an agitated or frustrated way), or when the act of taking control is altogether invalid (the supervisor has perceived the situation incorrectly). Where control is exercised in these situations, discomfort arises in the supervisor-employee relationship.

“Overkill – she told me how to get from a to b to c, without me asking her for that.”

“An email on: this is how you need to act, this is what you need to do; every morning at 8 o'clock.”

“Every day, she'd get a generated report on what I'd been working on. If I missed 10 minutes, I needed to say what I was doing in that time.”

[Participant 2]

“By saying, or doing, nothing, it reinforces that the person can continue to treat you like that, because they think they have control and power over you.” [Participant 6]

The supervisor might want to control the method of work for the employee, sometimes at a fairly detailed level, but instead of instilling appreciation, it ignites frustration within the employee, as participant 2 gives an account of. The further requirement to control not only work process, but also behaviour, repetitively can be demotivating for the employee. As participant 2 continues to share, her supervisor also had a report generated daily which outlined the content of the employees working hours, for which she had to account for in detail. This level of control could not only demotivate, but display a lack of trust in the abilities and

reliability of the employee. The frustration felt by the employee in response to the act of control, is not often voiced. The misconception that occurs is that in the silence and obedience, the control is welcomed and the supervisor persists in the assumption that the method to help is working. It however, displays a lack of sensitivity to the employee and a slight abuse of control, as shared by participant 6.

The authority the supervisor has over the employee is, by consequence of their role, expected. The degree, however, to which this authority is exerted, either overtly or subversively, over the employee to influence the way they perform in order to appease, or benefit, the supervisor, is when the problem arises.

“Do what I tell you.”

“And if I didn’t do what she said, it would snowball...The authority, the power over people they think they have.” [Participant 6]

“You were asked to think outside the box, but when you did you were asked to go back in the box.” [Participants 2]

“Subservient and stressed.” [Participant 8]

“They are just using people.” [Participant 7]

The exertion of authority often is assisted by the assumption that what is requested will be done. The presumption is that the assertion of the supervisor’s power to influence the consequences for the employee, would result in that power being acknowledged and the work being completed in the way commanded. Where this is not done, as participant 6 shares, the supervisor could become aggressive. If the employee chooses to do a task independently of the supervisor, where there is a supervisor who prefers an environment where their positional power is evident, they may disregard the initiative to restore a power-balance, similarly to the account shared by participant 2. This could leave the employee in a situation where everything the supervisor requests, and directs, is followed, leaving the employee “subservient and stressed” as indicated by participant 8. Participant 7 displays his dissatisfaction of supervisors who are perceived to be using employees for their own gain, often through the exertion of their power.

Participant 2 was particularly open in the interview and shared that while she had more experience than her “boss”, she would always treat her with respect. However, even with this choice in behaviour, she was still handled with an element of mistrust in her work and her ways of performing a task. She was consistently portrayed as incompetent – both privately and publicly – and she would be treated as though she was incapable of managing her own time and productivity in having to account for her hours and sometimes, minutes, at work. The difficulty for her, in particular, was that there appeared to be a duality in how she was treated professionally and personally – the former being with a sense of disdain and the latter, with warm regard. The confusion kept her at the current job, which was added to because of the loyalty she felt having known the supervisor previously, on a personal level. The consequence was that she shared that she had suffered depression, had a long-term partner threaten to leave her and had consistent constipation and physical illness. Eventually, choosing to leave when she “knew she was not a bad employee”, and stating that she “cried starting her new job”, not realizing that “there were good people out there.”

The nature of the need for control and assertion of authority, in some work situations, has been likened to an abusive domestic relationship.

“It almost felt like you were in an abusive relationship. I was asked by others, why are you going back?”

“I always hoped for a situation where she’s not there anymore.” [Participant 6]

“When the company wasn’t doing well, it was my fault. She didn’t want to let me go because she loved me too much, apparently.” [Participant 2]

“Tough love, but there’s no love.”

““Effort means nothing.” That’s how she’d respond to me.” [Participant 1]

“She cut my salary in half, because I was sick, but I still had to do 12 hours a day.”

“When I say “I’m struggling here.”, she would say “Yes, but my life is worse than yours.” [Participant 2]

“Every single month the manager would remind me that I’m under contract, and that I shouldn’t get comfortable.” [Participant 13]

“She would take it out on us in our performance review.” [Participant 11]

“In my new role with the new manager, it’s so different, it’s difficult to accept. One day I literally cried.” [Participant 2]

The nature of abuse present in the workplace is evident, as the following presented accounts, shared by five participants (a third of the total participant based), relayed instances that had resemblances of an abusive relationship in the workplace between the supervisor and the employee. As pointed out in Section 5.4 of this study, further research into this area is recommended.

ii. Micromanagement and Petty Tyranny

The need to control manifests in various ways including micromanagement and petty tyranny. Micromanagement refers to instances where the supervisor has very tight controls over the work process, and sometimes the behaviour, of the employee. This is implemented when the supervisor does not trust the employee in respect to their capabilities due to various real or perceived reasons. Some of these reasons include the employee having shown prior poor performance, or it may be because the employee is new to the task or role. It may however, stem from an inherent lack of trust the supervisor has of others, in general, where they deem themselves the only ones capable of successfully achieving a task or outcome. The latter is often where this becomes problematic.

“She wanted to think for me.”

“No freedom to use your own mind and to think.” [Participant 6]

“Like you cannot figure this out for yourself.” [Participant 2]

“Poor managers micromanage and dictate. They want to control.” [Participant 10]

“Maybe you miss one thing and then you’ll get email feedback from the day before - all about what you did wrong, no positives. It caused anxiety for me.” [Participant 2]

“Some employees think a leader who tells them what to do is actually a good leader, not everyone thinks micromanaging is bad. Someone who tells them what to do helps them to get the job done, and done correctly. So they think that’s right.”

“Some people don’t learn how to make a decision for themselves.”

“They grow their dependence on this “very good manager”.” [Participant 10]

“Early years of dependency on that one person.” [Participant 11]

“What happens is then they only take direction from the manager, instead of exploring themselves.” [Participant 5]

“Check and control. When they’re new, that’s how they are.” [Participant 10]

As participant 6 shares, the supervisor felt it necessary to submerge herself so deeply into the employee's work that there was no autonomy given to work as the employee would like on a particular task. Participant 2 shares a similar perspective in that her supervisor was unable to allow her flexibility to solve a problem at hand, herself, as though she lacked the abilities to do that. The need for control is mainly what drives micromanagement, as participant 10 acknowledged, which is often accompanied by poor management. The need to relay to the employee where they might be underperforming in an obsessive way, can sometimes create a lack of confidence within the employee, and ultimately result in anxiety as participant 2 openly shared. Participant 10 relayed that micromanagement has its usefulness, in certain instances, but that the association with this being a representation of good management, or leadership, is to be critically examined. The nature of having the supervisor help with the work needed is comforting, but the inability to form independent decision-making or work processes, may result from an early dependence on that supervisor, as further corroborated by participants 11 and 5 also. Micromanagement, as mentioned before, may have its perceived usefulness, as participant 10 mentions, in situations where the supervisor is new that the level of checks and control is high, as expected while the supervisor is trying to establish themselves in the new environment.

Petty tyranny refers to operating, and interacting, with the employee that displays extreme dissatisfaction with the employee if something fairly small relative to other more important larger-scale matters, is incorrectly, or inadequately, done. The supervisor's behaviour as expressed by petty tyranny relates to control of work processes, but also relates to the level of authority they have in relation to the employee. It the expression of this positional power and the desire to have it be inferred by others, that results in petty tyranny. The intention is to restore the power-balance between the supervisor and employee. is often accompanied with

"Sometimes petty tyranny, sometimes borderline tyranny." [Participant 2]

"She never gave constructive feedback - critiquing my spelling and grammar." [Participant 1]

"I want to be critiqued in a way that's constructive." [Participant 9]

"She would leave stuff on my desk, like if I see a toy on my desk, I must come to her office now. I didn't even get to unpack my bag or even sit down yet. You just know it's not going to be a good conversation." [Participant 6]

“Managers expect performance, otherwise they are frustrated.” [Participant 10]

“You don’t have to be nice, but you have to be human - some people don’t.” [Participant 13]

“She knew no-one liked her.” [Participant 6]

“If you speak out in an anonymous survey, she finds you.”

“If I say something am I going to get victimised?” [Participant 6]

“Team members are too scared to speak up and then the leader doesn’t get that feedback.”
[Participant 10]

Participant 2 shares that there were instances where petty tyranny persisted in her work environment, and that it would escalate to instances where the supervisor was near tyrannical. Tyrannical behaviour is often accompanied with overt expressions of dissatisfaction, sometimes severely expressed as disgust, which includes acts such as ranting, eruptive shouting, intense irritation, private or public shaming, or overly-critiquing work. Participant 1 and participant 9, both shared that their supervisors would critique their work in an unhelpful way – pointing out errors in their spelling and grammar, rather than providing feedback they could use to develop professionally. Subtle gestures could also elude to petty tyranny, as participant 6 shared that her supervisor would leave an inanimate object on her desk to indicate her potential dissatisfaction with her work, not finding an appropriate way or time to communicate to her as an employee. The supervisor who displays petty tyranny may critique the employee’s work, publicly or privately, in an attempt to relay the message to them that they are not at the level that they perceive they are. As participant 10 relays, supervisors have an expectation, communicated to the employee or not, of the level of performance they should be achieving, and where this level held by the supervisor is not achieved the supervisor tends to become frustrated with the employee. This indicates a level of power the supervisor holds in relation to the formal or informal consequence of poor performance. The message of poor performance, where this is valid, may, however, potentially be delivered in an alternative manner than that expressed through petty tyranny. The result of continually employing the technique of petty tyranny, is that often the supervisor’s persona is negatively formed within the team. Participants 13 and 6 expressed that their supervisors were not “nice” individuals, and became known as such, by others as well. The supervisor can often come across as insensitive to the human-nature of the employee and instead consider them as a resource that can be controlled. The supervisor may at the extreme, attempt to control even the employee’s feedback of them, presenting consequences to employees who “speak out”, as shared similarly by participants 6 and 10.

Participant 1 shared her experiences quite openly in the interview, and shared that her supervisor would engage with her only when deemed very necessary, leaving her to her own devices on a subject matter that she was really very new to. She continued to share that when she then had spent a fair amount of time on completing the task, she would submit her work to the supervisor, whose prompt response was returned only with marking out spelling and grammar mistakes. She was then asked by another set of leaders to present her work, and it was then that she was told by those leaders that her work did not “make sense”. The supervisor, who was present, agreed with them and in addition, proffered that she had told the participant that, which she had not. The participant was hurt and disappointed. She expressed that she did still not want to “take it out” on the supervisor, but chose to make the best of the situation with the “unavailable” supervisor. She also mentioned that she chose to maintain a positive attitude, even though “it was very hard”, and that she questioned herself and her abilities. It was only at the point that she started moving towards a cycle of self-doubt that she harnessed the confidence to raise this issue with the supervisor’s leader. At the time, she communicated nothing was done by the leader to improve relations.

iii. Lack of Trust in the Employee

There may be a lack of trust the supervisor has in the employee, which manifests overtly through exerting control and authority over the employee. This was raised by way of reasoning to why some supervisors behave aggressively, by various participants, and relates to the concept of control and power being two key influencers of aggressive tendencies. The lack of trust may also manifest in ways unrelated to control and an exertion of authority, and may simply result in a dislike of the character of the employee. The lack of trust could stem from the observed or perceived abilities, or lack thereof, of the employee, as well as the real or perceived, loyalty that employee shows towards the supervisor. The lack of trust, once perceived, is often difficult to be disproven through attempts by the employee. This difficulty is exacerbated when the mistrust stems from an unconscious bias (racism, agism, sexism, etc.) of the supervisor towards the employee, based on experiences with individuals other than the employee.

“Constantly checks on what you’re doing.”

“Would schedule an early morning meeting just to ensure we were all up and working.”

[Participant 5]

“He does not trust you as an employee.” [Participant 3]

“As a leader you have to trust the person to do what you need them to do. You can’t hover over their desks, constantly, to see what they’re doing.” [Participant 10]

“She wouldn’t let me get new skills. She even got me a coach - I don’t know how anyone can perform in environment like that though.” [Participant 2]

Participant 5 shared that his supervisor would perform constant checks on them, as employees, to ensure that they were working when they said they were, the supervisor would even go so far as to schedule meetings at the start of the day to ensure his team was working. This lack of trust was similarly stated by participant 3. Participant 10, relayed that from his perspective, supervisors should display a level of trust in their employees, and should provide a work environment where the employee can operate freely and independently, without fear that they are being constantly monitored. Trust is an important trait on which relationships are established, and where this trust is low, it makes it difficult for the employee to engage, openly and comfortably, with the supervisor, which ultimately this could affect the employee’s performance. Participant 2 shared that her supervisor lacked trust in her loyalty (fearing that she would leave or compete with her), that she disallowed her from acquiring new skills. The supervisor, in addition, focused on her slight underperformance over a period, and employed a coach as a way to emphasise that underperformance and her lack of trust in her abilities.

4.1.1.2. Reactive Insecurity (Envy and Jealousy)

Insecurities, such as envy and jealousy, could exist within the supervisor, which may be enacted upon toward the employee. The insecurity could stem from a number of avenues, such as the employee displaying overtly commendable traits or abilities, which become known publicly, or the employee’s performance being rewarded by other senior management, or team members. The insecurities may arise as a result of an interaction or situation directly involving the employee, or it may be as a result of prior experiences the supervisor has had with others, which are still present and impacts the way the employee is treated, i.e. real or perceived. There are other concepts that relate to insecurity, such as immaturity, pride, arrogance, selfishness, ambition as displayed by the supervisor. Here, the main components that the participants

contributed to were envy, jealousy and immaturity. One example of how the related concepts, in particular pride and immaturity here, may arise, in relation to the employee, include the employee being deemed to inadequately acknowledge the supervisor's position, and in turn have the supervisor react harshly through reprimand of other seemingly trivial pieces of work. The supervisor's insecurities may manifest as micromanagement and petty tyranny, amongst others, as well as their need for control and authority. The insecurities, however, could be harboured without reaction, and a disdain emerge for the employee which may then result in more extreme behaviour such as sabotage or workplace violence. The existence of insecurities within the supervisor can often be camouflaged on the assumption that they should not be experiencing that response, given their seniority. The result is that any physical reaction towards the employee can be unexpected and the reason for it, unclear. Eight participants contributed to the presence of insecurities causing a reactive response, usually an aggressive - overt or subversive - one, towards the employee.

“She wanted to think for me. Feeling threatened so you don't need to do anything, I'll think for you.”

“She probably had her insecurity or whatever she had to deal with...And it's easier to take it out on people.” [Participant 6].

“A little bit of jealousy as well. She knew process-wise I knew everything, that I could take that and start my own thing as her competition.”

“I trained her for the job and then she mistreated me afterwards.”

“She would set me up for failure. She would ask for a PowerPoint but then not tell me what she wants and then she would say “Oh you're wrong, you're not creative.” and give it to someone else.”

“They just create a barrier for you.” [Participant 2]

“She messes and picks at my character.” [Participant 1]

“She always compared herself to her peers and to her team.”

“The focus was on what it looks like, rather than what it really is.” [Participant 5]

“Her mother was also an owner of a company, and she felt like she had to match up to her.” [Participant 2]

“Then, the needs of the employee get negatively impacted because “they are hindering my progress”, as a supervisor. So, then the anger becomes harsh, and the relationship goes south.” [Participant 13]

“Because of what they’re trying to achieve, they blame the employees if the feedback is poor.” [Participant 3]

“Because we don’t have the maturity, the open conversations and the transparency to deal with this, the relationship suffers.” [Participant 6]

“Really good leaders are emotionally mature.” [Participant 10]

“I can say, I was not properly managed.” [Participant 11]

Participant 6 shared that when the supervisor felt threatened by her performance, she would attempt to disable her abilities and autonomy, which left her disempowered. In those instances, the supervisor’s abilities and power relative to the employee feels restored. It also reinforces that the employee is not as well-equipped as they perceive themselves to be. Participant 6, however, had awareness enough to discern that the supervisor might be experiencing a level of insecurity, and did not take the reaction personally, acknowledging that in those instances the individual feels inclined to transfer that insecurity onto others. Participant 2, also aware that the mistreatment experienced was likely a result of an insecurity, jealousy in this case, relays her perspective that both her and the supervisor were aware of her knowledge and abilities, having worked together before, and reasoned this potential competition caused the insecurity. In addition, she acknowledged that sometimes in the hand-over of knowledge, once the knowledge is acquired and the employee is no longer immediately useful to the supervisor, the supervisor is inclined to display their dissatisfaction, or disdain, of the employee, as a result of their insecurity. At the extreme, the supervisor, as is in this case, can create hinderances, or stumbling blocks, for the employee to avoid them succeeding and also belittle their abilities, as also shared by participant 2. This is often known as sabotage, which is also prevalent in the workplace. Participant 1, shares a similar perspective in that in her experience her supervisor persecuted her sense of self-worth and self-esteem, in hope of reducing her confidence in herself and her work.

The tendency can sometimes be that the supervisor, themselves, provoke their insecurities through comparing themselves to others, within the team and outside the team. Participants 5, 2, 3 and 13 share reflections of this in their own experiences where their supervisors focused on the superficial objective of projecting a good image to others, potentially for personal gain, which often came at the expense of the team’s, or employee’s, well-being. As participant 13 noted, this causes an inherent frustration within that supervisor, that then escalates to anger and

even further into harsh interaction, ultimately impacting the relationship with the employee. Participants 6, 10 and 11 note that if supervisors are able to display a bit more maturity, there is a possibility to engender healthy relationships, while a lack of maturity fosters struggling management and relationships with the employee.

iv. Consequences of control, authority, trust and insecurity outlined

The concepts introduced in these first few sections, as relayed by the participants, also were noted to have numerous effects which impact the well-being of the employee. While the focus of this thesis is on antecedents, because of the insight, reflection and experience of the participants, the researcher has chosen to present this to the reader for further context of the situations the participants contended with in respect to the challenges of the supervisor-employee relationship.

“Really unhappy team becomes too scared to share how they really feel.”

“People have voiced before, but were treated in such a bad way that they don’t anymore.”

“They become disengaged and survivors.” [Participant 10]

“I obviously couldn’t perform being told what to do 24/7. I wasn’t able to meet expectations.”

“After two years, I went to the doctor and had to take sick leave for a month. I couldn’t even go to the bathroom because I was so stressed. I had severe constipation.”

“Feeling close to a heart attack, because of the stress, I fainted.”

“I went through depression.”

“My boyfriend almost left because I was angry all the time.” [Participant 2]

“I just can’t assess how the day is going to be.”

“I had a complete panic attack, she didn’t hear me and made up her own mind about what I had said.”

“It makes you sick.” [Participant 6]

“It made me physically sick.” [Participant 11]

“I moved desks strategically. I didn’t want to have to go past her office before I sit down, every morning.”

“It actually makes you not want to go to work anymore.”

“I don’t have the energy for this.”

“And for me the turning point was, I love what I do, I don’t like who I’m working with.”

[Participant 6]

“When they were making me out to be a bad employee, I left. Because I knew I was not.”

[Participant 2]

Participant 10 shares that in light of mistreatment, employees become disengaged, they do not feel confident, or willing, to share their opinions and are riddled with fear and hopelessness. Participant 2, vulnerably shares that she was left physically ill with severe constipation and anxiety, where at one point she collapsed. Her illness escalated to depression, and her work experience was flowing over into her personal relationships. Participant 6 also shares a similar experience of anxiety and illness - the anxiety arising from the persistence of not being heard or being given control of her own work environment. The impact of the experience resulting in physical illness was shared by participant 11. Often the employee has to try to harness as much control as they can, and as relayed by participant 6, this includes physically moving locations in an attempt to create a more peaceful situation. The ultimate effect is that the employee wishes to leave the role, and the organisation, permanently, as a result of being consistently drained and unsupported in this experience. The employees are required to maintain a level of self-confidence and passion, amidst the mistreatment, so that – on reflection – they are able to leave the situation with their self-esteem intact, as presented by participants 6 and 2.

4.1.1.3. Adopted Management Style

The way the supervisor interacts and engages with their employee, could be a result of a learnt, and adopted, management style. When the style is observed, and admired; or seen to be effective, the supervisor may choose to adopt it with little questioning as to whether it is the best suited style for the employee, or themselves. This could be a style of management learnt while being an employee, having been exposed to various management styles earlier in their career as an employee under different management.

“My leadership style gravitates to somebody who has a similar leadership style.”

[Participant 4]

“Leaders who are not naturally like that then lead toward that.” [Participant 10]

“In my opinion there are charismatic leaders and there are transactional leaders.

Transactional leaders are all about the work, about the rules and regulations. No inspiration

to deal with people. No softer skills.” [Participant 9]

“Sometimes it’s a leadership style the organisation rewards.” [Participant 10]

“Is there really an environment where the employee can go to the leader and say this is where I’m at and I disagree with this.” [Participant 7]

“The Head single-handedly broke down the silos and brought people out of the office.”

“He really influenced the way they engaged with their teams and others in the organisation.”
[Participant 9]

As shared by participants 4 and 5, often leaders who resonate with a particular leader, tends to associate themselves with that leader, and their style, and find themselves wanting to be in the environment of that leader more frequently. This facilitates further learning of that management style, but also, fosters a level of comfort and reinforcement of the effectiveness of that style. Participant 9 offers a perspective on the different tip of leaders (used in the context of supervisors, here) that could exist within the workplace – he. Points to the difference between those who are able to engage with employee’s sensitivities and those who are unable or unwilling, and instead focus predominantly on task-completion. A style is often adopted because the organisation, itself, shows admiration of it and extends that through rewarding of the persons who employ that style, as conferred by participant 10. The rewarded style is then often adopted by management within the organisation, regardless of its assessment of effectiveness or harm. Participant 7 shares his account of a management style that created a perception that the employee’s opinion is not valuable. This perception is often reinforced where it is one experienced throughout the organisation, similarly. There are, however, instances where management styles are healthy, effective and near inspiring, as relayed by participant 9, where he shared that one leader, he was in contact with was able to shift the culture of a single department. This shows not only the effectiveness, but the influence, of management styles.

4.1.1.4. Summary the Key Points

Below are key points, summarised briefly, for reference to the concepts presented in this sub-chapter:

Key Points of Threats of Within	Description
A. Supervisor's Tendencies, Traits and Attitude	<p>1. Need for Authority and Control (<i>transacted through</i> Micromanagement and Petty Tyranny)</p> <p>The problem, however, comes in when the controlling tendency occurs too frequently or with too much intensity</p> <p>The need to control manifests in various ways including micromanagement and petty tyranny.</p> <p>The lack of trust stems from the seen or unseen abilities or inabilities of the employee.</p> <p>2. Reactive Insecurity (Envy and Jealousy)</p> <p>Insecurities could exist, mainly envy and jealousy, which are enacted upon sometimes in a very unexpected and harsh way.</p> <p>Unconscious bias refers to the ways of dealing with others that are not immediately apparent and engages prejudices.</p> <p>3. Adopted Management Style</p> <p>The way the supervisor interacts and engages with their employee, could be a result of a learnt and adopted management style.</p>

Table 5: Key points (Threats from within)

4.2. THE SITUATION OF THE EMPLOYEE (THREATS FROM BELOW)

The employee, in how they behave, or their performance on a task, can impact the supervisor's ability to perform their job. The participants shared their views on the ways in which the employee, in their behaviour and abilities, influence the supervisor's tendency to be aggressive towards that employee. While revealing these perspectives, it became evident that most of the elements the participants raised referred to a shared responsibility, between the employee and the supervisor. Items such as personal difference in ways of communicating, was referred to as a significant contributor to the challenges in the supervisor-employee relationship, but one that refers to the receiver and the conductor of the communication – which in different instances could be either the supervisor, or the employee. The sub-chapter therefore is arranged to

discuss those aspects which involve predominantly the employee and the supervisor, and the tendencies and influences of these parties on each other. There are however, employee-specific, traits that are referred to at the start of this sub-chapter.

Tendencies Stemming from Both the Employee and the Supervisor
1. Deceptive and Demanding Traits (Employee-specific)
2. Personal Differences (<i>in</i> Personal Values, Personal Styles of Work and Ways of Communicating)

Table 6: Tendencies Stemming from both the Employee and Supervisor (Threats from below)

4.2.1. Tendencies and Influences Stemming from Both the Employee and the Supervisor

4.2.1.1. Deceptive and Demanding Traits (Employee-Specific)

There might be instances that reveal the employee to be slightly deceptive as relates to their completion of work tasks and also the underlying intention for being employed in the role. By way of example, the employee may not comprehensively complete an assigned task, and may pass it off as completed, leaving the supervisor to either fill in the missing parts or having to re-delegate the exercise to an alternative employee. The employee may, in addition, over-emphasise their abilities to gain advantage, and also become easily distracted, or disinterested, thereby disengaging but concealing this disengagement with superficial interaction. The employee may, furthermore, not be fully committed to the role, or organisation, that they find themselves in – participating in other areas of employment or engaging in social endeavours during working hours. The participants shared that the employee may also be somewhat demanding of the supervisor’s time, and the organisation’s resources. As an example, the employee may want frequent meetings with the supervisor so that they can attend to their career desires, or alternatively request exorbitant funding for something that could otherwise be personally funded. These demands are often associated with ultimatums, if not met.

“Some people do take advantage”.

“They only come in for the pay-check.” [Participant 5]

“They do not want to only hear good job, they want to know it is leading somewhere. They

want more to keep them motivated.”

“We know that verbal recognition and affirmation given all the time, only goes a certain point.” [Participant 3]

“I was at the stage in my profession where I wanted progress. And I knew progression didn’t happen in the organisation, without taking charge. I had to leave to make the necessary impressions, to make people understand what I was after.” [Participant 9]

“I knew I had more knowledge than she did, and I should be given acknowledgement of that.” [Participant 11]

As participant 5 shared, they have experienced being in a team where employees do only contribute minimum effort and the employees, themselves, are aware that they are only in the role for financial benefit. This is often most readily undetected where the supervisor is preoccupied, or disrespected, by the employees. The demanding nature of employees was corroborated by participants 3, 9 and 10. Participant 3 acknowledged that employees’ satisfaction can be limited, and their demands may increase the more confident they become in their performance. Similarly, participant 10 shared that over his tenure, he assessed the organisation’s ability to promote him and where his demand for increased position was not met, he left – mainly as a gesture to reflect his dissatisfaction and engender an appreciation of his worth. Participant 11, similarly, boasted greater knowledge than his supervisor, which he perceived entitled him to certain attention and rewards. This attitude of entitlement is often associated with disengagement, and blame on the supervisor, where the employee is not rewarded in the manner they expect to be.

A note here is that the employee may not be readily taught how to transcend various barriers presented in the corporate structures in relation to promotion and communication, and the reliance on the supervisor to enable this is evident.

4.2.1.2. Personal Differences (including mention of Unconscious Bias, Patience and Understanding)

The participants shared observations of personal differences in personal values, personal style, and ways of communicating which caused aggravation within the supervisor-employee relationship. Some participants also relayed the experience of unconscious bias, sometimes as

a result of these and other perceived differences; and, in addition, offered their perspectives on the need for patience and understanding of each other. These are presented in this section below.

i. in Personal Values

It might not be directly obvious initially, but when the personal values of the employee (or supervisor) become apparent and are found to be in opposition, or – at least - in contrast, to those of the other individual, it results in difficult communication and potential tensions arising. This has been noted by the participants as occurring within the workplace, where the supervisor and employee’s values are sometimes opposing, or simply different. This extends to differences in personality. Consequently, disparate opinions on work related items, due to the divergent personal values, can emerge. In addition, dissimilar values can make it more difficult for the parties to find a point of connection, and interest, on which to build their relationship. While differences in the workplace should be welcomed, and facilitated, there observation points out why the conflict exists. Solutions to addressing how individuals may be able to engage with each other when they have differing personal values, is an area of research that should be given focus. Examples of differences in personal values include different religions, different cultural backgrounds and different gender preferences (or sexual orientations). When this is unaddressed, these natural and somewhat expected differences, can escalate into frustration with each other and ultimate aggressive behaviour.

“Our values weren’t aligned, and that happened quite often.” [Participant 2]

“Different personalities causes difficulties.” [Participant 10]

“Personalities make experiences.” [Participant 9]

“Some people just have a controlling nature, a character.” [Participant 10]

Participant 2 relays the experience of her and her supervisor not having similar values, as way of explanation of why the conflict between them arose. She also noted that in not having similar values, they were unable to align on work-related matters and this occurred frequently. The differences in personality, which may be acknowledged to be formed by personal values, causes difficulties in the relationships within the workplace, as conferred by participant 10. Participant 9 offers the perspective that the personalities of individuals within the workplace, create the experiences engendered within the workplace. Those individuals who have particular personalities, such as a controlling one, as proffered by participant 10, can create an

environment that revolves around control. The more powerful the individual is within the organisation, the more their personality, and personal values, can permeate through to most of the work environment.

ii. in Personal Styles of Work

Also having an adopted, learnt, or potentially cultural, ways of work, can present a point of departure between the supervisor and employee. Ways of work refers to the manner in which the individual runs their day-to-day operating within the work environment – in order to get tasks completed, successfully and remain on track with personal, and work-related, goals. This includes items such as preferred times of work (no additional work in the evening), preferred methods of communication (email instead of verbal discussions), and processes followed for completion of a task (complete high-level overview first, in isolation, then discuss detailed content collaboratively).

“It is differences in personality - and styles of work - that causes that pressure.”

“He or she doesn't fit in here because they work differently from us.” [Participant 10]

As relayed by participant 10, these differences - in styles relating to ways of work – contribute to pressure between the supervisor and employee. Where the supervisor expects a certain method to be followed, and adhered to, while the employee naturally employs an alternative, this creates pressure for the employee to either change their known style or face difficult conversations with the supervisor to negotiate an adaptation of their expectations. This becomes more difficult - for both parties - the longer they have been in the work environment. The consequence is that the more powerful of the two parties is likely to either succeed in altering the other's ways of work, or face ridicule and isolation from their team members and supervisor, as participant 10 further shares.

iii. in Ways of Communicating

Persistent communication issues with the supervisor may occur. These may be attributed to differences in ways of communicating. This includes nuances relating to choice of communication tools or techniques - such as style of communicating (casual or formal), tone (authoritative, teaching or friendly) and volume (loud, potentially to ensure one is heard; or soft, potentially to foster reciprocation). These methods may be an adopted, learnt or cultural, way of communicating, and it may be tools and techniques employed for the large part of the

individual's life. Changing this may not be easy, or possible within a short timeframe. The way of communicating may, however, not solely relate to that which is natural, but a method may be selected also depending on the perception of who the individual is dealing with. The latter is often where the points of conflict are exacerbated, due to underlying assumptions. Regardless of whether unintentional or intentional, ways of communicating present differences between the supervisor and the employee that need to be adapted to. Where this is not readily accepted, and potentially in conflict with any one individual's way of communicating, conflict may arise. A mention here should be made to accents – simple pronunciation of words “Team”, when meaning “Tim” can exacerbate frustrations. At the extreme, differences in ways of communication can ultimately lead to a breakdown in the pleasantries, and communication altogether, within the relationship. Difficulties in communication with an individual can be compounded by difficulties with other uncontrolled situations at work, such as work deadlines, creating additional pressure for coherent, clear communication.

“There is a challenge in communication between colleagues.” [Participant 9]

“Our communication was bad, or maybe it was just our attitudes.” [Participant 1]

“Miscommunications. People are not forthcoming with what they are expecting. A lot of friction arises.” [Participant 11]

“There's a difference between dictating and instructing.” [Participant 9]

“Some people use their “teacher's voice””. [Participant 10]

Participants 9, 1 and 11 agree that, in their experience, communication plays a critical role in promoting a successful relationship between individuals within the workplace. Participant 1, acknowledges that the communication between her supervisor and herself was not positive, and that may have influenced their attitudes towards each other. The possibility also exists that a poor attitude influences the way individuals communicate with each other, as she also alludes to. The result is that there can be “friction” between the individuals, which is exacerbated if they are not upfront about their expectations of each other in the interaction, or relationship, as shared by participant 10. Participant 9 and 10 observed the use of different tones and styles of communicating, which creates some frustration particularly where it is interpreted as condescending. Note here, that the use of body language is also considered a form of communication.

iv. Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias refers to the ways of dealing with others that are not immediately apparent and that engages prejudices. These often include classism, racism, agism, sexism and also extends to favouritism and nepotism. These biases which the individual might have, has an impact on how they treat the other party who fulfils some or part of these biases. It translates to reactions that might not be deserved and is not similarly endured by others. This is usually due to the individual having previous, poor experiences with someone of a similar, or perceived similar, class, race, age or gender. Favouritism refers to providing favour to someone without due course and where a particular person or group is offered favour above another, simply for having particular traits or a relationship that the supervisor is appeased by. Unconscious bias may occur both on the part of the supervisor, and also on the part of the employee.

“There are diverse groups of people now. This brings social challenges.” [Participant 10]

“When you’re in a massive organisation, you have to acknowledge the different cultures in it.” [Participant 9]

“Still have people who work for the company for a long time. There is baggage of what they want from a leader and you have to show them, first, that you can be trusted.”

“Most find it easier to work with a leader they are familiar with.”

“A lot of older folks, years with the company, struggled with the new Head.”

“Historically a different set of rules applied.” [Participant 10]

“Extremely hierarchical structure.” [Participant 9]

“The senior people were mostly “white”. [Participant 1]

“There are just systemic issues.” [Participant 8]

“I lost energy trying to change the status quo.” [Participant 9]

“Overworking some people, and favouring others.” [Participant 5]

“She was the same background more or less, but she was not nice.” [Participant 2]

“We stood there, in a circle – and they asked us “Who would like to go”, and we put our hands up, only the 2 us, both of colour – and he asked again “Who would like to go”. He ignored us. But you know, that was in 1991 when I just started. And you just hold onto your job. You got in, so you just hold on. And now, I’m a senior manager of a large team. There was a lot I had to overcome like that.” [Participant 14]

“When I was studying externally, my supervisor was of colour – I sensed that she was difficult with me because she always needed to prove herself - she always had to fight. I think

she was always landing in hot water with the students – they didn't respect her.”
*“I noticed the faculty only had two people of colour. I also noticed that in a class of 20, only
4 of us were of colour.”*

“They needed to get more ‘Black’ students in, to fill quota. She said it quite bluntly.”
*“People already had the perception of the institution being a “white” institution. I tried not
to have that perception. But that’s how I started thinking. I felt ignored and disregarded.
That I was “disadvantaged” because I was not from the right race.”*

“I was so hurt.”

“We were lost.”

“One of the students of colour eventually left the course.” [Participant 1]

Participants 10 and 9 both acknowledge that the current workplace is diverse, made up of a range of people from different cultures, creating interesting complexities. This is particularly emphasised, as relayed by participant 9, in larger organisations. Within organisations there may be pockets of individuals who have a mindset that remains referring to the past, and who become slightly resistant to change, as shared by participants 10 and 9, similarly. Staying with the familiar, and comfortable in the presumption that it is better. This view persists for a longer period than is necessary, within long-standing organisations and those that have a complexed hierarchical structure, where the prejudice to new experiences and people can continue at any level without reflection, and the resistance to change may be systemic and can be draining to those wanting to effect it, as relayed by participants 8 and 9. Participant 1 shared that she found most older individuals within the institution she referred to, were of the “White” race. This is particularly expected within the South African context, as most of the population of colour did not have open access to corporate work as did those of the “White” race. Trying to change the mindsets of others around you within the workplace is draining, as participant 9 shared. Participant 5 observed that some favouritism persisted in their environment, where some people were favoured over others in work-related, and personal, matters. As relates to instances of race, participant 14 bravely recounted her experience of being shunned and ignored as an individual of colour. Her testament was to persevere through the prejudices others might want to transfer, and in that, as an individual, you are more than likely to triumph. Participant 1 shared that while her and her supervisor were of the same race, they were not amicable, in fact she appeared to mistreat her because of the similarity. Participant 1 vulnerably relayed her experience of racism here of 20 students in an external institution, she was one of four of colour – one of which left after the poor experience within the class. She admitted that she was hurt

by the experience of prejudice and unfair treatment based on race within the institution, and they collectively felt “lost” as individuals of colour. While the institutional racism was known publicly, she was hoping that it was not something she would experience. She also relayed the understanding she grew to have of her own supervisor, who was an individual of colour, in the difficult experiences she must have had in her perspective – which gave her an acceptance of the struggles she, herself, was experiencing with her. This speaks to the prevalence of empathy extended due to shared experiences.

Participant 14 was incredibly vulnerable in the interview and shared her difficult early experiences with the researcher. The participant, who was now a senior leader in the organisation, recounted her earlier days when racism was still very prevalent, and somewhat accepted, in the workplace. She was standing in a circle, with a fellow black colleague, having been asked to come to the centre of the room with all other team members. The supervisor then asked “Who would like to participate in an elite team to do research work for the organisation”, he was putting together. She raised her hand. He asked again “Who would like to join?” Her friend joined her in raising their hands to signal they would like to, and their raised hands were in plain sight of the supervisor, yet he asked yet again “Would anyone like to join?”. She was not chosen for that team. However, some years later she created an opportunity for herself when she put herself forward for a difficult task when a fellow white colleague had fallen ill. The task had been repeatedly denied to her, with various excuses. She said she worked “so hard” and “delivered, to the point that the supervisor was willing to consider her for another, similar role”. Through this perseverance she started getting promoted. She said that her mother used to say to her “Once you get your foot in the door, you have to hold on until someone recognized you for what you do. Just get your foot in the door.”

v. Patience and Understanding of Each Other

Having patience on the part of the supervisor can be difficult; but then also having patience and understanding on the part of the employee and what the supervisor has to go through can be difficult for them too. The supervisor has many demands; but the employee is learning and also wants support to get to the next level.

“Having to understand the other makes the work that much harder.”

“It was hard to understand her, but I tried. I don’t think it was reciprocated though.”

“She’s also a human being.”

[Participant 1]

“I need to understand my personality and understand my shortcomings.”

“I need to understand myself first before I understand others.”

“I think it is important as an employee to understand and give direct feedback to your manager.” [Participant 9].

“I can understand why my supervisor was irritated with me.”

[Participant 1]

“There was a sense of pride on both parts.” [Participant 2]

“That’s why I gave her the benefit of the doubt.” [Participant 1]

“We need to have tough conversations, but somehow we can’t.” [Participant 11]

“They are leaders who can have difficult conversations - honest ones. And they don’t shy away from it.” [Participant 10]

“Why do we only collaborate for positive things. When faced with a challenge, we should be able to sit together and figure out, collaboratively, a way to resolve it.” [Participant 12].

The participants showed a high level of maturity in acknowledging either their lack of understanding or pointing out that patience and understanding should be exercised more regularly between the supervisor and employee. Participant 1 was able to acknowledge that trying to understand the other party is very difficult, and while that attribute was not reciprocated, it facilitated smoother handling of the challenging situation she found herself in. In her conclusion of her reflection, she stated that her supervisor was “human” also. Participant 9 also relayed his need to understand himself, as relates to his behaviour and his sensitivities, in addition to the supervisor. He further added that this act should be supported by a feedback mechanism. Through this reflection it can result in important insights that can facilitate, or completely change the nature of the relationship between the supervisor and employee. As participants 1 and 2 share, there insights of acknowledge their parts in contributing to the supervisor’s negative behaviour. Participant 1 continued to share that she was, through this understanding, able to extend compassion to the supervisor. Participants 11 and 10 both suggest that more enabling conversations should be facilitated whereby “tough” conversations can be conducted, between the supervisor and employee, that engender restoration or growth within their relationship. Participant 12 creatively put forward that collaboration should not be

restricted to engaging on positive things alone, but should be used as a tool for negative engagement.

4.2.1.3. Summary the Key Points

The following table, as in the previous sub-chapter, collates the key points that were raised here:

Key Points from Threats from Below	Description
A. Tendencies Stemming from Both the Employee and the Supervisor	<p>1. Deceptive and Demanding Traits</p> <p>A few of them include over-emphasising their abilities to gain advantage, being easily distracted or disinterested and not being engaged.</p> <p>Wanting more than the supervisor can give, indirectly being needy of their time or capacity.</p> <p>2. Personal Differences (<i>in</i> Personal Values, Personal Styles of Work and Ways of Communicating)</p> <p>It might not be directly obvious initially but when the personality and/or values become apparent and are in opposition or in contrast to those of the other individual, it makes communication difficult and has a potential root for conflict.</p> <p>The differences in personality, way of communicating, style of communicating, tone and volume of communicating as well as a more broadly personal beliefs, personal values may cause misunderstanding.</p> <p>Unconscious bias refers to the ways of dealing with others that are not immediately apparent and that engages prejudices.</p> <p>Having patience on the part of the supervisor can be difficult; but then also having patience and understanding on the part of the employee and what the supervisor has to go through can be difficult too.</p>

Table 7: Key points (Threats from below)

4.3. THE INFLUENCE OF THE LEADER (THREATS FROM ABOVE)

The influence of leaders - referring to the executives within the organisation, sometimes referred to as the supervisor's superiors in the literature - is noted here to influence the relationship between the supervisor and the employee. The leaders are known to drive the organisational strategies and outcomes, and can lean on their power and influence to implement

those strategies, mainly through delegation. The following sub-chapter outlines what the participants' contribution to how leaders influence the supervisor-employee relationship. The leader is often seen as apathetic when they do not contribute in a visual, day-to-day, manner. The apathy of the leader to engage with the employees can be seen in a number of ways, such as being overtly busy, operating through delegation and threats, reinforcing their importance and disregard for harmful attitudes, such as promotional manipulation, within the organisation. The leader has also suggested to lack focus on the employee's well-being, which foster a similar attitude from the supervisor. The leader's particular attitude it often permeates through the organisation. These elements, including influence on organisational access and priorities, are covered in what follows.

Leader's Attitude that Influences the Culture
1. Apathetic Leadership
2. Continuation of Restrictive Organisational Access and Priorities
3. Lack of Authenticity

Table 8: Leader's Attitude that Influences the Culture (Threats from above)

4.3.1. Leader's Attitude that Influences the Culture

4.3.1.1. Apathetic leadership

i. Avoidance of Direct Engagement

The busyness of leaders creates the perception that they are unavailable for engagement from employees. It further extends the perception that their time, and tasks, are very crucial and may even be slightly superior to that of others. Where this perception permeates through the organisation, there are various consequences – individuals within the organisation become very aware of “wasting” the leader's time, creating quick techniques of engaging with them, referring to other's requests as less important and a desire from individuals to appease and gain favour with the leaders, in hope of transference of importance. This may well become a culture within the organisation, that, if not adhered to, may appear offensive and disrespectful. By way of extension of the concept of being publicly busy, the concept of delegation from the leader to the supervisor is given, often privately. A request for the supervisor to implement the leaders requirements – with some agreed milestones and associated performance measures. Where

these milestones are not achieved, the leader may resort to threats towards the supervisor and their tenure within the organisation, a method of manipulation that the leader employs to ensure their agenda is met. This impacts the well-being, and focus, of the supervisor, together with the pressure they experience to perform according to the leader's demands, which may ultimately be transferred to the team. Moreover, with this very lenient leadership style, the supervisor can often be left to their own devices to navigate the relationship with the employee as they see fit, without being closely monitored.

“Leaders are highly pressured individuals, you have to deliver footnotes to them for the sake of their time.”

“I know they are dealing with the real strategic stuff.”

“I, as a senior manager, have access to them.”

“Being smart with how you engage with the leader. Find their sweet spot.” [Participant 4]

“That’s when you get rewarded, and the leader of the leader pats you on the back and reinforces that kind of behaviour.” [Participant 10]

“Really wanted to impress her superior.”

“She was very into her status.” [Participant 11]

“We understand business is under pressure. That pressure right from the top invades the team.” [Participant 10]

Participant 4 shared that her perception of leaders are that they are highly pressured individuals”, for which you have to be aware of their time when engaging and “deliver footnotes”. That they are the individuals in the organisation dealing with the “real strategic stuff” and that one needs to be “smart” when engaging with them, and find their “sweet spot”. This view is one that others in the organisation may share and may have developed as a result of either direct engagement with that leader, or indirectly, through the transference of someone else’s experience that is close to the supervisor, or employee. The perception this ends up creating, either intentionally or unintentionally, is that as a leader you wish to avoid engagement with the employee, and at a very minimal level can handle efficient interaction with the supervisor. This means that processes and tasks that they might otherwise keep them accountable or have them be held responsible for, is avoided, or at best transferred to the supervisor. As a way of ensuring continued loyalty and obedience from the supervisor, as relayed by participants 10 and 11, the supervisor is rewarded or given the desired attention to.

ii. Tolerance of Unfair Promotional Practices

An organisational culture of an “unfair” promotional practices can lead to an unnecessarily challenging environment for employees, in general. The leader has the capacity, and influence, to change unfair practices, or a harmful culture, and where this is tolerated it transmits a message of acceptance of these practices and behaviour. The environment becomes fraught with individuals competing with each other for attention, and seeking favours, from leaders – knowing that where their skills are made known, and seen as superior, to their peers, their chance at promotion is increased. Manipulation of leaders to gain favour, regardless of skill, is also ignited - where individuals realise they are able to create an opportunity for themselves and convince others of their suitability. It facilitates a “cut-throat” environment. An informal, and potentially manipulative and coercive, promotional culture incites a harmful environment, whereas a more formal, structured, approach that follows leading industry standards allows for a more fair and less stress-inducing atmosphere. Moreover, the participants stressed the nature of – whether through an informal or more formal promotion – individuals attain roles that they are not the best fit for. This lack of attention of leaders to inadequate promotional processes, potentially facilitated by HRD, the participants stressed is what leaves poorly-equipped individuals in supervision roles - of which, the employee suffers the consequence.

“If you have the gift of the gab, you can get anywhere in this place.” [Participant 11]

“Companies should take ownership of who they put in leadership.” [Participant 10]

“Failure in where people are placed in leadership.” [Participant 9]

“People who should not have been in the position in the first place. They were promoted because they were an individual contributor.”

“They were just not leadership material”. [Participant 7]

“The manager appointed was a sort of misfit to the structure.” [Participant 10]

“It was a job mismatch.” [Participant 3]

“Too senior for the role they were in. Didn’t have the time or capacity for you..”

[Participant 11]

“You can’t progress without being a manager of people. If you know how to manage people, then you can move up the ladder.”

“You throw people at them, and they are not able to handle managing people.” [Participant

13]

“Toxicity is a consequence of having to manage others even when the person is not ready.”

[Participant 7]

“Getting this role was a change for him. He was a specialist getting a management position.” [Participant 5]

“A good manager inspires the best outcomes. Where they manage them as a person and not as a tool.”

“That’s what happens when a technical person manages a team.”

“Technically sound but lacked leadership ability.” [Participant 8]

“There’s a career path with hierarchy.”

“When people get promoted, they need to be humble.” [Participant 3]

Participant 11 relays that if you’re able to successfully articulate yourself and appease the superiors, then within the organisation they operate, the individual is able to seek promotional opportunity. The organisation has been appealed to take more accountability of the promotional process, ensuring that the relevant people are placed in the appropriate positions, as mentioned by participant 10. Currently, within her organisation, participant 9 shares that leadership is failing to place the suitable people in the adequate positions. Six participants shared that there in their experiences, they encountered areas where the individual supervising was not suitable for that position. Instead, they were placed in the role, prematurely, with abilities to manage others not yet adequately developed – being a predominantly technical specialist. Participant 3 relays that within a hierarchical structure, there tends to be a certain predetermined career path. This often includes, as participant 13 shares, the requirement to manage people in order to “move up the ladder”. He continues to declare that one cannot seem to progress unless they are a manager of people. Participant 7 states that these situations – of prematurely allowing others to manage employees where “they are not ready” – leads to the “toxic” nature of certain environments. Participant 3 further alludes to that premature promotion means that individuals tend to bring a certain arrogance with them, which can exacerbate the frustrating engagement.

iii. Lack of Attention to Employee Well-being (Support, Value and Training)

The employees within the working environment today tend to desire a balance of monetary rewards and quality interactions and relationships. This includes having authentic support, being shown that their contribution is valued, and being extended adequate and appropriate training when desired. Where leaders do not genuinely engage in a component of support, empowerment and upskilling for the employee’s goals and aspirations, and in addition acknowledge the additional external pressures they face – such as family and global career

trends – this will result in disengagement from the employee or, at the extreme, withdrawal. There is a general lack of value given to the employee within the organisation with behaviours from supervisors, teams and leaders perpetuating this undertone. The limitation of power granted to the employee – and consequent disempowering - means that the employee is left feeling like everything needs to be checked with someone before going forward, creating a loop of self-doubt or lack of confidence. Relative to items such as organisational priorities, the level of attention given to support, empowerment and training of employees by the leaders, is small. The support, itself, does not need to be delivered by the leaders, but rather through the message they relay to others in the organisation. Supervisors and Human Resource Development staff, in particular, within the organisation form the main vein of support from which the employee can access these elements promoting their well-being. Where they are not told by leaders to prioritise these elements, or instead are given other “outcome-based” priorities above this as a driver of their performance, the supervisor and HRD staff will, likely, not give it much relative attention. The consequence is that employees, particularly those new to the company – either graduates or transferring professionals - will be left with longer periods of adjustment and learning, which could delay their ability to perform and succeed within the organisation. Supervisors and HRD staff furthermore, tend to support the leader, and in that any support they may proffer may be biased toward this relationship, leaning towards conflicting interests in issues that require trust and unbiased support.

“Good managers stand in the line of danger.”

“They create a psychologically safe place.” [Participant 5]

“Managers are a large influence on the success at work, they delegate work. They set you up. They show you how to do things, influencing your thinking, helping you.”

“They can make the employee feel less confident, and scared, where they leave you stranded.” [Participant 3]

“Some employees become disengaged but they stay. Because I have to work because I have to earn an income.” [Participant 9]

“I was brought up where you keep a job for 30 years. I cannot lose my job, I need to stay here, and you feel like a prisoner.” [Participant 6]

“Her mother was also an owner of a company and she needed to meet her mother’s standards.” [Participant 2]

“She left a big retail company, and started her own thing. It was the way the world was moving – being an entrepreneur. She felt it was a better move for what she wanted.”

[Participant 2]

“You do look elsewhere even though you like your role. You leave people, you don’t leave the role.” [Participant 11]

“A toxic culture has a negative impact on the individual’s performance and on their morale.” [Participant 7]

“I moved, and now with a good manager, I have the courage to speak up.”

“With this new role, I know now how managers should behave. I know I’m able to do stuff. I have met such great people.” [Participant 2]

“All people are leaders, not just the person who has positional power.”

“For the workforce to be successful in the future, you need the opposite of all the things happening now. You want each employee to be empowered as a leader in their own right. You want agility, the ability to think quickly, to make good decisions fast – and you need to help them to do this.”

“Good leaders enable their team with knowledge and skills, to make decisions. To work their way out of a problem.” [Participant 10]

“She gave me the wrong process.”

“There were things she could have picked up. She just let me do my own thing, not giving me the guidance I needed.” [Participant 1]

An acknowledgment that good leaders show support of the employee was relayed by both participants 5 and 3 – providing “psychologically safe” grounds to flourish and feel secure, and helping you closely as you navigate the organisation. Participant 3 further contributes that, while a leader can help establish the employee’s career, they can equally instil a lack of confidence and fear, if they are not properly supported. As mentioned, employees may find themselves with the external pressures of having to provide for themselves, and a family, and so “have” to work to earn an income, as shared by participants 9 and 6. Participant 9 shared that even though employees need to be financially secure, and so remain in an unsupportive, possibly discouraging, environment, they do become disengaged. This is was further confirmed by participant 6, who adds, more personally, that in her disengagement and need to remain – for personal beliefs – she is left “feeling like a prisoner”. Participant 2 contributed by explaining further the extent of the career pressures that employees face – competition with fellow peers and engaging with global trends of career aspirations (in this case, being an entrepreneur). Social pressure may also exist in the workplace, today, as comparisons with

peers are more evident with the presence of social media.

Where employees feel disempowered and devalued in their environment, they have a desire to leave, as shared by both participants 11 and 7 – as the lack of empowerment and under-estimation, ultimately affects their performance and morale. Contrastingly, when employees are shown value, they become more confident and encouraged to perform well, as shared by participant 2. Participant 10 conveys that, in their perspective, “all people are leaders” – a view of equal treatment and empowerment of employees – and adds that there needs to be a change to the way employees are treated currently – they need to be able to react as a leader, in their thoughts and decisions, so that they are able to compete in the future workplaces. This speaks to the element, as raised, of adequate and appropriate training, in learning styles that suit the particular employee. Participant 10 continued to share that good leaders, in his opinion, enable the acquisition of knowledge and skills to be able to problem-solve and think independently and innovatively. Where adequate training is not delivered, and in fact incorrect knowledge transferred, it creates frustration and a perception that the employee is not valued, as relayed by participant 1.

Recognition, here, is extended to current developments of flatter structures (e.g. holacracy – a method of decentralised management) which might facilitate and foster, in a more intentional way, the principles of support, value and training – where supervisors are being replaced by team leaders who are more focused on engagement with fellow employees - this usually is in “high-tech” companies or those proactively taking this stance; for the larger more slower-changing companies the lack of these elements is still pervasive.

4.3.1.2. Continuation of Restrictive Organisational Access and Priorities

Disseminating useful, or valuable, organisational information is often left to the leader to do – they decide on to whom, when and how that information is shared. When leaders continue restrictive access to this information, it advantages some while disadvantaging others. Through being apathetic towards restrictions on information sharing, the leaders can perpetuate a culture of value placed on certain individuals and a consequential inferiority of those who are not deemed fit to know. Where the supervisor of a team is an individual that is easily given access to information, not only does their personal view of themselves raised, but the well-being and

general treatment of the team improved. Opposingly, when the team's supervisor is not extended the same information-sharing, they have less insight and transparency to key elements of the organisation and could disadvantage their team in needing to complete tasks with less information, combined with a dejected supervisor leading the completion of those tasks. Information is an important currency within an organisation, and most employees are aware of this. Similarly, the restrictive granting of decision-making rights, causes opportunities to those granted it, and hindrances to those who are not. Leadership's influence and ability to create, or amend, certain policies, rules and procedures, furthermore, contributes to the set of organisational structures and activities that leadership influences – and through which an inattentive, unintentional leadership can do harm to those within the organisation through its impacts. As relates to restrictive organisational priorities, the leaders may have as an organisational focus, as dictated by their strategy, one that does not harness employee well-being. As an example, the focus may be to drive certain profit-orientated metrics at all costs. This may well be exacerbated in financially driven, and possibly technology, driven organisations.

“It was on a need-to-know basis.”

“It was about control. I am more senior, so I control what you know and what you don't know.” [Participant 7]

“With hierarchy there's a need for decision-making. Having someone needing to make the decision for you sometimes holds us back.” [Participant 9]

“Sometimes the superior doesn't adhere to the culture and values we are needing to.” [Participant 11]

“Culture drives an action-orientated, quantitative leader; if that's what it wants.” [Participant 10]

“Excellence, performance measures, clients. Employers want to see things that are real and tangible.” [Participant 3]

“They become part and parcel of an output.” [Participant 13]

Participant 7 shared his experience of information disparity – where information was given only on a “need-to-know” basis. He acknowledged that it was about control, and privilege, of who is able to acquire the knowledge. This is more severe, the more layers of hierarchy there is. Participant 9 conveyed that his awareness that within a hierarchical structure, there needs to be some levels of decision-making – but that the restriction of decision-making rights

inhibits progress, and flow of work. While implementing the culture, practices and rules, the leader holds the employees against these organisational elements, but then do not themselves adhere to it, as relayed by participant 11. This often alludes to the culture, practices and rules being a tool to ensure obedience to certain dictated elements. Participants 10, 3 and 13 contribute that they concur with where the organisational priority is quantitative and performance-based, the leaders drive this at the expense of the employee being “part and parcel of an output”.

4.3.1.3. Lack of Authenticity

Often the leader reserves authenticity for their fellow senior management, or alternatively those within the organisation they resonate with or find they wish to impress. It is often with these few that the leader attempts and exerts effort in creating an authentic relationship, sometimes in situations that might ultimately have a long-run benefit. That lack of authenticity may also be interpreted as the lack of desire to be a leader of people. The inauthentic nature of leaders makes them inaccessible to employees, and the employee is left to transact through the supervisor. Moreover, the understanding of true leadership and learnings that can be derived from that, is limited.

“They are fake. They are not consistent - doing something only to get something out.”

“They don’t give their all. They are just in the role but do not go above and beyond.”

[Participant 5]

“The character of the person just didn’t align to the company mission statement.”

[Participant 2]

“It takes a real leader to establish genuine relationships.” [Participant 5]

“When I had conversations about my personal life, there was a different side.” [Participant

6]

“At the shopping mall so nice, at the office so different.” [Participant 4]

“When you speak to the person, and when you read their emails, they are different.”

[Participant 5]

“When we spoke in our personal capacity, we seemed very aligned, which was strange.”

[Participant 2]

Participant 5 was quite resolved in his statement that they find that leaders are “fake”, they lack the consistency of character to establish sincere, authentic, engagement – “doing something only to get something out”. They also shared that in their perspective, leaders do not exert full efforts in leading the organisation, they fulfil their role but do not show any intention to want more for themselves, or the organisation. This sentiment was also noted by participant 2, who mentioned that she recognised that her leader’s character did not align with the organisation’s values, even though the leader herself created them. This lack of consistency and authenticity it intention was further corroborated by participants 5 and 6 also, where experiences of encountering the leader in a personal capacity revealed a different person to the one that was shared in the workplace. The way that the leader engages in emails, noted in this case to be more formal and commanding, than when they engaged with the same individual in a face-to-face encounter. Participant 2 continued to share that she found that the leader and her views were actually aligned, personally, even though there was conflict on work-related matters – presenting that where authenticity avails, peace might be present.

4.3.1.4. Summary the Key Points

As in the previous sub-chapters, the following table aims to provide a reference point for the key elements raised here:

Key Points of Threats from Above	Description
A. Leader’s Attitude that Influences the Culture	<p>1. Apathetic Leadership</p> <p>The leader is often seen as apathetic when they do not contribute in a visual manner to the day-to-day life of the employee.</p> <p>The busyness of leaders creates the perception that they are unavailable for engagement from employees.</p> <p>An organisational culture of an “unfair” promotional practices can lead to an unnecessarily challenging environment for employees, in general.</p> <p>The employee and the supervisor both have family pressure that can create expectations and provide pressure and distract.</p> <p>The reason the challenges relating to supervisors occur is also due to a global corporate culture that persists and reinforces the belief that the supervisor is the most important equation in a team and the team members are there but to help.</p> <p>2. Continuation of Restrictive Organisational Access and Priorities</p> <p>Disseminating useful, or valuable, organisational information is often left to the leader to do – they decide on to whom, when and how that information is shared. When leaders continue</p>

	<p>restrictive access to this information, it advantages some while disadvantaging others.</p> <p>3. Lack of Authenticity</p> <p>Often the leader reserves authenticity for their fellow senior management, or alternatively those within the organisation they resonate with or find they wish to impress. It is often with these few that the leader attempts and exerts effort in creating an authentic relationship, sometimes in situations that might ultimately have a long-run benefit.</p>
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Table 9: Key points (Threats from above)

4.4. THE INFLUENCE OF TEAMS (ADDITIONAL THREAT: THREAT FROM “AROUND”)

The working life of the employee involves various parties that make up those with whom the individual engages with in the workplace - the team being one of those central parties with whom the individual engages, often on a daily basis. The team is a group of individuals who find themselves working together, in a division or company, to achieve a collective goal. Each team member is often allocated a task that fits their strengths and experience, and the outcome brought together to present to the client - internal or external - from whom the request stemmed. Some team members may work independently of other members, but there are instances where two or more team members work collaboratively on the task. Even if the team members do not work together on a particular goal, there remains consistent interaction - and association - between members and the supervisor - in weekly team meetings, in engaging in discussions with the supervisor, and in being presented as a single unit from the perspective of an external party.

The participants relayed that the employee within a team finds it difficult to engage with the supervisor, and similarly the supervisor with them, because of varying dynamics of how team members relate with each other, and also the team culture itself. The team culture is the way the team members have in the past operated and chose to continue operating – such as, amongst others, the manner in which they welcome others to the team, the cadence of social events, the “tea-breaks” - its timing and attendees - and the acceptance of unusual behaviour. The culture is usually influenced by the members’ collective beliefs and values, which are impacted by their individual beliefs and values to varying degrees. The level of impact, or influence, any one member may have in the team commonly depends on their position, duration, and

performance within the team – it may also be affected by that member’s particular strength of personality. Those member’s who have more dominant personalities may be able to influence others, or the supervisor themselves, more effectively, than those who are more subtle. Together with the supervisor, the team culture and team members, generally, determine the level of comfort an employee has in the work environment – given their proximity and frequency of interaction. The participants contribution as relates to the team dynamics and team culture are presented in this sub-chapter. It forms a fourth, and fairly significant, consideration of the influences contributing to the aggression the supervisor displays towards the employee – it is labelled “Threats from around”, particularly referring to the pattern of engagement team members have with the supervisor, “hovering around” the relationship between the employee and supervisor because of their desire for equal attention within the workplace. The following outlines the items that will be addressed further below:

Dynamics between Team Members <i>as relates to</i>	Culture of the Team
1. Restriction of Success	1. Powerful Minorities
2. Inducing Fear and Isolation	2. Influencing Practices

Table 10: Dynamics and Culture of the Team (Threats from around)

4.4.1. Dynamics between Team Members *as relates to*

4.4.1.1. Restriction of Success (*as relates to Possessiveness and Competitiveness*)

Team members can be shown to display traits of possessiveness and competitiveness as relates to team resources - such as work tasks and team relationships – available within the workplace. The possessiveness is displayed, typically, when an employee is given work relating to the other team member’s specialty and that individual is aware that their strength is acknowledged, and rewarded, based on that area of work. It is in these instances, the team member will not allow the work to be allocated, easily – openly sharing opinions of their strength relative to the employee’s and the coercion it might take, privately, with the supervisor to have the work be re-allocated – to them. Competitiveness is displayed where the employee may be showing possibilities of being an outstanding performer, having successfully excelled in certain recent tasks. The team member, feeling threatened, may engage in open or subversive competition

with the employee – in an attempt to have the attention revert to their skills. This same behaviour – both possessiveness and competitiveness – may be displayed towards the personal relationships the team members shares with the supervisor, and others in the team. This is generally when the team member feels that the work relationship is important to them, and that the presence of the new individual jeopardises the strength of that relationship for them. This makes it difficult for a new individual to the team, to gain access to interesting, or challenging, work and possibly limit their exposure for success within the team, and organisation. They are also hindered from establishing prosperous relationships with the supervisor, and other team members. The nature of these team dynamics can have a great impact on the confidence, learning, growth and well-being, of an employee.

“Bringing me down, because she needed to be the only person succeeding.” [Participant 2]

“Made it clear was not on the same level.” [Participant 7]

Participant 2 shared an encounter with a team member who would persist in “bringing her down”, because, as participant 2 perceived, that team member needed to retain success and attention to herself. Participant 7 also relays that in his experience, a dominant team member “made it clear” that he was not “on the same level” as they were – a possible attempt to discourage him from succeeding in areas that were typically marked as the team member’s. Certain sabotaging behaviour can take place, either individually or collectively, within a team.

As relates to overt competitiveness – it can often be used as a tool to consistently show why an individual is more suited for a particular position, or potential promotion. Overt competitiveness is often associated with openly comparing scores, using “leader-boards” to publicly rank individual’s performance, and using naming-conventions such as “losers” and “winners” to describe individuals who have done poorly and well, in the team. Competitiveness in itself is not sometimes unexpected in a work environment, today, and may well be encouraged to promote productivity, in certain instances - however, “overt competitiveness” can often lead to low self-esteem, a lack of confidence, under-performance and eventual withdrawal where it is frequent and persistent. Competitiveness may, sometimes, naturally occur between two team members with a similar job title, or similar backgrounds - experience, race or age.

4.4.1.3. Inducing Fear and Isolation

Ultimately, fear - and similarly, anxiety - can ignite when team members create a difficult environment within which to operate – examples include fear of engagement, fear of ridicule, fear of embarrassment, fear of competitive interaction, fear of voicing opinions, fear of failure, and at the extreme, fear of aggressive behaviour and fear of loss of employment. Engaging with others in a workplace who incite fear, is difficult for the employee who - while experiencing this state of fear – is still required to successfully complete work tasks. The level of conflict with having to navigate a psychologically-unsafe place and also accomplish delegated tasks, can be draining, particularly without support - and consequently their performance may decline. Isolation, similarly, can be induced by team members who commonly manipulate the environment to engender ostracism towards employees they have deemed “not to like”. These team members commonly effect isolation by ganging up with other team-members, either overtly or covertly, to display their dissatisfaction of an employee – due possibly to either that employee’s need for approval, over-performance, or difference in background (age, race, gender, cultural preference etc). The team members influencing isolation do so in a fairly aggressive manner, so that it cannot be misinterpreted, and the resulting isolation either intentionally or unintentionally communicates to the employee that “they don’t belong”. The feeling of belonging to a group is a natural tendency for individuals, and where they feel an evident dissociation with a group, it can leave them feeling unmotivated, disengaged and ultimately depressed which could end in withdrawal. Social interaction and how one is perceived, and treated, by others socially can be crucial in the ability to engage with confidence and self-esteem.

“Other members in my team experiencing exactly what I’m going through and not saying anything.” [Participant 11]

“I might still enjoy what I do, but I don’t want to participate in the team. I don’t want to even engage with my supervisor.” [Participant 10]

Participant 11 relayed her account of experiencing difficulties within her team and eventually developing a fear of voicing her opinions – this was similarly felt by others within her team. Participant 10 vulnerably shared his experience of isolation, where even with a retention in passion for his work, the team dynamics led to him not wanting to engage with them, and

neither with his supervisor. At the point that the isolation has been developed, the feeling of belonging and desire for engagement dissipates. The supervisor, likely in their camaraderie with the team, was not available for support to the participant.

4.4.2. Culture of the Team

4.4.2.1. Powerful Minorities

Sometimes, within a team, there may exist a group, usually consisting of only a few dominant team members - a minority - who seem to have a great influence on the team itself, but moreover on the supervisor. The dominant team members may find cohesion amongst each other, in having worked together for an extended period, or because they have found some commonality in views, values, or backgrounds (age, gender, race, cultural preference, etc). This commonality has allowed them to establish a powerful, and unified, voice in discussion of certain elements within the team, and organisation. The team, generally, consists of numerous individuals who each have independent views and backgrounds, and finding association with each other can be difficult – therefore where this is found in a small group within the team, can result in this group of individuals, through their cohesion, dominating others who are still operating fairly independently. Although the size of the group may extend to only one to five individuals, where a point is being argued by one individual against five, this seemingly small size can make a large difference. The consequence, overall, is that this minority's views dominate and are promoted, while those of others are overlooked. Similarly, where this group has established influence with the supervisor, they are able to gain favour others would not usually be given – as an example, being able to hold discussions on important organisational matters, privately, where others are not extended this same favour. If, at any time, this group dislikes an employee, their opinion might be valued more highly than individual observation, and this view may permeate to other team members, and moreover, the supervisor. Where the perspective of the minority is held as important, a negative critique from this group, on the employee's work performance or behaviour, can put a strain on the relationship the supervisor and employee are trying to establish. The minority's power within the team, where created, is often left unmonitored by external leaders, and unchanged.

“The way they handled others, how they voiced their opinions over others – I came to accept that was just the immediate team culture.” [Participant 8]

*“I would get no response on emails sent, but others would get personal WhatsApps.”
[Participant 1]*

Participant 8 shares their experience of a group dealing with others unfairly, and acknowledged, reluctantly, that it was simply the way the team operated - the team culture - whether he agreed with it or not. Participant 1, in her experiences, vulnerably relayed how she was ostracised because of her background, and that she experienced a group of individuals who believed they were more powerful than others, and this established a culture of others believing similarly – to the point where the supervisor was treating them in a more favourable manner than others.

4.4.2.2. Influencing Practices (*as relates to Gossip, Shaming and Bullying*)

There are certain influencing practices within the team, that are employed to gain favour, opportunity, or power over others within the team. These include practices of gossip, shaming and bullying. Gossip can be fairly harmful where it is done consistently and where the rumours are spread to audiences wider than just one or two individuals within the team. The gossip is also often believed by others, where this is relayed in a sincere manner, or where it is relayed by an individual who has a high trust-level with others. The gossip may have elements of truth, or it may be falsified, in either case, it creates a culture of discussing matters with others, rather than the employee themselves. This fosters distrust of fellow team members, low self-confidence of the employee being spoken about and poor establishment of relationships with others – team members may be less inclined to develop a relationship with an individual others may not value. Moreover, it creates an environment of dishonesty, insincerity and a lack of transparency. This is particularly impactful, where the gossip is to, or extended to, the supervisor of the team – the supervisor being the leading authority within the team, has the ability to act on the rumours heard. Shaming, similarly, can have negative impacts on the supervisor-employee relationship. Shaming refers to the practice of “calling out”, publicly or privately, the errors made by an employee – based on either their work performance or behaviour. Public shaming occurs in some teams, and may even be considered acceptable and the norm - a way of letting team members know what not to do. This practice publicly devalues the shamed employee, and can leave them feeling incapable, embarrassed and could injure their

self-esteem. Where shaming is combined with harsh language, it is particularly damaging to the employee's self-worth. The employee's performance and engagement within the team may ultimately decline. Group bullying, similarly, can have an impact on the employee's self-worth, and can take place within a team, where there is not a good fit of the employee to the team members. The bullying involves belittling, requesting undue favours, threats and jeering, amongst other elements. Where the members see that the employee has little support, either from the supervisor or fellow team members, this behaviour persists and can sometimes escalate. Moreover, the other team members that observe the bullying seldomly report it – and at the extreme, the bullying may become accepted. Bullying can also take place by a supervisor. Bullying, overall, causes much distress for the individual being bullied and, where the practice is not exclaimed and terminated, the employee may feel apathetic, disengaged, and ultimately, depressed. Performance drops as a result, and eventual withdrawal occurs.

“My supervisor is not supporting me, and my team is talking behind my back.” [Participant 10]

“She accidentally sent me an email with a trail where the supervisor and her were gossiping about me.” [Participant 1]

“She lied. I sent them screenshots. Not one of them came back and apologised.” [Participant 1]

“They had nicknames for us.” [Participant 11]

“When you went against what they wanted, you were in their bad books.”

“You were asked to lie for them.” [Participant 11]

Participant 10 shares his perspectives of the lack of support and the prevailing practice of gossip within teams. The practice of gossip leaves the employee feeling devalued and angry, as relayed by participant 1, when she found communication between the supervisor and another individual about her. Participant 1 also recounts an incident where, in order to gain the upper-hand in the discussion, the supervisor shamed her and the participant was forced to redeem herself by relaying her version of the performance. Participant 11 conveyed that she experienced bullying within her team where a group of individuals persisted in calling her, and others, by nicknames they had determined - which were condescending. She further relayed that they threatened her, and others, with the subtleties of dislike if she went against what they

asked for. She also recounted that the group had such power over them, that even when asked to lie for them, she felt obligated to do so.

4.2.4.5. Summary the Key Points

The following is a table summarising the key point of this sub-chapter:

Key Points of Threats from Around	Description
A. Dynamics between Team Members <i>as relates to</i>	<p>1. Restriction of Success</p> <p>Possessiveness when it comes to team members; both for the member's work and for the relationships within the team.</p> <p>Competitiveness in itself is sometimes expected within each individual, however overt competitiveness refers to the characteristic of boldly, sometimes over-bearingly, competing with others over sometimes anything.</p> <p>2. Inducing Fear and Isolation</p> <p>Ultimately, fear and the close relative anxiety can exist, in particular as relates to groups with regards to fitting in and/or performance, measuring oneself to the others in the team.</p> <p>The interaction with the team can really bring a sense of isolation where the employee does not fit or is felt to feel as they do not fit.</p>
B. Culture of the Team	<p>1. Acceptance of a Minority Ruling</p> <p>A strong dynamic within the team that the power is actually with the minority and not seemingly with the leader of the team.</p> <p>2. Influencing Practices</p> <p>Influencing the opinion of the supervisor, through shared experiences or discussing rumours ("gossip").</p> <p>Calling them out for it to their face, but adding derogatory terms to that - like idiot or stupid - occurs.</p> <p>The group bullying could take place where there is not a fit, or where the members see loyalty to a supervisor or want to please the supervisor, where it seen that the supervisor does not particularly favour/like the employee.</p>

Table 11: Key points (Threats from around)

4.5. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

There are four key themes presented in the research findings. They relate to the threats experienced by the supervisor that influence their aggressive tendencies towards the employee.

The research question that this thesis addresses relates to the reasons behind the aggression of the supervisor towards the employee. The main point of extraction, as mentioned before, being the causes (or antecedents) of why the supervisor behaves in this way. These antecedents reside in the threats the supervisor perceives. These threats are divided, usually in the literature, into three areas. In these research findings, the participants have contributed to the presentation of a fourth.

The summary of the content of the preceding chapter, for each of these four themes, is presented below:

Threats from within

- The key areas that were presented relate to the supervisor's tendencies, traits and attitudes. These, in particular, presented the supervisor's behaviour, occurring naturally, that is inclined towards the employee.
- The supervisor has a natural, and sometimes validated, need for control and authority. While this is natural, the way that it is handled in respect to the employee can be problematic. Where the desire for this control or power is significant, the supervisor can tend towards mismanaging the employee through acts of micromanagement and petty tyranny.
- The supervisor also has the lack of trust, reactive insecurity – such as envy and jealousy - and adopted management styles that further exacerbate the situation between the supervisor and employee.

Threats from below

- The employee contributes to the possibility of the supervisor displaying aggressive tendencies, through certain of their own behaviours and attitudes – such as deceptive and demanding traits.
- The employee and supervisor also share similar areas of concern impacting their relationship, such as personal differences in personal values, work style, and ways of communicating.
- The presence of unconscious bias and the engagement in practices of patience and understanding was also noted by the participants, the latter urged on by the participants

to be taken into account when challenges present itself in the supervisor-employee relationship.

Threats from above

- The leaders also have an influence on the aggression displayed by the supervisor towards the employee - in particular their apathetic nature, including their delegation of responsibility and tolerance of harmful practices such as promotional manipulation.
- The leaders also lack support, empowerment and training of employees, which contributes to the poor engagement between the employee and the supervisor.
- The leader is given power to influence areas of the organisation where the supervisor and employee might in most instances be in conflict – these include areas such as organisational access and organisational priorities.

Threats from around

- This is the fourth, and proposed new to the academic literature, threat that was presenting in the research. It ascertains that team members are also, if not equally, responsible for a poor relationship between a particular employee and the supervisor.
- Their particular influence relates to the dynamics a team member displays towards the employee including possessiveness, competitiveness, isolation and the inciting of fear.
- The team also has an influence in its contribution to the team culture in ways such as perpetuating a minority ruling, practicing influencing methods – such as gossip, shaming and bullying.

The threats help describe why the supervisor over time can have aggressive tendencies towards the employee, which assist in the aim of addressing the research question put forward in this thesis.

5. DISCUSSION

The following chapter discusses the research findings and looks at how, what was presented, relates to the current literature. In particular, it aims to address whether or not there are similarities in the literature to what was presented and also notes what differences may have emerged. Thereby, corroborating previous research or adding to an existing gap. The research question, and main aim of this thesis, as a reminder, is to explore:

What are the perceived reasons the supervisor behaves aggressively towards the employee?

The study's findings gave light to four key themes and four central parties that enable the supervisor's aggression towards the employee. The principal parties that impact the supervisor's aggressive tendencies are, the supervisor themselves, the employees, the leaders, and the team members, as proposed here. These parties - in the way that they operate within the organisation and in their interaction with either the supervisor or the employee – have an effect, directly or indirectly - on the supervisor. This effect could be due not only to the interaction between the supervisor and employee, but also to that party's impact on the organisation, which indirectly affects the supervisor and the employee.

The supervisor could consider these parties, and their impacts, as threats - real or perceived – and, because of this perception, these parties are usually considered in the literature as “threats.” The threats as presented in the research findings formed a similar pattern to those presented in the literature and, in this way, certain similarities were shown to emerge. The findings covered the three key threats representing the three key parties: threats from within (the supervisor), threats from below (the employee), and threats from above (the leader). The study's findings, as mentioned, also presented a fourth threat representing the fourth key party: threats from around (the team).

This discussion chapter aims to first address, in general, the four threats and the various elements thereof as suggested in the findings, relative to the literature. It then isolates some key areas that relate to each of the threats that were marked as those most contributed to by the participants; these include: Control (the supervisor's vulnerabilities), Unconscious Bias (the supervisor-employee ways of engaging), Manipulation (the leader's lack of concern), and

Isolation (the team's effect on psychological safety). The detail around these areas is considered and the leading thought around these areas is discussed. This chapter will then continue to present an outline of the proposed main contributions of this study and its recommendations for future research and limitations. It, in addition, presents a praxis model proposed by the researcher with which to, practically, implement these findings and continue the contribution to the field (this is also further detailed in Appendix B).

5.1. A GENERAL LOOK AT THE THREATS TOWARDS THE SUPERVISOR

5.1.1. The Supervisor

Concerning the influence the supervisor has on themselves - their tendencies, traits, and attitudes – as were considered in the findings, the particular elements were the need for control and authority, micromanagement and petty tyranny, the lack of trust, reactive insecurity, patience and understanding and lastly, the adopted styles of management. In this section, the overarching elements of each of these traits are discussed. A few of the key elements, as mentioned above, are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

With regards to the supervisor's traits, the supervisor is presented in the findings to have a controlling nature, which sometimes is to the detriment of their relationship with the employee. Moreover, this can be combined with the desire for authority, which changes the dynamics of "superior and inferior" even more evidently. The way this is often manifested, by the supervisor, is through the practices of micromanagement and, at times, petty tyranny - where the supervisor exerts extensive control and display of authority in the oversight of the employee's work and behaviour. The supervisor also has the tendency not to trust too readily which inhibits the relationship the employee can develop with them. The supervisor's various insecurities - including mainly envy and jealousy towards the employee, or others - creates further aggressive ways of engaging with the employee. Lastly, the supervisor may have chosen, or learnt, a particular style of management – such as authoritarian or laissez-faire that does not promote the most effective way of supervising the employee – however, this has become the trusted style used by the supervisor, and one which the organisation may also accept and reward.

The literature has the following observations regarding the threats from within and the supervisor's traits, in particular: Rayner & Hoel (1997) found that the supervisor (referred to as "the perpetrator") has a tendency towards control and a power-imbalance; Tepper et al. (2017) suggests that a supervisor experiences threats to their identity as a leader when their sense of power, control, and competence is shaken. The literature is not new to the concept of control, as relates to the supervisor. Similarly, with regards to authority or as the literature readily refers to it, power. Pundt (2014) has stated that norm violations tend to threaten the supervisor's status, and can lead to aggressive acts that are intended to reclaim the power they assumed was lost. The study done by Kiewitz (2012) further suggests that abusive supervision in different cultures occurs at different severities because of the degrees of cultural acceptance of power differences within a hierarchical structure. As relates to micromanagement - the literature on abusive supervision does not specifically speak to this. This gap is noted here. *Petty tyranny* is a complete construct within the *workplace mistreatment* arena, and have various authors contributing to it. As an example, Ferris (2007) suggests that it is thought that the "abuse" label is more likely to be used when actions - such as public outbursts, derogatory name-calling, inappropriate blaming, and credit-taking - are not an odd occurrence, but constitute a sustained behavioural pattern.

There is no evident reference in the literature - either on workplace mistreatment or on abusive supervision - that refers to the need to consider the presence of trust (or lack thereof) in supervisor aggression towards the employee. This gap is also noted. As relates to insecurity, Wang (2015) suggests that a supervisor high in alignment with social dominance will perceive high-achieving performers as a threat, since they pose a direct threat to their desire to maintain the organisational hierarchical structure. Pundt (2014) further suggests that an unfavourable reaction to the supervisor's attempts at charismatic behaviour may also be considered to be a provocation and threat to the supervisor's self-esteem. Kiazad et al. (2010) suggest that certain personality traits of the supervisor may indicate self-interest and a strong need for power and control. They speak specifically of the supervisor's *psychological entitlement*, which is described as "the persistent belief that one is entitled to and deserves more than others." Cheng (2004) also suggests that supervisors are more abusive when they are lower in emotional intelligence, higher in psychological entitlement, and less politically skilled. Tepper (2017) suggests supervisors may have traits of Machiavellianism, which are argued to make aggressive thoughts more accessible and thereby facilitate hostile behaviour.

As relates to adopted management styles, Yam (2016) suggests that social learning theory helps explain why supervisors engage in abusive behaviour through the belief that it is acceptable and rewarding. Wang (2010) suggests that individuals learn which behaviours and attitudes are considered appropriate in different contexts, partly through observing their environments. Pundt (2014) shows how role models and organisational, or societal culture, indirectly encourage supervisors to use particular management styles; for example, an authoritarian management style may be encouraged to be used in the workplace and has been noted as a potential facilitator of workplace mistreatment. Brown (2005) suggests that role models (workplace and familial) are an important feature of social learning since, with role models, the individual is determining which behaviours to mimic by looking to those they perceive as high in status and credibility.

5.1.2. The Employee

Now turning to the elements relating to the employee - the employee has two key traits that were raised in the findings: being deceptive and demanding, at times. The other element of discussion relating to threats as they arise from the employee are those elements that both the employee and supervisor are responsible for; these include: personal differences – such as personal values, styles of work, and ways of communicating with each other. Consideration here was given to unconscious bias, a large topic for the participants, and also a focus a need for patience and understanding of each other. These form the basis of the threats that stem from the employee, that help motivate the aggressive tendencies of the supervisor towards the employee, as contributed to by the participants of this study.

Concerning these two traits, the employee tends to display deceptive ways through being distracted or being disengaged – resulting in frustration arising between the employee and the supervisor as performance declines. The employee can also be demanding of the supervisor's attention and the organisation's resources – this places undue pressure on the supervisor which can lead to a strain within their relationship with the employee. Concerning the employee's and supervisor's combined responsibilities as relates to certain traits or abilities: the difference in personal values and working styles could stem from either party but, if not

handled with a sense of interest and understanding, it can result in discomfort and, potentially, conflict. The ways in which these two parties communicate with each other – i.e., the tone and language used - might not be easily-understood or commonly accepted, and so may require some adaptation. There may also be condescending ways of communicating, or certain body language, used that may be inappropriate, which frustrate the supervisor-employee relationship. The existence of unconscious biases - such as racism, agism and sexism, amongst others – was largely contributed to by the participants – and highlighted that where these exist there is likely to be difficulty with the employee being able to succeed in the face of these, and also convince the supervisor of an alternative view of their character and abilities. Lastly, neither the supervisor nor the employee may be willing - or have knowledge on how - to display patience and understanding towards each other – this is often needed to remedy a situation or establish a healthy relationship.

As relates to deception: Simon (2015) suggests it tends to aggravate the supervisor when the employee appears to display counter-productive workplace behaviour (CWB), which includes acts of time-wasting or working on tasks that are redundant. In addition to this, even when the employee simply exhibits a tendency to avoid the supervisor, these behaviours may be assessed by the supervisor as violations of organisational norms, or at least of their understanding of them. Khan (2016) suggests that each of these instances, potentially, poses a threat to the supervisor's identity, since measures of the supervisor's performance often include the performance of the employee. Khan goes onto say that traits or behaviour such as these may even cause aggravation to the supervisor because they may be deemed to interfere with the supervisor's goals of accomplishment or compromise their need for authority. As relates to being demanding: this behaviour is not evidently spoken about in the literature on abusive supervision, and so constitutes a gap.

As relates to ways of communication: Dupre and Barling (2006) suggest that there are items - such as high levels of conflict between tasks, the interdependence of tasks, and a low level of openness in communication – that contribute to higher levels of workplace mistreatment within work groups. Leblanc and Barling (2004) further argue that the type of work given to the employee can also illicit workplace mistreatment through causing frustration, especially where these are small or repetitive tasks. While not referring to the elements of ways of

communicating, directly, it alludes to the impact clear communication around work-items, can have.

As relates to unconscious bias, Cross (2011) suggests that the supervisor may have a strong individual identity, such that they may be preoccupied with the way they are different from others, and such that they may be motivated mainly by self-interest and opportunities to demonstrate their superiority over others, which can lead to higher levels of abusive supervision. In an attempt to explain the supervisor's perception when there is relationship-conflict, Tepper (2011) suggests that there may exist a perspective of deep-level dissimilarity - which refers to a belief that there is a fundamental difference between the individuals (in this case, the supervisor and the employee). Opatow's (1995) moral exclusion theory suggests that the individual - in this instance, the supervisor - develops a psychological boundary, or what is referred to as a "scope of justice," which is deemed to separate them from those (the employee) whose behaviour they label as "unworthy of just treatment." Hafer and Olson (2003) give an example of how this might be when an employee's performance falls short of the standards set by the supervisor and it results in harsh treatment. Elias's (1986) victim precipitation theory suggests that an individual - in this case the employee - may appear vulnerable and unable to retaliate or defend themselves, and so become prone to becoming targets of aggression (known in this theory as the "submissive victim"). Elias further posits the case of the employee appearing aggravating and displaying behaviour the supervisor believes needs to be corrected (this is known in theory as the "provocative victim"). While the literature may not use the term "unconscious bias", elements of prejudice and mistreatment based on differences are dealt with in the literature.

The element of patience and understanding that were shared by the participants to have an impact on the health of the supervisor-employee relationship are not particularly referred to in the literature and suggest a gap relating to this in the abusive supervision literature.

5.1.3. The Leader

The leader's contribution to the supervisor's aggression is displayed in how their attitudes can have a significant influence on the organisational culture. The attitude leaders have towards

various aspects of the organisation, and its day-to-day operations, can have a substantial contribution to the perception, and treatment of others, employees transact with in the workplace. These attitudes, as relayed by participants, relates to their apathy in leadership, their continuation of restrictive organisational access and priorities and their lack of authenticity. The nature of an apathetic leadership extends to elements such as avoiding direct engagement, tolerance, and contribution, to practices such as promotional manipulation, and their neglect of employee well-being – including support, value and training.

The apathetic attitude of leaders relates to avoidance of employee engagement – delegating responsibilities to the supervisor rather than performing them themselves – tolerance of unfair practices regarding promotion – acceptance of promotional manipulation – and lack of attention to employee well-being – not facilitating the support (including that of external pressures), value and training structures within the organisation. The leader may also restrict access to information - an important currency within the workplace - and the ability to make decisions. Those who are granted these rights are given a, sometimes, unfair advantage and this privilege can create unhealthy competition within the organisation for these commodities. The priorities promoted within the organisation, by the leader, may also indicate a conflict with employee well-being – such as a focus on the demands of senior-management, or an outcomes-based, technical, and quantitatively measured approach to goal-setting. Lastly, in terms of a lack of authenticity displayed by the leader, the supervisor and employee could benefit from a genuine relationship with the leader – which often is reserved for senior peers or those who they deem fit to support.

In the literature, most of the reference to leaders is made as though the impact comes from the organisation itself, and tends to isolate the construct of “organisation” from that of the “leader”. Here, however, the researcher has chosen to call account to the individuals responsible for the organisation, in hope of facilitating direct engagement with the antecedents relating to them. Within the literature, the following relates to leaders/organisations: As relates to apathetic leadership: Taylor and Kleumper (2012) suggest that as well as the abuse of power, there is a reference to leaders being “too weak and indistinct” in certain instances, and in these cases also, workplace mistreatment occurs. As relates to both apathetic leadership and the influence leaders have on culture: Hershcovis (2010) suggests that, more indirectly, it is purported that workplace mistreatment can affect the organisation’s culture where such behaviours permeate

through multiple departments and divisions of the organisation. This alludes to where apathy is present in the leadership and aggressive accounts not correctly dealt with, it could have far-reaching consequences. They go on to say that certain aggression can permeate through the organisation – also – if those holding important positions, are also aggressive – presenting the influence of the leader’s behaviour on others. Balducci et al. (2009) suggest that workplace mistreatment may even be stimulated by organisations that normalise abusive - or even competitive – behaviours, displaying tolerance and promotion of these harmful instances. Ashkanasay and Nicholson (2003) even suggest that some leadership may see workplace mistreatment to this extent as positive as some organisational cultures may even encourage toughness from their employees, which may provoke workplace mistreatment as a sign of this toughness. Aquino and Douglas (2003) agree that organisations characterised by strong power imbalances can sometimes tend towards the institutionalisation of such behaviours. They concur that some organisations appear to permit, in some sense, workplace mistreatment (bullying in particular) as “the way things are done.” Liu (2012) suggests that aggressive organisational norms, or hostile organisational cultures, are antecedents of abusive supervision; in particular, through leading employees to believe that such behaviour is acceptable. While the avoidance of direct engagement and the tolerance of unfair promotional practices, together with the lack of attention to employee well-being, are not explicitly dealt with; the workplace mistreatment literature does refer quite extensively on the correlation between general tolerance of abusive attitudes and behaviour and workplace mistreatment. The abusive supervision literature conveys less evidently the impact of evasive leadership.

As relates to treating skewed organisational priorities, Ashkanasay and Nicholson (2003) suggest that typical considerations of “striving for excellence,” without consideration of the costs, may promote workplace mistreatment as acceptable within organisations. In particular the focus on senior management demands: organisational norms are suggested to create the expectation that superiors are to be treated with dignity and respect, above others (Simon, 2015). It is understood that, in a typical hierarchical structure, supervisors may be given threats from their hierarchically-superior sources, when work is not correctly implemented (Tepper, 2006). The result of this, however, is usually the abusive behaviour displayed towards the supervisor, is transferred to the employee (Tepper, 2006). The reason this happens is purported to be because of “displaced aggression” (Tedeschi & Norman, 1985) – this refers to the activity of transferring the emotional anger to an alternative, potentially weaker, party. Furthermore,

Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) have suggested that supervisors are said to exhibit “aggressor” behaviours when workloads are high and it is a high-strain job. The restriction to information and decision-making rights and its impact on the challenges faced in the supervisor-employee relationship, is not evidently dealt with in the literature.

As relates to the display of the need for authenticity by the leader, and supervisor, to foster healthy supervisor-employee relationships - this is not directly dealt with in the abusive supervision literature and presents a gap.

Not explicitly covered by the participants of this study but worthy of mention is that Lamertz and Aquino (2004) suggest that the cumulative effects of workplace mistreatment on the organisation are on the organisation’s performance and its overall bottom-line. The impact of workplace mistreatment will ultimately affect the leader’s profitability extracted from the organisation.

5.1.4. The Team

The teams - a proposed new party in the consideration of supervisor threats - also influence either the situation the employee, or the perception of the supervisor, in ways that then lead to aggressive tendencies in the supervisor-employee relationship. The teams are said to have an effect through their dynamics- the way the team members engage with each other - and also the culture of the team. The dynamics of the team include the consideration of possessiveness and competitiveness, and the induction of fear and isolation. The elements of the culture of the team that influence the employee and the supervisor are considered to be the acceptance of powerful minorities, and the tolerance of influencing practices – such as gossip, shaming and bullying.

The dynamics of the team members, as relates to methods with which the team member may restrict the success of the employee - possessiveness and competitiveness - speak to the intentional or unintentional behaviours of the team impacting the employee’s performance. Possessiveness refers to team members withholding information, or key relationships, in a possible attempt to disadvantage the employee. The ability for the employee to perform their work well and feel a sense of belonging is jeopardised here. The competitiveness of a team

member - especially where overt - results in open comparisons, score-keeping, and upstaging to ensure that one member is seen as better than another. The consequence is that the supervisor can be persuaded of this and act on this to the disadvantage of the employee. This is also likely to occur where the organisation promotes this type of behaviour, rather than inhibiting it. The fear that is engendered from engagement with a team member, or group, that is displaying aggressive tendencies or promoting difficulty in their role, can cause lack of motivation and performance, and likely depression. The isolation felt by the employee as a result of the way a team member, or group, engages with them is also crucial to their well-being – it also effects the employee’s willingness to perform and desire to continue in their role. These have impacts on supervisor-employee relationship – particularly in the way the supervisor handles the lack of performance, and the frustration that stems from the altered behaviour of the employee.

The culture of the team, in addition, impacts the supervisor and the employee in the acceptance of a powerful minority - which often, once the dominance is established, has influence on both the team, and the supervisor. Where this minority is not in favour of the employee, because of their influential, this view may have an ultimate impact on the perception, and relationship, of the supervisor with the employee. The tolerance of gossip about other team members - where the employee is the possible target of this gossip - either impacts the employee’s self-esteem or it has the consequence of reaching the supervisor, whose perception may be influenced by this gossip. The practice of shaming of the employee - publicly shaming others, use of derogatory names, or openly discussing sensitive information relating to them – can leave the employee insecure and vulnerable, and so effect their well-being, and performance, at work. Lastly, bullying - either overtly or covertly - also exists within teams and has the impact of creating anxiety, and possible depression, within the employee which also ultimately affects their well-being, and performance.

These elements relating to the impact of teams are not explicitly dealt with in the literature on abusive supervision, but certain components are found in the discussion of “groups” within the *workplace mistreatment* literature. As relates to competition: Leblanc et al. (2004) suggest that reward structures exist within certain organisations that provide incentives for employees to compete with one another and that, in turn, stimulates workplace mistreatment through behaviours that are intended to weaken the competition (co-workers). The aspect of possessiveness are less evidently dealt with in the workplace mistreatment literature. As relates

to isolation: Aquino et al. (2009) state that, at a team level, members who have been mistreated are likely to experience feelings of isolation and embarrassment. Consequently, those who experience isolation may have declining performance. Barling et al. (2009) further suggest that isolation is exacerbated where other employees tend to take sides between a perpetrator and a target, when witnessing workplace mistreatment, and more often take the perpetrator's side in fear of becoming the next target. They go on to say that this can be particularly destructive for group norms and cohesion.

As relates to the team culture: Cortina et al. (2001) have found that employees are more aggressive when witnessing other, more aggressive, colleagues. Moreover, Hershcovis et al. (2013) agrees that employees, other than just the perpetrator, through mimicking the observed behaviours, may start mistreating the target and other group members. Taylor et al. (2012) have also suggested that the group, as a whole, is likely to become more aggressive as they foster, and even encourage, workplace mistreatment as a group norm. Penny and Spector (2002), however, suggests that workplace mistreatment does have a negative consequence for witnesses and suggests that the consequences of workplace mistreatment can result in some emotional harm experienced by witnesses also.

As relates to a powerful minority ruling: Aquino and Bommer (2003) agree that a potential perceived power disparity between other members of the group and the employee, could exist. They further suggest that 20% of targets felt that they were mistreated because of being different from others. While this does not convey, explicitly, the influential nature of that group – in particular on the supervisor and the team - this can be extracted from the power they appear to hold within the team. The existence of influencing practices such as gossip, is not readily dealt with in workplace mistreatment literature. The practices of shaming and bullying are extensively dealt with – as *bullying* and *mobbing* are two very important constructs within the workplace mistreatment arena. Here, the suggestion by the participants, and the researcher, through the findings, is to incorporate these areas more explicitly into the abusive supervision literature.

A further notable mention that was not covered in the responses of the participants in this study comes from Roscigno et al. (2009), in that they suggest that, where instances of workplace

mistreatment occur within a team, it is perceived, either internally or externally, that the team's success is low. It therefore has an impact on team performance.

5.2. A SPECIFIC LOOK AT CERTAIN ASPECTS OF SUPERVISOR AGGRESSION

5.2.1. Control (the Supervisor's Vulnerabilities)

Control is one of the traits that was appraised in the "threats from within" (the supervisor) section of the research findings. The element of control also features in the "threats from above" (the leader) section - to a slight extent - when considering delegation and threats. There is a very close link between authority - otherwise labelled "power" - and trust. The participants also contributed to the perception of reactive insecurity of the supervisor, which also influences the way control and authority emerge. The final element considered here relating to control is how the control is manifested in the behaviour of the supervisor - that is, through micromanagement and petty tyranny. These five elements were considered in the findings - control, authority (power), trust, insecurity, and micromanagement/petty tyranny - are considered in more detail here in this section. This section is labelled as "the supervisor's vulnerabilities," since they form the key elements of the supervisor's traits that could be the most harmful to the employee when triggered incorrectly - that is, they are elements that the supervisor is most likely sensitive to.

Control, authority (power), and trust are closely linked because of their nature and because, often, control increases when trust is low and, similarly, control decreases when trust is high. Authority typically is needed in order to exert control. However, control can be exerted without the necessary authority. If the authority is not present, however, it is more difficult to exert control over an individual or their actions.

The findings showed that the supervisor is sometimes justified in exerting control, since, in stressful or demanding times, pressure can be high and the ability to deal with things calmly is limited. Control, however, is not itself problematic since it can be a natural result of being responsible for someone. However, where the level of control exerted by the supervisor is too frequent or overly-intense, this can become a problem for the employee. The need - or even

desire - for control over the employee can disable the employee's ability to excel independently and may stunt the employee's growth and happiness in the organisation.

As relates to authority, a similar sentiment to control, is given in the findings: that the overt, and sometimes unnecessary, exertion of authority or importance can be unwelcomed by the employee. The exertion of authority can sometimes come with an assertion of positional power for the benefit of the supervisor in an attempt to influence the employee to do something on their behalf. Condescending communication and unnecessary iteration of their importance may be used. The employment of these mechanics tends to devalue and disempower the employee.

The nature of insecurities, as well as the practice of micromanagement and petty tyranny, are also considered here as key contributions from the participants. Insecurity comes in where the supervisor has current triggers - especially as relates to envy and jealousy regarding the employee or other colleagues - and these insecurities result in the supervisor being overly demanding or harsh in situations where they otherwise would not be. The insecurity may trigger micromanagement as a way of controlling the employee, who may be blamed for triggering the insecurity. These may be triggered based on real or imagined actions or traits of the employee.

Micromanagement and petty tyranny, however, may be exercised independent of insecurities. It is often the manifestation of the desire for control, for various reasons, or the exertion of authority over the employee. It is also the result of a lack of trust or willingness to allow room for the employee to show whether they can be trusted or not. The term "micromanagement" relates to overseeing almost every part of the daily operations of the employee, and the term "petty tyranny" refers to the expression of severe dissatisfaction over usually petty work-related matters - e.g., spelling and grammar. The consequences of micromanagement and petty tyranny on the employee are often severe, ranging from physical illness – such as constipation and bouts of fainting - to suffering depression and anger.

Studies have referred to specific traits such as supervisor's *psychological entitlement*, which is described as "the persistent belief that one is entitled to and deserves more than others" (Kiazad et al., 2010, p 334). Traits such as *the dark triad*, a concept used to describe the combination of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, is mentioned by Kiazad (2010). This is the

occurrence of the supervisor expressing their frustration towards less powerful targets - those who are deemed relatively-safe targets - rather than the true source of their stress (Tedeschi & Norman, 1985). One particular theory that is used in the studies that do discuss this issue is “justice perspective” (Greenberg & Scott, 1996). It aims to explain why supervisors display displaced aggression. It suggests that the organisation’s injustice, as enacted by the superior - and perceived by the supervisor - threatens the supervisor’s sense of dignity and respect (Greenberg et al., 1996). The supervisor then, in turn, is led to negatively respond towards the employee and, through this, may feel the injustice was alleviated and equity was restored (Greenberg et al., 1996). An authoritarian leadership style has, in these studies, been found to exacerbate the relationship between the supervisor’s interactional injustice and abusive supervision (Tepper et al., 2017).

Moral exclusion theory suggests that the individual - in this instance, the supervisor - develops a psychological boundary, or what is referred to as a “scope of justice,” which is deemed to separate them from those (the employee) whose behaviour they label as “unworthy of just treatment” (Opotow, 1995). An example of this might be when an employee’s performance falls short of the standards set by the supervisor and this results in harsh treatment (Hafer & Olson, 2003). Victim precipitation theory suggests that an individual - in this case, the employee - may appear vulnerable and unable to retaliate or defend themselves, and so become prone to being targets of aggression (known in this theory as the “submissive victim”) (Elias, 1986). There is also the case, within this theory, of the employee appearing aggravating and displaying behaviour in need of correction, as considered by the supervisor (this is known in theory as the “provocative victim”) (Elias, 1986).

Elements that have less literature relating to the *abusive supervision* arena are discussed in the sections that follow.

5.2.2. Unconscious Bias (The Ways of Engaging)

Unconscious bias is in consideration here, since it one of the topics the majority of participants referred to. The presence of unconscious bias can be crippling, since it can be quite difficult to convince the supervisor of an alternative view of performance, if a prejudice exist. Participants pointed out that unconscious bias is present within supervisors, leaders, teams, as

well as employees themselves. It causes undue and lasting strain on relationships and is acknowledged to exist in today's workplace, due to the growing number of diverse groups present in it. What was conveyed, is that there tends to persist an overworking of some groups of people, in place of others – such favouring tends to be biased towards age, race, cultural background or class, amongst others. Unconscious bias has the unfortunate consequence of ostracising a particular person, or group of people, - usually a minority - because of their particular features or attributes which might otherwise be valued. Unconscious bias has the effect of impacting the employee's self-esteem and value in the team and workplace more generally.

“Status inconsistency” is a term used by researchers to describe a similar situation where, within a group, there is an employee (or employees) that is different from the other members of the group based on age, gender, race or some other characteristic (status) (Aquino & Bommer, 2003). Such employees are said to be vulnerable to being made targets of workplace mistreatment within the group (Aquino et al., 2003). There has been a study that suggests that employees who experience status inconsistency might also tend towards being perpetrators as a result of pent-up aggression (Aquino et al., 2003). The prevalence of this workplace mistreatment has been noted to occur with individuals of certain demographics being a target - as relates to gender (female mainly), race (non-White mainly), and age (older mainly) (Herscovis et al., 2013). As Sharma (2017) suggests a further consideration in this area is also the possible influence of national culture on the prevalence of abusive tendencies based on certain demographics, about which not many studies have been done to-date (Sharma, 2017).

5.2.3. Manipulation (The Leader's Lack of Concern)

Manipulation of the promotional practices within an organisation was another element raised by the majority of the participants of this study – and lies within the leader's area of the research findings. It specifically denotes the leader's “lack of concern”, or apathy, for organisational culture and processes – even where these are found to be harmful to others. The key thing the participants observed was the ability for others to manipulate the process of acquiring a promotion, and the effects this had on the employee. In particular, the successfully promoted candidate, may only have technical proficiencies, and not be apt in managing others. This lack

of ability was either overlooked – intentionally or unintentionally – by the leader or the HRD conducting the recruitment process. The awareness of the manipulative ability towards the leaders, results in an overtly competitive environment – where most individuals perform only for the attention, and approval, of the supervisor (or leader), and thereby for ultimate personal gain. This can be disabling for others who seek to progress in a more just way. The leader may be aware of these practices, and pass them off as acceptable, or may be unaware – in either instance, it communicates a general sense of apathy from the leader. At its severest, these unfair practices create a completely unhealthy environment impact – of catfights, uncontrolled competition, chaotic engagements and a “survival-of-the-fittest”, “no-rules” workplace. Some leaders may even promote such a culture – where manipulation in this instance is seen as a way to encourage “on-your-feet” learning and “this-is-the-way-the-world-works” engagement with the environment, which they support with a sense of commendation. The leader may even enjoy the benefits - through coercion – that they receive. It has the ultimate consequence of draining employees of energy that could alternatively be used in more productive and creative ways.

There is no explicit reference to manipulation – as relates to promotional activity – within the workplace mistreatment or abusive supervision literature. This, however, may exist within the *toxic leadership* literature, but may still not consider manipulation in light of promotions specifically. As mentioned earlier, the presence of it within the abusive supervision literature however is recommended, as it is can then more aptly be noted by the audience within the context of that arena.

5.2.4. Isolation (The Team’s Effect on Psychological Safety)

Isolation, fear, and bullying were raised as important points by the participants, that were previously not dealt with in the abusive supervision literature, as relates to teams. Isolation in particular, while dealt with to varying degrees in the workplace mistreatment literature, was found to be impactful on the supervisor-employee relationship. The engagement between team members who ostracise others for potential gain or from distrust, results in the individual lacking a sense of belonging and feeling isolated. The sense of isolation effects that individual’s ability to work effectively and their motivation to be part of the workplace, and team. It consequently impacts their performance and attitude towards the team and the

supervisor, which – in most instances – is not appreciated patiently by the supervisor. It therefore aggravates the supervisor-employee relationship, and little support in these matters are given to the employee within the organisation. Moreover, the supervisor may be unaware of these levels of isolation, where the supervisor is inattentive to the sensitivities of their team. and these are all threatening factors employees experience in teams. Fear and bullying may also occur – both of which causes problems with how well the employee engages with others in the team, and how effectively they can produce their work. In a similar way to isolation, the incitement of fear and the practice of bullying, both, can cause disparity in the relationship between the supervisor and employee – which again, is exacerbated where the supervisor is unaware of the source of the poor performance and behaviour.

It is noted that in today’s workplace, there is a growing awareness from practitioners that more “psychologically-safe” spaces need to be created for the employee. As mentioned earlier, *bullying* is a long-standing phenomenon within the workplace mistreatment literature. While there are some papers on the *sense of belonging* and *fear within the workplace*, within the workplace mistreatment arena; the area of isolation, however, still remains less evidently dealt with in the abusive supervision arena

5.3. MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS

The main contributions of this study that focus on the supervisor-employee relationship and address the gap in the literature relating to two aspects are: first, the nature of the study as a whole and where it fits into the literature gaps; and second, the more detailed presentation of findings that speak to the phenomena of workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision in particular. The study looks at the particular impact on the supervisor’s ability to manage the relationship between themselves and the employee.

As relates to the first contribution (the nature of the study), there are five points to consider here. First, this study was completed in the Southern Hemisphere - a viewpoint that is not predominantly found in the literature. The usual location for studies on abusive supervision is in the Global North, with only a few in the Australasian and South American regions. Another unique aspect of this study is that it researched a financial organisation. It is unusual to gain access to a financial organisation, to even try to openly do a study on workplace mistreatment

focusing on abusive supervision, and to get a welcomed response. The prevalence of abusive supervision in the financial arena is spoken of, but not many are able to gain access and, in particular, not using a qualitative method. Usually, where access is granted, anonymous surveys need to be emailed to a group with a broad statement about the study; then, the participation rate is fairly standard.

The third unique element here is that this study took a qualitative approach, which, again, is uncommon in both the workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision arenas. The qualitative approach involved unstructured interviews conducted personally with the participants, and it involved the analysis of outcomes using a thematic analysis. There are but a few studies that have taken a qualitative approach. Most have taken a quantitative approach using the Negative Acts questionnaire developed by Einarsen. The fourth unique element here was the inclusion of supervisors in this study: five out of the 16 (a third) participants were classified as supervisors, and they provided a viewpoint of the topic from a supervisor perspective also. This was a specific mention in the literature for researchers to contribute to for the abusive supervision field, as it is often only the employees that are interviewed or surveyed. The benefit of taking a qualitative approach here was that the supervisors ability to accept what they might have been a part of or how they behaved was eased into through a collection of making them comfortable with the topic and not giving them a sense that they would be shunned if they admitted it. Lastly, the work covered antecedents within the field of *abusive supervision* - an area that, while growing, still does not have many empirical studies contributing to it.

As relates to the second point about the main contributions of this study – in particular, its more detailed academic contribution to the *abusive supervision* area: the study corroborates the three important threats discussed under the *abusive supervision* umbrella (threats from within, threats from below, and threats from above). This forms a similarity to current literature and further confirms and corroborates it. It also shows that the phenomenon occurs consistently in the Global South.

The study further contributed a fourth threat to be considered: threats from around. The threat from around relates to the impact teams have on the supervisor-employee relationship. In particular, it was found that leaders are distant and evasive of accountability, while teams can contribute to a divisive, overtly-competitive environment. Whereas the study uncovers further

reasons why supervisors behave as they do, the study also finds that the supervisor is not the only one who mistreats the employee; the team members contribute in their own way to this mistreatment. Also, it has been noted here that, for workplace mistreatment in general, there needs to be more study of what are called “groups.”

Concerning the detail of what the findings presented in each of the three existing threats, there were associated differences in the literature that caused for unique contribution. The nature of trust, unconscious bias and lack of support were three key elements that stood out as unique in the threats from within. Limited discernment and organisational knowledge were pointed out as unique additions to threats from below. Joint responsibility for various dynamics as an overarching theme was also unique to this study, and the majority of the items discussed under this umbrella were unique; for example, ways of communicating, lack of role clarity, lack of training, patience and understanding of each other, and global trends. Personal differences and family and social pressures are dynamics that have been discussed in the current literature.

This study’s unique contributions to the discussion of threats from above include: influence through the creation of policies, and certain elements, such as the technical nature of the organisation, being considered a priority as inconsistent organisational priorities are perpetuated. Tolerance of promotional manipulation was a key contributor here, as well as the lack of contribution to authenticity, value, support, and training.

The study also has implications practically on how the parties in the organisation can go forward with enhanced engagement. Through understanding further the elements that cause workplace mistreatment, the readers who are practitioners can note three key things. Firstly, that there are four contributing parties that currently cause workplace mistreatment – the supervisor, the employee, the leader and the team. Secondly, that these parties have particular factors – real or perceived – that are aggravating the situation, often daily. Thirdly, through the acknowledgement that these factors exist and these parties could – currently or potentially – be exhibiting workplace mistreatment towards each other, the deeper understanding of these factors and their influence could be derived from this study. The study can practically inform the practitioners perspective and opportunity for resolve, in cases of workplace mistreatment. By way of offering a praxis model, which outlines the researcher’s approach to implementing a practical use of this study, the reader may review that detail in Appendix B.

5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There have been various observations that have emerged by the researcher, while completing the study, that point to recommendations for future research. These relate to the method of research, size of the study, the organisation used, the region and certain aspects covering the four themes (the threats of the supervisor) referenced in this thesis.

Firstly, as with most authors in the workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision field, the need for further qualitative studies would be suggested. The qualitative study has a few daunting issues, especially as relates to conversing to participants about a potentially sensitive issue for them. There are some points that the researcher has raised in Appendix B that speaks to discussions that are difficult and some points to get through this, should be considered by future researchers. It was through overcoming the initial inclination to go through a very structured and formal method of conducting the interviews, from the researcher's perspective, in an attempt to overcome the potential awkward moments, but it is recommended to welcome those awkward moments and "sit in them", and see what emerges by being present in the conversation with the participant.

The second relates to the size of the study. The size of the study was appropriate and deemed adequate, and the outcomes relevant, however it would be good, where possible, to obtain a wider participant size. It might be possible to obtain this by gaining access to two or three more large organisations. This might allow the participant base to be extended to at least around 50 participants ($16 \times 3 = 48$, assuming the same participation rate and organisational size as this study).

While it may be difficult to obtain access for this type of study for financial organisations, and while this is recommended other organisations could assist. To gain access to financial organisations should be a priority. In order to get access, researchers may be able to initially investigate which financial organisations have a programme currently or in the near future that speaks to "bullying" or "harassment" – these terms are often, and more acceptably used in the financial organisational context. The relationships the researcher may have with certain individuals within the financial context should be used, where it does not infringe ethically or

in bias. Financial organisations are more readily accepting discussions and the possibility of abusive situations within their organisations, likely because of further public interest in the existence of this in the workplace. An array of financial organisations should be considered, in addition. The area of financial services extend from a range of insurance, personal banking (savings), corporate banking, personal investment, corporate investment, pension-funding and management, together with the newer fintech and insuretech, amongst others. The current research focuses only on one (which will not be pointed out due to the possibility of determining the large financial organisation within South Africa once marked in the specific field). The usefulness of locating further studies in an array across the financial industry, is that certain assumptions of the nature of aggression being more prevalent in the investment and banking fields than the fintech and insuretech fields, should be investigated. There might be further nuances across these fields around how employees are treated, that might surprise the researchers.

Currently, there are not very many studies involved in the African continent and the Global South, only a few located in South Africa. South Africa, with their history of apartheid and their inclination towards European (in particular British, Dutch and French) cultures, the historical issues that relate to these issues (racism and colonialism) raises much fragmentation in understanding and drive for what organisations and their employees should do and be. This creates difficult interaction that continues to be an issue within South African organisations, that the researcher suggests has as a manifestation, workplace aggression. More studies that corroborate that workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision, within South Africa, the African continent and the Global South should be done. It will allow the academic literature to place the Global South in the context of abusive supervision more strongly.

As relates to the threats of within, below, above and around (as introduced here), there were various points that emerged that were interesting and further studies into these is recommended.

In the area of threats of within, has three important features that can be pointed out that were of substantive interest, to the researcher in particular. These relate to control, power and envy. One of the participants shared that the relationship with the supervisor could be likened to an abusive domestic relationship. This has been pointed out, not often however, in the academic literature before. There is not much research, currently, that explores the experience of abusive

supervisors to those of abusive domestic situations. This is a good area to further explore, as it is uncovered that the domestic relationship speaks to intimacy, as does the supervisor-employee relationship within the workplace, it speaks to trust (or mis-trust) and it speaks to jealousy.

The nature of power, which in this study was referred to as authority, is an area which should be further explored. A large part of power placement is done based on very structured terms, as relates to a promotional process, and yet once the power is transferred the person that is empowered has a character that either complements or corrupts the power given. The nature of Machiavellianism and the dark triad was referenced, but should be considered further in relation to abusive supervision. It is likely that those in power, that tend to disempower those they deem as inferior, have certain traits that either speak to desiring power or not being able to know how to treat others when power is transferred.

The nature of envy, is also a topic that is lightly explored, currently, in relation to abusive supervision. The nature of employees and supervisors' careers, it is likely that they are very close in career progression to each other, than some suggest. The supervisor often is the employee's previous colleague or that individual that the employee is bench-marking themselves to. Envy is a natural reaction in situation of such close proximity, as relates to career, and should be delved into a bit more to contribute to the antecedents of abusive supervision literature.

In addition to the above, for the threats of below and above, the areas of lack of training, patience and understanding, a lack of training, inappropriate recruitment, disengaged leaders and abusive.

Given the predominant new contribution suggested in this thesis, the threats from around – that impact the team members have on the supervisor-employee relationship, should be further corroborated. The literature speaks to the nature of groups, and their impact, but this relates mainly to the workplace mistreatment literature, in general, rather than abusive supervision specifically, and even with respect to groups and workplace mistreatment in general, scholars highlight the need for further contributions. The mobbing literature is large, but speaks to the situation of an employee experiencing a 'group attack' from colleagues, not necessarily in

relation to their own team members and how it impacts the employee's relationship with the supervisor. The abusive supervision literature should speak more to the team influence. Abusive team members who persist in gossip, bullying and disempowerment, should be further investigated. The effect of isolation and belonging are very interesting aspects within this area, to the researcher, that currently have academic literature exploring it, however this remains to be quite a few and more would expand the understanding of how isolation and belonging (or the lack thereof) impacts the well-being of the employee, their performance within the team and ultimately their relationship with the supervisor.

Overall, the researcher wishes future researchers wanting to explore these areas of the workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision, well. The researchers are welcome to contact the researcher at any time if they wish to discuss this study or any of its aspects further. It is with great excitement that this field is growing and will continue to grow. Collectively, further uncovering the reasons behind aggressive actions within the workplace.

5.5. LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The participants were very insightful and did not struggle to grasp the questions nor the phenomena being discussed. They in fact surprised the researcher, as to how well-reflected-upon their answers were and how comprehensive and articulate their concerns and suggestions were. The limitations of the study conducted was as the researcher and because of potential biases, it was disclosed openly to the participants that the researcher, was also an employee of the organisation. While the organisation itself is extensively large (around 7000 employees within South Africa alone) and the fact that out of the sixteen, only one participant was familiar with the researcher before, it could have contributed to biases in the following proposed ways:

- the participants might have had slight reservations to being completely open about their experiences, being aware of the researcher as an employee with “potential” contacts,
- the participants were overtly familiar and gave the researcher insights they would otherwise not have given another researcher;
- as the researcher, there may have been biases either towards experiences of aggression within the organisation or not, and while being very cautious towards these biases with the aim to retain balance - there might have been reactions that indicated those biases and then promoted certain responses, which may otherwise not have emerged.

The other limitations covered through this thesis include the size of the study, the specific field within the financial organisation, and the potential bias the researcher could be bringing in due to her passion for the phenomena – each of which is detailed further in Section 3.3.

5.6. PROPOSED PRAXIS MODEL

The following outlines the praxis model the researcher would implement following this, and potentially further, research. The praxis model follows a combination of the researcher’s eighteen years of experience within corporate institutions and the reflection of the theoretical learnings. The learning from executive management relates to ways of implementing organisational change and obtain acceptance by the prevailing organisational culture. It reflects on the particular processes deployed in order to facilitate these changes. The observation is that the organisation’s employees go through a combination of fear and excitement, which needs to be appropriately managed. The praxis model, introduced in this section, has greater expansion of the practitioners involved, the method and tools used, such as the agreements, the program, the weekly agenda, and the technology which is further detailed in Appendix B.

The praxis model proposed is depicted in the following flow-diagram and takes the form of a business/consulting organisation:

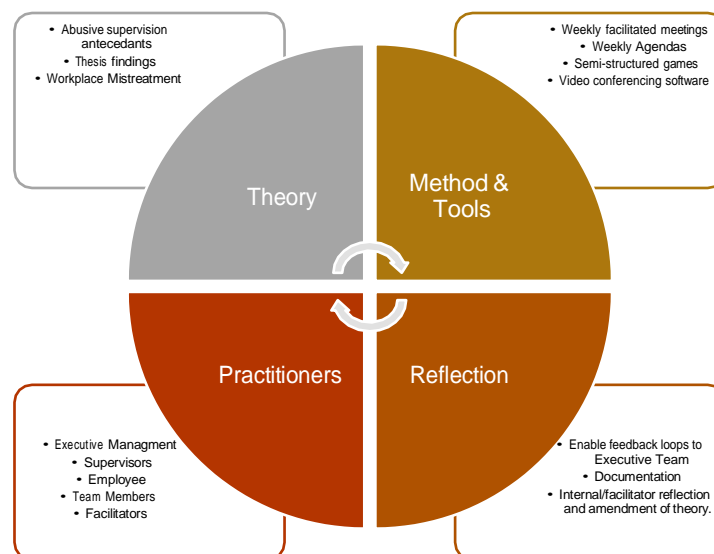


Figure 9: Praxis model for workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision organisational facilitation

The main purpose of the business model is to enable the growth and development of staff members that would allow them to discern, name and call-out the current, or potential, abusive situations, or practices. This is focused mainly on those aggressive situations that may arise between supervisor and employee, that may involve all four parties (namely, the supervisor, the employee, the leader and the team member), but that equips the employee to start noticing abusive supervision more readily. The ultimate aim is to create awareness, foster support and grow courage within the individual to the phenomena involved.

5.6.1. The Use of Theory

The current study together with other key studies in the area of workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision will be used to inform the way that operations will be implemented and also the agenda will be used in each weekly meeting with the staff members (detailed below). The use of relevant theory will be important for the correct and appropriate flow of dialogue and development of trust to engender insights to support the growth of the employees.

In particular, the outcomes of the group discussions will create awareness of key constructs within the theory, such as:

- supervisors exercise control and power when there are internal pressures (threats from within) and those from senior leadership, the employee themselves and also the team itself (threats from above, those from below and those from around);
- leaders are unnecessary apathetic and employees should try their best to challenge them to be more engaged, in a positive way.
- team members influence isolation of other employees, questioning what gives them that power and how the employee can more control of the situation.
- the employee's discernment and motivation in the workplace influences the conflict with the supervisor, are there any ways that the individual can acquire more knowledge and maybe even value elsewhere other than the supervisor?

6. CONCLUSION

The various contributions the participants have made and the messages conveyed through the findings have helped corroborate findings that the supervisor, the employee, the leaders and the teams all have an impact on the aggression displayed by the supervisor towards the employee. This research has uncovered important insights concerning the issues relating to control, trust, manipulation and apathy.

The hope of the researcher is that this study will be used to further corroborate the findings of other current researchers as it has shown consistent issues emerging, and that it will be used to further other (recommended) studies on such themes as control, fear and trust. The field of abusive supervision and workplace mistreatment, in general, is still growing (is only around 40 years old). It is the hope of the researcher that this study can contribute to the further development and exploration of these phenomena, in particular in the Global South. Through its use of qualitative techniques, this study will hopefully inspire the support of further qualitative studies and their more frequent use as a method in this field. It will also hopefully inspire support of further studies within the financial and corporate arena, where these phenomena tend to thrive, should also be supported as a key take-out from this study. In general, the suggestion from the researcher is that the field should consider an alternative - less provocative - naming convention, to allow more interested parties to openly and willingly access the content of abusive supervision. As an alternative to the naming convention that is often used academically – “supervisor aggression” – is suggested. This research suggests an even more widespread use of a naming convention in the title of this thesis: “the challenges of the supervisor-employee relationship”. Both these suggestions are expected to relay a more balanced view on the problem – one that does not immediately lend itself to negative connotations.

It is the hope of the researcher that this study, and the information therein, will particularly help support research into solutions in these areas of aggression displayed in the workplace; solutions such as collaboration, vulnerability, patience and training are but a few key areas where resolution resides. As mentioned earlier, this study, itself, presents a practical solution in the way of praxis - in the Appendix - as the researcher intends to follow this through with a business model for implementation through creating a start-up that accomplishes its aims. The

solutions will take time to find their way into the workplace as people contend with the issues, but the hope is that further research into the development of the solutions will at least become part of the current academic conversation.

It is understood that the topic at hand is still being explored and this researcher wishes to continue to contribute to the critical understanding of these phenomena. However, there needs to be a point where we are able to use the information gathered and start harvesting a solution where we are able to see, pragmatically, the establishment of genuine peace and well-being is seen within the workplace through reduction of occurrences in these areas.

The way forward is to explore the nature of control, power, isolation and fear and the display of aggression in relation to these issues within the workplace. These are powerful areas of study and each requires an in depth and sensitive investigation into their aspects in order to start gaining more understanding of these areas. It is worth noting that – as one participant mentioned - there are parallels to how the power dynamic may relate to the power dynamic of an abusive intimate personal relationship. As mentioned, further qualitative studies should be contributed to the field of abusive supervision and workplace mistreatment, and it should not be seen as difficult and avoided because of the potential sensitivity of the topic. What the researcher has found is that people are quite keen and potentially “ripe” to talk about this topic, now, and likely have been for a number of years. If we are able to know how, and when, to talk to people about this, we can harvest some wonderful insights from them in the intensive and extensive fashion qualitative studies allows.

Opening people’s eyes to the problem is key to what the researcher would like to achieve with this study, in addition to reinforcing the view that workplace mistreatment, and abusive supervision in particular, is often not a once-off phenomenon. These are issues that should be considered to be persistent problems in the workplace that need to be addressed - problems that do require the organisation’s leadership’s attention. Aggression in the workplace can be subtle, and may not be readily recognised as a problem; and, if seen, it is not often called out; but it has critical impacts on the individuals who are exposed to it. If its instances are called out sooner, there is the potential that it may be altogether prevented or, at least, its impact may be minimised. At best, persistent abusive situations can be cleared out. Often, the delay in reaction around these issues occurs because people are inclined to give the “benefit of the

doubt” to those involved, but, instead, they should be equipped with information and discernment around these issues to be able to flag them. Employees need to be taught how to be more aware of themselves and the space within which they operate. They should be given the training to see that this topic, and talking about it, is not taboo or frowned-upon. They should be made aware that workplace mistreatment - and abusive supervision in particular - are phenomena that people suffer from in isolation, with little being their fault. Without much knowledge of the causes, consequences or remedies of the problem, the employee and supervisor can be left in an abusive cycle. The hope here is that this starts changing, however slightly, as more studies in these areas are done and the information is shared publicly.

The researcher, herself, has suffered challenges as an employee, and as a supervisor, within the workplace. When she was an employee, experiencing workplace mistreatment, and abusive supervision, made her feel “not good enough” and, at times, worthless. These are but a few points in the findings with which she can resonate. For the most part, in those situations, she had anticipated that it was she who was contributing to the situation, and mostly she internalised it, being someone who, at the time, was very sensitive to achieving a good performance and who had a desire to please the authorities. In particular, in an attempt to approach it positively, she would bend to any and all demands made by a difficult team member or supervisor. It seemed, however, to give them justification for treating her even more poorly. It was only until it seemed to recur, and it seemed to be impacting her health, that she started to re-think the way she was perceiving the feedback and the situation. It was then that she started developing a slight suspicion that maybe this had very little to do with her; that there were issues that were beyond her that needed to be explored. She insisted that there needed to be a way out of experiences like this; and she did not want anyone else to experience what she had. She had not spoken to anyone about this before embarking on this research journey, and it was through this research that she, as a researcher, was able to enhance her understanding of the phenomena and grow the courage to talk openly about it.

As she moved along the research journey, for which she is very grateful, she was able to realize the importance of uncovering various perspectives and voices within the “story.” While noting that driving an outcome, or solution, for a problem is important, she came to realize that first understanding the problem is key; not only the problem that she, as the researcher of this study, has noted – or the problem as noted by the perspective of the participants of this study - but

also the problem noted from the perspective of other researchers who have been unpacking and debating these phenomena with equal intensity, contributing to the development of the field of study within which this research lies. The practice of reviewing current literature is a good one.

In the initial, overarching disappointment of finding that colleagues and supervisors sometimes don't behave in the best way, this researcher was hoping that the findings that emerged from this study were going to help prompt a way to "call out" those people who were behaving poorly to fellow colleagues and direct reports - a way to extract these people from the workplace and "thus" provide a safe space for those left to operate within. In a similar vein, her initial expectation was that the supervisor's impact was the most severe; that the supervisor was almost solely to blame for the mistreatment of employees in the workplace; and that, because of this, they should face consequences for their misbehaviour.

She has since, however, come to understand that it is not only the supervisor who contributes to the aggressive behaviours experienced by the employee, and also not only the supervisor who is to blame for acting aggressively towards the employee. Instead, as the study has shown, it is an intricate and dynamic array of individuals and circumstances that contribute to the aggressive tendencies of the supervisor. These insights have helped this researcher realize that even those who are aggressive have their story, and moreover, there is other, more important, background information at play here. The real concern and solution should be driven from this perspective.

Overall, this researcher would like to know that, in some way, this study has helped to give someone knowledge and confidence; that it has taught them things that, otherwise, they would not have known; and that it has given them sensitivity that, otherwise, they would not have displayed in discussions with others. She would like to know that, in some way, it helped employees to initiate tough conversations about practices that may be harmful to them. It is also her hope that this study can be relayed to others in such a manner that the average employee and supervisor "on the street" can interpret the findings; and that, through this, they will be able to see that they are not alone in their experiences; that others experience it, too, and that there are people working hard to help correct the situation the workplace finds itself in; that someone cares.

In particular, it is important that a group of academic people are doing something about the problem; helping to understand the phenomena involved so that the world can realize that this problem is important and turn even more attention towards it. This researcher's desire is to continue contributing in this way, through unpacking and being able to help with the explanation of these phenomena and, ultimately, a solution.

This researcher has taken joy in writing this. It was really about placing others above herself to engage with the topic and see how she could learn; that is what she is grateful for.

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APPENDIX A: Consent Form

FULL COLOUR THINKING



Interview Consent Form

Participant's name

Interview Date

Researcher's name

Researcher's email address and phone number

Kim Grimwood

grmkim001@gsb.uct.ac.za; +0027 84 351 5772

Research Title

A study into challenges of the supervisor-employee relationship in the workplace today.

Description of the Research

The research is set to explore the current state of the supervisor-employee relationship in the work environment for employees. What is it like? What challenges do they find? What has their experience been and what do they think the causes are where there are challenges?

This research has been approved by the Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee.

- I confirm that my participation in this research study is voluntary, and that no payment is received for participation but that your participation will assist in contributing to a greater awareness of the workplace, for others.
- I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. I understand that the interview, because of the nature of the research (looking at challenges in the supervisor-employee relationship), may leave me with slight discomfort. I can, at any time, end the interview or decline to answer a question.
- I confirm that the research interview will last approximately 60 – 90 minutes.
- I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.
- I agree that the researcher may record this interview so that it can be played back for accuracy when completing the research paper. The recording will be stored securely and no access will be given to the content other than to the researcher's supervisor, only if this is needed. The organisation will not hear or have access to these recordings.
- I have been provided a copy of the consent form, via email.
- I may request to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during this research interview.
- I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me, anonymously, if it better describes what was discussed.

By signing this form, I agree to the terms indicated above.

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Date Signed: _____

Date Signed: _____

APPENDIX B: Praxis Model

I am excited to deliver a proposed business/praxis model here. The praxis model I propose is depicted in the following flow-diagram and takes the form of a business/consulting organisation:

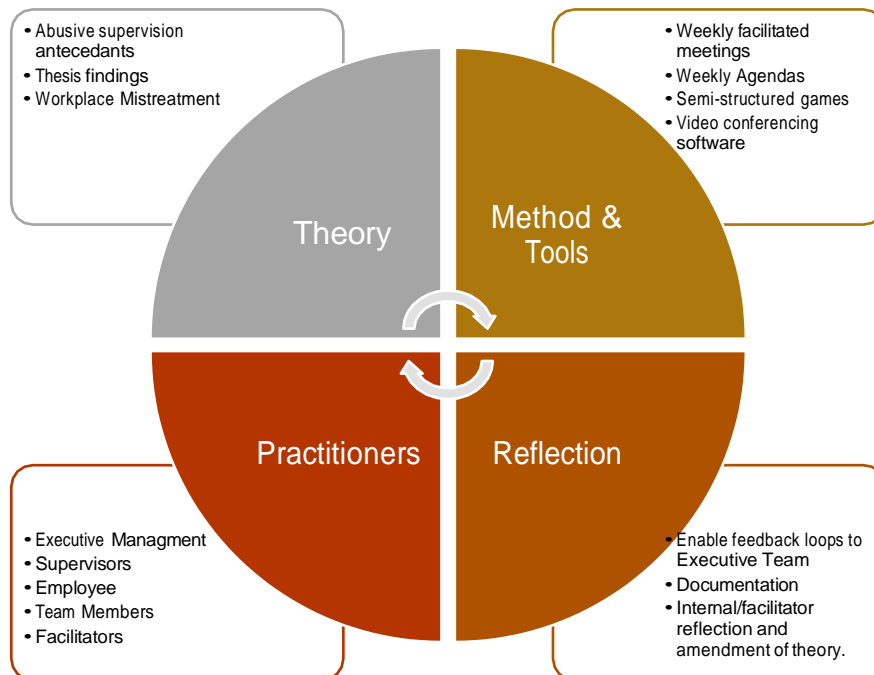


Figure 10: Praxis model for workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision organisational facilitation

PURPOSE

The main purpose of the business model is to enable the growth and development of staff members that would allow them to discern, name and call out the potential or current abusive situations or practices that may arise between supervisor and employee, that involves all four parties mentioned in this thesis; namely, the supervisor, the employee, the leader and the team member. The main method is to create awareness, foster support and grow courage within the individual.

THE USE OF THEORY

The current study together with other key studies in the area of workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision will be used to inform the way that operations will be implemented and also the agenda will be used in each weekly meeting with the staff members (detailed below). The use of relevant theory will be important for the correct and appropriate flow of dialogue and development of trust to engender insights to support the growth of the employees.

In particular, the outcomes of the group discussions will create awareness of key constructs within the theory, such as:

- supervisors exercise control and power when there are internal pressures (threats from within) and those from senior leadership, the employee themselves and also the team itself (threats from above, those from below and those from around);
- leaders are unnecessary apathetic and employees should try their best to challenge them to be more engaged, in a positive way.
- team members influence isolation of other employees, questioning what gives them that power and how the employee can more control of the situation.
- the employee's discernment and motivation in the workplace influences the conflict with the supervisor, are there any ways that the individual can acquire more knowledge and maybe even value elsewhere other than the supervisor?

The following key points that can be extracted from this particular study, will be used in the creation of the program and agenda:

- The supervisor could have envy and jealousy present with regards to their employee, and so it might be better to separate them in the discussion groups. This would be to mitigate against the reactive insecurity that might emerge as the employee shares.
- The leader's might be apathetic, and might delegate even this exercise to the supervisor and their employees, and dissociate themselves from it. The engagement from the leader, and their influence made known, should be reinforced and possibly contracted, to reduce evasiveness.
- The employee may be demanding and deceptive, and so the stories given either exacerbated or exaggerated in order to gain sympathy. The facilitator should be aware of this possibility and guide the discussion accordingly.

- The team members, who might be bullying the employee or possibly even initiating gossip around the employee, may be present in the group. The nuances between the group members who are in the same team should be noted, and either the engagement cautiously guided or for the sake of creating a psychologically safe space, separate the team members.

PRACTITIONERS

The following practitioners are expected to be involved:

- The Executive Management (C-suite individuals – e.g., CEO) of the organisation
- The Mid-level, or Junior-level Management (also known as “the supervisor in this thesis”)
- The Employee (i.e., the staff member)
- The Facilitator (i.e., the Consultant’s team member)

THE METHOD (OPERATING MODEL)

The practice model would take the form of a business run as a consultancy, wherein the main purpose is to extend consulting services to the Executive or Management team that enables the purpose as stated above; namely, that staff members become enabled – aware and supported – to discern, name, and call out potential or current abusive situations or practices.

Various marketing strategies will be needed to help others be made aware of the services available to their organisation, in order to build a client-base. The main purpose of promoting the healthy engagement of employees and facilitating the uncovering of potential abusive situations, while enabling the employee’s awareness of the phenomena, is important. The business should not lose focus on helping the employee, by access through Executive Management. Executive Management should form part of the program delivered, as well.

A high level of the way the engagement with the client and their employees would operate is as follows, depicted below:

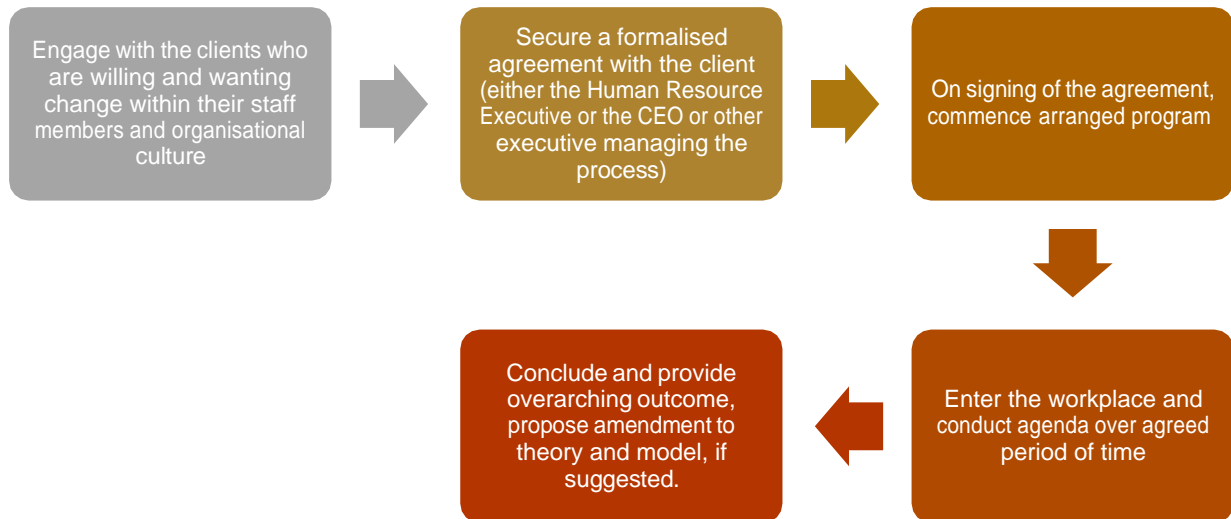


Figure 11: The proposed flow for the operations

The Agreement (Contract)

The following should be covered in the agreement with any particular client, ahead of engagement with the staff:

- The period over which engagement with the staff will occur,
- The anticipated and preferred outcome (clearly discussed and outlined),
- The extent of the employee base – either all employees or a specific focused group,
- The relevant payment for services,
- Agreed documentation and/or database to share outcomes, and
- Any further confidentiality agreement to be signed.

The Program

The program that the consultancy – in particular the facilitators that fall within the consultancy – should involve the following:

- Entering the workplace focused on the agreed employee base, for the agreed period of time (e.g., three months).
- Call for an informal introductory meeting to the consulting team (1 – 3 individuals – preferably 1 individual to 10 employees), who will then administer a series of social games to get to know one another and the consultants themselves. The base here is to gain trust and allow familiarity. The supervisors should be involved here also, and treated equally.
- The following week, a similar engagement will be delivered but with groups of 10, with one facilitator. Key here to include a supervisor within each group (not necessarily the team’s supervisor but a mix of employees and supervisors). The engagement here would also be fairly social, to further build unique trust and familiarity.
- The following week would involve the same 10 individuals and the facilitator – arrangements should be made to ensure that all 10 individuals can consistently be included regardless of mode of inclusion, support telephonic or video conferencing to join the meeting, and adjust flexibly the dates and times.
- In this meeting, there should be a particular agenda, where the “work” to equip employees begins (covered further below).
- This weekly cadence of meetings continues for the full duration of the agreed period and monthly reports of progress given, and discussed if needed, with Executive Management.
- The program, in parallel to the engagement with staff, should also include regular meetings/workshops with the leaders. Making these not too long, so as to join, but not too short, so as to not be impactful and insightful.

The Agenda

The agenda of the weekly meeting agendas over the allocated period - here assuming a three-month period – is given in the table below:

	<u>Month 1</u>		<u>Month 2</u>		<u>Month 3</u>
Week 1	Focus on building trust.	Week 1	Social Ice-breaker and what is similar between the challenges raised (find commonality – that they're not alone).	Week 1	Social Ice-breaker and How can we improve on the key challenges (solution finding together)
Week 2	Clarity of Purpose, Introductions and 1 thing that's challenging.	Week 2	Social Ice-breaker and What are the 5 key challenges we all are facing. (Start reducing the many to a few that can be tangible and a solution driven).	Week 2	Social Ice-breaker and How can we hold others to account for some of the key challenges (acknowledge awareness of others influence).
Week 3	Social Ice-breaker and 3 things that are challenging.	Week 3	Social Ice-breaker and What caused the challenges we faced. (acknowledgement of the various influences)	Week 3	Social Ice-breaker and What will I try to take and do differently (acknowledge empowerment)
Week 4	Social Ice-breaker and 5 things that are challenging.	Week 4	Social Ice-breaker and How can we pick it up sooner. (Start engaging empowerment).	Week 4	Social Ice-breaker and Close-out (reflections about the past 3 months).

Table 12: Proposed Agenda for each weekly meeting, given a 3-month period

The format of the meetings – over an hourly period - will be as follows:

- a. Welcome and informal chat (15 minutes)
- b. Social ice-breaker/game (15 minutes)
- c. Engagement with the facilitator's agenda for that week – intense work (25 minutes)
- d. Close-out and any questions or further discussion points (5 minutes; can carry through to discuss one-on-one if needed).

It is important to keep the attendants' time in mind, and show respect towards that. Together with knowing that these meetings are going to be held repetitively for the next three months,

and so it is also important to make them fairly short, engaging, and impactful. It is key to try to mitigate against attendants dropping off over the period, or becoming disengaged.

THE TOOLS

The following are the tools that would be used to facilitate the learnings/engagements:

- If physical meetings are held, a video-recording device and software (with consent from participants) and, if digital meetings, the appropriate video conferencing software;
- Note-taking software and devices for the facilitators (e.g., iPads with Evernote);
- Social games – including Web-based games or specifically-tailored games in consultation with a specific social gaming consultancy;
- Agenda for the meetings held weekly.

HOW TO DEAL WITH THE DIFFICULT DIALOGUE OF WORKPLACE MISTREATMENT AND ABUSIVE SUPERVISION (SOME SUGGESTIONS):

Within each session, there are likely to be some awkward moments or just a lack of wanting (or knowing how) to share sensitive information, especially within a group – some members of which might have had challenges between themselves. Here is a list of proposed ways to deal with the difficult group situation and dialogue that may emerge:

- Ensure that eye contact is maintained and do not shift body language too much, when awkward situations arise;
- Acknowledge, with a keen sense of empathy for what has been said, when it is delivered aggressively, in anger or in sadness. Do not make the delivery sound condescending in any way. This will cause shut down and disengagement.
- To facilitate sharing of difficult stories, assess the participant's journey of dialogue and sharing with the group and gauge whether they might be comfortable with a bit more "prodding." If they are, ask relevant and engaging questions on the deeper issue; if it is not well-received, return to the former topic or engage with another participant (openly stating "Okay, let's move to Sally now and we'll circle back to you, Joe, if you'd like.>").
- When difficult – abusive or emotional – stories are being conveyed to the group, be sure to acknowledge the bravery of the participant to share and show them utmost

appreciation and respect, not necessarily with words, but with body language – eye contact that is gentle and appreciative, and a slight nod of the head for appreciation. The “reward” will be seen by others and may encourage further sharing. In the least, it will make the participant who shared feel less vulnerable.

- To facilitate the sharing of sensitive information, either personal or organisational, ensure that the anonymity of the information – outside of the group – is reiterated. Creating a safe space through tools such as a consent form and agreement signed by members of the group as to confidentiality. Trust would have been built steadily over the first few weeks and, hopefully, is sustained. If broken or fractured at any time, a slight detour off the anticipated agenda should try to focus time to reconstitute this trust. The information – when personal – should show a similar “rewarding” element in behaviour from the facilitator to the difficult conversation to show appreciation of vulnerability. No over-reward should be given, as this would be manipulative. The display should be genuine.
- Overall, to raise issues that either relate to something hurtful in the past that triggered self-doubt and worthlessness is difficult; to speak to without re-immersing in those feelings - the key point of the facilitator - is to stay present and stay optimistic.
- Similarly to the above, to discuss things that involve team members or a supervisor that is present in the group is difficult – either the participant will not engage because “Is it really a safe space,” if they are there and the situation may not have been resolved completely or well, so re-surfacing the issue may result in eruption of emotion from either parties. Even if eruption occurs, it may be good to hear them speak their piece in it and let the narrative follow that story, in hope of some resolution there, but if it seems to be escalating and not creating a healthy debate, then the session should end with the group and those members stay on to discuss (not to cause any potential and unnecessary trauma for the rest of the group). However, ending sessions abruptly where it has not escalated, but the participants have simply started to share their current interpretations, in perhaps a heated manner, should be avoided. Do not be scared of emotion being displayed, especially in exasperation, that is a key area for vulnerability and is a display of it even if it is negative.