

The Dark Side of Leadership: A Qualitative Review on Leadership Fostering Workplace Toxicity

Sanjana Menon

Christ University

Bengaluru

<sanjana.menon@res.christuniversity.in>

Smita Kavatekar

Christ University

Bengaluru

<sanjana.menon@res.christuniversity.in>

Abstract

Toxic leadership is an issue that affects different organizations around the world in a very adverse manner due to behaviors such as micromanagement, narcissism, authoritarianism, and passive leadership, which are all unhealthy. Such behaviors create detrimental workplace settings, leading to low employee well-being, trust, and productivity. This qualitative literature review attempts to determine how and when specific leadership styles deemed reckless manifest, their effects on employees and organizational culture, and the reasons that encourage such behaviors at the end of the hierarchy. The results indicated that in addition to the above, toxic leaders also create a power differential, encourage emotional and psychological abuse, and reduce trust and openness in the workplace. Specific components of social learning theory and psychological contract theory are also used to understand how workplace culture and individual behaviors are adversely affected by toxic leadership. The review also identifies important areas for improvement in research, including very few comprehensive approaches to dealing with toxicity in organizations. The current study emphasizes the necessity of instilling accountability in both leadership and organizational structures as a way of combating toxic leadership and the impacts it may have in the long run toward creating healthier and more diverse workplaces.

Keywords: *Toxic Leadership, Workplace Toxicity, Leadership Styles & Employee Well-being*

Introduction

A young graduate full of zeal lands a job in a good organization for the first time. With time, the exhilaration wears off, and anxiety takes its place. Mornings are filled with apprehension and evenings with sheer tiredness, not because of too much work but because of the unyielding shadow of their leader. The leader started to micromanage the minutest of activities, beat down on even the slightest of errors, and receive accolades for achievements; the workplace transformed from a collaboration space to one of fear and competition. This narrative is not an exaggerated single event but rather chronicled events of a more significant issue that exists and is very common in many workplaces around the globe- toxic leadership. In a perfect world, leadership is expected to uplift and encourage. On the contrary, when the leaders misuse their position, or worse still, do not uphold ethical leadership, such leaders become toxic and create wretched conditions in which workers are demoralized, unappreciated, and unencouraged. Toxicity in the workplace is an issue that many

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organizations face, regardless of the level of the employees. It has a complex and multifaceted nature and can be difficult to perceive while affecting the mental and physical state of the individual to a great extent. A toxic work environment can cause stress, anxiety, and burnout, which can, in turn, reduce efficiency and morale and lead to medical complications. (Boye & Grönlund, 2018) Toxicity in the workplace is the unhealthy and detrimental atmosphere one must endure in a fit-for-purpose environment. It comprises several types, including, but not limited to, acts such as harassment, bullying, discrimination, and instilling fear and aggression in others. Such a menace could be from workmates, a superior, or the establishment itself. (Delios et al., 2021) The issue of toxicity in the workplace as a concern in an individual's life and profession cannot be disregarded. It may also provoke specific physical and mental health issues like anxiety disorders, universal depression, and even post-traumatic stress disorder. Furthermore, such toxic environments may also lead to unfavorable situations, such as high absenteeism, high employee turnover, and low productivity. (Wang & Brower, 2019)

Besides these internal effects, workplace toxicity may also greatly disrupt an employee's upward mobility. Most of them tend to operate on a system of semblance of hierarchy, which is based on favoritism and supporters. This leads to unequal distribution of resources, unfair practices, no appreciation, and, most importantly, a lack of chances for promotion. Furthermore, straight-talking against toxic practices within the work environment is neither encouraged nor appreciated, and those who try to do it suffer punishment consequences that derail their career development. In addition, employees facing toxicity in occupational settings may find it challenging to maintain an equilibrium between work and family commitments (Kurniawaty et al., 2019). The stress and tension experienced because of a toxic work setting can overflow into their personal life, resulting in problems with friendships and other interests such as sports or leisure activities. This then leads to further adverse effects on their mental and physical well-being. To sum up, work toxicity can be that silent cancer to one's career as well as existence. Many workplaces experience it as a social evil and thus, it needs great attention (Pratama, 2019)

Everyone has experienced circumstances that made working difficult due to the strains and stressors, resulting in self-esteem issues. We then try to reason out what the problem is. Ultimately, the blame falls on the environment and work culture, but hold on; is it just an unfavorable setting? What happens when some leaders, who portray themselves as toxic leaders, turn out to be extremely intolerable by nature and the ways that they end up damaging us more than we were when we encountered them? These leaders are toxic and have worked to ensure that no organization they have worked for remains the same (Anjum et al., 2018). There is extensive literature on the topic, but it does not necessarily equate toxic leadership with mental illness, wickedness, or the lack of managerial skill. That being said, its leadership acts may be considered constructive types of leadership behaviors that can undermine the motivation and effectiveness of the subordinate in every way possible (Narasuci et al., 2018) Even if passive employees decide to adhere to a toxic leader, in case the work situation is unfavorable and it is the leaders/supervisors who propagate the toxicity, more often than not the employees will look for ways to deal with the toxic nature of the work environment (Audenaert et al., 2021) Coping strategies frequently have long-term effects including those negative in nature causing more serious health problems associated with toxic leadership Furthermore, toxic leadership incites three common reactions from followers, which are assertion, avoidance, and adaptation. (Bangwal & Tiwari, 2019).

Literature Review

Toxic leadership assumes different forms and has serious repercussions for the culture of the workplace. Effective leadership is one of the themes most propagated toward understanding why

some organizations do better than others. It is responsible not only for the organization's strategic vision but also for its employees' work climate and experiences. Most of the literature depicts leadership in a rosy light, focusing on transformational and servant leadership that seeks to motivate and uplift individuals as they lead them. However, a rather dark and equally important counterpart exists in toxic leadership. This concept still borders on the fringe in leadership studies and includes all the harmful behaviors, attitudes, and even practices designed to or eventually cause mistrust and hinder teamwork, where such is essential for the organization's health.

Authoritarian leadership: Toxicity is neither a new phenomenon nor a new concept. It is, we argue, developing in practice, which calls for a re-evaluation of the construct. We maintain that evolution is principally the impact of the changes in our communication environment and the other associated technologies (de Hoogh et al., 2015). High control over subordinates is attributed to the Authoritarian leadership style (Chiang, 2020). Typically, authority abuse is a trait that authoritarian leaders embrace because such organizational structures guarantee the subordination of the followers. (de Hoogh, 2015). On the other hand, leaders who embody these leadership styles tend to distort the power structure and minimize and emphasize the distance between them and their subordinates (Schaubroeck, 2017). It has been documented that leaders who impose rules expect their followers to reach impossible goals and comply with the regulations (Karthik Sivashankar, 2021). However, these guiding principles of leadership do not readily suggest that they are conducive to creating a positive work environment or enhancing performance levels (Shen, 2019). According to Lipman-Blumen, toxic leadership is described as “a process whereby a leader’s destructive actions and/or personality traits causes serious and enduring injury not just to his or her subordinates and their organizations, but also to anyone who comes into contact with the leader” Building on this definition, Asha Bhandarker and Snigdha Rai report that “leader can be labeled as toxic if their actions towards their subordinates have physically or psychologically impaired them and causes lasting damage to the subordinates.” (Bhandarker et al. 2019). Birol Baskan notes three key components to this toxic form of leadership: a disinterest in the welfare of the subordinates, a personality or management style damaging to the corporation, and a perception among subordinate employees that their boss behaves in a self-serving manner. In light of all these factors opposing popularly accepted views on effective leadership, toxic leadership can be seen as ineffective leadership coupled with abusive behavior. In other words, poisonous leadership involves asinine abuse in leadership. Hence, towards the extreme spectrum of definition, such behavior, strictly speaking, is not leadership. (Baskan, B, 2020). **Narcissistic Leadership** : Perhaps narcissism can be viewed as a behavioral and stylistic feature prevalent among senior managers. It has indeed been shown to affect the psych of the subordinates, leading to undesired reactions and behavior such as cynicism, job dissatisfaction, disengagement, and intent to leave (Alhasnawi and Abbas, 2021). Recent investigations have also provided evidence for the prevalence of narcissistic leadership in predominantly collectivistic cultures (Weng, 201). Work carried out within the 20s revolved around the practice that Freud formulated, seen by most leaders as therapeutic in nature, most of such leaders have encountered patients with some personalities. Since then, many scholars have attempted to portray an understanding of why and how narcissism influences individuals who lead. There are also modern scholars who provide evidence for the truthfulness of other claims that supportive narcissists are overstrained individuals who view themselves with more regard than is usual therefore more are inclined to take up leadership positions. In this connection (De Vries and Miller, 1985) studied whether the effectiveness and dysfunctionality of leaders could be explained by their narcissistic traits and found that leaders differ in their narcissistic traits behaviorally. The concept of “narcissistic leadership” was first introduced by (Rosenthal and Pittinsky, 2006), and these researchers noticed that narcissist leaders are motivated by their own needs and aspirations, with the former

outweighing the goals of the organization. Still, the new generation which fills the modern workplaces has its share of deplorable features which need not be overlooked. They are said to be self-centered, showing an exhibition of feelings which is counterproductive in a team work environment. They are skilled performers but lack a sense of loyalty, especially in positions of power. **Micromanaging Leadership:** Micromanagement is a straightforward phenomenon whereby excessive control is exercised by a manager over the activities, responsibilities and decision making of their subordinate employees (Ryan and Cross, 2023). In a usual scenario, micromanagement is a phenomenon whereby a manager goes into detail about the inner-workings of the processes (Gardanova et al, 2019), usually impeding an employee's independence and self-assertiveness towards work (Cho, 2017). This managerial style usually does not only take place in the overseeing of how the work is done, but also in the dictation of how, when and why the work should be done and how the particular approach should be preferred over others while it intervenes continuously in order to comply with that preference of approach. As explained by Lee, Kim, and (Kang, 2021), it is the intense management of even trivial aspects of employees' work such as task execution, activity performance, and decision processes that constitutes micromanagement. Micromanagers tend to excessively instruct the employees on the proper way of completing an assignment. The excessive direction may involve stating the steps, procedures, and time frames in which one is supposed to work. This allows minimal or no breathing space for the workers to exercise their independence or even judgement. Lee, Kim and (Kang, 2021) showed that providing an employee with extensive task guidelines is inversely proportional to performance and autonomy of the concerned laborers, in most cases diminishing the workers' ownership and drive. Micromanagers engage in constant monitoring and surveillance of employees' activities. Supervisors check if the employees are working, ask for regular updates on their progress and watch the employees as they work. Lurie and (McCraw, 2020) in their study analyzed a condition of constant monitoring of employees and its effect on employees' stress and well-being and considered micromanagement as detrimental to the mental health and stability of employees. **Passive Leadership:** As (Bank, 2016) noticed, there are leaders who expect subordinates to complete all tasks as per the assigned job, but such leaders do nothing to supervise the employees while they are executing their work towards meeting the organizational objectives. In the opinion of (Busola Oluwafemi, 2019) Leaders also perform their duties but without giving guidance and coordination to the employees thus leaving them to devise their own methodology and approaches on how to accomplish the tasks and evaluating them haphazardly as they deem fit without any clear cut standards. This type of leadership can be defined as leaders who care less about the working of their subordinates. There is a boredom or laziness aspect that seems to characterize those in authority and this entails what is referred to as passive leadership. Forms of passive leadership can be characterized by behavior patterns like indecisiveness, avoidance of conflicts or difficult situations, and lack of positive reinforcement in the organization. This kind of leader is referred to as a passive leader, when the leader has no problem in allowing the employees work without regular checks on them, as well as giving the employees full control over work-related decision making. As proposed by (Smith and colleagues, 2016) passive leadership incorporates Management By Exception Passive and laissez-faire leadership styles. Management By Exception Passive is the type of leadership which members of the team probe the issue after mending the existing threats (Moreno-Casada, 2022). Hence, this type of a leader does not prevent problems from even arising but directs his/her efforts in solving problems that have already occurred; where clearly problem prevention would be less costly because the organization would not have to deal with high level threatening issues. As opined by (Sow and Aborbie, 2018) this style of leadership places less emphasis on leadership and more on collective decision-making and gives the led group area goals and methodologies. Nevertheless, in certain instances, the

laissez-faire approach to leadership may create a sense of disorganization and helplessness within individuals, as they are not provided with enabling structures of authority and direction.

Research gap

There are many gaps in the existing literature on toxic leadership. Most of the research fails to capture how HR policies favor toxic leaders at the expense of employees' complaints, encouraging a culture of impunity. The psychological, emotional, and career consequences of toxic leadership for employees are also underexplored in terms of how they evolve over time. While much research has analyzed individual toxic behaviors, the broader organizational culture that enables and tolerates them—most notably through structural issues relating to lack of accountability and rigid hierarchies—remains largely unexplored. Finally, the lack of all-embracing intervention frameworks is conspicuous; such frameworks would provide a cultural-psychological-systemic perspective to address and prevent toxic leadership while reinforcing accountability and ethical practices.

Research Objectives

The primary purpose of this paper is to:

To explore the toxic behaviors and styles of leadership that contribute to workplace toxicity.

To identify the impact of toxic leadership on employees and organizational culture.

To understand the themes of toxic leadership styles.

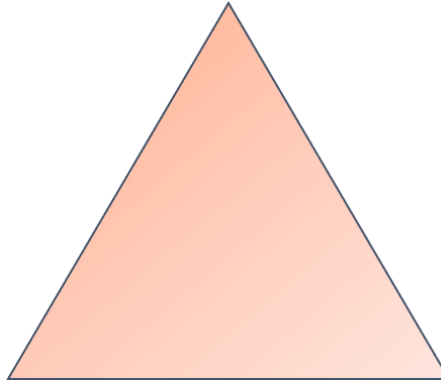
To highlight the future scope and propose directions for mitigating toxic leadership through cultural and systemic change.

Research Methodology

The qualitative review methodology outlined in this paper explores the phenomenon of toxic leadership and its effects on workplace relationships. This entails a very detailed analysis of existing scholarly literature to identify and synthesize key findings about toxic leadership behaviors and their implications for employees and the organization. The study stands on two main theoretical frameworks: Social Learning Theory, which explains how toxic behaviors are observed, modeled, and perpetuated within organizations, and Psychological Contract Theory, which deepens thinking about breaches of spoken and unspoken agreements between employees and employers when discontent and disengagement ensue. It conducts a thematic analysis that allows one to trace some of the themes occurring in toxic leadership, such as opposition to power and emotional and psychological abuse, as well as erosion of trust, thus promoting their well-being to a company level. This multifaceted approach allows a broad perspective concerning the complexity of toxic leadership and the system changes that would ameliorate its effects.

Theoretical Framework

Toxic Leadership



Destructive Environment

susceptible followers

Toxic Leaders: Leaders with narcissistic, authoritarian, or manipulative tendencies.

Destructive Environments: Organizational settings that encourage or tolerate toxic behaviors (e.g., lack of accountability, rigid hierarchies).

Susceptible Followers: Employees who are either conformers (obey due to fear or dependency) or colluders (enable toxic behaviors for personal gain)

Social Learning Theory: Albert Bandura’s social learning theory provides tools for understanding how leadership practices become part of the behaviour of the organization as a whole. Learning in this instance is described as observation, imitation and modeling. When subordinates witness forms of leader behaviour such as manipulation, intimidation or autocracy within an organisation, they will more than likely exhibit these same tendencies, be it as a coping strategy or otherwise, a learned behaviour. Their tendencies however can develop beyond a mere influence but rather pathogens capable of infecting the entire organizational culture. For illustration, it has been confirmed that employees who have witnessed or been victims of toxic leadership, exhibit higher levels of unhealthy behaviours commonly referred to as workplace deviance which spreads among different individuals within the organization like a virus (Mayer et al, 2009.) According to the Social Learning Theory, dysfunctional leadership behaviors such as abusive power, psychological harassment, or negative feedback deprivation are learned and modeled by the employees. If their leaders have a domineering way or favor certain subordinates, the subordinates see such people as role models for poor behavior. Employees also mimic these behaviors for coping or consider them as accepted behaviors by the organization. For example, an employee might see a manager's bizarre micromanagement or rejection of feedback and then internalize such thinking as the behavior that should be emulated within the company. Eventually, with the learning of such behavior, it becomes spread among teams, building a culture of distrust, defensiveness, and low morale. The Social Learning Theory explains that the action taken by the leader is not only theirs but is able to affect the whole culture of the organization and make a disease out of an individual practice to an expected norm.

Psychological Contract Theory: which was first formulated by (Argyris, 1960), and thereafter elaborated by (Rousseau, 1995), serves as an important conceptual tool in examining the unspoken rules between subordinates and superiors. According to this theory, it is assumed that an employee

makes a silent agreement with the employer about the relationship — it involves not only the work, but also elements such as fairness, respect and ethics. These contracts are violated when those in charge display negative tendencies like being dishonest, unfair, or manipulative. When such implicit agreements are broken, it results to a sense of despair, discontent and disengagement, all of which leads to increased employee turnover, absenteeism and reduced dedication to the organization (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). On the other hand, employees may undergo emotional and psychological distress, the effects of which have been established to include strain burnout and poor performance (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). The Psychological Contract Theory highlights the pain and damage caused by breaches to the tacit acts by an employee when a leader fails to meet certain unmet standards. The job of an individual within an organization has always been under some sort of understanding implicitly that they will be treated fairly, supported, and respected. When something like favoritism, emotional manipulation, or power dynamics comes to the surface, it breaches the implicit contract and brings out reactions of betrayal and lack of support for an employee. Often this does not lead to a fruitful employee-at-work involvement; rather the employee could get away from the workplace, be under distress, or develop many other unfavourables. This trust erosion results in the breakdown of what keeps the psychological contact between employees with it - that is morale and commitment. When it fails, it affects internal well-being and, thus, is toxic in leadership: creates an insecure-stressed, diseased environment with many conditions of turnover, absenteeism, and disengagement.

Themes Emerging from Toxic Leadership

Power Imbalance: Power imbalance exists when there is overt abuse of leadership roles to control and subdue subordinates, which results in an intolerable and vertical work setting.

Why It Is Important: In such spaces, workers tend to be disempowered, incapable of expression or making decisions further leading to low spirits and the sapping of autonomy.

How Such Leaders Make It Worse: Aggressive toxic leadership typically entails uncompromising submission to authority and threatening punishment for those who go against the leadership. Self-centered leaders also perpetuate the imbalance and focus on themselves at the expense of employees' contributions

Emotional and Psychological Abuse: Understanding emotional and psychological dependency. Whilst toxic leaders overtly display power over their followers, they do not forget to keep their dependents submissive and keep their emotional and environmental supportive structures under utmost control. This can be manifested through gaslighting, favoritism and or creating a high mad environment. These factors result in adverse effects on the employees in the form of; increased stress levels, heightened anxiety and drop in self-esteem. **Effects of Toxic Leaders:** Micromanagers try to control every aspect of functioning in an employee's work, which communicates a lot of distrust and causes the targeted individual to experience doubt in themselves.

Deterioration of Trust and Openness: Leaders' inadequacies in providing explanations are destructive to the organizational conscience since every individual within that organization will tend to have a culture of suspicion and insecurity.

Why it is important: Trust is the most vital component of collaboration and commitment among the employees in an organization as without that, the chances of engagement to the organization, working together and even retention is very minimal.

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How Passive Leaders add to the problem: Mounting pressure on employees, especially passive leaders who do not clearly communicate expectations or confront problems, geomap their teammates as directionless and disregarded. Toxic leadership prevents workers from taking part in any decision, thus making them feel alienated.

Feedback and Change Acceptance: Toxic leaders usually don’t accept outside opinion or feedback, nor do they modify their behaviors, hence continue with the workplace vices.

Importance of the Above: Such leadership is the cause of stagnation and lack of innovativeness since employees do not voice their opinions. The Role of Toxic Leaders: In the case of autocratic leaders, any feedback is considered as a direct assault on their supremacy, and therefore rejected. Managers who micromanage refuse to let go, and this includes changes that may enhance employee productivity and even their happiness.

Themes	Sub- Themes	Key Questions	Outcome
<i>Power Imbalance</i>	<i>Abuse of Authority</i>	<i>In what way is employee morale harmed due to power imbalances?</i>	<i>Disempowerment, reduced autonomy, and low morale have overshadowed aggressive and selfish leadership.</i>
<i>Emotional/Psychological Abuse</i>	<i>Gaslighting, Favoritism</i>	<i>What are the effects of psychological abuse?</i>	<i>Increased pressure, anxiety, reduced self-esteem, and therefore poor mental health among employees.</i>
<i>Erosion of Trust</i>	<i>Lack of Openness</i>	<i>How does the erosion of trust influence teamwork?</i>	<i>Cultivates mistrust and insecurity that decrease collaboration and engagement with the organization.</i>
	<i>Resistance to Feedback</i>	<i>How toxic leaders receive feedback?</i>	<i>Rejects feedback as a threat to authority and stifles</i>

<i>Feedback and Change</i>			<i>progress and innovation within the workplace.</i>
<i>Impact on Employees</i>	<i>Mental and Career Effects</i>	<i>What long-term consequences do employees suffer?</i>	<i>Psychological distress, burnout, and lack of movement in one's career due to unresolved toxic leadership.</i>

Discussions and Findings

Toxic leadership affects not only employees but also employers as it creates a work environment that is detrimental to their happiness and productivity, as well as that of the management itself. Many employees find it difficult to thrive under the command of authoritarian leaders, leading to stress, muted creativity, and a lack of independence, which in turn causes withdrawal and low spirit. The type of culture that encourages fear instead of collaboration and flexibility results to employers battling increased costs of creativity and innovation, loss of employees, and poor management practices. A passive approach to leadership exacerbates the situation by failing to provide employees with assistance and putting them in a state of disorder. Such a scenario raises one's dissatisfaction and renders most of the work useless. The owners, on the other hand, suffer from the repercussions instead to say a loss of chances and diminished responsibility, which further disrupts the efficiency of the organization. Power differential, workplace toxicity, and trust erosion are some of the components that constitute toxic leadership. Employees develop fears, low esteem, and even withdrawal, while employers experience a collapse in relations and inertia. Refusal to accept constructive criticism companies hampers creativity, thereby making such firms vulnerable to threats. Toxic Leadership is propagated by the Social Learning Theory, which suggests that behaviors are observed and subsequently reproduced. Broken exchanges or agreements between a leader and an employee are delineated in the Psychological Contract Theory, which is the main cause of voluntary quitting and withdrawal behavior, which hurts organizational culture and performance. In dealing with toxic leadership, the constant temptation of treating it only as a conflict of personalities must be avoided. It is necessary to address the individual problem as well as the system within which one operates. Organizations should carry out measures that will make leaders accountable and train them on emotional management, conflict resolution, among others, for effective leadership. Raising awareness through open communication and creating a confidential grievance mechanism is crucial to ensure employees have safe means of reporting issues. Creating an environment of respect and teamwork and implementing tools such as 360-degree assessments will help eliminate toxicity in its early stages. In addition, help regarding mental well-being should be given to the member and constraints on

leadership ethics should be encouraged. This overall leads to a more tolerant and healthy working environment.

Future scope of research

Eliminate favoritism towards the leadership held by HR departments: An important aspect that would require in-depth investigation in the years to come is the attitudinal distortion of the HR policies where it is the top leadership who tends to be protected rather than even the employees being abused by toxic behavior. Usually, people at an HR level are more concerned with the wellbeing of the organization in general, which has adverse effects of deaf ears or downplaying the employees' grievances who are victims of toxic leadership. Such a situation can create and perpetuate a rotten culture further as organizational members are left in despair and sometimes are even scared of raising such concerns.

Lack of Qualitative Analysis on Leadership Silence: Despite its impact, leadership silence remains underexplored. There is scope for understanding why the leaders are silent when there is too much of toxicity in the work place.

Longitudinal Studies on Employee Impact: Exploring how toxic leadership affects employees psychologically, emotionally and/or career-wise in the long run can add a very important perspective on the effects and how they can be overcome.

Conclusion

Toxic leadership has detrimental effects on organizations, creating challenges to employee wellness, increasing distrust and reducing efficiency. Nevertheless, these implications are not permanent. Simply by promoting accountability, ethical means of leadership, and working in a respectful culture, organizations can alleviate such effects. Open communication, fostering employee toughness and appreciating moderation will optimize trust and interaction once more. At its core, the perspective of leadership should be elevating. So much so, that people and teams flourish in such an atmosphere. Dealing with toxic leadership is more than dealing with the crisis it entails, it is about the wellbeing of the employees and the organization in the years to come. This dedication to the cause, however, changes any workplace into one that encourages progress, creativity, and respect. The objective of leadership is to motivate, steer, and promote progress. However, this is not the case when a leader becomes toxic; he/she instead creates a climate of panic and distrust with no growth. Toxic leadership does not only affect a few individuals; it is cancerous to the organization's culture and reduces morale, trust, and effectiveness. Still, this is not the end of the story. The solution to this challenge is found in making changes at the system level and actively promoting the engagement of positive leadership behaviors.

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Shri Dharmasthala Manjunatheshwara Institute for Management Development, Mysuru, India

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Sanjana Menon & Dr. Smita Kavatekar

Christ University Bengaluru

<sanjana.menon@res.christuniversity.in>

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Introduction

A young graduate full of zeal lands a job in a good organization for the first time. With time, the exhilaration wears off, and anxiety takes its place. Mornings are filled with apprehension and evenings with sheer tiredness, not because of too much work but because of the unyielding shadow of their leader. The leader started to micromanage the minutest of activities, beat down on even the slightest of errors, and receive accolades for achievements; the workplace transformed from a collaboration space to one of fear and competition. This narrative is not an exaggerated single event but rather chronicled events of a more significant issue that exists and

is very common in many workplaces around the globe- toxic leadership. In a perfect world, leadership is expected to uplift and encourage. On the contrary, when the leaders misuse their position, or worse still, do not uphold ethical leadership, such leaders become toxic and create wretched conditions in which workers are demoralized, unappreciated, and unencouraged. Toxicity in the workplace is an issue that many organizations face, regardless of the level of the employees. It has a complex and multifaceted nature and can be difficult to perceive while affecting the mental and physical state of the individual to a great extent. A toxic work environment can cause stress, anxiety, and burnout, which can, in turn, reduce efficiency and morale and lead to medical complications. (Boye & Grönlund, 2018) Toxicity in the workplace is the unhealthy and detrimental atmosphere one must endure in a fit-for-purpose environment. It comprises several types, including, but not limited to, acts such as harassment, bullying, discrimination, and instilling fear and aggression in others. Such a menace could be from workmates, a superior, or the establishment itself. (Delios et al., 2021) The issue of toxicity in the workplace as a concern in an individual's life and profession cannot be disregarded. It may also provoke specific physical and mental health issues like anxiety disorders, universal depression, and even post-traumatic stress disorder. Furthermore, such toxic environments may also lead to unfavorable situations, such as high absenteeism, high employee turnover, and low productivity. (Wang & Brower, 2019)

Besides these internal effects, workplace toxicity may also greatly disrupt an employee's upward mobility. Most of them tend to operate on a system of semblance of hierarchy, which is based on favoritism and supporters. This leads to unequal distribution of resources, unfair practices, no appreciation, and, most importantly, a lack of chances for promotion. Furthermore, straight-talking against toxic practices within the work environment is neither encouraged nor appreciated, and those who try to do it suffer punishment consequences that derail their career development. In addition, employees facing toxicity in occupational settings may find it challenging to maintain an equilibrium between work and family commitments (Kurniawaty et al., 2019). The stress and tension experienced because of a toxic work setting can overflow into their personal life, resulting in problems with friendships and other interests such as sports or leisure activities. This then leads to further adverse effects on their mental and physical well-being. To sum up, work toxicity can be that silent cancer to one's career as well as existence. Many workplaces experience it as a social evil and thus, it needs great attention (Pratama, 2019)

Everyone has experienced circumstances that made working difficult due to the strains and stressors, resulting in self-esteem issues. We then try to reason out what the problem is. Ultimately, the blame falls on the environment and work culture, but hold on; is it just an unfavorable setting? What happens when some leaders, who portray themselves as toxic leaders, turn out to be extremely intolerable by nature and the ways that they end up damaging us more than we were when we encountered them? These leaders are toxic and have worked to

ensure that no organization they have worked for remains the same (Anjum et al., 2018). There is extensive literature on the topic, but it does not necessarily equate toxic leadership with mental illness, wickedness, or the lack of managerial skill. That being said, its leadership acts may be considered constructive types of leadership behaviors that can undermine the motivation and effectiveness of the subordinate in every way possible (Narasuci et al., 2018). Even if passive employees decide to adhere to a toxic leader, in case the work situation is unfavorable and it is the leaders/supervisors who propagate the toxicity, more often than not the employees will look for ways to deal with the toxic nature of the work environment (Audenaert et al., 2021). Coping strategies frequently have long-term effects including those negative in nature causing more serious health problems associated with toxic leadership. Furthermore, toxic leadership incites three common reactions from followers, which are assertion, avoidance, and adaptation. (Bangwal & Tiwari, 2019).

Literature Review

Toxic leadership assumes different forms and has serious repercussions for the culture of the workplace. Effective leadership is one of the themes most propagated toward understanding why some organizations do better than others. It is responsible not only for the organization's strategic vision but also for its employees' work climate and experiences. Most of the literature depicts leadership in a rosy light, focusing on transformational and servant leadership that seeks to motivate and uplift individuals as they lead them. However, a rather dark and equally important counterpart exists in toxic leadership. This concept still borders on the fringe in leadership studies and includes all the harmful behaviors, attitudes, and even practices designed to or eventually cause mistrust and hinder teamwork, where such is essential for the organization's health.

Authoritarian leadership: Toxicity is neither a new phenomenon nor a new concept. It is, we argue, developing in practice, which calls for a re-evaluation of the construct. We maintain that evolution is principally the impact of the changes in our communication environment and the other associated technologies (de Hoogh et al., 2015). High control over subordinates is attributed to the Authoritarian leadership style (Chiang, 2020). Typically, authority abuse is a trait that authoritarian leaders embrace because such organizational structures guarantee the subordination of the followers. (de Hoogh, 2015). On the other hand, leaders who embody these leadership styles tend to distort the power structure and minimize and emphasize the distance between them and their subordinates (Schaubroeck, 2017). It has been documented that leaders who impose rules expect their followers to reach impossible goals and comply with the regulations (Karthik Sivashankar, 2021). However, these guiding principles of leadership do not readily suggest that they are conducive to creating a positive work environment or enhancing performance levels (Shen, 2019). According to Lipman-Blumen, toxic leadership is described as “a process whereby a leader’s destructive actions and/or personality traits causes serious and enduring injury not just to his or her subordinates and their organizations, but also to anyone who comes into contact with the leader” Building on this definition, Asha

Bhandarker and Snigdha Rai report that “leader can be labeled as toxic if their actions towards their subordinates have physically or psychologically impaired them and causes lasting damage to the subordinates.” (Bhandarker et al. 2019). Birol Baskan notes three key components to this toxic form of leadership: a disinterest in the welfare of the subordinates, a personality or management style damaging to the corporation, and a perception among subordinate employees that their boss behaves in a self-serving manner. In light of all these factors opposing popularly accepted views on effective leadership, toxic leadership can be seen as ineffective leadership coupled with abusive behavior. In other words, poisonous leadership involves asinine abuse in leadership. Hence, towards the extreme spectrum of definition, such behavior, strictly speaking, is not leadership. (Baskan, B, 2020). **Narcissistic Leadership :** Perhaps narcissism can be viewed as a behavioral and stylistic feature prevalent among senior managers. It has indeed been shown to affect the psych of the subordinates, leading to undesired reactions and behavior such as cynicism, job dissatisfaction, disengagement, and intent to leave (Alhasnawi and Abbas, 2021). Recent investigations have also provided evidence for the prevalence of narcissistic leadership in predominantly collectivistic cultures (Weng, 201). Work carried out within the 20s revolved around the practice that Freud formulated, seen by most leaders as therapeutic in nature, most of such leaders have encountered patients with some personalities. Since then, many scholars have attempted to portray an understanding of why and how narcissism influences individuals who lead. There are also modern scholars who provide evidence for the truthfulness of other claims that supportive narcissists are overstrained individuals who view themselves with more regard than is usual therefore more are inclined to take up leadership positions. In this connection (De Vries and Miller, 1985) studied whether the effectiveness and dysfunctionality of leaders could be explained by their narcissistic traits and found that leaders differ in their narcissistic traits behaviorally. The concept of “narcissistic leadership” was first introduced by (Rosenthal and Pittinsky, 2006), and these researchers noticed that narcissist leaders are motivated by their own needs and aspirations, with the former outweighing the goals of the organization. Still, the new generation which fills the modern workplaces has its share of deplorable features which need not be overlooked. They are said to be self-centered, showing an exhibition of feelings which is counterproductive in a team work environment. They are skilled performers but lack a sense of loyalty, especially in positions of power. **Micromanaging Leadership:** Micromanagement is a straightforward phenomenon whereby excessive control is exercised by a manager over the activities, responsibilities and decision making of their subordinate employees (Ryan and Cross, 2023). In a usual scenario, micromanagement is a phenomenon whereby a manager goes into detail about the inner-workings of the processes (Gardanova et al., 2019), usually impeding an employee’s independence and self-assertiveness towards work (Cho, 2017). This managerial style usually does not only take place in the overseeing of how the work is done, but also in the dictation of how, when and why the work should be done and how the particular approach should be preferred over others while it intervenes continuously in order to comply with that preference of approach. As explained by Lee, Kim, and (Kang, 2021), it is the intense management of even trivial aspects of employees’ work such as task execution, activity performance, and decision processes that constitutes micromanagement. Micromanagers tend to excessively instruct the

employees on the proper way of completing an assignment. The excessive direction may involve stating the steps, procedures, and time frames in which one is supposed to work. This allows minimal or no breathing space for the workers to exercise their independence or even judgement. Lee, Kim and (Kang, 2021) showed that providing an employee with extensive task guidelines is inversely proportional to performance and autonomy of the concerned laborers, in most cases diminishing the workers' ownership and drive. Micromanagers engage in constant monitoring and surveillance of employees' activities. Supervisors check if the employees are working, ask for regular updates on their progress and watch the employees as they work. Lurie and (McCraw, 2020) in their study analyzed a condition of constant monitoring of employees and its effect on employees' stress and well-being and considered micromanagement as detrimental to the mental health and stability of employees. **Passive Leadership:** As (Bank, 2016) noticed, there are leaders who expect subordinates to complete all tasks as per the assigned job, but such leaders do nothing to supervise the employees while they are executing their work towards meeting the organizational objectives. In the opinion of (Busola Oluwafemi, 2019) Leaders also perform their duties but without giving guidance and coordination to the employees thus leaving them to devise their own methodology and approaches on how to accomplish the tasks and evaluating them haphazardly as they deem fit without any clear cut standards. This type of leadership can be defined as leaders who care less about the working of their subordinates. There is a boredom or laziness aspect that seems to characterize those in authority and this entails what is referred to as passive leadership. Forms of passive leadership can be characterized by behavior patterns like indecisiveness, avoidance of conflicts or difficult situations, and lack of positive reinforcement in the organization. This kind of leader is referred to as a passive leader, when the leader has no problem in allowing the employees work without regular checks on them, as well as giving the employees full control over work-related decision making. As proposed by (Smith and colleagues, 2016) passive leadership incorporates Management By Exception Passive and laissez-faire leadership styles. Management By Exception Passive is the type of leadership which members of the team probe the issue after mending the existing threats (Moreno-Casada, 2022). Hence, this type of a leader does not prevent problems from even arising but directs his/her efforts in solving problems that have already occurred; where clearly problem prevention would be less costly because the organization would not have to deal with high level threatening issues. As opined by (Sow and Aborbie, 2018) this style of leadership places less emphasis on leadership and more on collective decision- making and gives the led group area goals and methodologies. Nevertheless, in certain instances, the laissez-faire approach to leadership may create a sense of disorganization and helplessness within individuals, as they are not provided with enabling structures of authority and direction.

Research gap

There are many gaps in the existing literature on toxic leadership. Most of the research fails to capture how HR policies favor toxic leaders at the expense of employees' complaints, encouraging a culture of impunity. The psychological, emotional, and career consequences of

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toxic leadership for employees are also underexplored in terms of how they evolve over time. While much research has analyzed individual toxic behaviors, the broader organizational culture that enables and tolerates them—most notably through structural issues relating to lack of accountability and rigid hierarchies—remains largely unexplored. Finally, the lack of all-embracing intervention frameworks is conspicuous; such frameworks would provide a cultural-psychological-systemic perspective to address and prevent toxic leadership while reinforcing accountability and ethical practices.

Research Objectives

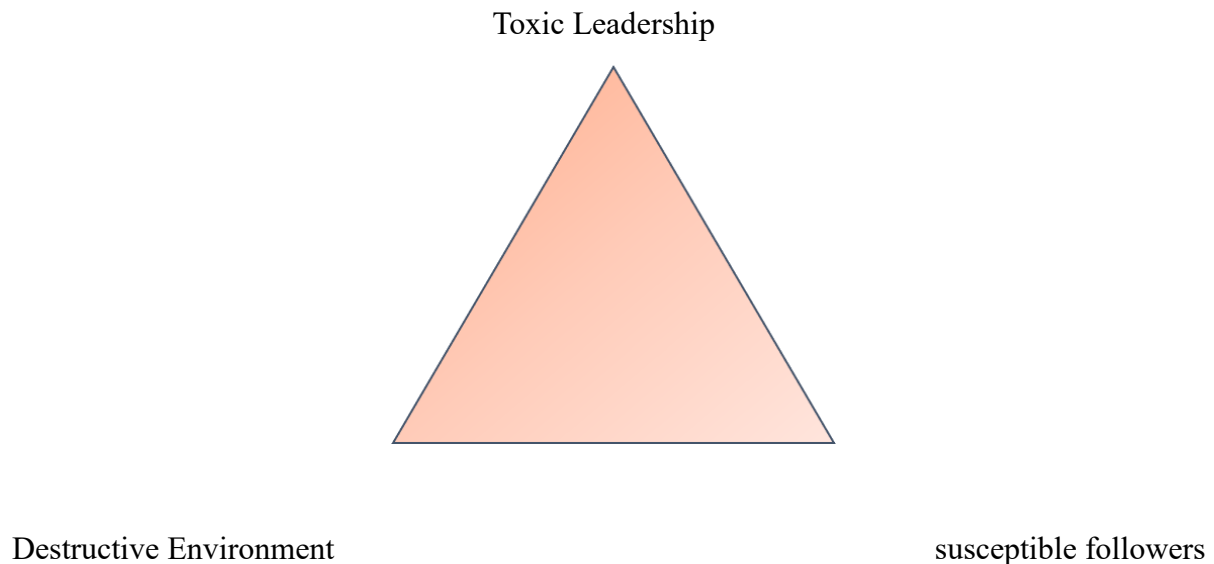
The primary purpose of this paper is to:

- To explore the toxic behaviors and styles of leadership that contribute to workplace toxicity.
- To identify the impact of toxic leadership on employees and organizational culture.
- To understand the themes of toxic leadership styles.
- To highlight the future scope and propose directions for mitigating toxic leadership through cultural and systemic change.

Research Methodology

The qualitative review methodology outlined in this paper explores the phenomenon of toxic leadership and its effects on workplace relationships. This entails a very detailed analysis of existing scholarly literature to identify and synthesize key findings about toxic leadership behaviors and their implications for employees and the organization. The study stands on two main theoretical frameworks: Social Learning Theory, which explains how toxic behaviors are observed, modeled, and perpetuated within organizations, and Psychological Contract Theory, which deepens thinking about breaches of spoken and unspoken agreements between employees and employers when discontent and disengagement ensue. It conducts a thematic analysis that allows one to trace some of the themes occurring in toxic leadership, such as opposition to power and emotional and psychological abuse, as well as erosion of trust, thus promoting their well-being to a company level. This multifaceted approach allows a broad perspective concerning the complexity of toxic leadership and the system changes that would ameliorate its effects.

Theoretical Framework



Toxic Leaders: Leaders with narcissistic, authoritarian, or manipulative tendencies.

Destructive Environments: Organizational settings that encourage or tolerate toxic behaviors (e.g., lack of accountability, rigid hierarchies).

Susceptible Followers: Employees who are either conformers (obey due to fear or dependency) or colluders (enable toxic behaviors for personal gain)

Social Learning Theory: Albert Bandura's social learning theory provides tools for understanding how leadership practices become part of the behaviour of the organization as a whole. Learning in this instance is described as observation, imitation and modeling. When subordinates witness forms of leader behaviour such as manipulation, intimidation or autocracy within an organisation, they will more than likely exhibit these same tendencies, be it as a coping strategy or otherwise, a learned behaviour. Their tendencies however can develop beyond a mere influence but rather pathogens capable of infecting the entire organizational culture. For illustration, it has been confirmed that employees who have witnessed or been victims of toxic leadership, exhibit higher levels of unhealthy behaviours commonly referred to as workplace deviance which spreads among different individuals within the organization like a virus (Mayer et al, 2009.) According to the Social Learning Theory, dysfunctional leadership behaviors such as abusive power, psychological harassment, or negative feedback deprivation are learned and modeled by the employees. If their leaders have a domineering way or favor certain subordinates, the subordinates see such people as role models for poor behavior. Employees also mimic these behaviors for coping or consider them as accepted

behaviors by the organization. For example, an employee might see a manager's bizarre micromanagement or rejection of feedback and then internalize such thinking as the behavior that should be emulated within the company. Eventually, with the learning of such behavior, it becomes spread among teams, building a culture of distrust, defensiveness, and low morale. The Social Learning Theory explains that the action taken by the leader is not only theirs but is able to affect the whole culture of the organization and make a disease out of an individual practice to an expected norm.

Psychological Contract Theory: which was first formulated by (Argyris, 1960), and thereafter elaborated by (Rousseau, 1995), serves as an important conceptual tool in examining the unspoken rules between subordinates and superiors. According to this theory, it is assumed that an employee makes a silent agreement with the employer about the relationship — it involves not only the work, but also elements such as fairness, respect and ethics. These contracts are violated when those in charge display negative tendencies like being dishonest, unfair, or manipulative. When such implicit agreements are broken, it results to a sense of despair, discontent and disengagement, all of which leads to increased employee turnover, absenteeism and reduced dedication to the organization (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). On the other hand, employees may undergo emotional and psychological distress, the effects of which have been established to include strain burnout and poor performance (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). The Psychological Contract Theory highlights the pain and damage caused by breaches to the tacit acts by an employee when a leader fails to meet certain unmet standards. The job of an individual within an organization has always been under some sort of understanding implicitly that they will be treated fairly, supported, and respected. When something like favoritism, emotional manipulation, or power dynamics comes to the surface, it breaches the implicit contract and brings out reactions of betrayal and lack of support for an employee. Often this does not lead to a fruitful employee-at-work involvement; rather the employee could get away from the workplace, be under distress, or develop many other unfavourables. This trust erosion results in the breakdown of what keeps the psychological contact between employees with it - that is morale and commitment. When it fails, it affects internal well-being and, thus, is toxic in leadership: creates an insecure-stressed, diseased environment with many conditions of turnover, absenteeism, and disengagement.

Themes Emerging from Toxic Leadership

Power Imbalance: Power imbalance exists when there is overt abuse of leadership roles to control and subdue subordinates, which results in an intolerable and vertical work setting.

Why It Is Important: In such spaces, workers tend to be disempowered, incapable of expression or making decisions further leading to low spirits and the sapping of autonomy.

How Such Leaders Make It Worse: Aggressive toxic leadership typically entails uncompromising submission to authority and threatening punishment for those who go against the leadership. Self-centered leaders also perpetuate the imbalance and focus on themselves at the expense of employees' contributions

Emotional and Psychological Abuse: Understanding emotional and psychological dependency. Whilst toxic leaders overtly display power over their followers, they do not forget to keep their dependents submissive and keep their emotional and environmental supportive structures under utmost control. This can be manifested through gaslighting, favoritism and or creating a high mad environment. These factors result in adverse effects on the employees in the form of; increased stress levels, heightened anxiety and drop in self-esteem. Effects of Toxic Leaders: Micromanagers try to control every aspect of functioning in an employee's work, which communicates a lot of distrust and causes the targeted individual to experience doubt in themselves.

Deterioration of Trust and Openness: Leaders' inadequacies in providing explanations are destructive to the organizational conscience since every individual within that organization will tend to have a culture of suspicion and insecurity.

Why it is important: Trust is the most vital component of collaboration and commitment among the employees in an organization as without that, the chances of engagement to the organization, working together and even retention is very minimal.

How Passive Leaders add to the problem: Mounting pressure on employees, especially passive leaders who do not clearly communicate expectations or confront problems, geomap their teammates as directionless and disregarded. Toxic leadership prevents workers from taking part in any decision, thus making them feel alienated.

Feedback and Change Acceptance: Toxic leaders usually don't accept outside opinion or feedback, nor do they modify their behaviors, hence continue with the workplace vices.

Importance of the Above: Such leadership is the cause of stagnation and lack of innovativeness since employees do not voice their opinions. The Role of Toxic Leaders: In the case of autocratic leaders, any feedback is considered as a direct assault on their supremacy, and therefore rejected. Managers who micromanage refuse to let go, and this includes changes that may enhance employee productivity and even their happiness.

Themes	Sub- Themes	Key Questions	Outcome
Power Imbalance	Abuse of Authority	In what way is employee morale harmed due to power imbalances?	Disempowerment, reduced autonomy, and low morale have overshadowed aggressive and selfish leadership.
Emotional/Psychological Abuse	Gaslighting, Favoritism	What are the effects of psychological abuse?	Increased pressure, anxiety, reduced self-esteem, and therefore poor mental health among employees.
Erosion of Trust	Lack of Openness	How does the erosion of trust influence teamwork?	Cultivates mistrust and insecurity that decrease collaboration and engagement with the organization.
Feedback and Change	Resistance to Feedback	How toxic leaders receive feedback?	Rejects feedback as a threat to authority and stifles progress and innovation within the workplace.
Impact on Employees	Mental and Career Effects	What long-term consequences do employees suffer?	Psychological distress, burnout, and lack of movement in one's career due to unresolved toxic leadership.

Discussions and Findings

Toxic leadership affects not only employees but also employers as it creates a work environment that is detrimental to their happiness and productivity, as well as that of the management itself. Many employees find it difficult to thrive under the command of authoritarian leaders, leading to stress, muted creativity, and a lack of independence, which in turn causes withdrawal and low spirit. The type of culture that encourages fear instead of collaboration and flexibility results to employers battling increased costs of creativity and innovation, loss of employees, and poor management practices. A passive approach to leadership exacerbates the situation by failing to provide employees with assistance and putting them in a state of disorder. Such a scenario raises one's dissatisfaction and renders most of the work useless. The owners, on the other hand, suffer from the repercussions instead to say a loss of chances and diminished responsibility, which further disrupts the efficiency of the organization. Power differential, workplace toxicity, and trust erosion are some of the components that constitute toxic leadership. Employees develop fears, low esteem, and even withdrawal, while employers experience a collapse in relations and inertia. Refusal to accept constructive criticism companies hampers creativity, thereby making such firms vulnerable to threats. Toxic Leadership is propagated by the Social Learning Theory, which suggests that behaviors are observed and subsequently reproduced. Broken exchanges or agreements between a leader and an employee are delineated in the Psychological Contract Theory, which is the main cause of voluntary quitting and withdrawal behavior, which hurts organizational culture and performance. In dealing with toxic leadership, the constant temptation of treating it only as a conflict of personalities must be avoided. It is necessary to address the individual problem as well as the system within which one operates. Organizations should carry out measures that will make leaders accountable and train them on emotional management, conflict resolution, among others, for effective leadership. Raising awareness through open communication and creating a confidential grievance mechanism is crucial to ensure employees have safe means of reporting issues. Creating an environment of respect and teamwork and implementing tools such as 360-degree assessments will help eliminate toxicity in its early stages. In addition, help regarding mental well-being should be given to the member and constraints on leadership ethics should be encouraged. This overall leads to a more tolerant and healthy working environment.

Future scope of research

Eliminate favoritism towards the leadership held by HR departments: An important aspect that would require in-depth investigation in the years to come is the attitudinal distortion of the HR policies where it is the top leadership who tends to be protected rather than even the employees being abused by toxic behavior. Usually, people at an HR level are more concerned

with the wellbeing of the organization in general, which has adverse effects of deaf ears or downplaying the employees' grievances who are victims of toxic leadership. Such a situation can create and perpetuate a rotten culture further as organizational members are left in despair and sometimes are even scared of raising such concerns.

Lack of Qualitative Analysis on Leadership Silence: Despite its impact, leadership silence remains underexplored. There is scope for understanding why the leaders are silent when there is too much of toxicity in the work place.

Longitudinal Studies on Employee Impact: Exploring how toxic leadership affects employees psychologically, emotionally and/or career-wise in the long run can add a very important perspective on the effects and how they can be overcome.

Conclusion

Toxic leadership has detrimental effects on organizations, creating challenges to employee wellness, increasing distrust and reducing efficiency. Nevertheless, these implications are not permanent. Simply by promoting accountability, ethical means of leadership, and working in a respectful culture, organizations can alleviate such effects. Open communication, fostering employee toughness and appreciating moderation will optimize trust and interaction once more. At its core, the perspective of leadership should be elevating. So much so, that people and teams flourish in such an atmosphere. Dealing with toxic leadership is more than dealing with the crisis it entails, it is about the wellbeing of the employees and the organization in the years to come. This dedication to the cause, however, changes any workplace into one that encourages progress, creativity, and respect. The objective of leadership is to motivate, steer, and promote progress. However, this is not the case when a leader becomes toxic; he/she instead creates a climate of panic and distrust with no growth. Toxic leadership does not only affect a few individuals; it is cancerous to the organization's culture and reduces morale, trust, and effectiveness. Still, this is not the end of the story. The solution to this challenge is found in making changes at the system level and actively promoting the engagement of positive leadership behaviors.

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