

Title: Digging under the fence, leaping over the fence: silence digs or leaps over exploitative leaders

Abstract

Leadership is a dynamic and complex system (e.g., Uhl-Bien et al., 2007), but is often operationalised in a static and oversimplistic manner. Although simplification has its merits, especially when it equates with parsimony, can't it at the same time, create an illusion of perfect interpretations of an imperfect world? Can't we unwittingly become trapped in a biased portrait, where "good things" are always good and "bad things" are always bad, and where there is a straight path between "things"?

This is observed in leadership studies when we think of the alleged exceptional consequences of good leaders (whatever it might be; e.g., Gui et al., 2021), and the nefarious effects of destructive ones (e.g., Mackey, 2021). This explains why the impact leaders have on followers and organisations is commonly dichotomised (they are either good or bad), and but a few call this into question (e.g., Einola & Alvesson, 2021). We challenge this "all-or-nothing" perspective as well as the linearity of the relationships between the consequences of leaders' behaviours and their effects by focusing on follower's silence.

Followers' silence expresses the decision of "employees to withhold their opinions and concerns about organizational problems" (Morrison & Milliken, 2000, p.707) and it is a suitable topic to challenge dichotomies because there are multiple instances of silence differentiated by its motives (e.g., quiescent, acquiescent, opportunistic, and prosocial; Knoll & Van Dick, 2013). These motives are crucial to analyse how followers define their position in different systems, namely in destructive leadership processes (Stouten et al., 2019).

When not motivated by prosocial reasons, silence is mainly taken as something negative that shows a lack of interest and mirrors disengagement or self-protection. An important correlate of disengagement is turnover intention. Turnover intention can inform on the role followers decide to play in a destructive leadership process: to stay and enable the system, to stay and try to readjust the system, or freeing oneself from it by leaving (Almeida et al., 2021). Both the first and third options are alarming: they may contribute to perpetuating a destructive system.

But how does silence impact turnover intentions? Departing from different types of silence and challenging the well-established linearity assumption, we believe it is reasonable to expect situations where low levels of silence may suggest both high turnover intention (e.g., "I have nothing else to lose"), and low turnover intention (e.g., "I will try to resist"); also, high levels of silence may suggest both turnover intention (e.g., "I resign... I will quietly quit"), and low turnover intention (e.g., "I align with the leader" or

“I will try to covertly resist”). Silence, as a reaction to destructive leaders, allows such duality of interpretations, which disavows linear, dichotomized interpretations.

We propose a mediation model that tests the effect of exploitative leaders (a leader destructive style) on resistance behaviours through the nonlinear effect of silence (acquiescent, quiescent, opportunistic, and prosocial) on turnover intentions.

We collected data from 190 employees with a time lagged three-wave design to test a conceptual model with path analysis, and results suggest that silence can both contribute and penalise the intention to leave the organisation, depending on its motives and intensity: 1) when silenced by fear, a u-shape curve shows that both the absence and high presence of silence is associated with turnover intention; thus, those who do not want to leave are the ones who express moderate levels of fear – they escape from the impulsiveness of too little fear or the drive to escape fear; 2) an attenuated u-shape pattern is found for opportunist silence, where moderate levels of silence can be related to a kind of regulatory process and a more politically skilled posture; 3) when silenced by conformity, a close-to-inverted-u shape indicates that when moderate, silence is associated with turnover intention; 4) the same pattern is found in prosocial silence, where the low levels of turnover intention indicated by both low and high levels of silence may suggest that to protect the group (and the system) it may be important not to hold the information or to hold it absolutely; 5) moreover, results suggest that those who want to leave are the ones who engage in non-constructive resistance.

All in all, findings support the claim that silence does not necessarily translate into organizational disengagement. To understand silence, one needs to look more closely at its roots and its nonlinear trajectory; silence in reaction to exploitative leaders can be a way to dig under the fence or leap over it.

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**The dangers of discourse:
Heroic leadership talk as a contributor to mental health issues**

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Images of managerial work differ vastly depending on where you look. On the one hand, we find the ‘folklore’ (Mintzberg, 1975/1990) of managerial work being about inspiration, motivation, strategic transformation, and shaping values and culture – in short, it is about being a great leader. On the other, we find the everyday grind of a high workload, fragmentation, urgency, complicated relationships, stress, and possible burnout. The latter more realistic image of everyday managerial work has been observed repeatedly over the last 75 years (Carlsson, 1951; Mintzberg, 1975/1990; Stewart, 1982; Tengblad and Vie, 2012). Despite such recurring observations, however, we still find a strong prevalence of the first image: heroic and romantic imagery surrounding talk about leaders, leadership, and what managers are expected to do and be. ‘Leadership handbooks and popular media tout the idea that we can overcome any barrier through assertiveness, self-confidence, power-posing, resilience, gratitude, a makeover or the power of attraction’ (Liu, 2020). That this imagery can severely distort managerial self-image and self-understanding has been noted (Sveningsson and Larsson, 2006; Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Carroll, 2016; Clifton, 2014; Schnurr, 2009). In this paper we extend the argument: We propose that heroic leadership talk may contribute to mental health issues among managers.

We make this claim based on a study where managers, HR personnel, and corporate health specialists addressed topics of managerial mental health. In Sweden, the site of this study, approximately 90 % of all those who are on sick leave for a mental illness have a common mental disorder, and common mental disorders largely comprises the increase in sick leave rates among managers (Forte, 2020). In the period 2014–2018, before covid-19 and its consequences, corporate health provider Previa¹ reported that the overall sick-leave among

¹ Previa has subsequently been acquired by the international corporation Falck and operates under this brand in Sweden.

managers increased 50 %, for mental health issues 500 % (based on sick-leave data from 12 300 managers; Previa, 2019).

The participants unanimously described managers as being stressed out and facing a difficult work environment. At the same time, and unprompted by the researchers, in all groups arose a discussion about a managerial ideal of a self-sufficient, strong, unwavering, and resilient person; of the difficulties and risks of showing vulnerability; and of it being the responsibility of the individual manager to see to her or his own health. The mystery (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007) appearing in the focus groups discussions – the recognition of a difficult work environment on the one hand, and an individualization of responsibility, on the other – mirrors the tension between heroic images of leaders and leadership on the one hand and the reality of managerial work on the other. In this paper, we will address these tensions and suggest that not only does heroic and romantic leadership ideals fail to represent or improve everyday managerial work – they also contribute to managerial mental health issues. We identify how heroic leadership discourse in and of itself generates a view of managerial work that individualizes responsibility and pathologizes managers' responses to demanding work situations.

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IS IT ALL ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP? THE NECESSITY AND DARK SIDE OF
SUPERVISOR-SUBORDINATE RELATIONSHIPS IN NEGATIVE FEEDBACK
CONVERSATIONS

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Performance feedback has a long history in OB, management, and leadership research (Johnson et al., 2022). Nonetheless, research on feedback has shown inconsistencies in both the approaches employed and the results pertaining to the efficacy of feedback (Alvero et al., 2001; Johnson et al., 2022; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Ossenberrg et al., 2019; Panadero & Lipnevich, 2022; Sleiman et al., 2020; Wisniewski et al., 2020). Research has focused mainly on specific characteristics of providers, receivers, and the feedback message, but has yet to be successful in consistently predicting negative feedback success.

The current literature has indicated that the supervisor-subordinate relationship is an important factor for the success of performance appraisals, as the relationship quality relates to positive appraisal reactions (Pichler, 2012). However, performance appraisals and negative feedback differ as the latter is unsolicited, informal, and possibly more frequent; Also, performance appraisals may include positive feedback. Moreover, high-quality LMX relationships can involve workplace friendships (Boyd & Taylor, 1998), as members of high-quality LMX dyads may transform or extend their relationship into friendship (Tse et al., 2008). As such, inter-role conflict between informal and formal workplace relationships may occur, affecting employee outcomes or resource sharing between friends may nourish the feedback conversations (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). This leads us to question how the supervisor-subordinate relationship affect providers' and receivers' experiences of negative feedback, and vice versa.

Method

We adopted a qualitative method with a grounded theory approach as this allows us to discover new and fresh insights about topics about which some knowledge already exists (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). To promote transferability of our findings we adopted “purposeful sampling”;

We interviewed 66 leaders at different layers of management from different organizations in Belgium and the Netherlands (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Murphy et al., 2017). Interviews were semi-structured, recorded, and professionally transcribed verbatim. Transcripts had an average length of 23 pages and totaled 1.487 pages. After each block of interviews, we identified emerging themes and adjusted our protocol accordingly so that subsequent interviews could further develop our understanding of these themes (Charmaz, 2008). We used NVivo software for data management and analysis. We used memo-writing, and a two-step coding system to analyze each interview (Butterfield et al., 1996; Hollensbe et al., 2008; Kreiner et al., 2006; Murphy et al., 2017). The inter-rater reliability was .81, which is well above the threshold suggested to represent sufficient trustworthiness (.70; Cohen, 1960). Theoretical saturation was reached by the 40th transcript (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Murphy et al., 2017). Throughout the analytical process, we used “member-checking” of our emerging findings to ensure the trustworthiness of our coding and findings, and to promote the credibility of our resulting grounded models (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Murphy et al., 2017).

Findings

Supervisors and subordinates deemed two outcomes of negative feedback important. First, they considered feedback conversations successful when the subordinate understood the feedback, which often led to feedback acceptance. Second, receivers having an (negative) emotional response to the feedback was deemed desirable by both parties.

We discovered a cyclical relationship between supervisor-subordinate relationship quality and negative feedback success. To visualize this finding, we present our first grounded model in Figure 1. High-quality supervisor-subordinate relationships facilitate negative feedback success, and successful negative feedback conversations in turn nourish the relationship. Low-quality

relationships deter from negative feedback success, and a lack of negative feedback conversations or their success harms the relationship.

We found a curvilinear relationship between supervisor-subordinate relationship strength and negative feedback success, which is presented in Figure 2. Having a “*too good*” relationship makes the process of negative feedback provision and reception more challenging. The nature and strength of the supervisor-subordinate relationship are thus important factors for the success of the feedback conversation.

Discussion

Our findings add to the literature in several ways. First, we discovered what success of negative feedback entails. Even though the term ‘performance feedback’ contains the word ‘performance’, improved performance does not always have to be the key outcome. Second, we discovered how the supervisor-subordinate relationship is a boundary condition for effective negative feedback conversations. The importance of the relationship is acknowledged by both supervisors and subordinates. Considering the lack of understanding of negative feedback success, our findings add to the knowledge base on negative feedback and assist in further theory building. Moreover, whereas high-quality LMX relationships and workplace friendships have generally been considered beneficial workplace factors, understanding the potential dark sides, such as the increased difficulty with negative feedback, is necessary for our understanding of how and when supervisors can ensure successful negative feedback conversations.

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Appendix

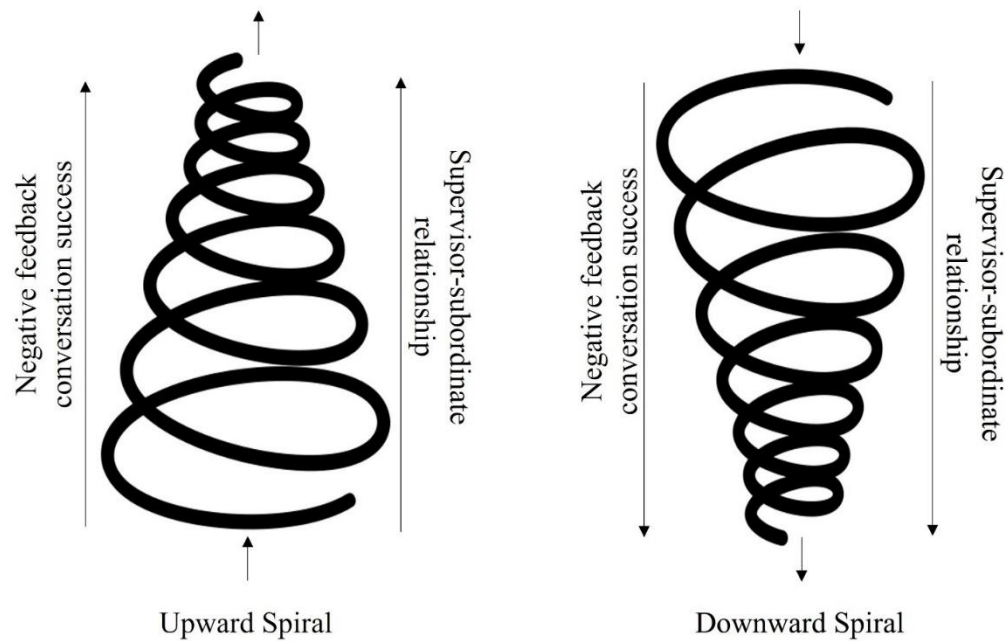


Figure 1. Cyclical Relationship between Provider and Receiver and the Efficacy of their Negative Feedback Conversations.

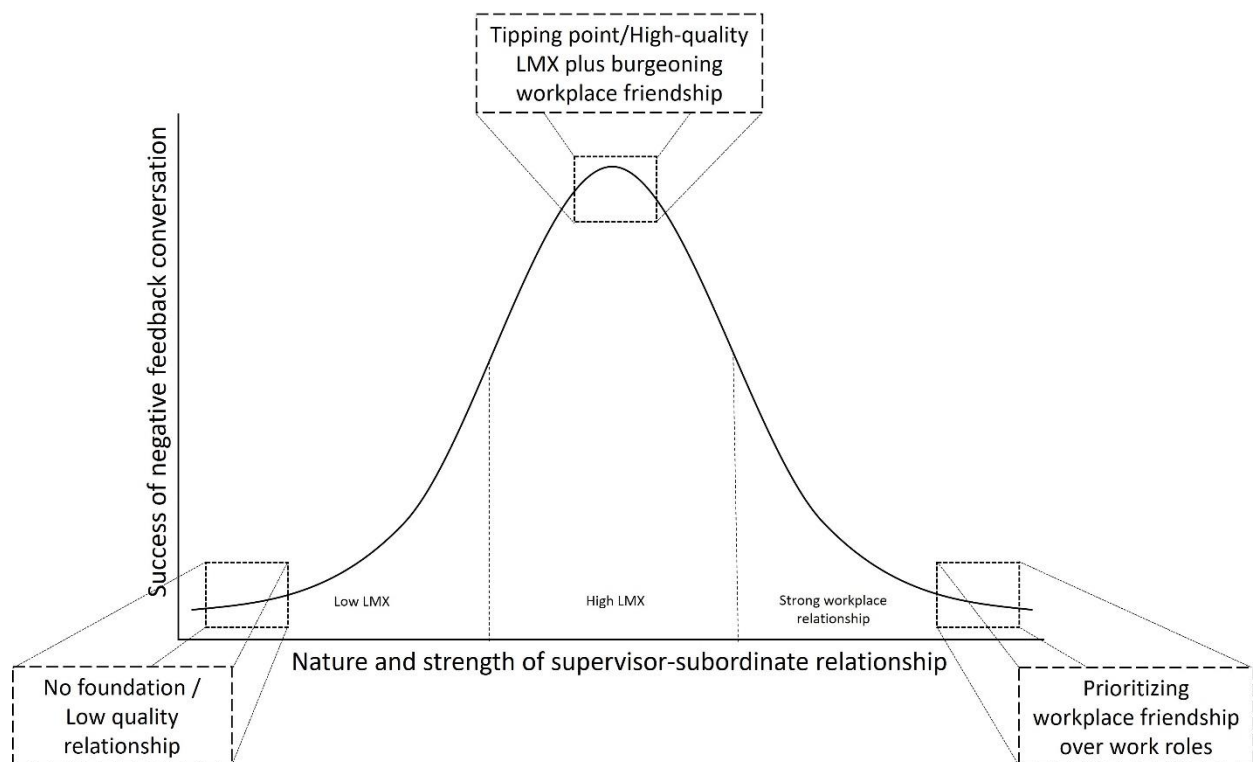


Figure 2. Curvilinear Relationship between Identification with Role-relationship and Success with Negative Feedback Conversations

**‘Everything Everywhere All at Once’:
A Systems Psychodynamics Interpretation of January 6th**

Sarah Chace

It is a critical commonplace in this area of study known as systems psychodynamics to say that the escalation of anxiety in groups, crowds, and societies creates a demand for ‘strongmen’ to step in and calm the waters; it therefore is not surprising that a considerable number of Americans voted for Trump in 2016. Among those social forces that were rising to the surface and causing collective anxiety were: Two successive terms of African American leadership in the White House; climate change; mass shootings; an increasingly aggressive Russia (had we really won the Cold War?); and the stirrings of #MeToo movement, which erupted a year later. A number of paradigm shifts were occurring at the same time, including a racial reckoning.

In this paper I turn to the psychodynamic theory of systems which has been well summarized by Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2020). Drawing upon their research, as well as that of other scholars of group relations broadly speaking, I turn an analytic lens to the events of January 6th using two constructs in particular: that of Le Bon’s and Canetti’s theory of crowds, and that of Bion’s basic assumptions (ba’s).

Bion’s basic assumptions (ba’s)

Bion’s theory of basic assumptions about groups provides a useful ‘cognitive filter’ (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020, p. 419) for the group dynamics of the crowd on January 6th. In Bion’s view, groups seek to contain their anxiety via three basic movements: dependency; fight/ flight; and pairing. Each of these dynamic attributions was visible on that day. First, the dependency upon an authority figure was the most obvious manifestation of ba/dependency. We need look no further than the slogans, signs, T-shirts, etc. to find expressions of dependency on an authority figure: ‘God, guns, and Trump’ is emblematic of this sentiment. Second, we have ba/fight/ flight. This basic assumption of a group’s tendencies is slightly more subtle. While the clear animating sentiment of the group was to fight (‘and if you don’t fight like hell you’re not going to have a country anymore’ Trump exhorted the crowd during his speech at the Ellipse that day), there was also the equally powerful impulse to flee. This was clearly present when Trump finally told the crowd to go home; it had an immediate effect. Finally, there is the notion of ba/pairing. ‘In the pairing mode, the group acts as if the pairing of two members will produce a solution to its challenges’ (ibid). In the case of January 6th, one might say that the pairing happened in reverse. Vice President Mike Pence and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi were ‘paired’ by the crowd in a kind of demonic coupling to produce a satanic offspring in the form of ‘the steal.’

Group Mind

Le Bon’s book *The Madness of Crowds* (1896) introduces the notion of ‘group mind.’ The author posits that the ‘civilized man’ will often lose himself in the cruder and often more brutish sentiments of the crowd, which can be fast moving as well as deadly. A number of documentaries depict interviews in which participants in the insurrection appeared to regret their actions, and whose affect seems wholly different than the collective personality that assaulted the Capitol.

We can also see the presence of depth psychology when considering Canetti’s (1978) work on crowds. One of the primal forces a rioting crowd seeks is to defend itself against is death (for example, with a public lynching). The production of a gallows and the chant of ‘Hang Mike

Pence' was not just a crowd getting 'out of hand,' and Pence's Secret Service agents understood this when they insisted on moving him to a more secure location shortly after the Capitol breach. The noose that was erected outside the Capitol that day was symbolic, but it had a very real function. In addition to serving notice that the protesters meant business with their threats (Edmondson, 2022), it served to 'other' the imminent demise of the Trump administration.

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