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THE DARK SIDE OF LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A REVIEW OF TOXIC LEADERSHIP TRAITS AND BEHAVIORS AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACTS

HANAN MUHAYA ALENAZY[1]*, AGEL FARA ALSULAMI[2]
[1]EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT, SHAQRA UNIVERSITY, SHAQRA, SAUDI ARABIA. FIRST AND CORRESPONDING AUTHOR, EMAIL: hanan.m@su.edu.sa ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9304-0156
[2]BUSINESS DEPARTMENT, JUBAIL INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE, ROYAL COMMISSION FOR JUBAIL AND YANBU, JUBAIL, SAUDI ARABIA. CONTACT: sulamiag@rcjy.edu.sa
ORCID: HTTPS://ORCID.ORG/0000-0002-0750-5939

This systematic literature review examines the behaviors, causes, and impacts of toxic leadership in higher education, focusing on Saudi Arabia. After conducting an extensive bibliographic search in six databases (Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, PsycINFO, ProQuest and Arabic database Dar Al-Manzooumah), 40 studies published from 1993 to 2024 and with the highest screening scores were included in the analyses. This review highlights the toxic leadership behaviors shaped via Saudi's cultural contexts of high-power distance and gender segregation, such as public denigration, over-control, and favoritism. The negative impacts of toxic leadership were related to diminished employee job satisfaction and poor organizational culture. This study identifies the need for prevention programs to tackle toxic leadership behaviors and foster supportive learning environments globally and within the Saudi Vision 2030 framework.

Keywords: Toxic Leadership; Destructive Leadership; Higher Education; Traits; Behaviors; Impacts.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed TO the first and corresponding Author: Dr. Hanan Muhaya Alenazy, Educational Management Department, Shaqra University, Shaqra 11961, Saudi Arabia; Halenazy17@Gmail.Com; Orcid: Https://Orcid.Org/0000-0001-9304-0156

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is inherently relevant to organizational outcomes (Bush, 2018), although bad leadership correlates with significant consequences (e.g., Bush, 2018; De Celles and Pfarrer, 2004; Klahn Acuña and Male, 2024; Krasikova et al., 2013; Lumby, 2019; Schyns and Schilling, 2013). Many studies have examined positive leadership, but there isa growing global concern toward the "dark side" of leadership (Kellerman, 2008; Tepper, 2000), which is especially relevant for Saudi Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia, as leadership is considered as an area of both organizational and human capital in this Vision (Ahmed, 2024; Al-Dossary, 2023; Al-Ghamdi AA and Al-Otaibi, 2024). Still, Saudi studies on toxic leadership remain lacking; while the impact of leadership on organizations has been frequently studied (Contreras and Espinosa, 2019; Fascia, 2018), few systematic studies have probed into toxic leadership. This is worrying considering the aforementioned role that leadership plays in Vision 2030.

There is thus the need for an approach that considers both positive and negative leadership(e.g., Ahmed, 2024; Attari and Essa, 2023; Evans, 2022; Hallinger and Kovačević, 2022; Larsson and Löwstedt, 2023; Liu et al., 2019). The inconsistent terminology and conceptual confusion associated with toxic leadership(Erickson et al., 2007; Landa and Tyson,2017; Lipman-Blumen, 2005a; Padilla et al., 2007; Tepper, 2000)and abusive behaviors (e.g., narcissism, abusive supervision, and Machiavellianism; Kellerman, 2008;

Krasikova et al., 2013; Lipman-Blumen, 2005a; Padilla et al., 2007) are also problematic, especially regarding translation and culturally/contextually relevant terminology within Saudi Arabia. Therefore, there is a need for a more comprehensive view of the pervasive phenomenon of toxic leadership in the Saudi context (Aasland et al., 2010; Burton and Hoobler, 2006). Furthermore, the scarcity of Saudi research on toxic leadership's antecedents/consequences evokes the need for further exploration (Adams, 2014; Başar, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; Başar et al., 2016). The current systematic review attempted to address this void, the final goal being to provide a resourceful reference to Saudi stakeholders by considering toxic ceteris *paribus* factors.

Toxic leadership is detrimental to employee well-being and organizational culture worldwide (Başar, 2020a; Evans, 2022; Hallinger and Kovačević, 2022; Larsson and Löwstedt, 2023; Tepper, 2000). Considering the influence of the sociocultural context, this research focuses on the Saudi setting (Ahmed, 2024; Attari and Essa, 2023). Few researchers have examined toxic leadership dynamics in Saudi Arabia's higher education (Ahmed, 2024; Attari and Essa, 2023), which is cause for concern given the Saudi Vision 2030's focus on human talent development.

First, although there is international evidence on toxic leadership (Başar, 2020a; Tepper, 2000), Saudi Arabia's higher education context warrants special attention because of its uniqueness. Second, based on research on culturally-specific leadership (e.g., Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004), the need emerges to examine toxic leadership in Saudi Arabia's collective culture (Ahmed, 2024; Attari and Essa, 2023). Third, in unveiling potential concept ambiguities within the Saudi management context and drawing context-specific conclusions, this study may have global implications. Fourth, given the scantness of toxic leadership research in Saudi higher education settings, this review emphasizes the importance of additional research to enrich the local and global bodies of knowledge.

This study aimed to develop a theoretical framework for toxic leadership in higher education settings, with a specific focus on Saudi Arabia. This focus is owed to several reasons, as follows: 1) toxic leadership leads to education quality losses;2) there is a need to investigate the interaction between Saudi cultural values and toxic leadership; 3) the need to provide baseline information for context-specific interventions consistent with Saudi Vision 2030's goals. The following research questions were posed: What are the defining characteristics, behaviors, and outcomes of toxic leadership? How do the unique Saudi cultural values shape the manifestation/perception of these behaviors, specifically in relation to other regional and international contexts?

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Leadership research has historically focused on positive leadership, such as transformational (Bass, 1985) and ethical leadership (Brown and Treviño, 2014; Yukl, 2018). Nonetheless, because of the pervasiveness of negative leadership, including abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), destructive leadership (Padilla et al., 2007) and toxic leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 2005b), have grown in numbers. The terms "poisonous" (Lipman-Blumen, 2005b) and toxic have been used metaphorically to refer to leaders/leadership that create unhealthy organizational cultures characterized by poor communication (Whicker, 1996). The accumulation of these problems leads to organizational dysfunction, high turnover, and burnout, thwarting the institutional mission/objectives (Whicker, 1996). All that then "feeds" toxic leaders in becoming narcissistic, tyrannical, demanding, and power-abusive (Frost, 2003; Kellerman, 2008; Lipman-Blumen, 2005a). The effects of these behaviors are exacerbated in Saudi higher education owing to the demand for stability among faculty/staff and to sociocultural factors such as high-power distance and gender separation (Al-Rasheed, 2022; Demirel, 2015). Importantly, the effects of toxic leaders can extend beyond the organization, tainting its reputation and sustainability (Kellerman, 2008), making it paramount to have knowledge of toxic leaders' origins for countervailing toxic leadership's outcomes (Frost, 2003).

Considering that hostile workplace climates are a pervasive issue and lead to numerous problems, direct examinations into negative leadership are germane for organizations. Indeed, studies into negative leadership styles, including abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), destructive leadership (Padilla et al., 2007), and toxic leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 2005b), have grown in numbers. Whilst such constructs have been addressed in other settings, including recent studies in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Al-Qahtani, 2022; Başar et al., 2016), the unique historical, cultural, and institutional characteristics of Saudi higher education have not been compared with those of other countries.

In Saudi higher education institutions, a toxic culture can be derived from the following: (1) problematic and perceived to be "subordinate" leadership/mentors; (2) relationships characterized by a prominence of conflict; (3) poor communication; (4) the dysfunctional, change-resistant bureaucratic environment. These challenges lead to faculty and staff stress, burnout, and turnover, hindering the realization of Vision 2030's objectives (Al-Shehri and Al-Qahtani, 2023). According to Whicker (1996), toxic leaders destroy the organization and workers through various unhealthy behaviors. These leaders also often correlate with other negative characteristics, including narcissism, control, aggression, and power abuse (Frost, 2003; Kellerman,

2008; Lipman-Blumen, 2005a; Schmidt, 2008; Walton, 2007). Specifically, toxic leaders are often unconcerned about workers' well-being, damage them, and have self-serving tendencies; these characteristics manifest through actions such as belittling employees in public, objecting to employment flexibility, neglecting staff's opinions, showing preferences toward specific employees, overcontrolling, and poor communication. Considering that Saudi higher education institutions rely largely on human resource retention for proper functioning, it is important to understand such leaders. Moreover, cultural factors in Saudi Arabia, such as high power distance, gender segregation, tribalism, and hierarchy, may feed back into these behaviors (Al-Rasheed, 2022; Demirel, 2015). Toxic leaders' presence also leads to organizational repercussions (e.g., reputation and sustainability hindrances), again highlighting how key it is to identify why toxic leadership exists in Saudi Arabia (Al-Shehri and Al-Qahtani, 2023).

Historical Context

Early leadership studies greatly concentrated on leaders' desirable qualities (Yukl, 2018), and it was the concept of toxic leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 2005a) that prompted attention to negative leadership roles. Studies on "petty tyranny," describing it as "authoritarianism and bullying" (Ashforth, 1994), and "abusive supervision" (Tepper, 2000)—referring to the detrimental effect of leaders' continual aggressive behavior on subordinate well-being—demonstrated the negative effects of detrimental leader behavior. Kellerman (2008) suggested redefining leadership to include negative/toxic leadership, recognizing the dysfunctional behaviors outlined by Whicker (1996) and Lipman-Blumen (2005a). Since the concept of toxic leadership emerged within Western organizational research, it is culturally and context-bound, highlighting a need for culture-specific research, especially in Saudi Arabia (Al-Rasheed, 2022; Demirel, 2015). Saudi research supports the need for a wider consideration of antecedents associated with maladaptive leadership (Al-Rasheed, 2022; Demirel, 2015).
As aforementioned, previous leadership research primarily focused on positive leadership behaviors (transformational and democratic leadership; Yukl, 2018), while the potential negative effects of toxic leadership have led to an increase in studies on toxic followership roles (Lipman-Blumen, 2005a). The initial investigations indicated that socially detrimental consequences may result when leader characteristics are ill-matched with contextual limits (Bush, 2008; Conger, 1990). Kellerman (2008) suggested that the historical focus of scientists on the bright side of leadership underpins a lack of comprehensive knowledge on negative/toxic leadership, acknowledging the existence of "paradoxical, poisonous, damaging, self-deceptive, manipulative behavior" (p. 14) and the need for further study. Toxic leaders also manifest erratic, bitter, harmful, self-centered, and deceiving behaviors (Whicker, 1996).

Although this background stems from Western cultures, its focus on authority and social harmony can be connected with Saudi Arabia's higher education context. Concomitantly, owing to toxic leadership and its various elements being culturally- and context-specific, contextually-sensitive research in Saudi Arabia remains warranted. Saudi research has advocated situating negative leadership-based constructs within their contextual predecessors to appropriately address toxic leadership in Saudi higher education (Al-Rasheed, 2022; Demirel, 2015).

Toxic Leadership's Dimensions

Çelebi et al. (2015), based on Schmidt's (2008) toxic leadership construct, distinguished four dimensions for the construct, namely egocentrism (self-centeredness), self-interest (self-seeking), devaluation (disregard) and negative affect. Though they exist universally, these dimensions take on distinct forms/significance across cultures. Accordingly, contextual research provides vital information for toxic leadership-related studies (Al-Rasheed, 2022).

Egocentrism (Self-centeredness)

Toxic leaders' proclivity to egoism (i.e., fixating on oneself and blaming others; Çelebi et al., 2015) manifests as the denial of fallibility and indiscrimination of merits (Demirel, 2015). These attitudes come at a huge social cost, particularly in places like Saudi Arabia, where humility and collective success are prized (Al-Rasheed, 2022). Also referred to as self-centeredness, low other-importance, and external attribution (Çelebi et al., 2015), egocentrism includes over-valuing the self, egoism, and not caring for others (Demirel, 2015); egocentric self-recognition; the perception of being irreplaceable (Çelebi et al., 2015); using "I" in speech negatively; use of negative language designed to incite fear to boost the ego (Demirel, 2015); taking credit for successes; blaming employees for negative outcomes; having disagreeable, anxious, deceptive, aggressive, flagrant, self-serving, and suspicious behavior; focusing on rewards for the self (Demirel, 2015; Whicker, 1996). These traits are especially disruptive in conservative societies deeply concerned with modesty and social status, like Saudi Arabia (Al-Rasheed, 2022).

Self-interest (Self-seeking)

This dimension refers to toxic leaders' disrespect, misbehaviors, embarrassments, threats, and efforts to create a threatening working environment. These leaders act in self-interest, betraying expectations and getting their way at the expense of trust and confidence (Goldman, 2009). Such behavior can be particularly harmful in cultures that value interpersonal harmony and deference to authority, where it will often be viewed as being unfair/biased. This is most truthful in the Saudi higher education context, where these values are highly regarded.

Devaluation (Disregard)

This dimension describes toxic lack of know-how, belittling of relationships with employees, doubting of the employee's work, and use of oppressive and authoritarian communication (Çelebi et al., 2015). This often leads to subordination being used for control to instill a pervasive feeling of staff incompetence. In an academic environment that thrives on collegiality and intellectual dialogue, such as the Saudi higher education environment (Klahn et al., 2024; Lanz, 2019), devaluing can become corrosive, undermining productivity/morale. Furthermore, toxic bosses may suddenly change rules (Lanz, 2019), causing employee distress, and their micromanagement (i.e., restricting employee autonomy) is particularly toxic in such environments (Klahn et al., 2024).

Negative Affect

Negative affect can be shown by exhibitions of uncomfortableness, like demonstrations of resentment through tone and non-coherent behaviors (Çelebiet al., 2015). The emotional effect of toxic leadership is not only maladaptive, destructive, or rude (Kellerman, 2008), but also constitutes an emotional stupidity in leader–follower interfaces. They gaslight, blame, and ridicule staff, setting up a culture of "blame and fear" (Demirel, 2015; Klahn et al., 202; Lanz, 2019; Neuman and Baron, 2005).

METHODS

This systematic literature review was reported following the PRISMA guidelines (Page et al. 2021). According to Snyder (2019), the systematic review design delivers a precise framework for the evaluation of social science literature. In searching six databases (Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, PsycINFO, ProQuest, Dar Al-Manzooumah), 499 potential studies were identified. Following the PRISMA framework, 305 papers were screened using pre-specified inclusion and exclusion criteria, and 40 studies were selected for a detailed analysis, ensuring transparency and minimizing bias. A bibliometric analysis was also conducted (Figure 1).

Screening and Selection Process

The studies were reviewed independently by two investigators, and discrepancies were resolved through a consensus discussion, in compliance with PRISMA guidelines. Inter-rater reliability was examined to guarantee an objective and unbiased screening and selection process. Studies were included based on the following inclusion criteria.

- **Context:** leadership behaviors in higher education, with a focus on Saudi Arabia.
- **Leadership focus:** toxic, destructive, or abusive leadership.
- **Study design:** empirical (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods) or systematic reviews/meta-analyses with theory.
- **Population:** faculty, administrators, and/or staff (excluding students alone).
- **Cultural analysis:** cultural factors influencing leadership.
- **Publication quality:** peer-reviewed journals or high-quality reports. High-quality reports were defined as reports from reputable academic/research institutions submitted to a rigorous internal review process similar to peer review.
- **Language:** English or Arabic.

Studies were excluded based on the following exclusion criteria.

- Unrelated to leadership or higher education.
- Does not address toxic, destructive, or abusive leadership behaviors.
- Grey literature (unless highly relevant). The assessment regarding relevance here was based on the credibility of the publishing institution and the clarity of the study's methodology section, which reassured the quality and dependability of the included studies.
- Published in languages other than English or Arabic.

Data Extraction Protocol

Data extraction involved a structured process focusing on five areas.

- **Study design:** qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, theoretical/conceptual, or literature review (based on the Methods or inferred from data collection/analysis).
- **Research setting:** higher education institution type, location in Saudi Arabia, organizational level, and cultural/institutional characteristics (based on the Introduction, Methods, and Discussion).
- **Participant demographics:** number, gender, roles (faculty and administrators), career stage, and hierarchical positions (based on the Methods, participant description, and Results).
- **Toxic leadership traits:** themes of toxic behaviors, specific manifestations, cultural influences, and contextual factors (based on the Literature Review, Results, and Discussion; most common traits reported).
- **Organizational consequences:** impact on morale, culture, performance, and psychological/emotional effects (based on the Results and Discussion; quantifiable results prioritized).

Ethical Compliance

This systematic literature review was based on publicly available academic works, and there was no direct involvement of human participants. The review followed PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021) for transparent and rigorous reporting, hence securing ethical compliance in the consolidation and interpretation of existing research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, this section affords an overview of the different toxic leadership types and tendencies, traits and behaviors, and origins. Second, it examines the impacts of such behaviors on both individuals and organizations.

Toxic Leadership Types

A thematic review of the included studies led to the identification of several toxic leadership types. They relate to multi-dimensional dynamics, toxic leadership behaviors, relevant cultural factors, and their effects on individuals and organizations (Table 1).

Table 1. Toxic Leadership Manifestations

Leadership trait	Behavioral pattern	Cultural context	Frequency in studies
Abusive behavior	Public denigration; excessive control	Authoritarian cultural norms	High
Marginalization	Exclusion; negative comparisons	Gender segregation; patriarchal structures	Moderate
Favoritism	Unfair treatment; discrimination	Tribal and familial influences	Moderate
Authoritarian leadership	Intimidation; imposition of domination	Centralized decision-making	High
Lack of ethical integrity	Corruption; deceitfulness	Tension between traditional and modern values	Low
Micromanagement	Excessive control; suppression of autonomy	High power distance culture	Moderate
Poor communication	Vitriolic, dismissive communication	Language barriers; cultural communication norms	Moderate
Self-centered behavior	Narcissism; excessive self-promotion	Individualistic vs. collectivistic cultural values	Low
Resistance to change	Discouragement of innovation; status quo maintenance	Traditional vs. modern tensions	Low
Work–life balance interference	Encroachment on personal time	Cultural expectations of work dedication	Low

The toxic leadership types with a high frequency were abusive behavior and leader authoritarianism. Prior international research corroborates these findings, proving the occurrence of toxic leadership-related behaviors within various structures (e.g., in both the workplace and public sector; see Krasikova et al., 2013; Tepper, 2000). Leader authoritarianism, which seems prevalent across cultural contexts, is stronglyrelated to Hofstede's (2001) theory on power distance, which conceptualizes power distance as the extent to which a culture tolerates/expects power to be unequally distributed within organizations/institutions. In high power distance cultures,there is a clear hierarchical order, a well-respected clear superior, and an obedient group of lower-ranked subordinates; these features facilitate the emergence of an authoritarian leader.

Marginalization, favoritism, micromanagement, and ineffective communication were found to be moderately prevalent toxic leadership types in the included studies, whereas unethical behavior,egotism, unwillingness to change, and hindrance of work–life balance were less prevalent.Toxic leadership is largely influenced by culturalcontext, specifically high power distance (Hofstede, 2001), with examples being authoritarianism (i.e., requires high power distance), gender segregation (i.e., can contribute to marginalization and is related to Hofstede's masculinity/femininity dimension), tribe or family ties (i.e., potentially resulting in favoritism and perhaps indicative of collectivism), and centralized decision-making (i.e., allows for the potential of abuse of power and is related to power distance). Thus, some cultural characteristics are welcoming and sometimes accepting oftoxic behaviors.

Aside from Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions, another well-known cultural paradigm includes the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) study (House et al., 2004). While the current review gives central stage to Hofstede's cultural dimensions because of the prevalence they held across the included studies, the GLOBE also provides added value to our understanding of the multiple representations of culture in leadership behaviors. Additionally, Hofstede's (2001) individualism/collectivism theory provides yet another perspective for the interpretation of the cultural dimensions of the effects of toxic leadership. Individualism is characterized by a focus on a loosely-knit social structure in which people is expected to care only for themselves and their immediate families. Meanwhile, collectivism is characterized by the acknowledgement that own survivalagainst others who absorb resources is assured by a social system wherein the person, as a member of the system, is expected to care forown family and/or tribe in exchange for absolute loyalty.

According to the reviewed studies, toxic leaders' focus on themselves at the expense of others could be particularly destructive in collectivistic societies as these leaders are unable to integrate into the group norm (i.e., solve problems affecting the collective good). The findings of the reviewed studies also indicated that the followers of toxic leaders could sometimes even help their toxic leaders in exchange for own benefits, implying that the increased social harmony associated with collectivism can actually be quite damaging depending on the context. This illustrates how culture might influence the expressions of leaders' toxic traits and others' responses.

Regarding organizations, Hofstede's (2001) masculinity/femininity theory—although not appearing as prominently in the included studies as power distance and individualism/collectivism—helps clarify the gender–toxic leadership association. This theory says that society associates masculinity with achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and a drive for competition, while femininity is associated with cooperation, modesty, quality of life, and a drive for group consensus. The included studies render it evident that in masculinity-oriented cultures, traditional gender roles might be more inflexible, potentially influencing women in their leadership aspirations and rendering them more susceptible to some toxic leadership forms (e.g., marginalization). In sum, the occurrence and consequences of toxic leadership stem from interactions between individual and cultural influences. cultural dimensions are useful for probing into these cultural impacts, bringing nuance to our understanding of toxic leadership in cultures and cross-culturally, as well as reducing its unrefined, universalized portrayal.

Toxic Leadership Impacts Individuals and Organizations

This study demonstrates that toxic leadership is corrosive both to individual and institutional work, concurring with prior international research (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2020; Tepper, 2000). Yet, the distinctive Saudi sociocultural context, oriented toward power distance and collectivism (Hofstede, 2001), seems to shape both the expressions and the impacts of toxic leadership (Table 2).

Table 2. The Impacts of Toxic Leadership

Impact type	Affected stakeholders	Severity	Cultural specificity
Decreased job satisfaction	Employees	High	Moderate
Reduced organizational commitment	Employees	High	Moderate
Increased turnover intention	Employees	High	Low

Psychological distress	Employees	High	Moderate
Decreased work engagement	Employees	Moderate	Low
Reduced productivity	Organization	Moderate	Low
Negative organizational culture	Organization	High	High
Increased counterproductive behaviors	Employees	Moderate	Moderate
Work–life balance issues	Employees	Moderate	High
Decreased innovation and creativity	Organization	Moderate	Moderate
Gender-based career barriers	Female Employees	High	High
Physical health problems	Employees	Moderate	Low
Erosion of trust	Employees/Organization	High	Moderate
Decreased educational quality	Students/Institution	Moderate	Moderate

The impacts of toxic leadership in higher education encompassed 14 categories. Workers appeared to be those most affected (8/14 categories), including by lower job satisfaction, work engagement, and higher psychological distress. These findings appear consistent with previous evidence showing that such negative consequences are associated with abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000) and destructive leadership styles (Padilla et al., 2007). The included studies also showed that toxic leadership leads to reduced productivity, the establishment of a negative organizational culture, and innovation suppression at the organizational level. Such effects align well with inferences derived from established theories of organizational climate and culture, stressing the importance of leadership in determining key work characteristics (e.g., Schein, 2010). Additionally, some demographic categories face unique challenges, with an example being female employees encountering issues related to an overlap of their professional and sex-role identities, showcasing the relevance of gender role theory to workplace dynamics.

Regarding the magnitude of such impacts, seven impacts were classified as severely harmful (e.g., reduced job satisfaction and psychological strain), while the other seven were considered to have moderate severity and their consequences to be potentially more gradual. Regarding cultural specificity, seven impacts seemed to be stronger in Saudi-influenced contexts, four were non-culturally-specific (i.e., may appear in more settings), and three were extremely culture-specific (i.e., heavy dependence on specific Saudi sociocultural characteristics).

Therefore, toxic leadership, commonly defined as leader behaviors characterized by self-interest, and its harmful impacts on subordinates/organizations represent a global challenge to be addressed across different sectors, including higher education. The specific leadership forms and the resulting negative effects can reflect various cultural, social, and organizational factors, although it is generally recognized that it leads to unhealthy outcomes.

Impacts of Toxic Leadership at the Individual Level

Psychosocial and Emotional Well-being

Toxic leadership in higher education has detrimental impacts on the health of staff worldwide, with numerous related studies demonstrating how subordinates report lower job satisfaction. This is consistent with Tepper's (2000) abusive supervision theory, which states that the vicarious exposure to hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors from supervisors, not including physical contact, negatively affects subordinates. In its international definitions, toxic leadership frequently reflects behaviors characteristic of abusive supervision (e.g., criticism in public, making belittling remarks, and creating a negative work climate). These actions do nothing other than reduce employee job satisfaction. Indeed, employees exposed to abusive leadership in higher education institutions worldwide systematically report suffering psychological distress. Padilla et al.'s (2007) destructive leadership theory concurs with these findings, describing that destructive leadership is both ineffective and actively harmful for followers/organizations. Toxic leadership can also lead to anxiety, depression, and burnout symptoms, which in turn can affect employees ' personal and professional quality of life.

Reduced work engagement is another internationally widely reported individual-level outcome of toxic leadership. Toxic leadership leads to a negative climate and interpersonal relationships, facilitating work disengagement and a reduction in work vigor, dedication, and absorption; that is, employees experience a lack of vibrancy to excel in their roles.

Professional Challenges and Identity

Employees in higher education institutions exposed to toxic leadership may face unique professional challenges, especially in light of broader societal norms and expectations. For example, when working under biased and unsupportive leadership, female employees may be faced with role conflicts between their professional ambitions and societal gender norms, especially in societies with distinct gender roles. This is

consistent with Bem's (1981) gender role theory, which contends that women may face special problems about their roles owing to the societal expectancies of the two genders. Toxic leaders with racial biases or who perpetuate female stereotype expectations can render these conflicts more severe and create barriers to female career advancement.

In addition, in collectivist societies, the value placed on group harmony and deference to authority may affect how followers/employees appraise and respond to toxic leadership. Although no specific collectivist cultural context is to be focused here, employees may be less inclined to openly counteract toxic behavior or engage in whistleblowing (Frank, 1986) owing to cultural norms of collectivism (Triandis et al., 1984) and their respect for hierarchy (Hofstede, 2001). Such contexts may generate a unique dynamic where the impacts of toxic leadership, whilst being experienced, may manifest differently in comparison to the manifestations in more individualistic cultures, where face-to-face confrontation or dissent might be more prevalent. This process could have implications for learned helplessness (Seligman, 1972) if employees perceive an inability to improve their environment and that the system is not open to challenge.

Work–Life Interface

The impact of leadership behavior on employee work–life balance is a major international topic, with toxic leadership derailing this balance the most. This unbalance is associated with greater employee stress and burnout and lesser job satisfaction and well-being, albeit cultural values and public norms regarding work ethics and personal time are highly relevant for how people experience this unbalance. Toxic leaders' requirements can escalate such problems, putting more strain on people already burdened by work owing to the cultural perceptions of work centrality or long working hours, extending the heavy burden into the personal and health dimensions of employees' lives. This shows how culturally-specific work beliefs can interact with toxic leadership and generate distinct difficulties for work–life balance.

Impacts of Toxic Leadership at the Organizational Level

Organizational Culture and Climate

Globally, in the higher education sector, various toxic leaders continuously generate a negative/toxic organizational culture. This is consistent with Schein's (2010) theories of organizational climate and culture, wherein leadership plays a critical role in shaping the shared values/beliefs/assumptions of an organization's culture and its atmosphere/climate. These situations, if not challenged, can be normalized, potentially leading to grand problems for organizational culture. Toxic leadership also causes trust levels to plummet in higher education institutions worldwide. This can be explained by Blau's (1964) social exchange theory, which describes the emphasis on trust and reciprocation within relationship exchanges. Toxic leadership behaviors (e.g., abuse) undermine this ideal, creating a situation where employees find themselves treated unfairly, unsupported, and possibly even exploited. This trust breakdown can impact leader–subordinate relationships and peer relationships, leading to an atmosphere of mistrust and sabotaging cooperation.

Productivity and Innovation

A lack of innovation and quantifiable productivity declines are other major organizational-level impacts of toxic leadership in academia worldwide. The downward spiral in employee well-being, job satisfaction, and work engagement, and the increase in psychological distress eventually lead to a reduction in performance and increased absenteeism and turnover. Combined, these situations lead to an overall decline in organizational productivity as unmotivated, unfocused, and disengaged employees are less productive and efficient.

Turnover Rate and Innovation

Globally, fast-paced changes within organizations and society may challenge the stability and equilibrium of higher education institutions, potentially resulting in adverse leadership behaviors and high turnover rates. Theories of change management posit that major changes typically create anxiety and resistance in individuals and systems (Lewin,1951), and this has been confirmed across cultures. Leaders exposed to uncertain and pressured environments can engage in more controlling—and even toxic—behaviors to cope with the situation or retain control, and these are strong drivers of employee dissatisfaction and turnover. This is not limited to any particular geographical zone, but the causes of change and the manifestation of stress differ by country (Green, 2014).

Given the impact of culture, how societal norms are associated with organizational and leadership behavioral changes may diverge considerably. In some contexts, quick modernization might lead to the clash of traditional hierarchies with newer, more collaborative and inclusive approaches, in which case you can have different forms of identification with leadership. The recognition of these culture-specific forces amid global changes is invaluable for exposing the causes of toxic leadership.

Organizational Sources and Systemic Consequences of Toxic Leadership

Frost's (2003) framework is useful for grasping the organizational sources of toxic leadership owing to the ease with which it can be extended to numerous organizational environments, like Saudi higher education. The model offers seven main sources of toxicity, as follows: intention, referring to purposeful self-harm/manipulation behaviors; incompetence, describing proof of a lack of the requisite capabilities; adultery, outlining a basic betrayal of trust and creed; callous, referring to a general disregard for others 'feelings; invasion, referring to wrong/unwelcome incursions into, or encroachments on, a boundary; organizational force, describing dysfunctions; inevitability, delineating the prevalent belief that toxic behavior "is what it is" and cannot be changed.

These sources exist in specific ways within Saudi higher education. Favoritism can be attributed to "purpose," while "incompetence" can result from a lack of leadership training. "Adultery" might mean academic integrity violations, and "insensitivity" could be about a failure to care about employees' lives. "Invasion" might register as micromanagement, "organizational pressures" as unyielding hierarchies or wishy-washy policies, and "determination" as a culture that normalizes toxic behavior. Updated knowledge of these sources is important in devising mitigation measures against toxic leadership (Burton and Hoobler, 2006). Expanding on this foundation, Basset al. (1996) identified several features of toxic leadership, as described herein: deep/lasting sense that oneself cannot do something; illusion/collage of artificial success; conditioned and weakened organizational dependence; fear/intimidation for control; arbitrary constraint-based imposition; vulnerability/situation exploitation; system process triggering the reinforcement of toxic leadership.

Additionally, the higher education organization's type influences toxic leadership worldwide. In contexts with strong top–down hierarchies, having the power and ability to be destructive on a large scale can be more pernicious; in such settings, leadership power and dictator-like power may be potent antidotes against toxic behavior (Hofstede, 2001). Institutional autonomy is also a significant factor in the fight against toxic leaders (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), as more autonomous organizations can introduce independent efforts for related protection. Meanwhile, individuals strongly influenced by outside sources may be bound to creating and maintaining productive standards. It is essential to comprehend these structural/systemic implications to better address toxic leadership and improve the healthiness of academic environments worldwide—and especially in Saudi Arabia.

Toxic Leadership and Saudi Cultural Values

The following subsections address core cultural dimensions that significantly influence toxic leadership in Saudi higher education.

Power Distance and Authoritarianism

In Saudi Arabia, power distance is high (Hofstede, 2001), and the population expects to lead hierarchical lives. This cultural tendency toward hierarchy facilitates an authoritarian leadership style characterized by strict control and restricted decision-making participation. This may result in a higher tolerance/acceptance of toxic leadership approaches that abuse power relationships. This reality contrasts with that in many Western settings, with a tendency toward participative, democratic, and transformational leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1994) rooted in individualistic and egalitarian values (Hofstede, 2001).

Collectivism and Egocentric Behavior

Saudi culture tends toward collectivism (Hofstede, 2001), where toxic leaders' self-centered behaviors may be harmful owing to their norm violations. Meanwhile, in individualistic cultures, self-centered leadership may not be as frowned upon, seeing that self-sufficiency and aggrandizement may be regarded as normal behaviors.

Gender Segregation and Patriarchal Norms

The Saudi culture is characterized by gender segregation and patriarchal cultural norms, strongly influencing how toxic leadership is experienced, especially for female leaders/staff. These norms may lead to problems, including a narrow professional network and gendered norms on behavior, that accentuate toxic leadership's undesirable consequences. These realities contrast with the usual situation in Western contexts, where gender equality is often advanced and gender roles are less strongly defined.

Communication Styles and Indirectness

Communication in Saudi Arabia tends to be characterized by indirectness and a desire to uphold harmony (Hall, 1976). These communication practices can hinder the delineation of and dealing with toxic behaviors, inhibiting open conversations and accountability. These behaviors contrast with the more

confrontational/explicit communication practices in Western cultures, wherein people may honestly confront toxic trends.

Religion and Traditional Values

Although Islamic values are based on strong ethics, the principles through which these values manifest are vulnerable to selective application/distortion, and can be used to legitimize toxic behavior. Thus, the interlacing of religious and ethical constructs provides a unique environment in Saudi Arabia for perceiving toxic leadership, and this environment differs greatly from the more secular constructs frequently observed in Western cultures.

Patterns of Social Transformation

Saudi Arabia is a growing society undergoing rapid societal changes, especially owing to Vision 2030 and its goal of transforming various national sectors, including higher education. This quick change can produce some turmoil, considering that old attitudes are being replaced and might clash with international ones. This kind of pressure and the stressful environment that emerges from fast-paced changes can encumber leadership, which may then lead leaders to guide their conduct using toxic behaviors (Lewin 1951). This situation contrasts with the slower social and organizational transformation taking place in many Western countries.

Employee Reactions and Cultural Norms

Employee reactions to toxic leadership are also influenced by Saudi cultural practices. The ingrained deference to authority and avoidance of confrontation/drama make it rare for people to directly challenge toxic behaviors. Workers may instead prefer to communicate their discontent through disengagement or grudging compliance, which are behaviors brought about by a belief that they are helpless (Seligman, 1972). This indirectness in response may be a result of cultural influences, whereas it may be easier to find more confrontational responses to toxic leadership in Western contexts.

Work–Life Balance

Cultural expectations about work ethics and personal time shape how toxic leadership affects work–life balance. Owing to the cultural expectations in Saudi Arabia about the employees' work dedication (House et al., 2004), collectivist attitudes (Hofstede, 2001), and workaholism, leaders' toxic behaviors that may spill over into employees' private lives can be especially harmful. This contrasts with the situation in many Western nations, wherein work–life is more emphasized and stronger employee support programs exist.

CONCLUSION

This study on toxic leadership in higher education has serious implications for both individuals and institutions worldwide. Employee well-being and career issues stemming from social norm biases and work–life balance problems could be outcomes of subordination to toxic leaders. These consequences are influenced by cultural variables that impact toxic leadership, its processes, and related reactions. Organizationally, toxic leadership deteriorates culture, trust, and productivity, stifling innovation. The impact of toxic leadership on institutions may also be supported by the organizational structure and the level of autonomy (Johor,2013). An integrated understanding of the individual, organizational, and situational factors that are associated with toxic leadership is necessary to craft strategies, based on organizational behavior and leadership theories, for addressing its detrimental impacts. Such an approach may enable the development of positive, productive, and equitable academic cultures in higher education institutions worldwide. This study makes the creation of this approach possible through its comprehensive presentation of toxic leadership's effects and remedies. Because toxic leadership can disrupt life at both the organizational and personal levels, this study holds that the development of resilient Saudi universities necessitates a focus on changing individual behaviors and correcting systemic failures associated with toxic leadership. Based on Holderied's (2006) three-level approach and Frost's (2003) ideas, this study suggests the following countermeasures for thwarting toxic leadership in Saudi universities.

Nurturing Mindfulness: recognizing unhealthy behaviors, breaking the silence, and creating avenues for the reporting of problems without fear of retaliation.

Strengthening Communication: Tackling gaps in communication among subordinates and superiors and various parts of the organization to promote an efficient information flow. This includes efforts to develop assertive communication skills, ethical role modelling, and addressing miscommunication instances that may be a consequence of cultural nuances or language barriers through cross-cultural communication training and inclusive practices.

Remediation, Systemic Changes, and Cultural Transformation: promoting corrective measures against toxic situations, advising employees to learn from past wrongdoings, and setting up a system that promotes positive changes. These actions include reforming policies and procedures, developing leadership programs on ethical leadership and emotional intelligence, and establishing oversight structures.

Culture of Transparency, Accountability, and Respect: The study also insinuates that promoting a culture of transparency, accountability, and respect may be critical in mitigating the enablers of toxic leadership.

Practically speaking, managers will need to take a proactive approach to manage both individual behaviors and systemic weaknesses associated with toxic behaviors. These steps include the following: cultivating contextual intelligence; nurturing employees; creating "toxic traps" (e.g., detection functions, early interventions, feedback mechanisms, ethical reporting systems, and regular health checks in the organization); encouraging open dialogue, engaged listening, and at the same time ensuring the development and learning of effective communication skills; building an environment characterized bysupport, collaboration, and integrity; developing feeling of community and common purpose. In the presence of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the potential for toxic behaviors to be reinforced by both the tendencies toward hierarchy and social harmony in Saudi Arabia, certain points need to be made. The mitigation efforts against toxic leadership could include developing ethical leadership procedures, ensuring process transparency, promoting good governance, conducting context-based research, and implementing evidence-based human resource policies. Saudi leadership must localize protocols applicable for addressing toxic leadership, as well as acknowledge that responding to toxic leadership is a matter that pertains to organizational change and not just to changing toxic leaders per se. Proactive intervention and tracking are vital in fighting the hidden, corrosive impacts of unbridled toxic leadership.

This research provides a valuable discourse on the nature and consequences of toxic leadership, especially in the Saudi higher education environment, highlighting the need to treat toxic leadership from both a universal and culturally bound perspective. It also provides implications for the Saudi academic system and is expected to fuel serious discussions about Saudi Arabia and gender-based violence for the year 2030. Finally, it presents an overview of the growing interest of culturally contingent approaches for leadership development and organizational interventions globally.

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