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Title: The dark side of teaching: Destructive instructor-leadership and its association with students' affect, behaviour, and cognition

Abstract

Leadership theory can provide a route for investigating teaching via the concept of instructor-leadership. Instructor-leadership is defined as a process whereby instructors exert intentional influence over students to guide, structure, and facilitate classroom activities and relationships in a class. Instructor-leadership in higher education research has focused primarily on constructive leadership. However, the classroom context is also conducive to destructive leadership. The objectives of this study are to (a) conceptualize destructive instructor-leadership and (b) investigate the association between destructive instructor-leadership and student reactions. Using 13 in-depth semi-structured student interviews at management schools across various universities worldwide, the results of a thematic analysis indicate that destructive instructor-leadership can be conceptualized as three dimensions, including callous communication, chaotic carelessness, and irresponsibility. The interview data are then used to demonstrate that destructive instructor-leadership is associated with students' affective, behavioural, and cognitive reactions. Theoretically, this study (a) contributes the concept of destructive instructor-leadership, (b) extends previous organizational behaviour research on destructive leadership by offering a multidimensional concept, and (c) examines the reactions of two manifestations of destructive leadership. Limitations, suggestions for future research, and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords

Destructive leadership, instructor-leadership, leadership, higher education, teaching.

Introduction

In an interview conducted by Anding (2005), Robert E. Quinn states that in his walks around a university campus, he would look through the windows of classrooms to observe the body language of students. In a few of the classrooms, 'the students were on the edge of their seats [and] deeply involved' whereas in the majority of classes, 'students were draped over their desks, only half awake' (Anding, 2005, p. 488). Quinn believed that the few classes in which students were highly engaged were led by teachers 'who turned ordinary students into extraordinary students' (Anding, 2005, p. 488). Quinn goes on to explain the potential usefulness of constructive leadership theory in creating highly engaged classes. But, how do we explain those classrooms with slumped students? Was such body language simply indicative of 'ordinary teachers' as suggested by Quinn or could it be that, in some of these classes, students were being taught by leaders of a more sinister nature?

Leadership 'involves a process whereby intentional influence is exerted over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization' (Yukl, 2006, p. 3). Management research typically focuses on leadership in the organizational context. However, leadership can also exist in less formal groups, for example, housewives who are active in their community, leaders of movements, and students (Bass, 1997). One unique quasi-organizational setting in which leadership can exist is the classroom. In the classroom, teaching and leadership can be regarded as the same process in that teachers and leaders 'use human influence to impact other people' (Anding, 2005, p. 489). Instructors use influence to guide classroom activities and facilitate relationships amongst the group of students in their class. This form of leadership is referred to as instructor-leadership.

Adopting Yukl's definition of leadership (Yukl, 2006), I define instructor-leadership as a process whereby instructors exert intentional influence over students to guide, structure, and facilitate classroom activities and relationships in a class. Instructor-leadership researchers provide support for the use of supportive leadership behaviours in the classroom, e.g. behavioural leadership (e.g. Baba & Ace, 1989; Dawson, Messe, & Phillips, 1972) and transformational leadership (Balwant, Stephan, & Birdi, 2014; Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009; Harvey, Royal, & Stout, 2003; Ojode, Walumbwa, & Kuchinke, 1999; Pounder, 2008; Walumbwa, Wu, & Ojode, 2004). These studies have shown that supportive instructor leadership is positively related to a myriad of desirable student outcomes including effort, satisfaction, perceived leader effectiveness, cognitive learning, affective learning, and academic performance. Even though instructor-leadership has been examined primarily as a constructive force, the leadership influence process is not inherently constructive – there is a darker side to leadership.

Organizational behaviour approach to destructive leadership

Research has focused heavily on the positive side of leadership. However, researchers acknowledge that leadership can sometimes be destructive. Destructive leadership has adopted a variety of labels in the organizational behaviour literature, including abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994), tyrannical leadership (Johan Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2007), unsupportive managerial behaviours (Rooney & Gottlieb, 2007), despotic leadership (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008), and toxic leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 2004). Krasikova, Green, and LeBreton (2013) review these various forms of destructive leadership to arrive at a conceptualization that clarifies the characteristics and boundaries of destructive leadership. They define destructive leadership as 'volitional behaviour by a leader that can harm or intends to harm a leader's organization and/or followers by (a) encouraging followers to

pursue goals that contravene the legitimate interests of the organization and/or (b) employing a leadership style that involves the use of harmful methods of influence with followers, regardless of justifications for such behaviour' (Krasikova et al., 2013, p. 1310). This definition highlights three key distinctions between destructive leadership and ineffective leadership or management.

First, harmful behaviours can only be classified as destructive leadership if they are used in the *process of leading* followers towards some goal. Hence, deviant work actions that are not used in the process of leading, e.g. counterproductive work behaviour, are not regarded as destructive leadership. Similarly, a laissez-faire leadership style does not involve leading, and thus represents the absence of leadership rather than destructive leadership.

Second, the definition refers to *two manifestations* of destructive leadership. The first manifestation describes a leader who influences followers towards a goal that is contradictory to the organization's interests. For instance, if an organization aims for high quality products through a number of quality control processes, a leader who persuades employees to forgo some of the testing procedures to increase the speed of production, encourages the pursuit of a destructive goal. The second manifestation refers to leaders who use harmful behaviours in the process of leading employees towards a goal. Using the same example, a leader who uses abusive behaviours towards followers to ensure that each product passes all quality control tests, is using a destructive leadership style. Schyns and Schilling (2013) add that such behaviours are only harmful if they are perceived by followers as being hostile or obstructive. Although both manifestations are independent, they can be employed simultaneously by the same leader.

Finally, destructive leadership is defined as *volitional*. With reference to the two manifestations stated above, this means that the leader chooses to follow the destructive goal, employ the destructive leadership style, or both. Krasikova et al. (2013) explain that a leader may

intend to harm, but they are not necessarily consciously aware that the chosen goal or actions are harmful. Rather, they may develop unconscious rationalizations to trick themselves into believing that such destructive leadership is necessary in order to protect their ego (James & LeBreton, 2010). Krasikova et al. (2013) assert that volition is key to distinguishing between destructive leadership and ineffective leadership. Destructive leadership describes the use of intentional leadership actions that are harmful whereas ineffective leadership refers to the unintentional absence of leadership due to a leader's inaptitude and/or low motivation to lead (Krasikova et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the leader's volitional behaviours can only be considered destructive leadership if they are *sustained* over a period of time (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). In other words, as opposed to a single destructive incident, the behaviour must be repeated in order to classify it as destructive leadership. As stated by Schyns and Schilling (2013, p. 141) 'a boss who has a bad day and takes it out on his or her followers should not be considered as a destructive leader'.

Destructive leadership is associated with many harmful outcomes. A recent meta-analysis by Schyns and Schilling (2013) showed that destructive leadership adversely affects followers' attitudes towards the leader, job satisfaction, job-related attitudes, justice, commitment, positive self-evaluation, and well-being. In addition, such leadership is positively associated with undesirable consequences such as follower resistance, turnover intention, counterproductive work behaviour, negative affectivity, and stress (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Researchers examine destructive leadership outcomes primarily in the corporate context. However, in this paper, I propose that destructive leadership can also exist in instructor-student relationships.

Educational approach to destructive leadership

There is a dearth of research on destructive instructor-leadership. In the education literature, I highlight two concepts that I believe are worth mentioning with regards to destructive leadership in the classroom context – teacher misbehaviours and disconfirmation. Teacher *misbehaviours* are defined as those teacher behaviours that disrupt student learning (Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991). Instructor misbehaviour is typically conceptualized as three dimensions including offensive, indolent, and incompetent (Kearney et al., 1991). *Offensiveness* refers to teachers verbally abusing students (Banfield, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2006). *Indolence* is akin to the ‘absent-minded’ professor who is forgetful (Banfield et al., 2006). *Incompetence* means that teachers lack basic teaching skills (Banfield et al., 2006). Indolence and incompetence are regarded as ineffective leadership, and thus cannot be regarded as destructive leader behaviour (Krasikova et al., 2013). However, offensive behaviour seems to share the same conceptual space as intentionally harmful behaviour proposed in destructive leadership theory. Similar to the offensive behaviour dimension, a concept called disconfirmation also seems to tap into destructive leader behaviours in the classroom context.

Teacher *disconfirmation* is defined as ‘the process by which teachers communicate to students that they are not endorsed, recognized or acknowledged as valuable, significant individuals’ (Ellis, 2000, p. 266). Hence, like the offensive dimension of instructor misbehaviour, disconfirmation represents one manifestation of destructive leadership – the use of harmful methods in the process of leading students towards a goal. These harmful methods are inclusive of behaviours such as rudeness; embarrassing and belittling; unwillingness to listen; arrogance and use of intimidation; communicating that he/she does not have enough time; and showing favoritism. The other manifestation of destructive leadership – a leader who influences

followers towards a goal that is contradictory to the organization's interest – is not apparent in the teacher disconfirmation concept. Nonetheless, Ellis' disconfirmation factor, as well as the offensiveness dimension of instructor misbehaviour, empirically supports the notion that instructors can use destructive leadership in the classroom context. This is hardly surprising given that the classroom context is especially conducive to destructive leadership.

The uniqueness of the classroom context and destructive leadership

The leader-follower dynamics in classroom interactions are characterized by similar leadership dynamics to that of the supervisor-employee in that both feature forms of communication, control, motivation, direction, and power differentials. However, the instructor-student relationship in classroom interactions features unique characteristics that distinguish this relationship from that of the typical supervisor-employee. I propose that there are two main unique features of leader-follower dynamics in the classroom context – distance or nonimmediacy and temporary group dynamics.

Distance or nonimmediacy. Leadership dynamics depend upon how 'close' or 'distant' a leader and follower are from each other (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002). Education and communication researchers refer to closeness between an instructor and student in the classroom as 'immediacy'. Immediacy is defined as 'verbal and nonverbal communication expressed by teachers that reduces both physical and psychological distance between teachers and students' (Neuliep, 1997, p. 431). In addition to physical and psychological or social distance, organizational behaviour researchers add that distance includes a third factor called perceived interaction frequency (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002). In the corporate context, physical, psychological/social, and interaction frequency distance between leader and follower can vary considerably depending on the organization and professional context (Antonakis & Atwater,

2002). However, in the higher education classroom context, these three distance factors between instructor-leader and student-follower may be similar across higher education institutions (HEIs).

Physical distance refers to the location of the leader in relation to followers. In the higher education classroom context, instructors are likely to be physically distant because of increasing class sizes in recent times, i.e. ‘massification’ (Allais, 2014; Hornsby & Osman, 2014). In such large classes, instructors may be limited by the extent to which they can be physically close to students, e.g. difficulties in recalling names in large classes or the need to stand on a platform or stage to ensure visibility in large classes. Accordingly, empirical evidence suggests that larger classes are more distant than smaller ones (Kendall & Schussler, 2012).

Social or psychological distance is defined as ‘perceived differences in status, rank, authority, social standing, and power’ (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002, p. 682). In the instructor-student classroom relationship, students are likely to respect instructors because of instructors’ experience, knowledge, and/or confidence in the subject (Kendall & Schussler, 2012). Differences in knowledge level between instructor and student are likely to exist, particularly at the undergraduate level. These knowledge differences may limit interactions between instructors and students, and thus contribute to social distance in the relationship (Kendall & Schussler, 2012).

Perceived frequency of interaction refers to ‘the perceived degree to which leaders interact with their followers’ (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002, p. 686). With massification taking place in higher education, increasing student to staff ratios may limit the frequency of interactions instructors can have with students in the classroom. Antonakis and Atwater (2002) explain that ‘when leaders supervise a greater number of followers ... it theoretically becomes increasingly difficult for the leader to spend more time with his/her followers’. Hence, the

logistics of large-group teaching limits the extent to which instructors can spend time with their students, e.g. spending time to provide individualized feedback and guidance. With little frequency of interactions, the instructor would be perceived as being distant.

The coexistence of physical distance, social or psychological distance, and frequency of interactions determine overall distance in leader-follower relations. As explained above, I expect that the instructor-student relationship is likely to be distant. This distant relationship between instructor and student can be perceived by students as being instructor misbehaviour (Thweatt & McCroskey, 1996). Thweatt and McCroskey (1996, p. 202) explain that ‘nonimmediacy (or distance) acts as a[n] [instructor] misbehavior, even though students do not necessarily recognize it as a[n] [instructor] misbehavior at a conscious level’. Their findings show that distance overpowers the influence of good instructor behaviours, and can be perceived by students as misbehaviour. Even though misbehaviour is not entirely reflective of destructive leader behaviours, the association between distance and instructor misbehaviour offers some insight into how distance may be perceived by students in the classroom context.

Temporary groups. Much of leadership research has focused on the relationship between supervisor and employee in permanent work groups, with few exceptions (e.g. Lamude, Scudder, & Simmons, 2000). Permanent groups are formed for an indefinite time period to achieve an ongoing objective (Barker, 1992). In these groups, individuals are usually more tolerant of each other and more committed to the group than in temporary groups because of the ‘permanent’ duration of the group (Barker, 1992). Permanent groups are also likely to feature leader-follower dynamics that are different to those in temporary groups.

Temporary groups are created to accomplish a time-limited task, e.g. task forces or ad hoc groups (Barker, 1992). In these groups, individuals with diverse skills are usually brought

together to accomplish a task. In higher education, module¹ groups comprising of instructor and students are similar to temporary groups because these groups are designed to achieve set learning goals over a limited time-period. However, module groups are different to temporary corporate groups in that individuals are neither interdependent nor working towards completing a common task. Still, the temporary nature of module groups can encourage instructors' use of destructive leader behaviour. The temporary short-term lifespan of module groups means that there is little time for instructors to develop students' confidence in the module. In addition to time pressures, student-followers can also unintentionally block the instructor-leader's goal of promoting learning and achievement, e.g. students' immaturity or incompetence (Krasikova et al., 2013). In these situations, instructor-leaders may become frustrated that achievement of their goals is being thwarted, and turn towards using destructive leader behaviours to try to accomplish their goals (Krasikova et al., 2013).

Overall, the uniqueness of the classroom context has important implications for destructive leadership. First, students may perceive their instructors as destructive instructor-leaders because of the distance in the classroom context. Second, instructors are also likely to use destructive leader behaviours because of the short-term pressures in temporary groups. Taken together, these arguments offer compelling reasons for studying destructive leadership in module/classroom interactions.

Destructive leadership dimensionality

Despite the growing body of research on destructive leadership, little attention has been given to the dimensionality of this concept. Some researchers examine the dimensionality of counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) (e.g. Gruys & Sackett, 2003). However, CWB is not

¹ When describing a unit of teaching over an academic term, 'module' is typically used in the UK and Australia, whereas 'course' is typically used in the USA and Canada. Moreover, in the UK, a course is used to refer to an entire programme of modules.

the same as destructive leadership because CWB is not used in the process of leading, e.g. stealing and gossiping (Krasikova et al., 2013, p. 1310).

Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) found that abusive supervision can comprise of two dimensions, including active personal abuse (e.g. ridiculing) and passive acts of abuse (e.g. not giving credit for hard work). However, their passive-aggressive dimension includes certain behaviours that describe active abuse, e.g. expressing anger towards the follower when the leader is angry for another reason. Furthermore, Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) examined only the active dimension because aggressive behaviour was the focus of their study.

Another dimensional concept was offered by Goodyear, Crego, and Johnston (1992) who studied ethical issues in the supervision of student research. Using critical incident technique, Goodyear et al. (1992) found that unethical supervision comprises of dimensions such as incompetence, inadequate supervision, supervision abandonment, intrusion of values, abusive supervision, exploitive supervision, dual relationships, encouragement to fraud, and authorship issues. Some of these behaviours are indicative of destructive leadership (e.g. abusive supervision or exploitive supervision) whereas others indicate an absence of leadership (e.g. inadequate supervision or supervision abandonment). Even though Goodyear et al. (1992) offer insight into potential dimensions of destructive leadership, their focus was on ethical issues as opposed to the use of harmful behaviours in the process of leading followers towards a goal.

Manifestations of destructive instructor-leadership

In addition to the dearth of research on destructive leadership dimensions, researchers have yet to simultaneously examine both manifestations of destructive leadership (Krasikova et al., 2013). These two manifestations are leaders (a) encouraging followers to pursue goals that conflict with the organization's interests and (b) using harmful methods in influencing followers

towards a goal (Krasikova et al., 2013). The educational approach to destructive leadership in classroom interactions, i.e. teacher disconfirmation (Ellis, 2000), reflects only the second manifestation, i.e. use of harmful methods. Teacher disconfirmation does not reflect the first manifestation, i.e. contradictory organizational goals. The question then arises, can instructors lead students towards goals that conflict with HEIs' interests? Based on my review of destructive leadership including its dimensionality and manifestations, one of the main goals of this study is to build theory on the conceptualization of destructive instructor-leadership.

Destructive instructor-leadership and student reactions

This study also contributes to existing research by investigating the association between destructive instructor-leadership and student reactions in the classroom context. Ellis' research suggests that destructive instructor-leadership exists in the classroom vis-à-vis teacher disconfirmation (Ellis, 2000). However, she did not study the reactions of teacher disconfirmation. I attempt to address this gap in destructive instructor-leadership research by examining its association with students' affect, behaviour, and cognition in the classroom context. As explained earlier, in the classroom context, destructive leadership is likely to be especially harmful for students. In this study, I use an inductive approach to explore the associations between destructive instructor-leadership and student reactions.

Purpose of the study

In order to address the identified research gaps, and advance destructive leadership research, the purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to conceptualize destructive instructor-leadership and its potential dimensionality; and (2) to determine the association between destructive instructor-leadership and students' affect, behaviour, and cognition.

Method

Ethical considerations

All participants were informed about the subject beforehand via an information sheet. The information sheet covered various ethical issues such as the potential for harm or discomfort induced by reflecting on unpleasant experiences students may have had with destructive instructor-leaders, voluntary participation without coercion, freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions, the use and management of audio recordings, protocol if something went wrong, anonymity and confidentiality of responses, and ethical approval of the study. To supplement the information sheet, participants were required to initial a consent form prior to the interview. This form ensured that participants read and understood the information sheet, and agreed to take part in the study. In addition to the formal information sheet and consent form, I remained alert for any signs of discomfort that could become apparent during an interview, to determine whether or not to stop the interview. After each interview, I informed candidates that if they needed support for dealing with harmful repressed memories, which were exposed in their responses, they should visit the counseling service at their university and/or their personal doctor.

Sample size and participants

To determine an appropriate sample size, the main issue was theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theoretical saturation means sampling continues until no additional theoretical insight can be gained from extra data (Baker & Edwards, 2012). This approach required data collection and data analysis to occur simultaneously rather than separate stages (Baker & Edwards, 2012). Accordingly, at the end of each interview, I read over my notes to summarize the incidents, and determine whether both manifestations of destructive leadership

were adequately captured. In particular, I examined the transcripts to determine whether students reported the most common manifestation of using harmful methods to lead followers.

For theoretical saturation, I followed the two stages for data saturation for theory-based interview studies proposed by Francis et al. (2010). For the first stage, Francis et al. (2010) proposed an initial sample of 10 interviews. Following these 10 interviews, the second stage involves collecting data from 3 additional interviews to determine whether any new themes emerge. This 10+3 saturation approach is consistent with the recommended 12 interviews for data saturation that was proposed by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006). Following the 10+3 approach, I first collected data from 10 respondents, and then data from an additional 3 respondents indicated that no new theoretical insights emerged, i.e., theoretical saturation was met. Therefore, the search for additional participants was halted².

The total sample for this study consisted of 13 graduates and current students from management undergraduate programmes ($n = 11$, 84.6%) and postgraduate studies in management ($n = 2$, 15.4%). Participants attended HEIs situated in Trinidad ($n = 5$, 38.5%), UK ($n = 2$, 15.4%), Canada ($n = 2$, 15.4%), USA ($n = 1$, 7.7%) Mexico ($n = 1$, 7.7%), Nigeria ($n = 1$, 7.7%), and China ($n = 1$, 7.7%)³. The participants from Trinidad were from three different HEIs and those from the UK and Canada each attended a different HEI. The sample included 6 males (mean age = 25.8 years) and 7 females (mean age = 24.7 years).

Materials

I conducted interviews using a topic guide. The topic guide was divided into 7 sections and the average length of an interview was 51 minutes ($SD = 9$ minutes). The information sought

² In the process of conducting interviews, the sample consisted of 7 females and 4 males. At that stage, the sample was not balanced by gender. Because of the slight gender imbalance, 2 potential female participants were turned away and I actively sought 2 to 3 additional male participants.

³ One student did part of her undergraduate programme in China and completed it in the UK. Her experiences were described from the HEI in China and so she was not regarded as part of the UK sample.

in each section of the topic guide was appropriate for an interview seeking depth of information. Section 1 elicited demographic data. Section 2 included a definition of leadership and an opening question on supportive instructor-leadership⁴. Section 3 contained two questions. First, ‘How would you define destructive instructor-leadership?’ This question was followed by my stating the formal definition of destructive leadership proposed by Schyns and Schilling (2013). Second, ‘From your undergraduate courses/modules, describe, in detail, two to three incidents in which you have experienced a lecturer/s using destructive instructor-leader behaviours in the classroom?’

Respectively, sections 5, 6, and 7 of the topic guide were used to solicit students’ affective, behavioural, and cognitive reactions to destructive instructor-leadership incidents. For these three sections of the topic guide, no specific questions were stated because my aim was to steer discussions towards students’ reactions based on students’ descriptions of an incident. For instance, for affective reactions one question was, ‘Do you remember how you felt when you approached him and he told you things like...?’ Affective reactions were usually initiated by participants’ descriptions of incidents, and I used follow-up questions to probe further, e.g. ‘Did it affect any of your emotions in anticipation of the class?’ For behavioural reactions, example questions were, ‘Did it affect how you interact with him/her outside of class?’ or ‘Did that affect your preparation for the class?’ For cognitive reactions, an example question was, ‘Did it affect your attention in class?’ For behavioural and cognitive reactions, I asked these types of questions only when students did not speak of such reactions during their discussion of the incident. I also frequently used probing questions to solicit in-depth descriptions of each incident and reaction, e.g. ‘Can you tell me a little bit more about...?’ or ‘Can you give me an example of...?’

⁴ The aim of the supportive leadership question was to (a) start the interview on a positive note and (b) acclimatize candidates to the notion of leadership behaviours in the classroom.

I conducted two pilot interviews to ensure that the topic guide was adequate for its purpose. Because the topic guide elicited contributions that were clear and met the required depth of data, no changes were made after the pilot interviews, and these interviews were included in the study.

Procedures

I conducted an inductive investigation by using critical incident technique in combination with open-ended interview questions. Such an inductive approach enabled insight into the nature of destructive instructor-leadership and was particularly appropriate considering (a) the lack of empirical research on destructive instructor-leadership; (b) the limited focus of existing quantitative measures, i.e., representative of only the harmful methods manifestation (e.g., Tepper, 2000); and (c) the sensitivity involved in the nature of the subject matter (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). As described later on, the use of interviews provided profound descriptions of destructive instructor-leadership that went beyond the conventional quantitative measure of destructive leadership proposed by Tepper (2000), and was useful for exposing reactions that are novel to the study of destructive leadership.

I used maximum variation sampling to obtain the sample. Maximum variation sampling is the purposeful selection of participants to maximize heterogeneity (Patton, 1990). To maximize variation, I chose HEI attended as the diversity criteria; a limit of two students were selected from a single HEI. I used maximum variation sampling according to HEI for two reasons. First, this variation prevented responses from being associated with a single HEI, thus avoiding potential harm to a HEI's reputation. Second, 'any patterns that emerge from great variation are of ... value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects' of a concept (Patton, 1990, p. 172).

I used maximum variation sampling in combination with snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is the identification and potential selection of participants based on referrals from a member of the target population. Snowball sampling was a reasonable approach because a participant might have been more likely to recommend a second potential participant from their HEI for another interview.

In addition to HEI attended, I also sought a balanced gender distribution in order to prevent any potential gender bias in perceptions of destructive instructor-leadership. To meet the HEI and gender requirements, I screened participants in advance of any interviewing. Screening took place via email, telephone or face-to-face. In each case, if the candidate met the gender and/or HEI criteria, I made arrangements for interviewing.

I conducted interviews during the period from December 2012 to April 2013. I transcribed the data derived from the interviews into a word processing program, and I then imported the transcripts into NVivo for analysis.

Data management

I managed the raw data comprising of verbatim transcripts in two steps. In step 1, I tagged the data relevant to each incident, as well as each affective, behavioural, and cognitive reaction. For each incident and reaction, I brought together all manually tagged data, thus making the data digestible, and allowing for deeper familiarization of the descriptions. In step 2, I synthesized the tagged material. I conducted this synthesis process by reading through the data chronologically and summarizing. All key terms, phrases, or expressions were kept as close to the original data as possible to avoid losing content or context (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). I replaced participants' actual names with pseudonyms.

Results

The participants described 53 critical incidents in total and the mean number was 4.1 ($SD = 1.38$). Some of the descriptions ($n = 8$) were not of behavioural incidents (e.g. uncontrollable spitting while talking, old and about to retire, accent), and I removed these from the analysis.

I used the summarized data from the data management process to conduct a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the process of classifying and organizing data to arrive at key themes (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In thematic analysis, the researcher moves beyond the emergent categories of data using interpretation to develop more abstract and conceptual themes. The benefit of using this approach was that it allowed for transparency and rigor in the data management process; I could move back and forth between the raw data and different levels of abstraction.

To conduct the thematic analysis, I followed three key steps suggested by Ritchie and Lewis (2003). First, *detection* involved repeatedly reading through all of the destructive instructor-leadership incidents and reactions, ‘noting the range of perceptions, views, experiences, or behaviours’ (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 238). The second step involved *identification and categorization* of broader and more refined elements. This stage represented the first level of abstraction in which the descriptions remained close to the original data. For the third step, I classified the categorized data into higher level classes. The labels assigned in the classification stage went beyond the original text and was more of a conceptual interpretation.

During the classification stage, I read each element along with its original description, and judged each element as being either a new class or part of a class that had been created based on a previous description. As this process unfolded, I often refined and updated the classes. I completed the classification process once each element was exhausted.

For the concept of destructive instructor-leadership, I arrived at ten classes in the classification stage. I then further summarized the ten classes into three abstract thematic dimensions. The process of moving from the ten classes to thematic dimensions required interpretation and judgement. Hence, I sought inter-rater agreement by hiring a doctoral researcher to independently conduct the same task of moving from ten classes to a more abstract and condensed list of thematic dimensions. There was very good inter-rater agreement for the classificatory reduction task because the dimensions arrived at by the secondary researcher partially replicated my thematic dimensions⁵. The movement from elements to classes and classes to thematic dimensions is illustrated in Figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Figure 1 caption: Analytical coding process to induce destructive instructor-leadership thematic dimensions.

I did not assume that these three dimensions were the only dimensions that could be identified. Nevertheless, the three dimensions represented all of the reported incidents of destructive instructor-leadership. The three dimensions also illustrated a clear conceptual structure and, while they were an abstract interpretation, they were not pulled far away from the original data.

During the classification process for students' reactions, I also frequently revised the classes to better represent the elements. After classifying the reactions, I abstracted thematic dimensions based on the classes. Refer to Figures 2, 3, and 4 for illustrations of the analytical coding process for affective⁶, cognitive, and behavioural reactions respectively.

⁵ The only difference between my thematic dimensions and that of the second researcher was that of the 'irresponsibility' dimension. The second researcher created a similar category labelled 'professionalism' but his category also contained lack of interest in student and embarrassment. Closer inspection of the raw data revealed that lack of interest and embarrassment appeared to be more relevant to teaching methods and communication respectively.

⁶ For affective reactions, students described their specific emotions and feelings. Therefore, because the elements and classes were nearly identical, only the classes are illustrated in Figure 2.

INSERT FIGURES 2, 3, AND 4 ABOUT HERE

Figure 2 caption: Analytical coding process to induce affective themes.

Figure 3 caption: Analytical coding process to induce cognitive themes.

Figure 4 caption: Analytical coding process to induce behavioural themes.

Discussion

The concept of destructive instructor-leadership

Although there is some conceptual overlap between offensive misbehaviour, disconfirmation, and destructive leadership, there is no consensus on the definition and conceptualization of destructive instructor-leadership. Given this problem, this study contributes to the educational approach to destructive leadership by offering a definition and conceptualization of destructive leadership in the unique context of the classroom. Based on the findings, I define destructive instructor-leadership as an instructor's sustained and volitional use of harmful behaviour that involves the (a) use of harmful methods of influence in the process of leading students toward a goal and/or (b) encouragement of students towards a goal that is contradictory to the HEI's interests. This definition highlights four characteristics of destructive instructor-leadership, including leadership in the process of goal achievement, two manifestations of destructive leadership, volition, and sustained actions (Krasikova et al., 2013; Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

First, for some of the incidents, participants describe the actions of their instructor as part of the *process of leading* them towards a goal. Some goals are relevant to classroom learning, e.g. increased understanding of module content or achievement of the session's learning goals. Other goals are relevant to project completion, e.g. some students believe that instructors use harsh and forceful behaviours to guide them towards producing higher quality work.

Second, the findings add to the general organizational behaviour literature by demonstrating the existence of both *manifestations* of destructive leadership. For the first

manifestation, instructors sometimes lead followers towards goals that are contradictory to the organization's interests, e.g. discouraging learning by promoting bribery as a means for success or by allowing students to submit blank sheets of paper for marks. This manifestation was also evident in the reports by two students in which they felt that they were purposely misled by the instructor with respect to exam guidance and project feedback respectively. According to one of these students, 'It was difficult to pass because [the] instructor was misleading in that he gave important chapters that you need to know how to do the questions for exam, but then changed the questions in the exam'. Such intentional misdirection is akin to sabotaging followers' performance. For the second manifestation, there are numerous cases of instructors using harmful behaviours in the process of leading students towards a goal, e.g. intimidating looks, shouting, foul language, etc.

The third characteristic of *volition* is difficult to determine because the data are based on students' input, and not information from the instructor as to whether they *choose* to follow the destructive goal or style or both. This difficulty is compounded because volition means that the leader can intend to harm, but is not consciously aware that the chosen goal or actions are harmful. Regardless, the findings indicate that certain students perceive that their instructors purposely choose to follow destructive goals, e.g. bribery, bullying, reading slides.

Finally, all of the incidents are indicative of *sustained* behaviours. Even when students describe one-off incidents, probing questions reveal that instructors continue to enact the behaviours in the future, e.g. on a weekly basis for the entire semester, or in other situations, e.g. during office hour meetings or during a class break.

The notion of destructive instructor-leadership in HEIs is supported by the interview data. Specifically, the interview findings indicate that destructive instructor-leadership is associated

with leadership in the process of goal achievement, both manifestations of destructive leadership, volition, and sustained actions (Krasikova et al., 2013; Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

Dimensions of destructive instructor-leadership

In addition to contributing the concept of destructive instructor-leadership, this study extends previous organizational behaviour research on destructive leadership by offering a multidimensional concept. The findings suggest that destructive instructor-leadership comprises of three dimensions, including callous communication; chaotic carelessness; and irresponsibility.

Callous communication. Callous communication refers to a leader's disregard and insensitivity towards followers via the display of harmful verbal and nonverbal behaviours. Similar to Tepper's conceptualization of abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), these behaviours include hostile behaviours such as rudeness, harsh exclamations or shouting, aggressiveness, intimidating looks, etc. For instance, one student said that she politely informed her instructor that his microphone was off and he responded, 'What! What! Girl, you [are] probably off!' The same student described another instructor giving guidance for a presentation, and this instructor exclaimed, 'I don't want you to speak like this, I don't want you to say these things, [and] I don't want you do this!' One student said '... if you do something wrong, he [the instructor] might just be like, how could you get this wrong?! ... How could you not know this?! ... like aggressive.' Another student said, 'I asked her [the instructor] if I could see the notes and she said *no* ... she basically put me down ... right there in front of people.' A final example is a student who observed an instructor '... shout[ing] at [a] guy in class ... in front of everyone.'

Adding to Tepper's conceptualization which focuses on hostile behaviours (Tepper, 2000), the callous communication dimension also includes behaviours that are not necessarily perceived as hostile, but are still perceived as harmful. For instance, disinterested facial

expressions, e.g. one student described his visit to an instructor's office to ask a question. The student said, 'His [the instructor's] facial expression, if I put words to it, it was I don't want to see you ... he was serious.' Another form of communication that was perceived as harmful is the instructor being monotone, e.g. a student said, 'She [the instructor] spoke in a somber, low voice, was quite strict ... and her tone is *flat* ... and there's no facial expression ... just like a robot, talk, talk, talk, talk.' Overall, callous communication appears to be directly linked to the manifestation of destructive leadership regarding the use of harmful methods in the process of leading.

Chaotic carelessness. Chaotic carelessness refers to the creation of disorder that is reinforced by a leader's negligence of followers. The behaviours in this dimension can be grouped into two aspects. First, chaotic carelessness with regards to *negligence of student-followers*. For instance, instructors showing a lack of interest in students, e.g. one student said that 'she [the instructor] didn't go through any of the midterm [exam] with us, so she didn't really care how we did in our final exam. [She gave] the exam because this is protocol.' In addition, instructors also displayed negligence with respect to contact with students, e.g. a student said, 'He [the instructor] never really seemed to want to make contact with me ... he just always had a meeting, or he had a meeting with somebody else, or that's not a good time for him. He just never really said anything specific.'

Second, instructors are described as being chaotic and careless with respect to *teaching*. One example of this is instructors' enforcing their views or ways, e.g. one student said, 'she [the instructor] was ... one of those people who if you do not repeat *exactly* the way in which she said something ... [then] you do not understand. It was only her way or the highway.' Similarly, another student described an instance in which the instructor said, 'Get rid of the Freudian

perspective, because, let's face it – it's bullshit.' Other examples of chaotic carelessness in teaching include unrealistic expectations, e.g. one student said, 'He [the instructor] would look at you as though ... you [are] supposed to know this. I'm waiting for your answer, give it to me'; poor quality of explanations, e.g. one student said '... we [the class] were thinking that he [the instructor] was not good enough to like explaining,' while another student said '... he [the instructor] [is] just not very good at ... transferring his knowledge to the students because he wasn't very good at explaining things'; and reading off of slides, e.g. one student said '...he'd have ... his slides that he'll put up and he'll just read over the slides...the slides [are] basically just a summary of the text.'

The behaviours in this dimension are associated with both manifestations of destructive leadership. First, chaotic carelessness with respect to interactions between instructor-leader and student-follower appears to be linked primarily to the manifestation regarding use of harmful methods in the process of leading, i.e. avoiding students. Second, chaotic carelessness with respect to teaching can be linked to both harmful methods as well as leading students towards goals that are contradictory to a HEI's interests. An example of the latter is an instructor that enforces his or her own point of view without exposing students to all sides of a topic.

Irresponsibility. The irresponsibility dimension refers to a leader's negligence of duties and responsibilities. One of these irresponsible instructor behaviours is a lack of and/or inaccurate feedback, e.g. one student said, '... that's a basic piece of knowledge, which he [the instructor] is then leading that student, through feedback, into [thinking] that's a wrong answer, but in fact it's the right answer.' Similarly, another student describes an instructor not taking responsibility to give feedback regarding exam errors, e.g. the student said that '... she [the instructor] messed up some of the questions so we [the students] had to go through our own

paper, come to [the instructor], [and] tell her ... we have to get more marks for this ... She didn't ... tell the class about it, she didn't tell the class it was a general mistake. So ... if you didn't notice there was an error ... then you just wouldn't get the mark for it.' In addition to poor or inaccurate feedback, another irresponsible behaviour is that of unfair treatment, e.g. one student referred to how his participation mark awarded was unfair. The student stated that the instructor said, 'Once you say something valuable, it could be once every three classes, you are good. I think we [the student's peer group] contributed almost every class in saying something. But, just because ... we [are] not going up to him ... in his face and talking at the end of class [or] sitting down in front of class, our grade was in the low 70s ... [even though] we all entered the exam with over 88 and 90. [The downgrade was] because he used the participation grade.' A final example of irresponsible behaviour is that of corrupt practices, e.g. a student said that '... those who failed can just pay him [the instructor] maybe £100 or maybe buy him expensive cigarettes ... and they will pass ... everybody knows this.'

The irresponsibility dimension represents both manifestations of destructive instructor-leadership. First irresponsibility includes the use of harmful methods, e.g. unfair treatment. Second, irresponsibility also includes leading followers towards goals that are contradictory to HEIs' interests, e.g. bribery provides opportunities to avoid learning, and is thus contradictory to HEIs' interests of developing students' intellectual capabilities. Similarly, inaccurate feedback means that students may acquire incorrect knowledge which contradicts the goals of HEIs.

Callous communication, chaotic carelessness, and irresponsibility are three conceptually distinct dimensions of destructive leadership. These three dimensions do not represent the lack of constructive leadership. Instead, callous communication may be considered the opposite of transformational leader behaviours such as idealized influence or inspirational motivation. Also,

chaotic carelessness is somewhat inverse to supportive or consideration-type leader behaviour. These destructive leadership dimensions are unique leadership dimensions that extend the conceptuality of destructive leadership. The three dimensions can also be used to operationalize destructive leadership for various research designs, i.e. the three behaviours can be expressed in an experiment, itemized in a survey, used in structured or semi-structured interviews, etc.

Reactions of destructive instructor-leadership

A key contribution of this study is that I extend the educational approach to destructive leadership by examining the association between destructive instructor-leadership and student reactions. The findings show that destructive instructor-leadership behaviours are associated with students' affective, behavioural, and cognitive reactions.

For *affective* reactions, as expected, destructive instructor-leadership is associated with students feeling bad, depression, and anxiety. Some exemplary quotations include '... when I got home ... I remembered feeling sad and angry' (Margaret); '... in anticipation of class ... I [was] dreading it' (Jennifer); 'I was furious [and] very angry' (Gary); 'I was bored [and] sleepy' (Anna); and 'it made me feel annoyed [and] angry ... because this is somebody who's supposed to know what they're talking about' (Phil). The results show that these feelings and emotions related to displeasure are the most common responses to destructive instructor-leadership. However, students also experience pleasurable feelings and emotions in response to destructive instructor-leadership. Unexpectedly, destructive instructor-leadership is also associated with students feeling good, enthusiasm, and comfort. For instance, students feel good, enthusiastic, and comfortable in response to an instructor's irresponsible practice of bribery or easy marks because these practices create easy opportunities for students to pass the module. According to one student, 'You could submit anything you want, and some people were happy about it ... I

was elated'. Another example is students' feeling of comfort and enthusiasm after class because of the instructor's chaotically careless behaviours during class.

The findings for *behavioural* reactions show that destructive instructor-leadership is associated with students' withdrawal and retaliation as expected. I find it interesting that destructive instructor-leadership is also associated with increases in students' efforts towards the module. Increased efforts are associated with destructive instructor-leaders' use of callous communication, e.g. one student told me, 'I wanted to be prepared for his class on the day, because I wanted to know what he [is] going to talk about so I could kind of have a head start so if he asked me a question, I'll have an idea what he is going to talk about'. Here, some students work harder to avoid instructors' hostility. Increased efforts are also associated with destructive instructor-leaders' chaotic carelessness. For instance, one student said, 'I actually had to read the textbook to understand what was on [the] PowerPoint [slides] because there was no guarantee that she was going to explain, in further detail, what was on the PowerPoint [slides]'. Here, some students work harder because the instructor intentionally covered insufficient material in class. Finally, the findings show that some students experience no change in their behaviours in response to destructive instructor-leadership (e.g. the student always attends classes). This latter finding suggests that personality or interest in the module may moderate the association between destructive instructor-leadership and students' behaviours.

For *cognitive* reactions, expectedly, destructive instructor-leadership is associated with a reduction in students' attention in class, e.g. 'I clearly zoned out because ... nothing significant or nothing different was brought to the table besides what is in the book' (Alice) or '... sometimes I daydream or I would talk to someone next to me' (Sam). Unexpectedly, two dimensions of destructive instructor-leadership appear to work together to lead to increased

attention. These dimensions include callous communication (e.g. increase in students' alertness to avoid instructor becoming angry and embarrassing student) and chaotic carelessness (e.g. expecting students to always know the answer to questions when called upon). For instance, one student told me, '[I] increased my attention, listening to what he had to say because ... if you don't know what he is talking about, he will get mad'. Similarly, another student said '... you want to be alert because you don't want to be embarrassed. He ... ask[s] questions and then he would be like, "what's wrong with you, why you don't know that?!"' Callous communication and chaotic carelessness are also associated with attention being unaffected. Here, some students explain that they are predisposed to be either attentive or inattentive; thus, the instructor's actions does not affect their attention. Finally, only one student uses cognitive restructuring in response to callous communication and irresponsibility. Overall, the findings show that, in the classroom context, destructive leadership influences followers' affective, behavioural, and cognitive reactions.

Another theoretical contribution is that this study examines the reactions of *both manifestations* of destructive leadership. This finding is valuable because it extends previous findings that support the detrimental consequences of only one manifestation of destructive leadership, i.e. use of harmful methods in the process of leading. My findings show that, in addition to harmful methods, the other manifestation, i.e. leading followers towards goals that are contradictory to the organization's interest, is primarily associated with undesirable affective, behavioural, and cognitive reactions.

Finally, this study benefits from two methodological strengths. First, most of the previous studies of destructive leadership was conducted using US samples (Tepper, 2007). Therefore, I contribute to the validity of destructive leadership and its consequences in *non US settings*,

including countries with higher power distance cultures such as Mexico and Nigeria. Furthermore, including students from a wide range of nations with varying cultures increases confidence that the associations between destructive instructor-leadership and student reactions are based on core experiences (Patton, 1990, p. 172). A second methodological strength is that the findings are derived from *in-depth one-on-one* interviews. This method is useful for building theory in a relatively unexplored domain for destructive leadership, i.e. the classroom context.

Limitations of the study and directions for future research

This is the first study that focuses on destructive leadership in the classroom context. For this reason, the sturdiness of the findings needs to be reinforced beyond this sample of students. This study should also be replicated in a corporate context in order to determine whether callous communication, chaotic carelessness, and irresponsibility are applicable to the work environment.

A second limitation of this research is that students' perceptions are used to determine instructors' volition. Although these perceptions can be valid, students generally struggled to answer questions pertaining to instructors' intentions in this study. Students sometimes responded by stating that they were unsure of the instructor's intention. Future research should consider using multi-source methods to measure volition. Information can be obtained on instructors' views regarding their intentions, and this information can be triangulated with students' input.

A third limitation is that the sample is biased because of the use of convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is useful for conducting interviews and employing maximum variation sampling. However, to improve representativeness of the results, future quantitative studies should use a random sampling technique to improve the validity of my findings. Future research

should also continue to include students from various HEIs and countries in order to examine the role of national culture in the relationship between destructive instructor-leadership and student reactions. According to Tepper (2007), followers' reactions to destructive leadership are likely to be less intense in countries with high power distance cultures. Hence, future research should examine the potential moderating effect of cultural dimensions such as power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and long-term orientation (Tepper, 2007).

A fourth limitation is that social desirability bias can affect findings from face-to-face interviews. For instance, some participants may claim that destructive instructor-leadership behaviours have no effect on their attendance in order to appear favorable to the interviewer. To reduce the risk of this bias, I asked questions regarding any inconsistencies in participants' responses. During interviews, I also frequently repeated participants' responses to them, and used careful pauses to give them time to reflect on and potentially add to or change their initial responses. I also reduce the risk of this bias, by conducting one-on-one private interviews, and assuring candidates that pseudonyms are used. Future research on destructive instructor-leadership, particularly quantitative designs, should further reduce the risk of social desirability bias by using a social desirability scale (e.g. Fischer & Fick, 1993).

Future research should also utilize the dimensions in this study to measure destructive instructor-leadership. Even though a measure is not developed and validated, future research can use the findings of this study to adapt and refine Tepper's (2000) instrument for the instructor-student relationship. In doing so, Tepper's instrument needs to be expanded to include (a) additional harmful behaviours such as use of threats or bullying; (b) harmful behaviours that are not necessarily hostile, e.g. disorganized/haphazard teaching, lack of feedback, etc.; and (c) behaviours that can lead followers towards a goal that is contradictory to an organization's

interests. Enhancing Tepper's instrument with these suggestions and using it in larger quantitative studies would validate my three dimensions beyond this sample of students.

Implications for practice and conclusion

This study offers important implications for HEIs. The findings show that, for the most part, destructive instructor-leadership behaviours are associated with undesirable student reactions. However, destructive instructor-leadership behaviours are also associated with desirable reactions such as positive affect, increased efforts, and increased attention. Based on these findings, I recommend that HEIs focus on altering some of their instructors' destructive leader behaviours to reap the benefits to students. The following are some examples of instructor behavioural changes:

1. **Affect:** The association between instructors' irresponsibility (e.g. providing marks for no work) and some students feeling good, enthusiastic, and comfortable indicates that students may experience these pleasurable feelings and emotions if they are sure of a path towards achieving good grades. Therefore, this irresponsible behaviour should be replaced with more goal-oriented leadership behaviour.
2. **Behaviour:** The association between chaotic carelessness (e.g. reading from slides in an uninteresting manner) and increased student efforts (e.g. reading more on their own) may be an indication that 'less is more'. Perhaps when instructors focus less on lecturing or reading notes, and instead act more as a facilitator in the classroom, this can drive work efforts because students will have to prepare readings in order to discuss topics in class.
3. **Cognition:** As explained earlier, poor verbal communication (e.g. embarrassing students when they do not know the answer to a question) and chaotic carelessness (e.g. unrealistic expectations of students' responses to questions) are also associated with increased attention.

Perhaps instructors should continue to ask questions in class in order to increase students' alertness and attention. However, instructors should refrain from becoming hostile when students do not respond accurately or at all, and instead use positive reinforcement when students answer correctly.

Hence, a second practical implication of this study is that instructors need to be trained to change and/or eliminate certain destructive leader behaviours. Training can be geared towards adjusting or extinguishing destructive instructor-leadership behaviours. The extinguished behaviours can then be replaced by more constructive instructor-leadership behaviours, e.g. transformational leadership. Before training can take place, HEIs must first identify which instructors are using destructive leader behaviours through methods such as student feedback surveys or trained observers. Specifically, students can be asked to rate lecturers on some of the related behaviours found in this study. Once identified via these methods, feedback can be sent to these instructors regarding their destructive leader behaviours.

This feedback approach may help to manage and maybe reduce the negative impact of destructive instructor-leadership in two ways. *First*, student feedback may force instructors to be more circumspect in their attitudes and behaviours in the classroom because there may be consequences for destructive instructor-leadership. *Second*, if the feedback on destructive leader behaviours are accompanied by recommended alternative supportive leadership behaviours (e.g. Pounder, 2008), this strategy may encourage instructors to reflect on student images of effective instructor-leadership (see Schyns, Kiefer, Kerschreiter, & Tymon, 2011). Such an exercise can act as a first step in increasing instructors' awareness of the differences between their images of appropriate classroom behaviour and students' expectations of supportive teaching. This reflection exercise can lead to changes in cognition, and such changes allow for easier changes in

motivation and behaviour (Schyns et al., 2011). In both instances, instructors using destructive leader behaviours in the classroom may be more willing to attend training programmes that focus on changing behaviours, e.g. discussion technique and/or the use of positive and negative role models in behavioural modeling (DeSimone & Werner, 2006).

In conclusion, this study extends both organizational behaviour and educational approaches to destructive leadership. The findings suggest that the features and parameters of destructive leadership proposed by Krasikova et al. (2013) and Schyns and Schilling (2013) are relevant to higher education classroom instruction. Furthermore, I offer a three-dimensional conceptualization, and potential operationalization, of destructive leadership. My findings show that these three dimensions of destructive instructor-leadership are associated with students' affective, behavioural, and cognitive reactions. In addition, the recommended training policies may help change management classrooms from having students 'draped over their desks' to classrooms where students are 'sitting on the edge of their chairs' (Anding, 2005, p. 488). I encourage future research that can build on this study to validate my findings.

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