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# UNMASKING TOXIC LEADERSHIP FROM A HUMAN RESOURCE PERSPECTIVE

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## INTRODUCTION

Toxic leadership has increased scholarly interest in organizational behavior and leadership research. Characterized by harmful traits such as abusive supervision, narcissism, and authoritarianism, this leadership style creates environments that often lead to workplace tension (Krasikova et al., 2013). Its effects extend beyond individuals; they also include the disruption of team dynamics, weakening cohesion, and undermining long-term organizational performance. According to Sull and Sull (2023), toxic leadership is linked to various unfavorable consequences, such as increased employee attrition and diminished workplace trust. Rizani et al. (2022) and Kafkas et al. (2024) support these findings by linking toxic behaviors to organizational cynicism, lower employee engagement, and reduced job satisfaction, often through workplace deviance and weakened organizational commitment. This indicates a requirement for human resource strategies that promote fair and responsible environments. Thereby, ethical leadership and worker support are essential factors in the development of organizational resilience and the maintenance of performance (Gupta & Chawla, 2024).

## TOXIC TRIANGLE THEORY

Padilla et al. (2007) proposed the Toxic Triangle Theory as a theory for understanding toxic leadership in organizations. It provides a comprehensive explanation of the emergence and entrenchment of toxic leadership within organizations. The three critical components are destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and a conducive environment.

*i) Destructive leaders:*

Individuals who exhibit narcissistic, manipulative, authoritarian, or unethical behaviors are leaders who prioritize self-interest, power, and control over the well-being of their followers and the organization. Their actions often leverage weaknesses in the organizational system.

*ii) Susceptible followers:*

- a. Conformers: Submissive individuals who comply with toxic leaders due to fear, dependence, or lack of confidence.
- b. Colluders: Opportunistic individuals who align themselves with toxic leaders to gain personal benefits, such as power or resources.

iii) *Conducive Environment:*

Specific workplace settings, such as environments characterized by instability, unclear ethical standards, or a culture of fear, are more likely to foster the development of toxic leadership. These kinds of conditions provide a breeding ground for destructive leadership behaviors to persist unchallenged.

The Toxic Triangle Theory highlights the interconnection between these three elements, suggesting that toxic leadership arises not only from the leader's behavior but also from the enabling environment and follower dynamics. This theory emphasizes the systemic nature of toxic leadership and stresses the relevance of holistic intervention to mitigate its occurrence.

## **IMPACTS ON EMPLOYEES AND ORGANIZATIONS**

Toxic leadership negatively affects trust and obstructs open communication and collaboration among employees. High levels of stress and burnout are frequently experienced by employees who work for toxic bosses, which results in lower retention rates (Tepper, 2007). The impact is not limited to individual well-being; it affects organizational performance and reputation. Fear-based environments led by toxic leaders frequently inhibit innovation, as they discourage creativity and risk-taking (Padilla et al., 2007). Executive coaching and behavioral counselling are examples of interventions that may be used as mitigating strategies, but their effectiveness largely depends on the leader's commitment to change (Krasikova et al., 2013). The broad impact of toxic leadership has become more widely recognized. According to the American Psychological Association survey in 2024, 15% of workers said they were employed in highly toxic workplaces (APA, 2024). These cultures, which are often shaped by toxic leadership, contribute to psychological distress, perceptions of unsafety, and increased turnover intentions, underscoring the necessity of respectful and psychologically safe workplaces (Sleek, 2024).

## **CONCLUSION**

Toxic leadership presents a complex and persistent threat to employee well-being and organizational sustainability. Addressing this issue requires the implementation of ethical leadership development that promotes psychological safety and structured feedback systems that ensure accountability. Future research should focus on the long-term impacts of toxic leadership, the efficacy of remedies, and their dynamics in digital work contexts. Furthermore, leveraging artificial intelligence to detect early indicators of toxic behaviors may offer innovative prevention strategies. A comprehensive, research-driven approach remains essential for the development of resilient, inclusive, and high-performing organizational cultures.

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