

The Business Case for Psychological Safety through the Lens of Destructive Leadership

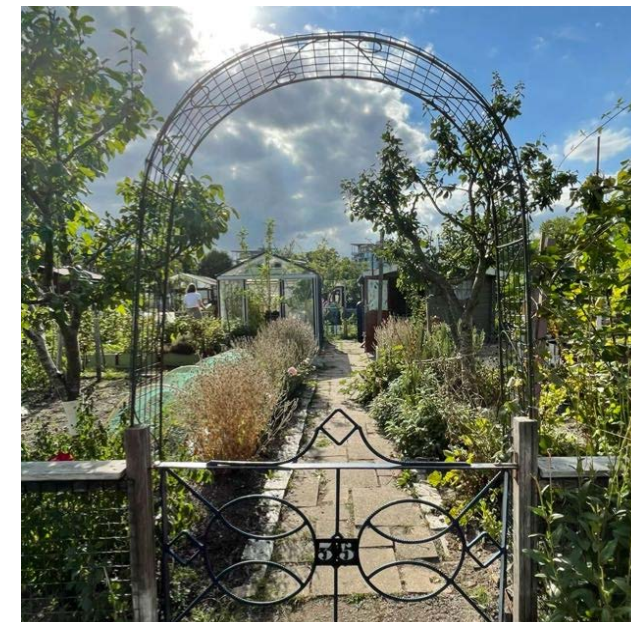
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- +15 years experience in the field of leadership and employee wellbeing
- This fall: Research Handbook on Destructive Leadership: Forms, Context, and Boundary Conditions



Agenda

- Part I Introducing Psychological Safety & Destructive Leadership
- Part II Impact of Destructive Leadership
- Part III Why Destructive Leadership Continues



Psychological safety

What does psychological safety mean to you?

Go to: menti.com



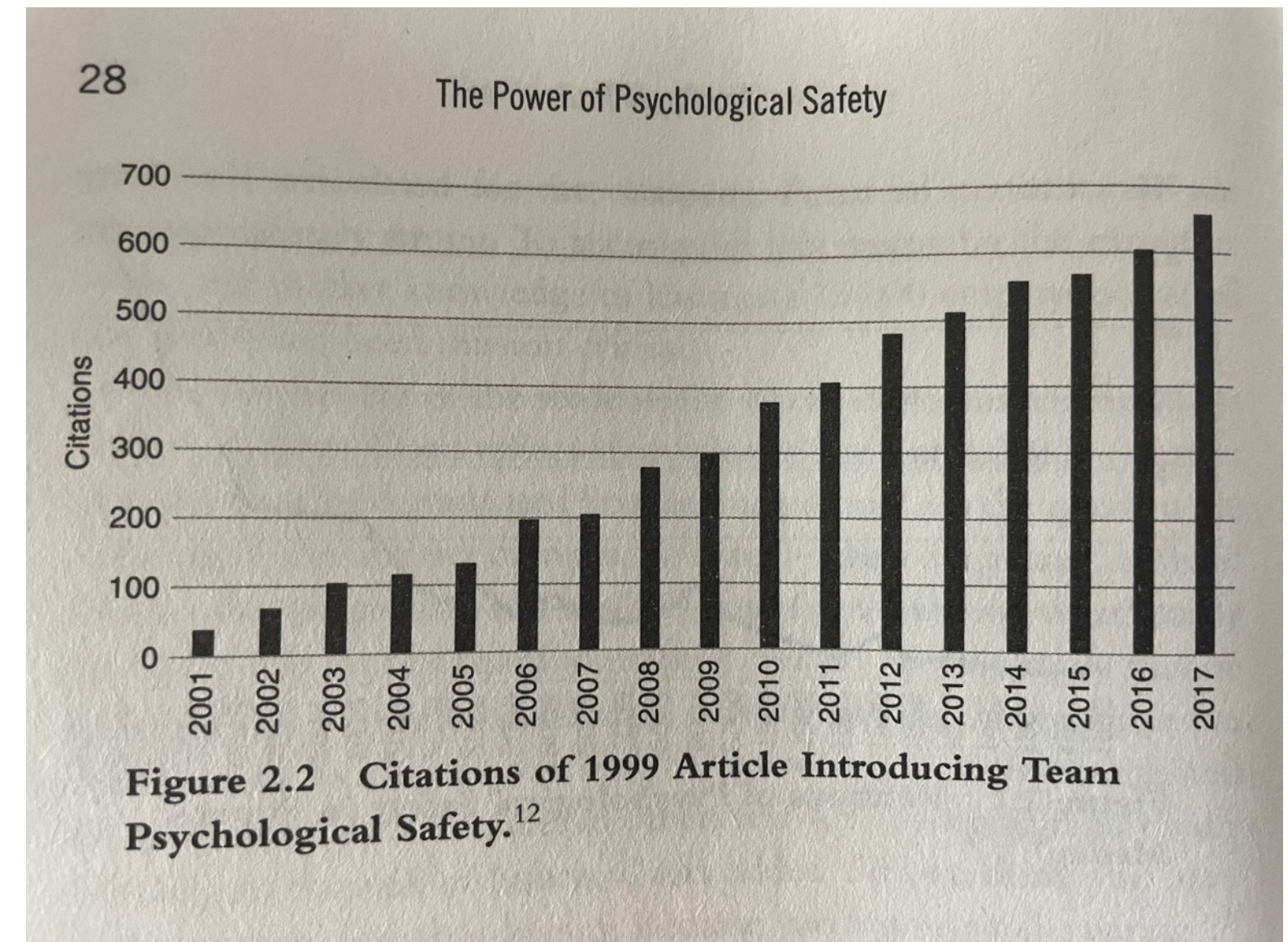
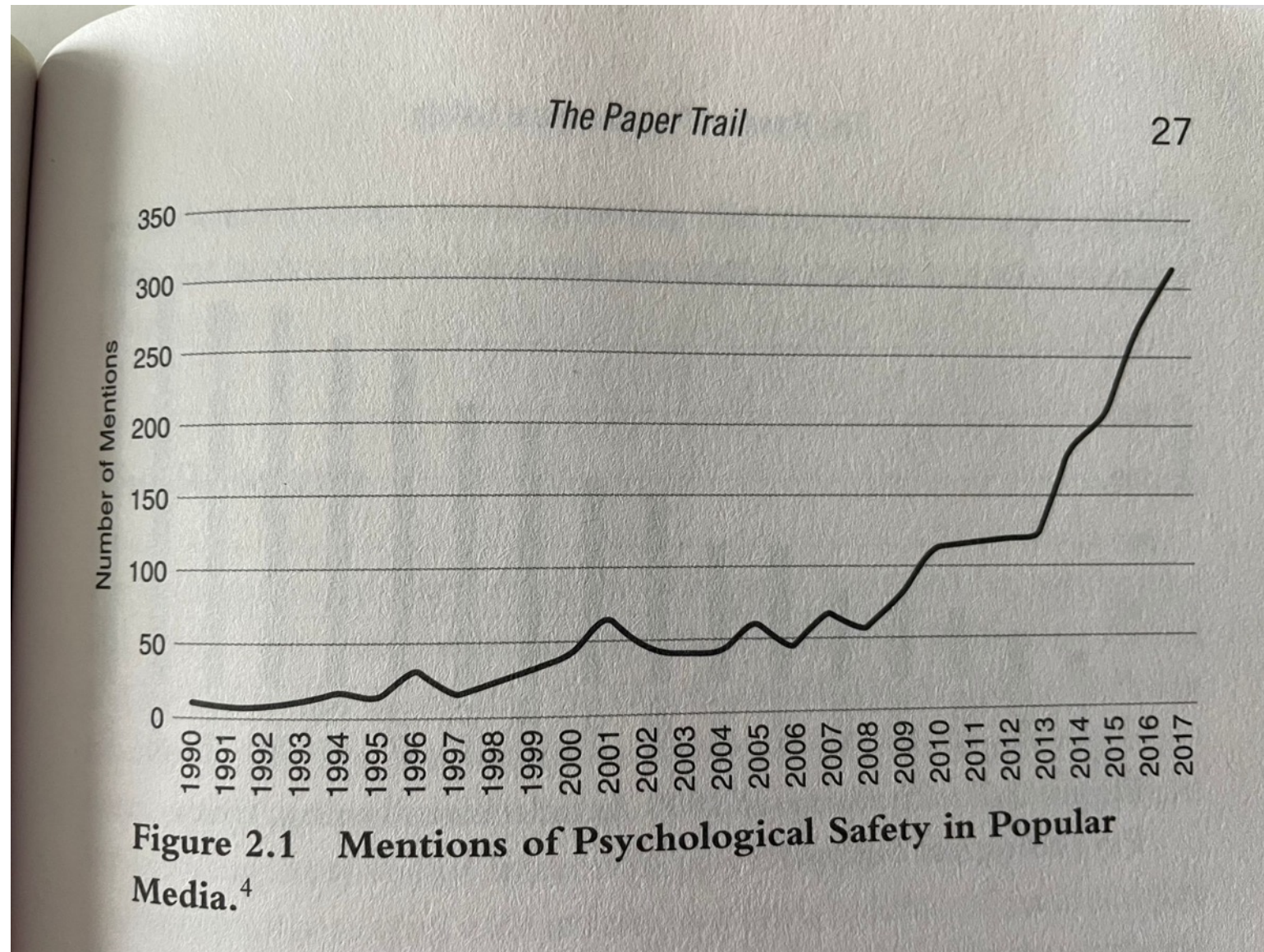
Psychological safety

Psychological safety is the belief that employees can express themselves, share their ideas, voice concerns, and ask questions without fearing negative consequences. It means that employees feel safe enough **to take interpersonal risks**, which can include admitting mistakes, offering innovative ideas, or challenging the status quo.

Why is it so difficult to speak up?

- We don't want to come across as ignorant, incompetent, or negative
- Impression management is very natural behavior: agreeing with your supervisor, sharing successes but not failures, being reluctant to ask for help

Psychological safety in science & practice



Doesn't fear motivate people to work hard?

It's an illusion!



- One of the world's largest automakers
- Deliberate manipulation of emissions tests for certain diesel vehicles
- CEO had created "a reign of terror and a culture where performance was driven by fear and intimidation"
- CEO resigned, 1.2 billion dollar fine

Dangerous silence

ca. 1706:13	KLM-1	We gaan. (We're going)
1706:18.19	Tenerife tower	OK.
1706:19.3	PanAm	No .. eh.
1706:20.08	Tenerife tower	Stand by for take-off, I will call you.
1706:20.3	PanAm	And we're still taxiing down the runway, the clipper one seven three six.
1706:19.39 -		RDO and APP communications caused a shrill noise in KLM cockpit - messages not heard by KLM crew.
1706:23.19		
1706:25.6	Tenerife tower	Roger alpha one seven three six report when runway clear
1706:29.6	PanAm	OK, we'll report when we're clear.
	Tenerife tower	Thank you
1706:32.43	KLM-3	Is hij er niet af dan? {Is he not clear then?}
1706:34.1	KLM-1	Wat zeg je? {What do you say?}
1706:34.15	KLM-?	Yup.
1706:34.7	KLM-3	Is hij er niet af, die Pan American? {Is he not clear that Pan American?}
1706:35.7	KLM-1	Jawel. {Oh yes. - emphatic}
1706:40:00		PanAm captain sees landinglights of KLM Boeing at approx. 700m
1706:47.44	KLM-1	[Scream]

<https://tailstrike.com/database/27-march-1977-klm-4805/>



The risks of an unsafe work environment

- Decreased employee well-being, customer satisfaction, etc.
- Resistance to change
- Increased turnover
- Increase silence
- Perpetuation of toxic and unethical workplace behavior



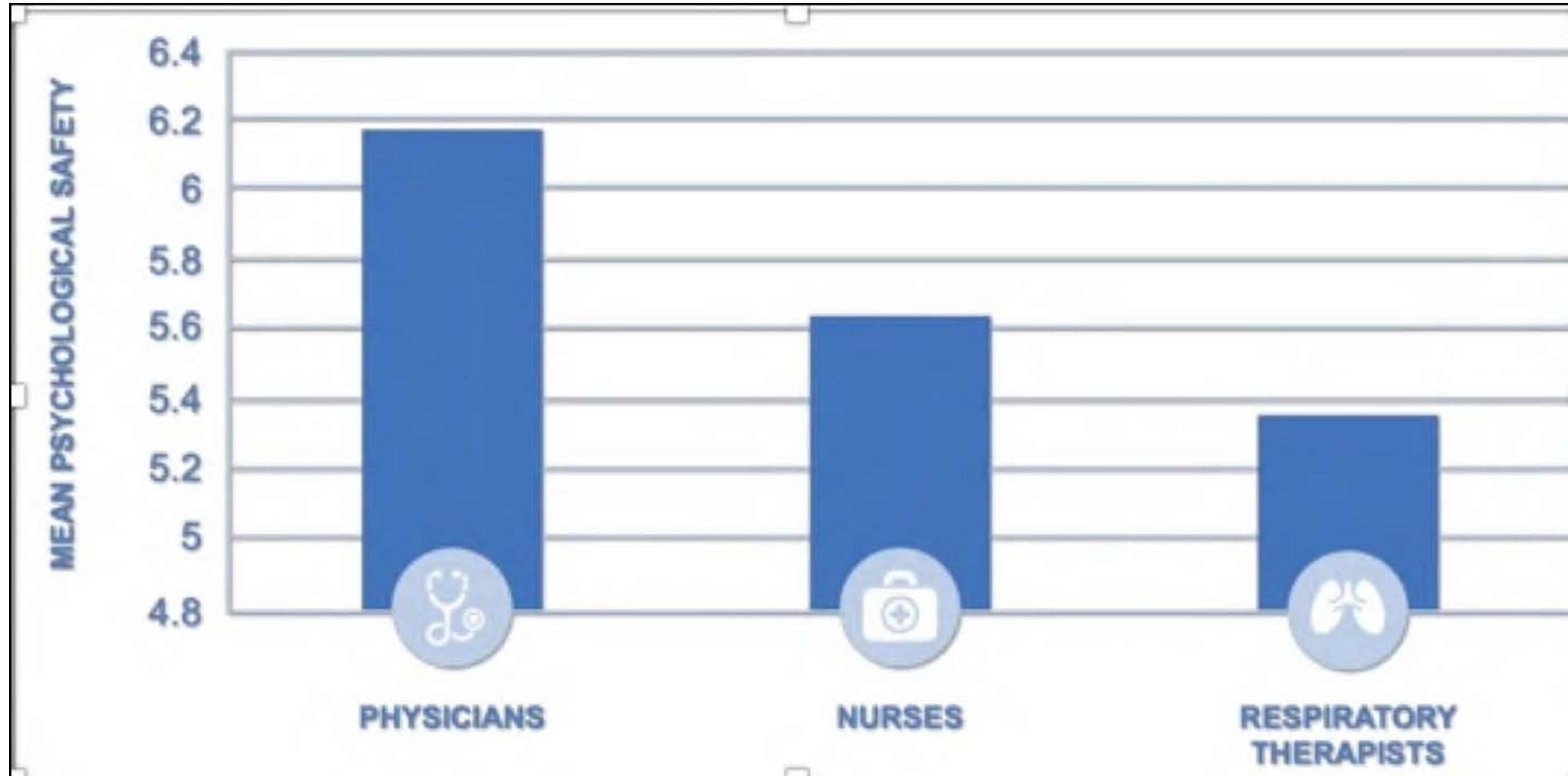
e.g., Edmondson, 2018; Edmondson & Lei, 2014

The benefits of a safe work environment

- Enhanced employee well-being and engagement
- Increased customer satisfaction
- Increased voice
- Higher performance
- Higher organizational resilience
- Context for learning



Psychological safety and hierarchy



e.g., Nembhard & Edmondson (2006)

The image features a white background with two large, irregular orange shapes in the corners. One is in the top right corner, and the other is in the bottom left corner. Centered on the page is the text "Unsafe work environment through destructive leadership" in a bold, black, sans-serif font, arranged in two lines.

Unsafe work environment through destructive leadership

Abusive supervision

“Subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the **sustained** display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact.”

Abusive supervision

Tepper (2000) Scale Items

Item	Factor	
	1	2
1. Ridicules me. ^a	.23	.71
2. Tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid. ^a	.28	.61
3. Gives me the silent treatment.	.45	.49
4. Puts me down in front of others. ^a	.30	.79
5. Invades my privacy.	.58	.29
6. Reminds me of my past mistakes and failures.	.46	.50
7. Doesn't give me credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort.	.60	.29
8. Blames me to save himself/herself embarrassment.	.63	.30
9. Breaks promises he/she makes.	.78	.17
10. Expresses anger at me when he/she is mad for another reason.	.53	.45
11. Makes negative comments about me to others. ^a	.40	.68
12. Is rude to me.	.54	.55
13. Does not allow me to interact with my coworkers.	.42	.29
14. Tells me I'm incompetent. ^a	.16	.65
15. Lies to me.	.76	.23

Abusive supervision

“I dread each day coming to work. Once inside the door, I feel “chained” to my desk like a prisoner. My boss is the “prison warden” who delights in “torturing” me with a daily barrage of public criticism and ridicule. I feel so powerless, like a “pawn” being played in one of his games.”

Abusive supervision

“It was in a factory job, that was already a toxic environment. The supervisor would berate people for mistakes the other shift made, keep tabs on small things people did against the rules (just to punish them later for it, when it was convenient), and generally make life a living hell for anyone who wasn't his personal friend.”

Abusive supervision

“One day, on a Zoom call, she gathered everyone in the company and shouted at me for 45 minutes about being unavailable at 8 pm the night before (the contract was mon–fri 8–16:30). When another senior manager tried to defend me, she shouted at him too to stop talking. This kind of thing happened often, almost daily even on the weekends. She would typically target one person until they quit or got given a separation package (they were fired, basically)..”


It's rare, right?

- Its overreported
- Non-abusive behavior is reported as abusive
- Diseases are considered rare if they affect 1 in 1500/2000 people

It's rare, right?

- 11% of Dutch employees are sometimes exposed to aggression from their supervisor.
- 13.5% of US employees were exposed to aggression from their superior during the last 12 months.
- 36.4–43.5% of Swedish employees report being exposed to destructive leadership.
- 33.5%–61% of Norwegian employees report their immediate superiors as showing some kind of consistent and frequent destructive leadership during the last six months.

It's rare, right?

- Even if at this moment, the amount of people working with an abusive supervisor is “low”, over their career, many people encounter an abusive supervisor at some point in their career
 - We need to take it seriously because of the lasting effects on employees
- 
- A large, solid yellow arc is positioned in the bottom right corner of the slide, curving from the bottom edge towards the right edge.

Unfortunately, it's all too common!

Ryanair dismisses chief pilot over 'unacceptable behaviour'

Email to staff says airline had uncovered pattern of harassment of junior female pilots



observer.com

Fixing a Toxic Culture Like Uber's Requires More Than Just a New CEO | Observer

3 French Executives Convicted in Suicides of 35 Workers

The employees at France Télécom killed themselves in the mid-2000s after management sought to reduce the work force through a policy of harassment, a court found.

NIEUWS

Structureel grensoverschrijdend gedrag bij talkshow DWDD: 'Het gevoel was: de zeis kan altijd onverwacht vallen'

The Business Case for Reducing Destructive Leadership



It's impact

Societal Impact

- Increased health care costs
- Increased use of the legal system

Organizational Impact

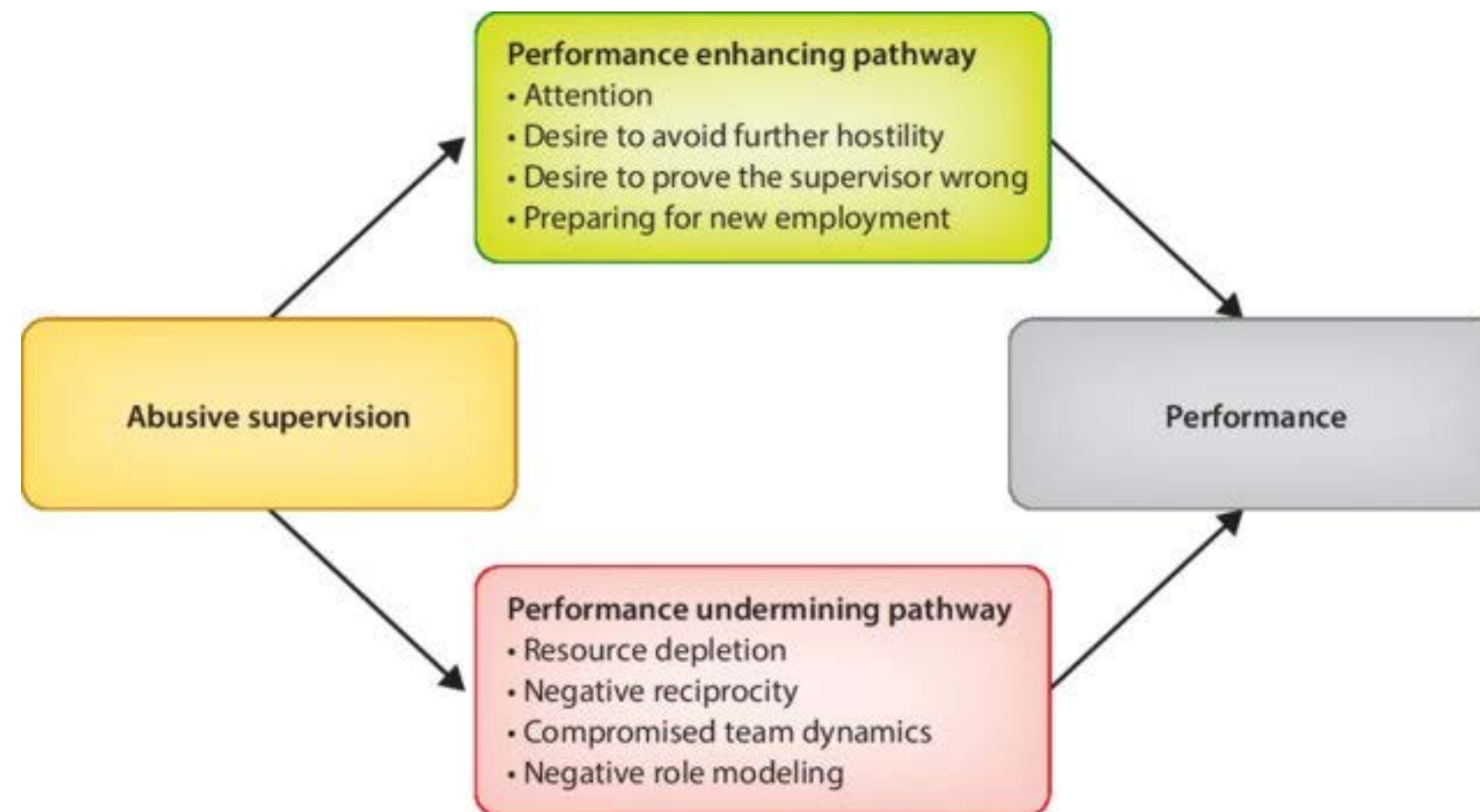
- Increased absenteeism and turnover
- Reduced performance
- Increased workplace deviance
- Reduced voice, increased silence

Cost American companies around **\$23 billion** each year in absenteeism, health care expenses, lost productivity!

If abusive supervision could be reduced by just 1%, organizations could save \$238 million annually

Organizational Impact

Why abusive supervision is not a strategic motivator



Impact on the Team

- Reduced knowledge sharing due to isolation
- Increased social support

"Camaraderie. As a group we united in adversity."

Impact on the Employee

- Insomnia, anxiety, depression
- Substance abuse/problem drinking
- Shame, guilt, fear
- Reduced self-worth
- Reduced life satisfaction, increased work-family conflict
- **Suicide**

Impact on the Supervisor

- Guilt
- Decreased engagement
- Decreased need fulfillment

Abusive Supervision

“Subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the **sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors**, excluding physical contact.”

On average, abusive supervisory relationship last around 2 to 3 years, ranging from one month to 30 years.

Reasons abusive supervisory relationships ended

- Employee left (+/- 50%)
- Leader left (6.5 - 12.8%)
- Leader got fired (5.8 - 6.7%)
- Victim got fired (3.4 - 6.5%)
- Situation was resolved (1.9%)
- **Leader was confronted (1.9%)**

Why it continues over time...

The Barriers Model of Abusive Supervision



- People often face multiple barriers across levels
- Barriers make it difficult to see that something is amiss
- Barriers make it difficult to take action

The Barriers Model of Abusive Supervision



Barriers in the larger societal context

“Start a savings account. Have a back up career. I’ve been there. The key is, don’t get yourself so dependent on any one job.”

The Barriers Model of Abusive Supervision



Barriers in the organizational context

“No one to talk to from the upper management. I think they simply did not care what was happening.”

“Camaraderie. As a group we united in adversity.”

The Barriers Model of Abusive Supervision



Barriers in the organizational context

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P8fsrWg6No>

The Barriers Model of Abusive Supervision



Barriers due to the abusive relationship

“There are plenty of other destructive leaders. Cope if you can, because the grass is not always greener. I have had several bosses say “you will never work anywhere else ever again”..”

The Barriers Model of Abusive Supervision



Barriers within the abused follower

“I was young at the time and had little to compare it to.”

Thank you for your attention!



www.kimberleybreevaart.com

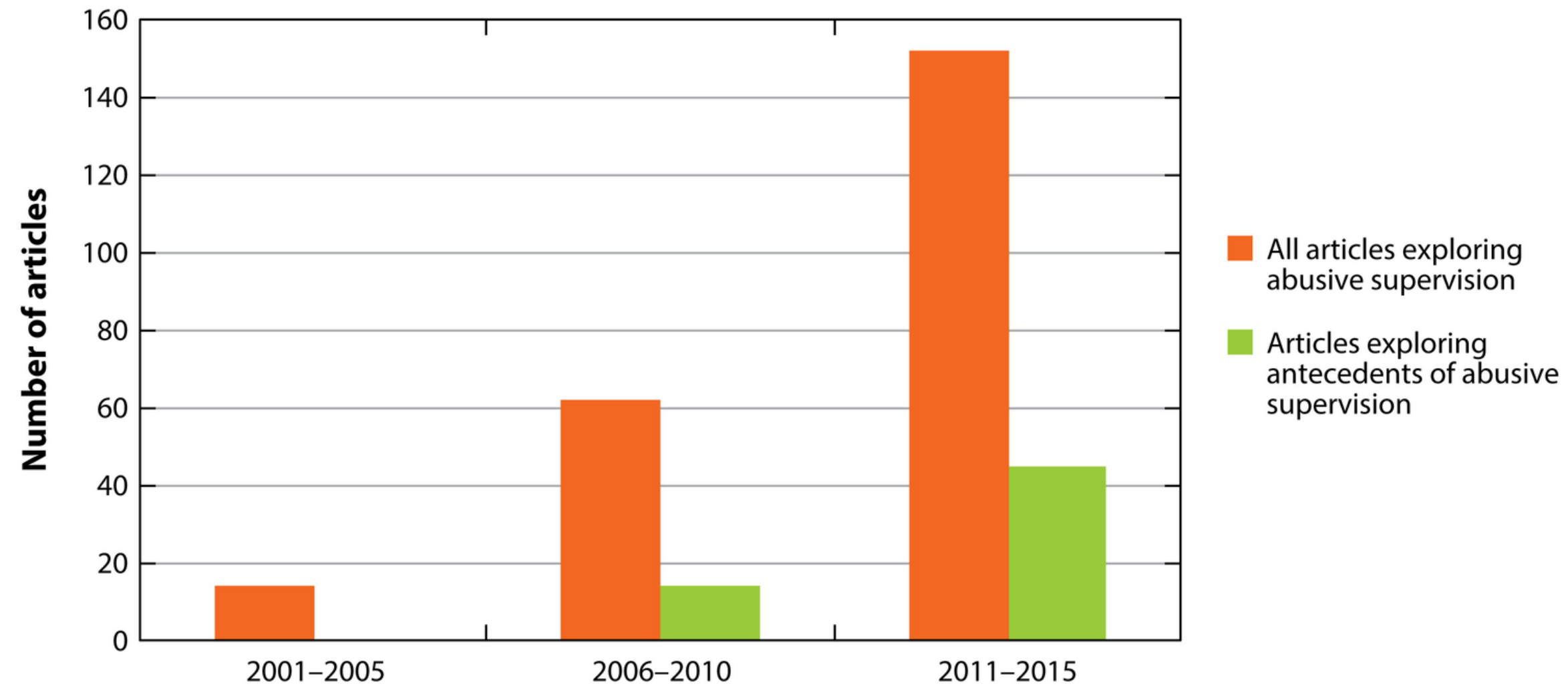
breevaart@essb.eur.nl


Origins of Destructive Leadership:

Why do they do it?



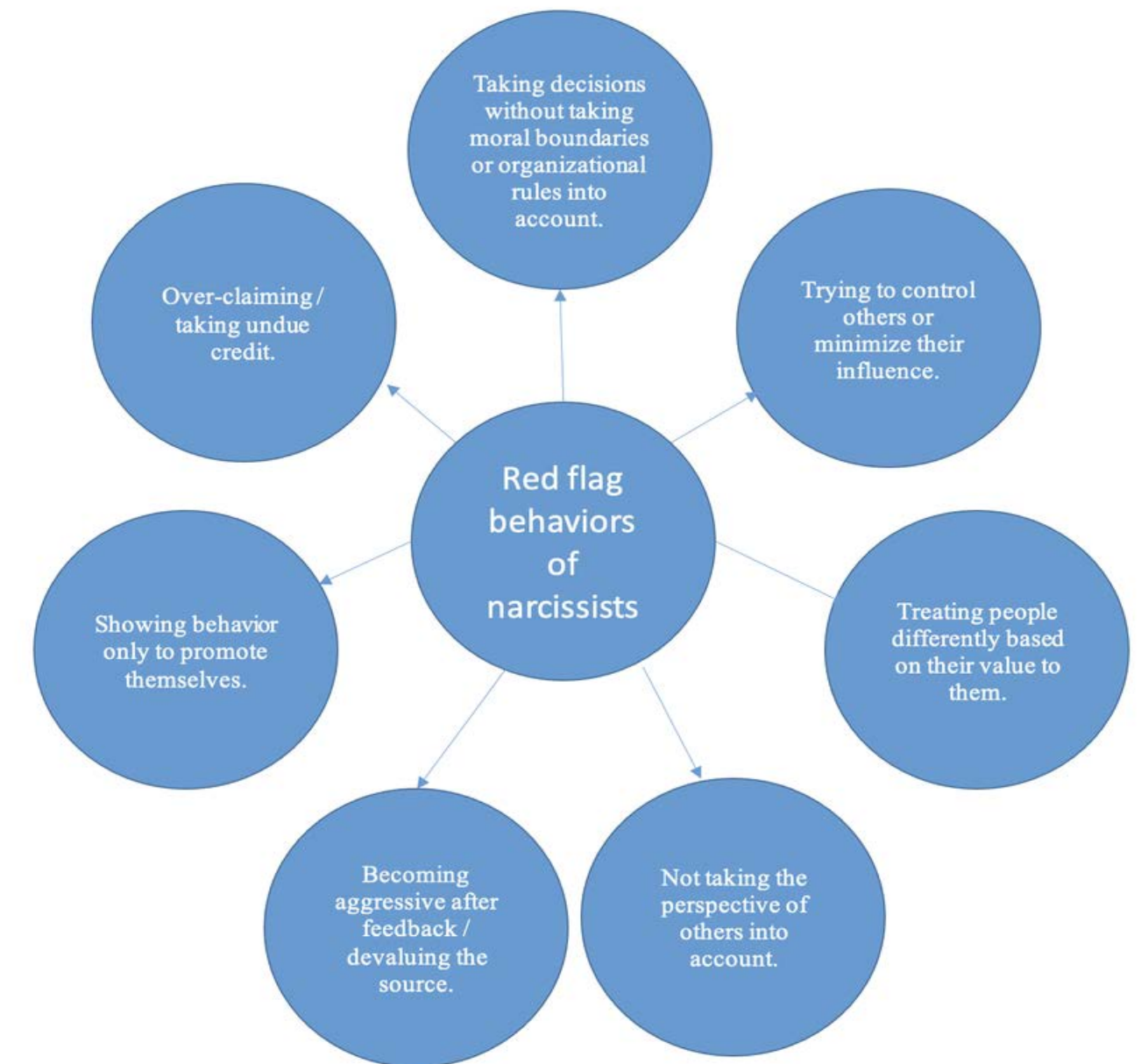
Research on origins of abusive supervision



 Tepper BJ, et al. 2017.
Annu. Rev. Organ. Psychol. Organ. Behav. 4:123–52

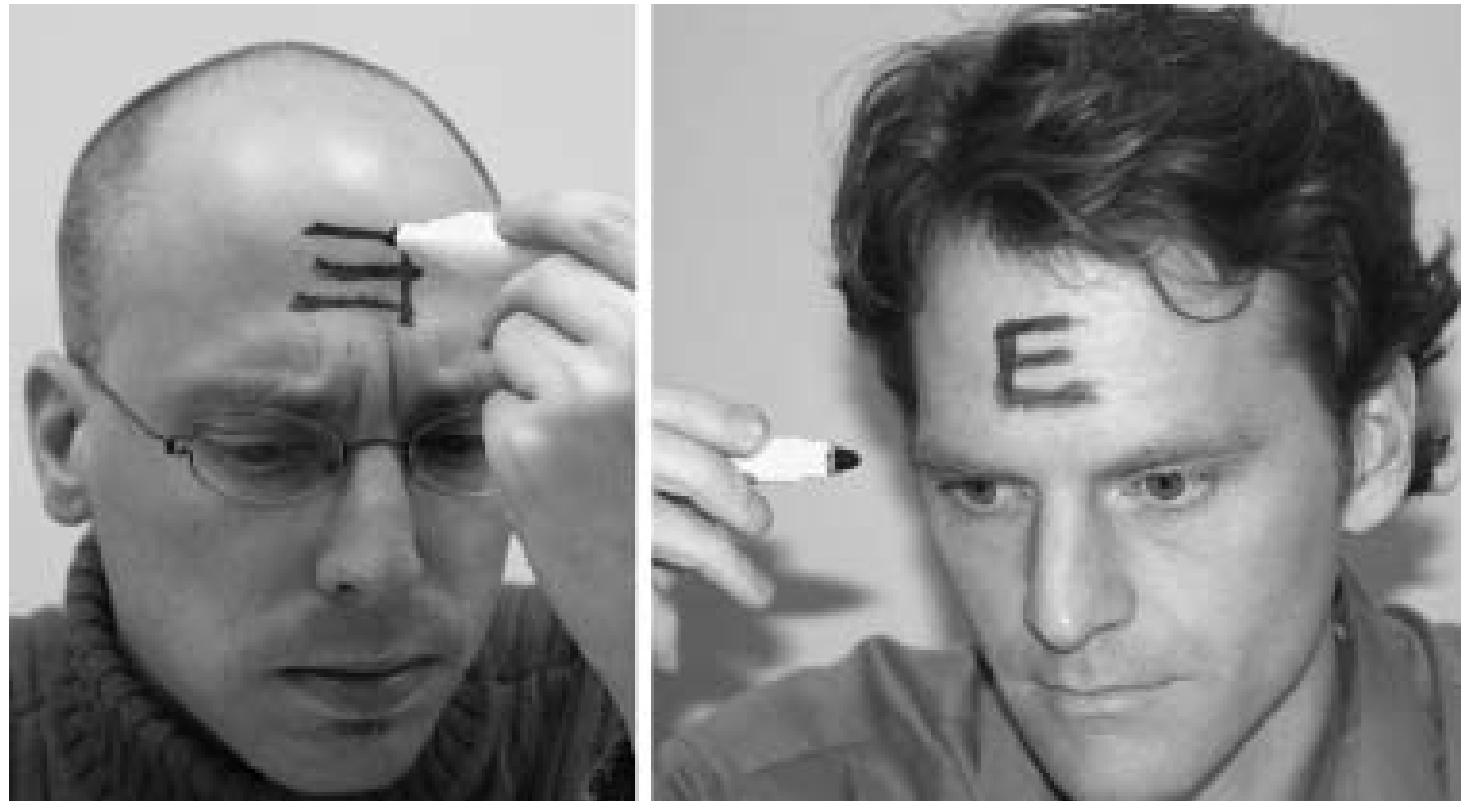
1. Individual Differences

- High Narcissism and Machiavellianism
- Less agreeable, less emotionally stable, less honest and humble
- Low emotional intelligence



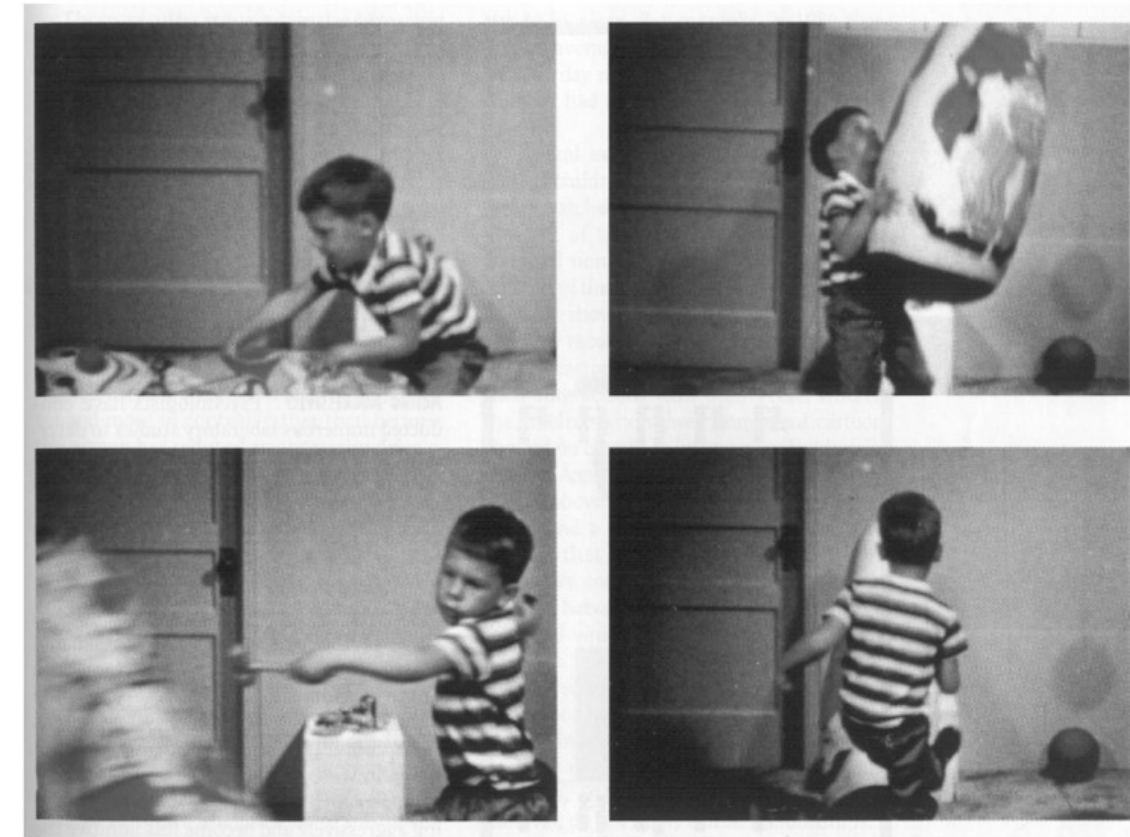
2. Power

- Sense of entitlement
- Lack of empathy
- Lack of feedback seeking and receiving



3. Social Learning

- History of family undermining
- Organizational culture/norms
- Country culture/norms
- Trickle-down effect/ displaced aggression



Bandura's research showed children imitating aggression they had seen.

4. Unhealthy Work Environment

- High stress, low resources
- No recovery from work, poor sleep quality
- Self-regulation impairment

France employees are getting the legal right to avoid work emails outside working hours.

The new law, which has been dubbed the "right to disconnect", comes into force on 1 January.

Companies with more than 50 workers will be obliged to draw up a charter of good conduct, setting out the hours when staff are not supposed to send or answer emails.

France has a working week of 35 hours, in place since 2000.

Dissimilarities

- Similarity attraction theory
- Deep-level dissimilarities

