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On the destructiveness of laissez-faire versus abusive supervision: a comparative, multilevel investigation of destructive forms of leadership

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ABSTRACT

Different forms of destructive leadership are prevalent in organizations, but rarely studied together. Additionally, most studies take an individual-level view on the consequences of destructive leadership. However, while most supervisors lead teams, it remains unclear how destructive leadership behaviours affect team processes and outcomes from a multilevel perspective. Building on this premise, we analysed the relationship of abusive supervision and laissez-faire leadership with OCB on the individual and team-level. As an important team process, we considered team trust as a mediating mechanism. Further, we investigated whether laissez-faire leadership is more harmful to OCB compared to abusive supervision. We tested our proposed model in a three-wave study with data from 658 team members out of 149 teams. Bayesian multilevel analysis generally supported our assumptions: Abusive supervision lowered team trust and subsequently OCB at the individual and team-level, whereas laissez-faire was not related to team trust on the team-level. Additionally, our results indicated that laissez-faire was more harmful to OCB than abusive supervision on both levels. Finally, implications for theory and practical use in organizations are discussed.

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Destructive forms of leadership behaviour are not only prevalent in today's organizational reality (Aasland et al., 2009; Tepper, 2000), but also predict undesired behavioural reactions of employees very well (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Y. Zhang et al., 2019). Destructive leadership ranges from active and aggressive forms (i.e., abusive supervision) to passive forms of leadership (i.e., laissez-faire; see Aasland et al., 2009; Skogstad et al., 2007; Thoroughgood et al., 2018). Abusive supervision, on the one hand, refers to the extent to which supervisors are seen to engage in a sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical contact (Tepper, 2000). Laissez-faire, on the other hand, is defined as the absence of leadership. High laissez-faire supervisors fail to respond to their followers' requests, are generally absent when needed, and avoid making decisions (Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Skogstad et al., 2007). There is converging evidence that recipients of such forms of destructive leadership—individually (Judge & Piccolo, 2004) as well as collectively (Priesemuth et al., 2014)—tend to reduce efforts regarding organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB). OCB covers pro-organizational behaviour that typically falls outside the formal job description and reward system but is an important driver of organizational effectiveness (Organ, 1988; Organ & Paine, 1999; N. P. Podsakoff et al., 2009).


Although the increasing academic attention has substantially enriched our understanding regarding the dark side of leadership, a comparative examination of different forms of destructive leadership is lacking. While abusive supervision

and laissez-faire have both been related to a plethora of outcomes underscoring their detrimental effects, research has largely treated them isolated from each other. Usually, either abusive supervision or laissez-faire leadership are studied, leaving open questions regarding each style's incremental validity (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). In a similar vein, regarding the targets of destructive leadership, the focus so far has been on consequences for individuals as recipients or (not and) on teams as a collective target (Tepper et al., 2017). In order to understand how consequences of destructive leadership unfold on the individual and team level and whether the consequences are similar across levels, we conducted this multilevel study. Doing so allows us to challenge an underlying assumption in the literature that may be in need of revision: That is, the more aggressive and destructive the leadership behaviour is, the more detrimental the outcomes should be and the more important it should be to study such phenomena (Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper et al., 2017). This understanding may be illustrated best by the rapid increase in abusive supervision studies while laissez-faire has garnered substantially less academic attention as of late.

We argue that when destructive leadership is measured by its effects on recipients' OCB, laissez-faire should have stronger effects than abusive supervision. The theoretical narrative which we develop suggests that while abusive supervision may be uniquely distressing, unfair, and, thus, detrimental (Y. Zhang et al., 2019), it still provides some level of social

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 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed [here](#).

exchange and orientation for followers. Therefore, it meets some implicit expectations about leadership (Rush et al., 1977): While abusive leaders show hostile and socially inappropriate behaviour, they still make decisions, set goals, and assign tasks (see Krasikova et al., 2013; Thoroughgood et al., 2018). In line with this reasoning, recent research reports a moderate positive correlation between abusive and directive leadership (Li et al., 2021). In contrast, laissez-faire leaders fail to provide their followers with any kind of exchange or orientation. With this, followers are put in situations where they are in limbo with how to accomplish their work. Furthermore, given that the absence of leadership tends to also be more prevalent in organizations than actual abuse (Aasland et al., 2009), laissez-faire and its effects for practice might be underestimated. Accordingly, it is important to deepen our understanding regarding the unique effects of these different forms of destructive leadership.

Drawing primarily from social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) and implicit leadership theory (Rush et al., 1977), we develop a model in which both abusive supervision and laissez-faire exert unique detrimental exchange processes that decrease followers' OCB. Importantly, in comparison to abusive leadership, the effects of laissez-faire leadership on OCB are expected to be more pronounced. To advance the understanding of these two forms of destructive leadership, we test a model of multilevel homology (Chen et al., 2005). Hence, this study can provide a more nuanced view on how abusive supervision and laissez-faire leadership unfold their consequences across the individual and team level which contributes to a more comprehensive and parsimonious theory of destructive leadership. As an operationalization of the quality of exchange relationships shaped by leadership, we introduce followers' individual as well as collective team trust as mediators in our model (see Figure 1). Trust is vital to the development and intensification of social exchange relationships because it reduces uncertainty about a partner's reciprocation and fosters mutual obligations (Colquitt et al., 2012). In this paper, we focus on team trust and follow Stoverink et al.'s (2014) work who provided preliminary evidence that destructive leadership affects relationships between targets of leadership (i.e., focal employee) and related third-parties (i.e., employee's team members). In our

study, we build on this work by including team trust on both the individual-level as well as the team-level. As a result we seek to broaden the understanding of destructive leadership for social exchange relationships within a team (reflected in team trust) and consequently OCB. We test our propositions using multilevel, three-wave data from 658 individuals nested within 149 teams.

This study provides three contributions to the literature. First, we extend the general discussion on destructive leadership by answering calls to compare and differentiate various forms of destructive leadership (i.e., abusive supervision and laissez-faire) and to disentangle their unique effects (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). At this point, we follow the classification of Skogstad et al. (2007) and Thoroughgood et al. (2018) who define laissez-faire as a passive form of destructive leadership because of its detrimental consequences and dissociate from the conceptualization of Schyns and Schilling (2013) viewing laissez-faire as a qualitative different negative form of leadership. Thereby, this research adds to the debate of whether laissez-faire should be considered as a destructive form of leadership. By taking a multilevel perspective, we also answer Tepper et al.'s (2017) call to differentiate between consequences for individuals as well as consequences for collectives. We are particularly unaware of any empirical work investigating the collective function of laissez-faire leadership, although such work might reveal important insights regarding the consequences of an absent leader for teams. Second, we add to the ongoing debate regarding actual leadership behaviours versus outcomes of leadership. While an increased awareness for the former has certainly revitalized the discourse regarding the uniqueness and value of different positive forms of leadership (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013), it may have led to an oversimplification with regard to destructive leadership. We provide a complementary perspective by gauging the destructiveness of negative leadership not by the extent of hostility of subsequent behaviours but by their consequences for recipients (Skogstad et al., 2007). Doing so allowed us to reveal that the nature of destructive forms of leadership and their social-exchange implications are subtler than previously assumed. Third, we gain new insights about social exchange theory in the context of destructive leadership. While it has so far been overly used to explain positive leader-follower exchanges

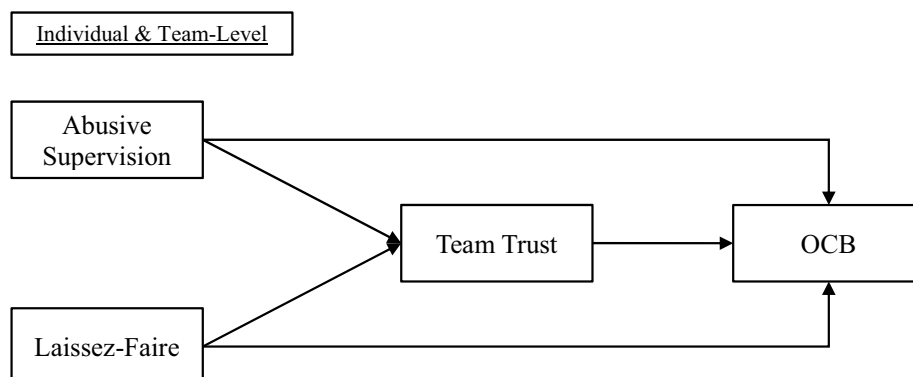


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

(Colquitt et al., 2012), we apply it in combination with multiple forms of destructive leadership. Moreover, we compare whether the consequences of a denied exchange relationship (via *laissez-faire*) are more harmful than of a hostile exchange relationship (via abusive supervision) for OCB at the individual and team level (Tepper et al., 2017).

Approaching destructive forms of leadership from a multilevel perspective

In our model, we consider the destructive leadership behaviours of abusive supervision and *laissez-faire* leadership, as well as team trust and OCB. To analyse the possible multilevel consequences of both leadership styles in teams, we are taking into account the individual and team level. Each individual within a team is exposed to the same team-specific stimuli, most notably the behaviour of the leader (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Leadership behaviour can therefore be understood as a stimulus shared in its perception by different team members. This justifies the aggregation of individual perceptions of leadership behaviour to the team level (see Bliese, 2000; Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). By applying this rationale to destructive leadership, we rely on prior empirical work which has considered destructive leader behaviour from a multilevel perspective (e.g., Farh & Chen, 2014). According to these findings, destructive leadership may have a detrimental impact on each individual team member, as they perceive and experience destructive leader behaviour (i.e., active or passive) from their own individual perspective (i.e., individual-level destructive leadership). Additionally, the team members may have a shared perception of destructive leadership (i.e., team-level destructive leadership), as the team leader shows destructive behaviour towards multiple team members. Accordingly, we model the team-level constructs through direct consensus composition by aggregating the individual-level perceptions of destructive leadership to the team level (Chan, 1998). It is important to distinguish this multilevel view of destructive leadership from a collective climate conceptualization of destructive leadership (see e.g., Priesemuth et al., 2014). Assuming a collective climate of destructive leadership would imply a referent shift from the individual perception ("I") to a collective perception ("we") of destructive leader behaviour (cf. Chan, 1998, 2019). Shifting the referent (i.e., from the individual to a collective perception) would measure a different construct (see Chan, 1998), as the team members' ratings for the latter are based on their belief about how the team as a collective perceives the team leader (i.e., individual assessment of the team experience rather than their own personal experience with the team leader; see Priesemuth et al., 2014).

Our multilevel conceptualization also applies to the focal consequences of destructive leader behaviour, which in this study are team trust and OCB. Accordingly, we define team trust at the individual level as the individual's belief or assessment about the degree to which the other team members are trustworthy and to which the individual is willing to accept vulnerability towards the team members. At the team level, team trust is the shared belief or assessment about the trustworthiness of the team colleagues (see Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012). Organ (1988) has described OCB as "individual behavior

that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization" (p. 4). Based on this definition, individual-level OCB refers to the extra-role behaviour of a single team member, whereas team-level OCB comprises the aggregated behaviour of the entire team.

Given this multilevel conceptualization of the focal constructs in our study, destructive leadership can be a shared stimulus for each individual team member (cf. Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). A shared or social stimulus may not only influence attitudes and behaviours of an individual member, but also of multiple members of one team (see Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978; with regard to destructive leadership see Farh & Chen, 2014). Hence, it might be possible that the shared consequences of destructive leadership for the team do not differ from the consequences for the individual team members. Thus, to improve the understanding of the consequences of destructive leadership in teams, we consider the possible outcomes of both forms of destructive leadership to be similar across the individual and team level, which will indicate a homologous multilevel model (Chen et al., 2005). This homologous model is intended to develop a sparser and more precise theoretical explanation of the consequences of destructive leadership in teams (cf. Chen et al., 2005; Klein & Kozlowski, 2000).

Abusive supervision and OCB at individual- and team-level

According to social exchange theory, individuals who repeatedly engage with each other create liabilities (Blau, 1964). In a dyadic relationship, for instance, both parties should aim for a reciprocal exchange: In case one party contributed a beneficial resource, the other party should try to reciprocate by providing a favourable return (see Mitchell et al., 2012). A series of such positive interactions can improve the quality of the relationship (Blau, 1964). In an employee-leader arrangement, a high-quality relationship has shown, for instance, to improve OCB (Masterson et al., 2000). In contrast, low quality relationships in a working context lead to impaired psychological well-being (Harvey et al., 2007) and performance (Zellars et al., 2002).

When employees experience abusive supervision (i.e., hostile verbal and nonverbal leader behaviours; Tepper, 2000), their exchange relationships with their leader show a low quality. Instead of bringing resources into the relationship, abusive leaders harm their followers through their behaviour (Grandey et al., 2007). The followers are, hence, not only impacted in their performance by this relationship, but might, *in exchange*, also be motivated to reduce their effort (see Gregory et al., 2013). As employees have a formal obligation to fulfil their working contract and hold a less powerful position than their leaders, they still might need to meet their formal responsibilities (see Gregory et al., 2013). Hence, a more suitable opportunity for employees to balance out their exchange relationship with their leader, should be to reduce OCB (Zellars et al., 2002). OCB is a discretionary individual behaviour that is not explicitly promoted by the formal reward system. Nevertheless, it can enhance the organizational function in aggregated form (Organ, 1988, p. 4). Thus, while organizations benefit from

OCB, this behaviour falls out of an employee's formal responsibilities (Bateman & Organ, 1983). In addition, OCB has a rather low visibility (see Gregory et al., 2013). Therefore, reducing OCB should be a save option for employees to counterbalance abusive supervision. Thus, based on social exchange theory, we predict:

Hypothesis 1a: Abusive supervision is negatively related to OCB at the individual-level.

Abusive supervision might not only create a low quality exchange relationship between each employee and the leader (see Xu et al., 2012), but should also create a shared experience and perception concerning the leader's abusive behaviours (i.e., at the team-level). In response to experienced abusive leadership, employees should retaliate against other team members and the organization as a whole, rather than against the abusive supervisor due to power asymmetry (i.e., indirect reciprocity; Folger, 2001; Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010). Additionally, abusive supervisors set informal behavioural standards within a team. When employees experience frequent abuse from their leaders, they tend to construe that unsupportive and hostile forms of behaviour are tolerated and legitimized (Liu et al., 2012; Mawritz et al., 2012). Consequently, abusive leadership should impair the social exchange relationships at the team-level (reflected, for instance, in lower team trust) and reduce cooperation (see Priesemuth et al., 2014). Thus, the shared experience of abusive supervision might affect the led team as a whole (Priesemuth et al., 2014) and, relate to on average lower extra role behaviour (i.e., OCB) at the team-level.

Hypothesis 1b: Abusive supervision is negatively related to OCB at the team-level.

Laissez-faire leadership and OCB at individual- and team-level

Laissez-faire leadership has been shown to undermine employees' satisfaction not only with their job and their leader, but also their perceptions of leader effectiveness (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Based on the social exchange framework, we assume that laissez-faire leaders do not interfere with their followers and thereby avoid their leadership responsibilities to make decisions or support employees to accomplish their tasks. Consequently, the team members' exchange relationship with their leader can be characterized as economic rather than social (Buch et al., 2015). As their expectations regarding the leader's supportiveness (see Xu et al., 2012) are not met, employees may reduce their OCB, as a high engagement in OCB would worsen the imbalance in the exchange relationship with the leader to their disadvantage. In contrast, Smith et al. (1998) theorized that leader supportiveness would be positively related to OCB because employees might perceive such behaviour as an act of assistance, which they then may reciprocate in the form of OCB.

In addition, the lack of support from laissez-faire leaders makes it more difficult for employees to cope with their work tasks. Employees would need to compensate for the lack of

leadership by putting more effort to accomplish their work tasks. Consequently, the accomplishment of formal tasks requires more resources from the employees. Since it is well established that employees are keen to preserve their resources (Hobfoll, 1998, 2001), they should not invest their remaining resources in extra-role behaviour in the sense of OCB. As a result, employees only perform their formally obligated role to a certain extent, but disengage in extra-role behaviour, such as OCB. Thus, we assume that laissez-faire leadership shows a negative relation with OCB at the individual-level.

Hypothesis 2a: Laissez-faire leadership is negatively related to OCB at the individual-level.

At the team-level, laissez-faire leadership leads to delays and disruptions in team processes as decisions are not made, roles in the team are undefined and the leader is disengaged to satisfy the needs of the team members (Bass & Avolio, 1990). This contradicts the team's needs to collaborate effectively (see Morgeson et al., 2010): To satisfy those needs, the leader is expected to define—among other functions—goals and plans, provide feedback, and solve problems. Thus, teams which are led by a laissez-faire leader have to devote a lot of their resources to compensate for the lack of leadership behaviour which is necessary to accomplish their tasks. Accordingly, this may result in a collective disengagement in OCB, because OCB is not required to fulfil the formal job role (Organ & Ryan, 1995). Furthermore, at the team-level, a laissez-faire leader may set the collective tone that caring for one another is not normative (i.e., helping others is not the standard within the team; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Thus, we predict:

Hypothesis 2b: Laissez-faire leadership is negatively related to OCB at the team-level.

Team trust mediates the link between abusive supervision and OCB

Due to the salient position of the leader, destructive leadership (active or passive) may not only influence the social exchange relation with the leader in a negative manner, but may also have strong negative consequences for relationships with other team members (cf. Cropanzano et al., 2017; Lavelle et al., 2007). Following previous scholars (Colquitt et al., 2012; Peng et al., 2014), we understand team trust (i.e., the individual's trust in other team members) to reflect the quality of social exchange relationships within a team. Hence, team members experiencing abusive supervision should report impaired social exchange relationships and lower team trust (see Peng et al., 2014). This may be explained as the individual's perception of abusive supervision goes hand in hand with the feeling of not being a valuable team member (Tyler & Blader, 2000). The treatment of the leader as a central member of the group serves as an indicator for one's position in the group (see Peng et al., 2014). Being a victim of abusive supervision may impair interactions with less abused team members (Farh & Chen, 2014). Hence, the respective team member should

encounter more difficulties in building high-quality social exchange relationships (i.e., lower ratings of team trust; Peng et al., 2014).

Impaired team trust should further relate to OCB (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2015). When employees show OCB, they share their resources with others and, hence, become vulnerable (see Peng et al., 2014). Consequently, they should be more willing to show OCB when engaging with colleagues they trust (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Thus, we expect the link between abusive supervision and employees' OCB to be mediated via team trust at the individual-level.

Hypothesis 3a: The negative relation between abusive supervision and OCB is mediated via team trust at the individual-level.

According to social exchange theory (see Cropanzano et al., 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) the behaviour of the leader should set a strong norm concerning reciprocal behaviour and consequently the quality of exchange relationships at the team-level (Liu et al., 2012; Mawritz et al., 2012). This should result in team members developing poorer exchange relations within their team when collectively facing abusive supervision (Peng et al., 2014). In addition, the shared perception of abusive supervision sets a norm for harmful interactions within the team (Farh & Chen, 2014), which should in turn reduce the willingness to be vulnerable to others. Consequently, the team-wide lower quality of social exchange relationships should be reflected in lower team trust (see Hogg, 1996; Lau & Liden, 2008; Peng et al., 2014; Smith et al., 1998). Furthermore, experiencing abusive supervision should increase team members' collective retaliation due to indirect reciprocity (Folger, 2001; Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010), which should further impair the quality of social exchange relationships. As impaired team trust may reflect lower collective expectations concerning reciprocal and supportive behaviours in the team, OCB should become less likely (Costa et al., 2018; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2015). Thus, abusive supervision should relate negatively to team trust and consequently OCB at the team-level.

Hypothesis 3b: The negative relation between abusive supervision and OCB is mediated via team trust at the team-level.

Team trust mediates the link between laissez-faire leadership and OCB

Since laissez-faire leaders are absent when needed and do not provide adequate feedback (Neuman & Baron, 2005) and support, team members' legitimate expectations towards the leader are not met (Skogstad et al., 2007). Accordingly, they are not able to establish social exchange relationships with their leader. In line with the social exchange theory, a purely economic exchange relationship takes place between the leader and the team members. The theory further emphasizes that interpersonal actions are often triggered by an interaction partner, and that it is precisely a partner with greater power who determines which behaviour is considered favourable or unfavourable (Cropanzano et al., 2017). A laissez-faire does not make any effort to satisfy the needs of his/her team, and may

cause the individual team member to feel ignored and isolated (Loi et al., 2009). In such an unsupportive working environment, the team member should not invest in social exchange relations resulting in lower team trust. Missing trustful exchange relations with their team members, individuals prevent themselves to help others and to invest in OCB (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2015), as they seek to avoid the risk of losing additional resources and are primarily concerned with their own tasks. Accordingly, we assume:

Hypothesis 4a: The negative relation between laissez-faire leadership and OCB is mediated via team trust at the individual-level.

Due to the lack of functional leadership behaviour (Morgeson et al., 2010), the team members collective expectations towards the leader are not met (Skogstad et al., 2007), which is particularly detrimental to teamwork. Additionally, a laissez-faire leader establishes a fundamentally indifferent and less trustful tone without creating a norm of reciprocity within the team (cf. Cropanzano et al., 2017). Therefore, team members are less likely to trust each other, build fewer social relations within the team, and show less engagement in extra-role behaviour (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012; Love & Forret, 2008). In addition, laissez-faire leadership promotes the self-interest of team members (Buch et al., 2015), which then might shift the focus of the team members towards their individual tasks. In consequence, laissez-faire leadership undermines collective investment in social relations (i.e., showing reciprocity), resulting in low trust at the team level (Colquitt et al., 2012; McAllister, 1995). Thus, laissez-faire leadership should be negatively related with collective OCB of team members via team trust:

Hypothesis 4b: The negative relation between laissez-faire leadership and OCB is mediated via team trust at the team-level.

The comparative destructiveness of abusive and laissez-faire leadership

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) predicts that individuals draw from a web of different implicit and explicit expectations and social norms to draw inferences about the behaviours of exchange partners as well as regarding the normative obligation such exchanges elicit. We argue that implicit leadership expectations (Rush et al., 1977) are particularly useful to explain the disparate social exchange processes which are set in motion with abusive supervision versus laissez-faire concerning OCB.

We assume that laissez-faire leaders have particularly detrimental consequences, as they avoid any interaction with their team members and consequently withhold a *social* exchange relationship. Thus, the individual should feel ignored and isolated (see Loi et al., 2009). Furthermore, a laissez-faire leader does not meet the individual team member's legitimate expectations, such as showing consideration and initiating structure (Rush et al., 1977; Schriesheim & Stogdill, 1975), making decisions, giving feedback and providing information (Neuman & Baron, 2005), or support (Skogstad et al.,

2007). Accordingly, a laissez-faire leader does not fulfil the formal responsibilities of a leader, which should particularly corroborate social exchange relations, and in turn reduce trust towards the team members and OCB.

In comparison, an abusive leader still meets some of the formal expectations towards a leadership position (such as setting goals, making plans, and providing feedback; see Tepper, 2000). Although the interaction with the individual is harmful and inappropriate, we assume that abusive leaders will nevertheless demonstrate prototypical leadership behaviours to some degree.¹ This view is supported, as abusive supervision can be used as a strategic means by the leader to achieve short term goals (Ju et al., 2019; Krasikova et al., 2013) and shows overlap with directive leadership (Li et al., 2021). We therefore assume that laissez-faire leadership shows an overall stronger negative relationship with individual-level OCB.

Hypothesis 5a: The overall relation between laissez-faire leadership and OCB is stronger than the relation between abusive supervision and OCB at the individual-level.

With laissez-faire leadership, the team members collectively experience a lower appraisal of their collective needs and a reduced sense of belonging to the team (Bass & Stogdill, 1990), which reflects in a lower quality of exchange relationships (i.e., collective lower trust in team members). As a consequence, employees are focused on reducing the imbalance of their exchange relationship with their leader and lower their contribution (i.e., by reducing their extra-role behaviour; Buch et al., 2015). Additionally, absent leadership (such as refusing to assign roles in the team, share knowledge, or make decisions), impairs team processes and outcomes (Mathieu et al., 2008). Accordingly, the standstill in the team can collectively impair the exchange relationship between the team members, which should diminish extra-role behaviours (i.e., reducing team-level OCB).

In comparison, abusive supervision may not be as harmful to OCB as laissez-faire at the team-level. Although, the collective perception of abusive supervision likely affects the social exchange relationships within the team in a negative manner, the team may not reduce OCB to the same extent to prevent from further hostility of the team leader (see Tepper et al., 2017). Accordingly, to avoid negative consequences in case of an abusive compared to a laissez-faire leader, the team might not risk to reduce OCB below a certain degree. Hence, we assume that laissez-faire leadership has a stronger negative relationship with OCB at the team level.

Hypothesis 5b: The overall relation between laissez-faire leadership and OCB is stronger than the overall relation between abusive supervision and OCB at the team-level.

Method

Sample and research design

This study was part of a larger research project. We invited 160 teams with a total of 697 team members from different organizations in Germany via a personalized link to our online survey

which was sent by email. The data collection was supported by research assistants. In order to reduce common method bias (P. M. Podsakoff et al., 2003), we chose a time-lagged design and measured predictors, mediator, and outcome with a time-lag of one month each. At time 1 (T1), team members provided their demographics and also rated their leader's laissez-faire leadership and abusive supervision. At time 2 (T2), team members filled out a questionnaire on team trust. At time 3 (T3), OCB was assessed. Additionally, the team leaders completed a questionnaire on their demographics at T3. After the teams had completed all surveys, they had the possibility to receive a feedback report upon request as incentive for their participation.

From the invited 160 teams, one team decided not to participate after their initial consent, and was, thus, excluded from the sample. Additionally, we excluded teams for which only the response of one team member was provided. Thus, the final sample was 149 teams with 658 team members. Of those, 601 team members participated at T1 (response rate = 91%), 578 team members participated at T2 (response rate = 88%), and 567 team members participated at T3 (response rate = 86%). The participating team members were mostly female (60%) and about 35 years old ($SD = 11.56$). Over a third of them held a university degree as the highest educational level (39%). 75% worked full-time and were part of their current team for 6 years on average ($SD = 3.03$ years). Average team size was 4.42 ($SD = 2.65$). More than the half of the team leaders were male (58%) and on average 43 years old ($SD = 11.46$ years). A majority (54%) held a university degree and they worked for 7 years with their team ($SD = 2.97$ years). Considering the organizational background, most teams were from organizations at the trading sector (10%), health-care and social sector (9%), finance and insurance sector (8%), and service sector (8%).

To examine possible non-response bias, we conducted a dropout-analysis. Results showed that team members, who did not participate at T2 and/or T3, did not differ from team members who participated at all measurement occasions in terms of gender ($\chi^2 = 0.00, p = .98$), education ($\chi^2 = 2.71, p = .44$), and age ($F = 0.09, p = .76$). We also did not find any differences for our control variables leader gender ($\chi^2 = 0.17, p = .68$) and span of control ($F = 1.50, p = .22$).

Measures

Abusive supervision (T1)

To assess abusive supervision, we used a five-item scale by Rowold and Poethke (2017). The scale has been developed based on the work of Tepper (Tepper, 2000; Tepper et al., 2007). In the validation study (Rowold & Poethke, 2017), this measure showed high congruent validity with Tepper's (2000) scale ($r = .88$). The items that were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). An illustrative item was: "My supervisor, takes his/her negative feelings (anger, annoyance, frustration) out on me". Cronbach's alpha was .91 for this scale. Given the hierarchical nature of our data, we calculated intraclass correlation coefficients (Bliese, 2000) and average $r_{wg(j)}$ to quantify the degree of within-team agreement (James et al., 1993). For this scale, ICC1 was .30, ICC2 was .66, and average $r_{wg(j)}$ was .79.

Laissez-faire leadership (T1)

We measured laissez-faire leadership with four items (Rowold & Poethke, 2017). This scale was based on a measure by Rowold (2011). In the validation study for this measure, Rowold and Poethke (2017) could find discriminant validity to other leadership styles (e.g., transformational leadership). The team members were asked about the extent to which their leader for example, “delays responding to urgent questions”. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach’s alpha was .87 for this scale. ICC1 was .32, ICC2 was .68, and average $r_{wg(j)}$ was .75 for this measure.

Team trust (T2)

We measured team trust with nine items on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 6 (*completely agree*) (Lehmann-Willenbrock & Kauffeld, 2010). A sample item was “My colleagues do not disclose personal information”. Cronbach’s alpha was .94 for this scale. For team trust, ICC1 was .20, ICC2 was .52, and average $r_{wg(j)}$ was .89.

Organizational citizenship behaviour (T3)

OCB was measured with 20 items (Staufenbiel & Hartz, 2000). This measure is widely used for German-speaking samples (e.g., Ingold et al., 2016; Niessen et al., 2016) and comprised the four facets of altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, and civic virtue. All items (e.g., “I actively try to prevent difficulties among team members”) were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach’s alpha was .83 for this scale. ICC1 was .08, ICC2 was .29, and average $r_{wg(j)}$ was .96 for this measure. Our decision to use self-ratings of OCB instead of other-ratings (e.g., from supervisors or colleagues) was informed by findings from Carpenter et al. (2014). They showed that in comparison to self-rated OCB, “other-rated OCB generally contributed negligible incremental variance to correlates” (p. 547).

Control variables

To rule out alternative explanations, we included span of control (i.e., leader’s reported number of direct subordinates) as a potential confounding variable on the team-level. Following for example, Bormann et al. (2018), a high span of control may be related to social distance in leader-follower interactions. These may be potential alternative explanations for the consequences of laissez-faire leadership and abusive supervision

behaviours on OCB. In line with previous research on laissez-faire and abusive supervision, we additionally controlled for leader’s gender (e.g., Skogstad et al., 2014).

Statistical analysis strategy

In order to justify the use of Bayesian multilevel modelling and aggregation of data, we calculated ICC1, ICC2, and average $r_{wg(j)}$ for all constructs (see “Measures” and Table 1). Results indicated a significant amount of shared variance on the team level and additionally a substantial degree of within-team agreement (Bliese, 2000). Summarized, the use of multilevel modelling and aggregation is supported by the data.

Following the recommendation of Enders and Tofighi (2007), we centred the individual-level predictors and the mediator on the respective cluster mean (i.e., team mean) to separate individual-level from team-level variance and to yield unconfounded parameter estimates. To test our multilevel mediation model on both levels, we modelled the team-mean centred variables on the individual level and the respective team means on the team level (see also Z. Z. Zhang et al., 2009). Accordingly, the team-level constructs are formed through direct consensus (Chan, 1998, 2019). To overcome convergence issues, we tested our model with manifest (i.e., observed) data. For data analysis, we applied a Bayesian estimator using Mplus 7.3 (L. K. Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2015). Bayesian data analysis has several advantages in comparison to frequentist approaches: First, a Bayesian approach does not only consider discrete parameter estimates (i.e., point estimate), but takes into account the distribution of plausible values for a specific parameter in terms of a posterior distribution. Thus, testing and interpreting results becomes independent from conventional p -values which are based on and restricted to sampling distributions assumptions (e.g., normal distribution) (Kruschke et al., 2012; Zyphur & Oswald, 2015). Second, Bayesian estimation is less computational demanding and shows a better computational performance (e.g., B. O. Muthén & Asparouhov, 2012). Last and most relevant to our analysis, a Bayesian estimation allows a more detailed analysis of model convergence and evaluation of model fit criteria (i.e., inspecting fit criteria for every estimated parameter, for example, in terms of trace plots; Depaoli & van de Schoot, 2017). The treatment of missing data is comparable to the full-information maximum-likelihood approach in Mplus, and so all available data can be used for model estimation (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2010).

In order to evaluate the Bayesian model fit and Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) convergence, we followed recent recommendations from the methodological literature (e.g.,

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>ICC1</i>	<i>ICC2</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Leader Gender	1.58	0.50	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Span of Control	13.67	16.35	-	-	-.07	-	-	-	-	-
3. Abusive Supervision	1.76	0.94	.30	.66	-.16	.09	-	.62***	-.25***	-.20***
4. Laissez-Faire Leadership	2.01	0.96	.32	.68	.00	.07	.57***	-	-.24***	-.30***
5. Team Trust	4.74	0.93	.20	.52	.10	-.13	-.31***	-.29***	-	.36***
6. OCB	5.57	0.62	.08	.29	.02	.12	-.18*	-.20*	.25**	-

Team level correlations are presented below the diagonal; individual level correlations are presented above the diagonal; Gender is coded 1 = female and 2 = male. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. Results from Bayesian multilevel model.

Model Path		<i>B</i>	Posterior <i>SD</i>	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Team Level					
Abusive Supervision	→ Trust	-.232*	.095	-.416	-.048
Laissez-Faire	→ Trust	-.105	.092	-.281	.077
Abusive Supervision	→ OCB	.016	.060	-.101	.137
Laissez-Faire	→ OCB	-.119*	.058	-.229	-.005
Trust	→ OCB	.130*	.053	.026	.233
Leader Gender	→ OCB	-.005	.060	-.125	.112
Span of Control	→ OCB	.004*	.002	.000	.007
Individual Level					
Abusive Supervision	→ Trust	-.173**	.053	-.277	-.069
Laissez-Faire	→ Trust	-.162**	.052	-.264	-.061
Abusive Supervision	→ OCB	-.003	.043	-.086	-.081
Laissez-Faire	→ OCB	-.173**	.042	-.254	-.090
Trust	→ OCB	.225**	.036	.156	.294

Presented are unstandardized model coefficients; all paths are modelled as fixed effects; Gender is coded 1 = female and 2 = male.

* 95%-CI excludes zero, ** 99%-CI excludes zero.

Depaoli & van de Schoot, 2017; Kaplan & Depaoli, 2012). Thus, we considered the posterior predictive *p*-value (PPP), posterior predictive checking (PPC), potential scale reduction (PSR), trace and autocorrelation plots for all estimated model parameters. For model estimation, we used 100,000 MCMC iterations with two independent Markov chains and uninformative priors (i.e., default values for the prior distributions in Mplus). Using uninformative priors implies that the results are not influenced in a certain direction by prior information (Zyphur & Oswald, 2015). The first 50,000 iterations served as a burn-in and thus were not used for the calculation of the posterior distributions.

Construct validity

We checked for discriminant validity of the study's constructs using multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (MCFA). As measurement of OCB was based on four sub-facets, we used those sub-facets as indicators for the overall construct (see Staufenbiel & Hartz, 2000). We used a Bayesian estimator and followed the recommendations of B. O. Muthén and Asparouhov (2012) to specify the measurement model (for a detailed description please see B. O. Muthén & Asparouhov, 2012; see also De Bondt & van Petegem, 2015). Accordingly, we used a normal-distributed prior of $N(1, 0.1)$ for the factor loadings and an inverse-Wishart prior of $IW(1, 28)$ for the residual variances on each level. Additionally, we included residual covariances between the indicators on both levels with an inverse-Wishart prior of $IW(0, 28)$. This prior indicates that the residual covariances are allowed to deviate to a small extent from zero (B. O. Muthén & Asparouhov, 2012, p. 317). Given the complexity of the model, we ran 1,000,000 MCMC iterations with two independent Markov chains and used only every 10th iteration (Depaoli & van de Schoot, 2017). Bayesian model fit was good (PPP = .352; PPC 95% CI using chi-square = [-78.951; 116.054]) and, thus, the results demonstrated discriminant validity of our measures in the study (for the full results see online supplement Table S1).

Results

(Table 1) contains the means, standard deviations, intraclass correlation coefficients, and intercorrelations for the individual- and team-level. The individual-level correlations were calculated using the team-mean centred data. To compute the team-level

correlations, we used the aggregated data (i.e., the respective team means of our variables). An inspection of the intercorrelations provides preliminary support to our assumptions, as all constructs are significantly correlated on both levels of analysis. The results from the Bayesian multilevel model are presented in (Table 2). All paths have been modelled as fixed effects and presented estimates are unstandardized coefficients.

Considering Bayesian model fit and MCMC convergence, the different evaluation criteria showed a satisfying model fit. We visually inspected the autocorrelation plots in Mplus. As the autocorrelation plots displayed a medium degree of autocorrelation for some parameters, we thinned the posterior distributions and used only every 10th iteration (Depaoli & van de Schoot, 2017). After applying the thinning technique, the degree of autocorrelation was low. PPP was close to the ideal value of .5, (PPP = .439) and the PPC confidence interval included zero (PPC 95% CI using chi-square = [-20.544; 23.591]; B. O. Muthén & Asparouhov, 2012). PSR decreased fast, fell below the cut-off of 1.05 after approximately 5,000 iterations, and reached a final value of 1.00 (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2010). Additionally, the inspection of the trace plots showed the typical pattern of MCMC convergence, without any long-term trends or discrepancies between the two independent Markov chains (Depaoli & van de Schoot, 2017; Kaplan & Depaoli, 2012).

In contrast to Hypotheses 1a and 1b, abusive supervision was not directly related to OCB on both levels of analysis, as the CIs of the posterior distributions included zero. For Hypotheses 2a and 2b, the results indicated notable relationships between laissez-faire leadership and OCB, as the posterior distributions for the direct effects on the individual-level ($B = -.173$, 95% CI = [-.254; -.090]) and the team-level ($B = -.119$, 95% CI = [-.229; -.005]) excluded zero as a plausible value.

Considering the mediational framework, team trust was associated with OCB on individual- ($B = .225$, 95% CI = [.156; .294]) and team-level ($B = .130$, 95% CI = [.026; .233]). Likewise, abusive supervision lowered trust on both levels (individual-level: $B = -.173$, 95%-CI = [-.277; -.069]; team-level: $B = -.232$, 95%-CI = [-.416; -.048]), while laissez-faire lowered trust only on the individual-level ($B = -.162$, 95% CI = [-.264; -.061]). For Hypotheses 3a and 3b, the results provided support for the mediational pathway of abusive supervision on OCB via team trust on both levels of analysis

(individual-level: $B_{ind} = -.038$, 95%-CI = $[-.068; -.014]$; team-level: $B_{ind} = -.028$, 95%-CI = $[-.072; -.002]$). Contrary, only the indirect effect of laissez-faire on the individual-level was different from zero ($B_{ind} = -.036$, 95%-CI = $[-.065; -.013]$), whereas the posterior distribution on team-level slightly included zero as a plausible value ($B_{ind} = -.012$, 95%-CI = $[-.045; .010]$). Thus, only Hypothesis 4a but not 4b received support.

For our last hypotheses, we compared total effects of laissez-faire and abusive supervision on OCB for the individual- and team-level. The results showed that the magnitude of the total effects of laissez-faire leadership was greater than the total effects of abusive supervision (individual-level: $B_{total} = -.209$, 95%-CI = $[-.292; -.125]$; team-level: $B_{total} = -.133$, 95%-CI = $[-.245; -.016]$). Additionally, the CIs of the total effects for abusive supervision on OCB included zero as a plausible value (individual level: $B_{total} = -.041$, 95%-CI = $[-.128; .044]$; team level: $B_{total} = -.014$, 95%-CI = $[-.133; .105]$), thus offering full support to Hypotheses 5a and 5b.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the consequences of abusive supervision and laissez-faire leadership on OCB mediated by team trust from a multilevel perspective. Therefore, we considered the consequences of these detrimental leadership styles on the individual- and team-level. In line with our assumptions, team trust mediated the relationship between abusive supervision and OCB on both levels of analysis. In contrast, the results for laissez-faire leadership revealed the mediating mechanism only on the individual-level. Additionally, laissez-faire leadership had a notable direct relationship with OCB on both levels, whereas abusive supervision was not directly associated with OCB. As most studies on destructive leadership considered the different facets of destructive leadership in isolation (i.e., investigate either abusive supervision or laissez-faire leadership), we included abusive supervision and laissez-faire – as active and passive forms of destructive leadership – together in our research model. This procedure allowed us to investigate the incremental validity of both leadership styles and to reduce the likelihood of omitted variable bias (Antonakis et al., 2010). The results of our study indicated that laissez-faire had a stronger negative relationship with OCB due to the direct association and hence may be more harmful for followers.

Theoretical contribution

Our study contributes to the research on destructive leadership, addresses calls to consider the unique effects of different forms of destructive leadership (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2007; Schyns & Schilling, 2013), and compares abusive supervision with laissez-faire leadership (Tepper et al., 2017). Most interestingly, we demonstrate that the overall effect of laissez-faire leadership impairs OCB stronger than the overall effect of abusive supervision on both levels of analysis. This is an important finding which contributes to the ongoing debate whether laissez-faire leadership is or is not a distinct form of destructive leadership. Based on findings from their own empirical work, Skogstad et al. (2007) concluded that laissez-faire leadership “is not a type of zero-leadership, but a type of destructive

leadership behavior” (p. 80). Consistent with this understanding, DeRue et al. (2011) highlighted that even engaging in suboptimal leadership behaviours is better than inaction. In contrast to this view, Schyns and Schilling (2013) excluded laissez-faire from their meta-analysis on destructive leadership referring to the qualitative difference between non-leadership and active supervisor hostility. “The latter can be expected to have much more severe . . . detrimental outcomes” (p. 141). In their words, laissez-faire leadership may be ineffective, but this ineffectiveness is not necessarily hostile and actively hurting. Putting this assertion into context of our study’s findings, we believe to provide first but solid evidence that this assumption may be in need of a revision. Indeed, the effects of laissez-faire and abusive supervision differ in quality, but we found laissez-faire leadership to be uniquely destructive. Above and beyond abusive supervision, laissez-faire leadership is negatively related to trust processes and extra-role behaviour as an important variable for organizational success (N. P. Podsakoff et al., 2009). However, this does not imply that abusive supervision is harmless or managers should resort to abusive supervision instead of laissez-faire. Given our comparative approach of including different leadership forms, we were thus able to sharpen the breadth of the conception of the meta-construct destructive leadership. Relatedly, our findings revealed that laissez-faire leadership and abusive supervision were positively correlated what may underline that both can be subsumed under the meta-construct of destructive leadership. However, a positive correlation may speak against an active vs. passive dimension of destructive leadership (e.g., Thoroughgood et al., 2018). Accordingly, future studies could address this issue.

Furthermore, we differentiate between effects of destructive leadership for individuals and teams as suggested by recent meta-analyses and reviews (Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper et al., 2017; Y. Zhang et al., 2019). Using a multilevel perspective, this study examines a homologous model (Chen et al., 2005) of individual and team-level consequences of two forms of destructive leadership. Thereby, we provide a more comprehensive view on abusive supervision and laissez-faire leadership. Considering the team-level, abusive supervision was negatively related to team trust, whereas laissez-faire leadership was not. A possible explanation for this unexpected finding may be that abusive supervision may be more strongly related to attitudinal and relational constructs or processes, whereas laissez-faire leadership may be more important for team outcomes. This speculation is somehow supported as laissez-faire leadership lowered team-level OCB directly and abusive supervision was, in contrast, only indirectly related to team-level OCB. Regarding a multilevel model of destructive leadership, this pattern of results implies that laissez-faire has differentiated consequences for team trust across levels: Whereas individuals may experience a diminished exchange relationship towards their colleagues, teams as collectives may be better able to deal with the shared experience of an absent leader. Regarding the consequences for OCB, we found a homologous relationship (Chen et al., 2005) across the individual and team level.

Finally, this study contributes to leadership research by highlighting the role of social exchanges (Blau, 1964) to explain, why laissez-faire leadership is more negatively

associated with OCB than abusive supervision. Our findings show that denied social exchange – in the form of *laissez-faire* or absence of leadership – seems to be worse than negative social exchange – in the form of abusive supervision – between the leader and the team members. Thus, our study demonstrates the assumptions of social exchange theory, which so far has been overly used to explain positive leader-follower exchanges (Colquitt et al., 2012) to be valid for negative leader-follower exchange relationships as well. Moreover, the results indicate a spillover from the leader-follower exchange relationship to the follower-team exchange relationship. This is an interesting finding against the background of the target similarity assumption of social exchange theory (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2013; Cropanzano et al., 2017; Lavelle et al., 2007). According to the target similarity assumption, the response towards a treatment should be most likely the initiating actor (in case of abusive supervision or *laissez-faire* leadership the leader). Contrary to this assumption, our results demonstrate that destructive leadership can influence the social exchange relationship with a third party which is not the initial actor (in this case: other the team members). Additionally, destructive leadership evokes a response in terms of lower team trust and OCB which aims at a broader entity demonstrating that the consequences of destructive leader behaviour go beyond the relation between leader and follower.

Practical implications

In line with previous findings, the results of our study show that it is generally important to focus not only on constructive but also on destructive leadership behaviours within an organization (see also Aasland et al., 2009; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Y. Zhang et al., 2019). Possible ways to set this focus in organizations might be to strengthen the corporate culture, for example, by anchoring constructive and supportive leadership behaviours (e.g., participative leadership) in the organizational leadership conception. In addition, HR departments could consider revising internal promotion procedures to only select suitable leaders (see Judge et al., 2009; Schleu & Hüffmeier, 2021), as well as offering employees the opportunity for confidential counselling if they or other team members are the target of destructive leadership behaviours. Moreover, for detecting destructive leadership behaviours it is important to regularly conduct leadership monitoring (e.g., 180° or 360°-feedback). Research as well as practical examples demonstrate that this is an effective way to promote positive and prevent destructive leadership behaviours (cf. Lee & Carpenter, 2018).

Another way to prevent destructive leadership behaviours is to focus directly on the leader. One solution for leaders to counteract *laissez-faire* is to actively engage in the leadership role. By this, however, we do not mean that leaders should switch from the passive to the active form of destructive leadership, but that they should meet the requirements of their leadership role at all. Additionally, leaders could be supported by offering mindfulness trainings: destructive leadership behaviour is less common among mindful leaders (Lange et al., 2018) and can be reduced through a mindfulness training intervention for leaders (Lange & Rowold, 2019).

Further, our findings revealed that team trust mediated the link between destructive forms of leadership and OCB. Thus, it is important for leaders to be sensitive for the concerns and needs of their team members and to respond appropriately to the team, as discrepancies in a team negatively influence trust within the team (e.g., Lau & Liden, 2008; Peng et al., 2014). For leadership development, this means that leaders would further profit from being trained in raising their awareness of the team's needs and negative reciprocal relationships among the team members. Gonzalez-Morales et al. (2018) could show that a leadership training that focused on leader's benevolence, fairness, and assistance with work-related problems reduced abusive supervision and improved the exchange relationship with the team.

Limitations and future directions

Since this study was conducted to gain an initial understanding of the unique effects of different forms of destructive leadership from a multilevel perspective, there are some limitations that should be addressed in future research. A first limitation refers to the design of the study which is of correlational nature and does not allow to draw causal inferences (Antonakis et al., 2010). Despite the time-lagged measures of our variables, which is used to reduce common method bias (P. M. Podsakoff et al., 2003), our data do not provide evidence about the causal direction of our mediational framework. This would require longitudinal data with all constructs measured at all three occasions (Maxwell & Cole, 2007; Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010). Additionally, we only referred to self-reported data. In the case of OCB, self-reports are an adequate way of data collection as these extra-role behaviours have a rather low visibility (Gregory et al., 2013). Therefore, OCB is difficult to observe through third parties (e.g., supervisor ratings). In future studies, it might be useful to replicate our findings with an experimental manipulation of leadership behaviour or with longitudinal (not only time-lagged) data to provide a stronger test of theory (Antonakis et al., 2010; Maxwell & Cole, 2007; Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010). It might also be beneficial to test our model with additional outcome variables using multi-source data (e.g., individual and team performance) to ensure the explanation based on social exchange theory is robust.

Another point to be considered in future studies might be not only to examine direct and indirect effects, but to take a closer look on interactions between leadership styles. For example, Breevaart and Zacher (2019) concluded that it is important to take interactions between different leadership behaviours into account when studying leadership effectiveness, as they found interaction effects of week-level *laissez-faire* and transformational leadership. Contrary to their predictions, they detected that trust in the leader and perceived leader effectiveness were reduced when leaders showed a combination of less weekly transformational and more *laissez-faire* leadership than usual. In the weeks that leaders showed more transformational leadership, followers had more trust in their leader and perceived their leader to be more effective regardless of the leader's use of *laissez-faire*. This

might also be an interesting way for future investigations on different forms of destructive leadership or a combination of destructive and constructive forms of leadership behaviours. For example, if employees are led in a highly transformational way and the leader additionally demonstrates destructive tendencies, a better performance is shown, but at the same time the stress level of the employees might be higher.

In this study, we only focused on team trust as a mediating mechanism for destructive leadership. Other studies examined different mediators like relationship conflicts, impaired self-efficacy, stress, and justice perceptions (Farh & Chen, 2014; Y. Zhang et al., 2019). Following a suggestion of Tepper et al. (2017), it may be important to compare different mediating pathways of destructive leadership for different forms of destructive leadership: Whereas abusive supervision may be related to outcomes via injustice perceptions or resource depletion (Martinko et al., 2013; Tepper et al., 2017), consequences of laissez-faire may be mediated by role conflicts or ambiguities (Skogstad et al., 2007). Furthermore, the consideration of competing theories for mediating mechanisms (e.g., conservation of resources vs. social exchange) would provide a deeper understanding and theoretical parsimony for research on destructive leadership.

Conclusion

At a first glance, abusive supervision seems to be per definition worse than laissez-faire for several organizational outcome criteria. By simultaneously analysing both forms of destructive leadership, our study demonstrates that – at a second glance – the apparently rather harmless laissez-faire leadership style is more harmful for OCB than abusive supervision. Additionally, the study reveals that this decline of OCB is mediated by a loss of trust in colleagues at the individual and team-level for abusive supervision, but only at the individual-level for laissez-faire leadership. In sum, these results demonstrate the importance of examining different forms of destructive leadership together and on different levels of analysis.

Note

1. We would like to point out, that we restrict our theorizing to the quality of exchange relationships with team members and OCB (the proposed mediator and criterion). Obviously, this comparison would result in different predictions concerning other outcome variables, for instance, employees' mental health (see Montano et al., 2017).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Supplementary Tables

Table S1. Results from Bayesian Multilevel CFA

Model Path	Loading	Posterior SD	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Individual Level				
Abusive Supervision				
AS1	.813*	.039	.724	.878
AS2	.816*	.044	.714	.887
AS3	.705*	.052	.590	.796
AS4	.822*	.038	.735	.884
AS5	.827*	.035	.748	.885
Laissez-Faire				
LF1	.739*	.048	.640	.826
LF2	.724*	.058	.595	.819
LF3	.828*	.037	.742	.889
LF4	.834*	.037	.747	.893
Team Trust				
TT1	.817*	.031	.750	.871
TT2	.778*	.040	.689	.845
TT3	.731*	.046	.631	.810
TT4	.584*	.066	.445	.703
TT5	.835*	.029	.769	.884
TT6	.853*	.027	.792	.897
TT7	.869*	.025	.810	.910
TT8	.818*	.033	.744	.873
TT9	.799*	.035	.720	.859
OCB				
OCB-CV	.680*	.061	.558	.797
OCB-S	.575*	.093	.370	.735
OCB-C	.682*	.072	.522	.805
OCB-A	.779*	.057	.646	.871
Team Level				
Abusive Supervision				
AS1	.864*	.049	.741	.929
AS2	.880*	.047	.757	.937
AS3	.883*	.045	.766	.941
AS4	.853*	.058	.702	.927
AS5	.874*	.048	.750	.935
Laissez-Faire				
LF1	.828*	.066	.661	.915
LF2	.843*	.061	.684	.919
LF3	.872*	.063	.700	.940
LF4	.897*	.052	.753	.949
Team Trust				
TT1	.874*	.050	.741	.935
TT2	.837*	.065	.666	.916
TT3	.819*	.070	.635	.908
TT4	.721*	.100	.473	.859
TT5	.872*	.051	.738	.934
TT6	.887*	.050	.753	.943
TT7	.883*	.049	.752	.940
TT8	.855*	.058	.703	.925
TT9	.854*	.061	.691	.928
OCB				
OCB-CV	.606*	.121	.338	.806
OCB-S	.557*	.154	.207	.795
OCB-C	.460*	.154	.129	.723
OCB-A	.370*	.170	.044	.704

Notes. Presented are standardized factor loadings; indicators for OCB are item parcels of the sub-facets; OCB-CV = OCB facet civic virtue, OCB-S = OCB facet sportsmanship, OCB-C = OCB facet conscientiousness, OCB-A = OCB facet altruism.

* 95%-CI excludes zero.