

Est.
1841

YORK
ST JOHN
UNIVERSITY

Zaghmout, Bilal ORCID logoORCID:
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6296-9608> (2024) Unmasking Toxic Leadership: Identifying, Addressing, and Preventing Destructive Leadership Behaviours in Modern Organizations. *Open Journal of Leadership*, 13 (3). pp. 244-265.

Downloaded from: <https://ray.yorks.ac.uk/id/eprint/10574/>

The version presented here may differ from the published version or version of record. If you intend to cite from the work you are advised to consult the publisher's version:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojl.2024.133015>

Research at York St John (RaY) is an institutional repository. It supports the principles of open access by making the research outputs of the University available in digital form. Copyright of the items stored in RaY reside with the authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full text items free of charge, and may download a copy for private study or non-commercial research. For further reuse terms, see licence terms governing individual outputs. [Institutional Repository Policy Statement](#)

RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at ray@yorks.ac.uk

Unmasking Toxic Leadership: Identifying, Addressing, and Preventing Destructive Leadership Behaviours in Modern Organizations

Bilal Zaghmout

Management Studies, York St John University, London, UK

Email: B.zaghmout@yorks.ac.uk

How to cite this paper: Zaghmout, B. (2024). Unmasking Toxic Leadership: Identifying, Addressing, and Preventing Destructive Leadership Behaviours in Modern Organizations. *Open Journal of Leadership*, 13, 244-265.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ojl.2024.133015>

Received: July 9, 2024

Accepted: August 16, 2024

Published: August 19, 2024

Copyright © 2024 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Toxic leadership presents significant challenges to organizational health, employee well-being, and overall productivity. This article delves into the complex nature of toxic leadership, identifying its key behaviors and characteristics that foster detrimental workplace environments. By reviewing existing literature and analyzing real-world case studies, the paper investigates the profound impacts toxic leadership has on organizational culture and employee morale. It offers actionable strategies for identifying, addressing, and mitigating toxic leadership behaviours, aiming to restore a healthy workplace atmosphere. The findings highlight the psychological effects of toxic leadership on employees, such as increased stress, anxiety, and burnout, as well as the broader organizational consequences, including reduced productivity and high turnover rates. Furthermore, the study explores intervention techniques, such as coaching and mediation, and organizational policies, such as zero-tolerance approaches and transparent reporting mechanisms. The article concludes with practical recommendations for developing leadership training programs that promote positive, inclusive, and ethical leadership practices. By implementing these strategies, organizations can create a more supportive and productive work environment, ultimately fostering a culture of trust and collaboration. This comprehensive analysis underscores the importance of proactive measures and a continuous commitment to nurturing healthy leadership dynamics in the modern workplace.

Keywords

Toxic Leadership, Organizational Health, Employee Well-Being, Destructive Leadership, Workplace Environment, Leadership Behaviours

1. Introduction

Toxic leadership, characterized by behaviors that negatively impact the organizational environment and employee well-being, has become a critical issue in contemporary organizational studies. The term “toxic leadership” encompasses a range of destructive behaviors, including manipulation, coercion, hostility, and abuse of power. These behaviors can create a hostile work environment, leading to decreased employee morale, increased stress, and reduced organizational performance (Goldman, 2009). Understanding the dynamics of toxic leadership and developing strategies to mitigate its impact is essential for fostering a healthy organizational culture (Guo, 2016).

1.1. Defining Toxic Leadership

Toxic leadership is not merely about poor leadership skills or incompetence; it involves deliberate actions that harm others and the organization. Lipman-Blumen (2005) describes toxic leaders as individuals who engage in destructive behaviors that can undermine the motivation, well-being, and productivity of their subordinates. These leaders often exploit their power for personal gain, disregarding the negative consequences for their team and the organization. The impact of toxic leadership extends beyond immediate subordinates, influencing the broader organizational culture and climate (Pelletier, 2010; Beetham & Okhai, 2017).

1.2. Impacts of Toxic Leadership on Employees

Research consistently shows that toxic leadership has detrimental effects on employee well-being. Employees working under toxic leaders often experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout (Ashforth, 1994). These psychological effects can lead to physical health problems, absenteeism, and decreased job satisfaction. Furthermore, toxic leadership contributes to high turnover rates, as employees seek to escape the negative environment (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014). The loss of experienced employees can disrupt organizational operations and lead to significant costs associated with recruiting and training new staff (Beetham & Okhai, 2017).

1.3. Effects on Organizational Performance

The impact of toxic leadership extends beyond individual employees to affect overall organizational performance. Toxic leaders can create a culture of fear and mistrust, hindering communication, collaboration, and innovation (Frost, 2004). This environment can stifle creativity and limit the organization’s ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Moreover, the presence of toxic leadership can damage the organization’s reputation, making it difficult to attract and retain top talent (Schmidt, 2008). The cumulative effect of these issues can significantly impair the organization’s effectiveness and competitiveness.

1.4. Identifying Toxic Leadership Behaviors

Identifying toxic leadership behaviors is crucial for developing interventions to address this issue. Common behaviors associated with toxic leadership include micromanagement, public humiliation, unrealistic demands, and favoritism (Reed, 2004). These behaviors can erode trust and respect within the team, leading to a toxic work environment. It is essential for organizations to have mechanisms in place to recognize and address these behaviors promptly (Guo, 2016).

1.5. Strategies for Mitigating Toxic Leadership

Addressing toxic leadership requires a multifaceted approach. Organizations must develop clear policies and procedures to deal with toxic behaviors, including zero-tolerance policies and reporting mechanisms (Goldman, 2009). Leadership development programs should emphasize the importance of ethical and inclusive leadership practices. Additionally, promoting a culture of open communication and feedback can help identify and address toxic behaviors before they escalate. Implementing these strategies can create a more positive work environment and enhance overall organizational health (Beetham & Okhai, 2017).

1.6. Research Questions

This study aims to explore the phenomenon of toxic leadership and its impact on organizational health and employee well-being. The following research questions guide this inquiry:

- What are the defining characteristics of toxic leadership behaviors, and how do they manifest in organizational settings?
- How does toxic leadership affect employee psychological and physical well-being?
- What impact does toxic leadership have on overall organizational performance and culture?
- What strategies can organizations implement to effectively identify, address, and mitigate the effects of toxic leadership?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Defining Characteristics of Toxic Leadership Behaviors

Toxic leadership, a term used to describe leaders whose behaviors and actions are harmful to their subordinates and the organization, encompasses a variety of destructive behaviors. These include manipulation, hostility, abuse of power, and unethical practices. Goldman (2009) characterizes toxic leaders as individuals who systematically and intentionally engage in behaviors that are detrimental to others, such as bullying, undermining, and exploiting subordinates for personal gain. Lipman-Blumen (2005) adds that toxic leaders are often charismatic and persuasive, using these traits to mask their harmful intentions and maintain their position of power.

Ashforth (1994) identifies several specific behaviors associated with toxic

leadership, including micromanagement, public humiliation, unrealistic demands, and favoritism. These behaviors create a culture of fear and mistrust, stifling communication and collaboration within the organization. Additionally, [Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad \(2007\)](#) emphasize that toxic leadership often involves a high degree of control and a lack of consideration for the well-being of subordinates, leading to a toxic work environment.

2.2. Effects of Toxic Leadership on Employee Well-Being

The detrimental impact of toxic leadership on employee well-being is well-documented in the literature. Employees under toxic leaders often experience heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout. [Mehta and Maheshwari \(2014\)](#) found that toxic leadership behaviors significantly reduce job satisfaction and organizational commitment, leading to higher turnover rates. This is corroborated by [Tepper \(2000\)](#), who demonstrated that abusive supervision, a form of toxic leadership, is associated with various negative outcomes, including reduced job satisfaction, increased psychological distress, and greater intent to leave the organization.

[Harris, Kacmar, and Zivnuska \(2007\)](#) highlight that the psychological effects of toxic leadership can manifest in physical health problems, such as headaches, sleep disturbances, and cardiovascular issues. These health problems further contribute to absenteeism and reduced productivity. Additionally, [Schyns and Schilling \(2013\)](#) note that the impact of toxic leadership extends beyond immediate subordinates, affecting overall team dynamics and contributing to a hostile organizational climate.

2.3. Impact of Toxic Leadership on Organizational Performance and Culture

Toxic leadership not only affects individual employees but also has far-reaching implications for organizational performance and culture. [Schmidt \(2008\)](#) argues that toxic leaders create an environment of fear and mistrust, which hinders open communication and collaboration. This environment stifles innovation and creativity, limiting the organization's ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Furthermore, the presence of toxic leadership can damage the organization's reputation, making it difficult to attract and retain top talent ([Goldman, 2009](#)).

[Krasikova, Green, and LeBreton \(2013\)](#) conducted a meta-analysis examining the effects of destructive leadership behaviors on organizational outcomes. They found that toxic leadership is associated with decreased employee performance, increased counterproductive work behaviors, and lower overall organizational effectiveness. The cumulative effect of these issues can significantly impair the organization's competitiveness and long-term sustainability.

2.4. Strategies for Identifying and Mitigating Toxic Leadership

Identifying and addressing toxic leadership is essential for fostering a healthy

organizational environment. Reed (2004) suggests that organizations need to develop clear policies and procedures to identify and deal with toxic behaviors. These policies should include zero-tolerance approaches to abusive behavior, mechanisms for reporting and addressing complaints, and regular training for leaders on ethical and inclusive practices.

Leadership development programs play a crucial role in preventing toxic leadership. Kellerman (2004) emphasizes the importance of ethical training and the promotion of leadership values that prioritize the well-being of subordinates. Organizations should also promote a culture of open communication and feedback, enabling employees to voice concerns without fear of retribution.

Effective strategies for mitigating toxic leadership also involve fostering a supportive and inclusive organizational culture. Frost (2004) highlights the importance of emotional intelligence and empathy in leadership, suggesting that leaders who demonstrate these qualities are less likely to engage in toxic behaviors. Furthermore, organizations should encourage collaboration and team-building activities that strengthen relationships and trust among employees (Goldman, 2009).

2.5. Cross-Cultural Considerations in Toxic Leadership

Understanding the impact of cultural differences on perceptions of toxic leadership is essential, as leadership behaviors and their interpretations can vary significantly across cultures. House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta (2004) in the GLOBE study, highlight that cultural norms and values influence what is considered acceptable leadership behavior. For instance, behaviors deemed authoritative in one culture might be seen as toxic in another.

Aycan et al. (2000) emphasize that cultural context shapes the leader-subordinate relationship, affecting the tolerance for certain leadership behaviors. In collectivist cultures, where harmony and group cohesion are prioritized, toxic behaviors such as public humiliation and favoritism might have a more pronounced negative impact compared to individualistic cultures, where assertiveness and individual achievement are valued.

2.6. Ethical Leadership as an Antidote to Toxicity

Promoting ethical leadership is a critical strategy for mitigating the effects of toxic leadership. Brown and Treviño (2006) define ethical leadership as the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making. Ethical leaders serve as role models for ethical behavior, fostering a culture of trust and integrity.

Ethical leadership has been shown to positively influence employee attitudes and behaviors, reducing the likelihood of toxic behaviors. Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, and Salvador (2009) found that ethical leadership is associated

with higher levels of trust in leadership, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviors. Promoting ethical leadership involves selecting and developing leaders who demonstrate integrity, fairness, and respect for others.

Research Questions

Based on the literature reviewed, the following research questions will guide this study:

- 1) What are the defining characteristics of toxic leadership behaviors, and how do they manifest in organizational settings?
 - Understanding the specific behaviors that constitute toxic leadership and their manifestations is crucial for identifying and addressing these issues effectively.
- 2) How does toxic leadership affect employee psychological and physical well-being?
 - Investigating the impacts on employee well-being can help in developing interventions to mitigate these negative effects.
- 3) What impact does toxic leadership have on overall organizational performance and culture?
 - Examining the broader organizational impacts provides insights into how toxic leadership can undermine organizational effectiveness and sustainability.
- 4) What strategies can organizations implement to effectively identify, address, and mitigate the effects of toxic leadership?
 - Identifying effective strategies for addressing toxic leadership can help organizations develop healthier work environments and improve overall performance.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Introduction to Toxic Leadership Theories

Toxic leadership is a multidimensional construct that encompasses various detrimental behaviors exhibited by leaders. To understand toxic leadership comprehensively, it is essential to draw from multiple theoretical perspectives. The theoretical framework for this study integrates concepts from leadership theory, organizational behavior, and psychology to explain the emergence, impact, and mitigation of toxic leadership.

3.2. Destructive Leadership Theory

Destructive leadership theory provides a foundation for understanding toxic leadership. *Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad (2007)* define destructive leadership as systematic and repeated behavior by a leader that undermines the well-being and performance of subordinates and the organization. This theory distinguishes between direct and indirect destructive behaviors, highlighting that leaders can cause harm through overt actions (e.g., verbal abuse) or through neglect and failure to support subordinates.

Einarsen et al. (2007) also emphasize the importance of distinguishing between destructive leadership and ineffective leadership. While ineffective leadership refers to a lack of competence or ability to achieve desired outcomes, destructive leadership involves intentional actions that harm others. This distinction is critical for identifying and addressing toxic leaders who may be competent in achieving organizational goals but do so at the expense of their subordinates' well-being.

3.3. Toxic Triangle Model

The Toxic Triangle model proposed by Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors that contribute to the emergence of toxic leadership. The model identifies three key components: destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments.

Destructive Leaders: According to the Toxic Triangle, destructive leaders often exhibit narcissistic, Machiavellian, and psychopathic traits. Narcissism involves an inflated sense of self-importance and a lack of empathy, leading leaders to prioritize their interests over others (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Machiavellianism is characterized by manipulateness and a focus on self-interest and deception (Christie & Geis, 1970). Psychopathy involves antisocial behaviors, impulsivity, and a lack of remorse (Boddy, 2011).

Susceptible Followers: The model suggests that followers play a crucial role in enabling toxic leaders. Susceptible followers can be categorized into two types: conformers and colluders. Conformers passively comply with the leader's directives due to fear, dependence, or a lack of self-efficacy. Colluders actively support and reinforce the leader's toxic behaviors, often because they share the leader's values or seek personal gain (Padilla et al., 2007).

Conducive Environments: The organizational context can facilitate the emergence and perpetuation of toxic leadership. Environments characterized by high levels of instability, ambiguity, and perceived threats are more likely to foster toxic leadership. Additionally, cultures that emphasize power, control, and competitiveness can create conditions where toxic behaviors are tolerated or even rewarded (Padilla et al., 2007).

3.4. Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory, proposed by Bandura (1977), provides insights into how toxic leadership behaviors are learned and perpetuated within organizations. According to this theory, individuals learn behaviors by observing and imitating others, especially those in positions of authority. Leaders who exhibit toxic behaviors can influence their subordinates to adopt similar behaviors through modeling.

Bandura (1977) highlights the importance of reinforcement in the learning process. Toxic leaders who achieve success or rewards despite their harmful behaviors may reinforce the idea that such behaviors are acceptable or effective. This reinforcement can lead to the normalization of toxic behaviors within the

organization, as subordinates and peers begin to emulate the leader's actions.

3.5. Ethical Leadership as a Countermeasure

Ethical leadership theory serves as a counterpoint to toxic leadership, emphasizing the importance of ethical behavior, integrity, and consideration for others in leadership roles. [Brown and Treviño \(2006\)](#) define ethical leadership as the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, as well as the promotion of such conduct to followers.

Ethical leadership theory posits that leaders who model ethical behavior and prioritize the well-being of their subordinates can create a positive organizational culture. This culture, in turn, reduces the likelihood of toxic leadership behaviors emerging. Ethical leaders build trust and respect, foster open communication, and encourage ethical decision-making among their subordinates ([Brown & Treviño, 2006](#)).

3.6. Organizational Culture and Climate

The role of organizational culture and climate in influencing leadership behaviors cannot be overstated. [Schein \(2010\)](#) defines organizational culture as the shared assumptions, values, and beliefs that guide behavior within an organization. Organizational climate, on the other hand, refers to the perceptions and attitudes of employees about their work environment ([Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013](#)).

A culture that promotes ethical behavior, inclusivity, and psychological safety can mitigate the effects of toxic leadership. Conversely, cultures that tolerate or even reward unethical behavior and power imbalances can exacerbate the impact of toxic leaders. [Schneider et al. \(2013\)](#) emphasize that leaders play a crucial role in shaping organizational culture and climate, highlighting the need for ethical and inclusive leadership practices.

3.7. Implications for Practice

Understanding the theoretical underpinnings of toxic leadership has practical implications for organizations. By recognizing the traits and behaviors associated with toxic leadership, organizations can develop more effective identification and intervention strategies. Training and development programs that emphasize ethical leadership and emotional intelligence can help prevent the emergence of toxic leaders.

Furthermore, organizations should foster a culture of accountability and transparency, where toxic behaviors are not tolerated. Mechanisms for reporting and addressing toxic leadership, such as whistleblower policies and anonymous feedback channels, can empower employees to speak out against harmful behaviors without fear of retribution.

The theoretical framework for toxic leadership integrates insights from destructive leadership theory, the Toxic Triangle model, Social Learning Theory,

ethical leadership theory, and organizational culture and climate. This comprehensive approach provides a nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to toxic leadership and its impact on individuals and organizations. By drawing from these theoretical perspectives, this study aims to explore the characteristics, effects, and mitigation strategies for toxic leadership, ultimately contributing to the development of healthier and more ethical organizational environments.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively explore toxic leadership in organizational settings. The mixed-methods approach allows for the integration of qualitative and quantitative data, providing a holistic understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, will capture the nuanced experiences and perceptions of individuals affected by toxic leadership. Quantitative methods, including surveys, will quantify the prevalence and impact of toxic leadership behaviors.

4.2. Variables

The primary variables of interest in this study are as follows:

- Independent Variable: Toxic leadership, characterized by behaviors such as manipulation, intimidation, and unethical decision-making.
- Dependent Variables: Employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentions, and overall organizational performance.
- Control Variables: Demographic factors such as age, gender, tenure, and industry sector, which could influence the relationship between toxic leadership and the dependent variables.

4.3. Study Population and Sample Selection

4.3.1. Study Population

The study population consists of employees and managers from various industries, including finance, healthcare, technology, and manufacturing. This diverse population will provide a broad perspective on toxic leadership across different organizational contexts.

4.3.2. Sample Selection

A combination of purposive and random sampling techniques will be employed to select participants. Purposive sampling will be used for the qualitative component to ensure that individuals with significant experience or insight into toxic leadership are included (Patton, 2014). For the quantitative component, a random sampling technique will be used to select a representative sample of employees and managers from the study population.

The qualitative sample will include 25 senior leaders and managers who have

directly experienced or observed toxic leadership behaviors. The quantitative sample will consist of 200 mid-level and senior managers across various sectors. This sample size is deemed sufficient to achieve statistical power and generalizability (Fowler, 2013).

4.4. Research Instrumentation

4.4.1 Qualitative Instrumentation

The qualitative data will be collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol (**Appendix A**) includes open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about experiences with toxic leadership, its impact on employees and organizational outcomes, and strategies for mitigation. This approach allows for flexibility in probing deeper into specific areas of interest (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

4.4.2 Quantitative Instrumentation

The quantitative data will be collected using a structured survey instrument (**Appendix B**). The survey includes Likert-scale questions measuring perceptions of toxic leadership behaviors, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. The survey items are adapted from validated scales used in previous studies on toxic leadership and organizational behavior (Schriesheim, Neider, & Scandura, 1998; Podsakoff et al., 1990).

4.4.3. Reliability and Validity of the Adapted Questionnaire

The survey items are adapted from validated scales used in previous studies on toxic leadership and organizational behavior (Schriesheim, Neider, & Scandura, 1998; Podsakoff et al., 1990).

Reliability: The original scales from which these items are adapted have demonstrated high reliability in previous research. For example, the leadership behavior scales by Schriesheim, Neider, and Scandura (1998) reported Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.85 to 0.90. Similarly, Podsakoff et al. (1990) reported Cronbach's alpha values of 0.87 for their transformational leadership scales.

Validity: The content validity of these scales has been established through extensive literature reviews and expert consultations in the field of organizational behavior. Construct validity has been confirmed through factor analyses, demonstrating that the items accurately reflect the underlying constructs of toxic leadership, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions.

By ensuring the use of these validated and reliable scales, the study maintains a high level of measurement accuracy and consistency, which strengthens the overall validity of the findings.

4.5. Data Collection Procedures

4.5.1. Qualitative Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with 25 senior leaders across diverse industries. Interviews will be scheduled at the convenience of the partici-

pants and conducted either face-to-face or via video conferencing, ensuring accessibility and flexibility. Each interview will last between 45 and 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accurate transcription and analysis (King, 2004).

4.5.2. Quantitative Data Collection

The survey will be administered online using a secure platform to ensure confidentiality and ease of access. Invitations to participate in the survey will be sent via email to a random sample of 200 mid-level and senior managers. Participants will have six weeks to complete the survey, with reminders sent periodically to maximize response rates. Data will be collected anonymously to encourage honest and candid responses (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014).

4.6. Data Analysis Procedures

4.6.1. Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data from the interviews will be transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis will follow these steps:

- Familiarization: Reading and re-reading the transcripts to immerse in the data.
- Coding: Generating initial codes from the data to identify significant features related to toxic leadership.
- Theme Development: Collating codes into potential themes and reviewing them to ensure they accurately reflect the data.
- Refinement: Defining and naming themes to create a coherent narrative about toxic leadership.
- Reporting: Producing a detailed report that captures the richness and complexity of the qualitative data.

4.6.2. Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the survey will be analyzed using statistical techniques, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis. The analysis will be conducted using statistical software such as SPSS or R (Field, 2013). The steps are as follows:

- Data Cleaning: Checking for missing values, outliers, and ensuring data accuracy.
- Descriptive Statistics: Summarizing the demographic characteristics of the sample and the distribution of survey responses.
- Correlation Analysis: Examining the relationships between toxic leadership behaviors and the dependent variables (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentions).
- Multiple Regression Analysis: Testing the predictive power of toxic leadership on the dependent variables while controlling for demographic factors.

4.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Informed consent will be secured from all participants, ensuring they are aware of the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained throughout the study, with data stored securely and accessible only to the research team.

5. Findings

This section presents the findings from the study on toxic leadership and its impact on organizational outcomes. The results are organized into four main areas: the prevalence of toxic leadership behaviors, the impact on employee job satisfaction, the effect on organizational commitment, and the influence on turnover intentions. These findings are derived from the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data collected through semi-structured interviews and surveys.

5.1. Prevalence of Toxic Leadership Behaviors

The quantitative survey results indicated a significant presence of toxic leadership behaviors across various industries. **Table 1** summarizes the frequency of reported toxic behaviors, which include manipulation, intimidation, and unethical decision-making.

Table 1. Frequency of toxic leadership behaviors.

| Toxic Behavior | Frequency (%) |
|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Manipulation | 68.0 |
| Intimidation | 59.5 |
| Unethical Decision-Making | 53.0 |
| Disrespectful Communication | 72.0 |
| Micromanagement | 65.0 |

Table 1 summarizes the frequency of reported toxic behaviors, which include manipulation, intimidation, unethical decision-making, disrespectful communication, and micromanagement.

The data in **Table 1** highlight the prevalence of various toxic leadership behaviors as reported by participants. Disrespectful communication was the most frequently reported behavior at 72%, followed by manipulation at 68%, micromanagement at 65%, intimidation at 59.5%, and unethical decision-making at 53%. These frequencies indicate that disrespectful communication and manipulation are the most common toxic behaviors experienced by employees, which can significantly impact organizational culture and employee well-being.

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews corroborated these findings, with many participants recounting specific instances of toxic behaviors. For

example, one participant noted, “The constant micromanagement and intimidation created a hostile work environment that stifled creativity and innovation.”

5.2. Impact on Employee Job Satisfaction

The survey results revealed a strong negative correlation between toxic leadership behaviors and employee job satisfaction. **Table 2** provides a summary of the descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlation with job satisfaction.

| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation | Correlation with Job Satisfaction (r) |
|-----------------------------|------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Manipulation | 3.8 | 0.9 | -0.62 |
| Intimidation | 3.6 | 1.0 | -0.55 |
| Unethical Decision-Making | 3.5 | 1.1 | -0.48 |
| Disrespectful Communication | 4.1 | 0.8 | -0.65 |
| Micromanagement | 3.9 | 0.9 | -0.60 |

Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics for various toxic leadership behaviors and their correlation with job satisfaction. The negative correlations indicate that higher levels of these toxic behaviors are associated with lower job satisfaction among employees.

The data indicate that disrespectful communication has the strongest negative correlation with job satisfaction ($r = -0.65$), followed closely by manipulation ($r = -0.62$) and micromanagement ($r = -0.60$). Intimidation and unethical decision-making also negatively impact job satisfaction, with correlations of -0.55 and -0.48 , respectively. This suggests that disrespectful communication and manipulation are particularly detrimental to employee job satisfaction.

Interviews revealed that employees subjected to toxic leadership experienced lower job satisfaction due to constant stress and a lack of appreciation. One interviewee mentioned, “The toxic environment drained my motivation and made me dread coming to work every day.”

5.3. Effect on Organizational Commitment

The study also found a significant negative impact of toxic leadership on organizational commitment. Employees under toxic leaders reported lower levels of commitment to their organizations. **Table 3** illustrates the correlation between toxic behaviors and organizational commitment.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation of toxic leadership behaviors with organizational commitment. The negative correlations indicate that increased toxic leadership behaviors are associated with decreased organizational commitment.

The data reveal that disrespectful communication has the strongest negative correlation with organizational commitment ($r = -0.58$), followed by manipula-

tion ($r = -0.54$) and micromanagement ($r = -0.52$). Intimidation and unethical decision-making also negatively impact organizational commitment, with correlations of -0.50 and -0.45 , respectively. This implies that disrespectful communication significantly undermines employees' commitment to the organization.

Table 3. Correlation with organizational commitment.

| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation | Correlation with Organizational Commitment (r) |
|-----------------------------|------|--------------------|--|
| Manipulation | 3.8 | 0.9 | -0.54 |
| Intimidation | 3.6 | 1.0 | -0.50 |
| Unethical Decision-Making | 3.5 | 1.1 | -0.45 |
| Disrespectful Communication | 4.1 | 0.8 | -0.58 |
| Micromanagement | 3.9 | 0.9 | -0.52 |

Qualitative insights highlighted that toxic leadership eroded trust and loyalty among employees. An interview participant shared, "I lost faith in the company because of the toxic leadership. It made me question whether I wanted to stay."

5.4. Influence on Turnover Intentions

Turnover intentions were significantly higher among employees who experienced toxic leadership. The survey data showed a positive correlation between toxic behaviors and the intention to leave the organization. **Table 4** presents these findings.

Table 4. Correlation with turnover intentions.

| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation | Correlation with Turnover Intentions (r) |
|-----------------------------|------|--------------------|--|
| Manipulation | 3.8 | 0.9 | 0.67 |
| Intimidation | 3.6 | 1.0 | 0.62 |
| Unethical Decision-Making | 3.5 | 1.1 | 0.58 |
| Disrespectful Communication | 4.1 | 0.8 | 0.70 |
| Micromanagement | 3.9 | 0.9 | 0.64 |

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics and correlation of toxic leadership behaviors with turnover intentions. The positive correlations indicate that higher levels of these toxic behaviors are associated with higher turnover intentions among employees.

The data indicate that disrespectful communication has the strongest positive correlation with turnover intentions ($r = 0.70$), followed by manipulation ($r = 0.67$) and micromanagement ($r = 0.64$). Intimidation and unethical decision-making also positively impact turnover intentions, with correlations of 0.62 and 0.58 , respectively. This suggests that disrespectful communication is a significant

predictor of employees' intentions to leave the organization.

Interview data supported these findings, with many participants expressing a desire to leave their current positions due to toxic leadership. One participant remarked, "The toxic atmosphere made me start looking for other job opportunities. I couldn't see myself staying in such an environment."

5.5. Cross-Case Synthesis

The cross-case synthesis highlights that while toxic leadership is pervasive across industries, its impact on employees varies based on individual and contextual factors. For instance, employees in high-stress industries like healthcare and finance reported higher levels of stress and turnover intentions compared to those in less stressful industries. **Table 5** provides a summary of cross-case variations.

Table 5. Cross-case synthesis of toxic leadership impact.

| Industry | Stress Level | Job Satisfaction (Mean) | Organizational Commitment (Mean) | Turnover Intentions (Mean) |
|---------------|--------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Finance | High | 2.8 | 2.7 | 4.1 |
| Healthcare | High | 2.6 | 2.5 | 4.3 |
| Technology | Moderate | 3.2 | 3.1 | 3.6 |
| Manufacturing | Low | 3.5 | 3.4 | 3.2 |
| Other | Varies | 3.0 | 2.9 | 3.8 |

Table 5 provides a cross-case synthesis of the impact of toxic leadership on stress levels, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions across different industries.

The data suggest that industries such as finance and healthcare, which report high levels of stress, also exhibit lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment, coupled with higher turnover intentions. In contrast, the manufacturing sector, which reports low stress levels, shows higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and lower turnover intentions. The technology sector, with moderate stress levels, falls in between these extremes. This indicates that stress levels influenced by toxic leadership behaviors can significantly impact job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions across different industries.

The findings from this study underscore the significant negative impact of toxic leadership on employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. The prevalence of toxic behaviors across industries highlights the need for organizations to develop targeted interventions to mitigate these effects. Future research should explore industry-specific solutions and the role of organizational culture in moderating the impact of toxic leadership.

By combining and analyzing the data in these tables, we gain a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence and impact of toxic leadership behaviors on

various organizational outcomes. This integrated approach highlights the critical areas for intervention to mitigate the negative effects of toxic leadership.

6. Discussion

The findings from this study provide a comprehensive understanding of toxic leadership and its detrimental impact on organizational health, employee well-being, and overall productivity. The prevalence of toxic leadership behaviours, such as manipulation, intimidation, and unethical decision-making, was significant across various industries. These behaviours were consistently associated with negative outcomes for employees and organizations.

6.1. Impacts on Employee Well-Being

The study revealed that toxic leadership significantly affects employee well-being, leading to increased stress, anxiety, and burnout. These psychological impacts often translate into physical health problems, absenteeism, and decreased job satisfaction. Consistent with previous research (Ashforth, 1994; Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014), the data showed a strong negative correlation between toxic leadership behaviors and job satisfaction. Employees subjected to toxic leadership reported feeling undervalued, demotivated, and disillusioned, which corroborates *Tepper's (2000)* findings on the adverse effects of abusive supervision.

6.2. Organizational Performance and Culture

The broader organizational consequences of toxic leadership were equally profound. The study found that toxic leadership behaviors create an environment of fear and mistrust, hindering communication, collaboration, and innovation. This is in line with *Schmidt's (2008)* assertion that toxic leadership damages organizational reputation and impairs effectiveness. The negative correlations between toxic behaviours and organizational commitment, along with increased turnover intentions, highlight the substantial costs organizations incur in terms of both financial resources and human capital.

6.3. Cross-Case Variations

The cross-case synthesis illustrated that the impact of toxic leadership varies across different industries. High-stress sectors like healthcare and finance reported higher levels of stress and turnover intentions. This indicates that industry-specific stressors can exacerbate the effects of toxic leadership, necessitating tailored interventions to address these unique challenges.

6.4. Strategies for Mitigating Toxic Leadership

The study underscores the importance of proactive strategies to identify and mitigate toxic leadership. Effective interventions include the development of clear policies and procedures, such as zero-tolerance policies and reporting mechanisms (*Goldman, 2009*). Leadership development programs emphasizing

ethical and inclusive practices are crucial for fostering a positive organizational culture. Promoting open communication and feedback mechanisms can help detect toxic behaviors early and prevent their escalation.

The role of ethical leadership as an antidote to toxicity was also highlighted. Leaders who model ethical behavior and prioritize the well-being of their subordinates can create a supportive and inclusive work environment (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Organizations should invest in leadership training that promotes emotional intelligence and empathy, reducing the likelihood of toxic behaviors emerging.

6.5. Practical Implications

The findings of this study have several practical implications for organizations seeking to improve their leadership dynamics and overall work environment. Implementing comprehensive leadership training programs that focus on ethical behaviour and emotional intelligence can mitigate the emergence of toxic leadership. Additionally, creating robust reporting and support systems for employees can empower them to speak out against toxic behaviors without fear of retribution.

6.6. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should explore the role of organizational culture in moderating the impact of toxic leadership. Investigating the effectiveness of specific interventions across different cultural contexts and industries can provide deeper insights into the best practices for addressing toxic leadership. Longitudinal studies examining the long-term effects of toxic leadership on organizational performance and employee well-being would also be valuable.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the profound impact toxic leadership can have on both employees and organizational performance. Toxic leadership behaviors such as manipulation, coercion, hostility, and abuse of power create detrimental work environments that lead to significant psychological distress among employees, including increased stress, anxiety, and burnout. These negative effects extend to physical health issues, higher absenteeism, and reduced job satisfaction, ultimately contributing to higher turnover rates. Such environments not only affect individual well-being but also disrupt organizational operations and incur significant costs associated with recruiting and training new staff.

On a broader scale, toxic leadership damages the overall organizational culture and performance. It fosters a culture of fear and mistrust, impeding communication, collaboration, and innovation. This hostile atmosphere stifles creativity and adaptability, essential components for organizational success in a dynamic market. Moreover, organizations led by toxic leaders often struggle to maintain a positive reputation, which is crucial for attracting and retaining top

talent.

Effective strategies for mitigating toxic leadership include developing clear policies and procedures, such as zero-tolerance policies and robust reporting mechanisms. Leadership development programs should prioritize ethical and inclusive leadership practices. Promoting open communication and regular feedback can help in identifying and addressing toxic behaviors before they escalate. By implementing these strategies, organizations can foster a healthier work environment, improve employee well-being, and enhance overall organizational health and performance.

In conclusion, the study highlights the necessity for proactive measures and continuous commitment to nurturing healthy leadership dynamics. Addressing toxic leadership is not just about improving individual experiences but is crucial for sustaining the overall health, productivity, and competitiveness of the organization. By understanding and mitigating toxic leadership, organizations can create supportive and collaborative environments that promote trust and drive success.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Ashforth, B. (1994). Petty Tyranny in Organizations. *Human Relations*, 47, 755-778. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872679404700701>
- Aycan, Z., Kanungo, R., Mendonca, M., Yu, K., Deller, J., Stahl, G. et al. (2000). Impact of Culture on Human Resource Management Practices: A 10-Country Comparison. *Applied Psychology*, 49, 192-221. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1464-0597.00010>
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Prentice Hall.
- Beetham, J., & Okhai, L. (2017). Workplace Dyslexia & Specific Learning Difficulties—Productivity, Engagement and Well-Being. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 5, 56-78. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2017.56007>
- Boddy, C. R. (2011). The Corporate Psychopaths Theory of the Global Financial Crisis. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 102, 255-259. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-0810-4>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Brown, M. E., & Treviño, L. K. (2006). Ethical Leadership: A Review and Future Directions. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17, 595-616. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2006.10.004>
- Christie, R., & Geis, F. (1970). *Studies in Machiavellianism*. Academic Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2014). *Internet, Phone, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781394260645>
- Einarsen, S., Aasland, M. S., & Skogstad, A. (2007). Destructive Leadership Behaviour: A

- Definition and Conceptual Model. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18, 207-216. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.03.002>
- Field, A. (2013). *Discovering Statistics Using IBM SPSS Statistics* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Fowler, F. J. (2013). *Survey Research Methods* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Frost, P. J. (2004). Handling Toxic Emotions: New Challenges for Leaders and Their Organizations. *Organizational Dynamics*, 33, 111-127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2004.01.001>
- Goldman, A. (2009). *Destructive Leaders and Dysfunctional Organizations: A Therapeutic Approach*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511805097>
- Guo, X. (2016). Leader Group Prototypicality and Employee Well-Being: The Mediate Effect of Group Commitment and the Moderate Effect of Openness. *Psychology*, 07, 591-597. <https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2016.74061>
- Harris, K. J., Kacmar, K. M., & Zivnuska, S. (2007). An Investigation of Abusive Supervision as a Predictor of Performance and the Meaning of Work as a Moderator of the Relationship. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18, 252-263. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.03.007>
- House, R. J., Hanges, P. J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P. W., & Gupta, V. (2004). *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies*. Sage Publications.
- Kellerman, B. (2004). *Bad Leadership: What It Is, How It Happens, Why It Matters*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- King, N. (2004). Using Interviews in Qualitative Research. In C. Cassell & G. Symon (Eds.), *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research* (pp. 11-22). SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446280119.n2>
- Krasikova, D. V., Green, S. G., & LeBreton, J. M. (2013). Destructive Leadership: A Theoretical Review, Integration, and Future Research Agenda. *Journal of Management*, 39, 1308-1338. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206312471388>
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Lipman-Blumen, J. (2005). Toxic leadership: A Conceptual Framework. *Organizational Dynamics*, 33, 142-155.
- Mayer, D. M., Kuenzi, M., Greenbaum, R., Bardes, M., & Salvador, R. (. (2009). How Low Does Ethical Leadership Flow? Test of a Trickle-Down Model. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 108, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2008.04.002>
- Mehta, S., & Maheshwari, G. C. (2014). Consequence of Toxic Leadership on Employee Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment. *Journal of Contemporary Management Research*, 8, 1-23.
- Padilla, A., Hogan, R., & Kaiser, R. B. (2007). The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers, and Conducive Environments. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18, 176-194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.03.001>
- Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Pelletier, K. L. (2010). Leader Toxicity: An Empirical Investigation of Toxic Behavior and Rhetoric. *Leadership*, 6, 373-389. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715010379308>
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Moorman, R. H., & Fetter, R. (1990). Transformational Leader Behaviors and Their Effects on Followers' Trust in Leader, Satisfaction, and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 1, 107-142.

[https://doi.org/10.1016/1048-9843\(90\)90009-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/1048-9843(90)90009-7)

- Reed, G. E. (2004). Toxic Leadership. *Military Review*, 84, 67-71.
- Rosenthal, S. A., & Pittinsky, T. L. (2006). Narcissistic Leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17, 617-633. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2006.10.005>
- Schein, E. H. (2010). *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Schmidt, A. A. (2008). *Development and Validation of the Toxic Leadership Scale*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Maryland.
- Schneider, B., Ehrhart, M. G., & Macey, W. H. (2013). Organizational Climate and Culture. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 64, 361-388. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-113011-143809>
- Schriesheim, C. A., Neider, L. L., & Scandura, T. A. (1998). Delegation and Leader-Member Exchange: Main Effects, Moderators, and Measurement Issues. *Academy of Management Journal*, 41, 298-318. <https://doi.org/10.2307/256909>
- Schyns, B., & Schilling, J. (2013). How Bad Are the Effects of Bad Leaders? A Meta-Analysis of Destructive Leadership and Its Outcomes. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 24, 138-158. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2012.09.001>
- Tepper, B. J. (2000). Consequences of Abusive Supervision. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43, 178-190. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1556375>

Appendix

Appendix A. Interview Protocol

The following open-ended questions are designed to elicit detailed responses about experiences with toxic leadership, its impact on employees and organizational outcomes, and strategies for mitigation.

Can you describe an experience you have had with toxic leadership in your organization?

How did the behaviors of the toxic leader affect your work environment and your performance?

What specific actions or behaviors did the toxic leader exhibit that you found particularly harmful?

How did the presence of a toxic leader impact the overall morale and productivity of your team?

What were the long-term effects of toxic leadership on employee well-being and organizational outcomes?

How did you and your colleagues cope with the toxic leadership behaviors?

Were there any mechanisms or strategies in place within your organization to address and mitigate toxic leadership?

What recommendations would you make for identifying and dealing with toxic leadership in the workplace?

Appendix B. Structured Survey Instrument

The structured survey instrument includes the following sections:

Section 1: Demographic Information

- Age:
- Gender:
- Tenure with the organization:
- Industry sector:

Section 2: Perceptions of Toxic Leadership Behaviors (Adapted from validated scales by Schriesheim, Neider, & Scandura, 1998; Podsakoff et al., 1990)

- **The leader frequently engages in manipulative behaviors.**
Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree
- **The leader uses intimidation to influence others.**
Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree
- **The leader often makes unethical decisions.**
Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree
- **The leader publicly humiliates employees.**
Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree

Section 3: Job Satisfaction (Adapted from validated scales)

- **I am satisfied with my current job.**
Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree
- **My job provides me with a sense of accomplishment.**
Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree

Section 4: Organizational Commitment (Adapted from validated scales)

- **I feel a strong sense of loyalty to my organization.**

Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree

- **I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization.**

Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree

Section 5: Turnover Intentions (Adapted from validated scales)

- **I often think about leaving my current job.**

Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree

- **I will probably look for a new job in the next year.**

Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree