

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

Kari Wik Ågotnes  | Ståle Valvatne Einarsen  | Jørn Hetland  | Anders Skogstad 

Department of Psychosocial Science, Faculty of Psychology, University of Bergen

Correspondence

Kari Wik Ågotnes, Department of Psychosocial Science, Faculty of Psychology, University of Bergen, Christies Gate 12, 5015 Bergen, Norway.
Email: kari.agotnes@uib.no

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

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2018 The Authors. Human Resource Management Journal Published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd

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). Victimization 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 (Glambek, 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 overarching 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, Herscovis 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; Glambe 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 R² and Nagelkerke R², 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 R² and Nagelkerke R² 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

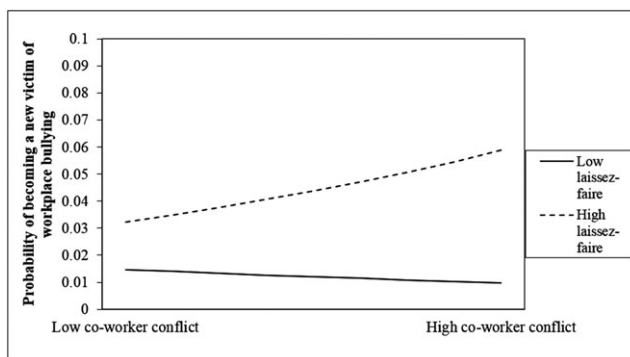


FIGURE 1 Interaction between T1 co-worker conflict and T2 laissez-faire leadership, with new cases of self-labelled victims of workplace bullying at T2 as outcome

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 align 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.

ORCID

Kari Wik Ågotnes  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5886-3576>

Ståle Valvatne Einarsen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0399-9847>

Jørn Hetland  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7845-7092>

Anders Skogstad  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3768-2477>

REFERENCES

- Avolio, B. J., & Bass, B. M. (2004). *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire: Manual and sampler set* (3rd ed.). Menlo Park, CA: Mind Garden, Inc.
- Ayoko, O. B., Callan, V. J., & Härtel, C. E. (2003). Workplace conflict, bullying, and counterproductive behaviors. *The International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 11(4), 283–301. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb028976>
- Baillien, E., Bollen, K., Euwema, M., & De Witte, H. (2014). Conflicts and conflict management styles as precursors of workplace bullying: A two-wave longitudinal study. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 23(4), 511–524. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2012.752899>
- Baillien, E., Camps, J., Van den Broeck, A., Stouten, J., Godderis, L., Sercu, M., & De Witte, H. (2016). An eye for an eye will make the whole world blind: Conflict escalation into workplace bullying and the role of distributive conflict behavior. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 137(2), 415–429. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2563-y>
- Baillien, E., Escartín, J., Gross, C., & Zapf, D. (2017). Towards a conceptual and empirical differentiation between workplace bullying and interpersonal conflict. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 26(6), 870–881. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2017.1385601>
- Baillien, E., Neyens, I., De Witte, H., & De Cuyper, N. (2009). A qualitative study on the development of workplace bullying: Towards a three way model. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 19(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.977>
- Baruch, Y., & Holtom, B. C. (2008). Survey response rate levels and trends in organizational research. *Human Relations*, 61(8), 1139–1160. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726708094863>
- Bass, B. M. (1990). *Bass & Stogdill's handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and managerial applications* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1990). *Transformational leadership development: Manual for the multifactor leadership questionnaire*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Baumeister, R. F., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C., & Vohs, K. D. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. *Review of General Psychology*, 5(4), 323–370. <https://doi.org/10.1037//1089-2680.5.4.323>
- Berthelsen, M., Skogstad, A., Lau, B., & Einarsen, S. (2011). Do they stay or do they go? A longitudinal study of intentions to leave and exclusion from working life among targets of workplace bullying. *International Journal of Manpower*, 32(2), 178–193. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437721111130198>
- Björkqvist, K., Österman, K., & Hjelt-Bäck, M. (1994). Aggression among university employees. *Aggressive Behavior*, 20(3), 173–184. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-2337\(1994\)20:3%3C173::AID-AB2480200304%3E3.0.CO;2-D](https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-2337(1994)20:3%3C173::AID-AB2480200304%3E3.0.CO;2-D)
- Bowling, N. A., & Beehr, T. A. (2006). Workplace harassment from the victim's perspective: A theoretical model and meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(5), 998–1012. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.5.998>
- Brodsky, C. M. (1976). *The harassed worker*. Toronto: Lexington Books, DC Heath & Co.
- Buss, A. H. (1961). *The psychology of aggression*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Dawson, J. F. (2014). Moderation in management research: What, why, when, and how. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 29(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-013-9308-7>
- De Dreu, C. K. W., & Gelfand, M. J. (2008). Conflict in the workplace: Sources, functions, and dynamics across multiple levels of analysis. In C. K. W. De Dreu, & M. J. Gelfand (Eds.), *The psychology of conflict and conflict management in organizations* (pp. 3–54). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- De Dreu, C. K. W., & Van Vianen, A. E. M. (2001). Managing relationship conflict and the effectiveness of organizational teams. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 22(3), 309–328. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.71>
- Djurkovic, N., McCormack, D., & Casimir, G. (2004). The physical and psychological effects of workplace bullying and their relationship to intention to leave: A test of the psychosomatic and disability hypotheses. *International Journal of Organization Theory and Behavior*, 7(4), 469–497. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOTB-07-04-2004-B001>
- Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., & Notelaers, G. (2009). Measuring exposure to bullying and harassment at work: Validity, factor structure and psychometric properties of the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised. *Work and Stress*, 23(1), 24–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678370902815673>
- Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., Zapf, D., & Cooper, C. L. (2011). The concept of bullying and harassment at work: The European tradition. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf, & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and harassment in the workplace: Developments in theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.) (pp. 3–40). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Einarsen, S., & Nielsen, M. B. (2015). Workplace bullying as an antecedent of mental health problems: A five-year prospective and representative study. *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health*, 88(2), 131–142. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00420-014-0944-7>

- Einarsen, S., Raknes, B. I., & Matthiesen, S. B. (1994). Bullying and harassment at work and their relationships to work environment quality: An exploratory study. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 4(4), 381–401. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13594329408410497>
- Einarsen, S., & Skogstad, A. (1996). Bullying at work: Epidemiological findings in public and private organizations. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5(2), 185–201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13594329608414854>
- Einarsen, S., Skogstad, A., Rørvik, E., Lande, Å. B., & Nielsen, M. B. (2018). Climate for conflict management, exposure to workplace bullying and work engagement: A moderated mediation analysis. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 29(3), 549–570. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2016.1164216>
- Einarsen, S., Tangedal, M., Skogstad, A., Matthiesen, S., Aasland, M., Nielsen, M., ... Hauge, L. (2007). Et brutalt arbeidsmiljø? En undersøkelse av mobbing, konflikter og destruktiv ledelse i Norsk arbeidsliv [A brutal work environment? An exploration of bullying, conflicts and destructive leadership in Norwegian working life]. *Bergen Bullying Research Group*. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1956/2381>
- Fisher, G. G., Matthews, R. A., & Gibbons, A. M. (2016). Developing and investigating the use of single-item measures in organizational research. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 21(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0039139>
- Gilbert, S., & Kelloway, E. K. (2014). Using single items to measure job stressors. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, 7(3), 186–199. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJWHM-03-2013-0011>
- Glambek, M., Skogstad, A., & Einarsen, S. (2015). Take it or leave: A five-year prospective study of workplace bullying and indicators of expulsion in working life. *Industrial Health*, 53, 160–170. <https://doi.org/10.2486/indhealth.2014-0195>
- Glasl, F. (1982). The process of conflict escalation and roles of third parties. In G. B. J. Bomers, & R. B. Peterson (Eds.), *Conflict management and industrial relations* (pp. 119–140). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.
- Hauge, L. J., Skogstad, A., & Einarsen, S. (2007). Relationships between stressful work environments and bullying: Results of a large representative study. *Work and Stress*, 21(3), 220–242. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678370701705810>
- Hauge, L. J., Skogstad, A., & Einarsen, S. (2010). The relative impact of workplace bullying as a social stressor at work. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 51(5), 426–433. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9450.2010.00813.x>
- Hershcovis, M. S., Turner, N., Barling, J., Arnold, K. A., Dupré, K. E., Inness, M., ... Sivanathan, N. (2007). Predicting workplace aggression: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(1), 228–238. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.92.1.228>
- Hoel, H., & Cooper, C. L. (2000). *Destructive conflict and bullying at work*. Manchester: Manchester School of Management, University of Manchester Institute Science and Technology (UMIST). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/qmcmmonitor/Destructiveconflictandbullyingatwork.pdf>
- Hoel, H., Glasø, L., Hetland, J., Cooper, C. L., & Einarsen, S. (2010). Leadership styles as predictors of self-reported and observed workplace bullying. *British Journal of Management*, 21(2), 453–468. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2009.00664.x>
- Hoel, H., & Salin, D. (2003). Organisational antecedents of workplace bullying. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf, & C. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and emotional abuse in the workplace: International perspectives in research and practice* (pp. 203–218). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Høstmark, M., & Lagerstrøm, B. (2006). Undersøkelse om arbeidsmiljø: Destruktiv atferd i arbeidslivet. *Dokumentasjonsrapport [A study of work environments: Destructive behaviours in working life. Documentation report]*. Retrieved from https://www.ssb.no/a/publikasjoner/pdf/notat_200644/notat_200644.pdf
- Jehn, K. A. (1995). A multimethod examination of the benefits and detriments of intragroup conflict. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40(2), 256–282. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393638>
- Laschinger, H. K. S., Wong, C. A., & Grau, A. L. (2012). The influence of authentic leadership on newly graduated nurses' experiences of workplace bullying, burnout and retention outcomes: A cross-sectional study. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 49(10), 1266–1276. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2012.05.012>
- Leon-Perez, J. M., Medina, F. J., Arenas, A., & Munduate, L. (2015). The relationship between interpersonal conflict and workplace bullying. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 30(3), 250–263. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-01-2013-0034>
- Leymann, H. (1990). Mobbing and psychological terror at workplaces. *Violence and Victims*, 5(2), 119–126.
- Leymann, H. (1992). *Från mobbning til utslagning i arbeidslivet. [From bullying to expulsion from working life]*. Stockholm, Sweden: Publica.
- Leymann, H. (1996). The content and development of mobbing at work. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5(2), 165–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13594329608414853>
- Mathisen, G. E., Einarsen, S., & Mykletun, R. (2008). The occurrences and correlates of bullying and harassment in the restaurant sector. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 49(1), 59–68. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9450.2007.00602.x>

- Nielsen, M. B. (2013). Bullying in work groups: The impact of leadership. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 54*(2), 127–136. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12011>
- Nielsen, M. B., & Einarsen, S. (2012). Outcomes of exposure to workplace bullying: A meta-analytic review. *Work and Stress, 26*(4), 309–332. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2012.734709>
- Nielsen, M. B., Hetland, J., Matthiesen, S. B., & Einarsen, S. (2012). Longitudinal relationships between workplace bullying and psychological distress. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health, 38*(1), 38–46. <https://doi.org/10.5271/sjweh.3178>
- Nielsen, M. B., & Knardahl, S. (2015). Is workplace bullying related to the personality traits of victims? A two-year prospective study. *Work and Stress, 29*(2), 128–149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2015.1032383>
- Nielsen, M. B., Matthiesen, S. B., & Einarsen, S. (2010). The impact of methodological moderators on prevalence rates of workplace bullying. A meta-analysis. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 83*(4), 955–979. <https://doi.org/10.1348/096317909X481256>
- Nielsen, M. B., Notelaers, G., & Einarsen, S. (2011). Measuring exposure to workplace bullying. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf, & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and harassment in the workplace: Developments in theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.) (pp. 149–174). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Olweus, D. (1991). Bully/victim problems among schoolchildren: Basic facts and effects of a school based intervention program. In D. J. Pepler, & K. H. Rubin (Eds.), *The development and treatment of childhood aggression* (pp. 411–448). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Parrott, D. J., & Giancola, P. R. (2007). Addressing “the criterion problem” in the assessment of aggressive behavior: Development of a new taxonomic system. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 12*(3), 280–299. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2006.08.002>
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J.-Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 88*(5), 879–903. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879>
- Podsakoff, P. M., Todor, W. M., & Skov, R. (1982). Effects of leader contingent and noncontingent reward and punishment behaviors on subordinate performance and satisfaction. *Academy of Management Journal, 25*(4), 810–821. <https://doi.org/10.2307/256100>
- Reknes, I., Einarsen, S., Knardahl, S., & Lau, B. (2014). The prospective relationship between role stressors and new cases of self-reported workplace bullying. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 55*(1), 45–52. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12092>
- Rogosa, D. (1995). Myths and methods: “Myths about longitudinal research” plus supplemental questions. In J. M. Gottman (Ed.), *The analysis of change* (pp. 3–66). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Salin, D. (2003). Ways of explaining workplace bullying: A review of enabling, motivating and precipitating structures and processes in the work environment. *Human Relations, 56*(10), 1213–1232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267035610003>
- Salin, D., & Hoel, H. (2011). Organizational causes of workplace bullying. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf, & C. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and emotional abuse in the workplace: International perspectives in research and practice* (2nd ed.) (pp. 227–243). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Singer, J. D., & Willett, J. B. (2003). *Applied longitudinal data analysis: Modeling change and event occurrence*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Skogstad, A., Aasland, M. S., Nielsen, M. B., Hetland, J., Matthiesen, S. B., & Einarsen, S. (2014a). The relative effects of constructive, laissez-faire, and tyrannical leadership on subordinate job satisfaction. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie, 222*(4), 221–232. <https://doi.org/10.1027/2151-2604/a000189>
- Skogstad, A., Einarsen, S., Torsheim, T., Aasland, M. S., & Hetland, H. (2007). The destructiveness of laissez-faire leadership behavior. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 12*(1), 80–92. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.12.1.80>
- Skogstad, A., Hetland, J., Glasø, L., & Einarsen, S. (2014b). Is avoidant leadership a root cause of subordinate stress? Longitudinal relationships between laissez-faire leadership and role ambiguity. *Work and Stress, 28*(4), 323–341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2014.957362>
- Skogstad, A., Nielsen, M. B., & Einarsen, S. (2017). Destructive forms of leadership and their relationships with employee well-being. In E. K. Kelloway, K. Nielsen, & J. K. Dimoff (Eds.), *Leading to occupational health and safety: How leadership behaviours impact organizational safety and well-being* (pp. 163–195). Chichester, UK: Wiley.
- Solberg, M. E., & Olweus, D. (2003). Prevalence estimation of school bullying with the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire. *Aggressive Behavior, 29*(3), 239–268. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.10047>
- Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2013). *Using multivariate statistics* (6th ed.). Harlow, Essex: Pearson.

- Van de Vliert, E. (1984). Conflict—Prevention and escalation. In P. J. D. Drenth, H. Thierry, P. J. Willems, & C. J. de Wolff (Eds.), *Handbook of work and organizational psychology* (Vol. 1) (pp. 521–551). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Van de Vliert, E., Einarsen, S., & Nielsen, M. B. (2013). Are national levels of employee harassment cultural covariations of climato-economic conditions? *Work and Stress*, 27(1), 106–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2013.760901>
- Van den Brande, W., Baillien, E., De Witte, H., Vander Elst, T., & Godderis, L. (2016). The role of work stressors, coping strategies and coping resources in the process of workplace bullying: A systematic review and development of a comprehensive model. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 29, 61–71. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2016.06.004>
- Williams, K. D. (2007). Ostracism. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58, 425–452. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.58.110405.085641>
- Wilson, C. B. (1991). US businesses suffer from workplace trauma. *The Personnel Journal*, 70(7), 47–50.
- Zapf, D., Escartín, J., Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., & Varita, M. (2011). Empirical findings on prevalence and risk groups of bullying in the workplace. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf, & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and harassment in the workplace: Developments in theory, research, and practice* (pp. 75–105). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Zapf, D., & Gross, C. (2001). Conflict escalation and coping with workplace bullying: A replication and extension. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 10(4), 497–522. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13594320143000834>

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>