

Work-related risk factors for workplace bullying

The moderating effect of laissez-faire leadership

Kari Wik Ågotnes

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)
University of Bergen, Norway
2022

UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN



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Date of defense: 07.06.2022

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Year: 2022

Title: Work-related risk factors for workplace bullying

Name: Kari Wik Ågotnes

Print: Skipnes Kommunikasjon / University of Bergen

SCIENTIFIC ENVIRONMENT

The present dissertation was supported and financed by the Norwegian Research Council (NFR) and the University of Bergen, under grant number 250127 – Workplace bullying: From mechanisms and moderators to problem treatment, a so-called ‘Toppforsk project’ headed by Professor Ståle Valvatne Einarsen. The work was completed at the Department of Psychosocial Science, Faculty of Psychology, University of Bergen. The candidate was enrolled at the Graduate School of Human Interaction and Growth (GHIG) and was a member of the Bergen Bullying Research Group (FALK). Data for the project was collected in cooperation with the Royal Norwegian Navy, Statistics Norway (SSB), and The National Institute of Occupational Health in Norway.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my sincerest gratitude to the many people who contributed to this thesis. Without them, the completion of this project would not have been possible.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors – Professor Ståle Valvante Einarsen and Professor Emeritus Anders Skogstad – for your guidance, support, and exceptional knowledge. Thank you for all the time and resources you have devoted to my PhD project, and for your invaluable feedback on my work. A special thanks to Anders for cultivating and developing my interest in laissez-faire leadership – starting when I was a young student writing my bachelors’ thesis in 2013 and continuing to do so in my masters’ thesis and finally during my PhD project. Thank you for all the valuable and interesting discussions, your enthusiasm for research is inspiring. I would also like to thank Ståle for including me in the Toppforsk project, and for providing the opportunity for me to integrate my interest of laissez-faire leadership into the larger context of workplace bullying. Your engagement and knowledge of the workplace bullying research field is truly inspirational, and I have learned a lot during this process.

To my co-authors – Jørn Hetland, Morten Birkeland Nielsen, Olav Kjellevold Olsen, Arnold B. Bakker, Johannes Gjerstad, and Roar Espevik – thank you for sharing your data, and for your valuable input during the writing and revision process. A special thanks to Jørn for always being patient and generous with his time when I have been struggling with methodological challenges.

Thank you to all the members of the Bergen Bullying Research Group (FALK) and everyone involved in the Toppforsk project. Thank you for all your support, critical feedback, and engaging discussions at various stages of my research process, it has been a great resource. Thank you for providing a wonderful professional and social work environment, and for instantly making me feel welcomed and included. A special thanks to Helga Marie, for everything you do that makes it possible for us to function as a research group.

I also want to give a special thanks to my colleagues and friends – Øystein, Lena and Sarah. Sharing an office with you for the past four years has been a privilege. Having the opportunity to engage in informal discussions whenever a specific issue presents itself has been very valuable, and you have not only increased my knowledge about bullying research and statistics, but also my inspiration and motivation for this work in general. I would also like to thank you for all the social gatherings and support in celebrating our big and small achievements. I am truly grateful that I have been able to share this journey with you all!

Thank you to all my colleagues at the Department of Psychosocial Science for creating a good working environment all these years. A special thanks to Anlaug and May-Britt for always being welcoming and generous with their time whenever I have been in need of administrative support.

I would also like to thank the respondents who participated in the individual studies included in the present thesis, as well as the Norwegian Research Council for providing the funding that made this PhD degree possible.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their encouragement and unwavering love and support at every step of this process.

ABSTRACT

Workplace bullying has been described as repeated and systematic exposure to negative social acts over time, which the target has difficulties defending against (Einarsen et al., 2020). Previous research has established that bullying in the workplace is related to a wide range of negative outcomes, and bullying has been classified as a more crippling and devastating problem for employees than all other work-related stress put together (Hauge et al., 2010; Wilson, 1991). Yet, the field still lacks systematic and thorough knowledge of the mechanisms that may explain how situational antecedents are related to the occurrence and development of the workplace bullying process. Drawing on the work environment hypothesis, studies have shown that bullying seems to thrive in demanding workplaces where employees experience organizational constraints and contradictory expectations and demands. Furthermore, leadership practices are expected to have a significant impact on the presence of stress at work. For example, poor and destructive leadership has been identified as a root cause of subordinate stress (Kelloway et al., 2005; Skogstad et al., 2014), and may, as such, act as a strong stressor in its own right. However, leaders may also impact the level of stress at work indirectly, either by influencing the opportunities employees have to cope with those stressors present, or by either aggravating or alleviating the stressors already present in the work environment.

The main aim of this PhD-project has been to improve our understanding of the phenomenon of workplace bullying, by investigating some mechanisms and conditions which allow bullying to flourish and escalate. The present thesis is comprised of three scientific papers, all of which employ self-report questionnaire data. The overarching research question in all three papers was whether laissez-faire leadership can act as a moderator in the relationship between various prevailing workplace stressors and subsequent experiences of negative acts and workplace bullying. Moreover, Paper 2 examines the role of the inter-relationship between two prevailing role stressors in the development of workplace bullying, by testing the mediating effect of role conflicts in the relationship between role ambiguity and subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours. In addition, Papers 2 and 3 also

investigated the potential buffering effect of transformational leadership, a constructive form of leadership that is in stark contrast to laissez-faire leadership.

In paper 1, the main objective was to investigate the prospective relationship between co-worker conflict at time 1 and individuals who self-reported as new victims of bullying two years later, and whether this relationship was exacerbated by the individuals' reports of laissez-faire leadership behaviour enacted by their immediate supervisor. Results from a logistic regression analysis on a representative sample of Norwegian workers ($N = 1772$) showed a significant positive relationship between conflict with co-workers and subsequent new victims of workplace bullying. Furthermore, the results showed that this relationship was only present for employees who reported high (vs. low) levels of laissez-faire leadership behaviour from their immediate supervisor.

Paper 2 had two main objectives. First, we aimed to investigate the mechanisms through which role stressors lead to workplace bullying, by testing the hypothesis that the impact of role ambiguity on employees' exposure to negative acts is mediated through their experiences of increased levels of role conflicts. Second, we tested whether laissez-faire leadership exacerbated, while transformational leadership attenuated, this relationship. In this study, we employed a national probability sample of 1,164 Norwegian workers, with three measurements across a 12-month period. The results supported our hypotheses, in that the relationship between employees' role ambiguity and subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours was mediated by an increase in employees' experience of role conflicts. Moreover, we found that laissez-faire leadership exacerbated, while transformational leadership attenuated, the indirect relationship between role ambiguity and subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours through role conflicts.

Finally, the objective of Paper 3 was to test whether it is possible to detect these mechanisms even on a daily basis. Accordingly, this study investigated the day-to-day relationship between employees' work pressure and their exposure to bullying-related negative acts and tested the hypotheses that even daily levels of laissez-faire

leadership exacerbated while daily levels of transformational leadership attenuated this relationship. Using data from a sample of 61 naval cadets, who completed a daily diary questionnaire on 36 consecutive days ($N = 1509$ daily observations), we tested the day-to-day relationships between work pressure and exposure to bullying-related negative acts, and the moderating effects of daily transformational and laissez-faire leadership. The results of multilevel analyses showed a positive relationship between daily work pressure and daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts, and a positive moderating effect of daily laissez-faire leadership behaviour. More specifically, our analyses showed that the positive relationship between daily work pressure and daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts was only present on days when the subordinates reported higher levels of laissez-faire behaviour from their immediate leader. Finally, we did not find support for a moderating effect of daily transformational leadership behaviour.

Taken together, these findings yield support to the theoretical notion of the work environment hypothesis, in that situational stressors represent prevailing risk factors for individuals to be exposed to negative acts and bullying in the workplace (Einarsen et al., 1994; Leymann, 1996). Moreover, our findings support the theoretical assumption that laissez-faire leadership is an important facilitator in the development of workplace bullying. Indeed, our results indicate that laissez-faire leadership may be of greater consequence in exacerbating the bullying process than transformational leadership is in attenuating the negative consequences of workplace stressors. If leaders neglect their inherent responsibility to adequately address employees' experiences of stressful situations and ongoing interpersonal conflicts that merit attention, the risk of workplace bullying is likely to increase. Furthermore, our results show the same trends across samples and research designs, thereby strengthening the robustness of our findings. Finally, the results from Paper 2 improve our understanding of the inter-relationship between role ambiguity and role conflict in relation to bullying, by supporting the hypothesis that employees' experience of role conflicts mediates the role ambiguity-bullying relationship. This finding indicates that role conflicts may be the more proximal, while role ambiguity may be a more distal antecedent of workplace bullying.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Paper I

Ågotnes, K. W., Einarsen, S. V., Hetland, J., & Skogstad, A. (2018). The moderating effect of laissez-faire leadership on the relationship between co-worker conflicts and new cases of workplace bullying: A true prospective design. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 28(4), 555-568.
<https://doi.org/10/gfprmc>

Paper II

Ågotnes, K. W., Nielsen, M., B., Skogstad, A., Gjerstad, J., & Einarsen, S. V.
The moderating effects of leadership practices on the relationship between role stressors and exposure to bullying – A longitudinal moderated-mediation design. Under review in *Work and Stress*.

Paper III

Ågotnes, K. W., Skogstad, A., Hetland, J., Olsen, O. K., Espevik, R., Bakker, A. B., & Einarsen, S. V. (2021). Daily work pressure and exposure to bullying-related negative acts: The role of daily transformational and laissez-faire leadership. *European Management Journal*, 39(4), 423-433.
<https://doi.org/ghdxf4>

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bullying in the workplace is increasingly recognized as a serious problem within the working environment (Hoel et al., 2010; Zapf & Vartia, 2020). Workplace bullying has been shown to be related to a wide range of negative outcomes for those targeted, including mental and physical health problems (Conway et al., 2018; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Theorell et al., 2015; Verkuil et al., 2015), reduced job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012), exhaustion (Laschinger et al., 2012), intention to leave (Djurkovic et al., 2004), and expulsion from working life (Glambek et al., 2015). Accordingly, scholars have described workplace bullying as not only a significant source of social stress at work but as a more crippling and devastating problem for employees than all other work-related stress put together (Hauge et al., 2010; Wilson, 1991). Moreover, people have in general been shown to be more strongly affected by bad events than they are by good events (Baumeister et al., 2001). Studies of negative events such as workplace bullying, which is associated with severe detrimental outcomes for exposed employees, organizations, and the society at large (Hoel et al., 2020; Mikkelsen et al., 2020), should therefore be of high relevance in organisational research.

During the past few decades, our knowledge on workplace bullying has increased and the methods for studying it have become increasingly sophisticated (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Accordingly, the prevalence rates and outcomes of workplace bullying are relatively well-established across the globe (Van de Vliert et al., 2013). If organizations are to successfully prevent and manage cases of workplace bullying, there is a need for a better understanding of the organisational mechanisms and conditional factors that may explain how and when bullying arises, develops, and impacts those exposed. However, these mechanisms and conditions are so far not very well understood, even if there is ample evidence of a work stressor–bullying relationship (Salin & Hoel, 2020). Leadership is an example of one such conditional factor that may be expected to have a significant impact on the presence of stress at work, both directly and indirectly. Already in the early work of Leymann (1996) and Brodsky (1976), leadership deficiency was highlighted as a prerequisite for bullying

to be allowed to develop and flourish in the work environment. However, at the onset of this PhD-project, the literature had mainly focused on leadership as a direct antecedent of exposure to negative social behaviours at work (Nielsen, 2013; Skogstad et al., 2007; Tsuno & Kawakami, 2015), rather than as a conditional moderator on the relationship between other workplace stressors and bullying (see Hauge et al., 2007; Rodriguez-Munoz et al., 2012, for two exceptions).

Drawing on the shortcomings in the literature outlined above, the main objective of the present thesis is to improve our understanding of the phenomenon of workplace bullying. Though there is ample evidence to support a positive relationship between stressors in the work environment and exposure to workplace bullying, the majority of studies on the subject have been cross-sectional in nature (Neall & Tuckey, 2014; Rai & Agarwal, 2016). As such, they provide only limited insight into the mechanisms and conditions involved in the bullying process. Therefore, we aim to extend this research by implementing various prospective (Papers 1 & 2) and daily diary (Paper 3) research designs. Paper 2 further extends the knowledge into explanatory mechanisms in the bullying process by investigating the potential mediating effect of role conflicts in the role ambiguity–bullying relationship. Furthermore, by testing the possible moderating effect of laissez-faire leadership on the presumed relationships between specific stressors in the workplace and employees' exposure to negative acts and bullying at work, we gain additional insight into conditional factors which may allow bullying to arise and develop. Additionally, the hypothesized exacerbating effect of laissez-faire leadership is contrasted with the potential mitigating effects of a constructive type of leadership, namely transformational leadership (Papers 2 & 3). Figure 1 illustrates the proposed relationships that I have tested in the three papers comprising the present thesis.

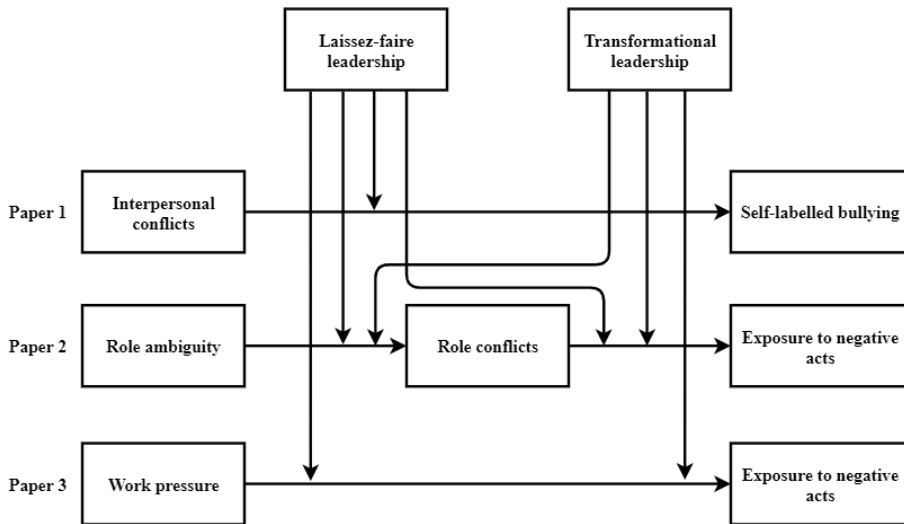


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the relationships investigated in the present thesis.

In the following, I will first present an overview of the two key concepts of interest in the present thesis, namely workplace bullying and laissez-faire leadership.

Subsequently, I will present the theoretical framework employed in the present thesis – encompassing several different but complementary theories explaining how situational stressors in the work environment may develop into instances of bullying behaviours and negative social acts, and over time, long term victimization of bullying – as well as some previous empirical evidence of the relationships of interest. Finally, I will outline some of the shortcomings in the literature pertaining to the lack of research on moderating effects in the antecedent–bullying relationship, before presenting the main aims of the thesis and the specific hypotheses investigated in each of the three papers. In this, the overarching focus will be on whether laissez-faire leadership can act as a moderator in the relationship between various prevailing workplace stressors and experienced negative acts and workplace bullying.

Additionally, I will touch shortly on transformational leadership as a potential mitigating conditional factor. However, as this is not the main leadership factor of interest in the present thesis, it is employed more as a contrast and control variable to

gain a more nuanced understanding of the exacerbating effect of laissez-faire leadership.

1.1 The concept of workplace bullying

1.1.1 Historical background

The phenomenon of bullying and harassment in the workplace was first described by the American psychologist Carroll M. Brodsky (1976), in his book entitled *The Harassed Worker*. Here, Brodsky described five different types of harassment, namely scapegoating, name-calling, physical abuse, sexual harassment, and work pressure. What these forms of harassment have in common is that they describe behaviours that if repeated and persisted over time, may place the target in a cornered position with little resources to retaliate in kind, resulting in negative outcomes for those targeted (Brodsky, 1976). Although he was among the first to describe the phenomenon of bullying among adults, Brodsky's work did not receive a lot of attention at the time it was published. It was only rediscovered many years later when it was brought into the pioneering work of Einarsen and colleagues (1994). Parallel to Brodsky's work in the US, research on the concept of workplace bullying began in Scandinavia in the late 1980s (Kile, 1990; Leymann, 1986, 1990b; Matthiesen et al., 1989; Thylefors, 1987), partly following the research on bullying among school children (see e.g., Heinemann, 1972; Olweus, 1978, 1993). The Swedish psychologist Heinz Leymann (1986) was the first to describe the concept of bullying among adults in his Swedish book entitled *Adult bullying. On psychological violence in working life* (English translation). Contrasting the more physical and direct forms of aggression, Leymann (1986) employed the term 'mobbing' to describe a phenomenon among adults involving systematic exposure to subtle indirect forms of aggression. Following Leymann's work in Sweden (Leymann, 1986, 1990b, 1996), researchers in Norway (Einarsen et al., 1994; Einarsen & Raknes, 1991; Matthiesen et al., 1989) and Finland (Björkqvist et al., 1994; Vartia, 1991, 1996) also became interested in the phenomenon of bullying in the workplace. Accordingly, large-scale research projects were initiated in these Scandinavian countries, aiming to document the existence of

this phenomenon, but also the severe negative consequences of targets' exposure to such negative social behaviour (Einarsen et al., 2020). In summary, the pioneering work of both Brodsky and Leymann has made important contributions to our understanding of the phenomenon of bullying in the workplace.

Since the late 1990s, research on the concept of bullying in the workplace has gained increasing attention all over the world (León-Pérez et al., 2021), resulting in an extensive growth in quantity, quality, and intricacy of issues investigated over the past 30 years (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Yet, most of the bullying research to date has concentrated on uncovering the consequences of being exposed to bullying in working life. The literature related to this research question is vast, and the research community now has a lot of knowledge about the individual outcomes that result from bullying victimization (Hogh et al., 2019; Mikkelsen et al., 2020). Meta-analytic evidence shows positive associations between workplace bullying and mental health problems (Conway et al., 2018; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Theorell et al., 2015; Verkuil et al., 2015), most strongly in the form of post-traumatic stress symptoms, anxiety, and depression. A recent systematic review also suggests a positive association between bullying and suicidal ideation (Leach et al., 2017), though there are still few studies investigating this relationship. Furthermore, bullying has been shown to be related to a wide range of physiological health problems, including sleep problems (Hansen et al., 2016; Hansen et al., 2014; Lallukka et al., 2011), headache, and bodily pain (Glambek, Nielsen, et al., 2018; Nielsen et al., 2014; Saastamoinen et al., 2009; Tynes et al., 2013), cardiovascular disease (Kivimäki et al., 2003; Xu et al., 2019) and type 2 diabetes (Xu et al., 2018). With regard to job-related outcomes, bullying has been linked to reduced job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012), and increased risk of sickness absence (Niedhammer et al., 2013; Nielsen et al., 2016; Ortega et al., 2011), job insecurity and turnover intentions (Glambek et al., 2014; Hogh et al., 2011; Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2017; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012), and expulsion from working life (Glambek et al., 2015). With such a wide range of serious and long-lasting detrimental effects at the individual level, it is reasonable to conclude that the presence of bullying also brings consequences for organizations and society at large. Particularly with regard to

sickness absenteeism, turnover, and expulsion from working life, the financial costs have been estimated to be very high (Hoel et al., 2020).

1.1.2 Defining workplace bullying

The previous section has documented that the phenomenon of bullying and harassment in the workplace has gained vast interest across continents and cultures. This increasing interest has since resulted in multiple streams of research into both the consequences and antecedents of bullying. As a result, several different labels are used to describe the underlying phenomenon of bullying and harassment in the workplace, including ‘harassment’, ‘mobbing’, ‘scapegoating’, ‘victimization’, and ‘incivility’ (see Notelaers & Van der Heijden, 2021, for an overview). Today, ‘workplace bullying’ is the term most commonly used in Europe to describe the phenomenon of systematic and prolonged mistreatment of employees (Einarsen et al., 2020).

One of the most well-established and widely accepted definitions of workplace bullying has been presented by Einarsen and colleagues (2020, p. 26):

“Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work. In order for the label bullying (or mobbing) to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g. weekly) and over a period of time (e.g. about six months). Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted may end up in an inferior position becoming the target of systematic negative social acts. A conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties of approximately equal ‘strength’ are in conflict.”

A core element in this definition is the exposure to ‘systematic negative social acts’, which are experienced as negative and unwanted by the target. These acts may be direct – including verbal abuse, accusations, and public humiliation – but also more subtle and indirect nature in the form of gossiping, rumour spreading and social exclusion (Einarsen et al., 2009; Notelaers, Van der Heijden, et al., 2019). Therefore,

bullying is strictly speaking not about single and isolated episodes or events but rather refers to behaviours that are repeatedly and persistently directed towards one or more persons (Einarsen et al., 2020). In line with this, Leymann (1996) has suggested that the victims must be exposed to at least one negative act on a weekly basis and that the duration of the bullying behaviours should last for a period of six months or longer. Other researchers have argued that a more accurate measure of workplace bullying would be to apply a minimum of two negative acts each week, over a six month period (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001). Another defining characteristic of workplace bullying is however the gradually escalating and prolonged nature of the exposure, indicating that bullying at any one time may come in different levels of intensity and frequencies of the said negative acts. An important aspect of this definitional component following from the latter is that bullying, therefore, is not an ‘either-or’ phenomenon, but rather a gradually evolving process where targets in early phases are subjected to indirect or discreet behaviours which may be difficult to pinpoint. However, in later phases more direct aggression may appear (Einarsen, 2000), and individuals may end up in an inferior position where they are targets of systematic negative acts. Accordingly, we may think of bullying not only as an end state – with its accompanying consequences – but also as an ongoing process, and even as a situation that plays out through experiences of specific negative acts happening on a daily or weekly basis. Hence, in the present thesis there will be studies that look at bullying as an end state where one is either bullied or not (Paper 1), as a situation where one is subjected to negative acts on a continuum from low to high exposure (Paper 2), and as episodes happening on a daily basis (Paper 3).

The last central characteristic of workplace bullying is an imbalance of power between the victimizer and the victim (Einarsen et al., 1994; Leymann, 1996). Typically, the victim will perceive that he or she has very few resources, if any, to defend themselves against the negative acts to which he or she is being exposed. Thus, according to the operational definition, it is not bullying if the two parties are of equal strength, at least not when arriving at the end of the process.

Although the operationalizations of the many different terms used to describe bullying and harassment in the workplace share many of the common characteristics, there are also some differences between the concepts. One important distinction is the differences in operational definitions employed in what has come to be known as the North American and the European research tradition, respectively. Research following the North American research tradition is often anchored in aggression theory, where the perpetrator's 'intent to harm' is an important aspect of the operationalization of interpersonal aggression (Neuman & Baron, 1997). This specification in the definition of aggression is made to distinguish aggressive behaviours in the workplace from mere accidental episodes, where the result may have been harmful, but where the behaviour itself was not intended to cause such harm. Scholars following this tradition classify workplace bullying as purposeful aggressive behaviour on the part of the perpetrator, thus arguing that intent to harm should be included in the operational definition (Baron & Neuman, 1996; Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Keashly et al., 2020; Rhodes et al., 2010). According to this perspective, it is necessary to include intent as an element in the definition because it makes it possible to distinguish workplace bullying from other forms of hostile workplace behaviour, such as incivility or accidental harm (Keashly et al., 2020).

In contrast, the majority of studies on bullying that have been conducted following the European research tradition focus on the target's perceived exposure in the victimization process. This research tradition has historically been characterized by a high degree of consensus regarding concepts and features of workplace bullying, and European scholars usually omit any mentions of intent when describing bullying in the workplace as the focus is on the target and not on the perpetrator(s). The argument is that it is impossible to verify the presence of intent on the part of the perpetrator when studying targets and/or victims and their exposure to bullying (Hoel et al., 1999). It follows, then, that if intent were to be included as a central element of the definition, it would fall to the perpetrator to decide whether their behaviour should be categorized as bullying or not (Einarsen et al., 2020). Moreover, if one were to consider intent as an integral part of the operationalization of the bullying concept, it would be necessary to clarify exactly what 'intent' refers to, thereby

ensuring that there is no ambiguity concerning how the term should be applied. However, this would be difficult, as there are several different ways of looking at intent, depending on what perspective on bullying is of interest. In a recent review chapter, Einarsen and colleagues (2020) argue that one may limit the meaning of intent to that of each single bullying act. In this case, if each single act were to be examined for evidence of intent, it would be very difficult for a target to prove that their perceived victimization has been repeated and systematic. However, the authors argue that intent may also be applied in a broader term, by referring to the bullying *process* as a whole, thereby indicating that the perpetrator intended to expose a single target to repeated and systematic negative acts over time. Alternatively, intent may be related to the end goal of victimizing a target, that is, to push the target into an inferior and defenseless position. Finally, intent may refer to the extent to which the perpetrator has a conscious and explicit plan to cause harm to the victim, as a means to expelling them from the organization (Einarsen et al., 2020).

Even if there were no uncertainty related to the meaning of intent in the operational definition, it would still be difficult to accurately capture intentionality in the instruments used to measure bullying in the workplace. In order to assess intent, targets must be able to refer to a particular perpetrator when answering questions of their experiences (Hershcovis, 2011). However, it may also be argued that the level of exposure that one person is experiencing is likely the sum of many small acts by several different potential perpetrators – that would potentially be written off as insignificant or simply thoughtless in and of themselves – but when accumulated over time may add up to a significant level of perceived victimization by the target. In other words, what a particular person in the work environment has done in isolation is of little consequence, as is that individual's intention behind their specific actions. Rather, what is important is the sum total of the target's experienced exposure, regardless of the identity of the perpetrator(s) and their assumed intent. Thus, most scholars within the European research tradition agree that intent is not a necessary criterion when defining bullying in the workplace. In the present thesis, the included studies are based on data with self-reported information about the potential targets' experienced exposure to acts of workplace bullying. As such, no information is

included from the perspective of potential perpetrators and their assumed intent to harm. Accordingly, focusing on the target perspective and following the definition by Einarsen and colleagues (2020), intent to harm is not included as a factor that may influence whether the respondents may be considered targets of bullying or not. The target's own *perception* of the perpetrators' intent, on the other hand, may be important in determining whether the target interprets and subsequently labels their experience as bullying or not (Einarsen et al., 2020; Keashly, 2001). When the duration of the exposure is long, many targets make sense of the situation by attributing their experiences to the perpetrator(s) intention to cause harm, with the ultimate goal of pushing them out of the organization (Vartia, 1996; Zapf, 1999). Yet, this is not included in the measurement methods used to capture exposure to bullying (see also Nielsen et al., 2020).

1.1.3 Explaining the phenomenon of workplace bullying

Because of the detrimental nature of many of the outcomes associated with bullying, many researchers have shifted their interest in recent years and begun uncovering which variables may cause bullying to occur in the first place. By knowing more about what triggers a bullying process, organizations stand a better chance of intervening early and preventing many of the harmful consequences we see when bullying has reached its highest level of escalation, at which point it may be too late to reduce the associated harmful effects. This stream of research has proposed two main explanations as to why bullying occurs in organizations. Predatory bullying describes cases where the victim has done nothing to provoke or justify the aggressive behaviours they are exposed to (Einarsen, 1999). Victims of predatory bullying often accidentally find themselves in a situation where the perpetrator is either demonstrating power or in some other way is exploiting the weakness of another individual, who then may become a victim by mere 'accident'. The actions of destructive leaders, demonstrating petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994) or abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007), represent this type of predatory bullying. Alternatively, an employee may also become the victim of bullying because they are seen as an 'easy target' for pent-up stress and frustration in a work group. Thylefors (1987)

describes this as a strategy used in situations where the source of tension is either difficult to define, inaccessible, or simply too powerful to be attacked. In such cases the group may instead take out their aggression on a person who is less powerful than themselves, deeming this person a suitable scapegoat.

Dispute-related bullying (Einarsen, 1999), on the other hand, relates to the belief that bullying is the result of an unresolved social conflict, that has escalated to the point where an imbalance of power between the involved parties has developed (Zapf & Gross, 2001). This notion is in line with Leymann (1996), who argued that bullying should be viewed as a process developed through four stages, starting with a critical incident, usually an interpersonal conflict. This first stage may be very short, thereby quickly leading into the next stage, stigmatization. In this second stage, the targeted individual is exposed to a variety of negative social acts characterized by aggressive manipulation designed to “get to the person” in order to punish him or her, resulting in the target feeling stigmatized (Leymann, 1996). At some point, managers are required to intervene in the situation, making it an official “case” for the organization in stage three. In this stage, it is not uncommon for the previous stigmatization of the victim to cause the management to view this individual as a “difficult employee”, arguing that the victims’ personal characteristics are responsible for the position they find themselves in, rather than considering potential environmental factors. Accordingly, management tends to favour the position of the perpetrator(s) and accept their negative view of the victim. The final stage of this bullying process, according to Leymann (1992, 1996), involves the expulsion of the target, either from their position, their job, or working life itself.

The argument that there is an interwoven and gradually escalating relationship between interpersonal conflict and workplace bullying has resulted in scholars questioning whether conflict and bullying are overlapping constructs, or two related, yet distinct, phenomena. In recent years, some longitudinal evidence supports the view that bullying is a distinct concept that is separate from that of interpersonal conflict and workplace aggression, both in the experiences of those exposed and in the related outcomes. A study by Baillien and colleagues (2017) substantiates this by

showing that interpersonal conflict and workplace bullying are both conceptually and empirically different. That is, if instances of interpersonal conflict are not resolved at an earlier stage, they will eventually develop into something different and more destructive than mere instances of interpersonal tensions between ‘equal’ parties. Likewise, using latent class cluster approach, Notelaers and colleagues (2018), found that while interpersonal conflict, incivility, and workplace bullying seem to be overlapping constructs when measured at levels of low intensity, bullying clearly deviates from the other two constructs when it reaches higher levels of escalation. Furthermore, the results showed distinct relationships for conflict-aggression and bullying, respectively, with several well-being and strain outcomes. Accordingly, the authors argue that a simple unifying approach, or employing a single label for the three phenomena, is not appropriate. As such, we may view interpersonal conflict as an independent construct, that functions as an important situational risk factor for bullying in the workplace.

1.1.4 Measuring workplace bullying

Measuring bullying and aggression in the workplace may be challenging (Jex & Bayne, 2017), as bullying is a complex and largely subjective construct comprised of several different facets. Accordingly, workplace bullying has been measured in several different ways, to investigate the nature and frequency of the phenomenon, as well as predictors and outcomes (Nielsen et al., 2020). When assessing bullying among children, a variety of observation methods and peer/teacher nominations have been applied, in addition to other data sources such as self-reports (e.g. Revised Olweus Bullying Questionnaire (OBQ); Olweus, 1996; 2007), mother reports, stress hormone data, projective techniques, and psycho-physiological measurements (Olweus, 2013). Studies such as these have provided useful information on different aspects of bully/victim problems, although some data sources, including peer nominations, have been criticized for not being well suited for prevalence estimation (Solberg & Olweus, 2003).

Following the European tradition, most researchers measure the level of exposure to bullying in the workplace by focusing on the experiences of the targets. Taking a

target perspective when investigating workplace bullying is useful in that it allows us to capture the whole range of bullying behaviours that the exposed individual is experiencing (Einarsen et al., 2020). This contrasts with the North American tradition, where the focus more often is placed on the aggressive behaviour enacted by the perpetrator (Keashly et al., 2020). However, by studying perpetrators, researchers may fail to capture the very concept of bullying, because this approach only provides access to information about the behaviour exhibited by one specific person, and not any other individuals who may also be involved in a bullying process. This information may also be unreliable, because the perpetrator in question may not be completely truthful when it comes to explaining their own behaviour. Nielsen and colleagues (2020) have further argued that it would be highly difficult to gather adequate information about a bullying process from all relevant sources, and, even if it were possible, the inter-rater correlation between target and perpetrator is likely to be low. Accordingly, as information on the perceptions of those exposed is crucial to study adverse effects on the targets' health and well-being, this is considered a useful and highly important area of research in and of itself.

Researchers in the European tradition commonly employ one of two approaches: a self-labelling approach or a behavioural experience approach (Nielsen et al., 2020). When applying the self-labelling method, participants are usually asked to answer a single-item question of whether they have been exposed to bullying within a specific duration (e.g., the last 6 months). Most frequently, this single-item question is presented along with a theoretical definition of bullying (see e.g., Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Nielsen et al., 2010; O'Moore et al., 2003). However, some studies do not include such a definition (see e.g., Lewis, 1999; Rayner, 1997). Response categories also vary between studies, with some employing either a five- or seven-point frequency scale, usually ranging from 'never bullied' to 'bullied daily' (Cowie et al., 2002). Other studies use simple dichotomous (yes/no) response categories (Finne et al., 2011). Studies following the former approach usually differentiate targets from non-targets by employing a cut-off criterion. Where this cut-off criterion should be set, however, is an ongoing debate between scholars in the field. While some researchers follow the criterion set by Leymann (1996) of experiencing

workplace bullying at least weekly during the last 6 months, others follow more liberal inclusion criteria, saying that any respondent who has experienced bullying at least occasionally during the last 6 months, should also be considered a target of workplace bullying (e.g., Berthelsen et al., 2011; Einarsen & Nielsen, 2015; Glambeek et al., 2015). However, it has been argued that many of the thresholds frequently used in the bullying literature are more or less arbitrary and lack a solid theoretical foundation (Hutchinson et al., 2017; Notelaers & Einarsen, 2013). Accordingly, some researchers instead take the position that every respondent that indicates one of the response categories representing any exposure to bullying should be defined as a self-labelled victim (see e.g., Berthelsen et al., 2011; Einarsen & Nielsen, 2015; Glambeek et al., 2015).

The self-labelling approach has several advantages, one being that it takes up very little space in a questionnaire and is therefore easy to administer. By explicitly asking respondents whether or not they consider themselves victims of bullying, this method also ensures high face validity. (Nielsen et al., 2020). As such, the researcher gets information regarding the respondents' subjective view of themselves as a victim of bullying. Despite these strengths, the self-labelling method also comes with some disadvantages. First, as mentioned, this method takes a subjective approach to measuring exposure to bullying, which makes it vulnerable to potential biases and misconceptions (Felblinger, 2008; Lewis et al., 2008). For instance, some people may find it difficult to admit or accept – both to themselves and to others – that they are in fact bullied. For many victims of bullying, it may be difficult to answer a direct question about whether they consider themselves a victim of bullying truthfully, because the negative connotations associated with a 'victim role' may represent a threat to the individuals' self-esteem (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Van Beest & Williams, 2006). This may result in a reluctance to self-identify as a victim, even if their experiences correspond to the formal definition of workplace bullying. Additionally, even when bullying is measured by a single item with a given definition of bullying, researchers cannot be sure whether the participants are in fact using this definition or if they use a definition of their own instead. However, meta-analytic evidence shows that studies using the self-labelling question presented alongside a definition yield

significantly lower prevalence rates than self-labelling studies without definitions (Nielsen et al., 2010; Rayner & Lewis, 2020). This indicates that respondents do take the definition of the bullying concept into consideration when this is presented alongside the single-item question. Finally, the self-labelling approach alone offers no insight into the nature of the behaviours involved (Nielsen et al., 2020). Accordingly, the usefulness of this approach may be limited when studying the nature of a bullying situation in the early stages of escalation. It is, however, a highly appropriate method when the goal is to capture the experiences of long-term exposed individuals who regard themselves as victimized.

Alternatively, researchers may employ the behavioural experience approach, in which respondents complete an inventory where they indicate how often they experience each of a range of specific negative social acts typical for bullying scenarios (Notelaers & Van der Heijden, 2021). Studies employing this approach present the respondent with a list of negative acts typical for bullying situations, without explicitly mentioning the concept of workplace bullying. Several different multi-item measurement inventories have been developed to measure and assess the behaviours involved. Some scales have only been employed in one single study, whereas others have been employed in a wide range of studies. These include the Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terror (Leymann, 1990a), the Work Harassment Scale (Björkqvist et al., 1994), the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ-R/NAQ; Einarsen et al., 2009; Einarsen & Raknes, 1997), and the Workplace Aggression Research Questionnaire (Harvey & Keashly, 2003). Of these, the Negative Acts Questionnaire–Revised (Einarsen et al., 2009) is the scale that is most frequently employed in studies investigating workplace bullying (Nielsen et al., 2020). While the validity studies of the original Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ; Einarsen & Raknes, 1997) was limited to the Scandinavian cultural context, the NAQ-R was developed with the aim of establishing a reliable and comprehensive scale that was also adapted to Anglo-American cultures (Einarsen et al., 2009). The NAQ-R consists of 22 items measuring three different types of negative social behaviour at work, namely person-oriented bullying (including social isolation), work-related bullying, and physically intimidating bullying. When presented with the scale, the respondents are asked to

recall their experiences in the workplace, usually during the past six months, and indicate how often they have experienced each of these 22 negative acts using a response scale ranging from ‘never’ to ‘daily’. In 2019, a short nine-item version of the scale was published (SNAQ; Notelaers, Van der Heijden, et al., 2019), and, subsequently, a four-item version of the SNAQ has been employed in studies utilizing a daily diary design (see e.g., Hoprekstad et al., 2019). The validity of the NAQ/NAQ-R has now been established in a range of studies from around the globe (see also Nielsen et al., 2020).

Nielsen and colleagues (2020) note several advantages to these types of scales when it comes to measuring complex phenomena such as workplace bullying, a major one being the ability to assess the psychometric quality of the scale. Furthermore, by using multiple items that capture different yet overlapping domains in the bullying phenomenon (e.g., person-related, work-related, and physically intimidating bullying), researchers are able to measure different forms of bullying in the work environment. Moreover, this approach makes it possible to statistically model the frequency and thereby the repeated nature of the experiences of different negative social acts. Accordingly, researchers are able to gain insight into not only the different forms of bullying but also their progress over time for different categories of respondents, at least when using appropriate statistical techniques and longitudinal designs (e.g., Latent Class Cluster analysis, Notelaers et al., 2006; Reknes et al., 2021).

One disadvantage to measuring bullying by frequency of exposure to negative acts, however, is that we cannot be sure that all the requirements according to the definition of bullying are fulfilled (Nielsen et al., 2020). For example, this approach does not provide any information explicitly relating to the assumed imbalance of power between the target and the perpetrator, meaning that we cannot be sure whether this criterion from the definition is satisfied. In an effort to investigate this potential limitation, a study by Nielsen, Gjerstad and colleagues (2017) looked at the potential moderating effect of the perceived ability to defend oneself against exposure to negative acts on the relationship between such exposure and symptoms of anxiety.

Interestingly, the results showed that the perceived ability to defend did act as a buffer against anxiety when the level of exposure to negative behaviours was low. When the level of exposure to negative behaviours was high, however, the ability to defend no longer seemed to have the desired protective effect. This indicates that the process of being exposed to high levels of negative behaviours over time in and of itself indicates that individuals do not have the ability to defend themselves against such behaviour. Finally, a potential disadvantage with the behavioural experience approach is that may be difficult to gain detailed information regarding the bullying process because the participants are – in most instances – required to recall correct information regarding the instances of bullying in the past 6 months (Cowie et al., 2002). However, this problem may be rectified by employing study designs with shorter time intervals, such as weekly or daily quantitative diary studies (see e.g., Hoprekstad et al., 2019).

When deciding between the two approaches of measuring bullying in the workplace, researchers need to take into consideration which part of the complex phenomenon they are interested in tapping into. For instance, the NAQ-R may be used to differentiate between groups of individuals with regards to levels of bullying exposure (targets), ranging from infrequent to severe exposure to bullying (Leon-Perez et al., 2014; Nielsen et al., 2009; Notelaers et al., 2006). In this, we may potentially uncover important information regarding the escalating properties in the bullying process. The self-labelling measure, on the other hand, makes it possible to differentiate between individuals' subjective appraisal of their status as a victim of bullying, usually at the end of an already highly escalated process. As discussed, both measures provide valid, but supplementary, information on workplace bullying (Nielsen et al., 2020; Nielsen et al., 2009), and which approach that is most appropriate depends on the research question. Finally, it is important to note that the prevalence measured by the two approaches seems to differ, depending on the methodology applied and the way the concept is operationalized (Nielsen et al., 2010). A meta-analysis by Nielsen and colleagues (2010) showed that the behavioural experience method on a global level is associated with a prevalence rate of 14,8 %, while the self-labelling approach when presented with a definition led to a prevalence

rate of 11,3 %. The highest prevalence rate was associated with the self-labelling approach presented without a definition (18,1 %). Therefore, scholars are advised to take care when comparing studies using different methodological measurements to assess bullying, as the results are likely affected by the chosen measurement method (Nielsen et al., 2010). In a more recent summary based on available samples – which has nearly doubled in size in the during the last 10 years – Zapf and colleagues (2020) estimates the prevalence among the European workforce to be between 3 % and 20 %, depending on the chosen measurement method. The authors categorize about 3 % of cases as victims of ‘severe bullying’ (i.e., combining the self-labelling-method with the behavioural experience criterion of bullying ‘at least once a week’).

Accordingly, as the present thesis aims to investigate the risk factors of bullying at different points of the presumed development process (i.e., from day-to-day exposure to long term victimization), the individual papers employ the measurement method that can most appropriately capture the bullying phenomenon at the development stage of interest. That is, paper 1 employs the self-labelling measure, as this study investigates the development of new victims of bullying over a two-year period. In Papers 2 and 3, on the other hand, the SNAQ (9 and 4 item version) is employed, as we are interested in the increase in targets’ experienced exposure to bullying behaviours over a 6 month and a day-to-day time frame, respectively.

1.2 The concept of laissez-faire leadership

One of the fields in applied psychology that has been the subject of much interest and research in the last century is the field of leadership and management. Historically, research in this area has mainly focused on the constructive aspects of leadership, and great emphasis has been placed on leadership styles and leadership behaviour as predictors of efficiency and motivation (Bass & Bass, 2008). However, in recent years, increasing interest has been devoted to the study of destructive forms of leadership, and their associated negative consequences for subordinates and organizations (Skogstad et al., 2017). This is also the case when investigating bullying in the workplace, and a large number of studies have investigated the role of

destructive leadership practices as a predictor of workplace bullying over the last couple of decades (Samnani, 2021). As leaders are in positions of power, they are often identified as perpetrators themselves (Tepper, 2007), or found to contribute to bullying indirectly by creating conditions that are more conducive to bullying behaviours (Skogstad et al., 2007). The majority of research on destructive leadership has focused mainly on the effect of more active types of destructive leadership – such as abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000) and tyrannical leadership (Ashforth, 1994) – on employee outcomes. However, an increasing interest has been placed on the more passive forms of leadership in recent years, both in general and in relation to workplace bullying (Skogstad et al., 2017). One such form of passive leadership, namely *laissez-faire* leadership, has proved to be a relatively frequent leadership style in Norway, with 21,2 % of employees having experienced some form of *laissez-faire* leadership over a six-month period (Aasland et al., 2010). *Laissez-faire* leadership has been associated with a wide range of negative consequences for subordinates (Skogstad et al., 2017) including being a risk factor for workplace bullying (see e.g., Hoel et al., 2010; Skogstad et al., 2007), making this an area of research that should be of special interest to organizations.

1.2.1 Defining *laissez-faire* leadership

Laissez-faire leadership denote leaders who fail to use their authority, avoid making decisions, and abdicate their responsibilities as leaders (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Skogstad et al., 2014). Bass and Avolio (1994) conceptualize *laissez-faire* as the avoidance or absence of leadership, and Bass and Riggio (2006) even refer to it as ‘non-leadership’. However, in the past few decades, *laissez-faire* leadership has increasingly been regarded as a passive type of destructive leadership in the form of non-responsive leadership in situations that may merit managerial attention (Schriesheim et al., 2009; Skogstad et al., 2014). Such avoidance and absence of leadership violate the followers’ legitimate expectations, and as such, may have destructive outcomes for followers (Skogstad et al., 2017). Researchers have also suggested that *laissez-faire* leadership may be conceived as a passive form of

aggression (Buss, 1961; Parrott & Giancola, 2007), and – in extreme cases – even as a distinct form of ostracism (i.e., social exclusion; Nielsen, 2013; Williams, 2007).

Conceptually, laissez-faire leadership represents the absence of transactions between the leader and the subordinates in the way that the leader avoids making decisions, denies responsibility, and fails to use their authority (Antonakis et al., 2003). The leader is absent even though the employees have a need for activity and involvement by the leader (Avolio, 2004; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008). Lewin and colleagues (1939) argued that laissez-faire leadership was not only about physical absence but also that the leader failed to meet the expectations and demands made to the leader by the staff, as well as the laissez-faire leader resigning from the responsibility and duties he or she had. The leader may demonstrate laissez-faire leadership at the individual level as a way of avoiding conflict (Thomas, 1976, 1992) or, possibly, alternate between being active/concerned or passive/detached depending upon the particular subordinate involved. Furthermore, Einarsen and colleagues (2007) argue that laissez-faire leadership violates the legitimate interests of the organization – for example by failing to meet the subordinates' legitimate expectations of guidance and support – thereby falling within the definition of destructive leadership. Thus, although laissez-faire leadership was originally defined as the most passive and ineffective form of leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994), it can be considered active in the sense that the leader deliberately or at least actively chooses to avoid taking action (Antonakis et al., 2003; Skogstad et al., 2014). This is also in line with Watzlawick and colleagues' (2008) statement that: “[...] there is no such thing as non-behaviour or, to put it more simply, one cannot not behave” (p. 74). Accordingly, Skogstad and colleagues (2014) further developed the operationalization of laissez-faire leadership as a passive and avoidant form of destructive leadership, and propose the following definition: “Laissez-faire leadership may be defined as a follower-centred form of avoidance-based leadership by focusing on subordinates' perceived situational need for leadership, and leader non-response to such needs, as the main source of variance in outcomes” (p. 325).

1.2.2 Destructive consequences of laissez-faire leadership

Not all researchers agree that laissez-faire leadership should be operationalized as destructive, simply because it is associated with destructive outcomes. In a highly cited meta-analysis, Schyns and Schilling (2013) argue that the definition of destructive leadership does not cover the type of ‘non-behaviour’ indicative of laissez-faire leadership behaviour, and that there is a clear qualitative difference between passive non-leadership and active supervisor hostility as described by concepts such as abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007) or petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994). Accordingly, Schyns and Schilling (2013) distinguish between destructive leadership and a more overarching term coined *negative* leadership (Schilling, 2009), which includes any form of negative leader *behaviour* ranging from ineffective (i.e., laissez-faire leadership) to the more active destructive behaviours enacted by abusive supervisors and petty tyrants.

On the other hand, I would argue that it is difficult to differentiate destructive behaviour from the destructiveness of its outcomes. This argument is in line with that of many other researchers, who emphasize the leaders’ avoidance and neglect in performing expected duties – for example by ignoring the individual needs of their subordinates – thereby taking the position laissez-faire leadership represents something more than the mere absence of leadership (Barling & Frone, 2017; Fosse et al., 2019; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008; Kelloway et al., 2005; Klasmeier et al., 2021; Skogstad et al., 2007; Thoroughgood et al., 2012). Moreover, active and passive forms of destructive behaviour from the leader appears to have similar negative effects on subordinates’ affective well-being, such as reduced job satisfaction, organizational commitment and increased emotional exhaustion (see Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Skogstad et al., 2017, for an overview). Additionally, it is assumed that passive leaders, who avoid their management duties (Avolio, 2004), can be an important predictor of employees’ experience of work-related stress. For instance, a study by Skogstad and colleagues (2014) have shown that laissez-faire leadership is the only leadership style that can predict role ambiguity over time. Furthermore, poor/ineffective leadership has been cited as a significant contributory factor towards

the fostering of unhealthy and destructive behaviour within the workplace (Harvey et al., 2007; Yamada, 2008). These findings are in line with the theoretical assumption that “bad is stronger than good” (Baumeister et al., 2001), a phenomenon in which the psychological effects of experiences that are associated with negative consequences systematically outweighs the psychological effects of experiences associated with positive outcomes. This generalized theoretical notion was nuanced by Fors Brandebo and colleagues (2016), who tested whether this hypothesis also holds true for a number of leadership issues. Their analyses showed that the impact of leadership may be outcome specific, that is, constructive leadership behaviours seem to have a greater impact on positive, work-related outcomes (i.e., trust in leader, work atmosphere). Conversely, destructive leadership behaviours appear to have a greater impact on negative phenomena with a stronger personal meaning (i.e., emotional exhaustion, propensity to leave). Interestingly, the dimensions of destructive leadership measuring passive forms of destructive behaviours showed the strongest associations with the negative outcomes. This line of reasoning supports the importance of focusing on the negative aspects of leadership – including passive-avoidant and laissez-faire leadership – when investigating when subordinates perform negative acts or other forms of counterproductive behaviour in the workplace. If the notion that ‘bad is stronger than good when the outcome is bad’ holds true, negative and destructive forms of leadership are likely to have a stronger impact on negative outcomes such as negative acts and bullying, than positive and constructive forms of leadership could be expected to have a positive impact.

1.2.3 Laissez-faire leadership and workplace bullying

With regard to workplace bullying, researchers have documented that destructive forms of leadership – be they active or passive – may be direct predictors of subordinates’ experiences of exposure and victimization (Balducci et al., 2021; Rai & Agarwal, 2018). In fact, laissez-faire leadership, characterized by a lack of support from the leader in stressful situations where there is a particular need for leadership, may in and of itself be perceived as bullying by subordinates (Hoel et al., 2010; Skogstad et al., 2007). This relationship between passive leadership and workplace

bullying may be explained in terms of low perceived costs for the perpetrator of being caught and condemned (Salin, 2003). Moreover, ineffective leadership can be viewed as a catalyst that allows a culture of bullying to fester, seemingly condoning these types of bullying behaviours by not interfering (Brodsky, 1976). Indeed, laissez-faire leadership may be considered a factor in the development and maintenance of a bullying dynamic (Salin & Hoel, 2020) and may be considered to have a more detrimental negative effect than ‘zero leadership’ because it implies that more could have been done to resolve a conflict before escalating to bullying (Skogstad et al., 2007). Moreover, by not intervening and managing conflicts and other stressful situations that their subordinates may be experiencing in the work environment, laissez-faire leaders are likely to exacerbate the prevailing level of stress in the situation, thereby increasing the risk of exposure to negative acts and bullying in the workplace. This latter possibility has so far received little attention from scholars investigating workplace bullying. Accordingly, the present thesis aims to extend the existing research on this topic, by including laissez-faire leadership as a situational moderator that may exacerbate the association between other risk factors in the work environment and exposure to negative acts and bullying.

1.3 Theoretical framework

1.3.1 Research on bullying in the workplace

Workplace bullying is a complex phenomenon with causes and risk factors on many levels, and is also most likely influenced by an interplay between such risk factors (Salin & Hoel, 2020; Zapf, 1999). Such a theoretical view is supported by empirical evidence which suggests that the reasons for why bullying arises and develops are likely to be associated with both individual factors (i.e., personality; Zapf & Einarsen, 2020), work-related characteristics (i.e., aspects of the job, work group, or the organization; Salin & Hoel, 2020) as well as societal level factors (Van de Vliert et al., 2013). This earlier work has resulted in two prevailing overarching explanations for why bullying occurs in the workplace, namely the ‘individual disposition hypothesis’ and the ‘work environment hypothesis’. In the following section, a brief

overview will be presented of these two different approaches to the study of workplace bullying. The main focus in the following, however, will be on the explanatory mechanisms in the work environment hypothesis, as this is the approach chosen for the present project focusing on the conditions by which bullying occurs, exists, and develops in the work environment.

The individual disposition hypothesis

The individual disposition hypothesis highlights individual characteristics or personality traits as potential precursors of bullying. According to this view, specific characteristics, or combinations of characteristics, are likely to increase the risk of either becoming a target/victim or a perpetrator of workplace bullying (Nielsen & Knardahl, 2015).

In relation to the victims' risk of being exposed to bullying, two distinct "victim personalities" have been described. The "vulnerable victim" describes individuals who are seen as "easy targets" of bullying, because they are seemingly unable to defend themselves and unable to manage conflicts at work constructively (Zapf & Einarsen, 2020). This type of victim is shown to score low on self-esteem, social competence, and aggression, and high on social anxiety and insecurity (Coyne et al., 2000; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007), making them likely to react with withdrawal when attacked. These individuals may also become victims of bullying simply because they are in some way considered an outsider or a non-prototypical member of a work group, resulting in the individual being forced into the role of a scapegoat (Thylefors, 1987). In contrast, the "provocative victim" (Einarsen, 1999; Olweus, 1978), describes victims who act in ways that trigger aggressive behaviour in others, who are aggressive themselves, and/or who are likely to respond aggressively when confronted with conflict- or bullying behaviour. It may also be that these individuals, in order to protect themselves, feel the need to retaliate against their aggressor, resulting in the victim becoming a bully themselves. In his research on school bullying, Olweus (1978, 1993) characterized these "bully-victims" as displaying a combination of anxious and aggressive reaction patterns, and these individuals have

been found to score low on self-esteem and social competence, but high on aggression (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007).

Although the issue of personality as a proposed antecedent of bullying is controversial (Björkqvist et al., 1994; Glambek, Einarsen, et al., 2018; Leymann, 1992), some notable findings have been presented with regard to victims' and perpetrators' personality traits from the Five Factor Model (McCrae & Costa, 1987) as predictors of workplace bullying. As regards the personality traits of bullying victims, meta-analytic evidence shows that exposure to harassment is associated positively with neuroticism, and negatively with extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Nielsen, Glasø, et al., 2017). More recently, a longitudinal study investigating the role of personality on the development of the bullying process showed that individuals with high levels of trait-anxiety and trait anger are not only more likely to be exposed to more bullying in general than other individuals, but their exposure is also more likely to escalate over time. Furthermore, this study showed that a bullying process involving targets with high trait-anxiety is less likely to de-escalate over time as reported by these high trait targets (Reknes et al., 2021). Additionally, there is a vast amount of empirical evidence showing a strong and consistent relationship between victims' propensity to experience negative affectivity and exposure to workplace harassment (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Bowling & Beehr, 2006).

When studying perpetrators, researchers have identified that the so-called "dark triad" of personality traits (i.e., Psychopathy, Narcissism and Machiavellianism) (Baughman et al., 2012; Linton & Power, 2013; Pilch & Turska, 2015), as well as high and/or unstable self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 2000; Baumeister et al., 1996; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007) and a lack of social competencies (Jenkins et al., 2012), seem to increase the probability of engaging in aggressive behaviour towards others in the workplace. Research on personality traits and workplace deviance and aggression more broadly defined consistently show robust relationships between high scores on neuroticism and low scores on agreeableness and conscientiousness (Berry et al., 2007; Bowling et al., 2015; Jones

et al., 2011). Perpetrators' negative affectivity has also been linked to engagement in workplace aggressive behaviour (Hackney & Perrewé, 2018; Martinko et al., 2017).

Accordingly, Nielsen and colleagues (2017) argue that personal characteristics should be considered when investigating harassment in the workplace, so as to be able to fully understand the nature, causes and consequences of harassment. However, although personal characteristics of both victims and perpetrators likely influence the bullying process to some degree, researchers have strongly argued against one-sided and mono-causal arguments when trying to explain the development of workplace bullying (see e.g., Hauge et al., 2009). In line with this, a recent study by Reknes and colleagues (2019) showed that victims' scores on trait anger, trait anxiety and negative affect strengthened the positive relationship between role conflicts and reports of bullying behaviours. Accordingly, the victim's personality does seem to have an impact on those who are exposed to negative acts, yet only when the situation lays the ground for bullying to flourish. In other words, the personality of the target is not enough in and of itself to trigger aggressive behaviour from others but may to some degree pose an extra risk, yet in combination with an otherwise sub-optimal working environment, characterized by conflicting demands and expectations, personality does seem to play an important part. Therefore, Reknes and colleagues (2019) argue that explanations for why such processes occur and develop in the workplace must focus on the potential influence of the various situational and organizational factors that exist in the work environment.

Despite this acknowledgment that both individual and organizational factors – as well as the interaction between the two – may be relevant for the understanding of the bullying process, the remainder of the present thesis will focus on antecedents and risk factors of workplace bullying in the psychosocial working environment and the prevailing organisation of work, including leadership practices. Studies consistently show far more robust relationships between stressors and leadership practices and bullying as compared to such personality factors. Accordingly, understanding these organizational factors are essential for developing effective and successful measures to prevent the escalation of bullying in the workplace (Salin, 2006). Furthermore, it

makes sense to focus on such organizational factors that, to a larger extent than individual factors, are under management control.

The work environment hypothesis

Contrasting the individual disposition hypothesis, the work environment hypothesis (Einarsen et al., 1994; Einarsen et al., 2020) – anchored in Heinz Leymann’s (1990b, 1992, 1996) seminal work – adamantly holds that bullying is a result of the prevailing psychosocial work environment and job characteristics within organizations. Ever since his early writings on the subject, Leymann was a strong proponent for the view that workplace bullying is largely a consequence of organizational factors such as deficiencies in work design, a poor psychological work environment, and inadequate leadership practices (Leymann, 1996). According to this situational view, deficiencies in work design and a generally negative psychological work environment are likely to elicit stress and frustration in exposed employees, which in turn may escalate into bullying. Further, Leymann (1996) emphasizes poor conflict management as an important risk factor for bullying, at least when occurring in combination with deficiencies in the organization of work and lack of proper management interventions. In other words, conflicts will only escalate into bullying when supervisors deny or neglect their managerial duty to resolve the underlying conflict issue. Yet, at the onset of the present thesis, the proposed combination and potential interactive effect of situational constraints and deficiencies in leadership practices had hardly been studied empirically (see Hauge et al., 2007; Rodriguez-Munoz et al., 2012, for notable exceptions). In the following section, I will provide an overview of the empirical evidence, as well as some additional theoretical explanations, that are in accordance with and may further illuminate the overarching theoretical assumptions presented in the work environment hypothesis.

1.3.2 Situational risk factors of bullying: empirical findings and theoretical explanations

A large number of empirical studies support the theoretical claim that bullying seems to thrive in demanding workplaces, in which employees are exposed to organizational constraints and contradictory expectations and demands (Salin & Hoel, 2020). In

their meta-analysis based on 90 separate samples undertaken between 1987 and 2005, Bowling and Beehr (2006) found that work constraints seem to be the strongest predictor of workplace harassment, followed closely by role conflict and role ambiguity. Accordingly, the authors concluded that “[...] characteristics of the work environment (e.g., other stressors) might strongly contribute to workplace harassment” (p. 1005). In line with this, Hauge and colleagues (2007), in a representative study in the Norwegian working population, found interpersonal conflict and role conflict to be the overall strongest predictors of workplace bullying, although the strength of the associations varied depending on the measure of bullying employed. Furthermore, the study showed that role ambiguity, tyrannical leadership, laissez-faire leadership, decision authority, job insecurity, and job demands also predicted exposure to bullying, again to varying degrees. In a more recent systematic review of work stressors predicting workplace bullying, Van den Brande and colleagues (2016) conclude that the most relevant work-related predictors of bullying include role conflict, workload, role ambiguity, job insecurity, and cognitive demands. Accordingly, the presented empirical evidence fits well with the work environment hypothesis.

However, many of the studies included in the above-mentioned meta-analyses and reviews, have based their analyses on cross-sectional data. Although some newer studies have tested this theory using prospective (Baillien, De Cuyper, et al., 2011; Baillien, Rodriguez-Muñoz, De Witte, et al., 2011; Reknes et al., 2014) and/or group-level designs (Hauge, Einarsen, et al., 2011; Skogstad et al., 2011), the field still lacks systematic and thorough studies testing the underlying theoretical assumptions put forward in this hypothesis. Accordingly, the present thesis aims to expand this knowledge by testing the work environment hypothesis using several different approaches, ranging from studying day-to-day relationships employing a daily quantitative diary design to longitudinal prospective research designs employing two or more time points, in order to capture different aspects of the bullying process that is known to often span from months to several years (Zapf et al., 2020).

Furthermore, as the reasons for why bullying develops are likely to be both complex

and interwoven, no single explanation is likely to be sufficient on its own to accurately explain why bullying occurs in the workplace (Baillien et al., 2009; Zapf, 1999). Accordingly, the overarching objective in the present thesis is to empirically test the assumed interaction between workplace stressors and inadequate leadership as put forward in the work environment hypothesis. However, while the work environment hypothesis is a widely used and generally supported theoretical explanation for the robust relationships that researchers have found between various situational work constraints and workplace bullying (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Van den Brande et al., 2016), the theoretical framework in itself is rather general, and as such not very specific in describing the mechanisms involved in these associations. In this framework, theorists do not go into much detail with regard to how or when the associations between situational stressors in the work environment and bullying are likely to take place. Thus, additional related, yet more specific, theories are needed to explain the mechanisms and conditions involved in the expected causal relationships between the situational stressors investigated in this thesis and bullying in the workplace. Furthermore, the stressors of interest in the individual studies in the present thesis are varied, ranging from interpersonal conflicts and qualitative work demands in the form of role stressors to more quantitative work demands in the form of work pressure. Accordingly, no one additional theory is sufficient to capture the complexities of the mechanisms believed to be at play in the process where workplace stressors may develop into exposure to bullying. Furthermore, some theories are more of a natural ‘fit’ with certain workplace stressors as compared to others. For example, when describing the development from being involved in an interpersonal conflict to subsequently self-identifying as a victim of workplace bullying, conflict escalation theory (Glasl, 1982; Van de Vliert, 1984) is an obvious choice. Furthermore, when examining the interrelationship between role ambiguity and role conflict, and their association with workplace bullying, the social interactionist theory (Felson & Tedeschi, 1993; Tedeschi & Felson, 1994), the frustration-aggression hypothesis (Berkowitz, 1989; Fox & Spector, 1999), and the stressor-emotion model of counterproductive work behaviour (Spector & Fox, 2005) are employed. In this, we theorize on the potential impact of stressors present in the

work environment both from a target and a perpetrator perspective. Finally, in examining work pressure as a potential risk factor for exposure to bullying behaviours, the effort-reward imbalance model (Siegrist, 1996) presents a nuanced perspective on how increased effort without access to sufficient resources may have detrimental consequences for the individual employee. In the following, a short review of these theoretical and empirical frameworks for the main research questions in the present thesis will be presented.

Interpersonal conflict and workplace bullying

Interpersonal conflict has been documented to be among the strongest work-related risk factors of workplace bullying (Baillien et al., 2016; Hauge et al., 2007; Zapf, 1999). Accordingly, so-called ‘dispute-related bullying’ (see Einarsen et al., 2020) has been accepted as a primary explanation for why bullying exists in the workplace, and Baillien and colleagues (2009) have documented conflict escalation as one of three main pathways to workplace bullying. An interpersonal conflict can be defined as “a process that begins when an individual or group perceives differences and opposition between itself and another individual or group about interests and resources, beliefs, values, or practices that matter to them” (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008, p. 6). According to conflict theory, bullying may signify an unresolved social conflict that has reached a high level of escalation, where the distribution of power between the involved parties has become imbalanced (Zapf & Gross, 2001). If the conflict remains unresolved, and even escalates into harsh personified conflicts (Van de Vliert, 1984), it may over time lead to further negative behaviour, which, in turn, may escalate into a case of workplace bullying (Baillien et al., 2009). When conflicts reach this level of escalation, the end result may be attempts to manipulate, retaliate, eliminate and destroy the other party (Glasl, 1982; Van de Vliert, 1984). This often manifests in the systematic negative acts as typically reported by targets of workplace bullying.

This belief that bullying is the result of a long and intense interpersonal conflict, which over time evolves into increasingly destructive negative acts and ends in severe victimization from bullying, may be illustrated in Glasl’s (1982) model of conflict

escalation (see also Zapf & Gross, 2001). According to Glasl's (1982) model, the start of this process is usually characterized by a rational conflict, the existence of which is perceived to be inevitable in any organization and generally believed to be constructive in that they may contribute to innovation and organizational performance (De Dreu, 1997). The main focus in this stage is still to co-operate in order to attempt to find a reasonable resolution to the original conflict issue. Once the conflict escalates, however, giving rise to interpersonal tensions and frictions between the two parties (Zapf & Gross, 2001), the increasingly difficult relationship with the other party becomes the issue at hand. From this, feelings of distrust, lack of respect, and overt hostility evolves, making it more difficult to communicate as the parties exclude each other, and are more concerned with preserving their own reputation and not 'losing face'. The model's final stage is characterized by overt aggression and destructive confrontations, where the end goal is the complete destruction and annihilation of the other party, to the point where the parties are willing to risk their own welfare in order to achieve this outcome (see also Van de Vliert, 1984). However, despite his theoretical description of this final stage in the model, Glasl (1982) argued that such escalation that reaches this stage is rare in organizations. Moreover, as this model was developed prior to the burgeoning research interest into workplace bullying, Zapf and Gross (2001) have suggested that the boundary between stage two and three in the model may in fact signify the change from a conflict between two parties of equal power, to a bullying situation where one party finds that they have difficulty defending themselves from the actions of their opponent. This theoretical assumption is also in line with a study by Baillien and colleagues (2017), outlining both the theoretical and the empirical similarities as well as basic differences between the two concepts. Moreover, a recent study by Notelaers and colleagues (2018) showed that while the constructs of conflict and bullying seem to overlap at low levels of intensity, they deviate into two distinct phenomena at higher levels of escalation. This escalating nature of the relationship between conflicts and bullying has also been substantiated by several studies looking at the mediating effect of relationship conflict on the positive association between task conflicts and exposure to bullying (Arenas et al., 2015; Baillien et al., 2016; Leon-

Perez et al., 2015). An important limitation related to these mediation studies, however, is that the analyses relied on cross-sectional data, thereby limiting the validity of making causal inferences. Therefore, more research using longitudinal data is needed to investigate how interpersonal conflicts may be related to increased victimization from bullying over time.

Role stressors and workplace bullying

Two of the most frequently described situational antecedents of workplace bullying are role stressors, known as role ambiguity and role conflict. Role ambiguity is a state in which the person has inadequate or uncertain information about the expectations about what is expected of a given employee in a given position or role in the organization (French & Caplan, 1972; Kahn et al., 1964). This results in a lack of clarity about duties, objectives, and responsibilities to fulfil his or her role to perform his or her role (Kahn et al., 1964; Rizzo et al., 1970). The experience of role ambiguity is, in turn, associated with increased feelings of anger, anxiety, and tension (Spector & Goh, 2001), reducing the extent to which the focal person is able to meet the demands and requirements associated with a given role (Kahn et al., 1964). Role conflict, on the other hand, refers to simultaneous but incompatible expectations and demands associated with a certain role, such that compliance with one makes compliance with the other more difficult (Balducci et al., 2012; Kahn et al., 1964; Rizzo et al., 1970). Furthermore, several different forms of role conflict have been identified, and these are commonly divided into a sub-category of either inter-role conflicts (i.e., incompatible demands placed on an individual occupying multiple positions or several roles simultaneously) or intra-role conflicts (i.e., conflictual expectations associated with a single position or role) (Beehr, 1995; Kahn et al., 1964). As with role ambiguity, role conflict is associated with increased feelings of anger, anxiety, and tension (Spector & Goh, 2001).

Ever since the theory of role dynamics in organizations was introduced (Kahn et al., 1964), research in work and organizational psychology has investigated the relationship between role stressors and various outcomes (Tubre & Collins, 2000). In order to effectively carry out their work, employees need sufficient information about

what is expected of them in a given role (Kahn et al., 1964). Unclear role descriptions lead to strain and are associated with negative consequences for the organization (Katz & Kahn, 1978), potentially including workplace bullying (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Van den Brande et al., 2016). More recently, longitudinal studies have also supported the notion that higher levels of role ambiguity (Reknes et al., 2014) and role conflicts (Balducci et al., 2012; Reknes et al., 2014) are positively related to subsequent exposure to bullying. However, there are some studies reporting a prospective relationship between workplace bullying and subsequent experiences of role ambiguity and role conflict (i.e., reverse causality) (Hauge, Skogstad, et al., 2011; Nielsen & Knardahl, 2015).

Two different theoretical frameworks are commonly employed to explain why role ambiguity and role conflict may act as antecedents of workplace bullying. Explanations in line with social interactionist theory (Felson, 1992; Felson & Tedeschi, 1993) argue that stressful working environments may lead to bullying because the experienced stressors generate affective and behavioural reactions in targets, which may, in turn, encourage others to engage in aggressive behaviour towards them. Individuals who for instance experience high levels of role stress may violate established social norms of politeness and/or perform their work less competently than others (Baillien, De Cuyper, et al., 2011; Reknes et al., 2014), thus evoking aggressive behaviour in other organizational members. If this aggressive behaviour by the perpetrator persists over time, the exposed individuals may be categorized as targets of workplace bullying.

Alternatively, and in line with the frustration-aggression hypothesis (Berkowitz, 1989; Fox & Spector, 1999), the presence of ambient role stressors in the general work environment may generate negative affect in potential perpetrators (as well as targets), thus encouraging these individuals to engage in aggressive behaviours and bullying of other organizational members. Stressful work environments may therefore result in more frequent bullying through the effect of environmental factors on aggressive behaviour in general, as well as creating risk situations by eliciting perpetrator behaviour and/or provocations from targets-to-be. Building on the

theoretical arguments presented in the frustration-aggression hypothesis, the stressor-emotion model of counterproductive work behaviour (Spector & Fox, 2005) further proposes that the aggressive behaviour displayed by perpetrators is in fact an emotion-based response to stressful environmental conditions experienced by all employees in the collective work environment (Balducci et al., 2012). Individuals appraise the seriousness of events in their work environment, and situations that are perceived as stressful elicit an immediate emotional response from the individual (Spector & Fox, 2005). This emotional response, in turn, motivate and energize subsequent behavioural, physical or psychological change in the affected individual (Spector, 1998; Spector & Goh, 2001). More specifically, individuals who experience high levels of role ambiguity and role conflict, and who perceived these situational constraints as threats to their individual well-being, are likely to experience negative emotional reactions such as anger and anxiety (Spector, 1998; Spector & Goh, 2001). Engaging in aggressive behaviour towards other organisational members may be one outcome of this stress process (Spector & Fox, 2005). Accordingly, the stressor-emotion model posits that work stressors (including role ambiguity and role conflict) may lead to bullying by increasing the overall levels of employees' vulnerability and aggressiveness.

Although most previous studies have investigated role ambiguity and role conflict as either separate or concurrent predictors of bullying (cf. Beehr, 1995), there is reason to believe that these two role stressors do in fact influence each other. In their early writings on role theory, Kahn and colleagues (1964) argued that the presence of conflicting role expectations may create uncertainty for the focal individual. Although each expectation may be clear, the combination of many different expectations from different organizational members may add up to confusion and uncertainty rather than clarity. Alternatively, Kahn and colleagues (1964) argue that for individuals who experience that the description of their given role is unclear, it is up to the individual to fill in the missing information themselves. This may be problematic, however, in that other members of the organization may interpret the same role differently, thus unwittingly confronting the individual with conflicting expectations and demands, consequently resulting in experienced intra-role conflict

for the focal individual (Kahn et al., 1964). However, these theoretical assumptions have so far been ignored by the research community at large. Instead, most studies that include both role ambiguity and role conflict have consistently treated both forms of role stressors as concurrent predictors of workplace bullying, without examining their interrelationship in this complex process (see e.g., Agervold, 2009; Hauge, Einarsen, et al., 2011; Skogstad et al., 2007). There are some exceptions to this, including a study by Notelaers and colleagues (2010) that analysed a structural equation model, in which role ambiguity and role conflict were hypothesized to mediate the relationship between parallel hierarchy and workplace bullying. Here, the authors found that the relationship between a parallel hierarchy and bullying was partially mediated by role problems, especially role conflicts. However, there was also an indirect relationship between role ambiguity and workplace bullying since role ambiguity was significantly correlated with role conflicts, which in turn predicted exposure to workplace bullying. Thus, there is reason to believe that role ambiguity may create intensified role conflicts, hence contributing *indirectly* to workplace bullying. Moreover, a cross-sectional study by Hartenian and colleagues (1994) found that role clarity (i.e. the opposite of role ambiguity) was negatively associated with role conflict. The authors argue that if an individual has a clear picture of job expectations and how to achieve them, he or she should experience less role conflict because the individual could adjust the requirements of other roles. Contrary, it follows that if an individual does not have a clear picture of his or her expectations, it is reasonable to assume that he or she would experience higher levels of role conflict. However, as this study focuses solely on the relationship between role clarity and role conflict, it does not offer any insight into how the interrelationship between the two role stressors affects the development of workplace bullying. Furthermore, as these studies are conducted using cross-sectional data, it limits the ability of the authors to make causal inferences based on their findings. Therefore, more research using longitudinal data is needed to investigate if these role stressors act as independent risk factors for bullying, or if role conflicts mediate the relationship between role ambiguity and exposure to bullying.

Work pressure and workplace bullying

Another well-documented situational antecedent of bullying in the workplace is quantitative work demands, including exposure to a high workload and working under time pressure. Brodsky (1976) even argued that work pressure may be viewed as a form of harassment in and of itself. Work pressure may be understood as a type of quantitative job demand that has reached a level above what is considered normal or acceptable in a certain situation or for a given employee (Van Veldhoven, 2014). Accordingly, high levels of work pressure may demand additional effort among those exposed, taxing their energetic resources. Brodsky (1976) argued that employees may view work pressure as threatening because it not only represents a potential loss of control over the work environment but also the risk of imposed punishment if the employee does not measure up to the increased demands. Such punishments may include threats, reprimands, demotion, or even dismissal. Many of these types of punishments are comparable to the negative social acts which characterize a bullying situation (Einarsen et al., 2009; Notelaers, Van der Heijden, et al., 2019).

The positive association between quantitative work demands and exposure to workplace bullying is well-established empirically, as documented in a systematic review by Van den Brande and colleagues (2016). Based on 26 of the 42 studies included in the review, the authors identify role conflict, workload, role ambiguity, job insecurity, and cognitive demands as the most important work-related stressors with respect to risk factors for workplace bullying. Of these, workload was found to have the highest weight of relevance of the antecedents included, closely followed by role conflict. This indicates that quantitative work demands are not only particularly relevant for researchers in the field, but that the finding of a positive relation is also highly consistent.

The mechanisms through which work pressure acts as a situational predictor of bullying can be understood by way of the theoretical underpinnings in the Effort-Reward Imbalance model (Siegrist, 1996). Central in this model is the notion that employees expect reciprocity between efforts spent in the organization (i.e. the demands and obligations the employee is faced with) and rewards received in return

(i.e., the money, esteem, and career opportunities awarded to the employee) (Siegrist, 1996). Siegrist and colleagues (2004) further theorized that employees who experience a lack of reciprocity are at risk of developing adverse health effects and that the presence of high-effort/low-reward conditions in the workplace likely will elicit negative emotions in exposed individuals. More specifically, individuals who experience work-related stress in the form of high levels of work pressure, are likely to also experience a mismatch between the level of efforts they expend and the rewards they receive in return (Siegrist, 1996; Siegrist et al., 2004). Accordingly, in situations when an individual experiences an increase in work pressure, without having the necessary time or resources to carry out the extra work, they are likely to experience increased feelings of stress and frustration. This increase in negative emotions, coupled with having to complete work tasks while working under time pressure, might cause employees to make more mistakes, be more sensitive to criticism, and ultimately become more vulnerable to conflict episodes and bullying-related negative acts (Zapf et al., 1996).

Although work pressure and other quantitative demands are well-known risk factors for bullying in the workplace, few studies have so far implemented the effort-reward imbalance framework (Siegrist, 1996) as the theoretical framework to explain this relationship. One exception is a recent study by Notelaers, Törnroos, and colleagues (2019), using data consisting of 2727 employees from 19 Belgian organizations. Their findings indicate that an imbalance between the employees' perceived effort and reward was associated with an increase in the likelihood of becoming a target of workplace bullying. Their results align with a study by Guglielmi and colleagues (2018), who in a two-wave prospective study with a sample of Spanish employees found support for the hypothesis that a stressful organizational environment, characterized by a high effort-reward imbalance, was related to a higher risk of exposure to workplace bullying.

1.3.3 Moderators in the antecedent–bullying relationship

In their 2018 review of the literature on mediators and moderators of workplace bullying, Rai and Agarwal (2018) note a severe lack of research as regards the potential moderating variables that may influence the relationship between antecedents in the work environment and workplace bullying. This is argued to be problematic and may lead to an oversimplification of the bullying phenomenon and limit our understanding of the potential underlying and intervening relationships between antecedents, bullying, and outcomes. In recent years, however, studies have emerged that do seem to take into account that certain conditional factors may influence the antecedent-bullying relationship. More specifically, some potential moderators in this relationship that have been examined include job autonomy (Baillien, De Cuyper, et al., 2011) conflict management styles (Baillien & De Witte, 2010), conflict frequency (Baillien, Notelaers, et al., 2011), psychological detachment and thoughts of revenge (Moreno-Jiménez et al., 2009), individual coping (Van den Brande et al., 2021) and conflict management climate (Zahlquist et al., 2019). Finally, a few studies have investigated the moderating effects of passive-avoidant and laissez-faire leadership on the relationship between work stressors (i.e., role conflict, procedural justice) (Hauge et al., 2007; Rodriguez-Munoz et al., 2012) and competition (Sischka et al., 2021), and workplace bullying, respectively. What these three studies have in common, is that they all find support for the theoretical notion that individuals who are working in stressful conditions – characterized by conflicting demands, unfair procedures, or high levels of competition between co-workers – are at a higher risk of becoming a target of workplace bullying when their immediate supervisor is exhibiting passive-avoidant and laissez-faire leadership behaviour.

Drawing on the previously mentioned studies, and following the argument presented in the work environment hypothesis – where inadequate leadership practices are included as an important variable when it comes to allowing for such negative social behaviours to exist and escalate into bullying situations in the workplace – laissez-faire leadership emerges as an obvious moderating variable of interest in these stressor–bullying relationships. Even in his seminal and very early work on bullying

and harassment, Brodsky (1976) stated that harassment will only flourish in environments where such behaviours are allowed or even rewarded. As such, while individual variables such as employees' experiences of stressors in the work environment (i.e., interpersonal conflict, role stressors and work pressure) may indeed be the triggering factors of a bullying situation, the presence of laissez-faire leadership behaviours in such stressful situations is likely to exacerbate this relationship. This line of thinking is also evident in the theoretical models outlined in the present thesis. More specifically, leaders who are not present when needed, and who do not intervene in situations characterized by high levels of work pressure and escalating conflicts (be they interpersonal or role oriented), are likely to allow, or even encourage, further escalation (Glasl, 1982; Zapf & Gross, 2001). In situations such as these, employees are likely experiencing increased levels of emotional distress (Siegrist, 1996), anxiety, and frustration (Spector & Goh, 2001). These emotional responses may, in turn, cause employees to act in ways that encourage others to behave aggressively towards them (i.e., the social interactionist theory; Felson & Tedeschi, 1993; effort-reward imbalance theory, Siegrist, 1996). Alternatively, and in line with the frustration-aggression hypothesis (Berkowitz, 1989) and stressor-emotion model (Spector & Fox, 2005), perpetrators themselves are likely experiencing many of the same stressors as their targets (Balducci et al., 2012). This theoretical assumption is supported by a study by Hauge and colleagues (2009), who found that individuals who reported experiencing role conflict and individual conflicts in the work environment had a significantly increased likelihood of engaging in bullying. Hence, the presence of ambient stressors in the work environment may cause exposed individuals to show displaced aggression and retaliate against other co-workers as a result. When these perpetrators realize that there are no consequences to their actions, due to the absent and avoidant nature of laissez-faire leaders, they may take this as a sign that such behaviour is allowed (Brodsky, 1976), and increase their actions, thus escalating the situation. In summary, the present thesis aims to investigate the potential moderating effect of laissez-faire leadership on the well-established associations between various stressors in the work environment and exposure to negative acts and bullying. Accordingly, we test the

assumption that laissez-faire leadership exacerbates the negative effects of workplace stressors on bullying, using a variety of research designs, ranging from immediate, day-to-day associations (Paper 3) to longer-term prospective relationships with varying time-lags (Papers 1 & 2).

In addition to testing the moderating effects of laissez-faire leadership, it is also highly reasonable to contrast the effect of this passive type of destructive leadership with the potential moderating effects of constructive and effective forms of leadership. Transformational leadership, one of the most widely studied constructive leadership styles (Anderson & Sun, 2017), is a complex set of leadership behaviours comprised of four core components. In its essence, transformational leadership may be described as occurring “when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group” (Bass, 1990, p. 21). An important aspect of transformational leadership, namely supervisory social support, is probably the most well-known situational variable that has been proposed as a potential buffer against job stress (see e.g., Bakker et al., 2007). Accordingly, Halbesleben’s (2006) meta-study shows that supervisory support, as compared to other sources of support, is the strongest predictor of burnout indicators. Likewise, a review by Nieuwenhuijsen and colleagues (2010) shows that low supervisory support predicts stress-related disorders. Furthermore, supervisory support has been shown to buffer the relationship between stressors and outcomes such as absenteeism (Biron & Bamberger, 2012) and job satisfaction (Ru Hsu, 2011; Sargent & Terry, 2000). As regards relationships between supportive leadership and bullying, several studies have found support for the notion that the presence of constructive forms of leadership is related to fewer instances of bullying in the work environment (see e.g., Astrauskaite et al., 2015; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2013; Dussault & Frenette, 2015; Nielsen, 2013; Salin, 2015; Tsuno & Kawakami, 2015; Warszevska-Makuch et al., 2015). As such, leaders who are supportive and considerate towards their subordinates are likely to deter the enactment of bullying in workplaces. Additionally, a department-level study by Hauge and colleagues (2011) found that fair and supportive leadership practices were

significantly related to lower instances of bullying on a departmental level. This supports the hypothesis that workplace bullying may, to a large extent, be explained by prevailing conditions in the work environment. Moving to the role of constructive leadership as a moderating factor, there are a few studies that have examined the role of leader- and organizational support in the bullying-outcome relationship (Djurkovic et al., 2008; Warszevska-Makuch et al., 2015). However, not much is known regarding the potential moderating effects of supportive and considerate leadership on the stressor-bullying relationship. A notable exception, however, is a multi-level study by Tuckey and colleagues (2017), which showed that transformational leadership buffered the positive relationship between leaders' task demands and their subordinates' experienced exposure to workplace bullying as assessed using the behavioural experience- and self-labelling approach, respectively.

In line with the theoretical 'bad is stronger than good' assumption (Baumeister et al., 2001; Fors Brandebo et al., 2016), one may expect that the attenuating effect of supportive forms of leadership, such as transformational leadership, to be weaker than the exacerbating effect of laissez-faire leadership, being a passive-destructive form of leadership. This point of view is also supported by two meta-analyses (Häusser et al., 2010; Van der Doef & Maes, 1999), showing inconclusive results as regards the buffering effect of social support in the stressor-strain relationship. Accordingly, including transformational leadership as a presumptively effective form of leadership allows us to test whether the proposed increased exposure to bullying is due to a lack of leadership per se, or whether it is de facto laissez-faire – i.e., absence and avoidance in situations that require leadership – which is the relevant conditional variable.

1.4 List of aims and hypotheses

In summary, an increasing volume of research has documented robust relationships between workplace bullying and a wide range of negative outcomes (Hoel et al., 2020; Mikkelsen et al., 2020). Consequently, bullying signifies a monumental problem in working life, with potentially detrimental consequences not only for

exposed individuals but also for the organization and society at large. Although the prevalence rates and outcomes of workplace bullying are relatively well established across the globe (Mikkelsen et al., 2020; Van de Vliert et al., 2013), the field still lacks systematic and thorough knowledge of the mechanisms that may explain how situational antecedents are related to the occurrence and development of the workplace bullying process. So far, there is a broad consensus among researchers that bullying is related to a work environment characterized by high levels of interpersonal conflict, inadequate leadership practices, quantitative job demands, and role stressors (Baillien et al., 2014; Salin & Hoel, 2020; Skogstad et al., 2007). However, there is a general lack of studies in the field investigating potential mediating and moderating factors in the workplace bullying process (Rai & Agarwal, 2018; Woodrow & Guest, 2017). This is especially worrisome in relation to leadership because leader behaviours and non-behaviours are paramount for most aspects of followers' effectiveness and health (Montano et al., 2017). In summary, I believe that laissez-faire leadership will strengthen the relationship between stressors in the work environment and subsequent experiences of negative acts and bullying, as the leader avoids taking action to prevent further escalation of a situation where stressful conditions and risk factors exist.

The aim of the present thesis is therefore to improve our understanding of the explanatory mechanisms and conditions involved in the development of bullying in the workplace. The thesis is conducted for both theoretical, methodological, and applied reasons. In terms of methodological reasons, the studies included in the present thesis employs both prospective designs with varying time lags (Papers 1 & 2), and "shortitudinal" designs employing a quantitative daily diary study (Paper 3), to investigate the already established relationships between stressors in the workplace and exposure to bullying. Furthermore, the present thesis aims to extend the theoretical and applied knowledge on explanatory mechanisms and conditional factors that may influence the bullying process. By examining the potential mediating effect of role conflicts in the relationship between role ambiguity and subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours, Paper 2 may provide an important theoretical

contribution to our knowledge into the mechanisms at play in the process of bullying development. Following up earlier work by Hauge and colleagues (2007) and Rodríguez-Muñoz and colleagues (2012), all three studies in the present thesis aims to provide important theoretical contributions by testing the possible moderating effect of leadership behaviours on the established relationships between specific stressors in the workplace and employees' exposure to negative acts and bullying at work. Accordingly, this PhD-thesis examines the moderating effect of laissez-faire leadership on the already well-established relationships between some important psychosocial factors in the work environment bullying, employing various research designs. Additionally, the exacerbating effects of laissez-faire leadership are contrasted with the possible mitigating effects of transformational leadership (Papers 2 & 3). Such knowledge on the role of leaders and their leadership practices may provide important and practical knowledge for employers, managers, and organizational consultants, hence the studies may have important applied contributions. Accordingly, the present thesis has three overarching research aims:

Aim 1: To extend our knowledge of the relationship between prevailing situational stressors in the work environment and subsequent exposure to negative acts and bullying, using prospective (Papers 1 & 2) and multi-level (Paper 3) research designs.

Hypothesis 1. Co-worker conflict at T1 predicts new incidents of self-reported workplace bullying at T2 (*Paper 1*).

Hypothesis 2a: Role ambiguity is associated with an increase over time in exposure to bullying-related negative acts at work (*Paper 2*).

Hypothesis 2b: Role conflict is associated with an increase over time in exposure to bullying-related negative acts at work (*Paper 2*).

Hypothesis 3: Daily work pressure is positively related to daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts (*Paper 3*).

Aim 2: To expand the research on role stressors as antecedents of workplace bullying and provide a more nuanced analysis of how these prevalent role stressors may be interrelated as risk factors for workplace bullying by investigating whether the relationship between role ambiguity and exposure to bullying-related negative acts is mediated through role conflicts.

Hypothesis 4: Role conflict mediates the proposed positive association between role ambiguity and subsequent exposure to bullying-related negative acts (*Paper 2*).

Aim 3: To extend the investigation into the mechanisms of the bullying process by also considering the possible moderating role of laissez-faire (Papers 1, 2 & 3) and transformational leadership (Papers 2 & 3) on the relationship between situational stressors in the work environment and exposure to negative acts and bullying.

Hypothesis 5: Laissez-faire leadership at T2 moderates the relationship between co-worker conflict at T1 and subsequent new cases of self-reported victims of workplace bullying at T2. Respondents who are involved in a co-worker conflict at T1 have a higher probability of becoming a new victim of workplace bullying at T2 if they report high levels of laissez-faire leadership enacted by their immediate supervisor at T2 (*Paper 1*).

Hypothesis 6: The positive indirect effect of role ambiguity on subsequent exposure to bullying-related negative acts through role conflict will be stronger at high (vs. low) levels of laissez-faire leadership (*Paper 2*).

Hypothesis 7: The positive indirect effect of role ambiguity on subsequent exposure to bullying-related negative acts through role conflict will be weaker at high (vs. low) levels of transformational leadership (*Paper 2*).

Hypothesis 8: Daily transformational leadership behaviour moderates the proposed positive relationship between daily work pressure and daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts (buffering effect). This relationship is weaker

on days individuals are reporting high (vs. low) levels of transformational leadership behaviours (*Paper 3*).

Hypothesis 9: Daily laissez-faire leadership behaviour moderates the relationship between daily work pressure and daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts (exacerbating effect). This relationship is stronger on days cadets are reporting high (vs. low) levels of laissez-faire leadership behaviour (*Paper 3*).

2. SAMPLES, INSTRUMENTS AND ANALYSES

2.1 Paper 1

Ågotnes, K. W., Einarsen, S. V., Hetland, J., & Skogstad, A. (2018). The moderating effect of laissez-faire leadership on the relationship between co-worker conflicts and new cases of workplace bullying: A true prospective design. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 28(4), 555-568. <https://doi.org/10/gfprmc>

To test the hypothesized relationships in Paper 1, we employed two waves of data from a representative sample of Norwegian employees, collected in a collaboration between the Bergen Bullying Research Group (FALK) at the Department of psychosocial science, University of Bergen, and Statistics Norway (SSB). The first wave of data was collected in 2005, where 4,500 employees randomly drawn from the Norwegian Central Employee Register were approached by mail and invited to participate in a survey about the working environment in Norwegian workplaces (Høstmark & Lagerstrøm, 2006). Altogether 2,539 questionnaires were returned in the first wave, yielding a response rate of 56.4%. With the exception of women being somewhat overrepresented (52%), the sample can be considered representative for the Norwegian working population with regard to multiple demographic characteristics (Høstmark & Lagerstrøm, 2006). The mean age was 43.8 years ($SD = 11.5$), with age ranging from 19 to 66 years. The mean working hours were 37.5 ($SD = 10.4$). The second wave of data was collected in 2007, and this time 1772 respondents completed the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 69.8%.

To identify employees who perceived themselves as victims of workplace bullying, we employed a single item self-labelling measure often used in this line of research: "Have you yourself been exposed to workplace bullying during the past six months?". The responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale with the following categories: (1) *no*, (2) *once in a while*, (3) *now and then*, (4) *about weekly*, and (5) *several times a week*. In connection with this question, the respondents were presented with the following definition of workplace bullying:

Bullying (for example harassment, torment, freeze-out or hurtful teasing) is a problem in some workplaces and for some employees. To be able to call something bullying, it has to occur repeatedly over a certain period of time, and the bullied person has difficulty in defending him- or herself. It is not bullying when two persons of approximately equal “strength” are in conflict, or if it is a single situation.

Respondents who chose one of the categories representing some form of exposure to bullying (i.e., 2-5) were defined as self-labelled victims of workplace bullying, while the rest were defined as non-victims. We subsequently constructed a new variable (*new victims of workplace bullying*), by removing all cases of bullying victims at T1. New victims at T2 were given the value 1, while non-victims at both T1 and T2 were given the value 0. At T2, 71 respondents considered themselves victims of workplace bullying. Of these, 47 were new victims.

Co-worker conflict was measured using two items from the Bergen Conflict Inventory (BCI; Hauge et al., 2007; Skogstad et al., 2007). Preceding the scale, participants were presented with the following definition of conflict:

A situation where a person experiences being hindered or frustrated by another person or group at work. This situation may reflect task-oriented disagreements as well as escalated interpersonal antagonisms, alternatively that a person experiences that someone acts in a manner that spoils his or her job satisfaction or the job satisfaction of other employees.

Following the definition, the two items measuring conflict with co-workers were introduced by the following text: “To what degree are you nowadays in the following situations: 1) a task-oriented conflict with co-workers or others in your workplace, 2) a person-oriented conflict with co-workers or others in your workplace”. Respondents could choose one of the following four response categories: (1) *to a high degree in conflict*, (2) *to some degree in conflict*, (3) *to a small degree in conflict* and (4) *not in conflict*. The items were reversed prior to the analysis so that a higher score reflected

a higher degree of co-worker conflict. The inter-item correlation was high ($r = .57, p < .001$).

Finally, *laissez-faire leadership* was measured using five items from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 1990). An example item from the scale is “My manager is absent when needed”. All items measuring *laissez-faire leadership* behaviour were scored on a four-point scale, ranging from (0) *never* to (3) *very often/nearly always*. The internal consistency of the scale was acceptable ($\alpha = .72$).

A binary logistic regression analysis was employed to investigate both the direct effect of conflict with co-workers on the risk of becoming a victim of bullying (hypothesis 1) and the moderating effect of *laissez-faire leadership* on this relationship (hypothesis 5) regarding new cases of workplace bullying. Dropout analyses for all study variables were conducted using independent sample *t*-tests and chi-square tests. The results showed no significant difference between respondents who dropped out after T1 and respondents who participated at both measurement points.

2.2 Paper 2

Ågotnes, K. W., Nielsen, M., B., Skogstad, A., Gjerstad, J., & Einarsen, S. V. The moderating effects of leadership practices on the relationship between role stressors and exposure to bullying – A longitudinal moderated-mediation design. Under review in *Work and Stress*.

In order to test the hypotheses in Paper 2, we employed a sample consisting of data from a three-wave dataset collected between April 2015 and August 2016, in a collaboration between The National Institute of Occupation Health in Norway (STAMI) and Statistics Norway (SSB). In the spring of 2015, a random sample of 5,000 Norwegian employees – drawn from the Norwegian Central Employee Register – received a questionnaire distributed through the Norwegian Postal Service. The sampling criteria were adults between 18 and 60 years of age that were registered as

employed during the last 6 months, in a Norwegian enterprise with a staff of five or more and with a mean working hour of more than 15 hours per week. A total of 1,608 questionnaires were satisfactorily completed, yielding a response rate of 32% in the first wave of data. The participants' mean age was 45.17 years (SD = 10.02) with a range from 21 to 61. The sample consisted of slightly more women (52%) than men (48%). Altogether 36 % had a leadership position with personnel responsibilities, indicating an overrepresentation of leaders and managers in the sample. The second wave of data (T2) was collected six months later following the same procedure as the first wave. Only respondents who responded to the T1 survey were invited to participate at T2. Altogether 1149 respondents participated in this follow-up survey (71.4%). Six months after the second wave, all respondents who participated at T1 were invited to participate at T3, even if they had not participated at T2. Altogether 1,164 respondents participated in the third follow-up survey (72.4%).

Exposure to bullying behaviours was measured using the Norwegian version of the Short-Negative Acts Questionnaire (SNAQ; Notelaers, Van der Heijden, et al., 2019). SNAQ describes nine negative and unwanted behaviours employees may be exposed to in their workplace. For each item, the respondents were asked how often they had been exposed to the behaviour at their present worksite during the last six months. Example items include “Being ignored or excluded”, “Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes,” and “Someone withholding information which affects your performance.” Response categories ranged from 1-5 (*never, now and then, monthly, weekly, and daily*). The internal consistency of the scale was good at both time-points ($\alpha^{T1} = .86, \alpha^{T3} = .87$).

Role stress was measured using scales from the General Nordic Questionnaire for Psychological and Social Factors at Work (QPS_{Nordic}) (Dallner et al., 2000; Wännström et al., 2009). *Role ambiguity* was measured at Time 1, using three items, with examples of items being “Do you know what your responsibilities are?” and “Do you know exactly what is expected of you at work?”. As the items from role ambiguity were originally phrased to reflect role *clarity*, they were reversed in the

present study. *Role conflict* was measured at T1 and T2, also using three items, with an example item being: “Do you receive incompatible requests from two or more people? All items were measured on a four-point scale ranging from (1) *never* to (4) *always*. The internal consistency for role ambiguity was good ($\alpha^{T1} = .80$), while the internal consistency for role conflict was lower than the recommended value of .70 ($\alpha^{T1} = .63$, $\alpha^{T2} = .57$).

Laissez-faire leadership was measured using four items from the Multilevel Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ; Bass & Avolio, 1990). In line with measurements of alternative forms of destructive leadership, such as abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), the wording of each item was adjusted so as to emphasize the one-to-one relationship between the leader and the respondent (see e.g. Nielsen et al., 2019). Accordingly, an example item in the adapted scale is: “My immediate supervisor is absent when I need him/her”. All items measuring laissez-faire leadership behaviour were rated on a five-point scale ranging from (1) *never* to (5) *very often or always*. The internal consistency of the scale was good ($\alpha^{T2} = .83$).

Transformational leadership was measured using the Global Transformational Leadership Scale (Carless et al., 2000). This seven-item short scale assesses transformational leadership as a single construct and is designed to represent a global measure of perceived transformational leadership of immediate leader (Carless et al., 2000). The items capture seven leadership behaviours: (i) Communicates a clear and positive vision, (ii) develops staff, (iii) supports staff, (iv) empowers staff, (v) is innovative, (vi) leads by example, and (vii) is charismatic. All items measuring transformational leadership behaviour were rated on a five-point scale ranging from (1) *never* to (5) *very often or always*. The internal consistency of the scale was good ($\alpha^{T2} = .89$).

Control variables. The mediation and moderated mediation analyses controlled for baseline levels of role conflicts^{T1} and exposure to bullying behaviours^{T1}.

A correlation analysis in SPSS (version 25) was employed to test the proposed direct effects between role ambiguity and role conflict, respectively, and exposure to bullying behaviours (hypothesis 2a and 2b). For the remaining hypotheses, a variety of mediation and moderated mediation analyses were conducted using the PROCESS macro for SPSS provided by Hayes (2013). This macro facilitates estimation of the indirect effect (ab) with a bootstrap approach to obtain confidence intervals (CIs). We first analysed the proposed mediation effect of role conflicts (hypothesis 4) by estimating a simple mediation model (PROCESS model 4). Subsequently, we estimated several mediated moderation models in order to test the proposed moderating effects of leadership (hypotheses 6 & 7). Our predictions were that laissez-faire and transformational leadership, respectively, would moderate the indirect path between role ambiguity and bullying, through role conflicts. However, as we did not have a specific hypothesis regarding where the two leadership styles would have an effect, we started by carrying out an explorative analysis (PROCESS model 45), in which the two leadership styles were included as potential moderators on both the path between role ambiguity (T1) and role conflict (T2), and on the path between role conflict (T2) and bullying-related negative acts (T3). Subsequently, the result from this first analysis was used to further inform our analysis strategy. These moderated-mediation models were tested using the above-mentioned SPSS macro. This SPSS macro facilitates the implementation of the recommended bootstrapping methods and permits the probing of the significance of conditional indirect effects at different values of the moderator variable. Bootstrapping was set to 5,000 subsamples.

2.3 Paper 3

Ågotnes, K. W., Skogstad, A., Hetland, J., Olsen, O. K., Espevik, R., Bakker, A. B., & Einarsen, S. V. (2021). Daily work pressure and exposure to bullying-related negative acts: The role of daily transformational and laissez-faire leadership. *European Management Journal*, 39(4), 423-433. <https://doi.org/ghdxf4>

The data used to analyse the day-to-day relationships in Paper 3 were collected in 2011, in a collaboration with the Royal Norwegian Naval Academy. The data collection was undertaken as part of a naval training mission, where 61 Norwegian naval cadets crossed the Atlantic Ocean in a tall ship as part of their training and education to become naval officers. During their voyage, the cadets completed a daily survey measuring variations in the study variables for 36 consecutive days. The cadets were instructed to complete the daily questionnaire at 5 PM each day. The cadets were part of one of eight teams, where members took turns in the role of team leader. Questions about leadership were therefore related to the leadership behaviour of the acting immediate superior in a team on a given day. Prior to the voyage, the cadets were presented with an informed consent form, which they all chose to sign. The sample consisted of 49 male participants (80.3 %) and 7 female participants (11.5%). Five participants did not report their gender (8.2 %). The mean age of the participants was 23.9 years ($SD = 3.21$). Of the 61 cadets that participated in the study, 56 completed a general questionnaire prior to the voyage, yielding a response rate of 91.8 % at the person-level. On the daily questionnaire, we obtained 1509 of the possible 2196 possible observations, yielding a response rate of 68.7% at the day-level.

Daily diaries were used to measure the study variables. All day-level questionnaires were adapted versions of existing scales. Both the time frame of the scales and the number of questions were adapted so the questions could be answered on a daily basis (cf. Ohly et al., 2010). The reliability of the daily measures was calculated using the approach described by Geldhof and colleagues (2014), by estimating omega (ω) at the within-person level and between-person level using a two-level CFA.

When measuring *day-level exposure to bullying-related negative acts*, we used an adapted four-item version of the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ-R; Einarsen et al., 2009; S-NAQ; Notelaers, Van der Heijden, et al., 2019) intended for daily diary studies (see Hoprekstad et al., 2019). The time-frame reference provided to the respondents was changed from the original “the last six months” to “during today’s shift”, with an example item being “repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes”.

All items measuring exposure to bullying-related negative acts were scored on a four-point scale ranging from (1) *not at all* to (4) *several times*. We created an index of day-level exposure to bullying-related negative acts by calculating the mean of the corresponding exposure on that particular day, where higher scores refer to higher levels of exposure to bullying-related negative acts. Day-level exposure to bullying-related negative acts showed acceptable reliability at both the within-person level ($\omega = .68$) and at the between-person level ($\omega = .69$).

Day-level work pressure was measured using four items from the subscale “Pace and amount of work” from the questionnaire on the experience and assessment of work (VBBA; Van Veldhoven & Meijman, 1994). An example item from the scale is: “Today, to what extent did you have to work very fast”. All items measuring work pressure were scored on a five-point scale ranging from (1) *not at all* to (5) *to a great extent*. Work pressure showed good reliability both at the within-person level ($\omega = .88$) and at the between-person level ($\omega = .97$).

Day-level leadership behaviour was measured using items taken from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ X5; Avolio & Bass, 2004), adapted to reflect a daily level of measurement. *Day-level transformational leadership behaviour* was measured using five items, representing each of the four sub-categories of transformational leadership, while *day-level laissez-faire leadership behaviour* was measured using three items. Examples of items are “During the last 24 hours, my closest supervisor”: “...helped others to develop their strengths” (transformational leadership), and “...was absent when needed” (laissez-faire leadership). All items measuring leadership behaviour were scored on a five-point scale ranging from (1) *totally disagree* to (5) *totally agree*. Daily transformational leadership behaviour showed acceptable reliability at the within-person level ($\omega = .76$) and good reliability at the between-person level ($\omega = .90$). Daily laissez-faire leadership behaviour showed acceptable reliability at the within-person level ($\omega = .77$) and good reliability at the between-person level ($\omega = .98$).

In order to capture the multilevel structure of the data in which daily observations (level 1) were nested within individuals (level 2), we carried out multilevel analyses using MLwiN 3.01 (Charlton et al., 2017). Multilevel correlations and reliability analysis (Omega) were estimated using Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017). All day-level predictors were centred at each person's mean, in order to facilitate meaningful interpretation of parameter estimates. Simple slope tests for hierarchical linear models were used to examine whether the slopes in the interaction were significantly different from zero (Preacher et al., 2006).

2.4 Ethics

The collection of the data employed in the present thesis was approved by the Regional Committee for Medical Research in Western Norway (Papers 1 & 2) and the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) (Paper 3). To ensure anonymity, the identity of the respondents in the samples employed in Papers 1 and 2 was withheld by Statistics Norway, who was responsible for collecting the data. In Paper 3, the data were kept separate from a coding key, which could be used to match an individual's ID with their age and other data that could make them identifiable. Hence, in all my analyses I have only worked on anonymized databases. All data employed in the present thesis were collected with informed consent, and respondents were informed about the fact that they could resign from the study at any time, and request for information about them to be deleted.

3. RESULTS

All the associations, main effects and interaction effects described below were statistically significant at $p < .05$, unless otherwise specified.

3.1 Paper 1

The findings from Paper 1 indicated that the presence of co-worker conflict at T1 increased the likelihood of being a new victim of bullying two years later (OR 1.40), thus supporting Hypothesis 1. We also note that laissez-faire leadership at T2 was a significant predictor of bullying at T2 (OR = 2.10). This is in line with previous research showing a positive direct effect of laissez-faire leadership on negative acts and bullying (Skogstad et al., 2017), although this relationship was not explicitly hypothesized in the present study. Moreover, we found support for the hypothesis that respondents who were involved in a co-worker conflict at T1, and also reported their closest supervisor's leadership style as laissez-faire at T2, had an increased risk of becoming a new victim of bullying at T2. When the interaction term was added in Step 2 of the logistic regression analysis, the results showed that laissez-faire leadership moderates the relationship between co-worker conflict and the likelihood of becoming a new victim of bullying two years later (OR 1.29), thus supporting Hypothesis 5. According to the simple slopes test (Dawson, 2014), the effect of co-worker conflict on bullying was significant only for respondents reporting high levels of laissez-faire behaviours in their immediate supervisors ($B = .312$, $SE = 0.147$), not for those reporting low levels of laissez-faire leadership ($B = -.202$, $SE = 0.290$, *n.s.*). In fact, respondents who were in a conflict with a co-worker, but who did not report higher levels of laissez-faire leadership behaviour from their closest supervisor, did not have an increased risk of becoming a victim of bullying two years later, when compared to respondents who were not involved in co-worker conflicts.

3.2 Paper 2

The results from the correlation analysis in Paper 2 revealed positive correlations for exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3} with role ambiguity^{T1} ($r = .157$) and role conflicts ($r = .334^{\text{T1}}$ and $r = .372^{\text{T2}}$), supporting hypothesis 2a and 2b. Additionally, laissez-faire leadership^{T2} was positively related to role ambiguity^{T1} ($r = .196$), role conflicts ($r = .342^{\text{T1}}$ and $r = .394^{\text{T2}}$), and exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3} ($r = .344$), as expected. Finally, negative correlations were found for transformational leadership^{T2} with all other study variables.

The mediation analysis (PROCESS model 4) revealed significant direct associations between role ambiguity^{T1} and role conflicts^{T2} ($B = .061$, $SE = .022$), as well as between role conflicts^{T2} and exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3} ($B = .119$, $SE = .021$). In support of hypothesis 4, the result of the mediation analysis revealed that the direct effect of role ambiguity^{T1} on exposure to bullying-related negative acts^{T3} was not significant ($B = -.003$, $SE = .004$, *n.s.*), indicating full mediation. This was further supported by a significant indirect effect of role ambiguity^{T1} on exposure to bullying-related negative acts^{T3}, through role conflicts^{T2} ($B = .007$, $SE = .003$, 95% CI [.002, .014]). The explained variance of the total effects model was 40 %. Additionally, we tested an alternative model to control for the possibility of reverse causality for the role stressors. Here, we tested whether role ambiguity^{T2} mediated the relationship between conflicts^{T1} and bullying behaviours^{T3}. However, we did not find support for this model.

The results from the initial moderated mediation analysis – where both laissez-faire and transformational leadership were included as concurrent moderators both in the path between role ambiguity and role conflicts (path a), and the path between role conflicts and exposure to bullying behaviours (path b) (PROCESS model 45) – revealed significant interaction effects of both leadership styles, but only on the path between role conflicts and exposure to bullying behaviours. Accordingly, we performed a new analysis in which laissez-faire and transformational leadership were

only included as moderators in path b (PROCESS model 16). When included in the same analysis, both moderators significantly contributed to explaining the variance in exposure to bullying behaviours at T3. However, in order to correctly visualize the interactions for each leadership style with role conflicts, we also performed two separate moderated-mediation analyses (PROCESS model 14). These analyses are the basis for the following results.

The analysis testing the moderating effect of laissez-faire leadership revealed that the effect of role conflict^{T2} on exposure to bullying-related negative acts^{T3} was stronger at high compared to low levels of laissez-faire leadership^{T2} ($B = .08$, $SE = .02$).

Supporting hypothesis 6, the results showed a significant index of moderated mediation ($B = .01$, $SE = .004$, 95% CI [.003, .018]), indicating that the indirect effect of role ambiguity^{T1} on exposure to bullying-related negative acts^{T3}, through role conflict^{T2}, is contingent on the level of laissez-faire leadership^{T2}. This is further supported by simple slope tests, where the positive slope for high levels of laissez-faire leadership was significant (Slope = 0.164, $t = 6.812$), whereas the slope for low levels of laissez-faire leadership was not (Slope = 0.037, $t = 1.451$, *n.s.*). The full model explained 43.9 % of the variance in exposure to bullying-related negative acts^{T3}. The interaction term alone explained 1.2 %.

In a second moderated mediation analysis, we found that the association between role conflicts^{T2} and exposure to bullying-related negative acts^{T3} was weaker at high (vs. low) levels of transformational leadership^{T2} ($B = -.09$, $SE = .02$). Supporting hypothesis 7, the results showed a significant index of moderated mediation ($b = -.01$, $SE = .004$, 95% CI [-.02, -.003]), indicating that the indirect effect of role ambiguity on exposure to bullying-related negative acts, through role conflict, is contingent on the level of transformational leadership. This is further supported by simple slope tests, where the positive slope for low levels of transformational leadership was significant (Slope = 0.185, $t = 7.505$), whereas the slope for high levels of transformational leadership was not (Slope = 0.027, $t = 0.999$, *n.s.*). The full model explained 44.7 % of the variance in exposure to bullying-related negative acts^{T3}. The interaction term alone explained 1.4 %.

3.3 Paper 3

The results of the multilevel analysis in Paper 3 showed a significant positive main effect of daily levels of work pressure on daily levels of exposure to bullying-related negative acts ($B = 0.026$). This is in support of hypothesis 3. On days the cadets were exposed to higher levels of work pressure, they also reported increased exposure to bullying-related negative acts. Contrary to our predictions, we did not find support for an interaction between daily work pressure and daily transformational leadership on daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts ($B = 0.009$, *n.s.*). Accordingly, hypothesis 8 was not supported. However, our results did reveal a significant interaction effect of daily work pressure and daily laissez-faire leadership behaviour on cadets' daily levels of exposure to bullying-related negative acts ($B = 0.040$), supporting hypothesis 9. Specifically, the relationship between work pressure and exposure to bullying-related negative acts was stronger on days the cadets reported higher levels of laissez-faire leadership behaviour from their acting superior on that day. Further supporting hypothesis 9, the simple slope analysis showed a positive relationship between daily work pressure and daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts on days the cadets report higher levels of laissez-faire leadership behaviour (Slope = 0.053, $z = 7.743$). The slope for low levels of laissez-faire leadership, however, was not significant (Slope = -0.001, $z = 0.131$, *n.s.*), indicating no increase in exposure to bullying-related negative acts at higher levels of work pressure. Finally, in addition to the hypothesized effects, we also found a significant main effect of daily laissez-faire leadership behaviour ($B = 0.016$). That is, on days the cadets reported high levels of laissez-faire leadership behaviour by their immediate supervisor, they also reported increased levels of exposure to bullying-related negative acts.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Discussion of the main findings

The overall objective of the present thesis was to extend our knowledge of the process through which negative acts and bullying occur in the workplace, by investigating some explanatory mechanisms and conditions which allow for this phenomenon to develop and flourish. More specifically, the present thesis aimed to investigate the relationship between prevailing situational stressors in the immediate work environment and work situation, and subsequent exposure to negative acts and bullying, using prospective (Papers 1 & 2) and daily diary (Paper 3) research designs. Additionally, Paper 2 aimed to extend our knowledge into explanatory mechanisms of role stressors in the bullying process, by investigating the potential mediating effect of role conflicts in a role ambiguity–bullying relationship. Finally, an overarching aim in all three papers was to test the hypothesis that laissez-faire leadership acts as a moderator in the relationship between various workplace stressors and experienced negative acts as a measure of workplace bullying. In addition, Papers 2 and 3 also investigated the potential attenuating effect of transformational leadership, a constructive form of leadership that is in stark contrast to laissez-faire leadership. Although the results of the investigated relationships are discussed in the respective individual papers included in the present thesis, I will discuss the main findings in the following sections, including some methodological strengths and limitations of the work presented. I will also present some practical and theoretical implications of the findings, as well as directions for future research.

4.1.1 Results relating to direct effects

With basis in the theoretical underpinnings in the work environment hypothesis (Einarsen et al., 1994; Leymann, 1996), the present thesis aimed to extend the empirical evidence on the relationship between experienced stressors in the work environment and reports of exposure to workplace bullying. Though there is ample evidence that supports such relationships, the majority of studies on the are cross-sectional in nature (Neill & Tuckey, 2014; Rai & Agarwal, 2016). As such, they can

only provide limited insight into the mechanisms and conditions involved in the development of bullying. Therefore, we aimed to extend this research by implementing various prospective (Papers 1 & 2) and daily diary (Paper 3) research designs. In this, we gained more and better insight into the process through which bullying can arise and develop out of well-known risk factors.

In Paper 1, the results showed that individuals who were involved in an interpersonal conflict with a co-worker had a higher risk of self-identifying as a new victim of workplace bullying two years later. This finding is in line with the general assumptions put forward in the work environment hypothesis (Einarsen et al., 1994; Leymann, 1996), and Leymann's (1990b, 1996) four-stage descriptive process model of workplace bullying. It also corresponds with the theoretical assumptions in conflict theory (Glasl, 1982; Van de Vliert, 1984), stating that increasing tensions and animosity between the conflict parties, when allowed to escalate, will eventually result in a shift in the balance of power between conflict parties. Consequently, this may result in one of the parties experiencing victimization from bullying. As such, our findings add to the existing literature of scholars who argue and substantiate that workplace bullying may be the end result of a highly escalated interpersonal conflict (Baillien et al., 2016; Baillien et al., 2009; Hauge et al., 2007; Leymann, 1996).

The results of Paper 2 showed a positive relationship between role ambiguity and role conflict on the one hand, and subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours on the other. This provides additional support for the work environment hypothesis (Leymann, 1996; Einarsen et al., 1994), and previous empirical evidence (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Van den Brande et al., 2016). Furthermore, some additional theories were employed to explain the underlying mechanisms believed to be at play in this study. First, looking at the results from the target's perspective, the presence of role ambiguity and role conflicts in the work environment is likely to trigger emotional and behavioural changes in employees. This is in line with the social interactionist theory (Felson, 1992; Felson & Tedeschi, 1993), in that such changes may lead employees to violate norms for expected workplace behaviour (Baillien et al., 2009). In this, individuals may end up acting in ways that inadvertently trigger aggressive

behaviours from others in the work environment (Neuman & Baron, 2011). Alternatively, from the perspective of potential perpetrators, the revised frustration-aggression hypothesis (Berkowitz, 1989; Fox & Spector, 1999) argues that ambient stressors in the work environment, such as role ambiguity and role conflict, affect all individuals working in the same environment, and not only the potential targets of negative behaviour (Balducci et al., 2012; Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Accordingly, potential perpetrators are also likely to be affected by these ambient stressors, resulting in their enactment of aggressive behaviour towards fellow employees. Yet, such an explanation includes an unobserved variable, that is perpetrator behaviour. However, returning to the target perspective, our result is also in line with the stressor-emotion model of counterproductive work behaviour (Spector & Fox, 2005). This model argues that individuals' appraisal and interpretation of perceived environmental stressors lead to negative emotional reactions, such as anxiety and anger, which can vary in intensity (Spector, 1998). Theoretically, it is these negative emotions that, in turn, may lead perpetrators to engage in aggressive behaviour towards other employees.

Contrasting the long-term exposure and late-stage escalation of bullying from long-term exposure to interpersonal conflicts in Papers 1 and 2, Paper 3 focused on the immediate and day-to-day effects of working in a high-stress environment. The results from this study showed a significant positive relationship between daily work pressure and daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts. This result may be explained by the theoretical underpinnings in the effort-reward imbalance model (Siegrist, 1996). In this, increased levels of work pressure may constitute an experienced imbalance between the level of effort needed to complete the job and the resources available to the individuals. According to the ERI-model, this imbalance is likely to result in rather immediate feelings of stress and frustration, which, in turn, leave the employees more vulnerable to conflict episodes and therefore to exposure to bullying-related negative acts. Furthermore, this is one of the first studies to add support to the work environment hypothesis (Leymann, 1996) in a short-term perspective, in that day-to-day issues in the work environment, such as increased levels of work pressure, seem to trigger discrete events of bullying-related negative

acts on the same day. As such, the results from this study indicates that even short-term experiences of working in a high-stress environment are enough to trigger exposure to the same bullying behaviours that have been documented in previous studies where individuals reported more long-term exposure to work-related risk factors of workplace bullying (see e.g. Baillien, De Cuyper, et al., 2011; Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Van den Brande et al., 2016).

Taken together, the presented results of the direct associations between various stressors in the work environment (i.e., interpersonal conflict, role stressors, and work pressure) and exposure to and victimization of workplace bullying all show support to the broader theoretical framework of the work environment hypothesis, as well as previous empirical evidence in the research field. Furthermore, although each study has employed different additional theoretical frameworks to argue more specifically for and explain the hypothesized relationships, the mechanisms believed to be at work are similar for all the theories employed, though the framing of these specific mechanisms varies to some extent. What these theories have in common is the fact that each of these different situational risk factors, irrespective of whether they are quantitative (i.e., work pressure) or qualitative (i.e., interpersonal conflict, role ambiguity, or role conflict) in nature, is hypothesized to induce feelings of stress and frustration in exposed individuals. As such, these situational stressors place employees under increased and often unmanageable demands (i.e., the effort-reward imbalance model), inducing feelings of stress and frustration, which again may cause them to change their behaviour and/or their perspective and perceptions. This change in behaviour on the part of the affected individual, such as violating existing work-related norms (Baillien, Rodriguez-Muñoz, Van den Broeck, et al., 2011) will undoubtedly also affect others in the work environment, who, in turn, may react to this change by acting aggressively in return (i.e., the social interactionist theory and the frustration-aggression hypothesis). These reported stressors may also reflect ambient stressors that could also directly affect others in the working environment (Balducci et al., 2012). In addition, this stressor-strain relationship may be further understood through the lens of the “gloomy perception mechanism” (de Lange et al., 2005), which posits that employees who experience high levels of negative emotions

(e.g., anxiety and frustration) are likely to also evaluate their environment more negatively and thus report less favourable working conditions (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). In this, employees may experience a vicious circle in which stressors in the work environment leave them vulnerable to experiencing negative emotions, which in turn cause the exposed employees to evaluate their working environment more negatively than others.

4.1.2 Results relating to the mechanisms involved in role stressors as antecedents of bullying: the mediating role of role conflict

The second aim of the present thesis was to contribute to the literature on the relationship between situational risk factors and workplace bullying by providing a more nuanced analysis of the interrelationship between two prevalent role stressors, namely role ambiguity and role conflict, and how these stressors may influence the process through which bullying is thought to develop. Previous research has shown that role conflict is one of if not the strongest predictor of bullying in the workplace (Balducci et al., 2012; Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Reknes et al., 2014). However, there is not much knowledge of *why* role conflict seems to have such a strong and consistent relationship with bullying, as compared to other related situational antecedents, such as role ambiguity. One explanation may be that role conflict is the more proximal antecedent of bullying, meaning that it occurs closer in time to the actual exposure to bullying behaviours than many of the other, more distal, situational antecedents that have been documented by researchers. However, to my knowledge, no studies have so far explored this assumption empirically. Accordingly, Paper 2 aimed to do just that, by investigating whether role conflict may act as a mediator in the direct relationship between role ambiguity and subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours. Supporting our hypothesis, the findings showed that the prospective relationship between role ambiguity and subsequent exposure to bullying a year later was mediated by employees' perceptions of role conflicts measured after six months.

Theoretically, this finding in Paper 2 is in line with early role theory (Kahn et al., 1964), in that employees who are uncertain with regard to their role and what is expected of them at work, are likely to be exposed to conflicting expectations and

demands from other individuals in the work environment. Without the necessary information available, they are likely unable to adjust to these conflicting expectations, resulting in increased experiences of intra-role conflict. This increase in role conflict, in turn, is likely to increase their feelings of anxiety and frustration, leading the individual to change their behaviour in such a way that triggers a bullying process (i.e., the social interactionist theory; Felson & Tedeschi, 1993; Tedeschi & Felson, 1994).

This finding is an important first step toward uncovering the temporal organization of situational risk factors of exposure to negative acts and bullying. Moreover, because of the limited empirical evidence investigating such an effect, we did also consider the potential for reverse causation between role ambiguity and role conflict, i.e., that the direct relationship between role conflicts and bullying behaviours may also be mediated through increased levels of role ambiguity. Disregarding their associations with workplace bullying, there are some arguments to support the notion of role conflict as an antecedent of role ambiguity in early role theory. Here, Kahn and colleagues (1964) present each of the causal relationships between the two role stressors as equally likely, without advocating strongly for one direction over the other. However, what these lines of argument do not take into consideration, is the two role stressors' inter-relationship in the context of workplace bullying. In this regard, role conflict seems to be the strongest and most consistent risk factor, and thus most likely to act as a mediator in the proposed role ambiguity–bullying relationship. Moreover, and in line with these theoretical and empirical arguments, our analyses in Paper 2 failed to support a reverse causal relationship in which role ambiguity served as the mediating mechanism. Accordingly, this result indicates a strong likelihood that role conflict is the more proximate antecedent over the more temporal impact of role ambiguity on workplace bullying. As such, this strengthens the hypothesis that the presence of role conflicts in the work environment is a crucial and proximal risk factor for bullying to occur and develop. This is also supported by two cross-sectional studies that have investigated this inter-relationship between the two role stressors (Hartenian et al., 1994; Notelaers et al., 2010).

Although the analyses employed Paper 2 utilized prospective data with three different measurement points, we did not test the potential of a reciprocal relationship, where exposure to bullying behaviours may also lead to subsequent experiences of role ambiguity and role conflicts. There are some studies that provide evidence suggesting the existence of such reverse causation (Hauge, Skogstad, et al., 2011; Nielsen & Knardahl, 2015). For instance, in a prospective study with a time-lag of two years, Hauge and colleagues (2011) found that exposure to bullying behaviours predicted subsequent role ambiguity and role conflict. They did not, however, find support for a model where role stressors predicted subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours, indicating that bullying is the triggering variable. In another prospective study investigating this relationship, however, Reknes and colleagues (2014) found evidence for a robust relationship between the two role stressors and subsequent exposure to bullying. When testing for a reverse causal relationship, the analysis showed a very weak relationship between workplace bullying and a subsequent increase in experienced role stressors in exposed individuals, and the authors note that this finding should be interpreted with caution. Another prospective study by Balducci and colleagues (2012) provided support for a significant relationship between role conflict (but not role ambiguity) and subsequent workplace bullying one year later. When investigating potential reverse causation, however, the authors documented that exposure to bullying predicted an increase in role ambiguity (but not role conflict) one year later. Accordingly, the empirical evidence regarding the causal relationship between role stressors and workplace bullying is inconsistent. As pointed out by Balducci and colleagues (2012), this may in part be explained by the different time-lags employed in various studies, with shorter time-lags (i.e., 6 months-1 year) indicating the impact of work environment factors on bullying, while longer time-lags (i.e., 2 years) showing evidence of reverse causation. This is in line with the theoretical arguments in the work environment hypothesis (Einarsen et al., 1994; Leymann, 1996), in that the presence of poor and stressful working conditions is a prerequisite for bullying to exist in the first place. Then, when bullying has become prevalent in the working environment, it is not unlikely that this will, in turn, further sour an already unfavourable psychosocial climate at work, creating a vicious cycle.

However, I argue that the process is triggered by the initial presence of workplace stressors, such as role ambiguity and role conflict. Nevertheless, because the causality of the relationship has been called into question, this should be further explored in future studies.

4.1.3 Results relating to the moderating effects of leadership in the stressor–bullying relationship

Laissez-faire leadership

The third aim of the present thesis was to extend the investigation into the antecedents and risk factors of exposure to bullying by also considering potential conditional factors, namely the possible moderating effects of leadership on relationships between situational risk factors in the work environment and exposure to negative acts and bullying. Accordingly, one of the most important contributions of the present thesis pertains to the consistent findings that support the hypothesis of a moderating effect of laissez-faire leadership on the established positive association between various stressors in the work environment and both exposure to workplace bullying and victimization from bullying. Leadership is generally considered a critical element of the organizational context as a whole, and thereby also for other factors present in the psychosocial work environment (Abbasi, 2018). Furthermore, it has been noted that the leader has a particular responsibility to ensure the well-being of their subordinates in stressful situations (Rayner & Lewis, 2020). The present thesis, therefore, proposed that leaders who engage in passive and avoidant laissez-faire leadership behaviours neglect this inherent duty of care, and thereby are likely to exacerbate the relationship between various risk factors and workplace bullying. Accordingly, with the theoretical underpinnings of the work environment hypothesis (Einarsen et al., 1994; Leymann, 1996) in mind – specifically the overarching notion that stressors in the work environment in combination with deficiencies in leadership practices is what triggers and maintains the bullying process – laissez-faire leadership can be considered a particularly important facilitating factor that has so far been largely overlooked in the bullying literature.

More specifically, the results in Paper 1 showed that the positive relationship between co-worker conflicts and subsequent new cases of self-labelled targets of bullying two years later was only significant for respondents who reported laissez-faire leadership behaviour from their immediate supervisor. That is, when leaders are not actively handling conflicts between subordinate co-workers, it not only permits an escalation of the conflict in question, but it also signals to those involved and others in the work environment that this type of behaviour is permitted and unlikely to have negative consequences for those involved. Accordingly, this result supports the theoretical notion that the lack of appropriate leader intervention in conflict situations is likely to contribute to a working environment that is a fertile ground for workplace bullying. Moreover, while this result was in line with our hypothesis and theoretical framework, it is interesting to note that only 47 respondents self-reported as new victims of bullying at T2, having changed their status from “not bullied” at T1. However, this is perhaps not so surprising when considering the findings of a recent study by Notelaers and colleagues (2018), who used a latent class modelling approach to investigate whether interpersonal conflicts, aggression, and bullying are overlapping or distinct constructs. While the authors were able to distinguish between interpersonal conflicts/aggression on one hand, and bullying on the other, their results did not detect a separate cluster for very highly escalated conflicts, as described in the highest stage of Glasl’s (1982) conflict escalation model. Notelaers and colleagues (2018) argue that this may be because such highly escalated conflicts in many cases will not be tolerated in working life, and likely will be stopped by leaders before reaching this level of escalation. This is also in line with Glasl’s (1982) comment that very few conflicts are likely to reach the highest level of escalation in organizations. Accordingly, it appears that only those co-worker conflicts that were allowed to escalate to a higher and more critical level developed into a situation characterized by long-term exposure to workplace bullying.

Moreover, the results in Paper 2 showed that laissez-faire leadership, as hypothesized, exacerbated the indirect relationship between role ambiguity and exposure to bullying through role conflicts. While the mediating effect of role conflict in the role ambiguity–bullying relationship has already been discussed above, this section will

focus on the specific moderating effect of laissez-faire on the indirect relationship between role ambiguity and exposure to bullying behaviours, through role conflicts. This finding further supports the work environment hypothesis, in that the lack of leader intervention in cases where the respondents experience increased levels of role conflicts seems to create high-risk environments in which bullying may flourish. Interestingly, in cases where the respondent did not report their immediate supervisor as exhibiting laissez-faire behaviour, there was no association between increased levels of role conflicts and subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours. Accordingly, leaders who demonstrate laissez-faire leadership behaviours, as experienced by an involved subordinate, may serve to isolate individuals and deny access to social support and thereby also exacerbate the negative effects associated with situations characterized by high levels of role conflicts (Kelloway et al., 2005). Such passive-avoidant leadership behaviours may cause employees to feel angry or frustrated because of their leader's reluctance to provide direction and structure, failure to clarify expectations, and unwillingness to help solve problems (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2013). Furthermore, passive leaders do not actively manage task and interpersonal processes in such a way as to minimize experienced role conflicts among members of their organization or team (Barling & Frone, 2017).

It is worth noting that while our analyses included laissez-faire leadership as a moderator on both the path between role ambiguity and role conflicts, and between role conflicts and exposure to bullying behaviours, this leadership style only exacerbated the association between role conflicts and subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours. One explanation for this finding may be that proper conflict management by the leader is especially important when there are signs of interpersonal conflict arising and/or some level of bullying behaviours are present. This assumption is also supported with the findings in Paper 1, where laissez-faire leadership moderated the relationship between co-worker conflicts and subsequent new victims of bullying, as measured two years after the initial conflict. Glasl (1982) argued that when conflicts are in the first main phase of escalation, both parties still consider the substantial aspect of their conflict to be central, and they are normally motivated to co-operate to resolve the conflict. In later phases, however, retaliation

and destruction of the opponent become more important to the parties over the original conflict issue, and resolution becomes more difficult to achieve. Thus, when a conflict situation has reached a high level of escalation, it is arguably less likely that the subordinate(s) in question, or other co-workers, will be able to de-escalate the situation themselves, for example by engaging in strategic prevention behaviour (Van de Vliert, 1984). On the contrary, Van de Vliert (1984) argues that conflicts in the second main phase are predominantly characterized by strategic escalation behaviour, while the third and most escalated main phase is characterized by a combination of strategic and spontaneous escalation behaviours by the conflict parties. Accordingly, it is reasonable to expect active involvement and conflict management strategies on the part of the leader to be particularly important in the later stages of conflict and bullying development. However, that is not to say that leader involvement is not also important at earlier stages. Following the findings from Paper 3, it may even be important on a daily level, in situations when risk factors are present in the environment. At least, the studies in the present thesis show that when things risk getting personal (as with interpersonal conflict, role conflict and high work pressure), then leadership action is paramount. Under uncertainty, as with role ambiguity, it may be of less importance.

Hence, even when taking a more immediate, day-to-day perspective on the moderating effect of *laissez-faire* leadership, the results in Paper 3 showed that the relationship between daily work pressure and daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts was only present on days when the respondents reported higher levels of *laissez-faire* leadership behaviour from their immediate supervisor. It is interesting to note that on days and in situations when the acting leader is described as avoiding their obligations and probably not managing and intervening in stressful situations, the effect on the respondents' perceived exposure to negative acts was immediate. On days when the leader did not display these types of avoidant behaviours, however, the level of work pressure was not related to an increase in reported exposure to bullying-related negative acts. In other words – and as already pinpointed – even at this early stage of a potential bullying process, the leaders' non-actions in situations that warrant intervention seem to be of vital importance for determining the level of

exposure to negative acts. Accordingly, the findings from Paper 3 support the notion in the work environment hypothesis that it is the interaction between a stressful work environment and lack of adequate leader involvement that creates a fertile ground for bullying to arise and develop (Leymann, 1996; Salin, 2003), even when looking at more isolated day-by-day events. Even more, our findings indicate that this process does not necessarily take weeks or even months to develop, but rather starts immediately when exposed to stressful conditions at work, at least when “the heat is on” as is the case with work pressure, role conflicts, and interpersonal conflicts.

Taken together, the moderating effect of laissez-faire leadership that is shown in all three papers included in the present thesis, support the notion that the combined effect of workplace stressors and leadership practices may in fact create an elevated risk for bullying over and above their additive effects (Cooper et al., 2001). Leaders who fail to intervene constructively in unfavourable working situations are likely to contribute to increased levels of anxiety and frustration among their followers, thus increasing their subsequent risk of being exposed to negative acts and bullying in the working environment. This adds further support to the work environment hypothesis (Einarsen et al., 1994; Einarsen et al., 2020; Leymann, 1996) by showing that poorly organized work conditions (i.e., interpersonal conflicts, role stressors, and work pressure), when combined with inadequate leadership practices, seem to create a fertile ground for the existence and development of bullying at work. It is further interesting to note that we find support for this effect in a wide range of research designs, all using different statistical analyses and data spanning from day-to-day changes within individuals to long term victimization. From this, I draw the conclusion that laissez-faire leadership likely is a key conditional factor in the development of bullying. Specifically, and in line with the social interaction theory (Felson, 1992; Felson & Tedeschi, 1993), the frustration-aggression hypothesis (Berkowitz, 1989; Fox & Spector, 1999), and the stressor-emotion model of counterproductive work behaviour (Spector & Fox, 2005), our findings indicate that the lack of active and constructive leader interventions in conflicting and demanding working situations – where subordinates are in need of leader support and intervention – is likely to exacerbate already elevated levels of experienced anxiety, frustration and general feelings of stress among subordinates.

By not taking action to prevent further escalation, laissez-faire leaders may fuel already existing cases of interpersonal tensions and conflicts, thereby increasing the risk of exposure to bullying.

Additionally, a likely consequence of laissez-faire leaders' non-response in situations characterized by increasing frictions between subordinates, is that perpetrators view this as a signal that their behaviour is acceptable. Accordingly, the abdication of proper leader interventions in demanding and conflicting situations probably signals to those involved that this type of behaviour is condoned by management (Samnani, 2021). In such situations, perpetrators may feel that conflict-escalating actions are unlikely to be sanctioned or have any form of negative consequences (Nielsen, 2013; Samnani, 2021; Skogstad et al., 2007), hence allowing for these negative acts to continue and even develop further.

This detrimental exacerbating effect of laissez-faire leadership may be contrasted by studies that have investigated the potential buffering effect of a strong climate for conflict management on the stressor–bullying relationships, indicating that the presence of such a climate in the work environment is related to fewer instances of bullying in the workplace even when risk factors exist (Einarsen et al., 2018; Hamre et al., 2021; Zahlquist et al., 2019). In organizations where the employees share the acknowledgment that there are fair and effective procedures in place for managing conflicts or other problems that may arise in the organization, as well as active and competent managers in relation to such conflicts (Rivlin, 2001), potential perpetrators will be made aware that any type of negative social behaviour directed towards fellow co-workers will not be tolerated. This recognition should effectively deter the bullying process before it has really had a chance to begin in the first place.

Transformational leadership

Contrasting the consistent finding of the facilitating effect of laissez-faire leadership, the results of analyses relating to the hypothesized moderating effect of transformational leadership in the present thesis were more inconclusive. In Paper 2, the results showed support for a buffering effect of transformational leadership on the

indirect relationship between role ambiguity and exposure to bullying behaviours, through role conflicts. There was not, however, support for the hypothesised buffer effect of transformational leadership on a daily basis on the work pressure–negative acts relationship in Paper 3.

There are several different explanations for why a moderating effect was detected in Paper 2 when transformational leadership did not seem to have such an effect on the daily work pressure–negative acts relationship in Paper 3. First, the research designs are vastly different, with Paper 2 looking at changes over a period of 6 months between measurement points and Paper 3 examining day-to-day changes within individuals. Therefore, one could argue that transformational leadership, characterized by leaders who act as a coach and a mentor, and who pay special attention to individual employees' need for achievement (Bass, 1990), may take longer to show the expected effect than for example *laissez-faire* leadership, where the leader is absent or avoiding their obligations as a leader when needed in immediate and specific stressful situations. Another explanation may be that transformational leadership, by definition, is more suited to address concerns related to the individual employee with regard to their given role in the organization (Bass, 1990), rather than issues related to time pressure and a high workload. Therefore, it is perhaps not so surprising that transformational leaders are able to offset the negative effects of role ambiguity and role conflict, by providing individual support to followers who are facing ambiguous and/or conflicting demands. However, when dealing with issues like time constraints and a high workload, employees may view leaders who constantly emphasize the importance of having a collective sense of mission and talk enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished (Avolio & Bass, 2004) as yet another constraint that they have to deal with in order to get their work done. As such, instead of the leader's inspirational motivation and idealized influence being viewed as a resource that may help reduce their overall work pressure, transformational leaders may in fact add pressure to an already stressful situation. Accordingly, a possible explanation for the lack of a significant buffer effect of transformational leadership in Paper 3 is that this type of leader behaviour in situations characterized by high work pressure, may also potentially represent a

mismatch between the leader and the situation. Transformational leaders – who set challenging expectations and motivate followers to go even further and aim higher (Bass, 1990) – may inadvertently also exacerbate already high levels of existing work pressure, thus not buffering any undesired effect. This may hold true particularly when considering the short-term perspective of the analyses in Paper 3, investigating day-to-day changes rather than changes that may take place over a period of 6 months between measurement points.

In Paper 2, we did find support for a buffering effect of transformational leadership on the indirect relationship between the respondents who experienced role ambiguity and subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours, mediated through increased levels of role conflicts. More specifically, it seems that respondents working under leaders who display higher levels of transformational leadership behaviours are not at risk of increased exposure to bullying behaviours, even if they report high levels of role conflicts. Accordingly, as argued in Paper 2, it is likely that the individual consideration and supportive behaviour enacted by transformational leaders effectively averts instances of subordinate negative social interactions from developing into escalated conflicts and bullying. In contrast to the stressful working environment investigated in Paper 3, the associations of interest in Paper 2 may constitute a case where the leaders' behaviour is a good match to the specific challenges the employee is facing, making it effective in preventing instances of negative acts and bullying (Tuckey et al., 2017). Furthermore, and in contrast to laissez-faire leadership, the findings in Paper 2 indicates that transformational leaders are effective in preventing experienced role conflicts from developing into instances of negative social acts in the workplace, probably by actively supporting and assisting their followers in coping with ambiguous or conflicting expectations and demands. This is supported by previous studies, arguing that effective, problem-solving conflict management skills (Baillien & De Witte, 2010; Baillien, Notelaers, et al., 2011; Zapf & Gross, 2001) are related to lower reported exposure to bullying.

In summary, the findings from the present thesis indicate that laissez-faire leadership seems to be a highly relevant conditional factor that contributes to developing and

maintaining the bullying process. When conflicts escalate and bullying start to happen and is allowed to continue without being managed and properly handled, it may cause the exposed individuals to start changing their behaviour, resulting in a vicious self-reinforcing cycle, where the targets' own behavioural changes may also fuel the aggressive reactions in potential perpetrators. Accordingly, this illustrates the importance for leaders to intervene, preferably before the bullying process reaches this level of escalation. Furthermore, when contrasted with transformational leadership, the effect of laissez-faire leadership emerges as the most consistent of the two forms of leadership, in that it seems to be of importance in many stages of the bullying process, from early exposure to discrete daily negative acts to full-blown cases where the respondents regard themselves as long-term victims of bullying. This adds support to the theoretical assumption that "bad is stronger than good" (Baumeister et al., 2001), especially in cases with a destructive outcome (Fors Brandebo et al., 2016), such as workplace bullying.

Transformational leadership, on the other hand, only seems to have an effect when allowed to accumulate over time, and only in situations where the demands the subordinates are faced with is a good 'match' with the type of qualitative support offered by transformational leaders. In situations characterized by quantitative demands, mere transactional leadership could possibly be more effective, in that transactional leaders are able to offer instrumental support (Avolio & Bass, 2004), without the risk of imposing even more pressure on the exposed individual. This assumption was, however, not investigated in the present thesis, and it therefore requires more research to actually reach such a conclusion.

4.2 Methodological considerations

4.2.1 Sample and generalisability

A significant strength of the studies included in the present thesis is the use of representative samples of Norwegian employees (Papers 1 & 2), indicating high external validity, thus making it possible to generalise the results to the wider

Norwegian working population and possibly beyond. Furthermore, the response rate in Paper 1 was quite high (58 % at Time 1), compared to other surveys on workplace phenomena in general (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). The use of such a large scale and heterogeneous sample increase the robustness of the findings (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). In Paper 2, however, the response rate was lower than what could be expected at only 32 %, which could limit the generalisability of the results from this study. On the other hand, the first wave of data from Paper 1 was collected in 2005, while the first wave of Paper 2 was collected 10 years later (in 2015). During this time, the field has seen a general decline in participants willing to participate in large-scale survey studies (Stedman et al., 2019). Accordingly, the relatively low response rate in Paper 2 is within the range of what is to be expected in later years in such studies. Nevertheless, generalisations to wider populations should always be made with caution. With regard to Paper 3, the analyses were performed using data from a highly selected and specialised sample of naval cadets. As such, the generalisation of the findings from this study may be more limited. For instance, there could be factors of importance in the selection process that might influence their response to the daily questionnaires and thus the results of the data analyses. However, as our hypotheses are grounded in broadly recognized and context-neutral theories and our findings are in line with previous studies which have greater generalisability to a wider population, there is reason to believe that our results would also hold true in other work contexts.

4.2.2 Study design

The use of three distinct research designs, ranging from “shortitudinal” day-to-day relationships (Paper 3) to longer-term prospective relationships with exposure to bullying behaviours (NAQ, Paper 2) and self-reported bullying (Paper 1) as outcomes, may be considered both a limitation and a strength. It is a limitation because it makes it difficult to directly compare the results from each separate paper because both the scales and the method of analysis used differ from one paper to the next. However, this may also be considered a strength, exactly for this reason. Some of the critique of the bullying literature to date has been that we do not know enough

of the bullying process as a whole (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Instead, individual studies give us a “snapshot” of some part of the assumed bullying process. Here, we have attempted to capture at least three distinct phases of such a process, and test whether *laissez-faire* leadership is an important conditional factor in relation to work stressors in each of these phases. Although we do not gain insight into the bullying process per se, the knowledge that *laissez-faire* leadership seems to act as a conditional factor in each of the situations investigated is important in and of itself.

Additionally, the use of prospective designs in two of the three papers included in this thesis is considered an important strength. However, while the use of prospective designs may be considered an advantage, the length of the chosen time lags and whether they are appropriate may be subject to discussion. It is important that the time lags employed in empirical studies match the true underlying causal time lags of the constructs of interest (Gollob & Reichardt, 1987; Taris & Kompier, 2014). For instance, Paper 1 employs a time lag of two years between the two waves included in the study. In light of the conception of bullying as a process that gradually escalates over months or even years (Einarsen et al., 2020; Zapf et al., 2020), and the fact that the dependent variable of interest in Paper 1 was measured using the self-labelled approach, I consider the 2-year time lag a strength, as it allows enough time for new cases of bullying to develop. If the time lag had been shorter, we might not have been able to capture the true number of new victims of bullying. However, as the analysis in Paper 1 is based on data from only two waves, making changes from T1 to T2 linear by default, it is difficult to determine the form of change over time (Rogosa, 1995; Singer & Willett, 2003). To rectify this issue, and following the recommendation to include several measurement points when the “correct” time interval is uncertain (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010; Taris & Kompier, 2014), Paper 2 employed three time points over a one-year period. This also makes it possible to test the hypothesized mediating effect of role conflict on the relationship between role ambiguity and subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours.

4.2.3 Instruments

Some issues should also be addressed in relation to the instruments used. Regarding workplace bullying, both the self-labelling approach and the behavioural experience approach have been used to capture the respondents' subjective experience of being exposed to bullying in the workplace. Paper 1 employed the self-labelling measure of workplace bullying, while Papers 2 and 3 employed the behavioural experience approach, respectively measuring bullying with a four- and nine-item version of the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (Hoprekstad et al., 2019; Notelaers, Van der Heijden, et al., 2019). While I have not followed the recommendation made by scholars in the field to employ a combination of these approaches in studies of bullying (Nielsen et al., 2009), I consider it a strength that through the combined inferences gained from each of the studies, we are able to capture bullying at different points of development, from early-stage, day-to-day exposure (Paper 3), to longer-term exposure to bullying behaviours (Paper 2), and, finally, to self-reported victimization of workplace bullying following the more strict definitional criteria for being considered as a victim and not only exposed (Paper 1) (Nielsen et al., 2020).

With regard to the self-report measure of victimization from workplace bullying (Paper 1), some limitations concerning the use of single-item measures should be mentioned. In general, researchers often discourage the use of single-item measures because they are said to suffer from reliability and validity deficiencies (Gardner et al., 1998; Nielsen & Knardahl, 2015). However, some researchers also hold that the reliability of single-item measures is in fact comparable to the reliability of longer scales (Gilbert & Kelloway, 2014; Littman et al., 2006) and that they have high content and criterion validity with regard to assessing job stressors (Gilbert & Kelloway, 2014). Furthermore, single-item measures are also reliable and effective at predicting outcomes (Fisher et al., 2016). More specifically with regard to the self-labelling approach to measuring workplace bullying, this single-item measure has shown to be a reliable and valid assessment of bullying victims both among adults (Nielsen et al., 2020) and school children (Solberg & Olweus, 2003).

Concerning internal consistency, the scales employed in the present thesis are generally well established and showed acceptable to high levels of reliability. Consequently, problems due to reliability are not likely to substantially affect the validity of the findings. One exception, however, was the scale measuring role conflict in Paper 2 (QPS_{Nordic}) (Dallner et al., 2000; Wännström et al., 2009). Although the internal consistency for role conflict in Paper 2 ($\alpha^{T1} = .63$, $\alpha^{T2} = .57$) was lower than the recommended value of .70, it was regarded as acceptable given that the scale only consisted of three items that showed moderate inter-correlations (Cortina, 1993).

Despite the use of these seemingly valid instruments, there is a challenge connected to measuring workplace bullying and environmental stressors by asking respondents to recall behaviours that have occurred several months ago (Jex & Bayne, 2017). However, bullying in the workplace is a gradually escalating phenomenon, and various empirical studies have shown the mean duration of bullying exposure to be relatively high, ranging from 12 to 62 months (Zapf et al., 2020, Table 3.2). Accordingly, there is a consensus among researchers that severe bullying is a prolonged problem that persists for periods of months or years rather than days or weeks (Einarsen et al., 2020). Thus, the use of retrospective instruments with long timeframes (i.e., six months) is necessary to capture the prolonged nature of this phenomenon. Additionally, the use of such instruments is often necessary when conducting research on phenomena with inherently low base rates, such as destructive leadership and workplace bullying. Nevertheless, it is a limitation that respondents may find it difficult to remember specific instances of negative workplace experiences, especially if these occurred several months in the past. It is worth noting that this is not an issue in Paper 3, as the respondents answer the same questions every day over a 36-day period, with a timeframe of the past 24 hours. The drawback with this approach, however, is that we only get a “snapshot” of the level of exposure that particular day, without the ability to include this information in the larger context of the development of bullying over time. Accordingly, there are both strengths and limitations connected to the different alternative measurement methods, and this is

also why it is important to develop a wide range of study designs that include both longitudinal and “shortitudinal” designs. This way, we would be somewhat better equipped to capture the whole picture of which variables are involved in the development of bullying in the workplace.

Another potential limitation related to the use of self-reported questionnaire data gathered from the same source is the elevated risk of common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Some biases related to the issue of common method variance, such as social desirability and consistency motif (i.e., the respondents’ urge to maintain consistency in their responses in accordance with their beliefs of how different constructs are related), may be limited by employing prospective research designs. The use of such designs may also increase the causal inferences made in Papers 1 and 2, as temporal separation reduces the chance of respondents recalling their responses to predictors measured at a different timepoint (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986; Rindfleisch et al., 2008). Additionally, when determining whether an individual has been exposed to workplace bullying, we follow the operationalization employed in the European research tradition. In this, we argue that victimization from bullying is a subjective assessment that is “in the eyes of the beholder”. In psychology, it is generally accepted that the feelings of the individual should be accepted at face value and taken seriously by others. In other words, asking respondents to subjectively report their own experiences fits with the primary research interest in the present thesis, namely, to investigate relationships between the respondents’ own *perception* of the level of exposure to workplace stressors, leadership behaviour, and negative acts/bullying. As such, the respondents’ self-reported experiences are, therefore, in many cases, preferable to more objective measures of actual behaviour, even with the limitations associated with self-reported questionnaire data.

4.2.4 Low base rate of reported study variables

Another important limitation is the low base rate of reported stressors in the work environment, including laissez-faire leadership and exposure to negative acts. As a consequence, due to fact that the full range of the response scale is unlikely to be used by the participants (cf. restriction of range; Notelaers & Van der Heijden, 2021),

most of the study variables are highly negatively skewed, meaning that most study participants report little or no exposure to the measured work-related stressors and bullying behaviours. Most of the existing theories on the relationships between workplace stress and its outcomes, including the theories employed in the present thesis, assumes causality based on relatively high levels of exposure. Accordingly, there is a mismatch between the levels of stressors assumed in the theoretical frameworks employed, and the actual levels reported by the respondents participating in the studies used to examine these assumed relationships. This issue, however, is not restricted to the studies included in the present thesis but represents a challenge for the fields of occupational stress and workplace mistreatment in general (see e.g., Fischer et al., 2021). Furthermore, with the exception of the proposed moderating effect of transformational leadership on the work pressure-negative acts relationship (Paper 3), we found support for all our hypotheses, and these results align with the theoretical and empirical reasoning used to argue for the proposed relationships. Accordingly, there is reason to believe that if the data used had reflected a higher base rate of reported stressors, the results might even be stronger than what is reported in the present thesis.

4.2.5 Strategy of analysis

The use of the logistic and multiple regression models to analyse our data, rather than estimating a structural equation model with latent variables, may be debatable. There are several limitations associated with standard regression analyses, including problems with measurement error in the data and the underlying assumptions of linearity and normality (Jeon, 2015). In order to compensate for some of these potential problems, alternative methods of analysis, such as structural equation models with latent variables, may be employed. There are several advantages associated with SEM-models, including information on a model's goodness of fit and the ability to identify and compensate for measurement error in the data used (Jeon, 2015). However, when dealing with interactions, which is the case in all of the three studies included in the present thesis, it is not quite as straightforward. For instance, simulation studies indicate that latent variable interactions cannot be reliably

estimated with skewed data using latent moderated structural equations (LMS) methods (Cham et al., 2012; Maslowsky et al., 2015). Additionally, this method requires the use of the maximum likelihood (ML) estimator, which functions under the assumption of normality. Alternative estimators that account for non-normal distributions in the data, such as the robust weighted least squares (WLSMV) estimator, is not applicable to SEM-models with latent interactions (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017). As such, this is not a viable solution for this problem. Thus, given that our study data are skewed and that the utility of the LMS procedure, as a result, is limited, we have deemed standard regression as an appropriate method of analysis in Papers 1 and 2. Although this does not solve the initial problem with inherently skewed data, we still considered this approach, with its known limitations, preferable to alternative and more complex analyses and accompanying unreliable and potentially invalid results.

4.2.6 Ethics

When conducting research using subjective self-report questionnaire data, there are ethical issues to be aware of. One of the problems with looking at bullying through a target-perspective on workplace bullying is the risk of “blaming the victim”. The ‘victim precipitation theory’ (Elias, 1986) argues that some victims may (unbeknownst to themselves) “trigger” aggressive behaviour in potential perpetrators through their personalities, attitudes, and/or actions (Cortina, 2017). Accordingly, the argument that targets sometimes provoke negative behaviours from others, by way of their own behavioural changes, may be considered the underlying theoretical explanation for the results in the present thesis. In other words, it may be argued that it is not the psychosocial work environment per se that is the issue, but rather the targets’ reactions to these situational conditions. However, as previously argued, while stressors in the work environment are likely to trigger a certain type of behaviour in a vulnerable individual which in turn may trigger negative behaviour from others, these aggressive actions may originate from several different places in the work environment. It is the *sum* of this exposure that leads to a perception of being victimized, and not the specific aggressive behaviour enacted by one specific

perpetrator. Moreover, as argued in the frustration-aggression hypothesis (Berkowitz, 1989; Fox & Spector, 1999), perpetrators are also likely to be affected by ambient stressors in the work environment, thus triggering them to enact aggressively towards other individuals (Balducci et al., 2012; Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Accordingly, using the victim precipitation theory as a way to justify blaming the victim for the victimization they experience, does not offer an adequate presentation of the complex interplay between work environment, target, and perpetrator(s) in a bullying situation.

4.3 Implications

The studies in the present thesis were conducted for both methodological, theoretical, and applied reasons. In the following, I will pinpoint some of the main implications for practice and for theory that may be drawn from this work.

4.3.1 Implications for practice

As shown by the three papers included in the present thesis, as well as previous research on the antecedents of bullying, the risk of becoming a victim and/or being exposed to bullying-related negative social acts increases when employees report working in a stressful work environment. Therefore, managers should prioritize implementing measures to decrease the presence of interpersonal conflicts, role stress, and high work pressure, as well as other environmental stressors, in the work environment. It is important to note that a certain level of task conflicts and challenge demands (i.e., work pressure) are to be expected in a working environment, and in some cases might actually have some beneficial effects, such as contributing to innovation and increasing organizational and/or team performance (e.g., Amason & Schweiger, 1997; De Dreu, 1997, 2006). However, this relationship has shown to be more complex than originally thought (De Wit et al., 2012), and some evidence suggests that any beneficial effects are contingent on some important moderators, such as a strong psychological safety climate (Bradley et al., 2012), high levels of team trust (Simons & Peterson, 2000) or when task and relationship conflict are weakly correlated (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). With regard to workplace bullying, however, the findings in the present thesis indicate that organizations should aim to

keep the levels of these stressors at a manageable level (Kahn et al., 1964). Specifically, the findings in Paper 2 indicate that if organizations make sure that their employees have a clear and complete understanding of their work role, and what is expected of them, the risk of further development of role conflicts and subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours is likely to be reduced.

On a related note, the key factor in determining when workplace stressors become detrimental (i.e., develops into workplace bullying), seems to be the presence of passive and avoidant leadership in situations where there is a need for active intervention from the leader due to the mentioned stressors. Therefore, it is important for organizations to take action to ensure that such a lack of active leadership is not prevalent in the work environment. This can be done in several ways. First, researchers have recommended that organizations take care in implementing anti-bullying policies and specific guidelines for the prevention of bullying (Zapf & Vartia, 2020). By clearly communicating that the organization has a ‘zero-tolerance’ for bullying, as well as clearly stating how and when leaders are required to take action, the organization may foster a positive working environment where bullying is not a systematic problem. It is important, however, that these policies and guidelines are continuously and systematically implemented in the organization, and not just serving as ‘window dressing’ (Rayner & Lewis, 2020). As previously noted, bullying will only be prevalent in organizations and work groups where the perpetrators assume that their negative social behaviour is tolerated by the management in the organization (Brodsky, 1976), and where there is a low perceived risk of being caught and punished for their behaviour (Salin, 2003). An important remark is that this is not only the responsibility of the individual leader but the organization and general management as a whole. This is illustrated in a study by Zahlquist and colleagues (2019), in which the authors substantiated that team-members’ shared perception of a strong climate for conflict management acts as a significant buffer on the impact of role conflict and cognitive demands on bullying behaviours. Similarly, a recent study by Hamre and colleagues (2021) documented the buffering effect of a strong climate for conflict management on the escalation of workplace bullying over time. That is, for individuals who reported working in what they perceived to be a weak conflict

management climate, the level of exposure to bullying behaviours was related to new and increased instances of bullying behaviours six months later. Such an escalation was not detected for individuals working in what they perceived to be a strong conflict management climate. Accordingly, in creating a strong climate for conflict management, the organization should be able to create an environment where the risk of employees' exposure to negative acts and bullying as a consequence of workplace stressors or previous bullying exposure is significantly reduced.

Furthermore, it is important to improve and increase individual leaders' competence and responsibility in dealing with conflict episodes – whether these are caused by interpersonal tension, high levels of quantitative demands, or conflicting demands and expectations – and to ensure that leaders intervene in the early stages of the escalation process before the stigmatization of one of the parties has occurred (Salin, 2006). In this regard, leadership development programs should include the development of competencies in identifying and dealing with early signs of conflict escalation and bullying. Furthermore, due to the inconsistent findings with regard to the moderating effect of transformational leadership, leadership development should not focus solely on promoting positive and effective leadership, as has been the dominating trend in development programs to date (Day & Dragoni, 2015). However, if the goal of the organization is to reduce instances of highly escalated conflicts and bullying, an essential part of leadership development is reducing *laissez-faire* leadership behaviours, that is leaders' disregard, inattention, and avoidance in concrete situations where subordinates are in need of leadership (Skogstad et al., 2014).

4.3.2 Implications for theory and directions for future studies

The use of various longitudinal and daily diary approaches in investigating antecedents and mediators/moderators of workplace bullying also add valuable knowledge to the field, as these issues have mainly been investigated with the use of cross-sectional data previously (Neall & Tuckey, 2014; Rai & Agarwal, 2016), yet with some noteworthy exceptions (Baillien, De Cuyper, et al., 2011; Baillien, Rodriguez-Muñoz, Van den Broeck, et al., 2011; Hauge, Einarsen, et al., 2011;

Reknes et al., 2014; Skogstad et al., 2011). Taken together, the findings from the three studies included in the present thesis support the theoretical assumptions of the work environment hypothesis (Einarsen et al., 1994; Leymann, 1996), in that stressors in the work environment were found to be related to a higher risk of being exposed to negative social acts – both on a day-to-day basis (Paper 3) and over a period of one year (Paper 2) – as well as self-identifying as a victim of workplace bullying in a longer time frame (Paper 1). Moreover, all three studies support the hypothesis that working under a leader that exhibits *laissez-faire* behaviours, further exacerbates the risk of exposure to bullying when facing stressors. In fact, these studies showed that only under the condition of higher levels of *laissez-faire* leadership were the examined risk factors related to instances of exposure to bullying behaviours or even experienced victimization from bullying. In situations with low levels of *laissez-faire* leadership, we did not detect an association with exposure to bullying. This is in line with Leymann's (1996) claim that poor and inadequate leadership in stressful situations is a vital conditional factor for bullying to be allowed to develop and flourish in the work environment. To my knowledge, the included studies are among the first to test the interaction aspect of the work environment hypothesis, rather than focusing solely on the detrimental effects situational stressors may have directly in relation to workplace bullying (see Hauge et al., 2007; Rodriguez-Munoz et al., 2012; Sischka et al., 2021, for other examples of studies addressing this aspect of the work environment hypothesis).

Further, it is also reasonable to assume that the passive-avoidant behaviours associated with this leadership style may in itself instigate group conflicts and peer-bullying (Hoel et al., 2010), thus also acting as a root cause of workplace stress (Kelloway et al., 2005; Skogstad et al., 2007), including bullying. As noted in the individual articles, we also consistently found direct associations between *laissez-faire* leadership and the respondents' levels of exposure to negative acts and bullying. These findings are in line with previous studies that have documented *laissez-faire* leadership as a precursor to workplace bullying in and of itself (Hauge et al., 2007; Nielsen, 2013; Skogstad et al., 2007). Furthermore, *laissez-faire* leadership may be experienced by subordinates as intended systematic neglect and rejection on the part

of the leader, which is closely related to the central characteristics of workplace bullying (Hoel et al., 2010; Skogstad et al., 2007). Subordinates may interpret this lack of social support and non-responsiveness on the part of the leader as a form of punishment. Accordingly, laissez-faire leadership may even be considered as a form of bullying in and of itself, namely social exclusion (i.e., ostracism) (Hoel et al., 2010).

Interestingly, our findings consistently support the hypothesized moderation effect of laissez-faire leadership on the stressor-bullying relationship, over and above the detected direct effect of this passive and avoidant form of leadership. Accordingly, the leaders' laissez-faire behaviour seems to have a dual role in the existence and development of bullying in the workplace. First, it may contribute to creating an environment where bullying is allowed, or even encouraged. But more than that, laissez-faire leaders also actively contribute, with their inaction, to the escalation and development of stressful situations into destructive interpersonal interactions with potentially detrimental outcomes. Accordingly, the combined effect of inadequate leadership and other workplace stressors seems to create an elevated risk of bullying – over and above their individual additive effects (Cooper et al., 2001).

Furthermore, based on the wide range of theoretical frameworks presented, there are several different mechanisms that in more detail may explain the association between environmental stressors, leadership, and exposure to bullying. These models are not interchangeable, however, but may be complementary in that they reflect and address slightly different aspects of the psychosocial work environment (Tsutsumi & Kawakami, 2004). Because of the variety of theoretical frameworks employed by researchers in the field, theorists have called for a more comprehensive, dynamic theoretical framework in order to understand the complex phenomenon that is workplace bullying (Wheeler et al., 2010). So far, however, no such framework seems to have gained a universal foothold amongst researchers of bullying. This may not be a problem in and of itself, as different individual theories/models used to explain the development of bullying at work serve as a valuable theoretical framework depending on the specific work stressor of interest. For instance, conflict

theory (Glasl, 1982; Van de Vliert, 1984) is an intuitive choice when studying the relationship between interpersonal conflicts and workplace bullying. Work pressure, on the other hand, may be considered both a challenge and a hindrance stressor for the employee, depending on the level of resources available to them in a specific situation. Therefore, the effort-reward imbalance model (Siegrist, 1996) is a good fit, as it takes this potential imbalance into account when arguing for the impact on work strain, such as exposure to bullying. Accordingly, the nature of the stressor in question may impact which mechanisms ultimately get put into play when determining whether an individual ends up being a target or victim of workplace bullying. Therefore, by relying on one single overarching theory of bullying development, we may lose some of the nuances and specificity offered by the narrower focus of individual theories and models.

From my point of view, for such an overarching framework to be of value to the research community, it would have to be general enough to encompass each of the triggering variables that are likely to be present in the work environment, but also specific enough to include detailed arguments for how these variables are likely to affect changes in the individuals involved in the bullying process (both targets and perpetrators), and how other conditional factors, such as deficient leadership practices, may influence such a process. One potential candidate in this regard is the “Three Way Model” of workplace bullying, as suggested in a qualitative study by Baillien and colleagues (2009). Here, the authors suggest an overarching framework in which bullying is theorized to develop through one of three main processes; namely as a consequence of either 1) inefficient coping with frustration arising from aspects such as work design and aspects of the psychosocial working environment, 2) escalated conflicts, or 3) destructive team and organizational culture or habits. Further, the authors argue that various individual and work-related variables may influence this process either directly (as antecedents) or indirectly (as moderators). However, since its publication in 2009, this proposed theoretical model has not received a lot of attention from other bullying researchers and thus remains largely untested.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that a common element in many of the individual theories included in the present thesis, is the inclusion of an increase of negative emotions (i.e., anxiety and frustration) as a mediating mechanism in the explanation for how bullying occurs and develops from various situational risk factors. However, although increased levels of frustration seem to be the leading explanatory mechanism in explaining why targets' levels of exposure to workplace stressors trigger aggressive responses in other individuals, very few studies actually test this theoretical assumption. This is not surprising, as emotions are states that may change quickly, and may therefore be difficult to capture reliably in a traditional longitudinal survey where the measurement points are months or even years apart. Employing daily diary designs when studying these associations, thus capturing the events in question close to when they are actually experienced by the respondents, may be a solution to this problem. However, as previously argued, these designs are not able to capture the more long-term changes that take place in the bullying process. Accordingly, there is a need for more research employing a wide range of research designs, to substantiate both the short-term and long-term effects influencing the development of the bullying process.

While the results in the present thesis suggest that laissez-faire leadership seems to be an important conditional factor in all stages of the bullying process, I am not able to make inferences as to when this type of leadership has the most impact, as none of the presented papers have explicitly studied the bullying process as such (see Reknes et al., 2021, for an example of a study that does). Although I have argued that there is sufficient theoretical and empirical evidence to suggest that role conflict may be the more proximate risk factor for workplace bullying, and therefore likely to act as the mediator in the role ambiguity–bullying relationship, there is still a lack of studies to systematically substantiate the likelihood of such an effect. Therefore, the studies included in the present thesis represent a starting point of research on the explanatory mechanisms and conditions that may facilitate or prevent the process of bullying development, that will hopefully continue to include a wide range of studies of various research designs at different levels of analysis, including potential mediators and/or moderators.

5. CONCLUSION

Because of the severe consequences associated with exposure to bullying and harassment in the workplace, it is important for organizations to have a thorough understanding of the phenomenon – including in which situations and under which conditions their employees are at risk of becoming a target of such negative social behaviour. As such, the findings in the present thesis contribute important knowledge regarding exposure to bullying at different points of the development process by examining the relationship between situational risk factors and exposure to negative acts and bullying employing prospective and daily diary research designs. Moreover, by examining role conflicts as a potential mediator in the role ambiguity–bullying relationship, we gain more nuanced knowledge regarding explanatory mechanisms in this process. Finally, by examining the moderating effect of leadership on the relationship between some prevalent risk factors in the work environment and exposure to workplace bullying, we extend our understanding regarding under which conditions bullying may actually arise and develop. Accordingly, the findings from the present thesis indicate that laissez-faire leadership seems to be a highly relevant conditional factor that contributes to developing and maintaining the bullying process, perhaps even more so than transformational leadership may attenuate such an escalating process. In this, the present thesis provides broad support for the interaction aspect of the work environment hypothesis, by showing that stressors in the work environment – in combination with inadequate leadership, characterized by lack of involvement in demanding and conflicting situations – increases the risk of employees being exposed to negative social behaviours and bullying at work. As such, the overall findings of this thesis substantiate that workplace bullying may be a consequence of leaders' inactions in stressful working situations. While our findings also substantiate the previous empirical evidence that prevailing problems in the work environment function as situational risk factors for workplace bullying, the main contribution to the literature is the finding that laissez-faire leadership seems to have an exacerbating effect on the development of workplace bullying, over and above the direct effects of leadership and situational stressors that prevail in the work

environment. Taken together, the findings from the three papers included in this thesis extend our knowledge into the processes through which bullying arises and develops in the work environment. This, in turn, enables us to make informed decisions regarding which organizational measures are likely to be effective in preventing instances of workplace bullying.

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The moderating effect of laissez-faire leadership on the relationship between co-worker conflicts and new cases of workplace bullying: A true prospective design

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Funding information

Norwegian Research Council, Grant/Award Number: 250127

In line with the work environment hypothesis, interpersonal conflict has been proposed as an important antecedent of workplace bullying. However, longitudinal studies on this relationship have been scarce. The aim of this study was to examine whether co-worker conflict predicted new cases of self-reported workplace bullying 2 years later and whether laissez-faire leadership moderated this relationship. In a sample of 1,772 employees, drawn from the Norwegian working population, the hypotheses that co-worker conflict increased the risk of subsequently reporting being a victim of workplace bullying and that laissez-faire leadership strengthened this relationship were supported. This study empirically supports the work environment hypothesis by showing that co-worker conflict within a true prospective research design is a source of new cases of bullying and that the lack and avoidance of leadership, through the enactment of a laissez-faire leadership style, likely is a main source for co-worker conflict to develop into workplace bullying.

KEYWORDS

co-worker conflict, laissez-faire leadership, true prospective study, workplace bullying

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Negative social events are claimed to affect people more strongly than do positive events (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). Therefore, studies of such events should have high relevance in organisational research. An example of such negative events at work is exposure to workplace bullying, which has been established as a prevalent social stressor with severe detrimental outcomes for exposed employees, organisations, and the society at large (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2010; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Victimisation from bullying is related to a wide range of negative outcomes, including job dissatisfaction (Mathisen, Einarsen, & Mykletun, 2008), intention to leave (Djurkovic, McCormack, & Casimir, 2004), exhaustion (Laschinger, Wong, & Grau, 2012), subjective health complaints (Nielsen, Hetland, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2012), and exclusion from working life (Glabek, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2015). Accordingly, workplace bullying has been classified not only as a significant source of social stress at work but also as a more crippling and devastating problem for employees than all other work-related stress put together (Wilson, 1991). Yet while the prevalence rates and outcomes of workplace bullying are relatively well established across the globe (Van de Vliert, Einarsen, & Nielsen, 2013), there is a striking lack of systematic studies on how this pertinent problem may be managed, be it at an individual, an organisational, or a societal level (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011). To prevent, handle, and treat cases of workplace bullying in the organisation, we first need a better understanding of organisational antecedents and mechanisms that explain how and when bullying arises, develops, and impacts those exposed. So far, these mechanisms are not very well understood above the fact that bullying is related to interpersonal conflict and high levels of demands and role stressors in the work environment (Baillien, Bollen, Euwema, & De Witte, 2014; Salin & Hoel, 2011; Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2007). Theoretically, scholars have proposed that bullying takes place in situations where stress and interpersonal frustration prevail, combined with the lack of proper management intervention (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2007; Leymann, 1996). Yet few studies have examined this proposition. Therefore, by employing a true prospective design (e.g., Reknes, Einarsen, Knardahl, & Lau, 2014), the aim of this study was to investigate the degree to which conflict with co-workers predicts new cases of workplace bullying 2 years later and whether a passive and avoidant leadership style, namely, a superior's *laissez-faire* leadership style, moderates this relationship. In this, we change the focus from leaders as perpetrators of bullying to leaders ignoring their subordinates and add to the present sparse empirical knowledge about how the omission of adequate leadership behaviour may play a vital role in how co-worker conflicts may develop into workplace bullying.

2 | THE CONCEPT OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

Workplace bullying has been described as a long-term process whereby someone is systematically and repeatedly subjected to negative acts in the workplace (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Olweus, 1993). In its most escalated form, workplace bullying is characterised by three central criteria, the first being that the negative acts are repeated regularly. Bullying is therefore not about single and isolated episodes or events but about behaviours that are repeatedly and persistently directed towards one or more targets (Olweus, 1993). Furthermore, workplace bullying is characterised by prolonged exposure and a perceived power imbalance between the bully and the victim (Einarsen et al., 2011; Olweus, 1991). Typically, the victim perceives that he or she has few resources, if any, to defend himself or herself against repeated negative acts. In line with this, Einarsen et al. (2011) state that "bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts" (p. 11). Hence, to study this process, time should be included by employing prospective and longitudinal designs, as is the case for this study. However, this approach has been lacking in the majority of studies on bullying (Salin & Hoel, 2011).

2.1 | The work environment hypothesis

Leymann (1996) stated that frustrating working conditions and poorly managed interpersonal conflicts were the main antecedents of workplace bullying. This is in line with the work environment hypothesis (Einarsen, Raknes, &

Matthiesen, 1994; Leymann, 1990, 1996), which claims that bullying is a consequence of problems in the prevailing psychosocial work environment.

Following the work environment hypothesis, several work stressors related to interpersonal frustrations have been studied as possible precursors of workplace bullying. Bowling and Beehr's (2006) meta-analysis showed that both role conflict and role ambiguity were uniquely related to workplace harassment. Together, they predicted 21% of the variance in workplace harassment. Furthermore, the meta-analysis indicated that individual differences among victims (with the exception of negative affect) have little influence on whether employees perceive themselves as bullied or not (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). These findings are further supported by Van den Brande, Baillien, De Witte, Vander Elst, and Godderis' (2016) systematic review, showing role conflict, role ambiguity, role insecurity, and cognitive demands to be the strongest predictors of being a target of workplace bullying. In a qualitative study among "key informants" in 19 Belgian organisations, Baillien, Neyens, De Witte, and De Cuyper (2009) identified three main avenues to workplace bullying. In line with Leymann's original proposition, one of these roads defined bullying as a situation that arises out of an escalated interpersonal conflict. The other two reflected ineffective coping with frustration, and destructive team and organisational cultures. In summary, the work environment hypothesis and the presented findings support the notion that a socially stressful work environment, particularly related to interpersonal stressors, is an important antecedent of workplace bullying.

3 | CO-WORKER CONFLICT AS AN ANTECEDENT OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

The most proximal antecedent of workplace bullying may be involvement in a highly escalated interpersonal conflict. An interpersonal conflict can be defined as "a process that begins when an individual or group perceives differences and opposition between itself and another individual or group about interests and resources, beliefs, values, or practices that matter to them" (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008, p. 6). This overreaching concept is usually separated into two subcategories, namely, task and relationship conflicts (Jehn, 1995). While task conflict represents disagreements about specific tasks to be performed (Jehn, 1995), relationship conflict reflects interpersonal differences resulting in high levels of frustration, tension, and animosity (De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001).

In their meta-analysis, Hershcovis et al. (2007) found that interpersonal conflict predicted interpersonal but not organisational-directed aggression. Accordingly, in a representative cross-sectional study looking at a wide range of work-related antecedents of bullying, Hauge et al. (2007) showed that involvement in interpersonal conflicts with colleagues and superiors and the immediate supervisor's leadership style were the strongest predictors of workplace bullying. Baillien et al.'s (2016) recent cross-sectional study showed a direct effect of task conflict on being a target of workplace bullying, as well as a mediating effect of relationship conflict on this relationship. This again is in line with Leon-Perez, Medina, Arenas, and Munduate's (2015) cross-sectional study showing that relationship conflict partially mediated the direct association between task conflict and workplace bullying. Baillien, Escartín, Gross, and Zapf (2017) conclude their empirical study by stating that even though interpersonal conflict and workplace bullying are both conceptually and empirically related, they are still distinct and separate phenomena.

In line with these findings, Leymann (1996) stated that workplace bullying should be viewed as the end state of a highly escalated and poorly managed interpersonal conflict, describing its development through four stages. The first stage is triggered by a critical incident, often a work-related or personal conflict. This stage is usually very short and ends when the target becomes the victim of bullying and stigmatising in Stage 2 (Leymann, 1990). In Stage 2, the victim will experience problems defending himself or herself against behaviours such as rumour mongering and ridiculing, withholding communication, isolation, and/or violence or threats of violence. The third stage involves intervention by management or human resources, and the conflict officially becomes a "case" for human resource. Leymann argued that management often adopts the prejudices of the victim's co-workers, turning the victim into a marked individual, and the victimisation process also renders the targets unable to sufficiently stand up for themselves in this phase. As a result, managers may

perceive the victims as difficult, unreasonable, and neurotic persons (Einarsen et al., 1994; Leymann, 1990). The last stage involves the possible expulsion of the targets, from their position, their job, or working life itself (Leymann, 1990, 1996).

Leymann's stage model aligns with conflict theory stating that bullying results from unresolved social conflicts that have reached a high level of escalation with an increased imbalance of power (Zapf & Gross, 2001). If a conflict is not successfully resolved, it will probably lead to negative and aggressive behaviour from one or more parties, which, in turn, may escalate into a case of workplace bullying (Baillien et al., 2009). In other words, a stressful social climate may easily escalate into a harsh personified conflict (Van de Vliert, 1984) where the total destruction of the opponent is seen as the ultimate goal (Glasl, 1994, as cited in Zapf & Gross, 2001). This escalation process creates a fertile ground for acts of manipulation, retaliation, elimination, and destruction (Van de Vliert, 1984), manifested in the systematic negative acts typically reported by targets of workplace bullying.

We therefore put forward the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. *Co-worker conflict at T1 predicts new incidents of self-reported workplace bullying at T2.*

4 | THE MODERATING EFFECT OF LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP

On the basis of a number of real-life cases, Leymann (1990, 1992, 1996) stated that inadequacies in leadership practices were another main precursor of workplace bullying. Accordingly, leaders have been identified as the most frequent perpetrator, with some 50% of all cases involving a superior in the role of the alleged bully (Zapf, Escartín, Einarsen, Hoel, & Varita, 2011). This claim is in line with a representative study from the Norwegian working population where 37% reported being bullied by their immediate supervisor, while another 25% reported other leaders as the perpetrator (Einarsen et al., 2007).

Although leaders are widely documented to be the main perpetrators of bullying, surprisingly few studies have looked at leadership behaviours and styles as antecedents and/or moderators of workplace bullying arising among co-workers (for an exception, see Hoel, Glasø, Hetland, Cooper, & Einarsen, 2010). However, scholars have stressed that various forms of leader passivity are core components in the bullying process (Leymann, 1990, 1996; Salin, 2003). Hence, this study will focus on a passive-avoidant type of leadership, namely, laissez-faire leadership. On the basis of Avolio and Bass' (2004) operational definition, Skogstad, Hetland, Glasø, and Einarsen (2014b) define laissez-faire leadership as a nonresponsive and avoidant type of leadership in situations when active leader involvement is needed. Accordingly, laissez-faire leaders do not meet the legitimate expectations of the subordinates (Skogstad et al., 2007). Laissez-faire leadership may also be conceived as a passive form of aggression (Buss, 1961; Parrott & Giancola, 2007) and in its extreme as a type of ostracism (Williams, 2007). Furthermore, a wide range of negative consequences have been associated with this kind of leadership among subordinates, including increased role stress, interpersonal conflicts, emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, and health problems (Skogstad, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2017).

Salin (2003, p. 1220) explained how passive leadership contributes to the development of bullying by stating that

The relationship between bullying and weak leadership can be explained in terms of low perceived costs for the victimizer. Since it can be assumed that weak leaders seldom intervene in bullying situations, weak leadership further reduces the risk for the perpetrator being caught and condemned.

Thus, it seems that a passive-avoidant leadership style provides a fertile ground for bullying between colleagues (Einarsen et al., 1994; Hauge et al., 2007; Salin & Hoel, 2011; Skogstad et al., 2007). By turning a blind eye to escalating conflicts, or by failing to intervene properly, the laissez-faire leader could easily be interpreted as condoning of the bullying behaviour (Hoel & Salin, 2003). This may lead to escalation in the conflict involving more openly aggressive behaviour and the perpetrators believing it is unlikely that their behaviour will be punished. This is also in line with Bass (1990), who stated that the abdication of superiors' responsibilities, as is the case with laissez-faire leadership, might result in high levels of conflict between co-workers. This may in turn increase the risk of conflicts escalating into new cases of bullying. Hence, there is reason to believe that a passive and avoidant form of leadership will act as a

moderator and facilitator in co-worker conflict–bullying relationships. In this, laissez-faire leadership may not primarily account for the existence of bullying but it may play an important role in strengthening the negative relationship between work environment stressors—such as co-worker conflicts—and subsequent cases of workplace bullying.

To our knowledge, few empirical studies have explored this mechanism empirically. One exception is Hauge et al. (2007), who in a large representative cross-sectional study of the Norwegian working population found that the experience of the immediate superiors' laissez-faire leadership style was significantly associated with high levels of conflict among co-workers. Yet, more importantly, they found that laissez-faire leadership strengthened the relationship between role conflict and exposure to bullying behaviours.

When bullying is considered to be the end result of escalated interpersonal conflicts (Baillien et al., 2017), leaders' passivity, including the nonsanction of conflict escalating behaviour, will likely further fuel the escalation process (Podsakoff, Todor, & Skov, 1982; Salin, 2003). Hence, within a true prospective design, we hypothesise:

Hypothesis 2. *Laissez-faire leadership at T2 moderates the relationship between co-worker conflict at T1 and subsequent new cases of self-reported victims of workplace bullying at T2. Respondents who are involved in a co-worker conflict at T1 have a higher probability of becoming a new victim of workplace bullying at T2 if they report high levels of laissez-faire leadership enacted by their immediate supervisor at T2.*

5 | METHOD

5.1 | Participants

This study was conducted using data from a two-wave longitudinal study of working conditions among employees in Norway. In 2005, a sample of 4,500 employees drawn from the Norwegian Central Employee Register were asked to participate in a nationwide study conducted by Statistics Norway (see also Hauge et al., 2007; Skogstad et al., 2007). The following sampling criteria were used: individuals between 18 and 65 years of age, registered in the Norwegian Central Employee Register as employed during the last 6 months before the survey, working in an organisation with at least five employees, and working 15 hr/week or more (on average). Questionnaires were distributed through the Norwegian Postal Service to the respondents' home address. Altogether, 2,539 questionnaires were returned at T1, yielding a response rate of 56.4%. With the exception of a somewhat skewed gender distribution (women being slightly overrepresented), the sample can be considered as representative for the Norwegian working population with regard to demographic characteristics (Høstmark & Lagerstrøm, 2006). The mean age was 43.8 years ($SD = 11.5$), with age ranging from 19 to 66 years. The mean working hours were 37.5 ($SD = 10.4$).

The second wave of data was collected in 2007, and this time, 1,772 respondents completed the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 69.8%. The project was approved by the Regional Committee for Medical Research Ethics in Western Norway.

5.2 | Measures

5.2.1 | Co-worker conflict

Co-worker conflict was measured using two items from the Bergen Conflict Inventory (Hauge et al., 2007; Skogstad et al., 2007). Participants were presented with the following definition of co-worker conflict:

A situation where a person experiences being hindered or frustrated by another person or group at work. This situation may reflect task-oriented disagreements as well as escalated interpersonal antagonisms, alternatively that a person experiences that someone acts in a manner that spoils his or her job satisfaction or the job satisfaction of other employees.

The two Bergen Conflict Inventory items were introduced by the following text presented after the definition: "To what degree are you nowadays in the following situations: 1) a task-oriented conflict with co-workers or others

in your workplace, 2) a person-oriented conflict with co-workers or others in your workplace.” The inventory has four response categories: 1 (*to a high degree in conflict*), 2 (*to some degree in conflict*), 3 (*to a small degree in conflict*), and 4 (*not in conflict*). The interitem correlation was high ($r = .57, p < .001$).

5.2.2 | New cases of workplace bullying

Participants were presented with the following definition of workplace bullying:

Bullying (for example harassment, torment, freeze-out or hurtful teasing) is a problem in some workplaces and for some employees. To be able to call something bullying, it has to occur repeatedly over a certain period of time, and the bullied person has difficulty in defending him- or herself. It is not bullying when two persons of approximately equal “strength” are in conflict, or if it is a single situation.

Following the definition, bullying was measured with a single item: “Have you yourself been exposed to workplace bullying during the past six months?”, employing a 5-point Likert scale with the following response categories: 1 (*no*), 2 (*once in a while*), 3 (*now and then*), 4 (*about weekly*), and 5 (*several times a week*).

In accord with previous studies (Berthelsen, Skogstad, Lau, & Einarsen, 2011; Einarsen & Nielsen, 2015; Glambek et al., 2015), respondents who chose one of the categories representing exposure to bullying (i.e., 2, 3, 4, or 5) were defined as self-labelled victims of workplace bullying. The rest were defined as nonvictims. This single-item measure has been employed in a range of studies among employees as well as school children and has both high face and content validity (Nielsen, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2010; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Furthermore, by using the chosen cut-off value, our study includes bullying cases that are in the early stages of escalation. In this, we are able to get a broader view of the escalation process from conflict to bullying, including the less severe and early on cases.

In employing a true prospective design (e.g., Reknes et al., 2014), we constructed a new variable on the basis of the dichotomised bullying measure. A measure of new victims of workplace bullying was constructed by removing all cases of bullied victims at T1. New victims at T2 were given the Value 1, while nonvictims at both T1 and T2 were given the Value 0. At T2, 71 respondents saw themselves as victims of workplace bullying. Of these, 47 were new victims, who are those of interest in this study.

5.2.3 | Laissez-faire leadership

Laissez-faire leadership was measured using five items taken from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 1990), an example being “My manager is absent when needed.” The scale employed four response categories, ranging from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*very often/nearly always*). The internal consistency of the scale was acceptable ($\alpha = .72$).

5.3 | Statistical analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 24.0. A binary logistic regression analysis was employed to investigate both the direct effect of conflict with co-workers (Hypothesis 1) and the moderating effect of laissez-faire leadership (Hypothesis 2) on new cases of workplace bullying. Dropout analyses for all study variables were conducted using independent sample *t* tests and chi-squared tests. The results showed no significant difference between respondents who dropped out after T1 and respondents who participated at both measurement points.

6 | RESULTS

The scales' means, standard deviations, and correlations are reported in Table 1. Positive correlations were found for both T1 co-worker conflict and T2 laissez-faire leadership with T2 self-labelled workplace bullying. T1 conflict with co-workers and T2 laissez-faire leadership were also positively correlated.

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables (N = 1,371–2,261)

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3
Co-worker conflict (T1)	1.32	0.57	–		
Laissez-faire leadership (T2)	0.51	0.49	.22**	(72)	
New victims (T2)	0.03	0.18	.10**	.19**	–

***p* < .01.

TABLE 2 Logistic regression analysis with T1 co-worker conflict as a predictor of new cases of self-labelled victims of workplace bullying at T2, moderated by laissez-faire leadership at T2 (N = 1,382)

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	OR	95% CI	B	OR	95% CI
Co-worker conflict (T1)	.333	1.395**	[1.09, 1.79]	.055	1.057	[0.72, 1.56]
Laissez-faire leadership (T2)	.739	2.094***	[1.65, 2.66]	.661	1.936***	[1.49, 2.51]
Interaction				.257	1.293*	[1.03, 1.62]

Note. CI = confidence interval; OR = odds ratio.

****p* < .001. ***p* < .01. **p* < .05.

A binary logistic regression analysis was performed to investigate whether T1 co-worker conflict predicted new cases of self-labelled victims of workplace bullying at T2 and whether laissez-faire leadership at T2 moderated this relationship (see Table 2).

On the basis of Cox and Snell *R*² and Nagelkerke *R*², variables included in Step 1 (T1 co-worker conflict and T2 laissez-faire leadership) predicted between 3.3% and 13.1% of the variance in bullying at T2. The regression model was supported by a significant chi-squared test ($\chi^2 = 45.80$; *df* = 2; *p* < .001) and a nonsignificant Hosmer and Lemeshow test ($\chi^2 = 2.39$; *df* = 6; *p* = .88). In summary, the results indicated that the presence of co-worker conflict increased the likelihood of becoming a new victim of bullying at a later time point (odds ratio [OR] 1.40, *p* = .008), thus supporting Hypothesis 1. We also note that laissez-faire leadership at T2 was a significant predictor of bullying at T2 (OR = 2.10, *p* < .001).

When the interaction term was added in Step 2, Cox and Snell *R*² and Nagelkerke *R*² indicated that the model as a whole explained between 3.7% and 14.6% of the variance in bullying at T2. The regression model was again supported by a significant chi-squared test ($\chi^2 = 5.65$; *df* = 1; *p* = .017) and a nonsignificant Hosmer and Lemeshow test ($\chi^2 = 5.18$; *df* = 7; *p* = .64). In summary, the results show that laissez-faire leadership moderates the relationship between co-worker conflict and the likelihood of becoming a new victim of bullying 2 years later (OR 1.29, *p* = .026), thus supporting Hypothesis 2. According to the simple slopes test (Dawson, 2014), the effect of co-worker conflict on bullying was significant only for respondents reporting high levels of laissez-faire behaviours in their immediate supervisors (*B* = .312, *SE* = 0.147, *p* = .033), not for those reporting low levels of laissez-faire leadership (*B* = -.202, *SE* = 0.290, *p* = .487). This interaction effect is illustrated in Figure 1.

7 | DISCUSSION

The main aims of this study were to prospectively investigate whether co-worker conflict at T1 predicted new cases of workplace bullying at T2 and whether laissez-faire leadership at T2 strengthened this relationship. The results supported both our hypotheses.

The logistic regression analysis showed that being involved in a conflict with co-workers at T1 increased the risk of identifying oneself as a new victim of workplace bullying 2 years later. This result supported Hypothesis 1 and add to the existing literature of scholars who argue and substantiate that workplace bullying may be the end result of an

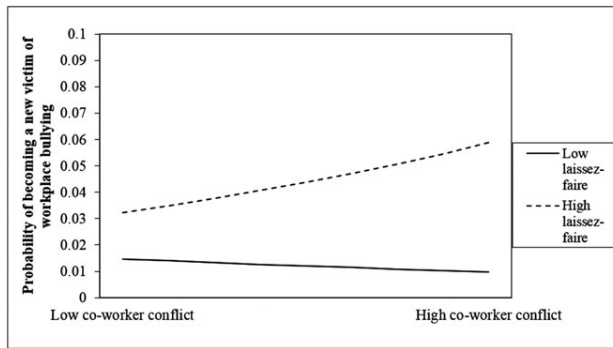


FIGURE 1 Interaction between T1 co-worker conflict and T2 laissez-faire leadership, with new cases of self-labelled victims of workplace bullying at T2 as outcome

escalated interpersonal conflict (Baillien et al., 2016; Hauge et al., 2007; Leymann, 1996) and that interpersonal conflict probably is one of the main avenues to workplace bullying (Baillien et al., 2009).

Theorists have long argued that bullying signifies an unresolved social conflict that has reached a high escalation level and an imbalance of power enabling one party to subject the other to repeated and systematic negative acts (Zapf & Gross, 2001). This process is illustrated in Glas's (1982) nine-step model of conflict escalation where long and intense interpersonal conflicts will lead the parties to ever more destructive and negative acts, which in the latest stages of escalation may be experienced as bullying. At this last stage of conflict escalation, parties often deny the opponents' human value, with manipulation, ridicule, aggressive outlets, and social exclusion as typical components (Van de Vliert, 1984). If one of the parties acquires a disadvantaged position in this struggle, often fuelled by a power imbalance, he or she may very well see himself or herself as a victim of bullying (Björkqvist, Österman, & Hjelt-Bäck, 1994). This line of reasoning is supported by a recent study by Baillien et al. (2017), stating that although the concepts of interpersonal conflict and workplace bullying are related, they are both conceptually and empirically different. That is, at some point, an interpersonal conflict will develop into something different and more destructive (i.e., workplace bullying) if not resolved at an earlier stage. This assumption is further supported by the relatively low prevalence of new victims at T2 in this study ($N = 47$). Thus, it appears that only those co-worker conflicts that were allowed to escalate to a higher and more critical level developed into experiences of workplace bullying.

The results also supported Hypothesis 2, namely, that laissez-faire leadership at T2 moderated the relationship between co-worker conflict and new cases of self-labelled victims of workplace bullying 2 years later. That is, we only found a significant relationship between co-worker conflict and bullying for respondents who perceived their immediate supervisor as portraying a laissez-faire leadership style. To our knowledge, this study is the first one to empirically investigate the moderating role of laissez-faire leadership on the interpersonal conflict-bullying relationship employing a prospective research design. This result aligns with the theoretical notion that when leaders are not actively handling conflicts between subordinates, this will probably contribute to a working environment that is a fertile ground for workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 1994; Leymann, 1996). The lack of proper leader interventions in conflict situations not only preclude the handling of the present conflict but also probably signals to those involved that this type of behaviour is condoned by management and that conflict-escalating actions are unlikely to have negative consequences (Hoel & Salin, 2003). Our result is in line with the study by Einarsen, Skogstad, Rørvik, Lande, and Nielsen (2018), showing that a perceived strong climate for proper conflict management is related to fewer reports of workplace bullying. Accordingly, Hoel et al. (2010) argue that the passive-avoidant behaviours associated with a laissez-faire leadership style may instigate group conflicts and peer bullying.

Furthermore, the fact that this study showed that laissez-faire leadership at T2 moderated the relationship between co-worker conflict at T1 and new cases of self-labelled victims of bullying 2 years later suggests that management interventions are especially important in the later stages of conflict escalation. We may conclude that a

laissez-faire leadership style, characterised by a systematic neglect of managerial responsibilities, is associated with an increased risk that a co-worker conflict will escalate into workplace bullying.

We also note that there is a significant main effect of laissez-faire leadership at T1 on the probability of labelling oneself as a victim of workplace bullying at T2 (OR = 2.10, $p < .001$), a finding that might have been anticipated (Skogstad et al., 2007), although not explicitly hypothesised in the present paper. Hence, it seems that a laissez-faire leadership style in itself provides a fertile ground for bullying, as argued by Salin and Hoel (2011). The absence and avoidance of adequate leadership, where leaders avoid making decisions, show little or no concern for their subordinates needs, and abdicate their responsibility in general (Avolio & Bass, 2004), is probably experienced as systematic neglect and ignorance by subordinates, because the leaders do not fulfil legitimate subordinate expectations regarding leader tasks and responsibilities (Skogstad et al., 2014b). Such leader avoidance and passivity may also be experienced as leader passive aggression (Buss, 1961; Parrott & Giancola, 2007), which in its extreme may be perceived as a form of social ostracism (Nielsen, 2013). However, as we cannot exclude that there also may also exist a reverse relationship where bullying predicts laissez-faire leadership, future studies should investigate this possibility.

7.1 | Methodological considerations

A considerable strength of this study is the use of a true prospective design where new incidents of bullying at T2 are predicted by levels of co-worker conflict at T1. Furthermore, this study is based on a large and nationally representative sample (Høstmark & Lagerstrøm, 2006), thus reducing the probability that the results are influenced by factors that may occur in a convenience sample. The response rate was 56.4% for the first wave and 69.8% for the second wave, which is within the expected to a higher than expected range for organisational studies (Baruch & Holtom, 2008), thus ensuring high relevance of the findings to the Norwegian labour market by strengthening the robustness and generalisability of the findings.

Some limitations of the study need to be considered. First, our data relied on self-reports and may therefore be subject to common method bias. However, the use of a prospective design minimises the effects of same source bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Nevertheless, collecting observations and experiences of leadership behaviour and bullying exposure from alternative sources may have strengthened the validity of the study. Second, all study variables were positively skewed. However, logistic regression analysis does not make assumptions about the distribution of the predictor variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Hence, skewness is not considered a major problem in this study.

Third, because this study only consists of two waves, any change from T1 to T2 is by default linear. Hence, it is difficult to determine the form of change over time (Rogosa, 1995; Singer & Willett, 2003). There may also be other, third variables than those controlled for in the study, which may affect the relationship between co-worker conflict and self-labelled bullying, such as constructive leadership styles (e.g., Skogstad et al., 2014a). In light of the conception of bullying as a gradually escalating process (Einarsen et al., 2011; Zapf & Gross, 2001), a strength of the present 2-year time lag is that it allows for new cases of bullying to develop. However, future studies should utilise alternative time intervals, such as 6 months and/or 1 year, in order to explore the escalation process from co-worker conflict to severe victimisation in greater detail.

Finally, this study measured workplace bullying with a single self-labelling item following a definition of bullying. The use of single-item measures has by some scholars been discouraged because they are said to suffer from reliability and validity deficiencies (e.g., Nielsen & Knardahl, 2015). However, studies have also shown that single-item measures of job stressors have high content and criterion validity (Gilbert & Kelloway, 2014) and that they are reliable and effective in predicting various outcomes (Fisher, Matthews, & Gibbons, 2016). In line with this, the present single-item self-labelling measure of workplace bullying has been established as a valid and reliable measure of victimisation from workplace bullying (Nielsen, Notelaers, & Einarsen, 2011). An important advantage of using a self-labelling measure, as compared with a behavioural measure (e.g., the Negative Acts Questionnaire, Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009), is that the present self-labelling measure accounts for the respondents' subjective perception of being a victim of workplace bullying, taking all the presented characteristics of bullying into account (Nielsen & Knardahl, 2015).

7.2 | Implications for practice

On the basis of the findings of this study, it seems clear that the presence of co-worker conflicts in the workplace may provide a fertile ground for bullying to develop, not the least when superiors perform a passive-avoidant laissez-faire leadership style. Hence, the prevention and proper management of interpersonal conflicts should be effective in preventing future cases of bullying. However, it may not be typical that interpersonal conflicts per se trigger workplace bullying (Ayoko, Callan, & Härtel, 2003). As shown by the moderator analysis, the connection between co-worker conflict and bullying was only present for those subordinates who reported their immediate supervisor as enacting a laissez-faire leadership style. This result is in line with Brodsky (1976) who in his pioneering interview study of harassed workers argued that bullying would only occur within organisations that allow such behaviour to take place. Hence, organisations should continuously strive to create and uphold a climate and culture where laissez-faire leadership is not tolerated. In order to achieve this, leaders need to be made aware of their vital role as active and responsive to subordinate needs and especially so when interpersonal conflicts are escalating into destructive interactions. Accordingly, organisations should encourage, or even make it mandatory, that leaders with personnel responsibilities participate in conflict management courses. Organisations should also make it a part of their policies to reward those leaders successfully handling and solving interpersonal conflicts. Accordingly, in order to reduce and, optimally, remove workplace bullying, management development programmes in general—which traditionally have emphasised the development and improvement of constructive forms of leadership, might be better served by also teaching leaders how to reduce and remove ineffective and even destructive forms, such as laissez-faire leadership seems to be in this context. This point of view is in line with the empirically based understanding that destructive events and behaviours in general do more harm than constructive do good (Baumeister et al., 2001).

8 | CONCLUSION

This study makes important contributions to our understanding of the process of interpersonal conflicts developing into workplace bullying. While most previous studies examining relationships between leadership and bullying have investigated leaders' actions as a source of workplace bullying, this study investigates the nonactions of leaders, namely, laissez-faire leadership, as a facilitator in the development of co-worker conflict into workplace bullying. First, the study provides empirical support for the work environment hypothesis, by showing that co-worker conflict is a significant risk factor for subsequent exposure to workplace bullying. Second, our study supports the notion that this risk is limited to those employees who perceive their immediate supervisor as laissez-faire. Taken together, this study indicates that by reducing—and optimally removing—this passive-avoidant leadership style, organisations may effectively prevent interpersonal conflicts from escalating into workplace bullying and thus reduce the overall prevalence of bullying in working life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work was supported by the Norwegian Research Council, under Grant 250127—Workplace bullying: From mechanisms and moderators to problem treatment.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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How to cite this article: Ågotnes KW, Einarsen SV, Hetland J, Skogstad A. The moderating effect of laissez-faire leadership on the relationship between co-worker conflicts and new cases of workplace bullying: A true prospective design. *Hum Resour Manag J.* 2018;28:555–568. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12200>

II

The moderating effects of leadership practices on the relationship between role stressors and exposure to bullying – A longitudinal moderated-mediation design.

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Keywords: role ambiguity, role conflict, transformational leadership, laissez-faire leadership, bullying, negative acts.

Acknowledgements: This work was supported by the Norwegian Research Council – NFR (grant number 237777/250127).

The moderating effects of leadership practices on the relationship between role stressors and exposure to bullying – A longitudinal moderated-mediation design.

Abstract

Role conflicts and role ambiguity have been identified as important risk factors for workplace bullying, particularly in combination with inadequate leadership practices. Even though role ambiguity theoretically can be considered as a causal precursor to role conflicts, previous research has mainly examined these role stressors as concurrent predictors of workplace bullying. The present study provides a more nuanced analysis by investigating role conflicts as a mediator in the relationship between role ambiguity and exposure to bullying behaviours. Adding to the understanding of the bullying process we also considered the possible moderating roles of laissez-faire and transformational leadership in the role stressor–bullying relationship. Employing a national probability sample of 1,164 Norwegian workers, with three measurements across a 12-month period, the results showed that the relationship between employees' role ambiguity and subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours was mediated by employees' experience of role conflicts. Moreover, laissez-faire leadership exacerbated, while transformational leadership buffered, the indirect relationship between role ambiguity and exposure to bullying behaviours through role conflicts. In summary, the present data show that if the management of organizations neglects its inherent responsibility to adequately address employees' experiences of role ambiguity and role conflict, the risk of workplace bullying is likely to increase.

Keywords: role ambiguity, role conflict, transformational leadership, laissez-faire leadership, bullying, negative acts.

The moderating effects of leadership practices on the relationship between role stressors and exposure to bullying – A longitudinal moderated-mediation design.

Workplace bullying has shown to be a detrimental psychosocial stressor with a wide range of negative consequences for those exposed and for the social environment where it takes place (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). It is therefore essential to identify those factors that provide a fertile ground for bullying to develop in the working environment, as well as employing those preventive measures that may stop, or at least halt this detrimental situation. Stressful working environments, combined with inadequate leadership practices, are assumed to be the most prominent risk factors in this regard (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018; Salin & Hoel, 2020). Specifically, bullying seems to be particularly prevalent in workplaces where employees experience organizational constraints and contradictory expectations and demands in the form of role ambiguity and role conflicts (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Reknes et al., 2019; Skogstad et al., 2007; Van den Brande et al., 2016). Although most previous research has investigated role ambiguity and role conflicts as concurrent predictors of organizational outcomes (cf. Beehr, 1995), including workplace bullying, some theoretical notions and cross-sectional evidence suggest that the effect of role ambiguity on workplace bullying is mediated through role conflicts (Hartenian et al., 1994; Notelaers et al., 2010). The present prospective study expands this research by testing the hypothesis that the experience of role conflicts is a prominent mechanism in explaining the relationship between role ambiguity and bullying. Building on the so-called “Work environment hypothesis” of workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 1994; Einarsen et al., 2020; Leymann, 1996) – in which the lack of leader involvement in stressful situations is argued to fuel and escalate the bullying process – we also address whether laissez-faire leadership and

transformational leadership practices moderate the impact of the two role stressors on the risk being exposed to bullying behaviours.

The present study makes three important contributions to research on workplace bullying. First, by testing role conflicts as an intervening variable in the relation between role ambiguity and bullying behaviours, we examine a mechanism that can explain how role stressors relates to workplace bullying. Such a mechanism has not previously been examined within a longitudinal research design, as may thus have significant theoretical as well as practical implications. By knowing more about the specific processes via which stressors in the work environment are transformed into workplace bullying, organizations should be able to initiate the appropriate interventions needed to prevent workplace bullying from arising and developing. Second, by examining transformational and laissez-faire leaderships as potential moderators of the association between role stressors and bullying behaviours we answer the call for more research on organizational conditions that may facilitate or prevent the development of workplace bullying (Rai & Agarwal, 2018). Finally, the use of prospective data from a 3-wave national probability employee sample with 6 months between time-points allows us to substantiate a plausible causal direction between the study variables.

Theoretical background

Bullying in the workplace refers to the systematic and repeated exposure to negative behaviours at the workplace by other organisation members, taking place over a prolonged time period, in situations or instances in which the target(s) find it difficult to defend themselves, potentially leading to severe victimization of the target over time (Einarsen et al., 2020). In practice, however, bullying occurs on a dimension from occasional exposure to severe exposure, typically being a gradually escalating process. We may distinguish between ‘victimization’ when looking at individuals who have been subjected to frequent and severe

long term bullying, and 'exposure to bullying behaviours' when including the whole range of such negative social experiences – from the occasional negative acts up to, and including, being a victim of severe bullying under the more strict formal definition (Nielsen et al., 2011).

Both work- and person-related factors may trigger workplace bullying (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). However, a growing body of evidence substantiate that role ambiguity and role conflicts are among the main risk factors in this regard (Hauge et al., 2007; Van den Brande et al., 2016). Conceptually, role ambiguity denotes a lack of information or a lack of clarity in communication regarding what is expected of a given employee in a given position in the organization (Kahn et al., 1964; King & King, 1990). In contrast, role conflict refers to incompatible expectations and demands associated with a certain role, such that compliance with one set of expectations makes compliance with the other sets more difficult (Kahn et al., 1964; King & King, 1990). While many different forms of role conflicts have been identified, most are conceptualized as a sub-category of either inter-role conflicts (incompatible demands placed on an individual occupying multiple positions or several roles simultaneously) or intra-role conflicts (i.e. conflictual expectations associated with a single position or role) (Beehr, 1995; Kahn et al., 1964), where intra-role conflicts is the primary focus in the present study. According to Kahn and colleagues (1964), organizational members need sufficient information about what is expected of them to effectively carry out their work. Clearly defined roles help leaders to make followers responsible for their own task executions and achievements. Unclear descriptions of a given role may, in contrast, lead to experiences of stress, with associated negative consequences for both the individual, the work group and the organization (Katz & Kahn, 1978). In this there is a risk of contradicting expectations and interpersonal tensions and even risk of destructive social processes potentially leading to workplace bullying (Baillien & De Witte, 2009b; Hauge et al., 2007; Moreno-Jiménez et al., 2009). Supporting this view, Bowling and Beehr (2006), in a comprehensive meta-analysis

including 90 independent samples, showed role conflicts and role ambiguity to be among the strongest predictors of bullying and harassment. Later studies employing prospective designs have further supported this notion (Reknes et al., 2014; Reknes et al., 2019).

Following a social-interactionist perspective (Felson, 1992; Felson & Tedeschi, 1993), a stressful work environment is likely to create feelings of stress and frustration among both potential perpetrators and targets of workplace bullying. That is, stressors in the workplace trigger emotional, cognitive, and behavioural changes in individuals, leading to aggressive outlets, breaches of established workplace norms for expected polite social interaction as well as less competent work performances (Baillien, De Cuyper, et al., 2011; Reknes et al., 2014). This, in turn, can cause others to behave aggressively in such a way that the targeted employee reasonably perceives him or herself to be exposed to bullying behaviours (Neuman & Baron, 2011). In line with this theoretical notion, role stressors are documented to be consistently related to self-reported strain, including anxiety, tension, anger, and depression (Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Spector & Goh, 2001; Örtqvist & Wincent, 2006). More specifically, role ambiguity has been hypothesized to increase stress because concerns and doubts about how to proceed with critical tasks may lead to frustration, resulting in increased tension (Schaubroeck et al., 1989). Role conflicts may have similar effects in the form of frustration and anxiety, because incompatible expectations from role senders diminish the focal person's self-perception of competence and effectiveness (Schaubroeck et al., 1993), and probably reduce one's experiences of decision latitude and self-control. Accordingly, one may both be unsure about how to execute one's job tasks as well as when to perform them. The uncertainty and ambiguity generated by such competing expectations inherent in role conflicts are expected not only to lead to work stress but also to interpersonal tensions and conflicts (Tidd & Friedman, 2002).

On top of this, targets' reports of role ambiguity and role conflicts may reflect ambient work stressors which also afflict potential perpetrator(s). Hence, working in a stressful environment may, in general, be associated with tense as well as frustrated employees, who engage in more aggressive behaviour towards others, particularly when conflicting expectations and demands are present, thus also triggering escalating conflicts which ultimately may result in bullying (Balducci et al., 2012; Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Theoretically, this line of reasoning corresponds with the revised frustration-aggression hypothesis (Berkowitz, 1989; Fox & Spector, 1999), which states that a stressful work environment may in the first place generate employees' negative affect, that in the following trigger perpetrators to engage in aggressive behaviours (Hauge et al., 2007). The stressor-emotion model of counterproductive work behaviour (Spector & Fox, 2005) proposes that stressful events will induce negative emotions in some or all affected individuals. Central to this model is the individual's appraisals of his or her abilities to cope with the given challenges (see also Lazarus, 1999; Perrewé & Zellars, 1999). Accordingly, a negative appraisal triggers a negative emotion (i.e., anger or anxiety) which, in turn, is linked to strain responses also including perpetrator negative acts and bullying behaviours. According to the stressor-emotion model, role stressors lead to bullying by increasing the overall levels of employees' vulnerability and aggressiveness. Such a mechanism is then thought to underly the relationships between role stressors and exposure to workplace bullying.

Taken together, employees experiencing high levels of role ambiguity and role conflicts probably also experience more frequent negative social acts and, ultimately, bullying behaviours, as these stressors probably trigger (directly and/or indirectly) perpetrators' aggressive behaviour (Hauge et al., 2009). Accordingly, it may well be that many of factors that precipitate perpetrators' aggressiveness are equal to those frequently reported by bullying

victims (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Based on these theoretical notions and empirical findings, we state the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Reported role ambiguity is associated with a subsequent increase in reported exposure to bullying behaviours at work.

Hypothesis 1b: Reported role conflicts are associated with a subsequent increase in reported exposure to bullying behaviours at work.

The relation between role ambiguity and role conflict

In line with Kahn and colleagues' (1964) work on role ambiguity and role conflicts – stating that “[...] conflict and ambiguity are independent sources of stress; either or both of them may be present in any given role” (p. 89) – the majority of research on role stress has to date treated role ambiguity and role conflicts as closely related yet separate and parallel constructs (Bowling et al., 2017; Fisher & Gitelson, 1983; Jackson & Schuler, 1985; King & King, 1990; Tubre & Collins, 2000; Örtqvist & Wincent, 2006). Accordingly, most studies on role stressors and workplace bullying have treated these two stressors as concurrent predictors of bullying (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). However, their concurrent and temporal interrelationships are still of relevance both from a theoretical and an applied perspective. In their original descriptions of the two role constructs, Kahn and colleagues (1964) were somewhat vague about how they might relate to each other (King & King, 1990). Nevertheless, the authors did argue that if a role is ambiguous for the focal person (i.e. the receiver of role expectations and demands), it is probably so for many of his/her role senders as well (Kahn et al., 1964). Furthermore, if a role is ambiguous, the focal person needs to fill it themselves. This may, in turn, be opposed and resisted by others, hence creating a state of intra-role conflict in the focal person. Similarly, in situations where role senders are vague or inconsistent in their expectations and demands – as captured in the concept of role ambiguity

– the focal person may over time be increasingly more likely to receive conflicting pressures from colleagues and superiors. This is likely to result in experiences of intra-role conflicts for the focal person, which could, in the long run, be met with sanctions of varying intensity and legitimacy from frustrated role senders. Such reactions may even take the form of negative social acts escalating into bullying behaviours and as such spurring a bullying process. Thus, there is reason to believe that a working environment characterized by high levels of role ambiguity will create a fertile ground for intra-role conflicts to develop which again may increase the risk of exposure to bullying behaviours.

Despite this line of reasoning, studies examining causal relationships between role ambiguity and role conflicts and their outcomes, are scarce. While various studies show relatively moderate correlations between the two (see e.g. Skogstad et al., 2007, documenting a correlation of .35 in a representative sample of the Norwegian working population), findings from two cross-sectional studies suggest that the effect of role ambiguity on workplace bullying is indeed mediated by role conflicts (Hartenian et al., 1994; Notelaers et al., 2010). However, to our knowledge, no studies have examined their relationships longitudinally. Therefore, there is a strong call for studies investigating how these frequently studied role stressors relate to each other as antecedents in the developmental process of workplace bullying. In line with the theoretical reasoning found in early role theory, we therefore propose that employees' increase in experienced role ambiguity over time will lead to an increase in experienced intra-role conflicts. In support of such a notion most studies on role stressors as antecedents of workplace bullying have shown role conflicts to be the stronger predictor over role ambiguity (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Van den Brande et al., 2016), which may indicate it to be the most proximal antecedent of the two (Notelaers et al., 2010). All taken together, we therefore propose that the relationship between role ambiguity and bullying behaviours is mediated by role conflicts.

Hypothesis 2: Role conflicts mediate the positive association between role ambiguity and subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours.

Leadership behaviour

Having proposed how role ambiguity may lead to bullying behaviours through role conflicts, we will now turn to leadership practices as a conditional factor that may moderate the effect of these role stressors on exposure to bullying. Bullying is unlikely to be explained by one factor alone, and is probably a result of an interplay between various factors acting in the work arena (Zapf, 1999). In line with the work environment hypothesis, bullying is caused by a combination of deficiencies in work design (also manifested in role stressors) – causing stress and frustration among employees – and deficiencies in the leadership practices of immediate and more senior managers (see Einarsen et al., 2020), which will allow the bullying process to escalate. Accordingly, the combined impact of the two role stressors and leadership styles of either a constructive (e.g. transformational leadership) or detrimental form (e.g. laissez-faire leadership) is likely to influence employees during their interactions (Cooper et al., 2001).

Leadership characteristics and styles have shown to be linked to a wide variety of followers outcomes, both positive and negative (Harms et al., 2017; Kelloway & Barling, 2010), including the exposure to workplace bullying (Hoel et al., 2010). The full range of leadership model (FLR; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Riggio, 2006), describes leadership behaviours and styles from the most passive and ineffective to the most active and effective styles of leadership. In line with this we will therefore elaborate on the potential moderating effects of laissez-faire and transformational leadership, on the proposed relationships between the two role stressors and becoming a target of workplace bullying. These two leadership styles represent the extremes of the full range leadership model, where transformational leadership is described as the most constructive and effective style of leadership. Laissez-faire

leadership, described as the most passive and ineffective (Bass & Avolio, 1994), has even been argued and substantiated to be a destructive form of leadership (Craig & Kaiser, 2013; Fosse et al., 2019; Skogstad et al., 2017).

Based on Bass and Avolio's (1994) model and operationalisation of laissez-faire leadership (see also Bass, 1999; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008), Skogstad and colleagues (2014) have defined laissez-faire as "a follower-centred form of avoidance based leadership by focusing on subordinates' perceived situational need for leadership" (p. 325). In line with this definition, laissez-faire leaders are absent, passive and/or avoidant when followers are in need of leader help or assistance (Skogstad et al., 2014). In addition to being perceived as non-responsive, laissez-faire leadership behaviour may in such a context be conceived as a passive form of aggression (Buss, 1961; Parrott & Giancola, 2007). It may even be perceived as a type of social exclusion and ostracism (Fiset & Boies, 2018; Robinson & Schabram, 2017; Williams, 2007) often seen in cases of workplace bullying (Notelaers et al., 2019). Laissez-faire leadership is not restricted to only being ineffective for the organization, but may in certain contexts also be experienced as a destructive type of leadership in and of itself, be it by subordinates emotional and cognitive experiences or by their consequences (Skogstad et al., 2017).

One explanation for why laissez-faire leadership should influence the magnitude of the association between role stressors and workplace bullying is that laissez-faire leadership may serve to isolate and exclude individuals, create uncertainty and deny access to social support, and thereby exacerbate the negative effects of other workplace stressors (Kelloway et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2013). Such passive-avoidant leadership behaviours may increase subordinates' felt tension from existing stressors – causing employees to feel even more frustrated, anxious, and angry, because of their superior's reluctance to provide direction and structure, failure to clarify expectations, and unwillingness to help solve problems

(Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2013). Furthermore, passive and avoidant leaders do not actively manage task and interpersonal processes in such a way as to minimize experienced role conflicts among members of their organization or team (Barling & Frone, 2017). In this, they neglect the legitimate responsibilities of their leader position and role to adequately address and amend stressful and conflicting working conditions, which is particularly troublesome when subordinates are in need of help and assistance (Skogstad et al., 2014). Thus, there is reason to believe that passive and avoidant laissez-faire leaders will increase the likelihood that followers' experiences of role conflicts go unmanaged, allowing them to escalate over time and, ultimately, even develop into workplace bullying. This line of reasoning is in accordance with the work environment hypothesis (Einarsen et al., 1994; Leymann, 1996) where the lack of leader intervention in cases of unfavourable working conditions is hypothesized to create high-risk environments in which bullying may flourish. To our knowledge, the moderating effect of laissez-faire on the relationship between role conflicts and bullying in the workplace has only been examined in one cross-sectional (Hauge et al., 2007) and one prospective (Rodriguez-Munoz et al., 2012) study. Both studies showed that at the relationship between role conflicts and bullying is stronger for those respondents who reported high levels of laissez-faire leadership from their immediate supervisor. Thus, bullying seems to be more likely to occur when supervisors avoid or neglect intervening in stressful situations (Ågotnes et al., 2018), including working conditions characterized by high levels of role stressors.

Hypothesis 3: The positive indirect effect of reported role ambiguity on subsequent exposure to reported bullying behaviours through role conflicts is stronger at high (vs. low) levels of reported laissez-faire leadership.

Contrasting laissez-faire leadership, transformational leadership is considered as, and has been shown to be, an effective and particularly beneficial form of leadership (Arnold,

2017), even if also criticized and questioned by its measurement (e.g. Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). Theoretically, transformational leaders serve as role models for their employees, inspire and motivate their followers to do their best by providing meaningful and challenging work tasks, communicate a shared vision and stimulate followers' innovation and creativity. Finally, and perhaps most important and relevant for the present study, transformational leaders show consideration for their followers' individual needs, concerns and well-being, through individualized consideration (Bass, 1985, 1990b). In this, transformational leadership behaviour includes the enactment of social support, whereby the leader provides both emotional (encouragement) and instrumental (advice) support (Kessler et al., 2013). In many instances, such supportive leadership makes the difference for employees when coping with work stress (Breevaart et al., 2014; Khalid et al., 2012). In strong contrast to laissez-faire leaders, transformational leaders pay individual attention to each of their followers' needs and should therefore be able to recognize and help followers who are faced with ambiguous or conflicting expectations and demands. Once a given leader is aware of such challenging working conditions, he or she is also likely to actively assist a given follower in managing the actual demands more effectively, including their experiences of role ambiguity and role conflicts (see also Bass & Riggio, 2006). In turn, followers will probably experience fewer negative emotions – such as frustration and/or anger – and their associated negative behavioural consequences (c.f. the social interactionist theory, Felson, 1992; Felson & Tedeschi, 1993), consequently buffering the risk of exposure to bullying in the workplace (Astrauskaite et al., 2015). Moreover, by showing effective conflict management skills (Baillien, Notelaers, et al., 2011; Zapf & Gross, 2001), and making it clear that negative social behaviour is not tolerated in the organization, transformational leaders will probably deter the occurrence of follower negative behaviours and, ultimately, workplace bullying to take place

(Baillien & De Witte, 2009a), and more so the higher the level of perceived role stress among subordinates. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: The positive indirect effect of reported role ambiguity on subsequent reported exposure to bullying behaviours through role conflicts is weaker at high (vs. low) levels of reported transformational leadership.

Method

Design and procedure

The sample was based on data from a three-wave representative survey of the Norwegian working force, with a six-month time lag between measurement points. A random sample of 5000 employees was drawn from The Norwegian Central Employee Register by Statistics Norway, which is the official register of all Norwegian employees as reported by employers. Sampling criteria were adults between 18 and 60 years of age employed in a Norwegian enterprise of more than 5 employees. The first wave of data (T1) was collected during the spring of 2015. Questionnaires were distributed through the Norwegian Postal Service. Altogether 1,608 questionnaires were satisfactorily completed and included in this study, yielding a response rate of 32 percent. The mean age was 45.17 (SD = 10.02) years with a range from 21 to 61. The sample consisted of slightly more women (52%) than men (48%). Altogether 36% had a leadership position with personnel responsibilities, indicating an overrepresentation of leaders and managers in the sample.

The second wave of data (T2) was collected six months later following the same procedure as the first wave. There were no changes to the survey questionnaire. Only respondents who responded to the T1 survey were invited to participate at T2. Altogether 1,149 respondents participated in this follow-up survey (71.4 %). The third wave of data (T3) was collected one year after T1 and six months after T2, following the same procedure as the

previous assessments. All respondents who participated at T1 were invited to participate at T3, even if they had not participated at T2. Altogether 1,164 respondents participated in the third follow-up survey (72.4%).

The survey was approved by the Regional Committee for Medical Research Ethics for Eastern Norway. Responses were treated anonymously, and informed consent was given by the respondents.

Instruments. *Exposure to bullying behaviours* in the workplace was measured using the Norwegian version of the Short-Negative Acts Questionnaire (S-NAQ; Notelaers et al., 2019). Response categories ranged from 1-5 (*never, now and then, monthly, weekly and daily*). Example items are “Being ignored or excluded”, “Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes,” and “Someone withholding information which affects your performance.” The internal consistency of the scale was good ($\alpha^{T1} = .86$, $\alpha^{T3} = .87$).

Scales from the General Nordic Questionnaire for Psychological and Social Factors at Work (QPS_{Nordic}) (Dallner et al., 2000; Wännström et al., 2009) were used to measure *role ambiguity* (3 items, $\alpha^{T1} = .80$) and *role conflicts* (3 items, $\alpha^{T1} = .63$, $\alpha^{T2} = .57$). Although the internal consistency for the role conflict scale was lower than the recommended value ($\alpha > .70$), we regarded it as acceptable in the present study given that the scale only consisted of three items that showed moderate inter-correlations (.31, .31 and .34, respectively). The items measuring role ambiguity are “Have clear, planned goals and objectives been defined for you?”, “Do you know what your responsibilities are?” and “Do you know exactly what is expected of you at work?” The items measuring role conflicts in the form of intra-role conflicts are “Do you have to do things that you feel should be done differently?”, “Are you given assignments without adequate resources to complete them” and “Do you receive incompatible requests from two or more people?” Respondents provided their responses on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1-4 (*never, sometimes, often, and always*). I line with

Rizzo et al. (1970) operationalisation of role ambiguity, the items were phrased to reflect role *clarity* and reversed to represent role ambiguity in the present study.

Transformational leadership was measured using the *Global Transformational Leadership Scale* (GTL; Carless et al., 2000). This seven item short scale assesses transformational leadership as a unified construct, and is designed to represent a global measure of perceived transformational leadership as portrayed by ones immediate leader/manager (Carless et al., 2000). The items capture seven leadership behaviours: (i) Communicates a clear and positive vision, (ii) develops staff, (iii) supports staff, (iv) empowers staff, (v) is innovative, (vi) leads by example, and (vii) is charismatic. Response alternatives ranged from 1-5 (*never, rarely, once in a while, quite often* and *very often or always*). The GTL has good convergent validity with established lengthier scales such as the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) and the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) (Carless et al., 2000). The internal consistency of the scale was very good ($\alpha^{T2} = .89$).

Laissez-faire leadership was measured using four items from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass, 1990a; Bass & Avolio, 1990). In line with measurements of alternative forms of destructive leadership, such as abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), the wording of each item was adjusted so as to emphasize the one-to-one relationship between the leader and the respondent (see e.g. Nielsen et al., 2019). Accordingly, the wording of the items are as follows: “My immediate supervisor...”...avoids involving him/herself in tasks that are important for me and my work”, “...is absent when I need him/her”, “...avoids making decisions that are important for me and my work”, “...delays responding to questions that I need urgent answers to”. Response alternatives ranged from 1-5 (*never, rarely, once in a while, quite often* and *very often or always*). The internal consistency of the scale was good ($\alpha^{T2} = .83$).

Data analysis

We conducted a correlation analysis SPSS (version 25) to test the proposed direct effects between role ambiguity and role conflict, respectively, and subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours (hypothesis 1a and 1b). In order to test the proposed mediation effect of role conflicts in hypothesis 2, we estimated a simple mediation model (model 4), using the SPSS PROCESS macro version 3.4 provided by Hayes (2013). This macro facilitates estimation of the indirect effect (ab) with a bootstrap approach to obtain confidence intervals (CIs). The application of bootstrapped CIs is preferred over the Sobel tests because the bootstrapping approach does not make any assumptions regarding the sampling distributions of the indirect effects, and also reduces the likelihood of Type 1 errors (MacKinnon et al., 2004; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Bootstrapping was set to 5,000 subsamples.

Subsequently, we predicted that laissez-faire and transformational leadership, respectively, would moderate the indirect path between role ambiguity and bullying, through role conflict. However, even if our theoretical line of reasoning regards leadership as a moderator between role stressors and bullying, we started by carrying out an explorative analysis (model 45), in which the two leadership styles were included as potential moderators on both the path between role ambiguity (T1) and role conflicts (T2), and on the path between role conflicts (T2) and bullying behaviours (T3). Subsequently, the result from this first analysis was used to further inform our analysis strategy. These moderated-mediation models were tested using the above-mentioned SPSS macro. This SPSS macro facilitates the implementation of the recommended bootstrapping methods and permits the probing of the significance of conditional indirect effects at different values of the moderator variable.

Results

The scales' means, standard deviations and correlations are reported in Table 1.

----- Insert Table 1 about here -----

Positive correlations were found for role ambiguity^{T1} with role conflicts^{T1 & T2}, laissez-faire leadership^{T2} and exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3}. Role conflicts^{T1 & T2} correlated positively with laissez-faire leadership^{T2} and exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3}. These results are in support of hypothesis 1a and 1b. Laissez-faire leadership^{T2} and exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3} were also positively correlated, as expected. Finally, negative correlations were found for transformational leadership^{T2} with all other study variables.

In order to analyse the mediating effect of role conflicts in the relationship between role ambiguity and exposure to bullying behaviours, we applied the PROCESS macro by Hayes (2013).

----- Insert Table 2 about here -----

The mediation analysis (PROCESS model 4) revealed significant direct associations between role ambiguity^{T1} and role conflicts^{T2} ($b = .061$, $SE = .022$, $p < .01$), as well as between role conflicts^{T2} and exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3} ($b = .119$, $SE = .021$, $p < .001$) (see Table 2). The direct effect of role ambiguity^{T1} on exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3} was not significant ($b = -.003$, $SE = .004$, *n.s.*), indicating full mediation. This was further supported by a significant indirect effect of role ambiguity^{T1} on exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3}, through role conflicts^{T2} ($b = .007$, $SE = .003$, 95% CI [.002, .014]), supporting hypothesis 2. In our analyses, we controlled for the stability of role conflicts^{T1}, which significantly predicted subsequent role conflicts six months later ($b = .46$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$). We also controlled for the stability of exposure to bullying behaviours^{T1}, which significantly predicted both subsequent role conflicts^{T2} ($b = .16$, $SE = .04$, $p < .01$), and exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3} ($b = .52$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$). The explained variance of the total effects model was 40 %. We also tested for the possibility that role ambiguity^{T2} could be the mediating mechanism between role conflicts^{T1} and bullying behaviours^{T3}, however we did not find

support for this model¹. This further supports our theoretical assumption that the level of experienced role conflicts is in fact the mediating mechanism at play.

In order to test the moderating effects of laissez-faire and transformational leadership as proposed in hypothesis 3 and 4, we conducted several moderated mediation analyses using PROCESS for SPSS (Hayes, 2013). First, we conducted an analysis that included both laissez-faire leadership^{T1 & T2} and transformational leadership^{T1 & T2} as concurrent moderators in the same moderated mediation model. As our hypotheses did not specify on which path leadership is expected to act as a moderator, we first conducted an analysis where the two leadership styles were included as moderators both in the path between role ambiguity and role conflicts (path a), and the path between role conflicts and exposure to bullying behaviours (path b) (see PROCESS model 45). The result of this analysis revealed interaction effects of both leadership styles, but only on the path between role conflicts and exposure to bullying behaviours. We therefore decided to only report the most parsimonious analysis, where laissez-faire and transformational leadership, respectively, are only included as moderators in path b_i (PROCESS model 14, see tables 3 and 4), in line with the suggestions of Cohen and colleagues (2003).

Table 3 shows the conditional indirect effect (through role conflict) between role ambiguity and exposure to bullying behaviours (S-NAQ) at different levels of laissez-faire leadership.

----- Insert Table 3 about here -----

First, the analysis revealed significant direct associations between role ambiguity^{T1} and role conflicts^{T2} ($b = .05$, $SE = .02$, $p < .05$), as well as between role conflicts^{T2} and exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3} ($b = .09$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$) (see Table 2). The direct effect

¹ These results can be provided upon request to the corresponding author.

of role ambiguity^{T1} on exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3} was not significant ($b = -.007$, $SE = .01$, *n.s.*), indicating full mediation. This provides additional support for hypothesis 2.

Furthermore, the effect of role conflicts^{T2} on exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3} was stronger at high compared to low levels of laissez-faire leadership^{T2} ($b = .08$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$). This interaction is illustrated in Figure 1, showing the effect at different levels of laissez-faire leadership^{T2} (± 1 SD).

Additionally, the results showed a significant index of moderated mediation ($b = .004$, $SE = .003$, 95% CI [.0002, .0101]), indicating that the indirect effect of role ambiguity^{T1} on exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3}, through role conflicts^{T2}, is contingent on the level of laissez-faire leadership^{T2}. These results support hypothesis 3. Controlling for the stability of experienced role conflicts^{T1} and exposure to bullying behaviours^{T1} (see Table 3), the full model explained 43.9 % of the variance in exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3}. The interaction term alone explained 1.2 %. This interaction is illustrated in Figure 1, showing the effect at different levels of laissez-faire leadership (± 1 SD).

----- Insert Figure 1 about here -----

In line with hypothesis 3, Figure 1 indicates a positive relationship between role conflicts^{T2} and exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3} for employees reporting high levels of laissez-faire leadership^{T2} from their immediate supervisor. For employees reporting low levels of laissez-faire leadership^{T2}, the figure indicates no increase in exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3} at higher levels of role conflicts^{T2}. This is also supported by simple slope tests, where the positive slope for high levels of laissez-faire leadership was significant (Slope = 0.151, $t = 5.816$, $p < .001$), whereas the slope for low levels of laissez-faire leadership was not (Slope = 0.023, $t = 0.850$, *n.s.*).

----- Insert Table 4 about here -----

Table 4 shows the conditional indirect effect (through role conflicts^{T2}) of role ambiguity^{T1} on exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3} at different levels of transformational leadership^{T2}. The association between role conflicts^{T2} and exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3} was weaker at high (vs. low) levels of transformational leadership^{T2} ($b = -.09$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$). This interaction is illustrated in Figure 2, showing the effect at different levels of transformational leadership^{T2} (± 1 SD). Additionally, the results showed a significant index of moderated mediation ($b = -.005$, $SE = .003$, 95% CI $[-.01, -.001]$), indicating that the indirect effect of role ambiguity on exposure to bullying behaviours, through role conflicts, is contingent on the level of transformational leadership, supporting hypothesis 4. Again, we controlled for the stability of role conflicts^{T1}, which significantly predicted subsequent role conflicts six months later ($b = .46$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$). Controlling for the stability of experienced role conflicts^{T1} and exposure to bullying behaviours^{T1} (see Table 4), the full model explained 44.7 % of the variance in exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3}. The interaction term alone explained 1.4 %, and is illustrated in Figure 2, showing the effect at different levels of transformational leadership (± 1 SD).

----- Insert Figure 2 about here -----

Figure 2 indicates no increase in exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3} at higher levels of role conflicts^{T2} for employees who report high levels of transformational leadership^{T2} from their immediate supervisor. For employees reporting low levels of transformational leadership^{T2}, however, there is a positive relationship between role conflicts^{T2} and exposure to bullying behaviours^{T3}. This is in line with hypothesis 4, where we proposed that transformational leadership would function as a buffer against the negative effect of employees' role conflicts on their exposure to bullying behaviours. This is further supported by simple slope tests, where the positive slope for low levels of transformational leadership

was significant (Slope = 0.175, $t = 6.603$, $p < .001$.), whereas the slope for high levels of transformational leadership was not (Slope = 0.014, $t = 0.489$, *n.s.*).

Discussion

Earlier studies have consistently shown positive associations between role ambiguity and role conflicts, respectively, and exposure to workplace bullying (see Van den Brande et al., 2016, for an overview). The present study extends this previous knowledge, by demonstrating a mediating effect of role conflicts in the relationship between role ambiguity and subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours. Moreover, our data showed that laissez-faire leadership exacerbated while transformational leadership attenuated the indirect relationship between role ambiguity and subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours through role conflicts.

Hence, in support of hypothesis 1, role ambiguity and role conflicts were positively associated with subsequent increased exposure to acts of workplace bullying (see Tables 1 & 3). These findings are in line with the theoretical underpinnings of the social interactionist theory (Felson, 1992; Felson & Tedeschi, 1993), where stressors in the work environment is thought to trigger emotional and behavioural changes in employees, leading him or her to violate norm-based expected work behaviours, indirectly unleashing workplace aggression from others. Alternatively, in line with the work environment hypothesis and the revised frustration-aggression hypothesis (Berkowitz, 1989; Fox & Spector, 1999), the results may also be explained by the notion that role stressors acts as ambient stressors, which may more directly trigger aggressive behaviour on the part of potential perpetrator (Balducci et al., 2012; Bowling & Beehr, 2006). This assumption is also in line with the stressor-emotion model of counterproductive work behaviour (Spector & Fox, 2005), where the presence of stressors in the work environment is theorized to induce negative emotions in some individuals, including

potential perpetrators. It is these negative emotions that, in turn, lead perpetrators to engage in aggressive behaviour towards other employees.

Supporting hypothesis 2, and in line with early role theory (Kahn et al., 1964), our findings indicated that the prospective relationship between role ambiguity and exposure to bullying a year later was mediated by employees' perceptions of role conflicts (see Tables 2, 4 & 5). Employees who do not have a clear picture of what is expected of them are likely to experience increased levels of role conflicts – that is increasingly more conflicting expectancies from different role-senders – probably because they have not received the necessary information and resources to be able to adjust to the requirements of other roles (Kahn et al., 1964). In line with the social interactionist theory (Felson & Tedeschi, 1993; Tedeschi & Felson, 1994), this increase in role conflicts, should, in turn lead to increased levels of frustration and negative affect in the individual which may act to trigger the bullying process, as well as trigger tension and conflict with and among others in the working environment. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first study to empirically demonstrate the mediating mechanism of role conflicts in the role ambiguity–negative acts relationship by employing longitudinal data. Hence, employees' experienced ambiguity constitutes a risk factor for bullying through creating fertile soil for intra-person role conflicts to develop.

In support of hypothesis 3, laissez-faire leadership exacerbated the indirect relationship between role ambiguity and exposure to bullying through role conflicts (see Table 4). This finding – along with studies showing the exacerbating effect of laissez-faire leadership on the negative effect of other stressors on bullying (Ågotnes et al., 2018) – support the notion that the combined effect of workplace stressors may in fact create an elevated risk of bullying over and above their additive effects (Cooper et al., 2001). This adds further support to the work environment hypothesis (Einarsen et al., 1994; Einarsen et al.,

2020; Leymann, 1996) by showing that the combination of poorly organized work conditions (role stressors) and inadequate leadership seems to create a fertile ground for the development of bullying at work. Specifically, the lack of active and constructive interventions on the part of a superior in conflicting and demanding working situations where subordinates are in need of leader support and intervention, are likely to increase subordinates' feelings of frustration and stress. This allows interpersonal tensions and conflicts to escalate, leaving the focal employee, or employees, at an increased risk of exposure to bullying (c.f. the social-interactionist theory).

Likewise, hypothesis 4 was supported, as transformational leadership buffered the indirect relationship between role ambiguity and exposure to bullying behaviours one year later, through role conflicts six months later (see Table 5). That is, employees who reported higher levels of superiors' transformational leadership did not report this increased exposure to bullying behaviours even when the level of role conflicts was high. The individual consideration and supportive behaviour enacted by transformational leaders may constitute a decisive mechanism in the role stressors–bullying behaviour relationship. Superiors who are attentive to their followers facing ambiguous and/or conflicting expectations and demands, and who actively support and assist their followers in coping with these demands, seem to be effective in averting subordinate negative social interactions from occurring and developing into escalated conflicts and bullying. Similarly, transformational leaders who show effective management skills (Baillien, Notelaers, et al., 2011; Zapf & Gross, 2001) and makes it clear that negative social behaviour is not tolerated in the organization (Baillien & De Witte, 2010), seem to be effective in preventing instances of negative social acts from developing in the workplace as a consequence of experienced role conflicts.

However, an important question not answered by this study is whether this finding only applies to transformational leadership, or if it is also present for other forms of

constructive leadership practices, such as transactional forms of leadership. Likewise, in addition to testing the detrimental effects of passive-avoidant forms, such as laissez-faire leadership, active-confrontive forms, such as abusive supervision, should be tested. Future studies should therefore explore the potential moderating effects of alternative constructive and well as destructive forms of leadership in the role stressor–bullying behaviour relationship.

Methodological strengths and limitations

The current study has several strengths, as especially indicated by its three-wave prospective design. Studies utilizing three or more waves of data are rare (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010), and there has long been a call for research employing longitudinal data when studying the antecedents and mechanisms in relation workplace bullying (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018) as well as to detrimental and destructive forms of leadership in general (Martinko et al., 2013; Tepper et al., 2017). In this regard, the present study represents a unique contribution to the field. By employing prospective data from a national probability employee sample with three measurement points over a total of 12 months, we were able to test the proposed mediation effect of role conflicts in the role ambiguity–bullying relationship with a proper longitudinal design – controlling for the T1 values of the dependent and mediating variables as well as testing for any reversed relationships between role conflicts and role ambiguity. Furthermore, all study variables were measured using psychometrically sound instruments. To fit the individual level hypothesis, the indicator of laissez-faire leadership was revised to emphasize a one-to-one relationship between the leader and the subordinate, rather than being a global measure of laissez-faire leadership behaviours across subordinates and situations (see Nielsen et al., 2019).

However, some limitations are also worth considering. First, the response rate at time-point 1 was only 32 %. This is lower than the average rate earlier documented for survey

studies (Baruch & Holtom, 2008), and could limit the external validity of the findings. It should, however, be noted that there is a declining trend in response rate in survey research, and our response rate is in line with other survey studies from the last few years (Stedman et al., 2019). Second, the problem of common method variance (CMV) due to self-reports always exist in such survey data (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Spector et al., 2017). However, the risk of common method variance is probably reduced by the use of a longitudinal research design with multiple measurement points (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Finally, the use of the PROCESS macro in SPSS to analyse our data, rather than estimating a structural equation model with latent variables, could be considered a limitation. There are limitations associated with standard regression analyses using PROCESS, including the fact that we do not have the opportunity to control for potential measurement error in our data. However, simulation studies indicates that latent variable interactions cannot be reliably estimated with skewed data using latent moderated structural equations (LMS) methods (Cham et al., 2012; Maslowsky et al., 2015). Thus, given that all our study data are highly skewed and that the utility of the LMS procedure as a result is limited, we have deemed PROCESS as an appropriate method of analysis in the present study.

Implications for theory and practice

By examining role conflicts as a mediator in the role ambiguity–workplace bullying behaviour relationship employing longitudinal data, our findings contribute important and nuanced knowledge regarding the inter-relationship between role ambiguity and role conflicts, at least with regards to workplace bullying, which so far has been lacking in the field. Furthermore, the fact that our analyses failed to support a reverse causal relationship, i.e., that role ambiguity did not function as a mediator in the relationship between role conflicts and workplace bullying, strengthens our hypothesis that the presence of role conflicts in the work environment is a crucial and proximal risk factor for workplace bullying to occur and develop.

From a practical standpoint, the implementation of measures reducing role stressors, starting with experienced role ambiguity, is likely a decisive measure to prevent negative acts and bullying from developing. Yet, as some presence of role ambiguity and conflicts in organizations is probably inevitable, the organizational goal should probably not be to eliminate role ambiguity and role conflicts completely, but rather to keep the levels of these stressors at a tolerable level (Kahn et al., 1964). In line with this, we have to keep in mind that role expectations have a very bright side in the form of role privileges and gratification (see e.g. Sieber, 1974). Important interventions as regards the dark sides of role expectations includes the implementation of work designs that ensures clarity about work roles and responsibilities, research-based strategies for the selection and development of considerate and responsive leaders, a culture that rewards considerate and helpful behaviours, and the development of a strong climate for conflict management (Zahlquist et al., 2019). If these interventions are successful, organizations will probably reduce the risk of negative social interactions as well as preventing workplace bullying from arising and developing.

Furthermore – as the present study underscores – escalating negative acts and bullying will only occur within organizations that condone and/or accept such behaviours to take place (Brodsky, 1976). More specifically, our findings show that it is only under high levels of laissez-faire leadership – as well as under low levels of transformational leadership – that role stressors pose a risk of for workplace bullying to develop. Therefore, it is critical to improve the competencies and sharpen the focus of supervisors, so that they are better equipped and tuned in to intervene and manage the stressful situations facing their subordinates. Therefore, organizations must intervene, not only in the organization of work-tasks and the clarification of roles, but also inform and train leaders about the type of leadership behaviours that are expected, and to reward those behaviours accordingly. In this regard, leadership development programs should include the development of competencies in identifying and dealing with

role ambiguities and role conflicts and early signs of conflict escalation and bullying (Salin, 2006). This approach may be an even more effective intervention than merely focusing on reducing role stressors in general. A noteworthy issue and finding in this respect is that transformational and laissez-faire leadership may work in tandem, which indicate that one should not only train leaders to be more transformational but also focus of the reducing their laissez-faire leadership behaviours, that is leaders' disregard, inattention, and avoidance in concrete situations where subordinates are in need of leadership (Skogstad et al., 2014).

Conclusion

The present study extends previous research on role stressors and workplace bullying by showing how role conflicts mediates the positive relationship between role ambiguity and subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours. In this, we add knowledge both to role theory in general, and more specifically to the processes and conditions via which workplace stressors are transformed into workplace bullying. Our study also shows that this mediation is moderated by two distinct leadership practices, namely laissez-faire and transformational leadership. As such, managers leadership styles will eventually determine whether ambiguous and conflicting working conditions gives rise to a working environment in which negative social interactions such as bullying acts are prevalent. Earlier data show that if the management avoids or neglects its inherent responsibility to adequately address stressful work conditions, as is the case with laissez-faire leadership, this may constitute a particularly high-risk situation in terms of the development of bullying at work (Leymann, 1996; Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). Our results support these findings, but also show a buffering effect of transformational leadership on the relationship between role conflicts and exposure to bullying behaviours. Therefore, one may argue that it is important not only to reduce the occurrence of laissez-faire leadership behaviour in order to prevent employees from being

exposed to bullying behaviours, but that the presence of transformational leadership behaviours also is important in this regard as a preventive measure.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables. Cronbach's alpha is reported in bold. ($N = 1103-1594$)

	Mean	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Role ambiguity _{T1}	1.608	0.563	.80						
2. Role conflicts _{T1}	1.973	0.473	.219**	.63					
3. Role conflicts _{T2}	1.946	0.455	.229**	.550**	.57				
4. ^b LFL _{T2}	2.349	0.788	.196**	.342**	.394**	.83			
5. ^c TL _{T2}	3.685	0.883	-.185**	-.293**	-.294**	-.514**	.89		
6. ^a S-NAQ _{T1}	1.196	0.342	.222**	.383**	.304**	.332**	-.288**	.86	
7. ^a S-NAQ _{T3}	1.173	0.328	.157**	.334**	.372**	.344**	-.330**	.634**	.87

Note. ^aS-NAQ = Short-Negative Acts Questionnaire, ^bLFL = Laissez-faire leadership, ^cTL = Transformational leadership.

** $p < .01$.

Table 2. *Analyses for the conditional indirect effect (through role conflicts) between role ambiguity and exposure to bullying behaviours (S-NAQ) (PROCESS model 4).*

Regression analyses for	T2 Role conflicts		T3 S-NAQ	
	B	SE	B	SE
Constant	.7472	.1624	.2458	.0431
^a S-NAQ _{T1}	.1560**	.0406	.5192***	.0262
Role conflicts _{T1}	.4643***	.0285	.0398	.0208
Role ambiguity _{T1}	.0607**	.0223	-.0033	.0144
Role conflicts _{T2}			.1197***	.0213
R ²	.3128		.4190	
	Effect	SE	t-test	<i>p</i> value
<i>Direct effect of role ambiguity_{T1} on S-NAQ_{T3}</i>				
Role ambiguity _{T1}	-.0033	.0044	-.2267	.8207
	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
<i>Indirect effect of role ambiguity_{T1} on S-NAQ_{T3}</i>				
Role conflicts _{T2}	.0073	.0032	.0017	.0143

Note. ^aS-NAQ = Short-Negative Acts Questionnaire.

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Table 3. *Analyses for the conditional indirect effect (through role conflicts) and direct effect between role ambiguity and exposure to bullying behaviours (S-NAQ) at different levels of laissez-faire leadership (PROCESS model 14).*

Regression analyses for	T2 Role conflicts		T3 S-NAQ	
	B	SE	B	SE
Constant	-1.1597	.0637	.5124	.0487
^a S-NAQ _{T1}	.1636***	.0410	.4938***	.0269
Role conflicts _{T1}	.4563***	.0291	.0338	.0209
Role ambiguity _{T1}	.0522*	.0228	-.0070	.0145
Role conflicts _{T2}			.0870***	.0221
^b LFL _{T2}			.0325**	.0116
^b LFL _{T2} * Role conflicts _{T2}			.0829***	.0194
R ²	.3030		.4388	
ΔR ² for the interaction			.0117	
Laissez-faire leadership	Direct effect	SE	t-test	p value
<i>Conditional direct effects at laissez-faire leadership low vs. moderate vs. high</i>				
Low (- 1 SD)	.0232	.0273	0.8502	.3955
Moderate (Mean)	.0870	.0221	3.9425	.0001
High (+ 1 SD)	.1508	.0259	5.8160	.0000
^b LFL	Indirect effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
<i>Conditional indirect effects at laissez-faire leadership low vs. moderate vs. high</i>				
Low (- 1 SD)	.0012	.0015	-.0012	.0047
Moderate (Mean)	.0045	.0025	.0003	.0099
High (+ 1 SD)	.0079	.0042	.0006	.0171
	Index	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
<i>Index of moderated mediation</i>				
Role conflicts	.0043	.0026	.0002	.0101

Note. ^aS-NAQ = Short-Negative Acts Questionnaire, ^bLFL = Laissez-faire leadership

****p* < .001, ***p* < .01.

Table 4. *Analyses for the conditional indirect effect (through role conflicts) and direct effect between role ambiguity and exposure to bullying behaviours (S-NAQ) at different levels of transformational leadership (PROCESS model 14).*

Regression analyses for	T2 Role conflicts		T3 S-NAQ	
	B	SE	B	SE
Constant	-1.1699	.0636	.5337	.0488
^a S-NAQ _{T1}	.1591***	.0410	.4940***	.0266
Role conflicts _{T1}	.4604***	.0289	.0276	.0209
Role ambiguity _{T1}	.0556*	.0227	-.0114	.0145
Role conflicts _{T2}			.0944***	.0216
^b TL _{T2}			-.0425***	.0097
^b TL _{T2} * Role conflicts _{T2}			-.0913***	.0196
R ²	.3085***		.4471***	
ΔR ² for the interaction			.0137***	
Transformational leadership	Direct effect	SE	t-test	p value
<i>Conditional direct effects at transformational leadership low vs. moderate vs. high</i>				
Low (- 1 SD)	.1747	.0265	6.6028	.0000
Moderate (Mean)	.0944	.0216	4.3728	.0000
High (+ 1 SD)	.0141	.0288	0.4891	.6249
Transformational leadership	Indirect effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
<i>Conditional indirect effects at transformational leadership low vs. moderate vs. high</i>				
Low (- 1 SD)	.0097	.0048	.0017	.0202
Moderate (Mean)	.0052	.0026	.0009	.0110
High (+ 1 SD)	.0008	.0017	-.0024	.0047
	Index	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
<i>Index of moderated mediation</i>				
Role conflicts	-.0051	.0028	-.0115	-.0007

Note. ^aS-NAQ = Short-Negative Acts Questionnaire, ^bTL = Transformational leadership

****p* < .001.

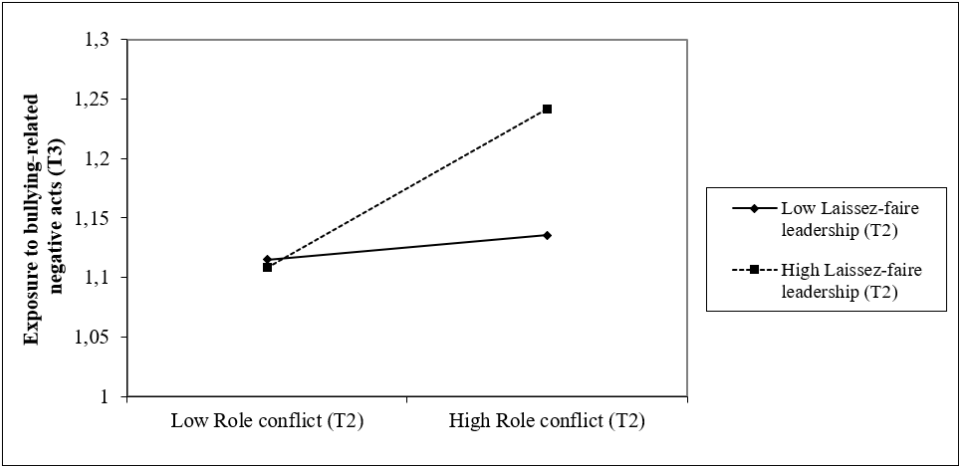


Figure 1. The relationship between role conflicts (T2) and exposure to bullying behaviours (T3), moderated by laissez-faire leadership (T2).

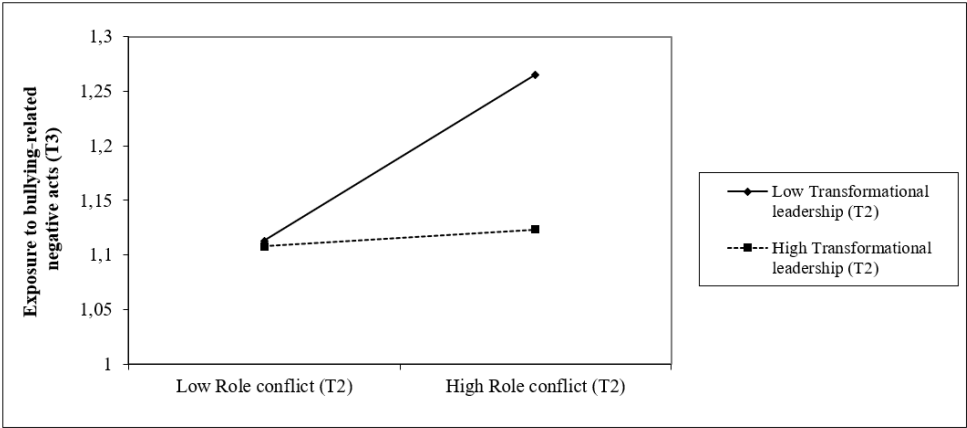


Figure 2. The relationship between role conflicts (T2) and exposure to bullying behaviours (T3), moderated by transformational leadership (T2).



Management Focus

Daily work pressure and exposure to bullying-related negative acts: The role of daily transformational and laissez-faire leadership

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 8 October 2019

Received in revised form

7 August 2020

Accepted 17 September 2020

Available online 18 September 2020

Keywords:

Work pressure

Transformational leadership

Laissez-faire leadership

Bullying

Negative acts

ABSTRACT

The present study integrates the work environment hypothesis and the effort-reward imbalance model to argue that work-related antecedents of workplace bullying are moderated by the day-to-day leadership practices of one's immediate leader. Specifically, we propose that individuals' daily experiences of work pressure are positively related to their daily experiences of bullying-related negative acts. Moreover, we claim that this relationship is weaker on days when those individuals report high (vs. low) levels of transformational leadership behaviour, and stronger on days when they report high (vs. low) levels of laissez-faire leadership behaviour. To test these three hypotheses, we asked 61 naval cadets on a tall ship sailing from Northern Europe to North America to fill out a diary questionnaire for 36 days yielding 1509 observations. The results of multilevel analyses supported our hypothesis of a positive relationship of cadets' daily reports of work pressure with their daily reports of bullying-related negative acts. In addition, laissez-faire leadership behaviour (but not transformational leadership behaviour) moderated the work pressure–bullying-related negative acts relationship. Our findings support the assumption that laissez-faire leadership is an important component in the development of conflict escalation and workplace bullying, while transformational leadership is not. We discuss theoretical as well as practical implications of these findings.

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1. Introduction

Work pressure is an increasing problem in European working life, with subsequent negative impact on individual health and psychological well-being (Eurofound, 2017; Niedhammer, Chastang, Sultan-Taieb, Vermeylen, & Parent-Thirion, 2013). Leaders and managers, on the other hand, constitute an essential resource in any organization with a responsibility to ensure the health and well-being of followers, particularly at times of high work pressure. Such duty of care to cater for and guard follower health and well-being is even legally founded in most western countries (Ironside & Seifert, 2003; The Norwegian Labour

Inspection Authority, 2017), and of special importance in high pressure work situations.

Moreover, a stressful working environment may not only be a problem in its own right but may lead to secondary problems such as increased social tension in the work group. In this regard, scholars have argued that workplace bullying and harassment particularly thrive in demanding workplaces, where employees experience organizational constraints and contradictory expectations and demands (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2007; Van den Brande, Baillien, De Witte, Vander Elst, & Godderis, 2016). Such triggering factors of bullying have been extensively documented in studies employing a range of research designs, and with both targets, perpetrators, and bystanders as informants (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2009, 2007; Vartia, 1996), and with both individual and group level analyses (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2011; Skogstad, Torsheim, Einarsen, & Hauge, 2011). Yet, we lack knowledge of the processes and conditions via which workplace stressors are

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transformed into workplace bullying (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018; Rai & Agarwal, 2018), and especially so when focusing on day-to-day interactions in the workplace.

Managers and supervisors may both prevent, stop, permit, or engage in the mistreatment of their followers (Woodrow & Guest, 2017), depending on which behaviours they display or hold back (Harms, Credé, Tynan, Leon, & Jeung, 2017; Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2007). This implies that leaders may shape the development of workplace bullying in different ways. Yet, most studies on leadership and workplace bullying have investigated leadership as a direct antecedent of workplace bullying (Hoel, Glasø, Hetland, Cooper, & Einarsen, 2010; Stouten et al., 2010). Studies have shown that transformational leadership behaviours have positive main effects on follower well-being (Arnold, 2017), and is related to less workplace bullying among followers (Tsuno & Kawakami, 2015). Conversely, *laissez-faire* leadership, characterized by the omission of constructive leader behaviour when expected and needed (Skogstad, Hetland, Glasø, & Einarsen, 2014), has been related to a variety of negative outcomes, such as reduced job satisfaction, burnout, and health problems (see Skogstad, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2017, for a review). Furthermore, *laissez-faire* leadership predicts complaints of exposure to workplace bullying (Skogstad et al., 2007; Tsuno & Kawakami, 2015). Yet, the acts and attitudes of managers may also affect other risk factors of bullying and hence moderate other antecedent–bullying relationships (Ágotnes, Einarsen, Hetland, & Skogstad, 2018), as proposed in the work environment hypothesis (Leymann, 1996).

In general, we find a striking lack of studies investigating moderators of the workplace bullying process (Rai & Agarwal, 2018; Woodrow & Guest, 2017). This is especially worrisome in relation to leadership, because leader behaviours and non-behaviours are paramount for most aspects of followers' effectiveness and health (Montano, Reeske, Franke, & Hüffmeier, 2017). Following the principle of employers' duty of care, one may argue that attentive and supportive managers and supervisors are particularly needed in demanding situations which may escalate into social tension and even workplace bullying. Therefore, there is a strong call for studies investigating how leaders' actions and non-actions may buffer or facilitate, respectively, the well documented relationship between job stressors and reports of exposure to bullying.

As most studies in the field have been cross-sectional surveys, with but a few longitudinal or group-level studies, previous research has failed to capture within-person and day-to-day fluctuations in how workers experience their work situation (i.e. work pressure) and the behaviour of others in the work environment (i.e. leadership and exposure to bullying-related negative acts). As workplace bullying is the sum of day-to-day negative social interactions, it is highly likely that exposure to such bullying behaviours in fact takes place on days and in situations when you are experiencing stress and frustration. If so, such findings may have important theoretical as well as applied implications. Thus, there is a strong call for research that captures these daily fluctuations. Accordingly, the present study makes three important contributions to the literature on workplace bullying and leadership practices. First, the study examines the association between work pressure as a quantitative job demand and perceptions of bullying-related negative acts close to when they actually happen, allowing us to capture the effects of episodic situational influences on perceptions of bullying in the workplace (Ilie, Aw, & Pluut, 2015). Second, we contribute to a nuanced analysis and understanding of the role of leaders in the management of such high-pressure work situations. Specifically, we examine two distinct leadership practices (i.e. transformational and *laissez-faire* leadership), and how these practices may influence the potential risk of increased work

pressure in relation to experiences of workplace bullying as perceived by targets on a day-to-day basis. Leadership is often portrayed as an overarching construct that applies broadly over time. Yet, leadership is certainly also about day-to-day interactions with employees (Johnson, Venus, Lanaj, Mao, & Chang, 2012), which again may have important implications both for these day-to-day events and even for long-term outcomes. Finally, we examine the abovementioned relationships in a unique context, where a sample of naval cadets underwent leadership training during a tall ship voyage across the Atlantic from Northern Europe to North America, and where the acting leader changed more or less daily. In this setting, our study makes an important practical contribution by showing when and how leaders should (or should not) act when leading small teams in situations with elevated work pressure and accordingly an elevated risk of uncivil social behaviour, at least as perceived by those targeted.

1.1. Theoretical background

Workplace bullying may be defined as “an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts” (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2020, p. 26). A core element in this definition is the exposure to ‘systematic negative social acts’, which includes both verbal and physical, as well as direct and indirect acts – experienced as negative and unwanted by those targeted. From this, we may view bullying both as (1) an end state, (2) an ongoing process, and (3) as a situation that plays out through perceptions of specific negative acts happening on a daily or weekly basis. Focusing on the latter aspect of bullying, the present study investigates exposure to such bullying-related negative acts as they are reported, on a day-to-day basis. In this regard, the measurement used in the present study does neither take into consideration the prolonged nature of the exposure, nor the imbalance of power across days. Hence, the present study measures perceived daily exposure to some typical bullying-related negative acts, which may also appear in cases of highly escalated interpersonal conflict, or in cases of mere workplace incivility (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Notelaers, Van der Heijden, Guenter, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2018).

The work environment hypothesis (Leymann, 1996) states that a work environment characterized by high levels of job demands creates a fertile ground for social tension which then may escalate into workplace bullying, especially if not properly managed – typically when *laissez-faire* leadership prevails. However, where the work environment hypothesis is specific when discussing this lack of leadership, the theory is not quite as specific in describing said stressful working conditions. In this, the effort-reward imbalance (ERI) model (Siegrist, 1996) may be valuable in our further understanding of why high levels of daily work pressure may lead to reports of increased daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts. As work pressure may be understood as a type of quantitative job demand that has reached a level above what is considered normal or acceptable in a certain situation or for a given employee (Van Veldhoven, 2014), it may demand additional effort among those exposed, taxing their energetic resources.

Central in the effort-reward imbalance model (Siegrist, 1996) is the notion of reciprocity between efforts spent and rewards received in return. While effort represents the demands and obligations the employee face, rewards are conceptualized as the money, esteem, and career opportunities the employee expects in return (Siegrist, 1996). Experiencing a lack of reciprocity in terms of high ‘costs’ (i.e. effort) and low ‘gains’ (i.e. reward) is theorized to elicit negative emotions in exposed individuals (Siegrist et al., 2004). Work-related stress may therefore be conceptualized as a

mismatch between efforts expended (i.e. work pressure) and rewards received at work (Siegrist, 1996; Siegrist et al., 2004). More specifically, when people are confronted with high-pressure situations, their efforts will need to increase. However, this increase in effort is contingent on receiving an equivalent increase in rewards or resources. In the absence of such resources, feelings of stress and frustration will arise, and the individual employee will be more vulnerable to conflict episodes and bullying-related negative acts (Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996). Such individual perceptions may even reflect a general increase in work pressure among more or less all colleagues, creating an elevated level of frustration in the work group, which may also affect potential perpetrators.

With regard to our study, we propose that these theoretical notions may even explain events that happen on a daily basis. That is, on days where employees experience an increase in work pressure, be it as a reflection of the existing social context or a specific individual experience that day, they may also experience not having the necessary time or resources to complete assignments in time or at the expected quality, leaving them more susceptible to stress. On days with enhanced work pressure, there will also be restricted time to manage arising conflicts in the work group (Zapf et al., 1996), increasing the likelihood that unsolved conflicts escalate, resulting in an increase in the level of aggression between leaders and followers as well as between peers. Consequently, employees might make more mistakes, be more sensitive to criticism, and be involved in more work conflicts, making them easy targets of negative acts on that particular day.

In line with this theoretical notion, studies show that work situations characterized by job stressors such as time pressure and high workload are related to subsequent escalated interpersonal conflicts as well as to instances of workplace bullying (Baillien, De Cuyper, & De Witte, 2011; Baillien, Rodriguez-Muñoz, De Witte, Notelaers, & Moreno-Jimenez, 2011). A meta-analysis by Bowling and Beehr (2006), employing the wider concept of workplace harassment, identified increased role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, and work constraints as the main work-related predictors of reported exposure to harassment. Consistent with these findings, Van den Brande and colleagues (2016) documented that employees who report higher cognitive demands and time pressure are more frequently exposed to workplace bullying. Tuckey, Dollard, Hosking, and Winefield (2009) found support for their hypothesis that, on average, employees reporting higher levels perceived job demands, also reported more bullying, as compared to employees who reported lower levels of job demands. Additionally, Notelaers, De Witte, and Einarsen (2009) showed that workload was positively related to exposure to workplace bullying. This is again in line with Baillien, De Cuyper and colleagues' (2011) longitudinal study showing that Time 1 workload was positively related to Time 2 likelihood of being a target of workplace bullying.

Although these studies have employed a between-person design we argue that through measuring these daily fluctuations we may come closer to discovering when and how the patterns of longer-term between-person differences in exposure to workplace bullying arise and develop. Following this, the present diary study examines day-to-day fluctuations in experienced work pressure as a predictor of their day-to-day experiences of bullying-related negative acts.

Hypothesis 1. Daily work pressure is positively related to daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts.

1.2. The potential role of leadership

How leaders act in high-pressure situations may be a decisive factor in determining whether bullying-related negative acts are

enacted and perceived. In this, we will look at leadership practices, not as a style of behaviour enacted consistently over time, but rather by specific behaviours played out in specific situations in relation to specific follower and their given day-to-day experiences. Theoretically, and in line with the effort-reward imbalance model, we view transformational leadership behaviours as a resource and rewards for employees. With regards to the ERI model (Siegrist, 1996), esteem rewards may be particularly relevant for understanding under which leadership conditions high levels of daily work pressure may lead to experiences of increased daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts. Conceptualizing esteem rewards as experiencing being accepted by supervisors or colleagues, as well as receiving help in difficult situations by supervisors or colleagues (Siegrist, 1996), it is conceivable that transformational, and also laissez-faire leadership, may be indications of receiving (or not receiving, in the case of laissez-faire) appropriate esteem rewards in connection with increased effort (i.e. work pressure). The negative role of laissez-faire leadership in this regard is, however, even more underscored in the work environment hypothesis, where the lack of leader intervention in cases of unfavourable working conditions is hypothesized to be a particular risk situation for conflict escalation and bullying (Leymann, 1996).

1.2.1. The buffering effect of daily transformational leadership behaviour

Transformational leadership, one of the most widely studied forms of leadership (Anderson & Sun, 2017), is associated with a wide range of positive outcomes, and, hence, may be a particularly strong esteem factor. Transformational leadership is characterized by four sub-dimensions, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985). Leaders who act as a coach and a mentor, paying special attention to employees' needs for achievement, and provide social support, may be of a particular importance in day-to-day situations where followers face high work pressure. Additionally, by getting followers to look at problems from different angles, transformational leaders may foster active learning and problem solving, thus buffering the imbalance created by increased effort. Furthermore, transformational leaders serve as role models for their followers, and emphasize the importance of having a collective sense of mission. By reassuring followers that obstacles will be overcome, in a collective effort, increased work pressure may not feel as insurmountable. Finally, transformational leaders behave in ways that motivate and inspire those around them by providing meaning and challenge to their followers' work. Taken together, we argue that such transformational leadership behaviour should act to counterbalance the potential imbalance created by increased work pressure.

Studies have indeed shown that transformational leadership may alleviate the undesirable influence of job demands, such as work overload, emotional job demands, and physical job demands on burnout (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005). Such a buffer effect of leaders' appreciation and support should provide the employees with the necessary tools to cope with demanding stressors at work, even as they happen, that is on a day-to-day basis (Breevaart, Bakker, Hetland, et al., 2014; Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Additionally, Väänänen and colleagues (2003) argue and show that leaders' appreciation and support facilitate performance, and therefore also may reduce interpersonal conflicts in demanding situations, hence contributing to fewer instances of negative social interactions between colleagues. To our knowledge, only one study has so far examined when such supportive and considerate leadership practices may influence the stressor–bullying relationship. In this multi-level study, Tuckey, Li, and Chen (2017) found that transformational leadership reduced the negative impact of

leaders' task demands on followers' reports of bullying from members of the workgroup.

The above-cited studies have mainly examined the more static between-person effects of transformational leadership on long-term workload. Yet, in the present study we focus on day-to-day dynamics, looking at how a leader may, or may not, influence followers' perception in the "heat of the moment". Accordingly, we expect leaders who get followers to look at problems from various angles, and who help followers to develop their strengths when under pressure, to have a buffering effect on the proposed relationship between daily work pressure and exposure to bullying-related negative acts. In line with the ERI-model, when followers are faced with increased work pressures, this type of leader esteem reward should decrease the risk of follower reports of exposure to bullying-related negative acts that day, as the followers are not experiencing the frustration associated with an effort-reward imbalance.

Hypothesis 2. Daily transformational leadership behaviour moderates the positive relationship between daily work pressure and daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts (buffering effect). This relationship is hypothesized to be weaker on those days when individuals report high (vs. low) levels of transformational leadership behaviours.

1.2.2. The exacerbating effect of daily *laissez-faire* leadership behaviour

Laissez-faire leadership has been described as a "follower-centred form of avoidance-based leadership by focusing on subordinates' need for leadership, and leader non-response to such needs" (Skogstad et al., 2014, p. 325). As such, *laissez-faire* leaders may not only fail to create the needed balance when efforts are high, they may even exacerbate the imbalance. In high pressure situations, social support is a valuable resource in that it is functional in achieving work goals, and alleviating the impact of work overload on strain and ill health (Bakker et al., 2005). *Laissez-faire* leaders, on the other hand, are by definition absent, passive, or avoidant in situations where followers are in need of leadership (Skogstad et al., 2014). Leader absence, passiveness or avoidance implies the violation of followers' legitimate expectations, and as such, may have detrimental outcomes for followers (Skogstad et al., 2017). Furthermore, these leaders may be seen to make an active choice to not provide their followers with the help they require in difficult situations, which is an important component of the esteem rewards conceptualized in the effort-reward imbalance model (Siegrist, 1996). There may, of course, be a range of reasons and leader intents behind such *laissez-faire* leadership behaviours, including situations where the focal leader may perceive that followers are capable of handling demanding or unsurmountable situations themselves. In any case, from the viewpoint of the subordinate, *laissez-faire* leadership can be regarded as leader avoidant behaviour where a negligent leader is withholding esteem rewards. This imbalance between follower increased effort on that particular day, and low esteem reward received for that effort by the leader, may leave followers with feelings of frustration and stress, whatever the reason the leader may have for this behaviour. Thus, followers might be more vulnerable to experience negative social interactions, interpersonal conflict episodes, and even acts of workplace bullying on high-pressure days, if their leader is not providing the necessary support and feedback on that particular day.

Even more, the work environment hypothesis proposes a lack of conflict management and constructive intervention as the main reason that the stress and frustration created by bad working conditions may escalate into bullying (Leymann, 1996). Thus,

leaders who, for whatever reason, are absent or neglect their responsibility to adequately address stressful work conditions may inadvertently create a particularly high-risk situation in terms of the development of bullying at work. Furthermore, the high job demands reported by targets may even be indicative of the presence of ambient stressors that are also perceived by potential perpetrators (Balducci, Cecchin, & Fraccaroli, 2012). Thus, on days when targets experience increased levels of stressors, perpetrators may be experiencing many of the same stressors, causing them to act aggressively towards co-workers (Chen & Spector, 1992; Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001). If this type of behaviour is not sanctioned by the focal leader, it may send a signal to the perpetrators that such behaviours are acceptable in the organization (Nielsen, 2013; Skogstad et al., 2007), providing a fertile ground for negative acts and bullying to flourish among co-workers. Hence, there are ample theoretical reasons to expect that follower experiences of *laissez-faire* leadership may exacerbate the negative effects of other workplace stressors.

Several studies have in fact shown that *laissez-faire* leadership is associated with reports of workplace bullying, particularly in combination with given job stressors (Hauge et al., 2007; Hoel et al., 2010; Skogstad et al., 2007). In a longitudinal study, with a moderated-mediation design, Glambek, Skogstad, and Einarsen (2018) found that *laissez-faire* leadership negatively moderated the relationship between workplace bullying and job insecurity, through the continued exposure to negative acts. Likewise, Ågotnes and colleagues (2018) showed in a prospective study that *laissez-faire* leadership strengthened the relationship between interpersonal conflicts with colleagues and the probability of becoming a victim of workplace bullying two years later. Based on empirical findings and theoretical notions from the effort-reward imbalance model and the work environment hypothesis, we propose that on days the cadets experience that their immediate supervisor avoids making decisions or delays responding to urgent questions in situations with high work pressure, those cadets will report higher exposure to bullying-related negative acts than on days they do not report *laissez-faire* behaviour from their immediate supervisor.

Hypothesis 3. Daily *laissez-faire* leadership behaviour moderates the positive relationship between daily work pressure and daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts (exacerbating effect). This relationship is hypothesized to be stronger on those days when the individuals report high (vs. low) levels of *laissez-faire* leadership behaviour.

Fig. 1 summarizes the proposed relationships and hypotheses to be investigated in the present study.

2. Method

2.1. Sample and procedure

Data collection was undertaken in 2011, amongst Norwegian naval cadets (N = 61) from a Military University College crossing the Atlantic Ocean in a tall ship as part of their education and training. This represents a unique opportunity to examine the study variables in a complex, shifting yet continuous work environment. In this context, the cadets are socially isolated from the outside world for an extended period, with limited opportunity for outside communications. Furthermore, they are operating in a low technology environment, meaning that many operations that are automated on a modern ship, has to be done manually by the crew, for example in terms of sail-manoeuvres or anchoring procedures. Consequently, working aboard this tall ship is physically challenging, there is a high degree of interdependence in the completion of work tasks, and any errors may result in a number of high-

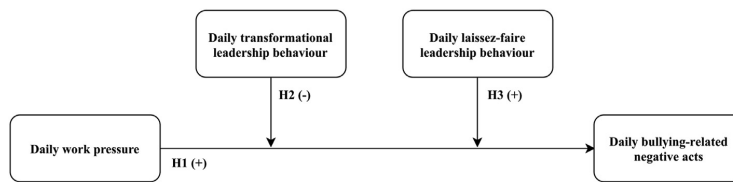


Fig. 1. Summarizes the proposed relationships and hypotheses to be investigated in the present study.

risk situations. Furthermore, the cadets continuously interact with each other and have few opportunities to retreat. They live in close quarters and sleep in hammocks side by side. The weather conditions of such a voyage are highly unpredictable, and sometimes very challenging, as the voyage was undertaken during storm-season. The tall ship had to be operated 24/7, with teams of cadets working in shifts of 4 h on and 8 h off. In addition to their shift-work, these cadets were also studying for an academic degree, meaning that they spent most of their time off shift preparing for exams.

During their voyage, the cadets completed a daily survey measuring variations in work pressure, leadership behaviour and exposure to bullying-related negative acts – among other variables – for 36 consecutive days. In the instructions, the cadets were asked to complete the daily questionnaire at 5 p.m. each day. The cadets were part of one of eight teams, where members took turns in the role of team leader. Cadets were therefore asked to rate the leadership behaviour of their acting immediate superior that day. Prior to the voyage, we presented the cadets with an informed consent form, which they all chose to sign.

The sample consisted of 49 male participants (80.3%) and 7 female participants (11.5%). Five participants did not report their gender (8.2%). The mean age of the participants was 23.9 years ($SD = 3.21$). Of the 61 cadets that participated in the study, 56 completed a general questionnaire prior to the voyage, yielding a response rate of 91.8% at the person-level. On the daily questionnaire, we obtained 1509 of the possible 2196 possible observations, yielding a response rate of 68.7% at the day-level. Since this response rate is exceptionally high, we checked whether the responses were invalid (e.g., abnormal distributions, same answers throughout the diary, etc.). We found no indications for invalidity. The participants were informed that the data would be used for personal feedback sessions during the return voyage, which could have contributed to the high response rate.

2.2. Measures

All study variables were measured using quantitative daily diaries, with adapted versions of existing scales. The time frame of the scales and the number of questions were adapted so the questions could be answered on a daily basis (cf. Ohly, Sonntag, Niessen, & Zapf, 2010). Moreover, the questionnaires were reduced in length when possible, as we asked the cadets to fill out the diary on 36 days of their journey.

Day-level work pressure was measured using four items from the subscale “Pace and amount of work” from the questionnaire on the experience and assessment of work (VBBA; Van Veldhoven & Meijman, 1994). The items were: “Today, to what extent did you” “... have to work very fast” “... have too much work to do” “... have to work very hard in order to complete something” and “... work under time pressure”. The scale consists of five response categories ranging from (1) not at all to (5) to a great extent. Reliability of the daily measures was calculated using the approach described by

Geldhof, Preacher, and Zyphur (2014), by estimating omega (ω) at the within-person level and between-person level using a two-level CFA. Work pressure had high reliability both at the within-person level ($\omega = 0.88$) and at the between-person level ($\omega = 0.97$).

Day-level exposure to bullying-related negative acts was measured using an adapted four-item version of the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ-R; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009; S-NAQ; Notelaers, Van der Heijden, Hoel, & Einarsen, 2019) intended for daily diary studies (see Hoprekstad et al., 2019 for a detailed account of the adaption process). The time-frame reference provided to the respondents was changed from the original “the last six months” to “during today’s shift”. The items were: “repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes”, “being ignored or excluded” “practical jokes carried out by people you don’t get along with” and “being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger”. The scale consisted of four response categories, ranging from (1) not at all to (4) several times. We created an index of day-level exposure to bullying-related negative acts by calculating the mean of the corresponding exposure on that particular day, where higher scores refer to higher levels of exposure to bullying-related negative acts. We did not expect that such a scale would have a high internal consistency as the scale may be looked upon as a formative measure in this study (see e.g. Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006; Hoprekstad et al., 2019). However, for the sake of transparency, we report the reliability estimates for daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts. In the present sample, we found an acceptable reliability at both the within-person level ($\omega = 0.68$) and at the between-person level ($\omega = 0.69$). Additionally, and following the recommendation of Ohly and colleagues (2010), we compared this shortened scale to the longer versions, using data from a representative sample of Norwegian employees. The scaled used in the present study correlated highly with the longer versions (NAQ-R: $r = 0.851$, $p < .01$; S-NAQ: $r = 0.909$, $p < .01$), suggesting that the use of these four items to measure exposure to bullying-related negative acts at work is valid.

Day-level transformational leadership behaviour was measured using five items adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ X5; Avolio & Bass, 2004), representing each of the four sub-categories of transformational leadership. This shortened day-level version of the scale has been published in a study by Breevaart, Bakker, and Demerouti (2014). The items were: “During the last 24 h, my closest supervisor”: “... got others to look at problems from many different angles” (Intellectual Stimulation), “... helped others to develop their strengths” (Individualized Consideration), “... emphasized the importance of having a collective sense of mission” (Idealized Influence), and, finally, “... talked enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished” and “... expressed confidence that goals will be achieved” (Inspirational Motivation). Participants could respond to the items using five response categories, ranging from (1) totally disagree to (5) totally agree. An overall index of transformational leadership was computed so that higher scores refer to higher levels of transformational leadership. Daily transformational leadership had

acceptable reliability at the within-person level ($\omega = .76$) and high reliability at the between-person level ($\omega = 0.90$).

Day-level laissez-faire leadership behaviour was measured using three items, adapted to reflect a daily level of measurement, from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ X5; Avolio & Bass, 2004). The items were: “During the last 24 h, my closest supervisor”: “... was absent when needed”, “... avoided making decisions” and “... delayed responding to urgent questions”. The scale consisted of five response categories, ranging from (1) totally disagree to (5) totally agree. An overall index of laissez-faire leadership was computed so that higher scores refer to higher levels of laissez-faire leadership. Daily laissez-faire leadership had acceptable reliability at the within-person level ($\omega = .77$) and high reliability at the between-person level ($\omega = 0.98$).

2.3. Strategy of analysis

In order to capture the multilevel structure of the data, in which daily observations (level 1) were nested within individuals (level 2), multilevel analyses were carried out using MLwiN 3.01 (Charlton, Rasbash, Browne, Healy, & Cameron, 2017). We estimated multilevel correlations and reliability using Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012). In order to facilitate meaningful interpretation of parameter estimates, all day-level predictors were centred at each person’s mean. Simple slope tests for hierarchical linear models were used to examine whether the slopes in the interaction were significantly different from zero (Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006).

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics

Means, standard deviations, as well as day- and person-level correlations for all study variables are presented in Table 1.

3.2. Multilevel analyses

Prior to testing the predicted models, we tested an unpredicted model (null model) in order to confirm that there is sufficient day-level variance in the current dependent variable. As shown in Table 2, the initial unpredicted model revealed significant variation in exposure to bullying-related negative acts at both the day-level (82.6%) and person-level (17.4%), allowing us to continue with the predicted models. Furthermore, the between-person variance was 24.8% for work pressure, 20.5% for transformational leadership, and 35.0% for laissez-faire leadership, leaving between 65.0% and 79.5% of the variance to be explained at the within-person level.

Hypothesis 1 stated that daily work pressure would be positively related to daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts. The main effects model revealed a significant positive main effect of daily levels of work pressure on daily levels of exposure to bullying-related negative acts ($B = 0.026, p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 1.

Even though the effect was relatively small, on days the cadets were exposed to higher work pressure, for example when they needed to deal with stormy weather in addition to their assigned work tasks, they were more likely to be exposed to bullying-related negative acts. In addition, we found a significant main effect of daily laissez-faire leadership behaviour ($B = 0.016, p < .05$), although not specifically hypothesized. That is, on days the cadets reported high levels of laissez-faire leadership behaviour by their immediate supervisor, they also reported increased levels of exposure to bullying-related negative acts.

Hypothesis 2 and 3 stated that day-level leadership would moderate the expected relationship between daily levels of work pressure and daily levels of bullying-related negative acts. Specifically, in Hypothesis 2 transformational leadership behaviour was thought to buffer this relationship, while in Hypothesis 3, laissez-faire leadership behaviour was thought to exacerbate this relationship. Contrary to our predictions, the interaction model did not show support for an interaction between daily work pressure and daily transformational leadership on daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts ($B = 0.009, n. s.$). Accordingly, Hypothesis 2 was not supported. There was, however, a significant interaction effect of daily work pressure and daily laissez-faire leadership behaviour on cadets’ daily levels of exposure to bullying-related negative acts in the interaction model ($B = 0.040, p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 3. Specifically, the relationship between work pressure and exposure to bullying-related negative acts was stronger on days the cadets reported higher levels of laissez-faire leadership behaviour. This interaction is illustrated in Fig. 2, showing the effect at different levels of daily laissez-faire leadership (± 1 SD).

In line with Hypothesis 3, Fig. 1 indicates a positive relationship between daily work pressure and daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts on days the cadets report higher levels of laissez-faire leadership behaviour. On days cadets report low levels of laissez-faire leadership, the figure indicates no increase in exposure to bullying-related negative acts at higher levels of work pressure. This is also supported by simple slope tests, where the positive slope for high levels of laissez-faire leadership was significant (Slope = 0.053, $z = 7.743, p < .001$), whereas the slope for low levels of laissez-faire leadership was not (Slope = $-0.001, z = 0.131, n. s.$).

4. Discussion

The present study makes three important contributions to the literature on workplace bullying and negative social interactions at work. First, applying a daily diary design, we demonstrate a short-term effect of daily work pressure on daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts at work, supporting the theoretical underpinnings of the work environment hypothesis and the effort-reward imbalance model for each single bullying-related episode. Furthermore, the fact that this relationship is present at the daily level adds to the literature on both stressors and bullying, in that it shows just how quickly stressors in the workplace can trigger

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and day and person level correlations for all study variables (N = 1517 observations, N = 61 respondents).

Variables	x	SD	ICC ^a	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Work pressure	2.242	.784	.248	–	.021	.008	.002
2. Transformational leadership	3.486	.572	.205	.061***	–	-.031*	.005*
3. Laissez-faire leadership	2.013	.673	.350	-.002	-.063***	–	.000
4. Bullying-related negative acts	1.055	.149	.174	.012***	.002	.004*	–

Note: a

ICC = Person-level intraclass correlation. Correlations below the diagonal are correlations on the within (day) level and correlations above the diagonal are correlations on the between (person) level. *** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$.

Table 2
Multilevel estimates for the prediction of daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts (NAQ).

	Null model		Main model		Interaction model	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Intercept	1.060 ^a	.009	1.060 ^a	.009	1.059 ^a	.009
Work pressure			.026 ^a	.005	.026 ^a	.005
Transformational leadership			.007	.007	.007	.007
Laissez-faire leadership			.016 ^c	.007	.016 ^b	.007
Work pressure × transformational leadership					.009	.010
Work pressure × laissez-faire leadership					.040 ^a	.009
Variance level 1 (day-level)	.019 (82.6%)	.001	.018	.001	.018	.001
Variance level 2 (person-level)	.004 (17.4%)	.001	.004	.001	.004	.001
–2 log likelihood		–1623.52		–1622.82		–1640.71

Note: N = 1493 observations; N = 56 respondents.

- ^a p < .001.
- ^b p < .01.
- ^c p < .05.

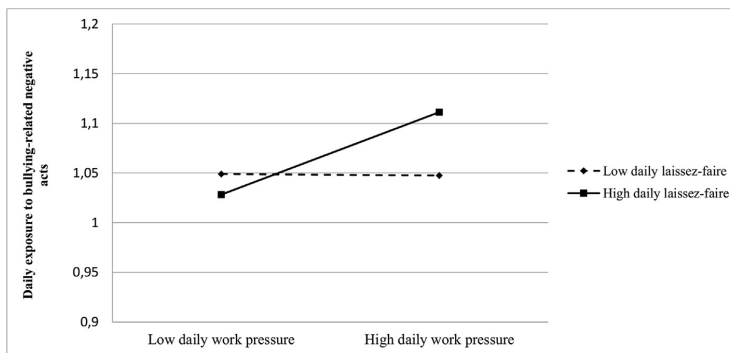


Fig. 2. The relationship between daily work pressure and daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts, moderated by daily laissez-faire leadership behaviour.

negative social interactions and thereby potentially trigger, facilitate or further escalate a bullying process. Second, we show how leadership may and may not be important for such perceived social interactions on days with high work pressure. In this, we found that daily transformational leadership did not act as a buffer while daily laissez-faire leadership acted as a facilitator in the expected relationship between daily work pressure and daily reports of exposure to bullying-related negative acts. Finally, by contrasting these two leadership behaviours in a unique setting, focusing on day-to-day fluctuations and events, we substantiate that laissez-faire leadership behaviours have unfavourable effects in high-pressure situations, and that these effects are immediate. Accordingly, laissez-faire leadership does not only have a long-term effect on bullying as shown in previous studies.

In support of Hypothesis 1, our results showed a significant positive relationship between daily work pressure and daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts. This result is in line with the work environment hypothesis, in that negative acts and bullying seems to be a consequence of prevailing problems in the work environment (Leymann, 1996), including work pressure. Furthermore, as argued in the effort-reward imbalance model (Siegrist, 1996), this process may be explained by an experienced imbalance between the increase in effort (i.e. work pressure) and available resources, resulting in rather immediate feelings of stress and frustration, and alterations in behaviours and perceptions. According to the ERI-model, these negative emotions leave the employees more vulnerable to conflict episodes and therefore to exposure to bullying-related negative acts. From an empirical point

of view, our result is also in line with previous studies in the field applying other research designs (see Baillien, De Cuyper, & De Witte, 2011; Notelaers et al., 2009). Furthermore, although the present study investigated exposure to bullying-related negative acts as discrete events on a day-to-day basis, rather than cases of full-blown workplace bullying, our results show the same trends as previous studies that have investigated work environment predictors of workplace bullying over longer periods of time (see Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Van den Brande et al., 2016).

Hypothesis 2, stating that daily transformational leadership behaviour would buffer the relationship between work pressure and exposure to bullying-related negative acts, was not supported. Applying the effort-reward imbalance model, we hypothesized that transformational leadership would provide the cadets with the appropriate esteem reward in situations where they need to increase their effort (i.e. work pressure). We argued that on days where both work pressure (effort) and transformational leadership behaviour (esteem reward) were high, cadets would not be experiencing an imbalance between effort made and rewards received, and thus would not face the negative strain associated with such an imbalance (hence making them report less bullying-related negative acts). However, as transformational leadership is a multifaceted construct, there may also be other mechanisms in play, which could potentially affect the relationship in the opposite direction. For example, transformational leadership in a situation with high work pressure might also represent a potential mismatch between the leader's focus and the situation. Transformational leaders set challenging expectations and motivate followers to go

even further and aim higher (Bass, 1990). In highly stressful work situations, such encouragement may exacerbate already existing work pressure, resulting in even more perceived work stress. Hence, these leadership behaviours may counteract any buffering effect of the supportive aspects of transformational leadership. Therefore, the behaviour of leaders must be both matched and unified in relation to a given work situation, in order to be effective in preventing negative acts and bullying (Tuckey et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the results in the present study show that the daily transformational behaviour of the leader does not act as a buffer in the daily work pressure-negative acts relationship.

Hypothesis 3, proposing that daily laissez-faire leadership would moderate the relationship between daily work pressure and daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts, was supported. More specifically, the relationship between work pressure and exposure to bullying-related negative acts was stronger on those days when the cadets reported higher levels of laissez-faire behaviour from their immediate superior. However, the same relationship was not present on days with low levels of reported laissez-faire leadership behaviour. Thus, exposure to bullying-related negative acts seems to be particularly prevalent on days and in situations where the leader is inactive and/or avoids intervening in and managing situations perceived as stressful by a given employee. Such lack of constructive intervention in unfavourable working situations is likely to sustain, and even increase the feelings of stress and frustration in exposed followers, leaving them at an increased risk of exposure to bullying-related negative acts. This adds support to the work environment hypothesis (Leymann, 1996) by showing that it is the combination of stressful working conditions and inadequate leadership when there is a follower need for leadership, in particular, that creates a fertile ground for bullying at work. Furthermore, perpetrators may view the non-response from the leader as a signal that their behaviour is acceptable by not being sanctioned (Nielsen, 2013; Skogstad et al., 2007), hence allowing for these negative acts to continue and even develop further. In addition, and in line with the theoretical assumptions in the ERI-model, it seems that by ignoring the strain of their followers' high effort in stressful situations, and not providing them with the necessary esteem rewards for these efforts, laissez-faire leaders leave these followers more vulnerable to exposure to bullying-related negative acts, possibly also lowering their threshold of reporting such experiences.

In addition to the hypothesized relationships, our analysis revealed that on days the cadets reported high levels of laissez-faire leadership behaviour by their immediate superior, they also reported increased levels of exposure to bullying-related negative acts, irrespective of other stressors (see Table 2). Although this main effect is quite small, it seems to suggest that laissez-faire leadership is an important and detrimental workplace stressor in its own right (Skogstad et al., 2017). This may be explained by the fact that laissez-faire leaders by definition are not present when needed (Skogstad et al., 2014), and thus turn a blind eye and do not intervene when other team members are being exposed to bullying-related behaviours. In extreme situations, the lack of support from the leader could make team members feel socially excluded and ostracized which again could lead to reports of bullying (Hoel et al., 2010; Skogstad et al., 2007).

4.1. Methodological considerations

A notable strength of the present study is the use of a daily diary design, which allows us to study the impact of daily fluctuations of work pressure and leadership behaviours on daily exposure to bullying-related negative acts. Furthermore, this method provided a unique opportunity to study these relationships within a natural

work context as they play out on a day-to-day basis (Ohly et al., 2010). The context was a highly controlled one, but at the same time dynamic, as the cadets continuously switched positions and learned new skills. Weather and climatic conditions also vary across the journey, providing variations in the contextual demands. Finally, the daily diary design reduces the risk of retrospective bias (Reis & Gable, 2000), which can be a threat to the validity of more general surveys.

However, although the present study has clear strengths due to its research design, it is not without limitations, some specific as well as some general ones. A general limitation is the problem of common method variance due to self-reports (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003; Spector, Rosen, Richardson, Williams, & Johnson, 2017). However, common method variance is considered as less of a problem in interaction regression models (Siemsen, Roth, & Oliveira, 2010), as interaction effects are deflated (rather than inflated) by CMV, making them more difficult to detect. Therefore, we do not consider this a major concern in the present study when looking at how leadership may buffer or strengthen the relationship between work pressure and exposure to bullying-related negative acts.

The use of a highly selected sample of naval cadets on a tall ship journey – with a predominance of fit and highly selected young men – may raise questions of the generalizability of our findings. Regarding the work pressure–bullying relationship, these respondents should be highly trained to tackle work pressure, to restrain from behaving destructively, and to be resistant when it comes to negative social behaviours by others. However, we do have strong theoretical and empirical reasoning for the proposed relationships between our study variables, and these are not context-specific and should not be restricted to such a population. Hence, there is reason to believe that our results also hold true and may even be stronger in other work contexts.

Furthermore, our result of the relationship between work pressure and negative acts remain correlational in nature and do therefore strictly speaking not allow for causal conclusions about within-person effects across days (Taris & Kompier, 2014). However, as we theorized in our hypotheses that the effects would occur within the same day, we did not presume to say anything about the causality of the relationships (see e.g. Breevaart, Bakker, & Demerouti, 2014). Nevertheless, future research should employ alternative research designs in order to clarify directions of causality, both within- and between persons.

Finally, one may also see the low prevalence of the bullying-related negative acts as a limitation of the study. In the present study, the mean score of daily bullying-related negative acts was only 1.06, indicating that negative acts are very rare in this sample. Note, however, that we examined bullying related negative acts on a day-to-day basis, rather than an accumulated score of the exposure during a longer period, e.g. the previous six months. Moreover, it is important to take into consideration that the naval cadets represent a selective group that undergo leadership training in a highly structured environment, where most forms of bullying behaviours will be open to both bystanders and supervisors, which in itself may act to prevent such bullying incidents. Furthermore, the findings are mainly as predicted, yet indicating that it is laissez-faire rather than transformational leadership that does the trick.

4.2. Theoretical and practical implications

The present study adds to the long line of research supporting the theoretical notion that workplace bullying and harassment seem to particularly flourish in environments in which unfavourable working conditions and inadequate leadership are prevalent (see e.g. Van den Brande et al., 2016, for an overview).

Furthermore, by showing that laissez-faire leadership behaviour facilitates the cadets' exposure to bullying-related negative acts on days with high work pressure, our findings extend the results of previous studies substantiating that the experience of a laissez-faire leadership style will allow interpersonal tensions to escalate into bullying behaviours, which then may continue and escalate further over time (Glambek et al., 2018; Ågotnes et al., 2018). In this, our study also adds to the scarce knowledge of the conditions in which workplace stressors are transformed into perceptions of workplace bullying (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018; Rai & Agarwal, 2018).

Furthermore, our study also contributes to the stressor and bullying literature by showing just how quickly stressors in the workplace may trigger negative social interactions and thereby potentially facilitate the start of a bullying process. Therefore, an important theoretical contribution made by the present study is that this effect is not necessarily down to a long-term exposure to stressors. The process may evidently happen quite quickly and may even happen as results of daily fluctuations. Hence, these mechanisms may therefore be even more potent than previously thought.

Our results also have several practical implications. First, the design of the present study, examining short-term (day-level) effects of work pressure on exposure to bullying-related negative acts, may be of practical significance to organizations in general. As we know from previous research, workplace bullying may be the outcome of a gradually escalating process based on increasingly frequent exposure to the negative acts examined in the present study (Einarsen et al., 2020). The results from the present study add to our understanding of this escalating process, by showing that stressors in the work environment may lead to immediate exposure to such negative behaviours (i.e. within the same day). Therefore, it is important for managers to be aware of these risk factors in order to intervene early in a conflict-escalating process that otherwise might end in bullying. For example, followers working under the conditions of a laissez-faire leader in a stressful work environment may result in highly escalated, full-blown cases of workplace bullying (Ågotnes et al., 2018). Furthermore, our results suggest that such early interventions should not only include conflict management in specific episodes, but also preventative steps to reduce the overall levels of all employees' (including leaders') work pressure, which may be a root cause of bullying-related negative acts (Baillien, De Cuyper, & De Witte, 2011). In this, organizations may be able to prevent these day-to-day episodic negative behaviours from developing further and possibly resulting in full-blown cases of workplace bullying.

Our findings also indicate some important implications for the way organizations regard leadership and management development. Traditionally, the focus of most leadership and managerial training programs has been the acquisition of individual knowledge, skills, and abilities (i.e. competencies), in an effort to bring about effective leadership (Day & Dragoni, 2015). However, what seems lacking in such leadership development programs is creating awareness of – as well as developing strategies for reducing – the occurrence of passive-avoidant destructive leadership behaviours, such as laissez-faire leadership (Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2018). This point seems particularly striking considering the results of the present study, where we found that laissez-faire leadership behaviour facilitated the development of workplace bullying, whereas transformational leadership behaviour did not have an equivalent buffering effect.

Another important organizational factor that so far has been neglected in the discussion of leadership and management development is the concept of climate for conflict management (CCM). The concept entails the perception of employees that their organization generally manages interpersonal conflicts well and fairly,

and that benefits and burdens within the organization are fairly distributed (Rivlin, 2001). Zahlquist, Hetland, Skogstad, Bakker, and Einarsen (2019) argue and substantiate that a strong CCM may play an important role in preventing sour psychosocial work environments, characterized by high levels of frustration, from developing into persistent bullying situations. Consequently, taking steps to improve the overall conflict management climate and the perception of fairness in the organization may be a highly effective way of preventing bullying in the workplace.

5. Conclusion

This daily diary study revealed that on days with high levels of work pressure and high levels of laissez-faire leadership behaviour, cadets reported increased exposure to bullying-related negative acts, a finding in line with the work environment hypothesis. Furthermore, our results showed that laissez-faire leadership exacerbated the relationship between work pressure and exposure to bullying-related negative acts on a day-to-day basis, whereas transformational leadership did not help to weaken the same relationship. Thus, bullying episodes seems to be particularly prevalent on days and in situations where the leader avoids intervening in and helping their followers in the management of stressful situations in the workplace. This is in line with the theoretical notions presented in the work environment hypothesis and the effort-reward imbalance model. Furthermore, the non-significant interaction of transformational leadership behaviour indicates that steps to promote constructive forms of leadership would probably not be very effective in preventing workplace bullying on a day-to-day basis. Instead, organizations should emphasize the prevention of work pressures in general, and even more so implement necessary measures to minimize the prevalence of passive-avoidant forms of leadership in critical situations where the followers are in need of leader support, such as conflict escalations.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Norwegian Research Council, grant number 250127 – Workplace bullying: From mechanisms and moderators to problem treatment.

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Doctoral Theses at The Faculty of Psychology,
University of Bergen

1980	Allen, Hugh M., Dr. philos.	Parent-offspring interactions in willow grouse (<i>Lagopus L. Lagopus</i>).
1981	Myhrer, Trond, Dr. philos.	Behavioral Studies after selective disruption of hippocampal inputs in albino rats.
1982	Svebak, Sven, Dr. philos.	The significance of motivation for task-induced tonic physiological changes.
1983	Myhre, Grete, Dr. philos.	The Biopsychology of behavior in captive Willow ptarmigan.
	Eide, Rolf, Dr. philos.	PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS AND INDICES OF HEALTH RISKS. The relationship of psychosocial conditions to subjective complaints, arterial blood pressure, serum cholesterol, serum triglycerides and urinary catecholamines in middle aged populations in Western Norway.
	Værnes, Ragnar J., Dr. philos.	Neuropsychological effects of diving.
1984	Kolstad, Arnulf, Dr. philos.	Til diskusjonen om sammenhengen mellom sosiale forhold og psykiske strukturer. En epidemiologisk undersøkelse blant barn og unge.
	Løberg, Tor, Dr. philos.	Neuropsychological assessment in alcohol dependence.
1985	Hellesnes, Tore, Dr. philos.	Læring og problemløsning. En studie av den perseptuelle analysens betydning for verbal læring.
	Håland, Wenche, Dr. philos.	Psykoterapi: relasjon, utviklingsprosess og effekt.
1986	Hagtvatn, Knut A., Dr. philos.	The construct of test anxiety: Conceptual and methodological issues.
	Jellestad, Finn K., Dr. philos.	Effects of neuron specific amygdala lesions on fear-motivated behavior in rats.
1987	Aarø, Leif E., Dr. philos.	Health behaviour and socioeconomic Status. A survey among the adult population in Norway.
	Underlid, Kjell, Dr. philos.	Arbeidsløse i psykososialt perspektiv.
	Laberg, Jon C., Dr. philos.	Expectancy and classical conditioning in alcoholics' craving.
	Vollmer, Fred, Dr. philos.	Essays on explanation in psychology.
	Ellertsen, Bjørn, Dr. philos.	Migraine and tension headache: Psychophysiology, personality and therapy.
1988	Kaufmann, Astrid, Dr. philos.	Antisocial atferd hos ungdom. En studie av psykologiske determinanter.

	Mykletun, Reidar J., Dr. philos.	Teacher stress: personality, work-load and health.
	Havik, Odd E., Dr. philos.	After the myocardial infarction: A medical and psychological study with special emphasis on perceived illness.
1989	Bråten, Stein, Dr. philos.	Menneskedyaden. En teoretisk tese om sinnets dialogiske natur med informasjons- og utviklingspsykologiske implikasjoner sammenholdt med utvalgte spedbarnsstudier.
	Wold, Bente, Dr. psychol.	Lifestyles and physical activity. A theoretical and empirical analysis of socialization among children and adolescents.
1990	Flaten, Magne A., Dr. psychol.	The role of habituation and learning in reflex modification.
1991	Alsaker, Françoise D., Dr. philos.	Global negative self-evaluations in early adolescence.
	Kraft, Pål, Dr. philos.	AIDS prevention in Norway. Empirical studies on diffusion of knowledge, public opinion, and sexual behaviour.
	Endresen, Inger M., Dr. philos.	Psychoimmunological stress markers in working life.
	Faleide, Asbjørn O., Dr. philos.	Asthma and allergy in childhood. Psychosocial and psychotherapeutic problems.
1992	Dalen, Knut, Dr. philos.	Hemispheric asymmetry and the Dual-Task Paradigm: An experimental approach.
	Bø, Inge B., Dr. philos.	Ungdoms sosiale økologi. En undersøkelse av 14-16 åringers sosiale nettverk.
	Nivison, Mary E., Dr. philos.	The relationship between noise as an experimental and environmental stressor, physiological changes and psychological factors.
	Torgersen, Anne M., Dr. philos.	Genetic and environmental influence on temperamental behaviour. A longitudinal study of twins from infancy to adolescence.
1993	Larsen, Svein, Dr. philos.	Cultural background and problem drinking.
	Nordhus, Inger Hilde, Dr. philos.	Family caregiving. A community psychological study with special emphasis on clinical interventions.
	Thuen, Frode, Dr. psychol.	Accident-related behaviour among children and young adolescents: Prediction and prevention.
	Solheim, Ragnar, Dr. philos.	Spesifikke lærevansker. Diskrepanskriteriet anvendt i seleksjonsmetodikk.
	Johnsen, Bjørn Helge, Dr. psychol.	Brain asymmetry and facial emotional expressions: Conditioning experiments.
1994	Tønnessen, Finn E., Dr. philos.	The etiology of Dyslexia.
	Kvale, Gerd, Dr. psychol.	Psychological factors in anticipatory nausea and vomiting in cancer chemotherapy.
	Asbjørnsen, Arve E., Dr. psychol.	Structural and dynamic factors in dichotic listening: An interactional model.

	Bru, Edvin, Dr. philos.	The role of psychological factors in neck, shoulder and low back pain among female hospitale staff.
	Braathen, Eli T., Dr. psychol.	Prediction of exellence and discontinuation in different types of sport: The significance of motivation and EMG.
	Johannessen, Birte F., Dr. philos.	Det flytende kjønnnet. Om lederskap, politikk og identitet.
1995	Sam, David L., Dr. psychol.	Acculturation of young immigrants in Norway: A psychological and socio-cultural adaptation.
	Bjaalid, Inger-Kristin, Dr. philos.	Component processes in word recognition.
	Martinsen, Øyvind, Dr. philos.	Cognitive style and insight.
	Nordby, Helge, Dr. philos.	Processing of auditory deviant events: Mismatch negativity of event-related brain potentials.
	Raaheim, Arild, Dr. philos.	Health perception and health behaviour, theoretical considerations, empirical studies, and practical implications.
	Seltzer, Wencke J., Dr. philos.	Studies of Psychocultural Approach to Families in Therapy.
	Brun, Wibecke, Dr. philos.	Subjective conceptions of uncertainty and risk.
	Aas, Henrik N., Dr. psychol.	Alcohol expectancies and socialization: Adolescents learning to drink.
	Bjørkly, Stål, Dr. psychol.	Diagnosis and prediction of intra-institutional aggressive behaviour in psychotic patients
1996	Anderssen, Norman, Dr. psychol.	Physical activity of young people in a health perspective: Stability, change and social influences.
	Sandal, Gro Mjeldheim, Dr. psychol.	Coping in extreme environments: The role of personality.
	Strumse, Einar, Dr. philos.	The psychology of aesthetics: explaining visual preferences for agrarian landscapes in Western Norway.
	Hestad, Knut, Dr. philos.	Neuropsychological deficits in HIV-1 infection.
	Lugoe, L.Wycliffe, Dr. philos.	Prediction of Tanzanian students' HIV risk and preventive behaviours
	Sandvik, B. Gunnhild, Dr. philos.	Fra distriktsjordmor til institusjonsjordmor. Fremveksten av en profesjon og en profesjonsutdanning
	Lie, Gro Therese, Dr. psychol.	The disease that dares not speak its name: Studies on factors of importance for coping with HIV/AIDS in Northern Tanzania
	Øygaard, Lisbet, Dr. philos.	Health behaviors among young adults. A psychological and sociological approach
	Stormark, Kjell Morten, Dr. psychol.	Emotional modulation of selective attention: Experimental and clinical evidence.
	Einarsen, Ståle, Dr. psychol.	Bullying and harassment at work: epidemiological and psychosocial aspects.

1997	Knivsberg, Ann-Mari, Dr. philos.	Behavioural abnormalities and childhood psychopathology: Urinary peptide patterns as a potential tool in diagnosis and remediation.
	Eide, Arne H., Dr. philos.	Adolescent drug use in Zimbabwe. Cultural orientation in a global-local perspective and use of psychoactive substances among secondary school students.
	Sørensen, Marit, Dr. philos.	The psychology of initiating and maintaining exercise and diet behaviour.
	Skjæveland, Oddvar, Dr. psychol.	Relationships between spatial-physical neighborhood attributes and social relations among neighbors.
	Zewdie, Teka, Dr. philos.	Mother-child relational patterns in Ethiopia. Issues of developmental theories and intervention programs.
	Wilhelmsen, Britt Unni, Dr. philos.	Development and evaluation of two educational programmes designed to prevent alcohol use among adolescents.
	Manger, Terje, Dr. philos.	Gender differences in mathematical achievement among Norwegian elementary school students.
1998	Lindstrøm, Torill Christine, Dr. philos.	«Good Grief»: Adapting to Bereavement.
V	Skogstad, Anders, Dr. philos.	Effects of leadership behaviour on job satisfaction, health and efficiency.
	Haldorsen, Ellen M. Håland, Dr. psychol.	Return to work in low back pain patients.
	Besemer, Susan P., Dr. philos.	Creative Product Analysis: The Search for a Valid Model for Understanding Creativity in Products.
H	Winje, Dagfinn, Dr. psychol.	Psychological adjustment after severe trauma. A longitudinal study of adults' and children's posttraumatic reactions and coping after the bus accident in Måbødalen, Norway 1988.
	Vosburg, Suzanne K., Dr. philos.	The effects of mood on creative problem solving.
	Eriksen, Hege R., Dr. philos.	Stress and coping: Does it really matter for subjective health complaints?
	Jakobsen, Reidar, Dr. psychol.	Empiriske studier av kunnskap og holdninger om hiv/aids og den normative seksuelle utvikling i ungdomsårene.
1999	Mikkelsen, Aslaug, Dr. philos.	Effects of learning opportunities and learning climate on occupational health.
V	Samdal, Oddrun, Dr. philos.	The school environment as a risk or resource for students' health-related behaviours and subjective well-being.
	Friestad, Christine, Dr. philos.	Social psychological approaches to smoking.
	Ekeland, Tor-Johan, Dr. philos.	Meining som medisin. Ein analyse av placebofenomenet og implikasjonar for terapi og terapeutiske teoriar.
H	Saban, Sara, Dr. psychol.	Brain Asymmetry and Attention: Classical Conditioning Experiments.

	Carlsten, Carl Thomas, Dr. philos.	God lesing – God læring. En aksjonsrettet studie av undervisning i fagtekstlesing.
	Dundas, Ingrid, Dr. psychol.	Functional and dysfunctional closeness. Family interaction and children's adjustment.
	Engen, Liv, Dr. philos.	Kartlegging av leseferdighet på småskoletrinnet og vurdering av faktorer som kan være av betydning for optimal leseutvikling.
2000 V	Hovland, Ole Johan, Dr. philos.	Transforming a self-preserving "alarm" reaction into a self-defeating emotional response: Toward an integrative approach to anxiety as a human phenomenon.
	Lillejord, Sølvi, Dr. philos.	Handlingsrasjonalitet og spesialundervisning. En analyse av aktørperspektiver.
	Sandell, Ove, Dr. philos.	Den varme kunnskapen.
	Oftedal, Marit Petersen, Dr. philos.	Diagnostisering av ordavkodingsvansker: En prosessanalytisk tilnæringsmåte.
H	Sandbak, Tone, Dr. psychol.	Alcohol consumption and preference in the rat: The significance of individual differences and relationships to stress pathology
	Eid, Jarle, Dr. psychol.	Early predictors of PTSD symptom reporting; The significance of contextual and individual factors.
2001 V	Skinstad, Anne Helene, Dr. philos.	Substance dependence and borderline personality disorders.
	Binder, Per-Einar, Dr. psychol.	Individet og den meningsbærende andre. En teoretisk undersøkelse av de mellommenneskelige forutsetningene for psykisk liv og utvikling med utgangspunkt i Donald Winnicotts teori.
	Roald, Ingvild K., Dr. philos.	Building of concepts. A study of Physics concepts of Norwegian deaf students.
H	Fekadu, Zelalem W., Dr. philos.	Predicting contraceptive use and intention among a sample of adolescent girls. An application of the theory of planned behaviour in Ethiopian context.
	Melesse, Fantu, Dr. philos.	The more intelligent and sensitive child (MISC) mediational intervention in an Ethiopian context: An evaluation study.
	Råheim, Målfrid, Dr. philos.	Kvinnerens kroppserfaring og livssammenheng. En fenomenologisk – hermeneutisk studie av friske kvinner og kvinner med kroniske muskelsmerter.
	Engelsen, Birthe Kari, Dr. psychol.	Measurement of the eating problem construct.
	Lau, Bjørn, Dr. philos.	Weight and eating concerns in adolescence.
2002 V	Ihlebak, Camilla, Dr. philos.	Epidemiological studies of subjective health complaints.
	Rosén, Gunnar O. R., Dr. philos.	The phantom limb experience. Models for understanding and treatment of pain with hypnosis.

	Høines, Marit Johnsen, Dr. philos.	Fleksible språkrom. Matematikklæring som tekstutvikling.
	Anthun, Roald Andor, Dr. philos.	School psychology service quality. Consumer appraisal, quality dimensions, and collaborative improvement potential
	Pallesen, Ståle, Dr. psychol.	Insomnia in the elderly. Epidemiology, psychological characteristics and treatment.
	Midthassel, Unni Vere, Dr. philos.	Teacher involvement in school development activity. A study of teachers in Norwegian compulsory schools
	Kallestad, Jan Helge, Dr. philos.	Teachers, schools and implementation of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program.
H	Ofte, Sonja Helgesen, Dr. psychol.	Right-left discrimination in adults and children.
	Netland, Marit, Dr. psychol.	Exposure to political violence. The need to estimate our estimations.
	Diseth, Åge, Dr. psychol.	Approaches to learning: Validity and prediction of academic performance.
	Bjuland, Raymond, Dr. philos.	Problem solving in geometry. Reasoning processes of student teachers working in small groups: A dialogical approach.
2003 V	Arefjord, Kjersti, Dr. psychol.	After the myocardial infarction – the wives' view. Short- and long-term adjustment in wives of myocardial infarction patients.
	Ingjaldsson, Jón Þorvaldur, Dr. psychol.	Unconscious Processes and Vagal Activity in Alcohol Dependency.
	Holden, Børge, Dr. philos.	Følger av atferdsanalytiske forklaringer for atferdsanalysens tilnærming til utforming av behandling.
	Holsen, Ingrid, Dr. philos.	Depressed mood from adolescence to 'emerging adulthood'. Course and longitudinal influences of body image and parent-adolescent relationship.
	Hammar, Åsa Karin, Dr. psychol.	Major depression and cognitive dysfunction- An experimental study of the cognitive effort hypothesis.
	Sprugevica, Ieva, Dr. philos.	The impact of enabling skills on early reading acquisition.
	Gabrielsen, Egil, Dr. philos.	LESE FOR LIVET. Lesekompetansen i den norske voksenbefolkningen sett i lys av visjonen om en enhetsskole.
H	Hansen, Anita Lill, Dr. psychol.	The influence of heart rate variability in the regulation of attentional and memory processes.
	Dyregrov, Kari, Dr. philos.	The loss of child by suicide, SIDS, and accidents: Consequences, needs and provisions of help.
2004 V	Torsheim, Torbjørn, Dr. psychol.	Student role strain and subjective health complaints: Individual, contextual, and longitudinal perspectives.
	Haugland, Bente Storm Mowatt Dr. psychol.	Parental alcohol abuse. Family functioning and child adjustment.

	Milde, Anne Marita, Dr. psychol.	Ulcerative colitis and the role of stress. Animal studies of psychobiological factors in relationship to experimentally induced colitis.
	Stornes, Tor, Dr. philos.	Socio-moral behaviour in sport. An investigation of perceptions of sportspersonship in handball related to important factors of socio-moral influence.
	Mæhle, Magne, Dr. philos.	Re-inventing the child in family therapy: An investigation of the relevance and applicability of theory and research in child development for family therapy involving children.
	Kobbeltvedt, Therese, Dr. psychol.	Risk and feelings: A field approach.
2004	Thomsen, Tormod, Dr. psychol.	Localization of attention in the brain.
H	Løberg, Else-Marie, Dr. psychol.	Functional laterality and attention modulation in schizophrenia: Effects of clinical variables.
	Kyrkjebø, Jane Mikkelsen, Dr. philos.	Learning to improve: Integrating continuous quality improvement learning into nursing education.
	Laumann, Karin, Dr. psychol.	Restorative and stress-reducing effects of natural environments: Experiential, behavioural and cardiovascular indices.
	Holgersen, Helge, PhD	Mellom oss - Essay i relasjonell psykoanalyse.
2005	Hetland, Hilde, Dr. psychol.	Leading to the extraordinary? Antecedents and outcomes of transformational leadership.
V	Iversen, Anette Christine, Dr. philos.	Social differences in health behaviour: the motivational role of perceived control and coping.
2005	Mathisen, Gro Ellen, PhD	Climates for creativity and innovation: Definitions, measurement, predictors and consequences.
H	Sævi, Tone, Dr. philos.	Seeing disability pedagogically – The lived experience of disability in the pedagogical encounter.
	Wiium, Nora, PhD	Intrapersonal factors, family and school norms: combined and interactive influence on adolescent smoking behaviour.
	Kanagaratnam, Pushpa, PhD	Subjective and objective correlates of Posttraumatic Stress in immigrants/refugees exposed to political violence.
	Larsen, Torill M. B. , PhD	Evaluating principals` and teachers` implementation of Second Step. A case study of four Norwegian primary schools.
	Bancila, Delia, PhD	Psychosocial stress and distress among Romanian adolescents and adults.
2006	Hillestad, Torgeir Martin, Dr. philos.	Normalitet og avvik. Forutsetninger for et objektivt psykopatologisk avviksbegrep. En psykologisk, sosial, erkjennelsesteoretisk og teorihistorisk framstilling.
V	Nordanger, Dag Øystein, Dr. psychol.	Psychosocial discourses and responses to political violence in post-war Tigray, Ethiopia.

	Rimol, Lars Morten, PhD	Behavioral and fMRI studies of auditory laterality and speech sound processing.
	Krumsvik, Rune Johan, Dr. philos.	ICT in the school. ICT-initiated school development in lower secondary school.
	Norman, Elisabeth, Dr. psychol.	Gut feelings and unconscious thought: An exploration of fringe consciousness in implicit cognition.
	Israel, K Pravin, Dr. psychol.	Parent involvement in the mental health care of children and adolescents. Empirical studies from clinical care setting.
	Glasø, Lars, PhD	Affects and emotional regulation in leader-subordinate relationships.
	Knutsen, Ketil, Dr. philos.	HISTORIER UNGDOM LEVER – En studie av hvordan ungdommer bruker historie for å gjøre livet meningsfullt.
	Matthiesen, Stig Berge, PhD	Bullying at work. Antecedents and outcomes.
2006	Gramstad, Arne, PhD	Neuropsychological assessment of cognitive and emotional functioning in patients with epilepsy.
H	Bendixen, Mons, PhD	Antisocial behaviour in early adolescence: Methodological and substantive issues.
	Mrumbi, Khalifa Maulid, PhD	Parental illness and loss to HIV/AIDS as experienced by AIDS orphans aged between 12-17 years from Temeke District, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: A study of the children's psychosocial health and coping responses.
	Hetland, Jørn, Dr. psychol.	The nature of subjective health complaints in adolescence: Dimensionality, stability, and psychosocial predictors
	Kakoko, Deodatus Conatus Vitalis, PhD	Voluntary HIV counselling and testing service uptake among primary school teachers in Mwanza, Tanzania: assessment of socio-demographic, psychosocial and socio-cognitive aspects
	Mykletun, Arnstein, Dr. psychol.	Mortality and work-related disability as long-term consequences of anxiety and depression: Historical cohort designs based on the HUNT-2 study
	Sivertsen, Børge, PhD	Insomnia in older adults. Consequences, assessment and treatment.
2007	Singhammer, John, Dr. philos.	Social conditions from before birth to early adulthood – the influence on health and health behaviour
V	Janvin, Carmen Ani Cristea, PhD	Cognitive impairment in patients with Parkinson's disease: profiles and implications for prognosis
	Braarud, Hanne Cecilie, Dr. psychol.	Infant regulation of distress: A longitudinal study of transactions between mothers and infants
	Tveito, Torill Helene, PhD	Sick Leave and Subjective Health Complaints
	Magnussen, Liv Heide, PhD	Returning disability pensioners with back pain to work

	Thuen, Elin Marie, Dr.philos.	Learning environment, students' coping styles and emotional and behavioural problems. A study of Norwegian secondary school students.
	Solberg, Ole Asbjørn, PhD	Peacekeeping warriors – A longitudinal study of Norwegian peacekeepers in Kosovo
2007	Søreide, Gunn Elisabeth, Dr.philos.	Narrative construction of teacher identity
H	Svensen, Erling, PhD	WORK & HEALTH. Cognitive Activation Theory of Stress applied in an organisational setting.
	Øverland, Simon Nygaard, PhD	Mental health and impairment in disability benefits. Studies applying linkages between health surveys and administrative registries.
	Eichele, Tom, PhD	Electrophysiological and Hemodynamic Correlates of Expectancy in Target Processing
	Børhaug, Kjetil, Dr.philos.	Oppseding til demokrati. Ein studie av politisk oppseding i norsk skule.
	Eikeland, Thorleif, Dr.philos.	Om å vokse opp på barnehjem og på sykehus. En undersøkelse av barnehjemsbarns opplevelser på barnehjem sammenholdt med sanatoriebarns beskrivelse av langvarige sykehusopphold – og et forsøk på forklaring.
	Wadel, Carl Cato, Dr.philos.	Medarbeidersamhandling og medarbeiderledelse i en lagbasert organisasjon
	Vinje, Hege Forbech, PhD	Thriving despite adversity: Job engagement and self-care among community nurses
	Noort, Maurits van den, PhD	Working memory capacity and foreign language acquisition
2008	Breivik, Kyrre, Dr.psychol.	The Adjustment of Children and Adolescents in Different Post-Divorce Family Structures. A Norwegian Study of Risks and Mechanisms.
V	Johnsen, Grethe E., PhD	Memory impairment in patients with posttraumatic stress disorder
	Sætrevik, Bjørn, PhD	Cognitive Control in Auditory Processing
	Carvalhosa, Susana Fonseca, PhD	Prevention of bullying in schools: an ecological model
2008	Brønnick, Kolbjørn Selvåg	Attentional dysfunction in dementia associated with Parkinson's disease.
H	Posserud, Maja-Britt Rocio	Epidemiology of autism spectrum disorders
	Haug, Ellen	Multilevel correlates of physical activity in the school setting
	Skjerve, Arvid	Assessing mild dementia – a study of brief cognitive tests.

	Kjønniksen, Lise	The association between adolescent experiences in physical activity and leisure time physical activity in adulthood: a ten year longitudinal study
	Gundersen, Hilde	The effects of alcohol and expectancy on brain function
	Omvik, Siri	Insomnia – a night and day problem
2009 V	Molde, Helge	Pathological gambling: prevalence, mechanisms and treatment outcome.
	Foss, Else	Den omsorgsfulle væremåte. En studie av voksnes væremåte i forhold til barn i barnehagen.
	Westrheim, Kariane	Education in a Political Context: A study of Knowledge Processes and Learning Sites in the PKK.
	Wehling, Eike	Cognitive and olfactory changes in aging
	Wangberg, Silje C.	Internet based interventions to support health behaviours: The role of self-efficacy.
	Nielsen, Morten B.	Methodological issues in research on workplace bullying. Operationalisations, measurements and samples.
	Sandu, Anca Larisa	MRI measures of brain volume and cortical complexity in clinical groups and during development.
	Guribye, Eugene	Refugees and mental health interventions
	Sørensen, Lin	Emotional problems in inattentive children – effects on cognitive control functions.
	Tjomsland, Hege E.	Health promotion with teachers. Evaluation of the Norwegian Network of Health Promoting Schools: Quantitative and qualitative analyses of predisposing, reinforcing and enabling conditions related to teacher participation and program sustainability.
	Helleve, Ingrid	Productive interactions in ICT supported communities of learners
2009 H	Skorpen, Aina Øye, Christine	Dagliglivet i en psykiatrisk institusjon: En analyse av miljøterapeutiske praksiser
	Andreassen, Cecilie Schou	WORKAHOLISM – Antecedents and Outcomes
	Stang, Ingun	Being in the same boat: An empowerment intervention in breast cancer self-help groups
	Sequeira, Sarah Dorothee Dos Santos	The effects of background noise on asymmetrical speech perception
	Kleiven, Jo, dr.philos.	The Lillehammer scales: Measuring common motives for vacation and leisure behavior
	Jónsdóttir, Guðrún	Dubito ergo sum? Ni jenter møter naturfaglig kunnskap.
	Hove, Oddbjørn	Mental health disorders in adults with intellectual disabilities - Methods of assessment and prevalence of mental health disorders and problem behaviour
	Wageningen, Heidi Karin van	The role of glutamate on brain function

	Bjørkvik, Jofrid	God nok? Selvaktelse og interpersonlig fungering hos pasienter innen psykisk helsevern: Forholdet til diagnoser, symptomer og behandlingsutbytte
	Andersson, Martin	A study of attention control in children and elderly using a forced-attention dichotic listening paradigm
	Almås, Aslaug Grov	Teachers in the Digital Network Society: Visions and Realities. A study of teachers' experiences with the use of ICT in teaching and learning.
	Ulvik, Marit	Lærerutdanning som danning? Tre stemmer i diskusjonen
2010	Skår, Randi	Læringsprosesser i sykepleieres profesjonsutøvelse. En studie av sykepleieres læringserfaringer.
V	Roald, Knut	Kvalitetsvurdering som organisasjonslæring mellom skole og skoleeigar
	Lunde, Linn-Heidi	Chronic pain in older adults. Consequences, assessment and treatment.
	Danielsen, Anne Grete	Perceived psychosocial support, students' self-reported academic initiative and perceived life satisfaction
	Hysing, Mari	Mental health in children with chronic illness
	Olsen, Olav Kjellevoid	Are good leaders moral leaders? The relationship between effective military operational leadership and morals
	Riese, Hanne	Friendship and learning. Entrepreneurship education through mini-enterprises.
	Holthe, Asle	Evaluating the implementation of the Norwegian guidelines for healthy school meals: A case study involving three secondary schools
H	Hauge, Lars Johan	Environmental antecedents of workplace bullying: A multi-design approach
	Bjørkelo, Brita	Whistleblowing at work: Antecedents and consequences
	Reme, Silje Endresen	Common Complaints – Common Cure? Psychiatric comorbidity and predictors of treatment outcome in low back pain and irritable bowel syndrome
	Helland, Wenche Andersen	Communication difficulties in children identified with psychiatric problems
	Beneventi, Harald	Neuronal correlates of working memory in dyslexia
	Thygesen, Elin	Subjective health and coping in care-dependent old persons living at home
	Aanes, Mette Marthinussen	Poor social relationships as a threat to belongingness needs. Interpersonal stress and subjective health complaints: Mediating and moderating factors.
	Anker, Morten Gustav	Client directed outcome informed couple therapy

	Bull, Torill	Combining employment and child care: The subjective well-being of single women in Scandinavia and in Southern Europe
	Viiig, Nina Grieg	Tilrettelegging for læreres deltakelse i helsefremmende arbeid. En kvalitativ og kvantitativ analyse av sammenhengen mellom organisatoriske forhold og læreres deltakelse i utvikling og implementering av Europeisk Nettverk av Helsefremmende Skoler i Norge
	Wolff, Katharina	To know or not to know? Attitudes towards receiving genetic information among patients and the general public.
	Ogden, Terje, dr.philos.	Familiebasert behandling av alvorlige atferdsproblemer blant barn og ungdom. Evaluering og implementering av evidensbaserte behandlingsprogrammer i Norge.
	Solberg, Mona Elin	Self-reported bullying and victimisation at school: Prevalence, overlap and psychosocial adjustment.
2011	Bye, Hege Høivik	Self-presentation in job interviews. Individual and cultural differences in applicant self-presentation during job interviews and hiring managers' evaluation
V	Notelaers, Guy	Workplace bullying. A risk control perspective.
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	Mamen, Asgeir	Aspects of using physical training in patients with substance dependence and additional mental distress
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	Haara, Frode Olav	Unveiling teachers' reasons for choosing practical activities in mathematics teaching

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	Melkevik, Ole Rogstad	Screen-based sedentary behaviours: pastimes for the poor, inactive and overweight? A cross-national survey of children and adolescents in 39 countries.
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	Røykenes, Kari	Testangst hos sykepleierstudenter: «Alternativ behandling»
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	Ree, Eline	Staying at work. The role of expectancies and beliefs in health and workplace interventions.
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	Øyeflaten, Irene Larsen	Long-term sick leave and work rehabilitation. Prognostic factors for return to work.
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	Helle, Siri	Cannabis use in non-affective psychoses: Relationship to age at onset, cognitive functioning and social cognition
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	Oanes, Camilla Jensen	Tilbakemelding i terapi. På hvilke måter opplever terapeuter at tilbakemeldingsprosedyrer kan virke inn på terapeutiske praksiser?
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	Ness, Ingunn Johanne	The Room of Opportunity. Understanding how knowledge and ideas are constructed in multidisciplinary groups working with developing innovative ideas.
	Hollekim, Ragnhild	Contemporary discourses on children and parenting in Norway. An empirical study based on two cases.
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	Adólfssdóttir, Steinunn	Subcomponents of executive functions: Effects of age and brain maturations
	Brattabø, Ingfrid Vaksdal	Detection of child maltreatment, the role of dental health personnel – A national cross-sectional study among public dental health personnel in Norway
	Fylkesnes, Marte Knag	Frykt, forhandlinger og deltakelse. Ungdommer og foreldre med etnisk minoritetsbakgrunn i møte med den norske barnevernstjenesten.
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	Egelandsdal, Kjetil	Clickers and Formative Feedback at University Lectures. Exploring students and teachers' reception and use of feedback from clicker interventions.
	Torjussen, Lars Petter Storm	Foreningen av visdom og veltalenhet – utkast til en universitetsdidaktikk gjennom en kritikk og videreføring av Skjervheims pedagogiske filosofi på bakgrunn av Arendt og Foucault. <i>Eller hvorfor menneskelivet er mer som å spille fløyte enn å bygge et hus.</i>
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2019	Kongsgården, Petter	Vurderingspraksiser i teknologirike læringsmiljøer. En undersøkelse av læreres vurderingspraksiser i teknologirike læringsmiljøer og implikasjoner på elevenes medvirkning i egen læringsprosess.
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	Heradstveit, Ove	Alcohol- and drug use among adolescents. School-related problems, childhood mental health problems, and psychiatric diagnoses.
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	Eldal, Kari	Sikkerhetsnett som tek imot om eg fell – men som også kan fange meg. Korleis erfarer menneske med psykiske lidningar ei innlegging i psykisk helsevern? Eit samarbeidsbasert forskingsprosjekt mellom forskarar og brukarar.

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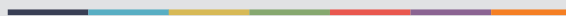
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Graphic design: Communication Division, UIB / Print: Skjipes Kommunikasjon AS



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ISBN: 9788230850916 (print)
9788230843130 (PDF)