faced with a high degree of uncertainty, individuals can simply try to cope with the situation, or they can try to maintain a low profile to "stay out of the way" of management ambiguity. A person who is adept at tolerating ambiguity and can still maintain a high level of productivity in the unstable climate is likely to continue to be an effective contributor in the work setting. Although they are probably few in number, there are those who fully embrace ambiguity, who see it as an opportunity for personal development and creative organizational change.

The world of work continues to grow increasingly complex. In businesses and organizations, those who are called upon to solve complicated problems and make good decisions must rely on more than factual knowledge. Dealing with uncertainty may evoke feelings of ambivalence or, in the extreme, paralysis and helplessness. Moving too quickly to decisive action, however, can lead to disaster. Employees and senior officers alike need to recognize uncertainty as a source of creative energy and therefore encourage a tolerance for ambiguity.

—*Nancy S. Huber*

See also Person-environment fit (P-E fit), Personality and careers, Proactivity

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TOXIC LEADERSHIP

Toxic leadership exists in virtually every arena of social life. It takes a special toll, however, in the workplace, where workers frequently feel particularly constrained to acquiesce to employers and managers whom they perceive as controlling their professional and economic destinies.

Toxic leaders in the workplace inflict serious and lasting harm on their employees, their colleagues, their organizations, and stockholders, even their customers and clients. They do so by virtue of their destructive behaviors and dysfunctional personal qualities. The garden variety "difficult boss" does not qualify as a toxic leader. Only those leaders who leave their followers and organizations measurably worse off than they found them—sometimes even totally destroying them—fall within this definition of toxic leaders.

Toxic leadership represents a social/psychological phenomenon, whose complexity is reflected in the fact that the same individual may be viewed as noxious by some and heroic by others, as toxic in certain situations and nontoxic in others, as intentionally damaging in particular circumstances but unintentionally harmful in still others. Consequently, understanding and defending oneself and others against various forms of toxic leadership require a multidimensional framework, one that takes into account both toxic leaders as well as their intended and unintended victims.

THE TOXIC LEADER'S SIDE OF THE EQUATION

At least six dimensions of the *leader's* decisions and actions need to be considered. These include *intentionality, intensity* and *duration* of the harm; nature and number of *destructive behaviors* and *dysfunctional personal characteristics*; and significance and impact of the *outcomes.*

In terms of *intentionality,* leaders who deliberately injure others or knowingly enhance themselves at great cost to others we consider intentionally toxic. Leaders who inadvertently cause substantial harm to others by careless or reckless behavior or faulty character structure, including incompetence and cowardice, we categorize as unintentionally toxic. *Intensity* of the leader's toxicity may vary considerably, as may the *duration* of harm; however, both intensity and duration must have a sufficiently significant *impact* to warrant the diagnosis of toxicity.

Behaviors of Toxic Leaders

Space limitations permit only an abbreviated list of *destructive behaviors* that qualify for inclusion in the

toxic leader's repertoire. Among the most destructive behaviors that toxic leaders use are the following:

- Violating human rights, by eliminating or destroying individuals through undermining, incapacitating, humiliating, intimidating, demoralizing, seducing, isolating, disenfranchising, and/or firing them without just cause
- Stifling constructive criticism and enforcing compliance with the leader's decisions through inappropriate means
- Weakening and/or destroying the organizational systems intended to promote truth, excellence, and equity, and otherwise engaging in deceitful, unethical, illegal, and/or criminal behavior
- Setting followers against one another, identifying scapegoats, and/or inciting disdain or other mistreatment of those the leader perceives as his or her opponents
- Deliberately creating the illusion that the leader is the only one through whose special gifts the followers can succeed, thereby increasing the leader's power and decreasing the followers' self-confidence. This behavioral strategy may involve stimulating the followers' most primitive fears and needs, including those for safety, material well-being, self-esteem, and meaningfulness
- Ensuring that the cost of unseating the toxic leader simultaneously destroys the organization.

This necessarily incomplete list of destructive behaviors combines with various character flaws to define toxic leaders.

Character Flaws of Toxic Leaders

Toxic leaders frequently exhibit a variety of dysfunctional personal qualities or character flaws, from lack of integrity to cowardice. Here too the following qualities represent only a partial catalogue:

- Deficient integrity that renders the leader untrustworthy
- Excessive ambition, lust for power, and/or greed that result in ruthless self-aggrandizement
- Outsized ego, disproportionate narcissism, and/or arrogance that blind toxic leaders to their own shortcomings, thereby limiting any capacity for self-correction and positive growth
- Amorality that limits the toxic leader's capacity to differentiate between right and wrong
- Inadequate empathy and compassion that prevents toxic leaders from grasping the actual impact of their actions

- Lack of intellectual and other relevant competencies that leads to misdiagnosing problems and failing to create appropriate solutions
- Cowardice that inhibits toxic leaders from taking necessary difficult decisions and actions.

THE FOLLOWERS' SIDE OF THE EQUATION

An adequate conceptual framework for toxic leadership also requires a complex understanding of those whose lives the toxic leader affects. In the workplace, this refers primarily, but not exclusively, to those individuals who work under the direction or authority of the leader. Although most followers, or in this case employees, would deny it, we often tolerate, prefer, and sometimes even create toxic leaders. As targets of toxic leaders, we followers respond in terms of three major components: our *psychological and existential needs* and *fears*; the *sociohistorical context* in which we exist; and the *interaction* between our *individual* capacities and experiences, on the one hand, and the *environment* in which we live and work, on the other.

Psychological and Existential Needs

Employees bring to the workplace the *psychological* needs and fears that stem from their individual psyches, as well as *existential* concerns that emanate from their common experience as human beings. Psychological forces that predispose individuals to seek out leaders include the need for reassuring authority figures to provide parental direction; the need for certainty, physical safety, and economic security in an uncertain and turbulent world; the need for approval and inclusion in some human group; the need to feel chosen and special, which may provide access to important centers of action; and the fear of one's personal inability to challenge a toxic leader. Toxic leaders manipulate these needs and fears to bend followers to their will.

The circumstances of our human existence heighten our vulnerability to toxic leaders. Perhaps the most critical *existential* force is our awareness that we inevitably shall die under conditions we currently cannot foresee. The suppressed angst, or existential anxiety, that such awareness provokes sends us on an endless search for safety, certainty, and the meaning of our lives. This existential dread initiates our quest to escape death, at least symbolically, by achieving immortality through heroic deeds. Toxic leaders

attract us with promises of security, certainty, noble enterprises, and heroic opportunities for immortality.

Our External Environment: The Sociohistorical Moment

The external environment pummels us with incessant change, turbulence, and uncertainty. Natural disasters, scientific and technological catastrophes, as well as social and political crises, unsettle followers. While uncertainty and change open the door to previously unavailable freedom, they also stimulate followers to reach for reassurance from the nearest source. In such perturbing circumstances, followers accept leaders who offer to restore order and safety.

Each culture also inculcates clear social norms and behavioral expectations. It articulates what constitutes outstanding achievement, a standard that sets the stage for heroic action. Moreover, each historical moment offers new challenges, from walking in space to discovering the cure for some dreaded disease.

The Individual's Experience in the External World: Psychosocial Forces

We measure ourselves against the achievement standards set by society and its various institutions, including work organizations. When, by dint of our own capacities and opportunities, we meet society's norms for achievement, our self-esteem rises. When we exceed those norms, we find ourselves acclaimed as heroes and leaders (since the culture rarely distinguishes carefully between the two). When we fall short, however, we often seek alternative routes to bolster our self-esteem. One common path entails joining the ranks of those already acknowledged as leaders so that we may share vicariously in their status.

Our perception that the leader (or the "boss" in the workplace) has special gifts, greater than our own, plays an important role in maintaining our acquiescence. This belief enforces our acceptance, even when the leader's behavior crosses the toxic line. When the corporate culture reinforces the external culture's criteria for leadership, we increasingly believe that employers or managers who meet or exceed those standards are worthy recipients of our respect and support. Such circumstances also undermine our personal confidence to challenge their decisions and actions. When leaders use toxic means—such as

unwarranted threats to our employment—to ensure compliance, we are intimidated all the more.

Toxic leaders in the workplace rarely need to expend much effort or resources controlling those individuals who work under their authority. Rather, those in the grip of toxic leaders tend to keep themselves under control. Individuals daunted by toxic leaders convince themselves through a set of *rationalizations* that they *cannot* resist because they lack the skills and talents to do so successfully. Eventually, these rationalizations harden into a web of *control myths* that persuade the followers they *should not* defy the toxic leader, because that individual deserves to be in control by virtue of his or her strengths and the followers' needs.

DEALING WITH TOXIC LEADERS

Although many employees who work under the aegis of toxic leaders silently endure their suffering, certain circumstances may induce resistance. For example, individuals tend to speak out against a toxic leader when they are sufficiently close to the toxic action to be aware of the serious harm being caused. When they identify with the individual or group being injured, followers are more likely to feel motivated to challenge the toxic leader. Moreover, when the costs of not speaking out outweigh the benefits, followers may feel compelled to oppose the leader, either privately or publicly. Occasionally, the emergence of a protestor and/or a critical event can galvanize previously silent sufferers and/or onlookers.

Various strategies can be used to control or unseat a toxic leader, although the risks can be substantial. All strategies for deposing a toxic leader require careful planning. Such planning includes gathering relevant intelligence not only about the toxic leader but also concerning others who might assist or undermine the effort. Keeping an evidentiary journal or log of the leader's toxic behavior is essential, since such documentation will help to induce others to act. Additional steps include identifying and collaborating with associates who not only recognize the harm being done but who also are willing and able to take measures to curtail the damage. Consulting trustworthy, experienced colleagues and opinion makers within the organization, as well as the toxic leader's peers or advisers, can assist challengers in developing an effective operational plan.

Personal Strategies and Policy Options

Personal strategies and *policy options* exist for dealing with toxic leaders. At the individual level, *personal* strategies involve taking action on one's own or in collaboration with like-minded colleagues. Acting alone is fraught with risks to the follower. Coalitions tend to be more successful than lone rangers in confronting toxic leaders.

Low-key approaches tend to work best when there is reason to believe the leader is both able and willing to change his or her toxic ways. Offering to counsel the leader, aided by a positive action plan with specific guidelines and benchmarks for change, can be a useful first step. If the leader responds positively, a schedule for future discussions and progress evaluations can be developed. "Keeping one's cool" at every stage in the process is imperative to a successful outcome.

When toxic leaders are unable or unwilling to change their behavior and/or control their character flaws, then employees may work quietly to limit, offset, or, if possible, undo the damage caused by the leader. If that option fails, followers may take action to undermine the leader; however, this strategy presents serious moral dilemmas that must be carefully weighed.

If the harm to the organization warrants removing the toxic leader, resisters should join with others, particularly the most senior and respected members of the organization, to undertake this mission. The participation of the board is critical, but since the board usually was responsible for selecting the leader, opening the board's collective eyes to the leader's shortcomings often proves to be a delicate undertaking. One strategy involves individually approaching key board members either directly or through their trusted associates. Once a sufficient number of board members perceives the need for collective action, a meeting of the executive committee or the full board is in order.

If the board refuses to act, then informing the media offers another recourse. Since the media frequently face their own organizational and political constraints, this strategy must be undertaken in an informed and cautious manner. Finally, when it is evident that none of these strategies will work, or if the harm is limited to you, then leaving the organization may be the most realistic way for an individual to deal with a toxic leader.

At the organizational level, *policy options* can be developed for preventing the emergence and/or limiting the damage wreaked by toxic leaders. The selection process is key to spotting potentially toxic leaders. The selection process should identify the largest possible cohort of qualified candidates, who then must be screened by multiple layers of reviewers from various sectors of the organization. Intensive due diligence should weed out toxic candidates. The selection process should be as transparent as possible. Once they have been selected, leaders at every level should be reviewed regularly with input from the total role set with whom they interact.

Followers should insist upon selecting leaders who do not offer them illusions of safety and grandeur. Leaders who expect them to participate in the governance and conduct of the organization are less likely to require submissive followers. Followers, for their part, must confront their own anxieties and fears to ensure that candidates cannot manipulate them through proffering unrealistic visions for the organization and its members.

Maintaining open and democratic policies and practices throughout the organization provides a bulwark against toxic leadership. The requirement for leaders to conduct periodic accountability sessions with large segments of the organization to explain critical decisions that they have taken is another useful policy option for keeping toxic leadership at bay. Term limits tend to prevent or reduce toxicity by reminding leaders of their future return to the ranks of followers or their timed exit from the organization. Finally, in organizations that create respectable departure options, such as a transition period with organizational support, leaders are less likely to cling to power beyond their reasonable usefulness to the organization.

—*Jean Lipman-Blumen*

See also Antisocial work behaviors, Leadership development

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TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Training and development (T&D) activities identify and ensure, through planned learning programs, the development of key competencies that enable individuals to perform to the best of their ability, aptitude, and attitude on the job. The T&D functions have evolved to contend with and respond to social and economic events, as well as being highly influenced by changes in management trends and philosophies. Effective training provides opportunities for people to perform in new functions and to be promoted into new situations.

Training should be distinguished from education. Education is instruction in more general knowledge such as history, philosophy, economics, or mathematics. Training teaches the learner how to do a specific task or function (i.e., manage their time, change a behavior, or run a machine). Being more technically oriented, training is more applicable to the adult learner who brings different experiences and psychological predispositions to the workplace.

T&D has evolved from simple apprenticeship programs to a blend of instruments, including classroom-based instruction, systematic job instruction, team building, simulation, Web-based individualized instruction, and many others. Before industrialization, training focused primarily on direct instruction and apprenticeships. Initially, as factories began to emerge in the Industrial Revolution, the first-line supervisor was normally assigned responsibility for training the workforce. Rationalization of work, division of labor, and routinized production created workers who became the keepers of the machinery. Due to this specialization, apprenticeships and on-the-job training were the training methods employed.

As the Industrial Revolution gained momentum, the number of factories increased and grew larger, and it became necessary to hire more employees directly from the farming communities who had little or no manufacturing experience. Unable to keep pace through one-on-one apprenticeships or on-the-job assignments, training moved into the classroom with assigned "trainers," enabling several people to be trained simultaneously with minimal disruptions to the production line. "Vestibule" training was developed for jobs requiring skill development on particular equipment away from the pressures of a production schedule.

By the first decade of the twentieth century, the United States had become a fully industrialized society with modern management, higher wages, and low unemployment. America's involvement in World War I created a widespread labor shortage, especially in skilled worker categories, because of the sudden need for production of wartime armaments, draft to government service and the military, and restrictions on immigration. Training departments were established in many companies to answer the call for faster and more efficient training methodology. A just-in-time method was developed, consisting of a four-step process that enhanced the teaching of repetitive, manipulative skills in a fast-advancing, automated world.

In the four decades after World War I, especially after World War II, the United States experienced unparalleled economic growth. While the industrial world was in full development mode, philosophers and psychologists were in the wings analyzing group dynamics and the learning processes. In the training arena, it was quickly recognized that not all workers were equal in their ability to learn and retain information. Given the numbers to be trained, the classroom was still the training site of choice, although it became necessary to rethink the way training was delivered, to incorporate techniques that would allow for the disparity of abilities and not hold back the more advanced learners. Self-paced learning and individualized training programs were developed to meet these needs.