Annotated Bibliography for Toxic Leadership and Related Constructs

DEFENSE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE
DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Dr. Richard Oliver Hope Human Relations Research Center
Directed by Dr. Daniel P. McDonald, Executive Director
366 Tuskegee Airmen Drive Patrick AFB, FL 32925
321-494-2747

Prepared by
Allyson Pagan, M.S.

Report No. 29-16

DEOMI Hope Research Center
Annotated Bibliography for Toxic Leadership

Table of Contents
Summary of Annotated Bibliography ........................................................................................................ 3
Theory and Leader Characteristics ............................................................................................................. 4
Antecedents and Consequences ................................................................................................................ 15
Scales and Assessments ............................................................................................................................. 28
Best Practice Recommendations ............................................................................................................... 29
Summary of Annotated Bibliography

This document presents an updated collection of published research articles focusing on Toxic Leadership. Articles include authors from both academia and the military, while concentrating primarily on military populations. This bibliography provides references published articles and abstracts. A total of 68 reference citations are provided that span from 1980 to 2016. All abstracts provided are taken directly from the cited source unless otherwise stated.

The first section of this annotated bibliography contains articles that deal with theoretical background and characteristics of toxic leaders. This includes research related to petty tyranny, abusive supervision, negative leadership, narcissistic leadership, and other terms that are synonymous to toxic leadership across the various fields in social science.

The second section contains articles related to antecedents and consequences of toxic leadership. Building from the previous section, the research in the Antecedents and Consequences section highlights predictors of toxic behaviors in the workplace as well as consequences of negative styles of leadership.

Next, scales and assessments are included in the fourth section.

The final section of the annotated bibliography contains literature related to combating toxic behaviors in the workplace. This includes academic as well as practical sources, often with subject matter expert opinions and testimony.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th># Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theory and Leader Characteristics</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antecedents and Consequences</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scales and Assessments</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Practice Recommendations</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theory and Leader Characteristics


A petty tyrant is defined as one who lords his power over others. Preliminary empirical work suggests that tyrannical behaviors include arbitrariness and self-aggrandizement, belittling others, lack of consideration, a forcing style of conflict resolution, discouraging initiative, and non-contingent punishment. A model of the antecedents of tyrannical management and the effects of tyranny on subordinates is presented. Petty tyranny is argued to be the product of interactions between individual predispositions (beliefs about the organization, subordinates, and self, and preferences for action) and situational facilitators (institutionalized values and norms, power, and stressors). Tyrannical management is argued to cause low self-esteem, performance, work unit cohesiveness, and leader endorsement, and high frustration, stress, reactance, helplessness, and work alienation among subordinates. These effects may trigger a vicious circle that sustains the tyrannical behavior.


Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to study gender-based differences in information-processing impact on message perception, leading to women viewing the behavior of potentially toxic leaders more negatively than they are viewed by men.

Design/methodology/approach – In total, 381 participants completed a series of measures of cue recognition items, collusion and conformity pertaining to a hypothetical toxic leadership scenario.

Findings – Results indicated that women perceived the toxic leader more negatively than men, elaborating more on negative message connotations, while men emphasized positives. Likewise, men recorded higher scores on their tendency to collude with the toxic leader compared to women. Evidence was also found that participants were more attuned to negative messages and behavior from a leader of the same gender.

Research limitations/implications – The Anglo-Celtic dominance of the sample is identified as a potential limitation. Further research exploring how not only gender, but age and cultural differences impact on how leaders are perceived is also proposed.

Practical implications – From a management standpoint understanding that men and women process information differently has worth in assisting in organizations more effectively.
structuring their intra-organizational communications. Gender-specific communications may help to offset perceptions of negativity toward leaders.

Originality/value – This study is the first to consider how gender-based information-processing differences may influence whether a leader is perceived as toxic by male and female followers. It also suggests that gender interaction effects may be critical when considering how leaders, particularly toxic leaders, are viewed by employees.


The behaviors that distinguish leaders from managers also have the potential to produce problematic or disastrous outcomes for their organizations. There are 3 particular skill areas that can contribute to such problems: (1) leaders’ strategic vision, (2) their communications and impression-management skills, and (3) their general management practices. The blind drive to create a very personal vision could result in an inability to see problems and opportunities in the environment. Basic errors in the leader’s perceptions can lead to a failed vision also. In the quest to achieve a vision, a leader may be so driven as to ignore the costly implications of a strategic aim. Leaders may present information that makes their visions appear more realistic or more appealing than the visions actually are. Leaders’ liabilities fall into several categories: (1) the way they manage relations with important others, (2) their management style with direct reports, and (3) their thoroughness and attention to certain administrative detail.


Manfred Kets de Vries combines expertise in two unlikely areas – management and psychoanalysis. But together they have given him a unique insight into one of the less-discussed aspect of modern corporations – the psychological state of senior executives, particularly CEOs.


This research examines the relationship of American presidential narcissistic behaviors with charismatic leadership and rated performance. Using historiometric procedures, raters assessed narcissism in unidentified profiles describing 39 American Presidents. Archival sources were tapped for two charisma and five performance assessments. Supporting the prediction, narcissism was generally positively associated with presidential charismatic leadership and rated performance. The results were explained in terms of Kohut’s psychoanalytic self-theory. The beneficial and detrimental aspects of leader narcissism, as well as future research directions, are addressed.

Why would a leader in the Army or in any organization choose to micro-manage subordinates; show a lack of respect for them; choose not to listen to or value their input; or be rude, mean-spirited, and threatening? Most leaders would not. Most people do not choose to act like this. However, it is clearly happening in the uniformed services and in society as a whole. The Army recently released a study reporting that 80 percent of the officers and NCOs polled had observed toxic leaders in action and that 20 percent had worked for a toxic leader. This problem is not new. Within the past few years, the Army has relieved two brigade commanders and a general for alleged toxic—and arguably narcissistic and abusive—behavior. A division commander who served in Baghdad during Operation Iraqi Freedom was “asked” to retire following an investigation of his leadership style and toxic command climate. Toxic leaders have been around for years and will continue to serve in all branches of our military. The Navy has recently relieved a number of commanders owing to toxic behavior and unhealthy command climates.


Hitler behaved within the parameters of an artist and a narcissist as mediated by charisma and charismatic leadership. An ex post facto assessment of Hitler’s personality type using the principles of Jungian typology reveals that even his most preferred psychological functions were not securely developed and this led him to overlook reality and become insensitive to the suffering of the people during World War II. As a result of his traumas, Hitler experienced “chronic narcissistic rage.” It resulted in destructive thinking and behavior. Hitler was able to relate his rage to that of the people and promise salvation through “national reawakening” and the creation of a new order. When he was no longer able to provide successes, Hitler began losing his charisma and the people ceased to believe in his heroism and providential role. His strong sense of mission and strength of will sustained him to the bitter end. Hitler transformed Germany and much of Europe and beyond.


Current literature on ethical leadership and unethical leadership reflects a Western-based private sector perspective, pointing toward a compliance-oriented understanding of ethical and unethical leadership. As today’s executives increasingly have to ethically lead across different cultures and sectors, it becomes vitally important to develop a more holistic picture how ethical and unethical leadership is perceived in the Western and Eastern cultural cluster and the private and the public/social sector. Addressing this issue, the present study aims to identify cross-cultural and cross-sectoral commonalities and differences in international executives’ perceptions of ethical and unethical leadership. Findings from in-depth interviews (N = 36) with executives from Western
and Eastern cultures working in the private or the public/social sector reveal collectively held perceptions of ethical leadership (including leader honesty, integrity, concern for responsibility/sustainability, and people orientation) and of unethical leadership (referring to leader dishonesty, corruption, egocentrism, and manipulation). Results indicate limited support for a compliance-oriented perspective on ethical and unethical leadership but yield a much greater trend toward a value-oriented perspective. Concrete practice examples illustrate these different perspectives. Cultural and sectoral particularities of executive perceptions of ethical and unethical leadership are discussed.


A disturbing trend has developed within the Army, as evidenced by several brigade-level commanders being relieved of duty because of toxic leadership practices. The destructive actions of these senior leaders have renewed interest into this leadership issue because of the prevalence and seriousness of the consequences such leadership failures cause. Recent studies and surveys, including the 2009-2010 Annual Survey of Army Leaders conducted by the Center for Army Leadership, have validated the presence of toxic leadership within the Army's ranks. This issue has caught the attention of senior Army leaders, who are focused on rooting these negative leaders from the ranks. This paper explores the concept of toxic leadership, examines recent examples of such leadership in the United States Army, and discusses potential ways to rid the service of this leadership flaw. An analysis of current data shows how large a problem toxic leadership is in the Army today. The paper reviews research on the characteristics of toxic leaders; potential causes of toxic behavior; and toxic leadership styles (i.e., The Narcissist, The Explosive (The Bully), The Gangster, The Turncoat-Backstabber-Accuser, The Casanova, The Invertebrate, and The Zombie). The paper also discusses ways to counteract toxic leadership styles, Army initiatives to improve leadership, and changing Army culture to fix the problem. The paper concludes with recommendations for identifying toxic leaders and changing Army culture to prevent this destructive leadership practice in the future.


Purpose – This paper aims to assess highly toxic personality disorders in leaders, implications for organizations, and methods for assessment and intervention.

Design/methodology/approach – Action research was used, including a thick description case study narrative and application of the DSM IV-TR.

Findings – Personality disorders are a source of a highly toxic and dysfunctional organizational behavior; borderline personality disorder in a leader may serve as a systemic contaminant for an organization.

DISCLAIMER: The findings in this report are not to be construed as providing an official DEOMI, U.S. military Services, or Department of Defense position, unless designated by other authorized documents.
Research limitations/implications – A qualitative, case study approach may not lend itself to replication or quantification; usage of the DSM IV-TR requires clinical training in counseling psychology; the growing incidence of personality disorders in leadership warrants cognizance, ability to assess, the creation of early detection systems and methods of intervention.

Practical implications – Through the narrative of a case study researchers and practitioners can obtain a glimpse into the day-to-day operations and nuances of a highly toxic leader and how it impacts an organization; interventions and solutions are provided.

Originality/value – This paper calls attention to highly toxic leadership and organizational dysfunction by investigating borderline personality disorder as a prototype.


Although a growing body of work examines follower outcomes of abusive supervision (see Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper, 2007 for reviews), scant attention has been paid to the perpetrators despite Tepper’s (2007) call for future theoretical models to consider how leader characteristics, such as narcissism, might predispose leaders toward abusive behaviors. To address these issues, we develop a conceptual model that details how narcissistic leaders’ cognitive processes may promote abusive supervision.


Surprisingly, the Leadership/Authority, Superiority/Arrogance, and Self-Absorption/Self-Admiration factors of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) can predict adjustment. In the present project, these apparently healthier forms of narcissism correlated directly with optimism and inversely with pessimism; and for more clearly pathological measures of narcissism like the NPI Exploitativeness/Entitlement factor and the O’Brien (Psychological Reports, 61, 499–510, 1987) Multiphasic Narcissism Inventory, these relationships were reversed. These data therefore revealed that the apparently more adaptive aspects of narcissism may be related to optimistic ‘illusions’ about the self which social cognitivists have linked with mental health. They also suggested that narcissistic phenomena may be relevant to the claim that there is an ‘optimal margin of illusion’ beyond which problematic psychological consequences may begin to appear.

Leaders behaving like villains or anti-hero are most appalling in social as well as organizational contexts. On large number of occasions, high-handed behaviour of leaders remains unreported thus reinforcing dysfunctional leadership patterns at the cost of organizational success and employee well-being. The consequences of dysfunctional leadership behaviour are beyond measure. Organizations lose out on competitiveness due to withholding of discretionary efforts on the part of the employees as a result of being victimized by their toxic bosses without any valid grounds. On the other hand, the employees working under dysfunctional leaders suffer from annoyance, psychological stress and trauma and transfer their frustration on to their family members in terms of being indifferent and violent. This paper provides perceptive view on the issue and suggests curative strategies to mitigate ill-effects of dysfunctional leadership.


The authors report results from 2 studies assessing the extent to which narcissism is related to self- and other ratings of leadership, workplace deviance, and task and contextual performance. Study 1 results revealed that narcissism was related to enhanced self-ratings of leadership, even when controlling for the Big Five traits. Study 2 results also revealed that narcissism was related to enhanced leadership self-perceptions; indeed, whereas narcissism was significantly positively correlated with self-ratings of leadership, it was significantly negatively related to other ratings of leadership. Study 2 also revealed that narcissism was related to more favorable self-ratings of workplace deviance and contextual performance compared to other (supervisor) ratings. Finally, as hypothesized, narcissism was more strongly negatively related to contextual performance than to task performance.


Having been largely unknown as a clinical entity, the narcissistic personality has recently come into the limelight. It is argued that one critical component in the orientation of leaders is the quality and intensity of their narcissistic development. In this paper, the relationship between narcissism and leadership is explored. Using concepts taken from psychoanalytic object relations theory, three narcissistic configurations found among leaders are presented: reactive, self-deceptive, and constructive. Their etiology, symptomatology, and defensive structure is discussed. The influence of each configuration on interpersonal relations and decision-making is examined in a managerial context.

Sustainable and ethical leadership in the financial industry expand in importance since the financial crisis of 2007–2009. This research examined the level of sustainable and ethical leadership of leaders in mortgage loan originator (MLO) organizations, as perceived by loan originators. The Perceived Leadership Survey (PLIS) developed by Craig and Gustafson (Leadersh Q 9(2):127–145, 1998) and the Sustainable Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) developed by McCann and Holt (Int J Sustain Strat Manage 2(2):204–210, 2011) were utilized for this research. The survey results yielded high levels of both ethical and sustainable leadership. Employees also felt their leadership was encouraging ethical and sustainable behavior. However, correlations between the PLIS and SLQ did not prove to be dependent or closely correlated.


Toxic leadership has existed in organizations, societies and nations and history is witness to all those leaders who have displayed toxic behaviors to fulfill personal needs. However, the concept of toxic leadership has not been given due importance in the whole gamut of leadership theories which exist. Toxic leadership not only impacts performance at the organizational level but also at the individual level. The aim of this paper is to understand the theory of Toxic Leadership and the behaviors exhibited by Toxic leaders. The paper also attempts to trace the origins of toxic behaviors and also to understand the reasons of toxicity and its impact on individual and organizational performance.


Destructive leadership entails the negative consequences that result from a confluence of destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments. We review how destructive leadership has been discussed in the literature and note that it has not been clearly defined. Building on prior research, we develop a definition of destructive leadership that emphasizes negative outcomes for organizations and individuals linked with and affected by them. Then we outline the toxic triangle: the characteristics of leaders, followers, and environmental contexts connected with destructive leadership. We illustrate the dynamics of the framework using Fidel Castro's career as the dictator of Cuba.


DISCLAIMER: The findings in this report are not to be construed as providing an official DEOMI, U.S. military Services, or Department of Defense position, unless designated by other authorized documents.
This paper provides empirical support for the behavioral and rhetorical constructs associated with toxic leadership in organizational contexts. Two exploratory studies were conducted that examined behavior and rhetoric of leaders through the lenses of abusive, bullying, destructive, toxic, and tyrannical leadership theories. In a qualitative study, participants expressed their direct experiences with leader toxicity. Eight behavioral dimensions emerged. Integrating those findings, a 51-item leader behavior assessment was developed to assess agreement of the severity of harmfulness of these dimensions. Based on the results of these studies, a typology of toxic leader behaviors and rhetoric was developed. Organizational implications are discussed.


In 2003, Secretary of the Army Thomas E. White asked the U.S. Army War College (AWC) to address how the Army could effectively assess leaders to detect those who might have “destructive leadership styles.”1 The most important first step in detecting and treating toxic leadership is to recognize the symptoms.


Ask a group of military officers and noncommissioned officers if they have considered leaving the profession of arms because of the way a supervisor treated them, and, depending on their time in service, anywhere from a third to all of them will raise their hands to say yes. However, what we should recognize about such an informal polling process is that we are only addressing the survivors. We have no idea how many actually left, and whether those who chose to leave were talented contributors chased out by bad leadership or low performers not suited for a military career. Spend some additional time with those who raised their hands and, if you give them a chance to tell you, you will hear some tales of abuse that are inconsistent with a world-class organization. A professional and recruited force requires leadership that inspires, not dissuades, continuing service.


Narcissism—a personality trait encompassing grandiosity, arrogance, self-absorption, entitlement, fragile self-esteem, and hostility—is an attribute of many powerful leaders. Narcissistic leaders have grandiose belief systems and leadership styles, and are generally motivated by their needs for power and admiration rather than empathetic concern for the constituents and institutions they lead. However, narcissists also possess the charisma and grand vision that are vital to effective leadership. We review and critically assess the theoretical and research literature on narcissistic leaders in order to understand the potential positive and negative consequences of their leadership, the trajectories of their leadership, and the relationship...
of narcissism to established models of leadership. We conclude that the study of narcissistic leaders is inherently limited in scope, and propose a new...


This article focuses on symbolic status, the tendency for followers to regard leaders as parent figures, and the effects of abusing this kind of power. There are several factors that enhance symbolic status and predisposes a leader to abuse it. First, the simple fact that charismatic leaders have heightened symbolic power makes followers more susceptible to their influences. Second, the leader’s psychological makeup is itself a factor. A narcissistic leader tends to abuse the power of symbolic status, that is, to induce followers to buy into abusive behaviors. Often, followers will respond to a narcissistic charismatic leader by not only complying with his or her requests, but also by coming to believe in the requests themselves. In essence, they collude with the leader, sometimes even sharing in his or her delusional belief systems. However, narcissistic leaders’ grandiose visions often fail to materialize; this, combined with the followers’ lack of necessary information, often leads to individual and collective poor performance. Narcissistic charismatics will generally place the blame for any failures on followers, who in fact tend to accept that blame and who consequently experience a loss of psychological well-being.


This paper explores the phenomenon of destructive leadership using the historical case study of the feud between the Hatfields and McCoys. The characteristics of destructive leadership as well as the consequences of this leadership style are reviewed, examined and analyzed. Utilizing a case from history to shine light on a contemporary problem, this paper will provide insight into identifying the characteristics of destructive leadership and raise awareness for future research into this important topic.


A growing literature explores abusive supervision, nonphysical forms of hostility perpetrated by managers against their direct reports. However, researchers have used different terminology to explore phenomena that overlap with abusive supervision, and extant research does not devolve from a unifying theoretical framework. These problems have the potential to undermine the development of knowledge in this important research domain. The author therefore provides a review of the literature that summarizes what is known about the antecedents and consequences of abusive supervision, provides the basis for an emergent model that integrates extant empirical work, and suggests directions for future research.

DISCLAIMER: The findings in this report are not to be construed as providing an official DEOMI, U.S. military Services, or Department of Defense position, unless designated by other authorized documents.

Alderfer’s (2013) piece on the Sandusky/Penn State tragedy reminds us that leader-centric analyses, the norm in leadership studies, often miss the mark. Alderfer joins a growing list of writers who increasingly recognize that leadership consists of three key elements in a triangle: leaders, followers, and environments. The Penn State scandal highlights how a conducive environment, typified by centralized power and an absence of checks and balances, coupled with flawed leaders and the actual assistance or quiet submission of certain followers, can lead to disastrous outcomes. As Alderfer observes, leadership is a social, or group, process. Leadership success or failure depends on group results, and group results involve more than just leaders and their characteristics and actions. Yet, over three-quarters of articles in scholarly journals consistently overlook the role of organizational environments and followers (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006), focusing instead on leader traits and behaviors (Kaiser, Hogan, & Craig, 2008; Thoroughgood, Padilla, Hunter, & Tate, 2012).


Toxic real estate has been used as a negative phrase to describe non-performing assets on a firm's balance sheet. Today there is another form of "TOXIC" real estate that needs management's attention, i.e. physical workplaces that are harmful to employees on a day-in and day-out basis. Particularly when productivity of workforce is now central to business competitiveness, it is timely to explore the interface between physical and social environments as many of the social/psychological impacts on employees have not been recognized or calibrated. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the links between physical workplace and social behaviour.


The American Army is, of necessity, a hierarchical bureaucracy. Disciplined response to authority remains a bedrock value. Ten years of complex operations conducted typically with notable professionalism by a true volunteer force must be unique in history. And that noteworthy effort followed decades of erratic funding and potentially traumatic alterations of structure. Our Army is also a remarkably introspective institution. Studies of leadership and command climates abound. Since “good leadership” is commonplace, headlines about “toxic leaders” should (and do) draw attention. Recent military journals provided sad details of conspicuous relief of Army and Navy commanders. The reason for concern about any toxic leaders, particularly in our senior ranks, is apparent: Talented people in the 21st century expect to work in healthy climates, where strong bonds of mutual trust facilitate mission accomplishment and support long-term
in institutional strength. Toxic leaders corrupt healthy climates. Indeed, their very presence, even in small numbers, undermines confidence in the institution’s commitment to high standards of leadership.
Antecedents and Consequences


The authors examined antecedents of abusive supervision and the relative importance of interactional and procedural justice as mediators of the relationship between abusive supervision and the work outcomes of affective organizational commitment and individual- and organization-directed citizenship behaviors. Data were obtained from subordinate-supervisor dyads from a telecommunication company located in southeastern China. Results of moderated regression analysis revealed that authoritarian leadership style moderated the relationship between supervisors' perceptions of interactional justice and abusive supervision such that the relationship was stronger for supervisors high rather than low in authoritarian leadership style. In addition, results of structural equation modeling analysis revealed that subordinates' perceptions of interactional but not procedural justice fully mediated the relationship between abusive supervision and the work outcomes. Implications for future investigations of abusive supervision are discussed.


When focusing on toxic leadership, many researchers emphasize the symptoms of toxicity (individual characteristics, traits) and not the disease (culture, climate, outcomes). Although characteristics and traits may be helpful in identify toxic leaders, they fall short of a holistic view by failing to identify or discuss how an organization’s culture may contribute to toxicity in its leaders. Culture is a key strategic factor in predicting behaviors and outcomes. An organization’s culture may have a moderating effect on the behavior of its members and may ultimately serve to promote toxic behavior. Toxic leadership is a topic of increasing interest in the military and civilian sectors. In this paper I will examine the possible cause and effect relationship between toxic leaders and the damaging cultures they foster. I will begin by defining toxic leadership; I will then use a classification-oriented approach to analyze the effect of toxic leadership on the elements of organizational culture: values, norms, and behaviors. Finally, I will explore the moderating environmental effects that may increase or mitigate the organization’s vulnerability to the damage caused by toxic leaders. The intent of this paper is to add to the understanding of this significant organizational concern through initial conceptualization and theory.

While physical acts of workplace violence have received much attention in the popular press in recent years, academic researchers have begun investigating lesser forms of workplace mistreatment (e.g., Neuman and Baron, 1997). While less sensational perhaps, verbal and passive forms of aggression, such as yelling, bullying, and humiliation, not only happen more frequently than active violence but can also be extremely damaging, contributing ultimately to workplace stress and target demoralization (Keashly, 1998). Some studies suggest that workplace violence occurs in 20% of workplaces (Romano, 1994), yet almost twice that many workplaces are the site of more subtle, verbally harassing behavior or thoughtless, negative acts (Bjorkqvist et al., 1994).


An experiment based on a two-by-two factorial design was conducted to test hypotheses involving the relationship of four supervisory styles to aggressive feelings and actions of subordinates. The supervisory styles were arrayed on two continuums: the close versus general and the punitive versus non-punitive. Close as compared with general supervision produced significant increases in aggressive feelings toward the supervisor and in indirect aggression toward the supervisor through lowered productivity, an insignificant increase in verbal aggression toward the supervisor, and an increase of borderline significance in aggressive feelings toward co-workers. Punitive as compared with non-punitive supervision produced significant increases in indirect aggression through lowered productivity and in verbal aggression, but no significant increases in aggression toward co-workers. The relationship between close supervision and aggressive feelings appears to be mediated by the self-esteem of the subordinate; an increase in aggressive feelings occurred only in subjects having low self-esteem. Finally, the combined effect of the close and punitive supervision dimensions, for both aggressive feelings and indirect aggression, was not a simple function, but was less than would be predicted on the basis of additive assumptions.


Purpose – In a replication of a multi-source study by Xu et al., the authors examined whether leader-member exchange (LMX) mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and employee work behaviors, more specifically task performance, organizational citizenship behaviors toward the organization (OCBO), and toward other individuals (OCBI). Moreover, the authors also examined whether LMX mediates this relationship when the authors focus on the two dimensions of abusive supervision, that is active-aggressive and passive-aggressive abusive supervision.

DISCLAIMER: The findings in this report are not to be construed as providing an official DEOMI, U.S. military Services, or Department of Defense position, unless designated by other authorized documents.
Design/methodology/approach – The authors collected multi-source data in order to minimize common method bias. The authors conducted regression analyses, Sobel tests, and bootstrapping techniques.

Findings – The authors found support that LMX mediates the negative relationship between abusive supervision and OCBO and OCBI. However, the authors could not replicate the mediating role of LMX in the association between abusive supervision and employees’ performance. Similar results were obtained when the data were analyzed with the active-aggressive and passive-aggressive abusive supervision subscales.

Research limitations/implications – Due to the cross-sectional nature of the study, this study does not allow the authors to draw causal conclusions regarding the proposed relationships.

Originality/value – The authors replicated Xu et al.’s findings in a European context with a different sample and different measures for LMX, performance, and OCBI. The authors conducted bootstrapping analyses in order to control for the skewed distribution of abusive supervision. The authors explore whether the proposed relations still stand with regard to active-aggressive and passive-aggressive abusive supervision.


PURPOSE. This is a report on a 2008 investigation of the influence of abusive supervision on nursing performance among registered nurses in an urban South Florida county. The findings suggest implications for patient satisfaction.

BACKGROUND. Research suggests that a myriad of negative personal and workplace consequences result when a supervisor is abusive. Researchers have reported frustration, anxiety, stress, psychological distress, problem drinking, family problems, less organizational commitment, fewer organizational citizenship behaviors, and greater intention to resign. Abusive supervision affects an estimated 13.5% of U.S. workers and costs U.S. corporations an estimated $23.8 billion annually. However, there was little understanding of abusive supervision’s impact on performance, including within health care.

METHODS. This study utilized an anonymous mail questionnaire of a random sample of 6,500 registered nurses in an urban South Florida county. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the responses. The survey instrument was self-reporting.

RESULTS. The study found that targeted subordinates reacted with noncompliance with significant organizational performance norms. The incidence of abusive supervision was 46.6%, with 36.6% of the nurses reporting negative influence on performance and compliance.

CONCLUSIONS. Supervisory abuse is a problem to the healthcare organizations because of the counterproductive behaviors that resulted. Concern is specifically suggested regarding possible

DISCLAIMER: The findings in this report are not to be construed as providing an official DEOMI, U.S. military Services, or Department of Defense position, unless designated by other authorized documents.
negative influences to patient satisfaction. This article offers a change model and recommendations to curtail abusive supervision.


We examined the effects of toxic leadership on unit and employee outcomes. Based on Bandura’s social learning theory (1977), we predicted that toxic leadership would have a direct impact on unit civility and that unit civility would mediate the relationship between toxic leadership and job satisfaction and organizational commitment. We also predicted that within-unit variability in perceptions of toxic leadership, or toxic leadership congruence, would moderate these effects such that the relationship between toxic leadership and unit and employee outcomes would be stronger when unit members had similar perceptions of their leader’s engagement in toxic behavior. Results indicate that toxic leadership behavior is negatively related to unit civility and that unit civility mediates the relationship between toxic leadership and job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Contrary to expectations, toxic leadership congruence did not moderate any of the effects of toxic leadership behavior. Implications for research and practice are discussed.


Purpose – Previous research indicates that employees reciprocate for abusive supervision by withholding discretionary organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). The purpose of this paper is to investigate the boundary conditions of the negative relationship between abusive supervision and OCBs, by investigating time and money (dyadic duration and pay satisfaction) as potential moderating variables to the abusive supervision-OCBs relationship.

Design/methodology/approach – A sample of 357 bank employees in Kazakhstan was used to test hypotheses.

Findings – Results indicate that the negative relationship between abusive supervision and OCBs is more pronounced when employees have been supervised by a particular manager for a longer period of time, as well as when employees are less satisfied with their level of compensation.

Research limitations/implications – Limitations include the use of cross-sectional data and the possibility of common method bias.
Practical implications – Satisfaction with pay as a moderator may suggest additional costs associated with abusive supervision, as employees may demand higher salaries when working for abusive supervisors. Additionally, dyadic duration as a moderator may suggest that abusive supervisor behaviors over time lead individual employees to withhold more and more OCBs. Social implications – Organizational cultures can be adversely affected by reactions to abuse, and abusive supervision represents a growing social problem that may necessitate legislation to protect workers.

Originality/value – This paper contributes to the literature by suggesting that employees appear more willing to withhold OCBs in longer-term dyadic relationships, and employees’ positive satisfaction with pay appears to lessen the negative relationship between abusive supervision and OCBs. Additionally, this study explores abusive supervision using a non-western sample.


We develop and test a model based on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991) that links abusive supervision to followers’ ethical intentions and behaviors. Results from a sample of 2,572 military members show that abusive supervision was negatively related to followers’ moral courage and their identification with the organization’s core values. In addition, work unit contexts with varying degrees of abusive supervision, reflected by the average level of abusive supervision reported by unit members, moderated relationships between the level of abusive supervision personally experienced by individuals and both their moral courage and their identification with organizational values. Moral courage and identification with organizational values accounted for the relationship between abusive supervision and followers’ ethical intentions and unethical behaviors. These findings suggest that abusive supervision may undermine moral agency and that being personally abused is not required for abusive supervision to negatively influence ethical outcomes.


Drawing on various theoretical perspectives, extant research has primarily treated subordinate organizational deviance as a consequence of abusive supervision. Yet, social interaction theories of aggression and victimization perspectives provide support for the opposite ordering, suggesting that subordinate organizational deviance may be an antecedent of abusive supervision. By using a cross-lagged panel design, we empirically test the potentially reciprocal
relation between abusive supervision and subordinate organizational deviance. In Study 1, we measured both abusive supervision and organizational deviance at 2 separate times with a 20-month lag between measurement occasions and found evidence that subordinate organizational deviance leads to abusive supervision, but not vice versa. In Study 2, with a shorter time lag (i.e., 6 months), the reciprocal effects of abusive supervision and organizational deviance were supported. Furthermore, we found that the effects of abusive supervision on organizational deviance were moderated by subordinate self-control capacity and intention to quit such that the effects were only significant when subordinates had low self-control capacity and high intention to quit. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.


Reed (2004) and Reed and Bullis (2009) discovered toxic Army leaders are individuals who have behavioral traits and characteristics that can inflict serious and enduring harm to their followers in their organizations. The poor leadership practices can cause a unit to not meet its mission objectives, and in the more severe situations, can cause injuries or death. In 2011, four Army brigade commanders were relieved of duty because their senior general officers lost confidence in their ability to lead. The objective of this study examined toxic leadership and how it has an effect on the morale and welfare of Soldiers. With exploratory qualitative case study, face-to-face interviews, and extensive literature review to back up the data, the researcher found that toxic leaders can cause serious harm to Army units. The results and findings of this study could be used for knowledge and planning to decrease the phenomenon of toxic leadership that currently exists in Army organizations.


Previous research has focused on the consequences of abusive supervision and the effects of moderators on the relationship between it and employee outcomes. Only a few studies have looked at the antecedents of this behavior and these have found that supervisors’ perceptions of fairness may lead to abusive supervision. Extending this research, this study examined antecedents of abusive supervision such as supervisors’ personal characteristics (e.g., narcissism), and supervisors’ level of stressors (e.g., job demands, work-family conflict). Also, I examined supervisors’ experience of abusive supervision as an antecedent to test a trickle-down model of this negative behavior. In addition, this study investigated subordinates’ dispositional characteristics such as neurotism and implicit person theories as antecedents of abusive supervision. Using data from both supervisors and subordinates, the current study conducted multi-level analyses and tested the effect of abusive supervision on employee unit-level organizational citizenship behaviors and performance. Further, this study examined the moderating effects of coping styles on the relationship between abusive supervision and...
employee psychological distress. Ninety three supervisors and 402 subordinates were surveyed in order to examine the proposed relationships among constructs. Results showed that supervisors who have experienced abusive supervision from their current bosses may treat their subordinates with same negative behaviors. Also, I found that subordinates high in neuroticism perceive more abusive supervision than those low in neuroticism. Results indicated that abusive supervision is positively related to subordinates’ psychological distress. Findings also showed that employees who have experienced abusiveness by their supervisor tried various coping strategies. Unfortunately, individual coping strategies did not buffer the impact of abusive supervision. Implications for practice and limitations of the study are discussed.


Researchers have theorized about a link between destructive and charismatic leadership but have left this link rather unspecified. This paper discusses charismatic leadership as an antecedent of abusive supervision. Based on the charismatic leadership process, it specifies five distinct pathways that may lead from charismatic leadership attempts to abusive supervision: Overdramatized charisma with abusive supervision as an unintended consequence, overambitious charisma with abusive supervision as a stress reaction, refused charisma with abusive supervision as a reaction to frustration and provocation, disappointed charisma with abusive supervision as a reaction to threatened self-esteem and negative affect, and abandoned charisma with abusive supervision as a volitional change of influence tactics. This paper aims to introduce these five pathways resulting in theoretical propositions that may inspire future empirical research.


Abusive supervision is a serious organizational issue for employees. Past research has shown that abusive supervision is linked to negative outcomes for employees, chiefly employees’ behavioral deviance directed at organizations.

The purpose of this study was to use multiple data sources to examine the relations between abusive supervision and less researched employee job strains. Specifically, the relationships between abusive supervision and employees’ behavioral strains (i.e., reduced in-role job performance and counterproductive workplace behavior supervisor-directed), psychological strains (i.e., anger, frustration, anxiety, depression, job dissatisfaction, intention to quit, exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy), and physical strains (i.e., physical symptoms) were investigated.

DISCLAIMER: The findings in this report are not to be construed as providing an official DEOMI, U.S. military Services, or Department of Defense position, unless designated by other authorized documents.
In addition, this study examined how workplace variables would moderate the negative relations between abusive supervision and employees’ well-being. The workplace ambiguity variables (i.e., authoritarian leadership style, uncertainty avoidance, and role ambiguity) were hypothesized to moderate the relationship between abusive supervision and employees’ job strains. Such that, when individuals experience more uncertainty in the workplace, abusive supervision will be more threatening to their welfare. Perceived job control variables (i.e., job mobility and job autonomy) were also hypothesized to moderate the relationship between abusive supervision and employees’ job strains. Such that, when individuals experience more perceived control in the workplace, abusive supervision will be less threatening to their well-being.

Self-report data was collected by anonymous surveys from nurses and their supervisors in a large, metropolitan home health care agency. The results suggest that abusive supervision was positively related to subordinates’ anxiety, depression, job dissatisfaction, intention to quit, exhaustion, cynicism, and physical symptoms. All three workplace ambiguity variables and both perceived job control variables moderated the relations between abusive supervision and various subordinate strains. Abusive supervision had broader effects on subordinates’ psychological and physical strains when employees experienced high uncertainty. Abusive supervision had broader effects on subordinates’ behavioral and psychological strains when employees experienced low perceived job control. The conclusions from this study add significant contributions to the abusive supervision literature and organizations can utilize these results to raise awareness amongst supervisors on how their behaviors in the workplace can create serious implications for their employees’ welfare.


In this paper, we identified an expanded array of mediators including interactional justice, organizational-based self-esteem, and the meaning of work, which link abusive supervision to two organizational citizenship behaviours – prosocial silence and prosocial voice. Data from 175 employee–supervisor dyads in the Philippines were collected. Results of structural equation modelling revealed that abusive supervision was significantly negatively associated with followers’ perceptions of interactional justice, which in turn was negatively associated with supervisor-rated prosocial voice behaviours. In addition, abusive supervision was negatively associated with followers’ beliefs that they are engaged in meaningful work and with organizational-based self-esteem, which in turn negatively influenced self-rated prosocial silence. The discussion focuses on the implications of the hidden costs of abusive supervision in organizations.

This article examines the phenomenon of toxic leadership in the military and suggests a number of detrimental effects that warrant an organizational response. It asserts that positive and aspirational notions of leadership serve to hide the fact that followers do not always experience leadership favorably. Some behavior of those in authoritative positions is perceived by subordinates as a detriment to mission accomplishment. The article reviews contemporary research on the topic and suggests potential solutions.


This article examines negative or destructive leadership behaviors experienced by high-potential senior military officers and civilian employees. The study used a questionnaire based on the Petty Tyranny in Organizations Scale to explore the scope and nature of destructive leadership as reported by U.S. members of the class of 2008 at a military senior service college. It also explored the relationship between leadership experiences and various measures of satisfaction and inclination to remain in service. The authors observe that despite the central role that the concept of leadership holds in the military, even senior personnel reported experiencing toxic leadership. There was a significant negative relationship between destructive leadership and all measures of satisfaction. Surprisingly, there was not a significant negative impact on inclination to remain in service among this career-oriented and dedicated population.


We developed a model of the relationships among aggressive norms, abusive supervision, psychological distress, family undermining, and supervisor-directed deviance. We tested the model in 2 studies using multisource data: a 3-wave investigation of 184 full-time employees (Study 1) and a 2-wave investigation of 188 restaurant workers (Study 2). Results revealed that (a) abusive supervision mediated the relationship between aggressive norms and psychological distress, (b) psychological distress mediated the effects of abusive supervision on spouse undermining, (c) abusive supervision had a direct positive relationship with supervisor-directed deviance, (d) the positive relationship between psychological distress and spouse undermining was stronger for men as opposed to women, and (e) employees engaged in relationship-oriented occupations reported greater levels of abusive supervision and psychological distress. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.
This phenomenological study explored perceived toxic leadership by assessing the lived experiences of registered nurses in hospital settings in the Chicago Metropolitan area. The selection process relied on purposive and snowball sampling techniques. A pre-study questionnaire was utilized to select participants who were able to share experiences related to a toxic leader within a hospital setting. Based on the results of the pre-study questionnaire 18 participants were chosen for in-depth interviews. After transcription of the interviews, analysis of the data occurred using Altas.ti. Four themes emerged. These themes included (a) the toxic leader’s approach to leading, (b) leader competence and leadership attributes, (c) the organization’s competence related to the toxic experience, and (d) the emergence of the phenomenon as it related to the lived experience of register nurses. Implications of the study were that toxic leadership impedes team work, affects communication, is detrimental to the culture of the organization, and the organization as a whole. The impact that toxic behavior has on direct reports and ultimately the patient is critical.

Despite increasing coverage of toxic leadership from the popular press and lay publications, it has only recently been the subject of rigorous empirical scrutiny. This investigation tested a moderated mediation model to examine the relationships between toxic leadership, group cohesion, and job outcome variables among military personnel in different deployment situations. Using conservation of resources (COR) theory as a grounding framework, responses were collected from military personnel who were stationed "in garrison" (i.e. at home, in a low stress situation), deployed, (a high stress situation), and deployed to an active combat zone (an extreme stress situation). Hypotheses were focused on group-level ratings of toxic leadership and job outcomes. Multilevel analyses were used to control for individual-level effects. Confirmatory factor analysis showed support for a five-factor structure of toxic leadership that includes dimensions of self-promotion, abusive supervision, unpredictability, narcissism, and authoritarian leadership. The higher-order construct of toxic leadership and its five component dimensions had direct negative effects on all four job outcome variables: group-level job satisfaction, group productivity, group-level organizational trust, and group-level organizational commitment. Toxic leadership also had a direct negative effect on group cohesion. Group cohesion was found to be a full mediator of the relationships between self-promotion, abusive supervision, and unpredictability and group-level job satisfaction. Group cohesion was found to be a partial mediator for the 17 remaining relationships between the toxic leadership dimensions.
and job outcomes. Relative importance analysis indicated that while the toxic leadership dimensions of unpredictability and abusive supervision were key predictors of job outcomes, self-promotion was the dimension with the most predictive power. No support was found for the hypothesized interactions caused by deployment status. Future directions are proposed for research on destructive leadership styles, and implications for practitioners are discussed.


Why do employees who experience abusive supervision retaliate against the organization? We apply organizational support theory to propose that employees hold the organization partly responsible for abusive supervision. Depending on the extent to which employees identify the supervisor with the organization (i.e., supervisor's organizational embodiment), we expected abusive supervision to be associated with low perceived organizational support (POS) and consequently with retribution against the organization. Across 3 samples, we found that abusive supervision was associated with decreased POS as moderated by supervisor's organizational embodiment. In turn, reduced POS was related to heightened counterproductive work behavior directed against the organization and lowered in-role and extra-role performance. These findings suggest that employees partly attribute abusive supervision to negative valuation by the organization and, consequently, behave negatively toward and withhold positive contributions to it.


This report supplements the main survey findings CAL Technical Report 2011-1, and provides in-depth analysis on the issue of toxic leadership. This research is the first that is based on a representative sample and highlights the prevalence, severity, and correlates/consequences of toxic leadership in the U.S. Army. This report provides a common framework, explains the importance of the subject, presents potential solutions and highlights 2 years of CASAL data and other recently collected data in both the Army and open literature. Estimates from the data suggest that about 1 in 5 subordinates view their leader negatively, and most believe that they have interacted with toxic leaders, and that the problem is severe. Toxic behaviors include: micromanaging, being mean-spirited/aggressive, rigidity and poor decision-making, and having a poor attitude and setting a bad example. Toxic leadership was associated weakly with unit wasting time on unproductive tasks, expected unit performance, mission accomplishment, and career intention; moderately with penalizing honest mistakes, lack of frank discussions, unwillingness to implement good ideas from subordinates, discouraging creativity, solving
problems at the surface level, and individual and unit morale; and strongly with lack of ethics, putting own needs ahead of unit, and lack of subordinate confidence to follow in life-or-death situations.


Drawing on justice theory, I examined the consequences of abusive supervisor behavior. As expected, subordinates who perceived their supervisors were more abusive were more likely to quit their jobs. For subordinates who remained with their jobs, abusive supervision was associated with lower job and life satisfaction, lower normative and affective commitment, and higher continuance commitment, conflict between work and family, and psychological distress. Organizational justice mediated most of these effects, and job mobility moderated some of the deleterious effects of abusive supervision.


Research on abusive supervision is imbalanced in two ways. First, with most research attention focused on the destructive consequences of abusive supervision, there has been relatively little work on subordinate-related predictors of perceptions of abusive supervision. Second, with most research on abusive supervision centered on its main effects and the moderating effects of supervisor-related factors, there is little understanding of how subordinate factors can moderate the main effects of perceptions of abusive supervision on workplace outcomes. The current study aims to advance knowledge of the roles of subordinates in the formation of and reactions to perceptions of abusive supervision. Specifically, based on victim precipitation theory, the authors examined subordinates’ personality traits and self-reports of task performance as antecedents of perceptions of abusive supervision. The results show that subordinates high in neuroticism or low in conscientiousness had high levels of perceived abusive supervision partially through their self-reported deleterious job performance. In addition, the authors investigated the moderating effect of subordinates’ personality on the relationship between perceptions of abusive supervision and subordinates’ interpersonal deviance. Consistent with trait activation theory, subordinates low in both agreeableness and extraversion were more likely to engage in deviant behaviors in response to perceptions of abusive supervision than subordinates high in either or both agreeableness and extraversion.

Previous research has identified both individual differences and perceived situational variables such as self-esteem and organizational justice as the antecedents of counterproductive work behaviors (CWB). This article focuses on employees’ perceived interpersonal interaction. More specifically, the relation between abusive supervision and subordinates’ counterproductive work behaviors toward the organization is examined. Using a sample of 198 dyads employees and their immediate supervisor (N = 396) from a multinational company in China, this research finds that abusive supervision results in increased levels of sabotage, withdrawal, production deviance, and theft. This research also examines the moderating effects of locus of control and perceived mobility on the relationships between abusive supervision and subordinates’ CWB toward the organization. The results suggest that locus of control moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and sabotage, production deviance and theft, but not abusive supervision and withdrawal; perceived mobility moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and withdrawal and theft, but not abusive supervision and sabotage and production deviance. Practical implications for human resource management are discussed.


The relationship between subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision and supervisors' evaluations of subordinates' organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) was explored among a sample of 373 Air National Guard members and their military supervisors. As predicted, the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' OCB was stronger among subordinates who defined OCB as extra-role behavior (compared with those defining OCB as in-role behavior), and this effect was fully mediated by the interactive effect of procedural justice and OCB role definitions. The study's implications for theory and research are discussed, its limitations are identified, and directions for future research are suggested.
Scales and Assessments


This article concerns leadership effectiveness studied from the reverse angle. We review the literature on managerial derailment and propose a taxonomy of derailment factors. We then describe an inventory designed to assess these factors, provide some evidence regarding the psychometric features of the inventory, and some evidence regarding its validity. We suggest that the base rate for managerial incompetence in any organization is quite high, and we propose our inventory is a useful device for management development – because it focuses on dysfunctional dispositions known to be associated with failure as a manager.


The NPI is the most commonly used assessment tool for measuring narcissistic traits in social psychological research. Raskin and Hall (1979, 1981) developed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), a 54-item, forced choice questionnaire with paired statements designed to measure individual differences in narcissism in nonclinical adult populations. For each paired statement, one represents narcissistic traits and the other nonnarcissistic. Several different versions of this tool have emerged since its invention. Currently a 40-item forced-choice adaptation of the NPI is the preferred format for assessing narcissism in adult subjects (Raskin & Terry, 1988).


While many publications focus on traits and behaviors that make leaders effective, some leaders engage in dysfunctional and destructive behaviors. These “toxic leadership” styles have been largely unexplored. The goals of this study were to empirically derive the dimensions of toxic leadership, to create a reliable and valid survey that measures the construct, to explore convergent and discriminant construct validity, and to perform a preliminary examination of subordinate outcomes that may result from working under a toxic leader. Using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies across military and civilian sectors, this study suggests that toxic leadership is composed of the following five dimensions: abusive supervision, authoritarian leadership, narcissism, self-promotion, and unpredictability. Toxic leadership is differentiable from other leadership constructs (e.g., transformational, LMX) and its dimensions significantly predict employee outcomes such as turnover intentions, job satisfaction, and satisfaction with the supervisor. Implications for future research are discussed.
Best Practice Recommendations


The subject of abuse, though still a societal taboo, has received increased attention of late. Issues of child and spouse abuse are dealt with daily in the news media and the courts. The workplace has not been free of concern, with issues of sexual harassment plaguing the military, government, and business. However, abuse in the workplace goes beyond gender issues to include how all people are treated. While many firms are known for treating their people with respect, honesty, and understanding, and may have formal policies and management development programmes to support this reputation, even managers in these organizations are not uniform in their treatment of subordinates. The pressures of restructuring, lay-offs, and financial constraints are ripe conditions for maltreatment. Managerial abuse curtails employees’ professional growth and development. Abused employees spend time worrying about the abuse. Their ‘on-the-job development’ consists of learning how to avoid and react to the abuse.

This article considers the extent of managerial abuse, the form it takes, the ways subordinates respond, and ways organizations can alleviate the problem. As such, the article should be a guide for creating management development programmes which address the issue. Understanding the causes and consequences of abusive managerial behavior can help abused employees cope and overcome the negative effects of abuse. Also, such understanding is essential in the establishment of development programmes and other organizational actions to control and prevent the problem.


The military wants to rid its top ranks of toxic leaders. A survey of more than 22,630 leaders from the rank of E-5 through O-6 and Department of Defense (DoD) civilians showed that roughly one in five sees his or her superior as toxic or unethical. As an institution of high ethics and values, DoD must pay particular attention to toxic leadership because of the serious consequences caused by leadership failure. Senior leaders must consider whether, minor adjustments are required or the situation necessitates major change to current policies. All services in the military can be dramatically affected by a small number of toxic leaders. However, most strategic leaders are viewed quite positively, and balance individual subordinate needs with meeting demanding mission requirements, despite a blistering operational tempo over the past 10 years. The one consistent attribute effective leaders have in common is a strong set of core values, and among them include character, ethics, and integrity. Strong leaders use their core values as a set of guiding principles or moral compass. This paper highlights the nature, frequency, severity, and trepidations of toxic leadership in the military and recommends three
strategies for adoption to shape a more positive and effective leadership culture and policy for the future.


In this magazine article, originally appearing in Computerworld in 2006, Brandel summarizes insights from several subject matter experts, their anecdotes, and other sources on how to approach a bad boss.


Toxic managers should be dealt with accordingly by human resources executives to avoid grave effects on the productivity of employees. This is the most probably result because a manager’s mood establishes the atmosphere in a workplace. Such kind of managers exist because people think it’s normal that managers yell, threaten, and bully. Moreover, most companies have not established a rating tool for managers that measures their capability in aspects other than productivity. Lynne McClure, an expert on high-risk behavior management in Mesa, AR, and author of a book on workplace-violence prevention, said that tolerance is the biggest factor that allows managers to abuse or misuse their authority.


The Center for Army Leadership (CAL) Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL) assesses and tracks trends in Army leader attitudes, leader development, quality of leadership, and the contribution of leadership to mission accomplishment. Over 100 questions cover topics on the quality of leadership and leader development. The results of the 2010 CASAL are summarized here in three main sections: leader development, effects of character and climate on leadership, and professional military education (PME) in leader development. The CASAL provides research guidance for policy decisions and program development. It is an authoritative source that uses a large, random representative sample and a rigorous scientific approach for survey development, data collection, and data analysis, and it calibrates its findings with other Army research. Data was collected online from a representative sample of over 22,000 Regular Army, Army Reserve, and Army National Guard officers (second lieutenant to colonel), warrant officers (chief warrant officer five), and noncommissioned officers (sergeant to command sergeant major). Approximately 22,500 Army leaders participated, with a response rate of 16.1 percent. The large, random representative sample, combined with comparisons with other Army
research, allows for high confidence in the accuracy of these findings. Responses are both quantitative and qualitative.


The right response in to recognize the damage that toxic leaders can have on their people and on organizations, to note the behaviors that are toxic, and to use them as examples for our professional leadership development efforts. It is likely that the behaviors will present as one or more of the leadership “blind spots” that Cioleman notes result due to a lack of F.I., such as arrogance, rejection of criticism, perfectionism, blaming others, personalized power orientation, and others. The second benefit of EI training is to help prevent many of the social ills that sometimes plague commanders. Marines who are better at managing relationships can better manage their families. Marines who are better at managing themselves can avoid the pitfalls that lead to suicide, alcoholism, and drug use. Leadership who are more socially aware can better help their subordinates understand and get past traumatic events, thereby reducing the incidence of PTSD. Commanders who are more self-aware are better able to understand how their own emotions and actions impact others, and calibrate themselves accordingly. Like it or not, humans are emotional animals and not robots, and EI touches every aspect of people’s lives. FI needs to be taught and reinforced in all leadership development training.


“The day this person left our company is considered an annual holiday!” This quote, taken from Kusy and Holloway’s research on toxic personalities, echoes the frustration and confusion that come from working with or managing an extremely difficult person. Just one toxic person has the capacity to debilitate individuals, teams, and even organizations.

*Toxic Workplace!* is the first book to tackle the underlying systems issues that enable a toxic person to create a path of destruction in an organization, pervading others’ thoughts and energies, even undermining their very sense of well-being. Based on all-new research with over 400 leaders, many from the Fortune 500 list, this book illustrates how to manage existing toxic behaviors, create norms that prevent the growth or regrowth of toxic environments, and ultimately design organizational communities or respectful engagement.

Kusy and Holloway’s research reveals the warning signs that indicate a serious behavioral problem and identifies how this toxicity spreads in systems with long-term effects on organizational climate, even after the person has left. Their two-year, cutting-edge research study provides very specific actions that leaders need to take to reduce both the intensity and frequency
of toxic personalities at work. No other book provides this menu of options from a systems perspective with practical relevance in real work situations.

You’ll learn how to identify the toxic personality and describe the leader reactions and approaches that typically don’t work. Toxic Workplace! provides hands-on approaches that work with research-based strategies at the individual, team, and organizational level. Toxic Workplace! will provide new insights on how leaders lead, how organizational cultures sustain themselves, and how teams deal with toxic personalities.


Toxic leaders are destructive of morale, productivity, and organizational effectiveness. Literature has reported the perspectives of followers, and sometimes how organizations address those toxic behaviors, but research has not examined the perspectives of human resource (HR) managers who must detect the existence of toxic behaviors and handle with the consequences of them. In order to address that gap, the purpose of this study was to determine how HR managers handle the destructive effects of toxic leaders. Schmidt’s definition of toxic leadership guided this phenomenological study about the lived experiences of HR managers involving the presence of a toxic leader. The goal of this study was to discover the processes used by HR personnel to identify and manage the conflict created by the behavior of the toxic leader. With this knowledge HR may be more effective and toxicity may be managed at an earlier stage. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 9 HR managers who reported some experience with a toxic leader and who belonged to the Professionals in Human Resource Association. The results identified a process commonly used by HR for managing conflicts created by a toxic leader, and revealed a negative impact of managing the conflict on the HR managers themselves. Positive social change may occur within organizations by applying the process outlined in this study for identifying and reducing the negative effects of toxic leaders before significant damage to people and organizations can occur.


Recent ethical scandals in the business world point to the growing need for developing leaders who consistently demonstrate the highest levels of ethical behavior. The goal of this article is to propose a blueprint for fostering sustainable authentic moral behaviors in leaders. This blueprint is based on research from the ethical decision-making leadership, positive organizational behavior, and positive psychology literatures. For leaders to display sustainable authentic moral behaviors they must first see their roles as including an ethical responsibility to all of their stakeholders. Authentic leaders will have developed a unique perspective to looking at problems that allows them to recognize moral dilemmas and address them in an open way. These authentic
leaders demonstrate a deep commitment to their own personal growth and the growth of those around them. Each dilemma they encounter is reflected on, each lesson learned is internalized, so they become better equipped for the next challenge that must be confronted.


This modified van Kaam phenomenological study was used to collect interview data from 20 rated officers in a United States Air Force flying squadron to explore four categories: leadership traits, leadership styles, leadership behaviors, and elements of effective leadership. The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover how rated officers could become more effective leaders in the USAF. Rated officers are commissioned aviators in the military who fly in diverse environments worldwide. While the USAF offers continued education and experience in technical competencies, this focus on enhancing aeronautical skills will not strengthen their ability to command squadrons. The problem was that lower-level rated officers were not given the appropriate opportunities to develop the leadership skills needed to command squadrons in times of war or peace. This void in leadership could ultimately degrade the quality and strength of the USAF. The modified van Kaam phenomenological research method included a strategy of inquiry to explore how current rated officers can acquire leadership training and discovered how they can enhance future training. Key results indicated that officers could commit to an aeronautical career if they sought leadership experience through alternative means. Followership, volunteering, and extracurricular activities were suggested methods that officers could use to discover combinations of leadership traits, styles, behaviors, and elements of effective leadership. One recommendation was to urge aviators in the military to seek out characteristics of transformational leadership and remain flexible in the USAF. Another recommendation is to conduct future studies that compare rated and non-rated USAF officers’ leadership effectiveness after acquiring more experience using transformational leadership styles and behaviors in diverse situations.


Ros Taylor surveyed 1,500 employees in January to find out what employees think of their bosses. Seventy seven percent of respondents say that their boss is not interested in them; 79% claim their boss does not set clear objectives, 90% believe their boss does nothing about poor performers; and 89% say their boss lacks innovation and is unreceptive to new ideas. When asked what would turn their bosses around, 10% said any leadership skills whatsoever would make a difference. Bad behavior happens when there is a skills vacuum. The answer is effective training and development delivered in advance of a promoted or new post—effective being the crucial word.

DISCLAIMER: The findings in this report are not to be construed as providing an official DEOMI, U.S. military Services, or Department of Defense position, unless designated by other authorized documents.