

**ABUSIVE SUPERVISION: A REVIEW OF THE SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION  
IN THE LAST 20 YEARS<sup>1</sup>**

***SUPERVISÃO ABUSIVA: UMA REVISÃO DA PRODUÇÃO CIENTÍFICA  
DOS ÚLTIMOS 20 ANOS***

***SUPERVISIÓN ABUSIVA: UNA REVISIÓN DE LA PRODUCCIÓN CIENTÍFICA DE LOS  
ÚLTIMOS 20 AÑOS***

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**ABSTRACT**

Abusive supervision (AS) expresses leadership actions recognized as hostile. This article addresses AS in organizational contexts based on a review of scientific production in the last twenty years. 67 theoretical-empirical studies were analyzed. We found eight specialized journals with publications since 2006, and 185 authors with research conducted in 83 countries. Tepper (2000) was the main reference indicated. Subordinates are the main source of data. The quantitative design was unanimous, presenting different data analysis techniques. Predominant theoretical and analytical models, more evident AS antecedents and consequences in the research are discussed.

**Keywords:** Abusive Supervision; Leadership; Systematic Review; Bullying.

**RESUMO**

A supervisão abusiva (SA) expressa ações de liderança reconhecida como hostil. Este artigo aborda a SA em contextos organizacionais, partindo de uma revisão da produção científica nos últimos vinte anos. Foram analisados 67 trabalhos teórico-empíricos. Encontramos 8 periódicos especializados com publicações a partir de 2006, e 185 autores com pesquisas conduzidas em 83 países. Tepper (2000) foi a principal referência indicada. A fonte principal dos dados são os subordinados. O delineamento quantitativo foi unânime, apresentando diferentes técnicas de análise dos dados. Modelos teóricos e analíticos predominantes, antecedentes e consequências de SA mais evidenciadas nas pesquisas são discutidos.

**Palavras-chave:** Supervisão Abusiva; Liderança; Revisão Sistemática; Bullying.

**RESUMEN**

La supervisión abusiva (SA) expresa acciones de liderazgo reconocida como hostil. Este artículo aborda la SA en contextos organizacionales, partiendo de una revisión de la producción científica en los últimos veinte años. Se analizaron 67 trabajos teórico-empíricos. Encontramos ocho periódicos especializados con publicaciones a partir de 2006, y 185 autores con investigaciones conducidas en 83 países. Tepper (2000) fue la principal referencia indicada. La fuente principal de los datos son los subordinados. La delineación cuantitativa fue unánime, presentando diferentes técnicas de análisis de los datos. Modelos teóricos y analíticos predominantes, antecedentes y consecuencias de SA más evidenciadas en las investigaciones son discutidos.

**Palabras clave:** Supervisión Abusiva; Liderazgo; Revisión Sistemática; Bullying.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Abusive supervision is one of the definitions used in the literature on organizational behavior to express a leadership action seen as hostile or destructive (TEPPER, 2000, 2007). Although history has already shown that leaders are not always an example and inspiration to reinforce higher values, worthy of a good group coexistence, it was only from the 2000s that researchers sought to understand this typical relationship between supervisors and subordinates in labor contexts (EINARSEN; AASLAND; SKOGSTAD, 2007; LIPMAN-BLUMEN, 2005; PADILLA; HOGAN; KAISER, 2007). The debate on abusive supervision focused on unveiling causal factors, on contexts conducive to its manifestation, and on the consequences that such destructive behavior can trigger in the organizational environment and social relationships (TEPPER, 2000, 2007).

In the international literature, abusive supervision has been a topic extensively explored in theoretical and theoretical-empirical studies, as we identified in our survey. These studies present abusive supervision concepts that show the specificities of the phenomenon, expressed in management relationships, its conditioning factors and their effects, checking models and measures of its manifestation, in addition to implications for interpersonal relationships and consequences for organizational results.

In Brazil, however, we observe that the topic under such destructive bias still has not been explicitly studied and debated in academia, despite the fact that it is recurring, nowadays, in different institutional and organizational contexts, public or private. Thus, what motivates us to address this topic is how much it can be expressed and practiced - without our perception - in the most different spheres of society, covering social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions that characterize modernity, and attacking today's values shared in different contexts that welcome us as professionals, workers and citizens. These harmful values are built and replicated within organizations, especially in management practices, under the justification of a limitless search for work rationalization, flexibility, efficiency, and productivity.

Based on these reflections, through this paper we seek to start a discussion on the topic, within the scope of organizational relationships, from the analysis of scientific

publications on abusive supervision (AS). To this end, we carried out a systematic literature review, covering the evaluation of empirical articles published in international scientific journals, in the last twenty years. We conducted the analysis based on pre-defined criteria that contributed to the initial exploration of the subject. In addition, the analysis helped approaching Brazilian reality to this discussion, in order to reinforce the academic debate on leadership and its related topics, and, in a broad way, to subsidize the organizational and administrative practices regarding the development of more sustainable and dignified environments and human bonds.

## **2 FROM LEADERSHIP TO ABUSIVE SUPERVISION: BASIC DEFINITIONS**

Leadership is a relational phenomenon that only happens in a group context, through the interactions between leader and followers; and the determinants that explain these interactions can result from different factors: individual, organizational, and environmental, observed when explaining their expressions and the ways they express themselves in action contexts (HEIFETZ, 1994; MINTZBERG, 2014; NORTHOUSE, 2016).

Among the discussions on the topic of leadership in organizational contexts is its relationship with management, the way it is configured as a practice, which actors play it, and its constitution as a dynamic process, its characteristics and expressions. Focus on the figure of the leader, director, or organizational executive is much present in the debates, as well as his role in the groups where he acts formally, in positions of management, supervision, or other forms of command (MINTZBERG, 2010, 2014).

In particular, a current approach in leadership studies is the leader's behavior, the means he uses to control his followers, and the personal forms and attitudes adopted in exercising power and authority. Some of these studies discuss and describe leadership as destructive, toxic, or abusive (ASHFORTH, 1994; EINARSEN et al., 2007; LIPMAN-BLUMEN, 2005; PADILLA et al., 2007; TEPPER, 2000). For Tepper (2000, 2007), one of the most quoted authors on the subject, subordinates perceive abusive supervision through the expression of hostile behaviors, verbal or non-verbal, by their leaders, with the exception of physical contact. It is, therefore, a subjective assessment expressed from the supervisor's action.

Although leaders may believe that abusive supervision has a positive impact on employees' performance (WATKINS; FEHR; HE, 2019) - including to increase their performance in order to prevent it (SHAO; LI; MAWRITZ, 2018) -, there are subsequent implications regarding these practices (WATKINS et al., 2019), which result in losses for the leader, subordinates, and the organization (AHMAD et al., 2019). From this perspective, much of the literature on abusive supervision examines the negative consequences arising from maltreatment associated with it (WHITMAN; HALBESLEBEN; HOLMES, 2014; FRIEDER; HOCHWARTER; DEORTENTIIS, 2015).

Studies on abusive supervision have expanded discussions around the number of harmful effects linked to this inappropriate behavior at the workplace (WHITMAN et al., 2014; PAN; LIN, 2018). Among them, they point out that maltreatment from abusive supervision results in employees' counterproductive behavior (JU; XU; QIN; SPECTOR, 2019; AHMAD et al. 2019; WATKINS et al., 2019), understood as a behavior that harms organizations and those who work there (JU et al., 2018). Employees may experience, for example, exhaustion and emotional distress (YUAN; XU; LI, 2018; SCHYNS; FELFE; SCHILLING, 2018); dissatisfaction, turnover intentions, reduced work effort (FRIEDER et al., 2015; KERNAN; RACICOT; FISHER, 2016); discouragement for sharing their knowledge (KIM; LEE; YUN, 2015), as well as work frustration and withdrawal of their organizational citizenship (AVEY; WU; HOLLEY, 2014). In these scenarios, such behaviors expand to family relationships and the personal lives of individuals, which can lead to states of depression, serious psychosomatic diseases, and, ultimately, suicide.

There are numerous approaches and perspectives on abusive supervision. In addition to its effects on the organizational environment, in terms of performance and hierarchical relationships, it also affects informal social interactions. The specialized literature mentions antecedent factors and externalities of abusive supervision that cross work relationships, leading to problems of adaptation and relationship, in other areas of people's social life. These studies were carried out by Breux, Perrewé, Hall, Frink, and Hochwater (2008), Brees, Mackey, Martinko, and Harvey (2014), Chi and Liang (2013), Han, Harms, and Bai (2017), Harris, Kacmar, and Zivnuska (2007), Kluemper et al. (2018), Lee, Kim, and Yun (2018), Lopes, Kamau, and Jaspal (2019), and Mackey et al. (2018).

Therefore, given the phenomenon's complexity, harmful to the dynamics of social and organizational contexts, which unveils as an underlying topic of the contradictory and paradoxical human relationships in modern society, which particularly affects different work environments, we start an exploratory process of study on what has been published on abusive supervision.

### **3 METHOD**

Systematic literature review covered 20 years of scientific production on the subject - between January 1989 and June 2019. We searched international journals, and considered the following inclusion criteria: full texts of academic journals published during that period, peer-reviewed, and available in PDF format, showing in the title the descriptor (exact expression) 'Abusive Supervision'.

The search at CAPES Journal Portal, a database used to track publications (restricted access through a public university terminal), resulted in 275 articles. From then on, we selected journals with Brazilian Qualis (2013-2016) classification A1 and A2 for the Management area, and Impact Factor (JCR 2018) higher than 1.4. The application of these criteria resulted in the following international journals: Management Decision Leadership Quarterly, Journal of Organizational Behavior, Journal of Managerial Psychology, Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, Journal of Business Ethics, Human Relations, and Frontiers in Psychology. In such journals, we found 73 articles on abusive supervision.

In a second stage of the systematic review process, we excluded from the set of publications texts in the form of editorials, review articles, repeated articles, and revision articles or meta-analyses. This resulted in a list of 67 articles, which served as a basis for the preparation of this review paper. Next, we read and analyzed the articles under the following criteria:

a) Regarding their identification: journal, country of publication/authors, and date of publication; journal's impact factor;

b) Regarding the methodology adopted in the study: sources of collected data (subordinates, supervisors, or both); research design (quantitative or qualitative); methods of data collection and analysis; sample size; definition of control variables, etc;

c) Regarding concepts and other specificities of the topic 'abusive supervision', we considered antecedents, behavioral expressions and consequences/effects of the phenomenon, in addition to theoretical or theoretical-empirical models used in the studies (framework), either original or replicated/validated.

We considered the criteria for description and analysis, adopted in the systematic review, as a means of orientation for an initial exploration of the subject, aiming at a future deepening of studies on abusive supervision in the Brazilian context. We expect to contribute, in a strict way, to the academic discussion on leadership and its forms of expression in different organizational environments; and, more broadly, to the social interactions that involve the Brazilian society as a whole.

## **4 RESULTS**

### **4.1 IDENTIFICATION AND GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDIES**

From the criteria adopted in this systematic literature review, the first set of collected data refers to the general identification of the researched studies. Thus, Table 1 presents the number of articles found in each international journal covered by this review, as well as their Qualis classification (2013-2016) and the impact factor by the Journal Citation Reports (JCR - 2018). Qualis is a Brazilian official system with the purpose of classifying scientific production.

Table 1 - Journals' Description

Journal	Papers	Qualis	JCR
Management Decision	3	A1	1.963
Leadership Quarterly	15	A1	5.631
Journal of Organizational Behavior	13	A1	5.000
Journal of Managerial Psychology	7	A1	1.415
Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies	7	A2	1.597
Journal of Business Ethics	17	A1	3.796
Human Relations	2	A1	3.367
Frontiers in Psychology	3	A2	2.129
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	-	-

Source: literature review.

Among the journals that we found with studies on abusive supervision, we highlight the publications related to organizational behavior, much associated with the topics of leadership and ethics. These references support the articulation of AS, especially with studies that link leadership to the person of the leader, the one who exercises the commanding role of the group or organization.

In Table 2, we mention the authors of the analyzed papers, ranked by frequency of publication in the referred journals.

Table 2 - Publications' authors

Author or co-author	Freq.	Author or co-author	Freq.
Mackey, J. D.	7	Decoster, S.	2
Harvey, P.	6	Eissa, G.	2
Martinko, M. J.	5	Euwema, M.	2
Brees, J. R.	4	He, W.	2
Hochwarter, W. A.	4	Huang, L.	2
Camps, J.	3	Huang, X.	2
Harms, P. D.	3	Kim, S. L.	2
Harris, K. J.	3	Lam, C. K.	2
Lee, S.	3	Lester, S. W.	2
Mawritz, M. B.	3	Perrewé, P. L.	2
McAllister, C. P.	3	Resick, C. J.	2
Stouten, J.	3	Restubog, S. L. D.	2
Yun, S.	3	Shao, P.	2
Avey, J. B.	2	Author/co-author with single publication	158
<b>Total (N of different authors)</b>			<b>185</b>

Source: literature review.

Mackey, Harvey and Martinko are the three authors with more publications between 1989 and 2019. Most papers (65 out of 67) have at least one co-author. We also noticed



that most authors published just once, increasing the diversity of researchers involved with the topic.

In Table 3, we ranked the articles by year of publication, showing the amount of publications for each year.

Table 3 - Year of publication

Year	Freq.	Year	Freq.
From 1989 to 2005	0	2013	7
2006	1	2014	6
2007	2	2015	4
2008	1	2016	7
2009	1	2017	6
2011	2	2018	18
2012	6	Until Jun/2019	6
<b>Total</b>		<b>67</b>	

Source: literature review.

It is interesting to stress, as shown in Table 3, that the topic of abusive supervision practically only appears in the literature in 2006, achieving focus as of 2012. The year 2018 concentrated the largest number of publications in a single year (18).

With emphasis on the origin of the studies published during the chosen period, we sought to identify the country that carried out each research. It is important to mention that some studies involved more than one country, so their total number (83) exceeds the total number of articles analyzed (67).

From the data on the origin of the studies, the United States (40) and China (13) appear as leaders in research on abusive supervision, concentrating almost two thirds of the publications analyzed. This finding draws attention if we relate it to the socioeconomic and political characteristics of the two countries, and to the complex relationship they have kept over time.

Still regarding the description of countries with studies on abusive supervision - even if in a much lower number than the United States and China - we find Canada, South Korea,

and Taiwan, with 4 papers; Belgium and India, with 3; and Germany and Australia with 2 articles. Finally, in countries like Singapore, the Philippines, France, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, and Romania, we found only one article published in each of them.

#### 4.2 METHODS OF THE ANALYZED STUDIES

In terms of methodological characteristics, all empirical articles examined used quantitative designs (for data collection and analysis). The methods and instruments for data collection were adapted from Tepper (2000), including that of Mitchell and Ambrose (2007), who presented, based on Tepper (2000), a reduced scale with 5 items. We highlight that the behavioral expressions of abusive supervision that prevail in the studies are essentially those indicated by this author, who recognizes it as the consistent display of verbal and non-verbal hostile behaviors, excluding physical contact (TEPPER, 2000). It is a scale that describes 15 abusive behaviors of the immediate manager, allowing the choice of 5 frequency options for the behavior in question (ranging from “I don't remember this behavior from him/her” to “he/she shows this behavior with me very often”).

Therefore, a pertinent questioning regards the fact that the literature on AS is based almost exclusively on results from a self-reported “pencil and paper” scale, with only 15 items. It is likely that other ways of recording the occurrence of AS - such as direct observation, reports from other sources, experimentation, etc. – could overcome any limited picture of the phenomenon.

As for the sources of data collection mentioned in the publications, in most cases subordinates were the survey respondents. In 15 studies data came from both subordinates and supervisors; no study considered only the supervisor as a source; and 52 studies addressed only subordinates to study abusive supervision. This observation made us think about the potential acceptance of a hostile behavior from the supervision, in studies on the subject. For example, by advocating the subordinates' logic, studies seem to legitimize the classic idea that the supervisor is someone who must act with rigor, domination, authoritarianism, and hostility. Thus, it explains approaching those who suffer such

attitudes, in order to get perceptions on the phenomenon, since for the supervisor it is a natural attitude, and he does not realize that it is an abusive relationship with subordinates.

Regarding the methods of data analysis (Table 4), consistent with the quantitative design of the survey, we used the following procedures: descriptive statistical techniques (frequencies, means, standard deviations, correlations); factor analysis (main components analysis and confirmatory analysis); variance analysis (Anova and Manova); regression (linear and multiple, hierarchical linear model, trail analysis, and mediation and moderation tests); structural equation modeling; and other methods like Chi<sup>2</sup> and T-test.

Table 4 - Data analysis methods

Methods	Frequency
Descriptive statistics only	7
Factor analysis	27
Analysis of variance	11
Regression	44
Structural equation modeling (SEM)	11
Others (Chi <sup>2</sup> , t-test)	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>

Source: literature review.

The most used method in the reviewed papers, in addition to descriptive and correlational statistics (frequency, mean, standard deviation, correlation between variables), was regression, which allowed establishing relationships between abusive supervision and other variables, as well as establishing predictors and consequences of the phenomenon. Factor analysis was also widely used, often as the first stage of analysis, for validating the data collection instruments. Structural equations modeling, although less used, proved to be robust for the design of complex models that conceived, for example, antecedents and consequences of abusive supervision.

Regarding the relationship among variables, specifically in the reviewed articles, almost all models of analysis that conceived causal relationships (predictors of abusive supervision or its consequences on other variables) included control variables. The most frequent were gender, education level and age (of supervisor and subordinate); exchanges between leader and subordinate (leader-member exchange); position in organizational

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hierarchy; time in position (organizational/team tenure, or tenure with supervisor); personality traits; team size; and variables related to the perception of abusive supervision and justice.

We also highlight that some articles addressed combined research (2 or 3 studies in the same paper). In most cases, these studies were carried out in different countries, or were distinct research stages or designs (such as an instrument validation study, and another for data collection on abusive supervision, or one descriptive study and another explanatory). Still, among them only a few showed results of longitudinal collection, making it difficult to establish cause-effect relationships. The size of the samples, although representative in almost all articles, varied considerably from one study to another. Typically, samples involved a few hundred participants (most of them between 200 and 600 people).

#### 4.3 THEMATIC DISCUSSION

As for the conceptual elements related to abusive supervision, present in the articles of this systematic review, we adopted, as one of the analysis criteria, checking whether the authors used theoretical or theoretical-empirical models already developed or validated (frameworks) to guide their research, or if they had created their own analytical models. Hence, we observed that, for data analysis, most articles did not show new models (about 1/4 of them), using frameworks already validated by the specific literature. Among the most used theoretical models, we highlight the following:

- Tepper's model (2000, 2007), which introduces and discusses the concept of abusive supervision;
- Conservation of Resources Theory (COR), a stress theory proposed by Stevan E. Hobfoll in 1989, which describes individuals' motivation to keep their current resources and search new ones (defined as things that are valued, specifically objects, status, and conditions);

- Control-Demand Model, proposed by Robert Karasek in 1979, also an occupational stress model that advocates that stress is an answer to the balance between individual's demands and the resources (or control) that he has for dealing with them;
- Social Exchange Theory, which studies the social behavior in the interaction of two parties that implement a cost-benefit analysis to determine risks and benefits; it suggests that if the costs of interaction are higher than the rewards, this could lead to problems (CROPANZANO; MITCHELL, 2005);
- Leader-member Exchange Theory, which refers to the daily relationship between the leader and his subordinates, observing the different treatment between them, because there are unique relationships one by one, with each person who reports to the leader (DULEBOHN et al., 2012);
- Social Identity Theory, described as a theory that anticipates certain behaviors among groups, based on the perceived differences of group's status, on the legitimacy and stability observed in such differences, and in the perceived ability to move from one group to another (TAJFEL; TURNER, 1986).

Another interesting aspect is that variables that relate to abusive supervision are mostly concentrated on the characteristics that concern the subordinate (victim), such as behavioral reactions, emotional regulation, and the victim's perception about the abuser or the abuse. These topics, together, were present in more than half of the reviewed publications.

Following the analysis criteria on the content of publications, we present the variables (grouped by topics) indicated as antecedents of abusive supervision, in the publications that included this element in their analysis models. The most addressed themes were personality traits, both the supervisor's and the subordinate's (dominance, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and anger as a trait). Other antecedents were also mentioned:

- The negative affection or negative emotions between the supervisor and the subordinate(s);

- The subordinate’s bad performance at work, from the supervisor’s (abuser) perspective;
- Questions related to the supervisor’s emotional regulation (including self-control, emotional exhaustion);
- The perception of interactional or interpersonal (in)justice;
- The pressure for performance or work overload, in addition to other antecedents such as assignment style (causal locus), supervisor’s social self-effectiveness, subordinate’s low self-esteem, and supervisor’s family issues.

Finally, according to the established analysis criteria, Exhibit 1 presents the variables (grouped by topics) indicated in the publications as consequences of abusive supervision.

Exhibit 1 - Consequences of abusive supervision

Description of consequence	Authors
Knowledge sharing among subordinates	Kim et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2018; Wu, & Lee, 2016
Organizational commitment (including organizational citizenship, proactivity, loyalty, and work effort)	Ahmad, et al., 2019; Frieder et al., 2015; Gregory, Osmonbekov, Gregory, Albritton, & Carr, 2013; Mawritz, Folger, & Latham, 2014; Ogunfowora, 2013; Schyns et al., 2018; Shao et al., 2018; Vogel et al., 2015; Xu, Zhang, & Chan, 2019; Zhao, Gao, & Liu, 2018.
Work x family conflict	Carlson, Ferguson, Hunter, & Whitten, 2012; Wu, Kwan, Liu, & Resick, 2012.
Creativity/innovation	Han et al., 2017; Jiang, & Gu, 2016; Lee, Yun, & Srivastava, 2013; Liu, Zhang, Liao, Hao, & Mao, 2016; Zheng, & Liu, 2017; Rousseau, & Aubé, 2018.
Performance (of the subordinate) at work	Harris et al., 2007; Kernan et al., 2016; Mawritz et al., 2014; Xu, Huang, Lam, & Miao, 2012.
Termination from work (including leave, intentions to terminate, and search for work)	Agarwal, 2019; Chi, & Liang, 2013; Frieder et al., 2015; Haggard, & Park, 2018; Harvey, Stoner, Hochwarter, & Kacmar, 2007; Palanski, Avey, & Jiraporn, 2014; Schyns et al., 2018.
Perception (trust in supervisor, work frustration, interactional justice, perception of supervisor’s ethics, felt violation)	Avey et al., 2015; Haggard, & Park, 2018; Kernan et al., 2016; Ogunfowora, 2013; Vogel et al., 2015.
Behavioral reactions (alcohol use and abuse, organizational aggression, bullying toward work colleagues, counterproductive behavior, deviating behaviors, gossip, feedback avoidance, hostility, negative reactions, silencing)	Brees et al., 2014; Decoster, Camps, Stouten, Vandevyvere, & Tripp, 2013; Ju et al., 2019; Kluemper et al., 2018; Lopes et al., 2019; Mackey, Brees et al., 2018; Mawritz et al., 2014; Park, Carter, DeFrank, & Deng, 2018; Shao, Resick, & Hargis, 2011; Schyns et al., 2018; Wang, Harms, & Mackey, 2015; Whitman et al., 2014; Yuan et al., 2018.
Emotional regulation (self-effectiveness, self-esteem, tension, stress, emotional exhaustion)	Agarwal, 2019; Breaux et al., 2008; Chi, & Liang, 2013; Carlson et al., 2012; Frieder et al., 2015; Haggard, & Park, 2018; Han et al., 2017; Harvey, et

Description of consequence	Authors
	al., 2007; Jiang, & Gu, 2016; Liu, Zhang, Liao, Hao, & Mao, 2016; Lopes et al., 2019; Mackey, Huang, & He, 2018; Park et al., 2018; Whitman et al., 2014; Wu, & Lee, 2016; Yuan et al., 2018; Zheng, & Liu, 2017.
Satisfaction (well-being, work satisfaction – of supervisor and subordinate)	Decoster et al., 2013; Haggard, & Park, 2018; Jiang, & Gu, 2016; Kim, Atwater, Latheef, & Zheng, 2018; Liu et al., 2016; Lopes et al., 2019; Ogunfowora, 2013; Zhao et al., 2018.

Source: literature review.

In addition to the described topics, there are other effects addressed in the studies that result from abusive supervision. They relate to organizational ethics, organizational identification, quality of the relationship between supervisor and subordinate, paranoia, subordinate's physical health issues, supervisor's remorse, and psychological safety (DECOSTER et al., 2013; HAGGARD; PARK, 2018; JIANG; GU, 2016; KIM et al., 2018; LIU et al., 2016; LOPES et al., 2019; OGUNFOWORA, 2013; ZHAO et al., 2018). Such issues draw attention and arouse interest of behavior and management scholars, in view of the individual and collective crises of current times, which challenge legitimized systems, showing their weaknesses and contradictions, as well as dominant political and economic models. Above all, they challenge relationships in society and organizations, weakening them more and more, and making people's "place" disappear, as protagonists and assistants of this dynamics, at the same time.

## CONCLUSIONS

The liquid and complex relationships of the contemporary world (BAUMAN, 2001) strongly affect human bonds, in general, and intra-organizational interactions, in particular, due to disputes over space that a context of structural instability, uncertainties, and insecurity has created, especially in the work environment. Hierarchical relationships of control and authority are among the interactions affected by a social reality that is supported by the transience and superficiality of standards and purposes. Under the logic of search for efficiency and effectiveness, in the first place, they cause harmful - or perverse - effects on the dynamics of the "supervisor-subordinate" relationship.

Enriquez (1997, p. 23) argues that, despite announcing that the individual is at the center and protagonist of the potential changes of our time, he is increasingly trapped in the meshes of organizations, and hampered in his way of thinking. To the author, it is not

impossible for an individual, under certain conditions, to create history, to be autonomous, to assume as a subject of change processes in his operating environments. The issue is that the advertisements for him to assume such protagonism serve, in fact, to make him believe in his autonomy, but entangled with the subtleties of the organizational limits of his work. In this perspective, the author sees the strategic structure of organizations as a far-fetched trap that guides individuals' actions according to approaches that, paradoxically, suggest a collective effort, without recognizing them outside the group that accepts and obeys norms, while stimulating individual effort.

It is in this controversial and contradictory context of current organizations' environment that social interactions are built, based on competition, hostilities - often harmful - expressed under speeches of efficiency and effectiveness, or performances that make use of power and control games between chiefs and subordinates, in order to demonstrate magnificence, brands, and successful attitudes.

At a time when organizational relationships are tied to strategic structure, the chief no longer commands, but persuades, encourages, and plays with appearances. This figure, while using seduction and charisma as a form of control over his peers or subordinates, assumes a role that is little aligned with everybody's expectations on the most appropriate way to build and lead work relationships (ENRIQUEZ, 1997).

Imbued with these ideas, we sought to address in this article an approach controversial to what is traditionally associated with principles and ideals of a supervisor (or leader), based on the expectation of a constructive role towards reality and organizations' objectives. It is the abusive supervision approach, also identified in the literature as destructive or toxic leadership, which expresses a hostile or destructive attitude by a leader or supervisor. Abusive supervision has aroused our interest precisely because of the contradictions and paradoxes that we have faced in recent times, when discussing the "absence of leadership"; and, at the same time, the prominence of leadership profiles that challenge management models considered better or positive for the new times of society and organizations.



Given that the topic of abusive supervision stands out in international studies, but still has some limitation in Brazilian research, we decided to conduct a systematic literature review of qualified publications that could bring us closer to foreign scientific production, showing general aspects addressed by researchers in their theoretical and empirical debates on the subject.

When retrieving some research findings, the origin of the papers drew our attention. They come mainly from the United States – a much higher number than all other countries – followed by China. If we remember the turbulent scenario of international relations – especially political and economic - that involves both nations, we asked ourselves if we could associate the interest and proliferation of research on abusive supervision, in some way, to the new work configurations and competitive productive systems that characterize the complex relationship between the two countries. In addition, the year with the largest number of published articles was 2018, when there was a crisis in their relationship, especially the “trade war” marked by the imposition of commercial tariffs on Chinese imports. However, despite the concentration of studies in the American territory, academic production on abusive supervision is distributed in all continents, with emphasis on the Eastern countries, during the period 2006- 2019, according to the findings of our survey.

In terms of the topics associated with the abusive supervision debate, we observed in the studies a relationship with themes addressed in other theories that analyze attributes and effects of human interactions, in addition to leadership and social identity. Also discussed in the publications are antecedent elements (predictors) and consequences of abusive supervision on the subordinate-supervisor relationship, with emphasis on personality traits of both, as specificities that disclose the phenomenon in the work context. In this regard, we draw attention to the diversity of consequences of abusive supervision present in the studies, ranging from socio-emotional reactions of subordinates, individually, and in different spheres of their lives, through effects on the behavior of the supervisor himself, to the externalities associated with the link and performance of both, which produce consequences at the organizational level.

As for the methodology, all the studies analyzed were quantitative and used statistical procedures, both for data collection and analysis. Therefore, these descriptive

papers focused on the phenomenon, according to the logic of subordinates (the population of all articles). This finding also made us reflect on the reasons for such methodological prevalence: would it be associated with an easier access to data? Were there any restrictions or constraints for discussing the topic with supervisors? Is there an acceptance or legitimation, from a historical conception, that the attitudes of a leader/supervisor "can" or "should" - given his 'place' and role in the relationship - be guided by the autonomy and self-sufficiency of a position or a function that requires attitudes free from eventual judgments? Therefore, is there any sense in trying to involve this actor in the debate?

Such questionings, stimulated by the other results of the study, reveal how much we can still elaborate on the topic of abusive supervision (or leadership), not only in the context of organizational interactions, but in social relationships at all levels. We saw different gaps that can stimulate new efforts to unveil the phenomenon and, in doing so, contribute to improve human interactions, helping to build healthier and more balanced relationships. From this first approach to abusive supervision, we dare to propose and encourage deeper qualitative studies that may reveal and explain much of what we are experiencing in organizations and in the Brazilian society nowadays. They should be based on individual, organizational, and social determinants that are leading to toxic behaviors and relationships, which destroy the journey towards a more just and solidary society.

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