

## Exploring the Consequences of Toxic Leadership on Employee Morale and Workplace Dynamics

Ankita Shrivastava<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Avnish Sharma<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>PhDScholar, Institute of Business Management, GLA University, Mathura, India  
[ankitashrivastava1410@gmail.com](mailto:ankitashrivastava1410@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Institute of Business Management, GLA University, Mathura, India  
[avnish.sharma@gla.ac.in](mailto:avnish.sharma@gla.ac.in)

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the effects of toxic leadership on employee morale and workplace dynamics, a topic that has attracted significant attention in organizational behavior research. Toxic leadership is characterized by detrimental behaviors such as manipulation, intimidation, and unethical decision-making, which can severely disrupt an organization's functioning and employee well-being. This research utilizes a qualitative methodology to meticulously assess relevant secondary literature, encompassing empirical studies and theoretical frameworks from the past two decades, to elucidate the complexities of toxic leadership. The findings demonstrate that toxic leadership leads to diminished staff morale, increased turnover intentions, and decreased organizational productivity. Additionally, the study identifies moderating elements, like organizational culture and leadership training, that can mitigate the detrimental impacts of toxic leadership. This research underscores the necessity for organizations to recognize and address toxic leadership practices to foster healthier workplace climates and improve overall organizational performance. This study advocates for the implementation of ethical leadership practices and nurturing corporate cultures as effective solutions to mitigate the adverse effects of toxic leadership. **Keywords:** Toxic Leadership, Employee Morale, Workplace Culture, Organizational Productivity, Leadership Training, Organizational Behaviour, Employee Well-being, Toxic Workplace Environment.

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### INTRODUCTION

There is a growing concern that toxic leadership is having a substantial impact on the dynamics of the workplace and the morale of employees in a variety of industries. Toxic leadership, which is characterised by manipulation, bullying, and a lack of empathy, creates an environment that is conducive to dread and anxiety, which in turn leads to decreased job satisfaction and increased employee turnover. This is demonstrated by recent incidents of staff mistreatment at Amazon, the misuse and commercialisation of personal user data by Facebook, and chronic discrimination at Uber. Toxic leadership phenomena will result in moral crises, as demonstrated by these examples. According to findings from a study that was conducted not too long ago by Life Meets Work Consulting, 56 percent of employees are currently working for a CEO who is toxic and whose behaviour contributes to an unhealthy working environment. It is estimated that approximately one third of all leaders exhibit actions that are damaging to the organisation. According to Brouwers and Paltu's research from 2020, a number of workers have recently come into contact with leaders and managers who have displayed toxic behaviour. Furthermore, studies have shown that the negative impacts of toxic leadership extend beyond the negative effects of toxic leadership on individual employees and have an influence on the overall culture and productivity of the firm. It is becoming increasingly important for organisations to have a solid understanding of the implications of toxic leadership on account of their desire to achieve sustainable growth and a favourable work environment.

Through this investigation, the complex implications of toxic leadership are investigated. Particular attention is paid to the detrimental impact that toxic leadership has on employee morale and the dynamics of the workplace. Ultimately, the goal is to encourage a transition to healthy leadership practices that nurture a workforce that is more supportive and engaged.

### **What is toxic leadership?**

The discourse on toxic leadership is enriched by language that includes attributes such as malevolent, hurtful, abusive, detrimental, inept, and unethical. The diverse language complicates discussions on toxic leadership, often leading to confusion and constraints stemming from the ongoing debate about its definition. Toxic leadership manifests in multiple forms, encompassing explicit aggression and widespread toxicity, with more subtle, nonviolent behaviours frequently seen in organisational environments. The diversity of detrimental behaviours has prompted many researchers to develop classifications of toxic leadership (Kılıç & Günsel, 2019).

Toxic leadership, according to the Toxic Triangle Model, arises from the complex interplay of destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and permissive environments, resulting in significant detrimental effects on employee morale and workplace dynamics. Destructive leaders often display a blend of charisma, narcissism, and an unquenchable thirst for power, allowing them to manipulate subordinates into compliance. Vulnerable followers, classified as “conformers—who passively support the toxicity—and colluders—who actively promote it—perpetuate this harmful cycle” (Thorough gooda, & Padillab, 2007). Moreover, conditions characterised by high pressure and inadequate supervision of authority promote the spread of these harmful behaviours. Toxic leadership leads to severe repercussions, such as heightened stress, reduced job satisfaction, and increased departure rates, negatively impacting overall organisational efficacy. Toxic leadership can foster an unpleasant work atmosphere, leading to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression among employees. This highlights the essential need for organisations to identify and mitigate toxic leadership behaviours to foster a better workplace culture (Milosevic et al., 2020).

Toxicity within organisational environments, stemming from either leaders or colleagues, has been empirically linked to detrimental impacts on productivity. Toxic leaders are characterised by their dictatorial and arrogant conduct, often exhibiting emotional instability that undermines a productive work environment (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013). Their leadership strategy includes public verbal abuse, withholding praise or support, and implementing retaliatory actions. Toxic leaders often employ a strategy of creating in-groups and out-groups, using the latter as scapegoats for problems, thereby consolidating their power and authority. This argumentative disposition not only distracts individuals from their duties but also fosters an environment of distrust and internal conflict. Toxic leaders have a harsh demeanour and an inability to distinguish personal emotions from professional matters (Hadadian & Zarei, 2016).

The toxic leader's focus on devotion and obedience often leads to the stifling of informal contacts and relationships among subordinates. They cultivate a siege mentality, suggesting that the organization's survival hinges on the loyalty of its adherents. This method is essential for controlling information distribution and acts as a tactic to suppress criticism, dissent, initiative, and creativity (Armitage, 2015). Passive-aggressive toxic leadership is characterised by an aversion to direct confrontation. Instead of confronting issues directly, these leaders employ marginalisation and intimidation tactics to suppress conflict, thereby bolstering their own egos and reputations. They are acknowledged for overloading competent employees without the intention of offering incentives, often usurping the achievements of their subordinates. The extensive occurrence of these leadership styles across many organisational tiers highlights the imperative for a thorough comprehension and proactive measures to mitigate the impacts of toxic leadership in the workplace (Fahie, 2020).

### **Impact and Effects of Toxic Leadership:**

Toxic leadership denotes a systematic management style marked by intentional intimidation, marginalisation, and devaluation of personnel, thereby substantially impairing the organization's overall performance. The effects of abusive supervision on individuals vary significantly among different people. The heterogeneity in responses to toxic leadership is shaped by a combination of factors, including individual personality qualities and particular personal circumstances (Yavaş, 2016).

Toxic leadership exerts excessive control, resulting in diminished excitement, autonomy, creativity, and innovation inside the organisation. These leaders prioritise self-promotion, exhibit stringent control, and employ authoritarian leadership, demonstrating a deficiency in empathy, sensitivity, and humanity. Toxic leaders foster a detrimental work climate, viewed as negative, undermining employee cohesion and collaboration. They seek to

provide an impression of individual success, while this accomplishment frequently undermines individuals in their vicinity (Kurtulmuş, 2020). Toxic CEOs undermine corporate success by infringing upon human rights and displaying harmful behaviours, resulting in diminished productivity and quality of work. Toxic leadership adversely affects employees' mental and emotional health, resulting in stress and demotivation. Moreover, offering training and personal development initiatives for leaders is essential for enhancing their communication, empathy, and interpersonal abilities. Establishing a healthy and supportive workplace enables organisations to enhance employee performance and, subsequently, their long-term success (Saqib & Arif, 2017).

Individuals typically collaborate to attain corporate objectives. In settings with more than two individuals, a management system is crucial for efficient job execution. At this stage, the manager or leader oversees and directs the personnel to fulfil the organization's goals. Leadership is crucial for determining a business's effectiveness; hence, leaders must possess the necessary qualities to guide and inspire their teams. However, several leadership methods negatively impact people and the work environment. In recent years, the prevalence of toxic leadership styles within organisations has risen (Akca, 2017).

Toxic leaders may demonstrate significant expertise and performance in their positions; nonetheless, they cultivate a detrimental environment among their subordinates and colleagues, with the consequences of their activities affecting a broader spectrum of individuals. This was a preliminary finding from research conducted on the topic. Toxic leadership can emerge from several factors, one of which is a leader's preference for their own agenda over the organization's long-term growth (Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021). Reduced output resulting from increased absenteeism and illness; impaired staff performance due to insufficient dedication and job dissatisfaction. Moreover, organisations lack the proficiency and resources to alleviate the effects of detrimental leadership. Organisations must incur the hidden costs arising from the harmful behaviour of toxic leaders. These expenses include reduced productivity, inadequate staff efficiency, wage costs, legal fees, and supplementary expenditures (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014).

The incidence of toxic leadership is widely recognised in management literature, attracting considerable attention from specialists in recent years. Recent research has investigated the adverse effects of toxic leadership on employee mental health and organisational efficacy (Vreja et al., 2016). Toxic leadership is not only defined by ineffectiveness; it is a unique leadership style in its own right. We employed toxic leadership frameworks for this experiment. Toxic leadership represents a critical element of unethical leadership, comparable to a poison that can spread insidiously and unnoticed. Toxic leadership negatively affects individuals, groups, and eventually the organisation as a whole (Gallus et al., 2013).

Studies demonstrate that toxic leadership is a major antecedent to increased turnover intention, employee discontent, less commitment, and psychological stresses such as anxiety, fatigue, depression, disengagement, low self-esteem, emotional weariness, and employee quiet. Research demonstrates that CEOs displaying toxic conduct significantly impair organisational learning and performance. Toxic leaders continuously view their activities as beneficial and assert that they are socially acceptable. This fact clarifies why toxic leaders continue to exhibit such behaviour (Labrague et al., 2021).

The concept of toxic leadership has garnered increased attention in organisational behaviour research because of its profound impact on employee morale and workplace dynamics. Toxic leadership refers to a style characterised by harmful behaviours, including as manipulation, intimidation, and unethical decision-making, which can significantly disrupt an organization's functioning. Toxic leaders, unlike effective leadership styles that promote growth and employee welfare, often create a hostile work environment, leading to adverse consequences for both individuals and the organisation as a whole (Bhandarker & Rai, 2019). Research demonstrates that toxic leadership impacts industries internationally, with as many as 30% of CEOs exhibiting toxic characteristics. In the healthcare sector, approximately 95% of polled leaders indicated experiencing such qualities in the workplace (Satiani & Satiani, 2022).

Toxic leadership adversely affects employee morale and workplace dynamics in library settings, resulting in negative consequences for service quality and collaboration. When library personnel encounter bullying, favoritism, or unethical conduct from leadership, their morale diminishes, resulting in decreased motivation to assist patrons and potentially damaging the library's reputation. This diminished morale can result in reduced enthusiasm for user interactions, fostering an uninviting environment that does not fulfill community requirements. Toxic leadership also inhibits open communication and collaboration, which are vital components in information-sharing contexts (Davis Kendrick, 2020). This culture suppresses knowledge sharing, restricts

resource management, and impedes the library's capacity to meet user needs efficiently. The resultant decrease in employee retention, stemming from insufficient support, further disrupts library operations and incurs supplementary recruitment expenses. Toxic leadership frequently disregards professional development, resulting in employees feeling stagnant and unmotivated. Conversely, supportive leadership cultivates a positive culture that improves morale and service quality, ultimately benefiting both employees and customers. Confronting the issues of toxic leadership is essential for fostering a healthy workplace environment in libraries, enabling both staff and patrons to prosper (Ortega, 2017).

#### **Case Study: The Wells Fargo Case**

The Wells Fargo affair is a prominent instance of toxic leadership in recent years. This example exemplifies how a detrimental work atmosphere, propelled by ineffective leadership, adversely impacted employee morale, ethical decision-making, and overall workplace dynamics.

Leadership at Wells Fargo applied pressure on workers to achieve ambitious sales objectives, motivating them to establish unlawful accounts for consumers. Employees encountered unattainable quotas, leading to a detrimental atmosphere in which unethical practices were not only disregarded but actually promoted by senior management. Individuals who expressed apprehensions regarding these activities were allegedly disregarded or sanctioned, so further undermining trust and morale inside the business.

This paper aims to analyse the impact of toxic leadership on employee morale and workplace dynamics, incorporating findings from contemporary literature and empirical research. This study seeks to clarify the intricate impacts of toxic leadership by examining key characteristics such as reduced employee engagement, increased turnover rates, lost organisational productivity, and the decline of psychological safety. The study investigates moderating factors, such as organisational culture and leadership training, that may mitigate the adverse effects of toxic leadership, offering insights into feasible strategies for organisations to address and prevent these leadership behaviours. This research highlights the necessity of recognising and addressing toxic leadership to foster a better and more efficient workplace.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

To analyse the effects of toxic leadership on employee morale and well-being.

To examine the impact of toxic leadership on workplace culture and productivity.

#### **Related Work**

**Indradevi, 2016** examined Toxic leadership is recognized as a significant and costly phenomenon occurring in contemporary businesses. A literature review was conducted to delineate Toxic Leadership and Toxic Leaders, illustrating the various behaviours and attributes of a Toxic Leader, as well as their effects on followers and the company. This paper provides strategies to counter toxic leaders, as indicated by prior studies.

**Karthikeyan, 2017** examined that it has been discovered that toxic leadership, which is linked to a variety of dysfunctional leadership philosophies, creates a poisonous culture and produces negativity inside organizations. Workers under such leadership frequently had two options: either adapt to the hazardous workplace or quit the company. The results underscored how critical it is to deal with toxic leadership in order to promote a more positive and effective company culture.

The aim of Atmadja's 2019 qualitative narrative case study was to thoroughly comprehend how leaders recognised and executed specific leadership strategies and behaviours in non-toxic workplace environments. The results of this study may aid corporate executives in averting litigation, reduced productivity, and increased employee turnover stemming from unaddressed or poorly handled toxic workplace elements.

The research conducted by Bakkal et al. in 2019 focused on the mediating influence of job satisfaction between the dimensions of toxic leadership and turnover intention (hypothesis 4), revealing a significant mediating effect of job satisfaction among three toxic leadership dimensions and turnover intention. Toxic leaders negatively affect the job satisfaction of healthcare employees, leading to attrition.

This study by Dobbs & Do (2019) employs the notion of the dark side of leadership to examine the relationship between perceived toxic leadership and organisational cynicism in a military educational setting. Survey and interview data were employed to assess the relationship between toxic leadership and organisational pessimism. Variations in the impression of toxic leadership are observed among racial groupings, but not according to gender or tenure within the organisation.

Baloyi's (2020) paper analyses leadership, specifically toxic leadership, which negatively impacts the workplace and interpersonal interactions. It promotes ethical leadership that cultivates dynamic relationships and trust

between leaders and their subordinates. The article demonstrates a correlation between ethical leadership and employee performance, which is essential for academic institutions.

Naeem and Khurram (2020) sought to examine the prevalence of toxic leadership within the banking sector and its effects on job-related outcomes, such as psychological well-being, employee engagement, and turnover intentions among staff. This study contributes to the existing literature by investigating the inadequately investigated concept of toxic leadership and its varied implications within Pakistan's banking sector. This study is the inaugural examination of toxic leadership as a precursor to turnover intention in the banking sector of Pakistan. The research conducted by Sim et al. (2021) contributes to the existing literature by illustrating the potential impact of toxic leadership on employees' perceptions of job design within an Eastern cultural context. This study underscores the imperative of utilising a multilevel framework to clarify the interconnections between toxic leadership, job instability, and workplace bullying.

Snow et al., 2021 sought to examine leadership among secondary educational institutions. The findings indicated a substantial increase in instances of toxic leadership. The findings indicate that the quality of leadership was perceived to influence the health of respondents and affect their occupational well-being.

Swanigan, 2022 sought to investigate the specific behaviours of toxic leaders as reported by personnel in penal institutions. The results of this study are also pertinent to workplace culture and accountability norms that guide decision-making in US correctional institutions. Additional research is required to determine the degree to which these detrimental behaviours affect correctional facility staff in different roles.

In 2023, Octavian examined the concept of toxic leadership, which has emerged as a notable divergence from traditional leadership ideas, particularly the Transformational Leadership Model. The examination of toxic leadership is crucial for understanding the complexities and potential disadvantages of leadership, highlighting the need for a thorough comprehension that includes both its positive and negative elements.

Glover, 2024 sought to attain a thorough comprehension of the toxic leadership phenomenon by analysing employee experiences and perceptions, with the aim of identifying strategies and best practices to alleviate toxic leadership, enhance productivity, improve job satisfaction, and increase morale and retention within an organisation. The findings underscore the necessity of identifying and mitigating toxic leadership to enhance morale and job satisfaction.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research technique of the review study utilized a qualitative approach, concentrating on a systematic review of the current literature. This methodology was selected for its capacity to comprehensively examine the multifaceted aspects of toxic leadership and its effects on workplace dynamics, facilitating the synthesis and analysis of diverse viewpoints from empirical studies, theoretical frameworks, and case studies.

➤ **Data Collection and Sources:** The research utilized secondary data, encompassing scholarly journal articles, books, papers, and other reputable sources pertinent to toxic leadership, employee morale, and workplace culture. These sources were chosen from reputable databases including Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Scopus, guaranteeing that the review encompassed a wide array of research undertaken during the last twenty years. Relevant material was gathered using specific search phrases including “toxic leadership,” “employee morale,” “workplace culture,” “leadership styles,” and “organizational productivity.” Both qualitative and quantitative investigations were used to furnish a thorough comprehension of the topic.

➤ **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:** The inclusion criteria for the review centred on articles and papers that examined the specific behavioural characteristics of toxic leadership, including abusive supervision, passive-aggressive leadership, and unethical management, as well as their effects on employee well-being and organizational performance. Research focusing on the impact of toxic leadership on employee morale, turnover intention, workplace stress, and productivity was prioritized. Articles that exclusively discussed broad leadership styles, without specifically addressing toxic leadership or its detrimental impacts, were omitted from the review to ensure focus.

➤ **Data Analysis:** Following data collection, thematic analysis was employed to discern reoccurring themes associated with the ramifications of toxic leadership, including diminished employee morale, heightened turnover, and decreased organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB). Themes were classified into sections focusing on certain outcomes, including the mental health effects on employees, organizational dysfunction, and stress produced by leadership. Thematic coding facilitated the synthesis of findings from multiple studies, yielding a comprehensive understanding of the impact of toxic leadership on numerous workplace dynamics.

➤ **Review Synthesis:** The synthesis of the literature entailed comparing and contrasting data from various studies to identify patterns and gaps in the study. The report emphasized consistent findings in the literature about the correlation between toxic leadership and employee disengagement, while also identifying contradictory or underexplored areas necessitating further inquiry. Contextual elements, including organizational culture and industry type, were examined to comprehend their moderating impacts on toxic leadership's impact on employees and workplace dynamics.

The research utilized a systematic literature review methodology to conduct a thorough and organized analysis of the repercussions of toxic leadership, yielding significant insights into its detrimental impacts on employee morale and organizational performance.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The results were obtained via the examination of several empirical investigations and theoretical frameworks. The literature synthesis identified several critical themes about the adverse impacts of toxic leadership on employees and the overall functioning of organizations.

➤ **Decreased Employee Morale:** The investigation repeatedly shown that toxic leadership markedly diminished employee morale across diverse industries and organizational contexts. Employees exposed to detrimental behaviours, including abusive supervision, intimidation, and micromanagement, frequently expressed sentiments of discontent, irritation, and demotivation. These adverse emotional reactions not only impeded their overall well-being but also resulted in a decrease in working passion and dedication. Research studies indicated that employees under toxic leadership often encountered increased stress, anxiety, and emotional fatigue, leading to a more hostile and disengaged workplace atmosphere.

➤ **Heightened Turnover Intentions:** The research robustly indicated that toxic leadership resulted with heightened employee turnover intentions. Numerous research indicated that individuals under toxic supervisors were more inclined to pursue alternative jobs owing to the adverse work environment. The influence of toxic leadership on employee turnover was particularly significant in sectors where workers had alternative job prospects, resulting in a "revolving door" phenomenon. Toxic leadership generated a ripple effect, affecting employees who did not directly engage with toxic leaders, resulting in diminished team cohesion and a lack of organizational loyalty, hence worsening turnover rates.

➤ **Decreased Productivity and Organizational Efficacy:** A prevalent subject in the literature was the deterioration of organizational performance and productivity resulting from toxic leadership. Employees subjected to toxic leadership frequently exhibited disengagement, diminished innovation, and reduced productivity. Toxic behaviours, including incessant criticism, humiliation, and neglect, eroded employees' confidence and creativity, resulting in diminished effort and initiative. Numerous case studies revealed that teams under toxic leadership exhibited inadequate collaboration and communication, hence exacerbating declines in productivity and project results. The findings indicated that toxic leadership directly correlated with diminished organizational citizenship behaviours (OCBs), implying that employees were less inclined to beyond their fundamental responsibilities to aid organizational success.

➤ **Influence on Organizational Culture and Psychological Safety:** The literature assessment indicated that toxic leadership undermined employees' psychological safety, fostering a culture of dread and mistrust. Toxic leaders frequently cultivate settings that suppress open communication, impose severe penalties for mistakes, and discourage dissenting viewpoints. Consequently, employees were less inclined to share new ideas, express concerns, or engage in risk-taking, all of which are vital for organizational growth and enhancement. Research indicated that firms characterized by toxic leadership cultures also encountered increased internal conflicts, diminished team collaboration, and a greater incidence of workplace bullying or harassment.

➤ **Influential Factors:** Organizational Culture and Leadership Development: Although the adverse effects of toxic leadership were widespread, certain research indicated moderating elements that could affect the magnitude of these repercussions. The organizational culture significantly influenced the amplification or alleviation of toxic leadership impacts. In organizations with robust, affirmative cultures that emphasized employee welfare, the detrimental impacts of toxic leadership were partly mitigated due to the presence of support networks for employees. Conversely, in businesses with deficient cultures, detrimental leadership yielded more significant adverse effects. Moreover, leadership training programs designed to enhance emotional intelligence and ethical leadership were determined to be beneficial in mitigating toxic leadership behaviours. Organizations

that invested in such training programs encountered fewer occurrences of toxic leadership, indicating that preventive efforts may alleviate negative effects.

The findings of the literature review underscored the profound and far-reaching impacts of toxic leadership on individual employees and organisational outcomes. The consistent evidence linking toxic leadership to reduced morale, increased turnover, and decreased productivity highlights the essential need for organisations to address toxic behaviours in leadership. The detrimental effects of toxic leadership transcended the directly affected individuals, permeating the entire organisation and cultivating a deleterious work culture that obstructed innovation, collaboration, and enduring success. The discussion emphasised that while toxic leadership can yield considerable negative repercussions, organisations can adopt strategies to alleviate these impacts. Creating strong business cultures that prioritise employee welfare, psychological safety, and ethical leadership development mitigates the negative impacts of toxic leaders. Moreover, leadership training programs that focus on emotional intelligence and positive leadership styles may serve as preventive measures to reduce the emergence of toxic leadership practices. The outcomes of this review demonstrate that toxic leadership considerably diminishes employee morale and workplace dynamics. Confronting these leadership problems via organisational transformation and leadership development initiatives is essential for fostering healthier, more productive work environments.

## CONCLUSION

Toxic leadership is a considerable challenge in modern firms, negatively impacting employee morale, workplace culture, and overall productivity. This study highlights the detrimental effects of toxic leadership behaviours, resulting in reduced trust, heightened turnover intentions, and adverse psychological consequences for employees. An examination of existing literature and empirical data reveals that confronting toxic leadership is crucial for cultivating a healthy corporate climate. Proactive strategies, including leadership development and the cultivation of supportive workplace environments, are essential to alleviate these impacts. Organizations must transition to ethical, compassionate, and authentic leadership approaches that prioritize employee well-being, thereby improving engagement and fostering sustainable success. Identifying and confronting toxic leadership can facilitate a more productive and unified workplace, resulting in improved outcomes for both people and the firm.

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