

TOXIC WORKPLACE!



ASSIGNMENT #4: EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY

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TOXIC WORKPLACE!

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**MANAGING TOXIC PERSONALITIES
AND THEIR SYSTEMS OF POWER**

**MITCHELL KUSY
ELIZABETH HOLLOWAY**

"Based on our research, we define the toxic personality as anyone who demonstrates a pattern of counterproductive work behaviors that debilitate individuals, teams, and even organizations over the long term" (Kusy & Holloway, 2009, p.116)

AUTHOR'S AIMS & PERSPECTIVES

The authors are consultants and repeatedly heard their clients complain about toxic individuals in their workplaces. This inspired the authors to conduct a two-year study on toxic workplaces. They took the results of that research and wrote this book, in an effort to help their clients and anyone who would like to address toxicity in their organization, or prevent it from happening (Kusy & Holloway, p. 146).

"Toxic behaviors become the status quo, allowing them to dominate the organizational culture through an unintentional but lethal process" (Kusy & Holloway, p. 1200).



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Figure 1.2 The Tip of the Toxic Iceberg





"Toxicity spreads not just within the immediate environment but to other departments, communities, customers and clients" (Kusy & Holloway, p. 1170).

CHAPTER ONE

There are both human and financial costs to having toxic workplaces. People suffer mentally, emotionally and often take their troubles home with them. If they leave their jobs, it creates a financial toll on them. Additionally the organization has to spend money recruiting, and training--not to mention there is a loss of productivity that occurs when a toxic person wreaks havoc in the workplace.

CHAPTER TWO

It can be very difficult to identify toxic personalities because these individuals are adept at masking their behavior when it suits them. However, there are three common toxic behaviors to look out for: shaming, passive hostility and sabotaging of teams. These individuals can be difficult to detect because they are often experts, productive and/or have special protectors that keep them employed. They are often considered chameleons or charismatic.

CHAPTER THREE

Unfortunately informal strategies used to deal with toxic individuals often don't work. These include: adjusting, leaving or reconfiguring the situation. Feedback strategies are also ineffective in dealing with toxic people. Surprisingly, formal strategies such as firing the individual, or enlisting the help from HR or an outside consultant are also deemed as ineffective strategies for correcting toxic situations.

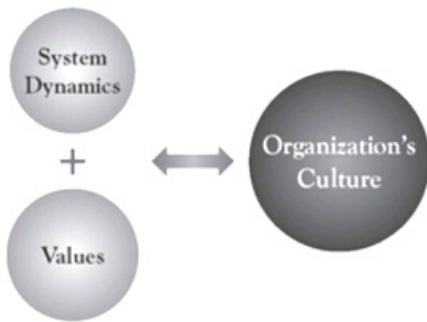
Figure 2.2 The Three Types of Toxic Behavior



CHAPTER FOUR

Often the toxic person affects entire environments as their behavior is normalized and sometimes even protected because of their perceived worth to the organization. When toxic behaviors are enabled, organizational culture becomes infested and the toxicity spreads in virtually every aspect, affecting teams, departments and even communities. This toxic state can last undisturbed for decades.

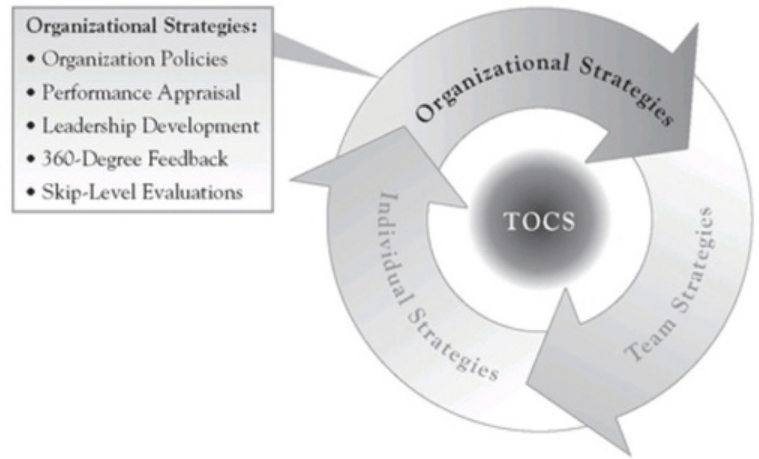
Figure 4.1 Organizational Culture: System Dynamics and Organizational Values



CHAPTER SIX

The next step in TOCS is to work on creating stronger teams by using those same values to create team norms, choosing the best team members, building leaderful teams, having exit interviews and identifying who may be a toxic protector. 360 degree assessments can also be done at a team level and can be utilized for feedback purposes.

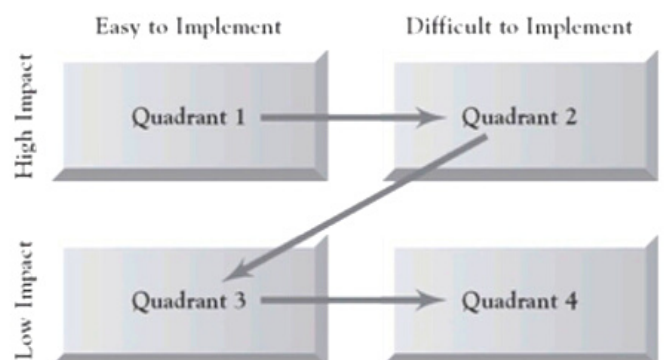
Figure 5.1 TOCS Model Organizational Strategies



CHAPTER FIVE

The TOCS model proposes to integrate formal values at an organizational level first and foremost. The authors lay out a step-by-step process that can be utilized by any interested organizations. They also advocate for altering formal evaluations like skip level and 360 degree evaluations to reflect the new value system. This process will help to eliminate existing toxic behaviors and preventing new ones from starting.

Figure 6.2 Matrix for Implementing Change



CHAPTER SEVEN

After laying the groundwork with organizational and team strategies, the final stage is applying the TOCS model at an individual level. If a value-driven workplace has been successfully created, the next strategies will be much more effective and easier to enforce. At an individual level, targeted feedback, performance appraisals and coaching can be implemented to eliminate and/or prevent toxicity. If nothing else works, termination is the final solution--however, termination alone is not the solution because toxic people thrive in toxic environments. You cannot just remove the person, you must also treat the environment, which is why the TOCS model stresses three levels of change: organizational, team and individual.

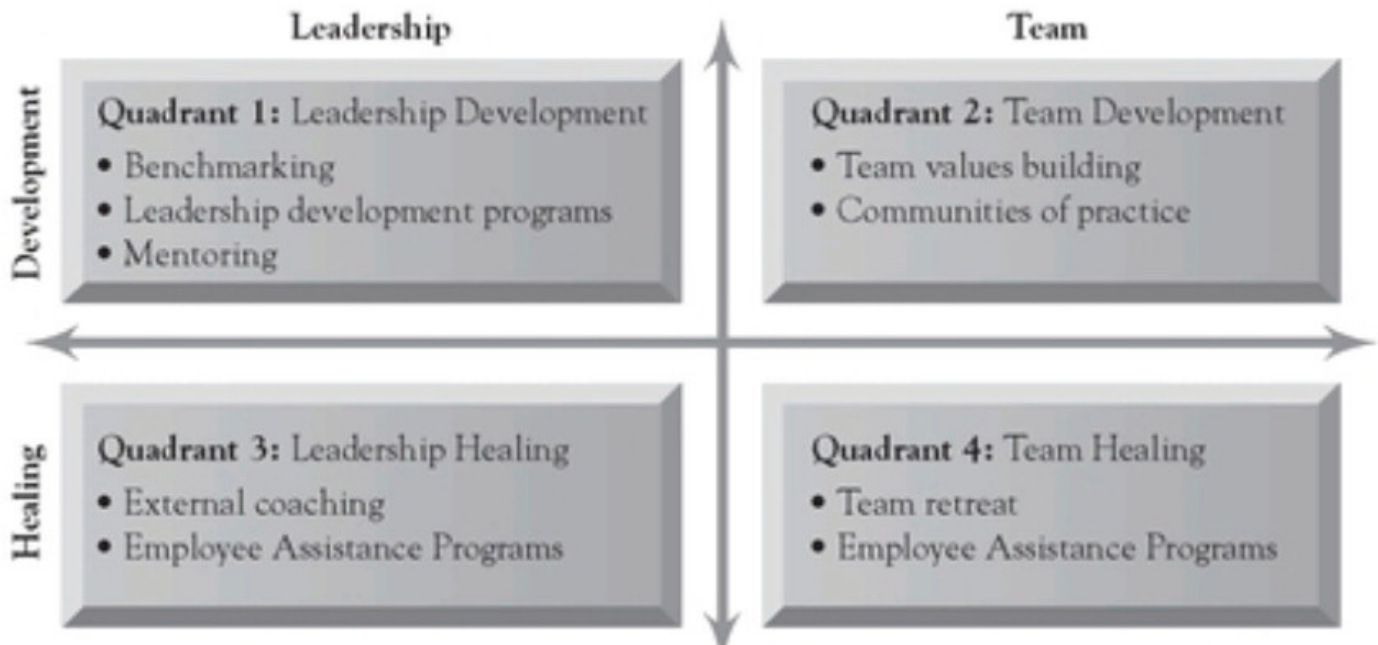
CHAPTER EIGHT

The last chapter of Toxic Workplace! debunks myths that are commonly held about toxic workplaces and then discusses the renewal process once the toxicity has been actively addressed. The strategies used for renewal are aimed at both leader and team renewal with things like benchmarking, mentoring, team values building and development and communities of practice. Strategies for healing include external coaching, employee assistance programs and team retreats.

Finally, the authors conclude by reminding readers that it is possible to transform a toxic workplace into a respectful, productive and healthy environment--but the best approach is a systems approach like TOCS which keeps everyone focused and aligned with the values of the organization at an organizational, team and individual level.



Figure 8.1 Matrix of Options for Organizational and Leader Renewal



ORIGINAL SUMMARY

Kusy and Holloway (2009) found a need for the exploration of toxic leadership in their consulting work, so they conducted research to answer the questions they were repeatedly asked. After two years' of research, they discovered the common issues and came up with the Toxic Organization Change System (TOCS) model to help organizations eliminate and prevent toxicity in organizations. The TOCS model emphasizes the need for creating and implementing values in organizations at three levels: organization, team and individual. By integrating values and using them as a baseline for evaluations, it is much easier to emphasize

"Although feedback strategies can be somewhat effective for those who have formal authority over the toxic person, these strategies are less effective with peers and mostly ineffective when the toxic person is the boss" (Kusy & Holloway, p. 907).

desirable behaviors and point out which behaviors contradict the values of the organization. With the removal of ambiguity, it is much easier to hold employees accountable and keep them focused on what really matters. The authors emphasize that it is not just a toxic person that creates a problem, but that there must be an environment conducive to toxicity, so the best place to start is to focus on the environment.

CRITICAL EVALUATION

I found this book to provide relevant and useful information of how to address workplace toxicity or prevent its occurrence. The concept of building a framework based on values that are important to the organization is a great strategy to create behavioral expectations which are clear and easy for all employees to understand. Also important to note is that it is next to impossible to address toxic behaviors that have not been clearly defined as unacceptable to an organization.

One puzzling aspect of this book is the way the digital copy doesn't list page numbers, but seems to have a paragraph count or some other confusing device. As I quoted all the "pages", it seemed as though the book had thousands of pages, which was not the case at all because this book is a fairly fast read, but I was totally unsure what the actual page number was.

I would highly recommend anyone who suffers at their workplace due to one or more toxic individuals. Whether the toxic individual is the boss or not, there are solutions offered in this book that would help to eliminate the toxicity and restore health and harmony to the workplace. The toxic individual(s) will have no choice but to change their ways or leave, either of which is the best possible outcome for those who have suffered for far too long.

"In the organizations that walk their talk regarding values, we would guess that at least one-third to one-half of the values have some association with respect for human dignity" (Kusy & Holloway, p. 1477).



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

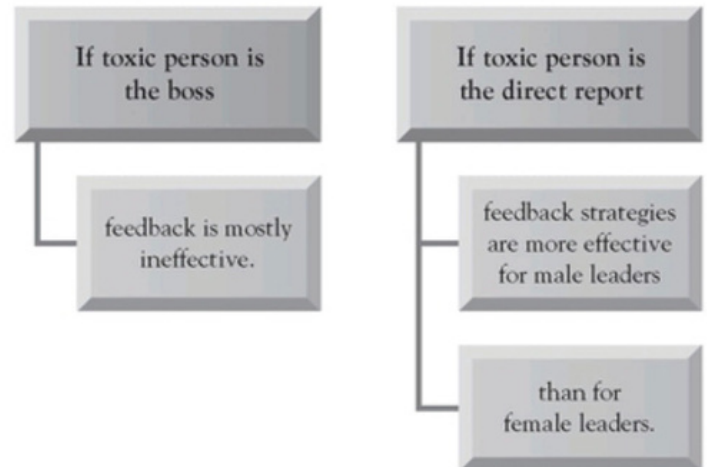
- Who are these toxic individuals?
- What makes them tick?
- How do they survive an organization?
- Why are their poisonous behaviors allowed to continue for so long?
- Why are the effects they have on others so consuming?
- Where do they get their support?
- How should leaders best handle them for maximum benefit to the organization?
- What if the leader is toxic?
- How do we stop them in their tracks? Can we?
- What needs to occur so that the organizational community operates through respectful engagement?

~ (Kusy & Holloway, p. 160)

APPLICATION TO THEORY AND/OR PRACTICE

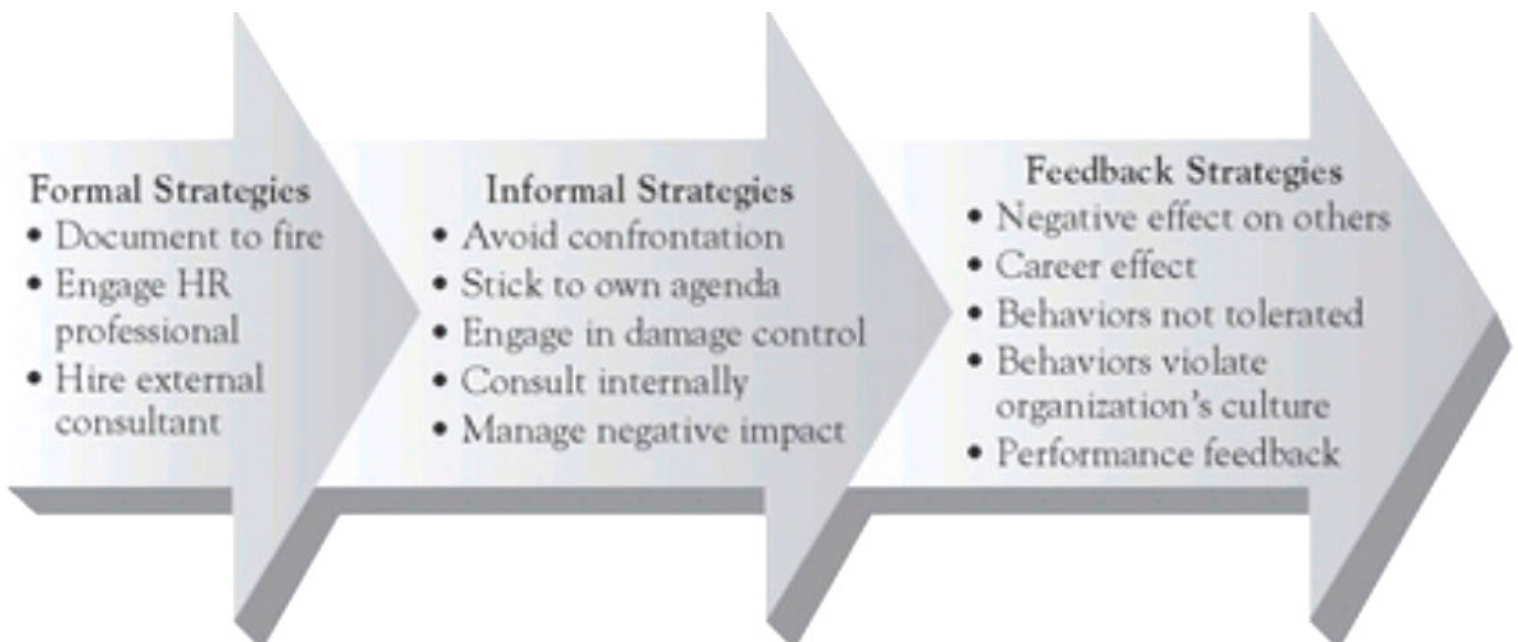
This book is based on two years' worth of research. The authors created their Toxic Organization Change System (TOCS) model design specifically to help individuals and groups to find solutions for toxic workplaces. They discovered that toxic individuals thrive in toxic systems (Kusy & Holloway, p.207). In an education setting, toxic workplaces are a likely scenario because they operate in a hierarchical manner and can easily result in power dynamics. Both the theory of TOCS and its application will be beneficial to toxic workplaces.

Figure 3.5 Impact of Positional Power on Effectiveness of Feedback Strategies



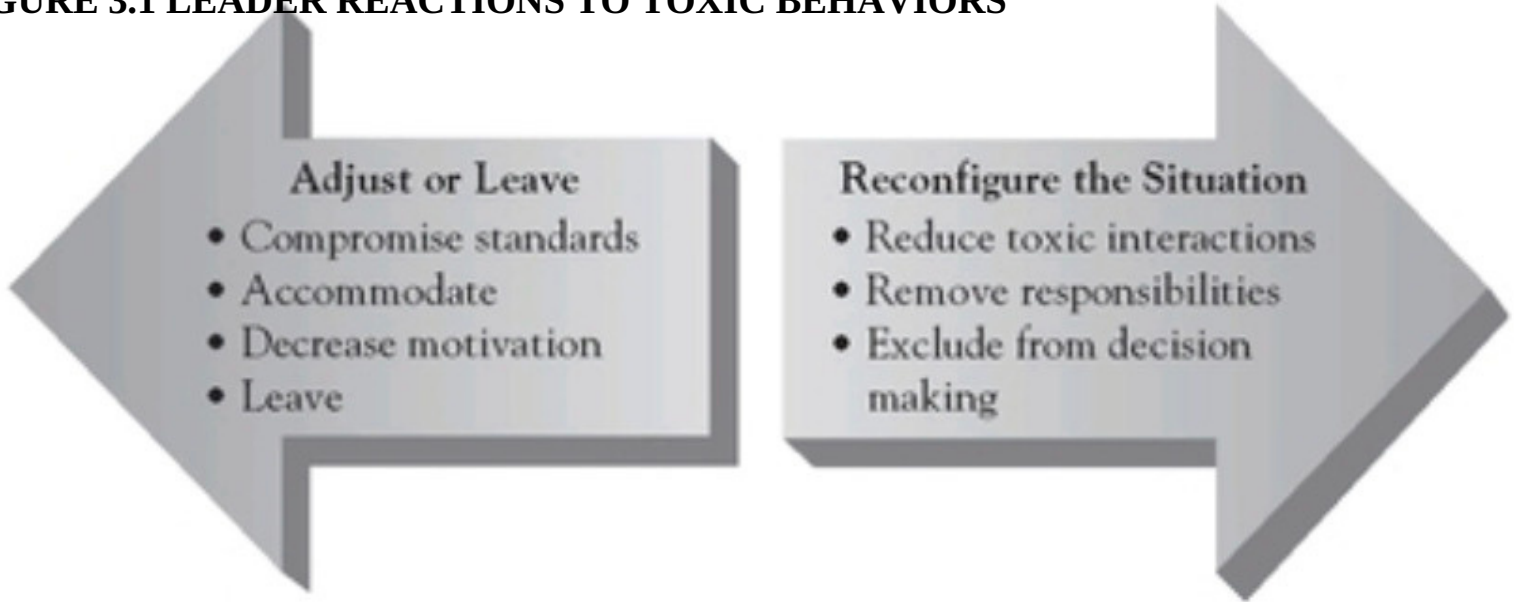
"Toxicity will be significantly reduced in organizations that clearly define the values in concrete ways, identify the kinds of behaviors the organization will and will not tolerate, and have a clear set of consequences when an individual does not live up to the values" (Kusy & Holloway, p. 1276).

FIGURE 3.3 LEADER STRATEGIES



"Given that several candidates' competencies and likability are about equal, hire the candidate who has a little less expertise but is more likable. The small difference in expertise can be addressed with good professional development" (Kusy & Holloway, p. 1657).

FIGURE 3.1 LEADER REACTIONS TO TOXIC BEHAVIORS



"In an organization of zero tolerance for habitual toxic behaviors and where the values are upheld by leadership, thoughtful and targeted feedback within the context of performance management can be effective" (Kusy & Holloway, p. 3430).



"Leaders must embody the behavioral values of an organization as much as they must meet deadlines, improve products and services, and manage people" (Kusy & Holloway, p.1493).

Specific	Precisely what do you want the toxic person to do?
Measurable	How will you know the individual has met this expectation such that it can be observed and measured?
Achievable	Are you providing expectations that are in the person's realm to accomplish?
Results oriented	Will the potential change in their behavior truly add value to the organization?
Time specific	What is the time period in which this should be accomplished?

SMART GOALS FOR TOXIC BEHAVIORS

"Values integration is the benchmark for the best kind of performance appraisal with toxic individuals" (Kusy & Holloway, p. 2339).

"The best way to engage a performance appraisal process with the toxic person is through the use of multiple assessors" (Kusy & Holloway, p. 2370).



Reference

Kusy, M.E., & Holloway, E.L. (2009). *Toxic Workplace! Managing toxic personalities and their systems of power*. Jossey-Bass.