

The Effects of Toxic Leadership on Employee Happiness

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the effects of toxic leadership traits, such as narcissism, autocracy, discriminatory behavior, and leadership insecurity, on various aspects of employee happiness, including job satisfaction, work environment, compensation, and professional development. A total of 92 respondents from professional WhatsApp groups were selected using purposive and snowball sampling. Data were collected through validated questionnaires on toxic leadership and employee happiness and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation, as well as linear regression. Results show a moderate negative correlation between toxic leadership and employee happiness ($r = -0.5189$). The regression analysis revealed that when leadership toxicity was zero, employee happiness was 797.825, and for every unit increase in leadership toxicity, employee happiness decreased by 2.146 units. To mitigate toxic leadership, it is recommended that organizations regularly assess leadership toxicity for decisions related to training, promotion, and compensation. Future research should focus on gender-based comparisons of toxic leadership, sector-specific studies, and exploring the link between toxic leadership and productivity.

KEYWORDS: Compensation, Employee happiness, Job satisfaction, Toxic leadership, Work environment

Word Count: 159

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The threat of a global leadership deficit is a real concern, as it poses significant risks to organizations and societies worldwide (Perna, 2024). However, for many African nations, particularly Nigeria, poor leadership coupled with corruption is already an unfortunate and enduring reality. This has led to the dashed hopes of many who believed that independence from colonial powers would result in a more prosperous and developed continent (Ebegbulam, 2012). Despite decades of varying leadership styles, a wealth of academic research, and abundant natural and human resources, Africa continues to struggle with ineffective leadership both in the public and private sectors (Arogbofa, 2022; Okorie et al., 2024; Pinto, 2020).

The corporate sector, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria, has also been severely affected by this leadership crisis. Gajere (2023) highlights two concerning trends: the stagnation in SMEs' contribution to GDP in the years leading up to 2021 (Adeosun & Shittu, 2021), and the alarming 62% mortality rate of SMEs, with 80% failing within the first five years (Emeka, 2023; Wee Tracker, 2020). These statistics underscore the impact of poor leadership on business sustainability, contributing to high unemployment rates, economic stagnation, and widespread poverty. As noted by Arogbofa (2022) and Okorie et al. (2024), ineffective leadership fuels these issues, leading to social marginalization, unrest, and a general lack of development across the continent.

The detrimental effects of poor leadership in Nigeria are further underscored by Pinto's (2020) argument that ineffective political, social, and economic leadership is a key driver of disunity, corruption, and developmental stagnation. He points out that despite Nigeria contributing 20% of Africa's GDP, the country ranks 152 out of 157 countries in the World Bank Human Development Index. Moreover, only 61% of children aged six to eleven attend primary school, and Nigeria has the second-highest prevalence of stunted children under five years old globally. These statistics reflect the broader consequences of poor leadership, which manifest in inadequate social services, poor education outcomes, and preventable health crises.

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Corruption, another consequence of ineffective leadership, is widespread and systemic. Hoffmann and Wallace (2022) classify Nigeria as one of the most corrupt nations globally, with 44% of public service users admitting to paying bribes. The country is also referred to as the "poverty capital of the world," a title that reflects the deep-rooted issues of governance and public service failure (Hoffmann & Wallace, 2022). The dissatisfaction with public services has led to calls for substantial reform in leadership practices, particularly within the public sector (Ojogwa, 2021). The median age of Nigeria's population, which is 18.1 years as of 2025 (UN Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs, 2025), further indicates the urgency of addressing the leadership crisis, as the youthful population demands effective governance and better opportunities.

A core root of these leadership failures is the presence of toxic leadership, which has a particularly destructive impact on organizational culture and employee well-being. Toxic leadership, characterized by negative behaviors and policies, creates a work environment that demoralizes employees and undermines productivity (Robinson, 2024). According to Robinson (2024), a 2022 poll found that 56% of employees currently work for toxic CEOs, which aligns with other studies that estimate that one-third of leaders globally are toxic (Veldsman, 2015). Toxic leadership is not only harmful to employees but also contagious, spreading across organizations and contaminating corporate culture. It undermines employee happiness, leading to decreased job satisfaction, poor mental health, and reduced overall well-being.

The destructive nature of toxic leadership is encapsulated by terms such as "evil leadership," "terrible leadership," and "dark side leadership". These negative traits contribute to a culture of fear and disengagement, where employees struggle to thrive in such toxic environments. The corrosive effects of toxic leadership extend beyond individual organizations, contributing to wider societal issues such as political instability, crime, and the erosion of trust in leadership.

This study aims to address significant gaps in the existing literature on toxic leadership and its impact on employee happiness, specifically within the African context. While research on toxic leadership primarily focuses on Western environments, there is a scarcity of empirical studies on its effects in non-Western settings. This research will fill this gap by examining the impact of toxic leadership on employee happiness in African organizations, particularly in Nigeria. Moreover, while many existing studies rely on qualitative methods, this research adopted a mixed-methods approach to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the issue. By incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data, the study offered actionable insights into how toxic leadership can be mitigated to improve employee well-being and organizational performance. Furthermore, the study provided specific recommendations for addressing toxic leadership, going beyond the generic solutions often suggested in existing literature.

1.1 Research questions

1. Is there any relationship between toxic leadership and job satisfaction?
2. Is there any relationship between toxic leadership and work environment?
3. Does toxic leadership significantly affect employee compensation?
4. Does toxic leadership affect employee professional development?

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between toxic leadership and job satisfaction.
2. To investigate the impact of toxic leadership on the work environment.
3. To determine whether toxic leadership significantly affects employee compensation.
4. To assess the effect of toxic leadership on employee professional development.

1.3 Research hypotheses

Arising from the research questions and objectives, the following null hypotheses were tested:

H₀₁ = There is no relationship between toxic leadership and job satisfaction.

H₀₂ = Toxic leadership does not affect the work environment

H₀₃ = Toxic leadership does not influence employee compensation

H₀₄ = Leadership toxicity and employee professional development are not related.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1: What is Leadership?

The meaning of leadership in scholarly literature is as varied as the types of leaders in different organisations. Bennis (1997) according to Mazza (2020) identified 'more than 850 definitions of leadership'. The English Dictionary Offline (2024) defined it as the capacity to lead. This passive definition was made more active in the New Oxford Dictionary of English (2021) which labeled it

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as 'the action of leading a group of people or an organisation'. Mazza (2020) gave a more action-laden definition of leadership as 'speaking up, stepping up, and standing up to make a difference in something that matters to you and makes a difference to others. But Kuye (2010) and the International Institute for Management Development (2023) believe that it is more of the ability to influence, inspire, and guide people towards achieving shared goals and values or simply a process whereby one individual influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Leaders thus motivate and inspire others to follow them. Leadership expresses its skills through observable behaviours which lead to measurable outcomes. These behaviours are used to help people align their collective direction, to execute strategic plans, and continually renew an organization (McKinsey 2022). Leadership behaviours are diverse but should maximize the efforts of followers towards the achievement of goals (Kruse, 2013) To be an effective leader, a manager must have a positive leadership style and positively influence their associates, through positive behaviours to achieve corporate goals. Examples of leadership styles with positive behaviours are transformational, transactional, servant, democratic, autocratic, laissez-faire, charismatic, and pacesetter (Bwalya, 2023; Hai and Van 2022). The toxic leadership 'style' is not positive, (Veldman, 2015 and Berry, 2019)

2.1.2: Definitions of Toxic Leadership and Toxic Leaders.

Toxic leadership is a leadership process that persistently harms the employees and their workplace (Lipman–Blumen, 2024). A toxic leader misuses power and has little or no care for his subordinates or the organisation; he belittles, bullies, and berates subordinates (Veldman, 2015). Berry (2019) describes toxic leaders as persons who have scant regard for the leader– followership relations and leave the subordinates and organisation 'in a worse state' than they met them. According to Johnson (2016), a toxic leader is a person who deliberately degrades the self-esteem and dignity of others and manipulates and forces them to have the leader's self-centred way. Simply put, toxic leaders abuse power and people (Blatnick, 2023). Blatnick (2023) also distinguished between bad leadership and the toxic variant; bad leaders may not be aware of their negative influence, but toxic leaders are aware of their toxicity and ignore improvement feedback and signals.

2.1.3: The Toxicity or Poisonous Attributes of Toxic Leadership.

Toxic leadership, as described by Fahey (2023), is perilous and manifests through a range of harmful behaviors that undermine both individuals and organizations. The toxicity of a leader is largely defined by the frequency and intensity of their negative actions, as well as their awareness of their behavior. Toxic leaders often display arrogance, which goes beyond self-confidence to the point where they are dismissive of others. They react with irritability and aggression when questioned and may demean or marginalize their subordinates, often shifting blame for their own mistakes onto others (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013; Yaus, 2016). These leaders are known to engage in slander, intimidation, and verbal abuse (Armitage, 2015).

One significant trait of toxic leaders is narcissism, often bordering on Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), characterized by an inflated sense of self-importance, a need for constant admiration, and an entitlement mentality (Kerr, 2022). They view themselves as superior to the organization and demand special treatment. These leaders frequently dominate conversations, dismiss the ideas of others, and accuse anyone who disagrees with them of envy or inadequacy.

Moreover, toxic leaders tend to be overly controlling, stubborn, and self-centered, even attempting to control areas beyond their competence. This micromanagement stifles employee growth and fosters a toxic environment where subordinates feel belittled and degraded. These leaders often operate from a position of power, using control rather than logic to achieve goals, leaving a trail of disillusioned employees and underperformance (Aimiwu, 2011).

Aggression is another common trait. Toxic leaders tend to be authoritarian, competitive, and hostile, prone to emotional outbursts and cruelty (Saqib & Arit, 2017). They often exhibit signs of depression, apathy, and a lack of passion for their work, while their paranoid tendencies lead them to misinterpret the actions of others, promoting a culture of secrecy and division. Finally, toxic leaders may exhibit traits of corporate psychopaths, engaging in manipulation, deception, and a lack of empathy (Boddy, 2020). These combined characteristics make toxic leadership particularly damaging to organizations and individuals alike.

2.1.4: The Toxicology or Destructive Effects of Toxic Leaders.

Toxic leadership and its effects are in all levels of management and not only in senior management (Johnson, 2016), and a reference to snakes will paint a clearer picture of their toxicity. Some snakes are poisonous or harmful when eaten but are not venomous because they do not spew toxins at people; in other words, a few snakes are only poisonous while others are both poisonous and venomous. (Jain, 2021). Toxic leaders are both poisonous and venomous, they destroy whatever and whomever they come in contact with- subordinates, superiors, work culture, or external stakeholders. (Johnson, 2016). This is a classic case of 'One bad (or rotten) apple spoils the whole bunch,' the destructive behaviour of toxic leaders negatively affects their subordinates and others. Reed (2015) quoted the statistics of Porath and Pearson (2009) in the 'Harvard Business Review' that toxic leadership, a silent corporate killer, accounts for a 48% fall in work efforts and a 38% fall in work quality. A survey by Life Meets Work consulting (2017) had equally depressing figures- employees with highly toxic leaders had 73% turnover and 70% work-life conflict rates as against 24% and 27% respectively for those collaborating with non-toxic leaders. Specifically, the corporate toxin or poison of leaders

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affects the mental and physical health of employees. It makes them come to work late, leave work early, procrastinate, and perambulate in the workplace.

Other symptoms of toxic leadership include an increase in conflict and job turnover and a reduction in productivity. There is a unique effect of toxic leadership in Nigeria called 'Japa,' a Yoruba language word for 'flee.' Thousands of Nigerians abandoned even well-paying jobs and relocated or 'japa' to other parts of the world, especially the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. One reason for this relocation is the toxic behaviour of political and corporate leaders (Olumoyo and Abiri, 2023; Falola, 2022, Okunade and Awosusi, 2023). Their dark or destructive leadership style chases employees to more predictable corporate environments. In summary, toxic leaders, true to their name, use divisive tactics to kill the team spirit, make risky and unethical decisions, and destroy employee well-being and happiness (Boddy, 2020). They degrade all the people they meet and the careers and organisations they enter. Top-class employees are especially vulnerable to their management 'gangsterism.'

2.1.6: What Is Happiness?

Yew-Kwang (2002) defined happiness as positive affective feelings minus negative ones. This net positive definition is close to that of James (2024) who described happiness as the opposite of sadness. However, Zimmerman (2021) believes that the opposite of happiness is emptiness and not sadness. A more comprehensive definition (Nelson-Coffey et al, 2015) is that happiness, also known as subjective well-being, has both affective and cognitive components. The affective component of happiness is the act of experiencing more frequent positive emotions than negative ones while the cognitive component is a positive overall assessment of a person's life. Either of both components is a satisfactory stand-alone characterization of the concept of happiness.

According to Atherton (2023) and Coffey et al (2015), happiness is more fleeting and triggered by a particular positive event while joy is more inward and longer lasting. In 'The How of Happiness,' positive psychologist Lyubomirsky (2007) described happiness in a threefold manner- 'the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful and worthwhile'. Another positive psychologist Gilbert (2023) gave a more analytical description that people have both an unchangeable natural happiness that they are born with and synthetic happiness from achieving goals and objectives; just as a physical immune system defends the body from illness, a psychological immune system defends the mind from unhappiness.

2.1.7. Art of Happiness

Dalai Lama and Cutler (1998) explained the art or nature of happiness and how to be happy. According to Dalai Lama and Cutler (1998), lasting happiness comes from the right mindset and not from external events and material achievements, therefore, training the mind should be compassionate, spiritual, and intimate with others (not romantic love) will increase happiness. The other happiness generators suggested are shifting perspectives to find good in every situation and examining thoughts and feelings of anger, sadness, low esteem, and hatred and replacing them with their positive opposites.

2.1.8. The Biology of Happiness

Happiness comes from the feeling centre of the brain, the amygdala, (Moawad, 2017). The brain and other parts of the body, stimulated by the environment, produce happiness hormones to make people happy. The hormones are dopamine which makes us feel good, serotonin which reduces depression and endorphins which reduce physical pain and makes us happy (Trakulkongsmut (2020). The environment and inheritance affect happiness, (Ramsey, 2023). Ramsey (2023) reviewed the work of Matsunaga et al (2014) and stated that a key gene, human cannabinoid receptor 1 (CNR1), activated by cannabis and endocannabinoids produced inside the body, impacts how satisfied and happy people are. CNR1 'is linked' to the production of a happy brain chemical, dopamine.

2.1.9: The chemistry of happiness

Lahoti (2023) explained that dopamine and serotonin are chemicals that send signals throughout the body to affect feelings; they respectively stimulate a sense of temporary pleasure and a long-lasting feeling of happiness. Rekhi (2016) expanded on the above and listed four happiness-inducing chemicals: dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, and endorphin. He stated that each of them stimulates the brain to induce happiness in response to different emotional states.

2.1.10. The Economics of Happiness.

Happiness economics studies the relationship between individual satisfaction or happiness and economic indices such as employment and wealth (Liberto, 2023). It uses happiness surveys to find out the welfare of people in different economies and applies econometrics to identify which factors increase or decrease their well-being. World Happiness reports of the happiest countries in the world are prepared from happiness economics metrics like Gross National Happiness (GNH) and other happiness indices, such as housing, income, employment, civic engagement, and health. In 2023, Finland and Iceland were among the top three happiest nations in the world, (Liberto, 2023). The unit of happiness in happiness economics is the util (from the utility).

2.1.11. The Mathematics of Happiness.

Even though Cameron (1963) stated that '... not everything that counts can be counted,' this section explains the mathematics of happiness to simplify and count an otherwise complex and subjective phenomenon. The happiness equation suggests relationships

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and perspectives to help understand the controllable and uncontrollable variables in happiness, even without the use of units, actual numbers, and functions. (Haidt, 2006; Aster, 2024). According to Haidt (2006), Rocha, (2021), and Aster (2024), The happiness equation is: $H = S + C + V$; where;

- H = an enduring or regular level of happiness. It is not the transient happiness that comes from external events and goes fast.
- S = set point of happiness or inherited affective style or range of emotions used in emotional regulation, e.g., emotion suppression and accepting setbacks. S factors account for 50% of our happiness level.
- C = conditions that are uncontrollable such as genes, age, and race, and controllable ones such as marital status and wealth; C factors account for 10% of our happiness level.
- V = voluntary activities such as exercises and learning. V factors account for 40% of our happiness level.

According to this equation, happiness increases with the 'C' variable. People should make the best of the uncontrollable conditions and carefully choose good controllable conditions to be happy. Voluntary activities generate a state of flow or pleasure.

2.1.12. The Geography of Happiness

Happiness is determined by where people live, space, and place (Ballas and Dorling, 2013). Sunshine and happiness are also linked, (Smith, 2020). The warm weather and outdoor activities increase positivity, sociability, creativity, and cognitive skills and reduce stress and lethargy. Geography also shapes feelings and perceptions of a place (Altaweel, 2021). In Turkish research reported by Altaweel (2021) communities that felt neglected or had poor transportation, high unemployment, and less resources for improvement showed more unhappiness. Living in a more rural location with more leisure and community engagement opportunities increases the level of happiness.

2.1.13. Religion and Happiness

Cranney (2024) reported the result of a review of 326 articles on the relationship between religion and mental health: 79% of the articles concluded that religious persons were happier than non-religious persons. The study also revealed that 1 in 3 religious persons believed they were 'very happy'. The ratio was 1 in 5, among non-religious persons. Cranney (2024) attributed this to the social connection and network of religious prayers and beliefs while Pointe (2023) and Aslam et al (2024) believe that hope and optimism in religion make people happy. Thompson (2022) summarized the correlation with the following immortal paraphrase: religion 'balm grief, resolves ... angst, and gives light in the darkest moments.

2.1.14 Sex Recession and The Toxic Leader

Sex recession or sexual continence is a decline in the sexual activity of adults. It reduces happiness and exacerbates toxic leadership. The hormonal rush from sexual intimacy lowers stress, enhances peace, and enables leaders to be empathetic and calmly engage in decision-making, innovation, and productivity. This is partly why, councilor Per – Erik Muskos, a Swedish lawmaker proposed a sex break for his city employees in 2017, (Blefsky and Anderson 2017). This subsidized sex, according to him, would increase the population of the city and make employees more levelheaded and productive. There is also a link between sex and happiness among internally displaced persons (IDPs) whose camps had hundreds of pregnancies and babies even during terrorist attacks and banditry- the male refugees asserted that sleeping with their wives eased their pains and sufferings (Duru, 2024).

2.1.15 Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is the feeling of pleasure and achievement experienced in a job. Job satisfaction is the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one's values (Locke, 1969) or simply how much people value different aspects of their work and how well their expectations are met (Locke, 1976). Job satisfaction or one's attitude to the job greatly impacts overall quality of life and is linked to perceived health status, job performance, work absenteeism, and job turnover (Nardo and Nardone, 2022.). One's attitude to a job (Job satisfaction) comes from relationships with co-workers, supervision, salary equality, promotion opportunities, training needs of employees, leadership, working environment, income, and the job itself ((Nilasari et al, 2024; Van Tran et al, 2023; Rodrigo et al 2022)

2.1.16 Work environment.

A work environment or the place where one works is the physical and professional space where a person interacts with others at work (Gunaseelan and Ollukkaran, 2012). It is a prime 'concerning issue' of employees and has a significant impact on job satisfaction (Taheri et al, 2020). A positive work environment is vital for employee productivity and stress reduction (Saidi, 2019) and should include better working facilities, clean and comfortable workplaces for frontline staff, praise, and recognition (Taheri et al, 2020; Fatma et al, 2023). A toxic workplace or a poor work environment has poor work conditions and can cause low productivity and low job satisfaction. (Sarode and Shirsth, 2011).

2.1.17. Professional development.

Czerniawski (2023) defined professional development in terms of the informal and formal processes that enable learners to improve their professional practice throughout their careers. According to Fredericksen (2016), professional development is a

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mechanism individuals use to learn, update, and improve skills, abilities, and behaviours over time. Mizelli (2011) opined that professional development encompasses different types of educational experiences related to a person's work, used to improve work knowledge and skills, and should have a demonstrable impact on the learner and their work (Guskey, 2000). Rigid professional development is getting out of date and consists of seminars, workshops and conferences where learners play little or no role (Van Veen et al, 2012). Others are innovative, interactive learning methods like book clubs, mentoring, coaching and collaborative research where learners play an active role in determining content, pace and performance.

2.1.18 Employee Compensation

Compensation is the remuneration received by an employee in return for their contribution to the organisation and includes fair salaries and monetary and non-monetary benefits. (Reddy, 2020; Naidu and Satyanarayana, 2018). Popular employee benefits or perks, in addition to their salaries, include goods and services that attract and retain staff and enhance their work and lives like bonuses, profit-sharing, overtime pay, recognition awards, and sales commission (Virtanen, 2023). Other benefits that also improve productivity and morale are free staff development courses, subsidized daycare, liberal promotion and transfer policies, and the ability to effect change in the organisation (Virtanen, 2023; Reddy, 2020; Naidu and Satyanarayana, 2018).

2.2. Theoretical Review

A. The workplace Happiness Model (Singh, 2024)

This new paradigm for organisational well-being explains the origin of employee happiness. Singh (2024) highlighted the following eight pillars for developing employee happiness: emotional well-being, work-life integration, professional fulfillment, inclusive and empowering culture, supportive leadership, organisational values and ethics, collaborative and creative environment, and autonomy and trust. This inclusive model is pertinent to this research - leaders and work environments without the Singh pillars of workplace happiness risk toxicity. Leaders should be trustful mentors, but when they are autocratic, narcissistic, anti-professional development, and anti-staff motivation, employees become unhappy. There is surely a link between job satisfaction and leader – satisfaction.

B. The Trait Theory of Leadership.

Early leadership studies focused on the physical characteristics of leaders (Koontz, et al.1980). These authors reported the research of Stogdill (1941) who identified five physical traits related to leadership ability, four intelligence and ability traits, sixteen personality traits, six task-related traits, and nine social characteristics. Not all leaders possess these traits, but recent leadership theorists like Hogan & Hogan, (2001) and Kippenberger (1997) posit that negative personality traits predict and produce leadership derailment. Paulhus &Williams, (2000) listed three of them as narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. The trait theory explains the nature of toxic leaders, they possess happiness-reducing dark traits like narcissism, autocracy, discriminatory behaviour, and leadership insecurity. In line with the theme of this research, leaders with toxic traits 'kill' employees – happiness.

2.3. Empirical Review

Many empirical studies exist on the relationship between toxic leadership and happiness-related factors. Lerato (2024) for example, studied the impact of toxic leadership on employee mental health. He saw toxic management as a 'spectrum of actions from subtle behaviours to overtly damaging actions' like micromanagement, undervaluing employees, negative work culture, and defaming employees into insecurity. The study concluded that toxic leadership silently affects the mental health of employees, resulting in anxiety, stress, clinical depression, burnout, and a diminishing sense of purpose. All these factors negatively affect happiness.

The research by Collins et al (2022) was more specific. It focused on whether toxic leadership would significantly predict psychological distress among federal civil servants in the Nnamdi Azikiwe University and Federal Ministry of Finance, Akwa, Anambra state of Nigeria. Simple random sampling and incident techniques were respectively used to select the two organisations and two hundred and seventeen participants for the study. The data collection instruments were the DetectaWeb- Distress Scale by Piqueras et al (2021) and the Toxic Leader Scale by Schmidt (2008). At the end of the analysis of the data by correlational design and multiple regression, it was found that toxic leadership dimensions of self-promotion, unpredictability, narcissism, and authoritarianism significantly predicted psychological distress among federal civil servants. However abusive supervision didn't significantly predict psychological distress in the same population. The researchers recommended leadership, trust building, and interpersonal relations training for leaders to detoxify them and de-distress their followers.

Olgin (2023) used a literature review and thematic analysis to fill the gaps in the literature on the causes, consequences, and solutions of toxic leadership. Articles from 2018 to 2023, with the themes 'toxic leadership', 'harassment', 'bullying', and 'unethical practices' were sourced from JSTOR, One Search, and Google Scholar and refined with Boolean operators. The research reported that there was a relationship between toxic leadership and low morale, high turnover, burnout, stress, and job dissatisfaction. It was recommended that to reduce toxic leadership, public organisations should have a positive environment, open, honest, and transparent policies and practices, and a generous investment in emotional intelligence and ethical leadership.

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Waldiya (2023) used a random sample of 339 working professionals and a paid survey through MTURK to investigate how toxic leadership behaviours were related to employee outcomes including burnout and subjective well-being or happiness. Results indicated that the relationship between toxic leadership and happiness was insignificant. Waldiya (2023) explained that the relationship was insignificant because happiness involved pleasant and unpleasant life events usually experienced in the long term and only longitudinal studies would adequately capture them.

3.0: METHODOLOGY

3.1.1: The Population and Sample

The research population was two hundred and fifty-two (252) professionals of both genders who were members of six professional WhatsApp groups purposively selected by the researchers because of their management focus. Ninety-two (92) of them who accepted to complete the Google Forms-powered questionnaires were conveniently chosen as the sample. The online questionnaire distribution enabled as many geographically distant persons as possible to partake in the research while the convenience sampling technique was easy and functional.

3.1.2: The Research Questionnaires

Two short, easy-to-complete questionnaires measured the level of toxic leadership in leaders and their subordinates' corresponding happiness levels. The Toxic Leadership Survey (TLS) involved the administration of a self-report questionnaire (see appendix 1) based on the following four dimensions of toxic leadership: narcissism, autocracy, discriminatory behaviour and leadership insecurity. Questions 2 and 9 measured toxic leadership narcissism, questions 1, 4, and 5 measured autocracy, question 6 evaluated discriminatory behaviour while questions 3, 7, 8, and 10 measured leadership insecurity. Respondents who scored high in this TLS had leaders with high toxicity while those who scored low had leaders with low toxicity, in the various dimensions.

The Employee Happiness Survey (see Appendix 2) contained ten items on the drivers of happiness and satisfaction in the workplace based on neuroscience (Whitehead-Smith, 2023). These drivers are job satisfaction, the work environment, compensation and benefits, and professional development. Respondents who scored high were happy and the reverse was also true (Whitehead-Smith, 2023). To achieve content validity, three subject matter experts (SMEs) reviewed and refined the draft questionnaires to produce the final copies in Appendices 1 and 2, which also had construct validity.

3.1.3: Data Analysis

The responses from both the Toxic Leadership Questionnaire (TLQ) and the Happiness Survey (HS) were analysed by a mixture of descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistical techniques like summation, mean, percentages, and mode summarized the data and enabled the researchers to understand their main characteristics and patterns. The descriptive research calculations also served as a foundation for further analysis by Pearson product-moment correlation which tested the research hypotheses by checking for any correlation between toxic leadership (x) and employee happiness (y) as listed in Fig 2. An additional analysis was done by a simple linear regression equation to predict employee happiness levels from toxic leadership data.

Completed online questionnaires were edited to eliminate inconsistent and fictitious responses and then analysed by a mixture of descriptive and inferential analyses. A Likert scale, with five response options of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree, determined the extent of respondents' agreement with specific statements to find out i) the levels of the four dimensions of toxic leadership behaviour in the respondents and their degrees of happiness. The researcher coded the responses to facilitate summation of the Likert scores, - strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, neutral = 3, disagree = 2, and strongly disagree = 1. (see appendices 4 and 5).

The researchers calculated the average rating of the responses by dividing the total numerical value of all the responses in each of the four dimensions of toxic leadership in Questionnaire One and the happiness survey in questionnaire two, by the number of respondents. They used an average rating of between 1 and 5 to make conclusions on the strength of each of the dimensions of toxic leadership. Similarly, the summation and means of the responses for the different dimensions of employee happiness yielded the values for job satisfaction, work environment, compensation and benefits, and professional development that contributed to employee happiness. In addition, other descriptive techniques like mode and the percentages of responses were employed to give more meaning to the data.

3.1.4; Hypotheses Testing.

The following hypotheses were tested:

H₀₁= There is no relationship between toxic leadership and job satisfaction.

H₀₂ = Toxic leadership does not affect the work environment

H₀₃ = Toxic leadership does not influence employee compensation and benefits

H₀₄ = Leadership toxicity and employee professional development are not related.

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The researchers used the responses from both the Toxic Leadership Questionnaire (TLQ) and the Happiness Survey (HS), listed as variables x and y respectively (fig 2 below) to calculate the Pearson product-moment correlation and the linear regression equation. An online Pearson product-moment coefficient calculator was used to establish any relationship between toxic leadership(x) and the different dimensions of employee happiness(y) in Fig 2. This correlation tool was suitable for actual, raw, or precise values, like the data sets in Figure 4, to get the direction (negative or positive) and strengths (from 0 to 1) of relationships and infer the effects of toxic leadership on employee happiness. The strength of coefficient correlation can be labelled as follows (Lani, 2025):

- Perfect correlation or relationship- plus or minus 1
- High correlation or relationship- values between plus or minus 0.5 and or minus 0.99
- Moderate correlation or relationship- values between plus or minus 0.30 and or minus 0.49
- Low correlation or relationship- values below plus or minus 0.29
- No correlation or relationship- a value of zero (0)

Beyond establishing the relationship between toxic leadership and employee happiness, there was a need to predict future values of employee happiness (criterion variable) from the present data of toxic leadership (predictor variable) through an online linear regression coefficient calculator. It is assumed that variables X and Y have a linear relationship, and the X or predictor values are independent and observed with negligible error. The linear regression equation is, $y = bx + a$, where

- y =the dependent, response, predicted variable or employee happiness.
- x = the independent, explanatory, predictor variable or toxic leadership.
- b = the amount by which y or employee happiness changes for every unit change in the level of x or toxic leadership.
- a = the value of y (employee happiness) when x (toxic leadership) = 0.

From the online calculator and Fig 2, $y = -2.146x + 797.825$.

| | X (toxic leadership) | Y (employee happiness) |
|----|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1 | 217 | 393 |
| 2 | 218 | 419 |
| 3 | 222 | 344 |
| 4 | 212 | 329 |
| 5 | 247 | 304 |
| 6 | 226 | 242 |
| 7 | 231 | 268 |
| 8 | 237 | 270 |
| 9 | 232 | 196 |
| 10 | 269 | 253 |

Fig 2: Coded values of toxic leadership and employee happiness from the relevant questionnaires.

4.0: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1.1: Results of the Descriptive analysis.

The descriptive analysis of the toxic leadership and happiness surveys yielded the results summarized in Figs 3 and 4 and the text below:

| TOXIC LEADERSHIP DIMENSIONS | RELEVANT QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTIONS. | TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONSES | TOTAL LIKERT SCORES | AVERAGE LIKERT SCORES 5 POINTS | STRENGTHS OF TOXIC LEADERSHIP DIMENSION |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| NARCISSISM | 2&9. | 174 | 450 | $450/174 = 2.59$ | 2.59(MODERATE) |
| AUTOCRACY | 1, 4 & 5. | 266 | 676 | $676/266 = 2.54$ | 2.54 (MODERATE) |
| DISCRIMINATORY BEHAVIOUR | 6. | 89 | 226 | $226/89 = 2.54$ | 2.54 (MODERATE) |
| LEADERSHIP INSECURITY. | 3,7,8, & 10. | 357 | 959 | $959/357 = 2.69$ | 2.69 (MODERATE) |

Fig 3: A summary of the findings from the descriptive analysis of the toxic leadership questionnaire data

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| EMPLOYEE HAPPINESS DIMENSIONS | RELEVANT QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTIONS | TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONSES | TOTAL LIKERT SCORE | AVERAGE LIKERT SCORE FROM 5 POINTS | STRENGTH OF THE HAPPINESS DIMENSION. |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| JOB SATISFACTION | 1,2&3. | 268 | 1156 | 4.31 | VERY HIGH |
| WORK ENVIRONMENT | 4& 5. | 175 | 633 | 3.61 | HIGH |
| COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS | 6,7&8. | 265 | 780 | 2.94 | MODERATE |
| PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. | 9&10. | 173 | 449 | 2.59 | MODERATE |

Fig 4: A summary of findings from the descriptive analysis of the happiness survey data.

- The average or mean toxic leadership level was a moderate 2.59 out of 5 points. This showed that the research respondents believed their leaders were moderately toxic. (fig 4).
- Out of the dimensions of toxic leadership, the strongest or most virulent was leadership insecurity with a mean of 2.69. This showed that leadership insecurity was more in the leaders assessed than narcissism (2.59), autocracy (2.54), and discriminatory behaviour (2.54).
- The average or mean employee happiness level was a high 3.36 out of 5 points. This showed that the research respondents believed they were happy.
- Out of the dimensions of happiness surveyed, the highest was job satisfaction with a mean of 4.31 points followed by work environment (3.61), compensation/ benefits (2.94), and lastly, professional development (2.59).
- The above point showed that job satisfaction was the highest contributor to the employee happiness surveyed, followed by the work environment, compensation/ benefits, and then professional development.

4.1.2: Inferential analysis findings from Pearson product-moment coefficient.

The Pearson product-moment coefficient of the data was -0.5189. (a negative zero point five one eight nine). This is a high correlation according to the decision criterion which states that values between plus or minus 0.5 and or minus 0.99 depict high correlation (Lani, 2025)

This high negative correlation means that toxic leadership and employee happiness are strongly and negatively related; high values of toxic leadership yield low values of employee happiness and low values of toxic leadership yield high values of employee happiness.

Therefore, all the null hypotheses were rejected and the alternate hypotheses were thus accepted which shows that; There is a relationship between toxic leadership and job satisfaction; Toxic leadership influences the work environment; Toxic leadership affects employee compensation and benefits, and Leadership toxicity and employee professional development are related.

4.1.3: Other findings from the linear regression coefficient.

From the linear regression coefficient, $y = -2.146x + 797.825$:

- When the level of leadership toxicity is 0, employee happiness = 797.825. this showed that an exceptionally low level of leadership toxicity yields elevated levels of employee happiness.
- For every unit change in leadership toxicity (x), employee happiness (y) will change by b or 2.146. Since there is a negative relationship between both variables, if leadership toxicity increases by 1 unit, employee happiness will reduce by 2.146 units and if leadership toxicity reduces by 1 unit, employee happiness will increase by 2.146 units.
- Therefore, if a leader reduces the toxicity in the work environment by 5 units, employee happiness will increase by 2.146 x 5 or 10.73 units. And vice versa.

5.0. CONCLUSION

The research was to find out the effects of toxic leadership on key employee variables such as job satisfaction, the work environment, compensation and benefits, and professional development. Results showed that toxic leadership affects employee happiness and its dimensions of job satisfaction, work environment, compensation and benefits, and professional development. This is in line with previous research that established a link between leadership toxicity and employee variables and behaviours. (Mehta and Maheshwari, 2013; Yaus, 2016; and Armitage, 2015). This means that the 'poison' in toxic leadership blights employee motivation and morale and reduces positive management indices like training, work environment, and job satisfaction. The implication on organisations is clear- leaders should mind and regulate their toxicity as they interact with employees. They should

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behave in a manner to motivates employees. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient of a negative 0. 5189 between toxic leadership and employee happiness was not as high as expected considering the literature on the negative effects of leadership toxicity on all stakeholders (Veldman,2015; Berry, 2019; Johnson, 2016; Kerr, 2021; Mehta & Meseshwari,2023; Blatnick, 2023; and Fahey, 2023, Elmasry, 2012, Shubha, 2021).

5.1. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research hypotheses and findings, the following measures will reduce leadership toxicity and increase employee happiness:

- Organisations should have their own bespoke or tailor-made leadership-toxicology test to easily assess the toxicity levels of their managers and environments.
- Such leadership toxicity tests should be part of a regular programme of staff performance appraisal to promptly identify, re-train, or weed-off leaders depending on their levels of toxicity.
- Effective training to enable leaders to understand the effects and symptoms of toxic leadership will empower them to deliberately take steps to be less poisonous.
- Low leadership toxicity should be a prime factor in leadership onboarding, retention, and promotion.
- Management should have red lines, like bullying, sexual harassment, or nepotism, that managers should not cross. This will change the toxic – mindset of leaders.
- A virile whistle-blowing and reporting system should keep managers off the toxic path.
- HR or administration departments should set up counseling units for perpetrators and victims of low-intensity cases of leadership toxicity.
- Organisations should feel free to hand over incorrigible leadership brutes to external bodies for counseling and punishment; covering up their mess may backfire if victims decide to report to law enforcement authorities, even in the future. There should be no esprit de corps with hardened toxic leaders.
- An annual leadership sanitation or sanctification week for leadership sensitization, counseling, bonding, tests, and rewards is important. Nothing is too much to do to de-toxify leadership and restore the trust of the followership.

5.2: SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES.

The following suggestions for future research will deepen and broaden toxic leadership studies for more effective and relevant organisational interventions. This research was on the effects of toxic leadership on employee happiness. Further research should focus on the effects of Machiavellian leadership, and the comparative effects of toxic leadership on the public and private sectors of the economy, on different genders, and in different countries. This will provide a more robust pool of knowledge for decision-makers.

Research should also spearhead the development of an online, valid, reliable, and easy-to-use toxic leadership calculator. This will enable all stakeholders to quickly measure leadership toxicity as a prelude to reducing it. There is also a need for longitudinal or long-term studies on toxic leadership; the present preponderance of short-term, cross-sectional research will not give researchers the needed comprehensive perspectives for well-rounded and reliable recommendations and intervention strategies.

Finally, there is a need to use experimental research to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between toxicity in leadership and employee variables like productivity, performance, and motivation to guide positive work policies.

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