

Conceptual Framework of Toxic Leadership

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Abstract

Leadership is considered a vital managerial function that helps to direct the organization's resources for improved efficiency and the achievement of goals. An Effective leader provides clarity of purpose, motivates, and guides the organization to realize its mission. On the other hand, toxic leader lacks self of control, ignores the right of employees and harms the whole organization. This paper provides a useful typology for a better understanding of toxic leadership. We explore the definitions, history, evolution, characteristics, dimensions, signs, symptoms, and the negative impacts of toxic leadership to identify its destructive behaviors and the tools that increase toxicity in the organization. We surveyed the practices of toxic leaders since 1995 and found that toxic leadership is a controversial topic. However, toxic leadership affects individuals and organizations negatively as it increases workplace deviance, the employee's intention to leave, and the turnover rates, and it reduces the level of job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Keywords

Toxic leadership, destructive behaviors, Dimensions of toxic leadership

1.Introduction

Leadership is considered an important factor in achieving organizational goals, coordinating employees, and directing the organization's resources to improve efficiency and performance. Many researchers focused on the majority and importance of leadership and how it has affected different employees and the organization (DeCelles& Pfarrer, 2004; Krasikova et al., 2013; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Lots of those studies focused on the positive leadership styles such as servant leadership, democratic leadership, or transformational leadership and their positive influence on some

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organizational outputs such as job satisfaction, productivity, performance, and creativity (Braun et al., 2013; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Conger, Kanungo & Menon, 2000; Foels et al., 2000). However, there is little consideration of the harmful or destructive leadership styles and their negative impact on employees and the organization. Contreras & Espinosa, 2019 and Baumeister et al. (2001) argue that the individual's attitudes and behaviors are affected by negative aspects more than positive aspects which means that harmful leader affects the employees more than good or charismatic or servant leader. Therefore, recent studies pay great attention to studying the impact of toxic or harmful leadership on employees and organizations.

Many studies refer to the non-supportive leader as a harmful, destructive, and dark side of leadership. But this description is misleading because it requires answers to some important questions such as:

- 1) What does the "dark side" of leadership mean?
- 2) What leadership styles or behaviors are described as dark leadership?
- 3) What are the consequences of using dark side of leadership?

Accordingly, recent studies used the term "Toxic Leadership". Lipman-Blumen 2005 refers to two types of toxic leaders. The first type is the intentionally toxic leader who intentionally harms other employees and enhances himself depending on others' expense, the second type is the unintentionally toxic leader who harms other people with careless and reckless behavior. The purpose of this paper is to provide a conceptual framework of toxic leadership. This paper covers the following areas: definitions, history, evolution, characteristics, dimensions, signs, symptoms, and the negative impacts of toxic leadership to identify its destructive behaviors and the tools that increase toxicity in the organization.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definitions of Toxic leadership

Whicker (1995) provides three types of leaders: trustworthy (green light), transitional (yellow light), and Toxic (Red light). She was the first scholar to use the term “Toxic leaders” in her book. She describes toxic leaders to be *"maladjusted, malcontent, and often malevolent, even malicious. They succeed by tearing others down. They glory in turf protection, fighting, and controlling, rather than uplifting followers"*. so, she identifies toxic leaders not by definition but by their behavior and by the negative effects they have on the organization. Frost (2003) describes two types of toxic leadership, the first one is the action and practice done by the leader that causes pain and suffering to both people and the organization, and the second one is related to the leaders who show sympathy to followers in the organization and leads to bad and undesirable performance. Wilson-Starks, K. Y. (2003) defined toxic leadership as a leadership approach that harms individuals and the company within the organization by toxin enthusiasm, creativity, independence, and innovative expression. Toxic leaders spread their toxins through excessive control. They define leadership as to how to exercise power and control over people.

Kellerman (2004) refers to “bad leadership” rather than “Toxic leadership”, he describes the leadership styles and behaviors related to bad leaders based on the qualitative case studies he conducted in which he focused on the leaders from political, religious, and business organizations. Kellerman proposed, *“In spite of all the work on leadership that assumes it by definition to be good, I describe how we exercise power, authority, and influence in ways that do harm”* Reed (2004) argues that the toxic leadership concept was primarily used in the military context, he conducted the research at the US Army War College, he concluded that toxic leadership is the behavior with three main symptoms, firstly lack concern for the well-being of the followers, secondly, an

interpersonal trait that hurts the climate of the organization, finally, the leader interested on his self-interest and ignores the organizational or the follower's interest.

Egan (2004) in orunbon et al.,2020 determined different types of toxic leaders as accidental, destructive, narcissistic, and psychopathic leaders. Schmidt (2008) described the toxic leadership behavior as a “*unique set of leadership behaviors that negatively impact the subordinate group in predictable ways.*” (Reyhanoğlu & Akın, 2016; Gündüz & Dedekorkut, 2014) in Abbas, M., & Saad, G. B. (2020)) define toxic leaders as leaders who intend to expose hostile behavior toward their followers because of the managerial authority and power they have, this behavior of toxic leaders can harm or damage the success of the individuals inside the organization and create anxiety among the members in the organization. (Maheshwari and Mehta,2014) defined Toxic leadership as a series of deliberate behavior of the leader that disrupts the effective performance of the organization and is intended to humiliate the subordinates or the followers with the goal of personal goals or interests.

Higgs, (2009) in Heppell (2011) indicated that researchers' views have been differed in expressing the term Toxic leadership as follows:

- Kellerman, 2004; Padilla and Mualvey, 2008 called it bad leadership
- Padilla et al., 2007 considered the dark side of leadership and called it destructive leadership
- Glad, 2002 considered the bad leader as the narcissistic leader
- Bensoen and Hogan 2008; Hogan and Hogan 2001 called it an evil leader
- And et al., 2008; MacIntosh and Rima 1997; Rowland and Higgs, 2008 called it the dark side of leadership

Benson and Hogan 2008; Frost, 2003; Goldman 2006, 2009; Lipman-Blumen, 2005a; Padilla et al., Padilla and Mualvey, 2008; Whicker, 1996 called it Toxic leadership.

Yapp (2016) in Laguda, E. (2020) mentioned that once a toxic leader exists the following elements must exist:

- conductive environment as toxic leaders needs a suitable environment which has some characteristics such as lack of governance, unstable climate, threat, and questionable standards and values.
- Hesitation in making decisions: When there's uncertainty, individuals recognize that definitive activity must be taken to reestablish arrangement and steadiness. They are willing to give up the slower equitable choice-making in favor of fast, one-sided choices.
- threat: The outside impact or performing artist makes a feeling of “under attack”. Individuals get frightened when they feel undermined. This leads to a readiness to acknowledge toxic authority. Fear is the most grounded human feeling. Harmful leaders attempt to form an environment where there's a perceived danger.
- Conformers: These individuals are inactive within the confront of harmful authority. They frequently need certainty; They need a specialist figure to provide security and certainty. They are focused on self-preservation and are improbable to fight harmful leaders who look for the way of least resistance.
- Collusive: These adherents are more proactive than conformers and will adjust and acknowledge toxic authority. They are regularly confident and rapidly advance towards getting to be harmful leaders by copying the behavior of harmful bosses.

2.2 Some previous studies related to toxic leadership

Orunbon, N. O., et.al,2022 investigated the relationship between school toxic leadership, teachers' job satisfaction, and organizational commitment in Lagos State tertiary institutions. The population of the study consisted of lecturers in Lagos State-owned tertiary institutions and the sample size was 240 lecturers. researchers adopted Correlational and descriptive research designs. results of the study revealed that there is a negative relationship between toxic leadership and teachers' job satisfaction in Lagos State tertiary institutions and there is a negative relationship between toxic leadership and organizational commitment. in Lagos State tertiary institutions. these results agreed with Schmidt (2014) and Mehta and Maheshwari (2013) as Schmidt (2014) found a negative relationship between toxic leadership and work satisfaction in individuals and organizations and Mehta and Maheshwari (2013) found a negative connection between toxic leadership and work satisfaction, and a negative link between characteristics of toxic leadership and variables of organizational commitment.

Tejeda, J. M. (2020) study aimed at investigating empirically the impact of Toxic leadership on organizational growth and efficiency, the study investigates the whole impact of Toxic leadership both direct and indirect impact on the performance of employees and organizational culture and investigates the harmful impacts of toxic leadership on the whole performance of the organization. and because of the impact of toxic leadership on the organization, it is important to study the over impact of it on individuals and firms to enhance the understanding of the leadership toxicity in the organization. the study is applied to employees in listed companies in the US, the researcher chooses this population because their information is published on publicly accessible sites. the sample size is 420 employees from 12 publicly listed companies, the researcher used structural equational modeling to test the

accuracy of the hypotheses. the scale of the variable's dimensions was measured based on a five-point Likert scale.

Results of the study have shown that increasing the score of toxic leadership is related to declining in growth whereas enhancement in the cultural perceptions; However culture has a mediating impact on the relationship between toxicity and growth, this impact is because of the direct impact of leadership; Toxic leadership correlates directly with employee performance; toxic leadership is significantly associated with efficiency; employee performance mediates the effect of toxic leadership on organizational efficiency most of these influences were due to the direct impact of toxic leadership and finally the multiple regression analysis results showed that there was a significant moderating influence of culture on the relationship between toxic leadership and efficiency but this influence was weak.

Labrague, L. J., Nwafor, C. E., & Tsaras, K. (2020) study aimed at investigating how practices of toxic and transformational leadership influence job satisfaction, absenteeism, psychological distress, and intention to leave the organization of the nurses. The study is applied to 770 nurses from fifteen hospitals in Central Philippines, the researcher collected the data using seven self-reported surveys. The researcher uses the (Labrague, Lorica, et al., 2020) scale to measure the toxic leadership; the scale consists of 30 items of four dimensions self-promoting, narcissistic, intemperate, and humiliating behaviors; 7 items of scale for the transformational leadership by Carless, Wearing, and Mann (2000); six items of job satisfaction were used to measure job satisfaction (JSI; Schriesheim & Tsui, 1980); Psychological distress was measured using 4 items scales (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983); the turnover intention was measured using 2 single items O'Driscoll and Beehr(1994); and absenteeism was measured using single question developed by the researcher.

Results of the study have shown that transformational leadership is a predictor of job satisfaction and intention to leave the nurse's profession and toxic leadership is a predictor of absenteeism, job satisfaction, the intention of the nurses to leave the profession, and psychological distress; results suggest that nurses working with a manager characterized by toxicity demonstrated higher intention to leave, higher levels of stress, frequent levels of absenteeism and lower levels of job contentment .but nurses working with a manager characterized by transformational leadership demonstrated higher levels of contentment but lower levels of intention to leave their profession.

Behery et al.,(2018) study aimed at investigating the impact of toxic leadership on organizational citizenship behavior; the study used the commitment and trust of the follower to mediate the impact of toxic leadership and organizational outcomes. Data were collected through a questionnaire, Behery et al., also used two online links to collect the data online the sample size consisted of 660 employees and the population was private and public UAE-based firms. Behery et al., used some statistical techniques to measure the hypotheses such as one way ANOVA test, T-test, and structure equational modeling. Beery et al., used five Likert points to measure the variables, a commitment was measured through 15 items on the scale was developed by Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979), and trust was measured through seven-item the scale was developed by Robinson and Rousseau (1994). Challenge-oriented and Affiliation-oriented organizational citizenship were measured through eleven items developed by MacKenzie et al. (2011). And finally, toxic leadership was measured through 30 items. and the scale was created by (Schmidt, 2008). Behery et al., used five dimensions of Toxic leadership which are Narcissism, unpredictability, authoritarian leadership, self-promotion, and abusive supervision.

Results of the study have shown that Abusive Supervision, Authoritarian Leadership, and Unpredictability as the dimensions of toxic leadership negatively correlated with Affiliation-oriented organizational citizenship behavior but the other dimensions of toxic leadership (Narcissism & self-promotion hadn't any significant relationship with the two dimensions of organizational citizenship behavior; the study also indicated that Challenge-oriented OCB significantly correlated positively with Followers' Trust and finally the study investigated empirically and conceptually How followers perceive and react to the various types of toxic leadership in a collectivistic culture.

3.Characteristics, behaviors, Signs, dimensions, and negative impacts of toxic leaders

3.1characteristics of toxic leaders

In many organizations, Toxic leaders are the most painful thing who affect their climate and performance by using their destructive and harmful behavior, so this section spots some of the common characteristics of the toxic leader.

Kellerman, B. (2004) identified seven common characteristics of toxic leaders as follows:

Incompetent

A toxic leader thinks he is the best in the organization, but he is incompetent and may struggle to make the simplest decisions and to do the simplest tasks

Rigid

The leader and at least some of his followers are tough. Although they may be highly qualified, they are unable or unwilling to adapt to new ideas, new information, or changing times.

Intemperate

The leader lacks self-control and is supported and abetted by followers who are unwilling or unable to intervene effectively.

Callous

The leader and at least some of his followers are uncaring or unkind, and ignore the ideas, opinions, wishes, needs, and wants of most people in the organization, especially subordinates.

Corrupt

The leader and some of his followers lie, cheat, or steal to a degree that goes beyond the norm, they put their interest above the public interest

Insular

The leader and some of his followers don't give any attention to the health and welfare of other people outside the group they are responsible for managing and directing

Evil

The leader and some of his followers commit an abomination. They utilize torment as an instrument of control. The harm can be physical, mental, or both.

Lipman-Blumen (2005) identified the following personality traits to determine Toxic leaders:

- an arrogance that encourages them to deny their mistakes and blame other people for these mistakes and bad results
- a lack of integrity and put their own interest and glory above any other person in the organization

- an arrogance that prevents them from recognizing their mistakes and results in blaming others and inability to distinguish between right and wrong
- a propensity towards carelessness and ignoring the costs of their activities to others as well as to themselves; and
- a form of weakness that leads them to shrivel from the troublesome choices.

3.2 Behaviors of toxic leaders

Brandebo, M. F., & Alvinus, A. (2018) mentioned some behaviors practiced by Toxic leaders as follows:

- Ignoring the right of employees
- Criticizing employees
- Belittling employees isolate employees and scare them
- activating an unfair management approach

3.3 Signs and symptoms of toxic leaders and organizations

Wilson-Starks, K. Y. (2003) mentioned the symptoms of toxic leadership and identified that in a toxic leadership organization if people agree with the boss or leader they will be rewarded directly and if they think differently from their leader they will be punished immediately. Wilson-Starks, K. Y. also added that people who always say "yes" are rewarded, promoted, and take turns in leadership roles.

(Macklem, 2005) in Çoban, C. (2017) determined some signs to describe the organization or the institution as Toxic as follows:

- they have no expectations about anything in the future because they think the same negative situations in the organization will be repeated

- Being away from virtuous attitudes and behaviors
- Not allowing others to express their opinion and ideas
- The fact that managers work under intense stress leads to a decrease in their success. This situation causes leaders to lose

Karthikeyan, C. (2017) investigated the typical signs of a Toxic organization resulting from harmful leadership as follows:

- Negative emotional moods: anger, loss of hope, discouragement, frustration, pessimism, and animosity
- Ineffective and aimless work.
- Destructive and counterproductive conduct
- employee physical and emotional withdrawal and withdrawal such as absenteeism, lack of contribution, and turnover intention.
- Unethical Deviant Behavior: Theft, Fraud, and Vandalism.
- Poor health and well being
- Dissatisfaction with life in general
- Lack of organizational commitment
- Lack of (team) morale and job satisfaction.
- Hierarchical organizational dis-identification

3.4 Dimensions of toxic leadership

(Çelebi, Güner & Yıldız, 2015) developed a scale and validation of toxic leadership this scale consists of four dimensions as follows: self-interest, ignorance, negative mood, and selfishness.

self interest

(Goldman, 2009) described it as being disrespectful with subordinates and humiliating employees, using fear to manage people, ignoring ideas and expectations of employees, destroying trust and commitment in the workplace,

and considering that their opinions and ideas are most important than any other person in the institution.

Ignorance

(Çelebi et al., 2015) determined that an ignorance leader as a leader who tells employees and subordinates all the time, they are underqualified and once they express about their opinion, he belittles them.

negative mood

Within the measurement of negative mood, Harmful behaviors such as irate, troubled, demoralized, reflecting the negative mood in a tone of voice, lopsided behavior, holding up for representatives to act concurring to the mood of the bosses are seen as behaviors that happen within the measurement of negative mental state. (Çelebi et al., 2015). (Kellermen, 2008) added that the dimension of negative mental state means lack of emotions, rude behaviors, and being incompetent with employees.

selfishness

In the dimension of selfishness, the leader thinks he is perfect all the time, the success of the organization depends on his existence, he is overqualified and has talents more than any other person in the institution, so he deserves his position and more than it (Çelebi et al., 2015). (Demirel, 2015). added that Toxic leaders practice behavior that uses the expression "I" they satisfy their ego and attribute the success of the organization to themselves and blame other employees for the failure happens.

3.5 Negative impacts of Toxic leadership

Wilson-Starks, K. Y. (2003) identified the impact of toxic leadership on a company as toxic leaders can create systemic damage throughout the organization, under the supervision of toxic leaders employees have mainly two

alternatives: conform or leave. those who choose to conform will experience diminishing expectations. Toxic leadership often causes a high turnover rate, a decline in productivity, less innovation, and interdepartmental conflict.

Orunbon, N. O., Lawal, R. O., Isaac-Philips, M. M., & Salaudeen, R. I. (2022) investigate that toxic leadership has a negative and significant impact on individuals and organizations. Orunbon, N. O., et.al, (2022) added that Toxic leadership has a disastrous impact on academics, learning, and teaching or the teaching institution. It also can undermine the aim of higher educational institutions in society.

Pelletier (2010) in (Burns Jr, W. A. (2017) agreed with Orunbon, N. O., et. al, 2022 and mentioned the negative impacts of toxic leadership on organizational and subordinates' level as at the organizational level, researchers found increases in deviance in the workplace by subordinates who report working for abusive supervisors.

4.the destructive behaviors and their supporting tools

(Lipman–Blumen2005) in Tavanti, M.2011 indicated the following actions to recognize the destructive behaviors of toxic leaders:

- Leaving followers worse of this is applied to dependent followers who need the actions of their leader. The actions of leader here are destructive and undermining. it begins when toxic leaders intend to eliminate their competent followers.
- Violating rights and dignity: Where political leaders and dictators are characterized as violating human rights, so too is a toxic leader. Therefore, respect for the dignity, opinions, or ability of others is necessarily a function of a successful leader and his interpretation of organizational success.

- **Spinning news and events:** They deliberately and strategically nourish their supporter's news that upgrades the leaders' control, and prevalence, and lessens or modifies other people or unit's values. by doing this, toxic leaders convince their followers that only the leader can save them and the organization. It weakens subordinates' ability to act independently to reassert the leader's authority.
- **Promoting or ignoring incompetence:** The shortcomings of the organization are always geared towards re-emphasizing ego-centric management systems so subordinates who want to support a toxic, arrogant leader will be promoted regardless of their competence. On the other hand, competent managers who do not express subordinate behaviors or do not support the agenda of a toxic leader are systematically excluded.

Karthikeyan, C. (2017) investigated five tools that increase toxicity in the organization as follows:

Workload: Preparing for failure is a well-established tactic of workplace bullying that a toxic leader can use against his competitors and subordinates.

Corporate control systems: they could use the applied processes and procedures to control what is going on. Disciplinary systems might be mishandled to help their control culture.

Organizational structures: They may misuse organizational hierarchies; interpersonal relationships and the way workflows at the workplace.

Corporate power structures: the toxic leader monitors who make decisions, if any, and how widely the power is spread

Workplace rituals and procedures: Management meetings, board reports, disciplinary hearings, performance checks, etc. may become too routine.

5.How to overcome the negative impacts of toxic leadership

(Holderied, 2006) determined that there are three steps to get rid of toxic leaders, environment, and organization as follows:

- The first step is to be careful and take care of small details and large ones also
- The second step is trying hard to eliminate the lack of communication, the lack of communication between supervisors, subordinates, and all units inside the workplace, trying to eliminate passive behaviors as employees follow their boss in everything for example if the manager comes late one day the employees come late the next day.
- The third and last step is correcting any mistakes made in the management before correcting different toxic situations.

6.Conclusion

Practices of toxic leaders existed since 1995 but researchers have different points of view to name this term

Toxic leadership has negative impacts on individuals and organization, it increases the workplace deviance, the employee's intention to leave, and turnover rates and reduces the level of job satisfaction and organizational commitment

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