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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

BEYOND BULLYING:
A HOLISTIC EXPLORATION OF THE
ORGANIZATIONAL TOXICITY PHENOMENON

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

By

Deirdre H. Carlock

February, 2013

Ronald Stephens, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
DEDICATION	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ix
VITA.....	x
ABSTRACT.....	xi
Chapter I: The Problem.....	1
Introduction	1
Background.....	3
Problem Statement.....	6
Purpose	7
Significance	7
Research Questions.....	9
Limitations.....	11
Chapter II: Literature Review	12
Introduction	12
The Toxicity Metaphor.....	13
The Toxic Organization.....	15
The Toxic Work Environment.....	17
Deviant Workplace Behavior	18
Leader Toxicity.....	34
Leadership and Ethics.....	43
Impact of Leader Toxicity	44
A Holistic Approach to Deciphering Toxicity	45
Four-Frame Model of Holistic Analysis.....	48
Structural Frame	49
Human Resources Frame.....	61
Political Frame.....	65
Cultural Frame	67
Summary.....	72
Chapter III: Methodology	76
Introduction	76
Research Design and Methodology.....	77
Data Collection	79
Validity and Reflexivity	84
Coding Plan	87

Protection of Participants.....	88
Summary.....	89
Chapter IV: Data Analysis and Findings	90
Introduction	90
Participants' Demographic Data.....	91
Data Collected During Interviews	92
Data Collected for Holistic Organizational Analysis	94
Summary of Findings	120
Conclusion.....	124
Chapter V: Discussion	125
Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study	127
Final Remarks.....	128
REFERENCES	138
APPENDIX A Participant Recruitment/Selection Plan.....	147
APPENDIX B Recruitment Communication Scripts	148
APPENDIX C Study Screening Questions.....	153
APPENDIX D Screening Participation Informed Consent Form.....	155
APPENDIX E Informed Consent Form.....	157
APPENDIX F Structure of Interview and Study Instruments	159
APPENDIX G Coding Plan	163
APPENDIX H Internal Review Board Approval	164
APPENDIX I Tables Presented in Chapter IV	166

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Deviant Workplace Behaviors	20
Table 2. Buss's Major Categories of Aggression	32
Table 3. Deviant Workplace Behavior Synthesized	33
Table 4. Whicker's Leadership Styles and Behavioral Typology	40
Table 5. Demographics of Study Participants.....	91
Table 6. Number of Responses Related to Interpersonal Aggression	93
Table 7. Responses Regarding Political Deviance	94
Table E1. Kvale's Types of Semi-Structured Interview Questions	160
Table E2. Patton's Interviewing Questions Typology	161
Table G1. Coding Plan.....	163
Table I1. Responses Referencing Elements within the Structural Frame.....	166
Table I2. Responses Referencing Elements within the Human Resources Frame	166
Table I3. Responses Referencing Elements within the Political Frame	167
Table I4. Responses Referencing Elements within the Cultural Frame	167
Table I5. Categorization of Participant References to Self.....	168

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Outline of organizational toxicity.....	13
Figure 2. Four-Frame Model of holistic analysis.....	13
Figure 3. Robinson and Bennett's (1995) Typology of negative deviant workplace behavior.	19
Figure A1. Participant recruitment/selection/interview process.	147

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated in loving memory to my mother,

Esther C. Henderson, who taught me

the meaning of love and strength

It is also dedicated to my wonderful husband,

Mark Alan Carlock, for so many reasons,

far too many to list

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For providing the very best professors and a doctoral program that has been professionally and personally challenging as well as enlightening. I am leaving this program more aware of myself and the impact that my actions and decisions have on the people I lead. I am leaving this program strengthened, renewed, and ready to sail into the world of possibility.

Finally, I wish to thank all the study participants who had the courage to share their stories with me for this project. It is my sincerest hope that I and other human resource management leaders will work to make a difference by significantly reducing or eradicating toxicity in the workplace.

VITA

Deirdre Carlock

An HR Professional dedicated to helping employers meet organizational goals through the respectful engagement and development of their human resource assets.

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ABSTRACT

A toxic organization is characterized by a narrow focus on bottom line profits and malicious or abusive behaviors go unnoticed or undisciplined (Kusy & Holloway, 2009; Macklem, 2005). It produces a toxic work environment where employees suffer emotional pain generated from damaging behaviors (Samuel, 2010). While some degree of toxicity is unavoidable, the unrelieved intensity of pressures over a prolonged period of time tends to wear people down (Bacal, 2000; Samuel, 2010).

Much of the academic and popular literature addressing organizational toxicity focuses on bullying and dysfunctional behavior. This research shows that harmful behaviors are symptomatic of more complex systemic problems. The purpose of this study was to uncover the organizational antecedents of toxicity using Bolman and Deal's (2008) Four-Frame Model of holistic analysis addressing the role that structure, human resources management, political systems, and organizational culture in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity.

The study was guided by 4 research questions:

1. What role, if any, does the Structural Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?
2. What role, if any, does the Human Resources Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?
3. What role, if any, does the Political Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?
4. What role, if any, does the Cultural Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?

The researcher used a phenomenological methodology and purposeful sampling strategy. Fifteen working professionals were interviewed to share stories of their experiences working in a toxic organization. Data extracted from the stories were synthesized through a holistic framework to identify the systemic sources of toxicity. The results revealed dysfunctions with organizational hierarchies, strategies, goals, policies, rules, standards, technology; failures in human resources management and political power sources; and the impact of leadership, values, and norms on organizational culture. These dysfunctions culminate in a toxic work environment.

This study was intended to provide leaders, students, and victims of toxicity with information for early and accurate identification of organizational toxicity. It concludes with suggestions for understanding the organizational antecedents of toxicity and provides a strategy for managing within, and emotional release from, the toxic work environment.

Chapter I: The Problem

Introduction

Tad Smyth and Bernard Jones partnered in 1970 to establish a law practice, Smyth & Jones, LLP (S&J). Although the names have been changed, the story of S&J is very real. With Smyth serving as managing partner, the firm grew to include 30 lawyers and 20 administrative staff members spread over five departments. He promoted collaboration between departments and encouraged diversity and teamwork. Every morning he walked through the firm, making a point to speak to the office staff as well as legal staff. He maintained an open-door policy and had a reputation for being approachable and empathic to the needs of his staff. The organizational culture reflected Smyth's leadership style; employees felt free to take charge of their own work and to speak up if they encountered problems. Attorneys and staff members ate lunch together and there were frequent celebrations, reward ceremonies, and family events. When a department won a case, the entire firm celebrated, which solidified the sense of all-for-one and one-for-all team spirit.

In 1997, Smyth became ill and transferred the managing partner position to the more pragmatic and introverted Bernard Jones. Jones' focus was firmly fixed on the bottom line; he felt the frequent celebrations were a waste of money and believed in drawing a clear line between professional staff and office staff. Through his leadership the environment changed from boisterous and bustling to one of library-like silence. Over time the culture deteriorated as Jones encouraged competition between departments and tied rewards strictly to profits. The competitive environment pitted lawyers against lawyers and staff members against each other. Relationships were damaged as the

collaborative environment was transformed into an organizational culture of cliques, fear, politics, restricted information, unequal workloads, hostility, and competition for resources. As employees left the firm, they were replaced by individuals with similar characteristics as Jones. There were no avenues of protection from bullying or threatening behavior, racial and sexual jokes were accepted as common, and favoritism was the norm. The performance management system and promotional opportunities were based on liking and disliking, which exacerbated the negative behaviors. Turnover rates increased, and approximately 1 year after Jones assumed the role of managing partner, diversity among the lawyers declined dramatically. Speaking up was considered complaining, which most employees understood would lead to retaliation or being labeled a troublemaker.

Employees reported situations of working harder and harder, taking on more and more responsibility, only to be frustrated with mediocre performance appraisals and small raises. Several stated that they began to consider their lack of success and poor work relations with supervisors as a personal failing. Others stated that while they were not personally bullied they observed others being publically ridiculed, threatened, and humiliated, with no avenue for protection.

One employee stated that she began to feel ill; every Sunday evening she felt increased anxiety over the thought of returning to work on Monday morning. Another employee quit after her boss threatened her with physical violence. Several employees filed workers compensation claims after suffering illnesses related to work stress and anxiety.

Finally, the firm was sued for age and race discrimination. They paid twice, first in heavy fines and punitive damages, and second through negative publicity that affected their reputation. The firm eventually closed in 2005.

Background

In the American workplace, people enter organizations where they interact in an effort to meet personal and financial goals, support their families and lifestyles, and prepare for their future. Regardless of size, industry, or setting, every business is an organization comprised of similar components: at least one leader, an organizational culture, systems of operation, and employees who carry out tasks to meet organizational goals. Levinson (2002) contends that an organization as a whole is a living system composed of interrelated subsystems. Levinson further asserts a similarity between the human body and the organizational dynamic, stating that organizations are living systems made up of components that interact together to make up a whole.

Continuing the concept of organizations as living systems, it stands to reason that, like all living entities, organizations are capable of a state of health or sickness, and are vulnerable to harmful toxins (Samuel, 2010). Bacal (2000) contends that organizations fall along a continuum: healthy well functioning organizations at one end; in the center, average organizations that are effective yet require improvement; and at the other end, toxic organizations that are destructive to both employees and leaders.

Healthy, well functioning organizations benefit from a productive workforce of employees who are motivated, loyal, free-spirited, and willing to go out of their way to get the job done (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Indeed, there is a vast amount of academic and popular literature that supports organizational health with theories and models for best

practices to motivate and engage employees, develop world-class organizational cultures, improve organizational systems, and develop effective leaders – all in the name of establishing and maintaining excellence in the workplace.

Despite this vast body of knowledge on best practices, evidence exists to suggest that a growing number of organizations are in fact unhealthy. In an era of economic recession and fierce global competition, organizations are experiencing increased pressure to generate profits by operating on leaner budgets with fewer employees. Over the past 20 years, organizations have experienced globalization, technological advances, the outsourcing of jobs, downsizing, restructuring, mergers, and shortened CEO tenures (Friedman, 2005; Musacco, 2009). These events have negatively impacted the work environments for millions of workers. As the pressure on American businesses increases, best practices for a healthy work environment go ignored (Musacco, 2009; Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000).

Pressurized work environments are responsible for increased levels of stress, job insecurity, ineffective communication, decreased concern for employees' wellbeing, increased employee demands, and less autonomy. Organizations can become vulnerable to toxins such as poor decision-making, incivility, worker deviance, incompetence, sabotage, and violence (Musacco, 2009). For many workers, the very thought of entering the workplace conjures up emotions of fear, stress, anxiety, and other physical affectations (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007; Bacal, 2000; Coccia, 1998; Frost, 2007; Kusy & Holloway, 2009). For some, these negative feelings are disabling, causing the victim to seek professional treatment for illnesses resulting from work-related stress (Coccia, 1998; Frost, 2007).

Toxic organizations are characterized as having a history of poor decision-making, high levels of employee dissatisfaction, and stress resulting from destructive human relations (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard; 2007; Bacal, 2000; Coccia, 1998; Kusy & Holloway, 2009). The central danger is that toxic organizations can cause long-term emotional damage to employees: damage that can persist for years, even after separation from the organization (Bacal, 2000; Fineman, 2003; Samuel, 2010).

Academic and popular literature examining the darker side of organizational life is beginning to emerge as stories and reports abound regarding employees being emotionally victimized or hurt in the workplace (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007; Kusy & Holloway, 2009; Pearson & Porath, 2009). Research and literature discussing organizational toxicity has traditionally been limited to matters related to toxic leaders, supervisors, and peer-to-peer behaviors of aggression and bullying. Indeed, bullying behavior has become the symbol of organizational toxicity.

Recently, however, business scandals, such as the one that occurred at Enron, have inspired scholars to expand their perspective beyond the narrow focus on singular behavior to the broader perspective of organizational dynamics, including the roles of leaders, systems of operation, and organizational culture, and how these elements perpetuate or even breed negative workplace behaviors (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007; Kusy & Holloway, 2009, Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006). Researchers and scholars have indicated the need for further research with a holistic approach to examining the root causes of workplace toxicity (Goldman, 2008; Levinson, 2002; Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006).

Problem Statement

Through his research on organizations across various industries and settings, Levinson (2002) discovered that the mental health of people working in organizations is significantly affected by the way the organizations are operated as a whole. Therefore, he concluded, the prevention of emotional distress requires a thorough understanding of organizational malfunctioning, the symptoms that result therefrom, and holistic approaches to ameliorate both simultaneously.

There continues to be a gap in the literature about the role of organizations in influencing dysfunctional behavior (Goldman, 2008; Levinson, 2002; Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006). To date, the majority of academic and popular literature addressing organizational toxicity focuses on overt acts of incivility, bullying, or other negative behaviors as the problem. The central subjects have traditionally been the offender and the offense, leaving the burden of coping or resolution to the victims of negative behaviors.

Levinson (2002) established that organizations are living entities comprised of interrelated systems and subsystems. Bolman and Deal (2008) complement Levinson's theory by stating that organizations are complex entities that must be viewed holistically. Therefore, it stands to reason that overt acts of behavioral deviance are merely symptomatic of more complex underlying systemic problems. A myopic approach to resolving organizational toxicity ignores the underlying root causes, thereby creating a cycle of further infection, relapse, and greater toxicity (Kusy & Holloway, 2009). The most important factors related to the elimination of toxins in the work environment

involve a clear understanding of organizational toxins, their impact on the organization as a whole, and an examination of the components that support or perpetuate toxicity.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to clearly define the toxic work environment and discover how organizational components may create or perpetuate a toxic work environment. This study was a holistic exploration of the antecedents of the organizational toxicity phenomenon through the lens of Bolman and Deal's (2008) Four-Frame Model, addressing organizational structure, human resources management, politics, and culture to determine the role of each in the composition of a toxic work environment.

Understanding the nature of organizational toxicity, as well as the organizational characteristics and systems that support and perpetuate workplace toxins, provides a clearer view of how leaders can build strategies for dealing with or preventing toxic work environments (Kusy & Holloway, 2009). This study is intended to increase leaders', employees', and students' awareness of the components and prevalence of a toxic work environment.

Significance

The root causes of workplace toxicity are worth investigating because of its tremendous cost to both employees and the organizations. Economic downturns and pressures for organizations to do more with less have combined to provide the perfect environment for toxicity to flourish. A 2007 Zogby International Workplace Bullying survey revealed that approximately 37% of American workers have suffered workplace

mistreatment so pervasive that their health suffered. This number increases to 49% after adding those employees who witnessed abuse (Falkenrath, 2010).

Toxic work environments cause employees emotional pain that manifests in the form of work stress, which has been associated with cardiovascular issues, immune system impairment, paralyzing anxiety, and even post-traumatic stress disorder (Falkenrath, 2010). The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health [NIOSH], n.d.) survey results revealed that 40% of employees stated they are stressed because of work, 25% of employees view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives, and problems at work are more strongly associated with health complaints than any other stressor, including financial and family problems.

Organizations pay a huge price for the emotional mismanagement of employees (Dyck & Roithmayr, 2001). Work stress related illnesses are estimated to cost American companies more than \$300 billion a year in health costs, absenteeism, and poor performance (Center for the Promotion of Health in the New England Workplace [CPH-NEW], n.d.). A study by Hoel, Sparks, and Cooper (2002) revealed that 40% of employee turnover can be attributed to stress. The average cost to replace a single employee can range from \$5,000 to \$20,000 (O'Connell & Kung, 2007). The average cost of absenteeism in a large company is more than \$3.6 million/year.

Another study revealed that depressive illness is a common side effect of job stress and is associated with nearly 10 annual sick days; and for every 47 cents spent on treating depression, another 53 cents is indirectly spent on absenteeism and disability (CPH-NEW, n.d.). There are further costs related to job turnover, such as lowered

morale, poor productivity, inability to recruit, damage to reputation, and litigation (Applebaum, Iaconi, & Matousek, 2007; Falkenrath, 2010; Pearson & Porath 2009). Dyck and Roithmayr (2001) state that while organizations offer employee assistance plans and other benefits to help employees manage stress, these solutions tend to be “expensive painkillers” (p. 2) in place of an examination of the root causes of workers’ physical and emotional pain caused by the work environment.

This study was intended to add to the body of knowledge on this subject by unearthing the root causes of organizational toxicity, taking a systematic approach to examine the phenomenon from a holistic perspective. The expectation was that the results of this analysis would provide tools for the early and accurate identification of precursors to organizational toxicity that will lead to better methods of prevention. Dealing with the root causes, as opposed to the symptoms of toxicity, may break the unfortunate cycle of harm. To accomplish this task, organizational leaders must unearth the root causes of toxicity, which requires that they study the components related to the cycle of stress and bring that data together to form a holistic picture of the relationships within the cycle (Dyck & Roithmayr, 2001).

Research Questions

This research investigated organizational toxicity through a holistic lens using Bolman and Deal’s (2008) Four-Frame Model focusing on the Structural Frame, including strategy, goals, roles, policies, rules, standards, and technology; the Human Resources Frame, which includes issues relating to organizational trust, compensation and reward systems, and human resources management; the Political Frame, which

involves the allocation of resources in a context of scarcity and divergent interests; and the organizational culture, composed of values, norms, and the influence of leaders.

This study was guided by the following four research questions:

1. What role, if any, does the Structural Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?
2. What role, if any, does the Human Resources Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?
3. What role, if any, does the Political Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?
4. What role, if any, does the Cultural Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?

In order to understand the organizational components that foster or perpetuate a toxic work environment, the researcher interviewed individuals who have suffered the effects of working in such an environment. The stories were rendered into data that could be synthesized through the Four-Frame Model to reveal the role of the four organizational components in creating or perpetuating toxicity. The focus of this study was on work environment and organizational components; the researcher specifically avoided and disregarded any discussion of medial symptoms, treatments, medications, or any other protected personal health related information.

Limitations

For the purposes of this study, the following limitations applied:

This study did not focus on any particular professions or industries, even though certain professions have a high propensity for toxicity (e.g., professions with a high demand for output and a small margin for error, such as law enforcement, firefighters, health care, or teachers). The goal of this study was focused on showing organizational components that are common to all professions and industries.

This study did not address stress-related illnesses and there were no questions or discussion related to diagnoses, psychological or medical treatments, symptoms, medications, or any protected health-related information.

This study did not examine external environmental factors as an instigator of organizational toxicity, although the literature does mention external pressures such as U.S. economic recession, global competition, and other economic stressors. Rather, this study focused primarily on internal instigators of organizational toxicity.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

Symptoms of organizational toxicity, such as bullying and other deviant workplace behaviors, have been well researched and documented; however, there is little to no literature examining organizational toxicity from a holistic perspective (Goldman, 2008; Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006). The purpose of this literature review is to clearly define the organizational toxicity phenomenon and to examine scholarly literature as it pertains to toxicity created or perpetuated by the Structural, Political, Human Resources, and Cultural Frames as defined by Bolman and Deal (2008).

This literature review is separated into two main sections. The first section begins with a discussion of the toxicity metaphor and the appropriateness of its application to organizations, followed by an operational definition and discussion of the toxic organization and the toxic work environment. This discussion examines behaviors that may be exhibited on all interpersonal levels, including groups and individual peer-to-peer, superior-to-subordinate, or subordinate-to-superior interactions. This section concludes with an examination of behaviors and characteristics specific to toxic leaders.

The second section uses a holistic approach to understand organizational toxicity through the lens of Bolman and Deal's (2008) Four-Frame Model of organizational analysis. This discussion illustrates how elements within each framework component can contribute to the creation or perpetuation of a toxic work environment. Figure 1 provides an illustrative outline of the discussion of organizational toxicity, and Figure 2 illustrates the outline of the Four-Frame Model of organizational analysis.



Figure 1. Outline of organizational toxicity.

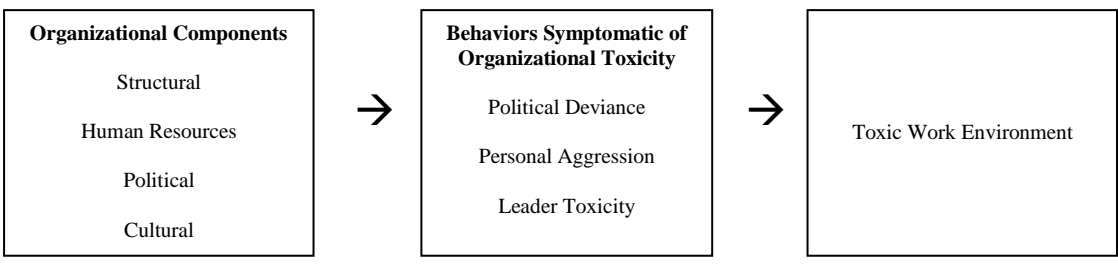


Figure 2. Four-Frame Model of holistic analysis.

The Toxicity Metaphor

In 1993 Peter Frost (as cited in Goldman, 2008) broke new ground by using the toxicity metaphor to describe a common and corrosive reality living in organizations. Frost (2007) theorized that dysfunctional organizational behavior spreads from one person to another and becomes harmful to the wellbeing of organizational members. Frost studied the effects of emotional pain on the human immune system and noted that “negative emotions such as anger, sadness, frustration, or despair can be ‘toxic’ to the

human body and affect the immune system” (p. 3). Frost theorized that a toxic work environment is one in which organizational members experience emotional pain that strips them of their confidence, hope, or self-esteem; they become disconnected from their work and instead focus, or even obsess, on the pain they feel and the perceived source of their pain. Since this seminal work, many scholars and researchers have published academic and popular literature that builds on the toxicity metaphor (Applebaum & Roy-Girard 2007; Bacal, 2000; Coccia, 1998; Dyck & Roithmayr, 2001; Fineman, 2003; Gallos, 2008; Goldman, 2006, 2008, 2009; Goleman, Boyatzis, & Mckee, 2001, 2002; Grazier, 1999; Kuzy & Holloway, 2009; Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Lubit, 2004; Musacco 2009; Whicker, 1996).

Despite the institutionalization of the toxicity metaphor, considerable dialogue between scholars has generated a heated debate over the legitimacy of the strategic use of the terms *toxic*, *toxicity*, and *toxins* in relation to organizational dysfunction (Goldman, 2008). Even Frost (2007) concedes that the use of the toxicity metaphor could be construed as overly dramatic, yet he argues that the term is uniquely appropriate because it clearly articulates the magnitude of elements that can poison a person or an entire system.

Samuel (2010) supports this argument in his contention that the use of the toxicity metaphor implies the existence of serious organizational problems that far exceed the minor discomforts of organizational life. In this sense, organizational toxicity can jeopardize the company’s survival because the toxins spread to large parts of the organization and deeply penetrate the culture.

Motamedi (2008) criticized the use of the toxicity metaphor as blurring the line between physical sciences and social sciences, thus causing confusion and opportunism. He argues that the use of the toxicity metaphor “reduces the human experience into objects, physical elements, and chemical-like by-products” (p.239).

Goldman (2008) counter-argues that “the tendency to reduce humans into objects is exactly what the toxicity metaphor is targeting” (p. 243). He further argues that the toxicity metaphor provides a description of the darker side of organizational territory and specifically highlights the neglectful, inhumane, dysfunctional, and sometimes repugnant practices operating in organizations today. Goldman further contends that organizational toxicity illustrates the concept of a poison that systematically spreads through the entire organizational system. He points out that the metaphor has become “a common vocabulary shared by researchers, consultants, and an international network of Academy of Management colleagues...and the title of both undergraduate and graduate courses...at Arizona State University” (p. 244).

The Toxic Organization

Frost (2007) provided the central and most succinct definition of the toxic organization as one in which organizational members suffer emotional pain that negatively affects their self-esteem and detracts their focus from work-related tasks. Other scholars have agreed that the toxic organization has an unhealthy organizational climate that renders employees dysfunctional (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007; Bacal, 2000; Kusy & Holloway, 2009; Musacco, 2009).

Scholars concur that toxic organizations fit a particular pattern; they are highly controlled and restrictive, objectives are often based on the bottom line profits,

interpersonal relationships are driven by manipulative and self-centered agendas based on greed and selfishness, problem-solving processes are driven by fear, internal communication systems are poor, mistakes are covered up or blamed on others, change occurs in response to disasters or crisis, and quick fix solutions result in waste and repetition (Bacal, 2000; Batstone, 2003; Coccia, 1998; Frost, 2007).

The central theme of the toxic organization is that malicious, abusive behavior often goes unnoticed or undisciplined (Kusy & Holloway, 2009). Macklem (2005) describes the following trademarks of a toxic organization: relentless demands, extreme pressure, brutal ruthlessness, and an absence of humanity. Macklem concludes that the narrow focus on bottom line profits contributes to the increase in the organizational toxicity phenomenon. Indeed, scholars agree that leaders in organizations exhibiting toxicity generally choose the pursuit of short-term profits as the central priority over the long-term health of the business and its employees (Bacal, 2000; Macklem, 2005; Musacco, 2009; Kusy & Holloway, 2009).

Frost (2007) conceded that some degree of toxicity in organizational life is not only inevitable, it is normal and unavoidable given the stresses, strains, and expectations of getting work done in an organization. Frost argued that organizational pain is part of doing business, stemming from the changes, traumas, and crises that people and companies experience from time to time. However, it is the unrelieved intensity of pressures over a prolonged period of time that tends to wear people down and let toxins into their systems. In some cases employees can suffer emotional pain so pervasive it causes long term damage that may last for years, even after separation from the organization (Bacal, 2000; Samuel, 2010).

Why is this happening? Scholars cite the economic recession, fierce global competition, technological advances, the outsourcing of jobs, downsizing, restructuring, mergers, and shortened CEO tenures as having negatively impacted organizational climates (Applebaum et al., 2007; Friedman, 2005; Musacco, 2009). Many organizations are experiencing increased pressure to generate profits by operating on leaner budgets with fewer employees who eventually become overworked. In many cases employers demand expediency and productivity while simultaneously stifling creativity and alienating employees. Under these circumstances employees are negatively impacted and organizational toxicity becomes an inevitable reality, particularly when leaders ignore the human toll (Macklem, 2005, Musacco 2009).

The Toxic Work Environment

A work environment is the cultural milieu that organizational members encounter when they enter the organization to help meet its goals (Samuel, 2010). The work environment consists of interactions between the organization, individual employees, their work, and their relationships with other employees, clients, and customers (Macklem, 2005). A toxic work environment is the byproduct of a toxic organization; it is where symptoms of toxicity are mostly likely to be seen or felt (Samuel, 2010). Toxic work environments are often rife with incivility, fear, and paranoia, resulting in an atmosphere that is ill suited for thoughtful, rich communication (Coccia, 1998; Macklem 2005; Musacco, 2009).

Organizational participants are leaders, managers, employees, or members who populate and operate organizations (Samuel, 2010). Organizational participants express a variety of behaviors as they maneuver throughout the workplace. Generally, these

behaviors fall within the constructs of organizational norms: the expected behaviors, languages, principles, and postulations that allow the workplace to perform at a suitable pace. When workplace behavior departs from the organizational norms, the consequences affect all levels of the organization, including decision-making processes, productivity, and financial costs (Appelbaum et al., 2007).

Deviant Workplace Behavior

Organizational toxicity is most evident in the cultural environment where symptoms play out in observable behavior patterns such as dysfunctional attitudes and emotions that seem to permeate the atmosphere (Chapman, 2009; Reed, 2004). A toxic work environment manifests in the interpersonal relationships and behaviors of organizational participants at all levels (Samuel, 2010), including peer-to-peer, superior-to-subordinate, and subordinate-to-superior (Kusy & Holloway, 2009). While there is no singular behavior that renders an entire work environment toxic, toxicity can develop from the cumulative negative effect of particularly harmful behavior patterns over an extended period of time (Reed, 2004).

Dysfunctional workplace behaviors have been referred to as negative behavior, antisocial behavior, organizational misbehavior, and non-compliant workplace behavior; however, scholars agree that behavior that violates organizational customs, policies, or internal regulations is considered deviant (Henle, 2005; Peterson, 2002; Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Robinson and Bennett (1995) define deviant work behaviors as “voluntary behaviors that violate significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the wellbeing of an organization, its members, or both” (p. 556).

Robinson and Bennett (1995) developed an empirically derived typology of workplace deviance using a multidimensional scaling procedure. The result was a two-dimensional classification of deviant work behavior that on one axis represents the target of the behavior, either organizational or interpersonal, and the second axis represents the severity, ranging from minor to serious. The four behavior classifications include (a) Production Deviance, (b) Political Deviance, (c) Property Deviance, and (d) Personal Aggression. The authors provide an indicative, although non-exhaustive, list of examples of typical deviant workplace behaviors, as shown in Figure 3.

	ORGANIZATIONAL		
MINOR	Production Deviance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaving Early • Taking Breaks • Work Slowdown • Wasting Resources 	Property Deviance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sabotage • Accepting Kickbacks • Lying about hours worked • Stealing 	SERIOUS
	Political Deviance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showing favoritism • Gossiping • Blaming • Competing 	Personal Aggression <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual Abuse • Verbal Abuse • Stealing from Co-workers • Endangering Co-workers 	
	INTERPERSONAL		

Figure 3. Robinson and Bennett's (1995) Typology of negative deviant workplace behavior. Adapted from "A Typology of Deviant Workplace Behaviors: A Multidimensional Scaling Study," by S. L. Robinson and R. J. Bennett, 1995, *Academy of Management Journal*, 38, pp. 555-572. Copyright 1995 by Academy of Management. Adapted with permission.

The second and fourth quadrants illustrating interpersonal deviance are specifically relevant to the discussion of workplace toxicity since both political deviance and personal aggression describe harmful interpersonal behavior (Robinson & Bennett,

1995). Other scholars expand upon Robinson and Bennett's (1995) list of specific deviant behaviors within the category of interpersonal deviance to include workplace behaviors such as dirty looks, sarcastic jokes, chronic pessimism, gossiping, backstabbing, ethical ambivalence, playing pranks, rudeness, arguing, incivility, backstabbing, belittling, public criticism, shaming, racial discrimination, bullying, harassment, and physical aggression (Henle, 2005; Kusy & Holloway, 2009; Morrison, 2010; Musacco, 2009) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Deviant Workplace Behaviors

Political Deviance	Personal Aggression
Covert	Psychological Aggression
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Backstabbing • Gossiping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harassment • Verbal Abuse
Proactive/Reactive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bullying • Incivility/Rudeness • Public criticism/Shaming
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blaming • Scapegoating • Use of Information 	Physical Violence
Misuse of Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slapping • Punching • Shooting • Murder
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual Harassment • Favoritism/Discrimination 	
Internal Competition	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turf Wars • Extreme Careerism 	

Note. Adapted from "A Typology of Deviant Workplace Behaviors: A Multidimensional Scaling Study," by S. L. Robinson and R. J. Bennett, 1995, *Academy of Management Journal*, 38, pp. 555-572. Copyright 1995 by Academy of Management.

Samuel (2010) defines interpersonal deviance in the workplace as self-serving behavior patterns between individuals and groups. These behavior patterns contribute to the toxicity metaphor because they are considered contagious, capable of spreading from one individual to another, generating antagonism among organizational participants. Left unchecked, these behaviors become toxins in and of themselves.

Organizational members subjected to these types of toxic workplace behaviors are more likely to experience increased fear, insecurity, decreased productivity, low morale, damaged self-esteem, emotional pain, and stress-related illnesses (Henle, 2005). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, an extended and modified version of Robinson and Bennett's (1995) classification will be used to encompass toxic workplace behavior, defined as deviant interpersonal behavior that is specifically intended to bring harm to organizational members (Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006).

Political deviance. Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson (1980) state that political behavior in the workplace is merely "tactics used by people at work to influence their superiors, co-workers, and subordinates" (p. 440) in an effort to meet organizational or personal goals. Bozeman, Perrewe, Kacmar, Hochwarter, and Brymer (as cited in Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2006) assert that political behavior in the workplace is the "readiness of people to use power in their efforts to influence others, secure personal or collective interests, or avoid negative outcomes" (p. x). However, in a toxic work environment, defined as one in which people suffer emotional pain (Frost, 2007), political behavior is intensified, becoming disruptive to the organizational climate (Dyck & Roithmayr, 2001; Frost, 2007) and harmful to others; therefore, it is considered deviant (Robinson & Bennett, 1995).

Robinson and Bennett (1995) define deviant political behavior as "engagement in social interaction that puts other individuals at a personal or political disadvantage" (p. 566). Their framework identifies politically deviant, often covert, behaviors such as favoritism, gossiping, and competing. Other scholars include blaming (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Appelbaum et al., 2007), scapegoating (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Brodsky, 1976)

nepotism, sexual harassment, spreading rumors (Samuel, 2010), and backstabbing (Malone, 2007; Morrison, 2010).

Covert political behavior. Covert behaviors involve sly, underhanded actions designed to inflict the greatest harm to the intended victims while preserving anonymity for the perpetrator(s). Covert behaviors include anonymous letter writing, malicious gossip, and lying (Neuman & Baron, 1998).

Backstabbing. Covert behaviors, commonly known as *backstabbing*, are actions conducted behind the target's back in an effort to damage a reputation or career, or put the target at some disadvantage. The acts are usually conducted in a sneaky, underhanded manner. The perpetrator often disguises the act under the veil of friendship while at the same time undermining or harming the target without his/her knowledge—thus, behind the person's back (Malone, 2007). Malone's (2007) empirical study revealed that the most frequent backstabbing strategies include dishonesty, blame or accusation, discrediting, taking credit or stealing an idea to prevent job advancement for the target, malicious gossip, misuse of information, instigating negative action, or betrayal.

Malone's (2007) study further revealed that backstabbing acts can be a means to express anger or act out hostility or aggression. Individuals and groups often utilize backstabbing techniques for reasons that confirm the definition of classic political behavior in the workplace. Typical of all deviant political behavior, respondents to Malone's study unanimously agreed that the acts were intentional, goal-directed, and considered instrumental in achieving a self-interest directed outcome such as avoiding a negative situation or for revenge.

A survey of managers conducted by Sherman (1987) revealed that managers listed backstabbing as one of their greatest concerns among employees in the workplace. Backstabbing negatively affects and infects the work environment because the behavior spreads and good employees become frustrated and hostile. The result is lowered morale, work standards, and productivity, and higher turnover (Sherman, 1987). Those who remain in such an environment may suffer depression, stress, or other illnesses (Yarborough, 1993).

Proactive and reactive political behavior. Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick, and Mayes (1979) theorized that political behavior in the workplace involves both proactive and reactive behaviors. Proactive behavior is considered initiating behavior intended specifically to promote self-interest, whereas reactive behavior is a self-preservation technique. Some behaviors can be both proactive and reactive depending upon the situation.

Scapegoating. Scapegoating is a typical reactive behavior intended to protect self-interests (Allen et al., 1979). Goldstein and Read (2009) define scapegoating as a method to avoid responsibility for a failing program or a negative situation. Scapegoating is employed when a situation is negatively evaluated and an individual feels he/she may be associated with an outcome of failure. Scapegoating is generally an impersonal act employed simply as a method for “getting off the hook” because “when something goes wrong, the first thing to be fixed is blame” (Allen et al., 1979, p. 78), particularly in a toxic work environment.

Blaming. Blaming is an intentional action employed to reduce competition for scarce resources between individuals or groups. It is a proactive behavior that involves

similar tactics as backstabbing, since the focus is on efforts to cause a rival to look bad in the eyes of influential organizational members by blaming another person or persons for failures or denigrating their accomplishments (Allen et al., 1979).

Use of information. Allen et al.'s (1979) study showed that the majority of chief executive officers, managers, and supervisors who were surveyed identified information as a political tool. The use of information as a political tool can be considered proactive, reactive, or both, depending upon the situation and whether information is withheld, distorted, or used to **Misuse of power**. The acquisition of power and use of power to influence others overwhelm another.

are well known definitions of organizational politics (Pfeffer, Durbrin, & LaBarre as cited in Kurchner-Hawkins & Miller, 2006). Egan (as cited in Kurchner-Hawkins & Miller, 2006) refers to power as “the essence of politics and the core of political action” (p. 328). In toxic work environments power is often used for selfish and manipulative purposes. Sexual harassment, preferential treatment, and discrimination are three common examples that describe the misuse or abuse of power (Popovich & Warren 2010; Rousseau, 2004; Samuel, 2010).

Sexual harassment. Although Robinson and Bennett (1995) generally categorize sexual harassment as an act of aggression, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Guidelines cites the abuse of power as a key element in the definition of sexual harassment (Popovich & Warren, 2010; Society for Human Resources Management, 2010). Samuel (2010) maintains that sexual harassment can be considered political behavior because it involves self-serving power-based conduct that exceeds the

limits of legitimate authority, such as the actions of a senior organizational member expressing dominance over junior members.

Popovich and Warren (2010) support Samuel's (2010) contention noting that sexual harassment is an abuse of power, whether by the generally accepted scenario of a supervisor demanding sexual favors of a subordinate in exchange for a promotion (i.e., *quid pro quo*), or the less obvious situation of a coworker posting sexually explicit pictures in the workplace (i.e., a hostile work environment). Although these scenarios are very different, they share the characteristic of power abuse.

A sexual harassment incident could also be a function of a combination of several roles and their supporting power bases. Roles include: individual-biological, meaning physically overpowering; societal, the perception that the perpetrator has greater value than the victim; and formal organizational, referring to the hierarchical placement of supervisor over subordinates (Tangri, Burt, & Johnson, 1982). The supporting power bases include position power, in which subordinates believe they *ought* to comply, based on consequences for noncompliance; the power to control or exchange rewards or other resources; coercive power, in which the target complies out of fear; expert power, which involves the ability to trade or withhold special expertise; referent power, based on charisma; and use of information, which involves withholding needed information or disseminating negative information. Power bases are not independent of one another; they can be used in any combination to influence employee behavior (French & Raven, 1959; Ivancevich, Konopaske, & Matteson, 2008; Popovich & Warren, 2010).

Preferential treatment and discrimination. A common misuse of power in the workplace lies in the concepts of preferential treatment such as favoritism, cronyism, and

nepotism. Favoritism implies that an individual or group will receive favors, higher compensation, better promotional opportunities, or other rewards for equal or lesser work output. Cronyism refers to preferential treatment by superiors to an employee based on a personal relationship or political ties (Rousseau, 2004). Nepotism is the systematic appointment or preferential treatment of friends and family members in the workplace (Samuel, 2010). Favoritism, cronyism, and nepotism are political in nature, by virtue of the use of power by decision makers to provide preferential treatment for unjust reasons. Preferential arrangements undermine the legitimacy of the formal organization since such arrangements are predicated on personal connections or preferences rather than individual capabilities that add value to the organization (Rousseau, 2004).

Preferential treatment can also open the door to discrimination since demographic similarity has been found to be a factor that shapes the relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate (Tsui, Porter, & Egan, 2002). Therefore, some organizational members may have a political advantage simply by virtue of their demographic characteristics or cultural background. These organizational members may be privy to inside information and valued resources that will allow them to develop the political acumen necessary to navigate the organization's formal and informal systems to their advantage. This situation often results in a negative impact on women and minorities who may have limited political acumen required to navigate the organizational hierarchy that would provide the opportunities enjoyed by favored organizational members (Rousseau, 2004).

Internal competition. Competitive behavior in the workplace is the cornerstone and very definition of political behavior. Some measure of competition can be a healthy motivator; however, in a work environment where there are conflicts over resource

allocation, unclear performance standards, or departments that operate in silos, competitive behavior can become toxic (Simmons, 2002). Two types of behaviors summarize deviant internal competition: turf wars (Simmons, 2002) on the group or departmental level, and extreme careerism (Bratton & Kacmar, 2004) on the individual level.

Turf wars. Turf wars among departments are usually caused by conflicts over resource allocation or infighting over territorial issues. Turf wars are indicative of an organization's inability to define a clear strategic direction, and are often thought to result in massive duplication of effort, wasted resources, sabotaged innovation, and poor financial performance (Birkinshaw, 2001; Simmons, 2002). Birkinshaw's (2001) discussion of internal competition provides the example of GEC to support his argument on the perils of deviant internal competition:

GEC, the British conglomerate, was built on a model of strict divisional autonomy and internal competition, which in the words of one former manager meant that "we duplicated development and then we cut each other's throats in front of the customer." (p. 21)

Simmons (2002) contends that every organization has different territories that employees come to think of as their own. Rather than operating on an organizational level, departments or groups become divided and individualistic; whether it is sales/marketing vs. operations vs. finance or middle management vs. senior management, the organization becomes divided by regional lines. Common strategies employed by groups embroiled in turf wars include: strategic noncompliance, agreeing to cooperate and then backing out at the last minute; information manipulation; blaming or covering up mistakes or problems; monopolizing resources; shunning or socially excluding others;

using personal criticisms to diminish credibility; using intimidation or veiled threats; covertly creating logistical impossibilities (red tape); and creating powerful alliances.

Extreme careerism. Careerism is the propensity for career-focused individuals to pursue personal career goals of promotion, power, or prestige through any negative activity necessary, particularly those activities geared toward exploiting others. The tactics used are those typical of political behaviors such as blaming, discrediting others, taking credit for someone else's work, or intimidation (Bratton & Kacmar, 2004).

Personal aggression. Robinson and Bennett's (1995) typology categorizes personal aggression as serious negative deviant workplace behavior. Individuals who engage in personal aggression cause harm by "behaving in an aggressive or hostile manner toward other individuals" (p. 566). Over the past 40 years, both academic and popular literature have provided various labels to identify and define negative aggressive behavior in the workplace (Musacco, 2009). The general consensus among researchers is that aggression is any form of behavior directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being (Baron, 1977). Baron (2004) provides a more specific definition of workplace aggression as "any form of behavior directed by one or more persons in a workplace toward the goal of harming (physically or psychologically) one or more others in the workplace" (p. 27). The major themes explicit in and central to the definition of workplace aggression are first that the behavior is intentional, second that it is intended to cause harm, and third that it is prompted by factors within the organization (Baron, 2004; Neuman, 2004).

Baron (2004) differentiates between instrumental aggression and hostile aggression to clarify the particular purpose for causing harm. Baron explains that

instrumental aggression involves harm that is produced while in pursuit of other goals or motives, such as obtaining a promotion or some other advantage in the workplace. In contrast, hostile aggression involves actions for which producing harm is the central purpose (Baron, 2004; Dodge & Coie, 1987). Although scholars agree that intention, purpose, and goals of harming are important components to the discussion of personal aggression, intention is often unclear or difficult to prove (Baron, 2004).

Musacco (2009) contends that personal aggression in the workplace can be separated into two broad categories: psychological aggression and physical violence. Psychological aggression includes incivility, bullying, mobbing, harassment, and emotional abuse, whereas violence lies in the broad spectrum between minor physical assaults and murder. Griffin and O'Leary-Kelly (2004) contend that psychological aggression is really a form of psychological violence because the victims of such abuse often suffer injury from fear, insecurity, high levels of stress, and damaged self-esteem and self-concept as a competent worker. Over time, these behaviors may even cause secondary harm to the victims' families. By far, psychological aggression, through verbal actions, is the most common behavior, while workplace physical violence is a much less common phenomenon (Musacco, 2009).

Incivility. Pearson and Porath (2009) contend that social interactions in the workplace that violate the norms of mutual respect such as rudeness, mistreatment, and disregard toward others, constitute uncivil behaviors. Acts of incivility require an instigator(s) who inflicts uncivil acts upon another person or persons. Actions of incivility entail rude treatment, for example speaking to or treating the target as if he/she were a child, publicly berating the target, sending demeaning notes or messages,

interrupting or cutting the target off, excluding the target from pertinent meetings or communications, or leaving trash for the target to clean up.

The central difference between acts of aggression and incivility involves intent. An instigator may behave uncivilly as a reflection of intent or without intent, and the action can be easily construed by others as unintentional, whereas acts of psychological aggression and violence involve more obvious intent to harm or injure. Given the potential for ambiguity, the instigator of incivility can claim that the target has misinterpreted the behavior or state that the target is hypersensitive. Therefore, the fact that intent is not obvious differentiates incivility from other more egregious mistreatments (Pearson et al., 2000).

Bullying. Bullying is a method employed by an abuser to control the behavior of a target or targets through the use of repeated, malicious, verbal mistreatment (Namie & Namie, 2000), whether deliberately or unconsciously, causing fear, humiliation, offense, and distress that may interfere with the target's job performance and cause unpleasant working conditions (Musacco, 2009).

Mobbing. Similar to bullying, mobbing involves hostile and unethical communications systematically directed towards one individual by a number of other individuals over a period of time. Mobbing may begin with joking and transition to employees ganging up on a target employee and subjecting that employee to psychological harassment. Mobbing behavior generally results in severe psychological and occupational consequences for the victim (Leymann, 1990).

Harassment. Harassment encompasses a continuum of behaviors ranging from humor, teasing, and pranks to specific harassment such as scapegoating, verbal

harassment, gossiping, and, at the far end of the continuum, sexual harassment, threats, and even physical abuse. Harassment is essentially repeated and persistent attempts by one person to intimidate, torment, wear down, frustrate, or get a reaction from another. It involves treatment that persistently provokes pressures, frightens, intimidates, or otherwise discomforts another person (Brodsky, 1976).

Shaming. Shaming involves overt public humiliation such as public insults or displays of anger using arrogant, condescending, demeaning or derogatory language; sending slanderous e-mails meant to cause embarrassment; or using public forums to ask questions meant to cause embarrassment. Shaming tactics can be difficult to detect since they can be easily disguised or justified as feedback or constructive criticism. Subtle acts of shaming, although harder to detect, can be just as harmful, involving verbal putdowns in which the target is initially irritated; however, as the abuse accumulates, the target becomes demoralized. This behavior is usually a precursor to bullying because it creates an undercurrent of disrespect and negativity (Kusy & Holloway, 2009).

Emotional abuse. Emotional abuse implies severe mistreatment that can be exercised verbally or non-verbally. Emotional abuse entails repetitive or patterned hostile behavior intended to cause harm and exploit the abuser's position of power over the target. Emotionally abusive behaviors can range from sarcastic jokes, teasing, or rude interruptions to personal insults, threats, intimidation through mean e-mails, face-to-face attacks, mean or negative facial expressions, ignoring, or invading the target's personal space (Musacco, 2009).

Categorizing deviant workplace behaviors. There are an infinite number of deviant workplace behaviors and scholars have argued for years over how to categorize

the various behaviors (Baron, 2004; Neuman, 2004). Well known for their research, coaching, and advocacy against abuse in the workplace, Namie and Namie (2000) categorize most of these behaviors under the general umbrella of bullying. Other scholars have attempted to construct typologies to organize the various behaviors into a more manageable number of dimensions.

The most recognized framework was developed by Buss (1961), who suggested that aggressive behaviors fall within three key dimensions: physical-verbal, active-passive, and direct-indirect (see Table 2). The physical-verbal dimension refers to harm through physical actions or harm inflicted through words as rather than deeds. The active-passive dimension refers to harm that results from a particular act (doing something) or, alternatively, failing to act or withholding something that the victim needs or values. Finally, the direct-indirect dimension refers to harm produced by actions directed at the intended victim or by actions that harm the victim indirectly though harm inflicted on something or someone the victim values (Baron, 2004; Neuman, 2004).

Table 2

Buss's Major Categories of Aggression

Category	Description
Physical	Physical actions on the part of the actor
Verbal	Inflicts harm through words as opposed to deeds
Active	Requires the actor to do something to harm the target needs or values
Passive	Involves withholding something that the target needs or values
Direct	The actor harms the target directly
Indirect	Harm is inflicted on something or someone the target values or target cares about or needs.

Note. Adapted from "Injustice, Stress, and Aggression in Organizations," by J. H. Neuman, 2004, in R. W. Griffin and A. M. O'Leary-Kelly (Eds.), *The Dark Side of Organizational Behavior*, p. 65, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Copyright 2004 by Jossey-Bass. Adapted with permission.

Buss' (1961) framework provides a category through which nearly all deviant workplace behaviors, both political and aggressive, can be synthesized. It also provides for a clear distinction between the terms violence and aggression, which are often used interchangeably in discussion of interpersonal workplace aggression. Whereas aggression refers to all forms of intentional harm-doing behavior, violence is in a category all to itself and refers primarily to intense instances of aggression that are specifically physical, active, and direct in nature (Baron, 2004). Together, Baron (2004) and Neuman (2004) illustrate both political deviance and personal aggression in their examples of how deviant workplace behaviors fall within each of Buss's dimensions, summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Deviant Workplace Behavior Synthesized

Type of Aggression	Example
Physical-active-direct	Punching, kicking, stabbing, shooting (physical violence)*
Physical-active-indirect	Sabotaging a piece of equipment so that another person will be hurt when using it*. Someone destroys or takes resources needed by another person**.
Physical-passive-direct	Physically blocking another person from obtaining a desired goal or performing an act*. Purposefully excluding someone from an important meeting**.
Physical-passive-indirect	Refusing to perform necessary tasks or provide information to a coworker*. Unjustly denying a promotion**.
Verbal-active-direct	Insulting or derogating another person*. Negative comments made about someone's intelligence or competence**.

(table continues)

Type of Aggression	Example
Verbal-active-indirect	Spreading malicious rumors or gossip about another person*. Taking credit someone else's work**.
Verbal-passive-direct	Refusing to speak to or answer questions from another*.
Verbal-passive-indirect	Failing to speak up in another person's defense when the person is knowingly unfairly criticized*. Failing to give warning about impending dangers**.

Note. *Adapted from "Workplace Aggression and Violence: Insights from Basic Research," by R. A. Griffin, 2004, in R. W. Griffin and A. M. O'Leary-Kelly (Eds.), *The Dark Side of Organizational Behavior*, p. 29, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Copyright 2004 by Jossey-Bass. Adapted with permission.

**Adapted from "Injustice, Stress, and Aggression in Organizations," by J. H. Neuman, 2004, in R. W. Griffin and A. M. O'Leary-Kelly (Eds.), *The Dark Side of Organizational Behavior*, p. 66, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Copyright 2004 by Jossey-Bass. Adapted with permission.

Leader Toxicity

There is a plethora of research as well as academic and popular literature on the subject of leadership ranging from attributes of a good leader to how to become a good leader. The consensus is that leadership, at its best, is uplifting, inspirational, and unifying. Great leaders are effective at developing organizational strategies, sharing visions of the future, and generating powerful ideas. Leaders are competent, courageous, honest, trustworthy, forward-looking, and more concerned with progress than pettiness. They have the ability to motivate followers, ignite their passions, inspire them to do their best, and encourage them to care about each other and the future (Goleman et al. 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Whicker, 1996).

Great leaders understand that their personality has a profound effect on the entire organization and recognize the effect their emotions have on the emotions of followers and the work environment (Goleman et al. 2002; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1987).

Goleman, et al. (2001) contend that a leader's ability to manage his/her emotions, as well as the emotions of others in the workplace, is what sets the best leaders apart, beyond the tangibles of better business results and talent retention, to the all-important intangibles such as higher morale, motivation, and commitment. Goleman et al. (2002) further contend that the primordial task of leaders, from the boardroom to the shop floor, involves "driving the collective emotions in a positive direction and clearing the smog created by toxic emotions" (p. 5).

These descriptions and characteristics of great leaders may pose an illusion of perfection, yet clearly no leader is perfect. During good times, good leaders are attentive to problems at work, on top of developing situations, sensitive to employee concerns, and articulate about organizational goals, strategies, and tactics for achieving goals. However, during bad periods, they may be distracted by external or internal crises or problems, may not devote their normal energy toward work, and in fact may be temporarily neglectful, impatient, short-tempered, and distracted because their attention and talents may be focused elsewhere. The main point is that these instances are temporary, short lived, infrequent, and caused by events beyond the leader's control (Whicker, 1996).

In contrast, toxic leaders exhibit a pattern of organizational dysfunction and toxic emotional contamination (Frost, 2007). Organizational dysfunction resulting from toxic leadership is characterized by plunging motivation and productivity, widespread instability, and a myriad of workplace conflicts (Goldman, 2006). Toxic leaders and managers are the main source of emotional pain in organizations because they have the ability to create and perpetuate toxic work environments through their actions and

decisions (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007; Frost, 2007; Goldman, 2006, 2008; Reed, 2004).

Reed (2004) maintains that the best way to determine a leader's toxicity is to examine the effect his/her decisions and behaviors have on morale and the organizational climate. Toxic leaders and managers exert a direct negative effect on organizational function because they eviscerate organizational vision and unity and encourage followers' baser instincts. Under their leadership the organizational climate becomes contaminated with toxic emotions. In such an environment, employees can be reduced to viewing each other as threats and begin directing their energies toward defeating each other, which in turn results in loss of organizational productivity and individual self-esteem (Whicker, 1996). Further, subordinates who view themselves as targets of toxic leaders may become disengaged from the organization and their tasks, resulting in work withdrawal, job tension, decreased organizational commitment, and ultimate intention to leave (Levinson, 2002).

Dyck and Roithmayer's (2001) research supports the fact that companies with *high people management practices* (PMP) usually outperform those who have low PMP, such as those with toxic characteristics. Toxic organizations often underperform due to the negative work environment created by toxic leadership. The financial impact of emotional mismanagement of employees is generated from costs related to excessive benefit expenses including high use of prescription plans, short and long term disability programs, and productivity losses. Employees feel a sense of despair, anger, low morale, poor communication, and depression, leading to poor work performance, high absenteeism, and increased turnover. The combined cost of the benefit plans, lowered

productivity, and turnover result in a negative impact on bottom line profits (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007).

Toxic leaders defined. Literature addressing toxic leadership predominately characterizes toxic leaders as bullies; however, Whicker's (1996) analysis provides a more comprehensive discussion of the characteristics of toxic leaders and the antecedents of their negative leadership styles and behaviors. Whicker asserts that leaders fall within a continuum ranging from trustworthy at one end, to the ineffectual slightly toxic transitional leaders in the center, and the truly malicious toxic leaders at the other end.

Trustworthy leaders, Whicker (1996) contends, are the good leaders similar to transformational leaders described by J. M. Burns (1978), who defined such leaders as those who engage the full person of the follower, resulting in a mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and leaders into moral agents. Whicker further characterizes trustworthy leaders as caring, ethical, communicative, people-oriented, confident yet humble, cooperative yet competitive, determined yet flexible, risk-taking yet sensible, responsible yet capable of saying no, visionary yet practical, patient yet persistent, empathetic yet able to make tough decision, and self-controlled yet emotionally expressive.

One of the profound differences between trustworthy leaders, whom Whicker (1996) also characterizes as healthy leaders, and toxic leaders is that healthy leaders enjoy inner personal security, grounded self-respect, and a healthy self-image. Healthy leaders are intrinsically secure individuals; they have no need to tear others down or play the manipulative and harmful games that contribute to a disruptive and toxic organizational climate. Instead, they are generally concerned with moving their

organization toward success by meeting specific organizational goals while maintaining a healthy organizational climate. Since they do not participate in toxic game-playing techniques, employees trust and respect them and show a higher level of organizational commitment and productivity (Goleman et al., 2002; Whicker, 1996).

In contrast, toxic leaders lack empathy for others and authentic connections to people (Lubit, 2004). Most suffer from a deep-seated sense of personal inadequacy that originated in childhood and continued into adulthood, resulting in toxic behavior patterns in the workplace (Whicker, 1996). These behaviors range from withdrawal and avoidance of the daily decisions and operations of the organization, to efforts to control every aspect of organizational activity, to bullying behaviors. Toxic leaders with severe forms of personal inadequacy may suffer from an inferiority complex that causes them to act out or engage in narcissistic behaviors such as posturing, puffery, and grandiose self-promotion. In the most severe cases of personal inadequacy, toxic leaders only feel competent and secure when tearing others down (Lubit, 2004; Whicker, 1996).

Healthy and toxic leaders also differ in the foundation of their values. A healthy leader's values are tied to compatibility between their personal goals and organizational needs; therefore, they perceive little or no conflict between their actions as a leader and what they want to do as a person. In contrast, because of their deep sense of personal inadequacy, toxic leaders never develop personal values that give priority to anything over their own personal needs. Since they lack a sense of personal competency and are continually trying to overcome their own sense of inadequacy, their values tend to be self-centered and self-promoting, leaving their concern for organizational needs at a much lower level than their need to focus on themselves (Whicker, 1996).

Transitional/slightly toxic leaders function below healthy leaders yet just above the truly malicious toxic leaders. Although they create and perpetuate organizational toxicity through their dysfunction, they are less destructive than the maliciously toxic leaders. Slightly toxic leaders also exhibit selfish values because they have not achieved overall compatibility and harmony between personal and organizational goals. Although they will work to enhance the organization's goals, they will only do so when those goals do not conflict with their own personal needs. Slightly toxic leaders focus on personal goals by grandstanding, pursuing personal pleasures, and limiting and restricting information. They may allow the organization to drift into a downward spiral while they continually make bad decisions that contribute to its descent into dysfunction and failure (Whicker, 1996).

Toxic leader styles and operational types. Whicker's (1996) analysis of leadership toxicity provides a comprehensive view of toxic leader behaviors. She contends that like healthy leaders, slightly toxic leaders and maliciously toxic leaders may assume either the consensus, coordinating, or command leadership styles that result in nine leadership operational types.

On one end of the continuum, healthy leaders exhibit a consensus leadership style as a consensus builder type. With the coordinating leadership style, the healthy leader takes on the role of team leader type. Finally, with the command style, the healthy leader is a commander type. Toxic leaders who exhibit these same styles do so from a base of deep-seated inadequacy, selfish values, and deceit that results in six toxic leadership types as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Whicker's Leadership Styles and Behavioral Typology

Leadership Style	Nine Leadership Operational Types		
	Healthy	Slightly Toxic	Maliciously Toxic
Consensus/*Affiliative	Consensus Builder	Absentee leader	Enforcer
Coordinating/*Democratic	Team Leader	Busybody	Street fighter
Commanding	Commander	Controller	Bully

Note. *Adapted from *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence*, by D. Goleman, R. Boyatzis, and A. McKee, 2002, Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press. Copyright 2002 by Harvard Business School Press. Adapted with permission.

Consensus/affiliative style. The consensus leadership style is closely related to the affiliative style described by Goleman et al. (2002). The hallmark of this style of leadership is the tendency to value people and their feelings through open sharing and to connect people to each other. Healthy/trustworthy leaders employing a consensus style are consensus builders who seek direction, guidance, and suggestions from others, including followers. Their toxic counterparts are absentee leaders who seek primarily affection and approval from followers, and enforcers who seek consensus and approval only from superiors (Whicker, 1996).

Absentee leader. The absentee leader is more mindless, self-absorbed, and disengaged than malicious. The distinguishing characteristic of this operational type is the assiduous avoidance of conflict and decision-making, and the almost obsequious cultivation of consensus in an effort to gain approval and affection for themselves rather than legitimate organizational matters. They do not care who makes the hard decisions as long as those decisions or the decision maker do not threaten their social standing or

leadership position. Although they are benign leaders, they perpetuate toxicity because they create a power void through their detachment from the job at hand. As organizational members sense this void they degenerate into infighting, game playing, turf wars, and other hyper-political behaviors perpetrated by malevolent underlings who sense a leadership vacuum (Whicker, 1996).

Enforcer. The enforcer seeks consensus only from superiors. An enforcer is usually a subservient second-in-command to an absentee leader, street fighter, or bully. The enforcer is a solid administrator with a bureaucratic mentality, the leader/manager who operates behind the scenes. When working for an absentee leader, the enforcer is the person who is really running the organization; when working for a street fighter or bully the enforcer is the person who does the dirty work behind the scenes. Enforcers maintain the status quo, whether it is uplifting and progressive or drifting toward decline. If battles and conflicts arise, the enforcer will sit on the sidelines and observe unless his/her particular position is threatened; then he/she proves capable of swift and destructive action as he/she uses hit-man tactics to defend his/her own position (Whicker, 1996).

Coordinating/democratic style. The coordinating style is similar to Goleman et al.'s (2002) democratic leader, who values input and encourages commitment through participation. In this style, the healthy leader is a team builder who gives and takes direction from others, each serving as a key focus of communication, with the leader as the center of the flow of organizational information. The toxic leadership types under the coordinator style differ in the content of their communication and their motives (Whicker, 1996).

Busybody. The busybody type craves attention and specializes in holding court over complaining employees. He/she coordinates the activities of followers by setting him/herself up as the center of communications, instigating tattling, gossip, rumormongering, and infighting. Busybodies use information as a control device and to retain power and manipulate subordinates. They assure the flow of complaints and information by failing to resolve conflicts or make decisions. Subordinate toxic leaders, managers, and other employees are encouraged to misbehave because they know there will be no repercussions for deviant or malicious behavior (Whicker, 1996).

Street fighter. The street fighter is an egotistical, yet charismatic leader with an unwavering need to dominate. Street fighters are maliciously toxic leaders who coordinate through rewards and punishments to achieve their competitive vision of winning at any cost. They generally operate on gut level survival instincts and dominate through gang politics of rewards for loyalty and retribution and punishment for those who challenge them. They solicit input from followers who can help them attain victory, but set out to destroy those who dare challenge them or dissent (Whicker, 1996).

Commanding style. The commanding leadership style emphasizes directives to followers rather than seeking input from others. Even healthy leaders using this style can exhibit toxic characteristics as they seek tight control and over-monitor subordinates with a “do it because I say so” communication style (Goleman et al., 2002, p. 77). In fact, the commander, controller, and bully all display some of the same behaviors, as each strives to be in control. The differences are revealed by the way command is exercised and the leader’s personal motives for exerting control over his/her organization (Whicker, 1996).

Controller. The controller is a slightly toxic leader who is described as rigid, a perfectionist, and a traditionalist: one who believes in the absolute and singular authority of leadership. This type of leader tends to micro-manage and manipulate followers by controlling information. One tactic controllers employ is dividing up tasks so that no one person, other than themselves, has the big picture of projects and policies. Controllers ultimately drain their organizations of great talent and innovation. As especially skilled employees become frustrated by the controller's micro-management and their inability to provide input on the final shape of their own projects, they leave the organization and are often replaced with less talented recruits, leading to a decline in innovation (Lubit, 2004; Whicker, 1996).

Bully. Bullies are generally angry, pugnacious, and maliciously toxic leaders who control employees through a variety of means including intimidation and personalized verbal and non-verbal attacks. The hallmark characteristic of the bully is his/her insidious need to invalidate or put others down. Bullies create and perpetuate an environment of fear, anxiety, and stress (Lubit, 2004; Musacco, 2009; Namie & Namie, 2000; Whicker, 1996).

Leadership and Ethics

Lubit (2004) adds an important dimension to the leadership toxicity phenomenon in his discussion of unethical leaders. Unethical behaviors include padding expense accounts, accepting bribes or kickbacks, cutting corners on safety or quality, stealing, price fixing, sabotage, discriminating, demanding or providing sex in exchange for favors, covering up incidents, over billing, insider trading, forgery, and lying.

Lubit (2004) discusses two types of unethical leaders: the antisocial leader, who breaks rules for the thrill of ignoring societal edicts, and the opportunist, who ignores ethical rules when under pressure to achieve a goal and the rule serves as an obstacle. Unethical leaders destroy their own reputation and that of the organization. An unethical leader sets the tone for the organization; his/her behaviors can spread quickly to organizational members as they are pressured to ignore them, cover them up, or participate in similar behaviors.

Impact of Leader Toxicity

Whicker (1996) states that initially, leader toxicity may be difficult to detect since toxic leaders are often masters of deception. They may initially espouse the rhetoric of a trustworthy leader; however, as time passes, their actions will stand in direct contrast to their words. Since the more malicious toxic leaders are driven to malign and tear others down in order to feel superior, they are especially adept at hiding their true selfish values and motives. Toxic leaders engage in a baser, more continuous, sometimes constant deceit that permeates the organization and destroys the mutual respect and information sharing that is crucial to efficient and effective organizational performance.

Toxic leaders destroy trust and produce an atmosphere of anxiety, suspiciousness, doubt, and malaise. As employees become affected by the leader's behavior, they may exhibit a sense of resignation, hopelessness, and anxiety about work. In an atmosphere of mistrust, employees may even be pitted against one another, producing peer-to-peer mistrust, malice, and hyper-political behaviors. Productivity plummets as employees spend more and more time protecting themselves and infighting and less and less time on the mission of the organization (Goldman, 2006; Lubit, 2004; Whicker, 1996).

A Holistic Approach to Deciphering Toxicity

Thus far, the discussion of organizational toxicity has focused on individual, group, and leader behaviors that contribute to a toxic work environment. The toxic work environment is one in which organizational members suffer emotional pain such as lowered self-esteem, fear, insecurity, anxiety, unhealthy levels of stress, and detachment from their work (Frost, 2007). Samuel (2010) advises that deviant behavior patterns contribute to the toxicity metaphor because they are contagious, spreading from one individual to another, generating antagonism among organizational participants. Left unchecked, deviant individual and leader behaviors can become toxins.

The majority of academic literature focuses on the positive aspects of organizational behavior and leadership and virtually ignores the dark side (Griffin & O'Leary-Kelly, 2004; O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Clew, 1996), even though 49% of Americans state that they have either been mistreated or witnessed the mistreatment of others in the workplace (Falkenrath, 2010). Much of the literature that does exist on deviant workplace behavior focuses on the individual and how targets of toxic personalities can deal with their workplace demons.

The central question remains, what is the organization's role in creating or perpetuating toxic behaviors in the workplace? Scholars on the subject of organizational toxicity caution that the singular focus on arresting toxic behavior is merely a distraction from larger problems that exist within the organizational system as a whole (Goldman, 2009; Kusy & Holloway, 2009; Levinson, 2002; Senge, 1990). Goldman (2009) urges "be suspicious of simplistic causality and those who point toward a singular source of organizational deviance. [Rather, entertain] a broader approach and be open to a

differential diagnosis” (p. xxi). Kusy and Holloway (2009) state emphatically that: “Toxic people thrive only in a toxic system” (p. 10).

Kusy and Holloway (2009) advise that the problem is really the system, rather than the individual; in fact, the source of a toxic person’s power is the system in which they operate. Understanding the sources of power within the system is essential to making a difference in how the organization deals with toxic behaviors. It is not efficient to simply deal with the person, deficiencies in the system as a whole must be changed because toxicity spreads and others may have begun to learn to interact in response to the toxic triggers.

Senge (1990) suggests that organizations must refocus away from the *effects*, which are the obvious symptoms (such as toxic behaviors), and toward the *cause*, which is the interaction of the organizational components within the system where symptoms are generated. Samuel (2010) contends that organizational toxins are manifested in the organization’s strategies, structures, and culture; they are mutually reinforcing, pervasive, and resistant to change. Goldman (2009) offers hope in his contention that organizations initially diagnosed as toxic can, in fact, be moved into the normal range with proper assessment, which involves assessing the organization holistically.

Levinson (2002) advises that when diagnosing organizational problems, one must respect an organization as a living system with interrelated components that interact to make up a whole. Senge (1990) supports the systems approach in his theory that organizations are systems made up of interrelated components; therefore, problems must be solved by considering the whole and its interrelated parts. A holistic analysis eliminates the propensity to find someone or something to blame and provides a refocus

on the root of the problem, thus propelling the organization away from temporary band aid solutions and toward unearthing foundational solutions to problems that lead to organizational toxicity (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Kusy & Holloway, 2009; Levinson, 2002; Samuel, 2010; Senge, 1990).

The purpose of this discussion is not to blame organizations for toxic people behaviors, indeed organizations are composed of people from all walks of life. Each and every individual entering the workplace brings with him/her life experiences, personal attributes, and personality traits, both positive and negative (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 1996). Research has shown that some people who enter the workplace are predisposed to aggression, such as those who were raised in a household where they witnessed or were the target of violence (Bandura, 1973). Further, some individuals, labeled emotionally reactive, are highly sensitive to insults, easily offended, and experience threats in seemingly innocent exchanges (Berkowitz, 1993). Therefore, blaming organizations for the personalities and predispositions of people does not accurately explain toxicity.

Rather, the purpose of this discussion is to examine how dysfunctions in the organizational components may trigger deviant or toxic behaviors that create toxic work environments. For example, one of the most well publicized media scenarios involves a terminated employee who returns to the workplace to injure other organizational members. Presumably the employee's termination triggered this aggressive behavior; therefore, the organizational factors that must be examined involve downsizing policies and termination procedures that could possibly have acted as triggers (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 1996).

Bolman and Deal's (2008) Four-Frame Model allows researchers and analysts to clearly see the organizational antecedents of toxicity. Understanding the organizational components implies that organizations have some degree of control and influence; therefore, leaders who examine their organizations through the four frames can work to reduce toxicity and avoid its reoccurrence.

Four-Frame Model of Holistic Analysis

Bolman and Deal (2008) advise that since organizations are complex entities, problems should be analyzed and diagnosed by viewing the situation through a holistic framework that clearly illustrates the role of each organizational component. These scholars suggest an organizational analysis that encourages inquiry into issues relating to people, power, structure, and culture. They delineate four frames – Structural, Human Resources, Political, and Cultural – that define the complex organizational system. Each component serves as a filter that “helps us decipher the full array of significant clues capturing a more comprehensive picture of what’s going on and what to do” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 6).

The core premise of the Structural Frame is that organizational performance depends on clearly defined roles, goals, and relationships along with sufficient coordination. The structural framework of an organization includes: the development of hierarchies; the allocation of authority and responsibilities; and the creation of policies, procedures, and systems, which together serve to coordinate diverse activities into a unified effort (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

The Human Resources Frame focuses on the relationship between the organization and its employees. This frame includes two key assumptions “first, people

need organizations and organizations need people; and second, there must be a fit between the system and the organization or both become victims” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 122).

The scope of the Political Frame includes the familiar concepts of bargaining and negotiation, competition for scarce resources, and competing interests. This frame includes issues related to differing values, beliefs, interests, and perceptions of reality (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

The Cultural Frame operates from the supposition that people find comfort, hope, faith, community, and a sense of clarity through symbols such as vision and values that instill purpose and resolve; heroes who represent the values of the organization through deeds; logos that provide a symbolic picture of community; and rituals, celebrations, and play that serve to solidify the organizational community and encourage a sense of comfort (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Each of these frames is discussed in more depth in the following sections.

Structural Frame

Given Levinson’s (2002) assertion that organizations are living entities, organizational structure can be conceptualized as the skeletal system that defines the expectations and exchanges among organizational members. The structural system includes hierarchies, strategies, goals, roles, policies, procedures, and technology that dictate how organizational members communicate and work together to coordinate diverse activities into a uniform effort (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Organizations can have a loose structure that encourages wide participation in decision-making, or a tightly controlled structure with a centralized authority and a clear

chain of command. Although toxic organizations have been characterized as overly rigid and restrictive (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007; Bacal, 2000; Coccia, 1998), the level of control generally depends on the organization's strategy, mission, and goals (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

The notion that employees prefer structures with more choices and latitude is not always accurate. In his book *Big Brown*, Gregg Niemann describes how the United Parcel Service transformed from a loose system, wherein employees were described as "scampering messenger boys" to a tightly controlled system that is highly standardized by computer technology that virtually replaced employee discretion (as cited in Bolman & Deal, 2008, p.10). Given such a tight leash, one might expect demoralized employees; however, organizational members have complimented the technology as having made their jobs easier, allowing them to be more productive. In contrast, the automotive industry, known for assembly line manufacturing methods and narrow job functions, has begun to encourage employees to voice their concerns and suggestions, even allowing them to halt the moving assembly line when they deem necessary (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

The right structure provides clarity for organizational members, reducing the risk that they will become confused, ineffective, apathetic, or hostile. Problems ensue when structure fails to line up with current circumstances; for example, a rigid or tightly controlled organization may have a negative impact if it provides an avenue for superiors to be overly controlling to the point of oppressing or inhibiting employees from getting their work done (Frost, 2007). An overly rigid structure is known to discourage creativity and productivity (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

In contrast, in an overly loose structure, some coordination may suffer as organizational members go their own way, with little sense of how their decisions impact other organizational members, units, or departments, giving way to personal agendas, political and other toxic behaviors. Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal agendas and extraneous pressures that lead to deviant toxic workplace behaviors (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Strategy and goals. The major responsibility for executive management is developing an organizational strategy and goals, and objectives to achieving them (Bolman & Deal, 2008). There are two types of goals: those related to organizational strategy and those related to individual or team performance. Both organizational and performance goals are closely associated with organizational values and expectations. Therefore, both exert influence on behavior and may directly instigate toxic behaviors (Vardi & Wiener, 1996).

Strategic goals are long-term organizational goals related to the organization's intention to secure survival through growth and profitability: the key phrase here is *long-term* (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984). The core of toxicity resides in an organization's own drive to survive. The true nature of the company/employee relationship is not what organizations often propose when they say they are about their people, when in actuality employees or their departments will be disposed of once they fail to contribute to the bottom line. Certainly, organizations do not start out with the mission, vision, and values of profit at any cost; however, as external environmental pressures, such as global competition, economic factors, and in some cases corporate greed, exert pressures on the organization, goals become more and more profit-centered (Frost, 2007).

Long-term goals are often taken for granted and neglected as a principal criterion for strategic decision-making. When this happens, many firms focus on short-term goals and quick fixes at the expense of the long run (Pearce & Robinson, 2011). In this instance, organizational strategy degenerates from proactive to reactive, allowing toxicity to precipitate (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984). According to Kets de Vries and Miller (1984),

A potential problem with the reactive orientation is that it can impede development of a concerted, integrated, and consistent strategy. The firm's direction is too much a function of external forces and not enough one of consistent goals, strategic plans, or unifying themes and traditions. (p. 27)

A toxic organization is characterized as one in which problem-solving processes are driven by fear and anxiety; therefore, change occurs in response to disasters or crisis, solutions are usually quick fixes, and objectives are based on bottom line profits (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007; Coccia, 1998). When concerns for expediency are at the forefront, a quick fix or a bargain may displace the assessment of long-term impact. Although profit over the long term is the clearest indication of a firm's ability to satisfy stakeholders, toxic organizations base decisions on short-term concerns for profits, leading to strategic myopia (Pearce & Robinson, 2011).

Downsizing is a typical short-term quick-fix strategy that first appeared as a trend in the 1990s and continues to this day (Fineman, 2003). The process of downsizing precipitates toxicity that spreads among employees in the form of depression, anger, insecurities, and distrust (Goldman, 2009). Survivors often suffer other consequences such as fear of further downsizing or other radical changes, guilt, stress or burnout from excess workloads, and an unwillingness to do more with the bare essentials (Butts, 1997).

Downsizing as a quick fix strategy may result in generating a new form of depressed enterprise rather than the economic advantages for which executives hoped (Fineman, 2003). A study by the American Management Association revealed that only 50% of 1,000 companies that underwent downsizing actually reduced costs, and only 22% increased productivity through a downsizing strategy (Guiniven, 2001).

The second form of organizational goals relates to individual and team performance. Effective performance goals provide a clear understanding of expectations and, when realistic, measurable, and clearly understood, these standards can serve as a motivator (Mathis & Jackson, 2003). Leaders who can get their team members to take on challenging but achievable goals, known as stretch goals, end up with team members who are satisfied, productive, and fulfilled (Zenger, Folkman, & Edinger, 2009). However, stretch goals that continue to reach farther and farther with little break in between can lead to employee burnout (Frost, 2007). Furthermore, unclear or lofty goals, or goals with shifting priorities, often serve to de-motivate organizational members who may exhibit retaliatory behaviors such as sabotaging, purposely slowing down, calling in sick, or feigning the appearance of busyness (Zenger et al., 2009).

Roles. Organizational roles explain the hierarchy and structure of the organization. Job descriptions identify where each role fits within the organizational hierarchy and defines job tasks, duties, and responsibilities (Mathis & Jackson, 2003). A suitable array of formal roles and responsibilities minimize distracting personal static and agendas (Argyris, 1957); however, organizational toxicity can be created or perpetuated by problems relating to roles that lead to interpersonal conflict and stress. For example, if organizational members have too little work, they become bored and interfere with or

distract others, yet if they are too busy incivility may ensue (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Pearson & Porath, 2009). If key roles and responsibilities are not clearly assigned, important tasks may fall through the cracks; however, roles that overlap or are too closely related may instigate conflict, duplication of effort, redundancy, and promote internal competition (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Role conflict. Research on job stress revealed that problems related to roles were positively identified as major sources of job stress. These stressors were positively correlated with psychological strain, including job dissatisfaction, anxiety, frustration, depression, and turnover intent (Jex, Beehr, & Roberts, 1992). Role conflict is perhaps the most widely examined individual workplace stressor; it occurs when a person has conflicting expectations between separate yet competing roles. Facets of role conflict include being torn between conflicting demands from a supervisor and feeling pressure to get along with organizational members (Ivancevich et al., 2008).

An increasingly common type of role conflict comes in the form of challenges to work-life balance, when work and non-work roles collide. As organizations attempt to increase productivity while decreasing workforce size, organizational members may experience pressure to work late, take work home, or travel more frequently in order to advance (Ivancevich et al., 2008). Indeed, Franche et al. (2006) found role conflict associated with work-life imbalance to be significantly associated with depression.

Role ambiguity. Role ambiguity occurs when roles are under-defined and organizational members have insufficient information to get the job done, such as the proper definition of the job, its goals, and the permissible means of implementation (Brodsky, 1976), or when superiors send mixed messages or vague demands (Ivancevich

et al., 2008). If organizational members are unclear about what they are supposed to do, they often tailor their roles around personal preferences instead of system wide goals, which can lead to internal conflict, political behaviors, or aggressive behaviors (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Role rigidity. Rigidity occurs when responsibilities are over-defined and restrictive, combined with policies that prohibit activities outside of the role. Organizational members may conform to prescribed roles and protocols in bureaucratic ways such as rigidly following job descriptions with disregard to product quality or quality of service (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Fineman, 2003).

In many instances, overly defined roles tend to be rigid and stressful when they produce obstacles such as excessive supervisor approval that causes delays and leaves employees feeling frustrated (Frost, 2007). Research suggests that high work demands with little or no control produces negative physiological changes that persist even after the individual has left work (Franche et al., 2006).

Quantitative and qualitative role overload. Role overload is a common stressor that most individuals in the working world have experienced in either of its two forms: quantitative or qualitative overload. Quantitative role overload means too much work or insufficient time and comes about when the number or frequency of demands exceeds the organizational member's expectations of what is reasonable and manageable (Ivancevich et al., 2008). Although most workers manage periodic peaks in load, the persistence of quantitative overload can be stressful (Frost, 2007; Ivancevich et al., 2008). Unrelenting job pressures may cause employees to suffer a condition of physical and emotional exhaustion commonly known as burnout, a situation where a once hopeful and optimistic

worker is transformed into a cynic who withdraws from colleagues, clients, and the job (Fineman, 2003).

Qualitative overload occurs when the job is beyond the organizational members' capabilities or performance standards have been set too high (Ivancevich et al., 2008). In this instance it is the type of work rather than the amount that causes stress, anxiety, and frustration (Brodsky, 1976). A situation of qualitative overload is often temporary while an incumbent trains or learns the job; however, organizational tolerance for inexperience is often limited and if the incumbent is persistently working beyond his or her skills and abilities the he/she may experience burnout. If the incumbent is a decision-maker, subordinates can suffer stress, anxiety, anger, and frustration as well (Fineman, 2003).

A combination of role conflict, role overload, and resource scarcity can gradually erode enthusiasm. The morale of organizational members may slowly deteriorate from caring to apathy; this phenomenon is a dramatic, self-protective disengagement from the painful realities of the job (Fineman, 2003). When work and life become excessively busy, values concerning civility may be ignored and the work environment may degenerate as general courtesies are abandoned (Pearson & Porath, 2009).

Policies, rules, and standards. Policies, rules, and standards control and institutionalize basic aspects of behavior in organizations by limiting individual discretion and ensuring that behavior is predictable and consistent (Pearce & Robinson, 2011). Together, these mechanisms govern conditions of work and specify standard ways of completing tasks, handling personnel issues, and relating to customers and organizational members.

When properly crafted, policies, rules, and standards ensure that similar situations are managed in a fair and consistent manner, which reduces favoritism and prevents decisions based on personal whims or political pressures (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Policies also support organizational values, and rules ensure their implementation (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Kusy & Holloway, 2009). For example, if an organization has a stated value related to respectful engagement of each individual, the key ingredient for successful implementation of this value is through policy information and rules articulated in a personnel manual or handbook (Kusy & Holloway, 2009).

Organizations can add to a toxic work environment when they promote policies that favor some over others, fail to enforce existing policies, or fail to enact policies addressing deviant behavior, which ultimately serves to reinforce them. The lack of policies or failure to use existing policies to quickly and decisively arrest deviant behavior sends a message to aggressors and game players that their behaviors will be tolerated (Bandura, 1973; Berkowitz, 1993; Frost, 2007).

Policies and rules can create or promote toxicity when they are unclear, unrealistic, or no longer in alignment with the current operations of the organization (Dyck & Roithmayr, 2001; Frost, 2007). Toxicity can be instigated when policies are overly restrictive, so loosely defined that they are difficult to interpret or enforce, or dishonest in premise (Frost, 2007).

Superiors, far removed from front line operations, contribute to toxicity when they fail to consider the human factor in the implementation of the policies they develop. Under these circumstances, policies can create obstacles to getting the job done or

conflict with other stated goals or policies, causing frustration, anxiety, and confusion (Frost, 2007).

Policies may be enacted or enforced in a manner that contradicts other existing policies. For example, policies enacted to support teamwork may conflict with reward policies that focus on individual achievement. This incongruity in organizational idioms may leave employees feeling demoralized and untrusting of their co-workers, ultimately leading to a competitive and uncooperative work environment that is subject to political game playing (Frost, 2007).

Workplace toxicity can develop when there are inconsistencies between stated policies and what actually occurs in practice (Frost, 2007). An example, common to many organizations, is the illusion of flexibility and the promotion of personal wellbeing represented in vacation and sick leave policies, when in reality employees are pressured to limit or entirely forego vacation and penalized for taking sick time off (Brodsky, 1976; Frost, 2007).

Policies that contradict organizational values set the tone for toxicity. For example, the Employment At-Will policy, designed to protect employers from wrongful termination suits, is usually the first policy employees are asked to acknowledge upon joining an organization. While the organization may articulate respect and value of employees, the unstated message is that the organization will only value employees who contribute to the bottom line, and those who fail to do so can be terminated at any time, which creates an atmosphere of distrust and a sense of insecurity (Brodsky, 1976; Frost, 2007).

Hochschild (1985) researched institutionalized toxicity perpetuated by policies that require employees to suppress their emotions at all costs. *The-customer-is-always-right* policies are enforced in order to promote superior customer service, regardless of customer demeanor. Airlines provide the perfect example, given that flight attendants are expected to maintain a cheerful and pleasing demeanor even in the face of blatant abuse. Hochschild referred to this phenomenon as emotional labor given that the attendants are responsible for both passenger safety and maintaining order. In many instances, maintaining order also entails tolerating abuse. Other workers who are expected to suppress their emotions to appease clients or customers include secretaries, waiters, sales staff, and other service industry employees. The pain is exacerbated when the employee feels unsupported by the organization, leaving no avenue for release (Frost, 2007).

Technology. Advancements in technology have led to many changes over the past 20 years, allowing organizations to function more efficiently with flatter structures and fewer employees. Technology has opened up a global knowledge-based economy, unchaining employees from their corporate desks and allowing them to work from home. Technology has been used to establish nationwide and global connections that allow employees to work together from remote sites (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Hallowel, 1999).

Despite the obvious advantages, technology can also play a role as an organizational toxin. Frost (2007) specifically points to continuous systems upgrades and intrusive electronic monitoring as examples of technology adversely affecting employees' sense of personal privacy, autonomy, and work-life balance, especially when policies advocating their use are insensitive to the impact that these actions have on employees' personal lives.

Pearson and Porath (2009) contend that technology adds to the complexity and fragmentation of workplace relationships. An example of this is the potential miscommunication precipitated by e-mail and time pressures caused by information overload, which serves to reduce niceties in the workplace (Hallowel, 1999; Pearson & Porath, 2009).

E-mail in particular nullifies inflection and nuance, leading to miscommunication, misunderstanding, and hurt feelings when messages are interpreted incorrectly. Both e-mail and voicemail lack the body language and facial cues necessary to discern irony and humor in contextual messages. In the absence of facial expression there is no way to decipher whether or not the recipient is sensitive to a particular subject and as a consequence, these subjects may not be avoided. Emotion is also difficult to register using these technologies since people may not feel free to express themselves due to privacy and confidentiality concerns (Hallowel, 1999).

Hallowel (1999) argues that technology has reduced, and in some cases eliminated, the human moment, defined as an authentic psychological encounter that can happen only when people share the same physical space. The human moment is thought to have two prerequisites: physical presence and emotional and intellectual attention. Drawing upon his background as a work stress psychologist, Hallowel contends that the disappearance of such interactions is worrisome as many of his patients, all senior level executives, are being treated for anxiety related to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and confusion at work.

Hallowel (1999) further contends that allowing the human moment to fall by the wayside may lead to organizational dysfunction. He argues that when human moments

are few and far between, over sensitivity, self-doubt, and even boorishness and abrasive curtness can be observed in the best of people. E-mail and teleconferencing tend to reduce the social responsibility that a face-to-face interaction would dictate. As a consequence, some organizational members may use technology as a weapon for the transmission of angry and negative emotions, which in turn creates a hostile workplace (Hallowel, 1999; Pearson et al., 2000). In such an environment, productive employees may begin to underperform or look elsewhere for employment. Technology can work to erode the sense of cohesion in the workplace, leading to disrespect and dissatisfaction, which, left unchecked, could spread like a contagion, affecting both the people and the culture of the organization (Hallowel, 1999).

Human Resources Frame

The Human Resources (HR) Frame pertains to the relationship between the organization and its members. The core assumption built into this frame is that organizations need people and people need organizations. In this symbiotic relationship, organizations gain the ideas, energy, and talent needed to survive, and people gain secure careers, salaries, and opportunities for personal success. The challenge, from the HR perspective, is finding ways for people to get the job done while feeling good about themselves and their work (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Organizational trust. Within the scope of the HR Frame is the relationship between the organizations and its members. Trust relates to the employees' perception that the organization cares about their wellbeing and the belief that the organization will fulfill its promises and treat people fairly (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

In toxic organizations, trust has often been compromised. In fact, Towers Perrin and Watson Wyatt, two preeminent global consulting firms for HR management, reveal that nearly 20% of workers believe their company lies to them, 44% say top management lacks honesty and integrity, and 52% do not believe information presented by top management. A survey conducted by Korn Ferry International found that 62% of executives were unhappy with their current positions of employment. This level of pervasive distrust manifests as active disengagement, negative job attitudes and work behaviors, and turnover (Pfeffer, 2007).

Pfeffer (2007) contends that there are three main causes of employee distrust, beginning with waves of downsizing and restructuring that leave employees feeling insecure and overworked. A second cause is disruption to work-life balance. Pfeffer further contends that even in organizations where work-family programs are in place, informal norms often exist against using these policies because putting family first is frequently taken as a negative signal of employee loyalty and commitment. The third cause of rising distrust is the broken implicit or explicit promises made to employees regarding assurances about pensions and health insurance. While employees have given up wages and benefits to improve economic performance, senior management and shareholders enjoy virtually all of the benefits.

Compensation and reward systems. Depending on their design, compensation and reward systems can encourage employees to engage in deviant behaviors. Certain incentive programs can encourage negative competition and unscrupulous behavior (Litzky, Eddleston, & Kidder, 2006). Other ill conceived or mismanaged incentive inducements or reward systems can instigate toxic behavior by promoting or rewarding

employees who succeed by manipulating or psychologically harming colleagues or subordinates (Litzky et al., 2006; O'Leary-Kelly et al., 1996; Peterson, 2004).

Human resources management. Levinson (2002) and Pfeffer (2007) argue that the way people are managed greatly affects organizational productivity and profitability. HR management (HRM) is the only function with the primary responsibility for safeguarding employee health, safety, and wellbeing while also helping organizations to become more productive (Rynes, 2004). Generally, HR departments (HRDs) are tasked with carrying out the central functions of HRM. Best practices in the HRM strategy include hiring the right people, rewarding well, protecting jobs, promoting from within, sharing the wealth, investing in people through development opportunities, empowering people, encouraging autonomy and participation, and promoting diversity (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

The door to organizational toxicity opens when HRDs fail or are slow to act. A primary example lies in HRDs' role as the protector of organizational justice related to fairness in hiring, promotions, performance appraisals, reward systems, and discipline (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Organizational justice has two dimensions, distributive justice, relating to who gets what and when; and procedural justice, relating to the process through which decisions are made. When organizational members feel a sense of unfairness, trust and organizational commitment are compromised. Feelings associated with a sense of unfairness include depression, demoralization, anxiety, and anger that may manifest in toxic behaviors such as those related to personal aggression, and internal rivalry resulting in political behaviors (Burton, 2002).

Together, managers and HRDs can contribute to a toxic work environment by failing to reprimand or by rewarding questionable behavior. Further, delays or complete failures to act demonstrate a tolerance for toxic behavior and subsequently encourage rule-abiding employees to copy deviant behaviors; in short, a new behavioral norm is established (Litzky et al., 2006).

The HRD has traditionally been an advocate of the employee while simultaneously protecting the organization through the enforcement of policies, rules, as well as legislative and local laws. However, Peterson (2004) contends that the focus on the bottom line has changed the character, role, and values of many HRDs and their officials. While HRDs traditionally assumed the role of the employer's designated conscience or monitor, HR's new role as a strategic partner has served to diminish the voice of employees because the current HR model gives bottom line results greater prominence.

Rynes (2004) supports Peterson's (2004) contention that HR is less protective of employee interests than it used to be. Rynes states that changes in the political, social, and economic environments created a different ethos in HR practices, leaving employees at a disadvantage. Indeed, employee advocacy is easier when labor is scarce and irreplaceable and much more difficult when workers are perceived to be dispensable. With the current emphasis on downsizing, the processes of recruitment, selection, and workforce planning have lost strategic importance to managers and executives. Further, since long-term employment is virtually a phenomenon of the past, it has become increasingly difficult to justify employee development programs or other HR services designed to improve long-term satisfaction, loyalty, and employee retention.

Political Frame

The Political Frame involves the allocation of resources in a context of scarcity and divergent interests (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Political theorists have clearly identified organizations as political systems containing social sub-systems within which people compete for advancement and resources (Burns, 1961). Social subsystems are behavioral settings that shape the thoughts, aspirations, and feelings of organizational members (Levinson, 2002).

Organizational politics relates to feelings of fairness and justice, and political behavior influences the dynamic of interpersonal relationships in the workplace (Hochwarter, Kacmar, Perrewé & Johnson, 2003). The concept of scarce resources suggests that politics will be more salient and intense in difficult times. When resources are plentiful, work is fun and relationships are positive; however, when resources dry up, budgets are slashed, programs end, plants close, and staff must be laid off. Conflict is common in situations of scarce resources due to differences in the needs and perspectives among contending individuals and groups. Bargaining, negotiation, coercion, and compromise are a normal part of everyday life. Solutions often arise through political skill and acumen and coalitions form when power is concentrated in the wrong places or is so broadly dispersed that nothing gets done (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

There have been numerous studies published in professional and academic journals on the topics of workplace and organizational politics; however, the majority of the studies equate organizational politics with the dark side of human behavior, such as manipulation, coercive influence, or other subversive and semi-legal actions. The Perception of Organizational Politics Scale (POPS) has been used in a large number of

studies to successfully show the negative influences of the political phenomenon by linking organizational politics with negative perceptions of procedural justice, distributional justice, fairness and decency toward employees (Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2006). Ferris, Russ, and Fandt (1989) revealed links between organizational politics and negative psychological outcomes such as stress and exhaustion and negative employee attitudes and behaviors such as tardiness, absenteeism, neglectfulness, and lowered organizational commitment.

In a politically charged work environment trust is often damaged, particularly when employees perceive that promotional opportunities are based on favoritism, and that cliques or in-groups have influence over decisions (Albrecht, 2006). When organizational members participate in political behavior to gain influence or power, other employees withhold psychological and emotional commitment (Hall, Hochwarter, Ferris, & Bowen, 2004), resulting in increased negative attitudes, wasted organizational resources, decreased reliability, and overall damage to organizational performance (Vigoda-Gadot & Dryzin-Amit, 2006). Hall et al. (2004) provide the best description of the adverse reactions to political work environments:

When environments are political, individuals attain desired outcomes by accruing power and influence. Because not everyone will be successful via these means, some will be relegated to outsider status. If resources and rewards are viewed as unattainable, dissatisfaction and tension should ensue. Accordingly, the immediate environment becomes more unpredictable because the unwritten rules for success change as the power of those playing the political games varies. This uncertainty blurs the relationship between performance and desired outcomes, thus causing employees to question whether it is in their best interest to try to contribute to the objectives of the organization. (p. 244)

Cultural Frame

Organizational culture is at the center of the four frames dynamic; whereas each frame is a component that completes the organization as a whole, the Cultural Frame is the heart of an organization. Each of the frames – Structural (strategy, goals policies, roles), HR (procedures and relationships), and Political (power and disbursements of scarce resources) – has a profound effect on culture, and together they constitute a framework of affective meaning for organizational members (Fineman, 2003).

Organizational culture is most significant because it has a profound influence on shaping behavior, both positive and negative, of current members as well as newcomers. Organizational culture evolves from the organization's history, its founders, policies, and practices (Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006). Culture is a combination of norms, values, symbols, language, assumptions, and behaviors that manifest in a work setting (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007; Coccia, 1998). The customs, norms, tacit understandings, ritualized practices (regular meetings, coffee groups, and celebrations), and status symbols (size of offices, company car, compensation) all culminate in meaning and define what the organization stands for in the eyes of organizational members. Routines, relationships, and objects are infused with feelings and emotions such as excitement, ease, anxiety, boredom, pride, belonging, embarrassment, and fear (Fineman, 2003).

A toxic organizational culture is defined as one that constrains or limits individual and group-level capabilities, encourages and rewards mediocre performance and toxic behaviors (Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006). Social information processing theory suggests that individual behavior in a social environment is guided by values, norms, displays of

behavior from others, and behavioral outcomes. These elements serve as vital predictors of how individuals may respond to various situations (Schein, 2004; Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006).

Values and norms. Organizational values signify what the organization stands for, with the aim of creating loyalty, creativity, and commitment among employees (Fineman, 2003). Values also identify standards for respectful engagement and managing toxicity (Kusy & Holloway, 2009).

Bolman and Deal (2008) contend that regardless of the ideology articulated in mission statements or other formal documents, an organization's true values are the ones that are lived each day. Within the scope of their contention is conflict between articulated and lived values. A perfect example of the articulated versus lived value conflict can be seen in the organization that articulates the value of family and work-life balance while at the same time promoting practices that penalize employees for taking time off work. Another example is the organization that articulates the value of respectful engagement, while at the same time rewarding managers who bully their subordinates (Fineman, 2003; Kusy & Holloway, 2009).

Schein (2004) defines organizational norms as expressions of expected behavior and performance. Conformity to norms relates to an individual's desire for acceptance and rewards associated with conformity, or alternatively, punishments associated with non-conformity. Toxic behavior can become the norm when organizational members believe deviant behaviors are acceptable and new employees are conditioned to conduct business in the same manner. Managers can encourage a toxic culture when they engage in, tolerate, or reward negative behavior, or allow senior employees to exert pressure on

newcomers to conform to negative group norms (Litzky et al., 2006). Norms of expected behavior and performance standards can also promote unhealthy behaviors, such as those that result in burnout. When the norm of working late and on weekends is a normal part of being perceived as tough, dedicated, and loyal, it becomes an intrinsic part of a toxic culture that results in burnout (Fineman, 2003).

Modeling. Van Fleet and Griffin (2006) contend that behavior in a social environment is guided by the displays of behavior from others. O’Leary-Kelly et al. (1996) found that observation and modeling encourage those who have a propensity for deviant behaviors and influence those who would not otherwise exhibit deviant behaviors. Supervisors and other employees of influence who engage in deviant behaviors often serve as role models, allowing organizational members to then rationalize their own deviant behaviors. Therefore, observation can stimulate or lessen an observer’s inhibitions regarding aggression, harassment, or other toxic behaviors (Berkowitz, 1993) particularly if perceived or actual restraints and punishments are minimal or absent (Berkowitz, 1993; Carlson & Marcus-Newhall, 1990; Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006). For example, a hostile environment of sexual harassment could be explained by modeling influences. If an individual observes co-workers being repeatedly sexually harassed with limited repercussions for the abusers, that individual may experience decreased inhibition toward engaging in similar actions (O’Leary-Kelly et al., 1996).

Leaders and culture. Organizational leaders are the most powerful determinant of organizational culture because they set the tone for the organization by defining the values, norms, policies, and practices that support the organizational culture. Leaders send powerful messages about what they value through reward and punishment, which

ultimately shapes the behavior of subordinates (Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006). Leaders set the ethical tone for the organization through the corporate code of ethics and whether or not it is enforced, how promotions are awarded, decisions about who is favored, and how budgeting is handled (Litzky et al., 2006; Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006). An organizational culture can become toxic when leaders fail to provide positive, concrete, behaviorally specific values; when they fail to abide by or enforce the corporate code of ethics; and when the culture has a high tolerance for toxic behaviors (Goleman et al., 2001; Kusy & Holloway, 2009; Litzky et al., 2006).

The previous discussion of toxic leaders firmly established that organizational toxicity is inextricably related to leadership toxicity. A toxic leader inevitably contaminates employees and negativity permeates the entire organizational system (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007; Goldman, 2009; Goleman et al., 2001; Kusy & Holloway, 2009; Reed, 2004; Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006).

Leaders set the tone for followers through their visible behavior, which communicates assumptions and values to followers. If the leader is disrespectful of employee rights and places profits before all else, others in the organization will likely recognize this behavior as a signal of how to behave. As the signal becomes institutionalized throughout the organization, the culture will become increasingly toxic (Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006). Similarly, if the leader creates a toxic culture of blame, employees will fear making mistakes, which eventually lessens risk-taking and ultimately stifles creativity (Bacal, 2000).

Leaders also have the ability to raise or diminish the cultural climate because their moods and behaviors drive the moods and behaviors of organizational members

(Goleman et al., 2001; Kusy & Holloway, 2009). Goleman et al.'s (2001) 2-year study revealed that a leader's negative mood is quite literally contagious, spreading quickly and inexorably through the organization and effectively changing the cultural climate. They provide the example of a cranky and ruthless boss who exhibits low levels of emotional intelligence. Such a leader creates a toxic cultural climate rife with apathy, fear, and anxiety.

Goleman et al. (2001) are definitively supported by Kusy and Holloway's (2009) finding that the demeanor of a toxic person in authority significantly affects the workplace climate, and that the toxicity spreads as organizational members are negatively affected. In fact, 99% of their study respondents agreed that their personal demeanor changed as they began to overly monitor their own behavior, resulting in lowered morale and withdrawal (Kusy & Holloway, 2009). Goleman et al. (2001) discuss the leadership and the science of mood contagion in the workplace:

Moods that start at the top tend to move the fastest because everyone watches the boss. They take their emotional cues from him [or her]. Even when the boss that isn't highly visible—for example, the CEO who works behind closed doors on an upper floor – his attitude affects the moods of his direct reports, and a domino effect ripples through-out the company. (p. 44)

Leaders and inadvertent toxicity. Leaders can inadvertently add to or create a toxic culture, even if they themselves are not toxic, by enabling toxic individuals. Leaders often avoid, ignore, tolerate, or even protect toxic individuals who exhibit deviant behaviors. Leaders may avoid managing the individual by relegating the perpetrator to an area where there is limited personal contact with certain people or reassigning work so that there is less interaction with clients or other staff, rather than managing the toxic the behavior through policies and disciplinary procedures (Kusy & Holloway, 2009).

Leaders may ignore, allow, or tolerate negative behavior because the toxic individual is productive, has special knowledge, or is important to business operations. They may even protect a toxic person by running interference or accommodating the person because the he/she brings value that usurps the negative impact of the toxic behavior. Leaders may also tolerate a person of lesser value because the leader does not know how to arrest the behavior or considers it too difficult to terminate the individual. In these cases, toxicity spreads throughout the culture as other organizational members are intimidated into silence (Kusy & Holloway, 2009).

Summary

The review of literature revealed a need for a holistic study of the organizational toxicity phenomenon. To date, no discussion has provided a thorough examination of this phenomenon and the antecedents that support toxicity. Many of the scholars who have contributed to the discussion of organizational or workplace toxicity merely touch on various aspects of toxicity, for example: deviant behaviors such as bullying; the negative results of toxicity such as a workforce rife with anxiety and fear; the darker side of organizational behavior such as aggression, discrimination, sexual harassment; and toxic leaders.

To date, the most comprehensive study of organizational toxicity has been provided by Kusy and Holloway (2009), in their book *Toxic Workplace*, which discusses toxicity from the perspective of those who have worked with a toxic boss or co-worker. Through their study, the researchers attempt to reveal the systemic organizational problems that perpetuate a toxic workplace, including structural, cultural deficiencies and leaders who fail to arrest toxic behaviors. The present study endeavors to build upon the

prior efforts by providing a more complete exploration of the organizational components that create or perpetuate toxicity.

The toxicity metaphor was first established in 1993. Since that time there has been a great deal of discussion and debate over the use of the term to describe organizational dysfunction. The central difference between a dysfunctional organization and one that is toxic lies in the definition of a toxic workplace: one where people suffer emotional pain that is prolonged over a long period of time, and where the pain is contagious, spreading from one person to another until the entire organizational system is affected. Since the inception of the term, many other scholars have written on various aspects of toxicity, and the phenomenon is just beginning to emerge in academic curricula.

The discussion of organizational toxicity is likely to continue due to the fluidity of the global economy, which has led to a new level of competition that the world has not previously experienced. Organizations must respond to rapid changes in the external environment in order to survive. As leaders attempt to maintain profits and shareholder value, they often neglect long-term strategies and focus instead on short-term solutions such as restructuring and downsizing.

Many organizations that are vulnerable to toxicity often do not have the resources, time, or interests to pursue employee development programs or to encourage longevity, and as employees perceive that employers do not care about their wellbeing, their trust and loyalty toward the organization and its members begins to decline. Further, as organizations operate on leaner budgets with fewer employees, the work environment is

negatively affected, employees feel alienated and become less civil, and there are fewer restraints on toxic workplace behaviors.

Workplace behavior that harms or threatens the wellbeing of organizational members is considered deviant. These behavior patterns contribute to the toxicity metaphor because they are contagious, spreading from one individual to another, generating antagonism and pain among organizational participants and or subunits. If left unchecked, these patterns become toxins in and of themselves (Samuel, 2010), and are thus known as toxic behaviors.

Toxic behavior is generally categorized as political deviance such as backstabbing, gossiping, blaming, scapegoating, misusing information, favoritism, discrimination, or competing; or aggression such as harassment, verbal abuse, bullying, incivility, or physical violence. Organizational members subjected to these types of toxic workplace behaviors are more likely to have increased fear and insecurity at work and suffer from stress-related illnesses, decreased productivity, low morale, damaged self-esteem, and emotional pain (Henle, 2005). Leaders contribute to organizational toxicity when they exhibit toxic leadership styles or behaviors, fail to restrain or arrest the toxic behaviors of others, or protect people who exhibit toxic behaviors.

Nevertheless, toxic behavior is merely symptomatic of larger problems in the organizational system; therefore, focusing on behavior only serves as a distraction. In order to eradicate organizational toxicity, leaders must consider a holistic analysis that allows examination of issues relating to structure, power culture, and the relationship between the organization and its people. Bolman and Deal (2008) provide the most comprehensive framework for analysis. Their Four-Frame Model allows researchers and

analysts to clearly see the organizational antecedents of toxicity through the lenses of structure, HR, political systems, and organizational culture.

The Structural Frame calls for examination in to hierarchies, strategies, goals, roles, policies, rules, and standards, and technologies that affect employees' ability to be productive and cooperative. The HR Frame examines issues relating to the relationship between the organization and its people such as organizational trust and the way people are managed, compensated, and rewarded. The Political Frame examines issues related to bargaining, negotiation, coercion, and compromise, which have become normal parts of everyday life in an environment of scarce resources. Finally, the Cultural Frame examines values, norms, and the role of leadership in cultivating toxicity.

The central importance of understanding toxicity and organizational components is the realization that organizations have some degree of control and influence over this phenomenon. Therefore, leaders who examine their organizations through the lenses of the four frames can reduce toxicity and avoid reoccurrence. As the world continues to become flatter and global competition continues to threaten organizational success, the importance of managing HR will eventually come to light. This research has been developed with the hope that leaders, researchers, and students will gain better insight into the broader issues of organizational toxicity, allowing them to diagnose and more reasonably deal with issues of organizational toxicity from a foundational perspective, rather than a perspective of blame.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

This study involved a holistic exploration of the of organizational toxicity phenomenon. The purpose of the study was to clearly define the toxic work environment and to explain how organizational components can create or perpetuate toxic behaviors in the workplace. To date, the majority of academic and popular literature addressing organizational toxicity has focused on the symptoms rather than the underlying organizational problems that cause or perpetuate toxic workplace behaviors. Therefore, this study sought to provide a holistic understanding of organizational toxicity phenomenon using Bolman and Deal's (2008) Four-Frame Model to address organizational structure, human resources management, politics, and culture to determine the role of each component in the composition of a toxic work environment.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What role, if any, does the Structural Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?
2. What role, if any, does the Human Resources Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?
3. What role, if any, does the Political Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?
4. What role, if any, does the Cultural Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?

Research Design and Methodology

The researcher employed a qualitative research design, using a phenomenological methodology with a systems perspective. Bolman and Deal (2008) contend that organizations are complex entities with multi-layered intricacies. The goal of this study was to uncover toxins hidden within those organizational layers. Such an endeavor required the analysis of in-depth information that would best be provided by individuals who have experienced a toxic work environment. The researcher considered the merits of the two most commonly used design strategies –quantitative and qualitative – and determined that the latter was particularly suited for this project.

A qualitative design is uniquely compatible with the study of organizational toxicity because this strategy provides a deeper understanding of social phenomena than would result from purely quantitative data. Qualitative designs provide detailed information necessary for the researcher to efficiently describe details, processes, and structures of particular phenomena. The qualitative design is especially appropriate for projects aimed at making sense of complexity and obtaining new understandings, such as understanding the nature of organizational toxicity (Richards & Morse, 2007).

Phenomenological studies focus on individuals' lived experience and offer a “descriptive, reflective, interpretative, and engaging mode of inquiry from which the essence of an experience may be elicited” (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 49). This methodology requires that the researcher carefully and thoroughly capture and describe how people experience a phenomenon; to accomplish this, the researcher must focus on how the study subject describes it, feels about it, remembers it, and talks about it with others (Patton, 2002).

Two major assumptions underlie phenomenology; the first is that human perceptions offer evidence of the world not as it is thought to be, but as it is truly lived, and second, that human behavior occurs in the context of four existentialisms: relationships to things, people, events, and situations (Richards & Morse, 2007). Therefore, it was clear that a qualitative design employing a phenomenological methodology could provide the best process to decipher the complexity of the toxic organization and to capture the reality of the lived experience of subjects who work or have worked in a toxic environment.

A systems perspective served to enhance the phenomenological methodology. Patton (2002) contends that the systems perspective provides a deep understanding of real-world complexities, which can be helpful in framing questions and making sense of complex qualitative data. Patton further states that holistic thinking is central to the systems perspective. A system is defined as a whole that is both greater than and different from its parts, yet the parts are inextricably interconnected and should not be examined separately. This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of organizational toxicity; for example, examining only structure or only culture would be inadequate to explain the toxic work environment without considering and examining the other components. A full explanation of organizational toxicity and the toxic work environment can only be achieved through a holistic systems approach. A phenomenological study with a systems theory perspective answers the question, “how and why does this system as a whole function as it does?” (Patton, 2002, p. 119).

Data Collection

This research was a quest to discover the antecedents of organizational toxicity and the toxic work environment. In their study of toxic personalities and the toxic workplace, Kusy and Holloway (2009) found that interviews allowed their study participants to provide unencumbered expressions of their actual experiences, which provided the researchers an opportunity to understand and record the intricacies and subtle nuances of the situation. These researchers also found that the interview process provided some measure of cathartic relief to the participants, who expressed gratitude for the opportunity to tell their story.

In order to understand the organizational components that foster or perpetuate a toxic work environment, the researcher interviewed 15 working professionals who stated that they had suffered the effects of working in such an environment. Through their stories the researcher was able to extrapolate commonalities that revealed the role of each of the organizational components in creating or perpetuating workplace toxicity.

Process for selection of study participants. Levinson's (2002) research on organizations revealed that toxicity is not specific to any particular type of business, industry, or profession; indeed, "the kind of organization [is] irrelevant" (p. x). This research project included working professionals who claimed to have suffered emotional pain from their work environment. Since any and all organizations can become vulnerable to toxicity, the population of potential study participants included individuals from a variety of industries, organizations, and occupations. The desired sample of participants was narrowed to no more than 20 and no fewer than 10. This small sample size is common to a qualitative study and indicative of the nature of qualitative

phenomenological research in which insights generated from qualitative inquiry depend more on information richness and analytical capabilities of the researcher rather than on sample size (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

The researcher used purposeful sampling and snowball sampling strategies to obtain data sources. The purposeful sampling strategy allowed the researcher to focus on individuals who had particular knowledge of or experience with the toxicity phenomenon and were willing to reflect on their experience. Snowball sampling involved asking current study participants and individuals within the researcher's network to recommend others to be invited to participate. The entire recruitment, selection, and interview process is illustrated in Figure A1 of Appendix A.

The researcher is an HR professional with over 15 years of experience in various industries, which has produced a large network of professional colleagues. This network includes men, women, and individuals from a variety of ethnic, socio-economic, and cultural perspectives. Although this research project was not designed to include an exploration of demographic differences relative to toxicity, individuals of all genders, ethnicities, ages, cultures, or socio-economic backgrounds could potentially be subject to organizational toxicity, therefore no demographic criteria were considered in the selection of participants.

The researcher posted an informational invitation to participate in the study using electronic media such as e-mail, Facebook and Linked-in. The researcher invited those within the researcher's network to participate or recommend others. The researcher expanded the pool of potential study participants by distributing flyers to attendees at a Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) gathering in Claremont, California;

to attendees at a Women for Obama gathering in Arcadia, California; and at a meeting of pro-bono consultants for the Taproot Foundation in Los Angeles, California. The solicitation scripts are presented in Appendix B. The solicitation process produced 18 potential study participants, 13 of whom were referrals (working professionals previously unknown to the researcher), and five colleagues within the researcher's network.

The researcher contacted each potential study participant by telephone to explain the project and advise them that a brief screening interview would be required. The researcher e-mailed the potential participant a Screening Participant Informed Consent document, along with instructions to review, and asked him/her to return the signed document by e-mail or fax. Once the researcher received the document, a screening appointment was scheduled. The screening interview and informed consent are presented in Appendices C and D. The information obtained from the screening form was not intended to be part of the final analysis; the form contained questions designed to exclude individuals with a history of job-related problems that are more reflective of their own personal affectations as opposed to individuals who have been affected by a specific incidence of organizational toxicity.

The screenings took place over the telephone and were not recorded. Sixteen participants passed the screening. One participant opted out, stating that even though the process would be confidential, she was too afraid to continue. The researcher thanked her for her efforts and confirmed that any previous discussions would remain confidential. Two participants did not pass the screening interview. To those individuals the researcher expressed gratitude for their willingness to participate and explained that

the fact that they were not selected was not a judgment on or about them, but merely a reflection of the required criteria for participation in the study.

Fifteen working professionals participated in the study; each was allowed to select a time and a location for the interview that would be comfortable and private. Six of the study participants were located out of state, or in a city where the distance precluded a face-to-face conversation; therefore, those conversations took place over the telephone. Prior to beginning the interview process, all participants were presented with an Informed Consent document as illustrated in Appendix E. The Informed Consent document advised the participants of their rights; minimal risks of discomfort; the purpose of the study; that the conversation would be recorded; and that they had the option to stop, ask questions, or withdraw from the process at any time without penalty or prejudice. The researcher faxed or e-mailed the document to those who participated via telephone and those participants returned the signed document via fax, or scanned and e-mailed the signed document.

Study instruments. Interviewing is a strategy employed in qualitative studies when direct observation is not an option. The challenge of qualitative interviewing is to provide a framework within which the subject can express his/her understanding in his/her own terms. The quality of the information obtained was highly dependent upon the skill of the interviewer and the interview instrument. A qualitative interview instrument should include open-ended questions designed to encourage detailed responses that will permit the researcher to understand the world and the phenomenon as seen by the respondent. This way, the researcher can capture the respondents' points of view in their own terms and through their own language (Patton, 2002).

Patton (2002) provides three basic approaches to collecting qualitative data through open-ended interviews:

- Informal conversational interview – unstructured with no pre-determined set of questions allowing for maximum flexibility;
- Interview guide – wherein the interviewer prepares a checklist of predetermined topics to be explored with each respondent. The list serves as a guide that allows the interviewer the freedom to establish a conversational interview style while focusing on particular subject areas, thus avoiding the possibility of straying off into new subject areas; and
- Standardized open-ended interview – in which the exact wording and sequence of questions are fully developed prior to the interviews.

Since the nature of this study involved individuals with varying experiences in the workplace, the researcher used a combination of the three interview approaches as presented in Appendix F, Structure of Interview and Study Instrument. This three-part document shows that the researcher began the interview by introducing the topic and the purpose of the study. Next, the researcher advised the participants of their rights according to the Informed Consent document (shown in Appendix E) and confirmed that participants' identities would remain anonymous. After the Informed Consent document was signed, the researcher asked if the participant was comfortable with being recorded; when the participant agreed, the researcher began recording using an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder and proceeded to Part III, which outlines the pattern of interview questions.

The researcher began with standardized questions. As the participant began sharing his/her story about his/her work situation, the researcher asked more probing questions as categorized by Kvale's (1996) and Patton's (2002) typologies of interview questions (shown in Tables E1 and E2). To ensure that each of the components in Bolman and Deal's (2008) Four Frames Model was addressed, the researcher used a Four Frames Interview Guide developed to allow the freedom of a conversational style, while ensuring focus on the relevant subject areas. The final stage of the interview, Part IV, involved thanking the participant and advising him/her of the next step: the opportunity to edit his/her transcript. Finally, the researcher brought the discussion to a close by asking if the participant wanted to add anything to the discussion or if he/she had any questions about the process or the study, thanking the individual for participating, and departing.

Validity and Reflexivity

In order to be considered a credible qualitative research study, researchers must appropriately address design validity and reflexivity (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

Validity. Validity, in qualitative designs, rests on data collection and analysis techniques (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Validity refers to accurate representation of a participant's meaning (Richards & Morse, 2007). Therefore, validity is the degree to which the interpretations between participants and researcher have mutual meaning; "[t]hus the researcher and participants agree on the description or composition of events, and especially the meanings of events" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 324). To enhance and ensure validity, the researcher used a combination of five strategies recommended by McMillan and Schumacher (2006).

Prolonged fieldwork. “Data for qualitative analysis typically come from fieldwork. Fieldwork requires the researcher to spend time in a setting where...people [can be] interviewed” (Patton, 2002, p. 4). The researcher conducted 15 individual in-depth interviews as outlined previously. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) recommend that a “lengthy data collection period provides opportunities for interim data analysis, preliminary comparisons, and corroboration to refine ideas and ensure the match between evidence-based categories and participant reality” (p. 325). Each interview lasted between 1-1.5 hours. The researcher took special measures to allow the participants time to share their stories and asked probing questions ensure that the researcher captured the precise meaning intended by the interview participant.

Verbatim language. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher and the transcribed material was phrased in the participants’ colloquial language rather than in abstract terms that may have lost or obstructed meaning. After the interview process was concluded, the researcher began transcribing the interview recordings. The researcher plugged the recorder into a laptop computer, downloaded the voice recordings into NCH Software’s Express Scribe, a transcription program. This program allowed the researcher to play back the recording and control the speed and stop-and-play action using foot pedals. The researcher personally transcribed each recording, printed the transcripts, and compared the voice recordings to the printed documents to ensure accuracy. Next the researcher e-mailed the transcript to the individual participants asking if the transcript reflected what they intended, or if they wished to make any changes.

Low interference descriptors. *Low inference descriptions* refers to the process of recording descriptions precisely as provided by the participants, ensuring that descriptions of behaviors and situations are precisely detailed as provided and understood by the participants. “Concrete, precise descriptions from interview elaborations are the hallmarks of qualitative research and the principle method for identifying patterns in the data” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 325). The nature of this study depended heavily on descriptions of the work environment encountered by the participants. As stated earlier, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher, and the researcher compared the typed transcriptions to the voice recordings. The researcher ensured that the transcribed material was phrased in the colloquial verbatim language of the participants.

Mechanically recorded data. The researcher used an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder, one of the most up-to-date hand held audio voice recorders available.

Participant review. After the researcher transcribed the voice recordings, and printed and reviewed the transcripts compared to the voice recordings, the researcher e-mailed each transcript to the respective participant with a message asking the participant to review the transcript to ensure that it reflected what they intended, or if they wished to make any changes.

Reflexivity. Creswell (2007) defines reflexivity as an important procedure for establishing credibility. Reflexivity requires that the researcher become conscious of, and self-reflect on, personal biases, values, and experiences while conducting the study. Patton (2002) states that the process of reflexivity serves to remind the qualitative researcher to be conscious and aware of his/her own cultural, political, social, linguistic,

ideological perspective and voice, and to be sensitive to the perspective and voices of the study participants as well as those individuals who will judge the research.

Pillow (2003) suggests three validated strategies of reflexivity: recognition of self through personal awareness, recognition of the other, and reflexivity as truth gathering. Personal awareness involves self-scrutiny during the data collection process in an effort to remain neutral, objective, and detached rather than interfering with or inserting personal bias into the study. During the interviews, the researcher projected an empathetic demeanor, while at the same time suppressing the instinct to lead the participants' responses, finish a sentence when they hesitated, or project verbal or non-verbal opinions.

Recognition of the other refers to respecting and capturing the essence of the participants by allowing them to speak for themselves. The researcher addressed the study from a stance of curiosity, seeking to discover the answers to the research questions; the interview guide helped to keep the interview focused on this goal. Truth gathering refers to accuracy. The researcher was committed to capturing the essence of the participants by allowing them to speak for themselves. The researcher accomplished this by asking open-ended questions (which precluded the researcher from presuming a particular response), using a recording device, transcribing the interviews verbatim, and allowing the participants an opportunity to review the transcripts to assure the accuracy of the data collected.

Coding Plan

After all transcripts were approved, the researcher began the task of synthesizing the data. The researcher used QSR NVivo9 to synthesize the data according to the

Coding Plan, illustrated in Appendix G. NVivo separates data into separate coded areas called *nodes* so the researchers can compare statements for analysis. The researcher uploaded the typed and approved transcriptions into the NVivo program and created coding nodes for each element in the Coding Plan. The researcher reviewed and coded each transcript line by line, categorizing sentences and phrases into the coded sections. Once the coding was completed the researcher compared the data within the nodes to answer the research questions.

Protection of Participants

Protection of human participants is of the utmost importance to both Pepperdine University and to the researcher. To ensure the participants' protection, the researcher obtained written approval from the Pepperdine University Institutional Review Board prior to solicitation of participants as shown in Appendix H. Each of the participants was presented with an Informed Consent Form (Appendices D and E) that assured confidentiality, clearly identified the nature and purpose of the project and the process for capturing data through audio recorded the conversation, and advised that they could withdraw, stop, or ask questions at any time during the process without penalty or prejudice.

The researcher treated the participants with respect and empathy at all times. The researcher was also keenly aware of the risk, albeit minimal, that the participants could have experienced a sense of discomfort, depression, anxiety, or fear as they recall the difficulties they suffered in the workplace. Therefore the researcher was especially sensitive and patient, allowing for frequent breaks or pauses.

The researcher was careful to maintain the participants' anonymity by using pseudonyms for each participant. Only the researcher knows the true identities of the participants. All relevant data collected, recordings, transcriptions, and computer files have been downloaded to a password protected CD and permanently deleted from the computer used. The CD was then stored in a secure location and will be destroyed in 5 years.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the organizational components that create or perpetuate a toxic work environment. Bolman and Deal's (2008) Four-Frame Model provides the components for studying this phenomenon and the review of literature provided insight into each of the components and how these components can lead to a toxic work environment.

This chapter presented the process for studying individuals who have lived the experience of a toxic workplace and could therefore substantiate the information in the literature review. This chapter also provided detailed information on the qualitative research design, phenomenological methodology, and systems perspective used to conduct the study, as well as techniques for validation and reliability. This chapter concluded with a discussion of the protection of human participants.

Chapter IV: Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to clearly define the organizational toxicity phenomenon and to discover how organizational components may create or perpetuate a toxic work environment. The literature review provided clear definitions of a toxic organization and the resulting toxic work environment, defined and categorized behaviors that create toxicity, and explained how elements within the organizational components can serve as antecedents to toxicity. Kusy and Holloway (2009) recommend that the best way to learn about the toxic work environment is to interview individuals who have experienced it.

The researcher conducted conversational interviews with 15 adult professionals who volunteered to tell their stories about the toxic work environment in which they themselves suffered emotional injury or witnessed co-workers who suffered emotional injury. This chapter presents the data obtained through the participants' interviews. The names presented in this chapter are pseudonyms used to protect the anonymity of the participants. Bolman and Deal's (2008) Four-Frame Model served as a framework through which the stories could be examined to reflect on the research questions of this study:

1. What role, if any, does the Structural Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?
2. What role, if any, does the Human Resources Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?

3. What role, if any, does the Political Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?
4. What role, if any, does the Cultural Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?

Participants' Demographic Data

For the purposes of this study, the term *organization* was defined as any business, regardless of size, industry, or setting, that is comprised of similar components: at least one leader, an organizational culture, systems of operation, and employees who carry out tasks to meet organizational goals. The 15 interview participants selected for this study were working professionals, male and female, between the ages of 30 and 65. Their educational levels ranged from some college but less than a degree to a Masters of Arts or Science (MA/MS) degree. The interview participants identified themselves, or were observed to be, from one of following ethnicity groups: African America (AA); Caucasian non-Hispanic (W); Asian/Pacific Islander (A); or Hispanic (H). These working professionals were from various industries, organizational structures, and sizes ranging from 10 employees to 100,000-plus employees. Table 5 summarizes the demographics of the study participants.

Table 5

Demographics of Study Participants

Pseudonym	Age Range	Race/ Gender	Education	Industry and # of Employees	Job Title
Brian	30-39	W/M	BA/BS	Banking 200 Employees	Division Manager
Vanessa	30-39	AA/F	MA/MS	National Non-Profit 600 Employees	Public Relations Manager

(table continues)

Pseudonym	Age Range	Race/ Gender	Education	Industry and # of Employees	Job Title
Jennifer	30-39	W/F	BA/BS	Multi-National Fast Food Industry 100,000+ Employees	HR Business Partner Regional Manager
Kirsten	30-39	W/F	Some College	Legal Industry 10 Employees	Legal Secretary
Sam	30-39	A/F	Some College	Legal Industry 250 Employees 2 locations	Legal Secretary
Jeannie	40-49	AA/F	Some College	Personnel Recruitment 30 Employees	Director Permanent Placement
Francine	40-49	AA/F	BA/BS	National Television Entertainment Provider 25,000 Employees	HR Business Partner Regional Manager
Alice	40-49	W/F	MA/MS	Banking 150 Employees	Vice President HR
Craig	40-49	AA/F	MA/MS	National Home Building Supply/ Manufacturer 1000+ Employees	HR Business Partner Regional Manager
Doc	50-59	AA/M	MA/MS	Government Agency 1000 Employees 2 Locations	Branch Chief
Cristy	50-59	H/F	BA/BS	University Foundation 100 Employees	Chief Financial Officer
Barry	50-59	W/M	MA/MS	Engineering 50 Employees	Senior Partner
Frank	60-65	W/M	BA/BS	Real Estate Development 50 Employees	Vice President of Operations
Ellen	60-69	W/F	MA/MS	Education Number Unspecified	Middle School Special Education Teacher
James	60-69	W/M	MA/MS	Engineering 3000+ Employees 5 Locations	Senior Project Director

Data Collected During Interviews

The structure of the interviews was designed to allow the participants the opportunity to provide unencumbered expressions of their actual experiences so that the intricacies and subtle nuances of the situations, behaviors described as toxic, and descriptions of the organizational components could be recorded. The participants were asked open-ended questions that would allow the researcher to gain an understanding of

the participants' organizational environments and the deviant work behaviors they experienced.

Tables 6 and 7 provide summaries of the incidents of toxic work behaviors described by the participants. The behaviors are separated into two major categories, interpersonal aggression and political deviance, as defined in Chapter II. All participants, except two, described situations that affected them personally. The two remaining participants described situations in which they observed and later became personally involved.

Table 6

Number of Responses Related to Interpersonal Aggression

Pseudonym	Psychological Aggression				Violence
	Bullying, Incivility, Rudeness	Harassment	Shaming, Criticism	Verbal Abuse	Physical Violence
Vanessa	4				
Brian	2	5			
Ellen	3	3	7		
Craig	4	9			3
Jennifer	12	2	3	7	
Barry	3		3	2	
Kirsten	1			1	
James	2				1
Cristy	1		1		
Doc	11	5	7	1	
Frank	6		6	2	1
Alice	3	4	3		
Francine	3	10	3	2	
Sam	4		1		1
Jeannie	3	1	3	2	
Total	62	39	37	17	6

Table 7

Responses Regarding Political Deviance

Pseudonym	<u>Covert</u>	<u>Proactive/Reactive</u>		<u>Misuse of Power</u>		<u>Internal Competition</u>
	Backstabbing and Gossip	Blaming Scapegoating	Use of information	Sexual Harassment	Favoritism Discrimination	Extreme Careerism & Turf Wars
Vanessa		2	6			1
Brian						
Ellen	6	2	5		12	
Craig	1				4	
Jennifer	5	6	3		2	
Barry	1					
Kirsten	1		1	6		1
James	9	1				
Cristy	1		3		2	5
Doc	1		6	1	13	2
Frank		1				
Alice					2	
Francine	1	4	1	1		
Sam			1			
Jeannie		1			1	
Total	26	170	26	8	36	9

Data Collected for Holistic Organizational Analysis

The participants' responses to the interview discussion are arranged according to Bolman and Deal's (2008) Four-Frame Model to show the organizational antecedents of toxicity through the lenses of organizational structure, HR, political systems, and culture.

Structural Frame. The structural system has been referred to as the backbone or skeletal system of an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Levinson, 2002). All of the participants contributed information regarding the Structural Frame component. The majority of the responses within this frame fell into four main sub-categories: hierarchies; strategies and goals; roles; and policies, rules, and standards, as shown in Table II in Appendix I.

Hierarchies. Each participant discussed the hierarchy and the relationships between management and staff levels. Themes that emerged included owners who

avoided the behavior of their partners by staying away from or avoiding contact with the toxic partner; executives acting as gatekeepers or barriers to information that should funnel up to higher-level executives with the power to remedy a toxic situation; dysfunctional partnerships in which no one has clear authority to make decisions or lead; organizations that allow remote locations to operate outside of the corporate structure; and partners who bully other partners whom they consider weaker.

Craig shared the story of what happened to him after he was transferred from corporate to a newly acquired organization located in a Southern state known for racial discrimination against African Americans.

The corporation bought another business [and] sort of still allowed them to operate as a mom-and-pop operation...HR was actually an employee of the corporation... this new company never had an HR before and the person who used to own it, who is now a general manager, he would tell me things like “Oh, we don’t look too kindly on you and HR”...So those are the kind of things that he would actually tell me, so, and he basically said “good luck with your job here.” (Craig, personal communication, April 18, 2012)

James and Francine shared stories about receiving threats from gatekeepers:

I don’t think the Sr.VP was communicating what the real problems were...the CEO really kind of chewed on me for not escalating things over my bosses head, but whenever I talked about doing something like that, I got told in no uncertain terms that if I did, that it would be the end my career. (James, personal communication, May 19, 2012)

I saw [the VP of HR] a couple of times. He would ask me how the property was, and what can we do to improve things, but...you knew you’d better not say anything about what was really going on...it’s going to come back on you...Like “why did you say anything, you shouldn’t have said anything to Bill;” because the VP’s around there were really like God coming to your property. (Francine, personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Kirsten provided an example of how no one in her firm will take the lead.

There’s no definitive person in charge...everybody wants to point to somebody else to do it...and I think that because there is a lack of any type of office administration and the way it is structured is based on [the partner’s] wants and

needs and nobody else's. The toxicity is because of the structure, there is none, the lack of structure. (Kirsten, personal communication, May 20, 2012)

Jeannie and Frank provided examples of how owners set the organization up in a way that allows them to avoid the reality of toxicity caused by their partner.

It was actually a small recruitment firm. It was headed by, or co-owned, by two individuals one was the president, one was the vice president and the vice president chose to not work in the office with the president. I later found out why. The vice president absolutely refused to work in the same office as the president. (Jeannie, personal communication, April 12, 2012)

Ken...had already made his money and so he was in the office maybe at the most 3 days a week. And the rest of the time he was out either traveling or he was doing something with his sons (Frank, personal communication, April 10, 2012).

Strategies and goals. Themes revealed by participants included goals so narrowly focused on profits that leaders failed to realize the strategies being employed to reach the goals. Jennifer provided an example of a district management who met and exceeded his profit margin goals using a strategy of allowing positions to remain vacant after lower level managers quit as a result of his bullying and mistreatment.

His boss started questioning, we had bad manager turnover. So he started [investigating], you know like why was Jack so profitable? It was because he never really addressed the turnover issues, he was saving money on salaried employees...that allowed him to be more profitable. (Jennifer, personal communication, May 29, 2012)

Another theme was goals initiated with no strategy of how to achieve them. James told this story of how his employer took on a major project.

The New Mexico project came up, I wrote the proposal and they said that I did a good job on that, so they put me in charge of the project...I'd never been a project manager before and I felt a little bit like I got thrown off a bridge, and it was kind of like, "hope you can swim when you hit the water." (James, personal communication, May 19, 2012)

Ellen provided an example of goals supported by unethical strategies. As a teacher, one of the goals in her organization is to help students meet the requirements of

the government standards test. Ellen stated, “I was told [during] my last evaluation that I should teach to the test, and I said ‘well that’s illegal, you can’t do that’ and she said ‘well...you would be better off if you did’ (Ellen, personal communication, May 7, 2012).

Several participants described strategies based on saving money regardless of the impact.

Well, one of the issues here is unavailability of resources. They made a conscious choice to have a reduced number of support staff. But some of us were overloaded and when we asked for help they said “you’re not managing your desk well.” (Sam, personal communication, May 2, 2012)

They were in the process of expansive growth so their goal was to really just get a lot of new customers and what they did was they left out quality of installation, quality of people hired, and developing their management. (Francine, personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Other themes included strategies and goals based on internal politics and individual selfishness that ultimately override organizational goals. Kirsten asserted that her firm has no goals or strategies, stating, “When something blows up, then it will prompt them, but then time will pass and they’ll just forget about it because nobody wants to be bothered” (personal communication, May 20, 2012). Doc provided the following example of political goals:

He played the political card that “I’ve been here for 20 years and if you don’t promote me to division chief, I quit!” but his boss wasn’t going to just step aside so they placed him into whatever division chief position was vacant, which happened to be my boss’s position. So yeah, what I think was it was a strategic move and it was at the expense of the staff that he had to manage temporarily while he was making his career move. (Doc, personal communication, April 2, 2012)

Roles. Role-related toxicity was the most heavily referenced component within the Structural Frame. The interview participants were asked to discuss their role in the organizations; their responses are categorized into the following themes.

Locations far removed or remote headquarters. Three participants worked in locations that were remote from headquarters or HR. The discussion revealed that when support systems, such as headquarters, a home office, or HR are so far removed from the location suffering from toxicity, these sources of support are either unaware of or unconcerned about the situation.

Sense of powerlessness and lack of support. Managers discussed situations in which they had legitimate authority, but no political power to actually solve problems related to toxicity within their own departments. Participants discussed the failure of individuals, with the authority and power, to intercede or provide support. Several participants stated that individuals in executive roles, those who had the political influence and legitimate authority to help lower level managers, often supported the toxic executive by failing to intercede for fear of alienating their colleague. James's story provides an example of conflict that ensued when a manager's legitimate authority was compromised by a more senior person, thus reducing his power to manage a toxic situation.

I didn't really have the authority to terminate him, I had to call the senior vice president who actually sent [this guy to us] and explain to him what he had done but it took about three or four of those calls before the senior vice president backed me up, and so in the meantime the client is getting more and more upset because [this guy] continues to do things like this, um, where he was attacking them. (James, personal communication, May 19, 2012)

The nature of the job. Several participants stated that toxicity was generated due to the nature of the job. Ellen, a middle school teacher provided the following example of stress related to the nature of her job.

It's a rough type of job because a lot of the parents are not schooled they are immigrants and they don't understand a lot of this and often school is not important to them. Also unlike Math and Language Arts where students with learning challenges have separate classes, in Science and History everybody is put together you have the Gate students, the RSP kids. I've got a mixture of all these kids in one room, so there's that challenge and I mean it's dysfunctional. (Ellen, personal communication, May 7, 2012)

Role ambiguity. Several participants discussed covert or unspoken rules and standards, unspoken pressures, ambiguous or nebulous expectations, or job descriptions assigned to their role that have nothing to do with the actual work performed.

Role rigidity. Participants discussed being micromanaged from upper level managers that restrict the movement and decision-making processes of lower level managers. Several participants discussed how micromanaging led to other role-related problems such as role ambiguity. The following response from Jennifer, an HR professional, provides an example of how micromanagement can lead to role ambiguity.

Any time they tried to do something a little bit different they got in trouble. There was this one situation in our restaurant where there was a money theft. The district manager had done the investigation... [She] wanted to handle it a certain way and she had called Jack, her boss, to say "hey here's what's going on" and Jack told her to fire everybody. She didn't agree. She agreed that some people were responsible and needed, per our policies, for their employment to be ended, but she did not think that it was to the extent to what Jack thought. So she called me and ran it by me and I said "well I do understand that he is your boss, but you need to do what you think is right, you are a leader." She did what she thought but she and [Jack's other subordinates], you know, they started to hide behind me "well I talked to Jennifer and Jennifer said it was okay." They were afraid. (Jennifer, personal communication, May 29, 2012)

Role conflict. The participants provided expanded explanations of role conflict, first conflict that occurs when the job description and expectations do not match the

realities of the job; second, conflict that arises between employees, with the same job title and job description, when the workloads are uneven; and finally, conflict that arises when job positions pay the same, yet expectations for contribution to the work are substantially different. Kirsten, a legal secretary, provided two examples of role conflict in her organization.

I can have up to 10 court filings a day...and I'm answering to 4 people. The work is definitely not evenly yoked with my coworker who only has two attorneys, and that has caused a conflict. The bosses are aware so I got a bonus but she didn't and that upset her because I come in to work later than her and so sometimes in the morning she will have to mail a letter or fax something for one of my bosses and it irritates her. So she feels like she is doing all my work and she feels like she should be compensated for doing that but she is not doing all the other things that I do but she feels slighted. The bosses have problems too; there is a lot of tension. They are equal partners, so they all get paid the exact same amount of money, but if you were to print out their billable time it is not equal. I know that is irritating to them because I've heard them say on occasion "what the hell is Fred doing, how come I am always doing all of these things and everybody gets equal compensation and they're not doing equal work." So as partners, all having an interest in the company, I could see where that would be frustrating. (Kirsten, personal communication, May 20, 2012)

Qualitative and quantitative role overload. Through her story, Francine, a regional HR representative, showed how quantitative role overload can also be connected to lack of support.

I managed the Long Beach office and the Chatsworth office initially. Long Beach is near my home and Chatsworth is about 50 miles one way. Operations started at 6:30 a.m. I had to get up at 4:00 and be on the road by 5:00. Then they doubled my territory, they added Atascadero, which is 200 miles one way and San Diego which is also about 100 miles one way, I had to be there once a week also which means I was up at 3 a.m. to leave at 4 to arrive. I was completely, completely exhausted. I was stressed out, and they basically said "this is the way it is, starting next week." And believe me, they would call the general manager: "How's Francine doing, what time does she get there? What time does she leave?" And you didn't know that unless you had a nice general manager that would tell you, "Hey, your manager's checking in on you." (Francine, personal communication, May 8, 2012).

Doc, a Branch Chief for a government agency, provided an example of how qualitative role overload can affect the relationship between a manager and his boss.

It didn't start off as toxic I worked there 16 good years before it became toxic. It was when I got a new boss who was promoted from a different division. He had never worked in analysis and he didn't understand it no matter how hard I tried to explain it. Frankly he was out of his depth and there was, I believe, a general mistrust because he didn't understand what I did. I think his first attempt was to control me by restricting my movements and reducing my authority, but it is very difficult to control someone when you don't understand the work. So if you don't understand the work and you want to control, you need to get somebody that you can manipulate. So I believe he consciously made it a toxic environment for me because of either resentment or distrust of me. (Doc, personal communication, April 2, 2012)

Policies, rules, and standards. With respect to policies, rules, and standards, themes included: no policies addressing behavior; policies are in place but not enforced because the person is a good performer; policies linked to performance standards that are unrealistic; and policies that are oppressive or out of touch with the realities of the job. Participants also discussed employment manuals that fail to address behavior or are so outdated that they are forgotten, rules that instigate micromanaging, failure to follow procedure, and leaders who manage to maneuver around or manipulate policies for their own benefit.

Francine, a HR professional, provided a remarkable example of how her department implemented an unspoken policy that was linked to performance standards.

[T]he employees were forced to sign up for the company's product service. [The district HR] would send [us] a report every week to [show which employees weren't] signed up. My manager would see it and was like '[HR Team] let's make it 100% [employee's signed up].' And people would tell me "'I'm on a bundling plan, I can't do it.'" Or "I don't [need it]." We told them "Well, can't you just [sign up for] it anyway?" The service wasn't free; we had to pay for it...and if they didn't buy it they would get on this list. So not only did I have to buy it, I had to convince the other employees to buy it... You know you had to do it and if you didn't and people stayed on the list for repetitive weeks the HR director would directly e-mail me and say "Francine, I see this person has been on the list

for a couple of weeks, how come you haven't convinced him to buy the service?"... There was another list for employees who owed [money for] the company's product service and the debt went into collections, but it would show a charge off. Now you know a charge-off is already tax deductible for a company. Well HR was forced to collect the charge-offs and initially the bosses wanted us to do payroll deduction for \$50 per paycheck, without authorizing it. I said "in this state you cannot take any money out of anybody's paycheck without authorization"....[T]he HR Director then got a payroll deduction authorization [form together]. We had to get it to [the employees on the list] and say "hey, we see that you have a past due balance we'd like to help you get it down" now in the mean while this is already charged-off, but they are still collecting the money.... [I]f the person said "well, I want to pay for it on my own" or "leave me alone" then we had to engage their boss. If the boss didn't agree with it then we had to engage that person's boss. I can tell you right now, on HR conference calls my boss specifically said that if these people do not sign these payroll deduction forms we will fire them. I couldn't tell people that, but I have to just say, eventually I got them to shave down their debt. I felt bad because [employees started] being evasive toward and [avoiding] me and I was concerned because I thought maybe they wouldn't even come to me for an HR issue because they thought that every time they would come to me I would sweat them about this payroll authorization form. (Francine, personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Brian and Alice shared information that demonstrates how policies related to discipline are not enforced because the problem appeared to go away, or because the person in question was a good performer.

[F]or whatever reason, he didn't enter into [the disciplinary process] I don't know why... I think the thought process was like well the issue is gone away; even though you're somewhat rewarding the bad behavior by not taking action. (Brian, personal communication, May 11, 2012)

[T]hey could've reined him in and unfortunately his output on other things was awesome. He did a good job on all the other things he did, he was an amazing writer he, he was great at marketing, so there was lots of other things he did that people would turn a blind eye because his output and his work product was so awesome that they let these other things suffer, meaning his people, because really Joe was the only one that could do certain things. (Alice, personal communication, May 16, 2012)

Craig, an HR professional for a national firm, provided two examples. The first demonstrates how a corporate headquarters can reduce a policy manual to the point

where it is ineffective and the second illustrates the consequences when corporate headquarters breaches a policy related to confidentiality.

I created a handbook, I put like a lot of different policies...the finished version actually went to corporate and they pulled out things...there were a lot of things that should've been in there that I actually put in or alluded to, but when the finished version came back from corporate, it wasn't in there...there wasn't anything in there about harassment. (Craig, personal communication, April 18, 2012)

[M]y [personal information] records were at corporate...the people at the location [should not have known] my address or any of my personal information...[O]ne day...somebody slid [a]...note that says your address is such-and-such, your son's name is such-and-such, your wife's name is such-and-such and we'd really hate for something to happen to them. (Craig, personal communication, April 18, 2012)

Cristy provided an example of how the executive director was able to use his position power to maneuver around the organization's hiring policies so that he could selectively hire only his friends from his previous employer, even though they were not qualified.

[W]hen you work for an organization that has government contracts you have to go through a certain particular hiring process...[T]here was a search committee but as I mentioned, he had pretty much direct reports working on the search and you're in a position where you either support what he ultimately wants or you support what really is the best for the organization and I'll be honest with you, I didn't support who he wanted because I just thought that this person really wasn't even qualified for the position so, is it possible that he retaliated, I mean in the short term, yes, that's a possibility, could I prove it? No. (Cristy, personal communication, April 4, 2012)

Jennifer and Francine demonstrated that even when a policy is in place to protect from toxic work behaviors, employees may be too afraid to come forward. Jennifer stated, "there were certainly harassment policies in place, that and violence in the workplace policies, but the problem came down to is proof, and investigation, and people coming forward" (personal communication, May 29, 2012). Francine shared, "they were

asking us to do something that is unlawful; but it's like everybody wants to say something, but nobody will say anything. Everybody's afraid" (personal communication, May 8, 2012).

Technology. The study participants provided information that demonstrated how technology can contribute to toxicity. Ellen and Vanessa shared their frustration when their bosses either ignore or fail to respond to e-mails. Ellen stated, "People have felt the administrator does not always answer people's e-mail, she'll leave people hanging" (personal communication, May 7, 2012). Vanessa shared,

He overlooks [e-mails] because there are people he doesn't consider to be really important enough; I've seen him [ignore people's emails]. I actually have a copy of an e-mail from another VP, a woman of color, where basically it is a dialogue between the two of them and it was basically about the same situation. (Vanessa, personal communication, May 12, 2012)

Francine shared how technology in her organization has been used as a tool to monitor employees, restrict movement, and micromanage employees.

They used Microsoft Communicator, which was an instant messaging program, formerly as a way of communicating, but informally they used it to track you to see how much you were and were not at your desk. If you didn't answer your cell phone...I could be with a client, or on my lunch, or it could be a Saturday, or I'm in church [on a Sunday], the minute you didn't answer your phone, they called your boss. I was scared, they were tracking [me] electronically and [my] phone really wasn't a phone, it was a tie, a chain. (Francine, personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Barry shared how technology was used to bully and ridicule him in public, stating, "I was eventually called a stupid clueless weasel... It was done in an e-mail that was copied to other people" (personal communication, May 1, 2012)

Human Resources Frame. In this study, the HR Frame refers to the way in which people are managed as well as the existence, or non-existence of an HRD and its influence on how people are managed and cared for in the workplace. The HRM

component has a direct effect on perceptions of organizational justice and organizational trust.

All of the participants discussed issues related to the way they were supervised or their relationship with the HRD (See Table I2, Appendix I). Themes that emerged from the interview discussions included their supervisor or boss's style of management, such as constant criticism, intimidation, or bullying. Some reported that the person causing the toxicity was the head of HR, and thus there was no other source of redress.

When looking toward an HRD for support, the participants stated, in summary, that HR failed to act or failed to investigate situations of harassment, HR actually took sides and actively supported the person causing toxicity, HR exhibited an apathetic approach to managing bad behavior, and HR staff lacked the authority or training to properly respond to toxic behaviors or situations of toxicity. Two participants stated that their HRDs were located in headquarters that were too far away to properly help with their situation of toxicity. Four participants indicated that their organization did not have an HRD or anyone acting in the role of HR, and two reported that HR professionals actually reported to the person who was instigating toxicity.

Brian, a bank manager, discussed a situation of an individual who was harassing a female janitor by defecating on the floor next to the toilet every day. When Brian, who was not this person's manager, caught the perpetrator, he was shocked by the response of both HR and the perpetrator's manager.

[O]ne of the things that I found troubling was because she [the janitor] was a contractor...our employee relations people said that there was nothing they could do...I was really perplexed by that because I'm thinking well this is a bank employee who is creating a hostile environment for one of our vendors...I would think it would be a huge problem for the bank...[T]his guy was in the process of going through a bitter divorce and I think his manager had a higher level of

sympathy for the guy...he said “look...this is how he’s acting out. He’s having a tough time I don’t want to pile on by accusing him or penalizing him...” And I get that but at the same time this is a public health issue and this is a hostile workplace issue. (Brian, personal communication, May 11, 2012)

In this instance, HR concentrated on the victim’s relationship to the organization rather than the perpetrator’s violation of policy, and the manager focused on the perpetrator’s personal life situation rather than violation of policy.

A major reoccurring theme was lack of support from HR. Cristy discussed her experience with the HRD when she asked them for advice on how to manage her relationship with her boss.

I did go to HR and I told them [about my boss’s behavior] and here’s what they told me “You know what Cristy, we know about him, but here’s the problem, there’s really nothing you can do when you have someone in charge who is basically a jerk and basically is mean. There isn’t anything that we can really do about it [either].” (Cristy, personal communication, April 4, 2012)

Organizational justice. Ellen provided an example of her frustration related to distributive injustice and the grant award process at her school district. She applied several times, yet each time the grant opportunities were been given to the same people with no explanation as to the true criteria the administration requires.

[T]here are several...grants available where a team of people were picked...I am constantly left out of that kind of stuff and what we have basically is, we have the administration, we have the teachers, and in the middle are these chosen people...the golden people...I applied and I was rejected and I still don't know why I was rejected I have not gotten an explanation as to why my qualifications weren't good enough. (Ellen, personal communication, May 7, 2012)

Sam, a legal secretary with a heavy workload and little support, provided a definition of justice at her organization: “Justice was if you did not complain or you did not ask for help or you just kind of floated under the radar” (personal communication,

May 2, 2012). Barry provided an example of procedural injustice when a senior partner actively lobbied to manipulate the decision-making process.

One of these imperial partners...found himself without much in the way of clientele...That left the rest of us scrambling around to try to make up for the shortfall that was being incurred by this person's performance...I attempted to hire a new employee because in developing more work I needed someone to do [the work]. This particular [partner] actively lobbied the other people who were involved in the decision-making process in advance of interviews...to convince them it was a bad idea...I was eventually called a stupid clueless weasel for pushing the hiring of this person. (Barry, personal communication, May 11, 2012)

The interview discussions revealed a more complicated reality related to a sense of organizational injustice manifested from the way the participants were treated in the workplace. Generally, the sense of organizational injustice is a secondary effect of other primary failures of the organizational system, particularly the questionable actions of management and HR professionals. Craig received threatening notes that he reported to his boss, the VP of HR. The notes became increasingly threatening. Here Craig provides an example of how he experienced injustice in HR's failure to act.

I faxed the note to him, I said "It's one thing if they have a problem with me, but they threaten my family, I have a serious problem with this." He would apologize and he would say if we can find out who is doing this we'll do something about it, but I kind of felt like they didn't care, you know to try to do a full investigation but all of this went on for about 9 months. There was never any type of [information like] these are the steps we are going to take. (Craig, personal communication, April 18, 2012)

Organizational trust. The interviews revealed that organizational trust reflects the experience employees have with their superior and the level of support they expect to receive from the HRD based on their personal experience, or the experiences of others that they observed, in the organization. Several participants provided descriptions of the trust relationships in their workplaces.

I definitely feel like I can't trust [my boss] I often feel like I'm walking on eggshells. I really feel like I can't be my authentic self. I feel kind of like disabled in a way. I feel like where most people are enablers I feel like he disables... People just don't trust our HR department to be honest. (Vanessa, personal communication, May 12, 2012)

[S]o I called up the employee relations woman and I said "what the hell!" And she said "well he would ask me where this came from so I told him." And I was like, "well first of all you didn't do your job at all, you know this is not what you do; you don't sell out your sources of information on conflicts!" (Brian, personal communication, May 11, 2012)

The only place I can go [for help] is to human resources or to the superintended and those are two places that I will never go again. (Ellen, personal communication, May 7, 2012)

I kind of felt like they didn't care, you know to try to do a full investigation, I never would get the results of an investigation or anything and so I'm not even sure that an investigation occurred. (Craig, personal communication, April 18, 2012)

I would say that there is little in the way of organizational trust. You are basically doing the job to the best of your ability and then waiting for the explosion that will happen whenever there is a mistake. (Barry, personal communication, May 1, 2012)

The interviews revealed that the level of trust employees have toward the organization is related to the trust that the organization demonstrates toward its employees. When employees are micromanaged, it sends a message that the organization does not trust them, thus further diminishing the trust employees have toward the organization. Doc stated, "I think he consciously made it a toxic environment for me because of either resentment of me or dislike of me, or distrust of me" (personal communication, April 2, 2012). Ellen noted,

And that is kind of permeating into the micromanaging of teachers by principals and not being allowed to have department meetings in our own rooms but we all have to meet in the library and we all have to be monitored while we have our department meetings and it has just gotten to be really bad (personal communication, May 7, 2012)

The discussions also revealed that fear is directly related to trust or the result of broken trust.

Other teachers are afraid to say anything because they see what's happened to me and a couple of other teachers, you know how we are like the untouchables in this caste system. You know I'm telling you this and I can't even believe it but you can't make this up, you just can't make it up. (Ellen, personal communication, May 7, 2012)

Compensation and reward systems. The literature review demonstrated how compensation and reward systems can encourage employees to engage in deviant behaviors (Litzky et al., 2006). The most obvious theme present in the interviews was systems of internal promotion that are used to reward good performance, yet ultimately breed managers who are insufficiently prepared to supervise and lead subordinates.

One of the fundamental problems with bureaucracies is there is no way to reward good performance other than promotion. So you have a lot of bosses that have no people skills... someone thinks they did a good job on something...[s]o we've got a lot of bad people as managers. (Doc, personal communication, April 2, 2012)

You have generally people that have long service dates... a lot of technicians where [this] was either their first or second job and then when they go up the hierarchy, they are 27 and 28 years old, probably with a G.E.D. education... Just because you are a good technician doesn't mean you are a good manager; but that wasn't something [the company] cared about. (Francine, personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Another theme that emerged was compensation systems, which, in conjunction with uneven workloads, diminish work relationships and inspire toxic work behaviors.

The compensation and reward system was not equitable. If you didn't [ask for help] then you were considered managing your desk... I kept asking for help... I got low raises. I had a heavy desk and the manager actually said "your friend Sally never asks for help she really manages her desk." Sally also didn't have a heavy workload... we were friends but I started to resent her a lot. (Sam, personal communication, May 2, 2012)

I am answering to 4 people...I got compensated for it...sometimes in the morning she will have to mail a letter or fax something for one of my bosses and ...so she felt like she was being slighted. (Kirsten, personal communication, May 20, 2012)

[The four partners]...all get paid the exact same amount of money, but...two attorneys there that do triple the work...and I know that it is irritating to them because I've heard them...It is their own passive aggressiveness with each other that is a problem and you see it. (Kirsten, personal communication, May 20, 2012)

Several participants discussed compensation and reward systems that focused on particular characteristics while ignoring other egregious behavioral characteristics.

Jennifer stated, "Frank was a bully...Frank made lots of money and as far as [his boss] was concerned that's all that mattered" (Jennifer, personal communication, April 10, 2012). Finally, two participants discussed the use of compensation incentives as a tool to coerce sexual favors. Another discussed punishment as an incentive or negative reinforcement to motivate behavior.

Political Frame. This study examined three aspects of the Political Frame: political power structures, favoritism, and scarcity of resources (see Table I3, Appendix I). The discussion interviews revealed that political power structures were the central element that influenced the ability to create or perpetuate toxicity within the Political Frame. Through the discussions a pattern was revealed in which scarcity of resources emerges as an instigator to political maneuvering and or coalition building. Position power is then used as the final element that enables decisions that may result in favoritism or other behaviors that create or perpetuate toxicity. This political activity leads to a sense of procedural injustice, distributive injustice, and or a sense of powerlessness.

[W]e don't have all the materials that we need... it kind of goes back in time to hunter gatherer groups you know you have that kind of splintering within a

modern organization where basically somebody is out to get your food from you and they'll do whatever it takes, I mean it's kind of like underneath the polish of education and enlightenment are these primitive hunters. It's very odd. (Ellen, personal communication, May 7, 2012)

Indeed, power and power sources were the central theme of the Political Frame.

Vanessa discussed several power sources: information as a source of power, the power in coalitions as colleagues "stick together," doing favors and protecting each other and personal attributes as power sources.

So basically part of the issue that we have is the fact that [the VP] hoards information and in our work that we do information is really powerful...Quite honestly, our executive team is so thick and thin...regardless of bad behavior, regardless of any of that, they just stick together and support each other...it's just a small handful of us that work directly with him everyone else sees the public persona, and people love the public persona...[but] if you had really worked for him you would have been like, "he's an A-hole." You know what I mean, but people just fall in love with him the public persona. (Vanessa, personal communication, May 12, 2012)

Each of the interview participants discussed position power in some form, whether it was a middle manager using the authority of his/her position to suppress information funneling to higher levels, position power based on proximity to higher, more powerful people, or position power based solely on the type of work performed versus work that is considered or perceived to be less valuable.

Conversely, Craig discussed the fact that his boss had position power without authority to act, which gave the previous owner, now a manager, the true power.

The director didn't appear to have real authority over his location...I think the previous owner [now a manager] had so much stock or something, he had some kind of power which is why they kind of left him alone...I think that was pretty evident because they didn't let him go and there were never any consequences [for his behavior]. (Craig, personal communication, April 18, 2012)

Cultural Frame. This study examined six elements within the organizational culture dynamic. Organizational norms and values were discussed extensively; however,

leadership was by far the most discussed element of the six (see Table I4, Appendix I). Leadership is the most important element of the Cultural Frame because organizational leaders set the tone for the organization by defining the values, norms, policies, and practices that support the culture. Leaders send powerful messages about what they value through reward and punishment (Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006).

Leadership. Leadership dominated most of the discussion concerning elements within the Cultural Frame. Fourteen of the participants discussed their leaders at length. The interview discussions centered around leader behavior and the impact of that behavior on the work environment. The level of leadership depended upon the structure of the organization. Several of the participants discussed *level 2 leaders*, defined as department heads, vice presidents or directors—generally leaders who reported to a president or CEO. Other leaders were *level 1*, defined as the top leaders of the organization, such as owners, partners, a CEO, or a president and vice president owners.

The researcher asked questions that would provide an understanding of the role leaders played in creating or exacerbating toxicity. Several themes emerged. First was an apathetic response by leaders in managing or dealing with toxic behavior by lower level employees. Nine of the 14 participants who discussed leadership stated that in some way level 1 and level 2 leaders either avoided dealing with the toxic person, condoned the behavior for larger payoffs from the toxic person who may be either a high performer or a person who generates profits, protected the person because he or she is a colleague, or the leader was either so remote from the toxic person that he/she was unaware of the toxic behavior in question.

Jennifer, an HR business partner, was tasked with investigating numerous employee complaints against Jack, a district manager, and high turnover rates in his district. The higher-level leaders condoned Jack's behavior by rewarding his ability to generate profits while ignoring his toxic management style. As Jennifer investigated, Jack accused her of singling him out; the leaders supported his claim and penalized Jennifer by requiring her to generate excessive and onerous reports to prove what was already obvious.

So, I mean...it took a lot to get their attention; I got to the point where I just shut up about it because my manager's manager was like "Jennifer, you're biased against him." And I'm like "no, really I'm not, you guys just aren't going to do anything about it." I had to do these reports...I was wasting time doing all of this reporting that, you know, I mean I'm not saying that it didn't show a story, because it did, but I was wasting time documenting every single thing so that I could prove, whenever it became questioned, because everything got questioned after a certain point, you know because I was "against him."...I spent at least a fourth of my time generating these reports. (Jennifer, personal communication, May 29, 2012)

The second themes were avoidance and protection of a colleague. Both Jeannie and Frank worked at organizations owned by two individuals, one of whom was a toxic bully. Both participants reported that the other partner avoided being in the same office as the toxic partner and refused to discuss the toxic partner's behavior for fear of jeopardizing the partnership. Each participant reported feeling a sense of abandonment by the partner who avoided the more toxic partner.

He knew how he was. He told this to me personally; it wasn't something that I surmised. He told me "I cannot work in the same office as Ted. I can't do it because we would be at each other's throats. His style and my style are totally different. The way it works is that I'm in Orange County, he's in West LA and that's enough distance." I was like "okay." At that point I really didn't understand, until I understood [from personal experience]. [H]e was like "I don't deal with him. I do my thing in my office, I bring in my money, the revenue blah, blah, blah; I'm fine. But whatever happens in West LA and the South Bay is not

my concern, that's his department." (Jeannie, personal communication, April 12, 2012)

I did talk to Ken on a couple of occasions, and I'm not the only one, that basically said "Dave is an extremely difficult person to work for and with and is there a way that we can create a better atmosphere in the company? Is there a way that we can, you know, just be able to work without all of that negativity and just walking eggshells around one certain person?" And we could never get anywhere. It never got any farther than just the talking phase. (Frank, personal communication, April 10, 2012)

When Doc went to a level 2 leader to discuss his boss's behavior, she took copious notes and then shared Doc's comments with his toxic boss, exacerbating the situation. Next, he went to the level 1 leader, which also proved fruitless.

I believe that going one step over my boss' head turned out to be a mistake. She came down from Sacramento...under the guise of "gee I'm on your side, I just want to know how I can help you," and you know I spilled my guts...And she's like "yeah I understand everything your saying. We're going to take care of this problem don't worry. I've got your back." What she did was immediately go to him and tell him everything I said. I actually confronted her after now he's coming at me with a vengeance because he knows everything I said about him, I confronted her and she said "you know if it comes down between you and my first line of command, it's going to be him."...I did insist upon going to see the Executive Officer...I talked face-to-face with [him, we] had formerly had a long productive relationship...and his response was "by the time it gets to me ain't shit I can do for you." (Doc, personal communication, April 2, 2012)

The third theme revealed that fear and intimidation restricted participants from seeking assistance from level 1 leaders.

I think it would have honestly been politically intimidating to go to the head of the university and say, "I think this person is not nice."...I mean it would have made me look [bad], or it wouldn't put me in a good position. (Cristy, personal communication, April 4, 2012)

The final theme was the impact on the atmosphere of the work environment when the toxic person is the level 1 or level 2 leader. Leader toxicity causes employees to engage in self-protecting activities such as shutting down, holding back their opinions, avoiding the toxic person at all costs, and developing coalitions in support of one another

against the toxic leader. Several participants described the atmosphere in their work environment as tense, unpredictable depending upon the mood of the leader on any given day, intimidating, demeaning, and depressing. Christy stated, “There was tension because you have someone [who] you weren’t sure what the expectation was going to be, so it was uncomfortable” (personal communication, April 4, 2012).

[T]he atmosphere is always sort of somber, it was a revolving door. I had people that came in and would work for maybe a month or two in some cases maybe a little bit longer but always ended up leaving because they could not work with Dave. (Frank, personal communication, April 10, 2012)

[I]t was years, like 10 years [of him treating people bad]...it was not a very fun environment and it makes me really nervous when I'm not sure who's going to show up[because] Joe could go from cracking you up to instant fear, I mean he had a full range of humor, so you're always unsettled, you know, there was always this kind of well what the hell, the shoe is gonna drop now, ya know. (Alice, personal communication, May 16, 2012)

There was a very sick feel to the atmosphere...To be quite honest, it was a very tense and unpredictable...He just created a negative vibe because you couldn't relax because you never knew, depending upon his changing, altered mood, what was coming down the pipeline and who it was going to be directed to...there was a fear base, and it was a very tense environment. (Jeannie, personal communication, April 12, 2012)

Barry described his atmosphere in the engineering firm, where he is a partner, as imperialistic.

People do things together but it's all employee-driven, and rather than being driven from the top down, [the partnership] generally views itself as elite and or kind of separate from the underlying employees...Every now and then we will have a potluck... none of [the partners] in the upper tier to the best of my knowledge has ever participated...I think the employees would be viewed as “the help.” (Personal communication, May 1, 2012)

Values and norms. As each interview participant shared his/her stories, the values and norms of their organizations became explicitly obvious. Based on their stories, the

researcher found that values and norms are inextricably related, and values can be revealed by employee behavior that the leadership chooses to reward, punish, or ignore.

The relationship between values and norms can best be demonstrated by a central focus on profits. When the generation of profits is the central focus, and leaders reward only profit generation while ignoring how those profits were generated, the relationship is obvious. Jennifer discussed how a district manager used intimidation, bullying, and micromanagement to generate profits. Under his leadership, managers self-terminated, and turnover rose substantially. He saved money by allowing the positions to remain vacant, which created an extra burden for lower-level employees. Although the organization's value was related to the ability to generate profits, the norm to generate those profits was micromanagement, bullying, and disrespect, which the leadership ignored. Since this manager's behavioral norm was to bully and micromanage, and he was able to use those tactics to add value, he expected the same behavior of his employees; therefore, disrespect became the norm and was related to the value of profit generation.

In James's case freedom of judgment, latitude for decision-making, and distance between levels of management were preferred values. Unfortunately, those values led to the normal behaviors of not communicating on a regular basis and other communication barriers that left higher-level managers out of touch with the challenging realities experienced by lower-level managers. The CEO was so out of touch with the progress of a politically-charged state-funded project that he was unaware of the problems until he heard media reports on the evening news. The communication gap also allowed the level 2 leader to work covertly in the background, blocking information that would have

alerted the CEO sooner. James stated that he was ill-prepared to manage such a large project and he felt unsupported, “a little bit like I got thrown off a bridge, and it was kind of like, ‘hope you can swim when you hit the water’” (personal communication, May 19, 2012)

Cristy discussed her situation in which the Executive Director valued loyalty and friendship over longevity and knowledgeable employees. His behavior was to work around or manipulate policies for selfish reasons. The resulting norms were employees who were afraid to speak up, and employees who avoided him for fear of seeming disloyal.

Doc reported that at his organization, a large state agency, loyalty to political allies was the value; the norm was excessive politicking and doing favors to get favors regardless of the impact on employees. At Frank’s organization, the value was strictly profit-driven, and the norm was disrespect and fear.

Alice’s firm valued high performance, while ignoring the normal behavior of disrespect, which is how her boss got the job done. Ellen’s organization valued cohesion; those who didn’t disagree or discuss controversial subjects were rewarded with extra-curricular grant activities and training, those who dissented were punished. Censorship and micromanagement was the norm to support the value of perceived cohesion. Carl stated that one manager valued relationships and longevity, so he protected a perpetrator of harassment.

Modeling. The concept of modeling suggests that the behavior of organizational members is guided by the behavior of leaders or other employees who serve as role models (Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006). The stories of both Francine and Jennifer provided a

demonstration of how values and norms are related to the concept of modeling. In Jennifer's case the value was on profits, while behavioral norms of toxic micromanaging, bullying, and intimidation were ignored. Since Jack, the regional manager, realized success through these tactics, he required his lower level managers to model his behavior.

[I]t trickled-down to the point where he expected his district managers to react as strongly as he did. He expected his district managers to react when there was a problem his reaction was to scream or to belittle someone in front of whoever happened to be there and he expected his managers to have a strong overreaction as he would when something went wrong. (Jennifer, personal communication, May 29, 2012)

Francine's story demonstrated how the paid time off policies were overshadowed by the organizational value of shortening a vacation or working while on vacation, and the behavioral norm was modeled by higher-level managers who also used punishment to discourage taking time off.

I earned PTO but I always felt like I was doing something wrong when I asked for time off. I felt like I shouldn't be asking for it, I felt like it was always going to be some questions. As a matter of fact, one of my co-workers would tell me that the regional manager would say "oh, so and so is on vacation *again!*" [T]he managers led by example, "you know I'll be out of the office for several days but I'll be checking my voice mail, I'll be checking my e-mail" so that would be covertly telling you "you need to check your voice mail and your e-mail while you're off."...I was on vacation in Tampa, Florida; I got e-mails and phone calls while I was on vacation asking me questions...the tension would just climb in my neck when I knew it was time to go back because I knew that something would happen that I would get blamed for just because I went on vacation. (Francine, personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Mission and vision statements. Surprisingly, all of the participants stated that their organizations either did not have, or they were unaware of, a mission or vision statement.

Effects on participants working in a toxic work environment. Each of the participants expressed a dedication to doing a good job and genuine concern for his/her

co-workers. Each expressed some level of depression, self-doubt, fear, anxiety, and even self-blame (see Table I5, Appendix I). Vanessa stated, “I feel like he is a disabler and [I feel] a sense of powerlessness and I definitely feel like it affects my self-confidence.”

(Personal communication, May 12, 2012)

It happened. I have gone through that. I have gone through that and the depression will set in and it’s like [I have to say to myself] “no, no, no, no, it is not all me, it can’t be all me, because I have kids come back and tell me and thanked me;” and when I hear that and it’s like no I don’t suck. But it does eat at you no matter how good of self-esteem you have, it eats at you. (Ellen, personal communication, May 7, 2012)

One of the attorneys that I work for now he sexually harasses people in the workplace, me and the other secretary, I ask myself [what do I do to] make him think that I am that type of woman, somebody that was not moral or didn’t have any type of integrity? (Kirsten, personal communication, May 20, 2012)

It has been, and continues to be a personal blow to my self-esteem. I question myself constantly because of that situation. It has taken a toll on my efficacy. I am not as effective as I can be, because I’m slower, because I don’t have confidence in myself that I had before, because I feel like I’m one screw up away from the same situation. So it is has had permanent and lasting impact on me and forever will be that way. You know, they say that which doesn’t kill you makes you stronger, but it’s really that which doesn’t kill you makes you weary. (Doc, personal communication, April 2, 2012)

Definitely, it hurt her feelings, it made her question herself all the time because he never thought she did anything right again, it was awful for her; and especially because she went from being the chosen one to nothing. He really damaged people that way. (Alice, personal communication, May 16, 2012)

I started questioning myself. Should I be in HR, is this the real HR and I haven’t been dealing with other HRs? I started questioning myself. I felt like I was never doing enough...I still worked, because all I’m thinking is “I’m messing up. I’m doing something wrong, it’s my fault, I’m not doing enough, I’m not organized.” That was my thought process. I still, I thought that they were being unreasonable with me, but I still thought that I could do it and prove them wrong. (Francine, personal communication, May 8, 2012)

I was really hurt. I started to doubt myself because I thought I used to be this really great legal Secretary. I mean, I worked for some tough litigators and some really big names and I got along with those guys. I mean, I started to doubt myself, I started to think that it was my fault, if I could just work a little bit

harder, if I could just come in a little bit earlier and stay later. I brought my kids in on the weekend to help me and they were little kids, you know, 7 and 9 years old and they knew what chronological order meant because I had to make them put the stuff in order to help me get my filing done. (Sam, personal communication, May 2, 2012)

[T]he most hurtful thing of my career was just that day when I realized that Dave had such disrespect for me that he would actually threaten to cut off my fingers, you know that was short of tongue in cheek, he would never do that but just even to say it, in front of everyone at a staff meeting...I was on anxiety medication during the time I worked there. (Frank, personal communication, April 10, 2012)

I had actually started going to counseling, not because I thought it was my fault, I thought that I had an anger problem. I thought that I was supposed to be able to handle this type of thing since I grew up in this type of environment [of racial hostility against Blacks]. I thought that I was supposed to be able to handle this type of problem. I thought that maybe I was having some anger issues because it would just make me angry every time something like this would happen and so I thought that it was on me [to be able to deal with it]. (Craig, personal communication, April 18, 2012)

It's terrible and when you step back and you look at it, you're like why did I subject myself to that, and you start questioning how you're thinking, and you feel a lot less...I started questioning my thinking...I would feel [anxiety] on Sunday, it was horrible. But what ultimately happened was I so wanted to quit this job because I saw that it was affecting me at home. I was starting to become depressed and I felt like it was affecting my family life and I was like, this is not healthy any more for me, I hate feeling this way. (Doc, personal communication, April 2, 2012)

Summary of Findings

The interview data covered each element within the Four Frame Model of structure, HRM, politics, and culture. Each frame is comprised of several elements that can cause toxicity for one or more person(s), an entire department, or an entire organization. These elements can work individually or collectively within a frame, and that dysfunction can affect other frames.

Research question 1. The first research question asked, what role, if any, does the Structural Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity? The

Structural Frame is comprised of five central elements that answer this question. These elements can operate in separately or in tandem to cause or perpetuate toxicity.

Hierarchy can create or perpetuate toxicity when:

- There is dysfunction within the top ranks, such as dysfunctional partnership relations, leaders who encourage dysfunction by ignoring bad behavior within their ranks, or leaders who serve as gatekeepers to bar pertinent information from reaching higher ranks.
- The organizational structure is too loose communication, creating barriers. Conversely micromanagement can be the result of hierarchies that are too narrowly structured.
- The link between a satellite location and headquarters is weakened due to distance, especially when that satellite location is allowed to operate outside of the organizational policy parameters.

Strategies and Goals can create or perpetuate toxicity when:

- They are so narrowly focused on profits that dysfunctional means for meeting the goals or strategies are ignored.
- The organization functions without any strategic plan or goals, with the understated or unspoken goal of just surviving or making a profit.
- When goals are based on strategies that are illegal or unethical.
- When strategies and goals are based on individual selfishness and covert politics.

Roles can create or perpetuate toxicity when:

- Employees are not supported by upper management, and when managers with the legitimate authority are precluded from leading.
- Roles are unclear and under-defined, or over-defined and restricted.
- Job descriptions fail to match the realities of the job.
- Employees are torn between competing or conflicting roles within the organization and in their personal lives outside of the organization.
- Workloads are uneven or performance expectations differ for employees with the same role (job title and description), an employee has too much work, or a job is beyond the employee's capabilities.

Policies, Rules, and Standards can create or perpetuate toxicity when:

- Existing policies are not enforced; policies are oppressive or out of touch with the realities of the job, or policies can be easily manipulated for selfish goals.
- Performance standards are unclear or unrealistic.
- Employees are too afraid to come forward even when there is a policy in place to protect them.

Technology can create or perpetuate toxicity when:

- E-mail, voicemail, or other technology allows for such a distance in communication that it reduces the social responsibility one would normally feel in a face-to-face interaction such as ignoring, avoiding, rudeness, or public shaming.
- It is used as a tool to micromanage and restrict or monitor the movements of employees.

Research question 2. The second research question asked, what role, if any, does the Human Resources Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity? In summary:

- The literature review and field data reveal that the way employees are managed and compensated have a direct effect on their sense of procedural and distributive justice, and ultimately on their level of organizational trust. When this trust is broken, coupled with the sense that there is no avenue for protection, employees can be emotionally injured.
- When the HRD is weak, ineffectual, or non-existent, employees are more likely to experience organizational toxicity.

Research question 3. Research question 3 asked, what role, if any, does the Political Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity? In summary:

- As indicated in Chapter IV, a pattern was revealed in which scarcity of resources emerges as an instigator, political maneuvering and or coalition building ensues, and position power is used as the final element that enables decisions, which may result in favoritism or other behaviors that create or perpetuate toxicity.
- Political behavior is highly contagious as others observe that game playing and politicking result in better rewards than following the policies or rules.

Research question 4. Research question 4 asked, what role, if any, does the Cultural Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity? In summary:

- The literature review and the field data support the notion that leaders are the most powerful determinant of organizational culture since they set the tone for

the organization by defining each of the elements within the Cultural Frame. Toxic and dysfunctional leader behavior has a trickledown effect on organizational members and the culture. As leaders set rewards based on what they value, employees strive to meet those values. Values thus influence norms of behavior as employees model the behaviors that breed perceived success.

Conclusion

Although the literature addressed the components individually, the interview data in Chapter IV began to show how one component could affect another. The conclusion of this study is that even though each of the components within the four frames can be examined separately, they are inextricably related. The way an organization is structurally designed affects the way people are managed, which ultimately affects their behavior as they maneuver within the political area of the organization; all three of these components culminate to form the organizational culture. Whether that culture, or work environment, is toxic or not depends chiefly on each of the components formed together as a whole and, most significantly, whether or not the leaders recognize the toxicity as a critical threat to organizational success and are thus willing to take the necessary steps to remedy the situation holistically.

Chapter V: Discussion

Organizational toxicity is a relatively new phenomenon about which little has been written, even though it is prevalent in many organizations throughout the United States. This researcher was inspired to study organizational toxicity from a holistic perspective after experiencing a toxic work environment herself. The researcher worked for a person who used bullying as a motivational technique to encourage superior performance. As the researcher reflected upon that experience, she became interested in how this person was allowed to behave in such a negative manner, since the organization espoused the value of respect in the workplace.

The researcher's curiosity grew because many of her friends and colleagues call upon her, as an HR professional, for advice and guidance on how they can best navigate through dysfunctional situations within their own work environments. The researcher's quest to understand toxicity, related to the organizational dynamic, was driven by a desire to first offer people suffering in a toxic work environment an understanding of their organizational realities so that they can make informed decisions about exiting the situation or develop strategies for managing themselves within the organization should they choose to stay. Second, the researcher wanted to provide specific, well-researched information to leaders about this phenomenon so they could develop strategies to move beyond blaming a person or persons to looking deeper into their organizational systems for the root causes of toxicity.

While information on leadership excellence and the bullying phenomenon is quite prevalent, there is limited information on the systemic causes of organizational toxicity generated through toxic behaviors. Generally, this lack of quality information renders the

burden of coping or resolution to the victims of negative behaviors. Simply stated, the most important factors related to the elimination of toxins in the work environment involve a clear understanding of organizational toxins, their effect on the organization as a whole, and an examination of the components that support or perpetuate toxicity. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to clearly define organizational toxicity, the toxic work environment, and to explore the systemic causes of toxicity through a holistic study employing Bolman and Deal's (2008) framework addressing each of the organizational components that comprise the total experience of an organization: the structure, HRM, political systems, and organizational culture.

The research on this topic led to a comprehensive literature review. Since few sources of academic literature address organizational toxicity or holistic examinations of organizational dysfunction, the researcher gathered literature that addressed one or more of the components. Next, the researcher conducted a field study by interviewing 15 working professionals from various backgrounds, industries, and organizational structures, all of whom stated that they had suffered emotional injury from their work environment.

A comparison of both the information from literature review and the field data collected from the interviews revealed a remarkable similarity, and these information sources served to compliment and validate one another. Although the literature review provided factual information, the interview process captured the lived experiences of the participants, thus providing a three-dimensional perspective of the phenomenon that could then be visually deciphered through the lenses of each of the four frames.

The interview participants provided vivid descriptions through which the researcher was able to enter the physical realities of their organizations, making palpable the toxic emotions and environments they experienced. The literature review provided the necessary foundational information that helped the researcher to separate meaning from the emotion of the stories provided by the participants, which then allowed for a straightforward application to the toxicity phenomenon. The four frame model served as lenses that provided clarity, allowing the researcher to focus on answering the research questions rather than becoming entangled in the emotion of the stories and the feelings of the participants. The research questions, based on Bolman and Deal's (2008) Four-Frame Model were as follows:

1. What role, if any, does the Structural Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?
2. What role, if any, does the Human Resources Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?
3. What role, if any, does the Political Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?
4. What role, if any, does the Cultural Frame play in creating or perpetuating organizational toxicity?

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study

This study did not take into account external influences on organizational toxicity such as economic or political influences on the organization. Several of the participants mentioned environmental factors; however, the scope of this study was limited to the

internal workings of the organization. There is certainly a need for further research to determine the effect of external influences on organizational components.

This study examined the organizational components individually; however, patterns of single incidents may lead to wider patterns that may explain how toxicity can spread throughout an organization. Future analysis may take into account how toxicity spreads by concentrating on secondary effects and outcomes that may be better determined through case studies.

This study focused on organizational components that contribute to toxicity within the working environment, leaving room for future studies to understand how individuals may contribute to situations of toxicity in their response to bullying and other dysfunctional behaviors.

Final Remarks

Frost (2007) contends that some measure of toxicity is a normal and unavoidable byproduct of organizational life; therefore, some measure of organizational pain is an inevitable part of doing business as the organization and its employees respond to changes, traumas, and crises within and outside of the organizational environment. Crowley and Elster (2006) support Frost's contention in their statement that the day-to-day reality of life working in any company is usually messy, complicated, political, and full of emotional traps.

The researcher's interest in studying this topic stems from a desire to help those who may be suffering in a toxic work environment. The researcher wanted to first acknowledge that organizational toxicity exists by providing a clear academic definition of the characteristics of a toxic workplace so that leaders and individuals

working within a toxic work environment can recognize and understand the full scope of the systems within their organization that may be creating or perpetuating behaviors that contribute to a toxic work environment.

There are two ways in which leaders, managers, and employees can empower themselves and their organizational members: first through recognition, and second, through self-management. These are the keys to surviving, or at least self-preservation, while working in a toxic organizational environment. Once an individual recognizes the full scope of the situation in which he/she is working, he/she will be empowered to make decisions on how to either manage the situation, if such management is within his/her power, or develop strategies to manage themselves until he/she can extricate him/herself from the situation or organization.

Recommendations for organizational members. Based on the research, the following recommendations are offered for those suffering in a toxic work environment.

1. The definition of a toxic environment is one in which people are emotionally injured (Frost, 2007). It is important to reflect on your emotional state in the workplace and to be able to recognize the symptoms of emotional injury.
2. Review the organizational components that are contributing to or allowing the toxic work environment so that you can recognize and understand the full scope of the toxic reality. Understanding your environment can help curb unrealistic or unreasonable expectations of yourself to fix larger organizational problems and prevents the self-blame and self-doubt that are typical reactions to workplace toxicity and precursors to stress-related illnesses (Boghosian, 2005). Understanding your environment can also

provide clarity to help prevent you from personalizing the situation or actions of others. It is important to understand your own actions and take responsibility; however, organizational toxicity stems from larger systemic problems.

3. Decide to be proactive rather than reactive to the environment or the toxic behaviors. Covey (1989) states that being proactive means working on the factors within your control. Once you fully understand the situation and the underlying systems supporting the toxicity, you can begin to develop remedies within your control, whether that means bringing the situation to the attention of a superior or making policy or other changes. Many people fall into the trap of reactive responses, such as focusing or dwelling on the weaknesses of other people and circumstances over which they have no control. Reactive responses only cause people to feel further victimized.
4. If there are no remedies within your control, then you must exercise self-management techniques, whether you decide to remain or work toward exiting the organization. Crowley and Elster (2006) suggest that people working in toxic work environments often feel trapped and unable to free themselves from the bad situation. These authors developed the term *hooked* to describe the experience of feeling caught in an emotionally distressing situation at work. Supporting Covey's (1989) suggestions on proactive self-management, Crowley and Elster state emphatically, "If you change your reaction, you will change your life" (p. 4). They offer four essential steps to *unhooking* from an emotional situation:

- a. *Unhook physically* by physically calming the body down to release negative energy. Physical reactions to emotionally upsetting and stressful situations are related to fight or flight instincts in which the person wants to strike back or run away, breathing becomes inhibited, and less oxygen reaches the brain, making it difficult to think clearly. The authors suggest healthy ways to physically release negative energy, such as breathing exercises, splashing water on your face, taking a 5-minute walk, or a rigorous workout. The goal is to release pent-up energy and quiet the nervous system so you can approach the problem with a sense of control. The authors encourage healthy ways of physically releasing negative energy and caution the natural instinct to disengage using unhealthy, potentially addictive, ways to relax, such as overindulging in food, sleep, alcohol, drugs, or television. Although these activities produce some measure of comfort, the results are temporary and often lead to other problems such as depression, anxiety, alcoholism, obesity, or ulcers.
- b. *Unhook emotionally*. This is the internal version of *talking yourself off the ledge*. The goal is to gain an objective view of the situation or the circumstances involved. This step involves asking yourself and providing thoughtful answers to the questions: what is happening; what are the facts in the situation; what is their part; what is my part; and what are my options? Asking and answering these questions helps

to clarify the situation, removes the instinct to blame, and encourages strategic thinking and problem solving.

- c. *Unhook verbally*, meaning finding the words, or even using silence, to protect yourself. It may mean finding well thought-out ways to say no or speaking up during or about a situation.
- d. *Unhook with a business tool*. Business tools help depersonalize challenging situations by providing objective ways to track events or measure the situation. A business tool could be anything from using your computer to document situations; using policies and procedure guidelines, memos, or e-mail; or preparing meeting agendas that will encourage staying on point for problem solving. Jack Boghosian (2005), a psychologist specializing in work stress, suggests acknowledging unpleasing feelings by keeping a written journal or an incident log. He states that the exercise of writing feelings and events and later reviewing it helps to organize your thoughts, meanings, and the situation. Ultimately, this practice can help you make sense of the experiences and makes them less chaotic and overwhelming.

Recommendations for leaders. The eradication of organizational toxicity begins with the level 1 leader who must first, be aware that there are problems; second, acknowledge the magnitude of the situation; and third, be willing to support change. When the necessity for change is realized by a level 2 leader, the challenge is even greater. They must gain buy-in from a level 1 leader for support. Level 2 leaders must first learn what is important to the level 1 leader. For example, if profits are the major

concern, the level 2 leader must show how toxicity is impeding progress and how the eradication of toxicity could lead to enhanced efficiency and higher profits. This study can serve as a guide for leaders to understand and recognize dysfunctions within organizational components that may create or perpetuate a toxic work environment. There are four steps that leaders can take to eradicate toxicity: scanning the organizational environment, conducting a four-frame analysis, developing and implementing a change strategy, and following up by monitoring the organizational environment scan.

Scan the organizational environment. “To act without creating more trouble [leaders] must first grasp an accurate picture of what is happening. Then they must quickly move to a deeper level, asking ‘what is *really* going on here?’” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 38). Scanning the organizational environment means learning about the current organizational reality which will reveal how systems are currently operating within the organization, how they are supposed to operate, and provide a glimpse of how systems should be operating in order to promote a healthy work environment. The best way to learn about the environment is to participate in front line processes and talk to organizational members about their challenges. Organizational members experience the environment every day; therefore they have intimate knowledge of what is working and what is not working. This information can later be transformed into data for holistic analysis (Goleman, et al., 2002).

In a toxic work environment, organizational members at all levels may be hesitant to speak up since trust is often damaged (Pfeffer, 2007). The leader must prepare the environment for open dialog by publicly acknowledging that there may be dysfunctions

within the organizational systems and that the company is seeking their input to assist with the development of positive change. Trust may slowly develop as organizational members realize their input, negative or positive, will be used to promote positive change and that their exchange of information and ideas will be free from punitive consequences (Goleman et al., 2002).

Conduct a four-frame analysis. After conducting a system-wide data collection, the leader can process that data through Bolman & Deal's Four-Frame Model using this study as a guide. As dysfunctions within structure, human resources management, political systems, and culture emerge, the leader can begin to consider new best practices to promote a healthy environment. This process also involves the hard work of investigating and understanding the role of leadership in creating to perpetuating the toxic situation.

An investigation into the role of leadership must include all leaders, with special emphasis on the level 1 leader who sets the tone for the organization. Goleman et al., (2002) contend that a leader's primal challenge is self-management, which flows from self-awareness. This means the leader must work to understand his/her own emotions and be clear about his/her purposes and values. This clarity and understanding can provide the focused drive that all leaders need to achieve their goals.

Implement a change strategy. One of the earliest models of planned change was provided by Kurt Lewin (as cited in Cummings & Worley, 2008) who viewed the actual change process as three steps: *unfreezing*, which entails introducing information to motivate members to change; *moving*, meaning intervening in the system to develop new behaviors, values, and attitudes through changes in the organizational structure and

processes; and finally, *refreezing*, which means establishing supportive systems that reinforce the new organizational culture, such as reward systems.

While Lewin's model provides a general framework, John P. Kotter's eight step model (as cited in Burnes, 2004; Cohen, 2005) provides a process for implementation.

1. *Unfreezing*, can be accomplished by:
 - a. Creating a sense of urgency;
 - b. Building guiding teams to work on, support, and promote the change; promoting a shared vision of the future; and
 - c. Communicating during the process to encourage buy-in.
2. *Moving* can be accomplished by:
 - a. Empowering organizational members through participation;
 - b. Creating short-term wins by celebrating milestones; and
 - c. Constantly monitoring the progress toward positive change.
3. *Refreezing* in this sense means:
 - a. Reinforcing the changes by rewarding behaviors that exemplify the new values;
 - b. Transform desired behaviors into day-to-day rituals that become permanent.

Monitor the organizational environment. Ensuring a healthy work environment is a continuous process of inquiry and analysis. Organizational leaders must periodically check the emotional pulse of the organization to

uncover [the] organization's emotional reality – what people care about; what is helping them, their groups, and the organization to succeed; and what's getting in the way.... While this may stick some leaders as a bit removed from the business issues, it is only when people talk about their feelings that they begin to uncover

root causes of problems in the [systems]...when people have authentic conversations about how they feel about their organization, there tends to be a very high level of agreement about what's working and what's not...They create a language that captures the real truth about the forces that affect people's day-to-day lives in the organization as well as their hopes for the future. (Goleman, et al., 2002, pp. 198-199)

Leaders must inspire a work environment where people are unafraid to voice their concerns about the organization; and those concerns must be used as data to be synthesized through a holistic analysis.

Recommendation for HR professionals. As documented in both the literature review and field data, the door to organizational toxicity opens when the HRD fails, is slow to act, or the HRD is weak and ineffectual. Traditionally HR practitioners served dual roles as the employee advocate and compliance officer. HR's new role calls for a more strategic presence that often gives bottom line results greater prominence over employee concerns (Pfeffer, 2007). It is possible for HR professionals to contribute as legitimate strategic partners as well as well as employee advocates; however four key objectives must be met. HR professionals must:

1. Adopt holistic perspective. Holistic thinking is vital for HR professionals to become a legitimate strategic partner. HR leaders must be able to view their organizations from a holistic perspective by recognizing that each of the components within the four frames is interconnected. They must understand the way the elements function within each component so that when employees or managers approach them with complaints they can use it as data to be synthesized to search out systemic causes, rather than simply a problem to be handled.

2. Learn to speak the language of the CEO. HR professionals must speak the language of leadership by being able to illustrate the relationship between respectful engagement in the work environment and organizational profitability.
3. Build relationships with organizational members of all levels to learn the challenges of each department and to participate in environmental scanning activities.
4. Participate in continuous learning activities concentrating on leadership practices so that they can effectively coach managers and leaders. Join professional HR associations to maintain current knowledge of best practices in HR to enhance their knowledge of the profession as well as to increase the knowledge and skill of lower level HR staff. It is also crucial that they learn the basic functions of other departments such as finance, marketing, and production so that they can speak the language of the leaders and employees managing those departments.

In conclusion, this study has shown that organizational toxicity is a real phenomenon and every organization, regardless of size, industry, or structure is susceptible to toxins. This study has also shown that the best way to eradicate toxins in the workplace is to move away from blaming an individual or individuals and toward understand the organizational components that create or perpetuate toxicity. Therefore, it is clear that leaders, human resources professionals, and employees must be aware of the systemic causes of organizational toxicity so that they can effectively manage themselves and the situations under their control.

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APPENDIX A

Participant Recruitment/Selection Plan

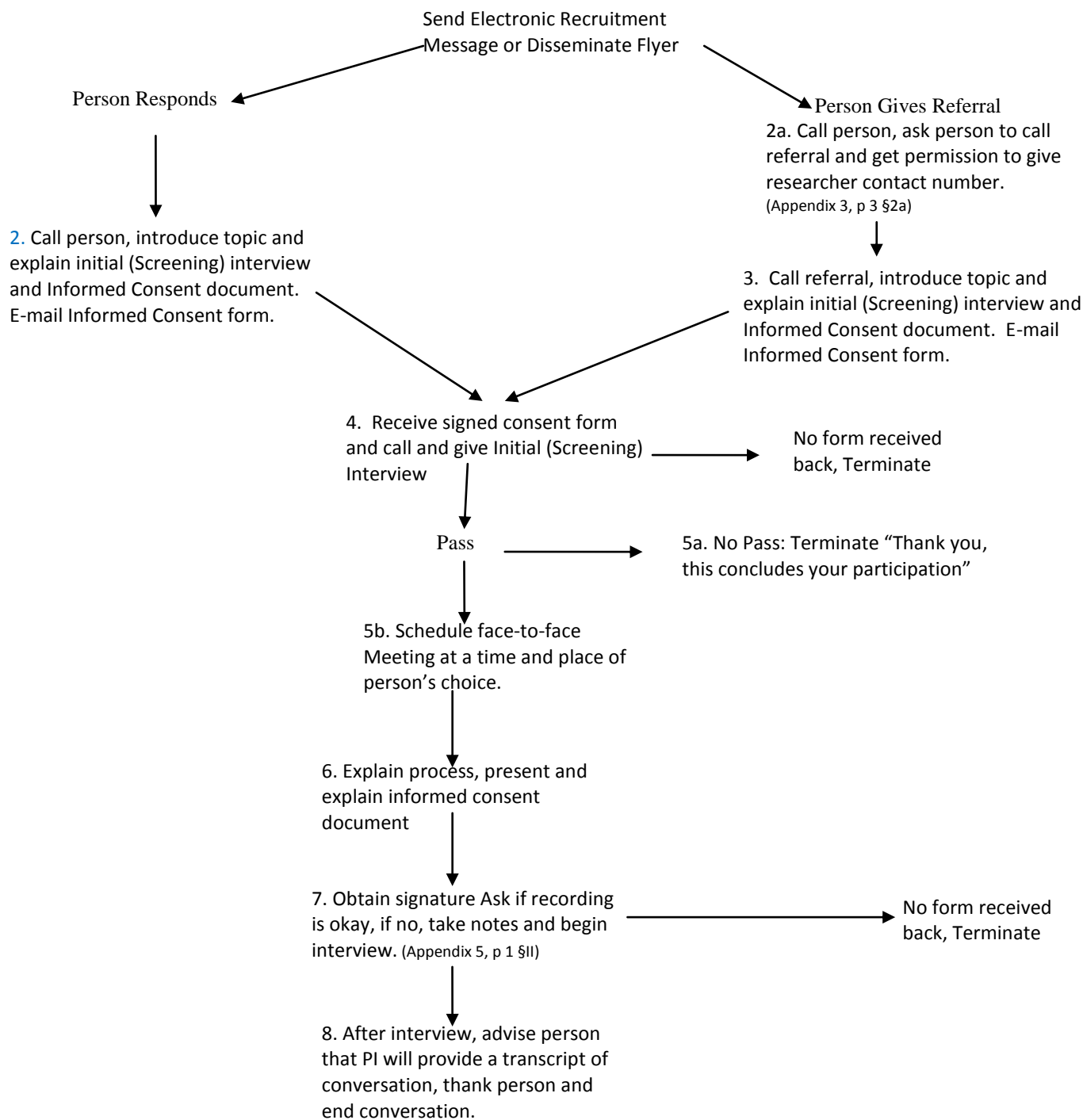


Figure A1. Participant recruitment/selection/interview process.

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Communication Scripts

1. Initial Communication: Verbiage for E-Mail and Flyer to Potential Participants

Dear Potential Participant:

I am a candidate for the degree of Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership from Pepperdine University. As part of the completion of my program I am conducting research on toxic work environments. Specifically, this study seeks to examine the organizational components that lead to a toxic work environment. A toxic work environment is one in which employees suffer emotional pain from certain toxins such as a toxic leader, toxic boss, bullying, backstabbing, gossip, blaming, sexual or other harassment, favoritism, discrimination, turf wars, excessive politics, verbal abuse, incivility, or physical violence. I would like to ask your help in seeking out individuals who have witnessed or directly experienced a toxic work environment. If you or someone you know has experienced a toxic workplace, and would be willing to participate in this research study, please contact me by e-mail or call me and indicate your telephone number and e-mail address. The study will be conducted by me, Deirdre Carlock, under the direction of Dr. Ronald Stephens, professor of Education and Organizational Leadership at Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education.

Participation in this study will involve taking part in a brief telephone screening interview that will last no more than 20 minutes. The purpose of the screening interview will be to examine each participant's work experience relative to the study criteria. The telephone conversation will not be recorded and answers provided in the screening will not be part of the final study. Those who meet the criteria will participate in a face-to-face interview that should last no more than 2 hours. This interview will be recorded unless the Participant prefers not to be recorded, in which case I will take notes.

Participation in all parts of the study process is completely voluntary. All participants are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with me or Pepperdine University. Information provided by study participants will be held in the strictest of confidence. Personal names, names of organizations, and employees will be changed to protect the anonymity of all study participants. This will be a published study, and a copy of the study results will be made available to study participants.

Sincerely,

Deirdre Carlock, MAOM, SPHR
Doctoral Student, Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

2. Script to Those Who Respond To Initial Recruitment (via telephone)

Hello [Name]

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the study. As you may know, my name is Deirdre Carlock and I am a candidate for the degree of Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership from Pepperdine University and this study is part of the completion of the degree requirements. The study is being conducted under the direction of Dr. Ronald Stephens, professor of Education and Organizational Leadership at Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education. Participation in all parts of the study process is completely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with me or Pepperdine University. Information you provide will be held in the strictest of confidence. Your name, names of any organizations, and employees will be changed in the study to protect your anonymity.

Introduction of Topic

The study seeks to examine the organizational toxicity caused by certain toxic work behaviors such as bullying, backstabbing, gossip, blaming, sexual or other harassment, favoritism, discrimination, turf wars, excessive politics, verbal abuse, incivility, or physical violence and the organizational components that lead to a toxic work environment. The purpose of this study is to clearly define the toxic work environment and to unearth the root causes toxicity by taking a systematic approach to examining the phenomenon from a holistic perspective using Bolman & Deal's Four Frame Model addressing organizational structure, human resources, politics, and organizational culture to determine the role of each component in the composition of a toxic work environment.

Understanding the nature of organizational toxicity, as well as the organizational characteristics and systems that support and perpetuate workplace toxins can provide a clearer view of how leaders can build strategies for dealing with or preventing toxic work environments. This work is intended to increase the awareness of leaders, employees, and students on the prevalence and components of a toxic work environment. The expectation is that the results of this analysis will provide tools for the early and accurate identification of precursors to organizational toxicity that will lead to better methods of prevention. Dealing with the root causes, as opposed to the symptoms of toxicity, may break the unfortunate cycle of harm.

Do you have any questions?

As part of the study, I am attempting to recruit between 10 and 20 people who believe they have witnessed or been the victim of workplace toxicity. Individuals who volunteer to participate in the study must meet certain criteria dictated by the nature of the study; therefore I would like to ask you a few brief questions about your work experience. The purpose of the initial interview will be to examine each participant's

work experience relative to the study criteria. Based on your responses, there is a chance that you may not ultimately be selected to participate in the final study, please understand that this is not a judgment on or about you, but rather a reflection of the criteria and number of participants required for the study. This initial interview will take place over the telephone and should not take longer than 20 minutes, will not be recorded, and your answers to the initial questions will not be part of the final study.

Before we begin, I will need to e-mail you an Informed Consent document that will further explain the research and your rights as a participant. Once you have signed this document, please fax it to me or e-mail it. Once I receive the document back, I will call you to ask the screening questions

2a. Script to Those Who Respond with a Referral

Hello [Name]

Thank you for your interest in my research project. Can you please contact the person you are referring and ask if you can provide me with their telephone number and the best time for me to contact them? Thank so much for your support.

3.Script to Those Who Are Referrals (via telephone)

Hello [Name]

My name is Deirdre Carlock, I was given your name by [*referring person*] who mentioned that you may be willing to participate in my study on toxic work environments. As [*referring person*] may have mentioned to you, I am a candidate for the degree of Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership from Pepperdine University and this study is part of the completion of the degree requirements. The study is being conducted under the direction of Dr. Ronald Stephens, professor of Education and Organizational Leadership. Participation in all parts of the study process is completely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with me or Pepperdine University. Information you provide will be held in the strictest of confidence. Your name, names of any organizations, and employees will be changed in the study to protect your anonymity.

Introduction of Topic

The study seeks to examine the organizational toxicity caused by certain toxic work behaviors such as bullying, backstabbing, gossip, blaming, sexual or other harassment, favoritism, discrimination, turf wars, excessive politics, verbal abuse, incivility, or physical violence and the organizational components that lead to a toxic work environment. The purpose of this study is to clearly define the toxic work environment and to unearth the root causes toxicity by taking a systematic approach to examining the phenomenon from a holistic perspective using Bolman & Deal's Four

Frame Model addressing organizational structure, human resources, politics, and organizational culture to determine the role of each component in the composition of a toxic work environment.

Understanding the nature of organizational toxicity, as well as the organizational characteristics and systems that support and perpetuate workplace toxins can provide a clearer view of how leaders can build strategies for dealing with or preventing toxic work environments. This work is intended to increase the awareness of leaders, employees, and students on the prevalence and components of a toxic work environment. The expectation is that the results of this analysis will provide tools for the early and accurate identification of precursors to organizational toxicity that will lead to better methods of prevention. Dealing with the root causes, as opposed to the symptoms of toxicity, may break the unfortunate cycle of harm.

Do you have any questions?

I am attempting to recruit between 10 and 20 people who believe they have witnessed or been the victim of workplace toxicity. In the process of recruiting participants, certain criteria must be met. Individuals who volunteer to participate in the study must meet certain criteria dictated by the nature of the study; therefore I would like to ask you a few brief questions about your work experience. The purpose of this initial interview will be to examine each participant's work experience relative to the study criteria. Based on your responses, there is a chance that you may not ultimately be selected to participate in the final study. Please understand that this is not a judgment on or about you, but rather a reflection of the criteria and number of participants required for the study. This initial telephone conversation should not take longer than 20 minutes, will not be recorded, and your answers to the initial questions will not be part of the final study. Those who meet the criteria will participate in a face-to-face interview that should last no more than 2 hours. This interview will be recorded unless the Participant prefers not to be recorded, in which case I will take notes.

Before we begin, I will need to e-mail to you an Informed Consent document that will further explain the research and your rights as a participant. Once you have signed this document, please fax it to me or e-mail it. Once I receive the document back, I will call you to ask the brief screening questions.

4.Script to Those Who Return Inform Consent Document and are Taking the Screening Questions (via telephone)

Hello [Name]

This is Deirdre Carlock, the student from Pepperdine University conducting the study on toxic work environments. Thank you for returning the Informed Consent Document. As I mentioned earlier, this research is to study the organizational antecedents to workplace toxicity caused by toxic work behaviors such as bullying, backstabbing, gossip, blaming, sexual or other harassment, favoritism, discrimination, turf wars, excessive politics, verbal abuse, incivility, or physical violence.

The purpose of the screening interview will be to examine each participant's work experience relative to the study criteria. As mentioned earlier, there is a chance that you may not be ultimately selected to participate in the final study, please understand that this is not a judgment on or about you, but rather a reflection of the criteria and number of participants required for the study. The telephone conversation will not be recorded and answers provided in the screening will not be part of the final study. This part of the process will only take 20 minutes or less, is this a good time to ask the screening questions? *[if participant says yes Researcher will ask screening questions. If participant says no—Researcher will ask for a better time, and call back repeating this script.]*

5a. Script to Potential Participants Who Fail Screening (via telephone)

Thank for your help. As I mentioned earlier, there was a chance that you may not ultimately be selected to participate in the final study. Based upon your responses, no further information will be required of you. Please be assured that this is not a judgment on or about you, but rather a reflection of the study criteria and number of participants required for the study. If you would still be interested in the result of the study, I will be happy to mail them to you upon completion. Thank you again for your interest and your support.

5b. Script to Participants Who Pass Screening (via telephone)

Thank for your help. Would you be willing to meet with me to talk further about your experiences? Our conversation will take about an hour to an hour and a half. Our conversation will be recorded, however if you would prefer not to be recorded, I can take notes instead. You will be afforded the opportunity to review, and make edits to, the transcript of our conversation prior to incorporation into the study. At the time of our meeting, I will present you with an Informed Consent document that will further explain the research and your rights as a participant. I can assure you that I will maintain your confidentiality throughout this study. If you are interested in the results, I will mail them to you upon completion. We will need a quiet, comfortable, yet confidential place to meet. Do you have any preference? If you do not have a preference I can make arrangements for a meeting room. When are you available to meet? I will meet you on _____ 2012, at _____ a.m/p.m, at _____ location. Thank you again for your support.

APPENDIX C

Study Screening Questions

1. How long have you been with the organization? (Rationale for the question: *Determine if the person has been with the organization long enough to be exposed and affected by workplace toxicity. For the purpose of this analysis, qualifying subjects must have spent 1 year or more at an organization.*)[Sample response that may lead to exclusion: *I have been with my organization for less than one year.*]
2. How many jobs have you had within the past 10 years and were the job changes for a promotional position or the same type of position? (Rationale for the question: *5 non-promotional job changes within the past 10 years or frequently changing employers may be an indication of problems that are not related to organizational toxicity.*) [Sample response that would lead to exclusion: *I have had 5 jobs within the past 10 years and each job change was to a similar position.*]
3. Have you ever felt that your supervisor mistrusted you because you could do a better job or were smarter? (Rationale for the question: *A pattern of superiority could signal potential for toxicity in the participant's behavior.*) [Sample response that would lead to exclusion: *Yes. I always seem to work for people who are not as smart as I am.*]
4. Do you believe that the best way to advance is to crush the competition? (Rationale for the question: *Attitudes of hyper-competitiveness may be a sign of potential toxicity in the participant's behavior.*) [Sample response that would lead to exclusion: *Yes. I see the workplace as a competitive and you have to beat the competition.*]
5. In general, do you believe your employer owes you a decent living? (Rationale for the question: *Sense of entitlement may be an indicator of problems that are not related to organizational toxicity.*) [Sample response that may lead to exclusion: *Yes, I should get raises because I work hard and the cost of living increases.*]
6. Do you believe that acts of incivility against a coworker are sometimes justified? (Rationale for the question: *This question may indicate a propensity toward incivility within the participant.*) [Sample response that would lead to exclusion: *Yes, sometimes you have to get them before they get you.*]

7. Do you prefer working alone or in teams? (Rationale for the question: *This question is geared to determine if the person is a lone wolf, or team player.*)
[Sample response that may lead to exclusion: *I like working alone.*]
8. I tend to get along well with people at work? (Rationale for the question: *This question is geared to determine if the person is a lone wolf, or team player.*)
[Sample response that may lead to exclusion: *I like to keep to myself.*]
9. Over the years I have many relationships that have lasted longer than the job? (Rationale for the question: *This question is geared to determine if the person has been able to develop relationships.*) [Sample response that may lead to exclusion: *No. Work people are not my friends they are just people at the same job.*]
10. What is generally your role when you have had to work in a team setting? (Rationale for the question: *This question is geared to determine how the person interacts within a team setting.*) [Sample response that may lead to exclusion: *I always need to be the leader because I am always better at giving directions than following them.*]
11. Thinking of your last or last two employers:
- How likely were/are you to participate in after hour job sponsored-activities? [Sample response that may lead to exclusion: *I don't workplace people are not my friends.*]
 - How likely were/are you to discuss your job (positive or negative) with non-co-workers? [Sample response that may lead to exclusion: *I tell them how bad the place is.]*
 - How often did/do you volunteer to work on projects or accept overtime work? [Sample response that may lead to exclusion: *I hate working overtime so I don't.*]
- (Rationale for the question: *Questions geared to determine any level of, or propensity toward, corporate engagement.*)
12. Do you agree that:
- Things tend to happen to you at work, either positive or negative; or
 - You make things happen at work for yourself, either positive or negative
[Sample response that may lead to exclusion: *Something's always happening to me at work because most bosses don't like me.*]
(Rationale: *This question is geared to determine the degree to which the person takes responsibility for themselves.*)

APPENDIX D

Screening Participation Informed Consent Form

The following information is presented to you, the participant; to help you understand the process, your rights, and to help you decide if wish to participate in the screening process of the research project described below.

1. This research project is conducted in completion of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership at Pepperdine University. The study will be conducted by the student researcher, Deirdre Carlock, under the director of Dr. Ronald Stephens, professor of Education and Organizational Leadership at Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education.
2. The topic of this study is organizational toxicity and the toxic work environment. The toxic work environment is one in which employees suffer emotional pain due to such toxins as bullying, backstabbing, gossip, blaming, sexual or other harassment, favoritism, discrimination, turf wars, excessive politics, verbal abuse, incivility, or physical violence.
3. The purpose of our conversation is to learn about your experience as it relates to the research project. The research project will be a benefit because it will allow you, the researcher, and ultimately society at large, to gain a better understanding of organizational toxicity phenomenon and the organizational components that lead to a toxic work environment. Your participation in this screening may not be of benefit to you as the researcher is seeking individuals that meet particular criteria. If you are selected to participate, the study process may benefit you in that you will have to opportunity to tell your story to an interested party which may provide you with a sense of comfort and release. If the research is later accepted for publication, upon your request, the researcher will present you with a copy of the final document.
4. For the purposes of the screening process, our conversation will not be recorded however the researcher will take brief notes. You are free to decide not to participate, or to withdraw, at any time without affective your relationship with the researcher or Pepperdine University. You may ask the researcher to stop or resume at any point in the conversation. If you so choose, you will receive a copy of any notes taken during the conversation.
5. Your name and position, and the names of your colleagues, associates, bosses, subordinates, or peers will be changed to protect your identity. The researcher will maintain the notes in a locked cabinet for confidentiality for a period of 5 years, after which the materials will be destroyed.
6. Your participation will entail a telephone conversation with the researcher. The duration of your participation in will be no more than 20 minutes. There is a minimal risk that you may feel discomfort, sadness, frustration, or anxiety as your recall incidents in your work situation. The researcher will be sensitive to your need to pause, or stop the process should you deem it necessary.

Screening Participation Informed Consent Form (Cont.)

Consent

7. I understand that I am voluntarily participating in a research project on organizational toxicity and the toxic work environment. _____.
8. I understand that the conversation between the researcher and me will not be tape recorded, however the researcher will take notes. _____
9. I understand that I may stop and ask questions at any time and that I have the right to refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without any prejudice or penalty. I also understand that the researcher may find it necessary to end my participation in the study. _____
10. I understand that my name and position, and the names of individuals discussed in the interview process will be changed for confidentiality. _____
11. I understand that if the findings of the study are published no personally identifying information will be released. _____
12. I understand that the data gathered will be stored in locked file cabinets to which only the researcher will have access. The data will be maintained in a secure manner for five years for research purposes. After the completion of the study, the data will be destroyed. _____
13. I understand that during and after the process the researcher is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research, the process, or my participation, and that I may contact the faculty supervisor, Ronald Stephens at Pepperdine University or Pepperdine University Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GSP IRB), if I have questions about my rights as a research participant. _____
14. I understand that no monetary incentives or payments will be provided for participation in this research project. _____
15. I understand that, after I participate in the screening, that I may not ultimately be selected to participate in the final study, and that this is not a judgment on or about me, but rather a reflection of the criteria and number of participants required for the study.

I agree that I am over 18 years of age and that I have read and fully understand the information provided above and I hereby give my consent to voluntarily participate in the discussion on my experiences in the work environment.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Deirdre Carlock

Printed Name of
Researcher/Investigator

Signature

Date

APPENDIX E

Informed Consent Form

The following information is presented to you, the participant; to help you understand the process, your rights, and to help you decide if wish to participate in the research project described below.

1. This research project is conducted in completion of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership at Pepperdine University. The study will be conducted by the student researcher, Deirdre Carlock, under the director of Dr. Ronald Stephens, professor of Education and Organizational Leadership at Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education.
2. The topic of this study is organizational toxicity and the toxic work environment. The toxic work environment is one in which employees suffer emotional pain due to such toxins as bullying, backstabbing, gossip, blaming, sexual or other harassment, favoritism, discrimination, turf wars, excessive politics, verbal abuse, incivility, or physical violence.
3. The purpose of our conversation is to learn about your experience in the workplace that you believe caused you or those you have witnessed emotional pain. This research will be a benefit because it will allow you, the researcher, and ultimately society at large, to gain a better understanding of organizational toxicity phenomenon and the organizational components that lead to a toxic work environment. Your participation may benefit you in that you will have to opportunity to tell your story to an interested party which may provide you with a sense of comfort and release. If the research is later accepted for publication, upon your request, I will present you with a copy of the final document.
4. Our conversations will be recorded via audio tape and transcribed verbatim. If you prefer not to be tape recorded, the researcher will take notes of the conversation. Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate, or to withdraw, at any time without affective your relationship with the researcher or Pepperdine University. You may ask the researcher to stop or resume recording at any point in the conversation. You will receive a copy of the transcribed document for review. Once you approve of the document, this information will be incorporated into the study.
5. Your name and position, and the names of your colleagues, associates, bosses, subordinates, or peers will be changed to protect your anonymity. The researcher will maintain the tapes, notes, and verbatim transcripts in a locked cabinet for confidentiality for a period of 5 years, after which the materials will be destroyed.
6. Your participation will entail sitting in a one-on-one conversational interview with the researcher. The duration of your participation in this study will be no more than two hours and take place at a location of your choosing or at a local university or community college conference room. There is a minimal risk that you may feel discomfort, sadness, frustration, or anxiety as your recall incidents in your work situation. The researcher will be sensitive to your need to pause, or stop the process should you deem it necessary.

Informed Consent Form (Cont.)

7. I understand that I am voluntarily participating in a research project on organizational toxicity and the toxic work environment. _____.
8. I understand that the conversation between the researcher and me will be tape recorded and I have the right to request note taking in place of tape recording. _____
9. I understand that the tape recording or notes will be transcribed verbatim into a written document and that I can edit, strike, or add information before the transcript is incorporated into the research. _____
10. I understand that I may stop and ask questions at any time and that I have the right to refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without any prejudice or penalty. I also understand that the researcher may find it necessary to end my participation in the study. _____
11. I understand that my name and position, and the names of individuals discussed in the interview process will be changed for anonymity. _____
12. I understand that if the findings of the study are published no personally identifying information will be released. _____
13. I understand that the data gathered will be stored in locked file cabinets to which only the researcher will have access. The data will be maintained in a secure manner for five years for research purposes. After the completion of the study, the data will be destroyed. _____
14. I understand that during and after the process the researcher is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research, the process, or my participation, and that I may contact the faculty supervisor, Ronald Stephens at Pepperdine University or Pepperdine University Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GSP IRB), if I have questions about my rights as a research participant.
15. I understand that no monetary incentives or payments will be provided for participation in this research project. _____

I agree that I am over 18 years of age and that I have read and fully understand the information provided above and I hereby give my consent to voluntarily participate in the discussion on my experiences in the work environment.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Deirdre Carlock

Printed Name of
Researcher/Investigator

Signature

Date

APPENDIX F

Structure of Interview and Study Instruments

PART I

Introduction and Purpose of Study:

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today to discuss your work experience. As you will recall, the research project is about toxic work environments. My goal in this study is to understand how certain toxic behaviors are created or perpetuated in organizations. Through your story and those of others I will be able to analyze the organizational components that lead to a toxic work environment. Is this location comfortable for you?

The purpose of the interview is to gather general and specific information about your work environment and the situation in which you suffered emotional pain. I will record your comments. If you prefer not to be tape recorded I will take notes instead. I will then transcribe the notes or recording verbatim, and provide you with a transcript. I will present the transcript to you so that you will be able to delete, change or add anything you feel is pertinent. Your name, your organization's name, the names of any colleagues, peers, or bosses will be changed in the written document of this study to protect your confidentiality. In appreciation for your participation, I will share with you a copy of the final work with you.

PART II

Discussion of Participant Rights and Presentation of Informed Consent Document:

Before we begin I would like to discuss with you your rights as a participant in this study project. Your participation is strictly voluntary; you may stop and any time, pause, or cease participation at any time throughout the interview process and after the interview process. This document is an Informed Consent Form that will explain your rights as a participant in this research project. Do you have any questions? If you fully understand, please sign next to your name.

PART III

Begin Interviews

Standard General Information Questions:

Tell me about yourself.

Tell me about the organization.

In what industry does this particular organization operate?

Tell me about your job and what you do?

What is your boss's job and to whom does your boss report?

Structure and Interview Instruments (Cont.)

In-depth Questions:

Give me a tour of your organization, what would I see?

Walk me through your organization, what is the atmosphere like?

As we walk through your organization what is the general attitude of your co-workers, peers, and bosses?

Tell me about your work situation.

How did you feel working there?

Can you tell me about a specific workplace incident that you considered particularly painful?

How did you go about addressing the problem?

Did you feel that there were policies and procedures in place to help you with your problem?

How did this situation affect you?

Was the situation resolved, if so how and by whom?

Other questions as indicated by the following typologies may be employed for clarity or deeper understanding such as:

Table E1

Kvale's Types of Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Type	Examples
Introductory Questions	Can you tell me about? Do you remember an occasion when? What happened in the episode you mentioned? Could you describe in as much detail as possible a situation...?
Follow-up Questions	Used to extend the subject's answers through direct questions of what the respondent has just said, or a nod indicating that the respondent continue.
Probing Questions	Could you say something more about that? Do you have further examples of this Can you give a more detailed description of what happened?
Specifying Questions	Used to get more precise descriptions Have you experienced this yourself? What did you think when...? What did you actually do when you felt...?
Direct Questions	Used to directly introduce topics and dimensions, should be used after the subject has given his/her own spontaneous description Have you ever received money for good grades? When you mention competition, do you then think of
Indirect Questions	Projective questions wherein answers refer to the attitudes of others or may be an indirect statement of the subject's own attitude How do you believe other pupils regard the competition for grades?

(table continues)

Type	Examples
Structuring Questions	Used when a theme has been exhausted, the interviewer politely breaks off long answers that are irrelevant by saying: I would now like to introduce another topic...
Silence	The interviewer employs silence to further the interview or pauses in the conversation so that the subjects have time to associate and reflect and then break the silence themselves with pertinent information.
Interpreting Questions	Rephrasing an answer, or other attempts at clarification You then mean that...? Is it correct that you feel...? Does the expression... cover what you have just expressed?

Note. Adapted from *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. (pp. 133-135) by S. Kvale, 1996. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Copyright 1996 by Sage. Adapted with permission.

Table E2

Patton's Interviewing Questions Typology

Type	Examples
Behavior/Experience	Questions that elicit what would have been observable: If I followed you through a typical day at your organization, what would I see? What experiences would I observe you having?
Opinions/Values	Questions aimed at understanding the cognitive and interpretive processes of people What do you believe? What do you think about...? What is your opinion of?
Feeling Questions	Questions that aim at eliciting emotions (happy, anxious, confident, etc.) How do you feel about that?
Knowledge Questions	Inquiring about factual information – what the respondent knows for certain
Sensory Questions	What is seen, tasted, touched, and smelled. Responses allow the interviewer into the sensory apparatus of the respondent. When you walk through the doors of the organization, what do you see? Tell me what I would see if I walked through the doors with you?
Background/ Demographic	Standard background questions that may help the interviewer locate the respondent in relation to other people.

Note. Adapted from *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (34th ed., pp. 349-351) by M. Q. Patton, 2002. Thousand Oaks, CA: Copyright 2002 by Sage. Adapted with permission.

Structure and Interview Instruments (Cont.)

Four Frames Interview Guide

Inquire into issues related to structure?

- _ Hierarchies
- _ Strategies
- _ Goals
- _ Roles
- _ Policies
- _ Technology

Inquire into issues related to human resources?

- _ Organizational trust
- _ Compensation and reward systems
- _ HRM

Inquire into issues related to the political frame?

- _ Scarcity of Resources
- _ Feelings for fairness and justice

Inquire into issues related to the cultural frame?

- _ Values and Norms
- _ Modeling
- _ Leadership

PART IV

Ending the Interview

Thank you very much for participating in this process. The next step in the process is that I will transcribe our conversation and provide you with a transcript. I will deliver the transcript, mail it, or e-mail it to you depending upon how you wish to receive it. At that time, you will have an opportunity to edit, comment, or correct it. All information will be held in the strictest of confidence, and names will be changed to protect your anonymity. I will keep the transcript and tapes in a locked file cabinet in my home for a period of 5 years, after which the materials will be destroyed. Do you have any questions, or any other comments regarding the process or our discussion of your work environment?

Again thank you for your participation.

PART V

Departure

APPENDIX G

Coding Plan

Table G1

Coding Plan

Code	Theme	Description
1.	Situation – Type of Toxin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political Deviance • Personal Aggression • Leader Toxicity
2.	Structural Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hierarchies • Strategies • Goals • Roles • Policies • Technology
3.	Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational trust • Compensation and reward systems • HRM
4.	Political Frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scarcity of Resources • Feelings of fairness and Justice
5.	Cultural Frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values and Norms • Modeling • Leadership

APPENDIX H

Internal Review Board Approval

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

March 27, 2012

Deirdre Carlock

Protocol #: E1111D13
Project Title: *Organizational Toxicity*

Dear Ms. Carlock:

Thank you for submitting your revised IRB application, *Organizational Toxicity*, to Pepperdine's Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB). The IRB has reviewed your revised submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. As the nature of the research met the requirements for expedited review under provision Title 45 CFR 46.110 (research category 7) of the federal Protection of Human Subjects Act, the IRB conducted a formal, but expedited, review of your application materials.

I am pleased to inform you that your application for your study was granted **Full Approval**. The IRB approval begins today, **March 27, 2012** and terminates on **March 26, 2013**.

Your final consent forms need to be stamped by the IRB to indicate the expiration date of study approval. Please email copies of your final consent forms to Jean Kang at jkang@pepperdine.edu. One copy of the consent forms will be emailed back to you and one copy will be retained for our records. **You can only use copies of the consent that have been stamped with the GPS IRB expiration date to obtain consent from your participants.**

Please note that your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the GPS IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For **any** proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit a **Request for Modification Form** to the GPS IRB. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for expedited review and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the GPS IRB. If contact with subjects will extend beyond **March 26, 2013**, a **Continuation or Completion of Review Form** must be submitted at least **one month prior** to the expiration date of study approval to avoid a lapse in approval. These forms can be found on the IRB website at <http://services.pepperdine.edu/irb/irbforms/#Apps>.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the GPS IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the GPS IRB and the appropriate form to be used to report this information can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* (see link to "policy material" at <http://www.pepperdine.edu/irb/graduate/>).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval. Should you have additional questions, please contact me. On behalf of the GPS IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jean Kang". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jean" and last name "Kang" clearly distinguishable.

Jean Kang, CIP
Manager, GPS IRB & Dissertation Support
Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education & Psychology

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Associate Provost for Research & Assistant Dean of Research, Seaver College
Ms. Alexandra Roosa, Director Research and Sponsored Programs
Dr. Yuying Tsong, Interim Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB
Ms. Jean Kang, Manager, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB
Dr. Ronald Stephens
Ms. Christie Dailo

APPENDIX I

Tables Presented in Chapter IV

Table I1

Responses Referencing Elements within the Structural Frame

Elements Within Structural Component	Number of participants	Number of references
Norms	15	164
Policies, Rules, Standards	15	135
Hierarchy	15	89
Strategies	9	39
Technology	4	14
Goals	7	12

Table I2

Responses Referencing Elements within the Human Resources Frame

Elements Within HR Component	Number of participants	Number of references
Human Resources Management	15	174
Organizational Justice	14	69
Organizational Trust	14	62
Compensation and Reward Systems	14	62

Table I3

Responses Referencing Elements within the Political Frame

Elements within Political Systems	Number of participants	Number of references
Power Structures	14	129
Favoritism	6	28
Scarcity of Resources	3	18

Table I4

Responses Referencing Elements within the Cultural Frame

Elements Within Culture Component	Number of participants	Number of references
Leadership	14	203
Norms	15	171
Values	15	130
Modeling	3	12
Mission and Vision	3	3

Table I5

Categorization of Participant References to Self

Elements Within Culture Component	Number of participants	Number of references
Health, Fear, Anxiety, Depression	14	90
Dedication to Job and Organization	7	20
Self Doubt as a result of toxicity	10	18
Self Blaming as a result	9	15
Fear of Retaliation	4	5