



Toxic Leadership in Modern Workplaces An Evidence-Based Framework for Recognition, Prevention, and Organizational Change

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Abstract – This paper will discuss the relationship between toxic leadership, abusive supervisions, and workplace bullying and their negative impact on the performance and employee feelings of a company. The study demonstrates that the issues continue to intensify in a company due to a misuse of power, personal biases, and jealousy by studying recent studies, real-life examples, and facts. These behaviors are costly to people, teams, and the company in terms of mental damage, reduced productivity and missed goals as demonstrated by the research. The article poses the question of why firms tolerate such practices despite the pain they cause, identifies the early warning signs, and provides effective remedies to the issues. This paper provides actionable steps to the victims, leaders who desire change, and companies who desire to change their culture using studies in the fields of organizational psychology, leadership, and health in the workplace. Its findings indicate that to work on toxic leadership, changes at the company-wide level are required, new regulations, mechanisms of holding anyone responsible, and commitment to the mental safety of individuals. This article provides some guidance on how to achieve better working environments that are healthier and more productive, as well as ones that respect individuals and their performance by examining situations in which things worked or those in which they failed to work.

Keywords: Toxic Leadership, Workplace Bullying, Abusive Supervision, Organizational Culture, Psychological Safety, Employee Wellbeing, Leadership Accountability, Workplace Transformation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The initial day in the company was a dream. The office was smooth, the team was enthusiastic and the departmental head was a good guy who offered mentorship and development. After some weeks, the dream began to disintegrate. The manager complimented work privately but put down the work in front of everybody. Friends became strangers. Ideas were not noted during meetings and then they were appropriated by another person. In half a year, Monday mornings were terrifying. Therapy assisted in the anxiety growth year afterward. One and a half years later another great employee left the company due to the stress being too much. This isn't just bad luck. It demonstrates one of the typical issues in most companies. Bullying, mean bosses, and unhealthy cultures are not solitary and individual battles. They are harmful trends which are detrimental to performance, annihilate innovation and snuff out potential in people. They are a result of power abuse, prejudice, and inescapable accountability which form vicious cycles.

The threat is more than ever. Remote working alters the process of working by supervisors, some of whom are difficult to observe, whereas others leave trace marks in the digital form. Safe working places are also desired by people and therefore toxic cultures could not remain secret. Businesses are competing to get talent and as such, they cannot afford individuals who leave or develop a bad reputation. They cannot afford to pay no attention to these issues, and in that case, they lose both morally and strategically.

This paper examines the problem of toxic leadership and provides the means of creating healthier work environments. Readers will get to know how to identify bad behavior before it becomes entrenched. Looking at structure, culture, and psychology, we explain why companies keep toxic leaders. But most importantly we provide effective strategies to end the cycle, be it as a victim, a manager or policy setting.

Breaking the Cycle of Toxic Leadership: Causes, Impact, and Interventions in Workplace Environments

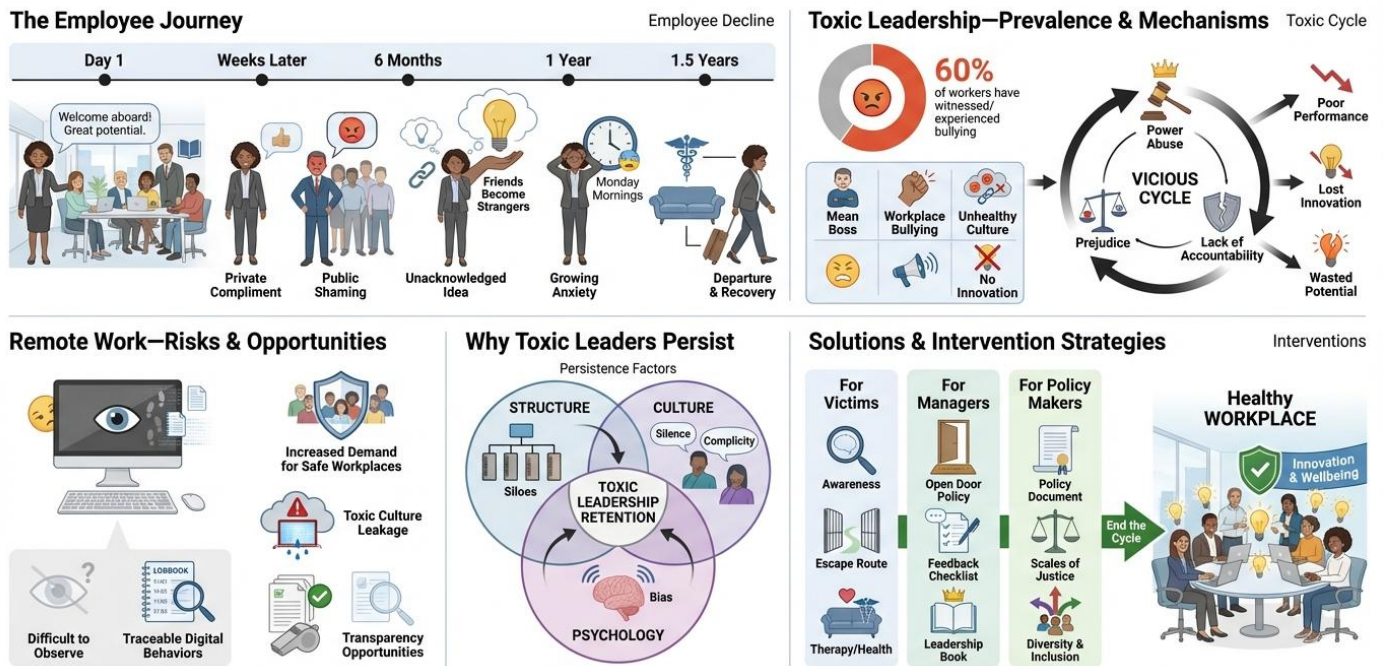


Fig -1: The Cycle of Toxic Leadership

This is experienced by practically all workers. Approximately 60 per cent have witnessed or experienced bullying. Most of them have done business with a manager who has been misbehaving. Having observed it personally or simply heard about it, workplace toxicity is a widespread issue which requires urgent intervention and systematic responses.

2. OBJECTIVES

- Studying has several goals. It desires to combine researches on toxic leadership, abusive supervision and bullying into a single concise model demonstrating that they do not operate independently of each other.
- It also examines the thought, the organization and culture that allow bad leaders to continue despite the harm that they cause. It examines the ways in which self-interest, jealousy and power orientation generate unhealthy work environments.
- The research records the impact of toxic leadership on people, teams, and the entire firm. The information is useful in research and actual activities.
- It also transforms useful tools to ensure that employees, managers, HR, and bosses should



establish toxic trends at an early stage.

- Finally, it gathers tested solutions to resolve issues, providing clear guidelines to individuals on the ground, leaders, and policy makers, so they operate in various locations.

3. METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed a mixed-method approach, which involves studying toxic leadership through reviewing the papers, examining real cases, and developing a model. The papers analyzed in the review were published between 2000 and 2025 in such domains as organizational psychology and management. We used database resources like PsycINFO, Business source complete, and Web of science. When we searched using terms such as toxic leadership, we managed to find 200 articles. The use of 95 studies was a result of quality filtration. We also read about actual cases of companies that transformed. We selected cases where the results were definite, data long, and the interventions were known. It was done on 12 in depth cases 34 additional supported the data. The sectors were in the fields of tech, health, finance, manufacturing, and services. We extracted strategies, tools and theories based on good ones. We sought similar elements in various environments, and where it required modifications. We were interested in the working and user-friendly frameworks. We compared findings that were found in various materials as a way of minimizing bias. In case, where the studies, cases and theories agreed, we had much confidence. We did record points of weak or varying evidence. We acted in accordance with ethics, particularly to preserve anonymity of cases and vulnerable individuals. No data of individuals were collected so there was no need to get approval from the ethics board.

4. CURRENT TRENDS

Toxic leadership practices and the response of the companies to them continue evolving with the changes of work. These issues are conditioned by several significant tendencies, which define their occurrence and ways in which companies address them. Remote and hybrid work presents some new issues and opportunities about bad bosses. Some of the abusive behaviors brought about by digital messages have records that can be used to demonstrate the abuses more clearly than face-to-face conversations and are thus easier to detect. Remote work also enables bad bosses to enjoy access to surveillance software that tracks keystroke and screen time, leave victims alone, send ambiguous messages that lead to anxiety, and blur the distinction between regular performance reviews and harassment. The companies that permit remote work will have to revise the regulations and habits to ensure safety among people in the online environment.

The less experienced workers that are younger are not as ready to take up abusive terms as compared to the older workers. They are more concerned with mental health, work-life equality, honesty, and employer fairness and call out abusive work environments via social media. This alters the pressure of the companies to put toxic leadership in mends or good people in danger. Job platforms such as Glassdoor and Indeed allow employees to give testimonies on workplace culture and bosses. These stories become viral through social media, making problems at the workplace a PR crisis. Its open nature increases the toxic leadership as a negative influence on the reputation of a company compared to the past where issues remained internal.

With the help of artificial intelligence and data tools, the health of a company can be monitored by reading messages, identifying trends in who exists or how people perform, and alerting potential problems in a timely manner. Such tools would assist companies to act earlier in case they are used

ethically and with respect to privacy. There is less stigma associated with mental health nowadays and thus people are more ready to correlate job abuse to psychological damage. This transparency allows people to seek assistance, and it allows companies to realize that unfavorable working conditions are damaging to the well-being of employees.

Evolving Trends in Toxic Leadership and Company Responses



Fig -2: Evolving Trends in Toxic Leadership and Company Responses

Legislation on psychological workplace injuries is evolving. Others have novel policies to prohibit bullying and psychological harassment, which presents legal risk to businesses on top of the current discrimination regulations. The rules provide the victims with additional avenues of seeking assistance. Workers are also more likely to be trapped with abusive bosses when the economy is shaky since they have less opportunities to leave a bad job. With tight labour market, a worker is in a position to bargain better or exit at will and it is difficult to retain talent in the firm even in a culture that is bad.

ESG investing lays emphasis on environmental, social, and governance, and investors are now concerned about the workplace culture and management. Those companies who wish to achieve good ESG scores must demonstrate that they are concerned regarding the health of the workers and ethical leaders provide an additional burden to correct issues. All these trends imply that toxic leadership has become more observable, poses a greater danger to businesses, and may be halted with technology and knowledge. Nevertheless, the underlying psychological and structural causes of toxic patterns remain, and companies should continue to pay attention.

5. DEFINING THE PROBLEM

5.1 The Three Faces of Destructive Leadership

To interpret the toxic workplaces, we need to appreciate the fact that toxic leadership, abusive supervision, and bullying are different and overlap to some extent. Toxic leadership is a gradually built habit where a boss can abuse power to humiliate, dominate and use the workers to gain something. They establish an atmosphere of fear, favors, and corruption. They prioritize their personal interests in the company and see workers as an instrument rather than humans to develop. Their bad habits remain constant with time.

Dynamics and Interconnections of Toxic Workplaces

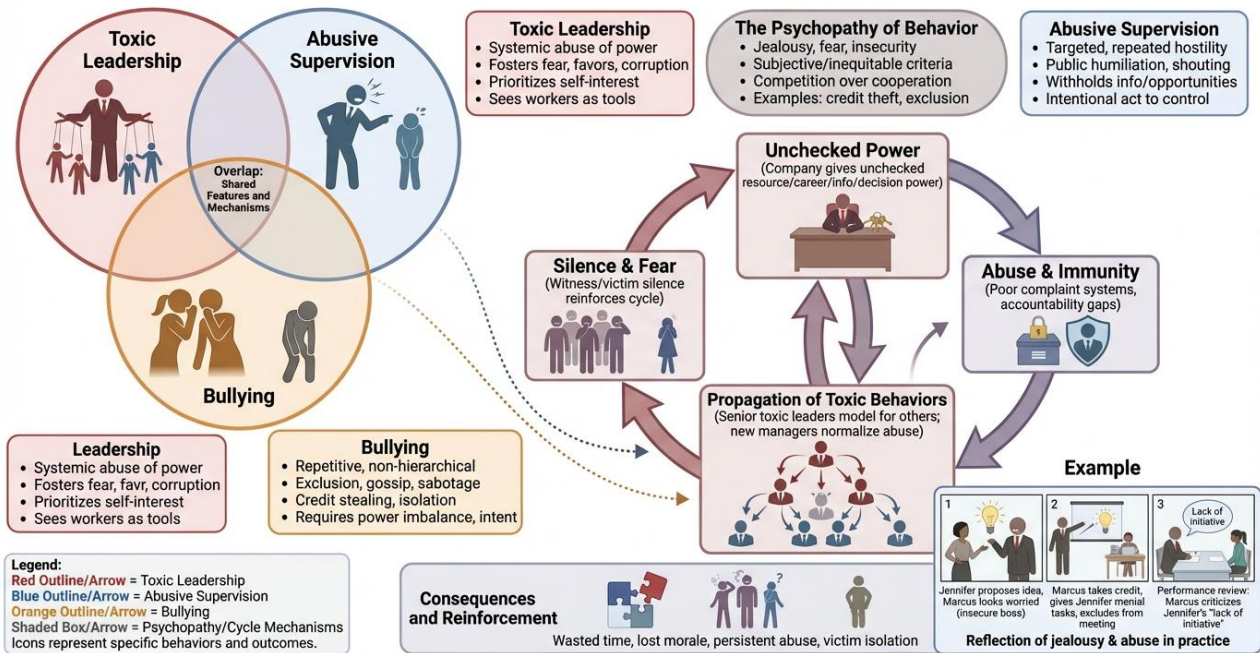


Fig -3: Dynamics and Interconnections of Toxic Workplaces

Bad leaders may be arrogant to their bosses and mean to their employees. This is their used behavior of kissing up and kicking down thus making it difficult to notice and eliminate.

Abusive supervision is an unusual case that considers a boss and the individuals under his supervision. It incorporates deliberate enmity like humiliation in public, shouting, unwarranted criticism and withholding of people out of practical information or opportunities. The thing is that the boss does it intentionally in order to control, discipline or fulfill personal needs. Research demonstrates that abusive supervision is not the same as bad management. An ineffective manager can provide unclear instructions or feedback since he/she is untrained. The terror of a boss, on the contrary, creates confusion to make workers off-balance and reliant. It is possible to train a weak manager, but one who is abusive as a boss must be dealt with. Bullying is not limited to bosses and co-workers. It is recurrent unseemly demeanor of companions, other employees, or managers that hopes to harm, frighten, or dismember somebody. It may be rejection, gossip, sabotage, credit snatching, blame or rendering work unpleasant. Bullying is not one fight. It requires repetitive acts, inequality of power and the desire to harm. One quarrel is not bullying. An isolation program of one or two months is.

5.2 The Psychology Behind Behavior

These malicious practices are because of certain attitudes that transform the normal power in the workplace to misuse. Leaders that allow the personal prejudices, feelings, and taste to take precedence in



the objective rules make power their weapon. Well leaders make use of information, plan, and equity. No matter what the work, toxic leaders abuse their power to reward those they like and punish those they do not like.

The aspect of subjectivity manifests itself in the form of inequitable criteria that shift the judged person(s). One worker will be praised with the same task being criticized by another worker. It is not the jobs, but the boss and his mood that makes a difference in terms of deadlines and results. The employees will end up wasting their time in addressing the mood of the boss than the actual work. Bad leadership is influenced by jealousy and fear. In case a boss feels threatened by a competent employee, he can allow such an employee to excel or even demoralize them. There is no way that toxic bosses do not seek to bring them down. They view good workers as threats rather than as assistants and hence competition rather than teamwork.

Take the example of a manager at a mid- size consulting firm, Peter. Peter was not proud, but feared when a junior analyst, Jennifer, came up with a structure that senior leaders preferred. He excluded Jennifer in the discussion, took the idea to himself, and gave her menial administrative work. Peter has claimed that Jennifer lacked initiative in reviews when her actual job failed. His jealousy made the company property a victim. This trend occurs in most disciplines. Researchers conclude that these behaviors are most demonstrated by the very self-centered and low self-esteem leaders. They are always in need of compliments and will also become aggressive when they perceive a threat. Being insecure makes them dangerous because they must prove their innocence by making a personal game out of work.

When there is no check on power, this opens the room to the bad leaders. Companies provide bosses with resource power, career power, information power, and decision power. Abuse is likely to occur almost always without checks. The prison experiment conducted by Zimbardo demonstrates how unchecked people abused power. The same conditions are made to occur every day in companies. Poor complaint systems, inquiries where the bosses are assisted, measures that are result-oriented only and cultures where victory is celebrated regardless of the methods are all sources of accountability gaps. Such loopholes are one of the reasons that make bosses believe that they can get away with all their vices.

5.3 How These Patterns Interconnect

Such actions do not occur in isolation. They establish positive feedback mechanisms that become more powerful and destructive. The loop works in ways. Toxic leaders who are seniors establish rules that propagate throughout the company. When top managers are abusive, the middle managers believe that it is normal and acceptable. They imitate it via observation. The abusive places of work have new managers who believe that it is normal work. Simultaneously, bullying becomes the possibility of abusive supervisors. When exclusion and gossip are the order of the day, bosses can misbehave without being detected. Their abuse is concealed to the toxic background. Employees fear complaining about the tyrant supervisors when the entire environment seems to be unfriendly.

Toxic leaders are then made to realize by their abusive supervisors that their behavior is effective. Bosses who mistreat subordinates achieve objectives or evade it, and thus such leaders believe that it works. This chain reaction causes the flaws of the levels to copy and amplify themselves upwards. These are behaviors that occur in clusters rather than isolated occurrences since they bring the same emotional gratification to the abuser and are products of the same company situations. An insecure leader who disregards smart workers must also embarrass them and rub rumours and steal their work. These behaviours strengthen one another and create wholesome patterns of abuse rather than isolated



occurrences. In an organization, silence is an avenue of abusing people. Workers and witnesses who do not speak up allow abuse to continue and flourish. Silence occurs due to fear, doubt that it is beneficial to report, belief that it is bad to complain or simply are simply fed up with dealing with toxic environments. All the silent witnesses inform the abuser and the victim. Silence constitutes permission to proceed to the abuser. To the victim, it shows that he is alone. This ensures that poisonous patterns survive. The greater the abuse, the riskier it seems to voice the issue and hence further into the loop of issues and silent issues.

6. THE HIDDEN COSTS

6.1 Impact on Individual Employees

Creating a strong organizational culture has led to changes in the nature of work and individual employees within the company. The human price of toxic leadership does not simply end with being uncomfortable with work. Research indicates that individuals in such settings experience severe chronic ailments. There is great psychological damage. The anxiety of employees with abusive supervisors is three times higher than that of employees with supportive managers. The levels of depression are two or three times elevated. There is the possibility of acquiring post-traumatic stress, intrusive thoughts about work, the feeling that one is on the alert at all times, and numb feelings.

It is a daily life of chronic stress of people who encounter toxic leaders. Their cortisol levels remain high, they sleep worse and the fear they experience all the time consumes mental energy. This pressure leads to personal time and relationships. Husbands observe transformations; friends observe aloofness and depressiveness. It causes career damage to psychological pain. When opportunities are withheld, credit and confidence are broken, and toxic leaders put a halt on growth. When people are assigned meaningless work or omitted in hard projects, their skills decrease. Reputation is destroyed when leaders relay bad information about effective employees. Networks reduce because colleagues isolate themselves to be linked to the person they do not like.

Numerous hard-working experts, such as the software engineer described above, do not only abandon the organization but also the entire sector after the prolonged mistreatment. Take an example of David who has had ten years of experience in the fintech field. The career of the actor was destroyed by two years of working with an abusive director. The director publicly debunked him during meetings, doubted his abilities despite excellent reviews, and blocked his promotion during three consecutive years. This stress failed him he was having panic attacks at work prior to attending work and his marriage was poor. He later left the company and the finance industry to work on a job that paid low wages, but he was of no use. The industry was deprived of a good professional and David was deprived of a job he enjoyed.

Continuous toxic leadership also makes physical health worse. Work anxiety demonstrates or exacerbates sleep disorders. Stress that is chronic causes issues with the heart, puts a strain on the immune system and makes one susceptible to disease. Headaches, stomach issues, and muscle tension become routine. There are studies that are associated with persistent abuse in the workplace leading to chronic heart diseases and metabolic problems. These are health issues that bring additional career challenges. Increased sick days imply that leaders are able to fail performance. Health care costs increase and unemployment endangers health insurance. The connection between the state of mind and the state of body complicates it to abandon as long as one remains in a toxic environment.

6.2 Team-Level Consequences

Toxic leadership disrupts the working team dynamics creating isolated units that do not collaborate with each other. Trust falls quickly. Employees imitate such actions to save their lives when leaders stab each

other, favor certain people, and lie. When sharing thoughts implies the boss takes credit, then he or she ceases sharing. When assisting a colleague involves the risk of retaliation, the assistance vanishes. Fear replaces teamwork.

This disillusionment is acted out. The team workers are not assistive. Knowledge is retained due to the hoarding aspect since by sharing information, you risk becoming redundant. Discussions are wary and official rather than free. The death of creativity is due to the fact that individuals do not want to be criticized or robbed of an idea. Holding knowledge to self could be survival. Sharing in a toxic environment will make you vulnerable to the attacks of the boss. This protects you and damages the team, which requires bandwidth of the information.

The Hidden Costs of Toxic Leadership: Individual, Team, and Organizational Impact

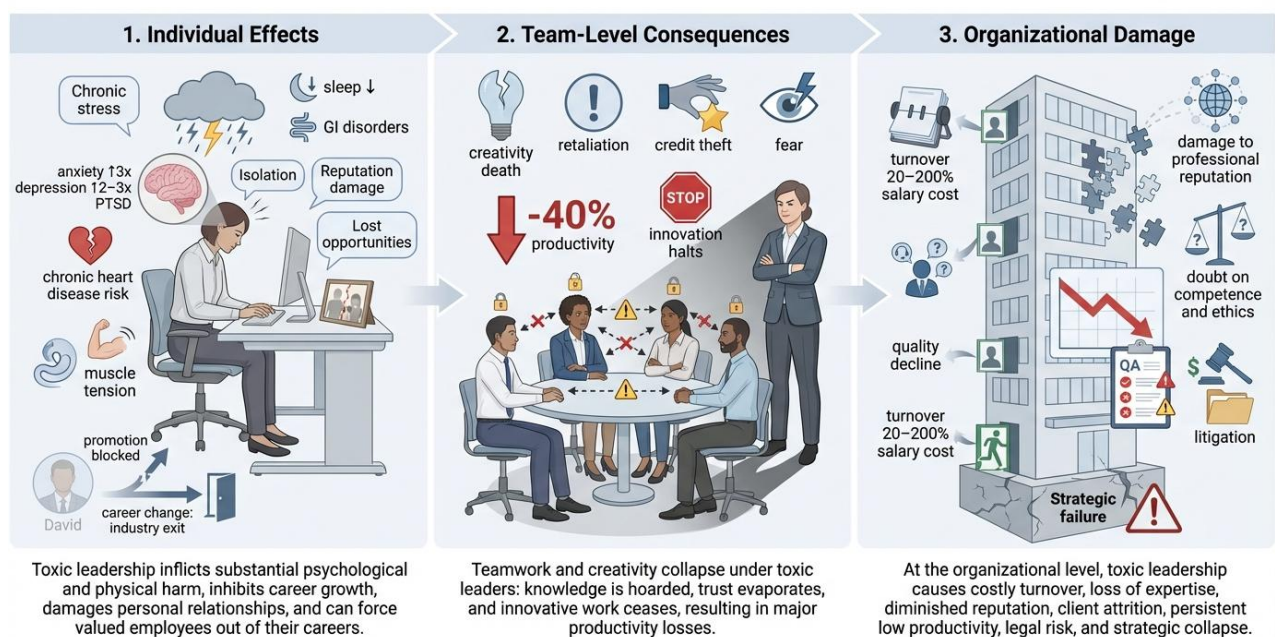


Fig -4: The Hidden Costs of Toxic Leadership

An example of a marketing department of a consumer goods company reveals these findings. Under a bad director, the team was able to exchange knowledge, coordinate effectively and increase productivity. The team was divided into opponents after the arrival of the director six months later. Shared knowledge stopped. Productivity fell 40% in a year. New concepts fell still further.

The cost of losing innovation is one large but unnoticed cost. Innovation needs a secure environment to experiment and fail, confidence, and equal consideration. Toxic environments eliminate all these. Individuals who handle toxic leaders defend themselves rather than thinking of innovative ways of dealing with them. They are not risk takers who adhere to conventional ways of doing things, nor do they ever challenge the status quo. This military attitude is contrary to the inquisitiveness that drives innovations.

Toxic leaders are likely to create conflict to prevent the union of individuals or to distract them towards their issues. They gossip, divulge secrets at their own pleasure, and oppose each other with their pit members. War breeds more war, creating enmity groups. Self-defensive behavior propagates in



unhealthy groups. Everything is written by employees in order to protect against false claims. They forward regular emails from bosses in order to leave paper trails. They also do not want to take a lead that can put them in a criticizing situation. They are not accepting volunteers that may put them in the limelight. Such actions are unproductive both in cost and contribution.

6.3 Organizational Damage

Unhealthy leadership is not only damaging to individuals and teams, but also the entire organisation.

Turnover is expensive in terms of money and plan. The costs of hiring range between 20 and 30 percent of the salary of a professional worker. The lost training of the experienced staff when they leave, variations in productivity during implementation, and lost project momentum accumulate. The prices per departure vary between 50 and 200 percent of a salary.

The cost of intellectual capital may be higher than money. By losing good employees, they lose knowledge, relationships with clients, knowledge of how to do things, and problem solving abilities that they might not find elsewhere. Just one resignation is enough to wipe years of education out.

One of the mid-size manufacturing firms lost 40% of their senior engineers within 18 months due to a toxic VP. The experience of those engineers was about 12 years old, they were aware of product specifications, customer requirements, manufacturing constraints, and suppliers. Going away with them they carried that knowledge. Even highly qualified new employees took years to achieve the same level of ability. It saw the slowing down of product development, decline in quality and poor client relations. The market position of the company became weak compared to the competitors.

It is difficult to substitute talent when damaged by reputation. Professional networks are the spreaders of the word. Culture has been made available to potential hires through review sites such as Glassdoor. Firms that have toxic leaders are unlikely to attract applicants, must pay more and receive less qualified applicants. The effects are also felt by the customers and the partners. Toxic workplace news casts doubt on both competence and ethics. The clients question whether internal issues influence the quality of products or services. Customers can re-evaluate their relationships with a company having low judgment and values.

The level of productivity decreases immediately and remains low. When in a toxic environment, individuals will work with low capacity due to distraction, lack of motivation, self-protection and politics. Research indicates the prevalence of 20-40 percent loss in productivity more than that of loss at times. Quality also suffers. Abused and exposed employees make more mistakes, cut corners and work to avoid being blamed rather than do a good job. These quality issues create customer complaints, warranty expenses and added reputation damage. Legal risks rise. There will be increased harassment, discrimination, and retaliation cases. The toxic leaders may fire resistance, and this may result in the wrongful termination claims. The issue of workplace safety can arise. Litigations are resource-consuming, reputation-damaging and leadership-distracting.

Settlement are damaging financially, yet indirect expenses of legal business may be more than paid. The time that leadership spends on litigation, the morale of the staff that the side is destroyed by witnessing their colleagues suffer, and the media attention to the high-profile cases damage the firm more than the settlement itself. The most dreadful thing is strategic failure. Firms under toxic leadership are unable to implement strategy since the talents are lost, innovations are killed, communication collapses, and leaders tend to act in survival rather than to achieve a long term objective. This makes success almost impossible in spite of market and resources. Many times, it is only too late that organizations find out that



the toxic leadership is not just a managerial problem but an existential one. When the failure becomes evident, it takes colossal efforts to remedy the damage, which the organization may not be able or willing to do.

7. WHY ORGANIZATIONS ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN

7.1 Structural Enablers

We should look at the structures that enable toxic leaders to remain in order to understand why companies do not eliminate them. The biggest problem is with short-term outcomes. Companies evaluate leaders primarily in terms of figures, sales, cost or production reductions. When toxic leader attains such numbers, then the negative behavior would be dismissed or justified. A sales director that achieves targets through scaring people also gets a bonus. Project manager with strict and tough methods to meet deadlines is still promoted.

Consider James. He worked as an executive sales director in a medical equipment company. Over five years he surpassed or beat revenue targets. Simultaneously he humiliated his team, overworked and stressed them. There was 60 percent turnover in the team in year which was much greater than the organizational average and most respondents in the exit interviews indicated that James was abusive. But James received rewards, compliment, and increased responsibility. Top executives were aware of the issue and counted cash. This situation remained unchanged until the company was sued over harassment and had to respond. The lawsuit was much more expensive than the sales made by James.

This trend continues to recur since quarterly requirements and annual strategies reward short term gains at the expense of long term health. Leaders are rewarded with instant outcomes and then relocate to the long term harm they bring. The harm is turned into the problem of another person. Even with the policies, workers are not safeguarded by weak HR systems. Most companies have well-developed anti-harassment policies, which are primarily legal provisions, rather than actual safety nets. This leads to the failure of the policies due to inadequate investigation tools, fear of investigating influential people, evidence policies that favor the accused and secrecy policies that protect the bad leaders at the expense of victims.

The complaints are usually not encouraged by the reporting systems. Workers must take ineffective procedures, climb the chain of command that can involve the addict, and face retaliation with no or limited security. Investigations are also weak when complaints are forwarded. HR departments are brief and not skillfully trained to trace evidence and credibility. Having power in the hand of an individual evades the checks to prevent bad leaders. Having only one person who determines budgets, promotions, projects, and reviews leaves abuse almost unavoidable. Firms unwillingly establish mini kingdoms in which managers at middle levels possessed almost unlimited authority over their subordinates. This concentration increases on the top. The power of the executive is considerably restrained. Not culture, but money boards look at. Executives tend to protect each other rather than play a check on each other. It is even more difficult to confront top managers than to cope with exploitative managers.

7.2 Cultural Factors

Toxic leadership is either inhibited or stoked by culture because it determines what is normal. Normalization transforms bad behavior into the manner of doing things. Abuse may be shocking to new workers but with time they become accustomed to it when they realize that other workers can bear it. What was previously an offense becoming a simple part of the way we do it. The higher the normalization of behavior, the greater one is likely to find it difficult to cease. Firms that have had toxic leaders over the

years make justifications about it. They refer to the abuse as high standards, tough love or separation of strong or weak. Those workers who come forward are labeled not fit or too sensitive. Such tales make bad leaders escape as critics are muted.

Victims and witnesses are afraid of being retaliated and are silent. Those employees who report abuse are seen to lose jobs, promotions, and reputation and also friends. Malicious leaders take revenge and the company is very seldom protective of whistle blowers. Witnesses face the same risk. Coming forward may brand them as unfaithful and ruin their profession. Even when the witness does not like what he or she witnesses, he or she remains quiet.

WHY ORGANIZATIONS ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN

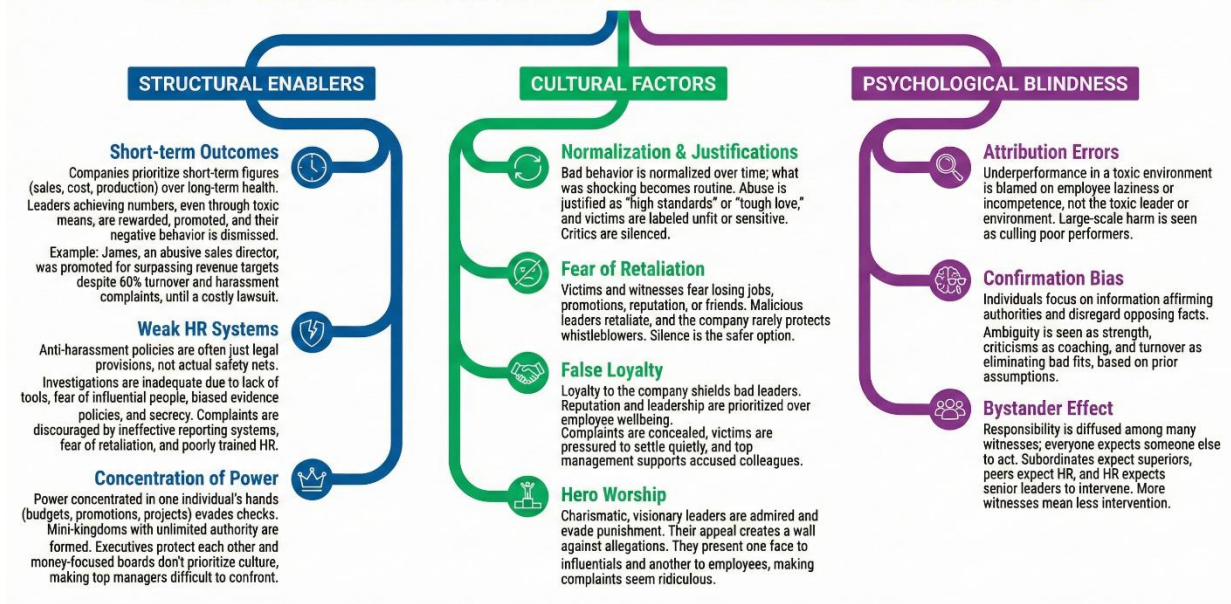


Fig -5: Why Organizations Allow this to Happen

It is false loyalty that shields bad leaders in the interest of the company. There are companies that take their reputation and leadership more than the wellbeing of the employees. Once complaints are made the reaction will be to conceal the issue instead of assisting the victim. This loyalty manifests in the way pressures are applied to make the victims deal privately, oppose complaints, and settle quietly rather than correct the source of the problem. The top management that is expected to act tends to support the accused as they are their colleagues rather than the victim.

The hero worship allows bad leaders who are charismatic to evade punishment. Other unhealthy leaders are highly charismatic, visionary/skilled, and they are admired by boards, customers, and senior employees. Their appeal forms a wall, and it becomes difficult to accept the allegations. These leaders will have one face with influential individuals and a different face with employees which is a kiss up and a kick down style. The visionary is viewed by decision makers and the tyrant by employees. A complaint by staff sounds so opposed to the version of the leader that the latter would seem ridiculous.

7.3 Psychological Blindness

Toxic leadership is also not realized and prevented by psychological factors. Attribution errors cause individuals to punish the victim, but not the abuser. Whenever an employee underperforms in a toxic



environment, the people who observe him/her believe that the employee is lazy or incompetent, rather than the environment is poor. This is a bias that conceals the actual harm that the leader causes. The mistake becomes even more powerful when the number of individuals who are hurt is large. When various employees are not doing well with a single manager, the outside parties will consider that the manager is culling out poor performers and not making them weak. The trend that ought to depict toxic leadership rather appears as success.

Confirmation bias makes individuals observe things that affirm the current authorities but disregard those that do not. Whenever there is ambiguity, the leader is perceived to be strong, then such ambiguity is perceived as tough leadership criticisms are perceived as coaching and turnover is perceived as elimination of bad fit. Both stories are processed by prior assumptions, and it is difficult to find true patterns. It is the most powerful prejudice among the senior leaders. Their ascendancy provides evidence of the ability that tints how individuals assess their subsequent deeds. Questioning their leadership is not allowed as it will make people drop the idea that they are competent.

The bystander effect diffuses the responsibility to many witnesses, reducing the likelihood of any action being undertaken. When more than one individual witnesses abuse, one believes that another person will act. This impact is more pronounced down the line. The subordinates expect the intervention of the superior the peers believe that the HR will take care of it the HR believes that the senior leaders will intervene. Senior leaders are practical receivers of no reports. The more witnesses, therefore, the less anyone gets to intervene. It is ironical because the most evident abuse does not get the lowest response since everyone anticipates another to take care of it.

8. RECOGNITION AND EARLY WARNING SIGNS

8.1 Red Flags in Leadership Behavior

Early discovery of toxic leadership must seek to enact evident markers to distinguish tough but fair leaders, and such as moribund leaders. When a leader criticizes them in front of everyone yet praises them behind, or does not praise them at all, then that is a red flag. Good leaders provide confidential, respectful feedback and praise in public. Bad leaders embarrass in front of many people and reserved praise. This is used by them to dominate by fear.

The problem is very frequently, too harshly criticized. Minor offences attract huge corrections. Even such simple questions are regarded as rebellions. This causes workers to remain nervous and obedient. Another sign is to take credit and put the blame on others. Good leaders do not hoard compliments and share failures. Bad leaders take the success of the team as their achievement and attribute failures to people. Leaders who boast of doing it when they accomplish things and when they fail, they state that they did it. See who is positively and negatively mentioned. These language practices represent their credit perception. The alteration of rules without any purpose causes suspicion. In case the expectations are made according to the moods or favorites of the leader rather than according to the rules, the workers cannot learn. The ambiguity makes them reliant on the leader.

On some occasions, one employee may be commended and one who carries out the same job reprimanded. Favorites easy deadlines. Other people have hard deadlines. Rules follow personal ties. This prevents the workers from being independent. People are kept out by leaders who chain off information who demonstrate power over work. They restrict workers on the level of information they possess, with whom they can socialize, and those present in meetings. Control, not performance, is exhibited by leaders who seek copies of all email messages, prevent cross-team conversation, and omit personnel in

meetings, or withhold information flow. Change of moods by the leaders is a source of nervousness in people. All people experience stress, whereas bad leaders change their moods at random. Employees believe that they should constantly follow the mood of the leader and not perform their work.

8.2 Organizational Warning Signs

Organizations would identify the toxic leaders based on group patterns and data. The local problems are indicated by high firing rates in one department and stable firing rates in others. When a particular team loses 40 percent of personnel and the entire organization loses 15 percent, they will probably be the boss's problem. Firing employees usually provide nice responses, yet the statistics requires verification. Intelligent companies do not count departments, but managers fired. This finds bad leaders fast. It is clear evidence that the same manager has huge turnovers in numerous places. Clues are found in detail in exit interviews, even polite. Bad leadership is disguised in phrases such as management style, fit to culture or better opportunity when referring around the same manager. However, although they refer to work-life balance, stress, or communicating, they could indicate underlying issues.

Recognition and Early Warning Signs of Toxic Leadership: Key Markers, Organizational Data, and Preventative Tools

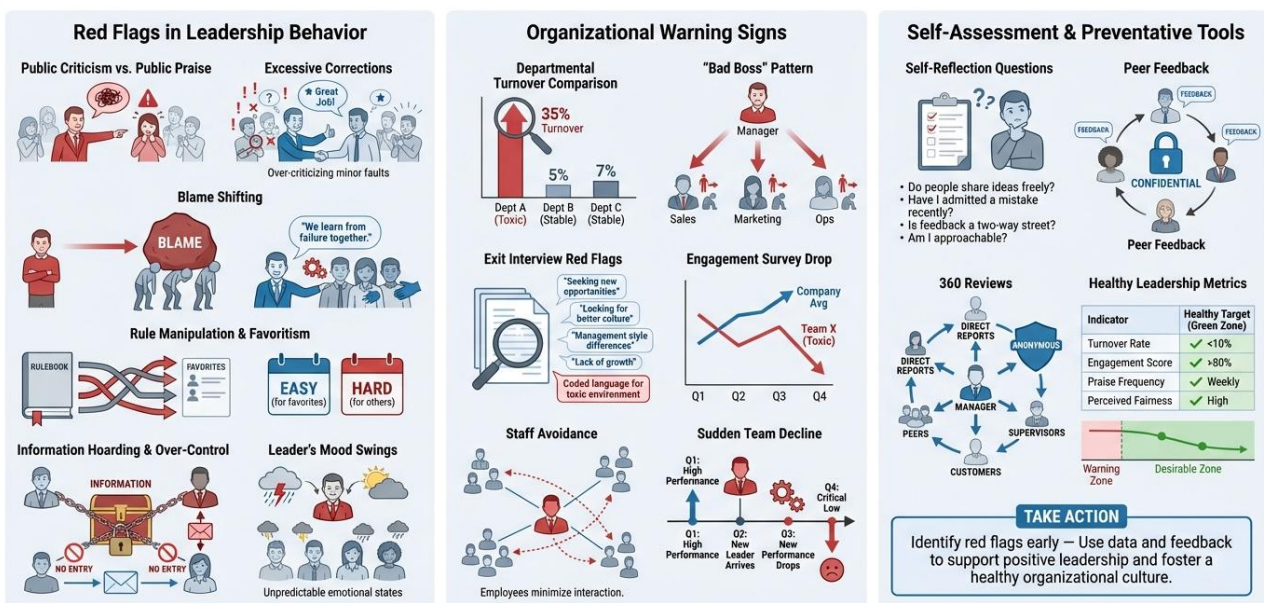


Fig -6: Warning Signs of Toxic Leadership

It is possible to observe latent problems in companies that search for exit data trends, but not a single comment. A significant number of interviews can be read with just software to determine positive and negative patterns. A decrease in the level of engagement through quick polls of yearly surveys in some of the groups can indicate areas of toxicity within a healthy company. When the trust, respect, or safety questions decrease within one team, one should investigate it. The most significant indicator is the case when the employees do not like their boss, or vice versa, yet they like the company. The disparity displays boss issues independent of the company. Individuals can avoid bad leaders in informal ways. When the staff avoids some managers, declines to work on their projects, or is glad when a change eliminates them as a bad boss, the hidden structure manifests itself.



See who is invited to volunteer on projects and who must select people. Know what issues leaders staff want to know. Check the departments to and out of which people change. These hints demonstrate the quality of bosses that will be eluded by math. Once a good team fails suddenly, it is the environment rather than the team that causes it. When the new leader is the only change and the team members remain the same, then it is likely that the new boss is the cause of change. Companies ought to scrutinize performance falls keenly with a view of locating circumstances within which a leader changed, a rule changed or a new setting came. When a trend implicates poor leaders and decreased output in most locations, something must be done.

8.3 Self-Assessment Tools

A number of check tools can be used by leaders who wish to test their style or companies that wish to test leaders. Some of the questions that the leaders must ask themselves on a regular basis include Do individuals exchange ideas on their own. Am I complimenting someone on the street this week. Have I acknowledged an error or reversed a decision due to the input of the staff. Are individuals comfortable being around me. What was the number of those who left last year and why. At home I would be happy with my style.

Such questions demonstrate the feelings and the behavior of the leaders. Honest self-check requires the readiness to state issues, not to make excuses. The leaders might have them written in a notebook on a weekly basis and find patterns. Peer feedback is effective when it is established effectively. Leaders may develop a small team of colleagues who will consent to provide sincere feedback. It is effective when the group maintains secrecy, sincerity, and non-defense. The other method is to seek the services of a career coach who examines actual behaviors and discusses with others. The coach can keep the leader accountable and provide feedback.

Using a 360 review needs skill. It may display or conceal bad ways according to the way it is done. Good review searches after shared themes among numerous individuals as opposed to an average score. It also examines the lapses between what the leader talks and what people say, in particular those beneath him and monitors the change in the situation. To ensure confidentiality, companies should maintain 360 reviews, recruit sufficient individuals such that a person does not get named, and request specific actions as opposed to the vague rating. As example: How often does this leader publicly praise you is better than Rate this leader communication.

A helpful list to check the health of leaders may include staff turnover vs. company average, engagement vs. company average, formal complaints, exit interview statistics, the frequency of praise, decisions changed at the staff input, fairness of the relationships, and consistency of the said values to actual behaviors, as well as how staff develop and are promoted. It should be perceived as a wake-up call that leaders or companies scoring bad should not be excused or ignore taking actions.

9. BREAKING THE CYCLE

9.1 Individual Strategies for Targets

The abused employees that are under the leadership of toxic leaders require steps to be taken practically, record and make decisions as to what to take next. Having a clear record is a way of securing yourself and also you have some options. Write facts, not feelings. Record the exact words spoken, the date, the time, people present and what transpired. Rather than writing My boss was mean, write On March 15 the director said, at the staff meeting of six people, that I was stupid to mention my proposal and went on without commenting.

Keep the record in an offsite safe location not within the records of the company. Send a copy on email. Archive any written communication, comments, and other documents. Record the witnesses who may attest to your account in case you have to rely on it on record. This record can assist you in resisting gaslighting, even when you are not formally involved, gives you the pattern, and provides predicates in case you put a complaint or file a lawsuit. Create an internal and external support system. Internally, locate credible colleagues that may listen, agree on what transpired, and provide insight. Select individuals who behave truthfully and have gone through such experiences before. Extrinsic, leverage professional networks, ex-colleagues, mentors, and friends. They are allowed to assist you in the determination of whether what you are going through is normal or abusive, advise you and emotionally stand by your without the politics of your place of work.

Boundaries help safeguard your sanity. Work not to get emotionally involved in the work taken or criticized. Do not give out information that may turn into an argument. Always remember that work is a medium of earning money and not who you are and make a very strict divorce between work and personal life. This can be seen as sacrificing something, yet it is a tool of survival. Use it till you can leave or the environment can be better. It prevents the loss of identity which makes it difficult to recover even when you leave.

Breaking the Cycle: Multi-level Strategies to Address Toxic Leadership in Organizations

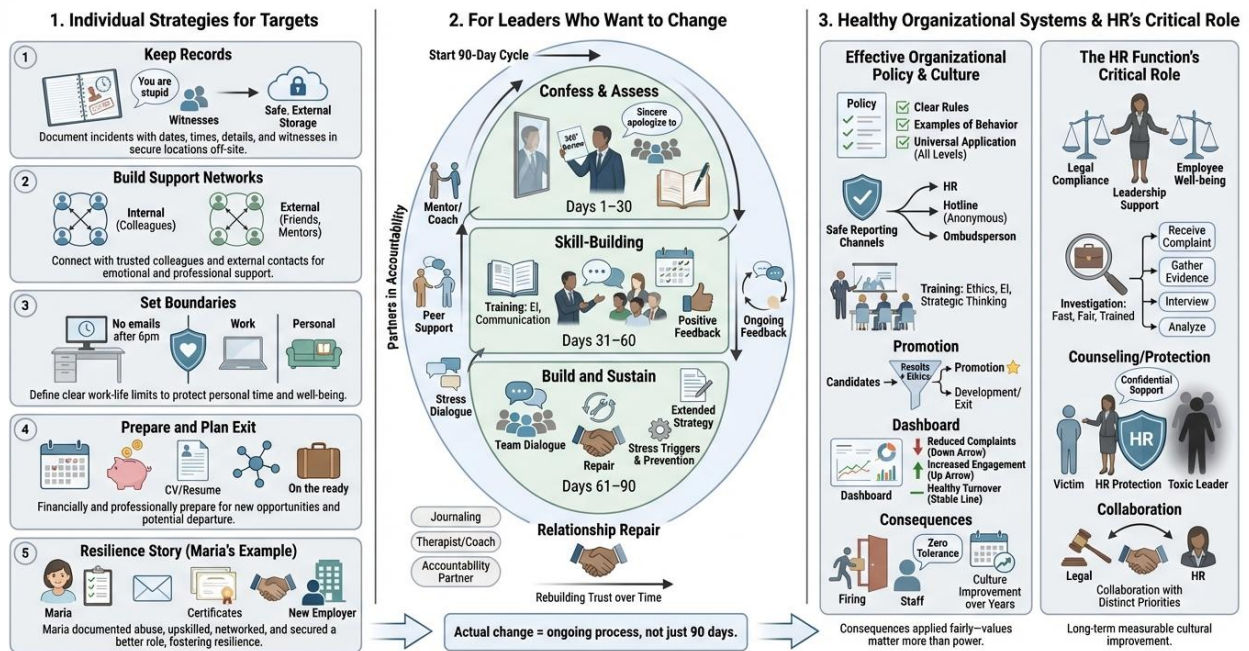


Fig -7: Multi-Level Strategies to Address Toxic Leadership in Organizations

Plan an exit carefully. Consider timely time, amass some funds and find a new work environment. Prepare emergency fund such that you do not have to reduce your pay. Refresh your competencies and qualifications. Network to get to know other jobs. Record the list of your accomplishments to demonstrate them to the employers in the future. The awareness that you are going to exit causes less mental damage as people do not feel helpless. The planning will make you feel in control even though it might take months or years.

Maria was a victim of abuse by a manager of a finance firm where she worked. She began raising notes about her incidents, dates, and eyewitnesses. She befriended the people in other departments and



maintained contact with the previous supervisors. She established some strict principles: she never checked email outside of the working day and never allowed criticism to hurt her. She also revised her resume, acquired additional credentials, and went unnoticed networking. Maria was prepared when a friend informed her about a job opening in another place. Her record showed the reason why she was going despite doing well. Having heard about the fame of the manager, the new employer gave her a clean sheet and located a healthier work.

9.2 For Leaders Who Want to Change

It is possible to change leaders who recognize that they have toxic habits, however, it requires actual commitment and a sense of strategy. Begin by confessing to your issues. See how your insecurities influence your behaviour. Pay attention to the way you respond to threats or challenges, the impact of your actions on others, and what causes you your most unpleasant moments ever.

Write a journal. Record every instance that you were bad, the danger you experienced and the desire you attempted to fulfill. Get an honest coach or therapist to work with a therapist who can provide honest feedback and help you realize the causes of your behavior. Select partners of accountability, who will monitor your actions. They may be co-workers, mentors, or the employees whom they trust. Concur with what kind of behaviors you are to change and they can openly call you out. This is kept going through frequent check-ins. It is important to ensure that the partner is independent, not one who will be afraid of your reprisal or someone who is subordinate and may conceal the truth. The most suitable ones are a peer or a coach.

Enhance the skills which result in toxic behavior. The toxic leader usually does not have easy skills to communicate calmly to control emotions in stressful situations, to resolve the conflict in a peaceful way, to provide constructive feedback, to make decisions grounded on facts and not prejudice. These skills are taught by training, coaching, instant feedback, and application of unambiguous decision-making models. Mend broken relationships by acknowledging the damage without retaliating, apologizing about behaviors, altering the current behavior, letting time to heal trust, and realizing that not all such relationships may be salvaged. This is a humiliating process for leaders who were accustomed to power, yet it is the only way to achieve actual change.

9.3 Organizational Solutions

Personal behaviors are not sufficient. Healthy and robust systems are required by organizations to prevent toxic leadership and develop healthy cultures. Policies should be actual regulations and not utopia. Behaviors that are bad must be listed clearly with examples. Facilitate secure methods of reporting that will offer safety against retaliation. Train investigators establish definite timelines in addition to connecting consequences to behavior and not just to performance.

Use the same criteria on everyone. If the seniors of leadership are lenient, then the policy is pointless. Organizations that embrace change establish an accountability of every level. Leadership training should be behavior-oriented and not strategy-oriented. Filter potential leaders on ethics. Train emotional intelligence and strategic thinking. Provide frequent behavioral feedback and not only results. Promotion of linking with what is done and how. The competency model should be based on results and ethical behavior, which should have equal weight. There should be an indication of ethical supportive leadership on promotion decisions based on subordinates feedback and observations. Create reporting systems that eliminate blockers. Provide a variety of avenues HR, ethics hotline, ombudsperson, and senior leaders. Guarantee confidentiality. Ban retaliation. Give some schedules so that the people are aware of what to expect. Distribute share without violating privacy.



Anonymous reports are a menace since they do not support investigation and follow up. Go ahead and see patterns but name complains to act. Posters are not all that culture change is. Leaders must demonstrate desired behaviour. Demonstrate that infractions are real. Honor good instances. Think in terms of years, not months. Track improvements using concrete measures for manager turnover, scores on engagement as the period goes on, resolutions and number of complaints, and a feeling of psychological safety. Display these in leadership dashboards and financial information. Consequences should be applied whether the individual is important or not. In case an effective leader develops turnover and distress, it is either to retain or eliminate them. The elimination of signs of the importance of values.

A technology firm reduced the number of toxic complaints by 70 percent over three years. They revamped policies, mandated leadership behavior training, conducted quarterly safety surveys, made the CEO address publicly that behavior is as important as results, and fired 3 top leaders who did harm. The shootings were a message. When leaders were punished, all came to realize that the company was concerned. This led to real change.

9.4 HR's Critical Role

HR sits at a tough spot. They must juggle between the leadership requirements, legal issues, and the welfare of the employees. These goals can clash. HR needs to shift towards not just safeguarding the legal interests of the company but being a proponent of a healthy workplace. Monitor turnover, engagement, and complaints data to identify issues at the beginning. Engage the leadership in culture initiatives rather than give orders. Defend employees regardless of the tension it causes with influential leaders. HR requires the assistance of the top management to serve as a culture guardian. Unless HR is viewed as powerless administration, executives will not grant them power. Leaders should enable HR to bring up hard matters and do so.

A good investigation is fast, has trained investigators familiar with the law and trauma, collects all evidence available, treats all people equally and communicates deadline and findings efficiently. They are expected to complete the majority of the cases within a period of 30 days unless they are complicated. Victims are sensitive, so support them. Trust them, describe the procedures, counsel them and guard them against retaliation. Do not ask the victims to confront the accused and continue working closely with the accused in the investigation. They can be safeguarded through temporary relocation or re-positioning. The legal problem can be a stressor in working. Law is concerned with capping the risk, hence may deter a deep investigation or a hush-up settlement. HR has to fight towards solutions that safeguard employees and enhance culture despite the legal counsel argument. Establish effective HR-legal collaboration with respecting the priorities of each. Employee protection also tends to minimize legal risk through avoiding issues that result in lawsuits.

10. PREVENTION AND PROACTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

This article is about identifying and correcting bad leaders. However, it is cheaper to prevent the onset of toxic leadership. Prevention implies that we select leaders with great care, educate them and create a working environment that does not encourage bad behavior.

10.1 Selection and Hiring Practices

Firms need to better select people to prevent toxic leaders. Normal hiring examines skills and previous performance and disregards behavior and people skills. The process of good prevention begins with behavioral interviewing where one inquires about previous conflicts, failures and the manner of exercise of power. Reference checks must inquire about leadership style and the impact that the candidate has

made on the team and not what that individual did. Personality tests can identify risky personalities such as narcissism, emotionlessness and blame others, but it will require the involvement of a pro to interpret the test and should not substitute other tests. Different people should be allowed to contribute towards the selection of the leaders, including their own who will be working under them. Top-down interviews can lack habits that can be demonstrated by peers and subordinates. Other companies allow the team members to have the opportunity to meet the most successful candidates during the final selection, as they want to know who their leader will be.

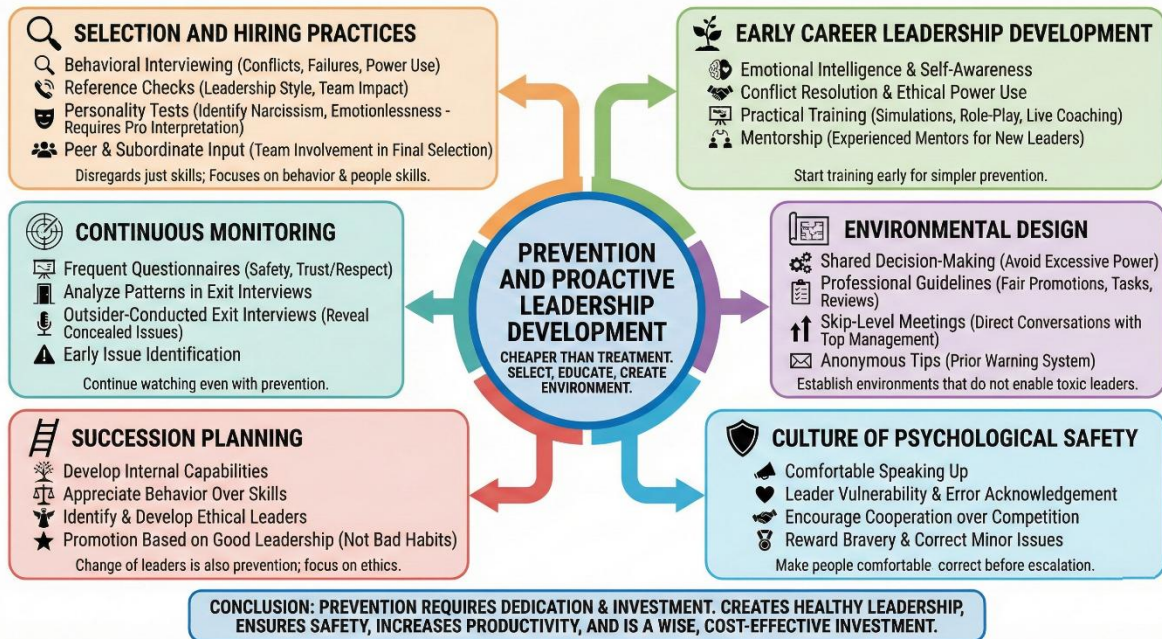


Fig -8: Prevention and Proactive Leadership Development

10.2 Early Career Leadership Development

When the training begins at an early stage of a career, prevention will be simpler. The new managers should be trained in emotional intelligence and how to be aware of oneself, provide helpful feedback, resolve conflict without resorting to power, use power ethically, and create safety. The training ought to combine concepts as well as practice together with simulations, role-play, and live coaching. Mentors who are good and can help with the initial problems should also be the mentors of new leaders.

10.3 Environmental Design

Companies can establish environments that do not enable poisonous leaders to flourish. They should share the moment of making decisions to avoid excessive power in the hands of an individual. Professional guidelines to promotions, tasks and reviews prevent unfair favoritism. Having frequent skip-level meetings will allow employees to have a direct conversation with top management, which will introduce a sense of responsibility. Tips made anonymously provide warning.

10.4 Culture of Psychological Safety

Most significantly, there should be a culture in which people are comfortable speaking up. Leaders have to be vulnerable and acknowledge errors, encourage cooperation as opposed to competition, reward bravery where individuals speak out and correct minor issues before they escalate.



10.5 Succession Planning

Even the change of leaders is also a question of prevention. Companies ought to develop internal capabilities which appreciate behavior over skills. Succession planning must identify and develop ethical leaders, hence when promotion is made, it is based on good leadership rather than bad habits that lead to an easy victory.

10.6 Continuous Monitoring

Although prevention is good, continue watching. Frequent rapid questionnaires on safety, trust/respect assist in identifying issues at the initial stage. When considering the individuals leaving a manager, one notices issues. The patterns are reflected in exit interviews conducted by the outsider and may be concealed by the person who leaves. Prevention requires dedication and investment money by the entire firm. However, prevention of toxic leaders is much more cost-effective than treatment. Companies that practice prevention in selecting, training and developing the workplace make healthy leadership a simple option and prevent the toxic ways. This proactive approach ensures the safety of people and the company is productive and this is a wise investment rather than additional expenditure.

11. CONCLUSION

Problems that are related to each other and detrimental to people, teams and the company are toxic leadership, abusive supervision and bullying in the workplace. They are because of insecurity, jealousy, power imbalance, poor accountability, and a culture that tolerates bad behavior. The evils are not confined to discomfort they bring mental and physical health issues, destroy team spirit and creativity, and damage the company due to turnover, negative image, and unproductive use of resources.

Organizations permit these patterns to continue despite their awareness that they are causing harm to individuals because they are concerned with immediate benefits, poor reporting and investigative functions, condone bad acts and attitudes, and focus on the victim or evidence denial. These issues require an intervention at numerous levels. People are required to document incidents, seek support, establish limits, and map out exits. The leaders who desire to change should be truthful with themselves, develop accountability, learn the necessary skills that are missing and mend broken relationships. Firms need to re-write rules to impose actual responsibility, re-design their training of leaders with behavior, establish effective reporting practices, and continue culture re-engineering. HR must go beyond observing the rules and preserving the culture by undertaking thorough investigations and collaborating with the attorneys to save lives and be impartial.

It is not about being ideal but demonstrating actual interest in improvement and responsibility. Individuals will not act kindly sometimes. Whether the result of those mistakes is learning and changing or it is the justification that they should occur once more. The individual action of different people may begin on Monday morning. Bad leadership on employees who have faced the vice should begin recording the incidences and seeking support. They must understand that defending themselves is not a sign of disloyalty and weakness. Leaders that are concerned about their style ought to receive a 360 review or other feedback and need to be candid with the feedback, keep in mind that it is the initial step in rectifying the situation. Manager should monitor turnover and involvement by companies to identify issues and assess policies in line with best practices to ensure safety of culture. To create an argument in favor of change, HR is to gather information about the expenses of toxic leadership and compare the company with evidence based information.

Hope exists. The systematic changes in companies have transformed the companies into non-toxic and



healthy companies instead. A technological firm reduced complaints by 70 percent. Personal change works through a leader who acknowledged the previous harm and recreated the team. A victim can recuperate through an employee who has documented the abuse and exited successfully and performed elsewhere. Our working environment is what we create and what we deserve, and everyone can create it. Leaders make decisions daily on whether to construct or to destroy. Firms make decisions on whether to exercise values or break them. People decide whether to be courageous, to protect or not to protect other people or not. HR can choose to either concentrate on rules or culture health. All these decisions come into reality.

These issues are not just something to avoid causing damage they open the world of possibilities to humans and make an organization great. Creativity is enhanced when the employees are safe, trust the leaders, and collaborate without any fear. The innovation takes place in the area where individuals will be able to experiment without fear of failure. This makes companies adapt and learn which is necessary in winning. The talented individuals will be eager to come and remain, contributing to the meetings with a fresh set of energy and knowledge that cannot be purchased and imposed. The bad leadership style is not simply the opposite of the abusive style, but a superior one supporting work, mission-serving power, and success through the release of talent instead of controlling by intimidation. This is not a fantasy vision but rather an implemented possibility for those companies that are willing to do the dirty and necessary job of changing culture.

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