The intoxication of the organizational organism:
a literature review

Maria Menshikova -

Sapenza University of Rome, maria.menshikova@uniroma1.it

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Nowadays the "toxic" organization is a phenomenon faced by a large number of organizational realities. The concept of toxicity and analysis of some of its elements have already been described in the recent scientific and technical literature. The toxins studied by several authors are multiple and relate to different components of the enterprise life: toxic leader and toxic manager; toxic personnel and deviant behavior at work; toxic workplace and toxic HR practices; toxic culture, toxic communication and toxic emotions to get in the end to the entire toxic organization, created by the interaction of the above named items.

The organization that suffers from toxicity are generally defined as mostly ineffective as well as destructive to people who work in (Bacal, 2000) leading to negative outcomes that produce serious workplace problems.

This paper is of particular importance to one of the main topics of the conference aimed at the study of people and human resource management. This paper considers the human capital as a key in achieving the goals of the enterprise. The interaction of human resources of company with toxins in organizational environment may adversely affect the performance and cost of the work (Kusy & Holloway, 2009), which once again confirms the importance of this subject for the efficient operation of each enterprise.

Analysis of the existing research on the subject confirms the fact that all contributions have very fragmented nature. A wide range of the previous work on the phenomenon highlights different aspects of the intoxication process within an organization and some methods of dealing with it. Some studies have analyzed the causes and the charactersitics of environments, favorable for the germination of this disease, others have tried to study the single elements of the toxicity inherent in the organizational environment, still others have investigated some effects that negatively impact on human resources in different organizational level.

The contribution of this work is strictly theoretical, the objective of which is to systematize the knowledge obtained in the course of the last few years and structure the information through the logic of the life cycle of a phenomenon (in our case, the intoxication of an organization) that we have divided in the following phases:

1) Origin of desease: causes and favorable environments,

2) Characteristics: spread direction and intensity of extension

3) Manifestations/symptoms

4) Leison of some parts of the organizational body (individual, group, organization)

These stages have been constructed and described based on the previous studies for the search of which were used the main databases: Google Scholar, EBSCO and Scopus using some key words: "toxic leader", "toxic workplace", "toxic organization", "toxic manager", "toxic culture", "toxicity in the organization", "toxic behavior" hat were searched for in article title, abstract or keywords.

Having found a number of contributions, authors have carried out a careful analysis of these articles, a database that included only several works was built. Items to be included in the analysis were chosen based on a key parameter: membership in the field of organizational studies or business management.

1. Definitions

Before starting to rebuild the process of disease within an organization, we would like to dwell on some important definitions that will help us to gain a better understanding of possible dynamics and development of the malaise in the organizational environment.

Stark (2003) defined toxicity as "a pain that strips people of their self esteem and that disconnects them from their work in the workplace". Following the reasoning of Appelbaum & Roy-Girard (2007) toxicity in the workplace appears to come from toxins within the organization which renders it as a toxic organization.

This statement led us to the analysis of various types of toxins inherent to the organizational environment described in the studied literature such as toxic leader, toxic manager, toxic persons and their toxic behavior.

The first toxin in the organizational environment, which in the opinion of many researchers has the strongest effect on human resources of the organization is toxic leader. Heppell (2011) speaks of the multiplicity of conceptual perspectives from which it was studied this phenomenon. Toxic has been deployed as a term to describe the leadership of CEOs within the business community; the leadership of the clergy in terms of their methods of dealing with sexual abuse allegations; military leadership; leadership within sport; and of course political leadership.

Lipman-Blumen (2005) states that leaders are considered toxic when they inflict severe and enduring harm because of 2 factors: 1) destructive behavior; 2) dysfunctional personal characteristics. The scholar defines this typology of leaders as individuals whose leadership generates a serious and enduring negative, even poisonous, effect upon the individuals, families,

organizations, communities and societies exposed to their methods, thus emphasizing that the effects of this toxin are also multiple and complex.

Seeger et al. (2005) describe toxic leader as someone that is motivated by self-interest, has an apparent lack of concern, and negatively affects organizational climate. They often are destructive leaders who focus on visible short-term accomplishments and succeed by tearing others down.

The second toxin disseminated in the organizational environment is toxic managers. According to Appelbaum & Roy-Girard (2007) a subset of toxic leaders is toxic managers. They create a negative work environment by destroying morale, impairing retention, interfering with cooperation and information sharing, as well as being unpredictable, explosive, and disrespectful to the personnel. They are focused only on immediate goals that satisfy a budget-driven world.

Lubit (2004) argues that toxic managers lack the emotional maturity to deal with others in a constructive, supportive way. The toxic manager can also be unconscious about the harm that can cause in the organization. The toxic manager confuses subordinates, uses very subtle ways of punishment for real or imagined transgressions, creates a high degree of dependence, and is internally conflicted. According to this researcher, furthermore, toxic managers can be divided into four categories: narcissistic, aggressive, rigid, and impaired managers.

The other toxin described mainly by Kusy & Holloway (2009) is toxic persons or in different words individuals who demonstrate a pattern of counterproductive work behaviors that seriously debilitate individuals, work teams, and organizations over the long-term.

As mentioned earlier, all 3 categories of toxins lead to toxic behavior. It would be safe to assume that while it is true that employees suffer from a negative work environment, it is also true that organizations themselves, toxic or not, suffer from the behavior of their employees. This behavior is known as toxic or deviant behavior (Bolin and Heatherly, 2001; Goldman, 2008). According to (Robinson and Bennett, 1995) this type of behavior can be defined as "voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both".

The interaction between the above-described toxins or high level of one of them can lead to the formation of toxic organization. These organization are usually defined as largely ineffective as well as destructive to its employees (Bacal, 2000). The researcher argues that a toxic organization shows two characteristics that distinguish it from healthier workplaces: 1) poor performance, and poor decision-making, 2) high levels of dissatisfaction and stress.

2. Characteristics: spread direction and intensity of extension

Recent research revealed some important dynamic for toxicity spread. Stark (2003) and Finkelstein (2005) argue that the phenomenon of toxicity is often a top-down phenomenon. The higher up the toxic person is, the more widely spread is the pain, and the more people there are who behave in the same way. Furthermore, Appelbaum & Roy-Girard (2007) assume that every person that comes into contact with these toxic person situated in the high level of the organizational hierarchy can be affected in 2 ways: 1) by their behavior, and 2) by their decisions.

Enron is an excellent example of a toxic culture that was developed from toxic leadership and supported by toxic managers (toxic leader -> toxic culture –> toxic managers).

Appelbaum & Roy-Girard (2007) in their study affirm that the culture of an organization is dependent on the behavior of all groups within the organization, but the higher up the toxic group is in the organization, the greater the impact to the culture will be noted.

According to Kusy & Holloway (2009), it is important to remember that the toxicity spreads in systems with long-term effects on organizational climate even after the person has left voluntarily or has been dismissed.

3. Origins of desease: causes and favorable environments

Appelbaum & Roy-Girard (2007) suppose that toxic behavior can be linked to 2 main factors: 1) surrounding environment of the workplace, 2) attitude, perception and personality of employees and/or managers.

According these scholars, one of the external factors that can cause the toxicity within the organization (in particular toxic behaviors by management) is organizational bottom lines and intention to achieve financial goals. Very ambitious goals, set by the holders of capital and by top management in a consequence, have a direct negative impact on all levels of the organizational structure. In connection with this fact, many researchers claims that both leaders and employees are rewarded for their short-term accomplishments, which lead to an increase of competition between employees, unethical practices, and a disregard for co-workers.

Over the last decades many companies had restructuration and radical changes. Frost&Robinson (1999) assume that in many cases, such transformations have also caused

confusion, fear, and anguish among employees. Thus, reorganization with the resultant downsizing is the other trend that has increased the toxicity level in the workplace.

According to many researchers, the other reason of intoxication of organisational environment is a personal characteristic or noncompliance of an employee/manager at his/her workplace (Flynn, 1999; Gilbert et al., 2012), that lead to toxic inter personal relationship and toxic communication, becoming the core of the organizational sickness (Bacal, 2000).

However, some organizational systematically generate distress through policies and practices without the particular impact of external condition or toxic personalities, these organizations are toxic themselves (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007).

Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) highligted that the environments that are conducive for the emergence of toxins inside the organization is the environment dominated by instability, lack of accountability, values.

Lipman-Blumen (2005b) argues that the times of economic downturn are also one of the factors leading to increased toxicity in the organization, bringing out the worst in people especially toxic personalities who can spin out of control.

4. Manifestations/symptoms

The main distinctive feature of toxic organizations is the ability to achive results. Bacal (2000) describes some sympotms of the toxic organization such as: inability to achieve operation goals and commitments; problem-solving processes that are driven by fear and rarely yield good decisions; poor internal communication; huge amounts of waste that result from poor decision, and lots of rework; and interpersonal relationships are driven by manipulative and self-centered agendas.

Reed (2004) assumes that the only way to determine whether an organization is toxic is to examine the cumulative effect of de-motivational behavior on morale of the employees and climate over time.

According to Brett and Stroh (2003) toxic work environment causes feelings of despair, anger, low morale, poor communication, and depression among employees that usually impacts on the dependent variables, e.g. poor work performance, high absenteeism, and increased turnover. Bostock (2010) notes that the toxic leader 'contaminates' their environment and that the process of contamination might be slow as "small, homeopathic-like doses of toxic activities induce a sense of distrust, fear, uncertainty, unpredictability, foreboding and menace". The other important indicator

is the intention to quit the organization (Pelletier, 2012). The measurement of this variables can be useful to recognize the existence of some toxic elements.

5. Leison of some parts of the organizational body

Based on existing literature it can be concluded that the toxicity in the organization affects the wellbeing and performance of at least three components: individual, group/team and organization itself.

Deviant behaviors cause enormous costs, but also the social and psychological effects on the workplace. Toxic organizations destroy people, that will pay a huge price in terms of personal health, and career (Bennett & Sawatzky, 2013).

Kusy & Holloway (2009) highlight that the toxic workplace impact directly not only on demoralization of single employees but also to demotivation and under performance of the entire teams.

With regard to the efficiency of the whole enterprise, the most costly of toxic behaviors are absenteeism, theft, unproductiveness and unethical practices. (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007). Another negative effect on the organizational level considered by some researchers (Longenecker & Fink, 2014) is a reduction in the ability of talent retention and an increase of key manager leave.

Conclusion

This short paper aims at the analysis of the toxicity characteristics and its dynamics within the enterprise. This research can be an important measure and the first step for the subsequent more in-depth study of the existing literature dedicated to methods for the recognition and diagnosis of the disease in the organizational environment and its further disintoxication (prevention and care) in full paper, the scope of which will be the reconstruction of the "full life cycle" of toxins existence in the organizational reality.

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